

# NATIONAL FORESTS

By Len Shoemaker

While I was working in the Denver Regional Office of the United States Forest Service (about 1940), I did a lot of research to get data for use with National Forest maps which the Drafting Department was putting out. After retirement, I eventually ran down and listed all of the National Forests that had been established in the United States since such areas had been authorized in 1891, a total of 387 names.

The list showed the serial number, the name, the date of establishment, the original acreage, and what had become of the units not then existent. Units 1 to 6 had been called Timber Land Reserves; units 7 to 175, Forest Reserves; units 176 to 397, National Forests. Changes in title had occurred on July 1, 1892 and March 4, 1907.

A copy of that list was placed in the Conservation Center of the Denver Public Library, where it is available for reference.

In 1910 the National Forests were divided into Districts, and each group was named and numbered. The units in Colorado, South Dakota, Nebraska, and the western part of Wyoming were placed in the Rocky Mountain District, or District Two. In 1910 the term "District" was changed to "Region", hence the abbreviation R-2.

A check of the complete list showed that 47 units have been established in R-2; in 1940 they had been reduced to 21 units; at present there are 16 units. The 47 units once existing in R-2 are shown below. Those in Kansas and North Dakota were abolished. The others have been combined with the present 16 units in the interest of economy and better supervision.

Unit No.	Year Est.	Unit No.	Year Est.
COLORADO		COLORADO	
2 White River Plateau	10-16-91	94 Montezuma	6-13-05
4 Pikes Peak	2-11-92	95 Uncompahgre	6-14-05
6 Plum Creek	6-23-92	110 Holy Cross	8-25-05
7 South Platte	12-9-92	113 Fruita	2-24-06
9 Battlement Mesa	12-24-92	157 Ouray	2-2-07
44 San Isabel	4-16-02	162 Las Animas	3-1-07
81 Gunnison	5-12-05	199 Arapahoe	7-1-08
82 Leadville	5-12-05	202 Rio Grande	7-1-08
89 San Juan	6-12-05	203 Routt	7-1-08
91 Park Range	6-12-05	239 Hayden	7-1-08
92 Wet Mountains	6-12-05	276 Sopris	4-26-09
93 Cochetopah	6-13-05	281 Colorado	7-1-10

290 Durango	7-1-11	WYOMING	
312 Grand Mesa	3-11-24	1 Yellowstone National	3-30-91
309 Roosevelt	3-28-32	29 Big Horn	2-22-97
SOUTH DAKOTA		30 Teton	2-22-97
24 Black Hills	2-22-97	40 Crow Creek	10-10-00
66 Cave Hills	3-25-04	48 Medicine Bow	5-22-05
67 Slim Buttes	3-5-04	148 Sierra Madre	11-5-06
98 Short Pine	7-22-05	240 Shoshone	7-1-08
285 Harney	5-16-11	289 Washakie	6-30-11
NEBRASKA		KANSAS	
45 Niobrara	4-16-02	99 Garden City	7-25-05
46 Dismal River	4-16-02	189 Kansas	3-15-08
114 North Platte	3-10-06	NORTH DAKOTA	
256 Nebraska	7-02-08	267 Dakota	11-24-08

### ORIGIN OF NATIONAL FOREST NAMES

WHITE RIVER is the name of the principal stream within the original area established by President Benjamin Harrison as the White River Plateau Timber-Land Reserve. It was the second area of that kind established in the United States. When the White River and Holy Cross Forests were combined, the name was retained for that reason or because of that fact. It has the largest acreage of any existing national forest in Region Two.

Pike is in honor of that intrepid explorer, Captain Zebulon M. Pike, who was among the first to explore that area, and incidentally the first to see Pikes Peak, the now world-renowned "hump" which bears his name. He and his associates first sighted the peak from the plains on November 14, 1806. Pike and three companions attempted to climb the peak, but failed to reach the top. Gold seekers to the state in 1859 publicized the name and the peak with their "Pikes Peak or Bust" migration to the Rockies.

SAN ISABEL is a pleasant-sounding, easily-spoken contraction of "Santa Ysabel." It goes back to Queen Isabella of Spain, who sponsored the Columbus explorations, and who is the beloved patron saint of the Spanish speaking folk of southern Colorado. As applied to the national forest, it was taken from San Isabel Creek within the first small reservation in the Sangre de Cristo Range. Presumably, San instead of Santa was used for euphonious effect.

GUNNISON is in honor of Captain John W. Gunnison, who was chosen by the Government to select a route for an east-to-west railroad across the Rockies. He followed the 38th parallel of latitude as closely as possible and crossed Cochetopa and other passes to the present Gunnison River. He went in into Utah where he was killed by Indians. The name was given to the town of Gunnison in 1874 and to the county of

Gunnison in 1877 before it was attached to the National Forest in 1905.

SAN JUAN is the equivalent of Saint John, and the frequent use of the name in southern Colorado shows its popularity and the regard of the Spanish settlers for that patron saint. It was first applied to the river and the mountain range by Spanish conquistadors in the 18th century. Then it was applied to the county, to San Juan Basin, and to San Juan National Forest. It probably is the most used geographical name in the state.

COCHETOPA is a contraction of Cochetopah, a Ute Indian name which meant "buffalo gate". Great herds of bison crossed this and North Pass annually in their migration from the plains to the upland ranges. Captain Gunnison and other explorers used this route across the Continental Divide. The first road led over North Pass, but the name settled on this one. The Forest name came from the Cochetopa Hills, within the area.

MONTEZUMA was the name of the ninth King of Mexico, who opposed the Spaniard Cortez, and was killed by him. The name has retained historical and romantic significance throughout the Southwest and was given to Montezuma County as early as 1889. The name as applied to the National Forest was the result of its popularity in that part of the state.

UNHOMPAHGRE is a Ute Indian name which meant "red springs", the springs being a unique physical feature of that area and a popular camping spot for the tribe. Early geographers gave the name to the river which joins the North Fork of the Gunnison at Delta, and to the plateau and peak nearby. The peak is ranked as sixth in elevation in the state, 14,309 feet. The Forest was named for it.

HOLY CROSS is a part of the name "Mount of the Holy Cross," a peak in the Saguache Range which has a large natural cross on its east face. The peak was discovered and named by two Spanish monks who went about teaching the Indians. Wm. H. Jackson, with the Hayden United States Geographical Survey, first photographed the peak in 1873. The National Forest and a National Monument, which was later released from that status, were named for the Mount.

ARAPAHO is a contraction of Arapahoe, an Indian tribe which occupied the plains country adjacent to Denver. They called themselves Inuanaina, which meant "our people"; the Crow tribe called them "Arapahoe", which meant "tattooed-on-the-breast people." White settlers used Arapahoe because it was more easily spoken. The name was first applied to the Arapahoe peaks and glacier, then to Arapahoe County. When the National Forest was named, the final letter "e" was dropped.

RIO GRANDE is a Spanish name which means Grand River. The large stream drains the south-central part of the state and flows southward through New Mexico. The upper part of the present Colorado

River was previously called Grand River, but geographers added it to the Colorado, thus removing the duplication of the name, Grand and Rio Grande.

ROUTT is in honor of John L. Rountt, a native of Kentucky, who was appointed by President Grant as territorial governor of Colorado in 1875. He was so satisfactory to both Washington officials and Colorado settlers that he was elected as the state's first governor. His services were so proficient that he was reelected in 1890. Routt County was formed in 1877, the national forest in 1908.

GRAND MESA is the name of the large plateau in western Colorado, supposed to be the largest flat-topped mountain the world; it averages about 10,300 feet high. The early reserve was called Battlement Mesa, for another physical feature, but Grand Mesa was the more attractive, more pleasing name. The hard cap under the surface soil provides basins for many beautiful lakes.

ROOSEVELT is in honor of President Theodore Roosevelt, the greatest champion of forestry and conservation in our country's history. He established forests totaling about 160,000 acres, reorganized the government's forestry forces, renamed them "Forest Service", and transferred their administration to the Department of Agriculture, in 1905. When it seemed desirable to change the name Colorado National Forest the Forest was renamed Roosevelt. President Hoover approved the change.

BLACK HILLS is the English translation of "Paha Sapa", the Sioux Indian name for that topographical feature. The name referred to the dark appearance of the timbered hills in contrast to the plains country. The name was applied to the whole region by early explorers and settlers who followed General Custer's 1874 expedition to the area, and it was a natural choice for the Forest.

HARNEY is in honor of General Wm. S. Harney whose military activities in the area adjacent to the Black Hills are well recorded. In 1855 he led an expedition to negotiate a treaty with the Indians. The name was first applied to Harney Peak, 7240 feet in elevation, and then to the Forest when the Black Hills forest was divided in 1908, but it is now reunited with that Forest.

NEBRASKA is an Indian word which often meant "flat water". In the Omaha tongue it was pronounced like the present state name; the Otoe tribe pronounced it Ne-brath-ke, which meant flat or valley water. In 1902 two small reserves, Niobrara and Dismal River, were established and conifer plantations were started. Now combined, they show what man can do to assist Nature.

BIG HORN is the combined name of Big Horn, the river that drains that area. It is the common name for the Rocky Mountain sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) which early Spanish explorers found in that area. They were

named and described by Dr. George Shaw of London in 1804. The Indians called them "ahsasta" or "ahsahsooha". The name was later applied to the Big Horn mountains and still later to the Forest.

MEDICINE BOW is the name given to a locality in south-central Wyoming by friendly tribes "to make bows," and in early-day lingo "to make medicine". The exact origin of the name is unknown, but the name probably grew out of the association of the terms good medicine and good bows. The mountain ash used to make bows could have been considered as "good medicine bow" material. A creek, the range of mountains, and the town renowned in Wister's *The Virginian* bear the name, which was later bestowed on the national forest.

SHOSHONE is a variation of Shoshoni, the name of an Indian tribe who inhabited northwest Wyoming. The word meant "valley dwellers", and was given to them by other tribes before they were forced into the mountains by the Sioux and other more powerful tribes. The government gave them protection and set up a reservation for them, because of the peaceful attitude of their chief, Washakie. The Arapahoes now share the reservation with them. The Forest took its name from the Shoshone River, the principal stream of that area.

WASHAKIE is in honor of Chief Washakie of the Shoshoni Indian tribe. He ruled over the tribe from 1840 until the time of his death in 1900. He was always friendly to the early explorers and settlers, and because of that many conflicts were averted. He claimed that "no white man's scalp has decorated my tepee." He sleeps in the military cemetery at Fort Washakie adjacent to the national Forest, where he was buried with full military honors.

#### NATIONAL FORESTS IN R-2

For ready reference the sixteen existing national forests in Region Two are listed below alphabetically by states:

COLORADO—Arapahoe, Grand Mesa, Gunnison, Pike, Rio Grande, Roosevelt, Routt, San Isabel, San Juan, Uncompahgre, White River. The Grand Mesa and Uncompahgre are administered jointly.

NEBRASKA—Nebraska

SOUTH DAKOTA—Black Hills

WYOMING—Big Horn, Medicine Bow, Shoshone