



# TOWN HISTORIES

## **Bayfield**

Bayfield lies due East of Durango in the heart of the Pine River Valley. The original settlement was called Los Piños and consisted of fifteen families. By 1894, Los Piños had developed into a ranching community and was sold to William Bay of Missouri. The Bay family donated land to build a town, as did the Schiller Family. A coin toss in 1898 determined which family would get to name the new town. Today, the Bay home can be seen still standing at 225 Pearl Street.

The town itself offers much in the form of recreational activities. Lake Vallecito and Navajo Lake are close by, as is the Weminuche Wilderness, the San Juan National Forest and much BLM land. Hiking, camping, mountain biking, river rafting, rock climbing, snowshoeing and hunting are just a few of the sports Bayfield has to offer.

## **Crow Canyon**

The Crow Canyon Archaeological Center is noted worldwide for research and education programs designed to expand awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the ancestral Pueblo (Anasazi) cultures of the Mesa Verde Region. All of Crow Canyon's work includes consultation with a Native American advisory group, to ensure cultural integrity and sensitivity.

Every year, more than 2,500 students from across the country spend as many as five days on Crow Canyon's 170-acre campus, participating in excavation programs and learning first-hand about ancestral Pueblo lifestyles.

Crow Canyon's Cultural Explorations are led by nationally-recognized scholars and Native Americans. They offer an in-depth and unique perspective on the Southwest, the opportunity to experience the awe-inspiring cultural and natural resources of remote canyons and mesas, and to join family-oriented excursions. These adventures explore ancient ruins, raft the San Juan River, and explore Monument Valley on horseback. Workshops that provide hands-on opportunities to create ceramics, weaving, and other Native American arts round out Crow Canyon's offerings.

## **Cortez**

The town of Cortez was founded in 1886 and named after the 16th century Spanish explorer, Hernando Cortez. In earlier history, the Navajos called the area Tsaya-toh, which means "rock water." The settlement was later known as Mitchell Springs, until it moved 10 miles North to the current location of Cortez.

After the Dolores River was used to irrigate Montezuma Valley, Cortez became a center for ranching and farming. The Ute and Navajo tribes still consider the town a trading hub, providing an excellent collection of their crafts and artwork. The Cortez area is also known for its numerous archeological sites, boasting the highest concentration in the U.S.

## **Dolores**

Located on the San Juan Scenic Skyway, Dolores sits at the foot of McPhee Reservoir, Colorado's second largest lake. The town was named for the Dolores River, originating from the Spanish name for the river, "Rio de Nuestra Senor de las Dolores," or "River of Our Lady of Sorrows." Early Spanish expeditions by Fathers Dominguez and Escalante provided the area with this and many other names still used today.

The town is best known for its small ranching community and recreational activities. Along with McPhee Reservoir, Dolores is home to the Mount Wilson Primitive Area, the Dolores River Canyon and the Anasazi Heritage Center. The Center holds over 2 million artifacts, and more than 1,380 ruins have been sited in the Dolores vicinity.

## **Durango**

Located 6,512 feet above sea level, the Durango area has seen many visitors in its long history. The earliest occupants were Paleo-Indian hunters, followed by the Ancestral Puebloans. By the 17th century, the Utes and Navajo had claimed Durango as their home. Around this time, Spanish explorers ventured the terrain and named much of the rivers and mountains. However, it was the discovery of gold and silver in the San Juan Mountains that caused a feverish growth for the town, starting in the late 1870s.

In 1881, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad connected Durango to many of the small mining communities. Around this time, a smelting facility opened in the south part of town. Since the town was "booming" so rapidly, many of Durango's early buildings were simple wood structures. Yet in 1889, a devastating fire broke out that ravaged downtown. When the area was rebuilt, the buildings were mostly constructed of brick and stone, which is a major reason why downtown is so well preserved.

Beginning with the 1910s, Durango became more of a ranching, agricultural and logging community. In the 1950s, it experienced another boom with oil exploration and uranium mining. Soon after, Fort Lewis College and what is now Durango Mountain Resort both established Durango as their home. Since then, the town is mostly known as a vacation destination, boasting incredible scenery and a multitude of outdoor activities.

## **Durango Mountain Resort**

Formerly known as Purgatory, Durango Mountain Resort (DMR) covers more than 2,400 acres, 723 of which are maintained terrain. 75

groomed Nordic trails serviced by 11 chairlifts span 40 miles of the mountain. In the summer, DMR welcomes hikers, bikers and families to ride the scenic chair lifts or experience the alpine slide. The resort is 30 minutes North of Durango and offers many choices in restaurants, lodging and entertainment.

## **Fort Lewis College**

Fort Lewis College is a four-year, undergraduate public liberal arts college that offers degree programs in the schools of Arts & Sciences, Business Administration, and Education.

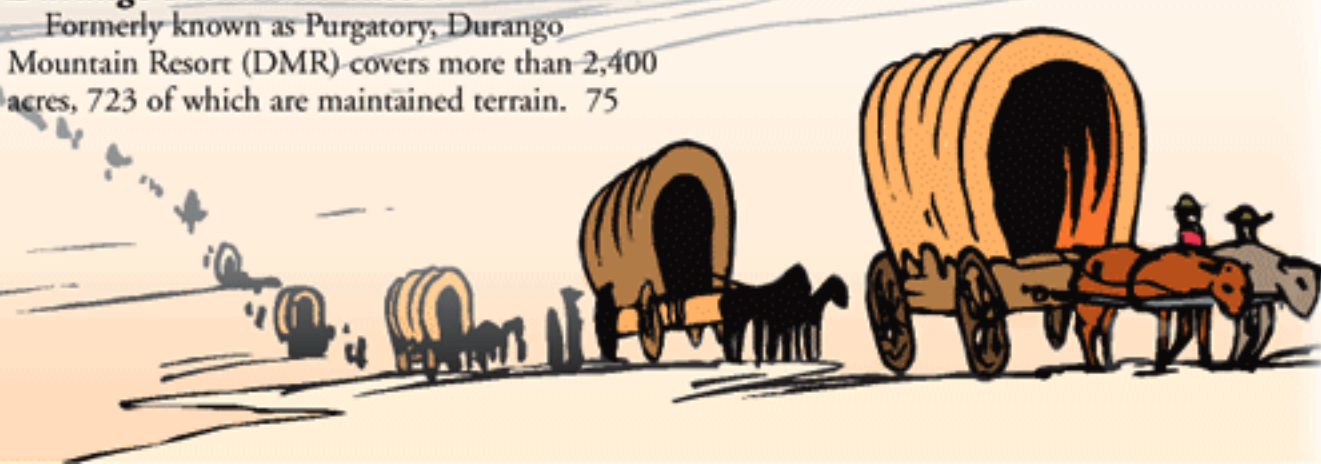
The college began in 1878 as a U.S. Military fort outside of Pagosa Springs, CO. In 1880, the fort moved its base to 14 miles southwest of Animas City, which later became Hesperus.

After 1891, the fort was deactivated and given to the Secretary of the Interior to be used as an Indian Elementary School. The school opened with 51 children enrolled, representing the Navajo, Ute, Sioux, and Apache Tribes. After the government established more reservation-based Indian Schools, Congress offered the property to Colorado, on the basis that it remain an institute for learning. It was this bill that established "that Indian Pupils shall at all times be admitted to such school free of charge" and remains to this day.

Fort Lewis then became a high school in 1911, focusing on agriculture and industry training. In 1927, it was approved for teaching 2-yr college class work, but retained the high school until 1933. It was then that Fort Lewis became solely a junior college. In 1956, it moved to its current location on the overlooking mesa east of Durango. In 1962, it evolved into the 4-year baccalaureate college that it is today.

## **Hovenweep**

Located near Blanding Utah, Hovenweep National Monument spans five prehistoric, Puebloan-era villages. Home to countless multi-story towers and primitive structures, the park is known for its preserved beauty. Although the name "Hovenweep" means "Deserted Valley," the twenty-mile area was once home to over 2,500 people. These ancient Puebloans exhibited masterful masonry, even surpassing the detail of the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde.



## **Ignacio**

Established in the 1870s and located east of Durango in the Pine River Valley rests the town of Ignacio. It is the headquarters of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. Among the outdoor activities that can be enjoyed there everyday, Ignacio offers several events throughout the year, including the popular San Ignacio Fiesta. The area is also known for its interesting mix of Anglo, Spanish, and Native American cultures. Ignacio is home to the Sky Ute Casino, and cultural museum. The name Ignacio derives from Chief Ignacio, who, after the Dawes Act of 1887, refused restrictive land allotments imposed on his people.

## **Mancos**

Nestled between the La Plata peaks and Mesa Verde National Park is the small ranching community of Mancos, Colorado. Historically, Mancos became a center for cattle shipping in 1891 with the help of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad. In 1894, the town was incorporated, and today it is home to a community of just over 1,100 people. History and tradition are rich in this small, Western town, as many of the shops still have iron rings outside so visitors can tie their horses while shopping. Any time of year is exciting in Mancos with Mesa Verde National Park 7 miles away, winter sports at the nearby Hesperus Ski Area, summer or sportsman activities at the McPhee Reservoir, or a trip back in time on the Mancos Valley Stagecoach. The posh valley scenery also allows for hiking, rafting, jeep tours, horseback riding, and splendid opportunities for photography.

## **McPhee Reservoir**

Stretching west from Dolores is the ten-mile-long McPhee Reservoir. The reservoir was named after the McPhee sawmill, which was once the largest sawmill in the western United States. Currently, the mill resides under the waters it helped name. Fishing and boating are popular activities for the reservoir, drawing people from around the area. Fisherpeople in particular love the waters, being that over 4.5 million fish have been stocked here to date. Of course, camping, biking and hiking are also available.

## **Mesa Verde**

Mesa Verde National Park was established in 1906, after president Theodore Roosevelt signed a bill protecting the area. It is the first and only National Park established to preserve the works of people. Giving insight to more than 700 years of history, the park holds over 4,000 archeological sites. It is most known for its spectacular cliff dwellings, which are carefully preserved structures nestled in the alcoves of the canyon walls. The past inhabitants of the cliff dwellings are known as the Ancestral Puebloans. By 1300 A.D., the dwellings were empty, leaving much speculation over the reason. Disease, drought, and lack of defense are some possible causes, but the true explanation for the land's desertion remains a mystery.

## **Navajo Lake**

Located 25 miles east of Bloomfield is Navajo Lake State Park. Combining three separate recreation areas, the lake is a result of Navajo Dam, which regulates the San Juan River. It is also fed by the Piedra and Pine Rivers and offers camping, fishing, boating and scuba diving, along with a visitor center and marina. It is New Mexico's second largest lake and contains both cold and warm water fish species. Exploring some of the side canyons, visitors can find evidence of some of the earliest known villages in the Southwest area.

## **Pagosa Springs**

Long before Pagosa Springs became a settlement, the Utes and other Indian tribes would visit the area frequently. The origin of its name is from the Ute Indian word "Pagosah," which means, "healing waters." Being the largest hot spring in the San Juan Mountains, Pagosa Springs was revered by Native Americans, who believed it had healing and curative powers.

After the discovery of gold in the area, Pagosa Springs was the first home of Ft. Lewis military post, which later moved just south of Durango. When the base left, settlers created the town of Pagosa Springs, incorporating it in 1891. With the short-lived extension of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad came a booming logging

industry, which later fell second to ranching and mining. Today, the Pagosa Hot Spring discharges 700 gallons per minute and is used to heat some of the downtown buildings, along with providing water for several motel pools.

## **Silverton**

At 9,318 feet above sea level, Silverton offers the unsurpassed beauty of the San Juan Mountains combined with rich Victorian charm. Founded on the mining boom of the late 1800's, the town contains so much preserved history that the Department of the Interior has designated the entire area a National Historic Landmark. Contrary to most towns of the West, Silverton never experienced a major fire; therefore, most of the buildings constructed in the 1800's are still standing.

Withstanding the harshness of the Rockies and the downfall of the mining industry, Silverton is the only town left in San Juan County, which claims the highest mean elevation of any county in the United States. Several ghost towns dot the area, and jeep rentals and maps are a popular way to discover these artifacts. The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad is also an excellent outlet for absorbing the overwhelming beauty of the mountains and the inherent history of Silverton.

## **Towaoc**

West of Cortez lies Towaoc, the tribal capital of the Ute Mountain Ute Reservation. Being the only town on the reservation, Towaoc is at the base of Sleeping Ute Mountain, a mountain resembling a sleeping Indian with a headdress. The Ute Mountain Utes pride themselves on tradition, still speaking their native language. Every Spring, the tribe holds the Bear Dance, which celebrates the end of the bear's winter hibernation. The celebration has been honored for over 100 years. Hundreds of archeological sites are nearby, and short tours, day tours, backpacking, camping and mountain biking are available. However, reservations are required. The Ute Mountain Utes and their cousins, the Southern Utes, are the only Indian tribes remaining in Colorado today.

## **Vallecito Lake**

Only 23 miles northeast of Durango is one of the area's largest reservoirs, Vallecito Lake. This beautiful mountain valley lies 8,000 feet above sea level and offers activities for every season. There are seven National Forest Campgrounds that are serviceable for most of the year. With record-breaking fishing, boating, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling, Vallecito Lake is the perfect place to visit.

## **Wolf Creek**

Just East of Pagosa Springs on Highway 160 is Wolf Creek Ski area. It is a high altitude resort with the base at 10,300 feet and the summit reaching 11,900 feet, making sunscreen and sunglasses a necessity. It often reports the most snowfall in Colorado and covers 1,600 acres, much of which remains ungroomed. The resort boasts incredibly beautiful terrain and is usually open from early November to April.



*Photo by Charles O. Foster*