The Historian

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TRIPS & TOURS
Submitted by Carolyn Newman

HCHS board member Bruce Johnson led two trips this summer — to Williams Ranch to view the dinosaur footprints and petroglyphs, plus a climb up the Huerfano Butte. Great reviews from all trippers and climbers. Really, the Huerfano County Historical Society is earning a reputation in Southern Colorado for being an active group!

Only ten cars were allowed in the on the private Houchin property at the summit of old Sangre de Cristo pass July 25. That pass connects to La Veta pass. Friends of Fort Garland organized the limited outing to look for the site of the 1819 Spanish fort, the only Spanish fort on Colorado soil. A beautiful day and great vistas on the upper Huerfano River valley, even though the exact spot could not be confirmed.

HCHS member John Van Keuren spent five weeks on the archaeology dig at Fort Massachusetts (1860s) on the San Luis Valley Trinchera Ranch. Four HCHS members took a day trip to the dig with the director Dr. Goddard. Next year we will try to arrange a trip for more to visit. During our visit, and every day, a replica cannon was fired by the college students at the dig as the United States flag was raised.

Circulation

This Official Newsletter of The Huerfano County Historical Society is printed and mailed to 66 members, quarterly. With an increase in both postage rates, and the cost of the necessary supplies and time spent, the expense of mailing each single newsletter is about 84¢, or $55.44 per mailing, or $221.76 annually. It really adds up. The newsletter is also e.mailed to 52 members. The cost is about 5¢ in time spent. Thank you for receiving this newsletter electronically and helping us to reduce cost and waste.

MINING MUSEUM

The stark black-and-white Ludlow massacre 100th anniversary banner hanging on the front of the courthouse has increased the number of visitors to the Walsenburg Mining Museum and its Ludlow exhibit.

Our Annual Ice Cream Social was a success. Thank you to all who helped pull it all together at the last minute! Jerriann Vigil, her son and family and friends, the Spanish Peaks Foundation, Spanish Peaks Medical Center, the Museum board, and many others.

NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

Information for the next quarterly issue should be submitted via e.mail to — hchistorian@rocketmail.com

The deadline for submissions of articles, announcements, and notices, is —

Wednesday, November 5th, 2014

Newsletter Printing Courtesy
Saint Mary Catholic Church
Walsenburg, Colorado
OLD TRAPPERS' TRAIL TOUR
Submitted by Kay Beth Avery

More than one hundred people attended the August 2nd Old Trappers' Trail Tour sponsored by the Huerfano County Historical Society. The event, deliberately held in conjunction with the Gardner ChuckWagon Dinner, was organized by Kay Beth Avery and Carolyn Newman. Highlights of this five hour trip included the site of the Huerfano Butte Valley settlement, the historic cottonwood grove near the Centennial Kimrel Ranch, the Badito Ruins where the county seat used to be in the 1860s, two century-old Catholic churches, and a 150-year-old Hispanic homestead located on private property. Along the way, participants also learned a little about Open Range Round-ups and a great deal about the history of a route over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains frequented by Native American tribes, the Spanish military, French spies, fur-trading adventurers of many nationalities, and American pioneers.

HUERFANO BUTTE CLIMB
Submitted by Bruce Johnson

Rushing along I-25 you pass the namesake of our wonderful County, Huerfano Butte. Last month, a group of 20 curious and fearless folks were standing on the very top of that landmark. They came together to learn about the butte’s history, both geologic and humanistic. They also wanted to be able to claim the all-important statement, “I’ve been on top of that”. As someone collects stamps or coins, others collect mountain or butte tops. As we heard about the geologic history before we climbed and while at the top, you could also see the changes that the area has gone through. From visualizing a great inland sea in the area to a grand erosion of a mile or more of sediment exposing the Huerfano Butte, a volcanic plug. We also learned that the volcanic plug was at some time bisected by two different volcanic dikes, giving it that unique shape with a dip in the middle of the plug, as explained by our geology leader, David Moore.

Also from our great vantage point at the top of Huerfano Butte we were able to visualize some of the human history of the area thanks to our speaker, Dave Steffan. The Huerfano River valley was a big trade route even before white man made it to the area. It was called the Old Trapper’s Trail or The Taos Lightning Trail. Did you know that the Huerfano River was a possible spot for the Transcontinental Railroad? If it had been chosen, there was a plan to have a large statue of John Fremont, mounted on a horse, waving a sword, sitting on top of our Huerfano Butte greeting all of the folks on the passing trains. Dave did a wonderful job of pointing out land features that could be seen as we perched on top of Huerfano Butte.

This trip was a joint venture by the Huerfano County Historical Society and Cucharas Valley Recreation. As we sat on top of our historical little orphan butte, we feel better connected to this neat little spot as we go buzzing by on I-25. And we didn’t see a single rattlesnake!

MINING DAYS

Miner’s Plaza (Main and Sixth, Walsenburg) fits the county’s mining history. Next up are Mining Days beginning Saturday, September 20 with a 10 a.m. parade. All descendants of mining families have an opportunity to honor their family by entering a vehicle of any kind or a float with the family name or mine camp displayed. Ethnic dancers from the Pueblo Russian Orthodox church will add color and music and two bands will join the fun.

That evening is a performance of Tomorrow We May Die, an original play with music based on the life of striking miners’ wives at Ludlow. Performances are to be Washington School auditorium for four days, part of the Celtic Festival.

MONTOYA RANCH

The project is entering a new phase although the Huerfano County Historical Society is no longer the sponsor. The State Historical Fund has awarded $105,347 for building stabilization with an equal amount to be matched by donations or other grants within the next year before work can begin. This is the fourth grant to the Montoya Ranch, which is owned by Jim Gerkin.

The Montoya Ranch at Farrisita may be the most unique historic building in the county, with a fortified full adobe basement dating back to the 1860-70s. Archaeologist Richard Carrillo sent his report Aug. 1 to the State Historical Fund and to HCHS, listing artifacts and outbuildings found on the grounds. His grant, also through the state historical fund, was for $9,000 plus. A large sheep operation was once in place on the property and the animal pathways to the Huerfano River are still visible as are remains of Hispanic and Lebanese sheep pens. Carrillo feels there is potential for more archaeology work, especially for some excavations. He is donating $500 to HCHS to help increase public awareness of Colorado’s Hispano heritage.

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