

FIRST DRAFT

More than a century's worth of tourism, trade at Buford

When Tom Tucker was a youngster in the early 1960s and clerked at the Buford Store on behalf of his parents, Guy Steely often called. Steely, an old rancher and hunting guide, lived several miles upstream and usually requested grocery items. "Send 'em up on the stage," Steely would tell Tucker. The "stage" was actually a truck that delivered mail three days a week from Meeker to Buford and Trapper's Lake. But trucks were successors to the horse-drawn stages or freight wagons that had served the area when Steely was younger.



BOB SILBERNAGEL



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

Diane and Tom Tucker stand outside the old log Buford Store. Although the store itself is now closed, the Tuckers still rent the historic cabins at Buford and operate a small RV park.

Buford lies 22 miles southeast of Meeker on the White River. It is roughly halfway between Meeker and Trapper's Lake.

Tucker and his wife Diane rent the old log cabins at Buford to tourists, fishermen and hunters, and they run a small RV camper park there.

But the massive log store and the nearby gas pumps are no longer in operation. The revenue they generated didn't justify the cost, Tucker said.

Ranchers began moving into the White River Valley almost immediately after the Utes were removed from the region in 1881. The Army built a small post of log buildings at what would become Meeker.

When the Army left, the logs from the Army post were used by locals for their homes and outbuildings.

One of the cabins at Buford has "U.S." stamped on its logs and may have come from the old Army post, Tucker said.

But ranchers weren't the only ones who came to the White River Valley. Tourists also began arriving soon after the Utes left. Teddy Roosevelt famously hunted mountain lions northwest of Meeker in 1901 and stayed at the Meeker Hotel.

One pre-1920s newspaper advertisement for the Buford Stage Line touted the line as the "Tourist route to Trapper's Lake, the Marvine Lakes and the Upper White River."

In those days, Buford's buildings — a store, post office and nearby school — were all on the south side of the White River near its confluence with the South Fork.

The school, which still stands near the South Fork, predates the store by several decades.

The Upper White River School District was organized in May 1889. Not long after it opened, the teacher, Mrs. Cloherty, and her students decided — for reasons long forgotten — to name the school after Civil War General John Buford. By

1902, it was officially known as the Buford School District.

Mrs. Cloherty also served as postmistress for Buford, operating the post office out of her ranch house.

Later, her husband sold the ranch to John and Alice Bartlett and Alice became postmistress. In 1899, the Bartletts opened the first Buford Store at their ranch on the south side of the river.

As a result, Buford became an important freight stop.

"The women sent cream, butter and produce down on the stage to Meeker," wrote author Ricki Buckles, whose family owned land in the Buford area. "In return, the freight wagon brought up mail, supplies."

People could also hitch a ride on the freight wagons into Meeker or up the valley to other stops.

In 1919, the Buford Post Office closed, and presumably the store as well, although mail continued to be carried to Marvine Lakes.

Two years later, a man named Lawrence "L.L." Offerle purchased the property on the north side of the river where the current Buford cabins and store now sit.

Offerle soon had a new version of the Buford Store operating in a small cabin on the property. That cabin still stands and is rented to tourists.

A friend of Offerle's set up a sawmill on the property and, by 1923, they had constructed the main store, with living quarters, and a number of other cabins. The Buford Post Office was re-established at the new store, and a gas station to serve the growing automobile and

truck traffic was added.

Offerle, who went on to operate a lodge at Trapper's Lake, sold the Buford Store to Charles and Clara Grove in 1936, and they sold it to their son, Ralph Grove.

From 1945 through 1947, Glen Stephens lived in a U.S. Forest Service cabin two miles upstream from Buford while his father served as a forest ranger. He attended Buford School.

The school, Stephens said, "was a two-room building with an outhouse and a multi-stall horse shed." He and his brother rode horses to school, as did many other students.

"One family had a goat that sometimes came to school with their kids and horse," he added.

The Stephenses made infrequent trips to Meeker when they could. But not in the spring.

"The narrow winding road to Meeker was sometimes dusty, but during each spring breakup was muddy and impassable for almost a month," Stephens wrote.

When L.L. Offerle owned the Buford Store, he worked at sawmills or on road projects in the winter to supplement his income. Ralph Grove continued working for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service after he bought the store.

"Everyone who has owned this place has had to have outside income," said Tom Tucker.

His family owns a property-management company in Fort Collins, which a son and daughter operate in the summer. Tom and Diane spend winters in Fort Collins.

By the time Harry and Ethel Tucker — Tom's parents —

purchased the Buford Store and cabins in 1958, the school had closed. Tom Tucker and his brother, Harry, or Chips, attended school in Meeker, where their mother was a teacher. Harry also taught school for a time.

Tom's father depended on that teaching income for much of the 40-plus years he owned the business. When he could no longer handle the business, Tom and brother Chips took over.

Buford remains in the Tucker family today. Tom and Diane have operated it since 2006, renting RV camping spots and the historic cabins.

Situated in the pines along the White River, Buford is a cool attraction during the heat of July, with nearby access to the Flatops. It continues to draw people back, year after year.

"If I didn't enjoy it so much, and because I grew up here, we probably would have sold it long ago," Tom Tucker said.

Glen Stephens wrote in the 1990s that he and his brother visited Buford repeatedly throughout their adult lives.

"The Buford experiences we had ... have a special place in our memories," he said. "We lived many other places as children. But we have not had the urge to retrace our steps to those other places."

Sources: Tom and Diane Tucker; "My Memories of Buford, Colorado, 1945-1947," by Glen Stephens; "A History of Buford, Colorado," by Ricki Buckles.

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Crews fight lightning-caused fire near Rulison

By SENTINEL STAFF

About 50 people battled the lightning-caused Cache Creek Fire near Rulison on Sunday, according to a press release from the U.S. Forest Service.

The fire was reported about 8:30 p.m. Saturday and by Sunday night covered more

than 100 acres, crews estimated. Smoke was visible from the Interstate 70 corridor.

"We're engaging it as aggressively as we can," said Tyko Isaacson, Central Zone fire management officer for the Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire Management Unit.

He said helicopters and single-engine

air tankers were working the fire Sunday morning, and two engines and two 20-person crews also were responding.

Crews delayed responding until Sunday morning because of a lack of visibility, the release said.

No evacuations had been ordered as of Sunday afternoon.

BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Liquor store thief being sought in Montrose area

The Montrose Police Department is looking for a suspected liquor store thief who officers believe is linked to a "series of shoplifting cases" in the Montrose area, according to a press release.

The suspect was captured on security cameras wearing a yellow tank top and dark baseball cap during a theft at 4:12 p.m.

July 21 at West Main Liquors.

According to the release, the man stole a can of alcohol and left in a 2015 blue Honda.

Anyone with information about



the case may contact Montrose Regional Crime Stoppers anonymously at 970-249-8500 and may be eligible for a cash award.

Tipsters can also provide information at P3tips.com or using the PR Tips mobile app.

According to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office:

Deputies sought a warrant for the arrest of a 49-year-old woman in connection with an assault reported July 27 in the 100 block of Homestead Court.

Pick 3 Midday Sunday: 2-5-2 Evening Sunday: 6-8-4

Cash 5 Sunday: 22-24-25-29-31

For information, go to www.coloradolottery.com.

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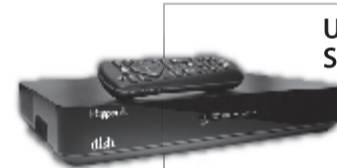
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