

FIRST DRAFT

Tree and rock drawings gave shepherd an artistic outlet

Pacomio Chacon was a very good shepherd, and he was proud of that fact.

But he was an even better artist. He left his drawings — mostly of curvaceous women, but also of animals and other scenes — on aspen trees and rock walls throughout western Colorado and eastern Utah.

Chacon died in 2009, but earlier this year, Montrose archaeologist Steve Baker published a book about Chacon's life and art: "My name is Pacomio; The Life and Works of Colorado's Shepherd and Master Artist of Nature's Canvases."

Countless shepherders have carved drawings on aspen trees throughout the West, and several books and studies have been conducted about this form of folk art.

But, Baker wrote, "It is the comparatively high quality and prolific nature of his work that sets Paco far apart from these other old 'tree writers.'"

Despite conducting years of research to find examples of shepherders' art throughout the West, Baker said, "I can't find anybody who was as good as Paco. If he hadn't drawn women, if he had just done horses or landscapes, we would still be celebrating his art."

But he did draw women, probably hundreds of them. Mostly he drew nudes, but some were partially clothed. He proudly signed them, and they became his backcountry calling cards.

Baker once asked Chacon why he drew so many figures of women, and the shepherd replied "Ay yay yay, that is all I could think of when I was out there."

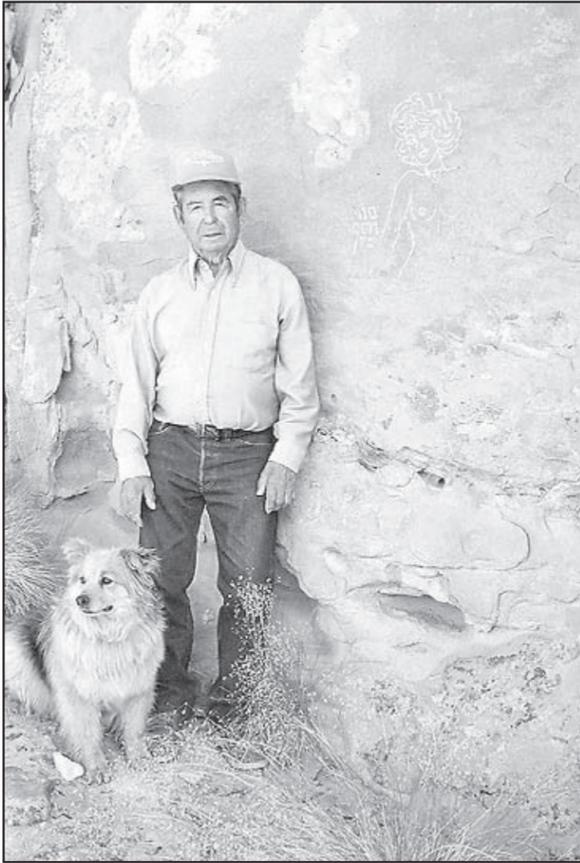
Chacon's aspen carving technique was as unique as his talent.

Others gouged wide cuts in the trees, so their work was immediately visible. But in a few years, as the tree produced ever more scar tissue to heal the cut, the images would be less and less recognizable.

Chacon carved with the smallest blade on his pocket knife, barely breaking through the bark. These carvings were almost invisible initially.

It would take two or three years for the black scar tissue to fill the carved marks enough to make the drawing fully visible, and several more years before the drawing reached what Baker called "full bloom," when it was most distinctive.

If Chacon changed jobs, or



The late Paco Chacon is shown in 1992 with some of his rock art near Rangely. The shepherd's life is chronicled in a book.

if his employer moved to new summer pasture, he might never see his drawings in full bloom.

Pacomio Martinez Chacon was born in 1916 in La Mesa del Poleo, New Mexico, a poor Hispanic community. Paco was the third of six sons.

When he was 15, in the midst of the Great Depression, Chacon got his first job as a shepherd on a ranch near Monticello, Utah. Eventually, he would herd sheep near Craig, Meeker, Montrose and Norwood in Colorado, and in west-central and northeastern Utah, as well as the Monticello region.

Although he had only a few years of formal education, Chacon could read. And he wrote in fancy, flowing cursive or fine block printing. That talent helped during World War II, when his Army comrades traded Chacon cigarettes and candy to have him address their letters home.

When Chacon was discharged from the Army, he moved to Fruita with his young bride, Ophelia, and the couple had six children. Chacon briefly worked for the railroad, but soon returned to shepherding,

an occupation he would continue for 50 years.

But the absentee life of a shepherd and Chacon's hard-drinking ways when he was home didn't sit well with Ophelia. The couple separated in 1957 but never divorced.

In later years, he would often stay with his daughter, Alice Montano, in Fruita. After he retired from shepherding, he lived with his brother in Fruita. His final years were spent in an assisted-living center there.

Baker first encountered Chacon's art on aspen trees in the Lone Cone area in the 1970s. He ran into the masterful drawings again, this time as rock art, while working on an archaeological project near Rangely in the late 1980s. He decided to seek out the artist.

They met in Fruita in 1992, and Baker put together a photographic show of Chacon's work that was displayed at the Meeker Sheepdog Trials that year, with assistance from the Colorado Endowment for the Arts and the Museum of Western Colorado.

He also helped win recognition for the shepherd as a "Master" folk artist.

Over the ensuing years,



A fully dressed female figure drawn by Paco Chacon, date unknown, on an aspen tree that was later cut and the drawing recovered. It is now owned by the Meeker Museum.

Baker and Chacon traveled together — to the tiny community where Chacon was born to sites where some of his art was still visible and to other places. Chacon recounted stories of his life and shepherding to Baker.

Baker's book isn't just about Paco Chacon's life and art. It's also the story of the unique friendship that developed between the university educated archaeologist from Kansas and the poorly schooled New Mexican who spent most of his life with sheep.

Baker told Chacon he planned to write a book about the shepherd and his art — "mi libro," Chacon called it.

But Chacon died before Baker completed the book, and that is one of Baker's great regrets, he said.

The last of Chacon's aspen art is well past its full bloom now, and is rapidly deteriorating. A few of his drawings were cut by loggers and preserved. But all of those have either vanished or are in private collections.

Some of his rock art is still visible but is difficult to find. Photos of some of his work may eventually be put on display in a museum, but for now, the only opportunity to see examples of Pacomio Chacon's artwork is in Baker's book.

Information for this column came from interviews with Steve Baker and from his book, "My Name Is Pacomio," which is available at *Out West Books, Grand Valley Books and Crystal Books in Grand Junction, at the Museums of Western Colorado and through Centuries Research in Montrose.*

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Thurlow loses appeal over campaign finances

By CHARLES ASHBY
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Rep. Dan Thurlow's argument that he shouldn't have been fined for making errors on some of his campaign finance reports last year didn't

past muster with the Colorado Court of Appeals. A three-judge panel of the court ruled last week that none of the Grand Junction Republican's points were persuasive in arguing that an administrative law judge erred when he imposed a fine of \$1,080 and told Thurlow to return \$1,000 in campaign contributions.

The case began when a right-leaning group, Campaign Integrity Watchdog, filed a complaint against Thurlow in April 2015 saying that some of the then-freshman lawmaker's campaign finance reports filed with the Secretary of State's Office failed to show the occupation of some donors as the law requires.

A second complaint was later filed by the same group when Thurlow tried to file an amended report to correct those errors, which also included three contributions that should have been included in an earlier report.

As a result, the law judge reviewing the two complaints concluded that Thurlow was in violation of state laws governing how reports are to be filed.

In his appeal, Thurlow said

he shouldn't have been fined because he tried to "cure" the errors in the amended filing, saying that attempt constitutes "substantial compliance" as the law allows.

Thurlow also argued that the group was only able to file its second complaint after he tried to comply with earlier errors in his amended report, saying being fined for doing so would discourage other candidates from trying to correct honest mistakes.

Instead, candidates would wait for the statute of limitations to pass before correcting errors.

The court, however, didn't agree.

"A candidate committee that discovers its failure to have made required disclosures would still be choosing between two risks: on the one hand, amend as soon as possible to stop the per-day penalty accrual; or, on the other hand, delay amending until the statute of limitations has run, hoping that a potential complainant will not discern the inadequate disclosure from another source and file earlier," Judge John Webb wrote in the opinion, which was joined by Judges Robert Hawthorne and Anthony Navarro. "To the extent that this choice creates a dilemma, it inheres in the plain statutory language, from which we cannot depart."



REP. DAN THURLOW

IN BRIEF SENTINEL STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

Hearing set on Rocky Mountain changes

On Wednesday, the Colorado attorney general will conduct a public hearing on the proposed conversion of the Rocky Mountain Health Maintenance Organization from nonprofit status to for-profit status, and its subsequent sale to United HealthCare Services Inc. Members of the public are invited to attend the hearing and submit their comments about the proposed conversion.

The attorney general is reviewing the proposed conversion, under the agency's common law authority over charitable trusts. The terms of the proposed conversion and sale, as submitted to the attorney general, can be found on the attorney general's website at coag.gov.

The public comment period for the proposed conversion is open, and members of the public can submit comments on the attorney general's website until close of business on Nov. 2.

The public hearing will be from 5 to 7 p.m. Wednesday at the DoubleTree Hotel, 743 Horizon Drive in Grand Junction.

Heat, clear skies intensify Junkins Fire

WESTCLIFFE — Firefighters say warmer-than-normal weather, clear skies and low humidity are intensifying a wildfire burning near Westcliffe that has destroyed nine homes.

Officials on Sunday urged drivers to watch out for higher levels of smoke on the road that can impair visibility. They also warned drivers not to slow down or stop unexpectedly to observe firefighting efforts. Some residents remain evacuated from their homes.

BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

No local law enforcement agencies submitted crime reports on Sunday.

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Chemical cloud over Kansas town dissipates

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATCHISON, Kan. — A chemical spill at a northeast Kansas distilling plant released a noxious cloud of fumes Friday, forcing temporary evacuations and sending dozens of people to the hospital, including two who were in intensive care, officials said.

Most of the people who went to hospitals since have been released.

The spill occurred at the MGP Ingredients plant in Atchison, according to Katie Horner, spokeswoman for the Kansas Department of Emergency Management.

She said the spill occurred as two chemicals, sulfuric acid and sodium hypochlorite, were mistakenly combined at the plant, which produces premium distilled spirits and employs about 300 people.

When the two chemicals combine, they can release chlorine gas, according to the Environ-



Trey Cocking, the city manager of Atchison, Kan., addresses the media after a chemical incident occurred at the MPG Ingredients plant on Friday in Atchison.

mental Protection Agency.

Homes and schools near the plant were evacuated early Friday, but city officials gave the all clear for residents to return be-

fore noon. Atchison has about 11,000 residents and is about 50 miles northwest of Kansas City.

"The threat is really over, and it's safe to be outside," said

Becky Berger, assistant city manager. She advised residents to air out homes that smell like a swimming pool.

Sixty-seven people sought medical attention at the Atchison Hospital emergency room, spokeswoman T.C. Roberts said, and one person remained in stable condition in intensive care. Most had been released, but two other people were admitted to the hospital.

Mosaic Life Care in nearby St. Joseph, Missouri, also treated about 18 people, including one who remained in ICU, said Joey Austin, hospital spokeswoman. All the others were released.

The regional EPA office said it was supporting state and local emergency crews and had sent a coordinator to the site to assess the situation.

MGP didn't immediately return calls seeking comment.

Chris Gitro, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said wind conditions helped the plume break up.

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