

The Bostwick Park Project:

Colorado River Storage Project

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The Bostwick Park Project

The former small west-central Colorado town of Bostwick Park barely made a blip on most maps and atlases, if it even showed up at all. A small farming community of roughly forty-five families, the town offered little in the way of tourist attractions, which probably accounted for a decided lack of general knowledge and information about the area.

The area did, however, register in the United States Bureau of Reclamation's internal project planning. Charged with developing the Upper Colorado River Basin under the Colorado River Storage Project Act in 1956, Reclamation designed a project to aid local water users with their continued irrigation needs. One of the designated "Participating Projects" of the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP), the Bostwick Park Project, as it came to be known, was partially constructed with funds from the generation of power at CRSP units located on the main-stem of the Colorado River, including Glen Canyon and Flaming Gorge. The overall CRSP system was designed to encourage development of the upper Colorado river basin. Participating projects were tied financially, through power revenues deposited in the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund, to the actual CRSP units, allowing for construction of smaller projects which might otherwise be financially unstable. In this case the program worked; main stem hydropower generation funded construction of a smaller project in an area which otherwise could not support project funding, but needed the additional water resources Reclamation could provide.

Project Location

Located in west-central Colorado just north of the city of Montrose, the Bostwick Park Project consists of the Silver Jack Dam and Reservoir and an irrigation distribution system. The dam sits on Cimarron Creek about twenty-miles above its junction with the Gunnison River. The project developed flows of Cimarron Creek, a tributary of the Gunnison River, for irrigation and recreational purposes. The project provides full and supplemental irrigation water to

approximately 5,608 acres of land in the Bostwick Park Water Conservancy District.¹ Project facilities, with the exception of the distribution system, are entirely located within the Uncompahgre National Forest.

Historic Setting

Prehistoric Setting

The earliest archaeologically confirmed inhabitants of southwestern Colorado date back nearly 10,000 years. The discovery of Folsom and Clovis Points on the Uncompahgre Plateau suggest land usage and possibly settlement by early humans, Folsom and Clovis hunters, dates back even further.

The Uncompahgre Complex, an archaeological term denoting native residents of the region of west-central Colorado along the Uncompahgre Plateau, inhabited the region beginning in roughly 10,000 B.C. This group depended primarily on hunting and gathering for subsistence and as such traveled extensively throughout the region. Archaeologists theorize that the Uncompahgre Complex preceded the Ute Indian culture.

The Fremont group occupied the region just to the north and west of the Uncompahgre Complex from roughly 700 to 1100 B.C.; the Fremont culture was so named because the original archaeological finds occurred in the Fremont River basin in south-central Utah. Archaeologists know little about this particular culture, however artifacts found throughout the Uncompahgre Complex region demonstrate a fairly wide sphere of influence. The Fremont people constructed pithouse-like structures and used aboveground masonry. They relied on a variety of subsistence methods; they grew crops as well as traditional hunting and gathering. For as yet undetermined reasons, the Fremont returned to a nomadic existence around 1100.

1. United States Department of the Interior, Water and Power Resources Service, *Project Data*, (Denver: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 61.

The Anasazi Indians, the most recognized of Colorado's ancient inhabitants, settled throughout southwestern Colorado beginning about 2000 years ago and lasting for about 1300 years. Archaeologists divide the Anasazi period into four distinct cultural periods—the Basketmaker Period (1-450), the Modified Basketmaker Period (450-750), the Developmental Pueblo Period (750-1100), and the Classic Pueblo Period (1100-1300). Each period denotes a subtle advance in either technology or craftsmanship throughout the culture, the final considered a period of cultural greatness. Though theories abound as to why the Anasazi abandoned the area in 1300, no definitive widely-accepted conclusion has been reached.² On the other hand, the Uncompahgre Complex stayed and slowly evolved into the Ute culture encountered by the Spanish several hundred years later.

Historic Setting

The earliest exploration of the southwestern United States took place in 1540, when Coronado journeyed throughout the area. In the late 1500s, prior to the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock in 1620, Spanish colonists from Mexico moved northward encountering Pueblo villages and the Grand Canyon. By 1640, the Ute realized the benefits of the horse and established trade with the Spanish. The new trade relationship ensured amicable relations which in turn allowed the Spanish to freely explore beyond the frontier north of New Mexico.

Beginning in 1761, Juan de Rivera led three separate expeditions to the northern Colorado Rockies looking primarily for mineral wealth. Though the first two expeditions found no precious metals, the third one did establish a brisk trade with the Ute living in the vicinity of the Gunnison River. Outside of sporadic trade records historians know little about Spanish activities in southwestern Colorado after Rivera's expeditions.

2. Paul M. O'Rourke, *Frontier in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado*. Cultural Resources Series, No. 10, (Colorado: Bureau of Land Management, 1980), 15, 17-8.

The next major Spanish expedition took place in 1776. Fathers Francisco V. Dominguez and Silvestre Velez de Escalante set out hoping to discover a route between Santa Fe and the missions of California. The fathers believed that a more southwestern course to California was impractical due to the Hopi villages and Hopi hostility to the Spanish. For this reason the fathers chose a route north of the Colorado River through Ute country. Though they never reached California, the fathers and their expedition discovered much about the history and development of the southwest. As new explorers and settlers traveled north from Mexico and New Mexico they followed a portion of the fathers' route which later became known as the Old Spanish Trail.

By the start of the nineteenth century, Spanish dominance over the southwest began to wane. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803, brought more and more pressure in the form of explorers. From 1821, when Mexico formally took control of the area, until the American annexation of Mexican lands in 1848 following the Mexican War, Mexico tried to retain control of the land in present Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona. Their efforts were to no avail, however, as the start of the fur trade brought additional explorers to the region.³

The explorers the fur trade brought to the region would not fit anyone's traditional definition of explorers. They did not set out to map, document, and settle the region, instead they came to exploit the fur resources of the area. The fur trappers explored much of the Rocky Mountain region while searching for new hunting grounds, though they rarely recorded their findings. This period of informal exploration lasted roughly forty years, after which much of the beaver had been trapped.

More traditional explorations of the region, many of them sponsored by the Federal Government, followed the decline of the fur trade. While Lewis and Clark undertook their famous expedition beginning in 1803, they never reached into Colorado. Other federally

3. O'Rourke, 25-6, 28.

sponsored expeditions followed. Led by the likes of John Frémont (in ventures supported by his father-in-law, Senator Thomas Hart Benton), Captain John Williams Gunnison, and Captain Randolph B. Marcy, the expeditions of the first half of the nineteenth century all had common goals, namely finding a route to the Pacific Ocean and generally mapping the region. Many, including Fremont and Benton, believed that the best route west went through Colorado over the Rocky Mountains. Just the opposite proved true as the Rockies proved nearly impassible, especially in winter which proved disastrous for more than one expedition as they floundered off course and got lost in the snow. For the most part, Anglo settlers, miners, missionaries and opportunists avoided the area, as there seemed to be little of interest in the region.⁴

Throughout the first part of the nineteenth century, even as explorers began to map the region, the Ute remained relatively unaffected by the growing Anglo presence in the region. Until roughly 1860, the Ute retained their seasonal hunting grounds and wandering way of life with little contact with the mostly Spanish residents. The discovery of mineral wealth in southwestern Colorado brought many new settlers and gold seekers to the area which in turn disrupted the traditional Ute way of life. The influx of people, many with “mineral fever,” drastically changed the Ute way of life; suddenly the Ute had to compete for previously uncontested lands and resources. The invading Anglos prevailed, as they did throughout most of the West, and the Ute were gradually moved onto reservations. By 1881, the Ute had been entirely moved onto reservations in far southwestern Colorado and Utah effectively ending the Ute occupation of southwestern Colorado.⁵

Removal of the Ute from southwestern Colorado further opened the area to settlement and use by Anglo settlers. Those seeking to exploit the mineral resources of the area could do so

4. O'Rourke, 35-7, 40.

5. O'Rourke, 45, 47, 54.

unencumbered by previous settlement of the land. At the same time, nothing blocked establishment of at least semi-permanent settlements. Settlers were primarily merchants and farmers who provided much needed food and supplies to others within the region. The growing settlement of the area in turn created a demand for better and more efficient transportation methods and routes.

In January of 1882, Joseph Selig, O. D. Loutzenhizer, S. A. Culbertson, A. Pumphrey, and John Baird laid out the town of Montrose. The arrival of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (D&RG) soon after establishment of the town answered the need for improved transportation while also assuring the town's role as a regional distribution center. The proximity of the railroad led to the introduction of cattle and sheep ranching in the area.⁶

Residents first settled in Bostwick Park and its vicinity in the 1880s. By 1930, the area reached its peak population of seventy-five to eighty families; from there the population decreased to roughly forty families by 1960, largely due to poor climatic and economic conditions in the area. The families in the area concentrated their efforts on raising cattle and sheep with irrigated lands used to grow feed, including alfalfa, grass hay, pasture, and small grains.

Irrigated agriculture in the Bostwick Park area began during the early 1900s. Early irrigation in the region was provided by a number of private irrigation companies, the Vernal Mesa Ditch and Reservoir Company, the Hairpin Lateral Ditch Company, and the Cimarron and Uncompahgre Valley Canal and Reservoir Company. These companies built private ditches and canals to deliver water to local residents. As the needs of irrigators outgrew the capabilities of the irrigation companies residents began looking for outside sources of funding to maintain local water supplies. One such source was the Bureau of Reclamation which began investigations in

6. O'Rourke, 71, 83, 122.

the project area in 1951.⁷

Project Authorization

Reclamation originally investigated the Bostwick Park Project in conjunction with the proposed Gunnison River Project. A 1951, reconnaissance report detailed plans for both projects, however the project remained undeveloped. Congress passed the Colorado River Storage Project Act April 11, 1956, authorizing construction of the four storage units of the Colorado River Storage Project (Flaming Gorge, Glen Canyon, Navajo, and the Wayne Aspinall⁸ Units). The Act also authorized construction of eleven participating projects scattered throughout Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. As development of the upper basin continued Congress authorized additional participating CRSP projects.

In 1961, Reclamation prepared a second feasibility study on Bostwick Park. Essentially the same as the original, this new report provided the basis for Congressional authorization of the Bostwick Park Project, on September 2, 1964, as a participating project of the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP).⁹

Construction History

The Bostwick Park Project consists of Silver Jack Dam and an extended distribution system supplied by the existing Vernal Mesa Ditch to serve lands above the original irrigation facilities. Silver Jack Dam, a zoned earth-fill structure located about seventeen and one-half miles south of Cimarron, Colorado, on the Cimarron River, has a structural height of 173 feet with a crest 1,050 feet long and thirty feet wide. The structure itself contains 1,278,140 cubic feet of material. The outlet works consist of a morning glory spillway structure, spillway basin,

7. Denver Colorado, National Archives and Records Administration: Rocky Mountain Region, Records of the Bureau of Reclamation, Record Group 115, "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 11, 1976," 1.

8. Reclamation renamed the Curecanti Unit the Wayne Aspinall Unit October 3, 1980.

9. *Project Data*, 63, 360-1.

and adjacent outlet stilling works basin. The Silver Jack Reservoir holds a total of 13,520 acre-feet of water. Project water is released from Silver Jack Reservoir into Cimarron Creek. From the creek water travels into the pre-existing Cimarron Canal two and one-half miles below the dam. Some water is used on lands in the Cimarron area, but the canal conveys the bulk of project water another twenty-three miles to the canal's end at Cerro Summit. From there the water is diverted into the existing Hairpin and Vernal Mesa Ditches. The Reclamation-constructed Bostwick Lateral delivers water from the Vernal Mesa Ditch and conveys it across Bostwick Park through an 18-inch siphon to lands above the West Vernal Mesa Lateral. The preexisting Cimarron Ditch, the Vernal Mesa, east and west Vernal Mesa, and Hairpin ditches also supply water to project lands.¹⁰

Preconstruction surveys for Silver Jack Dam began August 4, 1966. Bids for construction of the project were opened September 8, 1966. Reclamation awarded the contract to the low bidder, Johnson and Blattner Construction Company of Litchfield, Minnesota. Construction activities started October 21, 1966, with the cutting of timber and brush and clearing of the damsite. The contractor diverted the Cimarron River through a channel cut along the toe of the left abutment beginning on November 18. Soon after the diversion of the river construction activities ceased for the year.

The contractor resumed work on the Silver Jack Dam in April of 1967. Work continued on the project through November when weather forced a halt to construction activities for the season. Work during the 1967 season focused primarily on excavation operations for the canal areas, the spillway, cutoff trench, and the reservoir and damsite. Actual construction of the dam embankment began in August.

10. *Project Data*, 61; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 1, 1966," 11; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 8, 1973," 4.

Construction activities resumed in May of 1968 with the dewatering of the stilling basins for the spillway and outlet works. Work continued for the remainder of the season without interruption. The following year, 1969, work on the project began in late March after considerable snow removal. Structure excavation for the spillway stilling basin extension started April 14, and continued until late April.

During the night of April 22, 1969, a massive landslide occurred on the right cut slope of the spillway stilling basin. The slide covered approximately nine and one-half acres and contained an estimated 700,000 tons of material. Even after cleanup operations had been completed in mid-May, the slide forced the abandonment and relocation of a portion of the spillway stilling basin. Two additional minor slides occurred on July 16 and 26. The new slides deposited an estimated 300 cubic yards and 150 cubic yards of saturated material within the excavated area of the relocated spillway conduit. Cleanup of the new slides was completed in August and concrete placement in the relocated spillway began August 15. Work continued on various portions of the project until late December when construction activities ceased for the year.¹¹

Work on the project resumed May 6, 1970, when the contractor began clearing snow from the County Road to the damsite. The contractor again rerouted the Cimarron River in July, diverting it through the outlet works allowing them to concentrate operations in the diversion gap. During the year, much of the work centered on completion of the dam embankment. The dam itself was sufficiently completed by the end of the year which allowed the Cimarron River to return to its previous route on December 23, 1970. For the first time since the start of

11. "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 1, 1966," 11-2; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 2, 1967," 10-11; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 3, 1968," 5; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 4, 1969," 6, 11-3.

construction work continued through the winter season. The initial structures on the project were completed enough to allow the initial diversion of water through the outlet works for irrigation purposes on May 4, 1971, just in time for the start of the irrigation season.

Reclamation accepted all work under the contract as substantially complete September 1, 1971, with only cleaning and inspection work on the spillway remaining. Reclamation accepted the contract as complete on January 4, 1972, and delivery of project water began in June of 1972..¹²

Development of design and specification data for the construction of additional canals and laterals on the project began in March of 1967 with field surveys of the existing canals and laterals in the vicinity of the project. The first stage of this portion of the project began October 27, 1972, when Reclamation awarded the contract for siphon replacement on the Vernal Mesa Ditch. The contractor completed the siphon replacement the following March, but due to leaks Reclamation did not accept the contract as complete until May 10, 1973. Reclamation awarded the contract for construction of the Bostwick Lateral in September and work began October 15. Work on the Bostwick Lateral was completed in July of 1974. On October 25, Reclamation entered into a contract with the Bostwick Park Water Conservancy District for rehabilitation of the Bostwick drains. The conservancy district contracted to do the work based upon Reclamation's plans and specifications. The conservancy district completed work under this contract on October 31, 1974.¹³

In 1975, the Bostwick Park Water Conservancy District made required repairs to the Bostwick Lateral on the north and south ends. After completion of the necessary repairs,

12. "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 5, 1970," 10; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 6, 1971," 8, 10; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 7, 1972," 7.

13. "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 2, 1967," 9; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 7, 1972," 7; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 8, 1973," 5; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 9, 1974," 2.

Reclamation officials made a pre-transfer inspection of the project. Reclamation then transferred the project to the Bostwick Park Water Conservancy District for operation and maintenance on January 1, 1976. The conservancy district held a public dedication ceremony on July 29, 1976. Former Congressman Wayne Aspinall was the principal speaker.¹⁴

Post-Construction History

In 1979, Reclamation investigated the area along the canal and lateral system based on a report from the conservancy district detailing evidence of several small landslides over a period of approximately fifteen years. Reclamation determined that a deposit of Mancos shale precipitated the slides and that further movement in the area could pose a hazard to canal operations. Since the slide took several years to develop immediate repairs were not necessary. In the meantime, the Forest Service began construction of recreation facilities near the reservoir in 1980.

The conservancy district delayed work on the slide affected areas until 1984, when damage to additional features on the project, including Silver Jack Dam and the Cimarron Canal, required immediate attention. On May 31, 1984, the Bostwick Park Water Conservancy District submitted an application to Reclamation for an emergency loan to repair the damaged features. Damage consisted of destruction of the spillway outlet gate at Silver Jack Dam and a massive slide on the Cimarron Canal. After inspecting the project features in June, Reclamation officials recommended approval of the loan request. Reclamation executed a contract with the conservancy district for funds to rehabilitate the project, on September 26, 1984. The conservancy district completed the necessary repairs the following year.¹⁵

14. "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 10, 1975," 6; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 11, 1976," 2-3.

15. "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project-Participating Project, volume 14, 1979," 33-34; "Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage

(continued...)

Settlement of the Project

Local residents developed the lands in the vicinity of the Bostwick Park Project prior to construction of the project. Due to the existing settlement, no new lands were developed in conjunction with the project.

Uses of Project Water

Operated and maintained by the Bostwick Park Water Conservancy District, the Bostwick Park Project provides dependable late season irrigation water to residents in the Bostwick Park area. The project supplies full and supplemental water to approximately 5,608 acres of land. As the primary enterprises in the area center on cattle and sheep, the principal crops grown on project lands include alfalfa, grass hay pasture, and small feed grains.

Silver Jack Reservoir provides recreation opportunities, including sport fishing. Under a cooperative agreement with Reclamation, the Forest Service developed and manages the recreation facilities at the reservoir. Facilities include campgrounds, a boat ramp, access roads, and trails. Visitor days numbered almost 22,000 in 1992.¹⁶

Conclusion

Few people know of the Bostwick Park Project, a participating project in the Colorado River Storage Project. The local residents, however, understand the value of the project for it allows them to maintain a lifestyle which has been evolving since before the turn of the century; a lifestyle centered around small family owned and operated farms and cattle ranches. The water supplied by the Bureau of Reclamation in the 1960s alleviated previous water storage problems experienced by area residents allowing local residents to continue their established way of life.

15. (...continued)
Project–Participating Project, volume 18, 1983-1985,” 3; “Annual Project History, Bostwick Park Project, Colorado River Storage Project–Participating Project, volume 18, 1983-1985,” 28.

16. *Project Data*, 63; United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, *1992 Summary Statistics: Water, Land and Related Data*, 113.

For this reason, and for this reason alone, the project achieved its purpose.

About the Author

Toni Rae Linenberger, a Colorado native, received her B.A. in History from The Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colorado in 1996. In 1998, she earned a MS in Western American History from Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Ms. Linenberger's final paper, a case study entitled *A Dam for All Seasons: Hollywood, the Bureau of Reclamation, and Construction of Parker Dam*, explored the relationship between the growth of a small town in California and the development of the Colorado River.

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