

A little history ...

When the official Spanish government expedition, headed by Escalante, took it's siesta on the banks of Dove Creek on the hot afternoon of August 15, 1776, the area was already known to traders from Spanish New Mexico. The Escalante-Dominguez Expedition in 1776, was from the Catholic mission in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Their purpose was to explore unknown lands and to open a route to the Spanish missions in California. They also set out to convert Indians to the Spanish culture and religion. A historical marker is placed in Triangle Park marking the Expedition's journey through Dove Creek.

Later the Old Spanish Trail witnessed the passage of thousands of traders with their pack animals through the site of the community in the mid-1800's. The dust from trader caravans with their plodding Indian captives (for sale as slaves in New Mexico) and California horses had scarcely settled when Dove Creek began to echo with the jingle of cowboy's spurs.

Hidden from the world by rugged mountains, inhospitable deserts, desolate canyonlands, and vast distances, the region was inhabited by several hostile Indian tribes. These tribes included Utes, Navajos, and Paiutes. Not until the 1870's did stockmen settle the area. Chief routs of ingress were the paths of the Old Spanish Trail along which traveled the long-riding Texas cowboys with their thousands of longhorned cattle.

The high elevation pasture lands of the Great Sage Plain proved a paradise for incoming stockmen. It was a vast land of waving grass. The sage was kept in check by the lush native grasses which grew up to the cowboy's stirrups, and often higher than a mule deer's back. A century later, a retired cattleman, Henry McCabe, fondly remembered that, "This was wonderful range."

About 1910 overgrazing of the open range cattle country had caused many acres of the Dove Creek area grasslands to become mostly sage-covered. When the federal government surveyed the area and opened the region to homesteaders in 1914, farmers flocked to the sagelands. Thus ended the open range livestock area within a few years.

Dove Creek got its name from a creek that runs on the east side of town. History says that doves were very numerous. It is guessed that the freighter who hauled products over the ungraded dirt track from Dolores, Colorado and Monticello, Utah may have gotten the name from the local cowboys. In 1912 and 1913, the two bachelor Stokes brothers built the first retail store in western Dolores County on the hillside west of the creek. The building became the nucleus of Dove Creek over 90 years ago. The Stokes brothers also built the building that later became the County Courthouse. It still proudly stands on the southwest corner of Main Street and Highway 491.

For a complete history of Rico check their Web Page at www.ricocolorado.org.

Points of interest ...

Dolores Canyon Overlook ...

This magnificent recreation area is located 8 miles east of Dove Creek on Bureau of Land Management land. The area includes an absolutely spectacular view of the Dolores River and overnight camping is permitted. Fire pits, picnic tables, and primitive restrooms are available. This is one of the County's best hidden secrets.

The San Juan National Forest ...

The Glades is a vast area of beauty on the National Forest. Many of the roads are not maintained in the winter, so travel is limited. But many area residents find these areas a great place to travel by cross-country skis. Camping is permitted, and in the fall hunting season, the side roads are lined with hunting camps.

Historical points of interest ...

There are two sites in western Dolores County listed in the National Registry of Historical places.

The last Indian battle in Colorado took place at the Beaver Creek Massacre site. To locate it, take the Dolores-Norwood Road (Forest Road 526) to Forest Road 525. Turn southwest, and travel one mile on an unimproved dirt road. An historical marker is located on the north side of the road.

Beaver Creek Massacre occurred June, 1885. A band of 11 Southern Ute Indians camped in the meadow. On that fateful morning, angry cattlemen charged the camp, killing 10 of the Utes. The cattlemen believed the Utes were responsible for killing cattle and stealing horses.

Fort Narraguinnep is the site of a fort built to protect the cattlemen from the Indians that same year, 1885. The fort was built with three-foot thick walls to protect the cattlemen, who feared an Indian uprising. The uprising never came.

Fort Narraguinnep is located at the head of Narraguinnep Canyon, on the west side of Forest Road 514, a few miles from Beaver Creek.

There are many buildings in Dolores County that hold untold history. Old log homesteader's cabins dot the countryside and edges of farm fields.

Within the town of Dove Creek itself, several older buildings line the main highway. In the town of Rico, in eastern Dolores County, the streets are lined with buildings built in the late 1800's. Rico was once the County seat and was a major mining center in the late 1800's and early 1900's. If you get the opportunity, you must visit the old jail in the basement of the Rico Courthouse.

Last but not least, the ancient remains of Anasazi dwellings and the artifacts from that culture cover the western portion of Dolores County. Be aware that picking up Indian artifacts of any kind is illegal. Please preserve the past and leave the artifacts where they lay.

Hiking trails ...

The high mountain hiking trails are mostly located in eastern Dolores County. Here are a few of the marked trails on Forest Service land.

FISH CREEK TRAIL

This nine-mile trail follows closely along the banks of Fish Creek through timbered as well as numerous dense-growth meadows. Be prepared for several stream and creek crossings. A large and well marked rock slide is easily crossed about one-third of the way up. Good fishing is reported, especially above the rock slide. Lush meadows also create a welcome environment for flies and mosquitoes. Long-sleeved shirts and pants are advisable, as well as insect repellent.

The trail is open to horseback riders, hikers, and mountain bikes (although their use could be quite difficult in places).

To reach the trail, travel up the West Dolores Road to a fork in the road (8 miles), turn west. The road then travels through private property until the Forest Service sign.

MAVRESSO TRAIL

This trail is named after a friendly Ute war chief, Mavresso. The chief camped summers at the head of the canyon which also carries his name. The trail starts at 8,700 feet in altitude and ends at 9,000 feet. The trail is 2.5 miles long. It is a popular trail, used to access the Nipple Mountain area.

The trail starts in an aspen forest, and brings you to a grassy meadow, then into oak brush territory.

To find it travel five miles up the West Dolores Road, to Forest Service Road #532 (Cottonwood Road), proceed about three miles. The trail head is posted on the east side of the road before Cottonwood Springs.

FALL CREEK TRAIL

This is a good trail for cross country skiers and snowshoers. The lower portion of the trail follows a road. The first two-thirds is quite scenic and a constant climb. The next mile takes on along an old logging road and is clear cut. The last portion is much steeper, though switchbacks help to alleviate some of the worst parts. Conifer and aspen forests provide a good habitat for mule deer, elk, pika, and various birds. The trail is the quickest ascent to the Calico Trail.

To locate the Fall Creek Trail, travel south after passing through Dunton. Remember, Dunton is private property, and should be treated with respect.

The trail is four miles long. It starts at 8,800 feet and ends at 11,600 feet.

GEYSER SPRINGS TRAIL

Colorado's only true geyser is located at the end of Geyser Springs Trail. The geyser erupts about every 30-40 minutes with slight action for 12 to 15 minutes. The smell of sulfur gas is strong with the eruption. The geyser flows into a small hot pool where the water temperature is 82 .

The total hike is one and one-half miles. It rises approximately 900 feet in elevation. The ascent is gradual and passes through Aspen forests and small meadows.

To find the trail head, go 2.2 miles south of Dunton (or 23.3 miles from the junction of Colorado State Highway 145 and the West Road), and cross the West Dolores River.

HORSE CREEK TRAIL

By traveling north of Rico for two miles, you will find a gate that provides access to the Horse Creek Trail head. You can drive beyond the gate for one mile before the actual trail takes off.

This trail has a 2,000 foot climb in its three mile stretch, starting at 9,500 feet and ending at 11,760 feet. Consideration for those coming from sea level, and trail bike riders should be aware that the last climb is very steep. Horses account for half the total usage of this trail.

The walk up takes one through lush meadows, spruce, fir and aspen forests inhabited by mule deer, elk, coyote and smaller mammals such as the vagrant shrew. Several species of reptiles and birds also make their home here.

Approximately 1.5 miles from the trail's beginnings is an old mine with a vertical shaft about 10 feet off the trail -BE CAREFUL.

NAVAJO LAKE TRAIL

Only the well conditioned hiker should try this five mile hike. It has steep switchbacks and climbs to 11,154 feet in altitude.

Navajo Lake and the trail have some special rules for visitors. Please do not camp on the shoreline, or above the treeline. Try to camp so other campers can not see or hear you. Please deposit human waste more than 100 feet from the lake or streams. Camp in different spots each night to avoid damage to the vegetation.

To find Navajo Lake Trail head (the only way to get to Navajo Lake is to hike to it) travel one mile north of the Burro Bridge Campground, and turn west into a parking lot.

It is advised that you boil your water before drinking it, or carry water in.

This is an ideal overnight trip. Pick up brochures at the entrance and register.

SCOTCH CREEK TOLL ROAD

Scotch Creek Toll Road is a 19th century stage and wagon road. It starts three miles south of Rico, on Highway 145, when you turn east on Forest Road #550. The trail is at 8,600 feet in altitude at its beginning, and has sections as high as 9,178. This road can be traveled by vehicle, but travelers must be aware that the roads are steep, and can be slippery when wet.

Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife Viewing...

Arid sandstone canyons to snow covered mountain peaks along with rugged pine covered forests and rushing rivers provide a unique and diverse population of wildlife that can be found in very few other places besides Dolores County. People visiting Dolores County often come solely for the purpose of enjoying the diverse, and large amount of wildlife.

There are six species of big game animals that can be found in the county including mule deer, elk, black bear, mountain lion and desert bighorn sheep.

Large populations of both deer and elk exist through the majority of the county, and provide ample opportunity for sportsmen and nonconsumptive users alike. The largest mule deer ever recorded was taken in Dolores County.

Wintering herds of elk can frequently be found in area east of Dove Creek and Cahone.

A growing population of desert bighorn's inhabit the lower reaches of the Dolores River and can often be seen on the cliffs surrounding the river.

The mountain lion occupies similar habitat with populations remaining stable throughout the county.

Much of the area known as the Glade is ideal black bear habitat and supports a substantial portion of the state's black bear population.

In addition to the numbers of big game species that can be found in the area, there are several other types of wildlife that can be found in Dolores County.

Both beaver and river otter inhabit the Dolores River along with a growing population of wintering bald eagles. Both Bald and golden eagles can be found in Disappointment Valley through the winter. Dolores County is also home to coyotes, gray and kit foxes, badgers, longtail and shorttail weasels, raccoons, cottontail and jack rabbits. The Marriam's turkey is also common and can be found in many of the large Ponderosa Pine forests in the county.

Dolores County is also home to three species of grouse: Sage Grouse, Sharptail Grouse, and Blue Grouse. The Blue Grouse is common in the county while Sage and Sharptail are remnants of a once larger population and are protected. In addition to these birds, Dolores County

has a diverse population of waterfowl. Both ducks and geese can be found along the Dolores River and many small ponds throughout the county. There are also a myriad of other species of birds found in Dolores County for the visitor to enjoy.

Fishermen visiting the county are also in for a real treat. A large portion of the Dolores River is managed as a quality trout fishery. This catch-and-release portion of the river provides fishermen the opportunity to hook into trophy-sized Brown Rainbow and Cutthroat trout. The lower section of the Dolores River is also a good trout fishery and is managed so that those fishermen wishing to keep a limit of fish may do so.

Groundhog Reservoir, located in the northeastern portion of the county is also a great place for fishermen.

Nearby McPhee Reservoir is one of the largest bodies of water in the state and provides fishing for both warm and cold water fish, along with other types of water related recreation.

With over 60% of the county managed as public land through the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service, visitors have the unique opportunity to relax and enjoy wildlife in the area without overcrowding.

For more information on hunting season or watchable wildlife, contact the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

Our Area ...

In a survey conducted a few years ago, the residents of Dolores County rated "freedom" as one of the highest attributes of the community. Coming in second was the feeling of safety and security. Community satisfaction and social rewards followed in third place. Growth is now becoming a major issue in the area. The Town and County have recently reorganized their Planning Commissions to deal with growth issues.

The top three things people liked most about Dove Creek were the friendly people, small town atmosphere, and the location. The quality of life in Dove Creek is not only a community asset, it is also a continuing goal in economic development.

Social opportunities received a high rating - with 98% of the people saying they were satisfied with the social opportunities in the town. Physical surroundings received a 78% satisfaction rating followed by medical facilities and leisure opportunities.

The majority of the Dove Creek residents have a high school diploma, followed by those who have attended and/or completed a college degree program.

The Town of Dove Creek is the county seat for Dolores County. Dolores County had a population of 1,881 in 2003. Approximately 700 live inside the city limits of Dove Creek, while the remaining live outside the city limits (approximately 880), or in the Rico/Dunton area (300).

Nationally, less than 2% of the United States population lives in towns less than 1,000.

The County encompasses 1,064 square miles, mostly high mesas and narrow valleys in the western portion. The eastern portion is high mountains. The elevation in Dolores County ranges from 5,900 feet in Disappointment Valley to 14,046 feet on Mount Wilson.

The elevation of the town of Dove Creek is 6,843 feet and Rico is 8,800 feet. The average mean temperature is a low of 22 F. in January to an average high of 68 F. in July. The average precipitation is 15.07 inches of rain including and average of 48 inches of snow. Rico

has an average mean temperature of 21.7 in January and 57.8 in July. Rico has an average precipitation of 27.3 inches which includes 169 inches of snow.

City of Dove Creek water ...

Domestic water is provided within the town of Dove Creek by the local town government. The water system for Dove Creek was upgraded in 1978, and the treatment plant and pumping station were upgraded in 1989, 1993 and 2001.

The water is pumped from an underground water table at the Dolores River. It travels 4.5 miles and has a vertical rise of 1,000 feet to the town treatment plant. The treatment plant can treat 500,000 gallons per day. In addition, two steel storage tanks have a holding capacity of 625,000 gallons of treated water. A raw water reservoir will hold 100 acre feet. The plant is currently operating at 40% capacity. During the spring, summer and fall, raw water is available from the Dolores Water Conservancy District through the Dove Creek pumping plant.

There are over 500 water taps in Dove Creek. Contact the Dove Creek Town Office at 677-2255 for more information.

Rural water system ...

The system was completed in 1995 and provides potable water to residents in western Dolores County and parts of southwestern San Miguel County. There are 66 miles of mainline, three pumping stations, two in-line booster pumps and three 300,000 gallon storage tanks. The water is managed by Montezuma Water Company of Dolores.

There are currently 360 homes on this system which has the capacity to serve over 1,500 homes. All the water for the Rural Water System comes from the Montezuma Water Company water plant in Dolores but the system is tied into the Town of Dove Creek water system for mutual back-up capacity. For more information, contact Montezuma Water Company at 970-882-2226

Sanitation waste treatment ...

Those homes and businesses within Dove Creek are served by a city sewer system which has a mechanical aerobic lagoon. The lagoon was upgraded and brought into compliance in 1991.

Waste treatment outside the city limits is provided by land-owner placed septic systems. All new septic systems and any repairs done to existing systems, must be inspected by the county health inspector. Call the Commissioners office for more information at 970-677-2383.

Home fuel and electricity ...

Empire Electric of Cortez is the electric supplier in Dolores County. The main office is located in Cortez at 970-565-4444. Empire Electric is a rural electric cooperative.

The natural gas supplier is Greeley Gas 1- 888-442-1313.

Propane is supplied by Amerigas, which maintains an office in Dove Creek 677-2279. The company is privately owned.

Several local fuel suppliers will also supply gas and diesel to farm operations.

Solid waste disposal ...

Waste Management, Inc., of Cortez provides home trash collection to most (but not all) residents of western Dolores County. Polycarts or dumpsters are available for a once a week pickup. Call their main office for info at 970-565-1133.

The Dolores County Solid Waste Transfer Station is located northwest of Cahone on County Road M and is open only on weekends. Only designated solid waste is accepted, there is an on-site caretaker, and waste must be separated - fees are charged. Solid waste is then trucked to the landfill in Montezuma County.

Rico

Rico was founded in 1879, and is a picturesque old mountain mining town. It was the County seat at one time and it has preserved many of the old mining residences and the old County Courthouse building which is on the National Historic Register. There are also remnants of the old mines and narrow gauge railroad system that connected Rico to Telluride and the Town of Dolores. You must check out the old Jail in the basement of the courthouse. Their web site at www.ricocolorado.org has a wealth of information on this beautiful and growing community.

Small Parks...

There are several small parks in Dolores County. Three small parks are located within the town of Dove Creek.

Weber Park is located on Guyrene Street within Dove Creek, and is 8.3 acres. It has a ball field, restrooms (open in warm months only), Skating rink, tennis court, bleachers, picnic tables, grills, horseshoe pits, outdoor volleyball court, basketball court, fenced play area, and a 4,900 square foot Community Center. The Community Center has two large gathering rooms, an office, and a fully equipped kitchen. It can be rented for public or private use (970-677-9540).

Triangle Park is a small picnic area on Highway 666 in Dove Creek. Within the 2/10 acre site are picnic tables, two monuments, shade trees, lawn area, flagpole, and an information booth.

Debbie Park is actually owned by the county not the town. It is located in mid Dove Creek and covers 1/2 acre. The park has large shade trees, picnic tables, lawn area, and grills.

Cahone park is located in Cahone, along Highway 666. There are four acres in the park with a ball field, restrooms, and a picnic area. Overnight parking is permitted. The park is owned by Dolores County and is maintained by a committee of Cahone residents.

The Town of Rico has a park north of the elementary school with a variety of facilities and a ball field located just south of town next to the Dolores River.

For more information on Rico check their Web Page at www.ricocolorado.org.

Law enforcement...

The Dolores County Sheriff's Office (677-2257) and the Town of Dove Creek have contracted to provide law enforcement jointly. A 24-hour dispatch service is provided, with 16-hour through the courthouse and 8-hours from the officer's homes.

Regular patrols include State and County roads, parts of San Miguel County, national forest, and officers regularly assist other agencies from adjoining counties.

Dolores County is part of the 22nd Judicial District, which also includes Montezuma County to the south. A local justice of the peace handles small claims, small civil suits, marriages, fish and game violations, and traffic violations. A district judge handles the greater offenses. A district attorney is shared within the district, and the office is located in Cortez.

Dolores County has a Colorado Division of Wildlife Officer stationed in Dove Creek. Dove Creek's Area Wildlife Manager is responsible principally for western Dolores County and southwestern San Miguel County - 677-2750.

The County has an active volunteer Search and Rescue organization. The group has regular training programs, and assists the Dolores County Sheriff's Office as needed with searches of rescues.

The County participates in the Federal Civil Defense and Homeland Security programs.

The nearest Colorado State Patrol Office is located in Cortez.

The Bureau of Land Management has a ranger, based in the Anasazi Heritage Center near the town of Dolores, who patrols BLM land near Dove Creek.

Emergency Enhanced 911 calling is available. Enhanced 911 allows the Sheriff's office to be notified of the address you're calling from without the person having to be able to speak.