

White Ranch Park Historical Background

White Ranch Park rises across the transition zone between the western edge of the Great Plains and the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. It is sandwiched between Golden Gate Canyon, to the south, and, Ralston Creek Canyon, to the north, which formed vital gateways into the central Rockies for centuries of Native Americans and later waves of Euro-American settlers and prospectors.

Paleo-Indians lived in Colorado from approximately 12,000 to 7,000 years ago. Living in groups of 20-25, they were a dispersed, highly mobile people. Paleo-Indians made tools from chipped stone, used stone-tipped spears to hunt larger animals, gathered small game, waterfowl, and shellfish, and collected many plant foods. Their annual migration followed the seasonal ripening of vegetation. Foraging parties sought food by making loops outward from temporary base camps, creating a daisy pattern. When the daisy was complete, the base camp was moved to progressively higher elevations, following the ripening vegetation into South, Middle and North Parks, before returning to winter in this transitional zone. Unrelated groups met annually to celebrate marriages, exchange family members, and share practical knowledge, stories, and sacred wisdom.

During the Archaic Stage, from 7,000 to about 2,000 years ago, semi-nomadic people began to construct shelters. Prime locations provided a combination of water, shelter, plant and animal diversity, and good views. Archaic people developed grinding tools for processing wild plants, chipped stone tools for cutting, chopping and scraping, large projectile points for hunting. White Ranch includes numerous historic cultural sites, including rock shelters.

The Plains Ceramic Stage began nearly 2,000 years ago and lasted until approximately 200 years ago. The introduction of the bow and arrow and the use of pottery mark the onset of this stage, while the later years include the earliest contacts of the native population with people from Europe. The Ute and Arapahoe tribes used White Ranch during this period.

The California gold rush of 1849 brought tens of thousands of men west. Many prospected on their way through Colorado, and some decided to stay. Prospectors were generally limited to “placer mining,” washing the heavier gold from the gravel in a sluice box. Colorado’s first placer gold was found in 1850 on Ralston Creek, several miles east of White Ranch.

Finding “mining the miners” more lucrative than prospecting, entrepreneurs began building toll roads up Golden Gate, Clear Creek and Ralston Canyons, with rough supply towns alongside, including Arapahoe City (Jefferson County’s earliest settlement), Boulder City, Golden City (now Golden), Mount Vernon, Bradford City, Piedmont, Apex and Golden Gate City. In June, 1859, Rocky Mountain City straddled the road to the Gregory Diggings, just north of Golden Gate City. Starting with a grocery in a tent and two or three covered wagons, plans were made for a large trading post, but by 1860 Rocky Mountain City was a ghost town.

Golden Gate City, a bustling town with two rows of log houses, several stores, liquor shops, and a pottery kiln, was founded in 1859 at the mouth of Golden Gate Canyon. By 1860 it boasted several firms, hotels, stores and shops, but never had a mayor or any form of local government. Alfalfa fields and haystacks abounded, providing both fodder and income. Golden Gate City was also known as “Baled Hay City,” because every house advertised baled hay for sale!

For a year or two Golden Gate City and Golden City were archrivals for the County seat, population and influence. Both were named for Tom Golden, a farmer, rancher, sometime-miner, politician, and town promoter. Tom Golden bought disillusioned miners’ used mining gear and equipment, and then re-sold it to newcomers.

Ralston Peak's legendary sleeping Indian profile, now called Ralston Buttes, provided a prominent landmark to guide pioneers westward to numerous toll roads to the Gilpin and Clear Creek County gold mining districts. The Golden Gate and Gregory Road operated as a toll road from 1860-1971. The Ralston Wagon Road, or Ralston Wagon Toll Road, incorporated in 1865. Beginning in Arvada as Ralston Avenue, it became a toll road at Ralston Buttes, and followed Ralston Creek through portions of today's Golden Gate Canyon State Park into Gilpin County. Pine Ridge Road followed the broad hogback valley northwest from Golden City and Golden Gate City, along the eastern border of White Ranch, and north through Glencoe Valley. The 1866 Middle Park and South Boulder Wagon Road Company made its connection east of the Buttes.

Jone Heivner filed claim on a bed of highest quality coal five miles north of Golden City. He sold his claim in 1865 to Murphy, Loveland, and Armor. Their success caused coal-mining towns to sprout like mushrooms across the northern hogback valley and beyond. Murphyville, Tindale, Glencoe, Ralston, and Leyden all supplied good and cheap fuel to the mountains and plains. The Leyden Mine produced well into the 20th Century.

While en route to California in 1865, James Bond and his wife were travelling near Dorey Hill when their son, Wesley Bond Bond, was run over by their wagon. Following his death, they filed a homestead. The Frank Bond family sold the land to John Andrist. Paul White purchased the property from the Andrist family in 1913. From 1913 to 1974, the Paul White family owned and operated the land as a commercial cattle ranch. After Paul White's death in 1969, his wife, Anna Lee White, entered into a purchase/gift agreement to turn over ownership of the land to Jefferson County Open Space.

The Glencoe Land Company at one time owned property in Glencoe Valley comprised of holdings at White Ranch and the entrance to Ralston Canyon. Mr. Roe M. Baldwin originally purchased the Ralston Buttes (Lacy) property from the federal government on March 11, 1930, using the property for cattle grazing. Adolph Coors Company owned the land Open Space purchased from Golden Properties LTD., having mined it for clay for porcelain. Glencoe Valley Road was built in 1956. Bisecting the property, it provides access to the Schwartzwalder uranium mine, located approximately one-quarter mile north of the Ralston Buttes property. Ralston Buttes was purchased by Open Space and is now a part of White Ranch Park.