

Colorado Then & Now

By Marilyn Reeves

While I was a girl growing up in Salida, the local attractions were hunting and fishing, which Dad catered to by selling guns and fishing tackle out of his downtown sporting goods store. There was no skiing in the area. There was no white water rafting. But a few intrepid kids would risk life, limb and drowning by riding inner tubes on the Arkansas River that flows through the bottom of town.

The old home town that I remember began to change dramatically in the mid-seventies when Walmart put up a store out on Highway 50. The majority of the old privately-owned businesses like Crews-Beggs, Pacheco's Shoe Store, and Cady's Hardware shut their doors one by one, to be replaced by a plethora of artsy-craftsy shops and boutiques that grace the downtown streets of Salida today. I hardly even recognize the place anymore.

A short time before our high school graduation in 1960, Monarch ski resort opened for business. I remember envying my friends who were allowed to work up there the following summer. That was the beginning of the ski industry in our neighborhood.

Then sometime in the mid-60's or early 70's somebody got the bright idea of taking paying tourists down the river on a big rubber raft, and the white water rafting industry, which is now a major part of Chaffee County's revenue, was born.

There didn't used to be an I-70 through the Colorado Rockies. Construction began on the interstate in 1956 and was completed in 1992.

The Town of Vail was born in 1966 to accommodate skiers who utilized the new I-70.

The Town of Breckenridge began as an old mining town back in 1859 when gold was discovered nearby. But since it also experienced a boost from the ski industry, the old town got a facelift that resulted in the touristy Breckenridge of today.

Sometime during the 1950's, I remember taking a long drive from Salida to Aspen, which was basically just a small hamlet at the time. It too was formed as a community for miners during the Silver Boom of the 1880s and there was nothing remarkable about it when we passed through. Nowadays Aspen's ski industry is as rich and renowned as the celebrities who populate the glamorously renovated town.

Those simple, unremarkable little towns of my youth are no longer there. They have been replaced by designer resorts and villages that attempt to suggest 'rustic' and 'quaint' to the thousands of tourists who hurry on the crowded interstate past the real beauty of the mountains.

Perhaps a few of those pristine places still exist, somewhere in the back of beyond, accessible only by a whining old jeep slowly ascending a rocky road in granny gear. And when that jeep can go no further, attaining that last quarter mile or so on foot, careful not to step on the delicate purple columbine or the scarlet Indian paint brush as you pass by. And once you reach

the top, beholding on the other side the turquoise expanse of a high mountain lake reflecting back the endless sky.

That was the Colorado of my childhood. I hope some of it still remains.