

SUN VALLEY RANCH

Owners:

(Survey of December 1881 shows a ranch with 3 buildings near center SE1/4 section 25, and a ranch with 3 buildings near center of NE1/4 section 25.)

Rob Harbison homesteaded, didn't prove up - 1902 or 1906

Edwin T. "Ed" and Katheryn DeWitt - homesteaded @1914, @660 acres, Snowed-In Ranch; by @1917,1918, took in some guests for fishing, named Sun Valley Ranch. In 1920's, named Sun Valley Guest Ranch.

Sold several times. Gradually expanded facilities/ commercial kitchen and living room added to lodge.

Jack Montgomery 1943-45 Sold in February/Spring 1946

? to Ken England Reverse KL Bar

? to Troy Carr

Wallace Taber – sometime 1946 - 1953

Stan and Ester Williams - 1954, added kitchenettes in the cabins, owned land around lake. Taber still owned other property, but sold off over time.

Dr. Robert Henry - 1964, bought a portion of the ranch, subdivided; 1969, sold to John & Kay Boyle

Various other purchases of portions of the property

Ken Bruton - August 1964, purchased 27 (30?) acres for a dude ranch, Sun Valley Ranch; Dude Ranch closed, 1982, and converted to luxury cabins, Sun Valley Estates.

Location:

County Road 491, on the North Fork of the Colorado River





Haying pictures taken 1943-45



General Ranch Information:

* DeWitt was a German carpenter, raised some cattle, but mainly worked building furniture and repairing wagons. 1916, little Mrs. DeWitt peeled huge rafter logs while her husband hauled more in with his mules so they could build the cabin. (from Judy White) In 1920s, when taking guests, would go to Granby to meet the train with horses and wagon to bring guests to ranch. European style, meals extra. Son Clinton, with wife Violet, built his homestead cabin, still in original location across from Sun Valley Estates. Daughter Beulah married a Johnston at Stillwater Ranch.

* In the booklet called "Grand Lake School and Sleepy Hollow School" Gertie Johnston Olsen states on page 24 that *"On Sundays we would have someone to our house or we were invited to someone's. We loved to go up to Mr. & Mrs. DeWitt's."* In "Grand County Historical Association Journal" June 1986 titled "A Dude Ranch Is....."1875-1986 which gives histories of various Dude Ranches in the area on page 9 it states: *"Another ranch north of Grand Lake taking guests prior to 1920 was the Snowed-In Ranch, later the Sun Valley Ranch. The first owner was a German Carpenter, Ed DeWitt who did not actively ranch, but who did take in some guests for fishing, perhaps as early as 1917-1918."* (From Judy White)

* When the Montgomery's had the working dude ranch, they averaged 25 guests a week: day-long trail rides, cabins with clean bed linen, campfires and songs, "nine solid log guest cabins and a good lodge... lights were from carbide gas buried in a tank", outdoor plumbing, gas-driven washing machine. Had own garden, chickens, eggs, milk, hogs, wild game. Mexican braceros helped with haying.

* Business card, showing "DeWITT'S Snow'd-In Ranch", and advertising Horses, Cabins – possibly published circa 1930-1950

* Ken Bruton's Sun Valley Ranch was strictly American plan, everything included, capacity of 34 guests. (Schedule of ranch's day in file)

Files:

Sun Valley Ranch

Pictures:

Ranch

Haying 1944





SUN VALLEY RANCH

A survey of December 1881 shows a ranch with three buildings at the site of Sun Valley Ranch on the east side of the river – either the survey was in error or the river has shifted its course eastward. Rob Harbison filed for a homestead on this area but did not prove it up.

The first owner was a German carpenter, Ed DeWitt, who did not actively ranch but took in some guests for fishing, perhaps as early as 1917-1918. He drove to Granby in his buggy to meet guests arriving by train. In 1916, little Mrs. DeWitt, who with her husband homesteaded Snowed-In Ranch (approximately 600 acres), peeled the huge supporting rafters for their log buildings while her husband hauled more in with his mules. Together they worked to raise the walls, built a barn, one room lodge and several small cabins in 1916. DeWitt raised some cattle, but mainly worked building furniture and repairing wagons. Early in the 1920's they began taking in paying guests. At this time, they changed to name from Sun Valley Ranch to Sun Valley Guest Ranch. They served European Style, meals were extra, and the cost of the week only included lodging.

Jack and Marian Montgomery bought the ranch in 1943 and operated the guest ranch for three years. Their daughter Peggy-Jean, a silent movie film star in the 1920s, worked at the ranch for three summers. ([click here for her story and memories of working at the ranch](#)). These were war years and in spite of war rationing and travel restrictions, the ranch was a busy place. A wealthy young investor from Maryland came by in February of 1946 and expressed interest in the place and Jack sold the ranch.

The ranch was sold several times before Wallace Tabor bought it prior to 1954. Tabor was a well-known lecturer, specializing in wildlife pictures. The ranch was operated through this period as a guest ranch. Many of these owners were helped by an outside income.


Sun Valley Ranch

GRAND LAKE, COLORADO

Our Own Private Lake and 5 Miles of Colorado River
Fishing

MEALS — MODERN CABINS — HORSES —
GAMES — SQUARE DANCING

ONLY \$77.00 WEEKLY, per person.
Special low family rates. Write Box 518



(Advertisement from 1959)

Stan and Esther Williams bought the ranch of 440 acres in 1954 and added kitchenettes in the cabins. In 1964 the ranch was sold to Robert Henry who split the ranch, and in August 1964 Ken Bruton purchased 27 acres for a dude ranch, carrying on the name of Sun Valley Ranch. He made the operation strictly American Plan with a capacity of 34 guests. Bruton had no room to expand and feeling his capacity was too small for efficient and profitable operation, he closed the dude ranch in 1982. All cabins have been removed and the site was developed for luxury homes.



The Sun Valley Ranch operated from April through September with a crew of 14 for the 34 guests and 35-40 horses. The crew signed a contract for a specified period of time. If someone did not stay to the end of their contract, they forfeited their tip money – all tips were divided among the crew at the end of the season.

A typical week at the ranch:

- Guests arrived Sunday afternoon and left the next Sunday morning.
- Sunday evening was turkey dinner with all the trimmings and slide show of area
- Monday-one-hour horse rides morning & afternoon
- Tuesday – expanded horse rides
- Wed & Thurs – all day rides, chuckwagon lunch
- Fri & Sat – more rides or sightseeing
- One night would be a square dance
- One night a steak fry outside
- One night would be musical entertainment put on by the crew.

Gourmet food was expected at a guest ranch, even in the early days of the industry when people would brag about the good food at various ranches in the valley. Sun Valley even had one of their recipes published in Gourmet magazine.

Cost of a week at the ranch

- 1965 - \$150 per person per week
- 1982 – Family of four \$1,000-\$1,200 plus tip (\$250-300 per person)

A swimming pool was added in 1970 and a spa and sauna in 1977.

Each September a five-day pack trip was held by Ken Bruton and three other staff members. Twelve guests and 24 horses were needed for the guests and supplies. They crossed the Continental Divide four times and were up at 10,000 feet most of the time. Only the most experienced guests were allowed on this trip.



On October 21, 2020, the East Troublesome fire consumed over 100,000 acres of land in Grand County and Rocky Mountain National Park. Most of the buildings at the ranch were completely burned to the ground.