

Recycling History: Log Cabin Renovated and Adopted for New Use

By Ann Bond, Public Affairs Specialist San Juan National Forest

The Farmer Cabin was constructed in the late 1950s on Cascade Creek about 30 miles north of Durango. Gary Farmer of Durango says his family leased it from the Forest Service for use as a line camp from which to administer their grazing permit on the national forest. The Farmers ran several hundred head of sheep in the Cascade Creek, Coal Creek and Deer Creek drainages from about 1960 to 1990.

As the property of the U.S. Forest Service, the log cabin had not been used for more than two decades. Neglect, vandalism and exposure to weather were taking a toll on the historic structure, which is listed on the San Juan County Register of Historic Sites and eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places.

"We've learned that if these old buildings aren't used, they deteriorate. If you don't live in them or use them, they wither and die," said San Juan National Forest Heritage Program Lead Julie Coleman. *"The Farmer Cabin had several needs to address, but it wasn't past the point of no return."*

First Step: Renovation

After grants were secured from the Colorado State Historical Fund and National Trust for Historic Preservation, Coleman contacted HistoriCorps, a program of Colorado Preservation Inc. to help bring the Farmer Cabin back to life. The project included improving foundation drainage, repairing flooring, restoring the roof and windows, sealing the exterior and replacing rotted logs.

"Government agencies fund our projects, and we handle the management, tools and volunteers," said Chris Thompson, HistoriCorps supervisor. *"We do about 20 projects annually across the Mountain West, mostly involving the restoration of log cabins."*

Thompson and HistoriCorps crew leader Dan Saxton oversaw the work of more than two dozen volunteers for five weeks at the Farmer Cabin. *"Volunteering gives people a strong connection to the areas they travel to for projects,"* Saxton said. *"They learn hands-on skills and receive training that can be used in their careers or to take back to work on their own homes."*



Passport in Time volunteers work with HistoricCorps staff members to restore the Farmer Cabin on Cascade Creek north of Durango. The cabin was constructed in the late 1950s and used for three decades by the Farmer family, which grazed sheep in the area.

In an ultimate act of recycling, nonprofit organizations have teamed up with the Columbine Ranger District to turn a historic cabin on the San Juan National Forest into an educational backcountry learning center.

Volunteers signed up through Passport in Time, a program that helps the Forest Service conduct archaeological surveys and excavation, rock art restoration, archival research, historic structure restoration, oral history gathering and analysis and curation of artifacts. Volunteers receive a "passport," which is stamped to document each project they work.

The Farmer Cabin drew volunteers from Philadelphia, Vermont, Texas, Iowa, Oregon, Oklahoma and Alberta, Canada. *"I grew up outdoors and love history, and this is a great combination,"* said Ruth Ann White, of Tulsa, Okla., who has worked on more than 50 Passport in Time projects across the country with her husband, Allen. *"It's a great way of giving back. I got hooked after my first trip."* John Koetteritz of Summit County volunteered at the Farmer Cabin for three weeks to take advantage of the training. *"I'm interested in all phases of construction, from dirt to paint,"* he said. *"I want to build something just like this for myself. I like the simplicity of the construction; you cut the logs, stack the logs and daub the logs. It's really enjoyable work."*

More...

Next up: Adoption and Reuse

The newly renovated Farmer Cabin has a new purpose and a guardian angel to ensure it will remain a vital and living historic structure. The nonprofit group Four Corners Backcountry Horsemen has adopted the cabin so it can be used by the community as a rustic backcountry learning center. *"We decided that making the cabin available for educational purposes and retreats for volunteer groups would be a great use,"* said Matt Janowiak, San Juan National Forest Columbine District Ranger. *"The setting lends itself to outdoor learning, with Cascade Creek and trails nearby."*

Under an agency agreement, the Backcountry Horsemen handled the historical grants for the renovation and will now assume the role of cabin caretakers. The Forest Service will provide materials for yearly maintenance, and Backcountry Horsemen will help with upkeep. *"We'll monitor the use of the cabin and make sure it's not damaged, pick up trash, etc. In return, the cabin will be available to us to host packing clinics, cross-cut or chain-saw clinics, or youth educational events,"* said Bob Volker, Backcountry Horsemen president. *"It has been a very gratifying project that has inspired us to become more active in working with the agency and community."*

How to Reserve

WHO: Local nonprofits engaged in science or nature studies will be eligible to reserve the cabin, beginning next year, for up to five consecutive nights for educational purposes or team-building exercises.

WHEN: The cabin will be closed in winter and available for reservation summer through fall. Reservations will be accepted during a two-week period each April on a first-come, first-served basis.

HOW: Interested groups must send a representative in person to the Columbine Ranger District in Bayfield office to reserve dates on a calendar. Guests must agree to the established ground rules for use. There will be no cost, but a refundable deposit will be taken.

WHAT: The cabin has no electricity, power or running water. The interior has wood-plank flooring, original kitchen cabinets and an enamel sink. The kitchen will be supplied with pots, pans, plates and utensils. Guests will need to bring their own paper towels and plates, and other utensils. Some cleaning supplies will be supplied. The wood-fired stove and oven are in working condition, but a camp stove with fuel is recommended for cooking. Light must be provided by lanterns, and groups must either bring their own drinking water or filter water from the nearby creek. There is a fireplace to warm the cabin, when needed. The access road is rough and primitive and requires a high-clearance four-wheel drive vehicle. Parking for as many as eight vehicles will be available at the cabin.

For More Information:

Historicorps: <http://historicorps.org>

Passport in Time: www.passportintime.com

Four Corners Backcountry Horsemen: www.4cbch.org

USDA FOREST SERVICE ● ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

COLORADO: Arapaho Roosevelt NF & Pawnee NG ● Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, & Gunnison NFs
Pike-San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron-Comanche NGs ● Rio Grande NF ● San Juan NF ● White River NF
NEBRASKA: Nebraska & Samuel R. McKelvie NFs ● SOUTH DAKOTA: Black Hills NF
WYOMING: Bighorn NF ● Medicine Bow-Routt NFs & Thunder Basin NG ● Shoshone NF

www.fs.usda.gov/r2

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer

follow us

