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Great Sand Dunes National Park

Colorado National Parks

Letter from Frank Swancara, Jr. to Superintendent Harold F. Schaafsma

Frank Swancara Jr.

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Frank Swancara, Jr.
285 South Pearl Street
Denver, Colorado

"Heritage worth preserving
shall endure."

July 14, 1954

MEMBER
Colorado Archaeological Society
State Historical Society
of Colorado
American Forestry Association
National Parks Association
Wilderness Society
National Geographic Society

Harold Schaafsma, Superintendent
Great Sand Dunes National Monument
P.O. Box 60, Alamosa, Colorado

Dear Harold,

Well, I arrived home without any misfortune after a wonderful trip. The climb up Mt. Blanca, a great experience in itself, climaxed quite an eventful stay at the Dunes. There is absolutely no way in which I can adequately thank you for your hospitality and cooperation and for the stimulating associations we both had. Of course I appreciate the trouble Mrs. Schaafsma went to in order to prepare all those wonderful meals for which my appetite so graciously increased - (especially after eating my own cooking for a week).

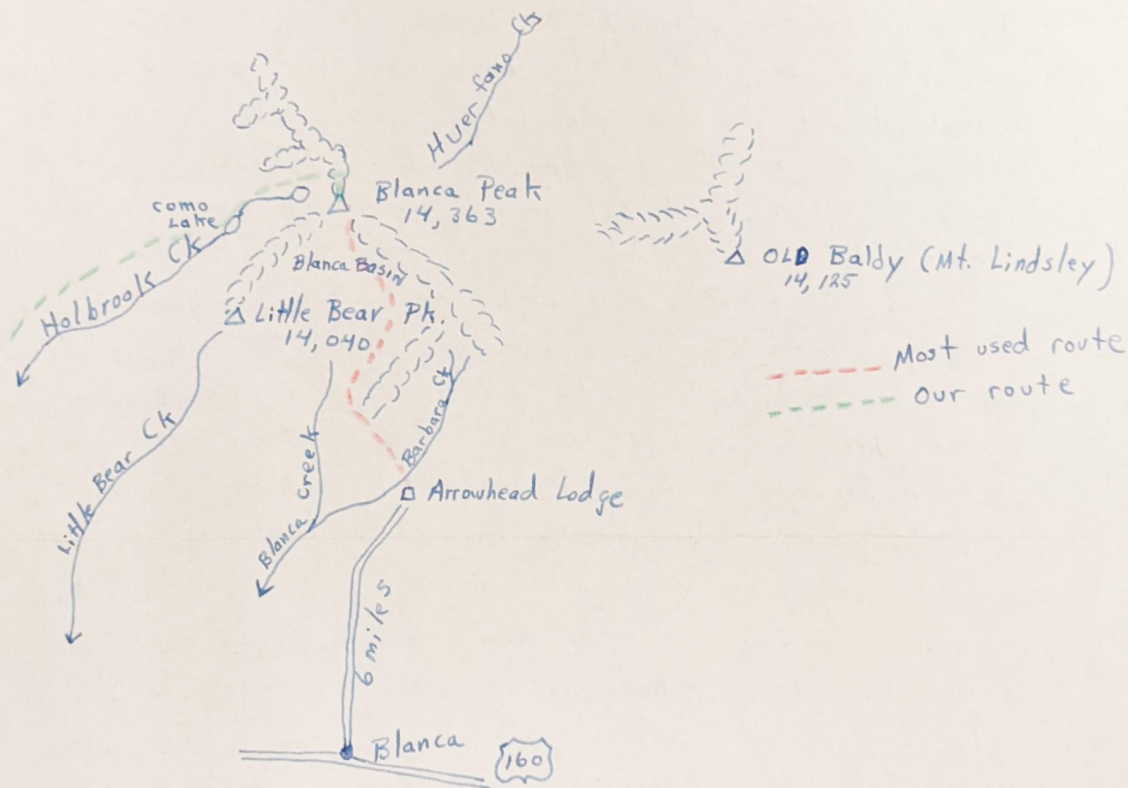
So far I haven't been able to find out about the ghost town on the slopes of Blanca. Maybe you can get some information from Ben. I do have a few bits of history on Mt. Blanca which I will mention here. The first ascent of Blanca Peak was made by the Wheeler Survey in 1874 (August 14). Gilbert Thompson and Frank De Y. Carpenter, members of the survey, stayed all night on the summit using it as a main triangulation point. Lieutenant Rhoda and a man by the name of Wilson made the second ascent in 1875. Rhoda, in his account of the climb, says "The only relics of former visitants consisted of a curious excavation 6 to 8 feet across, surrounded by a rock wall of loose rock, 2 feet high." This could have been the work of an Indian who used the peak for a lookout. Similar excavations on summits of high peaks have been noted by early explorers. But, in my opinion, it is very doubtful that an Indian would climb so high when better vantage points could be found

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(over)

at lower and more accessible places. A mountain sheep could be responsible for those excavations if it were not for the fact that the dimensions are (or were) so regular. Lieut. Beckwith of the Gunnison Expedition (1853) calls the peak "Sierra Blanca". The Wheeler Survey (1874) calls it "Cerro Blanco."

I was wrong in calling the mountain North-Northwest of Blanca Little Bear Peak. I must have gotten that wrong idea from the Colorado State Highway Dept. map which shows Little Bear Peak between Mt. Lindsley (old Baldy) and Blanca, which is of course very misleading for a first impression. The map below is added to give correct perspective to the area.



I plan on coming back to the Sand Dunes the middle of August with George Cropley, who is past state President of the Colorado Archaeological Society and has shown a lot of interest in the Indian Spring. And- before I forget it I want 3 shares of that mining stock and 6 shares in the great Silicon dioxide deposit which is administered by the Park Service. I am sending to you some books which I hope you will enjoy later. Write me at your convenience.

Sincerely, Frank Swancara, Jr.