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Bent's Old Fort

Colorado National Parks

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### **K.P. at Bent's Fort**

Denver Post

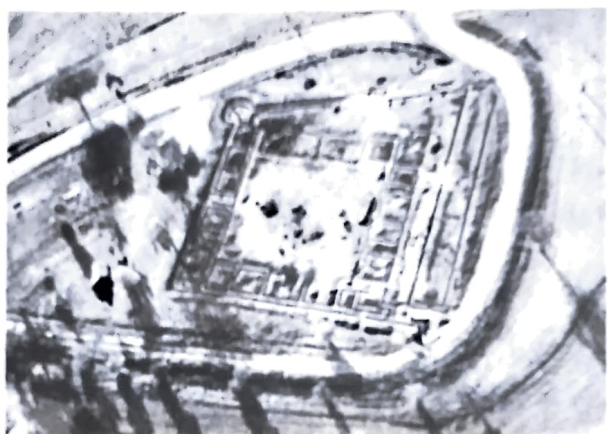
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Post Excavation Aug 29, 1954  
TST

# K.P. at Bent's

*Martha Dick's job is to feed a crew of hungry archeologists seeking to restore the historic trading post*



Joe Ross

Guided by an old drawing, archeologists uncovered remains of adobe walls of Bent's Fort near La Junta.



Martha Dick, whose husband heads the project, keeps crew fed by working over coal stove in open kitchen.



Her duties include caring for her children, Kathy, 2, and Matt, 4. Lack of water complicates this task.

# Fort

By JOAN REESE

WHILE Herbert Dick and his crew excavate the mound at old Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River in Otero county, Colorado, his wife Martha operates Fort K. P. within a shovel's length of the historic site. As a necessary part of the restoration project, Martha cooks for ten men, two women, and two children on equipment which only the most enthusiastic could even call meager.

"At this point," says Martha, 33, who majored in anthropology at the University of New Mexico, "I wish I'd studied Home Ec."

Bent's Fort was built by Charles and William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain in 1833. One of the most famous landmarks on the old Santa Fe Trail, it was abandoned in 1849 after operating as a fur trading post, a quasi-military outpost and a stage coach stop.

Wind, weather, and years took their toll of the big adobe structure. Following the great Arkansas river flood of the 1920's there was nothing left but a dust mound pawed over and argued over by historians and just plain pot-hunters. In ensuing years the river channel changed, upsetting the calculations of oldtimers.

Recently Dr. LeRoy Hafen of the Colorado State Historical Museum found an accurate drawing of the fort made by Capt. J. W. Abert in 1845. Using this map as a guide, the Historical Society began its present excavations.

Herbert Dick, head of the department of anthropology at Trinidad State Junior college, brought his campers early this summer to the site on the Arkansas near La Junta where they pitched their tents and started to work. The group includes Brad White, 15, Boulder, Colo.; Jerry Bair, 17, Trinidad J. C. student; Earl Templeton, 24, University of Colorado, and his bride, Rosalee; Charles Borders, 17, Trinidad; Alvin Parrish, 20, Akron, Colo.; Irvin Schlick, Trinidad; Bob Komerska, 24, taking his doctorate at the University of Arizona; Bob Drummond, Pueblo; and Delbert Orr, 17, La Junta. Most of the boys are working on the excavations for course credit, the State Historical Society footing the bill for the camp's expenses.

Martha's job is to feed this crew, as well as watch over her own youngsters, Matt, 4, and Kathy, 2. The heavy cooking is done on a coal range set in what Martha calls her air-conditioned kitchen. The "air-conditioning" is so extreme that frequently prairie winds cool the pots as fast as the stove can heat them. The menus are variations on the theme of beans, stew and roasts. A too-small ice chest is the one roughly modern note. The floor of the "kitchen and dining room" is raked regularly.

"I keep hoping," Martha says, "that one of these projects will have enough money to hire a camp cook." Her boarders, however, are loud in praising her abilities as a chef. Martha explains the men are almost always hungry and therefore easy to please. The queasier stomachs have been disciplined by ridicule, like the time one boy refused to eat the jam even after Martha had scraped all the ants off.

Martha keeps her good humor even though she's buffeted by hot winds, scorched by the coal stove and gritty from blowing sand. Clothed in jeans and shirt, she greets visitors to the campsite with disarming ease. She hoots at the idea that she is roughing it. "It's only eight miles from town!"

When she and her husband were working with the Upper Gila survey in Arizona for the Peabody Museum of American Archeology, she was camp cook with the nearest store 12 miles away, the nearest supply house 80 miles away, and the rattlesnakes as numerous as June bugs.

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She insists that her work is really easier than it would be at home in Trinidad. There are no floors to scrub, she says, and frequent washings are out of the question, as water must be carried to the campsite. The entire crew piles in the station wagons on Saturday afternoon for shower baths in La Junta and as many malted milks as they can drink.

The summer's excavation has unearthed the remaining adobe walls of the fort, about a foot high and 27 inches thick. The foundation of one of the two original towers is plainly visible as are the outlines of the rooms. When money becomes available, the state will reconstruct the fort.