

History of Sandstone Ranch

Landscape

The landscape of Sandstone Ranch area is a testament to time, shaped by ancient seas, shifting continents, and erosion over millions of years.

- The Fountain Formation (red rocks), formed from prehistoric river deposits over 300 million years ago.
- Above it, the Lyons Sandstone tells the story of an ancient desert.
- The Dakota Sandstone, visible in towering cliffs, was once the sandy shore of an inland sea. These formations were sculpted by wind, water, and uplift, creating the dramatic ridges, valleys, and buttes seen on the Open Space

General History

- For thousands of years, Native hunters and gatherers traveled through Sandstone Ranch, later making more frequent stops in the area.
- By the 1860s, settlers arrived, drawn by mining opportunities and the Homestead Act. Ranching, lumber, and quarries soon flourished, supplying growing communities.
- The first 21 recorded landowners shaped the ranch's early development, and by the 1900s, five key families dominated the landscape. By the late 1980s, ownership had consolidated, leading to Douglas County's purchase—making every resident a steward to this historic land today.

Sandstone Ranch is a 2,038-acre property acquired by Douglas County in 2018 for \$18.75 million. \$6.5 million was donated by Chatfield Reservoir Mitigation Company and a \$3.5 million dollar grant from GOCO. The entire property is protected by a conservation easement held by Douglas Land Conservancy.

The site was a working ranch since the 1870's, with the red sandstone quarried from the property for local use. The ranch was a proposed site for a large housing development before the 2008 economic downturn allowed the county to intervene and preserve the land.

Early History & Ranching Era

- 1870s: The ranch was a working ranch, utilizing the red sandstone that gave it its name.
- 1890s: The Robinson family significantly expanded the ranch and commercially exploited its sandstone deposits, which were used to build historic structures in Denver, such as the Brown Palace Hotel. The ranch also became home to the

Tucker family, who worked there for five decades and eventually acquired the entire property.

- 1989: After the death of George Robinson, the land passed to the Tucker family, who managed it as the Gove Canyon Cattle Company until 1989.

Historic Structures

- *Gove Barn* was built in late 1878 (the barn right after the bridge where the road to the ranch overlook begins).
- *Palm Barn* 1904 (the barn past the Bunk House also traveling towards the ranch overlook).
- *Robinson/Tucker* barn can be seen from the ranch overlook. It is the historic barn directly east of the ranch house and used to house cattle and calves.
- ‘*Club Med*’ was built by Frank Fazzio so his children had somewhere to play on the property.

Recent History & Public Acquisition

- 2006: A developer purchased the land, with plans for a luxury housing & horse community. You can still see the metal poles with numbers cut out indicating where the homes were going to be built.
- 2008: The global financial crisis halted development, and the ranch was put back on the market.
- 2017-2018: Douglas County, through its Open Space Program, acquired the property for \$18.75 million. The acquisition involved partners like Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and CRMC.

Today

Sandstone Ranch is now an open space available for public use, offering 12 miles of trails for hikers, cyclists, and equestrians.

It preserves historic ranch buildings, wildlife habitats, and natural features. Cattle are also still ranched on the property to preserve the cultural heritage.

2020 Master Plan established guidelines for public access and preservation of the ranch's cultural and natural assets.

At the heart of this landscape, water remains its most valuable resource. The Gove Ditch, originating here, has sustained agriculture for generations. The retention pond and main headgate are still essential for irrigating pastures, reinforcing the ranch's long-standing connection between land, water, and livelihood. Today, Colorado state inspectors monitor the ditch to ensure its continued function, just as generations before relied on it for survival.

The natural resources of Sandstone Ranch have long played a role in its history. Frank Fazio acquired three quarries—Ramsour Brothers' gravel quarry, a silica sand pit used by Coors for beer bottles, and a sandstone quarry in Juniper Valley. The area also showed traces of lead, hinting at the possibility of silver, but the 1893 Silver Crash ended exploration before it could be developed.

As we drive past the loafing shed toward Sandstone Reservoir, we follow a landscape shaped by both people and nature. Dug in 1989 for water storage, the reservoir marks the terminus of the Gove Ditch, an essential irrigation system supporting ranching operations for over a century. The dam, humorously nicknamed "Asswam Dam" by former owner Frank Fazio, now holds water managed by the Perry Park Water and Sanitation District.