



Crestone, Colorado

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Crestone is a town in Saguache County in Southwestern Colorado, United States. The population was 73 at the 2000 census. It is a small village at the foot of the western slope of the Sangre de Cristo Range, in the northern part of the San Luis Valley. Crestone was a small mining town, but little paying ore was discovered. In the 1970s a large land development, the Baca Grande, was established to the south and west and several hundred homes have been built.

The Crestone area, which includes the Baca Grande and Moffat, Colorado, is a spiritual and new age center with several world religions represented; including a Hindu temple, a Zen center, a coed Carmelite monastery, several Tibetan centers, and miscellaneous new age happenings.

Crestone is easily accessible to visitors, a National Forest Service campground is about a half mile north of town, and other lodging is available including several bed and breakfasts. Activities in the area include camping, fishing, hiking, climbing, as well as spiritual explorations.

Crestone is probably named after the district of Crestonia in ancient Macedonia, a district where gold was found. Crestonia is mentioned in Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War. In the nineteenth century a classical education might have included reading of this work.



History

The first settlement in the Crestone area occurred after the American Civil War with the granting of the Luis Maria Baca Grant No. 4 to the heirs of the original Baca Grant at Las Vegas, New Mexico. Title to the grant at Las Vegas was clouded by a second grant of the same land. The Baca heirs were offered alternative lands from the public lands of the United States. The tract selected near Crestone was 12.5 miles on a side and was located to the south of the town of Crestone. The Bacas deeded the land to their attorney, but it soon passed by tax sale to a third party. The ranch headquarters were on Crestone Creek to the southwest of Crestone. The Baca Grant was one of the first large tracts of land to be fenced in the West and in its heyday was the home of prize Hereford cattle.

In addition to ranching there was some mining in the area to the east of Crestone, but no big strikes. In 1880 the town of Crestone was platted by George Adams, the owner of the Baca Grant. In 1900, with the help of Eastern investors, George Adams ignited a minor boom, reopening one of the more promising mines and building a railroad spur to the town and the mines along the Range south of town.





However, lacking good ore, the boom was short-lived. A long period of decline followed.



By 1948 Crestone had declined to its post-war population of 40 souls, mostly retired folks and cowboys who worked on the Grant, as the Baca Grant was called. Many of the old cabins were used as vacation homes. By 1971 the Baca Grant came into the ownership of the Arizona-Colorado Land and Cattle Company which subdivided a portion of the Grant creating the Baca Grande, a subdivision originally platted for about 10,000 lots. At great expense underground utilities were installed and roads built. However, sales lagged and by 1979 the development was considered a liability by the corporation, now AZL. Maurice Strong, owner of a controlling interest in AZL and his fiancée Hanne Marstrand visited the development and "fell in love with it." The

Strong's were inspired to create a world spiritual center and began granting parcels of land to traditional spiritual organizations.

The population gradually began to increase and by 2006 several hundred homes had been built and a number of small spiritual communities had become established. As the Baca Grande contained no provision for business uses, Crestone became the business center of the community and having enacted a small sales tax was in a position to finance further improvements.

Luis Maria Baca Grant No. 4

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The Luis Maria Baca Grant No. 4 was made by the United States to the heirs of the original Baca Grant at Las Vegas, New Mexico.[1] Title to the grant at Las Vegas was clouded by a second grant of the same land. The Baca heirs were offered alternative lands from the public lands of the United States. The largest of the tracts selected, near what is now Crestone, Colorado, was 12.5 miles on a side and was located to the south of what is now County Road T, about 1 mile south of the 38th parallel. The Bacas deeded the land to their attorney, but it soon passed by tax sale to a third party. The ranch headquarters was on Crestone Creek to the southwest of Crestone. The Baca Grant was one of the first large tracts of land to be fenced in the West and in its heyday was the home of prize Hereford cattle.

In addition to ranching there was some mining in the area to the east and south of Crestone, some on the lands of the Grant, but no big strikes. In 1880 the town of Crestone was platted by George Adams, the owner of the Baca Grant. In 1900, with the help of Eastern investors, George Adams ignited a minor boom, reopening one of the more promising mines and building a railroad spur to the town and the mines along the Range south of town. However, lacking good ore, the boom was short-lived. A long period of decline followed.

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corporate ownership of the Arizona-Colorado Land and Cattle Company, immediately south of Crestone, was subdivided creating the Baca Grande, a subdivision originally platted for about 10,000 lots. At great expense, underground utilities were installed and roads built. However, sales lagged and by 1979 the development was considered a liability by the corporation, now AZL. Maurice Strong, owner of a controlling interest in AZL and his fiancée Hanne Marstrand visited the development and "fell in love with it." The Strongs were inspired to create a world spiritual center and began granting parcels of land to traditional spiritual organizations.

The remaining lands and waters of the ranch, now termed the "Baca Ranch" or "Baca", were used as a base by the corporate ownership of the ranch, reorganized as "American Water Development, Inc" (AWDI), to make an application in the water courts of Colorado to develop and export deep underground water to the front range cities of Colorado. This application was vigorously opposed by the local community in the San Luis Valley and defeated. Bankrupt, the lands of the corporation, after sustained litigation, were purchased by the Nature Conservancy and subsequently incorporated into the public lands of the United States, the southern and eastern portions as national forest and the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve and the northern and western portions as the Baca National Wildlife Refuge.[2] The original ranch headquarters and other buildings are on the wildlife refuge. As is usual on federal wildlife refuges, grazing and hay production continue on a limited basis.

