

HISTORY OF JORDAN HOT SPRINGS

Inyo National Forest Mount Whitney Ranger District

The history of Jordan Hot Springs starts long before the coming of the white man. Findings indicate the Native Americans used this area for summer encampments for hundreds of years before John Jordan's Native Americans led him to this spot in the summer of 1861.

In 1860 Darwin French and a party of Visalia prospectors found gold and silver in the Coso Range east of the Owens Valley. As was usual in those days, this discovery was communicated throughout the state very quickly.

Nearly all the miners heading for the lode started from Visalia. That first year the miners made their way over the Sierras any way they could. It is not surprising that there was an outcry for a route over the Sierras.

In the summer of 1861, John Jordan blazed a trail from Visalia to Olancho. He had Native Americans on his work crew and in many places followed their trails.

Two routes were blazed that summer. A southern or early route, that went through Jordan Hot Springs, and a northern or late summer route that split off the Kern River and went north through Little Whitney Meadow. The northern route was never completed.

In the fall of 1861, John Jordan formed a corporation and petitioned the Tulare County Board of Supervisors for a franchise to build a toll trail from Visalia to the Owens Valley. The charter was granted early in 1862, with the proviso that the trail would be widened into a much needed wagon road.

On May 22, 1862, John Jordan drowned while trying to cross the Kern River on a raft.

In 1863, a subscription of \$1600.00 was raised in Visalia and the Jordan Trail was completed by G.W. Warner. The trail was put to immediate use by Company D from Fort Independence, in the Owens Valley. They marched to the new Fort Babbitt near Visalia that fall to protect Union Loyalists from Southern Sympathizers. The story goes that a soldier died in route and was buried at Jordan Hot Springs.

In 1864 a toll road was completed over the Greenhorns and Walker Pass, thereby ending the pressure to turn the Jordan Trail into a wagon road.

In the late 1800s, packing and hiking in the Sierra Nevada became increasingly popular. The Jordan Trail was used by foot and horse traffic. It is said that at this time, there were 25 or 30 tents set up at Jordan Hot Springs on any summer day.

We now think of the wilderness as being a place with few people and a lot of empty space, but in the 1900s, there was much activity in the Sierra Nevada. There were miners traveling through, sheepmen and cattlemen bringing stock up to the high country for the summer and vacationers from both the San Joaquin and the Owens Valleys using the area.

It was reported by Gerald Waring, of the United States Geologic Survey, that by 1915 there was an old cabin and some rustic tables at the Hot Springs. He also reported finding fourteen hot springs along Nine Mile Creek, four of which had been developed to form bathing pools.



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Forest Service history tells us that by 1916 there was a telephone line in Jordan that ran from the Tunnel Meadow Station south through Casa Vieja Meadow, Jordan Hot Springs and Monache Meadow then on to other southern Sierra stations. Also at this time the resort owners were required to haul out mail.

The Cow Camp era was in full swing by this time. The ranchers, their families and their cowhands needed a social center as well as an economic center. People from the surrounding area, the Owens Valley and the San Joaquin would travel to Jordan for the dances and to use the Hot Springs. While at Jordan, the "locals" would get mail and supplies.

In 1918 Ethel Olivas was 10 years old. She remembered spending that summer at her Aunt and Uncle's cow camp at Red Rock Creek, just three miles north of the Jordan resort. Mrs. Olivas recounted that Jordan, at the time, "was a big resort with an outside dance floor". That dance floor was a large wooden platform.

About 1925 Walter Jean Dowell bought Jordan from Hal Wormack and installed a sawmill and a Pelton wheel. This began the third episode of construction at Jordan. The dining room, kitchen walls, and the tent platforms were all built during this time. Also, lumber was milled for cabins in Monache Meadow and to be packed out on the packers return trips.

In 1927, Bill Carrasco was seven years old. His family owned cow camps at Templeton Meadow and Ramshaw Meadow. He remembers going to Jordan where they would "take" the baths and visit with people. He remembers it as a "landmark", a busy place called Jordan Junction. "Always lots of people there. Strings of mules going through there steady, and they packed from the other side too. It was, I'd say at that time, a mass". He recalls the store and the packers from Lone Pine, including Ollie Deerborn and the Olivas brothers who packed in groceries and "stuff". For the return trip, they would haul lumber that had been milled at Jordan.

By 1935, Walt Gregg had bought the permit for Jordan and air strips had been built in Monache, Templeton and Tunnel Meadows. People from Southern California would fly into these airfields and then pack down to Jordan. People would also pack

into Jordan from both the east and the west sides of the Sierra.

When Clarence Purnel, his brother Elmo and Tom Madar bought the resort in 1941, they restored the Pelton water wheel and the saw mill and used them for awhile.

During this time the Forest Service bought lumber from the mill to bridge Nine Mile Creek. During the Second World War, the Purnels had the resort closed for two or three years. Clarence Purnel ran the resort until he sold it to Reginald Stocking in 1964.

Mr. Stocking ran the resort as a vacation home, not a commercial resort, until 1972 when Bob and Alice Burkhardt bought it.

In 1978 Congress signed the Wilderness Act that created the Golden Trout Wilderness. Many changes took place because of this, not the least of which was the decision that commercial enterprise and wilderness values were incompatible. The decision was made that the resort would be closed as a commercial venture by 1990.

After the Golden Trout Wilderness was created, the resort changed hands two more times. First in 1981 when Bob and Tiese Quinn bought the permit and again in 1985 when Jim and Julie Porter bought it from the Quinns. Today, Jordan Hot Springs remains a very popular camping spot. In 1992, Jordan Hot Springs was declared an Historical Landmark and the remaining structures and artifacts are protected. The Inyo National Forest has plans to maintain and repair the resort in the same manner that it was built.

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