



## Snowmass and its peaks: the name game

By Catherine Lutz

When white men settled the Roaring Fork Valley over a century ago, driving out the native Ute Indians, they didn't pay much attention to the Brush Creek Valley. Old records indicate that prospectors ventured up the drainage, and there's evidence of exploratory digging, but the mineral-hungry men of the day soon realized there was little to be found here, and wisely moved on to the Aspen area.

As the silver boom engulfed Aspen, the new settlers dubbed just about every geographic feature in the area, mostly after mining claims: Little Annie, Smuggler and Ajax are still in our vocabulary today. When the population boom eventually spilled over to the fertile Brush Creek Valley, where a handful of vast ranches were established, the naming craze didn't hit so hard. Then in the mid 1960s, men from the Janss Corporation came in search of a place to develop a ski resort, and Snowmass-at-Aspen was born according to a partnership between Janss and the Aspen Skiing Corporation.

About 3,000 acres worth of runs, lifts and terrain features had to be named, and those early developers did a good job, dedicating trails to ski patrollers and physical features on the mountain.

But what about those prominent peaks in the background, beyond the ski area boundaries? Some can only be seen from the lower parts of the valley, while others are visible from high points on the mountain. And what about those high points, like Sam's Knob and Elk Camp? Where did they get their names?

### **A little history**

Some of the original names of peaks and prominent features undoubtedly have been lost over the years, as the early explorers didn't stick around, the Utes were driven out, and there is little written record of Snowmass' ranching history.

The Elk mountain range, a swath of dense craggy mountains from Crested Butte to Aspen, was first explored (and named) in 1853. Lieutenant E.G. Beckwith of the Gunnison Survey led his men northwest over Cochetopa Pass and stumbled onto a mountain range where they found "numerous elk horns É scattered whitening on the hills."

But the Gunnison Survey produced little reference information, because when twenty years later another official party stumbled onto the area, a chronicler described the mountains as "terra incognita; nameless, untrodden, unknown peaks."

Starting in 1873, the Hayden Survey, under the authority of the Secretary of the Interior,

explored the Elks, quickly becoming the most comprehensive study of the range to date. The group climbed peaks, took measurements, and wrote detailed descriptions of their findings, leaving for future generations several newly named peaks.

As is customary, Hayden Survey members named many mountain after themselves. One summit the party attained, however, was simply called Snow Mass (14,092 feet), for the perpetual swath of snow draped between its two summits. The Utes had called the mountain Cold Woman -- often hidden by clouds, it was believed to be the source of bad weather. Some pioneers called it White House Peak, but eventually Snowmass won out. Oddly enough, the mountain that prompted the name of Snowmass Village and what's now known as Old Snowmass, is hardly distinguishable from the town -- although it's great mass and height makes it clearly visible from several northern summits of the Sawatch Range to the east.

The Hayden party also named Capitol Peak (14,130 feet) after the stately Washington, D.C. building (some would argue that there is little physical resemblance), although they didn't climb it. Capitol's distinct tapered triangle peak is easily visible from Snowmass Village -- it's the next significant peak to the left of Mt. Daly when facing the ski area.

Mount Daly (13,300 feet) is the most prominent peak seen from Snowmass Village. With its distinctive whitish band, Daly is Snowmass' trademark -- its outline even adorns police department vehicles. But Daly, sometimes called Ribbon Mountain, holds a bit of a mystery; none of the local experts nor any of the books consulted for this article shed any light about whom the peak was named after. (If anybody has any clues to this enduring mystery, please contact the Snowmass Sun.)

Although Hayden's men are credited with naming several area peaks, they didn't climb many of them. The named-but-didn't-ascend list also includes Pyramid Peak (14,018 feet), christened so because of its distinct shape, and the Maroon Bells, which Hayden considered one inaccessible mountain. North Maroon (14,014 feet), South Maroon (14,156 feet) and Pyramid are visible from Elk Camp on Snowmass Ski Area, and can't be mistaken.

In his book "Guide to the Colorado Mountains," Robert Ormes describes Snowmass Mountain as an "inconspicuous hump" to the right of handsome Hagerman Peak, which at 13,841 feet shares a perch on the giant. He also calls Hagerman "a photographer's dream," although it too is hard to pick out from Snowmass Village.

Hagerman Peak was in fact named after an explorer, or rather, an early Aspen mountaineer. Percy Hagerman, an Aspen businessman whose father had made it big owning a mine, and a partner, Harold W. Clark, also an Aspenite connected to a mining fortune, exhaustively exploring the Elks of their backyard from 1908 to 1910, with little more than an old Hayden Survey atlas to guide them. Their forays ultimately culminated in a book penned by Hagerman, "Notes on Mountaineering in the Elk Mountains of Colorado, 1908-1910," in which he writes:

"These peaks are among the finest in the Rockies for a number of reason. They have big

streams and fine large lakes; they are rugged, steep and forbidding in appearance; some of them are richly colored; and finally, the upper stretches have not been scarred with mining claims.”

Early in their exploration Hagerman and Clark had scaled a peak that they thought was Snowmass, but was in fact its sister summit. Now Hagerman Peak bears one of the mountaineer’s names, and Clark’s Peak (13,570 feet) honors his partner. From the Village, Clark’s Peak sits to the left of Mt. Daly and slightly in front of Capitol. Hagerman and Clark are credited with the first ascent of Daly, the Maroon Bells and Pyramid.

### **In the neighborhood**

The high daunting peaks of Snowmass’ backcountry are not the only ones with histories. Garret Peak (12,808), temptingly close from the top of Snowmass Ski Area, has by far the most interesting story of the local mountains. Originally an unnamed peak, it was dubbed Garret by a local powder guide in the early days. According to Jim Snobble, who laid out ski trails for the Aspen Skiing Corporation, guests constantly asked the guide to name all the peaks in the area. Rather than say unimaginatively that it didn’t have a name, the guide told his clients it was called Garret, after a rooming house (flophouse, according to Snobble) that he owned in Aspen.

Sam’s Knob (10,630 feet) was named after Sam Stapleton, a rancher in the Owl Creek Valley.

The Cirque (12,510), at the top of the Cirque Poma, is actually a nub on a ridge that extends to Baldy Mountain (13,155 feet), so named because of its smooth white top. Although its position above timberline would also merit that name, Baldy was struck by a major fire in the 1880s that also created the Big Burn; most say the Utes set the fire to discourage people from entering the area. (Obviously that didn’t work.)

Elk Camp (11,235 feet) is literally that: an elk calving ground here. The animals spend part of the spring here, and descend to their wintering grounds through this area to lower Brush Creek.

Burnt mountain (11,385 feet), slightly to the east of the ski area, is the result of a more recent forest fire: charred stumps can still be found there.