



## ***Battlement Mesa: An Emerging New Community, Part Two***

By Keith Lammey, President

In last month's Echo I explained that I had discovered an interesting document on the Western Research Institute's website, which is a Wyoming based nonprofit that researches advanced energy systems.

The article refers to our community as "Battlement Mesa: An Emerging New Community." It is unattributed and apparently was written in the mid-1980's and explains the circumstances and events which led to Battlement Mesa's transformation from a rural ranching area to a residential community.

Most local residents know that there are two Battlement Mesas. There is a geographic land form lying north of the Grand Mesa known as Battlement Mesa and there is a Planned Unit Development {PUD} named Battlement Mesa. The history of the Battlement Mesa PUD is closely tied to oil shale development. And, in part, local oil shale history dates back to the Native Americans of this area and the infamous, "rock that burns" Mt. Callahan story which is frequently told by our local residents.

I don't know for how long and how much the Native Americans knew about oil shale but apparently they understood that oil shale and ordinary rock were dramatically different otherwise, they wouldn't have warned Mike Callahan not to build his chimney with oil shale rock back in 1882.

According to the Western Research Institute article, oil shale history in Garfield County, Colorado has always been a boom and bust story and dates back, at least, to the end of World War I. After World War I, several companies tried to produce oil from oil shale but quickly discovered that it was difficult to produce large quantities of oil from oil shale. After a few failed attempts to do so, the oil shale pioneers lost hope and disappeared.

Several years later, after World War II, new oil shale pioneers conceived and began construction of the Anvil Points facilities on the south rim of the Roan Plateau between present day Parachute and Rifle. This Federal Government initiated facility operated in varying degrees of activity until the mid-1950's. Each new oil shale pioneer claimed to have the magic formula that enabled him to convert oil shale to oil profitably. After the boom attracted many new residents to the area and the pilot programs unsuccessfully attempted to convert to commercial production, the post World War II boom turned to bust by the early 1960's.

The boom and bust oil shale cycle was quiet between the early 1960's and the oil embargo of 1974. While most of us were waiting in long lines to fill our cars with gasoline, new oil shale pioneers had concluded that the true oil shale era had arrived. The Federal Government joined the action and fueled the oil shale boom by awarding two Federal Oil Shale Leases in 1975. By 1980, after five years of environmental and pilot programs, commercial production levels was thought to be inevitable and on the immediate horizon. In 1980, Colony Oil Shale announced that it would construct a 47,000 barrel per day oil shale to oil facility and Union Oil of California added to the oil shale fervor by announcing its intention to build a 10,000 barrel per day unit of an even larger oil shale production facility. The new oil shale boom had reached a new, much higher level of optimistic reality. Many Americans were certain that oil shale would create vast new U. S. oil production and eliminate the country's dependence on foreign oil and the likelihood of lines at the gas pump.

Exxon was among the believers and acquired ARCO's 60 percent interest in the Colony Shale Oil Project which was located 15 miles north of Parachute. Suddenly, Battlement Mesa was an emerging new community that was expected to become home to nearly 25,000 people. Exxon's Battlement Mesa showed great promise in the early 1980's and even the most skeptical residents of the Western Slope were certain that this time the boom was real.

And then, on May 2, 1982, everything stopped when Exxon's board of directors made the decision to terminate The Colony Oil Shale Project. The date became known to area residents as "Black Sunday." The oil shale boom had gone bust, again.

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