

## Land, Water and People

### 100 Years of Travel

By Mike Blakeman

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, the Rio Grande National Forest will turn 100 years old. A lot has changed in that time with how people visit and enjoy their Forest.

For example, in 1908 the primary method for people to get up into the forest was by walking or riding a horse. Many people still visit the forest this way, but most of these folks use an automobile to get to the trailhead. 1908 was also the year that the first truly affordable automobile, the Model T, rolled out. So it probably wasn't long before folks were visiting the forest in their gasoline or ethanol-powered "horseless carriages."

Now some people drive their big 4x4 pickup trucks to trailheads, unload their knobby-tired ATVs, UTVs or motorcycles and then cruise up a rocky motorized trail. While others seek out similar rocky trails but prefer to travel by way of human-powered, high tech mountain bikes that are so light a 12-year-old can lift one over her head with one hand.

Winter travel was mostly restricted to snowshoes or cross-country skis back in 1908. It was difficult to even reach the forest as there weren't any snowplows clearing major travelways (except railroad tracks). Then, in the mid-1950s, the "modern" snowmobile was invented and in the 1960s they started being mass-produced. Now, with technological advances, snowmobiles can go just about anywhere.

Skiers and snowshoers also have benefited from technological advances. Snowshoes are now made with lightweight aluminum tubing, synthetic mesh and have metal cleats on the bottoms. Skis are shorter, wider, and made with high-tech composites that make them exceptionally responsive. And, of course, winter clothing is also made with high-tech materials that wick sweat, block wind, repel water, and are light weight and warm.

The number of people recreating on the forest has increased dramatically with these improvements in transportation and outdoor clothing. With this increase in use, we have also experienced an increase in conflicts. There are now organized user groups for every specialized recreation type asking the Forest Service for their own piece of the public land pie. In the summer it's become the hikers vs. the mountain bikers vs. horseback riders vs. the llama trekkers vs. dirt bikers vs. ATVers vs. the extreme jeepers.

All the user groups pay taxes and have an equal right to express their views as to how their public lands are managed. This has significantly increased the complexity of travel management on public lands. The SLV BLM is currently developing a new travel management plan while the Rio Grande National Forest is developing a new motor vehicle use map. The new motor vehicle use map will then form the foundation for the next round of Forest travel management planning.

Travel management plans will always be in a constant state of flux as technological advances continue to influence how people recreate on the Forest and BLM lands. Who knows, maybe 100 years from now people will be jet-packing up to the tops of our mountains.

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