



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

YMCA OF THE ROCKIES HISTORY

The YMCA of the Rockies has a rich history of service to children, families, non-profit and faith-based groups, and the YMCA international movement. By joining our team, you help make history for the next generation of service.

The Rocky Mountain region has been the site of YMCA summer encampments since the 1890s. In 1906, YMCA leadership determined to establish a permanent summer training center for YMCA professionals in the Rockies. One year later, July 1907, 23 YMCA leaders met in Grand Lake, CO and a motion was made to, "form a property corporation to be known as the Western Conference of Young Men's Christian Associations, to provide facilities and cooperate in the conduct of conferences, institutes and other assemblies of YMCA workers." A small group headed out from Grand Lake on foot, crossed over the Continental Divide and spent a night at the Wind River Lodge, on the property of what is now the Estes Park Center, YMCA of the Rockies. In 1908, ninety-three men attended the 1908 summer school in Estes Park.

The Western Conference began improving the property almost immediately. Three buildings in the center of Y camp still comprise the heart of the Estes Park Center. The Administration Building, the Assembly Hall (now Hyde Chapel) and the Walnut Dining room were all constructed between 1910 and 1913. By 1912, the organization began serving Y professionals and their families from around the country. The Estes Park Center grew in popularity as a training center and within the next few years the State meeting rooms were constructed to keep up with increasing demand. A fourth building, the Wind River Lodge, served as the first lodge for over sixty years. Demolished in 1977, a part the building was preserved and is now the Dorsey Museum.

By the early 1920s, the Estes Park Conference YMCA was becoming known as an ideal place for a family vacations and groups outside the YMCA movement began utilizing the facility for conferences. In 1925 a Women's Auxiliary was formed (women were not accepted as members until later) and the youth day camp started. Through the tenacity of its leadership, the YMCA of the Rockies survived the Great Depression and World War II. After the War, the Estes Park Conference shifted organizational focus from a summer school facility to a family vacation and conference center. In the 1950s, Walter G. Ruesch, along with the support of his wife Alice, opened the Y Camp for the winter season. Today, Estes Park Center continues its service for all by offering meeting rooms, comfortable accommodations, meals and many activities including horseback riding, archery, family programs, a Craft & Design Center and a new Mountain Center (opens 2018) on 860 acres.

Surrounded by Rocky Mountain National Park and an abundance of hiking trails, you can find something for everyone.

By the time of the 1966 expansion to include the Summit property, the YMCA of the Rockies was overflowing at capacity during the summer months. The Board of Directors approved a plan for a second site and a search began. In 1967, they voted to purchase the Just Ranch in Grand County. This operational ranch boasted sheep, hay, and no conference facilities. Snow Mountain Ranch, today almost 6,000 acres, was born. Within a short fifty years, the facility now includes reunion cabins, special event space, a dog sledding course, an adventure zone and camping for tents and campers.

As the soon-to-be operator of two facilities, the Estes Park Conference YMCA changed its corporate name to the YMCA of the Rockies in 1968, with the existing facility being named Estes Park Center. The new facility, named Snow Mountain Ranch, opened in 1969 offering quiet solitude in summer and excellent winter sports opportunities. Today, this family friendly place offers some of the best Nordic skiing in Colorado, fishing, biking, and hiking trails. Families don't have to leave property to find adventure, or solitude. Snow Mountain Ranch also hosts several specialty camps including Adam Camp, Heritage Camps, and Project Sanctuary.

The 1980s saw a growing interest and involvement between the YMCA of the Rockies and the greater YMCA movement, domestically and internationally. The YMCA of the Rockies is the only YMCA Conference Center in the world to host 2 International World Council of YMCA meetings. The YMCA of the Rockies hosted the 8th World Alliance in 1981 and the 18th in 2014.

In 1980, the YMCA of the Rockies acquired Camp Chief Ouray from the Denver Metropolitan YMCA and relocated it to Snow Mountain Ranch. The addition of Camp Chief Ouray, a traditional residential camp for boys and girls, helped strengthen the bond between our unique YMCA and more traditional YMCAs throughout the country.

The past decade has seen much expansion and renovation in an effort to provide meaningful experiences for future generations. More than a century ago, the YMCA of the Rockies began as a place where a few YMCA men could spend a summer and receive professional training in a tranquil and inspirational setting. While the setting remains, the Y has evolved into a year-round center where everyone is welcome. No matter the reason for their visit or the changes that we've made, our guests can still enjoy the foundation of the YMCA of the Rockies.