

Trailhead parking area to move, grow

Twin Owls accesses famed part of Rocky Mountain Nat'l Park

By Gary Gerhardt
ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Access to an area of Rocky Mountain National Park popular for decades with rock climbers, bird watchers and nature hikers will be moved in two years.

The Twin Owls trailhead parking lot north of the 132-year-old MacGregor Ranch homestead will be moved southeast of the ranch, increasing parking by 35 spaces but adding a three-quarter-mile trek up to the Lumpy Ridge and Gem Lake trails.

Lumpy Ridge is one of the most popular climbing areas in the park, nationally known for its dome-like granite rock formations offering hundreds of technical climbing routes, as well as for the aeries and perches for numerous raptors.

President Bush signed into law legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Fort Morgan, and supported by many of the state's congressional delegation that was designed to protect the historic ranch as well as improve and increase parking.

"Rocky Mountain National Park is a crown jewel of the National Park system. I am pleased the President signed this bill because it is a common-sense solution that respects both the property rights of the MacGregor Ranch, a historic Estes Park homestead, and improves access to the national park," Musgrave said in a statement.

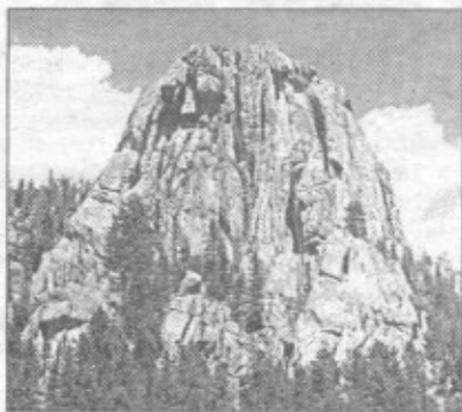
She said the boundary adjustment negotiated over more than 20 years by the National Park Service and the ranch is mutually beneficial to both.

Rocky Mountain National Park is one of the top five most-visited parks in America and received nearly 50,000 more visitors last year than Yellowstone National Park.

Park spokeswoman Kyle Patterson said construction on the new parking area will take place in the off seasons and is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2007.

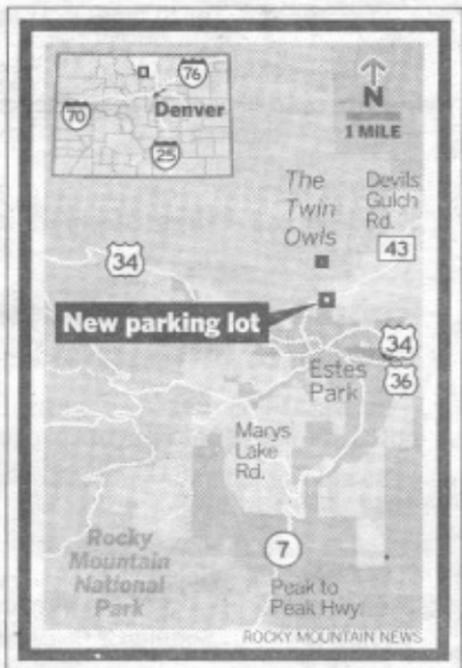
The new parking area will be built between the ranch entrance and the current Gem Lake trailhead, with 15 parking spaces that will close. The new lot will have room for 80 vehicles, Patterson said.

Patterson said the current 30-car Twin Owls parking lot, which will be eliminated under the new configura-



ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

Twin Owls is in the popular Lumpy Ridge area of Rocky Mountain National Park.



tion, often is filled early in the day, forcing cars to park along the entry road.

"Over the years, there have been a lot of discussions about this move, and I know a lot of groups in Estes Park wanted it to stay where it was," said Gary Neptune, owner of Neptune Mountaineering in Boulder and a longtime climber in the area.

"I feel there was not enough parking, that I don't mind walking a bit further to the trailhead, and it also may mean more people now will use the eastern side of the ridge and make room for others who don't mind walking to the west end."

He said climbing-guide services often take up most of the parking areas on summer weekends when more than 100 climbers clamber over the crags.

"It may be a bit farther for nature hikers and birders to walk up there, but I doubt they'll mind either," he said.

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