

The History of The Buffalo Creek Gun Club

written by Fred Crowle

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The Buffalo Creek Gun Club (BCGC) was 35 years old some time in the summer of 1996. Exactly when is not known, because the first written records of the club of October 5, 1961 indicate that the founders had already put into action the idea of forming a gun club.

In spirit, BCGC is many years older than a third of a century. An essential part of it, the rifle range that became its organizing focus, dates back to World War I. In fact, this club is one of the very few in the United States or anywhere which began with a shooting range looking for shooters, rather than shooters looking for a range.

The range, which has become renowned among highpower rifle shooters around the country for its excellence and natural beauty, apparently began life with the U.S. Army in 1918. But how and why and for what is a mystery. Nearly 20 years later, in 1937, the Army decided it needed a rifle range and sent its Reserve Second Engineers from Ft. Logan to renovate the old range. The Engineers established camp near where the club currently has its statistics cabin. They built the concrete target pits and the rest of the range in 1938. The facility was first actually known to be used for shooting in that year. But in this phase it had a very short life. It was abandoned after the end of World War II. This army range had berms at 200, 300, and 500 yards. It had been designed for military use, and before World War II armed services rifle shooting was done at those distances. The original 200 and 300 yard berms are still being used today by BCGC.

But to fit the shooting style of the 1960's, the club in its early days used most of the dirt from the 500 yard berm to make a new berm at 600 yards.

The army range got a name from a freak accident that happened while it was being re-built in 1938. A Lieutenant Fickes and two other soldiers were in the Engineer's mess tent (where the Roger Nolan pavilion is today) when a wild lightning storm came up. A bolt stuck the tent and killed the three men. Another bolt is said to have improved the 6-hole latrine, located down the hill a bit from the mess tent, by blowing a hole in the ground in line with the existing 6 holes, and thus expanding the latrine to 7-hole service at Camp Fickes.

Throughout World War II and then for a decade and a half more, the range lay in disuse and disrepair. It was rediscovered some time in 1960 by a man looking for a place to go hunting in Pike National Forest. This man was Ed Harvey, and his discovery sparked the beginning of BCGC. He recognized the abandoned concrete works and associated berms as part of a rifle range. He told his rifle-shooting friends about his find at a meeting of the Table Mountain Gun Club. Enough of them were interested to band together and form a new club. They had their first meeting at the Arvada Rifle and Pistol Club, although no records have been found to tell exactly when. It was sometime in the middle of 1961, because the first recorded minutes of a meeting of the Buffalo Creek Gun Club of October 5, 1961 refer to a previous meeting. According to those minutes, a one-year permit costing \$62.50 was obtained from the United States Forest Service for development and use of the range. A Mr. Thorp (club secretaries have made a habit until recently of referring to people as "Mr." or "Mrs.") made a motion at that meeting that the club "incorporate immediately." Ed Harvey, the man who discovered the range and who got rifle shooters interested enough in it to start this new club, was elected its first president.

The club's bylaws had been written and approved by the end of November

of 1961. The 18 members who approved the bylaws at the November meeting also voted to incorporate. Work already was being done on the range itself. Martin Ames, with help from Ray Barrett, surveyed and laid out the road that leads into the range. For this service, Ames was awarded an honorary life membership in the club. To make sure the club retained access to its range, Ed Harvey filed two gold claims on the property. These were for two quartz outcroppings which occur near the range, one immediately north of the 300 yard line. Building of the original target frames in the pits began in December of 1961. The first two frames were installed in March of 1962, and tested "to see how they work."

Apparently, they worked fine, and 11 more of the same kind were planned to be built during 1962. Thus, the number of functioning frames, and of firing points, when this range began its second life, was 12. This number was expanded to the current 15 frames and targets in 1978, 16 years later.

The club became officially affiliated with the National Rifle Association (NRA) in February of 1962.

It became a habit of the club to elect its new officers in January and to install them in February, and so in that month of 1962 the first full slate of officers listed in the minutes was installed:

Hugh Kline, President

Simon Zerlin, Vice President

Jenny Strbiak, Secretary

Ed Keller, Treasurer

C. A. Lowitz, Executive Officer

Jim Kirk, Range Officer,

and Instructors

E. D. McMichael

Ed Harvey

George Kaser.

The road, bunkers, and back stops had to be fixed and a bridge put across the small stream near the present entrance to the land on which the range is situated. To meet the cost of these improvements, the club decided to issue \$5.00 non-interest bonds, payable on demand three years after their date of issue. The \$710 raised in this manner was just enough to pay the \$700 remainder of a contract for \$1,500 to put in a culvert and improve the road. Most of the bonds never were redeemed.

The club's tradition of mixing business with pleasure started early. An "open house" at the range was planned for June 15, 1962. There would be hot dogs and coffee, but participants would be expected to work on the range. A second toilet was to be installed. Meeting minutes record that the first toilet was installed on the range in May of 1962. The open house was well attended, and the guests worked hard. They were able to complete installation of six target frames and carriers.

With frames and carriers in place, and berms already there from old army work, the range began to be used. It hosted its first highpower rifle match on June 28, 1962, a Department of Civilian Marksmanship (DCM) qualification match given the name "Columbine," because it was put on by the Columbine Gun Club. Buffalo Creek Gun Club received \$10 for this use of their range. The remaining of the original 12 target carriers were

completed in July of 1962. Apparently, some time during this same summer, the original small target shed also was built, because in the club's October minutes there is a notation that the target shed roof needed to be sealed.

The club entered and held its first State Highpower Match in September of 1962, but not at its own range. For several years, it was timid about holding this match on the range because of tradition that the match should be held at Buckley or Fort Carson ranges. But it did start holding Department of Civilian Marksmanship (DCM) matches on its own range. The first of these DCM qualification matches was on October 14, 1962. Seventeen members fired this match; 14 qualified. The training tradition at Buffalo Creek Gun Club began early: 10 Explorer Scouts were given instructions and got to shoot at this match. This same month, the club obtained a bond allowing it to qualify to receive DCM rifles for training and shooting purposes. The club received its first allotment of DCM match ammunition in February of 1963. The members noted, with some grumpiness, that this was 1943 corrosive issue.

The club got NRA approval to run its first Rocky Mountain Regional Highpower Match in 1963. It planned to hold this match at its Buffalo Creek range. Accordingly, various improvements were made. The most notable was outfitting the target frames with their infamous head-basher, hand-smasher cement core counterweights to make them run more smoothly. A program was printed, underwritten by the Redfield Gunsight Company. Nevertheless, when the club did hold the match, on April 21, 1963, it was at the Buckley range near Denver. The club still was not confident enough about its own range. This match was reported to have netted the club \$22.17 on food and \$274.60 from fees.

Even though the club did not use its own range for the Highpower Regional, in 1963, it did expand its members' own regular use of it. There

was another DCM National Match Course fired at the range on May 11, 1963. Fourteen members entered. The top score was a 211-10V (they were using the old style 5V targets) shot by Wilbur Boese. The club also regularly rented its range to other clubs. The Table Mountain Juniors, for instance, rented it on June 8, 1963 for a "picnic and qualification." The Board of Directors at their June meeting decided, in fact, to establish a pricing policy -- the rent would be \$10, and club members would be allowed to shoot free in any match put on by another club renting the range.

Vandals have always been a problem at the range. Phone lines were strung between the shooting lines and the target pits sometime in 1962. In the spring of 1963, the lines had been torn down. A decision was made in the summer of 1963 to re-string them underground. The backstops were still too low, so they were built up. And the first steps in building a "clubhouse," excavating and pouring a concrete foundation for it, were taken. This building, slightly northeast of the 600 yard berm, was to be used by members and guests for meetings, picnics, and shelter from storms. It would be the place where shooters could gather to view their posted scores, and to get their awards. But the far-sighted Ed Harvey had also gotten this building written into the agreement signed with the Forest Service for lease of the land as a material inducement for club members to build the cabin. According to the lease, it had to be completed in 1963, or lease and range would be lost. The members assessed themselves \$20 each to collect enough money to build this structure. Most of the roof had been put up by the end of September, and the building was completed in October. The first of several signs and fences in and around the range also had been installed.

At about this same time one of the club's most cherished traditions was established. In August of 1963, Jim Shipper proposed that a regular,

yearly intra-club match be held, the winner to receive for one year's possession a large traveling cup award. Money for this handsome trophy was given by Jim's father, Mr. Jack Schipper. Later, this regular yearly match would come to be known popularly as the "Ed Harvey Match." The trophy was first shown to members at the September meeting, in 1963.

By the end of 1963, the club was slating regular activities resembling its current schedule of shooting events. For instance, its plans for 1964 called for three National Match Course tournaments in April, June, and September, the Regional Highpower Match in June (still planned elsewhere, Ft. Carson in particular); and in August the "Ed Harvey Cup" match. The December 26, 1963 members meeting at which this schedule of activities was proposed by Ray Barrett is historically significant because that is when Ed Harvey's name was first attached to the yearly intra-club match. Another part of the Harvey match tradition was established at the March 1964 members meeting (the club got into the habit of having a Board of Directors meeting and a regular members meeting once a month, excepting during the fall hunting season). Someone moved, and someone else seconded, that "...a picnic be held after the Ed Harvey, at which awards would be presented."

The club found out in 1964 that it was not wise to schedule the first match of a year as early as April because of the good possibility of severe, cold weather at the 8,100-foot altitude of its range. They decided from sad experience in that April of 1964 to schedule each year's first match in May.

Buffalo Creek is highly respected for its training program for junior shooters. These shooters seldom have their own rifles, and so a first step in this training program was taken in June of 1964. That was when the club received its first two DCM rifles. They were used in the June 28 DCM match at the Buffalo Creek range.

Facilities at the range are inspected from time to time by the Forest Service. In its early years, the club had to make several improvements to retain its lease. In the middle of 1964, the cost of these improvements was beyond what was in the treasury. So, an "anonymous nonmember" (later identified as Mr. E. H. Hilliard, Jr., of the Redfield Gunsight Company) offered to pay for the various needs: fencing materials, components of the cabin's fireplace, another outdoor toilet, some road repairs, raising the backstop, and widening the 600 yard bunker. The widening of the 600 yard line was done with 400 cubic yards of rocky earth taken from an area just north of the 300 yard line. The resulting excavated area at 300 yards became a very convenient parking lot.

Buffalo Creek Gun Club sold its first brassards beginning in September of 1964. They went for \$1.00 each. Still shy about running a Regional Highpower Match at their range, the club ran the 1964 Regional at Ft. Carson. They planned to run the 1965 Regional also at Ft. Carson. Always trying to improve their regular members meetings and attract more attendance, they included in their plans for 1965 an ambitious program of talks on how to set up a match, how to operate a statistical office, how to run a match, and also how to shoot.

In 1965, they held their first coaching clinics for inexperienced shooters.

In June of 1965, the members noted a need for a new, much larger target shed, in addition to re-roofing of the small older one. The new shed was primarily to be used for storing targets for scheduled matches. The club had been making up new targets for each match immediately before the match. They also began debating how to blast away "a large rock" which was causing ricochets at the backstop berm. Their Ed Harvey Trophy match in August of 1965 was considered to be a great success. German steins were used as prizes. The membership was so pleased with the match and the fun they had that they decided that it should be a regular yearly

event "even if it has to be subsidized a bit."

May 14 and 15 of 1966 were historic: BCGC finally held the Rocky Mountain Highpower Regional at its own range on these two days. The match was limited to 60 competitors, civilians being given first preference through the first 51 signed up. Steve Graham was the Chief Range Officer, and Maurice Ashley the Chief Pits Officer. That pesky large rock in the backstop was blasted out of the way before the Regional. The match went well and netted the club \$150. From this time on, except in 1968, the Regional was held yearly at the Buffalo Creek range.

The last year that the old 5V targets were used in a Regional was 1966. In 1967, the new decimal targets were required. Nineteen sixty-six was the first year in which the club used trophies "bearing a buffalo." Shooters liked this powerful and unique symbol.

Today's shooters enjoy camping overnight, before a tournament or during two-day tournaments, around the east end of the range. They have the conveniences of picnic tables and cooking grills. These were not provided by the Forest Service; they were built and installed by BCGC. The picnic tables were made by Mr. Bray for \$15 each in the spring of 1967. The barbecue grills were put in much later, in the spring of 1980, when the club authorized spending of \$600 for the four grills and some playground equipment. Nineteen sixty-seven also saw the beginning of regular monthly publication of a club bulletin with Steve Graham as editor. This same man deserves credit for making the first recorded move toward starting organized juniors shooting activities in the club: at the members meeting of June 29, 1967 he proposed establishing a Junior Division of the club with reduced dues and match fees for juniors in order to "encourage youthful shooters."

Secondary communication between the firing lines and the pits is still

today by way of World War II vintage field telephones. Ray Barrett was authorized to spend \$20 for the first of these at the March 1968 members meeting. Roger Noland worked out plans for the new target shed, to be placed on a leveled plot south of the target pits, the dimensions to be 24 x 28 x 13 feet. Construction of this building began in April of 1968. The March meeting recognized Ed Harvey's importance to BCGC by presenting him with a certificate in appreciation of work and financial support "...in organizing this club, obtaining its range, and helping to maintain it as a growing concern."

Nineteen sixty-eight marked the beginning of a dark period in shooting history in the United States. Anti-gun hysteria reached up to Federal Government levels. The DCM drew back its support to gun clubs throughout the nation. No centerfire ammunition was to be available any longer, for example for junior shooting programs. At best, only .22 cal. ammunition would be provided. The club's six M-1 rifles were recalled by the DCM in the fall of 1968. The leg match part of the Rocky Mountain Regional Highpower Match was cancelled because there was no ammunition to shoot it. BCGC reverted to holding this Regional at the Buckley National Guard Range. However, it did host the Colorado State Rifle and Pistol Association-sponsored Colorado State Highpower Tournament at its own range on August 3 and 4 of the year. That match, run by Roger Noland, had an entrance fee of \$1. After-expenses profit to the club was \$3. Very late in 1968, the club completed the second, larger target shed.

Today's shooters at highpower matches are used to the disc system for scoring targets, instead of the paddles that had been used for so many years. This disc system was first used at the Buffalo Creek range in the 1970 State Association match. According to reports, this resulted in "... some confusion in the pits" during the match. The main problem seemed

to be that targets could not be raised high enough for shooters and scorers to see the scoring disc when it was used in the lower part of the target to indicate an X, 10, or 9. The targets were too low behind the parapet.

The house which the club built at the range originally was known as the "clubhouse." Apparently, the charter members hoped that its use would fit its name. The club tried to get members to meet there regularly in May and June of 1971. The members were supposed to gather there late on a Saturday morning, conduct some business, do some repairs and maintenance, and then maybe do a little shooting. But the idea was unpopular. Clubhouse meetings never mustered a quorum. So, this idea was quickly abandoned, and today, of course, the house is pragmatically known as the "stat house" instead of the clubhouse.

Late in 1972, more dirt was moved from north of the 200 and 300 yard lines to widen the 600 yard line, and early in 1973 the range officers' bench was built onto the 600 yard line.

Through mid-1973, the club had mailed out a "bulletin" on a somewhat irregular basis, mostly to transmit match date and meeting information. In August, the bulletin conceptually assumed its current, regular monthly form as Pete Blanc volunteered to edit it on a one-year trial basis. October was when the first regular bulletin was mailed out. Its primary purposes still were to list all match schedules for the club and notify members of all meetings.

The original bonds of 1962 which provided loan money to the club to get it started were called in January of 1974. Any that were not redeemed by December of that year would be considered to be donations. Interestingly, none were redeemed in response to the calling.

One of the outstanding activities today of BCGC is its juniors program.

Attempts to help juniors get started in highpower shooting had been made sporadically by the club since nearly the time it began operation. Formation of a Junior Highpower Rifle Team was proposed by Ron Adams at the January 1976 Board of Directors meeting. At the March members meeting, Adams presented a plan for organizing the team and a request to be made to the Colorado State Rifle and Pistol Association Highpower Executive Officer for issue of four of the State's DCM M-14 rifles for use by the juniors. One month later, the program got underway under the direction of Pete Blanc. Blanc received \$35 for incidental expenses connected with starting the junior program. Two of the State DCM M-14 rifles were assigned for use in the program.

The club supported the juniors program enthusiastically. Blanc was authorized at the May 1976 meeting to spend whatever was needed to conduct it. The junior shooters received incentive advantages, such as entry to club-sponsored matches for half-price fees. The first match the juniors participated in officially as a team was on June 20, 1976. This match had 47 entries, of which six were juniors. It is interesting that the cost of the juniors program during its first year of existence was reported by Blanc, at the August 24 members meeting in 1976, to be \$53.67. There had been nine junior shooters in the program. The plan for 1977 was to allow a maximum of six shooters, and to run this program from April through August.

In the summer of 1977 the club sent its first juniors to Camp Perry, where junior Greg Griffith would have won the junior championship except for "...an unfortunate cross-fire during a rapid-fire string." The junior program has the distinction of entering the first all-girl junior team at Camp Perry. That was in August of 1980.

By long-standing tradition, targets at highpower ranges were put up on cloth. Today's shooters will hardly remember that, being used to the

currently used cardboard backing. This cardboard backing was first used at the Buffalo Creek range in 1977 matches. Nineteen seventy-seven was when the club issued a new brassard. The supply of original brassards was exhausted by mid-1976. This new brassard became available in April of 1977. One was given to member Keith Kelly's daughter, as thanks to her for having designed it.

Further strengthening of the juniors program appeared in the March meeting of 1978 when a motion was made and passed to create a new Board of Directors officer, to be known as the Juniors Executive Officer. This brought the number of Directors from seven to eight. Pete Blanc, previously known as Junior Chairman, thus became the club's first Juniors Executive Officer.

In June of 1978, the 600 yard line was widened by eight feet to its present size of 15 firing points. The 300 yard line was raised to its present level. The conspicuous concrete cylinders which shore up the sides of the 600 yard line were installed in the spring of 1979.

The first record of authorization of club stationery and envelopes appears in the minutes of the March 25, 1980 members meeting. Another famous symbol of the club, its "Special Buffalo Awards" (the bronze, silver, and gold buffalo pins) were first given out to competitors in the summer of 1982. These, formally known also for a very short time as Buffalo Creek Achievement Awards, were eagerly received and highly prized by shooters who earned them.

In July of 1980, BCGC built its 200 yard outhouse. The last building to be put up on the Buffalo Creek range is a large pavilion. It was planned and its construction supervised by Roger Nolan during the summer of 1996 -- the 35th anniversary of the club. Sadly, Roger died of cancer just a few months after this pavilion, now named after him, was completed. The last

modification in shooting sports at the club range was the introduction of smallbore silhouette shooting in the spring of 1984 by John Perrizzola. Recent attempts to introduce Any-Any highpower shooting (1994) and Rattle Battle matches (1995) have not been very successful. These kinds of shooting did not require making any changes to the range.

The Buffalo Creek Gun Club is a robust highpower rifle shooting organization. Partly, this is due to continued support from highpower rifle enthusiasts. But it is perhaps as much also be due to the outstanding beauty and utility of its mountain forest range near the town of Bailey, Colorado. In its third of a century of existence, it has produced many nationally and internationally acclaimed competitive shooters, many of these starting in its junior ranks. It is the nucleus of highpower competitive rifle shooting for Colorado

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This history of the Buffalo Creek Gun Club was compiled mostly from information from club secretary Record Books 1, 2, and 3 of minutes for membership and board of directors meetings (first entry, October 5, 1961; last entry in a bound book, December 7, 1983). Quotations in the text of this history are taken directly from minutes of various meetings.

I wish also to acknowledge help from Ray Barrett, Roger Noland, Ed Keller, and Jim Schipper, who dug deep into their fond memories of the club to provide information not found in the minutes. Simon Zevin was reported in the membership meeting of January 28, 1981, to have submitted a summary history of the club, especially of Ed Harvey and the Harvey Memorial Match. The history was proposed to be published in the next issue of the club bulletin. But I have not been able to find a copy of that history. Together with Ray Barrett and Roger Noland, I published a brief history of the Buffalo Creek range in the Colorado State Rifle and

Pistol Association's Colorado Bulletin, 32, 1-4, 1988.