

History Trail Run....The Greenland Trail By Jack Anthony



In my last History Trail Run article (October 2005 issue) we celebrated reaching Palmer Lake after a 10-article, 17-mile trek that started at the Woodmen trailhead in January 2005. Thus, I thought, the History Trail Run series was complete. Well, did you know there is a ½ mile connector trail that links the New Santa Fe Regional Trail with the Douglas County's Greenland Trail? This 3500 acre open space area is part of a 33,000 acre initiative called the South I-25 Conservation Corridor Project. The project's goal is to keep this beautiful countryside looking forever the same, almost as it was when the pioneers came to Colorado. This article will introduce the Greenland Trail and specifically Kipps Loop--an 8.5 mile loop that features a 500 foot elevation change and some tough trail hiking, running or biking challenges.

The connector trail from Palmer Lake to the Greenland Trail is easy to find. It heads off to the northeast from the parking lot. Be careful, it's got some steep sections and does require you to cross County Line Road. There is also access to the Greenland Trail in the community of Greenland. Our journey will take us on a counterclockwise circuit of Kipps Loop.

Before we embark, look to the west and you'll see the railroad tracks just north of Palmer Lake. Recall from our Husted article that here in the late 1800's and early 1900's helper engines would complete their chore of aiding trains up the grade and over the Palmer Divide. Here north of Palmer Lake they would turn around on section of track called the "Wye". The "Wye" was simply a "Y" section of track and switches that in three movements and flipping some switches enabled a helper engine to turn around. The mighty helpers returned to Husted to turnaround on a turn table, hook up and help another freight or passenger train "over the divide." Trains going south would also require helper engines on the long grade up from Denver. The helpers would also use a turnaround arrangement south of the Divide. Did you know that the "Little Engine That Could" book/story was written based upon the trains climbing the Palmer Divide?

Thanks to a 2005 Eagle Scout project by Scott McFadden, there are superb trail markers identifying the trails and distances. We'll head north to intercept the Kipps Loop. We then head east and start a steady climb. The trail rises rapidly and at the crest of the north-south ridge we arrive at Kipps Grave. The site is actually the Greenmont Cemetery and it was originally for Palmer Lake. The cemetery was incorporated in 1889 by Palmer Lake's founder W. Finley Thompson and several other town leaders. The name on the grave stone is Edward Thomas Kipps. Not much is known about Kipps other than what is on the stone. There is speculation by some that W. Finley Thompson is buried in Greenmont Cemetery. Adding to the air of mystery, many of these folks say it is W. Finley Thompson who is buried in the Kipps grave!

From the Kipps (or is it Thompson?) grave we proceed north along the ridge. You'll soon see evidence of a brush fire that occurred in the summer of 2002. From the burn area there are some really nice overlooks. From this point the trail takes us north west towards a trail junction that continues our counterclockwise journey on Kipps Loop or, if you turn right, heads north to the Greenland. You'll also note in this section we return the 500 foot elevation gain rather swiftly—it's joyously downhill! Let's learn more about Greenland, Colorado.

The Greenland area earned its name from Helen Hunt Jackson, famous author and poet who loved Colorado. She bestowed the name based on Greenland's natural beauty. How pleased Helen would be to know this area is being preserved to enable the beauty to remain forever! In 1871 the Denver & Rio Grande railroad reached the Greenland area and a new village was born. Greenland was platted as a 20 acre town site in 1875 by Fred Soloman prior to Colorado statehood. The layout was a typical railroad town with a "Front Street" parallel to the train tracks and intersected with written numbered street names followed by presidential names. This naming arrangement is also found in the Town of Monument. From Greenland, large quantities of lumber, grain, clay, potatoes, milk, and building stones were loaded and shipped. In the early 1900's, the Greenland area was one of the greatest potato producing area in Colorado. One year, 400 railcars full of potatoes were shipped from Greenland. In 1898, 25 citizens called Greenland home. By 1910 the population had doubled! At the run of the century, Greenland had a post office, three stores, two blacksmith shops, a wagon making shop, saloon, school, 2 railroad depots (The Santa Fe RR also came through Greenland) and a hotel. Greenland pioneer families include Mary and Charles Riggs, J.P. Riggs, I. J. Noe, C.B Kountz, Charles Allis and A.B Daniels. In 1906 John Higby bought the Greenland Ranch. The Higby Mercantile opened for business in Greenland on July 6, 1907. Higby owned similar stores in Eastonville and Monument. These families and others were the heart of Greenland and helped it prosper through livestock ranching and businesses.

Have you ever noticed the beautiful red barn in Greenland? It is a unique and distinct symbol of the Greenland area. The original barn was built in the late 1870's and was larger than the one we see today. In 1922, the barn was hit by lightening and it burned to the ground. The fire was so hot that train traffic was delayed for hours due to the intense heat. The new barn we see today is 25 feet shorter in length than the original barn, but pretty much looks the same. The loft can hold up to 100 tons of hay.

Carpenter Creek originates in Palmer Lake and runs though Greenland and onto Larkspur where it joins Plum Creek. It flooded many times causing train derailments and destruction of property. The flood of June 1965 is most memorable. Sixteen inches of rain fell in Palmer Lake and the surrounding area. A 30-foot wall of water came roaring northward causing serious damage to Greenland and then further on north in Larkspur, Castle Rock and Denver. You may have noted that the Palmer Divide separates two watersheds. Water flowing north ultimately empties into the Platte River and water flowing south from the Palmer Divide drains to the Arkansas River.

From the Greenland turn, we head south...about 2.5 miles to go, but no more significant hills! Along the current route of the active railroad was the old territorial road that connected north of Castle Rock to Palmer Lake and later led to Colorado Springs. Did you know that in 1899 State Senator Ammons of Douglas County sponsored a bill that appropriated \$5000 to develop a bicycle path from Littleton to Palmer Lake with options to continue it all the way to Pueblo. This section of Kipps Loop is on that Ammons bike-way. Senator Ammons would be thrilled to see the many Open Space pathways we enjoy today! As you proceed south on this section of the trail, be alert and catch a glimpse of the remains of a concrete bridge structure that was once part of the Santa Fe Railroad route. This structure supported a steel girder bridge. A photo of the bridge is included. This photo was taken during World War I when the Army assigned soldiers to protect this critical railroad bridge!



We arrive back at the south trailhead after an adventurous, if not grueling, 8.5 mile trail hike, bike or run ...whew! I wish to credit and praise the Larkspur Historical Society and the Douglas County staff for their fabulous web sites and willingness to answer my questions. Penny Burdick leads the Larkspur society and was so helpful to me in my research. The Larkspur web site is www.larkspurhistoricalsociety.com and the Douglas County's web site is www.douglas.co.us. The Douglas County Open Space and Trails portion of their web site includes a map created by Richard Marks as well as some additional information on the trail. Be sure to check it out before embarking on your Greenland Trail adventure. There is also a pamphlet made available at each trailhead.

Additionally, my loyal mentor Roger Davis of the Palmer Lake Historical Society and Vaile Museum was able to contribute several interesting historical tidbits on the area. The PLHS website is www.ci.palmer-lake.co.us/plhs/