

The Pritchett Ranch

Steamboat Springs, Colorado



by James Logan Crawford

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The Pritchett family: Margaret, Lulie, Carr, and Lulita, taken around 1913 at the home of Lulie's parents

Cover Picture — A view of one of the lower meadows of the Pritchett Ranch, looking southwest with the top of Emerald Mountain at the left - photo taken May 2006

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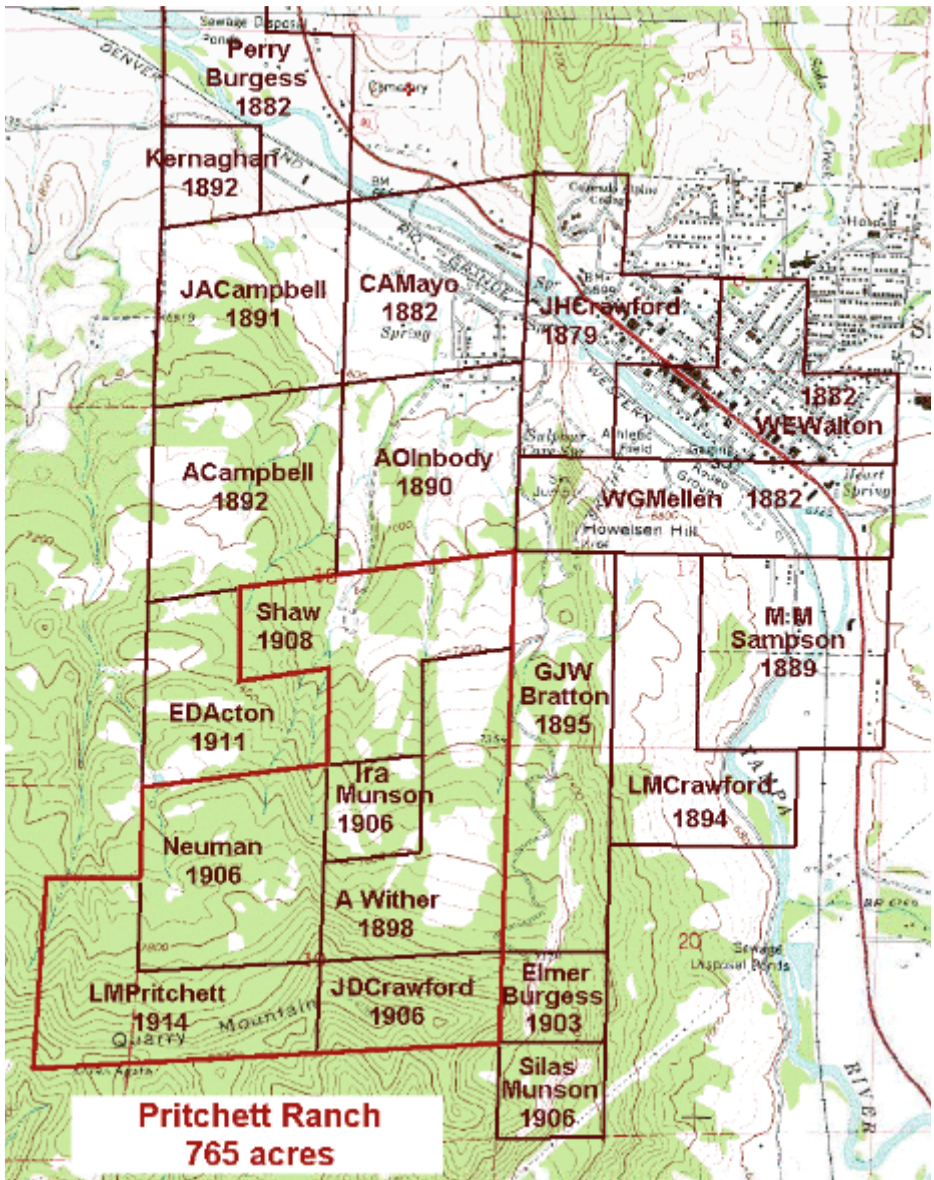
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Early History of Emerald Mountain's North Slope

Steamboat Springs is located on the Yampa River at the bend where the river changes its course from flowing north to flowing northwest and finally west. Tucked into the bend is an elevated land mass now commonly known as Emerald Mountain, but in the past known as Quarry Mountain or Onyx Mountain. This mountain is actually a ridge extending a couple of miles east to west with half a dozen high points including Quarry Peak in the east at 8252 and Agate Peak in the middle at 8239 . North of this high ridge the land slopes gradually down to the river over a distance of two to three miles. To the east the drop is much more rapid, falling 1400 over the distance of a mile to where it reaches the river a mile south of Steamboat. This precipitous drop to the east occurs all along the north slope to where it culminates at the steep slopes of Howelsen Hill across the river from downtown Steamboat Springs.

The early pioneers of Steamboat Springs staked their claims along the Yampa River at the bend. The first land patent was granted in 1879 to James H. Crawford, the founder of Steamboat Springs, for 160 acres which spanned the Yampa River from approximately where modern day 11th St. meets the river to just past the train depot. In 1882 the next four land patents of 160 acres each were issued to Perry A. Burgess, William E. Walton, William G. Mellen, and Charles A. Mayo. Burgess and Walton were friends from Butler, Missouri, who met Crawford at Hot Sulphur Springs in 1874. Mellen was a mining and hunting partner of Jim Bourn, Mrs. Crawford's brother, and spent the winter of 1874-1875 with the Crawfords in Hot Sulphur Springs. Mayo was originally from Vermont, and likewise met Crawford in Hot Sulphur Springs. All four men took land along the Yampa River adjacent to the Crawford claim: Mellen and Walton chose land to the southeast, while Mayo and Burgess took land to the northwest.

Land patents were issued under the Land Act of 1820 or the Homestead Act of 1862. Settlers were allowed to own 160 acres of public land if they lived on the land for five years and farmed the land or made improvements to it. The land was free, but they paid a filing fee of \$200.00. A special provision was made for Civil War veterans: the five year period was reduced by the number of years served in the war. Thus Crawford received his land patent in 1879, three years before the other four pioneers received their patents, because Crawford served for three years in the Civil War. Also note that there was a couple year delay in actually receiving the land patents. Crawford first filed for his land in 1875, and was eligible for



Land Patents granted for north slope of Emerald Mountain

the patent in 1877, but the paperwork took two years before it was finally issued on May 6, 1879.

The second round of pioneers in the Steamboat Springs area claimed most of the remaining flat lands along the river including the lowest parts of the north slope of Emerald Mountain where it approaches the river. The upper parts were first homesteaded by Archie Wither, who in 1898 obtained a land patent for 160 acres of what is now called the upper Orton Meadows. Sometime after 1898 he sold the land to Elmer Burgess and Silas Munson, who both already owned land nearby.

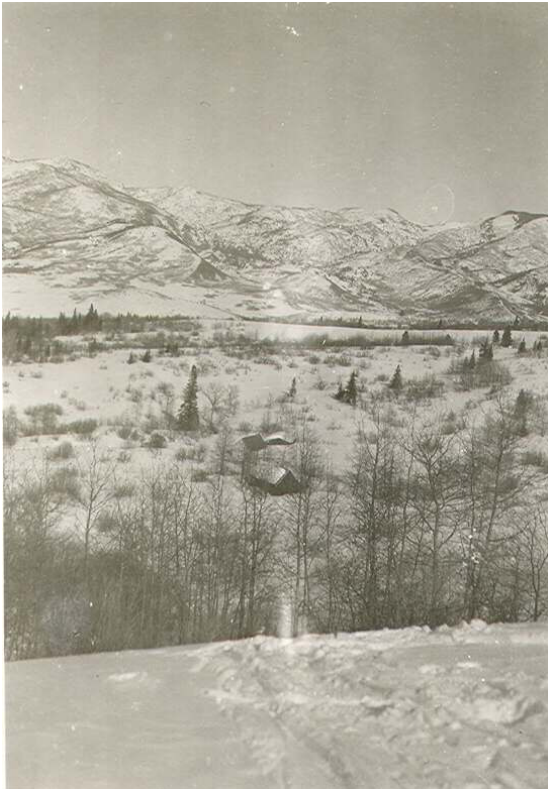
George Bratton claimed the land to the east of the Wither homestead and was issued a patent for it in 1895. This land was acquired by the Steamboat Springs Town Company and a stone quarry was developed at the southern end of the land. A road, which is now called Blackmere Drive, was built north from the quarry through the Bratton land and then along the west side of Howelsen Hill. The road twists and turns down the mountain to provide a gradual descent for the stone-laden wagons. The earliest known building that used stone from this quarry was the Crawford House, built in 1893-1894.

Lulie Crawford, oldest daughter of James H. Crawford, built a claim cabin on the eastern slope overlooking the river in the late 1880s. She obtained her land patent in 1894 for 160 acres to the east of the Bratton land. She sold this land for \$10,000 on October 1, 1897 to the Colorado Onyx Company, which developed an onyx mine in the northeastern corner of the property. Today this land is criss-crossed by winter Nordic ski trails and summer mountain bike trails.

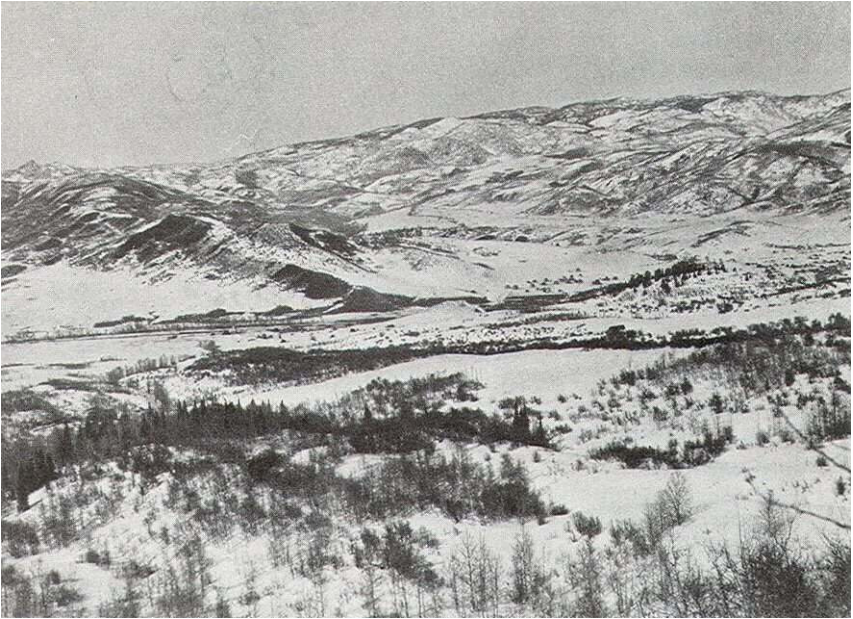
Lulie Crawford would later return to Emerald Mountain. On October 18, 1892 she married Carr Waller Pritchett, Jr., a mining engineer who first came to Routt County in 1887 to work on the Gilpin Mine near Mt. Zirkel. They moved to Old Mexico, where he worked for eight years. He became quite successful in his work, and the family moved to Denver in 1900 while he traveled to many parts of the west and Alaska to consult with various mining projects. The family returned often to Steamboat Springs for summer vacations, and soon they had the money to buy land for a summer home on Emerald Mountain. Lulie bought the Wither homestead from Burgess and Munson on October 25, 1905 for \$1,800.

The Pritchett family now had their summer home, which they called the Wild Rose Ranch. They soon added the 40 acre Ira Munson homestead, and in 1911 acquired the 162.97 acre Stephen Neuman homestead from K. L. Mills and Henry Howard for \$3000 and the 160 acre William C. Shaw homestead for \$3500. Lulie was granted another land patent in 1914 for

160 acres, and she added another 80 acres by buying the land her younger brother John D. Crawford had obtained by a land patent in 1906. The Pritchett ranch was now complete and included most of the upper north slope of Emerald Mountain west of Blackmere Drive and north of Quarry and Agate peaks. The Pritchett family, which now included daughters Margaret and Lulita, lived on the ranch during the summers, and with the help of Carr's brother Oswald and ranch manager O. H. Krueger, raised registered Shorthorn cattle. For three years, from 1919 to 1922, Carr quit his work as a mining engineer and the family lived on the ranch year around, enabling Lulita to graduate from the Steamboat Springs High School, class of 1922. However, Carr became restless, and considered the ranch a financial failure. He returned to his profession of mining engineer, and the family moved back to Denver. Carr sold the ranch in 1923 to the Colorado Farms Company. The ranch has had several owners over the years, but remarkably the land has stayed intact and is currently owned by the Orton family and is now commonly referred to as the Orton Meadows.



Looking east - upper ranch with house, tool shed, log stable – date unknown



Looking northeast over lower ranch with Crystal Peak at top left and Woodchuck Hill below it leading down to Yampa River - the buildings are hidden at left center – date unknown



Similar view to top photo only much lower down - the foundations for the two barns can be seen in the middle of photo - taken May 2006

The Pritchett Ranch

The Pritchett Ranch consisted of 765 acres of open space surrounded by aspen and conifers. 100 acres of the land grew alfalfa, with the balance in well watered pastures. It was approximately 1¼ miles square with a chunk cut out from the northwest corner by the Acton homestead, referred to by Lulita Pritchett as Acton Hill. There were two distinct parts of the ranch, called the upper ranch (including the old Wither homestead) and the lower ranch (including the Shaw homestead). The upper ranch had three buildings: a one-room frame house, a tool shed, and a small log stable. The main buildings of the ranch were located on the lower ranch at the northern edge of the property, one mile south of the train depot at the end of a private dirt road now called Old Dairy Lane. The Pritchetts built their cottage there in 1913, at the edge of the forest next to a seasonal creek and across the creek from the main farm buildings.

According to the auction announcement (see below), the largest building was a 50 x 80 cattle barn with stanchions for 52 head, 4 large box stalls, 3 calf pens, bins for 40 tons of grain, a loft that could hold 135 tons of hay, and equipped with a litter carrier. There were corrals surrounding the barn and a large cement drinking vat heated by a “Cowboy Tank Heater”. There was also a smaller 30 x 50 horse barn with 9 stalls, 2 box stalls, 2 grain rooms, a harness room, and a loft for 80 tons of hay. Near the barns were a bunkhouse, power house and granary, machine sheds, blacksmith shop and carpenter shop. A well pumped spring water to the cottage, bunkhouse, and barns. A private phone line was strung from town to both the lower and upper ranches.

The land was unquestionably beautiful, as it still is today. There are panoramic views to the east and north showing Sand Mt, Hahn’s Peak, Crystal Mt, Soda Mt, Woodchuck Hill, and Mt. Werner, with Steamboat Springs peeking around Howelsen Hill. Lulita wrote often about the lovely wild flowers and groves of aspen or pine that are everywhere.

The ranch was sold at an auction held on the property on October 9, 1923. E.O. Furlong, who established one of the first hardware stores in Steamboat Springs (the Furlong Building on Lincoln Ave.), was the auctioneer along with Col. C. H. Murphy of Boulder, Colorado. In addition to the land and buildings, they sold 46 head of registered cattle, 2 large teams of draft horses, 1 saddle horse, harness and saddles, 100 tons of alfalfa in stacks and barns, and miscellaneous machinery listed as follows:

General Equipment, including 1 8-hp. Gas Engine, Kelly Duplex Combination Grinder, Manure Spreader, Stump Puller, Complete

Blacksmith Outfit.

1 2-seated Mountain Buggy, 1 Single Seated Top Buggy, new; 2 Bob Sleds.

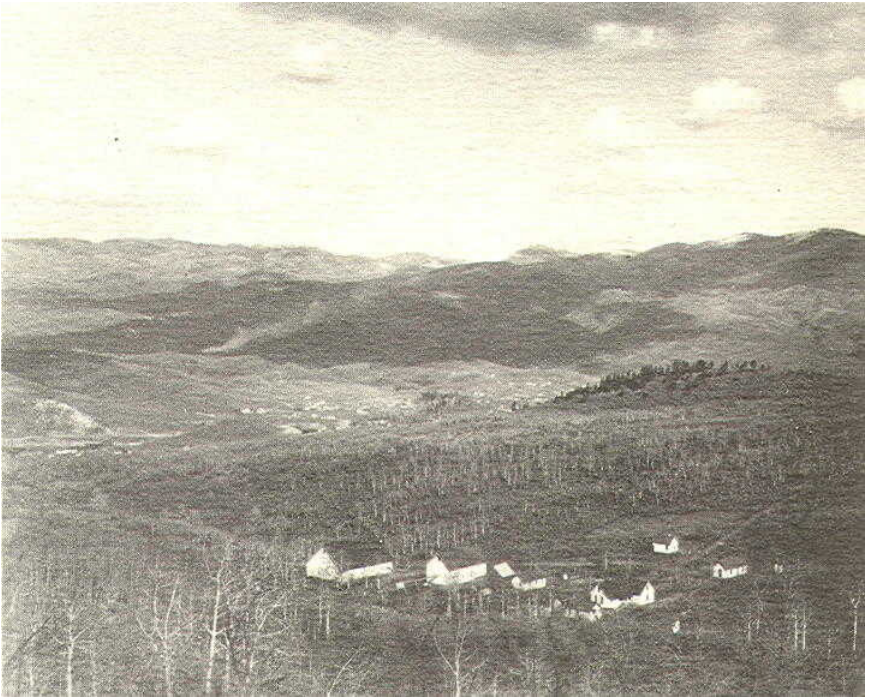
Grain Drill, 2 Disc Plows, 1 Renovator, 1 Harrow, 1 Disc, Potato Digger, Cultivator, 2 Mowing Machines, Hay Rake, 2 Hay Racks, 15-ft. Land Roller, Victor 600-lb. Platform Scales, 3-section Ladder, double Block and Tackle, Lot of Lumber, Steel Roofing and other articles too numerous to mention.

Household Goods, 2 steel Ranges, 4 Heating Stoves, Fireproof Safe, Office Desk, Typewrite and Filing Cabinet, Kitchen Utensils.

Today, all of the buildings of the ranch are gone. The remains of the three buildings on the upper ranch have not been found. But there are several foundations and collapsed siding to show where the principal buildings were on the lower ranch. The foundations for the two barns, the cottage, the well, and the drinking vat are all visible. In addition there are two cavities in the ground that were clearly man-made, and there are two large cement blocks placed about 12 feet apart. Finally, in the woods to the south are two more cement foundations: one about 8' x 20' and over 5' deep with two water pipes, and the other about 20' x 30' and up to 3' deep.



Nancy (Crawford) Rosi sitting on cement drinking vat with cow barn in background - taken May 2006



Looking east over lower Pritchett Ranch with Steamboat Springs in background – cow barn is the largest building to the left – date unknown



Looking east with cow barn in back and well in front - taken May 2006
www.LulitaCrawfordPritchett.com

Life on the Ranch

All we know about life on the Pritchett Ranch comes from Lulita Crawford Pritchett's writings. In 1921, the year she turned 15, she kept a diary (*Lulita Crawford Pritchett's 1921 Diary*, published on www.LulitaCrawfordPritchett.com) that has many entries describing the beauty she saw in the ranch. Here are some excerpts from the diary:

April 16: ...But such a storm! The "folks" say it is the worst one they have ever seen and that's saying a good deal....Mama and I went up to the Wild Rose Ranch to see what harm had been done there. Well the buildings were alright but when we got home we had counted 32 big spruce trees that had been blown down! It is a sorry sight, indeed, to see trees that have lived for perhaps half a century torn down in an instant never to stand again but to mold away in the earth. Hundreds of Aspens are down and broken limbs are scattered all over every place. The folks phoned up that the hay shed in the field had been blown down and sure enough it is a veritable wreck. Papa can manage to get the hay out though I think and save some of the building material. Pieces of the roofing were scattered all over the field.

June 5: ...It is very hard to keep from getting lonesome and heartsick when I think that I will have to leave this lovely place someday - it is indeed terrible. I know Mother thinks about it a great deal and today especially she looked tired and worried I thought. I love her so I wish I could do something to ease her. I don't believe Papa has any sentiment for places at all.

July 22: Margaret, G.R. & I walked up to the rock quarry & to top of our mt. before noon. Hard trip but pretty even though very warm.

July 27: This morning Mama & I took time to climb the Acton hill and see if we could find a white clematis I was positive was there. We found it but it had blue clematis seed pods on it. Ironed, tended to chickens, found a hen's nest with 17 eggs in it and old hen setting and watched lovely sunset.

July 28: Mama, Margaret & I went down the gulch below the road to town and picked up what Gooseberries we could find. We got enough to make 2 large glasses of lovely red jelly. We had a good time, but ran on to 5 or 6 yellow jacket nests and lots of nettles.



Aunt Mary, Lulie, Lulita, Margaret, Grandpa and Grandma - black and white photo colorized by Lulie - taken around 1913.



The author sitting on the foundation of what might be the cottage in the upper photo - taken May 2006.

Buster got lost from us away down the road and cried till I came after him. Papa is having the cow barn roof painted black to help keep off the heavy snow. Costs \$140!!!! Terrible.

Aug 1: *...Tonight I thought I heard voices down the road and went down to the horse barn to listen. They didn't come any nearer so I went and sat on the fence and watched the 6 little calves play in the barn lot. There is one cute white one, several roan ones, one red and white spotted and one almost all red but with white on its forehead. They romped and played and kicked up their heels and nearly tumbled head over heels in their play. They had just found out they could scratch their necks on an old leaning "Quaker,"...*

Aug. 5: *After we did up all the usual work this morning we 3 went for a tramp. We took a lunch and left one here for the 2 men and set off up the mt. We went near the Wild Rose Ranch and followed the Newman road beyond that steep rocky hill to the little open park just on the other side then up that to the pines. We followed them along the hill side hunting for Pipsissewah...*

Aug. 6: *...Jim called up and said he was coming up... We couldn't find much to do this A.M. He brought up two cry baby balloons but we broke them both inside of half an hour. Watched Papa & Uncle Os hoist up the hay - ate peanuts and chewed gum which he brought. The men finished putting up all the hay that was down today. While Jim & I were sitting in the loft kind of drowsy and looking out the big doors we saw a lot of sheep running across the alfalfa field - of course they weren't really sheep but they looked almost exactly like it running all the same way etc. but it was only the wind blowing the alfalfa leaves and turning them the wrong way making them all silvery and wavy. This PM we waded in two tubs of water which we had filled in hopes the ducks would come in them and bathe. We soon decided it would be much more fun to go down to the big watering trough & splash around so we did. It didn't take us long to get enthusiastic and thoroughly wet. After we had stirred up the moss in the bottom we spied a lot of little boards just right for a raft. Well we piled about 5 on top of each other so they wouldn't sink with us and then tried to balance on them. We fell off several times & got pretty wet but had more fun than a little! Pretty soon we heard the hay wagon coming and decided we had better put back the boards and be quick about it and skip to the house.*



Upper meadows of Pritchett Ranch - Lulie, Margaret, Grandma, Grandpa, Lulita, and Aunt Mary - taken around 1913



Upper meadows - taken May, 2006

Sept. 25: *It is very pleasant up here in the door to the hay loft; I have run away from the house and tiresome conversations that don't interest me a bit. I have fled to my haven of refuge - the stair steps on the horse barn. I have come to think out problems of life and to consol my spirits as best as I can. Mr. and Mrs. Krueger and her father are here looking over the place thinking to lease it this winter while Papa goes to N.Y. to hunt work and goodness knows what will become of us all. It makes my heart ache to think that in a short time perhaps strangers - in feeling unsympathetic and un-caring may treat this as theirs when it really isn't and never will be in my heart and soul. What can they know of our sweet wanderings thru the pines to gather orchids, hunt Pipsissewah or pull pine gum! They couldn't love it all as we do - they couldn't. They might not even notice the sunset pictures or the purple hills and valleys and they wouldn't love the Wild Rose Ranch as we would.*

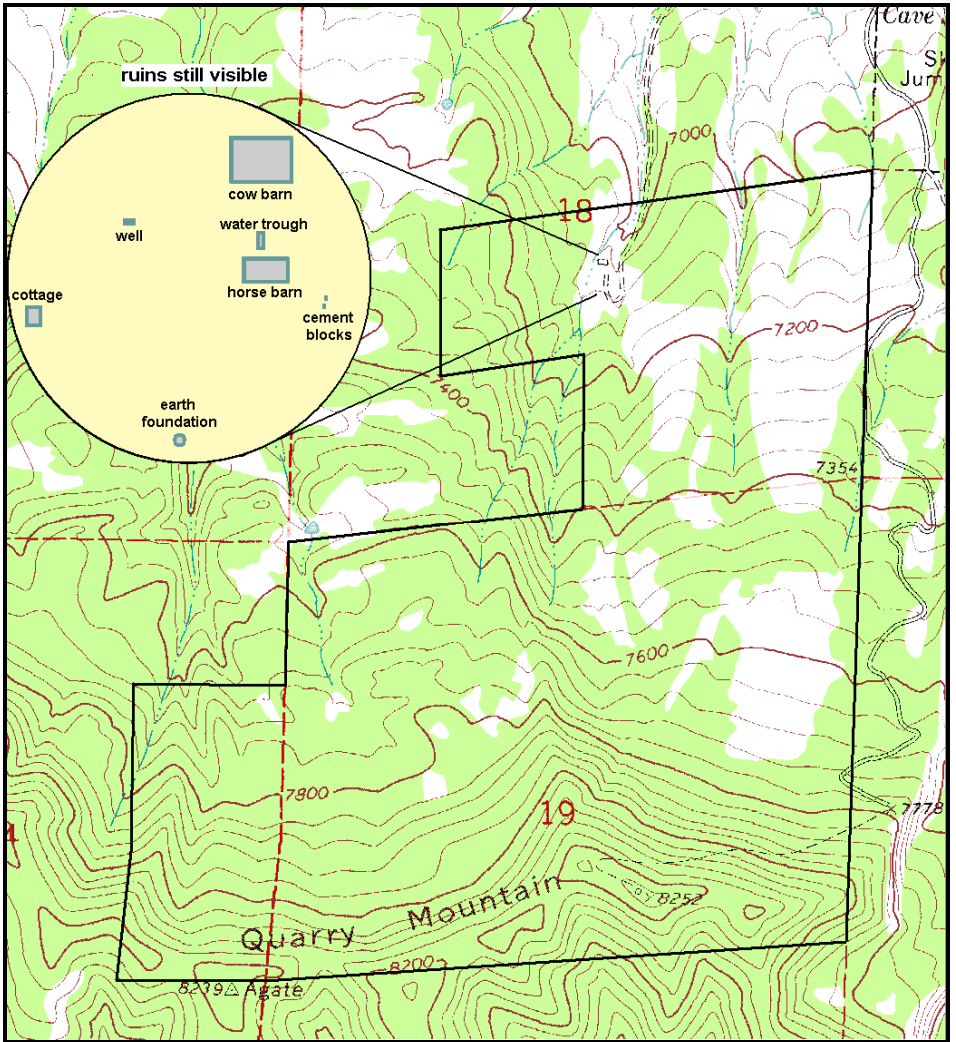
Lulita never forgot her years on the Pritchett Ranch. 25 years after the family left, she was still dreaming about it:

Deserted Ranch

Somebody lived here once –
Watched sunrise from that window;
Felt the soft dusk
Enfold the chimney warmth;
Heard rain and brown wrens
Scamper on the roof.

The house stands empty now –
Wind looted....but spring dawn
Still beckons meadowlarks
To the bleached fence, and evening
Scatters blackbird jargon
Through the weeds.

And where the garden was
Rhubarb lives on,
Stunted and gnarled,
Waiting someone to water it again –
Stubbornly rooted
As a woman's dream.



USGS map showing the approximate boundaries of the Pritchett Ranch. The ranch buildings near the northern edge are at the end of Old Dairy Lane, one mile from the Steamboat Springs Train Depot