



**A, C, D, & J. HITCHENS OVERLOOK RANCH
U. S. Highway 40, Milner**

The Hitchens Ranch is one of the oldest continuously-owned and operated family ranches in Routt County. Through the Homestead Act, James Hitchens filed on 160 acres in 1886; later, his son Albert bought surrounding lands, and gradually the ranch grew to 1,980 acres. When James built his two-room log cabin along the stage route between Hayden and Steamboat Springs, he dug nearly three-mile-long trenches to irrigate fields and provide a pond in front of his house with which to water the stage horses that rested in the still-extant barn (see photo). At one time, the original log cabin homestead functioned as a post office. Eventually, James built additions and a second story on the house and sided the residence with clapboards. James later built a two-story home in Milner that provided the area with a larger post office, a pool hall, and a barber shop. Albert, the last of nine children, was born on the ranch in 1892, attended school two miles away, and ranched with his father. Later, he homesteaded adjacent to his parents' home. Albert had a hernia rupture that prevented him from farming, so he worked at as a barber, assistant postmaster, and a cobbler, but since his first love was ranching, he traveled to Kansas City for a paraffin treatment that was apparently successful: He returned to the ranch, moved all of his homestead buildings onto his parents' ranch in 1929, divided his two-room log house into a chicken coop and a bunkhouse, expanded the barn, and moved the Milner house by a wagon pulled by 28 horses onto the ranch, and lived on and ranched the property until he died at 93 years of age. Errold, Albert's youngest son, assumed the ranch's operations in 1958. He was known for his high-yield barley crops, oat and wheat production, and cattle-raising, and for good weed control practices. The Colorado State University Extension Office used plots within his fields to test new strains of grain. Errold also served as a ski patrolman and lift operator at Howelsen Hill and Mt. Werner. The ranch is currently leased to

Errold's daughter and son-in-law, who named the ranch Overlook because from the property, the Elk River, Steamboat Springs, Milner, and the Flat Top Mountains are visible. The ranch continues to produce wheat, hay, barley, oats, cattle, sheep, and pigs, and serves as a wildlife habitat for diverse species. The bunkhouse, open to the public year-round, has been restored and displays old photographs and historic memorabilia related to the ranch.