



Battlement Mesa 1982. Daily Sentinel Collection
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Ups and Downs, Battlement Mesa has Earned Name

Like the legendary phoenix rising from the ashes, the town of Battlement Mesa has arisen from near-extinction to become a thriving community during the last 30 years.

The Battlement Mesa story began in March 1975 when Atlantic Richfield, the operating partner for community development in the Colony oil shale operation, asked Garfield County Commissioners to change the zoning on 3,010 acres south of what is now the town of Parachute. The area was then zoned agriculture residential, and Atlantic Richfield sought planned unit development zoning.

The purpose of this new town, which was to be built by Exxon, was to provide housing for oil shale industry workers. By the completion of the project, it was expected that around 7,000 units would be built.

By March 1980 public hearings were being held on planning the new town, with construction to begin in September that year. In November officials said that the first residents would move into the town by March 1981.

Charlie Pence, the president of Battlement Mesa Inc., a subsidiary of Exxon, said that the town was being built for workers at the Colony Oil shale project which was expected to be operating in 1985.

Pence said that the plan for Battlement Mesa had called for four churches, but eight were expected to be added. There would be a recreation center and school facilities.

By January 1982 officials of Exxon Corp. told Garfield County officials that their construction schedule would require a peak work force of 6,992 by 1985. That work force projection had grown from 3,000 in 1980. At that same meeting Garfield County officials were told that more than 200 apartments were scheduled to be completed in April and 500 apartment and 250 other housing units were slated to be ready by the end of 1982. In January 1982, there were 1,500 people living in Battlement Mesa.

Then came Black Sunday on May 2, 1982.

On that Sunday, the Battlement Mesa community housed 1,700 people. Thirty-three single-family home were occupied, along with 32 apartments, 465 trailer spaces, and 180 recreational vehicles. Forty-six homes were under construction, 400 units were in some stage of construction, and foundations had been poured for 122 more.

Construction under way on a City Market Superstore was put on hold, as was the recreation center.

Things looked grim for the new frontier town.

By February 1982, Battlement Mesa was still home to more than 1,700 people, and City Market had opened a scaled-down version of the store planned earlier.

By September 1983, with eight out of 10 living units sitting empty, developers were cutting costs, offering incentives and touting attributes to fill vacant units. Rents which had been an average \$650 were \$380 to \$450, and apartments were renting from \$275 to \$450.

A \$300 renter bonus, \$75 worth of groceries from the City Market and a membership in the newly completed recreation center were being used to encourage new residents.

By 1984 the population had dropped to 650 people, and there was concern that Battlement Mesa could become a ghost town.

Exxon started an advertising campaign to lure people with low rents, such as \$270 a month for a two-bedroom apartment with a fireplace, new appliances, and use of the pool and tennis courts.

The bargain prices for housing and amenities paid off, and by August 1985 Battlement Mesa had reached its goal of 1,500 residents. The area was becoming a desirable retirement community.

Battlement Mesa had become so popular by 1987 that rents were increasing.

Exxon sold Battlement Mesa in 1988 for an undisclosed amount. By that date Exxon had invested more than \$125 million to develop the town.

When Unocal ceased its shale operation in 1991, that closure did not have the impact that Exxon's actions had on Battlement Mesa in 1982.

Today Battlement Mesa is far from a ghost town. It is a thriving community with a population of more than 4,000. Amenities include a full range of schools, an activity center, 18-hole golf course, a shopping center and the Battlement Mesa Medical Center.