

ALPINE'S GORILLA

The Log Cabin Café, a landmark in Alpine for over half a century, had a most interesting architectural feature—a large oak tree growing right through it. Perched on a limb above the restaurant was Alpine's resident gorilla. Locals and tourists alike enjoyed viewing this almost six foot tall fellow when they visited the Log Cabin, located on what is now Alpine Boulevard near where the Alpine Inn now stands, for a home-style meal or a treat from the soda fountain.

The gorilla was created back in the early 1960s by the Fiberglass Menagerie. Alpine's Jim and Mildred Rorie were the manufacturers of wonderful life-like fiberglass creatures. Among their creations was the Denver Broncos' Stallion, Bucky the Bronco. Bucky stood atop the scoreboard of Mile High Stadium for twenty-five years prior to being moved to the new Invesco Field at Mile High.

Bea LaForce wrote in *Alpine—History of a Mountain Settlement*, “The Log Cabin Café was well known and popular for its luncheons, dinners and soda fountain refreshments, with cottage accommodations in connection.” The Log Cabin was established in 1915 and was in business until 1970 when Frank Harris purchased the property in order to establish the Alpine Inn. The gorilla was still there at that time and was a part of the deal.

Brian McCall, a lifelong resident of Alpine, tells that the gorilla was taken to his brother Mike's garage to protect it from vandals. After several years passed, and having had some experience working with fiberglass, Brian decided to restore the massive fellow. He patched a few holes and gave the mighty gorilla a new paint job. Brian worked with Frank Harris and it was decided to donate the huge animal to the Alpine Historical Society and to perch it in the eucalyptus tree along Tavern Road adjacent to the museum.

Deciding this was not a task he could undertake without assistance, Brian went to the Casino Inn to solicit help. He asked the guys there if they wanted to have some fun, and a bunch of them went with him to Tavern Road to place the gorilla in the big white eucalyptus tree next to Tavern Road. Brian said the group had a great deal of fun accomplishing the task and, at the end of the day, the gorilla looked out on all who traveled north on Tavern Road.

On August 20, 2000, at the third annual Ice Cream Social of the Alpine Historical Society, Frank Harris made the official presentation. Alpine's historic gorilla was now firmly in his new home to be enjoyed by all.

Unfortunately, there were problems with placing Mr. Gorilla so close to Tavern Road and the Historical Society was notified that he must either be removed or moved back further on the property. Brian once again came to the rescue. Borrowing a big truck and lift from San Diego Gas and Electric Company, another group of men went to the museum, took the gorilla down from his perch and hoisted him up another tree.

Make sure you take a look the next time you're driving down Tavern Road. The big guy looks down on everyone who travels that road—he is a fixture in Alpine's history! If you have stories to share about Alpine history, or need to know something about it, please e-mail or call me and I'll pass stories along and research questions.

Carol Walker and her husband Paul have lived in Alpine since 1988. Carol is the Membership Chairman of the Alpine Historical Society. She can be reached at cwalker@alpinehistory.org or 445-4024.



The Alpine Gorilla, in its original home, atop the old Log Cabin Café. This fellow now Hangs in a giant tree above the Alpine Historical Society.



Alpine's gorilla in his new home.