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Hunter Creek fight shook Aspen 25 years ago

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ASPEN - Twenty-five years ago this summer, a minor land-use dispute between Pitkin County government and a landowner went public and erupted into a community fight rarely matched before or since in Aspen's lengthy list of squabbles.

The fight over access to public lands in Hunter Creek Valley was indicative of the strains starting to appear in 1987 between "old Aspen," resistant to change, and wealthy newcomers used to doing things their way. It was also a precursor to debates sparked when wealthy landowners developing in rural areas wanted to turn public lands into private holdings through land swaps.

The 1987 fight broke out after Tom and Bonnie McCloskey purchased 70-plus acres of land from Fritz Benedict on the east end of Red Mountain. Their property was just west of the public lands of Hunter Creek Valley, affectionately known as Aspen's backyard.