Third time's a charm for HistoriCorps' return to Rourke Ranch! For 2018, we invited volunteers to come a few days early to enjoy and explore all that this area has to offer – and HistoriCorps volunteers who arrived a couple days early took advantage of exclusive **discounted rates and coupons** for local lodging, restaurants, and attractions! We collaborated with Visit La Junta ([www.visitlajunta.net](http://www.visitlajunta.net)) to offer these memorable experiences.

This volunteer favorite offers a unique glimpse of a once-bustling time in history, in an area almost untouched by the modern day outside world. Visitors with an eye to building construction techniques will enjoy seeing the impact technology and increased access to building materials affected the ranch buildings' development and design.

Visit La Junta writes,

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La Junta is located in the beautiful Arkansas River Valley, one of the best kept secrets in Colorado, on US Highway 50 and Amtrak's Southwest Chief Route. The name La Junta means “the junction” in Spanish. The town of La Junta is located at what once was the junction of the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail and the Trappers Trail into the mountains and gold camps of Colorado.

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**PROJECT PARTNER:** Comanche National Grasslands

**PROJECT SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY:**

The beautiful Picketwire Canyon saw a great deal of growth and settlement in the 1870s. In 1871, Eugene and Mary Rourke homesteaded 40 acres on the banks of the Purgatoire River; so began Rourke Ranch. The cattle and horse ranch grew through three generations of Rourkes to over 50,000 acres before being sold out of the family 100 years later in 1971. In its day, Rourke Ranch was one of the most successful ranches in Colorado. The quality workmanship and architecture of its adobe buildings can still be seen and has earned Rourke Ranch a place on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, Rourke Ranch is preserved by the Comanche National Grassland as a testament to the hardy pioneers that helped settle the west and is well worth the time to visit.
A first time visitor to the Comanche National Grassland is usually surprised to find such a varied landscape from rolling short grass prairies to rugged canyons rimmed by pinion-juniper forests. It encompasses a fascinating landscape that reveals the history of the region in its exposed rock layers of prehistoric sea beds and ancient lakeshores riddled with dinosaur tracks. Cultural sites in the grasslands represent a diverse history spanning thousands of years.

These vast expanses and hidden canyons were once the home to Native Americans who left their messages in the form of petroglyphs and pictographs on the cliff faces and rock overhangs throughout the region. Early traders passed through the area on the Santa Fe Trail, the canyons protect the rock walls of old stage stops from the days before the railroad, and ruins of early homesteads and ranches remain to remind us of life in another era.

HistoriCorps undertook the first phase of preservation work on the Rourke Ranch barn in 2016. In the winter of 2016/2017, strong winds blew the roof off of the ranch’s calving shed, and volunteers again lent a hand to restore it. For spring 2018, we preserved the ranch’s stable and bunkhouse.

**WHAT:** Volunteers worked with field staff to learn and improve their skills at the following tasks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Approximate Percentage of Scope*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stable: Remove, repair, and re-install historic roof framing timbers</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable: Re-align and stabilize walls</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunkhouse: Remove non-historic elements, including framing, flooring, and wall paneling</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunkhouse: Stabilize historic adobe walls</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WHERE:** Located within Comanche National Grassland in Colorado [map](https://www.google.com/maps/place/Comanche+National+Grassland/@37.589567,-103.647678,17z/data=!4m2!3m1!1s0x8b41f24e5f9b9ba9:0x5f5485c5e5484985?hl=en).  
**Coordinates:** 37.589567,-103.647678  
**Nearest Town:** La Junta, Colorado, roughly 20 miles away over 4WD roads and paved roads.

HistoriCorps is a service learning partner of the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture committed to the preservation and stewardship of significant resources on public lands.