



Contact sheet of photos from the National Chicano Land Rights Campout/Conference in Chama, Colo. in July 1979.

Reclaiming Historic Land Rights

San Luis Valley land rights based on Mexican Land Grants dominated the pages of *La Cucaracha*. Beginning in March 1977, we told the story of how Jack Taylor, a N.C. timberman bought the 77,000-acre land tract that had been set aside by Carlos Beaubian to be used by the settlers of the Sangre de Cristo Mexican Land Grant for timber, grazing, and firewood.

Other milestones included: Founding of the Land Rights Council, filing of *Rael vs. Taylor* lawsuit, attempts by the state to purchase the Taylor Ranch as a state park, Colorado State Supreme Court upholding plaintiffs' rights to access the land as part of their rights stated in Taylor's deed.

In addition to reporting the developments in the land rights case, the staff of *La Cucaracha* produced a slide show and helped make a documentary film, "La Tierra: Last Stand in Costilla County." In 1979, the "Cucs" helped Ray Otero and Shirley Romero start a newspaper — "Tierra y Libertad." For a short time, "Tierra" was inserted into *La*

Cucaracha. Later, they also helped start "¡Ya Basta!", another newspaper distributed on the Western Slope of Colorado.

Years later, the former Cucs followed the Land Rights story to its conclusion. When the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Colorado courts' ruling in favor of *Rael vs. Taylor* in 2002, Juan Espinosa and Pablo Mora, both on staff at "The Pueblo Chieftain" reported the story. The case lasted so long that

David Martinez had time to become a lawyer and join the Land Rights team of lawyers.

The 2002 ruling was appealed by Taylor's lawyers to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Colorado Supreme Court was upheld when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal. As a result, the process began to identify property-owner plaintiffs who were allowed to go up on the mountain to reclaim their rights to pasture, timber and firewood.

Subsequently, residents in outlying areas sought access to The Mountain Tract. In November of 2018, the Colorado Circuit Court of Appeals issued a final ruling granting access to the Mountain Tract to property owners in greater outlying areas. The court also ordered that the same process to establish these additional property owners' rights to access the land be followed at the expense of the owner of the Mountain Tract. The deadline for appealing the ruling expired in December 2018.

