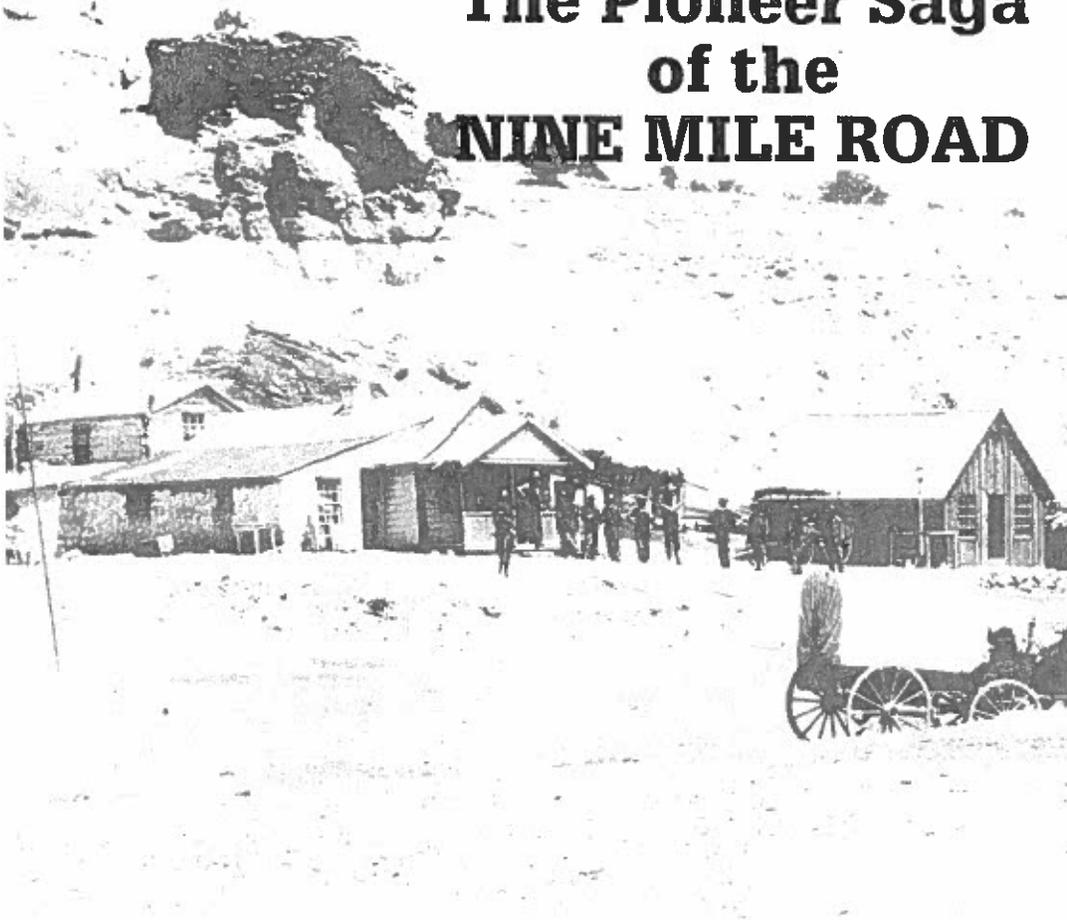


The Pioneer Saga of the NINE MILE ROAD



INTRODUCTION

In the early development of the Uintah Basin of Eastern Utah, no other road played a more important role than did the Price—Myton through Wells Draw and historic Nine Mile Canyon, from which it takes its name. Its influence is evident in most every facet of early growth, legend, and human interest between Carbon County and the Uintah Basin, leaving a common heritage between them. Carved from some of God's roughest handiwork by the all-black 9th U.S. Cavalry, Nine Mile Road construction coincided with the building of Fort Duchesne on the Uintah frontier in 1886. Following an authentic Indian trail, the road linked the Fort with the nearest railhead and telegraph line and, for the next quarter-century, was the main road into the "Basin". The stagecoach and mail went over this route along with freight shipments that built communities. When the Uintah and Ouray Ute Indian Reservation opened to white

settlement in 1905, over 15,000 homesteaders trod this path in search of a new home. One could not go more than a ¼ mile without meeting someone either coming or going, and the immigrant road could be traced through the barrens by the dust trails streaming skyward. The saga of the Nine Mile Road surges from the impulse of that expansion.

HOW TO USE THIS BROCHURE

A map provided on the back page of this brochure shows where numbered markers are to be found at historic sites along the tour route. These posts are number-keyed to information in the brochure about each site. Mileage between stops is also given. Use these resources to identify your location. The total distance is 80 miles, most of which is dirt road. You should plan about three hours travel time, more if you stop for pictures or to hike. It is recommended that you fill your fuel tanks and carry a properly inflated spare tire. Please do not litter. If you carry it in, carry it out. Starting from Price or Myton, you will find this to be one of your most interesting and informative outings ever. Drive carefully, enjoy your trip.

If you are starting from Price, go south 7.5 miles on Highway 50-6 through Wellington. Exit left at the large gas station a *Back Country Byway* sign and information kiosk will greet you. You are on the historic trail headed for Nine Mile Canyon. Follow the paved road. Use the number key in reverse order, starting with 20 and going to zero.

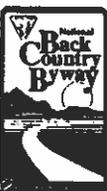
If you are starting from Myton, travel west on Highway 40 for 1.6 miles. Exit onto the first paved road to your left and go .3 miles. You will notice a *Back Country Byway* sign and information kiosk; you are on the historic trail headed for Nine Mile Canyon. Leaving the kiosk, go 1.4 miles. Ascending gradual hills, you will pass several homes, cross a canal, and come to a historic monument. Take the paved road to the right of the monument and use the number key in order 1 to 20.

Fremont Indians occupied much of this region almost 900 years ago and many of their structures and rock art remain to be seen in Nine Mile Canyon. This brochure does not treat this subject. You may want to select a companion guide that does.

The Federal Antiquities Act protects this entire region. Disturb nothing. "Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints." Most lands and dwellings you will see are private. Be sure to ask permission before crossing onto them at any time.

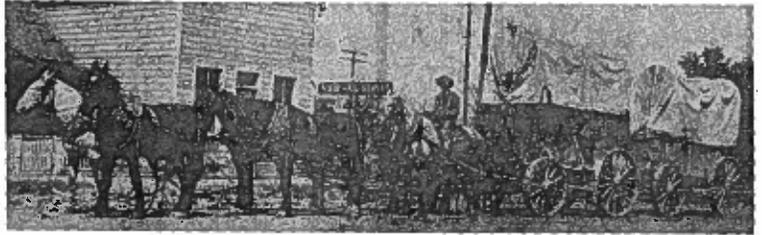
THANK YOU

Courtesy of the UTAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY



1

Looking northeast you will see "Van Wyck Hill," about three miles away with a water storage tank on top. While the shortest route to the Bridge (today's Myton) was over the hill as used today, heavier loads could not always pull the grade of this formidable barrier and would go to Van Wyck Hill where they used a more gradual dugway. Early freight rigs, like that shown on the right, consisted of a wagon and "pup" and hauled 9000 pounds combined load weight!



DES PITTS FREIGHT LINE

4.2

2

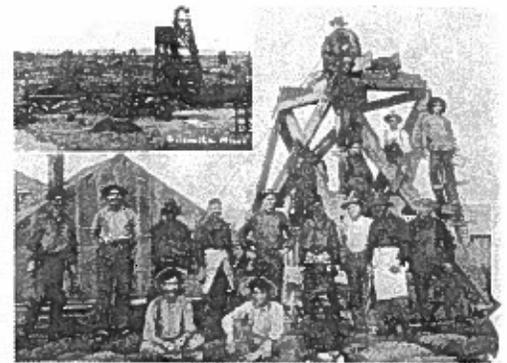
This small hill where the road enters and leaves Wells Draw is "The Pitch." The ground was too soft to continue down the draw and travelers chose to make an abrupt ascent at this point to the flats above. Buried now under the present road, this incline was so steep that it often caused wagoners to double-team to pull its grade. Tired horses could not pull this hill. Arriving here in the evening, exhausted after a day's work, man and beast had to lay over. In the flats below was a campsite used by travelers for that purpose.

1.7

3

The road descending the adjacent hill came from the Gilsonite mines nine miles to the east. Named after Sam Gilson, who first developed it in the Uintah Basin in the 1870's, Gilsonite is a 99.6 percent pure hydrocarbon. It has many industrial purposes including base for paints. When mining started in 1889 it became a common load freighted to Price and the railhead. Staple commodities and other supplies were always in demand at Fort Duchesne and the Indian agencies at Whiterocks and Ouray, and the infant expansion required certain other shipments as well. Because of these needs, wagons coming into the Basin were always full. On the return trip to Price a load was not always found. Gilsonite was one sure load most always and shipments even went into European markets. Uintah Basin Gilsonite mines are the only vertical-shaft Gilsonite mines in the world. Some are still worked at Bonanza, Utah; all other local mines have shut down.

PARRIETTE MINE CIRCA 1900



0.4

4

"West Point," built in the mouth of this draw and against the north ledges, got its name because a young Academy graduate established a check point here. He wanted to make sure the Indians did not leave the reservation. Ute boys teased him, riding by quickly in the dark, making lots of noise. In pursuit, the lieutenant would meet the same young men calmly riding back. "Oh yes, they went that way," the boys would reply when questioned, sending the soldiers on a wild-goose-chase. The lieutenant soon realized his efforts were folly; Utes knew many routes by which to leave the Basin, not one followed a road. The camp closed.

1.4

5

At this point you will see a short ledge jutting out of a small hill to the east of the road but within 200 feet. It was here at "Smokey Ledge" that Owen Smith first tried to establish the only watering hole between Minnie Maud Creek, in Nine Mile Canyon, and the Duchesne River at Myton. Some 35 miles of dry road lay between these water sources. Saddle horses and light rigs could make the distance without water, but not hard-worked freight teams. Early freighters had to haul water with them, diminishing their pay load by the equivalent weight of the water. After digging more than 150 feet into the earth without finding water, Owen Smith gave up his attempt. He hired a "witcher" to locate the right spot to dig and find his elixir of the desert. He found it at the site known as "The Wells," further up the road at stopping point number six.

2.9

6

Owen Smith came here in 1891 with his wife and family of five children. To establish an "oasis" in the middle of 35 miles without water, Mr. Smith dug 185 feet into the dusty earth, struck water, and established "The Wells." The water, brackish and not good for human consumption, was only used for such things as watering livestock and doing laundry. But there was plenty of water. Cattle herds as large as 500 head watered in one stop; the well never went dry. Mr. Hamilton, who operated The Wells starting in 1907, displayed a sign showing charges to water horses, cattle, and sheep. Being a dog lover, he had at the bottom of the sign, "Dogs Drink Free." Hauled by necessity for the next 34 years, drinking water came from Minnie Maud Creek in Nine Mile Canyon, or from the Duchesne River. Besides The Wells, a sheep shearing corral and dipping vat sat in the mouth of the canyon across the draw. It serviced 8000 head of sheep annually. The Wells became a favorite layover of early teamsters. Like a modern-day truck stop, as many as 50 rigs would pull up here for the night, and the stagecoach made an overnight stop as well. Life at The Wells seethed with excitement. Many distinguished men and women slumbered within its walls: Senator Reed Smoot, Emma Lucy Gates, Governor William Spry, Congressman Don B. Colton, and Butch Cassidy and other ring leaders of the "Wild Bunch." The total facility included an eight-room hotel, general store, hay house, blacksmith shop, and restaurant. An early photograph of The Wells graces the brochure

2.1

cover. In the small cabin behind the main house an injured man had his arm removed by an army surgeon bound for Fort Duchesne. With only a butcher knife and a kitchen meat saw as his instruments, and with 4-6 men holding the patient down, he amputated the man's gangrenous arm, saving him from a death of blood poisoning. After that the cabin became known as "The Hospital." Seen on the ledges here are very old names and dates. Please, do not add yours to them, dig, or in any way disturb remaining rock walls of this once busy site. Let's preserve what remains.

7

The long escarpment of ledge you see here some early travelers thought looked like Buckingham Palace, and they called it "Castle Rock." Others called it "Cliff Station." Starting in 1888, before the building of The Wells (No.6), it was here that light mail wagons from Vernal and Price met at midnight. Though not a stage line per se, they often carried a passenger or two. There were no buildings here. A campfire was built; a meal was served; the horses were fed. Then, drivers exchanged passengers and mail bags and returned to their point of origin. Mail service into the Basin was bi-weekly. In 1889 a daily stage began service and took the postal contract as well. Mail from Salt Lake City now went on an express train to Price. Making no stops, it arrived in time for the mail to leave with the Price—Myton stage at 8:00 am. Thus, the Uintah Basin had next-day delivery on its mail from the State's capital. "Uintah," an English homonym for a Ute conjunction, means "land at the foot of the mountains where the pines trail off."

4.9

8

Markers 8 & 9 are at opposite ends of a footpath following the pre-1920's road for a walking distance of 1 ¼ miles. This section of road is believed to be part of the original 1886 military road. Some claim it was built decades later, ca 1917. It may have been early military, abandoned for the present route at some time and resurrected in the teens, then promptly abandoned again. Hiking, you will see retaining walls and culverts made of stone that help one appreciate the great labor that went into building the road. Cuts into the hillside often required removal of ledgerrock by blasting and use of horse-drawn implements. You may walk the path and have someone drive your vehicle 2.3 miles to the next marker post to pick you up. Be careful and enjoy your hike.

2.3

9

2.7



EARLY CONSTRUCTION CREW

10

If you look down into the wash from where you stand you will see evidence of an old road going along the edge of the hill below. This is part of the original army-built road. You will notice that the roadbed, just as it crosses the wash, is pure ledgerrock. This is "Slick Rock." A constant seeping of water flowed over this ledge and moss and slime grew on the surface of the rock, making it very slippery. Wheels on heavily laden wagons would slip in this muck, sometimes causing the wagon to go into the deep wash below. More often, a sudden slip ended with an equally abrupt stop as the iron rim grated on bare sandstone. The inertia caused wooden wheels to buckle, or metal rims to break. This presented a real problem because repair required access to a forge. There was no blacksmith shop here in Gate Canyon and one would have to walk four miles to the nearest one.

2.7

Before long, to remedy this situation, someone left a forge at Slick Rock. Other passersby left an anvil, tongs, hammer, etc., until a fully stocked forge was in place at this historic site. At the base of the cliff, directly across the ravine from where you stand—where names in black appear on the ledge—a small rock building housed the forge setup. Contrast this trust with today's society. Tools left today would soon be stolen.



FREIGHTERS ON PRICE/MYTON ROAD

11

1.0

Here the road descends "Lee Dugway." Named after J. Braken Lee, it was built by him while serving as an early State road superintendent. Before the dugway the early road mainly followed the wash. The site where it passed between the high ledges east of this point is "The Narrows." The Narrows led to Slick Rock (stop number 10). The flat area below you is "The Shelf." Horse and mule pack trains would stop here at night, avoiding the lower wash and possible flash floods. Wagoners did not use it because they could not pull up to it from the early road deep in the wash.

12

Stretching angularly across the road (A-B), a stone arch once spanned the ravine at this point. It was destroyed about 1905. Iron-rimmed wagon wheels sent a shutter into the ground, especially when passing over solid ledgerrock. These vibrations caused small rocks atop the arch to work their way to the edge where they sometimes

0.5

fell onto the wagons passing underneath. Some people, the stagecoach company in particular, became convinced that the arch was decaying. Owners envisioned that someday someone would be crushed under a massive stone as the arch collapsed. Pressed by fear, they had the arch destroyed. Newt Stewart, who proponents hired to do the blasting, identified this as the spot where the landmark stood. You will notice a few names left by early travelers who sat atop the arch. The area of light-colored rock below them is where the arch met the canyon wall. "It is a shame the arch was destroyed," Mr. Stewart said later. "I don't know how long that arch had been there, but considering what it took to blow it down, if it had been there for 5000 years, it would have stood for another 5000." Once destroyed it could never return.

By placing a tall post each side of the road and another pole or board across—between the two uprights—ranchers have always built unique entrances to their ranch sites. These often display the name of the ranch and its brand, and are referred to as "gates." Because the arch resembled such a gate, this winding canyon became known as "Gate Canyon," a name that has stuck with it to this day.

13

1.3

This sharp bend in the road is "Outlaw Point," legendary site of what was to be a bloodbath slaughter and robbery of Indian annuities and army payroll bound for the Uintah Basin. The plan of the ad hoc outlaw group was to ambush and kill all twenty soldiers in the escort guard, leaving no witnesses. While some members of the Wild Bunch allegedly took part in this scheme, Butch Cassidy, Elza Lay, and Sundance did not. They knew the army would hunt them relentlessly for such murderous actions. An informant put the army wise to the plan, and when the strongbox rolled through the guard was doubled. The highwaymen, waiting in hiding on the ledges you see around you, hastily called off the holdup massacre. Some think that Butch may have tipped off the army himself, realizing that he probably would be blamed for the crime whether he was really there or not. On the mountainside to the east you will see a single rock formation having four parts. This is nicknamed "Mount Rushmore."

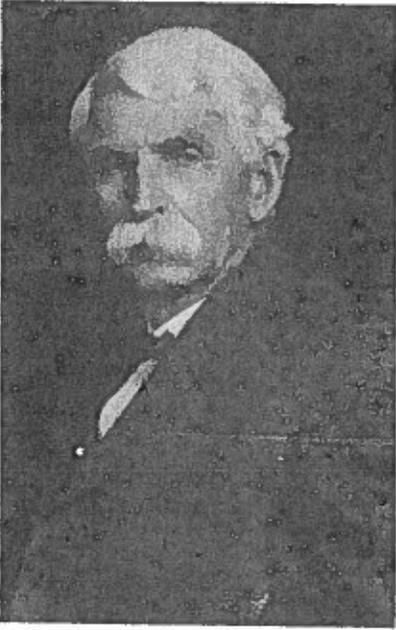
14

2.8

This ranch site, first known as "Brock's," was homesteaded by a man of that name and became a stop for the first stagecoaches. Freighters camped along the cliffs just below the ranch, resting their teams before attempting the arduous climb up Gate Canyon. Pete Francis saw them as potential customers, bought the place from Brock, and developed it commercially. The stop offered among other things, a fifteen-room hotel, destroyed by fire in the 1930's, and a saloon, housed in the old cabin next to the road on the south. Francis allegedly was shot to death in that saloon. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Francis did not want to remain and operate the stop any longer. In 1902 she sold out to Preston Nutter, who for fifty years was a well-known cattle baron in the state of Utah.

Nutter wanted the location as headquarters for his large cattle enterprise. He closed the saloon and used the hotel as a bunk house. The stage stop moved further up the canyon to the Egan place (No. 15) and then to the Alger Ranch. With the purchase of Brock's came a lone peacock. A mate was found for the bird and they multiplied rapidly. Peacocks and the Nutter Ranch soon became synonymous. Preston Nutter controlled hundreds of thousands of acres either through ownership or lease, and stories have it that he really did not know just how many cattle he had, there were so many. More reliable sources put the figure at somewhere over 25,000 head. They ranged from here to the Arizona strip on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Unlike the cowboy image portrayed on the movie screen, Preston Nutter rode a mule instead of a horse, and supposedly, never owned a pair of cowboy boots. Nevertheless, he led a life that reads like a great western novel. At age 58, Nutter married Katherine Fenton, manager of Colorado Springs' Postal Telegraph. She had a homestead at Ioka, in the Uintah Basin, and had met Mr. Nutter in her travels back and forth. The small cabin in the field behind the block buildings is her homestead cabin from Ioka; family moved it here in the 1960's. When Preston Nutter died in 1936, Katherine kept the ranch and passed it on to her daughters, one of whom lived here until her death in 1977. A short time later the ranch was sold to an oil company interested in the tar sands found on some of its property.

Before electricity, telegraph equipment got its power from acid cell batteries. These were not strong enough to send a message from the garrison at Fort Duchesne all the way to Price. It was necessary to have a relay station about half way, and this was that location. The stone building against the cliff, and the log cabin next to it, were part of that telegraph relay system. The Cabin housed the relay equipment and quartered the soldiers assigned to be caretakers and telegraphers. Ed Harmon, a civilian contract telegrapher who came into Nine Mile Canyon later, laid up the little rock building. He lived in it while building his home further up the canyon at stop number 16 of this brochure.



PRESTON NUTTER
Courtesy of the UTAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

15

This was the "Egan Ranch," an early stagecoach stop—albeit only briefly. Owners began construction of sleeping quarters but they never reached completion. Late in his life, Frank Alger, who drove the Price—Myton stage for

2.3

years, identified this rock building as that used to house the stagecoach horses. His ranch, just up the road half a mile, next became the stage stop, serving meals to the passengers and boasting a store. Acclaimed the best-stocked in miles, "Alger's General Store" even sold Jelly Beans! Most Nine Mile Canyon residents sold some type of service: forge work, feed, baked goods, butter and milk, etc.

16

This home, exceptionally beautiful in its day, still stands in stately honor of Ed Harmon, who built it and worked the ranch surrounding it. Orchards, shrubs, and flowers made this one of the most beautiful and tranquil places for many miles. To the south looms "Harmon Canyon," named after this early telegrapher and rancher of the area.

0.6

Just to the right of the Harmon home, Nine Mile Canyon residents realized their dream of having a "real" school house. It was a one-room frame structure built about 1901. Against State school rules, it doubled as a community events center, hosting many old-fashioned hoe-downs. Left vacant, the school fell victim to an arsonist's match years ago.

17

1.5

On the point next to the road you will see a large, balanced rock. Said to resemble Porky Pig when looked at from the west, most call it "Pig Head Rock". Disney's porker didn't exist for early freighters. They thought it looked like a wad of gum on a bed post and dubbed it "The Giant's Chew of Gum." It is one of Nine Mile's most noted landmarks.

18

13.2

Nine Mile's town of "Harper" spread out from here down the canyon for about a mile. Mail deliveries and voting took place in the old log buildings you see here. Tom Taylor homesteaded this ground before the Army built the road through to Fort Duchesne and the Uintah Basin in 1886. Purchased by Ed Lee, the old homestead became known as "Lee Station," a stage stop. It was a rest haven for the hard-worked horses that spent the better part of their lives at a fast gait along the stageline road. A large and beautiful barn housed the recuperating horses and a second, the currently running teams. The Lee Station House, built during this time, had running water and a "real" sink.

Starting sometime before 1895, residents of Nine Mile Canyon struggled to keep a school district going. The first school house, built of logs by residents, sat in the mouth of Argyle Canyon, just down the road 1/2 mile. Moved to Wellington in the 1930s, it later burned. The steel poles in the Canyon, installed by the army ca 1886, are Civil War surplus shipped from the East. They first carried the telegraph line. This telegraph line became the telephone line into the Basin in 1907 and remained until 1917. The poles have since serviced a local line only.

19

6.5

This wide valley is Whitmore Park. It was a winter threat to travelers of the Nine Mile Road due to drifting snow. Pairs of horses on a team would have to be shuttled from the rear forward as one pair after another exhausted themselves beating the crusted snow, pawing it to break passage. Wallace Dennis freighted with his father in 1908. He reported that after a full day of hard work shoveling snow and changing horses, they could look back and see the smoke curling up from the log still smoldering at the previous night's campsite less than a mile away. Snow was more than three feet deep, and Wallace slept in a snow cave to escape the wind. Their feed expended, the horses ate the bristles on a large bundle of brooms meant for a merchant in the Basin. "Squaw Bridge" spanned the gully at the east end of the Park. Early travelers felt that if they could make it to that bridge, they could make it into the Uintah Basin. Stagecoach stops operated about every twenty miles along the road. The first one encountered, if coming from Price, was at the west end of the Park. At the head of Soldier Creek, its location marked the upper end of Soldier Creek Pass. This pass covered a twelve-mile stretch of particularly dangerous road. It mainly followed the creek bed, but occasionally diverged along rough and narrow passages skirting dropoffs into the creek below.

20

10.0

"Soldier Creek Camp," used by early freighters and travelers along this historic route, sat here in the mouth of the canyon. The road did not go into Wellington as today; it went over the foothills to the west in a more direct route to and from Price. One could camp here overnight and go into Price the next morning, unload, reload, and return for a second night's camp. This allowed for a rested start on the three-day journey into the Uintah Basin via Nine Mile Canyon and Wells Draw. A round trip from Fort Duchesne over this historic road took one week on a wagon. If you were lucky you earned about \$80.00. Chosen for its low passes not exceeding 7400 feet altitude, this early route has long been considered all season. The new Indian Canyon road into Duchesne began taking the Nine Mile Road's traffic as early as 1915. The mail still came along this route during the winter months due to heavy snow on Indian Canyon's summit; it was not unusual to see mail and other shipments going through on the Nine Mile Road late in the 1920's.

Wellington
turnoff



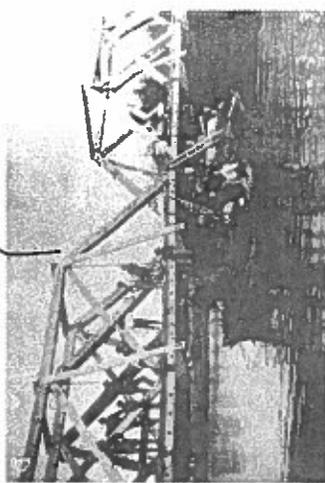
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To Vernal US 40
to Fort Duchesne

ROOSEVELT



OLD MYTON BRIDGE

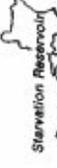
Gilsonite Mines

Flattop Butte

MYTON

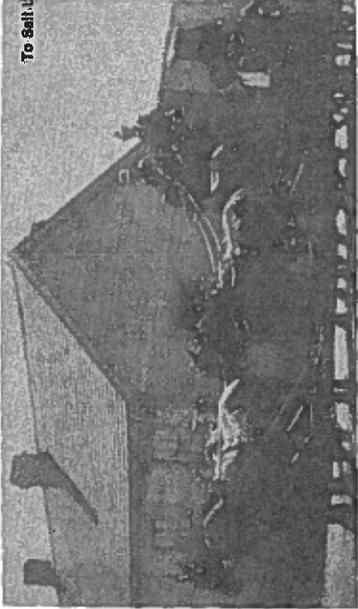
US 40

DUCHESNE
Elev 5515



Starvation Reservoir

To Salt Lake US 40



FIRST STAGE FROM
PRICE TO FORT DUCHESNE

BAD LAND CLIFFS

ARGYLE CANYON

Summit Elev 9100

WEST
NINE MILE CANYON

TAVAPUTS

NINE MILE CANYON

PLATEAU

-Grain Point Elev 10,295

Foot Path

GATE CANYON

10
11
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WHITMORE
Elev 7300

PARK

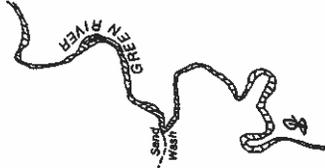
SOLDIER CREEK

Elev 5567
PRICE

Old Freight Road

To Grand Junction 50-6

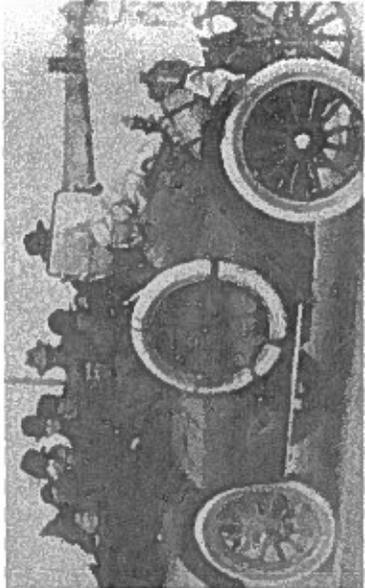
WELLINGTON



GREEN RIVER

Sand Wash

FIRST AUTOMOBILE STAGE FROM
PRICE TO VERNAL



MILES