RIMROCKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Of Western Montrose County

Promoting Awareness, Understanding, Appreciation, and Preservation of our area's Past & Present.

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Photo: Ruth Phippeny

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DOLORES RIVER CANYON

PARADOX VALLEY

SELF GUIDED TOURS

PARADOX VALLEY–DOLORES RIVER CANYON TOURS

These tours will guide you through the scenic and historic Paradox Valley country and the spectacular canyons formed by its waterways. You will also have the option of taking only the River Canyon Tour, or branching off into some interesting side tours. Allow at least two hours for the river canyon drive; depending on where you go from there—hiking, driving, exploring—plan on several days to explore this colorful region. Low clearance vehicles not recommended on dirt roads, avoid these roads in wet and stormy weather, drive slowly watching for rocks and ruts, sharp curves and on-coming vehicles. Before you start, pick up the *141 Highway Tour, Long Park Mine Tour*, and the *Hanging Flume*, and *Uravan* brochures. You will refer to these along the route.

UPPER DOLORES RIVER CANYON

Beginning at the West End Visitors Center in Naturita, drive west out of town and then north 13 miles on Highway 141. At **Mile 76.3 is the River Road, Y11** Turn left here at the metal buildings, and set your odometer to zero. You will follow this narrow dirt road for eleven miles along the river.

The Dolores River was named "The River of Our Lady of Sorrows" by the 1776 Escalante Expedition. (See: *Highway 141 Tour*.) The river path was diverted through the Paradox Valley 70 million years ago, when it began to carve this canyon. Towering cliffs expose three main rock layers: on the bottom are the 300 million year old Pennsylvanian limestone, next the 140 million year old Entrada sandstone deposited in the Jurassic period, and this is capped with rough Dakota sandstone.

MILE 3.2 Hanging Flume & Reconstruction Kiosk (See: *Highway141 Tour* & *Hanging Flume Tour* brochures.) In 1999 the Hanging Flume was targeted as one of the most endangered historic places in Colorado. It was decided that a section of the flume should be restored as an interpretive site. In April of 2004 a group of archeologists and engineers began work on this project, with the help of History Colorado, the UT Byway, CDOT, and the BLM, and local groups and citizens. A 48' section was restored in 2012; and took 5 days to complete using modern tools and techniques.

MILE 4.5 Confluence Dolores and San Miguel Rivers Both rivers begin high in the San Juan Mountains, to the southwest, but the Dolores falls on the south side of the mountain ridge and takes a long, winding route to reach this point, is dammed at the McPhee Reservoir, and picks up large amounts of sediment there and along the way.

MILE 5 For at least a mile you can see salt crystals along the opposite bank of the river. Prior to the Bureau of Reclamation efforts to reduce the salt in the river, the Dolores picked up an estimated 180,000 tons of salt annually on its way through the Paradox Valley.

Continue on the next page...

Continued UPPER DOLORES RIVER CANYON ...

MILE 8 Paradox Valley The canyon begins to open and you will see the valley spread from east to west—where the La Sal Mountains tower over it. The valley was formed by the upward movement of salt beds that were deposited by a sea 300 million years ago. Eventually, groundwater entered the beds from the northeast and collapsed the center. This dome is about 1,400 feet deep and 300 feet under the surface at the river. It spreads the length and width of the valley. In 1875, a government surveyor noted the "Paradox" that the Dolores River flows across the valley instead of down it.

The La Sal (Spanish for salt) Mountains in Utah, were formed by igneous rocks that intruded the softer sedimentary rock layers some 30 million years ago. Erosion has since removed the overlying sedimentary rocks, exposing the igneous core of the mountains.

MILE 10 Colorado River System Salinity Control Program When the Uravan uranium/vanadium mill was operating (1950-1980s), brine from Paradox Valley was piped to the mill for use in the ore processing. In 1996, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation opened the Paradox Unit here. There are nine collection wells on the river, each 40' deep. 100,000 tons of brine per year containing 2.2 pounds of salt per gallon, are injected into a well three miles deep, reducing river salinity by 50-75%.

MILE 11.5 Junction Hwy 90 A right turn will lead you to three other area tours (described later), turn left to continue this tour.

MILE 21.5 San Miguel Power Community Solar Panel Project This one megawatt array boasts 4,784 panels, and produced 1,999,158 kilowatt hours of electricity—enough to power 215 homes in 2013, its inaugural year.

MILE 24 Monogram Mesa Right Rim The large open pit mine was excavated in 1980, but closed in 1981 due to a depressed Uranium market.

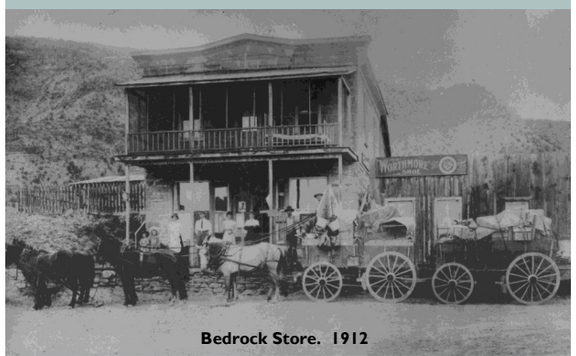
MILE 25.5 Joe Dandy Hill County Rd. DD-14 ascends Monogram Mesa and passes through the center of the mining district. Some of the first claims for carnotite ore were staked in this area in 1910. Between 1947-1980 over 2.4 million tons of uranium and vanadium ore were mined here.

MILE 24 Nil-No. 2 Mine The dump of this once productive mine is visible on the right.

MILE 28.9 Long Park Road County Rd. EE-22 on the left provides access to the historic Long Park Mining District. (See: *Self Guided Long Park Mine Tour*.)

MILE 31.6 Coke Ovens Ranch Named for the former site of six coke ovens. Coal mined near here was burned at high temperatures to produce coke, used as a fuel in blast furnaces. This site was the headquarters of the early 1900s Standard Chemical Co. (See: *Uravan the Town that Was,* and *Highway 141 Tour*.)

JUNCTION HWY 141 turn right to the West End Visitor Center



Bedrock Store. 1912

DOLORES RIVER CANYON SOUTH—HIKING TOUR

MILE 15.1 (West on Hwy 90) Y9 Rd begins at the old Bedrock Store. Bedrock boomed between 1899-1908 when copper and silver were discovered and mined at the Cashin Copper and Cliff Dweller mines, 4 miles west. During its heyday the town boasted two hotels, two saloons, a store, and 500 residents.

Follow this road about one mile to the *Boat Ramp* and park your vehicle. **This is a fairly easy, three mile hike along a scenic, well-defined trail. Allow at least 3 1/2 hours for the round trip.** Pack in plenty of water.

In the late 1800s to early 1900s this was the main route traveled by ore wagons, moonshiners, cowboys and outlaws, between the La Sal country to the west, and the Paradox Valley and towns to the east.

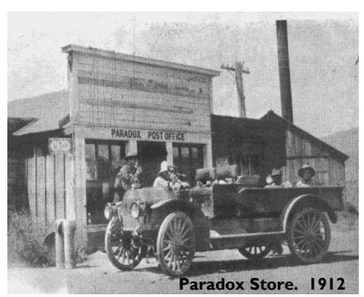
Passing the reclamation plant, you will soon traverse a sandy hillside. Just beyond this on the right look for a low rock wall. This canyon was once part of a private ranch, and stock were corralled here. At the bottom of the cliff walls is a stretch of rocky talus where sharks' teeth have been located. Note how you periodically

come across smooth river rock among the jagged canyon rocks. Further ahead on the trail you may spot remains of rock walls that once shored up the road. Also keep alert for rocks that have embedded dinosaur bone fossils; there are a few along the trail about two miles down. You will finally reach an area of large boulders just off the right of the trail. The overarching petroglyph rock is the main boulder with several smaller ones nearby. Dinosaur tracks, faint but noticeable, appear on one rock about 20' to the right of the main boulder.

Hike 1/2 mile further to the confluence of La Sal Creek and the river. (A rough one mile creek-fording hike up the La Sal will take you to the Cashin Mine.)

PARADOX VALLEY & THE TOWN OF PARADOX

Driving west on highway 90 past Bedrock to **MILE 11, 6.75 Rd.** and turn right. In one mile you will reach a "T". (Just before this, you will pass the cemetery on your left with some interesting old grave markers.) At the "T" a left and soon a right will take you to the "center of town". It's small, isolated, not much has changed over the years, and you can't get lost, so just enjoy wandering. A right back at the "T" and then a left will take you past the rock entrance and what is left of the 1930's CCC camp. The Civilian Conservation Corps. constructed a road up the steep Carpenter Ridge that you see at the north end of the valley.



Paradox Store. 1912

The Paradox Valley was historically part of the Ute Indian Reservation, but white settlers started moving in by 1870. Because of its remoteness and rugged setting and its proximity to the Utah border, the valley drew many notorious outlaws, rustlers, and shady characters, even well into the 20th century. Deadly disputes over water, land, minerals and almost anything that was worth arguing, are legendary. Many of the locals today are direct descendants of these iconic figures.

LA SAL CREEK & THE CASHIN MINE

From the town of Paradox, drive west on Highway 90, up the switchbacks to **MILE 5.4, X4 Rd,** on the left. This is a three 1/2 mile descent along La Sal Creek to the site of the historic Cashin Copper Mine. The canyon is breathtakingly beautiful, and an easy drive, or a rewarding hike if you are in shape. There are several pullouts and picnic areas along this single lane road.

The Cashin was once a very productive mine that has changed ownership many times. It is still privately owned, but has been inactive for several years. Some structures date from the late 1800s as a pioneer waystation, and to the more recent 1970's upgrades built on early 1900s buildings.

The story of *Slim Hecox and the Murder at the Cashin Mine* is a legendary page-turner that typifies the wild and wooly history of this remote, western Colorado outpost. This book and several others on this area's history are available at the West End Visitor Center in the Naturita and the Rimrocker Historical Society Museum in Nucla.

RIMROCKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN MONTROSE COUNTY