RIMROCKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Of Western Montrose County

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

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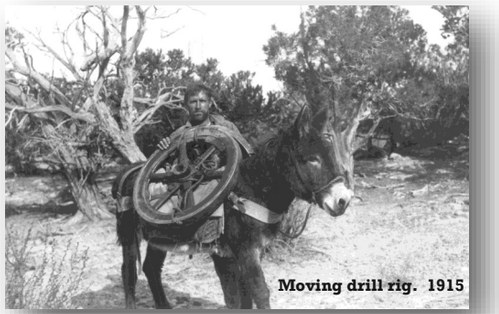

Moving drill rig. 1915

UNAWEEP-TABEGUACHE
HISTORIC & SCENIC BYWAY
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FIND YOUR WILD WEST END COLO.

NUCLA NATURITA
Area Chamber of Commerce

West End Visitors Center & the
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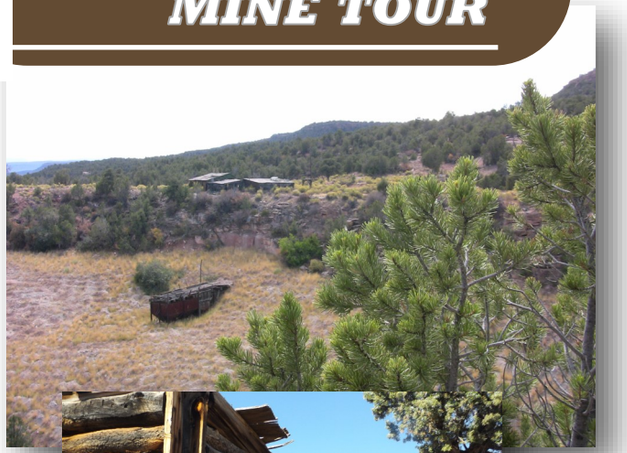
LONG PARK MINE TOUR



- **Distance:** Approximately 20 miles, not including side trips.
- **Time:** Allow at least 2 1/2 hours for main trip.
- **Vehicle:** Medium to high clearance recommended for main trip . High clearance required for side trips.
- ***Use extreme caution in stormy weather and on muddy roads.***

Long Park Mine Tour

Gold prospectors trickled into this region in the 1860s igniting a rich mining history. Twenty years later another yellow mineral was discovered that set a new course for these early miners. This was Carnotite (also called Colorado Yellowcake), the raw ore that contains Radium, Uranium and Vanadium. It is prevalent here, and is found in the Morrison Formation of the Jurassic Period.

French scientist, Marie Curie, was developing her radium research by 1900. 50% of the radium she used came from extractions in this area. During World War I, vanadium rose to importance as a hardening agent for steel. And with World War II uranium grew in demand. Uravan played a prominent (and secret) role in the Manhattan Project. The mining and milling operations in this area were productive from the early 1900s to the 1980s when the price of both uranium and vanadium fell below a profit-making level.

This tour will take you back through time, to the heart of what was once a bustling mining community. "*We arrived at Long Park, which was away high up in a saucer like basin with mountains all around. " A. Blake, C. 1900*

⇒ **Beginning at the Uravan Ball Park Kiosk, turn left and drive one mile north on the highway to County Rd EE22.**

You are now entering what was once the flourishing town of Uravan, population about 1,500. To the left was F Block. Imagine rows of neat, little houses, picket fences, fruit trees, gardens, and children playing, On the right stood a gas station. As you curve to the right, envision a school on your right side and a large gymnasium on the left. Just before the sweeping turn up the hill, on the left side, stood the boarding house, built in 1912-1913.

The house served as a residence and social center for single men who worked at the mill. It also provided a home base for Standard chemical Company officials and visiting dignitaries. Beyond the fenced area on the right stood the Joe Jr. Mill, the main processing plant, the laboratories, and other support services.

Boardinghouse. C. 1912

⇒ **Clear your mileage indicator now, and drive up the hill 1 mile.**

Both sides of the road are a graveyard. As part of the superfund cleanup, radioactive waste from Uravan, the VCA Mill in Naturita and mill tailings from under numerous dwellings in both Nucla and Naturita, were shredded, encased in concrete, and buried under rock.

⇒ **A mile further…**

You will see numerous workings on both sides of the road. These are the Club Claims. There were many dwellings here at one time, as well as a boarding house. The Shattuc Den shaft was located directly off the road to your left. No trace remains.

You will spot many side roads on this tour; exploring them is optional.

⇒ **4 miles from the Boarding House**

You can turn right on County Rd W 16 if you have a high clearance vehicle. Drive 2 miles on this road and it will take you to the old Pittsburgh Mill site. This mill was a concentrator in the early 1900s when ore was being processed for radium. Return to the main road. This is a 4 mile round trip. Add at least 30 minutes to your time schedule.

⇒ **Turn right, go 1/2 mile**

Stop for a scenic overlook of Saucer Basin, Beautiful canyon rims, and in the distance the scenic La Sal Mountains. (La Sal is Spanish for *The Salt.)*

⇒ **6.7 miles**

To the left is the waste dump of an old mine and the remains of a miner's cabin. On the right are more waste dumps and an old filled-in mine shaft.

⇒ **7.5 miles**

This is the head of Hieroglyphic Canyon. The hieroglyphics are about 1/2 mile up this canyon from the old Uravan school site. Most reports state that they have been covered up with wastes and can no longer be seen.

⇒ **7.7 miles**

On the right side, are 2 old mines and portals. They are part of the "Great Western Claims". There are also several mine workings on this side of the road and they were also part of the "Great Western". Also on your left you will see several poles sticking up from the ground. These are old electrical power poles that have been cut off. In the late 1950s electrical power was brought to Long Park to run the fans for ventilation in the mines. It was also utilized in other ways, but this was the main reason for the power coming to these outlying areas.

⇒ **7.9 miles**

At Rd Y 16, you will see workings called the "Honeymoon Claims". The Republican is down Rd Y 16. If you take this side tour, add 15 minutes to your time schedule. There is a humorous story told about this mine. One time a European visitor from of the Scandinavian countries came to Long Park and joined a group touring the Republican. This gentleman had a long beard and at this time men in this area were clean shaven. Someway, the visitor became separated from the group and wandered around the mine tunnels until he found a miner hard at work. He said, "I'm lost; would you please tell me how to get out of here." The miner, seeing his beard exclaimed, "My God! How long have you been down here?"

On both sides of the road you will see more side roads to other claims and also more drill roads.

⇒ **8.7 miles**

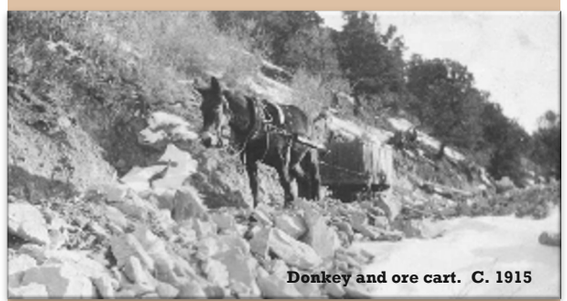
Henry Clay claims on the right. You can see an old vent pipe that was used for mine ventilation. This is also a scenic overlook– the San Juan Mountains and Lone Cone to the east, and the La Sal mountains in the west.

⇒ **8.9 miles**

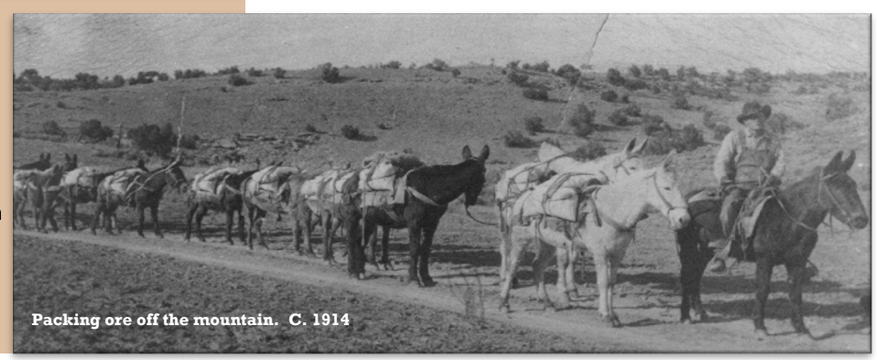
County Rd Y16 re-enters the main road. The Maggie C. claims are on the left. This was one of the biggest ore producers in the early days when vanadium was in demand.

⇒ **9.0 miles**

This little used road to the right goes to the old Long Park Camp. You need a high clearance vehicle to drive this road, but it's worthwhile walking the short distance to see all the old artifacts left at this once busy camp. There were numerous dwellings, a school, and a boarding house here. You will see a dugout to the left of the road. Many miners lived in dugouts such as this. On the right is an old baseball backstop. You may spot several artifacts of bygone days here: the remains of a baby carriage, an old refrigerator, rusted cars, some old shoes, and many more. On your right, on the way back out, you will see the remains of a clothes line and on top of the hill– a big tank that was used to store either water or air for the pneumatic drills the miners used. Add at least 1/2 hour to your time schedule.



Donkey and ore cart. C. 1915



Packing ore off the mountain. C. 1914

⇒ **9.8 miles**

County Rd Z 17. This road goes to the LP 21, a mine that was in continuous operation for many years. The road will rejoin the main road in about a mile. Add 15 minutes to your schedule for this side trip.

⇒ **10.5 miles**

County Rd Z 17 rejoins the main road. You are now in the Long Park mining district. For about 2 miles you will see the Long Park claims on both sides of the road. These claims started with LP 1 and went to LP 21.

⇒ **12.5 miles**

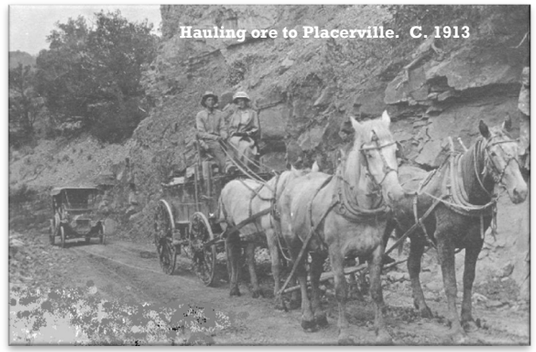
On the left, as you are leaving Long Park proper, is an ore bin and waste dump. These were the Pop Corn claims. There are also drill roads on the hillside above the claims. Notice that the hill is a blue-green shale that is prominent in the Morrison Formation.

⇒ **12.7 miles**

Starting here and for the next 2 miles look at the many unique rock formations and vivid colors on both sides of the road.

⇒ **14.4 miles**

As you come off the hill you will see the Bitter Creek claims nestled in the valley below. You will drive right by this mine and ore bin.



Hauling ore to Placerville. C. 1913

⇒ **14.7 miles**

Scenic overlook. The valley below you is East Paradox, and the mesa on the other side of the valley is Monogram Mesa. To the south, above the valley, you can see the open pit mine that was dug for Cotter Corp. in the early 1980s. The accident at Two Mile Island and the bust in uranium prices halted this work. No ore was mined at this site. The big mine dump nestled in a draw on the other side of the valley and to the left is the Nil; there is another dump to the right.

There are over 3,500 mines in the West End that once bustled with activity during the hey- day of uranium mining. Makeshift roads crisscrossed the mesas like spider webs. Today, less than a handful of these mines are being worked, yet their stories and the artifacts that remain are a rich part of this area's history.

⇒ **18.6 miles**

Turn left on State Highway 90. (Right will take you to Paradox and Utah.) In about 5 miles you will arrive at the 141 intersection. A left turn will take you back to Uravan; turn right to go to Naturita & Nucla where you can visit the Rimrocker Museum to view artifacts, and learn more about mining history.

RIMROCKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN MONTROSE COUNTY

Other tours of interest include: *Uravan: The Town That Was; Scenic & Historic Highway 141; Hanging Flume; Dolores River Canyon.*