RIMROCKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Of Western Montrose County

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

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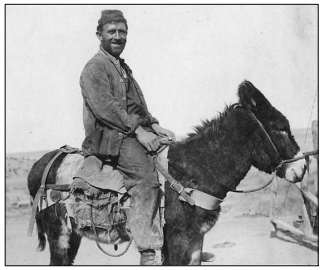

UNAWEEP-TABEGUACHE
HISTORIC & SCENIC BYWAY
INTERPRETIVE CENTER
230 W. Main Street Naturita, CO
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NUCLA NATURITA
Area Chamber of Commerce

West End Visitors Center &
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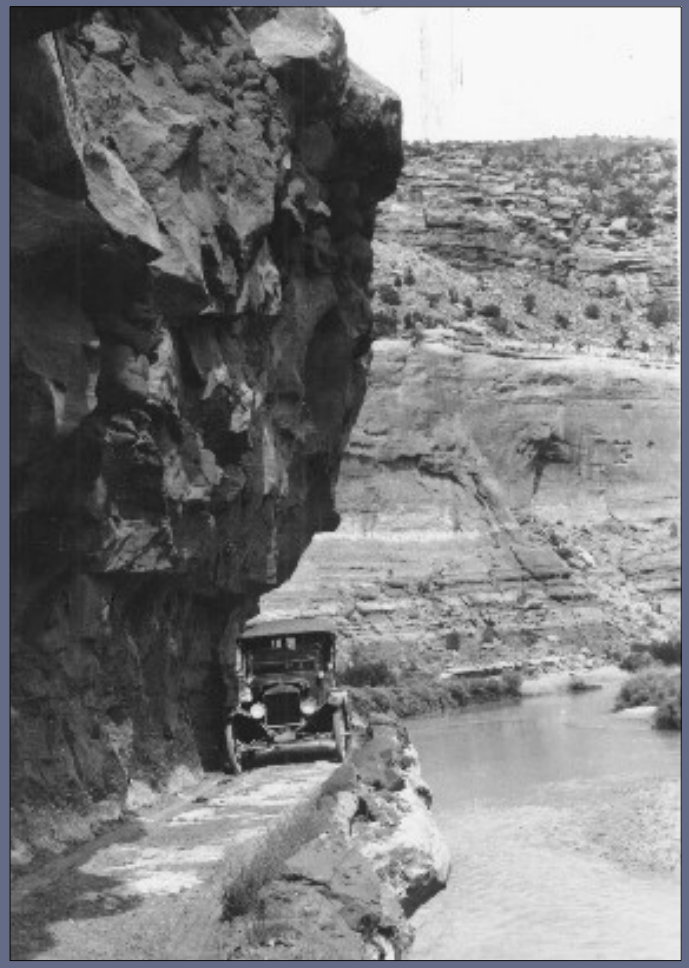
Scenic & Historic Highway 141 Tour

Naturita to Gateway



This tour takes you 52 miles along the *Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic and Historic Byway,* State Highway 141. Although primarily an auto tour, there are several points of interest that can only be reached by way of short hikes—a couple-hundred yards or less. Be alert for the designated mile markers (MM), and if you are slowing your speed please be aware of the traffic around you; for safety always signal your intentions. Mile markers are approximate.

MM 60 NATURITA

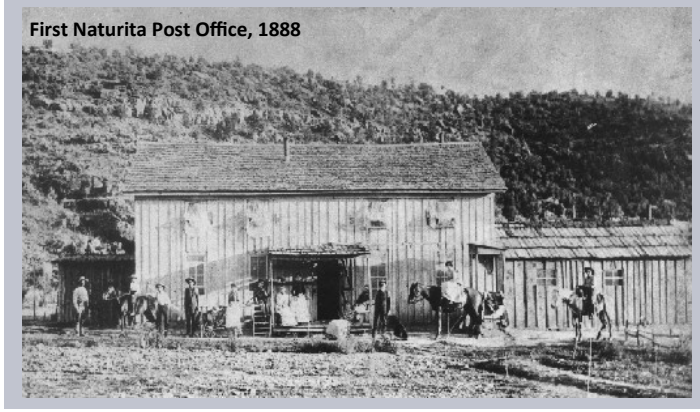
This region was home to the Ute Indians until 1880 when they were moved to reservations. At that time freighters, miners, and cattlemen were traveling through this area; the first to settle here were a Mr. Payson, who built the first log cabin home, and a Mr. Rockwood Blake. His wife, Lupei, was of Spanish descent and named the new settlement on the San Miguel River—Naturita, meaning "Little Nature". Here, they raised their children, established a school and a post office, and welcomed others to their little community.

In 1894, members of the newly formed Colorado Cooperative Company, set up their first camp in Naturita while they surveyed and planned the work ahead of them: to build a 15 mile ditch that would bring water from the river to irrigate the parks above Naturita and allow them to build their town—Nucla.

Early 1900 saw the arrival of the mining booms: gold, copper, and carnotite ore bearing radium, vanadium, and uranium. Naturita was a crossroads for the activity coming and going from the mines and mills. Stores and houses sprang up overnight. The town rode the highs and lows of the industry until 1983, when the last mill was closed.

MM 61.9, EE26 Rd. VANCORUM—*2 miles west of Naturita, left above highway*

At the top of this hill you will drive through East Vancorum. It was built in the 1930s to house the management of the VCA Mill (further into tour), and was known as "Snob Hill". Across the ravine to the west was the housing complex of the mill workers. Each of the several worker units was composed of 4 or 5 apartments. They even had indoor plumbing.



First Naturita Post Office, 1888

MM 91.5 THE SPRING—*Left*

This is a natural spring with delicious, cool water. A nice place to stop and refresh as travelers have done for years.

MM 95.7 MONTROSE/MESA COUNTY LINE

MM 97.5 PRAYING MAN—*Left*

In the 1950s, the rock that forms hands of this figure stood up on the mesa above.

MM 99 PETROGLYPHS—*Left*

Just a short walk from the roadway is a large boulder with examples of petroglyphs.

MM 101.3 SEW 'EM UP MESA KIOSK—*Right, just after the cattle guard*

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a cattle rustler would pull together a small herd of cows and take them up to this rugged mesa, cut the old brands out and sew the hide back together. When the scar was healed he would put his own brand over the old site, and ship his "new herd" to market.

MM 101.3 SINBAD VALLEY RD. Z 26—*Right*

About five miles up this canyon there is a strange stain on the right side of the canyon wall. It looks like a sailing ship. There is also a copper mine on the right wall, called the Copper Nugget. (High clearance vehicle + map needed.)

MM 103.5 LAUGHING FACE—*Right*

MM 107 CAMEL'S HUMP—*Straight ahead, butte rises behind Gateway*

MM 108 PIONEER CABIN—*Right*

MM 110.6 JOHN BROWN CANYON—*Left*

Driving about five and 1/2 miles up this road will take you to the summit overlooking the town of Castle Valley. At the summit in the canyon to the right is an area that has several embedded dinosaur tracks. (High clearance vehicle + map needed.)

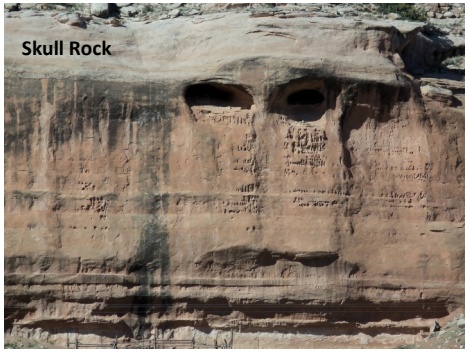
MM 111 GATEWAY

So named as the "Gateway" to the spectacular slickrock country of the Dolores River Canyon. Although our tour ends here, the Gateway area is rich in local history.

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, and rugged mining towns were thrown together overnight. Today, less than a handful of these mines are being worked, yet their stories and the artifacts that remain are a vibrant part of this area's history.

Other tours include: *Uravan: The Town That Was; Long Park Mine Tour; Hanging Flume; Paradox Valley and the Dolores River Canyon Tour.*

MM 85 SKULL ROCK—*Right, beyond hayfield*


Skull Rock

There is a pullout to the left just past the site. Skull Rock was photographed in the early 1900s, and appears in historical records.

MM 85. 3 MESA CREEK Q14 Rd. & LOONEYVILLE

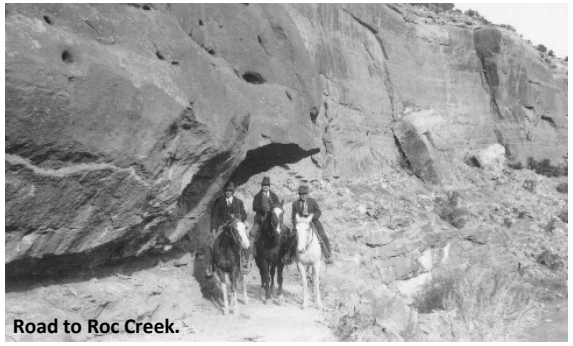
On the right, about 1/2 mile up from these ranch hayfields, was the first site of the 1800s town of Looneyville. It was a stopping off point for cowboys, trappers, miners, and loggers supplying timber for the Hanging Flume. In the '40s, as mines like the very productive "Eulabelle" opened deeper up the canyon, the town followed. It consisted of 6-10 wood frame and tar-paper buildings, a school, dugouts, and work sheds. The town is gone, but many stories remain. (High clearance vehicle + map needed for backcountry travel.)

MM 88 PETROGLYPHS—*Right*

Walk from the mile marker, stay left of the large boulder, and on to the rock face. Several rock art etchings can be seen on this section of the overhang, although they have worn down with time.

MM 88.5 ROC CREEK—*Hay fields and cabin, Left*

This was the headquarters of Roc Creek Ranches established in the early 1900s. The town of Uranium was once located here as well as the Rajah, the first big uranium mine of the region.


Road to Roc Creek.

MM 89 UNAWEEP DOLORES RIVER CANYON—*Both sides*

Here you enter a canyon with towering cliffs on both sides This route is rich in interesting rock shapes that often appear as faces; many were recorded years ago.

MM 89 GOLD PANNING ROAD—*Right*

You will see many low piles of round, flat river rocks along this little road. This was a place where the early placer miners panned for gold.

MM 62.3 ESCALANTE & DOMINGUEZ Kiosk—*bottom of Vancorum loop*

Two friars led the first expedition to explore and map this region in 1776.They left Santa Fe looking for an overland route to their mission in California. Their journals told us the story of the journey.

MM 63 VCA MILL—*Right, in flat below the road*

In 1927 Rare Metals Corporation of America began to build a vanadium processing mill here. Between 1934-1935 Vanadium Corp. of America secured assets in Colorado and acquired the mill and turned it into a fully operational vanadium processing plant by 1939. In 1940 the mill was processing 100 tons of Vanadium per day.

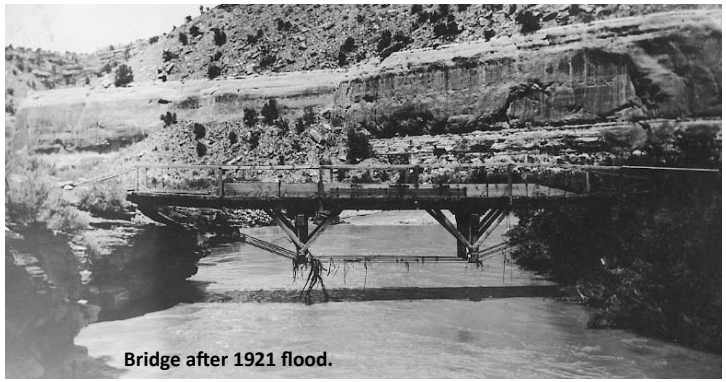
First Cabin in Naturita. C. 1881

MM 64.2 CALAMITY ROAD

In the early 1900s this bridge washed out, and probably lent its story to the naming of the road, bridge, and draw. Also along this stretch of highway you can see rockwork supporting the old road bed. The road was rebuilt from old mining 2-track to a graded road during the Roosevelt era, by the Civilian Conservation Corp. (CCC). Highway 141 has been redirected and upgraded many times during its existence.

MM 65.3 GRAVE—*Left*

Look for the small fenced in area about 50 yards above the road. One of the first white children born in Naturita, Suzy Lonsway, died as a young mother and left three children who roamed the hills wild and free.


Bridge after 1921 flood.

MM 67.9 FOOT BRIDGE—*Right*

Look carefully to spot the cables of this old bridge spanning the river.

MM 69 CHIPETA—*Right, in the flats between the highway and the river*

Gold was discovered on the San Miguel River in the late 1800s, and the fever drew crowds of men to the area. A group of miners from Ouray, Colorado formed a placer company and built a tent town here on the "Amalgamator Flats". They established a post office on October 21, 1881, and called the town Chipeta. Like most of the placer claims along this stretch of the San Miguel, that operation was not productive due to the fineness of the gold particles.

MM 72 SLEEPY HOLLOW—*Right*

This was another tent town location, used by the early Uranium miners.

MM 74 NATURE CONSERVANCE PRESERVE—*Right*

MM 74.1 TABEGUACHE CREEK—*Dirt road right, after bridge*

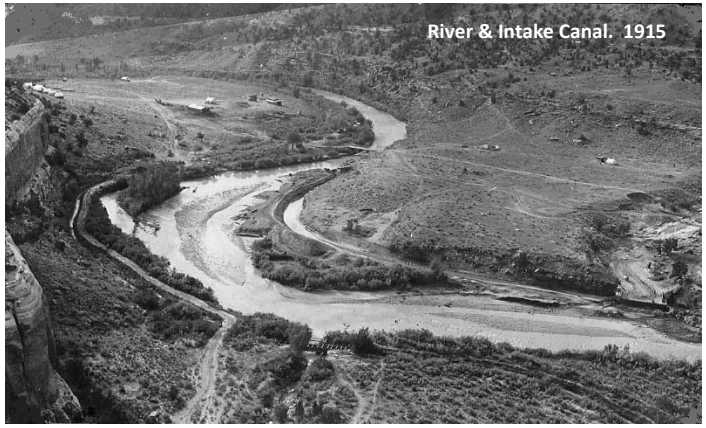
Site of the 1880 gold mining town of Cameville.

MM 74.1 URAVAN BALL PARK/ Kiosk—*Left*

This park was dedicated on July 4, 1957 as the *Carbide Recreation Park.* It consisted of a picnic area and grassy baseball field—complete with lights, and was a popular spot for the people of Uravan and the West End community. The Rimrocker Historical Society maintains this historic site as a picnic/camp ground.

MM 75 HANGING FLUME INTAKE—*Left*

In 1889 construction began on this historic project. Look over the side of the road toward the river and you will see a large hole. This was the beginning of an earthen ditch, a tunnel, more ditch, until it reached the sheer rock walls where the Hanging Flume was built. More history is told at the Kiosk stop (MM 81.5)



River & Intake Canal. 1915

MM 83.4 COKE OVEN—L*eft on flat below road*

Coke Oven & Biscuit Rock in distance.

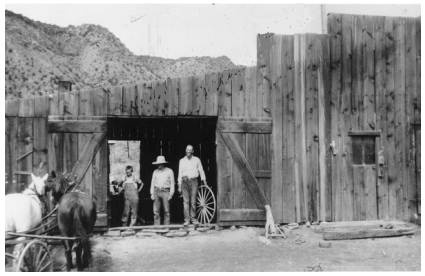
Coke ovens were used to burn coal at high temperatures. Coke is the solid remainder that can be used as a fuel in blast furnaces for working iron. This coke oven was used to make coke for the blacksmithing needed on the Hanging Flume project.

MM 83.6 BISCUIT ROCK—*Left, across river*

The big round rock is a local landmark. Just below is a bridge where the road crosses the river and goes up to Carpenter Ridge above Paradox Valley. There are remainders of rock piles where the water carried from the flume finally ended as it shot at the hillside. In the cliff below the road there is a big cave that has been excavated by archeologists over the years.

The dirt road crossing the bridge continues up to Carpenter Ridge, which spans the length of the Paradox Valley, west of here. This route is the western section of the 166 mile long *Rimrocker Trail,* that crosses the backcountry from Montrose, Colorado to Moab, Utah.

Historic photo, Hanging Flume



1920s Blacksmith shop

RIMROCKER HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN MONTROSE COUNTY

MM 82.1 HORSE COLLAR & JOHN CHRISTION'S GRAVE—*Left*
MAILMAN'S LADDER—*Right*

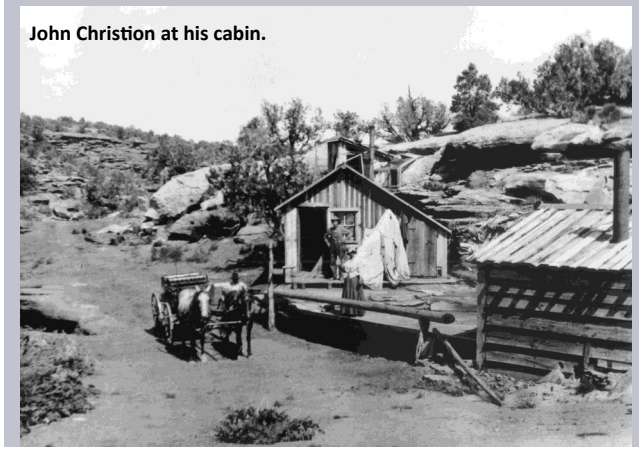
A dirt road on both sides of the highway leads to these interesting sites. Both are just a short hike off the highway.

Mailman's Ladder

On the slickrock face to the right you can see the remnants of a ladder etched in stone. The steps have worn down over the years, and the handrail has fallen away. The ladder was used in earlier days to go down to pick up mail at a box along the road. Each evening a man would walk down and back, bringing the mail for all the men working in the mines in the area.

The road on the left points you toward a unique rock formation on the opposite side of the river, water runoff from above has washed a hole through the rocky cliff and falls a great distance to the bank of the river where it has washed a small pond before entering the river. Old time locals called this the Horse Collar.

Park your vehicle and hike down toward the rim. Slightly to the left of the path is a grave marker for John Christion. John was a member of the Royal Family of Denmark. At the age of 21 all male members of the Royal Family were expected to serve in the army. John did not want to go, so he rowed his boat far out in the North Sea, near a steamship that was bound for the U.S. He cleared immigration and came West where he built a cabin near here using wood from the flume, and worked for the Club Ranch. He was a handyman and farrier for the ranch, and an inventor. He created donkey "ice shoes", and was working on a perpetual motion machine.


John Christion at his cabin.

One day the ranch owners stopped by with some groceries for John, and they found him dead. They buried him, marked his grave with a stone, and burned the cabin.

MM 75.3 URAVAN F Block, South end of the town—*Left, just before Rd. EE22*

In 1928 U S Vanadium (USV) bought this property, including the ore processing mill, and developed the town, giving it a new name: Uravan—for URAnium + VANadium. It grew into a bustling company town of 1,500 people, with all the modern amenities of the times. Blocks of houses spread along the river, each one alphabetically coded. When the uranium industry dwindled, the company began closing the town. December 31, 1986, the last resident left "kicking and screaming". The town was dismantled, shredded, and buried as part of a Superfund cleanup project. *(More information on Uravan is available at the Uravan Ball Park Campground kiosk, the West End Visitor Center, and the Rimrocker Museum.)*

MM 75.7 STORAGE CAVE - *Right, after short canyon*

Look carefully to spot this opening, Mining blasting supplies were stored here.

Uravan, Mill. C. 1920

MM 76 ROAD U 18 - *Right*

This road leads up to a great viewing spot where you can take in the whole layout of Uravan. The road once lead to the Uravan Airport, no longer in existence.

MM 76 JOE JR. MILL—*Left, across the river*

In 1914 Standard Chemical built the Joe Jr. Mill here, to process carnotite ore that was being mined locally. At this time radium was recovered from the ore and used for radiology research and painting luminous dials.

By 1918 the company owned 375 mining claims in the area and employed 200 men in its southwestern Colorado plants. The company ultimately produced 74 grams of radium (at $70,000 a gram), roughly 47% of the country's entire domestic radium production.

When USV purchased the plant in 1928, they operated 940 local mines and processed 240 tons of ore a day for vanadium, used in hardening steel. There were 4,000 workers in the total operations.

Uranium was milled here under the Manhattan Project. Following WWII, Uranium was processed for peaceful purposes. After years of booms and busts, in 1984 the Uranium industry in this area finally shut down.

MM 76.9 THE CLUB RANCH— *Left on flat below the road*

Club Ranch Crew. C. 1900

In the 1880s, Dr. Dearborn, a retired army doctor, got an option on placer claims and range land along the San Miguel River. He enticed friends back East to partner with him and form the San Miguel Cattle Company. They bought herds of cattle that were coming up from Texas, and at one time the Club ran 10,000 head of cattle on their range. The ranch changed hands several times until about 1910 when Standard Chemical bought the property on the west side of the river. The ranch was named after the *clubs* card suit.

MM 77.5 CLUB RANCH CORRALS— *Left*

These corrals also held the livestock used at Uravan.

MM 78.7 THE DONKEY— *Right on cliff face, before cattle guard*

The donkey was painted in 1955 by a miner who lived in a cave house. It symbolized their use in the mines. The donkey has been painted many different colors over the years.

Hanging Flume showing reconstruction

MM 80.1 FLUME RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT— *Left, first pullout after cattle guard, hike toward cliff edge*

In 2012, with the support of History Colorado and private funders, teams of experts came together here to find the answer to "how did they do that?" 48 feet of the flume were rebuilt (using modern day tools) in five days, working over the edge of the cliff here. The project can be viewed, as well as an informative kiosk, on a short side trip, 3.2 miles down the River Rd. Y11; turn west at MM 76.3.

MM 80.2 THE CONFLUENCE OF THE SAN MIGUEL & DOLORES RIVERS OVERLOOK— *Left, a small road leaves the highway, just as road curves to the right*

A short hike to the cliff edge will give you a long view of the confluence and the river canyons. The Escalante Expedition first named "El Rio de Nuestra Senora de Dolores" or "The River of Our Lady of Sorrows". The San Miguel was originally called "Rio de San Pedro".

MM 80.9 KIOSK OF MINING HISTORY, MINE & DUMP— *Right*

After sorting ore from the rock, miners shipped the ore to the mill and the rock spoils were dumped over the hills. Look for similar mine dumps along the route.

MM 81.5 THE HANGING FLUME PULLOUT— *Kiosk, Point of Interest, left*

This kiosk tells a little of the history of the Hanging Flume and offers a great overlook of some of the remains of the flume.

In the late 1880s there was a major gold strike along Mesa Creek Flats below the confluence of the San Miguel and Dolores Rivers. The Montrose Placer Mining Company, composed of wealthy St. Louis investors, bought six-and-a-half miles of mining claims along the rivers. The gold was there, but in what quantity nobody knew. What they did know was that they needed a large supply of water to wash the gold from the gravel beds—four miles down river from the confluence. When the flume builders ran out of earth for a ditch, they constructed a wooden flume and hung it onto the canyon walls high above the river. It was an open water chute six feet wide and four feet high, built from 1.8 million board feet of lumber. It rested on brackets bolted to the cliff with the end of the bolts driven 18 inches into the rock. Additional support came from a brace extending diagonally down from the outer edge of each bracket to a groove cut into the rock wall and anchored with a spike driven through the wood and deep into the rock. Sometimes the lumber was transported down the finished flume bed, at other times the workers swung down from the top of the cliff in a boson's chair. Not one worker was killed on the project.

The flume transferred 80 million gallons of water over a 24 hour period. The total length of the ditch and flume was 13 miles. It functioned for three years, but failed to turn a profit—the gold was too fine and washed away with the hydraulic pressure. Today the Hanging Flume is listed by the Worlds Monument Fund as one of the "100 most endangered Sites in the World."

Confluence—San Miguel & Dolores Rivers

More information can be found in the Hanging Flume brochure. Pick one up at the Uravan Ball Park Campground kiosk or the West End Visitor Center.