

--Cottonwood Uranium Mining Project--

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In cooperation with *Blue Mountain Shadows* and Utah Division
of Oil, Gas, and Mining

INTERVIEWEE: Glen Black

INTERVIEWER: Adrian Shumway

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PLACE: Home of Glen Black, Blanding, Utah

TOPICS DISCUSSED: Road Building

TRANSCRIBER: Kimberly Hiatt

S: This is an interview with Glen Black at the home of Glen Black in Blanding. This is for a research paper. Glen Black has lived in Blanding for 74 years. He came here from Mexico with his parents when he was three years old.

My first question is: What were your earliest recollections of road building? What were some of the first roads ever built besides just the ones used in town?

B: All the roadwork was done when I was young man with a team of horses. Workhorses furnished all your scraper and road grader power. And, so you know they didn't get very much work done with that kind of horsepower. Now the first road that I ever worked on was out at the Elk Mountain. It was 1927. Dad and Elmer Bailey and I were there for a few weeks and at that time the road was just a narrow trail and we would just go along and drill some of the big rocks along the [sheathen/]. I remember my first experience with dynamite. We set off a charge in some rocks and I thought, "Oh, I'll run way down hill here and get out of the scattering rock coming out of the sky" but I should have gone up hill because the blast automatically shot the rocks down the hill. I was behind a big cedar tree and the rocks started falling out of the air. I really crowded that cedar tree. But I learned from then on that you are supposed to go up hill away from the blast.

S: From what years did most of this construction take place that you did?

B: This roadwork we did on Elk Mountain (of course it was Forest Service that paid the bill) was the year that Lindberg flew across the Atlantic Ocean. I remember what big news it was. It was in the papers. Of course we didn't have television or radio then. It was strictly telephone news or paper news. From that Elk Mountain road work that I was in on, we had a job out here on Bushy Basin the next year. I'm not right sure on my dates, but it was around 1928 or 1929. We had to go about the roadwork the same way. It was still hard with four legged horses. We always had to

camp on the job even though it was just a few miles from town because there was no way to get back and forth. I remember we were going to the camp. When we got to work we had a big horse by the name of Bess and she was a gentle animal. We were going down the road and I ran and jumped up on her, and boy, it scared her and she boosted me about 20 feet.

S: How many men usually worked on these roads?

B: There were probably 12 to 15 men and young boys. Most of this roadwork in those days was just in the summer time when we were out of school. Dave Black was the foreman on that Bushy Basin job. I don't remember the particular individuals, but I know there were several.

S: You said that most of the money came from the Forest Service.

B: On that first job.

S: Where did most of the money come from?

B: The next money for Bushy Basin, I would imagine, was from the state or county. Probably a little of both.

S: Did you ever work on road building in town?

B: I laid a lot of the first oil in these streets with a big grader patrol -- a Caterpillar grader [] -- that the county had. That was the only piece of equipment we had back then in 1940-1945. Now they have so much equipment, they hardly have room to park it all.

S: How long did the roads usually take to build?

B: While I was running the county roads, we had different gravel projects. I put the first gravel on Dodge Pine road. We graded those roads and put in lumber culverts which were 3x12 planks to put across the top to cover them up for water drainage. I did grading on this road down below Blanding over to Recapture. We graveled that road out on the top of Recapture on the other side. This was all county work. We graveled up to Horse Head road out east of Monticello. That was the first gravel ever put on that. We graveled from Harley out to Ucola for miles. That was the first gravel ever on that road. So, we did quite a lot of work with what equipment we had.

S: Can you tell me a little more about the equipment? Did you use picks or just the grader and the horses? Or did you usually have to do manual labor?

B: In the early days, lots of times we would use picks and crowbars and drive a big steel down under a big rock and then shoot it out and loose. That was a lot of handwork. But most of it was with horses and plows and scrapers.

S: Did they build the roads because of the cattle industry, or the mining, or just to get in touch with the outside world?

B: My first road building back in those days was to open up the country. You couldn't even get to Natural Bridges before this road we build out on Elk Ridge. The narrow wagon road went up to Bears Ears and you couldn't even get off to Natural Bridges. So, most of the roads, that I was in on in my day, were to develop better roads which have all been redone pretty much now. That one year we were on this oil campaign, spreading oil on the cities. We joined with Moab and Emery County. Each one had a patrol. You had to stir the oil and lay it when it was warm. You'd put the oil into gravel and stir it back and forth with a blade. After you got to a certain texture, then you'd spread it out and lay it out. All these roads in Blanding and Monticello, most of the side roads are still that first oil. Although a lot of them now have been widened out.

S: That leads to my next question. After the roads were built for wagons and horses and teams and buggies, did you have to change a lot of the roads when cars were introduced? Or was it a very drastic change?

B: One of the first roads that I was in on out there at Devils Canyon went straight south and swung back down in and went clear down to the bottom of the canyon. Then there was a little post bridge at the bottom that went back across. So in those days, if you had a heavy load on a wagon you usually had to double up on two teams to pull it up somehow. We used to come down to the bottom of Recapture with two loads of wheat, two wagons, and we'd take one team off one wagon (right where the radio station is now) and unhook them and go back down and get the other wagon.

S: How did the road building in San Juan County compare to the road building nationally?

B: We were way behind. We were way out in the frontier. We were 100 miles from the railroad. And years ago you had to freight everything in by teams of wagons. So, people thought you were way out in the sticks if you were 100 miles from the railroad.

S: So did most of the nation have cars before anyone here did?

B: I imagine we had less because of the roads that weren't very good. There were two or three cars, but very few.

S: Do you remember who had the first car in Blanding?

B: I remember one of the first. I remember on the Fourth of July we moved out to this Devils Canyon farm every summer. Means of transportation was by horse and wagon or buggy. You'd go out 10 miles and have to stay a week. Dad got [man's

name/]; he was quite a mechanic, an early truck driver in the country. He came up in a model T Ford and brought it down to Blanding for the Fourth. It was an open top with two seats. I thought that was really, really hot. As far as I know, that was the first car I ever rode in.

S: Didn't you build some of the road out by Marie Ogden's camp? Can you tell me about you and your brothers building that?

B: That was when I was working for the county. Roads used to wind around up through that area. You notice those buildings up through that area. The road just wound around through the brush through those different houses. One day I just took that old patrol I called little Sari; I don't know how that happened to come about. Anyway, I pointed that old Caterpillar grader right towards that gap way up there, if you notice where those road goes to Canyonlands. Of course, I had to brush it out first and clean out the brush on both sides. Then I graded it. And that was an eyeball-engineering job there. That road is still right there where I put it.

S: How long did you work for the county? Tell us about your job and what you did for the county.

B: I started working for the county in 1940 until 1945. The first part of my time with them we used to have a tent when we'd go out on the side road. The last two to three years I got a little house trailer, which made it a lot nicer to move around. You could move your camp equipment by just hooking it up to the pickup or the patrol and take off. In those days you didn't run back and forth like they do now. I made some of the first improvements down in Indian Creek road. That is the same road that goes to Canyonlands. At that time I had Fletch Bronson and Grant Bronson and Warren Bronson, Joe Cooper as a count down there in Indian Creek. About \$2,000.00 was spent down through there, up and down through some of the bad spots. We didn't grade the road too much. One spot where you come down through Indian Creek, to get a big blade down through there, you'd have to go down into the creek to get under it, sort of. We knocked a hill out there so you could get under it. But, these guys all turned out to be millionaires, most of them. Later on we got the half jack pine out in White Canyon and they sold it out. So I had millionaires working for me at one time. That was before they turned into millionaires.

S: What were your wages?

B: I earned ninety cents an hour on that big equipment. When I was out in La Sal or east of Monticello or off in some part of the county like that, I would work until just after sundown. There was nothing else to do, so I would just sit on my patrol. But it was pretty good money in those days.

S: And the county paid that to you?

B: Yes, that was San Juan County.