

**--Cottonwood Uranium Mining Project--**

Sponsored by Bureau of Land Management and USDA Forest  
Service

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

INTERVIEWEE: Clark Bayles

INTERVIEWER: LaVerne Tate

DATE: April 17, 2001

PLACE: Home of Donald Bayles

TOPICS DISCUSSED: Drilling and Mining in San Juan County

TRANSCRIBER: Kimberly Hiatt

-----

T: I understand that you started your drilling here with your brother, Randee Bayles.

B: Yes, my brother and Junior Hoggard.

T: How old were you?

B: I was 16. I dropped out of high school. My dad said if I wasn't going to go to high school, I was going to go to work. So I ended up on a rig up in Scofield, Utah drilling for coal. My brother worked me so hard that summer that I decided to go back to school the next year. But it didn't work out again. So I was back on the rigs.

T: What was your job usually on the rigs?

B: I was a floor hand. A helper is what I was, tripping the pipe out and back in, putting new rods on so we could drill deeper.

T: What did you do the second summer?

B: The second summer, I was with my dad, plumbing. My dad is a retired plumber. I more or less went back and forth from plumbing to drilling.

T: So what was the next drilling job that you had?

B: The next drilling job was up in Cottonwood working up on the Ransom and a lot of that property up in Cottonwood Wash.

T: Who were you working for?

B: I was working for Quality Drilling. It was Clinton Howell from Mexican Hat.

T: Who else was out there besides you?

B: I worked with a lot of different people. We had two rigs going most of the time. George Petty and his hands were out there drilling on one part of the property and we were on the other part.

T: What was your job?

B: Water truck driver, driller's helper.

T: Could you tell when they hit ore?

B: Oh yes. You could tell when they hit ore, especially when the geologist was out there and it was coming out of the ground and they are smiling. (laughter).

T: This was a time when uranium drilling was going pretty good out there?

B: Yes. This was when those guys were knocking down the money and doing real well for themselves. Those were some good years for those guys.

T: Did you camp out or did you drive back and forth every day?

B: We'd usually stay up there probably three or four days out of the week and then we'd come home and take a night off, and go back up again.

T: Did they furnish you a ride out there and back?

B: They furnished our rides, fed us steak and potatoes every night. We ate really well. They more or less fed us, bought all the pops and everything else for us. It was just show up and go to work. They were making enough money to pay for all of that.

T: Did you stay with this company long?

B: I was on and off with Quality Drilling probably four or five times in six years. I always told Clint when I'd go to work that I'd probably be there for about six months and then he wasn't going to see me again for a while. He was always good about it. I tried to do the best I could for him. Every time I came back, he'd hire me again and I'd go back out for him again.

T: Did you like to drill more in the summer than you did in the winter?

B: Oh yes. (laughter)

T: The weather gets pretty rough in the winter, doesn't it?

B: Well, most of the time, they would shut down for the winter for most of the crew anyway because of the snow. When it was wintertime, I usually helped my dad with plumbing.

T: That would be quite a science, trying to find where you're supposed to drill the holes when there was much snow out there.

B: That's true, too. Moving the equipment and everything else was a rough deal.

T: After five or six years did you still stay with the same company?

B: I had one other area back after Scofield when I went to Grants, New Mexico with a company out of Kayesville, Utah. Down there, I helped Kelly Laws for four or five months. That was as long as I'd been with him. I lost my job there, though. They sent me back to Utah and told me not to come back to Grants anymore. I was really kind of wild.

T: I guess kids have to live and learn, don't they?

B: Yes.

T: Was this the time you went to mining after you did your drilling out there?

B: I didn't start mining until after I got married in 1980. I think that was when I went up to the Betty.

T: Who were you working for when you went to the Betty mine?

B: I was working for a plumbing outfit out of Salt Lake. My wife and I were in Lake Tahoe. When I came back from there, I got a job at the Betty mine.

T: Who owned the Betty mine?

B: Energy Fuels.

T: Can you remember any of the supervisors out there?

B: George Spillman was our boss. The foreman in the mine was Don Bellum. All the miners were Jim Bright, Bryan Tate, Dan Hurst. When I first went there and started, Matt Bayles was working there. I took his job and he went to school. I started and then they brought Gordon Grover out. He's the only other guy I remember working out there besides those I mentioned before.

T: What did you think about George Spillman?

B: He was really hard, but it was constructive criticism that he gave us. He was hard on you but I always learned from him. He was onery. (laughter).

T: Did you stay out there all the time or did you drive back and forth?

B: I stayed up there two or three days and then drove back home. We worked four-ten hour days and then three off.

T: Was the Betty making pretty good ore?

B: Yes. It wasn't bad. It was making 12 to 20/100.

T: How did they pay you?

B: I was paid hourly. I was called a top lander. What I did was get up in the morning before everybody else, start the equipment, get everything warmed up and ready to go. Then everybody would come to the portal. I forgot about Wayne Mosher. He was the hoist man out there.

T: Do you know if they paid bonuses or if they just barely made regular ore?

B: They paid bonuses. Another good thing about George Spillman was that he went to bat for these guys all the time with the people from Energy Fuels to get the money and bonuses for them. I remember that happening a lot. As far as me working out there, I stayed up on top. When the trains would come up and dump the ore, they dumped it on a grizzly. I was swinging a sledgehammer most of the day, breaking rocks up with it. Then I'd haul it to the different ore pads depending on what grade it was: waste or good ore. If those guys had made a lot of ore that month, they'd all chip in \$100 or \$200 to me to keep me breaking rocks through that grizzly. So they kind of took care of me, too, up there. They made quite a bit more money than I did.

T: Do you remember accidents happening out there at the Betty mine?

B: Oh yes. I watched everybody get hurt or almost get hurt. Probably the scariest one was with Bryan Tate when he was down under ground and was lighting a round. One of the rounds went off on him and he knew it was going to blow up. He took off running. I believe I was the first guy to see him come out of the mine when the train came up and he walked out of that portal. He was wearing a mining or rain jacket, a yellow one, and he looked at me and when he turned to start walking, he asked me where George was. When he walked off, I looked at his back and it looked like someone had taken a 12 gauge shot gun to him from about 30 yards away. So he was pretty blistered. When stuff like that happened, George Spillman was on top of things. He just loaded him up and got him to town. He took care of it.

Another event out there was Jim Bright. I hadn't seen him for a while. Every once in a while I'd take the train in and go underground when we were caught up. I was

looking for him. I went clear up into the north side of the mine and found Jim Bright just barely getting up and trying to get out of there. What had happened was, he was running a little bob cat skid loader and he got up into the end of the mine where the back was real low. He hopped the skid loader up into the back and it crushed his back. I can't remember how bad his back was broke. But, I don't think he ever mined again. Anyway, I helped him come out of there. The dummy should have laid down and let us haul him out. He walked out. He was hurt pretty bad.

Then one other time all of us were underground. Dan Hurst had a pry bar and he was prying down a slab off the back. All I remember is that we were talking and he was prying and George Spillman looked over at him and said, "Boy, you better get that bar away from your chest." About the time he said that, Dan moved that bar and that slab fell. If he hadn't have moved that bar away from his chest, it would have gone right through him. So the boss saved his life that day. He did. That's about all the pain and agony I saw out there.

T: Did you fly in an Energy Fuels plane to look at a gold mine?

B: I didn't. They offered me the plane ride to check out that job. I decided to go to work at the mill. I wanted to stay here. So I didn't take the ride.

T: How long did you work at the mill?

B: Off and on for nine years. So it turned out to be a pretty good deal for me.

T: What did you start as at the mill? What was your job?

B: I fed the mill with the loader, outside. I fed the grizzly that feeds the Ball mill, the first process after the scale house.

T: Is that what you did the whole time?

B: No, I ended up working through the whole mill.

T: What was your next job?

B: After the loader, I went to the Buall mill. That's where the loader fed and the mill ground the ore up and made it into a slurry. We'd store the slurry, and from there it went to another process.

T: Did you do that the whole time you were out there?

B: I worked the sag mill and the loader for two years. One of the foremen came out and asked me if I wanted to come in and learn the whole process and make more money.

T: Who owned the mill at this time?

B: It was Energy Fuels then. Shortly after I did come in and start learning all the circuits, it was bought out by Union Carbide, UMETCO.

T: Did you work for UMETCO.

B: Yes.

T: How long did you work for them?

B: I probably worked for UMETCO for six years.

T: You were still a lead man for UMETCO?

B: I was when the last lay off occurred. I decided to go to school. They always told me up at the mill that if I stayed there and worked my way up to shift job, I'd be on until that place was reclaimed. Another kid out there had nine months seniority on me and he got a shift job, which was fine. I have no feelings about that. But they laid him off after they made him a shifter. On that lay off, that's when I didn't go back. I decided to go to school and get my journeyman's plumber license.

T: Okay. It sounds like you've pretty well covered the drilling and also the milling in some of your younger years when everything was booming around here.

B: I remember yellow cake at \$45.00 a pound. It dropped down to around \$10.00 at the end.

T: Did you feel like those were good days for our county and for the economy?

B: Oh boy. The mill really boosts the economy around Blanding.

T: It sure would be good if we could get some of these things going again for ourselves, wouldn't it?

B: You bet. It would be really nice.

T: Did you enjoy the years you spent at the mill?

B: One of my most favorite jobs was the Betty. I enjoyed working up there. I liked underground. Every time they let me go down there and load holes or run buggies, I loved that. I wanted to underground mine.

T: It seems like that's what all the guys say, they liked those days.

B: When you were underground, the day went by like nothing. Ten hours was like

five hours when you were underground. When you were on top, it was ten hours. But when you were underground, the day just flew by. I liked that part of it.

T: I appreciate you letting me do this interview. I'll furnish you with a transcript. If you have anything that you'd like to add, you can do so if you think it will be of a benefit.