

**--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: Donald Bayles

INTERVIEWER: LaVerne Tate

DATE: March 22, 2001

PLACE: Home of Donald Bayles, Blanding, Utah

TOPICS DISCUSSED: Mining and Trucking in San Juan County

TRANSCRIBER: Kimberly Hiatt

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T: When did you first start out there at Cottonwood?

B: It was in 1949, probably.

T: Do you know how old you were?

B: I was probably around 23, roughly.

T: Okay. Who were you working for?

B: At this particular time in Cottonwood, I worked for Merwin Shumway.

T: What was the name of the mine?

B: The mine I was working in was called a stinky mine. (Stinky Hole)

T: What was your job?

B: Well, at the time, I was mucking.

T: What kind of equipment did you use?

B: We used horse carts. The horses were very well trained. I was quite amazed at them. They'd go in those holes and they'd have a little carbide light on the front of the horse. He would see his way in there, but he wouldn't have to have that. Sometimes the light would go out. They'd go in the mines looking for the horse. There's no light to go by and in various steps of the mining, the horse would have certain places it was supposed to be. Well, being that they'd move around in two or three different places, he wasn't

exactly right in the place they had figured he was. But, he was in the wrong place to turn around, all backed up, ready for them. He didn't have any light on him. He could see pretty well. (laughter)

T: So how did you load the cart?

B: We'd load them with shovels.

T: Who else was working out there with you?

B: Well, I wasn't working there too long. I can't even remember who I was working with.

T: Okay. Did you do any mining after that period?

B: Well, I worked up in Northern Cottonwood.

T: Who was that for?

B: It was for Colorado C.O.G.. Our superintendent was E.E. Ernie. He was an archeologist, a mining surveyor. He was our boss who told us which ways to go and what he was planning on doing in the mine that day.

T: Do you know who else was working up there with you?

B: Hanson Bayles worked in there. We had various people there. I was trying to think of a young fellow who was there working with us. He was somebody new that moved in here into town. He was trying to get his own mining, but at the time he was working with us. Afterwards, he did finally get his own mine, got in there, made some mistakes and he was killed. I can't remember his name.

T: You may think of it and you can write it on the interview later. So by the time you got to this mine, what kind of equipment did you use?

B: We used shuttle cars there.

T: Rubber tired?

B: It was rubber tires, diesel.

T: And what was your job?

B: Well, I did everything. I made the powder, the caps and then I drilled and shot. I mucked part time. We didn't do so much mucking in there with shovel. We had a big front end loader. The ceilings had to be high for the loader.

T: What year was it when you started at this mine?

B: I'm not really sure. What makes me so undecided is the fact that in 1951 I bought an ore truck.

T: So this was before that?

B: Now this is the thing I don't know. I can't remember if it was before or after.

T: So then in 1951 you decided you were going to truck?

B: I thought that was the easiest job, just sitting in one of those ore trucks. (laughter)

T: And you bought your own truck?

B: Joe Nielson and I bought our own trucks. I hauled for Floyd Bleak's dad in Cottonwood. (Art Bleak). From there I was in Red Canyon and hauled for Elliot Redd.

T: Tell me a little bit more about your Studebaker truck. Did you buy it new?

B: Yes, I bought it new. I worked the tail end off it. I was hauling some ore in from Cottonwood and I generally made a round trip on two tanks. I had two tanks of fuel. I could generally go out to Durango or Naturita, whichever. Then I could come back, go to the mines, load up, come back to Blanding. From there I could gas up and make my round trip again.

T: About how much could you haul?

B: Colorado was kind of strict. They had a different weight load that you could haul with a half-ton truck. I was supposed to haul just a little over seven tons. I'd haul between seven and seven and a half tons. This one trip, it was kind of snowy and a little bit muddy going out to Cottonwood. I went out and loaded and came back. After I got out of Cottonwood, I ran out of gas. Well, it was very cold. I caught a ride into town. I tried to find means to go out there, but it was a little bit late, so I didn't. I left my truck there for a while. They weren't hurting for me, so I went and got a job mining for a little while and just left my truck there for a week or so. Then I went and got it and brought it in.

T: Can you remember where you were mining during that period?

B: It seems like I went back out to Cottonwood. After I got my check for mining, I added up the money I got from mining and the money I got from hauling ore. I found out I could mine and pay for my truck, making more money than I could when I ran my truck. So I wasn't too thrilled in the situation I had there. I hauled a few loads of ore from what they call The Whirlwind mine on the reservation. That crosses the San Juan river and goes clear down on the other side of Oljato and up one of those knolls there.

T: Did you usually have to load your own truck when you got out to the mines?

B: Yes. Down there I had to load my own truck by hand.

T: Did you always have a loader?

B: No. There was never a loader there. I hauled ore from down on Navajo One. It was for Bob Redd's wife's dad. They had someone to help me load.

T: Okay. Nancy Redd's dad.

B: Yes.

T: I must be thinking of a different Bob Redd. So you're not talking about Morgan Nielson?

B: Morgan Nielson, that's it.

T: When you were out to the mines, did most of them have bins or did you have to shovel it on?

B: At the Whirlwind mine and out there working for Nielson, we loaded by hand. I hauled ore from Mexican Hat which is Monument Valley One Mine. They hauled the ore up and would put the ore in a bin on the other side of the bridge. Then from there they'd have a little truck to take it across the bridge. They'd take it up on this side of Mexican Hat to a little creek. Then they'd take it on top. They had some little chutes they'd dump it in. When we'd come down and load it, we'd just open the chutes. They'd keep trucking it across the bridge there because the bridge wasn't made for too much weight.

T: Did you ever hire anybody to drive your truck?

B: Well, I got Hanson to drive it a little bit. He never drove it much. I did most of the driving on it. It kept me pretty busy.

T: Did you ever do any mining on your own? Or did you just work for other people?

B: I worked for other people all the time.

T: How many years did you haul out in that area with your truck?

B: Well, I hauled for about four years.

T: Did you sell the truck or did you keep it?

B: I had a chance to trade it to a guy that wanted a dump truck. I traded it to him for his

car.

T: Okay. You said you sometimes used someone to help you load.

B: At Red Canyon, I was hauling for Elliot Redd. He had a mine there that he'd just push up with a cat. He didn't do any drifting or anything like that. He'd go out there and push it up. Then we'd go out and load it by hand. I generally got somebody to go and help me. It was Eugene Posey. I'd bring him to town and Gene would say, "Well, where are you going to go?" I said, "I've got to take this to Durango." He said, "I'll go with you." I told him okay. So we'd ride to Durango and back. When he wouldn't go, Ora would go. Ora went with me quite a bit. In the meantime, I got to where I'd have a hard time driving late at night. My eyes would get sore. So Ora would drive the truck back. Devil Canyon was such a bad curve that vehicles wrecked on there a time or two. Ora was really nervous about that. She'd wake me up. I'd drive down Devil's Canyon and up the other side, then she'd bring it on in to town. Our little black dog would be along. (laughter)

T: This was when you were first married?

B: Yes. Then from the Whirlwind mine, we'd go down there and load by hand. On the way back, if we didn't get started too early (sometimes it would get quite late at night) we'd just sleep there on the other side of Mexican Hat. We'd just throw out our sleeping bags. We did have a big sleeping bag. We'd both sleep together. When the trucks would come by in the early morning, see us there sleeping. Boy they'd wave their hands and stick out their heads, make some kind of remark and away they'd would go. (laughter)

T: That's a good story. Well, I'm trying to collect a little bit about the truckers too so they'll have a picture about what went on out there. We haven't had a woman truck driver yet, I don't think.

B: Well, I'd haul from Navajo Mountain. I'll tell you something, from Green River down across there to Navajo Mountain, sometimes you get some of those sand holes that pretty near bury your truck. It was very, very slow. It took us an awful long time.

T: What happened if your truck got buried? Did you ever get stuck?

B: Well, I'll tell you. I was coming back and Uncle Lyman Bayles was with me. I was driving an F150. He was driving a two-ton truck. We were coming along up through there and he was going to outrun me on that dusty road. I had just as much power as he did, so I just laid it down into overdrive and just kept up with him, pulled ahead, and hit one of those chuckholes. Boy, it sent me off down through the boondocks. I just put my feet up against the steering and held it as solid as I could. I didn't go very far because the sand was very deep. (laughter) Uncle Lyman came back and saw me out there in the boondocks. When we went down, we fooled around here and there. He found a place where they had a bunch of steel cable, probably oil rig cable. I got in the truck and we

went back down there, got a big length of that steel cable, brought it back, hooked on to me and he pulled me right out, thank goodness. Of course, from there on we didn't have any trouble. We took that ore to Naturita.

T: So whose truck was the F51?

B: Well, the trucks that we were both driving were Vernon Rowley's.

T: This is Lyman Bayles, your uncle?

B: Who I was with, yes.

T: When we used to come up Comb in that old Studebaker, Oh Mercy! After we'd load up down there on the old Comb Dugway. Coming up the dugway, the truck would be doing all it could and then we'd have about a six-inch jump up. On up a little farther, you'd have another. From there on, if you made it to there, you were all right. My truck was new. I guess I had pretty close to seven and a half tons on it, which I didn't figure was too much. We came up that hill just a-zooming and shifting and shifting. We hit low gear and then we got up to that first jump up and the truck just gave out on me. The brakes were really good, so I could hold myself. Ora got out, put some blocks behind the wheels. I flogged it and went up the first jump up, but I couldn't make the second one. All I did was take four chunks of rock, maybe 10 pounds a piece off from that. That's all I took off. I made it on up. (laughter) Now this might be a story that would be hard to believe. But that's what it was. After we got up on top, we went back and picked the ore up.

T: The first time when you came to the first jump, you mentioned about flogging it. What does that mean?

B: Oh, I was just giving it all I could coming up there, winching the motor real fast and letting out the clutch fast.

T: Well, that's quite a story too. Some of those old hills had lots of curves.

B: Oh, Mercy! That hill right at the top, if you can remember, you kind of made a turn to the left which was really just a gradual turn. There was no problem there. From then on I hauled a little smaller load. I had a few troubles with it sometimes when I was driving somebody else's truck. It wasn't really all that bad.

T: How long did you drive for Vern Rowley?

B: It wasn't a year. I didn't drive for him for a year. Finally, I started driving the F2. He paid a little more money for the bigger truck.

T: How much could you haul with the F2 compared with the Studebaker?

B: It seems like it was right around nine tons or less.

T: Nine tons? So it didn't have a trailer behind it?

B: No, no trailer.

T: The roads wouldn't accommodate those?

B: No, they were too small for trailers. Just enough that you could pull yourself. Maybe you've heard about this from other truckers, LaVerne. You'd get down Comb and then you'd hit a canyon, really a snake canyon - just back and forth - sometimes you'd have to back up just to make those turns. They'd continuously work you from right to left, zigzagging up that canyon until you got up on Lime Ridge.

T: Okay, nobody has told us about that yet. Some of those roads weren't so good. So Devil's Canyon as it is right now wasn't the same?

B: No, it wasn't the same.

T: They had a lot of truck accidents on Devil's Canyon?

B: Yes. They had a few accidents there. If you look there really closely when you're going up Devil's Canyon, you can see a car that's off the road in the brush.

T: Quite some roads back in those days, right?

B: Oh boy, and when we'd go east of Monticello, we'd have bad roads there. They fixed that road once, it went to pieces. They fixed it again, it went to pieces. The third time they fixed it they finally put big cobblestones on the base of it and finally got it fixed where it would hold heavy loads.

T: So before they got it all fixed, you went through a lot of chuckholes to get to the mills?

B: There were quite a few chuckholes even going to Durango and Naturita. One time when I was coming down off the top of Hesperus, the road was black. It looked all right and I wasn't driving fast. The snow was on the side of the road. I got down to where the road was on the north side. There hadn't been a bit of sun hit that. Everything was just perfect. I was doing just about 15 MPH when all of a sudden with no reason at all, that truck of mine made a complete turn, stayed on the right hand side of the road and then took me all the way into Durango.

T: That woke you up for awhile!

B: Boy, I'll tell you, it was icy.

T: So the roads on that end quite often were a lot better. They had better highway?

B: Yes.

T: Did they often have more snow or ice?

B: I don't think Colorado was in the habit of pushing snow. I could be wrong. When I was driving out there, lots of times the roads would have snow on them until it melted. That wasn't always the case. There was snow that was sometimes deep enough that they'd put blowers on it and blow it as high as the telephone poles. This was just east of Monticello, Utah.

T: So when you were driving for V.C. Rowley, about how much did they pay you? Did they pay you by the day, by the load or by the mile?

B: Twelve dollars for that F2.

T: Twelve dollars per trip?

B: Yes. For the other truck it was about \$10.50.

T: That job took you about how many hours for the twelve dollars?

B: Here to Durango, it was pretty close to eight to eight and a half-hours.

T: And then back again?

B: Just back to here.

T: And then out to the mine was wherever you were going?

B: Out to the mines, when I was hauling for Bleak with my own truck, we would load out of a chute. At The Whirlwind mine, it was all shoveled on. We'd go up to a certain switchback, back up the next section, and go up the next layer and back up the next. So when I loaded up there, I wouldn't put a full load on. I would put what I figured I could come down real easy and my brakes hold. I'd have a little platform on the bottom. I'd unload it on the platform of rocks, stop, load it onto the truck and come home.

T: So you had to go up to the mine twice to get a full load?

B: Yes.

T: Well, you had to stay physically fit in those days didn't you?

B: They don't know what it means to drive a truck nowadays. It was an experience in its own right.

T: So after you drove for Vernon Rowley for a while, you didn't go back out to the mines?

B: After Vernon Rowley, I drove for a guy by the name of White from Delta or some place in there. I'd take the truck from Blanding out to Durango and back here.

T: What mines were you hauling out of?

B: Well, I don't know where they were hauling out from. Somebody else would drive the truck, pick it up and bring it here. I'd just go from here on out.

T: You had two shifts on it?

B: Yes, two different drivers on it.

T: Did that one pay a little better?

B: Well, about the same as Vernon.

T: So you would only get six dollars for your part of the shift?

B: Oh, no. From here I would get about 10 to 12 dollars a day.

T: Well, I appreciate you visiting with me and telling me a little bit about your experiences in that area. Ora said I could copy your pictures.

B: Yes, sure.

T: So, we'll probably have a picture of your fine truck for you. You were quite pleased with your Studebaker truck.

B: It was kind of an odd breed. The truckers didn't necessarily like the bracket, I guess, because it hadn't been proven as much as the Ford trucks. It had a very good spring set up on it. It got me by all right. Joe Nielson bought one the same time. He hauled from the same place.

T: I remember you saying, "we would haul," and I was going to ask you about that. So you and Joe Nielson each had a Studebaker truck, a new one.

B: Yes, we got them from the same place. Glen Skinner was driving his truck and sometimes we'd travel together but not very often.

T: Well, we'll furnish you a copy of this and then you can make corrections or additions or add names or whole paragraphs if you want to.