

--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: Darroll Young
INTERVIEWER: Corinne Roring
DATE: January 21, 2001
PLACE: Monticello, UT
TOPICS DISCUSSED: Cottonwood Mine roads
TRANSCRIBER: JoAnna Bethea

R: This is for real this time. This is Corinne Roring at Darroll Young's home in Monticello, UT January 2, 2001. His name is spelled Darroll Young. Darroll, they want to know to begin with, your birth date and the year married for some reason.

Y: I was born in 1911. On June 9, 1911, in Grayson, UT. That will give them a chuckle.

R: Born June what?

Y: June ninth.

R: June 9, 1911, in Grayson, UT. I'm glad to see you still say Grayson. When were you married Darroll?

Y: I was married on November the 22, 1938.

R: Gee, you don't even have to count backwards. I have to count backwards to see how long I've been married. Now I'm going to stop here for just a minute.

R: Darroll what they're interested in is the work on the mines and roads that were done on Cottonwood and on Elk Ridge and I know you did a lot of shuttle bugging with the Young buggy. Did you ever own a mine out there?

Y: No we never did own any mines.

R: Did you ever work a mine anywhere?

Y: Well not to be as a miner, no. I worked in mines with delivering our shuttle buggers to the mines and then instructing them on how to operate them, but I never did work in any mines as a miner.

R: What do you remember about the AEC drilling and road building program in Cottonwood or on Elk Ridge?

Y: Well, all I know is that they had done most of their drilling before I got involved in it if I remember correctly. But it's possible that they continued drilling because I knew... an awful lot of uranium mines, I'll tell you for sure. ... and then I guess I went to most of the mines in the San Juan County at one time or another. A lot of the mines in the front of Grand County.

***X: ...shooting there was kind of a holiday or something and anyway, I flew him down there in that plane I had and we landed out there on a little strip they had out there. He went in and shot a bunch so it would clean it out during the holiday, when there wasn't any work in there.

Y: Now what road did you have to go over to get there?

X: Well they had a little strip where they cut the sage brush off right along the highway, and we lit right in there.

R: So who did you fly down there (Rule/name)?

X: Russ Black.

R: Oh, Russ Black.

Y: You flew Russ down there did you?

X: Yes.

Y: I flew a plane and landed on that strip there right by Fry. Was that where it was where you landed?

X: Well it seems like it was closer to Happy Jack than to Fry.

R: I'm just making some notes as we go along here.

X: ...That stuff with his teeth huh? You know...

R: The caps?

X: No, they had to crimp the cap onto the fuse.

R: And that was enough for you, huh?

X: Yes.

***Y: ...Jones too and their mine, we thought we had killed Keith but it turned out we didn't. We thought we could have killed him, in other words what happened could have killed him.

R: So at this time when you went into some of these mines, out on Elk Ridge in the mountains, what about this one when you went into Curtis' then and Keith's. Just go ahead and tell us what happened in that mine.

Y: You mean you want me to tell about what happened?

R: Yes, just tell what happened back there with Keith and Curtis.

Y: Will that have anything to do with...

R: Oh, we will get all of this, we have a list here and we will go back. While you're thinking about it go into what happened with Keith and Curtis that night.

Y: Well I'll tell you about that. I traveled on the same road to get to the mine of Curtis and Keith as the Cottonwood road that we're talking about. And then I turned west and went into Brushy Basin and then on down into Cottonwood canyon and across to their mine that they had over at... their mine was in one of the moss bags formations over by Fry canyon. And they had this mine that had an incline shaft down into the working area. They had two young buggies down in the bottom of the mine that hauled the ore from the drifts in the mine over to the bottom of the mine over to the railroad where they hoisted it out.

In their blasting procedure they had started using electric caps instead of the fuses. Instead of fuses they were using electric caps, electric blasting detonators. I didn't know how they were doing it at the time, but what they were doing was that they had a power plant up on the surface and they had a power line down into the bottom of this incline shaft with a railroad track on it. They had some electric lights down there to help with the servicing of the shuttle buggies and their mechanical loader that they had. And what they were doing was after they started using the electric blasting caps, they would signal the hoist operator up on the surface to shut the power plant off. So they would shut the power plant off and they would hook the electricity into the circuits for the blasting caps. And then they would tell them to turn the power plant back on. And when they did that, of course all the blasts would go off.

So we were working down at the bottom there, working on the two shuttle cars we had in there. It came quitting time and the miners quit to go out and they had already signaled the hoist man to shut off the power and we were working with the little carbide lights in the front. When we would go away from the base at the bottom of the incline shaft we would have to have the carbide light to see our way. Keith was loading the blast holes while Curtis and I worked on the shuttle buggies. Keith came out to where we were at the bottom of the mine and tested his circuitry. He said to Curtis, "I don't have a circuit, I have to go back to the face and see what I've done. I got to make a connection somewhere." And so he went back to the face, and when he went back to the face, as these miners went out, some of these miners got the idea that...they were Navajo miners and they may not have understood all of the English words that were spoken as they went

out. When they got to the top of the incline, it took them quite awhile to climb out, they thought they were supposed to tell the hoist operator to turn the power back on. Well, Keith had gone back to check his stuff and he had been gone quite a few minutes, and all at once the lights flashed on and the blasts started going off. And Keith hadn't gotten back to where we were so when the blasts started to go off, it blew our carbide lights out and everything was pitch black. The electric lights didn't come on at the base, but these blasting shots were on a delayed basis. One blast went off and then later another went off, and then another would go off, and then another would go off. And all this time we were trying to get our carbide lights to burn again. Just enough time from when our lights went out to the time they came back on for you to run the flint to turn the carbide light back on. We would just get the light on and another blast would go off and blow it out again. Curtis was calling, "Keith, Keith", but nobody would answer. Finally the blasts quite going off and Curtis got his light to burn so he could run down the drift, the tunnel there, and so he ran down the drifted tunnel toward... the tunnel was crooked, it went down a ways and then made a turn. Keith had found his mistake on his wiring and had corrected it and got back out so he was just around the first corner when they started to go off. So the two of them came back out to where I was at the base of the shaft and explained to me what they were doing, and then they explained to me that they were firing the electric caps by using the electricity of the power plant. So they asked what they could do and I said, "Well man alive if that's what you're doing the thing you should do is buy you a blasting machine." I said, "You can buy one of those for around a hundred dollars, a hundred and ten or twenty dollars, then use the blasting machine to fire all your blasts and then you'll be safe." So they had me order them a blasting machine when I got back into town. So the next week they went to work down there they took the blasting machine with them and used the blasting machine from that time on. Instead of firing their blasts with electric power they used the blasting machine.

R: What was the name of their mine?

Y: They called that mine, the Gismo. That was in the Gismo mine. Then they had another mine a little ways from that that went from the other side of the mountain back into the Gismo mine, under there, and beyond the Gismo mine where they had another drift that they ran in there. And they always used the blasting machine for their blasting after that excitement.

R: That was one of the successful mines in the county wasn't it?

Y: Yes, the Gismo, and then the other one was called, I guess it was called Gismo II. I don't remember what they called the second mine.

R: I remember a Blue Lizard name.

Y: The Blue Lizard was (Pep Redd's) mine.

R: Darroll, where the Cottonwood mines are, right down in Cottonwood wash there, the old Kimmerle mines you know.

Y: Yes.

R: When the AEC came into that area, didn't they start building all these roads into these mines and open up this whole country?

Y: Well, I think that the Shumway's had built road into their mines and were mining those mines before the AEC started to drill so much. And the roads were already built before the AEC started their drilling programs.

R: So the roads have been there for as long as you can remember.

Y: That road's been there since before I was born. The road was there because to get up on the Elk Ridge... when I was just a boy my father did a lot of freighting. To freight rock salt into the mines or into the cattle (peva) for the cattle owners who operated their cattle on the Elk Ridge, my father would have to go south of Blanding, beyond Three Cedars, and go down by Black Mesa, across Big West Water canyon and what they called The Big Hole, into Cottonwood canyon, travel up Cottonwood canyon to where the road took out to go up across the slick rocks to the milk ranch and to Kigalia ranger station. So that was long years before the mining started in; that road was there. It went a little different way but when you go down just south of Blanding and cross over through what they call the Big Hole and through the lower end of Brushy Basin, into Cottonwood canyon, then you would have had to travel back up the canyon. When you would go that way to get on Elk Ridge, that was pretty close to where they built the mill to get the vanadium, the vanadium mill was built.

I think that road was established there and I think that road was right where it is right now where you leave the road between Blanding and Bluff at Shirt Tail corner. But if I remember correctly, we had to go down into Three Cedars before we could get over into Cottonwood at the time. So there must have been a road going across the north side of Black Mesa right down at the Three Cedars area that went over across the West Water canyon and across the Brushy Basin outlet into Cottonwood. And then went up Cottonwood there to where you could.... So that road existed there since before World War I.

R: So do you remember going right west of Blanding to go out toward the mountain, so they could out on Kigalia and through there?

Y: Well I remember when the front of that road was built. My father helped build that road.

R: That's the only road that I remember. Where you could go directly...

Y: But that came long after what I'm talking about. The first time that road was built to avoid going clear down to Three Cedars and crossing over into Cottonwood. That road went over cross Big West Water canyon then went across the west mesa and went into

Brushy Basin. It crossed Brushy Basin and went down and around in Cottonwood canyon then it went back up to the same place to turn to go up across the slick rock area.

R: So your father built that road?

Y: My father built the road through Brushy Basin canyon. Now some other people built the road across the West Mesa area there that is on the West Side of Big West Water canyon. When I was in the sixth grade of school, which would have been about...no I wasn't in the sixth grade of school, I was in the third grade of school. They built the road down into West Water canyon, and I think Dave Black built that road. The school had a field day one day and all the school kids went out and worked on the road to get that road built across West Water canyon and over onto the mesa. They didn't go in down off the mesa into Brushy Basin until sometime in nineteen twenty-two. In about nineteen twenty-two I would have been about eleven or twelve years old of age. I think my dad built that road through Brushy Basin, I think in the year of nineteen twenty-one or twenty-two, nineteen twenty-two probably.

R: What would having a field day for a high school kid... what could they do out there?

Y: It wasn't high school kids, it was every kid in school clear down to the first grade. I was only in first or second grade and I helped roll rocks out of the road that we were building. We built that road down into Big West Water canyon and I helped roll rocks out of the road over the hills. I helped build that road and I was probably only ten or eleven years old.

R: They started early teaching you about community projects didn't they?

Y: We had a big field day for the entire school. In those days I don't think they had a high school in Blanding yet. They had just up to the eighth grade. So the schools went on a field day out there to help and we had kids all over that mountain side rolling rocks down out of the way.

So that road has been there a long time, that road and the road that went out from... I think that the Shumway folks built a road from that road that you're talking about that goes west of Blanding. I think they built a place from there where they could go down to their mines from that road. And also it was built so that you could come on that other road that leaves the road from Shirt tale corner. That road went over and into Cottonwood canyon and then traveled up the canyon until it came to the place where the road turned west to go over into the Butler and then down into the Comb that was made some time shortly after World War II was over.

R: Now that was made by the AEC wasn't it?

Y: Well I think so. All I know is that my brother Bill rode in an airplane to help them chose a route. They flew in an airplane and he pointed out from the airplane where they could go out and go down along the cliff side there into Comb wash. He flew in an

airplane to help, I guess it was the government people, it must have been the AEC. Did the AEC build the road down into the Comb Wash?

R: That's the way I understood it. That old Comb Wash going down there was built by the AEC.

Y: Well, whoever built that road...that road was built after these other roads had already been in existence for many years. And on that road, where the road turns and goes west again, you could go right on up Cottonwood canyon to a little place where you had to cross the Cottonwood creek and go over...on the second crossing on the Cottonwood creek is where I remember where the mill sight was. So after that road was built they could go that way and get into the mill as well as coming down the other way.

R: Darroll, what do you know about the VCA. Do you remember the VCA when they were out here?

Y: The VCA was out of business when I came to Monticello in... the VCA was still operating a mill over in Durango. But they had closed the mills over this way. The VCA, I don't know whether any of their mills... they were operated for the Uranium program or not. They'd been entirely involved in processing Vanadium. But I think that they did get into the early...but I had never had any particular dealing directly with the VCA.

R: So after you started Young's machine, and built you buggy, the Young buggy, then you went around in all of these mines just to test them or to put them in operation or what?

Y: We'd deliver our buggies to the mines, yes. And we'd deliver them over these roads that already existed and that began in nineteen fifty-three. Now I was to these... this picture that's here was taken in the early months of nineteen fifty-three. That picture was taken in nineteen fifty-three.

R: Well that was swinging high out there wasn't it?

Y: That's right. And that's in the... these portals in this picture are the Shumway's portals and that black horse was the Shumway boys operation.

R: Then Darroll, in the Young's machine then you sold most of these mines their supplies didn't you?

Y: Well we sold supplies to a lot of the mines, yes we did.

R: The dynamite too?

Y: No, we didn't sell dynamite. Well we did sell dynamite for a short time but after the roads were built a little bit better, why the powder companies quit having a middleman. They started taking the powder right to the mines.

R: But you did sell fuses and the picks and the drills?

Y: We sold picks and drills and drill steel and the shovels and stuff like that.

R: How much would a typical mineworker make at that time? Do you remember?

Y: Back in those days miners were getting about two dollars and a half or three dollars an hour.

R: Then the muckers and blasters, did they get any more?

Y: I don't really know, but I know that they were being paid by the hour, all of them. Because we were having to pay people that worked in our shops approximately the same wages that the miners were paying them. And then in nineteen fifty-three, I think we started out paying some of our people two and a half an hour and then it got up to three dollars an hour and a little more and finally it got up to three and a half an hour.

Tell you a little story while I'm at it now. I had a man who came to the United States from Holland; Airy Crack was his name. He worked for us out at our shop. He finally decided to leave us and go over to Denver to work for a company over there because he could get paid more money then we were able to pay him. The following year after he went over there, I went to Denver to show one of our buggies at the Denver mining show, the western mining show that was held in Denver every year. And Airy was living in one of the suburbs of Denver and so I thought I would call airy up. I called him up and visited with him about his job over there, what he was doing. I was interested in knowing what kind of... he was working in a factory and I was interested in knowing what kind of a factory he was...what he was actually making, what he was working to help manufacture. And I said, "What are you making Airy?" And he said, "Four fifty and hour". And he went over there because he was getting more money than what we were able to pay him over here. And so he left our employment to go get a job where he could earn four fifty and hour.

I had to explain to him that, no I'm not interested in how much money you earning, I'm interested in what you are making. And he said, "Well I'm working for a company that manufactures rock drills for the mines. As the lead welder," he said, "I'm the lead welder for this manufacturing company that makes drills for..."

R: That you probably bought.

Y: Well, we probably...he was probably working for the Gardner Denver company that made the Gardner Denver blasting, air drills that the miners used.

R: Did you ever have any interaction with the Ute's in any way? You know with your association with mining?

Y: No we didn't have any real reaction except we'd work on our automobiles and things like that as individual people but as a tribal business we didn't have any reactions that way. We hired some Navajo welders that worked in our shops and they still do work in the shops out there. We hired (Hedre Benally), was one of the first Navajo's we hired, and he still works there.

R: I want to ask you, out in Cottonwood do you know whether the creek has been realigned to get the ore bodies, ever? Where, and is it still in its manmade channel?

Y: I don't know of any places where the creek was really altered, particularly to accommodate anything that anyone was doing, unless it was right where the old mill sight was. They might have altered the creek a little bit there. Because there was quite a sand dune there, an area where sand had accumulated from the grinding process. They might have altered the creek right where the sight where the vanadium mill was located.

R: Did you ever stay in Cottonwood or on the Elk Ridge, you or your family?

Y: I never stayed there, no. You mean to live?

R: Yes.

Y: I stayed overnight at some of the mines out there but I never... at one of the mines that was down on the Long point, but I never did live out there.

R: How did the mining change the businesses in Monticello and Blanding and all over?

Y: Well the mining made us all more prosperous. Because we... I guess all the other people catered to the mines. The businesses like motor parts was established after sometime in the nineteen fifties, maybe the early sixties. Motor parts were established and Van Palmer established a hardware store to cater to the mines down at Blanding. That was probably nineteen fifty-four or fifty-five. Café's and things like that were increased in both towns to a certain extent. And the people, the communities, the people that worked at the mines, their income was increased. In fact, the mining industry was a big boom to San Juan County.

R: Wasn't it Ed Hall, he and Sonny Baley that started the mines supply?

Y: That's right.

R: And there was a plumbing shop here at one time in Monticello. Lee Ritchey's...

Y: Lee Ritchey had a plumbing shop but...

R: Hardware shop wasn't it?

Y: I don't know whether he had a store in connection with it or not. All of those things were before my time here. I didn't know anything about Monticello particularly until nineteen fifty-three when I came here. Other than the fact that I knew about Monticello when I was younger, when I was a high school boy.

R: But your business came about because of the mining.

Y: My business was established entirely because of the mining.

R: When I was here, I worked down at the mill until fifty-three. It was the lifeblood of this county, Blanding and Monticello.

Y: That's right.

R: When you employ a hundred and fifty to two hundred people in an area, even into Dove Creek... we need it again today don't we?

Y: We sure do. The thing that's important is that a mill was established here in Monticello and of course that created a lot of employment of people, which was beneficial. Not only that but there were a few, like ourselves, motor parts were established and the Young Machine Company was established. The Frost's started the slaughterhouse; the slaughter plant was started. All as a result of the mining industry. The mining industry was what brought it all about. There is no question about that.

R: Another question (Resesta) said, how has the techniques in mining equipment changed through time, and how you kept up with the new technology. I think that in your article in Blue Mountain Shadows, you absolutely were the leader.

Y: Young's Machine Company was a pioneer in the trackless mining system. Mining with rubber tired equipment, we were one of the earliest people to advocate using rubber tired equipment instead of tracks and locomotives. We could be considered one of the earliest pioneers of the trackless mining industry, which is now accepted as the most satisfactory system of mining throughout the world.

R: Well and labor...

Y: But now they go to these huge big machines that carry ten tons scoop full of material...ten or twelve tons at a time in a scoopmobile, that will pick up and carry ten or twelve tons...they go pick it up and carry it out and dump it into a truck that can hold two or three scoops and then the truck takes it on out. We pioneered that system.

R: And Darroll you kept improving it all the time didn't you?

Y: Oh yes we did. We started out by building machines that were only four feet wide and would carry one and a half tons of uranium ore. Within a few years time we were building machines that would carry ten tons of uranium ore. The whole thing grew rapidly. It just sky rocketed in other words. We not only built machines for the local uranium mining industry, we built machines here in Monticello that we shipped over seas to foreign nations. And sent machines into Canada. We had machines that were hauling ten tons of hard rock ore in the Bunker Hill mine in Idaho. We had a big fleet of them that we built in Monticello and took up there. So we were using... for all of the mining in San Juan County we were using these roads to take our equipment and the supplies that went with our equipment. Over all these roads that lead to any of these mines that might have been mined in San Juan County. We utilized those roads tremendously.

R: When you give credit to the mining industry, the boom of vanadium and uranium sent the AEC that came in and just opened up this whole county didn't they? With the roads that would not have been really feasible and possible for individuals to make. But that is what the uranium industry has left us, this gigantic (politudes) of roads all over this county.

Y: I had an experience one time going with the city counsel to meet the Secretary of the Interior who had floated down the Colorado river, and then came up through Indian creek. And we met them at Indian creek and the Secretary of the Interior at the time was...

R: Was it (Udall)?

Y: (Udall), and he had a man with him who was of an environmentalist type person... he said we've got to...the city counsel met them at the Dug Out Ranch. And as we visited, this man spoke up and said, "We've got to do something to stop the building of these roads all over these hills." He said, "that's terrific, we've got to stop that. We can't have roads like that being built on these teleslopes of these beautiful mountains and canyons." And I spoke up and I said, "These roads across these teleslopes have been the thing that has been a God send to the people of this country. It has changed our ability to travel from using a saddle horse and a pack horse to carry our bedrolls, to being able to go someplace in a pickup truck once in awhile. To accomplish what we need to do." And I said, "Besides that, this whole country is a country of high rascality. When water falls on these rock ledges it falls straight down." He had commented about the roads changing the rainfall pattern. And I said, "What's going to hurt if the water that falls on these rock ledges that runs straight down and goes straight down these teleslopes, if it gets in the little ditch by the side of that road and runs around a little ways before it does go straight on down." I said, "What's that going to hurt? It will just conserve the water a little bit wouldn't it?" And I didn't get a very good reception from this man, but I said, "These roads have been the God send to this country. They've been the thing that has made it possible for us to realize the potential of this area, are these roads."

R: And they're still important to this area aren't they?

Y: The roads are still important to this area and this idea that we have to close all these roads is a far fetched idea because, if somebody wants to walk somewhere they can walk in plenty of places anywhere right now. And those others that can't walk any more to go to these places, we need to be able to ride to what ever we want to do.

R: Well to make a living?

Y: Yes, especially to make a living.

R: So you don't feel like the landscape has been changed... altered very little by all these roads that were made?

Y: The landscape hasn't been altered enough by all these roads, that I can see any difference in the vegetation patterns that I knew when I was a child and when I was a young man to what I can see now when I go out on them. I said, "In fact, some of the places have improved. Even though the roads are there they've improved over what I can remember when I was young."

So this idea of having to close the roads to preserve our country for the future generation is hogwash as far as I'm concerned.

R: Well Darroll this covers about most of the questions to where you would come into this mining deal. You don't need to know about what you ate out in the field and all this stuff because you weren't actually down the hole in there mining. So maybe I'll let them transcribe this and then come back and see if they have some more questions on it.

Y: That would be fine.

R: Can you think of any more mining experiences that you had back with these vines anywhere?

Y: I can think of some of them and I'm going to put them in the... I'm going to write some of them up and I guess that will be what I could do and make them available to you after I get them written up.

R: Well don't forget.

Y: I've already written up a lot of experiences. And I've written up quite a comprehensive history of the Young's Machine Company. But I'm kind of negotiating with my nephews out there as to what we'll do with it. I don't know yet what will happen. I've written up a lot of these things and that story about Keith and Curtis is included in one of those writings.

R: O.K. Well there are a lot of them. You're full of it Darroll just keep writing.

R: This is the end of the interview with Darroll Young, for this one tape anyway, we'll probably be back later.