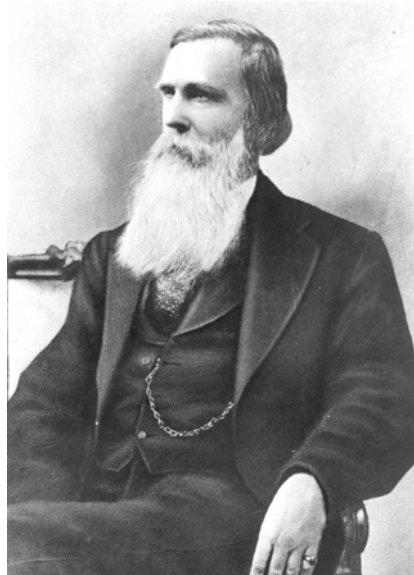


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**A Look Along the Uinta Mountain's Carter Road:
A History, the Development of the Region, and Current Research**

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Abstract:

Vernal, in northeastern Utah, is always living in the past, but this is not a new phenomenon: as the frontier was vanishing and outposts were being dismantled- Fort Thornburgh was established.

The Carter road began as a military supply road from the Oregon Trail route in southwestern Wyoming, over the Uintah Mountains, down the Uintah Basin. The establishment of Fort Thornburgh was to assist American settlers against aggressive native attacks.

The Carter road occupied a small length of time, less than three years. In most places it is overgrown, trail markers are few and far between. It winds up hills, through marshes, and disappears in some spots.

Yet, despite having existed for a short time, the Carter road has a tremendous amount of material culture. This report will discuss the reasons why the Carter Road is so visible historically and archaeologically.

The Uniqueness of the Uinta Mountains and the Carter Road's Place.

The Uinta Mountains are a unique mountain range within the wider Rocky Mountains. Clay Johnson and Byron Loosle describe the uniqueness of the range by stating,

“Historically and prehistorically, the high peaks, deep canyons and dense forests of the east-west trending Uinta Mountains have affected weather patterns, distribution of flora and fauna, occupation and north-south travel. The Uintas are prominent as a border between physiographic and floristic regions, climatic regions, and cultural regions.”
(Johnson and Loosle; 2002, 1)

The Uinta Mountains and the Uinta Basin are surrounded by the Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming state boundaries. This has made policies and decisions in the region disjointed at times. In addition to multiple state policies the area has various land ownership administrations such as the Ashley National Forest, Wasatch Cache National Forest, Uinta National Forest, BLM, Uintah Ute Reservation, State Lands, corporate owners, private owners, and Rail Road Land grants. The major cities in the area are Vernal, Utah in Uintah County and Rock Springs, Wyoming in Sweetwater County. These cities are linked by a two hour drive down US 191 to the east of Flaming Gorge Reservoir or Utah 44/Wyo 530 to the west. The major highways through the region are Interstate 80 running in Wyoming and US 40, south of the mountains in Utah. Observing the area by modern standards it is still relatively isolated, however like most regions in the United States west, development in the Uinta Basin and Uinta Mountains has been dramatic over the last 100 years. The Carter Road was the first road over the Uinta Mountains and much of the region's development owes its prosperity to this seemingly abandoned cultural feature. This report will highlight the Carter Road's history; it will discuss the road's impact on the region's

development, and describe the recent archaeology methods, research, and results in uncovering this long lost route.

The Road's History.

Most students of American History recognize the importance of the Oregon Trail. The Oregon Trail was surveyed by the mountain men who followed the native trails, which followed the game trails. The wagon road led to the Rail Road routes and later interstate corridors. Along the Oregon Trail were various supply forts that operated as islands of civilization for travelers and natives. The Oregon Trail in Southwestern Wyoming had Fort Bridger as a supply fort and gathering center. It was established in 1859. Fred R. Gowans and Eugene E. Campbell write, "Bridger was an annual meeting place for Chief Washakee and the Shoshones from the Wind River in the North and the Utes from the White River, South."(Gowan and Campbell: 1975, 127)

The principle figure in the development of the Carter Road and the success of Fort Bridger was Judge William Alexander Carter. He was known as Mr. Ft. Bridger because of his influence. (Gowans and Campbell: 1975, 145) Carter was a veteran in the Seminole War where he met a lifelong friend who became General Harney. Harney secured Carter's appointment to Ft. Bridger. Michael W. Johnson writes,

"Harney had used his influence to get Carter appointed as a sutler to the army's Utah expedition. Sutlers were officially appointed by the federal government and attached to military organizations as traders and merchants. Large sums could be made purveying merchandise to soldiers, and such appointments were highly prized... A man of culture who carried himself as a southern gentleman, William A. Carter soon became Green River County's most prominent citizen. His wife, Mary, was certainly the area's most celebrated woman, entertaining guests in a grand manner. In addition to his work as a sutler, Carter also became a merchant, rancher, postmaster, justice of the peace, and probate judge. He was a gracious host to military men and travelers, and his house was known for its Steinway piano and impressive library." (Johnson M: 1998, 51)

An interesting note to Judge Carter's judicial appointment is that he wasn't a lawyer or schooled as one.

"Although he had no training as a lawyer, Judge Carter was regarded highly by the military leaders who found him to be a man of great honesty, integrity, and sound judgment. When Judge Burr resigned from the position of justice of the peace in 1858, Carter was assigned to that position. Governor Cumming named him probate judge in 1858 and he was reappointed to that office year after year without a break until Fort Bridger became part of the newly organized Wyoming Territory. This position was rather

unique in Utah territory, because two early federal judges, unhappy with their experience with the Mormon hierarchy, left the region, and the territorial legislature had given criminal and civil powers to the probate courts.” (Gowan and Campbell: 1975, 151)

It is important to note that it was Judge Carter’s influence that determined the southwestern corner of Wyoming would not fall under Utah’s ownership. Carter’s influence would have been confined to the northern edge of the Uinta Mountains had an event not happened in Colorado that led to the need for a military supply road into the Uinta Basin. The event was called the Meeker Massacre. “Following a Colorado uprising by the White River Utes in 1879, in which Agent Nathan C. Meeker and seven agency employees were killed, the Secretary of the Interior ordered the removal of the White River Utes and the Uncompaghres to the Uintah Reservation in northern Utah.”(Williams: 1976, 1)

There was a need to establish a new military fort in the Uinta Basin area with the hostile removal of the White River and Uncompaghres Utes. Gary Lee Walker writes in his Dissertation, that the Secretary of Interior, S. J. Kirkwood concurred with J.J. Russell, the Ute Commissioner that a military force should be in place to keep an eye on the Utes. Russell wrote to the Secretary and asked for more troops to be placed at new ‘Fort Thornburgh’ to protect the 500 to 600 white settlers in the region. (Walker: 1992, 41)

The newly established fort in 1881 needed to be supplied. The military and suppliers started a search for the best route by which to supply Ft. Thornburgh. Judge Carter had much to gain by moving his own supplies quickly from Bridger, only miles away from the Union Pacific Rail Road at Carter Station to Thornburgh. Gary Lee Walker writes,

“When the new site was selected at the mouth of Ashley Creek, a new route was needed for the transport of supplies to the new installation. Fort Bridger, which has been abandoned since May 23, 1878, was ordered reoccupied in 1880 because of the Ute problem in Colorado and governmental consideration of removing them to Northeastern Utah. An influential and long-time resident of the Fort Bridger area, Judge William A. Carter, successfully influenced General Crook of ‘the practicability of making a wagon road across the Uinta Mountains to the proposed site of the new post, by a shorter and more direct route than the one then in use by way of Park City, Utah.’” (Walker: 1992, 91-92)

Carter suggested one of two routes over the eastern portion of the Uinta Mountains. Both routes had been native trails used by the Uinta Utes. A. R. Standing writes in his Carter Road article in Utah Historical Quarterly, “No one knows the road’s beginning. Originally, the route was used as a trail by Indians before white men entered the country. The first known use of any portion of the route was a wagon road began in 1865 when Major Noyes Baldwin, who was then

commanding officer at Fort Bridger, opened a road from Ft. Bridger to Browns Park or Browns Hole.” (Standing: 1967, 259)

The path for supplies was a contentious issue and there was competition for the government contracts. Standing writes,

“There was much rivalry between towns in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming for the location of the road to the new military post, but Fort Bridger was favored by distance...Judge Carter undertook, at his own expense, the work of making a passable road along the route designated, expecting that it would be adopted and improved later by the War Department. The winter of 1881-1882 was approaching; there was no time for surveys; streams had to be bridged; marshes corduroyed; a roadway cleared through timbered sections; and two long and difficult dug-ways were to be constructed. One of the latter, a half-mile long ran from Sand Canyon to the top of the mountain near Lodgepole Park; and the other two miles long, climbed the main range between Mammoth Springs and Summit Park. (Standing: 1967, 260)

The construction of the road went comparatively fast for having hardly any survey. Doris Karren Burton write in her book A History of Uintah County,

“Judge Carter of Ft. Bridger undertook to construct a passable road at his own expense in anticipation of the government later accepting and improving the road. By the late fall of 1881 Carter had succeeded in constructing a road following the Lodge Pole Trail across the mountains. Judge Carter became ill with pleurisy while at his camp on the creek that now bears his name and died shortly afterward at his home in Ft. Bridger.” (Burton: 1996, 194)

Carter received his contract with the War Department and his son Willie Carter assumed the responsibility of finishing what William began. The lack of survey and the impromptu construction of the road proved to be problematic on the first freighting over the Road. It took three weeks with heavy mud, snow and rain filled ravines, and many other physically challenging experiences. In the summer of 1882, Lt. Young was sent with a detachment of men to improve the road. They created corduroy over swamps, removed large boulders, and improved the speed of travel considerably. (Standing: 1967, 261)

Fort Thornburgh was abandoned in 1883 after only two years of occupation. The question that begs answering is why would Carter and others spend so much time constructing a road over the Uinta Mountains to supply such a short lived fort?

Walker writes that the abandonment of Thornburgh wasn't expected by folks in the region.

“The status of Ft. Thornburgh as a permanent military installation did not seem to be a serious question in the minds of the public. A month before the arrival of Captain Hawking in the Uintah Basin, The Daily Tribune, reporting on the mission of the Ute Commission and the removal of the Colorado Utes to Utah, indicated that ‘the military

post will be established at the mouth of White River and will be a permanent fort.' The same newspaper was still reporting that Thornburgh would be permanent as late as July, 1883, just three months before the post was abandoned. When the move was made from the first site to the Ashley Creek area, The Deseret News noted that 'preparations are being made to erect a substantial fort.'" (Walker: 1992, 50)

Despite the abandonment of Thornburgh and the death of the region's most influential magistrate, the road was a new transportation link that opened up the isolated Uinta Mountains and Basin for further development.

The Carter Road's Impact on Development.

The famous line 'If you build it they will come,' describes the inevitable situation that occurs when lines of transportation are created into isolated areas. Walker writes that the settlers in the Uinta Basin were encouraged by the prospect of a military fort not only for protection but also the economic boom that would result. (Walker: 1992, 45)

The Carter Road was built for the purpose of supply to Thornburgh; however the abandonment of the fort led to the second phase of the road's usefulness in the form of commercial transport into and out of the region. Standing writes,

"Impracticable and nearly impassible as the road was, the ranchers in western Daggett County were grateful for it. While they couldn't use it to haul heavy loads, they could at least get over the mountains to Ashley Valley in a buckboard to get honey and apples or to take a sack or so of grain to the grist mill to be ground into flour...Daggett County had again changed its allegiance, being shifted from a part of Summit County to Uinta county, with Ashley, or after 1885, the brand new, little town of Vernal as their county seat. So to Ashley or Vernal everyone had to go to file on their land, pay taxes, get married, serve or answer a writ, or any other official business. For this purpose, the old military road came in very handy." (Standing: 1967, 262)

The military road and the access it allowed to the rail road in the north spurred on great economic opportunities for the region. One of the biggest benefactors of the Carter Military Road was the Dyer Mine. Mainly copper, but also gold, silver, and other deposits were located and shipped over the road. Estimates vary, but approximately 1 million dollars of ore flowed out of the mine during the 1880s. Later a smelter at Anderson creek was added that increased employment for settlers. Sleighs were used to keep the ore flowing year round. (Standing: 1967, 264)

In addition to economic growth the road provided a valuable communication link to the outside world. Burton writes, "The first technological communication with the outside world was made possible when the government moved Fort Thornburgh from Ouray to Ashley Valley and

built a telegraph line from Fort Thornburgh to Fort Bridger in the summer of 1882. Nearly one hundred miles of copper wire were used in the installation. The route followed the Fort Thornburgh-Carter road.” (Burton: 1998, 213)

The growing population and first automobiles early in the twentieth century began to require modern graded roads. The residents of Uinta and Daggett County needed to be linked to the north and in 1926 a new road replaced the Carter Military Road as the primary route from Vernal to Manila and then on to Rock Springs. (M. Johnson: 1998, 236-237)

There is no doubt that the Carter Road was a catalyst for the present development of the region. Communication and commerce provided by the road enabled employment and population growth. Most accounts of the Carter Military Road’s usefulness end around 1926; however recent archaeological investigations show that the road has been in use continually in one form or another.

Current Research and Results.

The Carter Road currently has segments that are in use as trails, ATV, and two track access routes. The road has segments that have completely disappeared from existence. Recreational uses have created disturbance to the historic road and some former surveys have been incomplete or inaccurate resulting in lost sections. The advance of GPS data collection techniques has practical applications for the Carter Road in site mapping and tracing its exact location. There is an added immediacy for current research because ground cover in sections is obscuring the road. Every year that passes, more sections disappear from the physical terrain.

The Ashley National Forest Heritage Department and Forest Archaeologist Dr. Byron Loosle has conducted investigations on the Carter Road in the 2004 and 2005 field seasons with their Passport in Time program. The Passport in Time program is a national program that enables volunteers to work on project with federal cultural resource managers.

The 2004 Carter Road Passport in Time called upon volunteers to conduct a metal detecting survey in two areas along with a formal excavation. The two areas chosen were the Saw Mill site at Government Park conducted by myself and the Dodds Hollow Camp conducted by Alissa Leavitt. The formal excavation at the Saw Mill site focused on excavating an area with a rectangular rock outline. The formal excavation was conducted by Brian Storm and showed that the area was a milled wood structure with a rock foundation. A distinct pattern of square nails and milled wood were recorded close to the surface. Materials were located that pointed to a structure built for residential purposes.

A secondary survey was conducted surrounding the formal excavation using 10 metal detectors. The metal detectors scoured the area and were able to cover a large area. Military buttons, shells, ammunition rounds, and other items were uncovered along with a pattern showing separation of work areas and residences was visible through material culture. The primary result

of this survey was an accurate map with a PDOP value of 6 or lower that detailed a large number of artifacts over vast area and their relationships.

The Dodds Hollow investigation used the metal detecting method without a concurrent formal excavation. The objectives and results were similar to the Government Park Sawmill with a detailed map being the largest benefit.

The 2005 Carter Road Passport in Time project concentrated on two different areas. The areas investigated were at Taylor Mountain, from the forest boundary to the Taylor Mountain Pass and the Trout Slope Park area.

The Taylor Mountain area's objective was to identify the many routes taken by travelers on the road. The area from the pass above to the forest boundary below spreads out onto a sagebrush hillside. A spider web pattern of routes exist. The survey crew of 20 metal detectors led by myself was used to identify the routes. The area has a line of telegraph poles, approximately 18, that traverse the up the hill in haunting reference of the Carter Road's former location. A car from the 20's, license plate from 1942, ox and mule shoes, 100's of nails, wagon parts, and a pencil eraser end from 1881 were some of the items found during the course of the investigation. The main result of the Taylor mountain survey is an accurate map of the Carter Road along a section that has mostly disappeared with the exception of the telegraph poles.

The Trout Slope survey was conducted by Melissa Murphy and Alissa Leavitt. The goal of that project was to locate the exact location of the road in the Trout Slope Marsh. Using the same method of metal detecting, the crew was able to identify the area the road was in. It was lost until the detectors picked up a distinct linear pattern in the middle of a marsh; however the ends are still unidentifiable. An accurate map was created showing the distribution of artifacts that will prove useful in future surveys in the area.

The Carter Road was an important feature that led to significant developments in the Uinta Basin and Mountains and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The need for preservation of this road is vital because of the length of time that has passed since its creation. Current research is being conducted and improved upon in retracing this route with accuracy by the use of volunteers and heritage professionals. This ongoing research will keep the Carter Road's physical and cartographic existence alive for future generations of the region to investigate and learn about.



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