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3-D Maps available

UINTAH COUNTY BRIEF HISTORY

Author: Craig Fuller

Source: University of Utah, Media Collection

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Area: 4,487 square miles; population: 22,211 (in 1990); county seat: Vernal; origin of county name: after the Uinta-Ats Utes; principal cities/towns: Vernal (6,644), Maeser (1,850), Naples (1,334), Ballard (644), Jensen (400), LaPoint (250), Whiterocks (200), Fort Duchesne (200); economy: cattle, hay and alfalfa, lumber, oil, gas, and oil shale; points of interest: Dinosaur National Monument, Utah Field House of Natural History in Vernal, Steinaker Reservoir, Ouray National Wildlife Refuge, Stewart Lake Waterfowl Management Area, Red Fleet Reservoir.

The geography of Uintah County diverse and includes the high mountain terrain of the Uinta Mountains, the fertile Ashley Valley, a significant portion of Dinosaur National Monument including the quarry- and the Green River, which bisects the county from the northeast to the southwest and forms the boundary between Carbon County and Uintah County. Fort Duchesne, which was established as a military post by the United States Army in 1886 and operated until 1913, is not the headquarters for the Ute Tribe.

Uintah County is located in the central portion of the Uinta Basin, which extends sixty miles into western Colorado. The northern rim of the basin is formed by the Uinta Mountains, the western rim by the Wasatch Mountains, and the southern rim by the Roan and Book cliffs. The basin is the geological remains of prehistoric Uinta Lake, formed during the late Tertiary period, the same period when sediment was deposited in the lake bottom to form gilsonite, oil shale, tar sands, and oil. Ashley Creek and the White, Uinta, and Green rivers are the major streams in the county. The Green, the largest of the four, slices through the central portion of the county.

Prehistoric Indian sites suggest that the Uinta Basin was inhabited thousands of years ago by Archaic and more recently by Fremont peoples. In historic times it was part of the Utes' domain. The first white men in the area were Fathers Dominguez and Escalante who traveled through the Uinta Basin in 1776 searching for a land route to Monterey, California. In his diary Escalante called the basin "a fine plain abounding in pasturage and fertile, arable land, provided it were irrigated." Nearly fifty years later American and French trappers found the Basin rich in beaver and other wildlife. In 1831-32 Antoine Robidoux, a French trapper licensed by the Mexican government (Utah was part of Mexico until 1848), built a small trading post near present-day Whiterocks where trappers could trade beaver pelts for supplies. The post was abandoned in 1844 because of difficulties with the Indians.

In 1861 Brigham Young sent a small party to explore the basin for possible settlement. They reported "that all that section of country lying between the Wasatch Mountains and the eastern boundary of the territory, and south of Green River country, was one vast contiguity of waste and measurably valueless." With this report, Young decided not to send settlers there.

That same year, President Abraham Lincoln created the Uintah Indian Reservation, thus beginning the relocation of many Utah and Colorado Indians to the Uinta Basin. In the

1880s the Uncompahgre Reservation (now part of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation) was created in the southern portion of Uintah County. Ashley Valley was not part of either reservation, and by 1880 enough ranchers and farmers had settled there that the territorial legislature created Uintah County, taking most of the land from Wasatch County. The county seat, originally in Ashley, was later moved to the larger community of Vernal. With the building of irrigation canals other towns were founded, including Jensen, Maeser, and Tridell.

In about 1888 Gilsonite was discovered in various parts of the county and on the eastern portion of the Uncompahgre and Uintah reservations. Miners quickly persuaded the federal government to withdraw 7,000 acres from the Uintah Reservation so that they could legally mine Gilsonite. This area, called "The Strip," for a time lacked any law and order.

Uintah County's economy rests on farming, ranching, and the removal of oil and gas. It is increasingly influenced by worldwide energy prices.

Uintah High School located in Vernal and Union High School, which serves residents of both Uintah and Duchesne County, is located exactly on the county boundary on the eastern edge of Roosevelt. The county's largest celebration is the Outlaw Festival, a month-long festival held each summer in Vernal which celebrates the Old West traditions and folklore that were part of the history of Uintah County.

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DUCHESNE COUNTY DESCRIPTION:

Area: 255 square miles

Population (2000): 14,371

County Seat: Duchesne

Origin of County Name: after the Duchesne River which was possibly named for a French-Canadian trapper

Principal Cities/Towns: Roosevelt (4,299), Duchesne (1,408), Myton (539);

Economy: livestock, alfalfa and hay, oil, natural gas

Points of Interest: High Uintas Wilderness Area, Starvation Reservoir, Big Sand Wash Reservoir

DUCHESNE COUNTY BRIEF HISTORY

Author: John D. Barton

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The community of Duchesne is located just above the junction of the Strawberry and

Duchesne rivers in the Uintah Basin of northeastern Utah. It was first identified as a potential town site by Father Escalante when the Dominguez-Escalante expedition camped near the present-day town 18 September 1776 while on their epic journey. Duchesne is strategically located not only due to its location at the junction of the rivers but it is also at the mouth of Indian Canyon, the major route into the Basin through the Tavaputs Plateau from Price.

The town came into being in 1905 when the United States government opened the region to homesteading under the Allotment Act. The land that forms all of Duchesne County and western Uintah County had formerly belonged to the Ute Indians as part of their reservation. A.M. Murdock, an Indian trader at Whiterocks, obtained permission from the government to set up a trading post at the site that became Duchesne City. With the assistance of several other men, he set up a large circus tent for a general store and trading post. Government surveyors laid out the streets and the survey was accepted by the government on 18 October 1905. Other settlers soon pitched their tents and built pioneer dwellings that were replaced over the next months and years with more modern buildings for homes and businesses.

The town was originally called Dora, after Murdock's baby daughter. This name was replaced for a short time by the name Theodore, in honor of President Theodore Roosevelt. But when town to the east adopted the name of Roosevelt, it was thought that two towns in the same county named for the same president would be too confusing for mail delivery. The name Duchesne was utilized for the new community. The name Duchesne is taken from the name of the river that runs through town and was likely named by fur trappers in the 1820s in honor of Mother Treasa Duchesne founder of the School of the Sacred Heart near St. Louis, Missouri.

On 1 January 1915 the eastern portion of Wasatch County was split off to form Duchesne County; by a vote of county citizens, Duchesne City became the county seat. Today Duchesne is a community of approximately 1,200 people. It hosts four chapels (two LDS, a Baptist, and a Catholic), two schools (an elementary and a high school/junior high), several businesses and the county offices. For several years, work on the Central Utah Project boosted the community's population and business; a park and a bowling alley were built to make the city more attractive for construction workers. However, in the mid-1980s the dam projects were completed and Duchesne's population declined by several hundred people. The economic base of the community is presently centered in farming and oil industry. As county seat, Duchesne's major celebration is the annual county fair held in August. Due to the late date of settlement of the community, even at the present date several of the older citizens remember coming into the region as pioneers as children with their families.

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ROOSEVELT CITY BRIEF HISTORY

Author: John D. Barton

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In 1905, by an act of Congress, the unallotted land of the Ute Indian reservation was opened to homesteading. Several thousand hopeful twentieth-century pioneers congregated in Provo and Grand Junction with the hope of successfully drawing lots for a homestead in a fertile region of the soon-to-be-opened lands. Throughout the fall and winter of 1905-06 the settlers came to the Uinta Basin. The town of Roosevelt was founded in early 1906 when Ed Harmston turned his homestead claim into a townsite and laid out plots. His wife named the prospective town in honor of the president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. Within a short time a store, a post office, and the Dry Gulch Irrigation Company were in business in the new town. In 1907, the Harmstons donated two acres of ground for the town's citizens to build a school. The first class had about fifteen pupils, who had to provide books from their homes. Roosevelt soon became the economic center for the area, eclipsing Myton and Duchesne.

Roosevelt is situated on U.S. Highway 40 in the northeast corner of the state, south of the Uinta Mountains, at an elevation of 5,250 feet. The town was incorporated at a mass meeting of forty-four citizens on 21 February 1913. From 1906 to 1914 Roosevelt was in Wasatch County, but in 1914 Duchesne County was formed from part of Wasatch County, and, as the largest town in the county, Roosevelt anticipated becoming the county seat. However, when the total county-wide vote came in, the seat went to Duchesne. Roosevelt is today home to approximately 3,500 people but serves as the business center for several times that number from the many small towns and farming areas that surround the town. Roosevelt has become the region's educational center with Union High School, Uintah Basin Area Technology Center, and Utah State University's Uintah Basin Education Center all located there. Roosevelt is also home of the only hospital in the county, Duchesne County Hospital. The economy of Roosevelt is based on agriculture and the oil industry. Pennzoil Refinery is the largest single employer in the city.

The UBIC (Uintah Basin Industrial Convention) is Roosevelt's annual celebration. What started in the early part of the century as a yearly display of the latest in farming and industrial technology has developed into a yearly gala complete with parade, talent show, concerts, and dances.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the dominant religious denomination in Roosevelt, with two stakes centered in town; but the community also boasts Roman Catholic, Christian Assembly of God, Baptist, Jehovah's Witness, and other smaller denomination congregations. Located near the Uintah/Ouray Indian Reservation headquarters of Fort Duchesne, Roosevelt is a multicultural and polyethnic community, with Caucasians and Native Americans being the most numerous.

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FORT DUCHESNE BRIEF HISTORY

Author: David L. Schirer

Source: University of Utah, Media Collection

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Fort Duchesne was established by Major Frederick William Benteen on 20 August 1886, on a site selected by General George Crook, and General Crook soon took command of the new fort. Construction began in October 1886 and the reservation was officially designated by President Cleveland in September 1887. The fort continued to serve, with an average detachment of 250 men, until its closure in September 1912. Remnants of the fort still exist.

Fort Duchesne was established to replace Fort Thornburgh in the Uinta Basin, which had been abandoned by the U.S. Army during the winter of 1884-85. An outbreak of inter-band warfare among the Utes during the winter of 1885-86 once more raised the question of placing a fort in the basin. The Department of the Interior and the War Department each sent investigators to the area who recommended the establishment of a permanent fort. Crook selected the site in August 1886; it was three miles above the junction of the Uintah and Duchesne rivers and midway between the Whiterocks agency and Ouray agency headquarters.

Major Benteen led two troops of the Ninth Cavalry from Fort McKinney, Wyoming, and a Captain Duncan led four companies of infantry from Fort Steele, Wyoming, onto the Ute Reservation to establish the fort. The cavalry troops Benteen led into the Uinta Basin were a detachment of the Ninth, which was a Black cavalry unit that served on the Uintah frontier for twelve years. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, the Ninth was sent to Cuba in 1898. The soldiers of the Ninth were highly decorated during that war, and were among the men who followed Colonel Theodore Roosevelt up San Juan Hill.

While Benteen's men reached the fort site without incident, Duncan's infantry barely escaped disaster. As Duncan's men prepared to take a shortcut, a Ute policeman rode up on a well lathered horse and informed Duncan that nearly three hundred Utes lay in ambush for his men. Duncan decided to march via the longer, regularly traveled road, and arrived at the fort site without incident.

When the combined forces arrived at the fort site, they were confronted by a force of 700 Utes. The soldiers quickly threw up a picket line and began to dig defensive trenches. These proved to be unnecessary when the Utes became convinced that the army would not attack them as long as they remained passive. By October, the soldiers had settled into the routine and business of the camp and its construction.

President Grover Cleveland officially designated the six square miles that comprised the fort reservation on 1 September 1887. During the summer of 1887, the troops spent approximately \$22,800 on construction of the fort. This included the construction of officers' and enlisted men's quarters, a commissary, a storehouse, and a hospital, all of adobe brick. Establishment of Fort Duchesne caused the War Department to again evaluate the need for the string of small western forts. Fort Steele was abandoned in 1886 when the troops left for Uintah County, and Fort Bridger was abandoned in 1890. Fort Duchesne was designated to guard the Indian frontier in eastern Utah, western Colorado, and southwestern Wyoming.

Fort Duchesne declined in use from 1890 to 1910. In 1893 the four infantry companies were

removed to Fort Douglas. By 1909 there was only one company of cavalry left. In 1910 the inspecting officer of the U.S. Army "found no military reason why Fort Duchesne, Utah should be continued as a military post." On 13 September 1912 Troop M of the First Cavalry, the last remaining unit at the reservation, left Fort Duchesne for Fort Boise, Idaho. The Indian Service consolidated its Uintah and Ouray operations at Fort Duchesne after the fort's abandonment by the army. The buildings that had been constructed to control the Indians were at last used to assist them.

See: Thomas G. Alexander and Leonard S. Arrington, "The Utah Military Frontier, 1872-1912: Forts Cameron, Thornburgh, and Duchesne," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 32 (Fall 1964); June Lyman and Norma Denver, compilers, *Ute People: An Historical Study* (1970); Couben and Geneva Wright, "Indian White Relations in the Uintah Basin," *Utah Humanities Review* 2 (October 1948).

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VERNAL CITY BRIEF HISTORY

Author: Doris K. Burton

Source: University of Utah, Media Collection

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Vernal, Uintah County's largest city, is located in eastern Utah near the Colorado State Line, and 175 miles east of Salt Lake City. It is bordered on the north by the Uinta Mountains, one of the few mountains ranges in the world which lie in an east-west rather than the usual north to south direction. The Book Cliff Mountains lie to the south, and Blue Mountain to the east, while Vernal itself lies in Ashley Valley, named in honor of William H. Ashley, an early fur trader who entered this area in 1825 by floating down the Green River in a bull boat made of animal hides.

Vernal, unlike the majority of Utah towns, was not settled initially by Mormon pioneers. Brigham Young sent a scouting party to Uinta Basin in 1861 and received word back the area was good for nothing but nomad purposes, hunting grounds for Indians and "to hold the world together." That same year, President Abraham Lincoln set the area aside as the Uintah Indian Reservation. Captain Pardon Dodds was appointed Indian agent for this reservation.

When Dodds retired, he moved Ashley Valley to raise livestock, along with agency workers, Morris Evans and John Blankenship. They arrived on 14 February 1873 and settled on Ashley Creek. Dodds built the first cabin in the valley, located about four miles northwest of present day Vernal. Many single men--trappers, prospectors, home seekers, and drifters--arrived in Ashley Valley, and some stayed. However, there wasn't a woman in the area until 1876.

The area where Vernal is now located was called the Bench, and it was described as a large barren cactus flat. The David Johnston family moved onto the Bench on 6 June 1878. It was reported that when they stopped their wagon, David took his shovel from the wagon and

cleared off the cactus so the children could stand without getting cactus needles in their feet. He put the wagon on logs to keep it off the ground as there were many lizards, horned toads, scorpions, mice, and snakes in the area. Alva Hatch came to the valley looking for a place to locate in May 1878. He returned later with his family and his father, Jeremiah Hatch, along with Jeremiah's two wives. The fall of 1879 brought many settlers to the valley.

On 29 September 1879 the Meeker Massacre occurred in Colorado, with the White River Utes killing their agent, Nathan Meeker, among others. Renegade Utes then rode to Ashley Valley to convince the Uintah Utes to join them in killing all the white people in the area. Instead, the Uintah chiefs advised the settlers to "fort-up." A fort was built on the Bench due to its open expanse. Many settlers of Ashley Valley took their cabins apart, moving them to the fort site. The incident was settled, but the people remained in the fort that winter. The winter was severe, killing most of the animals. The humans also suffered. Much of their grain had been gathered from the ground, since grasshoppers had knocked it from the plant stocks; it became moldy. Diphtheria took its toll. It was March before they could get out of the valley for supplies.

Many families moved their cabins back to their homesteads, others remained in the fort. A town grew out of the fort and became known as Ashley Center. A store was opened and the residents applied for a post office. The name Ashley Center was requested, but it was too similar to the town of Ashley; therefore, the name Vernal was assigned to the community by the U.S. Postal Department.

The enterprising settlers of the valley developed a basic irrigation system that still serves the valley today. Because of the distance to a major railhead, settlers produced, manufactured, and developed about everything they needed. The leading livelihood was the cattle and sheep; milling, the production of honey, and the farming of grains and alfalfa were also important. Vernal still remains without a railroad, but the highway transportation system has enabled the city's residents to have access to most good and services..

Although the LDS Church helped set up Vernal as a town in 1884, the town wasn't incorporated until 1897. Vernal thus had the distinction of being a city without taxation for fifteen years. In 1948 Vernal had its first oil boom. From that time on it has been a boom and bust town. A thriving tourist business by Dinosaur National Monument, as well as livestock and agriculture production, help keep Vernal going during "bust" times.

Flaming Gorge Dam was built in 1964, bringing more tourists to the area. Steinaker and Red Fleet dams, built in 1962 and 1980, provided irrigation water and recreation. As with many cities, big stores have moved to the outskirts of town, but small businesses are keeping the downtown area alive. The population of Vernal City in 1990 was 6,644. Vernal, being the county seat, draws from a county population of 22,211 and also from western Colorado.

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