

FIRST DRAFT

Blizzard wreaked havoc on railway

There's not much evidence of Shay No. 3 these days. A few scattered pieces of iron and one very large chunk of steel that may have come from the locomotive's boiler lie in heavy oak brush along an old wagon road below the top of Baxter Pass.

Shay Engine No. 3 was a locomotive on the old Uintah Railway, which ran between Mack and Dragon, Utah, from 1904 until 1939.

No. 3 went off the tracks on the north side near the top of Baxter Pass during a snowstorm on Feb. 10, 1909. Engineer Joseph E. "Doc" Lane was killed in the wreck, along with an unnamed Greek workman. "Another horrible railroad tragedy is to be added to the fearful calendar of tragedies that has been unfolding in this section since the first of the year," The Daily Sentinel wrote.

Late last month, Mike Perry and I went looking for remains of Shay No. 3, and we found a few fragments that may be from the old engine. Perry, the former executive director of the Museums of Western Colorado, had visited the site about 25 years ago with other historians and archaeologists and was able to find some of the larger pieces again.

Weather had created problems throughout early February 1909. On Feb. 7, a fireman and brakeman on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad were killed when their freight train hit a rockslide between Ruby Canyon in Colorado and Westwater, Utah.

The wreck of Shay No. 3 occurred just three days later. And two days after that, the continuing blizzard created a snowdrift about two miles long and up to 20 feet high on Baxter Pass. It halted railroad traffic for a week.

During that week, no mail reached Vernal, Utah, because at the time mail was routed through Mack on the Uintah Railway, then by wagon from Dragon to Vernal.

A decade later, regular truck service was established between Craig and Vernal, providing a different mail route.

In addition to searching for wreck remnants, our trip last month was an opportunity to travel on the old Uintah Railway grade over Baxter Pass. There's little doubt it was a unique bit of railroad engineering.

There were 37 trestles in the 28 miles between Mack and the railroad community of Atchee, built at the edge of the Book Cliffs. And that was the easy section.

In the 12 miles from Atchee to Lake McAndrews on the north side of the pass, there were 233 curves, some so tight that conventional locomotives couldn't maneuver around them.

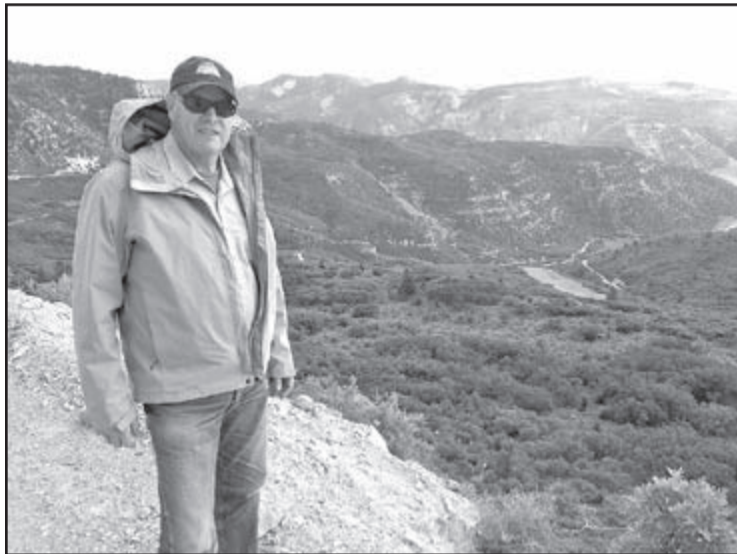
The rail grade also gained 2,012 feet in elevation in the 5.8 miles from Atchee to the top of the pass.

The Uintah Railway was created out of desperation. Samuel Henry Gilson and his partner, Bert Seaboldt, had discovered the only commercially recoverable deposits of what became known as gilsonite in northeastern Utah. They knew the substance could be used in var-



MUSEUMS OF WESTERN COLORADO/Special to the Sentinel

A Shay engine hauls a passenger train down the east side of Baxter Pass early in the last century.



MIKE PERRY/Special to the Sentinel

The author stands near the top of Baxter Pass, looking southeast toward Mack. Parts of the old Uintah Railway grade, now a road, are visible in the background.



MIKE PERRY/Special to the Sentinel

Mike Perry stands near an old piece of iron believed to have come from the 1909 wreck of Shay Engine No. 3.

nishes, inks and paints. Later it would have a variety of uses in the automotive industry, oil drilling, and in asphalt.

But the isolated deposits could be reached only by wagon, which was too slow and expensive.

The partners approached the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad about extending a spur from its line near Grand Junction to Dragon. But D&RG officials said no.

By then, the company had been sold to a group in St. Louis headed by Charles O. Baxter, for whom the mountain pass was later named.

Baxter and his group, which became the General Asphalt

Co., decided to build their own railroad.

To do so, they had to build a new community in western Colorado, where their narrow-gauge railroad could connect with the standard-gauge D&RG. They decided to name the town after the president of the General Asphalt Co., John M. Mack.

Because of the steep grades and tight curves from Atchee, over Baxter and into Dragon, special machinery was required.

That's where the Shay engines came in. Produced in Lima, Ohio, the Shays had side-mounted pistons and gear-driven axles. Also, both

the front wheels and rear ones swiveled. And they produced large amounts of power for their size.

Initially, the Uintah Railway ran conventional Baldwin narrow-gauge locomotives on the first half of the trip, from Mack to Atchee. There, the engines were switched to Shays to power over the worst section of the route.

In the mid-1920s, the Shays were replaced by specially designed, articulated Baldwin locomotives that had the power and turning ability to handle the most difficult parts of Baxter Pass.

Although the Uintah Railway was created primarily to haul gilsonite, it also carried mail, passengers and some other kinds of freight.

It hauled out most of the fossils excavated in the early decades of work at Dinosaur National Monument.

But trucks, better roads and, eventually, a pipeline all made the Uintah Railway superfluous. So, in May of 1939, the last train made the trip from Mack to Dragon.

But in 1909, the Uintah Railway was a busy line, carrying gilsonite, mail and passengers between Dragon and Mack each day.

The rail crews fought the weather constantly. Flash floods often damaged trestles on the lower part of the route, and heavy snowfall required special plowing runs up high.

That's what Shay No. 3 and Engineer J.E. Lane and his crew were doing that February day in 1909.

"The engine got from under the control of the engineer in some way and shot down the mountain side at a fearful rate of speed," the Vernal Express reported on Feb. 12, 1909. "It rolled over and over many times, and when it stopped there was nothing left but scrap iron."

Information for this column came *The Daily Sentinel* and *Vernal Express* newspapers, the *Museums of Western Colorado*, archaeological reports of Sally Crum and the books, "Uintah Railroad: The Gilsonite Route," by Henry E. Bender Jr. and "Uintah Railway Pictorial, Volume I — Mack to Atchee" by Rodger Polley.

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Commission candidate wants medical school to be built in the valley

By GARY HARMON
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The prescription for too few physicians in Mesa County is clear, said one of the Democrats seeking a seat on the Mesa County Commission.

Build a medical school, said Dave Edwards, a Palisade town councilor who worked at a hospital in Minnesota and for an insurer before moving to western Colorado.

Building a medical school in the Grand Valley would provide an answer to the difficulties of attracting physicians, as well as provide a much-needed economic driver, said Edwards, who concedes that it's an expensive, long-term project.

"Everything doesn't have to be on the Front Range," Edwards said.

Edwards, a Democrat, is seeking to unseat Commissioner Rose Pugliese in District 3, the east end of the valley. Commissioners are elected at large, meaning the entire county votes in the contest.

The idea has been explored before, Pugliese said, noting that "it is not the proper role of county government to start up a medical school."

The commission, however, should lead the effort to persuade the state Legislature to start the process with \$100 million, said Edwards, who said the process could take 15 years and

cost \$500 million.

It would, however, pay dividends quickly, as the necessary planning would bring new jobs and give the economy a much-needed jolt.

Eventually, construction jobs would also be needed, but Mesa County would gain from a medical school in a variety of other ways.

Medical schools have teaching and research missions and having one in the county would not only

attract medical students and allow residents to seek treatment nearby, research would also attract pharmaceutical companies, makers of medical devices and other ancillary businesses, Edwards said.

A medical school would put Mesa County on par with other contenders for businesses, Edwards said.

"If we create this here, we will be as good as any place," Edwards said.

Mesa County already has done much to promote medical education, Pugliese said.

The county "has consistently been collaborative and supportive of the efforts of (Colorado Mesa University) to grow programs, especially in the medical field, that CMU feels is needed in our community," Pugliese said.



DAVE EDWARDS

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State Patrol warns public of phone phishing scam

Colorado State Patrol is warning people about a phone scam where callers try to obtain recipients' personal information by telling them that one of their family members has been in a car crash.

"When asked which family member was injured, the caller does not provide that information," the agency wrote in a press release.

The caller also doesn't provide their own identifying information, although in some instances the number 720-365-3887 has appeared on recipients' caller ID, according to the press release.

People who receive this call are urged not to give any information to the caller, and should ask for the caller's own name, employee number and phone number.

Recipients of the call should then use the internet or phone book to find the agency's actual number and verify the caller's identity.

"If the caller is valid, they will not avoid telling you their agency and name," the release said.

According to the Mesa County Sheriff's Office:

- Deputies responded to a reported sex assault in the north desert area of Mesa County on Aug. 28.

- Deputies in separate incidents arrested Clint Converse, 37, on Friday and Charles Neese, 20, on Saturday on outstanding warrants for each of them.

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We're wearing **jeans for charity** at The Daily Sentinel. Ask me how you can help!

we've got heart!

The employees of *The Daily Sentinel* have joined together to adopt a local non-profit organization/charity of the month. We want to help raise awareness and badly needed funds for these organizations that are dedicated to helping people in our community.

SEPTEMBER JEANS FOR CHARITY ORGANIZATION:

Western Colorado Suicide Prevention Foundation

Western Colorado Suicide Prevention Foundation (WCSPF) was founded to help reduce suicides in one county, but has expanded to twenty-one counties. WCSPF attempts to reduce suicide, stress, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, suicidal behaviors, alcohol use, and many other issues in our communities by sharing key knowledge with individuals, workplaces, and in community settings. The need is dramatic. The local suicide rate has remained nearly twice that of the United States rate since 2000. If you would like to join with us and help this committed organization, please send your donation to:

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