UPCOMING EVENT:
Fremont’s Fatal Fourth Tour

Saturday, July 16 – 10:00 a.m.
Meet at El Pueblo History Museum
301 North Union Avenue
Pueblo, Colorado
Tour leaders: Berl and Pat Meyer

After leaving Pueblo, the tour follows U.S. 50 west to CO 67. Between Florence and Wetmore we will visit the site of the frontier post of Hardscrabble where John Fremont stopped before entering Hardscrabble Canyon. We will make stops on pull-offs going up the Canyon. Lunch at Chappy’s Mountain View Bar & Grill in Westcliffe. From there, we’ll head south to Gardner, where Fremont and his crew saw Gardner Butte, a volcanic plug. The tour will end late afternoon or early evening in Gardner.

● If you plan to attend, please RSVP to Berl Meyer and include your cell phone number: kygeology@gmail.com or 502-558-2379. Please see page 8 for historical background information on this tour.
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT
By Mark Voth

I attended OCTA’s Mid-year Board Meeting and Symposium in St. George, Utah in March. The highlight of the meeting was discussion of this year’s OCTA convention in Fort Hall, Idaho.

The event will be held August 1-5 and registration information is now online. Jerry Eichhorst from the Idaho Chapter has put a lot of effort into working with the locals to provide a great event.

The 2017 convention will be held in Council Bluffs, Iowa and is being largely planned by the national office as OCTA does not have local chapter there.

The Saturday symposium was excellent with all of the speakers presenting various topics relevant to the Spanish Trail. Sunday provided two car tour options, “Mountain Meadows” and “Leaving Utah to Virgin Hill in Nevada.” I chose the Mountain Meadows tour and learned a lot about the massacre and events leading to it.

This year’s events are in planning with chapter meetings/field tours being considered for June and September, Berl’s Fremont trip in July, OCTA convention in August, and a chapter meeting with a speaker in October.

The Idaho Chapter is seeking donations for the raffle and auctions at the August convention. Please see page 7 for further information.
I went on the Nevada tour after the Symposium in St. George. This tour was led by Leo Lyman, a noted historian of Southern Utah. Many thanks to Leo for leading the tour and the fascinating Spanish Trail history he shared, and to Bryce Billings from the Crossroads Chapter for sending the photo above. Climbing the peak in the background was a big challenge for those who were up to it!

Bryce also enclosed these photos taken on the Mountain Meadows tour after leaving the Nevada tour:
SOUTHERN TRAILS SYMPOSIUM
By Bruce Watson

While wintering in Arizona, Peggy and I attended the Southern Trails Chapter’s symposium in Willcox, Arizona. It was well-attended by members from diverse locations, including some from OCTA’s national board. The speakers were excellent, and the subject matter dealt primarily with historic figures and locations within the Southern Trails geographical area.

On April 8 a walking tour of historical downtown Willcox was conducted, followed by lunch at the Chiricahua Regional Museum. Tours to local historical sites were scheduled for the following day. These included visits to Apache Pass/Fort Bowie, and separately a back roads drive to Dragoon Springs Stage Station.

The Southern Trails Chapter usually holds symposiums in the spring, in various locations. They are very informative and interesting, and we would highly recommend attending them.

On the way to Willcox we visited Yuma, Arizona for two days. We stayed at a hotel very close to the historic Colorado River crossing, an important location for one of the major routes across Arizona.

Yuma has created a well-done river walk along the Colorado, which we took to visit the Yuma Territorial Prison. This, of course, is a must when visiting Yuma, and it’s certainly worth the time, and we highly recommend it.

We were anxious to also visit the location of Fort Yuma, on a hill across the Colorado River. But it is now all on an Indian reservation, and there is no museum or historic buildings available for tourists. The north end of Yuma is considered the historic district, and we visited brew pubs and wineries in that area.

Tour of downtown Willcox

Continued on page 5
Photos of Yuma Territorial Prison by Bruce Watson
THE OLD TOWN OF CARBON
By Lee Underbrink

A few miles southwest of Medicine Bow are the remains of the first coal mine in Wyoming. It was established by the Union Pacific railroad in 1868 for its coal fired engines. Thomas Wardell, considered the founder, leased the land from the U.P. for fifteen years and contracted to sell the coal to the railroad. His arrangement was odd, $6 per ton for the first two years, $5 for the next three, $4 for the next four, and $3 for the next six years. Seven mines were opened employing 600 men taking out as much as 200 tons of coal per day.

Carbon was a rip-roaring town, as most coal mines were in their days. It was described as a prairie dog village, reclining against the sage slopes, the stovepipes bobbed upward and outward like inquisitive gopher heads. The shoddies in which the miners lived were fashioned of stone slabs gathered from the nearby knolls, or of twelve foot boards brought by the railroad and used upright, chinked with sod and roofed by mortared earth or flattened tin cans.

The area around had long been an Indian hunting ground and hostilities frequently broke out. During this time it was not uncommon for Carbon’s women and children to stay in the mines guarded at night while the miners stood watch. One mine stable boss was killed by Indians, becoming the first to be buried in the Carbon cemetery and some travelers along the Cherokee or Overland trails were scalped in the area.

Soon the business district formed along the railroad with a depot, mercantile stores, a church which became a school, and of course, saloons. Living conditions were primitive. A large cistern lined with boards provided water, which was hauled by the U.P. from Medicine Bow. The miners dipped what water they needed and hauled it to barrels that stood before the shanties and stores, at a cost of 25 cents per barrel.

Hunting soon became a bore for two or three hundred elk resided just outside of town. Sage grouse were even closer. Shooting an elk had the same satisfaction as shooting a Guernsey cow.

The men were from Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Ireland and Great Britain. They were good miners but lousy carpenters so the homes were poor. They were however, aligned in their love of Carbon as illustrated by the saying “once a Carbonite, always a Carbonite” Sam Dickenson, clerk in Carbon in 1886 stated: “There never was such a town—we were Carbonites, and if anything needed to be done for Carbon, we all pulled together to do it”

Near here is where Dutch Charlie and Big Nose George, members of a gang of train robbers, ambushed and killed Carbon County sheriffs Tip Vincent and Thomas Widdowfield. When Dutch Charlie was captured in Montana, he was being returned to Rawlins for trial The miners waylaid the train in Carbon and strung up Dutch Charlie to the cross arm of a telegraph pole. The next morning the miners’ sons ganged about the swinging body of the killer and took turns whirling it until the rope was knotted, then watching it spin in the other direction as the rope untwisted. Thomas Widdowfield was buried in the Carbon cemetery by his friends who erected a monument over his grave.

Continued on page 7
Continued from page 6

The above demonstration by the miners warned everyone that Carbon was tough on law breakers. It explains why D.O. Clark, chief clerk could carry the entire month’s salary in his business rail car. Clark would drop the heavy envelopes of gold and silver into the palms of the hands of the miners and they found it unnecessary to count the pieces that made up their wages.

In 1883 Calamity Jane visited Carbon and showed the miners how to drink straight shots of whiskey. The miners were their own lawmen and ladies of the night were run out of town with ruffians and swindlers. Arguments between cowboys and miners were usually won by the cowboys.

Of course payday resulted in a few saloon brawls but betting on horse racing and pigeon shooting became popular. The Lancaster miners had an infallible was of winning pigeon shooting contests until they were found out. They would jab a pigeon’s eye out depending on which way they wanted it to fly. After the losers discovered the trick the Lankies resorted to squirting tobacco juice in the pigeon’s eye, until they were caught again.

The first coal was 85 feet below the ground and a hoist and tipple were soon constructed. The coal lay in seams which were dug with mules pulling one car out at a time. Seven mines were established, the furtherest being two miles from where buildings and soddies were.

In 1890 a lodger in the hotel tipped over a kerosene lamp and the business part of town quickly burned for the only water was in the cistern. They had a volunteer fire department but not enough water in the fire wagon. Soon the town was rebuilt.

A strike by the miners caused the U.P. to repurchase the mines in 1874. The price of coal then went to twenty three cents a ton.

Number 2 mine had an interesting ventilation system where boys would pull strings which opened and closed doors to the mine tunnels depending on which way the wind on the surface was blowing. Another invention was the sprags—pointed wooden poles were inserted by boys into the spokes of the oar wagon to slow it down as it reached the mine entrance. Other boys would pull out the sprags if they wanted to speed up the car. Numerous fingers were lost in this invention.

Although some miners died in accidents, here it was a relatively safe place for miners. A large explosion did not kill any miners. Flooding of the mines was a problem at times. The town was closed in 1902 when a better grade of coal was found in Hanna.

I am sure I would not like being a Carbon resident, but it and its cemetery are interesting to see. So take the short way off the highway and visit old Carbon someday.

Sources: Ghost Towns of Wyoming by Donald Miller, Ghost Towns of Wyoming by Pence & Homsher, History of the Union Pacific Coal Mines 1968-1940

The Idaho Chapter is seeking donations for the annual raffle and auction at the upcoming convention. Message from Margie Houdyshell: “Items do not always have to be Trail related, and could be art, pottery, a collectible, jewelry, books, camping, other outdoors objects, or Native American just to give a few examples. Please contact me: houdyshell@cableone.net or (208) 863-2125. Items can be taken to the convention or mailed after contacting me.”
Background information for July 16 tour

“Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, long interested in the financial potential of the west, befriended Taos trapper Antoine Leroux in hopes of discovering the best way from Missouri to California. Leroux's response to the Senator's inquiries was to "start as the people do now, going to New Mexico from the frontier of the State of Kansas or Independence, and for summer travelling go through the prairies up towards Bent's Fort, and up to the Huerfano to the pass El Sangre de Cristo; then out by the Coo-che-to-pa Passing, [sic] following a trail to the Great Spanish Trail". Benton realized the city that seized the initiative, and made a dramatic effort on its own toward building the railway route would ultimately secure necessary federal support. In the summer of 1848, he convinced several St. Louis businessmen to finance an exploration of a central, or 38th parallel route that would run west from St. Louis to San Francisco. The expedition would be led by his son-in-law, John Charles Fremont.

By 1848, Fremont had already undertaken three explorations of the west. In 1842, 1843, and 1845 he had traversed, explored, mapped and described the Oregon Trail and the wagon routes to California. In his fourth western expedition, Fremont planned to follow the 38th parallel as closely as possible and locate a new pass over the Continental Divide in the vicinity of the Cochetopa Pass, which led out from the San Luis Valley, and would open a route over the San Juan Mountains into the valley of the Green River. He and Benton both seemed to believe that there was indeed an easy passage in this vicinity, and on the other side of which the mountain was an accessible route to California. In this assumption, they were ignoring a great deal of Colorado geography, as Fremont was to discover. The party left Westport, Missouri on October 20, 1848, followed the Kansas River, and pushed across the prairie until they reached the Arkansas River. Following the south bank of that river past Bent's Fort they came to El Pueblo, where the experienced mountain men warned them of an unusually hard winter to come. While at El Pueblo, Fremont engaged "Old Bill" Williams as guide, and then moved on, past Hardscrabble Post, over the Sangre de Cristos' at Mosca Pass, and down into the upper Rio Grande region in the San Luis Valley. It was December, and the party had already encountered heavy snows while crossing Mosca Pass, but Fremont persisted in his search for a central railroad route. Accordingly, "Old Bill" led the party north up Alder Creek, and into the San Juan Mountains, an impassable wintry waste where the snow was more than ten feet deep and the temperature fell to twenty degrees below zero. Somewhere in the snow Bill Williams lost his way, and the party turned north fifteen miles too soon. By the middle of December they were 12,327 feet above sea level, on Pool Table Mesa near Wanamaker’s Creek, and caught in a blinding snowstorm.

In all, ten perished in a month-long ordeal before rescue, which is recorded as one of the greatest disasters in the history of American exploration. Surprisingly, Fremont's and Benton's enthusiasm for the 38th Parallel route had not diminished. Five years passed before another such expedition attempted to penetrate the rugged mountain barrier of the San Juans. It would be under a different command however, that the route was explored.”

Source:
Frontier in Transition: A History of Southwestern Colorado
BLM Cultural Resources Series (Colorado: No. 10)
Excerpt from Chapter IV: The Great Reconnaissance and the Rediscovery of the Southwest

- 8 -