

## The Georgetown-Empire- Middle Park Wagon Road on the Grand County side of Berthoud Pass

The Georgetown – Empire – Middle Park Wagon Road on the Grand County side of Berthoud Pass starts at the Summit. The photo to the right is from Ben Dugan’s book<sup>1</sup> and shows the now old wagon road, with the new auto road in the foreground.



The wagon road and the auto road shared the same footprint from this point to Hell’s ½ Acre. See MP 242 – 243: The Shared Road.

When the U. S. Forest Service learned that the author was writing an auto tour of Berthoud Pass, they requested that location of the wagon road on the Grand County side of the Pass not be shared. There are many historic artifacts still along the wagon road on the west side, and the concern was for their protection.

Their concern is understood. On the Clear Creek County side of the Pass, there was a large flat boulder along the wagon road. For years, people had added rusty nails, broken and sometime whole blue and purple bottles, rusty cans, a lunchbox, etc.



The site was well-known by the locals and very near U. S. Highway 40. After years of being enjoyed by many, one day the whole collection just disappeared.

Five teams of students from the Colorado School of Mines with the author mapped the wagon road on the Grand County side of the Pass, a continuing project that took three years. In this photo, a team is showing the Forest Archeologist, Sue Struthers, their findings.

<sup>1</sup> Images of America: Berthoud Pass by Ben M. Dugan Arcadia Publishing 2011

So with that in mind, the author has divided up the wagon road on the west side into the four sections that the students from the Colorado School of Mines named when they mapped the wagon road with the author.

They are “Holy Rock”, “High Bridge”, the “Boulder Field”, and “Museum Rocks”. The author has tried to tell the history of each section while addressing the USFS concerns.



The “Holy Rock” section is near the top of the Pass and is named for a rock that lies beside the trail (old wagon road) with a hole in its side. The hole was made by a dynamite drill into the rock. Getting to the “Holy Rock” section is the most difficult part of the whole west side wagon road experience. Debris has come off the mountain from the construction and improvements of U. S. Highway 40 along with the sand of winter travel concerns. Once upon the trail it is easy to recognize and is still in beautiful condition.

The second section is called High Bridge or Two Bridges. *Blecha’s Colorado Place Names*<sup>1</sup> list two names for this area. The first is Sheets Tavern in Grand County. The description reads: “A settlement on N slopes of Berthoud Pass, about 0.5 mile and above the crest and twin bridges on the stage route. A frame building tavern in a ravine, run by Bill Sheets.” The second one is simply Two Bridges: “A settlement and stage station on the N slope of Berthoud Pass below Sheets Tavern.” One of the few notes that Frank Maxwell made in his survey of 1891 for the Grand County side of the Pass simply said “High Bridge”.

The following was taken from the Archeological Assessment of Berthoud Pass written by the author in 2007:

“The following description of High Bridge is taken from *Enterprise at Fraser* by Frank A. Easton:

An old button-up shoe found by the CSM students on the Grand County side of the Pass.

How hard it was to leave it behind so others could find it again and enjoys it too! But they did!



<sup>1</sup> Blecha’s Colorado Place Names: A genealogical & Historical Guide to Colorado Sites by Arvid D. “Mike” Blecha Published by Colorado Genealogical Society, Inc. Denver, Colorado 2001

...The original road over Berthoud was steep, rocky, and rough. The four horses found it difficult to pull the spring wagon, loaded with a taciturn driver and seven tenderfoot passengers and their baggage, up the heavy grade. Near the top, they ran headlong into a snow storm. The faithful horses plowed ahead until they could go no farther. Everybody piled out, gathered wood, and built a fire. Eastom found that the driver had a pair of snowshoes in the wagon and was told that there was a combination tavern and stage station ahead where the horses were changed. Deciding that something had to be done, Eastom put on the snow shoes and struck out for the station, but he had to walk a quarter of a mile to the summit and an additional half mile down the west slope to reach it. Arriving at his destination, he explained the situation; a bobsled was harnessed and the stranded passengers were soon picked up.

The proprietor of the tavern was a colorful gent by the name of Bill Sheets. A large man with a fierce looking black mustache, he was nevertheless a kindly individual, an expert horseman, and a fluent conversationalist. His establishment was situated between the top of the pass and a place called Two Bridges, and consisted of a wooden board building constructed in a kind of



Photo of the High Bridge/s site

ravine near one of the many bends in the road. Bill had roamed over much of Middle Park on horseback, was familiar with the forest and streams, and was a friend of many of the ranchers. The heavy snowfall and the approach of darkness made it necessary for the stage passengers to remain all night at the tavern where they slept on pool tables...

Frank S. Byers wrote a *History of Berthoud Pass* in 1922. In it, he writes:

Glen (Sheriff – his cousin) and I found a man frozen to death that trip, just above High Bridge. He was seated on a stump stick – that stump was a dead pine 12 to 15 feet high, that showed how deep the snow is up there.



The footprint of the two different bridges can still be seen today. An old stone wall remains in the meadow.

In Byers' *History of Berthoud Pass* that was included in the *Snow Story* by Chauncey Thomas, Harrison in a foot note writes:

17 – “High Bridge was not named for its dimensions but because its location made it the highest bridge on the Berthoud Pass wagon road. The bridge was built of logs sheered flat on top to cross Current Creek a short distance below the summit on the Western slope.”

Between the north side of the High Bridge's Meadow and the Boulder Field are the remains of an old truck.



The third section is the “Boulder Field”. The wagon road footprint is covered with wide boulders from the construction of the auto road, which is now much higher up on the mountain. The boulders are large and so is the boulder field itself. There is a narrow meadow below the field that can be used to get around the large rocks, or it is almost as easy to simply cross the field. In among the boulders can be found rocks with the holes planned for dynamite sticks.



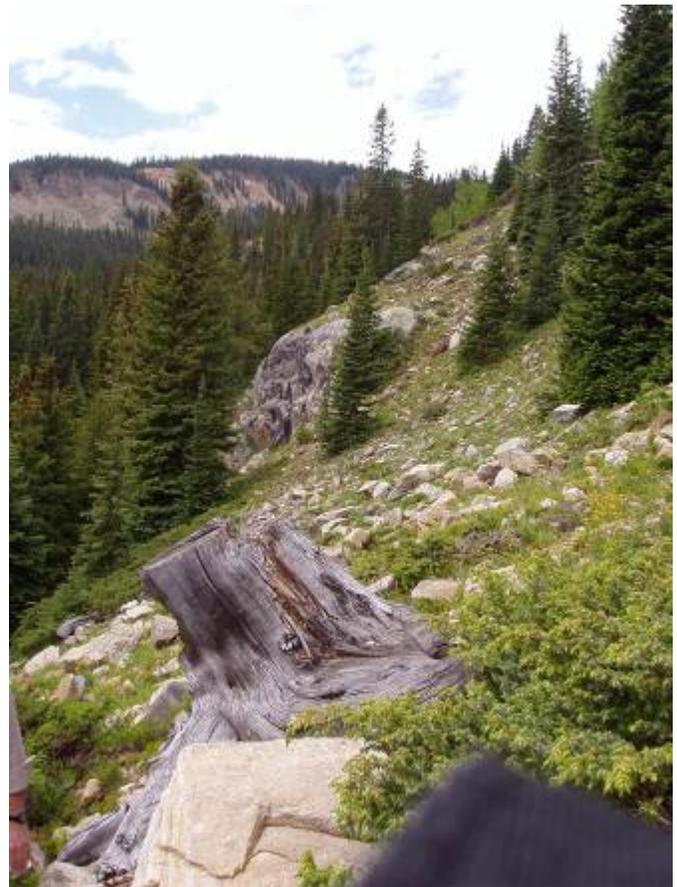
The last section is called “Museum Rock” and is a reminder of the rock that was along the wagon road in Clear Creek County. It has become a very special place and it is hoped that visitors will protect it for future explorers of the wagon road. The rocks are called *Museum Rocks* for the treasures found on it.



Ralph Phillips in 1981 wrote from memory the location of the early logging camps and mills in Grand County. He describes a sawmill at the foot of Berthoud Pass on the west side. He thought that it was the first mill in the eastern end of Grand County. This document can be found in the Grand County Museum in Hot Sulphur Springs, Colorado.



The photo above is used with permission from the Grand County Historical Association. It shows the wagon road on the west side of the Pass. The photo on the right is a current photo of the same area.



The photos in this section are either the author's or from reports made to the author from the various Colorado School of Mines students with the exception of those already credited.

It seems appropriate for the author to say thank you to the many Colorado School of Mines students and their professor, Dr. Robert Knecht, who have explored the Pass with her over the years. It is hard to express the respect and affection she has for them. Without their help her knowledge of the Pass would be much less. Besides they were a lot of fun to be with !!!

