

Fruita first to get safe drinking water

By Kathy Jordan

Today when there is a news story reporting on Third World countries not having safe domestic water it *is difficult to imagine. However, that is the way it was here in the Grand Valley in the early days.*

It was until 1907 when Fruita became the first town in the valley to get their drinking water from a safe mountain supply.

Before that the residents hauled the typhoid contaminated water from the river or irrigation ditches.

On June 27, 1905, A.A Betts, mayor of Fruita filed on the water from East Creek for Fruita's domestic water supply and work began on the Fruita water supply pipe that would bring the water from the streams on Pinon Mesa down 23 miles of mountain and sheer cliffs of what would become the Colorado National Monument.

There was a bit of a dust-up over water rights and the Town of Fruita had to take several of the ranchers on the Pinon Mesa to court to get the water rights that the city had acquired from John Snipes in 1905. The issues was finally settled in August of 1911 when the court's decision gave Fruita the first ten statute inches of water from the Little Dolores Creek and set the points of diversion on the creek.



To the left is a makeshift wooden bed, photo above, on two-wheel assemblies resting on the track that was used to haul construction materials. Portions of the railroad are still in place today. Photo courtesy of the Loyd Files Research Library Museum of Western Colorado



Above workers dig the trench for the cast-iron pipeline supplying water to Fruita, which was installed in the 1930s. Photo courtesy of the Loyd Files Research Library Museum of Western Colorado

The difficulty of the construction of the 23 miles of wooden pipe most likely seemed insurmountable. The pipe had to be hauled by wagon from the railroad at Fruita, then across the Colorado River, and on up Fruita Canyon. There was no bridge crossing the Colorado River when the project first started so a ferry was used, and in winter when the ice prevented the use of the ferry, a cage ran on a cable, an extremely dangerous way to cross the river. During the early stages of construction of the pipe line several men had lost their lives trying to get materials across the river by ferry or cage.

The Fruita bridge was built in 1906 to make the transportation of construction materials across the river safer.

Once the pipe was on the south side of the river the difficult job of getting the 40 to 50 carloads of pipe from the valley floor out and over the steep walls of the canyons on the monument still.

To solve that problem the Fruita Dugway was blasted out of rock and built up through the canyon so that the wagons could go up the hills with loads of pipe.

The wooden pipe, known as the Fruita aqueduct, stretched from the springs on Pinon Mesa, down to the Glade Park cutoff, through the camp grounds on the Monument where it emptied into the reservoir at the base of the Colorado National Monument

After the Colorado National Monument was formed in 1911 the City of Fruita and the officials of the National Park Service reached an agreement that allowed the pipeline crossing the park to remain.

During the depression the Civilian Conservation Corps or C.C.C. built the Rim Rock Drive through the Colorado National Monument.

At the same time the Rim Rock Drive was being built the U.S. War Department made an agreement with the Town of Fruita that for 10 per cent of the water flow in the water line the CCC and Work Progress Administration or WPA would replace the wooden pipes in the boundaries of the park with cast iron pipes.

The water line no longer supplies Fruita with water. Years ago the City of Fruita was going to change out the filter plant and found that it was going to be expensive so the administration opted to go with Ute Water.

Today water line does provide water for some residents on Glade Park through a lease agreement between Fruita and the Glade Park Water Users. The Glade Park Water Users maintain the water line and have a work party every year to make necessary repairs.

You can still see the water pipe on the west side of the Colorado National Monument and the Fruita Dugway are also visible. In some places on the Dugway trail you can see the remains of two small rails resting on railroad ties. This "railroad" helped transport materials used in the construction.

At one time the Dugway was used as a hiking trail and perhaps someday it will be again.