



Passengers on a ferry crossing the Grand (now Colorado River) in the 1890s, from left to right are, first man unidentified , John Gavin, Thomas Lowry, either John or Joe Duckett, and the child is either a Duckett or Gavin. Some examples of fares for a one-way trip on the ferry were; 10 cents for a pack mule, 25 cents for a saddle horse; seven head of cattle, \$1.05, fairly expensive for the day. Photo from the Duckett Family Collection.

Gordon Ferry and Toll Road

By Kathy Jordan

The Gordon Ferry and Toll Road to Pinion Mesa wasn't a superhighway in its day. In fact, it was said to be an extremely rough road.

Nor was it the only access to Pinion Mesa. Some other roads were Jacob's Ladder, Ute Trail and Billy Goat Trail.

Four months after the incorporation of Grand Junction, John Gordon and partners, Joseph McLearn and R.D. Mobley, filed articles of incorporation for the Gordon Toll Road, Bridge and Ferry Company. Because Mesa County was not formed until 1883, the filing on Nov. 4, 1882, occurred in Gunnison County, of which Grand Junction was then a part,

Incorporation papers described the road as starting at the south end of Second Street and running west to approximately West Main St. in the Crawford Addition. There the Gordon Ferry crossed the Grand (now Colorado) River to the Gordon ranch. The road then went southwest to Gordon Canyon and Prairie Park, now Little Park. It progressed to North East Creek, then to the head of Unaweep Valley through Big Rocky Canyon. The road ran a total of about 30 miles.

Rates to cross on the ferry and use the toll road were: Wagon and one team \$1.25; each additional team, 25 cents; pack with saddle animals, each 25 cents; loose stock, 10 cents

The Gordon Toll Road was difficult to travel, covering some of the roughest dirt and rocks and steepest ground around. But it shortened the 20-mile trip from Grand Junction to the new Pinion Mesa sawmills to 15 miles.

Not happy with the condition of the road, P.A. Rice petitioned the Mesa County Commissioners to build a public road for easier excess to his Pinion Mesa sawmill in November 1883.

After the public road was constructed, another problem arose. Because the public road to the sawmill crisscrossed over the toll road, the toll road suffered major damage in a short time. In fact, the two roads crisscrossed so often that flags had to be placed along the roadway so travelers knew which road they were using. In April 1884, Gordon and his partners took the county to court and were awarded restitution for the damage to the toll road.

From available records, it appears that the toll road wasn't in business for long after the public road was built. However, it continued to be used as a wagon road and stock trail.

Gordon sold his ferry and cable to Joseph Nelson, after his father, Patrick Gordon, drowned crossing the river on an overloaded ferry. Nelson later sold the ferry to Thad Duckett.

With the completion of Serpents Trail Road in 1921, the Gordon Toll Road as a wagon route was by-passed. Stockmen continued to use the road as a stock trail.

After Rim Rock Drive was completed in 1950, concerns were raised about the possible conflict between livestock being moved on trails through the Monument and the increasing use by motorists.

For several years, the Pinion Mesa Stock Grower's Association and National Park Service officials worked on an agreement for stock trails into Fruita and Grand Junction. The stockmen argued that the roads they wanted to use were old established roads, and under State of Colorado Law were automatically public rights-of-way.

In 1952 the Colorado National Monument and the Pinion Mesa Stock Growers Association agreed, most likely under protest, that they would no longer use the Serpents Trail to move stock. Welby Schrader, who by then owned the Gordon Toll Road, closed it. Only in case of emergency and with permission, were the ranchers allowed to use the road, and they could use it only one time. After the BLM and Parks Service built the Blue Hill Trail, the stockmen could no longer use the old toll road as a stock trail.

The Gordon Toll road was used off and on as a livestock driveway for approximately 70 years and is now a trail in the Colorado National Monument. Access is the vicinity of the Devil's Kitchen Trailhead.