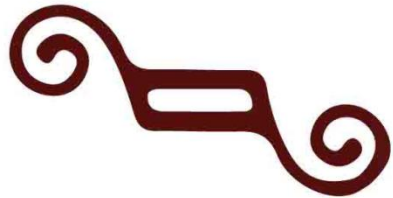


NATIVE AMERICAN TRAILS AND PIONEER ROADS of the Southern Uncompahgre Plateau



D A R G

Dominquez Archaeological Research Group

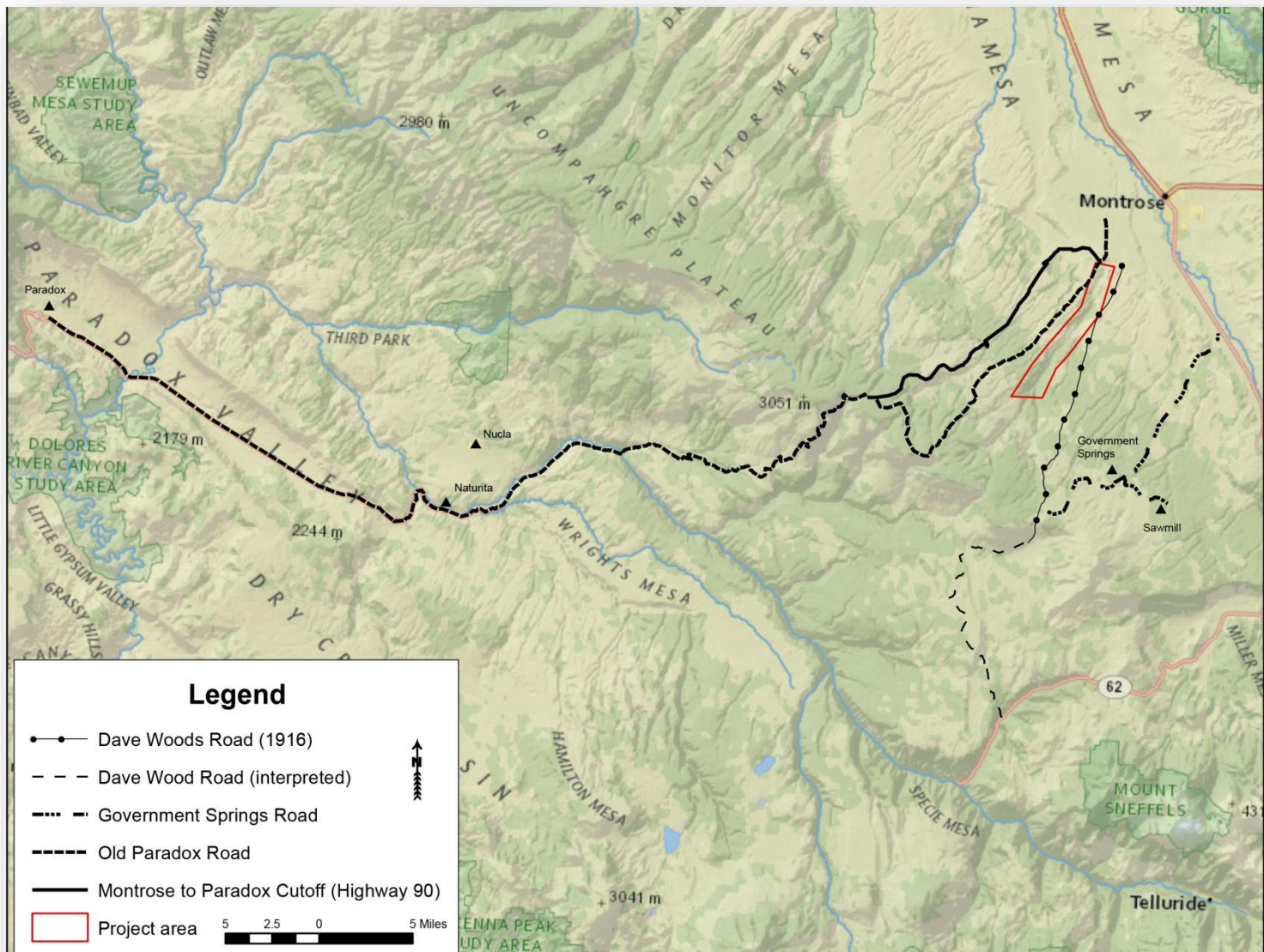
This presentation was derived from a project report prepared for a State Historical Fund Grant (SHF #2017-01-049) called Ute Trails Of The Uncompahgre Plateau: Spring Creek Section. We would like to acknowledge not only the support of History Colorado, but also that of the Bureau of Land Management's Uncompahgre Field Office and the U.S.D.A. Forest Service's District Office for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests.

PIONEER ROADS

Our search for Native American Trails began with recorded historic trails of the Spring Creek Canyon area located southwest of Montrose. Examinations of General Land Office (GLO) and other maps*, oral histories and memoirs were used to determine locations of Native American trails and historic pioneer roads of the Southern Uncompahgre Plateau. These indicated that the rims and adjacent mesa tops of Spring Creek Canyon had important historic roads that connected the Uncompahgre River Valley with the San Miguel River Valley and beyond. Such included the Old Paradox Wagon Road (northwest of Spring Creek Canyon), the Dave Wood Road (southeast of Spring Creek Canyon), and a portion of a trail known historically as the “Navajo Trail,” that became the Government Springs Road (located further to the south on the mesa north of Horsefly Creek).

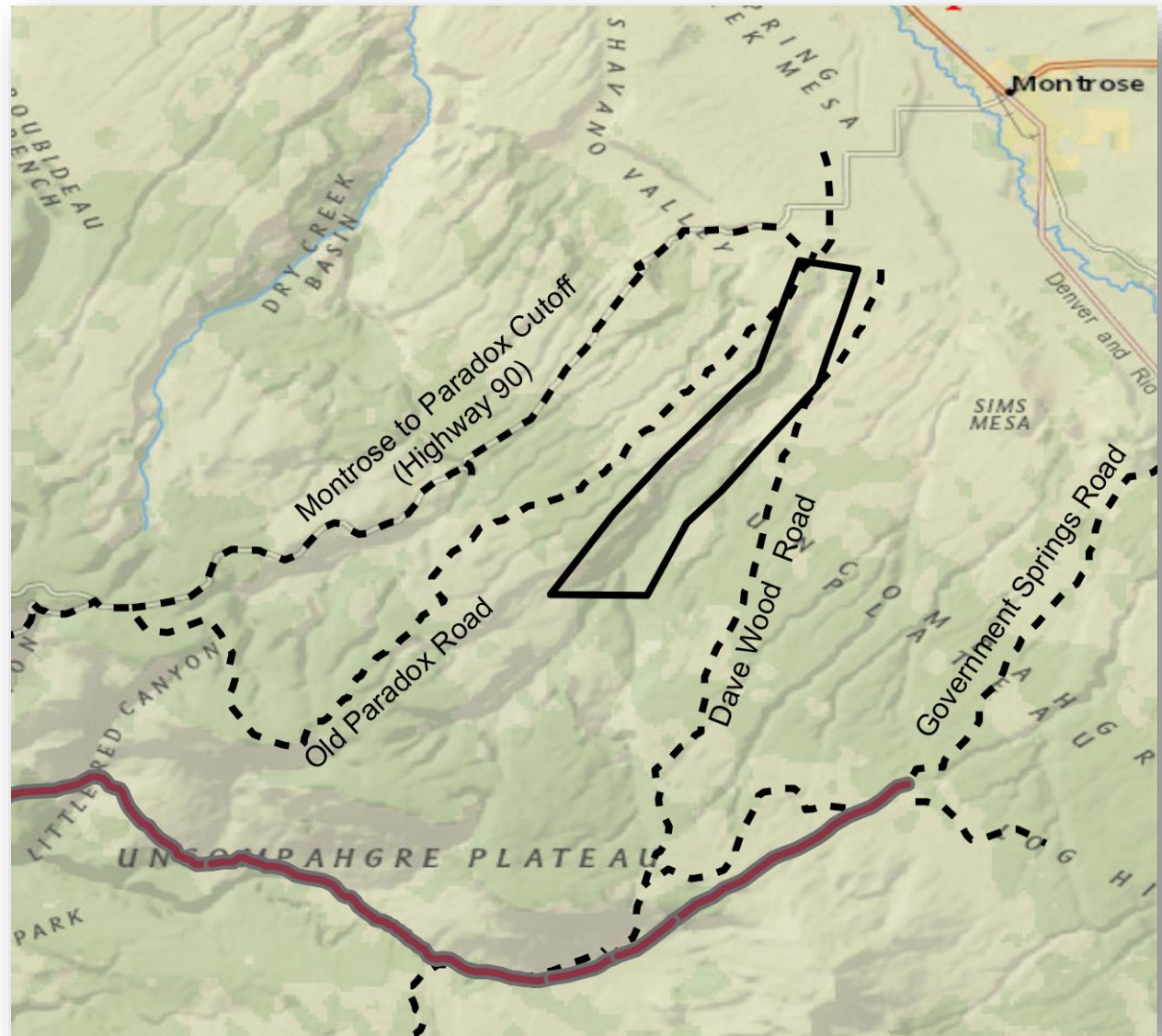
*The following historic maps were consulted: those of F.V. Hayden's survey of southwestern Colorado between 1874 and 1875 (Hayden 1881a), and a survey of western Colorado completed between 1874 and 1876 (Hayden 1881b); G. M. Wheeler's maps of southwestern Colorado between 1875 and 1877 (Wheeler 1878); Louis Nell's topographic map of Colorado from General Land Office surveys and other authentic sources in 1884; the USGS 15 minute quadrangles of Montrose (1909), and Paradox Valley (1916); and, the Uncompahgre National Forest map published by the USDA Forest Service in 1935.

Oral histories relevant to the project area consist of a series of interviews conducted between 1933 and 1934 for the State Historical Society of Colorado by the Civil Works Administration (CWA). As part of that project, the Montrose County series interviews were conducted by Arthur W. Monroe. Memoirs utilized include *Uncompahgre*, by Muriel Marshall; *Trails and Trials*, by Eda Baker Musser; *I Hauled These Mountains in Here*, by Frances Elizabeth Wood and Dorothy Wood; and an article from *Colorado Magazine* titled Fort Crawford, Colorado, 1880-1890 by Maj. John H. Nankivell.



Roads were the life blood for the early settlers, bringing provisions from distant suppliers.

Pioneer roads and more recently built Hwy 90 leading southwest from Montrose that cross the Southern Uncompahgre Plateau. Dark black outline is the Spring Creek Canyon study area. Red line is the approximate route of the “Navajo Trail.”



Old Paradox Road

Soon after the removal of the Utes (1881), cattle companies were formed and grazing began in the highlands of the Uncompahgre. One such called the Ashley Cattle Company was known to have grazed near the Horsefly Ridge area and may have been the first to use the Native American trails of the Southern Uncompahgre. The Old Paradox Road was one of the most important of the trails that became roads as it played a major role in the economic development of west-central Colorado, linking the Paradox and Uncompahgre Valleys. It became the route from the Paradox, Dry Basin, and southeastern Utah areas to the newly established railhead in Montrose (1882), which alleviated the problem of stock drives to cattle markets in Wyoming and the Dakotas (Mehls 1982:111-112).

Dave Wood Road

David Walker Wood was an entrepreneur, owner of a livery stable in Pueblo, Colorado, and noted for starting a “fast line” of passenger wagons. He was contracted by The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad to move his business to “end of the track” locations in Colorado including that of Montrose. His teamsters hauled supplies of all kinds needed to operate mines, including food, machinery, dynamite, coal, passengers, and ore. In 1884, his crews built what is still known as the “Dave Wood Road” from Montrose to Leopard Creek (access to the Telluride area), a distance of 33 miles. It was a toll road and travelers from the Paradox area were able to avoid the toll by staying to the Old Paradox Road. Unfortunately, in 1893, Wood lost his freight business during an economic panic, an estimated worth of at least \$250,000. The road was then used by farm and ranch homesteaders that came to the Horsefly area in the early 1900s.

Government Springs Road

This road was used by the cavalry of Fort Crawford to obtain water and timber building supplies from the “Government Spring” area located at the head of West Horsefly Creek. The wagon road followed an established Native American route to the top of Uncompahgre called the Navajo Trail. The location for the fort was chosen as early as 1880, when six companies of cavalry and nine companies of infantry traveled from Fort Garland in southwestern Colorado to the Delta/Montrose area. They ultimately established a cantonment northwest of the Uncompahgre Agency (present day Colona) and southwest of the Uncompahgre River. The road was used to access the “yellow” timber (Ponderosa Pine) forests of the Uncompahgre Plateau, and the first sawmill of the area was erected at Government Springs. It was operated by the soldiers of Fort Crawford initially to provide lumber for the buildings of the cantonment, and later for repairs.

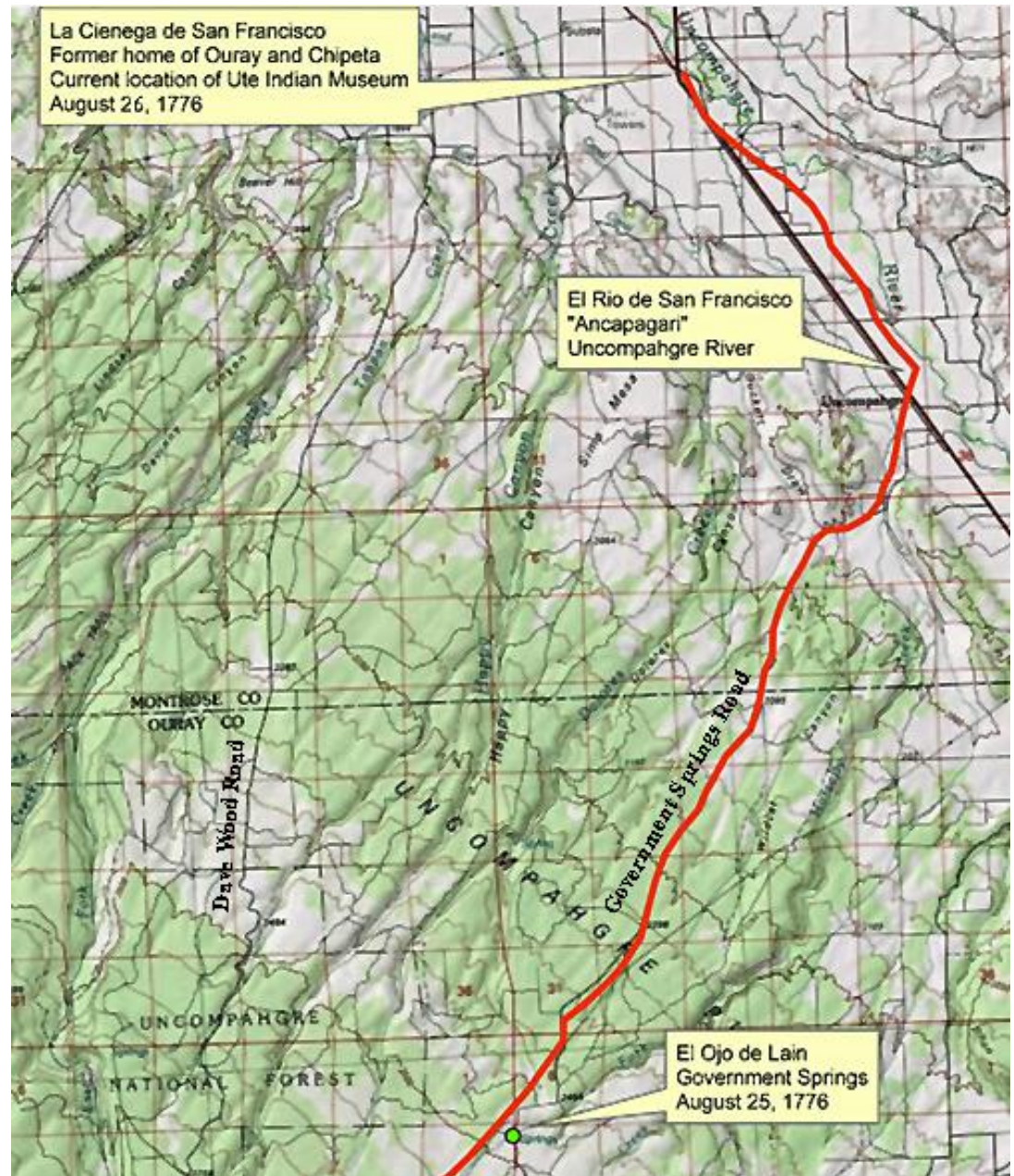
DOMINGUEZ AND ESCALANTE EXPEDITION ROUTE ON THE SOUTHERN UNCOMPAHGRE PLATEAU

The first serious Spanish exploration of the western Slope area was conducted in 1765 by Juan Antonio María de Rivera. While following the path that became known as the Old Spanish Trail he named several of Colorado's rivers, including the Navajo, San Juan, Piedra, Pinos, Florida, Animas, and Dolores Rivers. Initially following along a similar route into Colorado in 1776, explorers Francisco Atanasio Dominguez and Silvestre Velez de Escalante set out to find a route to Monterey, California. They followed Native American trails used by Juan de Rivera as far as the top of the Uncompahgre Plateau, where they met and traded with Utes who became their guides for the next legs of their journey. That expedition was the last official Spanish foray into central and northwestern Colorado, and the region remained largely unexplored until the early nineteenth century, when trappers, traders and surveyors from the United States began to scout the intermountain West. Fortunately, the Dominguez and Escalante Expedition maintained detailed logs – translations of which were consulted for the following discussion.

A review was made of The Dominguez-Escalante Journal for the period when they crossed the Uncompahgre Plateau near the project area (Chavez 1976:24). According to that translation -- and our interpretations in brackets ([]) -- on August 25, 1776, the explorers traveled to and rested at El Ojo de Lain [Government Springs area], a “copious spring” lying on the northern flank of the sierra [Uncompahgre Plateau]. Then, “On the 26th, we set out from El Ojo de Lain toward the northeast and traveled one league. Here the path we were following splits in two, one toward the east-northeast [along Horsefly Creek] and the other toward the northeast [present day Government Springs Road]. This one we followed, and after going two leagues and a half northeast we finished descending the sierra and came upon the banks and meadows of El Rio De San Francisco – among the Yutas called Ancapagari (which, according to our interpreter, means Red Lake, because they say that near its source there is a spring of red-colored water, hot and ill-tasting). On this river meadow, which is large and very level, there is a very wide and well-beaten trail. We went along it downstream for a league and a half [northwest] and halted next to a big marsh greatly abounding in pasturage, which we named La Ciénega de San Francisco [present day Chipeta Lakes]. Today five leagues [a distance of about ~ 13.5-14 miles].”

The rationale for determining this route for the trail centered on backtracking from the Chipeta Lakes area (using ~ 2.68 miles per league) along the Uncompahgre River then turning southwest along a route that presently follows the Government Springs Road. By doing so, it seemed likely that the El Ojo de Lain spring is the current location of Government Springs, from which the well-maintained road to the valley takes its name. Accordingly, the interpreted route is one that has the expedition leave Government Springs on August 26th heading northeast and downslope along the mesa between Dolores Creek and Horsefly Creek canyons – ending at the mouth of Horsefly Creek. Continuing to the Uncompahgre River, the expedition intersected a trail that followed the River in a northwest direction about 4.0 miles (1.5 leagues) to the large marsh of present day Chipeta Lakes. Notably, the text states they traveled *northeast and downstream; however, that direction is contrary to the local geography, as the river runs northwest*. In the translation and perhaps in the log itself, the direction was corrected in their record for August 27th: “we set out from La Ciénega de San Francisco, downstream, and heading northwest” (ibid:25).

A Tabeguache Ute guide joined the expedition on August 24th at a camp on the southwest side of the Uncompahgre (ibid.:22). The Ute guided the expedition along what was later called the Navajo Trail and away from two other trails: one that followed the Old Paradox Road and the other that approximated the Dave Wood Road. Both of those routes would have brought the Spanish into the Shavano Valley, an area of spiritual importance to the Utes.



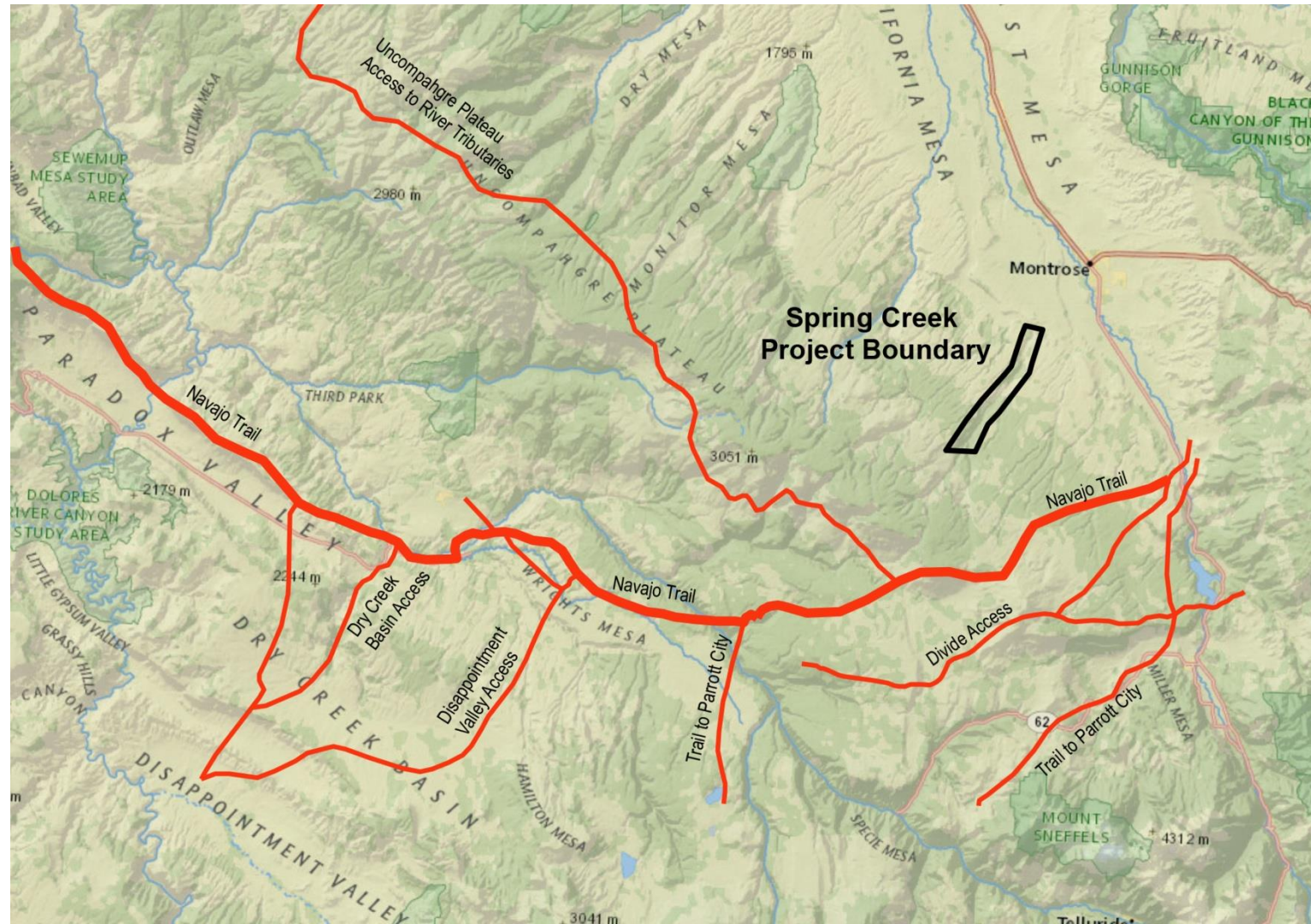
Ute Trails of the Southern Uncompahgre Plateau

Over at least the past 700 years the Utes have walked and later rode horses over Western Colorado following ages old trails and likely creating numerous new trails and paths.

John Wesley Powell, one of the first anthropologists to record observations of aboriginal Ute lifeways, went so far as to remark that:

“It is curious to notice with what tenacity an Indian clings to a trail; a path which has been followed by his forefathers is sacred to him, and though in the constant and rapid erosion of the gulches and sides of the hills and mountains these trails have become very difficult yet he never abandons them when they can by any possibility be followed, even though a shorter and better road is very perceptible” (Fowler and Fowler 1971:39).

A network of Native American trails cross the Uncompahgre. When analyzed as such, a few general conclusions can be drawn. It appears that the main east-west trail system across the southern Uncompahgre is the “Navajo Trail,” illustrated on Hayden’s map of Western Colorado. From the top of the Uncompahgre Plateau, its western extension follows the north side of Naturita Creek, then divides into trails heading south to Gypsum Valley (through Dry Creek Basin), west through Paradox Valley toward La Sal Junction in Utah, and northwest along Roc Creek (Outlaw Trail) toward the Moab area. As the trail proceeds east from the Naturita area and accesses the top of the Uncompahgre Plateau, it branches in three directions with one that heads northwest -- ultimately crossing Unaweep Canyon (avoiding the deep canyons of the Dolores River) and proceeding to Pinon Mesa and Glade Park. The branch to the north at the top of the Plateau heads toward Surface Creek, the confluence of the Gunnison and Uncompahgre Rivers (Riveras’ route), and then on to Grand Mesa. The main east-trending trail leads to the Uncompahgre Valley (Dominquez and Escalante Expedition route along what is now the Government Springs Road). When it reaches the Valley, the trail divides again with one trail heading northwest along the Valley floor, another eastward toward Lake City, and the other southward into the San Juan Mountains.



Selected portion of Hayden's trails from his thematic map: Western Colorado and Parts of Utah, 1881.

CONCLUSION

From DARG's trails-mapping effort, an ARCGIS database has been compiled for Federal lands east of Unaweep Canyon and the Dolores River, north of the San Miguel, west of the Uncompahgre River, and south of the Gunnison River (attached disc contains the ARCGIS data). This data was compiled from the maps listed at the beginning of this report segment. Use of this information in files searches for inventory projects on State and Federal land may help with their on-ground identification. Potentially, this data may be used in the assignation of Ute (*Nuche*) place names to localities and bring forth ecological knowledge buried in the Ute language. As time goes by, the generational loss of this knowledge of sacred places tied to landscape ecology increases, and use of the trails data combined with archaeological site records may aid in its preservation.