

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received JAN 14 1980

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Hole-in-the-Rock Trail

and/or common

**2. Location**

A trail commencing at Escalante, Utah and terminating  
street & number at Bluff, Utah. not for publication

city, town *Escalante and vicinity* vicinity of congressional district 02, 02, 01  
state Utah code 049 county *Garfield, Kane, San Juan* code 017, 025, 037

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NA being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: None

**4. Owner of Property**

name Multiple ownership. See attached

street & number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Garfield County Recorder, San Juan County Recorder, Kane County Recorder

street & number 55 South Main 88 North Main 70 North Main

city, town Panguitch Monticello state Kanab

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title None *N/A* has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local \_\_\_\_\_

depository for survey records

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

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**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved      date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Hole-in-the-Rock Trail between Escalante and Bluff is approximately 180 miles long and for the purposes of the National Register nomination, the boundary lines are two hundred feet on either side of the trail designation on the attached USGS maps.

The trail begins approximately one mile southeast of Escalante where it leaves present day Utah Highway 12 and follows south one mile to Alvey Wash then southeast down Alvey Wash to Ten Mile Spring. The trail followed an existing wagon road which had been developed by settlers of Escalante who arrived in the area in 1875-76. David Miller notes that Ten Mile Spring "more often than not...was, and still is, more of a name than a reality, being merely a seepage where limited water may be obtained for man and beast." (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p.49). Platt D. Lyman who arrived at the spring on November 20, 1879 reported that they could get no water for their horses and had to send their stock east seven miles to the Harris Ranch because of the scarcity of water on the road. The spring is located near Utah point (13) on Map #3 - Ten Mile Flat, Utah.

At Ten Mile Spring the road leaves Alvey Wash and continues southeast across Ten Mile Flat, and follows a soft sandy road two and a half miles to Cottonwood Wash, across Cottonwood and skirting Deadman's Ridge to the south one and a half miles to Half Way Hollow, (UTM point 17 Map 4 - Ten Mile Flat, Utah) then across Seep Flat and continuing southeast seven miles to Twenty Mile Springs. (UTM point 23 Map 5 - Seep Flat, UT). Platt Lyman described the road between Ten Mile Spring and Twenty Mile Spring in his journal entry for November 21, 1879 in the following manner, "We drove ten miles over a soft sandy road crossing several deep gulches where we had to double team and camped at dark at the twenty mile spring where there is plenty of good food but very little water." (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock, p. 161).

From twenty mile spring the road continues southeast across Sunset Flat where remains of the road are still visible (see photograph 1-24) and on to Dance Hall Rock approximately twenty-four miles southeast of Twenty Mile Spring photograph 3-24 Dance Hall Rock (UTM point 52 Map 9 Sooner Bench, a sandstone formation with an amphitheater-like cave and smooth floor is a major landmark on the trail and derives its name from its use for dances by pioneers camped a mile away at Forty Mile Spring. Forty Mile Spring (near UTM point 54 Map 9-Sooner Bench, UT) was the major expedition headquarters for more than three weeks as individual groups journeyed down the trail to Forty Mile Spring between November 15th and December 5, 1879. The spring offered the best water supply between Escalante and the Colorado River and is presently piped into a tank for watering cattle. (see photograph 4-24).

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1879-1880

Builder/Architect

N/K

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Hole-in-the-Rock Trail is significant because of its importance in the Mormon exploration and settlement of Utah and the San Juan country of the southwest. The trail reflects the commitment and courage of a people who were convinced they were a part of a divinely inspired and directed mission. The Hole-in-the-Rock Trail is an important symbol of the Mormon colonization effort in the intermountain west during the last half of the nineteenth century. Although the settlement came at a relatively late date in this history, the descent through the Hole-in-the-Rock and the persistence in constructing a road through one of the most rugged and isolated sections of the United States illustrates the fortitude of the American pioneer and serves as a vivid lesson to other generations of the importance of commitment and cooperation in meeting the challenges of their day.

The Hole-in-the-Rock Trail is significant as one of the last remaining and best preserved pioneer trails in Utah and the United States. While almost all routes used by pioneers in Utah have evolved into major highways, the Hole-in-the-Rock Trail, except for a few sections, has not. Because of the lack of development along the trail, it has, in many places, remained unchanged. Original cribbing, cuts blasted out by the road builders, stumps of trees cut to allow passage through the cedar forests, traces across the mesas and along the valley floors, important natural landmarks and Indian ruins remain unchanged since they were described by the travelers. In a few places, parts of original wagons are found along the trail.

The construction techniques and engineering of the pioneer road which are still visible illustrate the needs and limitations of a different form of transportation than we know today.

The Hole-in-the-Rock Trail is also unique in that it was not used very much after it was constructed. Most trails and roads are significant because of the heavy use they received and the role they played in the history of transportation. The Hole-in-the-Rock Trail, in contrast, is important primarily for its construction.

The settlement of the San Juan region by Mormons in 1880 was a continuation of the practice initiated with the arrival of the first Mormon pioneers in Utah in 1847 and which lasted more than fifty years into the twentieth century. The colonizing effort by Mormons in the intermountain west led to the establishment of nearly four hundred communities found as far north as Canada and into Mexico on the south. While each of these settlement efforts required, in some measure, the sacrifice, commitment and pioneering ability of

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Cadastral Public Land Survey Maps and Notes. Bureau of Land Management State Office, SLU, UT.  
 Draft Management Plan for the Hole-in-the-Rock Trail. Glen Canyon National Recreation Area;  
 Escalante Planning Unit, Cedar City BLM District; San Juan Planning Unit, Moab BLM District.  
 Miller, David E., Hole in the Rock: an Epic in the Colonization of the Great American West.  
 2nd Edition. Salt Lake City, University Press, 1966.

# 10. Geographical Data UTM NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property ~~225~~ miles of trail ~~1/2 mile~~ corridor see continuation sheets  
 180 *EGS 8-6-82* 400 FT.

Quadrangle name 48.5 ac. **ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED** Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UMT References

A	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	B	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	D	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	F	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	H	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Two hundred feet on each side of the trail designation on USGS maps

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>NA</u>	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: A. Kent Powell/Coordinator for Historic Preservation Research

organization: Utah State Historical Society date: January 1979

street & number: 307 West 2nd South telephone: (801) 533-6017

city or town: Salt Lake City state: Utah 84101

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

\* *F.O. Holland*  
*Asst. Dir., Cultural Resources*

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. *12/11/80*

State Historic Preservation Officer signature: *Melvin T. Smith* BLM, Chief of Division of Recreation & Cultural Resources

title: Melvin T. Smith, State Historic Preservation Officer date: January 3, 1980

For HCERS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<i>Bruce ...</i> Keeper of the National Register	date: <i>8-9-82</i>
Attest: <i>Eugene Joe Saxe</i> Chief of Registration	date: <i>8-9-82</i>

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U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management  
Utah State Office  
125 South State  
Salt Lake City, Utah

U.S.D.I. National Park Service  
Glen Canyon Recreation Area

Alvey, Arnold  
45 West 200 South  
Escalante, UT

Bailey, Gale C.  
220 South Center  
Escalante, UT

Blair, Charles W. and Beverly  
4289 West 3500 south  
Salt Lake City, UT 84120

Bolton, Henry L. and Naomi  
Escalante, Utah

Button, Arnold J. and Leah H.  
Escalante, UT

Carter, Philo C., ETAL  
Escalante, Utah

Griffin, Lorenzo and Ruth  
120 West 1 North  
Escalante, UT

Hawes, Earl D.  
90 South 200 East  
Escalante, Utah

Lincoln Lyman Construction Company, Inc.  
Escalante, UT

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Liston, Neal and Alberta  
70 West Main  
Escalante, Utah

Lyman, Lincoln  
145 North Center  
Escalante, Utah

Luellen, Glen and Virginia  
25 South 2 East  
Escalante, UT

Marsh, Thelma and Sharon Dale  
135 South 1 East  
Escalante, Utah

Moore, Earl  
4212 South 20th West  
Lancaster, California 93534

Murry, William M.  
Star Route 2  
Box 61  
Susanville, California

Osborne, Berlin  
Escalante, Utah

Spencer, J. C.  
90 East 2 South  
Escalante, UT

Spencer, Karl and Anne C.  
Escalante, UT

Spener, Thurman  
Escalante, Utah

Wilson, Leo  
120 West 2 South  
Escalante, Utah

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Wilson, Zelma  
Escalante, Utah

Woolsey, Mrs. Jane  
275 East 1 South  
Escalante, Utah

Woolsey, Lucinda  
Escalante, Utah

Woolsey, Wallace and Darline  
Escalante, Utah

River Ranch Estates  
Ben Hess and Clarence Pehrson  
P.O. Box 427  
Monticello, UT 84535

Golden Gate Estates  
Gordon S. Reese and G. J. Gorlick  
36 West 300 North  
American Fork, UT 84003

Clarence Perkins and Ray Perkins  
P.O. Box 464  
Blanding, UT 84511

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From Forty Mile Spring the trail continues southeast across Sooner Bench and ten miles onto fifty-mile spring. The terrain became much more difficult with numerous gulches and canyons to cross. Because of the scarcity of water at the Hole-in-the-Rock, six miles away, the camp at Fifty Mile Spring (near UTM points 70 and 71-Maps 9 and 10, Sooner Bench, and Rincom, UT) became the major headquarters during construction of the road through the Hole-in-the-Rock. Here approximately half of the expedition remained while those working on the road returned to the camp on Saturday evening to spend Sunday with their families before returning to work on the road Monday morning.

In 1880 the Hole-in-the-Rock offered the only possibility for crossing the Colorado River between Lee's Ferry on the south and present-day Moab on the north, a distance of approximately three hundred miles. In 1956 a rock fall in the gorge destroyed much of the road (see photograph 8-24) and has made it impossible for wagons, motor vehicles or even horses to get down the trail. It is possible to hike through the gorge with a limited amount of climbing and crawling over the fallen boulders. Within the gorge chisel marks remain and at the bottom of the gorge, where Uncle Ben's dugway was constructed cribbing built and post holes drilled by the original expedition remain (see photograph 9-24). Approximately 150 steps chisled from the solid rock also remain, however, these were not cut by the Hole-in-the-Rock expedition, but by citizens of Escalante twenty years later who were establishing an Indian trading post at the base of the Hole. The steps were to facilitate the packing of goods from the trading post to and from the top of the canyon rim.<sup>1</sup> (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p.108).

Today the lower half of the trail is covered by the waters of Lake Powell. However, the section covered is a long steep sandy hill on which little construction work was needed. Fortunately the most spectacular features of the Hole-in-the-Rock are above the lake level and are accessible by boaters on the lake.

After crossing the Colorado River, the trail, passing between Register Rocks on which the inscriptions carved by members of the expedition have been covered by the Lake, followed southeast up Cottonwood Canyon then up Cottonwood Hill (UTM point 80-Map 11 Navajo Mountain, Utah and Arizona). The road up Cottonwood Hill is still very visible, especially the rock blasted by the expedition for fill (see photographs 10-24 and 11-24).

Approximately one mile from the top of Cottonwood Hill was Cheese Camp, so named when supplies arrived including forty pounds of cheese from the Panguitch Tithing Office.



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At Cheese Camp the trail turned to the northeast across a difficult stretch of slick rock to the Chute, (UTM point 84-Map 11 Navajo Mountain, Utah and Arizona). Although the Chute did not present a major obstacle to the pioneers, requiring only double teaming of wagons to make the steep climb up the slick rock, it is a frightening experience to drive up or down in a four-wheel drive vehicle (see photograph 12-24).

From the Chute the trail continues northeast two miles to Grey Mesa and a flat sandy seven mile stretch of table land separating the Colorado and San Juan River drainages.

The descent off Grey Mesa was extremely difficult. David E. Miller writes, "Here the mesa terminates abruptly, and there is no natural 'chute' down its precipitous slopes. The only way to take wagons to the sandy and boulder-studded valley a thousand feet below was to literally cut a series of dugways from one ledge to the next one below - all out of solid rock. (see photograph 14-24). When completed the road was less than a half mile long, but it took a week to accomplish the task." (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p.132).

Millers account of the trail from the base of Grey Mesa to Lake Pagahrit (UTM points 95 and 99-Map 13 Lake Canon, UT) continues:

From the base of Grey Mesa the old road still visible a good deal of the way, follows a northeasterly direction toward Lake Pagahrit, approximately seven miles distant. Here was a beautiful body of clear, fresh water, indeed an unusual and unexpected sight in that desert country. The lake seems to have been gradually formed in past ages as sand drifted into Lake Canyon, slowly building a massive obstruction or dam behind which the water from natural springs and occasional storms accumulated. The old road ran right across this natural dam. When the pioneers arrived there the lake was a J-shaped body of water approximately fifty feet deep near the dam, nearly a half-mile long, and about a quarter of a mile wide in the widest place. Numerous kinds of birds were found there and vegetation grew in abundance, furnishing a very pleasant setting for a few days of rest and another major washday for the pioneer train. Members of the expedition noted with interest the obvious value of this site for a cattle range and subsequently made good use of it.

But the once beautiful Lake Pagahrit is no more. In 1915 three days of unprecedented sudden and heavy storms filled the natural reservoir to capacity; rapidly rising waters flooded over the dam, soon cutting a channel down through the soft sand; and the waters of Lake Pagahrit thundered down Lake Canyon into the Colorado." (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p.133).

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Approximately a mile from the site of Lake Pagahrit the trail turns in an easterly direction to a rock cairn placed by the four scouts who passed through in December 1879. (UTM point 102-Map 13, Lake Canyon, Utah and photograph 15-24). A little over a mile from the cairn are remains of a wagon wheel which have been bolted into the slock rock by the Bureau of Land Management (UTM point 103-Map 13, Lake Canyon, Utah and photograph 16-24).

Continuing in an easterly direction, the trail crosses the divide and reaches Castle Wash which it follows up to Green Water Spring (UTM point 102-Map 14 Clay Hills, Utah). Located a short distance from Spring (UTM point 103-Map 14, Clay Hills, Utah) is a group of Indian ruins (photograph 17-24). These ruins were first discovered by the four explorers who passed by them in December 1879. In his report of the exploring trip, George Hobb's wrote, "...we started up the northeast canyon and after traveling a short distance, camp upon a cliff dwellers' dwelling, in which there were seven rooms. The bake oven being in such a perfect state of preservation that by cleaning out the dust it would be ready to bake bread in at this late day." (Quoted in Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p.87).

Approximatey two miles east of the Indian Ruins is Clay Hill Pass where a week was spent constructing a road off the 1000 foot high blue clay hill. (see photograph 18-24). Once off Clay Hill, the road turned to the northeast and followed the valley floor along the Red House Cliffs. Today much of the trail is still visible as it parallels and intersects Highway U-263 (see photograph 19-24). The trail then enters an area of heavy vegetation, primarily cedar and scrub oak, as it continues north around Grand Gulch and south below Elk Ridge and the Bears Ears. Here evidences of the trail are clearly visible (see photograph 20-24) and the stumps of trees cut by the expedition remain (see photograph 21-24).

After circling around the head of Grand Gulch (UTM point 139-Map 17 Bears Ears, Utah) the trail turns to the south and southeast passing through two clearings known as Mormon Flat, (UTM point 142-Map 17 Bears Ears, Utah) and Snow Flat (UTM point 153-Map 18 Cedar Mesa, Utah) before dropping off the Twist (UTM point 156-Map 19, Bluff, Utah) and continuing southeast to Comb Wash.

Because of the impossibility of crossing Comb Ridge the trail followed south down Comb Wash to its junction with the San Juan River. With no other alternative, the expedition undertook construction of a road up San Juan Hill. (UTM point 168-Map 20, Boundary Butte, Utah). Construction of the road was the last major obstacle before reeaching the settlement site at Bluff. Today

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the original road remains in much the same condition as when constructed in 1880 (see photographs 23-24 and 24-24).

After crossing San Juan Hill, the road continued northeast up the west side of Butler Wash to a point where it could be easily crossed (UTM point 174-Map 19, Bluff, Utah) then turned south then east a distance of five miles to the site of Bluff.

### Present Condition

Most of the trail remains in the original condition altered to minor degree by natural processes. In a few areas more recent roads have been constructed on top of or across the original trail. These sections of the trail are usually only a few hundred yards in length and are the only man-made alterations to the trail with the exception of the creation of Lake Powell whose waters cover approximately four miles of the trail. Federal land owning agencies are well aware of the significance of the trail and are instituting programs to enhance its preservation. Almost all of the trail is under Bureau of Land Management and National Park Services control including the better preserved portions of the trail.

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Utah's first Mormon settlers, the efforts of those men and women who built and crossed the Hole-in-the-Rock Trail, loom, in retrospect, larger than any other pioneering endeavor in Utah and perhaps the entire west. As the historian of the Hole-in-the-Rock expedition, David E. Miller, noted it was truly "An Epic in the Colonization of the Great American West."

The San Juan region was, and is still, one of the most isolated parts of the United States. The country is extremely rough and broken. The canyons of the Colorado River and San Juan River and their tributaries are usually characterized by sheer walled cliffs several hundred feet high, while the surrounding mesas, hills and washes with their bone jarring slick rock, cedar forests and sand presented their own obstacles to transportation. In addition, by 1880 the San Juan Region was the last area in Utah of occupation by a large number of Indians as the San Juan River was something of a natural meeting area for Navajos, Utes and Paiutes who occupied the region.

Given the isolation from other Mormon settlements, the closest was Escalante about two hundred miles away, the ruggedness of the country, the questionable agricultural potential of the region, the availability of more assessible virgin agricultural land in other areas, and the threat of Indian hostilities, it is understandable why the settlement of the San Juan area came in the twilight of the Mormon settlement effort. That the settlement was not delayed longer than 1880 was due to the need to cultivate better relations with the Indians, to insure Mormon control of the area thereby increasing the security of Mormon settlements to the west and providing a springboard for future Mormon settlements to the east, south and north.

Despite an avowed Church policy to feed rather than fight the Indians, as Mormon settlements pushed into southern Utah and Northern Arizona, the roving bands of Navajos and Paiutes found the flocks and herds of the Mormon settlers an easily available and irresistible booty. As David E. Miller notes:

Being well acquainted with all possible crossings of the Colorado, small parties of Indians often raided the outlying settlements, drove off stock and disappeared into secret hideouts southeast of the river, beyond the reach of their pursuers. At times this plundering assumed rather important proportions. One writer states that in 1867 a herd of some twelve hundred stolen animals was pushed across the Colorado at the Crossing of the Fathers and that in one year more than a million dollars' worth of horses, cattle and sheep was looted from the impoverished Utah frontier...

By the mid-1870s the San Juan area of southeastern Utah had for some time been known as a refuge for lawless men, white as well as red; it was

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literally an outlaw hideout, as the settlers would soon learn. A colony there would act as a buffer to absorb any possible hostilities far short of the rest of settled Utah. (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock pp. 7-8).

Also of great concern to Church leaders was the occupation of all usable farm and grazing land, especially as non-Mormons threatened to acquire the land. The San Juan Region was also felt to provide a more satisfactory home for converts from the Southern states who found the winters too cold yet, according to church leaders, needed the pioneer experience to get "... a good foundation temporally and spiritually." (John Morgan to Erastus Snow, May 9, 1978, quoted in Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p.6.).

Finally members of the Hole-in-the-Rock expedition were convinced that they were carrying out the work of the Lord. As one member of the expedition wrote in later years:

My purpose in this humble effort in writing about it (the Hole-in-the-Rock trek) is to convince my children and my descendants of the fact that this San Juan Mission was planned, and has been carried on thus far, by prophets of the Lord, and that the people engaged in it have been blessed and preserved by the power of the Lord according to their faith and obedience to the counsels of their leaders. No plainer case of the truth of this manifestation of the power of the Lord has ever been shown in ancient or in modern times. (Kumen Jones quoted in Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p.13)

Plans for a colonizing mission to San Juan were announced at the quarterly conference of the Parowan Stake held December 28 and 29, 1878. Although the specific location of the settlement had not been selected, people were issued calls to participate in the endeavor. For many this meant giving up comfortable homes in the older settlements of Parowan, Cedar City, Paragonah, Panguitch, and other communities. While those called were not compelled to go, many firmly believed that the call was divinely inspired and wherever church authorities directed, they would go.

In the spring of 1879 an exploring party consisting of 26 men, two women and eight children under the leadership of Silas S. Smith, left to explore the trail to the San Juan River and select a permanent settlement location. Traveling southeast into Arizona they crossed the Colorado River at Lee's Ferry and continued on to Moenkopi where they turned northeast and traveling through Navajo country recrossed the Utah-Arizona border and made their way to Montezuma on the San Juan River. Here they spent two and one half months exploring the area, building a dam, digging irrigation ditches and building a

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few houses before returning to the settlements for their families and equipment.

The trail from Moencopi to the San Juan River had proven very dry, and severe Indian threats led to the abandonment of this route as a practical way to the San Juan Region from the Southern Utah settlements. The exploring party returned to their homes by traveling north past the future site of Monticello and to the Old Spanish Trail at the south end of the LaSal Mountains. They followed the Old Spanish Tail west to the crossing of the Colorado River at present-day Moab, the Green River at present-day Green River, through Castle Valley, and down Salina Canyon to the Sevier Valley then south back to Parowan. In retrospect this northern route along the Spanish Trail would have been the most practical. However the circuitous route covered a distance of more than five hundred miles whereas a direct route would be less than half the distance.

To those called to settle the San Juan region, the report that a direct route from Escalante to the San Juan River had been found must have been taken as evidence of God's help in the endeavor. During the summer of 1879 Andrew P. Schow and Reuben Collett of Escalante, in response to a request by Silas S. Smith the leader of the San Juan mission, explored east from Escalante with a two wheeled cart carrying a wagon box boat to the Colorado River. After crossing the river they returned to Parowan with a favorable report of the trail. Silas Smith, who was good friends with the men, was anxious to avoid both the southern and northern routes of the exploring expedition and on the strength of the Schow-Collett report, announced in September 1879 that the Expedition would proceed to the San Juan via the Escalante route.

Shortly after the announcement, members of the expedition began their journey to Escalante then on to Forty-Mile Spring which was the first major camp site and general point of rendezvous for the groups coming from different communities.

From Forty-Mile Spring exploring parties were sent out to reconoiter the trail east of the river. Despite negative reports of the feasibility of constructing a wagon road east of the river, Silas S. Smith was left with little choice but to push on ahead since the winter snows in the Escalante mountains blocked the return to their former homes. The decision to push on was welcomed in the camp and confident that the decision was divinely inspired a spirit of optimism and good will prevailed as the expedition began its push to the Colorado River and the descent through the Hole-in-the-Rock. This section of the trail was not without difficulty. Miller writes:

From a road builder's point of view, the sixty-five mile region between

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the town of Escalante and the Colorado River at Hole-in-the-Rock grows progressively worse as one proceeds southward into the desert. The San Juan pioneers had experienced considerable difficulty on the first forty miles of the road, but the remaining fifteen miles they found several times more difficult. This country is very deceptive: What appears to be a fairly level plain, lying between the Straight Cliffs of Fifty-Mile Mountain and the Escalante River, is literally almost straight-walled gorges and canyons which head in the Kaiparowits and cut deeper and deeper as they extend eastward toward the Escalante River gorge.... From Forty-Mile Spring southward the washes, gulches, and canyons not only become progressively more numerous, but also much more difficult to cross. If the San Juan pioneers had merely succeeded in building a wagon road through that part of the country--to Fifty-Mile Spring--and then returned to the settlements, their achievement would have been outstanding. But this was really easy terrain to cross compared to what lay ahead. (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock pp. 70-71).

By early December 1879 the expedition had arrived at the Hole-in-the-Rock where they would spend the next eight weeks on three major road building tasks: the notch itself; the road from the base of the cliffs to the Colorado River; and the dugway out of the river gorge to the east which had to be cut from the Solid Rock Wall.

Before work started down through the Hole-in-the-Rock, the cleft was nothing more than a very narrow crack--described as "...too narrow to allow passage for man or beast." (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p.101).

Because of the shortage of blasting powder and tools and the limited working space at the top of the Hole, the men were divided into three crews and work proceeded simultaneously on all three projects. Those working at the top of the Hole had to be lowered over the cliff with ropes until a suitable grade had been cut. Jens Nielson, Benjamin Perkins and Hyrum Perkins were in charge of the blasting. The Perkins brothers became proficient in the use of blasting powder in the coal mines of Wales before emigrating to the United States.

The descent by wagon through the Hole required rough-locking the wheels and attaching long ropes to the wagon so that a dozen or more men could hang on and help slow the descent of the wagon. Women and children walked down through the Hole and were forced to slide down the forty feet at the top because it was so steep they could not walk. Writing to her parents Elizabeth Morris Decker gave this contemporary account of the descent to the river:

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It is about a mile from the top down to the river and it is almost straight down, the cliffs on each side are five hundred ft. high and there is just room enough for a wagon to go down. It nearly scared me to death. The first wagon I saw go down they put the brake on and rough locked the hind wheels and had a big rope fastened to the wagon and about ten men holding back on it and then they went down like they would smash everything. I'll never forget that day. When we was walking down Willie looked back and cried and asked me how we would ever get home. (quoted in Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock p. 116).

Despite the dangerous descent there was no major tragedy--no animals were killed and no wagons were tipped over or seriously damaged.

While the road was being cut through the Hole-in-the-Rock, four scouts were sent ahead to explore the rest of the trail to Montezuma. Setting out on December 17th the scouts reached the present site of Bluff December 28th. Despite an extremely difficult trek, marked by snowy cold weather and no food for the last four days, the scouts did locate the trail at the San Juan River and returned to the Expedition at the Hole-in-the-Rock with their report on January 14, 1880.

Although the descent through the Hole-in-the-Rock would symbolize the courage and commitment of the San Juan pioneers once across the Colorado River they would be tested at several other locations including Cottonwood Hill, The Chute, Clay Hill Pass, and San Juan Hill. This journey of 125 miles took over two months with much of the time spent in road construction.

The last great test was only a few miles from their final destination at San Juan Hill. Because of the sheer cliffs on Comb Ridge, the expedition was forced to follow Comb Wash to its junction with the San Juan River. With no choice but to go up onto Comb Ridge the pioneers spent several days building a road up the steep slope of San Juan Hill. The ascent up San Juan Hill seemed, in many ways, more difficult than the descent through the Hole-in-the-Rock. Charles Redd, whose father L.H. Redd was a member of the original expedition, wrote the following account of the climb up San Juan Hill:

Aside from the Hole-in-the-Rock, itself, this was the steepest crossing on the journey. Here again seven span of horses were used, so that when some of the horses were on their knees, fighting to get up to find a foothold, the still-erect horses could plunge upward against the sharp grade. On the worst slopes the men were forced to beat their jaded animals into giving all they had. After several pulls, rests, and pulls, many of the horses took to spasms and near convulsions, so exhausted were they. By



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the time most of the outfits were across, the worst stretches could easily be identified by the dried blood and matted hair from the forelegs of the struggling teams. My father (L.H. Redd, Jr) was a strong man, and reluctant to display emotion; but whenever in later years the full pathos of San Juan Hill was recalled either by himself or by someone else, the memory of such bitter struggles was too much for him and he wept. (Miller, Hole-in-the-Rock pp. 139-140).

Once on top of Comb Ridge the road, with the exception of constructing dugways into and out of Butler Wash, was relatively easy on to the San Juan River. However, the expedition stopped eighteen miles short of the intended destination of Montezuma and named the site of their new settlement Bluff.

Although the Hole-in-the-Rock Trail did not become a major highway, it was used on occasion until the Hall's Crossing route was opened several years later. However, much of the trail, with the exception of the difficult stretch from Lake Canyon to the Hole-in-the-Rock, was used as part of the Hall's Crossing route. Jeep expeditions and hikers still follow the trail and major commemoration activities are planned for the Centennial Anniversary of the Hole-in-the-Rock Expedition in 1980.

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Southern Utah Coal Series infra-red aerial photographs. Bureau of Land Management  
State Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Personal communication with: Dr. Adrienne Anderson, National Park Service, Denver  
Mr. Jerry Ballard, Bureau of Land Management, Monticello.  
Mr. Rex Wells, Bureau of Land Management, Escalante.

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