

The Roads to Utah's Dixie

THE ROADS TO UTAH'S DIXIE THE BLACK RIDGE The toughest, heartbreaking barrier to the colonization of "Utah's Dixie" was the Black Ridge between New Harmony and Pintura, north of Toquerville, Utah. A deep, rough, lava flow clogged the valley from the base of the towering Hurricane cliffs on the east, to the foothills of Pine Valley Mountain on the west. The jolting rocks subjected the pioneer wagons, animals, and human tempers to a terrific strain. There were broken axles, broken wheels and fellies, broken kingbolts and run-off rims, to try the patience of the weary travelers who were forced to resort to their own ingenuity in making repairs, being miles away from any possible relief. Apostle George A. Smith, for whom St. George was named, proclaimed this road to be "The most desperate piece of road that I have ever traveled in my life, the whole ground being covered for miles with stones, volcanic rock, cobbleheads - and in places deep sand." This old pioneer trail and Peter's Leap Road, were both used until 1869, when the winding road was constructed along the east side of Ash Creek. Many Dixie peddlers and freighters traveled this road daily with wagons. PETER'S LEAP Peter's Leap, two and one-half miles north of Pintura, was no doubt the worst part of the route that ignited Apostle Smith's ire. The road followed a long-used Indian Trail, crossed Leap Creek Canyon, a 165 foot gorge cut in lava rock, at a point approximately one and one-half miles west of where Leap Creek joins Ash Creek. Peter Shirts, a Cedar City pioneer, inspired the name. Shirts was paid \$300.00 by the Washington County Commission, to build a road along the old Indian Trail on the west edge of the Black Ridge. When asked how wagons would get across the deep canyon that barred the way, he replied, "We'll Leap It!" The 165-foot canyon-crossing became "Peter's Leap." The stream became "Leap Creek." The road leading into the gorge from the south could be built at a somewhat reasonable grade of 15 percent. Down the north face, however, the dugway grade was a dizzying 30 percent grade. A sturdy windlass was erected on top of the north canyon wall. The wagons coming from the north were stopped here. The cargo was lashed securely to the wagon box. The teams were unhitched and led down the winding trail to the canyon bottom. Then the wagons were eased down the canyon wall. The teams were then hitched to the wagons and they were pulled out of the canyon, up a gradual slope through a break in the south canyon wall. The distance between the top of the north canyon wall to the point where the road leveled out on the south, was 100 feet. Freighters and peddlers coming from the south, unhitched their teams in the bottom of the canyon and the windlass pulled their loaded wagons up the face of the cliff. In 1869, the Territorial Legislature appropriated \$1000.00 to build a good surveyed road along the skirt of the Hurricane Cliffs, east of Ash Creek. This road was well-graded and wound in and out of the ravines. It was a single track, with turnouts to let traffic pass. This road was used as a main route from Salt Lake City to Utah's Dixie, and to California from 1869 to 1925. In 1925, a two-lane graveled road was built over the Black Ridge. Many years later this road was replaced by Interstate 15. PETER'S LEAP INDIAN CAVE The early pioneers discovered an Indian Cave, near the top of the canyon wall, at Peter's Leap. It is

accessible from the south rim, by following a narrow trail down the face of the cliff to an opening over 100 feet above Leap Creek. Early settlers found woven yucca sandals, arrowheads, spearpoints, bone awls and other items in the Cave, as well as deposits of bat dung or guano. In January of 1858, a group of workers went to Peter's Leap Cave and excavated the bat droppings. Nitrate was leached out and combined with sulfur and sagebrush ashes. The result was saltpeter, the main ingredient of old-fashioned gunpowder. Production cost: twenty-five cents per keg.

Source: http://history.utah.gov/apps/markers/detailed_results.php?markerid=3119