

= Utah State Route 128 =

State Route 128 (SR @-@ 128) is a state highway in the U.S. state of Utah . The entire length of the highway has been designated the Upper Colorado River Scenic Byway , as part of the Utah Scenic Byways program . This road also forms part of the Dinosaur Diamond Prehistoric Highway , a National Scenic Byway . Residents of Moab frequently refer to SR @-@ 128 as " the river road " , after the Colorado River , which the highway follows .

The highway was originally constructed to connect rural cities in eastern Utah with Grand Junction , Colorado , the largest city in the region . Part of the highway was merged into the Utah state highway system in 1931 ; the rest was taken over by the state and assigned route number 128 in 1933 . Today , the highway is used as a scenic drive for visitors to the area .

The highway crosses the Colorado River at the site of the Dewey Bridge , listed on the National Register of Historic Places . This bridge was the longest suspension bridge in Utah until April 2008 when it was destroyed by a fire started by a child playing with matches . The future of the bridge is uncertain , with Grand County conducting a study to determine the feasibility of reconstructing it .

= = Route description = =

State Route 128 begins just north of Moab , where it is commonly known as " the river road " . The highway follows the southern bank of the Colorado River through a narrow , steep gorge , described as spectacular by National Geographic . The sheer sandstone walls of the gorge along Route 128 are recommended for their beauty on vacation guides from as far away as France and Germany .

As parts of the road are very narrow , with blind corners and no shoulders , the Utah Department of Transportation has prohibited trucks and vehicles over 55 @,@ 000 pounds (24 @,@ 948 kg) from the entire highway . In addition , a restriction at the junction with U.S. Route 191 requires vehicles over 15 feet (4 @.@ 6 m) wide to have two police escorts .

Between Moab and Castle Valley , the Colorado River , and indirectly , Route 128 , form the southern boundary of Arches National Park . Arches National Park is so named because of over 2000 natural arches inside park boundaries . While the highway does offer views of several features in the park , there is no park access along the highway . Popular attractions along this portion include Negro Bill Canyon , with hiking trails to Morning Glory Arch , campgrounds and boat docks at a curve in the river called Big Bend .

The gorge widens where the highway passes by Castle Valley and Professor Valley , which have been the shooting locations for many western films (including Wagon Master and Rio Grande) and television commercials . Near the east end of the valley the highway crosses Onion Creek , a stream sourced by springs that contain naturally occurring minerals that produce a strong odor in the water . At the east end of the valley the highway has a view of the Fisher Towers , a set of dark red spires . After leaving the valley , the road winds farther up the river gorge until arriving at the Dewey Bridge , named for Dewey , a nearby ghost town .

After the bridge , the road follows the northern bank of the river for a few miles then exits the Colorado River gorge . At this point the highway proceeds across desert towards the Book Cliffs to terminate at Interstate 70 near Cisco . Cisco is a ghost town along the main line of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad , founded as a water re @-@ filling station for steam locomotives . The last 3 miles (4 @.@ 8 km) of the road parallel the railroad and is an old routing of U.S. Route 6 / U.S. Route 50 , in use before the construction of I @-@ 70 .

= = History = =

Access between Moab and Castle Valley was originally via a pack trail called the Heavenly Stairway . This trail , named for a dramatic descent of over 1 @,@ 000 feet (300 m) , was described as beautiful , but difficult to navigate . Isolated from Utah 's population centers , this area depended on Grand Junction and other cities in Colorado for both everyday supplies and a market for agricultural products . Moab residents pushed for a road to be built along the riverbank . By 1902

, the trail was replaced with a toll road , called King 's Toll Road , after Samuel King . King was an early settler who also operated the toll ferry used prior to the construction of the Dewey Bridge . Rocks inscribed with " Kings Toll Road " can still be found along the roadway . While the road did improve travel , it was not built high enough above the river level and was often flooded .

= = = Dewey Bridge = = =

The Dewey Bridge , built in 1916 , originally carried SR @-@ 128 across the Colorado River . The bridge featured an all wood deck measuring 502 feet (153 m) long , 10 @.@ 2 feet (3 @.@ 1 m) wide from support to support and 8 feet (2 @.@ 4 m) wide from rail to rail . The bridge also consisted of two metal towers , a run of seven cables on each side of the bridge deck , and cable anchors .

In 1912 Grand County unsuccessfully petitioned the state to finance the construction of a bridge . In 1913 , the ferry was out of service for a time because ice in the river struck the ferry , causing it to sink . This raised the level of urgency for a more reliable river crossing . Grand County held a municipal bond election , and was able to raise \$ 25 @,@ 000 (1913 , approximately equivalent to \$ 550 @,@ 000 in 2008) to finance the construction of a bridge . The county employed the Midland Bridge Company of Kansas City , Missouri , to build it . Plans originally called for the bridge deck to be 12 feet (3 @.@ 7 m) wide , but with the bonds not producing the expected yields , the deck width was scaled down to 8 feet (2 @.@ 4 m) . In 1916 , the bridge was dedicated with a strength test by having approximately 70 attendees attempt to cross the bridge at once . The total was seven wagons , two people on horseback and several on foot . The bridge was designed to support the weight of six horses , three wagons , and 9 @,@ 000 pounds (4 @,@ 100 kg) of freight .

On the day of its completion , it was the second @-@ longest suspension bridge west of the Mississippi River . The longest was the Cameron Suspension Bridge , also built by the Midland Bridge Company , who used the same base plans for both bridges . The Dewey Bridge remained the longest suspension bridge in Utah until it was destroyed by fire in 2008 .

As part of a tribute , a reporter for The Daily Sentinel interviewed locals and visitors about their first experience crossing the bridge . Many recalled how nervous they felt as the bridge would creak and sway under load . One stated , " A lot of people lost a lot of mirrors on that bridge " . Drivers with wide vehicles had to fold in their side mirrors to safely cross , as the bridge deck was only 8 feet (2 @.@ 4 m) wide .

An agreement was reached in 1984 between the Grand County Commission and the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) to balance the conflicting public demands to retire and preserve the aging bridge . As part of this agreement , UDOT would commission a new bridge and once finished , transfer ownership of the original bridge back to Grand County . Grand County agreed to petition to have the bridge be included in the National Register of Historic Places , assume maintenance and guarantee the bridge would be preserved . The nomination was approved and the bridge was added to the National Register of Historic Places on July 12 , 1984 . In 1988 , the replacement bridge was completed , and the title deed to the Dewey Bridge was handed over to the county in 1989 . Grand County completed a restoration project in 2000 .

After being replaced for automobile use , the Dewey Bridge was used by the Kokopelli trail , a bicycle trail , and a pedestrian trail . The east approach to the bridge features an abandoned gas station and the ghost town of Dewey . The west approach has been converted to a rest area and park .

On April 6 , 2008 , a seven @-@ year @-@ old boy accidentally started a fire in a nearby campground while playing with matches . The fire moved up the riverbank and destroyed the bridge 's wooden deck and rails . The county funded a study to determine the feasibility and cost of reconstructing the bridge . The engineers determined that the steel cables and towers most likely did not suffer structural damage and could be reused . The study estimated reconstruction costs at \$ 850 @,@ 000 . The engineers determined the original blueprints , preserved in a museum , were of sufficient quality that only minimal engineering work would be required . The county agreed to direct the effort , but will not fund it with taxpayer money . As replicas do not qualify for historical status ,

historians are debating if using the original towers and cable is enough for the structure to qualify as historical . Grand County has set up an account for interested parties to donate to the reconstruction effort .

Though the Colorado River runs for over 400 miles (640 km) in Utah , there are only three sites with bridges to cross it . One is the Dewey Bridge site where SR @-@ 128 traverses the waterway ; the other two are an unnamed bridge that carries US @-@ 191 (built in 1911 , replaced in 1955 and again in 2010) and the Hite Crossing Bridge (built in 1966) used by SR @-@ 95 .

= = = From trail to highway = = =

With the bridge finished in 1916 , by the 1920s the toll road was reconstructed above the ordinary high water mark so it could be used year @-@ round . The road was briefly used for the route of the Midland Trail across eastern Utah . However , by 1923 the trail had been moved to a more direct routing , similar to modern I @-@ 70 . The road from Moab along the river to Castleton was added to the state highway network in 1931 , as SR @-@ 129 . In 1933 , the route was redesignated SR @-@ 128 and extended to Cisco . The highway was gradually upgraded to a two @-@ lane paved roadway .

The state legislature extended SR @-@ 128 about 3 miles (5 km) at its east end in 1969 , due to the pending construction of Interstate 70 . Plans called for the freeway to bypass the Cisco area , including the terminus of SR @-@ 128 . The legislature transferred a portion of SR @-@ 4 (the legislative designation for what was then signed US @-@ 6 / US @-@ 50) near Cisco to the proposed junction with I @-@ 70 . When that part of I @-@ 70 was completed in 1971 , signs were changed to SR @-@ 128 on its portion of the old road , while the remainder of the bypassed road through Cisco was relinquished to the county .

The highway was recognized by the Utah Scenic Byways program for its scenic value and given the name Upper Colorado River Scenic Byway . The highway was recognized as a National Scenic Byway and named as part of the Dinosaur Diamond Scenic Byway in 1998 . A petition is currently before the Federal Highway Administration to recognize Route 128 as an All @-@ American Road . To meet this criterion the highway must be deemed by the administration to have enough scenic value to be a " destination unto itself " .

= = Major intersections = =

The entire route is located within Grand County .