

= Interstate 70 in Utah =

Interstate 70 (I @-@ 70) is a mainline route of the Interstate Highway System in the United States connecting Utah and Maryland . The Utah section runs east ? west for 232 @.@ 15 miles (373 @.@ 61 km) across the central part of the state . Richfield is the largest Utah city served by the freeway , which does not serve or connect any urban areas in the state . The freeway was built as part of a system of highways connecting Los Angeles and the northeastern United States . I @-@ 70 was the second attempt to connect southern California to the east coast of the United States via central Utah , the first being a failed attempt to construct a transcontinental railroad . Parts of that effort were re @-@ used in the laying out of the route of I @-@ 70 .

Unlike most Interstate Highways , much of I @-@ 70 in Utah was not constructed parallel to or on top of an existing U.S. Highway . Portions of I @-@ 70 were constructed in areas where previously there were no paved roads . Because it was built over an entirely new route , I @-@ 70 has many features that are unique in the Interstate Highway System . For example , the 110 miles (177 km) between Green River and Salina makes up the longest distance anywhere in the Interstate Highway System with no motorist services . This same piece is noted as the longest highway in the United States built over a completely new route since the Alaska Highway , and the longest piece of Interstate Highway to open at a given time . The construction of the Utah portion of I @-@ 70 is listed as one of the engineering marvels of the Interstate Highway System .

The choice of the route had a significant impact on the character and culture of the Sevier Valley . It has also been a motivating factor for environmentalists to create a new National Park along the path of the highway to protect scenic areas around the route . I @-@ 70 from Green River to Grand Junction , Colorado is part of the Dinosaur Diamond Prehistoric Highway , making I @-@ 70 one of the few Interstate Highways to be named a National Scenic Byway . Attractions listed by the Federal Highway Administration for the Dinosaur Diamond Prehistoric Highway on or near I @-@ 70 include , Arches National Park , Canyonlands National Park , Cleveland @-@ Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry , Goblin Valley State Park and Westwater . The designation lists several side roads branching from I @-@ 70 that lead to dinosaur bones or footprints .

= = Route description = =

I @-@ 70 begins at a trumpet interchange with Interstate 15 , near Cove Fort . It then proceeds east over the Pavant Range , cresting at an unnamed summit with an elevation of 7 @.@ 076 feet (2 @.@ 157 m) . The eastern descent from the Pavant range features bridges high above Clear Creek and its side canyons . The longest of these bridges is the Fish Creek bridge at 1 @.@ 180 feet (360 m) long . The descent into Clear Creek features a brake check area and runaway truck ramp to aid truckers down the steep slope . The freeway then skirts the edge of Fremont Indian State Park before entering Sevier Valley .

= = Sevier Valley = =

I @-@ 70 serves as the main thoroughfare of the valley , the only area traversed by the freeway in the state with more than a few hundred residents . Richfield is the largest city along I @-@ 70 in the state . The highway enters the valley just north of Big Rock Candy Mountain , a mountain named for a song attributed to Harry McClintock . The highway proceeds northeast along the western edge of the valley , passing to the west of the communities of the valley , including Joseph , Monroe , Elsinore , and Richfield . As I @-@ 70 approaches Salina it cuts across the valley passing to the south of that town . The highway avoids the downtown areas of all of these cities . The portion between Richfield and Salina is the busiest , with an annual average daily traffic of 11 @.@ 535 vehicles in 2006 . In the Sevier Valley , I @-@ 70 was built parallel to U.S. Route 89 .

= = Wasatch Plateau = =

At Salina , US @-@ 50 joins I @-@ 70 , and the two highways run concurrent for the rest of the way through Utah . After leaving Salina I @-@ 70 departs on a 110 @-@ mile (177 km) course to Green River . This is the longest distance in the Interstate Highway System with no motorist services . The route to Green River crosses two major geographic obstacles , the Wasatch Plateau and the San Rafael Swell .

I @-@ 70 ascends the Wasatch Plateau via Salina Canyon . The top of the canyon is the highest point of any of Utah 's Interstate Highways , although the elevation differs from source to source . The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) has listed the elevation at 7 @,@ 923 feet (2 @,@ 415 m) and 7 @,@ 886 feet (2 @,@ 404 m) . Other maps have listed the figure 7 @,@ 980 feet (2 @,@ 432 m) . At least one map has given this point a name , Emigrant Pass . This portion of I @-@ 70 is on protected lands as part of Fishlake National Forest . The freeway exits the Wasatch Plateau at Fremont Junction , the name of the junction of I @-@ 70 with State Route 10 .

= = = San Rafael Swell = = =

Between Fremont Junction and the junction of SR @-@ 24 near Green River , Interstate 70 crosses a geologic feature called the San Rafael Swell . The construction of the freeway through the swell is listed as one of the engineering marvels of the Interstate Highway System , with one engineer claiming this section as " one of the most significant highway construction feats of its time " . The construction of I @-@ 70 through the swell required boring through many solid rock canyons , cliffs , and mountains . The swell is noted for its sheer canyons and rock formations and is home to a large amount of exposed dinosaur remains . This includes the largest known collection of Jurassic period dinosaur remains at the Cleveland @-@ Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry at the north end of the swell .

The highway ascends the western edge of the swell on a steady slope loosely following the north rim of Devils Canyon . At the top of the grade is a view area with a view of Devils Canyon and an overlook of the country west of the swell . It then crosses Eagle Canyon via a pair of steel arch bridges . The eastbound bridge is 489 feet (149 m) long and the westbound bridge is 523 feet (159 m) long .

The highway then ascends Ghost Rock Summit , the highest point for I @-@ 70 inside the swell . At the summit is another view area overlooking the Little Grand Canyon of the San Rafael River . The summit is named for unusual rock formations nearby . The Ghost Rocks themselves are at 7 @,@ 405 feet (2 @,@ 257 m) , although the freeway is slightly lower . I @-@ 70 meanders through a relatively flat portion of the swell until reaching Spotted Wolf Canyon , which provides the exit route to the swell . The eastern descent features one brake check area and two runaway truck ramps to aid trucks down . About halfway down is a view area of the canyon narrowing as it approaches the eastern escarpment of the swell , the San Rafael Reef . Just as the highway exits the swell it passes to the north of Goblin Valley State Park . The highway exits the swell near Green River .

= = = Book Cliffs = = =

West of Green River , US @-@ 6 and 191 join I @-@ 70 . Also at Green River , the freeway reaches the southern edge of the Book Cliffs , a mountain range which I @-@ 70 follows to Grand Junction , Colorado . This portion of I @-@ 70 is part of the Dinosaur Diamond Prehistoric Highway , recognized as a scenic byway by both the National Scenic Byways and Utah Scenic Byways programs . Listed attractions along the byway in the Green River area include Crystal Geyser , Capitol Reef National Park and Green River State Park .

From this point east the freeway is routed across a flat area between the Book Cliffs and the Colorado River , called Sagers Flat . Along the way it passes by the towns of Crescent Junction , Thompson Springs and Cisco . Natural features visible from this portion include Arches National Park and Castle Valley . Other listed attractions along the byway near this section include Canyonlands National Park and various areas with Morrison Formation , a layer of rock where dinosaur remains are common . I @-@ 70 , US @-@ 6 , and US @-@ 50 all enter Colorado concurrently . Where I @-@ 70 follows the Book Cliffs , it was built parallel to or on top of US @-@

== History ==

=== Old Spanish Trail ===

The first route through this portion of Utah was the Old Spanish Trail , a trade route between Santa Fe , New Mexico and Los Angeles , California . The trail was in common use before the Mexican @-@ American War in 1848 . Although the trail serves a different route than I @-@ 70 , they were both intended to connect southern California with points further east . I @-@ 70 generally parallels the route of the Old Spanish Trail west of Crescent Junction . I @-@ 15 south of the junction with I @-@ 70 also generally parallels the trail .

=== Transcontinental railroads ===

The first attempt to build a modern trade route through the area is credited to William Jackson Palmer , founder of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad (D & RG) . Palmer started a project in 1880 to make what had been a local railroad from Colorado into a transcontinental railroad empire . This would mean a second transcontinental railroad would be built across Utah . This would also place the D & RG in competition with the First Transcontinental Railroad , then operated by Union Pacific Railroad and Central Pacific Railroad .

Disagreements in the company led to two proposals . Both proposals called for extending the railroad west from Colorado as far as what is now Green River . West of Green River a " northern route " would extend the railroad towards Ogden , Utah , there connecting with the established Overland Route . This proposal was eventually completed as the Utah Division , loosely following the route of modern U.S. Route 6 across eastern Utah . This line soon became the main line of the D & RG and remains one of the main transcontinental rail arteries of the U.S , now operated by the Union Pacific Railroad as the Central Corridor .

The second proposal was a " southern route " that would continue due west from Green River and head towards Los Angeles , similar to the route of modern I @-@ 70 . This proposal would require extending the railroad farther west , to connect with what would become the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad .

Due to disagreements in management and poor communication , construction began on both routes . It was soon obvious that the southern route was unfeasible given the remote area , technology available at the time and the rough terrain of the San Rafael Swell . The D & RG spent \$ 217 @,@ 470 (1883 , equivalent to \$ 4 @.@ 6 million in 2007) on the project before declaring it a failure . One of the accounts in the book Utah Ghost Rails states the railroad fired the lead surveyor , even though the workers had graded a path past the San Rafael Reef . This route today is a jeep trail . According to a sign placed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) , had the southern route succeeded it would have been the shortest transcontinental railroad in the U.S.

Construction resumed in 1901 on a portion of the southern route , to build a spur line to service coal mines on the Wasatch Plateau . The railroad branched from an existing line at Salina and traveled east up Salina Canyon . After the mines closed , the railroad bed was used to improve State Route 10 , between Salina and Fremont Junction . I @-@ 70 would later use the railroad bed for a path across the Wasatch Plateau .

=== Plans for Interstate 70 ===

By the time the Interstate Highway System was in the planning stages , no paved road had yet entered the San Rafael Swell . The established highway through the area was US @-@ 6 / US @-@ 50 which , like the railroad , entered Utah from Colorado and turned north around the swell .

As first proposed in 1956 , the western terminus of I @-@ 70 was Denver , Colorado . Officials from

Colorado pressured the federal government to extend the plans for I @-@ 70 further west . After several discussions with Utah officials , Utah supported an extension that would follow US @-@ 6 / 50 (now US @-@ 6) , to connect with I @-@ 15 at Spanish Fork . This proposal would connect the Salt Lake City area with Denver . While accepting the Colorado / Utah proposal , federal planners also decided to show a modified proposal , with the terminus of I @-@ 70 at Cove Fort , to planners at the Department of the Army . The planners opposed the extension to Salt Lake , but felt the modified proposal would benefit the U.S. Army , by providing a better connection to southern California . The new route would shorten the distance between Los Angeles and Denver by about 200 miles (320 km) . The route to Cove Fort was approved on October 18 , 1957 . A general announcement was made , with no prior notice given to Utah officials of the modification . The commissioner of the Bureau of Public Roads later admitted that the lack of notice was intentional , fearing infighting if the bureau did not announce a final decision .

A state historian stated the news hit Utah " like a bombshell " . Except for the officials in Utah that represented the area , most opposed a freeway that would serve no populated areas in the state . The route was mocked as a public relations blunder and a " road to nowhere " . Utah officials attempted to revert plans to their preferred alternative , but later resigned to construct I @-@ 70 on the federally selected route . Governor George Dewey Clyde concluded , " Utah had no choice but to accept the Cove Fort routing , or have none at all . " Even attempts to route the freeway slightly north , to serve more cities in Emery County , were blocked . Federal planners insisted the freeway pass Green River on a southwest course and not turn north . Even today , there is no direct interstate link between Salt Lake and Denver . Motorists must choose between the two lane routes (US @-@ 6 or US @-@ 40) or detour on I @-@ 80 through Wyoming .

= = = Construction = = =

With the plans for I @-@ 70 extended , a transcontinental route would again be attempted across the San Rafael Swell . The area west of Green River was so remote that survey crews followed wild horses with jeeps to survey parts of the route . According to a story told at the highway 's dedication , by an engineer who surveyed the highway , his group was approached by a sheep rancher and asked what they were doing . The rancher fell over laughing when he was told they were building a freeway .

The survey crew did not use the route of the railroad past the San Rafael Reef . However , they did use the route of the railroad across the Wasatch Plateau . The construction crews destroyed two of four tunnels when the bed was widened for the freeway . The two remaining tunnels are visible just south of the freeway and are used by a frontage road .

Some portions of I @-@ 70 over the Pavant Range and Wasatch Plateau were opened to traffic before the portion over the San Rafael Swell . These portions were temporarily signed as State Route 4 . The portion over the San Rafael Swell opened to traffic in 1970 , finally making the Utah portion of I @-@ 70 a drivable route .

Interstate 70 was dedicated on December 5 , 1970 , at the Ghost Rocks view area inside the swell , even though it would take another 20 years to fully complete the freeway . At the ceremony the mayors of cities recently made neighbors , including Grand Junction , Colorado , introduced themselves . Then Governor Calvin L. Rampton noted that I @-@ 70 was the longest road the U.S. had built over a completely new route since the Alaska Highway , during World War II . It was also noted this was the longest piece of the Interstate Highway System to open at a given time .

Initially only two lanes , now the eastbound lanes , through the swell were constructed . The official highway map for Utah noted the new freeway , but qualified its existence with the words " two lanes open " . The first portions of I @-@ 70 to be constructed to Interstate Highway standards were along the non @-@ disputed portion of the route east of Green River .

The Utah portion of I @-@ 70 was not completed to Interstate Highway standards until 1990 , when the second Eagle Canyon bridge was dedicated . A second dedication ceremony was held at the bridge declaring the Utah portion of I @-@ 70 complete . Archie Hamilton , one of three engineers who worked for Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) long enough to see I @-@ 70 progress

from conception to completion , said the most memorable moment was seeing the excavation at Spotted Wolf Canyon . He said before construction began , he could stand in one spot and touch both sides of the canyon . To carve the first 8 miles (13 km) through the canyon required excavating 3 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 cubic yards (2 @, @ 700 @, @ 000 m3) of rock . It was estimated construction cost for the San Rafael Swell portion was \$ 183 @. @ 5 million , \$ 105 @. @ 5 million (1970 , \$ 595 million in 2008) to build the first two lanes , and \$ 78 million (1990 , \$ 130 million in 2008) to construct the rest . At the 1970 dedication , it was noted the cost of land acquisition helped to offset the cost of the massive excavation . UDOT acquired the right of way to build the majority of I @-@ 70 from the BLM at the lowest cost per mile of any highway in Utah .

= = = Effect on rural Utah = = =

In 2002 , the Salt Lake Tribune interviewed the mayor of Richfield about the change I @-@ 70 brought to the Sevier Valley . Previously these were isolated farming communities , whose residents felt they were unaccustomed to the crime and other effects that a transcontinental highway can bring . Residents of Richfield soon started to call I @-@ 70 " Cocaine Lane " . The mayor stated that I @-@ 70 is a mixed blessing . He stated the highway is a boon to the hospitality industry and has made Richfield more accessible to other cities . However , the new road brought types of crime previously unknown to the city . The mayor lamented that after the completion of I @-@ 70 , many residents started locking their doors for the first time . The interview resulted from an event that served as a " wake @-@ up call " , that rural Utah is " not isolated from crime " . Panic ensued after the public witnessed Utah Highway Patrol troopers carrying away a suspect in handcuffs , while removing plastic bags and coolers full of body parts from the trunk of his car . The event caused a frenzy of people checking on their neighbors , fearing the murder victims were local residents . In 2007 , there were 11 violent crimes in Sevier County , a county of 19 @, @ 386 residents .

Green River is the largest , and only incorporated city directly served by I @-@ 70 in eastern Utah . Unlike the communities of the Sevier Valley , Green River was founded as a stopover for travelers along transcontinental arteries . The area was first used as a stopover for travelers navigating the Green River . Later the town was formed to serve travelers along the Old Spanish Trail and stagecoach mail routes . Green River was an established stopover by the time the railroad and later highways were built through the area .

= = = Effect on the San Rafael Swell = = =

Before the construction of I @-@ 70 the San Rafael Swell was relatively inaccessible and not well known or explored . There were , however , a few efforts to protect the swell as early as 1935 . Since the construction of the freeway the number of visitors to the swell has increased significantly , as the swell can now be accessed by automobile . As such , several groups are increasing efforts for protected status of the area , via National Park , National Monument or wilderness designation .

A major push occurred in 2002 when officials from Emery County , joined by Utah governor Mike Leavitt , petitioned President George W. Bush to use the authority of the Antiquities Act and create a San Rafael Swell National Monument . This effort lost momentum after the governor promised to honor the wishes of Emery County residents via a non @-@ binding referendum , which did not pass . Common reasons given by residents for opposing the designation included fear of the federal government restricting access and a repetition of events that occurred with the Grand Staircase @-@ Escalante National Monument . This monument was established in 1996 , by President Bill Clinton . In that case the monument was proposed at the federal level in secret . Boundaries were drawn without the consent or even knowledge of local residents . This incited anger and triggered a backlash in rural Utah .

Currently most of the swell is administered by the BLM and is not given special consideration . A small portion on the eastern edge is protected as Goblin Valley State Park , administered by the Utah Division of Parks and Recreation . Today the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance continues to lobby for protection .

== Route number changes ==

Before the formation of I @-@ 70 , there was a road over the Pavant Range numbered SR @-@ 13 that was similar to the route of I @-@ 70 . The highway , which largely still exists as a two @-@ lane road between SR @-@ 161 (former US @-@ 91) at Cove Fort and US @-@ 89 at Sevier , had been taken over by the state on August 2 , 1912 , and assigned the label by the early 1920s as part of Utah 's initial highway numbering . In the Wasatch Plateau , the base for I @-@ 70 was derived from a portion of SR @-@ 10 . Both of these were transferred to State Route 4 , which was the state legislative designation for all of I @-@ 70 in Utah , in 1962 . U.S. Route 50 was changed to overlap with Interstate 70 through most of Utah in 1976 , with U.S. Route 6 remaining on its former route . In 1977 , Utah renumbered its state routes so that the legislative and signed numbers would match . With this change , the state designation for Interstate 70 is now State Route 70 .

== Exit list ==