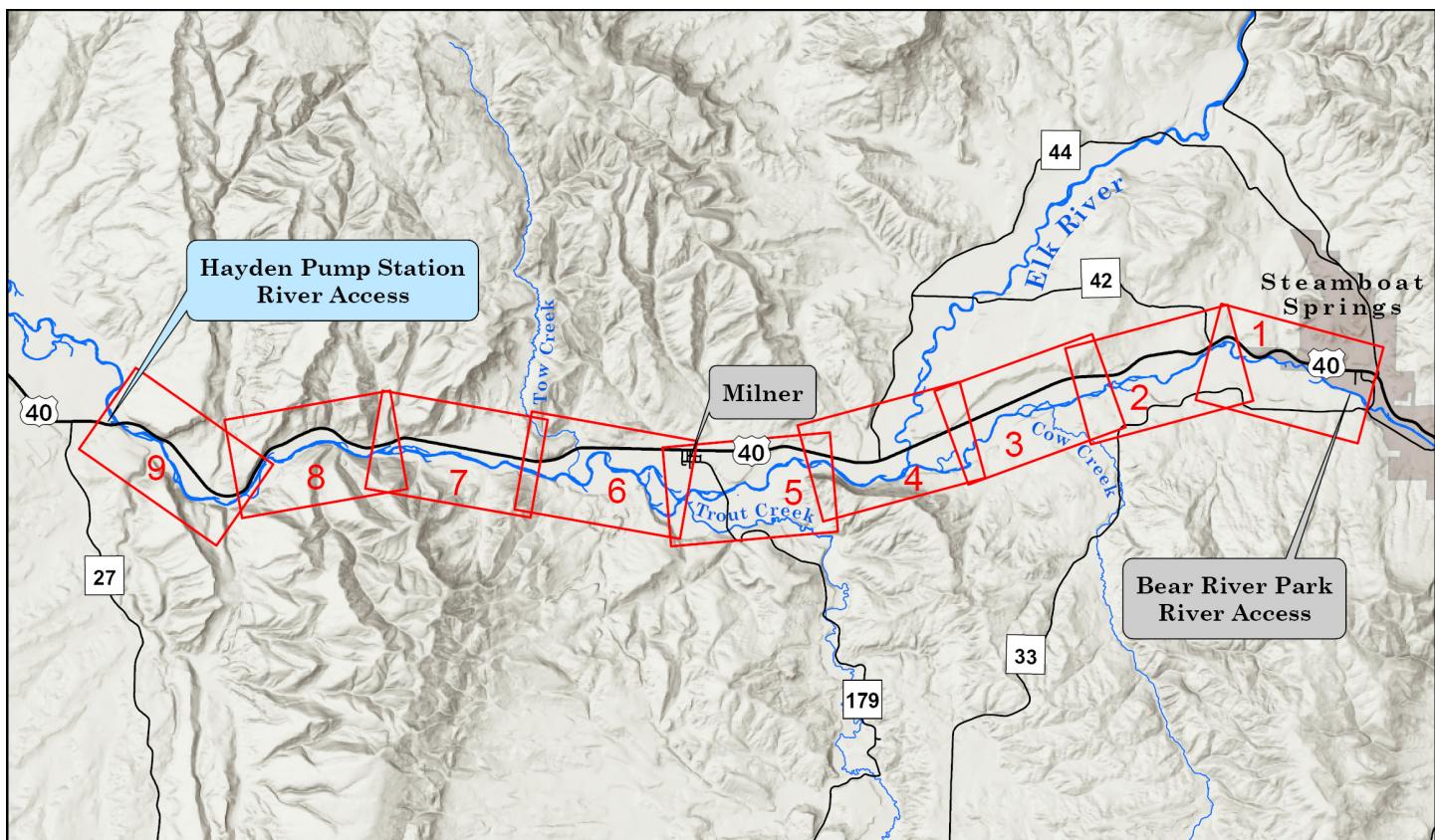


# YAMPA RIVER GUIDES

## MILNER REACH



## MILNER REACH LEGEND

### HYDROGRAPHIC FEATURES

- Stream or Mainstem Ditch
- Intermittent Stream
- Branch Ditch
- Irrigation Pipe or Culvert
- (125) River Mile

### ROADS AND STRUCTURES

- Trail or Closed 4WD
- City Bike Path
- 4WD
- Graded Road
- Paved Road
- Railroad
- Graded Parking
- Paved Parking
- Power Line
- Building
- Abandoned Oil Well or Test Hole

### ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

- (diagonal lines) Steamboat Springs Parks or Open Space
- (square with diagonal line) Yampa River State Park
- (yellow box) Bureau of Land Management

### ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

- (light green) Active or Prehistoric Floodplain
- (medium green) Riparian Herbaceous/Short Shrub
- (dark green) Riparian Tree/Tall Shrub Canopy
- (light brown) Upland Tree/Shrub Cover
- (yellow) Fluvial Sand or Gravel
- (gravel icon) Gravel Quarry

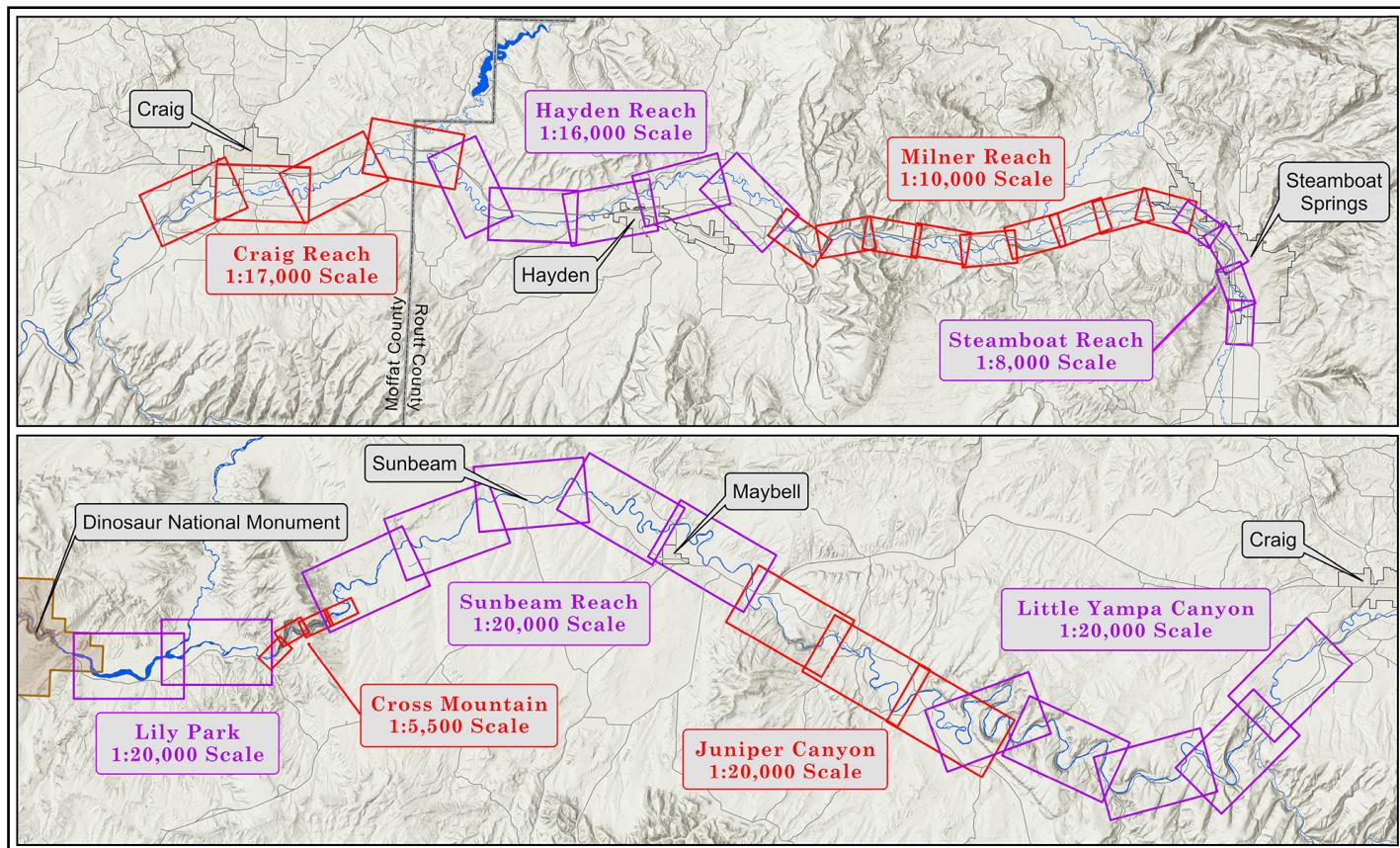
### RECREATIONAL AREA SYMBOLS

- (dollar sign) Fee Area
- (question mark) Information Kiosk
- (table icon) Picnic Tables
- (rest room icon) Rest Rooms
- (tent icon) Designated Camping
- (no camping icon) No Camping
- (P) Longterm Parking
- (no parking icon) No Longterm Parking
- (bus icon) City Bus Service
- (fishing icon) Fishing
- (boat icon) Trailered Nonmotorized Craft Access
- (boat icon) Small Craft Access
- (no tubing icon) Tubing Prohibited or Discouraged

# YAMPA RIVER GUIDES

Yampa River Guides are a FREE, downloadable series of map guides in PDF format, designed for recreational users of the Yampa River. When the entire series is completed they will cover approximately 158 miles of river, from the Chuck Lewis State Wildlife Area upstream of Steamboat Springs to the Deerlodge Park boat ramp on the eastern boundary of Dinosaur National Monument.

## The Yampa River Guide Series



## How to Download and Print Your Guides

Go to <https://guides.wildyampa.com> to download the most recent versions of the Yampa River Guides. Every attempt will be made to keep these guides up-to-date as boater access and river conditions evolve in the future. You can check the version date of your download at the bottom of the front cover and on each map page.

### PRINTING ON LEGAL PAPER

Ideally, your Yampa River Guide should be printed on legal-size paper, using a duplex (prints to both sides) printer. Whether you can print to both sides of the paper or not, be sure to select the “ACTUAL SIZE” option in the print wizard (this keeps the printer software from adding an extra margin to the printed page).

Duplexed pages will lay out like a book, with each map page on the right and its corresponding text page facing it on the left. Your pages can then be stapled, or laminated and spiral bound for a more durable guide. You might also consider printing on waterproof paper.

### PRINTING ON LETTER PAPER

Yampa River Guides can also be printed successfully on letter-size paper—the maps and print will just appear smaller. When printing on letter-size paper, be sure to select the “FIT” or “FIT TO PAGE” option in the print wizard.

## Help Keep These Guides Accurate

The Yampa River is always in a state of flux, so over time even the best map is destined to become inaccurate. Legal river access for boaters is also a moving target. And of course, the author of this guide makes no claim to infallibility. If you discover errors or have suggestions for improvement, please E-mail [Pete@wildyampa.com](mailto:Pete@wildyampa.com) with “Yampa River Guides” in the subject line. Or just let me know if you are finding these guides helpful!

## Terms of Use

The Yampa River Guides are FREE to download and print for personal recreational use. Any other reproduction or publication of these guides, or any portions thereof, is strictly prohibited.

If someone is charging you for the contents of this guide, they are in copyright violation.

Maps, text and uncredited photographs © Peter A. Williams

## About The Maps

As has become the convention with river guides, the Yampa River Guide maps and their accompanying text are laid out with the river running from the **bottom to the top** of the page.

The river channels and environmental features depicted on these maps were originally drawn directly on top of the 2019 National Agricultural Imagery Program (NAIP) **aircraft overflight photography**. However, since 2019 there have been several significant changes in the river channels, and more should be expected in the future. Yampa River Guide maps are regularly revised as the river evolves, using as reference the most recently available photography. NAIP offers superior resolution and detail, but is only updated every two or three years (most recently 2023). During the interim, the online version of Copernicus/Sentinel-2 satellite photography, although much lower in resolution, is conveniently updated weekly.

An aerial photograph, or the map drawn from it, can only capture a dynamic, seasonally evolving river in one moment of time. These maps depict the river during a period of low flows, when the river channels are filled with **exposed sand and gravel bars**. Higher flows in the spring will inundate many of these features, and normally dry backwater channels may even be floatable under those conditions. Conversely, it is assumed that during lower flows boaters will appreciate having some idea of where the sand and gravel is likely to emerge.

The **river miles** (RM) depicted on these maps are measured upstream from the confluence of the Yampa and Green rivers at Echo Park, in Dinosaur National Monument. They were created specifically for these maps, and follow a line up the center of the main river channel as it existed in the fall of 2019. Note that there has never been a formal, “official” set of designated river miles for the Yampa River. River miles depicted on maps elsewhere have typically been based on long out-of-date hydrographic data, and can vary from the Yampa River Guide maps by as much as a mile or more.

## Private Property

Private property boundaries are not represented on any of these maps. The only property boundaries depicted in the Yampa River Guides are for publicly owned (or publically leased) properties that specifically allow for public boating access. ***Everywhere else should be treated as off limits to or from watercraft traveling the Yampa River.***

Under Colorado law, ownership of the river bank does not stop at the high water line. While the water and fish may belong to someone else, the **river bottom is the property of the abutting landowners**. Under these circumstances, standing on the river bottom, even in moving water, is trespassing. This can especially be a problem once river flows drop enough to require dragging your craft over obstacles. Please avoid floating the Yampa River when and where such conditions exist.

Much of the Yampa River from Steamboat Springs to Dinosaur National Monument flows through private land. Please help us stay on good terms with our private landowning neighbors, so boaters can continue to float the Yampa River without further restrictions in the future. Always stay in your boat when floating through private property.

## Safety

The Yampa River Guides are intended for use as a general resource for boaters. ***They are not a substitute for staying alert to hazards and practicing good boating skills.*** Rivers are dynamic environments, and conditions can change dramatically as water levels rise and fall.

With the exception of the Cross Mountain and Juniper canyons, experienced boaters will find the “whitewater” character of the portions of the Yampa River covered by the Yampa River Guides to be mild. Nevertheless, natural hazards such as strainers or entrained wood may still be encountered. Human-made structures, especially bridges and diversion structures, can also create significant hazards to boaters. The most notorious (but certainly not all) of these structural hazards have been identified on the maps with **red-bordered labels**. When you see these labels, pay close attention to the **“Hazard!”** description in the accompanying text.

Always come prepared for the unexpected. Pay attention, and always keep an eye out downstream. Proper personal equipment should always include a PFD (Personal Flotation Device), appropriate footwear, and sunscreen. And, although much of the Yampa is flatwater, the knowledge gained from a swiftwater rescue course might one day help you save a life, even in downtown Steamboat Springs. In Cross Mountain and Juniper canyons such knowledge is essential.

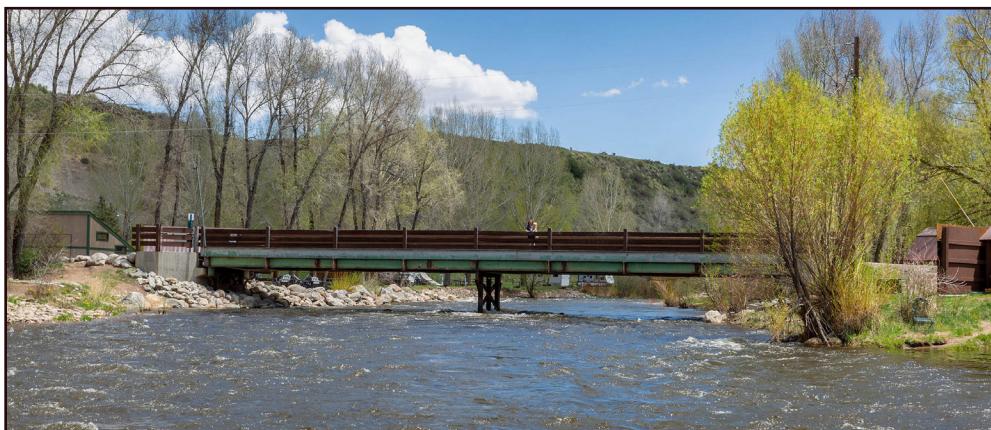
Ultimately **YOU** are responsible for your own and your companions’ safety.

## Disclaimer

The author and distributors of the Yampa River Guides are not responsible for trespass, property damage, personal injury, or death resulting from activities involving anyone using or possessing these river guides.

# Milner Reach Map 1

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.



*The KOA bridge seen from upstream on flows of about 1,300 cfs, as measured at the Soda Creek gauge.*

RM 196.25 The **KOA bridge** is not generally a hazard to boaters. The KOA boater access is in an inlet just past the bridge on river left. There is a charge for access, and no boater parking.



*The Fournier Open Space river access, as seen from the river at about 715 cfs in late June. The downstream direction is to the left. There's no sign and it can be easily missed if you aren't paying attention.*

RM 196.5 The **Fournier Open Space river access** is on river right as the river bends left.

RM 197.25 The existing **Bear River Park river access** is a narrow concrete path on river right. This access is currently only suitable for hand-carried craft.

Planning for a number of improvements to Bear River Park, including a new trailer-accessible boat ramp near the current access path, has been underway for a number of years. Construction of the new boat ramp portion of the project had been set for 2025, but other infrastructure complications subsequently postponed it for another year. It's still unclear when the ramp might finally be completed and available for use—keep your fingers crossed.

When the new boat ramp is eventually completed, it will become the primary take-out point for larger craft floating through the Steamboat Reach, as well as the put-in for rafters beginning their float down the Milner Reach.

RM 197.5 **HAZARD!** If you are floating into the top of the Milner Reach from a launch somewhere upstream of Bear River Park, be sure to **stay in the right-hand channel** immediately after passing the James Brown Bridge. A diversion structure for the Woolery Ditch completely blocks the left channel at all water levels.

## Launching on the Milner Reach

The options for putting a larger craft on the river for a downstream run of the **Milner Reach** are less than ideal at this time. Until the future Bear River Park boat ramp has been constructed, the only public trailered access to the Yampa River in the Steamboat area is the boat ramp upstream in **River Creek Park**. The **Stockbridge Transit Center** probably offers the best option for launching from the downstream side of Steamboat, though you still have to carry your boat a short distance (across bicycle traffic) to put it on the river. Both of these access points are covered in the guide to the **Steamboat Reach**. The **Fournier Open Space** access, shown on this map, is also popular, but it offers very little parking and some poor footing between your trailer and the water. Note as well that—with no turn lane for getting off of the highway from either direction—accessing Fournier's small dirt lot can be hazardous during periods of high traffic.

**Please respect private property. Unless marked specifically as public, all property shown on these maps is privately owned and closed to the general public.**

## Milner Reach

### Map 1

0 Feet 1,500  
Scale 1:10,000  
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33

195

40

196

Woolery  
Ditch

197

33

Bear River Park  
River Access



Diversion  
Structure

STOP

KOA Campground  
Private River Access



Fournier Open Space  
River Access



40

Elk River Road

Lagoon Ct

Avenue



40

Elk River Road

## Milner Reach Map 2

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

RM 193.3 At this point you are leaving the Hard Rock Open Space behind.

RM 193.6 The **Hard Rock Open Space** begins on river right. Hard Rock allows public access to the shore, but no boat launching or take out. This is the **last public property access to the shore** on either side of the Yampa River until you reach the Hayden Pump Station boat ramp at RM 177.7, another fifteen and a half miles downstream.



*A view of the railroad bridge at RM 194.4, as seen from the river right shore at about 2,000 cfs. A submerged log obstructs the closest channel between the abutments, while another tangle of wood is hung up on the third abutment from the left.*



*Approaching the railroad bridge at RM 194.4 on a relatively casual 715 cfs. On this day a large log completely blocked the channels between the first three abutments on river right, but it was only visible at the last moment during the approach to the bridge.*

RM 194.4 **HAZARD!** The abutments for this **railroad bridge** sit at an angle to the current, making it difficult to see and negotiate through them at higher river flows. Additionally, this bridge has a nasty habit of catching large pieces of floating wood, which can then block one or more of the channels between the abutments. The **safest approach** is to stay hard river left and aim for the channel between the two abutments closest to shore, where the current is slightly slower and there is less likelihood of encountering entrapped wood.

At exceptionally high river flows it might even pay to inspect this bridge before launching on the Milner Run. Access to the upstream river right side can be made through the Steamboat Golf Club property.

RM 194.9 Starting at about RM 194.9, and extending downstream beyond the approaching railroad bridge, the property on river left is part of the historic **Stanko Ranch**. First acquired by Peter Stanko in the early 1900s, the ranch is still being operated by his son Jim and his wife Jo. The Stanko Ranch has been honored as one of Colorado's Centennial Farms & Ranches.

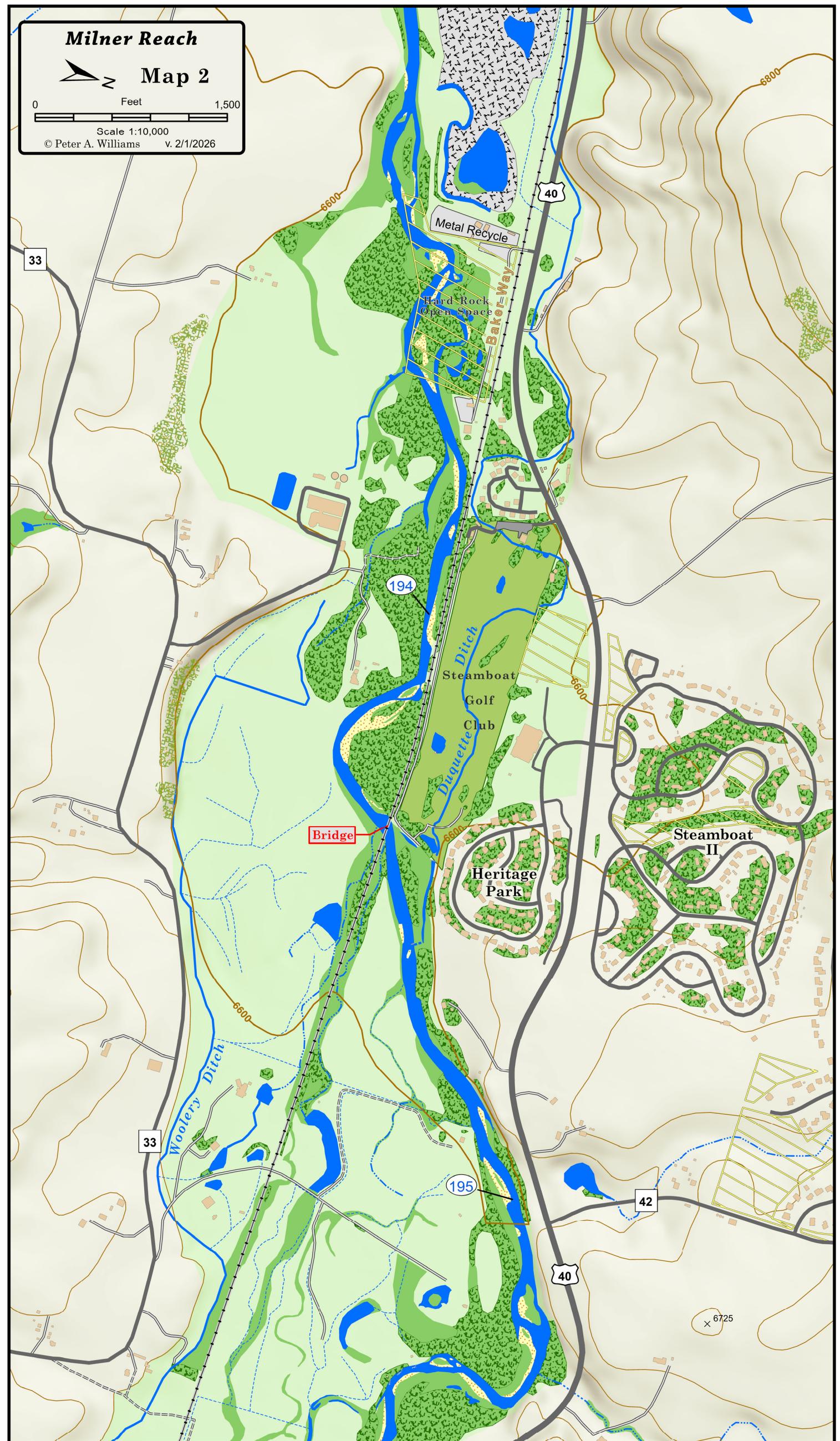
Stanko Ranch information courtesy: Tread of Pioneers Museum

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## Milner Reach

### Map 2

0 Feet 1,500  
Scale 1:10,000  
© Peter A. Williams v. 2/1/2026



## Milner Reach Map 3

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.



*“The Bridge to Nowhere,” seen with flows of about zero cfs.*

RM 191.9 to RM 191.3 Speaking of bridges, from just upstream of the RC 33A bridge, and continuing for about three quarters of a mile downstream, you will be able to catch views of **“The Bridge to Nowhere”** on the far river right skyline. This was once the superstructure for the original Stockbridge in Steamboat Springs, built in the 1940s. At one time essential for getting cattle across the Yampa to the stockyard west of the railroad depot, the bridge was dismantled and replaced with a pedestrian bridge at the end of the 1990s. In retirement, the superstructure has no roadbed, crosses no river, and possesses no purpose except to amuse.



*Approaching the Routt County 33A bridge on about 1,300 cfs.*

RM 191.8 The **Routt County 33A bridge** has roughly the same clearance as the KOA bridge upstream, minus a center pylon. It is not normally a hazard for boaters.

RM 193 You may notice the valley widening a bit more as you float through the next ten miles of your journey. Though they may not always be obvious from the river, on the next few maps you will see many **long-abandoned channels** of the Yampa River, now filled with riparian vegetation appearing in distinct contrast to the drier areas of the valley floor. The Yampa remains a wild, dynamic river, and where it is not constrained by narrow canyons it continues to make full use of its broad floodplain. New channels will appear while older channels gradually fill in and are abandoned by the river—at least for a time.

RM 193.3 At this point you are leaving the **Hard Rock Open Space** behind. Hard Rock is the **last public property** on either side of the Yampa River until you reach the Hayden Pump Station boat ramp at RM 177.7, another fifteen and a half miles downstream.

For the next mile and a half you will be floating through the historic **Hogue Ranch** on both sides of the river. Originally the Duquette Ranch (for which Duquette Ditch north of the river was named), it was purchased by Frank and Annie Squire in 1915. Frank’s parents, Albert and Mina Squire, had emigrated from England and homesteaded north of Hayden in 1894.

Frank and Annie Squire’s daughter Margaret married Charles Hogue, and the ranch was passed down to them after Frank’s retirement. It remains a working ranch in the same family today, qualifying as one of Colorado’s Centennial Farms & Ranches.

Hogue Ranch information courtesy: Tread of Pioneers Museum

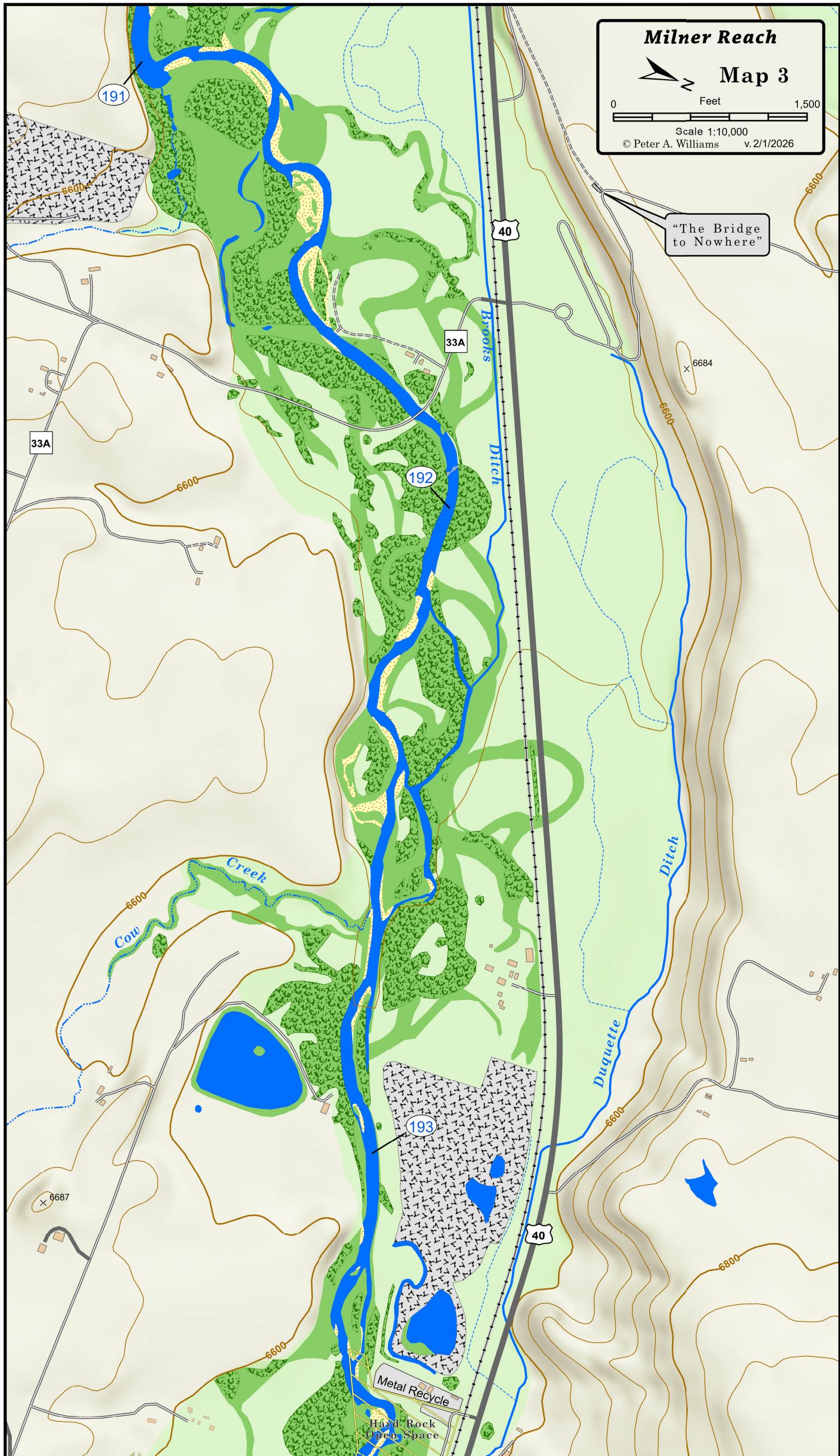
Stockbridge information: Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library

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## Milner Reach

### Map 3

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Scale 1:10,000  
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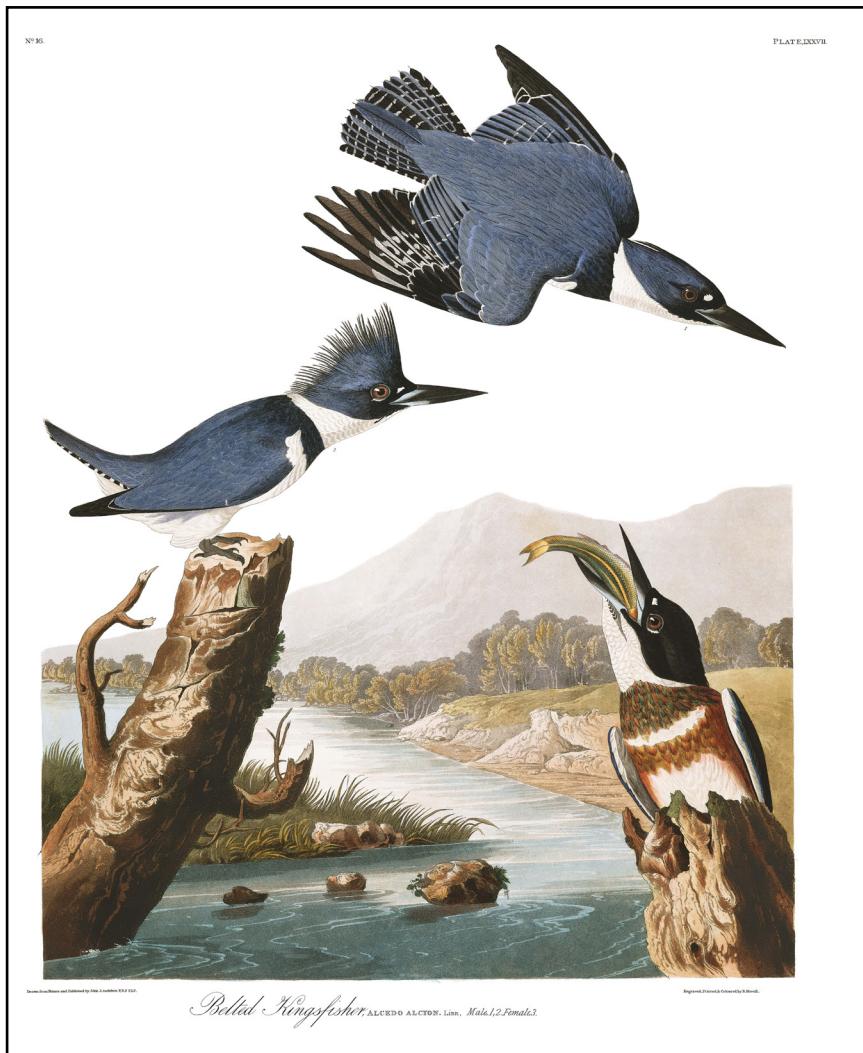
## Milner Reach Map 4

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

RM 189.4 The **West Fork** of the **Elk River** joins on river right, but you may not notice it if you aren't watching for it. The West Fork is a small channel that takes water from the mainstem of the Elk about a mile north of the Yampa. While its origins may have been natural, today it is dammed and diverted into several irrigation systems, and barely reaches the Yampa River.

RM 190.2 The **mainstem** of the **Elk River** and its broad floodplain enter the Yampa River on the right. The headwaters of the Elk River lie along the west side of the Park Range north of Steamboat Springs. Draining an area roughly equal to the headwaters of the Yampa, the Elk can often double the volume of the Yampa below their confluence. Expect a faster ride from here on downstream.

For the next mile and half below the confluence of the Yampa and Elk rivers, the steep north slopes of Saddle Mountain bring an **upland forest community**, dominated by Douglas fir, down to the water's edge on river left. The conifer forest stands in dramatic contrast to the riparian floodplain habitats on the opposite side of the river, with deciduous narrowleaf cottonwood, boxelder and willow. Kingfishers have been spotted in this area.



*The Belted Kingfisher, from John James Audubon's Birds of America*

*Courtesy of the John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove, Montgomery County Audubon Collection, and Zebra Publishing.*

### Signs of Riparian Health

Kingfishers are an indicator species for the Yampa's water quality, as are all fish-eating birds. As predators of the local fish population, fish-eating birds are especially visible members of a chain of relationships that begins with a river possessing uncontaminated water, ample woody debris, and a natural hydrograph (i.e., the appropriate volume and timing of seasonal peaks and lows). These conditions foster healthy macroinvertebrate populations—the insects that live on the woody debris and/or depend on the natural hydrograph for part of their life cycle. Healthy macroinvertebrate populations are essential for healthy fish populations, which in turn feed the fish-eating birds. The fish-eating birds of the Yampa River include kingfishers, as well as great blue herons, American white pelicans, ospreys, and bald eagles.

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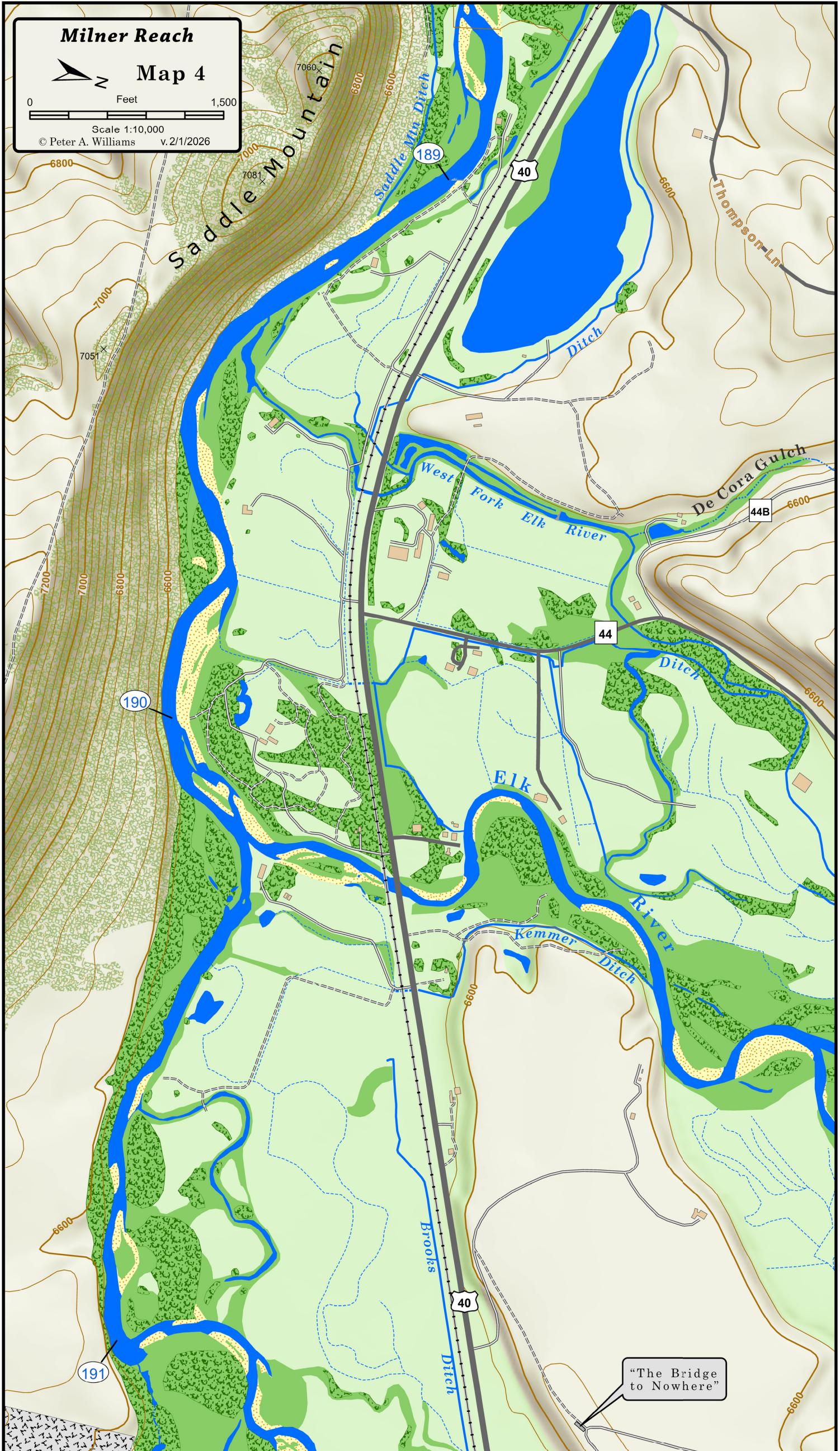
## Milner Reach



## Map 4

0 Feet 1,500

Scale 1:10,000  
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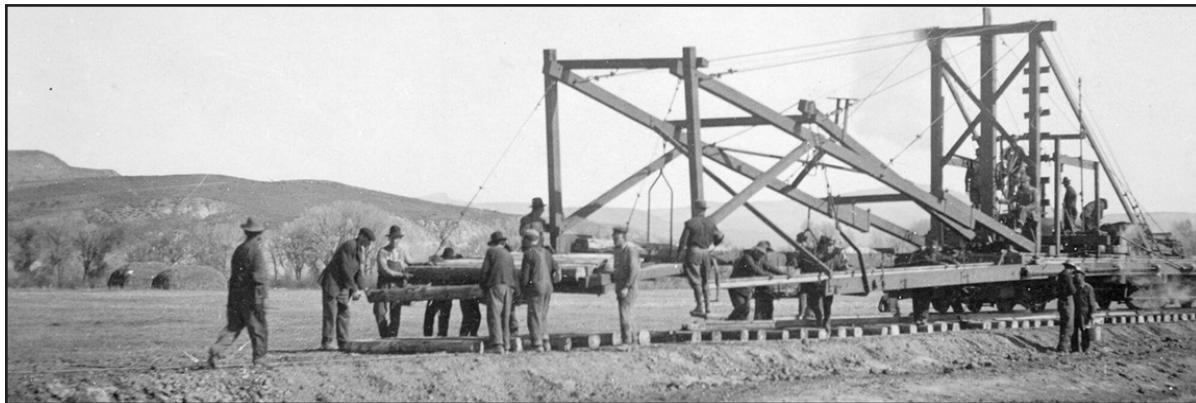
# Milner Reach Map 5

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

RM 186.7 A power pole in the middle of the river marks the spot where the **river channel forks**, just below the mouth of Trout Creek. The main channel flows to the right.

RM 187.4 The **Routt County 179 bridge** presents no problems to the boater. The present county road follows the route used between 1912 and 1924 to access the Curtis Mining Company's operations in Curtis Gulch (the Elk Creek drainage), two miles south of Milner.

RM 188 The **railroad bridge** you are about to pass under carries a spur line to Peabody Energy's Twentymile Mine, located about twelve miles to the south of the river in Twentymile Park. The Twentymile Mine is still active. Peabody reports producing 1.5 million tons of coal from the mine in 2022, with an estimated 11 million tons of "proven and probable" reserves.



*Laying track near Hayden, summer of 1913.  
Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, Z-5347 (detail).*

## The Moffat Road

As the twentieth century began, the Yampa Valley was still only accessible by horse, wagon, or stagecoach. While its potential for coal and cattle production had been well known to the outside world for at least 25 years, northwest Colorado's remoteness from any railhead remained a serious impediment to the commercial development of those resources. Cattle had to be driven long distances to reach a market, and exporting large quantities of coal was impossible. While a number of small-scale "wagon mine" excavations of coal already existed, these operations were just about satisfying local consumption.

Meanwhile, Denver had been sorely disappointed when the Union Pacific Railroad built its portion of the transcontinental railroad through Cheyenne, leaving Denver just a sidetrack off the national transportation grid. David H. Moffat and a group of investors responded in 1902 by incorporating the Denver, Northwestern and Pacific Railway (later reorganized as the Denver and Salt Lake Railway) to construct what became known as the "Moffat Road." The plan was for a direct railroad connection from Denver to Salt Lake City, via the Fraser, Grand (aka Colorado), and Yampa river drainages, then on to Salt Lake via the Uinta Basin in Utah.

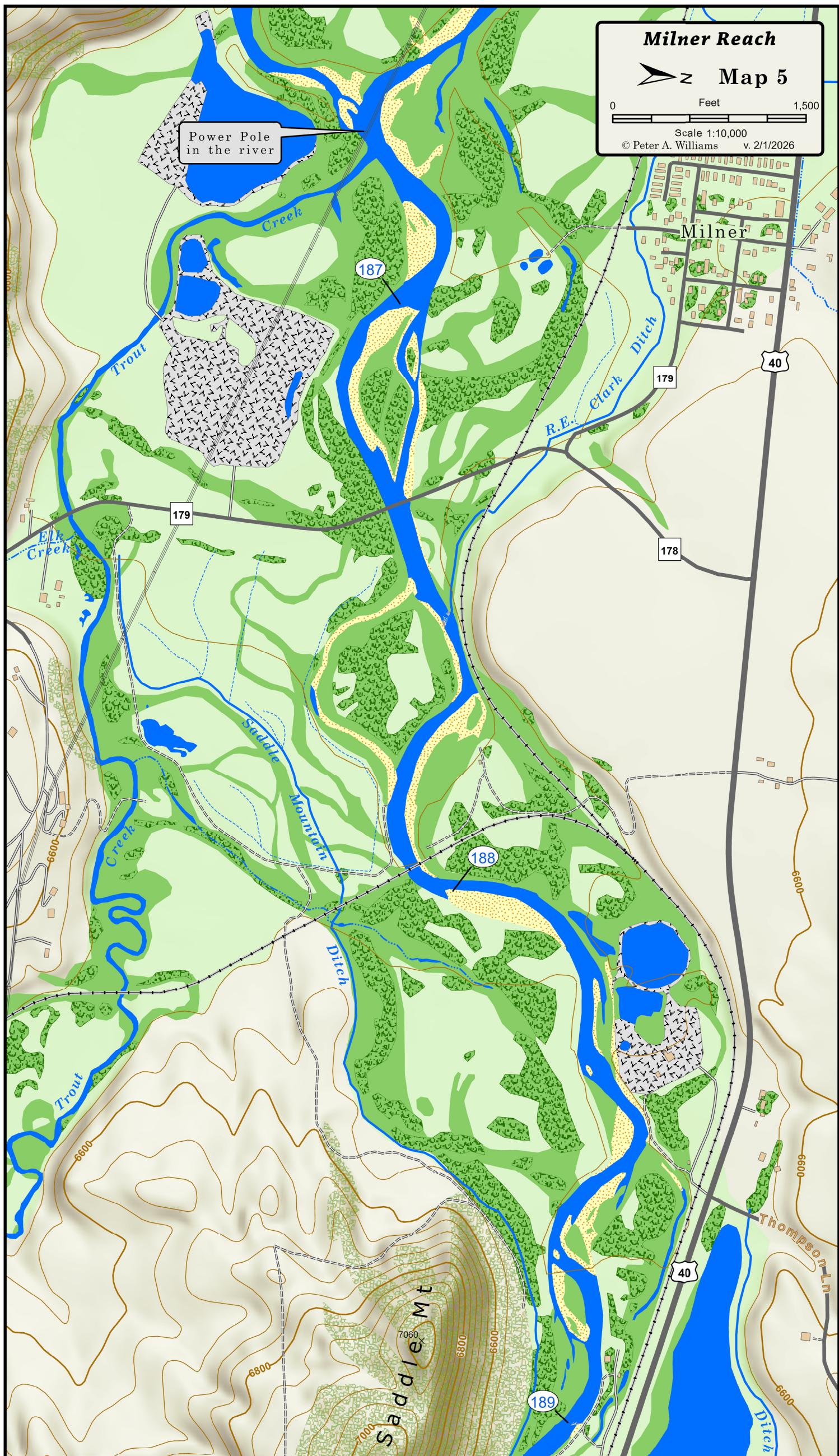
After engineering a spectacular crossing of the Continental Divide at Rollins Pass (and the equally remarkable passage through Gore Canyon downstream on the Grand), Moffat's railroad began service to Steamboat Springs early in 1909, followed by service to Craig in 1913. The arrival of the railroad in the Yampa Valley immediately fostered an explosion of local production. According to an exhibit in the Tread of Pioneer Museum, just a year after freight service began, Steamboat was shipping more cattle than any other railroad stop in the world. The impact on the coal industry was equally impressive, with large mining operations commencing production almost immediately. Yampa River coal camp communities such as Milner, McGregor, Bear River, Coalview, and Mount Harris were soon thriving.

But David Moffat died in 1912, before the tracks to Craig had been completed. Despite the lucrative coal- and stock-hauling business the railroad now enjoyed in the Yampa Valley, the company was in fragile financial straits. The debilitating cost of maintaining regular winter freight service over 11,660-foot Rollins Pass remained a huge deficit against the railroad's income, and the economic means to continue the rails beyond Craig never materialized.

Today the portion of the Moffat Road servicing the Yampa Valley remains just a branch line, owned and operated since 1996 by Moffat's old rival, the Union Pacific Railroad.

Moffat Road information courtesy:

Griswold, P.R., *David Moffat's Denver Northwestern and Pacific: "The Moffat Road"* (1995)

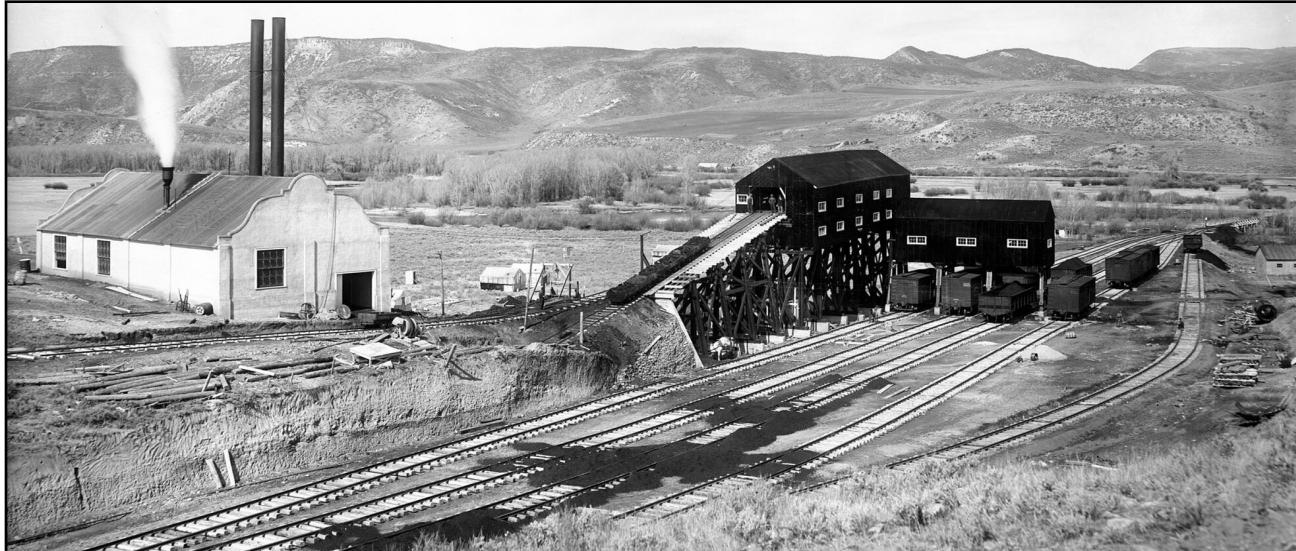


## Milner Reach Map 6

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

RM 185.85 and RM 185.7 You may see a number of vehicles with boat trailers parked on river right just upstream of the bridge, as well as at another spot on river right a little farther downstream of the bridge. These are spots used by commercial fishing guide services that have made arrangements with the private landowner. They are not a public river access.

RM 185.8 The **Routt County 205 bridge** is located where the railroad spur servicing the McGregor Mine tipple once crossed the river. It normally poses no difficulties for boaters.



*The McGregor tipple on its spur off the Moffat Road. Photo by M. C. McClure, ca. 1915.*

*Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, MCC-2377 (detail).*



*American white pelicans float the Yampa below the last remains of McGregor.*

### McGregor

As you approach the large left bend in the river at about RM 186.2, two dilapidated buildings will come into view on a high bluff above river left. These are about all that's left of the once-thriving **McGregor Mine company town**. In addition to about fifty homes, the town once sported a general store, amusement hall, school, and post office. Founded by John McNeil around the time the railroad reached Milner, he gave the mine his mother's maiden name.

The original mining at McGregor was in underground shafts, and last of these were abandoned by 1935. A strip mine, the Osage, then operated from 1949 to 1962. The Osage was mostly farther up the slopes south of the town, but a secondary pit also mined just behind and to the left of those last two buildings you can see—erasing almost all of the original townsite.

A coal-fired, steam-generated electric power plant was built at McGregor in the 1920's. As part of the Colorado Utilities Corporation, and later the Yampa Valley Electric Association, it once supplied power to local communities as far as Craig and Steamboat. The plant was retired when the Hayden Station began operation in 1965.

McGregor information courtesy:

Stanko, et al., *The Historical Guide to Routt County* (2010)

Clark and Ross, "Let There Be Light", *Three Wire Winter* (#20, Spring 1985)

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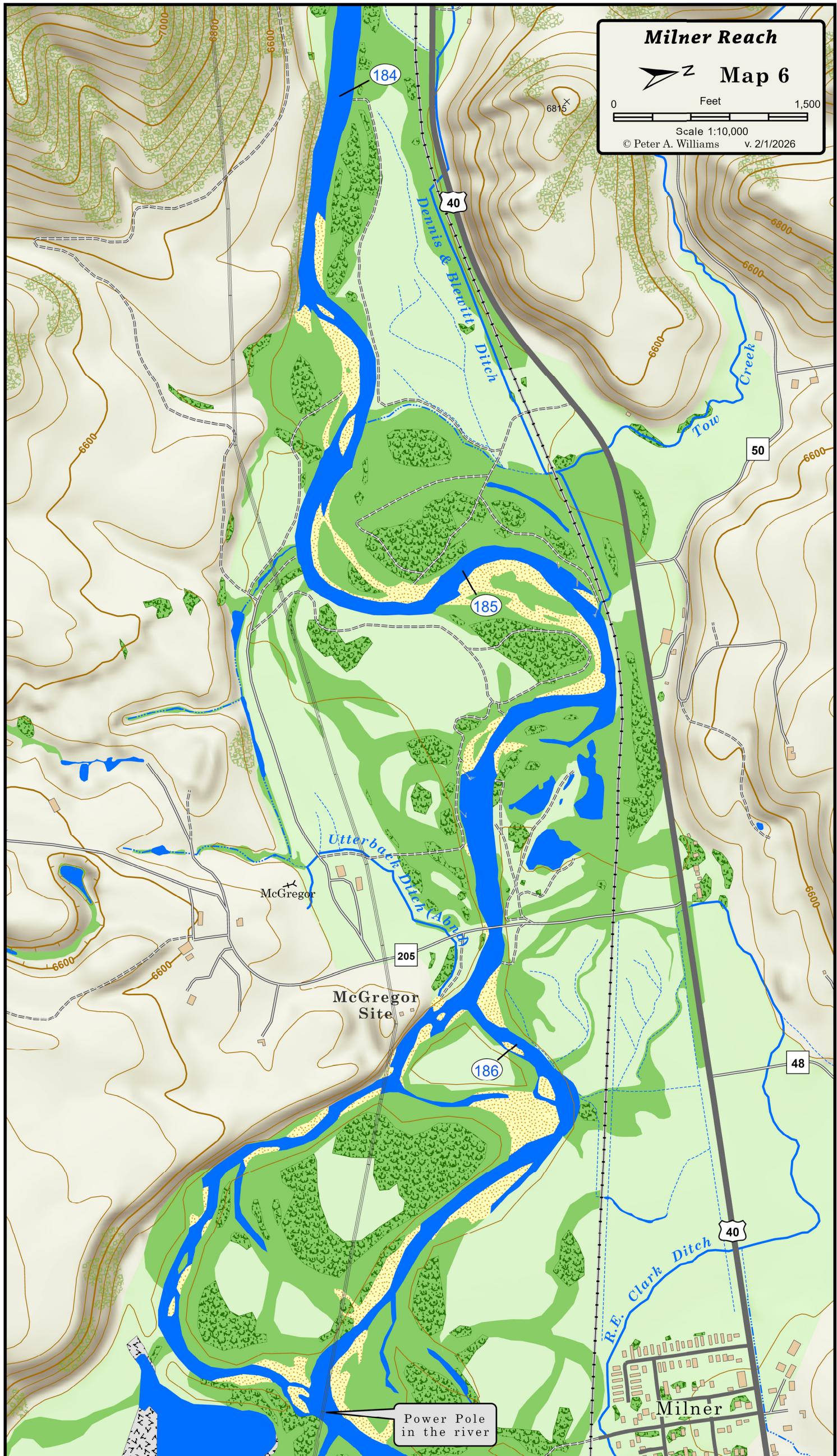
## Milner Reach

### Map 6

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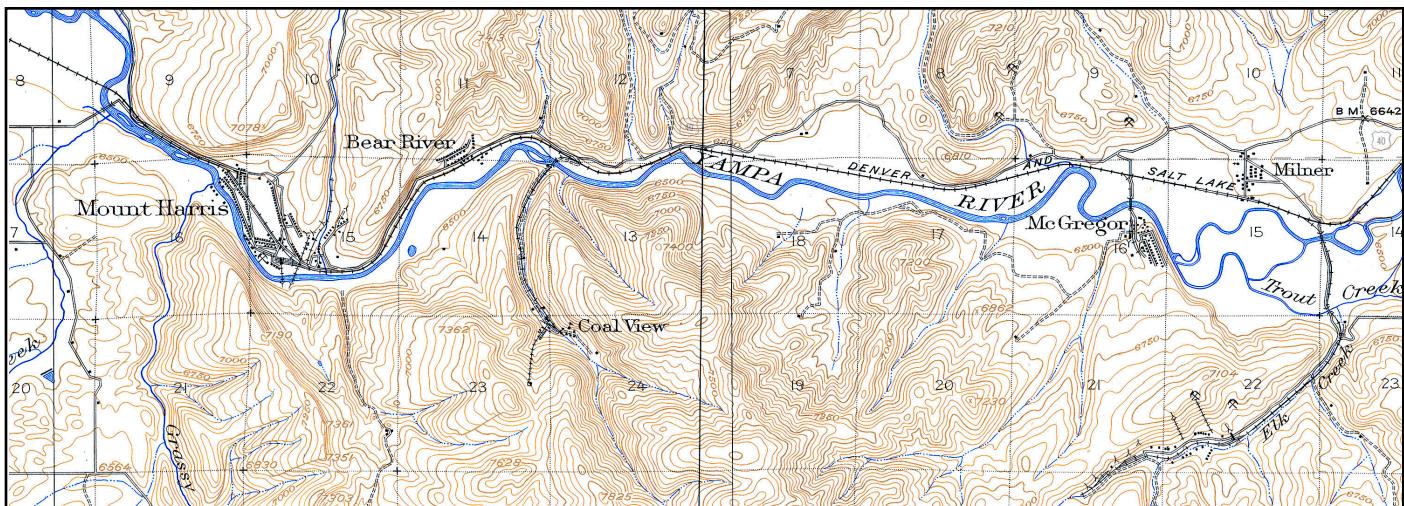
Scale 1:10,000

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# Milner Reach Map 7

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.



*Yampa River coal mining communities as they appeared on the 1924 Mount Harris USGS quad. The Tow Creek Oil Field was in the broad area of the canyon near the center of the map, and the Bear River Canyon is the narrower reach to its west.*

**RM 182** The narrower stretch of canyon from here to where the river enters the broad valley of Morgan Bottom has traditionally been known locally as the **Bear River Canyon**. Today a few homes can still be found in the canyon, but a hundred years ago it was populated by several thriving mining communities.

**RM 182.2** Possibly as a result of the narrowing of the canyon below Little Butcherknife Gulch, the course of the Yampa River has proven to be especially dynamic in this vicinity. When tracked through four decades of aerial photography, the main river channel appears in constant flux, always moving back and forth from one side of the flood plain to the other.

In recent years the movement has been decidedly rightwards. During the spring high water of May 2023, the river began flooding through what had been a densely vegetated gravel bar along the right side of the flood plain, quickly establishing a new side channel close to the railroad tracks. By early July 2024, this new channel had become deep and wide enough to offer an attractive alternative to floating the increasingly shallow “main” channel. And in August of that year, the new channel had finally captured all of the water remaining in the river, leaving the older channel just a broad expanse of dry gravel.

These days the older channel continues to be quite floatable during early spring high water, but may become too shallow for rafts by late May or early June. Look for significant changes in the riverbed to continue in this vicinity over the next few years.

**RM 183.3** A **suspended pipeline** crossing the river signals that you’ve already floated across the axis of the Tow Creek Anticline. From here to Morgan Bottom the rock strata will now dip to the west.

## Tow Creek Oil Field

The Tow Creek Anticline is a pushed-up arch or fold in the geologic strata, with the axis (crest of the fold) running north-south, perpendicular to the Yampa River. It was likely caused by compressive forces from the uplift of the Park Mountains to the east. Although most of the anticline is well below the surface, you can see evidence of its existence in the tilt of exposed cliff-forming layers north of the river—as you approach the axis line, you will see these layers dipping steeply to the east; downstream of the axis they gradually dip to the west. Oil from deep organic-rich layers tends to migrate upward through porous strata, until it “pools” along the axis, trapped under the impervious Mancos Shale layer some 2,500 feet below the surface.

Evidence of the anticline was recognized by geologists as early as 1906, and test drilling for oil soon followed. The first successful well began producing in 1924, and by the 1930s multiple wells were tapping into two local pools—the main pool under the Tow Creek Oil Field, and a smaller pool north along the axis, in the Tow Creek drainage (just off the map on river right). Productive drilling continued into the late 1950s. Green dots on the map mark drill holes. Occasional revivals of interest in the anticline’s potential for further oil development have come and gone over the decades since.

Information courtesy:

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library  
Saterdal, A., “Tow Creek Oil Field, Routt County, Colorado” (1955)

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## Milner Reach

### Map 7

0 Feet 1,500

Scale 1:10,000  
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182

Older Channel

New Channel

BLM

40

BLM

Tow Creek  
Oil Field

TOW

Suspended  
Pipeline

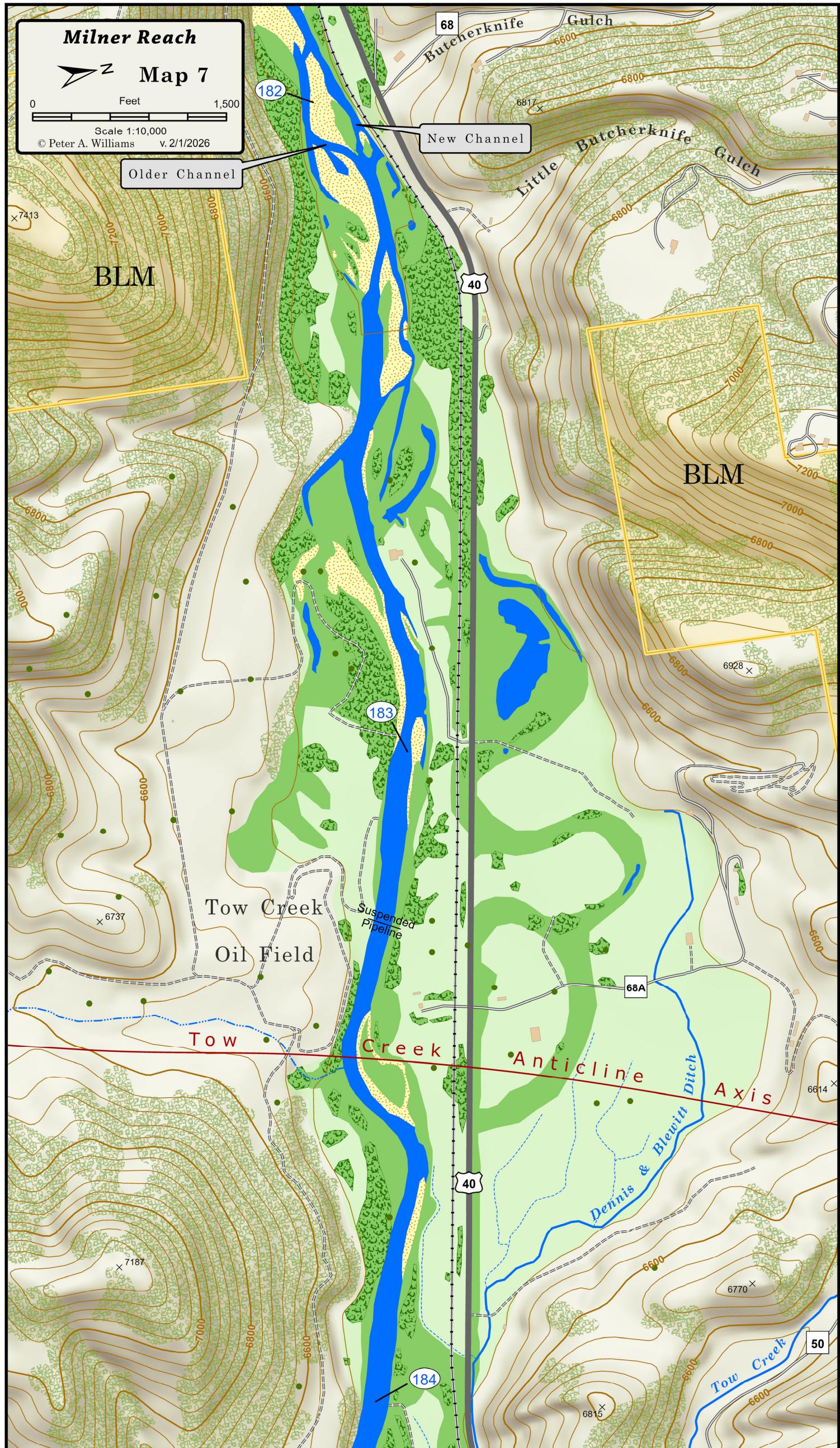
Creek

Anticline

Axis

184

50



# Milner Reach Map 8

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

RM 180.7 This **bridge** across the Yampa was originally built to give access to the strip mines on the mountaintops south of the river in the 1970s. It offers little hazard to boaters.

RM 180.9 The **Bear River Mine company town** was located along the base of the slopes on river right.

RM 181.3 A few concrete chunks in the river channel mark all that's left of the bridge where the railroad spur crossed the river to climb up **Coalview Gulch** on river left.

## Bear River Canyon Coal Communities

In 1887, James Wadge and his family homesteaded in the Wolf Creek drainage, near RM 179.5 (see Map 9). The family operated a stage stop. Wadge also did the first coal mining in the canyon, eventually developing a small wagon mine across the river south of the homestead.

In the summer of 1913 the grade for the new Moffat Road railroad (by now reorganized as the Denver and Salt Lake Railroad) was completed through Bear River Canyon. The rails were laid to Milner by early October, and by late November the track-laying machine reached Craig. The following June, the Colorado-Utah Coal Company (owned by brothers George and Byron Harris) broke ground on a mine tunnel downstream of the old Wadge wagon mine.

The new company town for the mine was originally named Harris, but with the establishment of a local post office the name was changed to **Mount Harris** (to avoid confusion with another "Harris" elsewhere in the state). The community grew quickly, and soon became the largest company town in Routt County. By 1920 it had close to 1,300 residents, as large as Steamboat Springs at that time. As other Bear River Canyon mining camps were established nearby, Mount Harris also became the center of social activities, with a church, ball fields, and a community center for dances and movies. Mount Harris lasted the longest of the Bear River Canyon communities, closing in 1958, when tunnel mining was being replaced by more economical strip mining operations. For tax purposes, the entire community was dismantled and auctioned off. Some Mount Harris homes were moved and still exist in surrounding towns.

In 1915 the Victor-American Fuel Company purchased nearby properties, which included the Wadge homestead, and they established their first mine tunnel in the vicinity of the old Wadge wagon mine. As a result, their entire operation soon became known as the **"Wadge Mine."** The **Wadge company town** was close to but separate from Mount Harris, although the two communities shared some resources, including a school building built on the Victor-American property. The Wadge community would survive the devastating mine disaster in 1942, but not the closure of the Victor-American mining operations just ten years later.

The International Fuel Company also purchased property northeast of the Wadge homestead in 1915, and began to develop their own tunnel on the east side of the Wolf Creek drainage. In 1925 this operation was purchased by the Pinnacle-Kemmerer Company, after which the mine and its small mining camp became known as the **P-K**. The P-K closed in 1934.

Other nearby communities were quickly established farther upstream in the canyon. The **Bear River Mine** was also established in 1915. The mine entrance was on the slopes above the company town. During peak production in the 1930s, about 150 families lived in the town, which had a general store, post office, school, and boarding house, as well as a small hotel. The town also had its own power plant, located between the railroad tracks and the river. The local coal bed was exhausted by 1940, when the mine was closed. All of the buildings were dismantled or auctioned off, leaving just the school building on site for many years after. Today the only traces of the mine and town are a couple faint foundations north of the highway.

About a mile and half up Coalview Gulch was the location of the small coal camp of **Coalview**, established around 1916. At its peak, Coalview had a post office and general store, but operation of the several mines was never as dependable as at Mount Harris and Bear River. In 1924 Routt-Pinnacle Coal shut down the last Coalview shaft "indefinitely," and the steep railroad spur tracks soon fell into disrepair—which complicated an attempt to revive operations in the late 1920s. Some occupation of the camp appears to have lingered on through the 1930s, while the Bear River and Mount Harris mines continued to offer employment.

Information courtesy:

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library

Griswold, P.R., *Denver and Salt Lake Railroad: 1913–1926* (1996)

Mack, C. *Remembering Mt. Harris: A Collection of Memories About My Old Hometown* (2011)

Stanko, et al., *The Historical Guide to Routt County* (2010)

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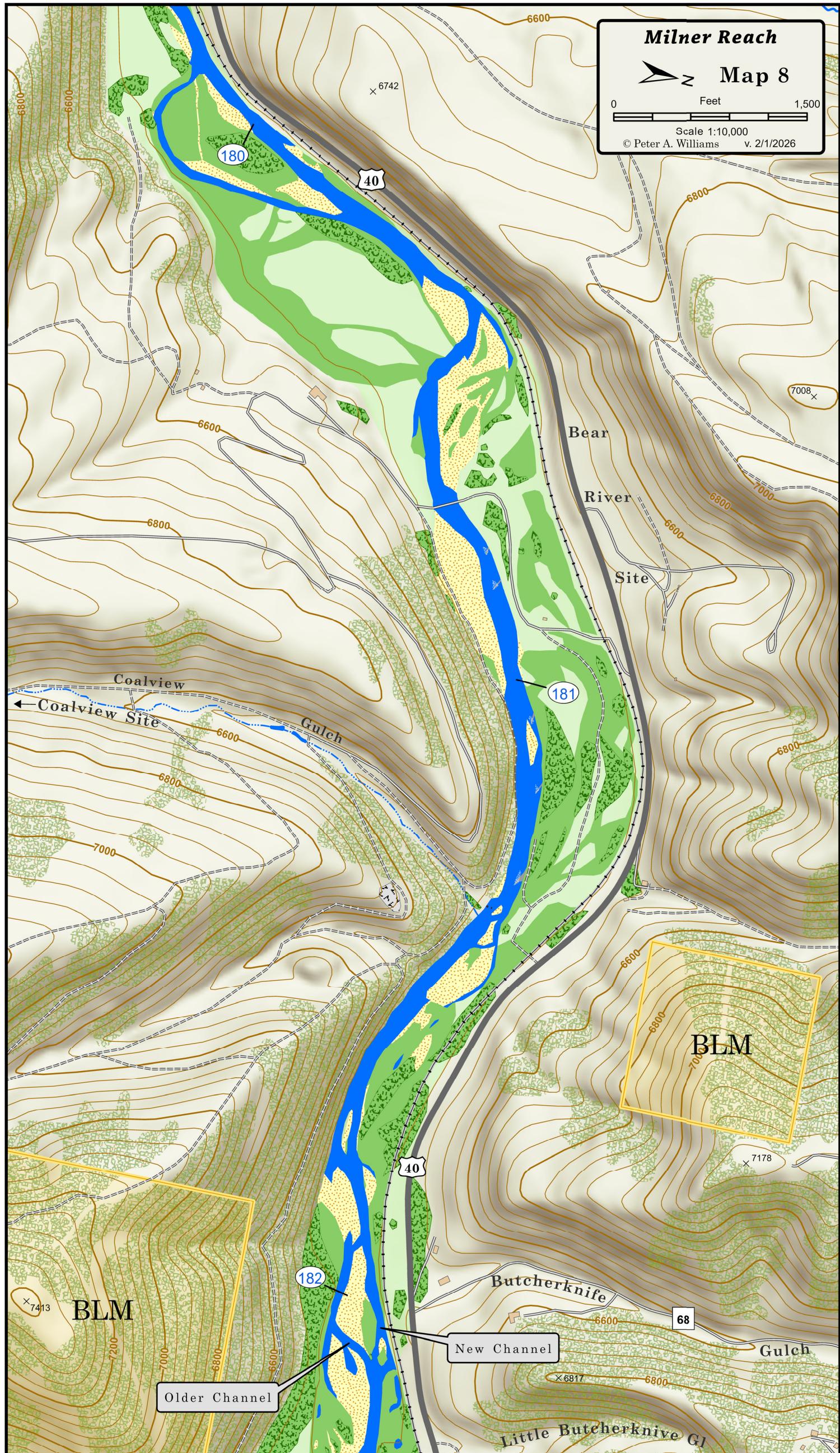
## Milner Reach

### Map 8

0 Feet 1,500

Scale 1:10,000

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# Milner Reach Map 9

River Mile (RM) topics follow the flow of the river, from the bottom of the page to the top.

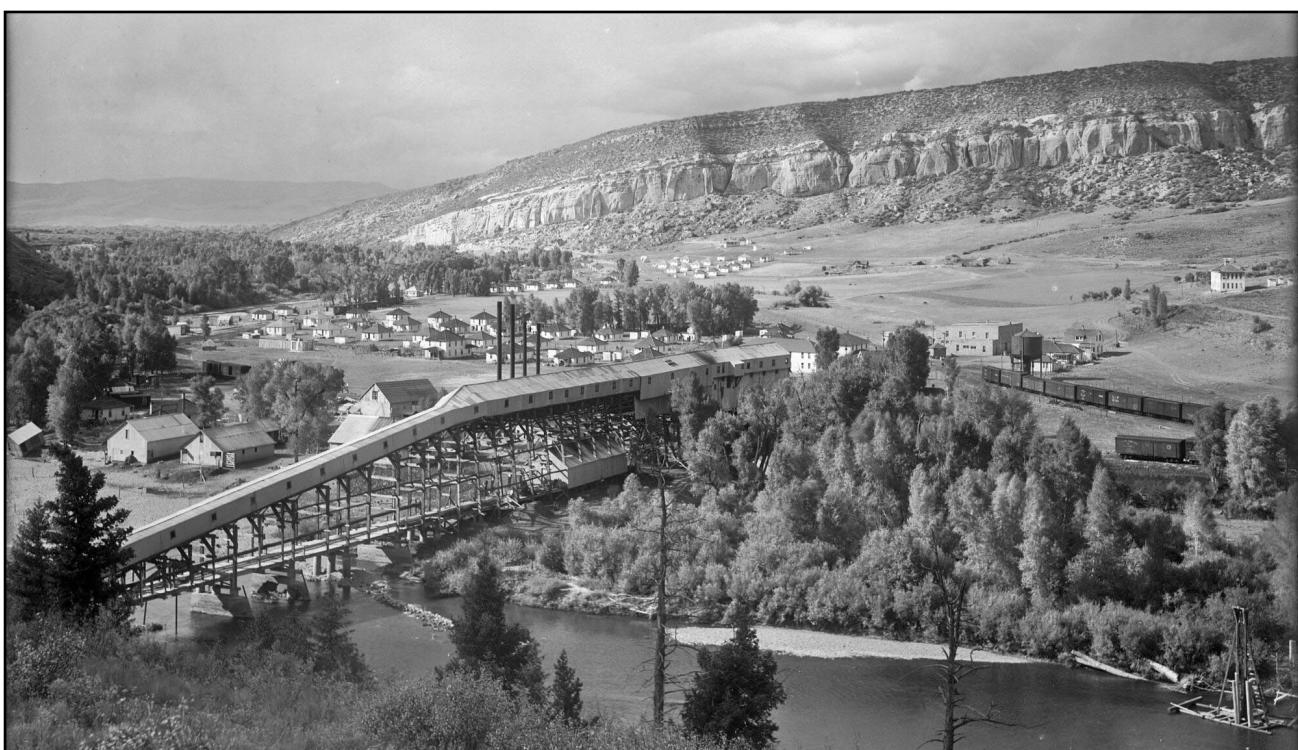
RM 177.7 The Yampa River State Park's **Hayden Pump Station boat ramp** provides trailered river access on river left, immediately after the **US Highway 40 bridge**.

RM 178.1 The large white bags on river right are used to enhance the diversion berm extending out into the channel from river right. During periods of higher flows they are stored on shore. Their purpose is keep the **Gibraltar Ditch headgate**, just upstream, from becoming high and dry during low flows.

RM 178.9 **HAZARD!** The low, river-wide gravel **diversion berm** for the Marshall Roberts Ditch comes and goes, but may block your passage through the left channel at very low water.

RM 179 The area on river left for the next mile is protected by The Nature Conservancy's **Yampa River Preserve**. It contains one of the largest remaining examples of a type of rare riparian forest dominated by narrowleaf cottonwood, box elder and red-osier dogwood.

RM 179.2 These crumbling concrete piers marching across the river are all that's left of the **Mount Harris Mine tipple**. A tipple is a structure used to load coal into railroad hopper cars, but in this case it also served as a bridge to get the coal across the river.



*Mount Harris and Gibraltar Rock lie beyond the tipple. Photo by M. C. McClure, ca. 1917. Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, MCC-2671 (detail).*

## The Mount Harris (Wadge) Mine Disaster

In the 1920s, Victor-American began developing a second mine tunnel, with the entrance on the original Wadge homestead north of the river. The second Wadge tunnel excavated westward under the Mount Harris community to mine coal from deep beneath Gibraltar Rock and what is today the Nature Conservancy's Carpenter Ranch property.

In the evening of January 27, 1942, an explosion in the second Wadge mine killed 34 miners. Only four men on the night crew, who had been working just 3,000 feet from the entrance, survived after hearing the explosion from much deeper in the tunnel. They were able to race to an air intake shaft and so escaped the "blackdamp," or carbon monoxide gas, that soon billowed up from the explosion site. The cause of the explosion was later determined to be a buildup of methane gas, probably concentrated in the work area by a blower fan that had been brought in to help dissipate it. Mixed with the coal dust at the work site, the gas was extremely explosive and was probably set off by an electrical spark from a piece of equipment.

The larger Mount Harris community, and indeed all of Routt County, was devastated by the disaster. Forty-three children lost their fathers. All the mines were shut down, schools were closed, and sporting events were canceled while the Yampa Valley mourned its loss.

Information courtesy:

Leslie, Jan, and the Hayden Heritage Center, *Images of America, Hayden* (2010)  
Mack, C. *Remembering Mt. Harris: A Collection of Memories About My Old Hometown* (2011)  
Stanko, et al., *The Historical Guide to Routt County* (2010)

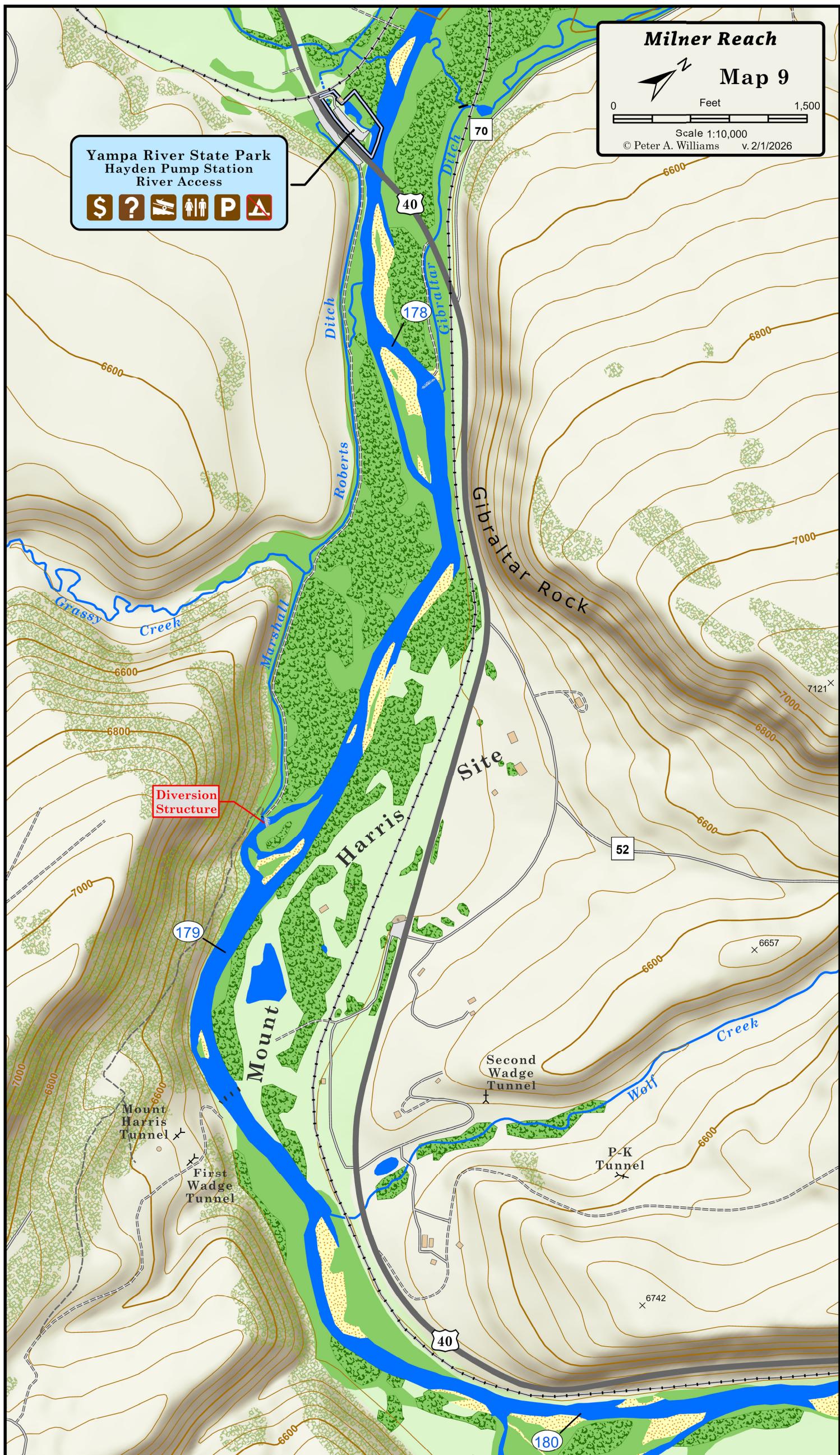
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## Milner Reach

### Map 9

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Yampa River State Park  
Hayden Pump Station  
River Access



# THE BACK PAGE

## Milner Reach Stream Gauges

RM 199.2 **USGS #09239500** Yampa River at Steamboat Springs (5<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge)

RM 198.6 **USGS #09240020** Yampa River below Soda Creek (13<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge)

NA **USGS #09242500** Elk River near Milner

The **Yampa River below Soda Creek** gauge is the preferred resource for the upper section of the Milner Reach, but it is only operational from May through August. The rest of the year the **Yampa at Steamboat** gauge, which lacks the contribution of Soda Creek, will suffice.

The volume of water in the Yampa River is substantially increased by the Elk River, roughly seven miles downstream of the Bear River Park boat ramp. Combining the **Elk River near Milner** gauge with one of the Steamboat gauges will give you the flows that you will be riding for the final twelve-and-a-half miles to the Hayden Pump Station boat ramp.

Additional information and further flow recommendations for the Milner Reach can also be found at <https://friendsoftheyampa.com/know-before-you-go-milner/>.

### Yampa or Bear?

The headwaters of the Yampa River lie in the Flat Tops Wilderness southwest of Steamboat Springs, at an elevation of a little over 11,000 feet. Starting in a high mountain basin, a small mountain stream called the Bear River drains northeast to the historic town of Yampa, where it joins Phillips Creek. From there the combined Bear and Phillips become the Yampa River, which then flows 240 miles across two counties to its confluence with the Green River, in the heart of Dinosaur National Monument.

That's the official story, as established by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN). The BGN was created by the federal government in 1890 to address "the complex issues of domestic geographic feature names during the surge of exploration, mining, and settlement of western territories after the American Civil War. Inconsistencies and contradictions among many names, spellings, and applications became a serious problem to surveyors, map makers, and scientists who required uniform, non-conflicting geographic nomenclature."

The present Bear River, upstream of the town of Yampa, still retains what was once a popular alternate name for the entire river, from its the headwaters to the confluence with the Green. Both names for the river can be found on the earliest survey maps of the region, so neither has priority in that respect. In fact, early mapmakers generally avoided making any choice between the two, preferring to label the river as the "Yampah or Bear."

There is no truth to the oft-cited notion that *yampah* is a Native American word for *bear*—the two names actually have nothing in common. The plant called the common yampah (*Perideridia gairdneri* ssp. *borealis*) is a member of the carrot (aka parsley) family. It was traditionally harvested for consumption by the local northern Utes (who were known as the *Yampatika*, or "yampah root eaters"). The plant is common in the wet meadows along the upper reaches of the river, and so gave the entire river a name. On the other hand, "Bear" was more commonly used by the early fur trappers, who were the first white visitors to the valley. If there was a specific reason or occasion for their choice of that name, it has been lost to history.

Later settlers used both names. In 1907, the May 4 edition of the *Yampa Leader* (published in the town of Yampa) prominently sported the headlines "**Yampa or Bear? Which is Better Name for Famous River? Time to Terminate Confusion Caused by Two Names.**" The paper proposed the choice should be made by its local readers, who could turn in a ballot accompanied by a short essay explaining their reasoning. A prize of five dollars in gold would go to the voter with the "best argument." As to the paper's position, of course it favored "Yampa," arguing (logically) that there were lots of Bear Rivers across the country, but only one Yampa. Besides, they pointed out, "Yampa" was the name used "for hundreds of years" by the "original people of this country." Not to mention its recent adoption by the BGN for "all official maps and publications relating to this region."

The *Steamboat Pilot* and *Meeker Herald* newspapers took note of the *Yampa Leader*'s contest, and weighed in as favoring "Yampa." The *Herald* added that the "euphonious Spanish and Indian names" should be retained everywhere in Colorado, because "they mean something, both from the standpoint of nomenclature and history."

Not surprisingly, the *Yampa Leader* announced on June 1, 1907, that its readers had voted unanimously for "Yampa." Of course, that was not the end of it, and downstream the two names persisted in regular use throughout at least the first half of the twentieth century.

Information courtesy:

<https://www.usgs.gov/us-board-on-geographic-names>

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library