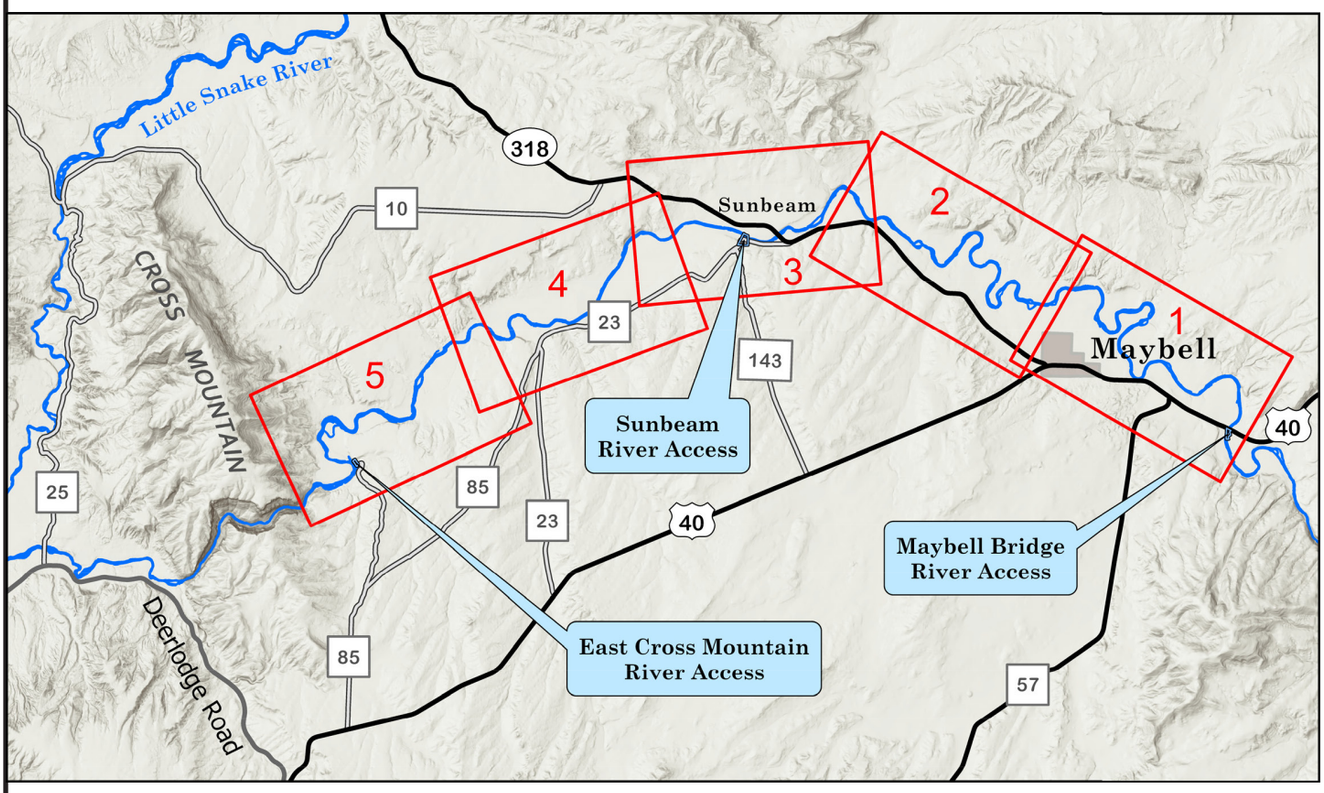
YAMPA RIVER GUIDES

Sunbeam Reach



Sunbeam Reach Legend

Hydrographic Features

- Stream or Mainstem Ditch
- Intermittent Stream
- Branch Ditch
- Irrigation Pipe or Culvert
- Cross Mountain Ditch
- Irrigation Pump
- Center-Pivot Irrigation
- 125 River Mile

Roads and Structures

- Trail or Closed 4WD
- 4WD
- Graded Road
- Paved Road
- Power Line
- Buildings

Administrative Boundaries

- Bureau of Land Management
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Environmental Features

- Active or Prehistoric Floodplain
- Riparian Herbaceous/Short Shrub
- Riparian Tree/Tall Shrub Canopy
- Upland Tree/Shrub Cover
- Fluvial Sand or Gravel
- Gravel Quarry

Recreational Area Symbols

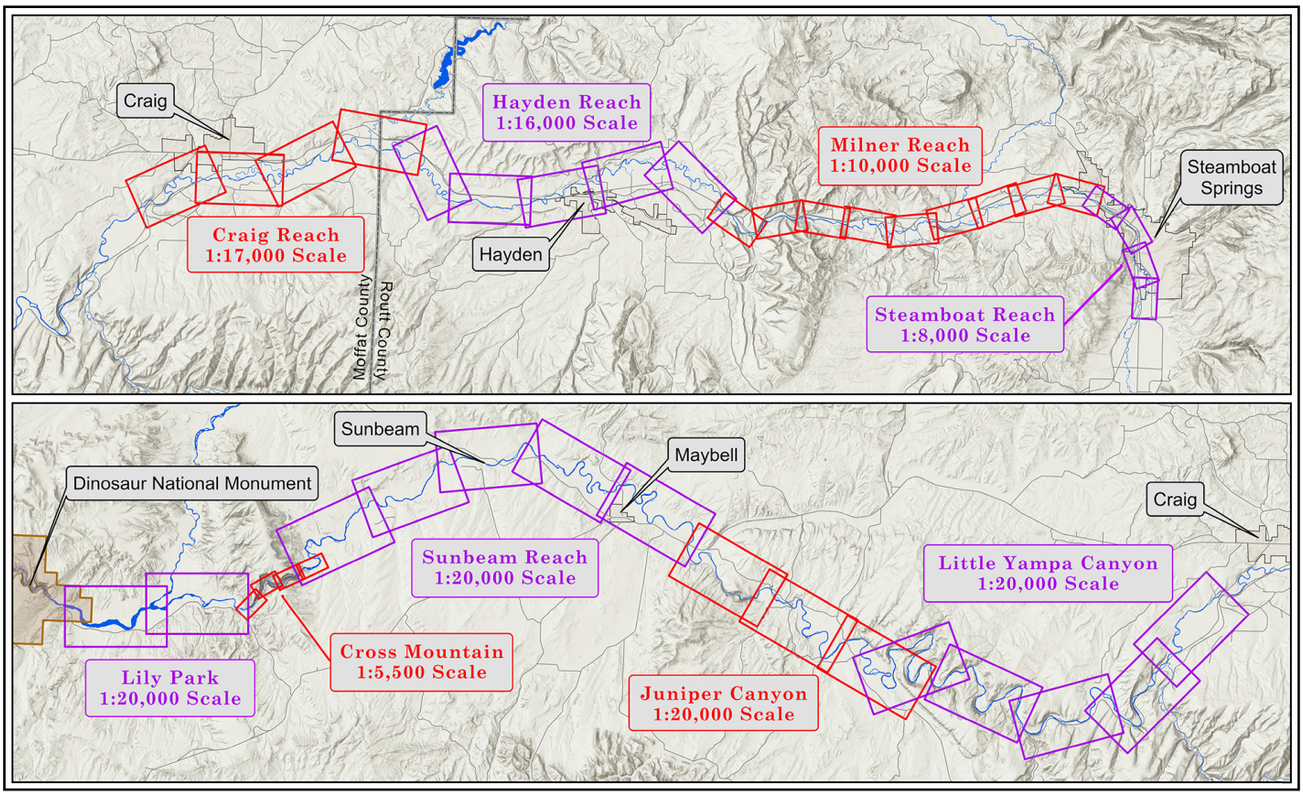
- Fee Area
- Trailered Craft Access
- Picnic Tables
- Rest Rooms
- Longterm Parking
- Designated Camping
- No Camping

Version Date September 27, 2026

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** with "Yampa River Guides" in the subject line. Or just let me know if you are finding these guides helpful!

Terms of Use

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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 publicly 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.

Sunbeam Reach Map 1

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

RM 81.1 The **Moffat County 19 bridge** offers little hazard to boaters. The first bridge at this spot was completed in 1929, providing a more direct access to Maybell for the ranches and small communities in the Fairview and Spring Creek areas to the north.

RM 83.7 The abandoned **pumping station and aqueduct** at Spring Creek were built to supply water to a **uranium mill** operated by the Union Carbide Corporation, located about 4.5 miles northeast of the river. The mill serviced multiple local open pit mines, and processed about 2.6 million tons of ore between 1957 and 1964. In 1971 Union Carbide (which goes by Umetco today) dismantled the mill and began the work of stabilizing the radioactive tailings pile. The U.S. Department of Energy took over in 1995, encapsulating all of the tailings and other materials (including the demolished mill) in a massive "disposal cell" 30 feet high and covering about 66 acres. The site cleanup was completed in 1998.

RM 84.8 On river left you can see what remains of the old **Cross Mountain Ditch** headgate. Completed late in 1904, the Cross Mountain ditch was intended to supply water to points much farther downstream than the Maybell Ditch would reach. In its relatively brief heyday the ditch irrigated properties nearly to the head of Cross Mountain Canyon.

The original wooden headgate was prone to damage by river ice, and so was replaced in 1914 with a steel headgate set in a large concrete structure—the newspapers reported that it would now "last as long as the river and the land." Nevertheless, in 1920 it was again severely damaged by high water. By 1929 the high cost of repairing persistant breaks along the entire length of the ditch prompted the shareholders to consider pumping directly out of the river as an alternative. More flood water erosion in 1930 was the final blow, and the ditch was finally abandoned. Still, a century later, many sections of the old ditch channel remain.

RM 88.7 The Sunbeam Reach begins at the Yampa River State Park **Maybell Bridge river access**. Use of the boat ramp requires a state parks pass, and camping requires an extra fee.

The next public river access is at Sunbeam, 17 flatwater miles downstream, where there is no camping. The East Cross Mountain river access is then an additional 11.5 flatwater miles beyond Sunbeam. You will be floating through private property for the entire Sunbeam Reach, until just above the East Cross ramp. Please plan your trip and shuttles accordingly.

The Fraker Ford Bridge

The first "Maybell Bridge" was known as the Fraker Ford Bridge, and before that there was just the Fraker Ford, a shallow, low-water crossing in the vicinity of the modern bridge. It was named for the Fraker brothers, Ab and Charlie, who had ranches in the area and ran wagon freight between the railroad at Rawlins and the Maybell Valley. As with all fords across the Yampa River, it was treacherous when frozen, and totally impassible during the two months or more of high water. After the construction of the bridge downstream at the Thornburg crossing in 1890–1, it did become possible to avoid fording the river when traveling eastward out of the valley. But for residents of the upper Maybell Valley that also meant an extra 20 miles added to their long horseback journey to Craig when purchasing supplies.

By 1902 Fraker Ford had already been the site of several drownings. The new Maybell community started petitioning the county commissioners, complaining not only of the hazards, but also that until a bridge is built, "the growth of the valley will be greatly retarded." The commissioners in turn began petitioning the state assembly. In April 1905 an appropriation for a steel "wagon bridge" at Fraker was finally signed into law, although it was for significantly less than the anticipated cost of construction. After the county agreed to cover the deficit, at last construction could begin. A center pier had already been put in place when it was toppled by river ice in March 1906—which only made crossing on the ice more perilous than usual that spring. Work recommenced late the next summer, and finally in early January 1907 completion seemed imminent. Yet there was still one more delay, when the state inspector refused to certify the bridge because of a sag in its middle. The "Maybell Notes" in the January 17 *Routt County Courier* complained that "the contractors have the entrances fastened up with padlock and chain, while we fret and fume and cross on the ice or go under, just as the luck runs." Fortunately, repairs could be made, and the bridge was at last open to traffic early that spring.

Information courtesy:

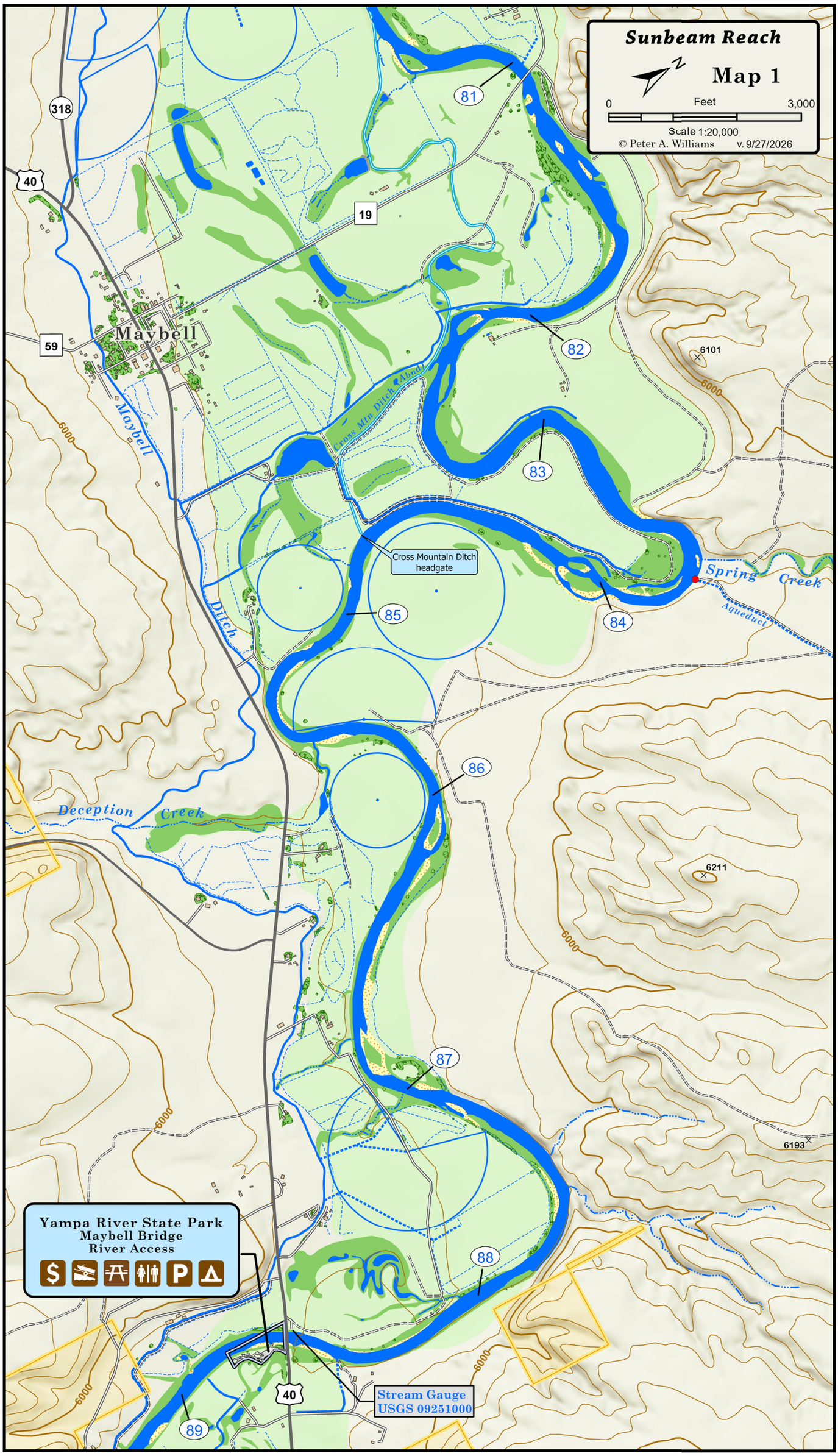
Colorado Department of Natural Resources, **Division of Water Resources**

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library

DOE Office of Legacy Management, **www.energy.gov/lm/maybell-colorado-disposal-site**

FitzPatrick, V.S., *The Last Frontier, Volume II* (1976)

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Sunbeam Reach
Map 1
N
0
Feet
3,000
Scale 1:20,000
© Peter A. Williams v. 9/27/2026
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
Maybell
Cross Mtn Ditch (Abnd)
Maybell Ditch
Cross Mountain Ditch headgate
Spring Creek Aqueduct
Deception Creek
6101
6211
6193
6000
318
40
19
59
Yampa River State Park
Maybell Bridge
River Access
Stream Gauge
USGS 09251000

Sunbeam Reach Map 2

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

RM 74.6 **Boston Hill** was named for B.F. "Boston" Shedden, according to Moffat County historian V.S. Fitzpatrick, who recounts several tales of Shedden's adventures while he worked as a cook and horse wrangler for Ora Haley's Two Bar ranch, or as a driver on the Meeker-to-Rawlins stage line. But Fitzpatrick neglects to mention *why* the hill was named for Boston—that's left to John Grounds, who briefly mentions that a Two Bar chuckwagon driver named Boston lost control of his team, thus meeting his end while descending the hill.

RM 76.5 In 1899, Ruben B. Overholt purchased 40 acres on the flats below **Overholt Draw**, as part of the sale of state trust lands brokered by the Maybell Canal Company. Over time he continued to expand his holdings, creating a 280-acre irrigated ranch described in newspaper accounts as "one of the most productive places in the valley." Overholt was also prominent in the community as the respected ditch construction foreman, and served terms on the company board of directors. In later years he was elected to two terms as Moffat County commissioner.

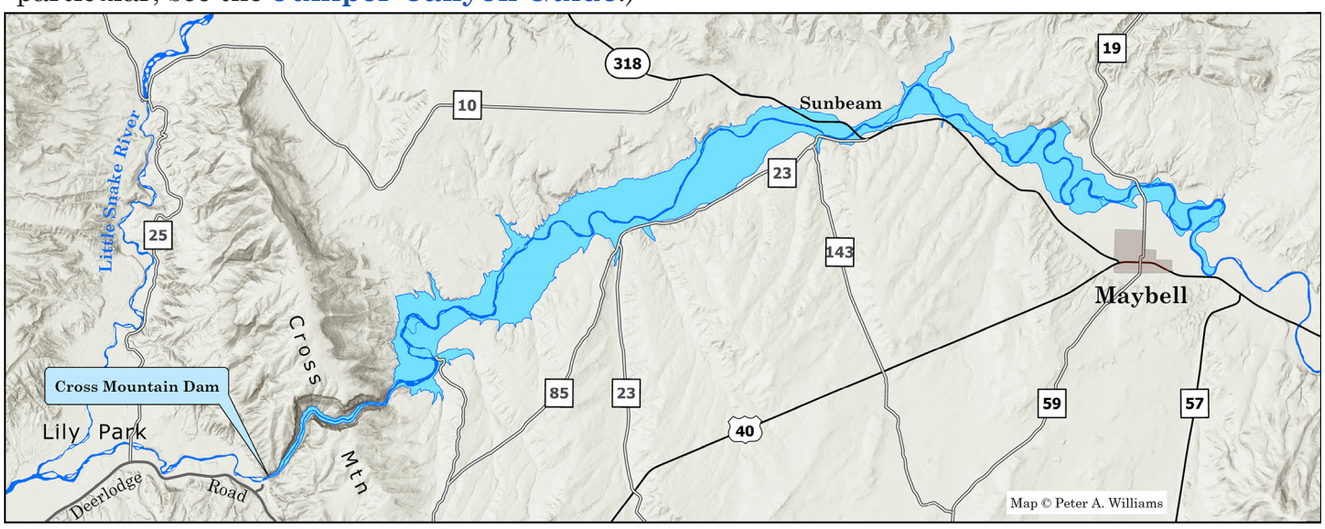
The Cross Mountain Reservoir

The Maybell Valley would be a very different place if the Cross Mountain dam and reservoir had been built as proposed in the 1980s. Part of the larger Juniper–Cross Mountain Project, the dam would have formed a 260-foot-high plug at the mouth of the Cross Mountain Canyon, with turbines capable of producing 50,000 kilowatts of electrical power. At full pool the reservoir would have stored 208,000 acre-feet of water, and had a shoreline of about 55 miles. Nearly all of the historically irrigated lands in the valley would have been flooded.

The potential for a Cross Mountain Canyon dam was first studied well over a hundred years ago. In 1901, Denver investors commissioned the engineering for a 60-foot-high dam at the mouth of the canyon, as part of their plan to irrigated the entirety of Lily Park. Once the Reclamation Service (precursor to the Bureau of Reclamation) took a look at Cross Mountain, it quickly established a federal power withdrawal in 1910. Although not a primary component of the Bureau of Reclamation's Colorado River Storage Project during the 1960s (the Bureau mostly had eyes on a Juniper Canyon dam), a Cross Mountain dam was again front and center by 1980, when the Colorado River Water Conservation District applied for a license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to build the Juniper–Cross Mountain Project.

Both of the proposed dams would have generated electric power, with the Cross Mountain power plant operated to "re-regulate" (smooth out) the widely variable "on demand" releases from the larger Juniper power plant. Promotional materials also emphasized the recreational value of the reservoirs—multiple campgrounds, picnic areas, boat ramps, and a 50-boat marina providing access to "high-speed boating" were promised for each reservoir.

The dams were hotly debated throughout the 1980s, but ultimately it was the cost of the project—and its potential to impact endangered native fish—that led to its demise. (For more details on the history of the Juniper–Cross Mountain Project, and the Juniper dam in particular, see the **Juniper Canyon Guide**.)



The proposed Cross Mountain Reservoir, ca. 1980, with the current river channel superimposed.

Information courtesy:

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library

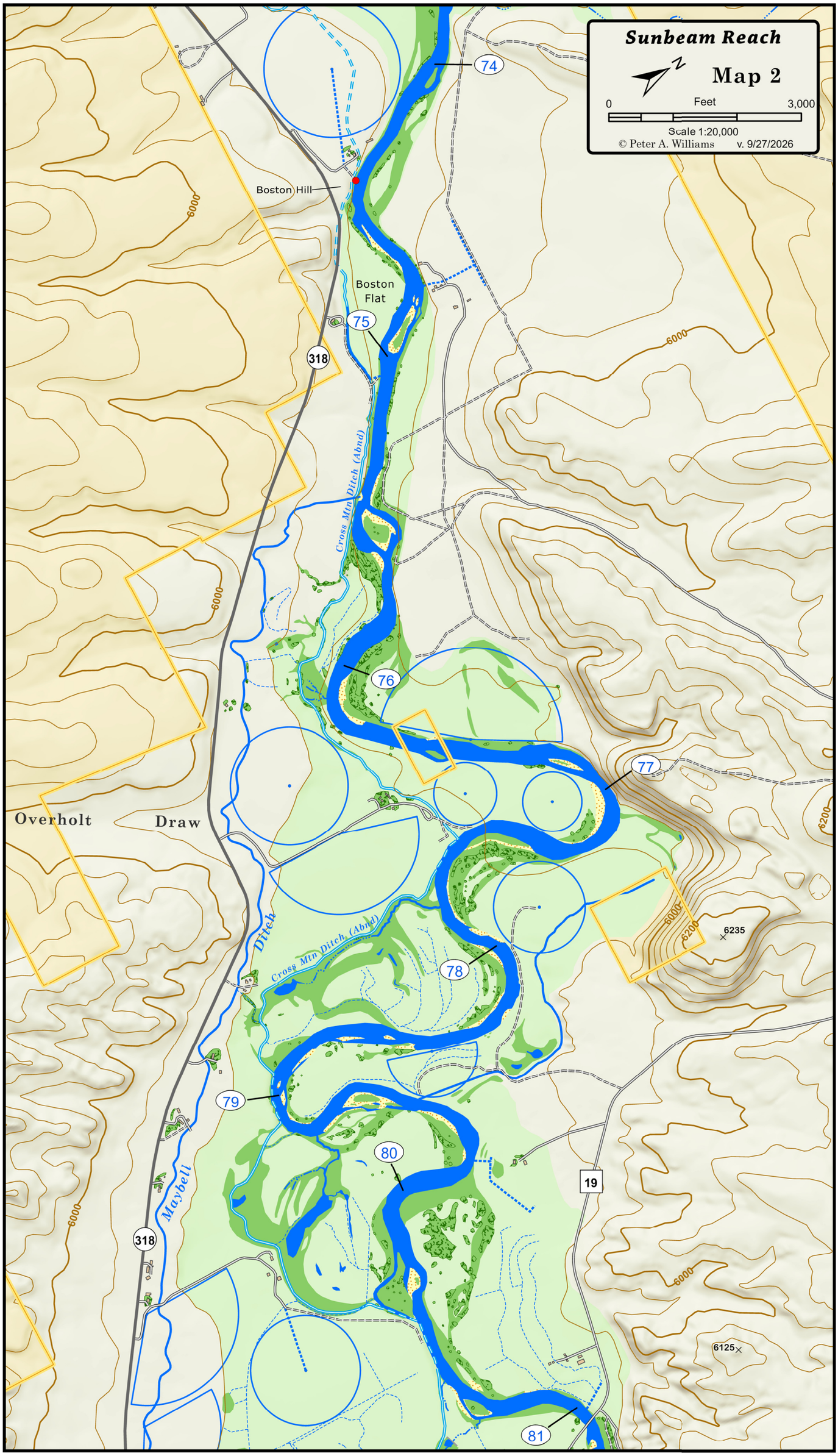
FitzPatrick, V.S., *The Last Frontier, Volumes I and II* (1974, 1976)

Grounds, John Cureton, *Trail Dust of the Southwest* (1977)

CRWCD, *Juniper–Cross Mountain Hydroelectric: Summary, Preliminary Project Report* (1980)

Woolley, Ralf R., *The Green River and its Utilization: USGS Water Supply Paper 618* (1930)

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Sunbeam Reach
Map 2
N
0
Feet
3,000
Scale 1:20,000
© Peter A. Williams
v. 9/27/2026
74
Boston Hill
Boston Flat
75
318
Cross Mtn Ditch (Abnd)
6000
76
77
Overholt
Draw
Ditch
Cross Mtn Ditch (Abnd)
78
6200
6235
79
80
Maybell
318
19
6000
6125
81

Sunbeam Reach Map 3

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

RM 71.5 Look for the Yampa River State Park **Sunbeam river access**, a narrow lane through the tall willows on river left. Unfortunately, camping is prohibited at both the river's edge and in the parking/picnic area located behind the willows.

The midriver **pier for the old Thornburg Bridge** is clearly visible just downstream of the river access. The first Thornburg Bridge was built with state money in 1890–1, at the shallow ford where older wagon roads had crossed the river on their way to the upper Little Snake valley or the railroad stop at Rawlins. Throughout the following seven decades, the bridge and its many successors were frequently damaged or destroyed by ice, then repaired or replaced. In 1959 the final version was moved to a crossing of the Yampa River at Lily Park.

RM 72.15 The state highway commission appropriated money for a **State Highway 318 bridge** at this location in 1950, but post-war steel shortages delayed construction until 1952. The bridge was a replacement for the aging Thornburg Bridge, and was integral to the state's plan to straighten and upgrade the old dirt road to Brown's Park into a modern highway.

Sunbeam

Around 1909, Nils C. Bonnevie, a civil engineer from Denver, began seeking investors for a new irrigation project he envisioned for the lands north of the Maybell Valley. His plan was to build reservoirs to capture and store the flood waters of the Sand and Spring creeks, which would then be redistributed on 15,000 acres of land atop Peck Mesa, farther to the west. The goal was to create a new community of homesteaders on the "reclaimed" mesa. By early 1910, Bonnevie's North Bear Irrigation Company had purchased 200 acres of school trust land at the Thornburg Bridge, put up a company headquarters building, and begun the survey work for the project. The Bonnevie family homesteaded in the foothills just to the north of the bridge.

An April 1910 notice in the *Routt County Courier*, announcing that a dance was to be held near the bridge in "the new town of Sunbeam," revealed that Bonnevie also had plans to build a new community along the river. ("Sunbeam" was his family's pet name for six-year-old daughter Alice.) Over the next few years Bonnevie energetically promoted his new town, even touting it as the "future commercial center of the lower valley." The townsite was platted, a few lots were purchased, and in 1912 a post office was established, soon followed by a general store.

But by that time the North Bear Irrigation Company was in trouble—the anticipated floods in the creeks had failed to materialize—and in 1915 the state declared the company "defunct." While Sunbeam has managed to endure, by late 1918 Bonnevie had given up and moved back to Denver to pursue new interests. The county soon foreclosed on his homestead.

Thornburgh Road

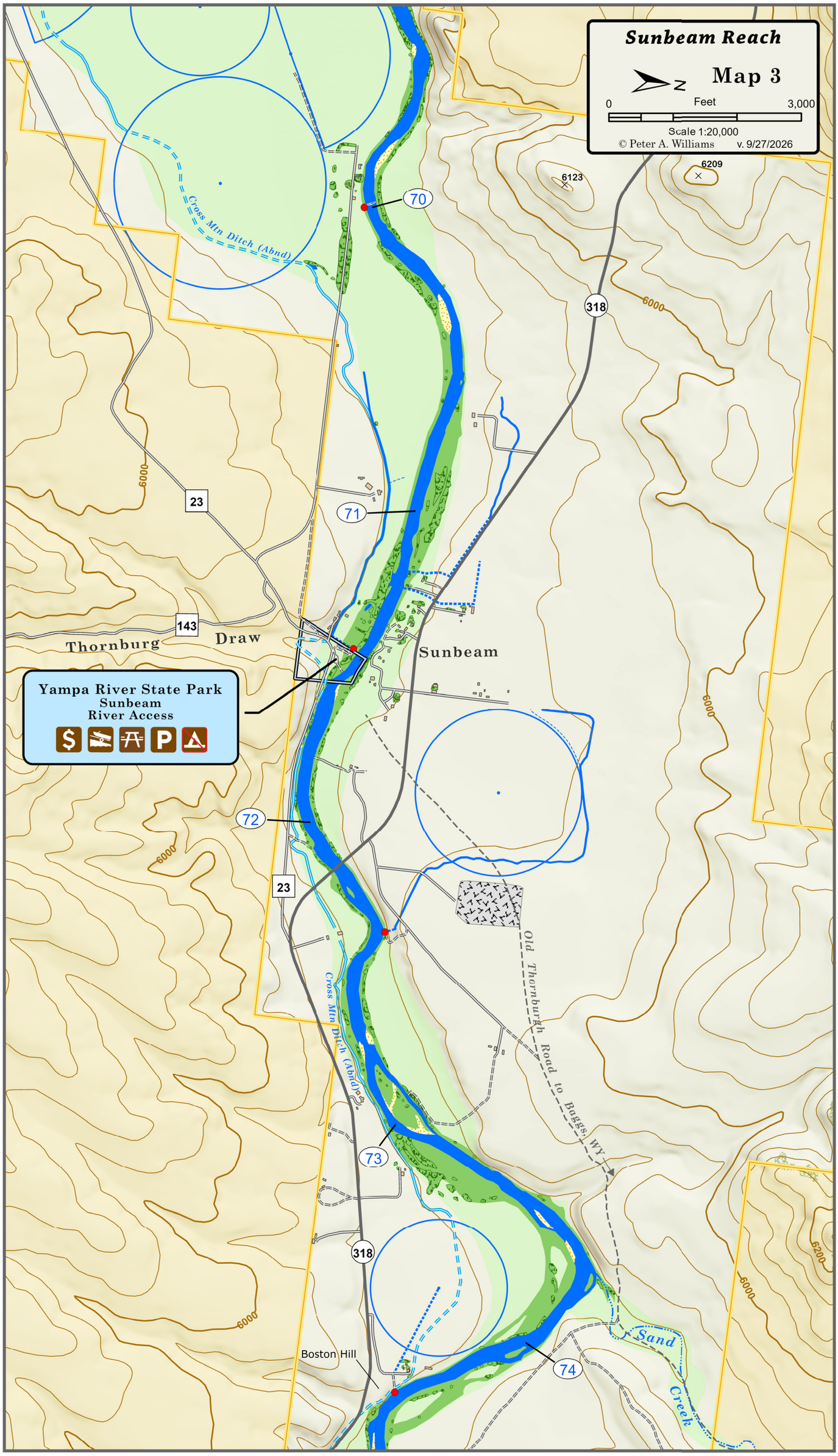
The precise history of this early wagon road is difficult to reconstruct. Likely portions were first traveled in the early 1870s. It was one of several branches off the main wagon route into northwest Colorado from the railroad stop at Rawlins. From Baggs, the Thornburgh Road turned southwest, eventually reaching the Maybell Valley via Sand Canyon. After fording the Yampa River, it continued west towards Lily Park (roughly the route of today's County Roads 23 and 85), before eventually reaching Vernal, Utah. From the vicinity of the river crossing, other wagon roads branched northwest to Browns Park, and south to Powell Park and Meeker.

The fact that the State of Colorado appropriated money as early as 1890 for a bridge at the "Thornburg crossing" (the final "h" was soon dropped from "Thornburgh" in local usage) testifies to the regional importance of the wagon roads converging there. The Thornburg Bridge appears to have been the fourth bridge ever built over the Yampa River, preceeded only by the "Government Bridge" in Axial Basin (the first), and the earliest bridges at Steamboat Springs and Hayden. However, although the bridge itself remained important to the Maybell Valley for decades, the direct route to Baggs did not, and eventually the section of road through lower Sand Canyon was abandoned. In contrast, the Fairview and Spring Creek communities to the north continued to make use of their local portions of the old road. In 1929, a few of these sections were relinked to the valley as County Road 19, with a new bridge directly to Maybell.

In later decades the existence of the Thornburg(h) names sometimes confused county residents, and one explanation offered was that the old road must have been the route Major Thornburgh and his troops took in 1879, on their way to the Battle of Milk Creek. Not so. But after Thornburgh lost his life in that battle, his name was soon bestowed on many Colorado landmarks. It's certain that the old wagon road, and its associated bridge, were two of these.

Information courtesy:
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
Historic Cadastral Survey Plats, **General Land Office Records**

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Sunbeam Reach
Map 3
N
0
Feet
3,000
Scale 1:20,000
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v. 9/27/2026
6209
6123
70
Cross Mtn Ditch (Abnd)
318
6000
23
71
143
Thornburg
Draw
Sunbeam
Yampa River State Park
Sunbeam
River Access
72
23
Old Thornburgh Road to Boggs, WY
Cross Mtn Ditch (Abnd)
73
318
Boston Hill
74
Sand
Creek
6200

Sunbeam Reach Map 4

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

RM 65.9 The **large power lines** crossing the river above you are part of Rocky Mountain Power's (RMP) regional electrical grid. The 416-mile, 500-kilovolt transmission line takes a shortcut across Moffat County while connecting RMP's Aeolus substation (in Carbon County, Wyoming, east of Rawlins) to their Clover substation (in Juab County, Utah, south of Salt Lake City). Rocky Mountain Power actually services Utah, Wyoming, and the southeast corner of Idaho, but not Colorado. Construction of the lines was completed in November 2024.

RM 66.5 During the troubles resulting from Warden Wilcox's raid on the Ute encampment on the Little Snake River in 1897, many of the local white families in the lower Little Snake and Yampa river valleys took refuge at the **Vaughn Ranch** house, on river right, opposite Cedar Springs Draw. Brothers Boyd and Boone Vaughn homesteaded both sides of the river in 1885.

RM 67.3 In 1884 **Henry Templeton** homesteaded in this area. Henry Templeton's wife, Cornelia "Nellie" Templeton, took over the Maybell post office in 1888, running it out of the ranch house until 1894, when it was moved all the way upstream to the Barber ranch in the upper valley—close to where the town of Maybell would be established just a few years later.

"Indian Troubles"

The banishment of the northern Ute bands to the Uintah and Ouray reservations, following the 1879 "Meeker Incident" and Battle of Milk Creek, was never as comprehensive as Colorado and U.S. officials desired. Small bands of Utes often made periodic foreys off of the reservations back into northwestern Colorado. Many believed that the right to use their traditional hunting grounds had not been rescinded by the "treaty" imposed on Chief Ouray and the other Ute leaders in Washington, D.C., on March 6, 1880. Others simply insisted that they had never been party to any such "agreement," and so it did not apply to them.

Predictably, the early white homesteaders, those who had so quickly taken advantage of the recently "vacated" Indian territory, often reacted to the continued Ute presence with as much fear as hostility. The Colorado newspapers were also quick to add to the vitriol. During the Colorow incident (at its heart, an attack on Chief Colorow's band for exaggerated reasons in 1887), Maybell postmaster Wilson Henry Banks expressed these fears when he wrote to the governor, pleading for "at least one company of troops and arms and ammunition" to protect the valley. "I am thoroughly convinced that we are on the verge of a serious outbreak."

There was no outbreak in 1887, however, and as Utes continued to visit and hunt in the same territories over the next decade, the white fear of attack gave way to a growing umbrage over the number of deer killed for hides by the hunting parties. In 1895, John Lowell, a rancher in Lily Park, complained to the newspapers that "the depredations committed by the Indians this year are far worse than in any preceding season," and the Utes "seem to utterly disregard all laws and claim that they had the authority of their [federal Indian] agent for doing so."

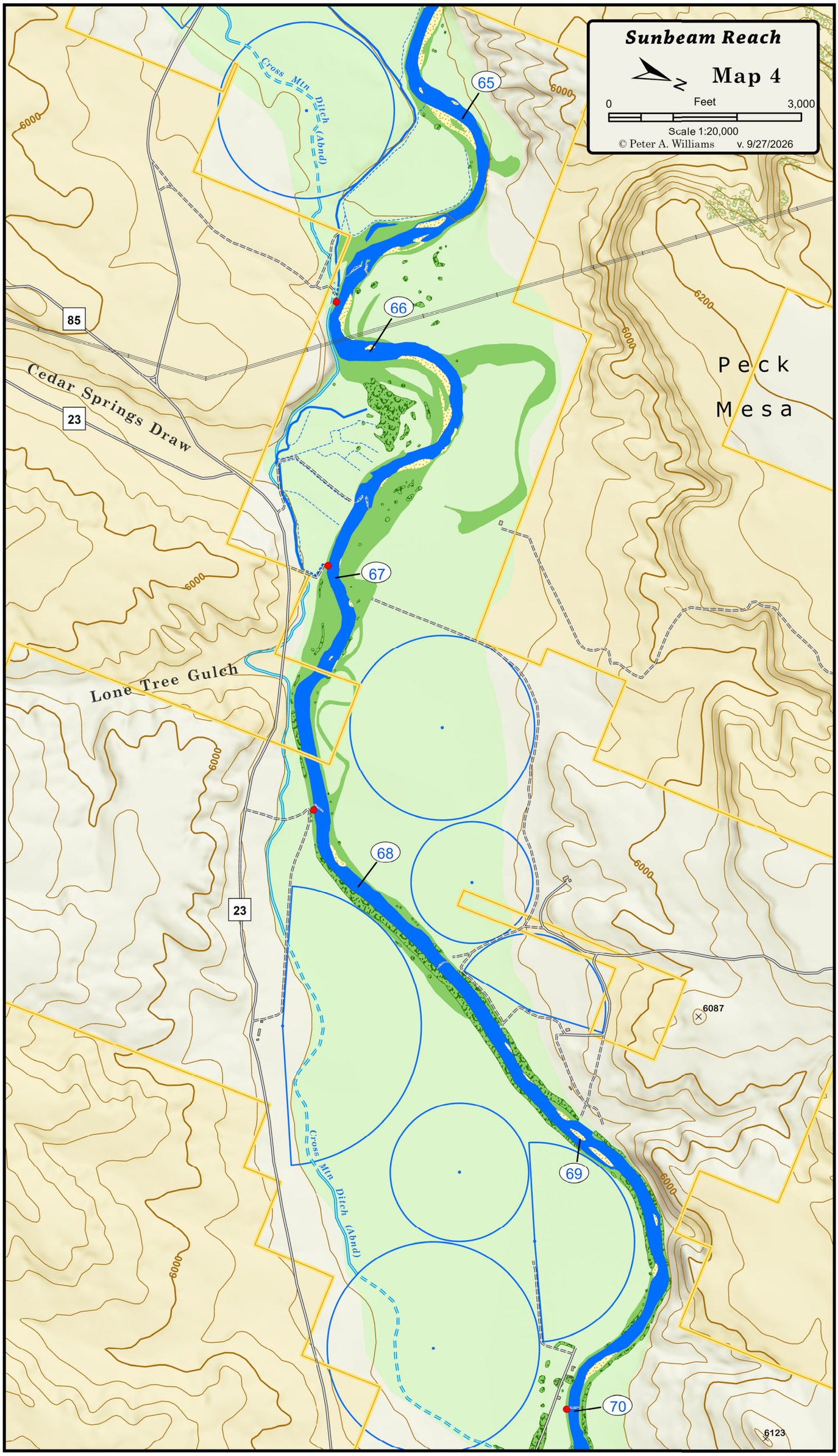
Two years later, in October 1897, state game warden W. R. Wilcox, accompanied by a posse of volunteers from Craig and the Maybell Valley, attempted to arrest a party of Utes camped along the Little Snake near the north end of Cross Mountain. After several hours of negotiations, a fight broke out. Later investigations suggest the first shot was fired during a struggle over a gun held by a Ute, which accidentally went off, wounding a Ute woman. Early newspaper reports claimed that up to five Utes were then killed by the whites, who were forced to fire "while in defense of their lives." Yet the only white injury was one man hit on the head during the struggle for the gun. In the final tally, two Utes were killed and several wounded. The skirmish provoked a Ute raid on a ranch owned by one of the posse, four miles upstream along the Little Snake. Finding no one there (the family had evacuated to the Vaughn ranch, five miles away on the Yampa), the raiders burned his haystacks and stock buildings (but not the house, as the newspapers claimed). The county sheriff was summoned, but when he arrived from Browns Park with a posse a day later, the Utes had already returned to Utah.

The Steamboat Pilot reported the incident with the headline "They are Good Indians" (as in, "the only good Indians are dead Indians"), followed by a rant that "the people of northwest Colorado are becoming tired of being overrun each year with a pack of greasy, lousy Utes . . . Five or six will not be missed. Ten times as many, if it becomes necessary, would not cause any tears to be shed." Such sentiments were widespread, even if not uniformly held in that era.

The Ute excursions to the area continued at least into the early 1920s, and in time the enmity of the reporting declined, but it remains an uncomfortable aspect of our local history.

Information courtesy:
Carey, Shawn, "Out of State, Out of Mind," **History Colorado** (2023)
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
PacifiCorp Gateway South Transmission Line Fact Sheet

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Sunbeam Reach
Map 4
N
0
Feet
3,000
Scale 1:20,000
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v. 9/27/2026
65
66
67
68
69
70
Cross Mtn Ditch (Abnd)
Cedar Springs Draw
Lone Tree Gulch
Peck Mesa
85
23
23
6000
6200
6087
6123

Sunbeam Reach Map 5

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

RM 60 Look for the Yampa River State Park **East Cross Mountain river access** on river left. Flatwater boaters should exit the river here, your last stop before the difficult whitewater boating downstream in the Cross Mountain Canyon.

RM 63 The crude map filed with the original 1884 **Maybell post office** application placed its location about a mile south of the river, somewhere in this vicinity. The actual office would have been in the home of the first postmaster, **Wilson Henry Banks**. Despite his important role in the community, Banks seems to have remained just a "squatter" on lands for which he never filed a homestead claim. He was well regarded among his neighbors, appearing as a witness for several of them when it came time to "prove up" on their own homesteading claims. Banks remained the postmaster until 1888, after which he apparently left the valley. The post office was then moved a few miles upstream to the Henry Templeton ranch.

Also at this point the river leaves the last of the private property behind. Until relatively recently that had not been the case. Sometime prior to 1890, **William "Bill" Morgan** homesteaded a ranch on the flats at the head of Cross Mountain Canyon. Morgan was one of the famous Morgan siblings—seven brothers and three sisters, all but one of whom were among the earliest white settlers in northwest Colorado. Financial misfortunes appear to have forced him to sell the ranch to an upstream neighbor in 1913, though he continued to live on the property for the rest of his life, employed as the ranch foreman. He died in 1928 from an infection caused by a tick bite.

In more modern times the old Morgan ranch had become part of a larger private property known as the **Cross Mountain Canyon Ranch**, which extended all the way upstream to RM 63. For many years the BLM sought to purchase the 920-acre ranch, with an eye to improving public access to the mountain and the canyon. Finally, in 2012, the Western Rivers Conservancy brokered the purchase, conveying the property to the BLM in the following year.

RM 64 Cattleman J. N. "Jerry" Pierce moved his ranch headquarters into the lower Maybell Valley in the mid-1880s, operating as the **Bar Diamond** ranch. Later, after he was in partnership with investor Joseph Reef, the ranch became known as the **Sevens** (both names were derived from the brands they used). By the early 1900s the Sevens had become one of the three largest cattle operations in northwest Colorado, sharing that distinction with Ora Haley's Two Bar ranch, headquartered on the Little Snake River, and the Cary brothers' Two Circle Bar ranch, headquartered west of Hayden. The original adobe headquarters building of the Sevens ranch was located south of the river somewhere in this area. Today the irrigated bottomlands in this section of the valley belong to the Cross Mountain Ranch.

What's a Maybell?

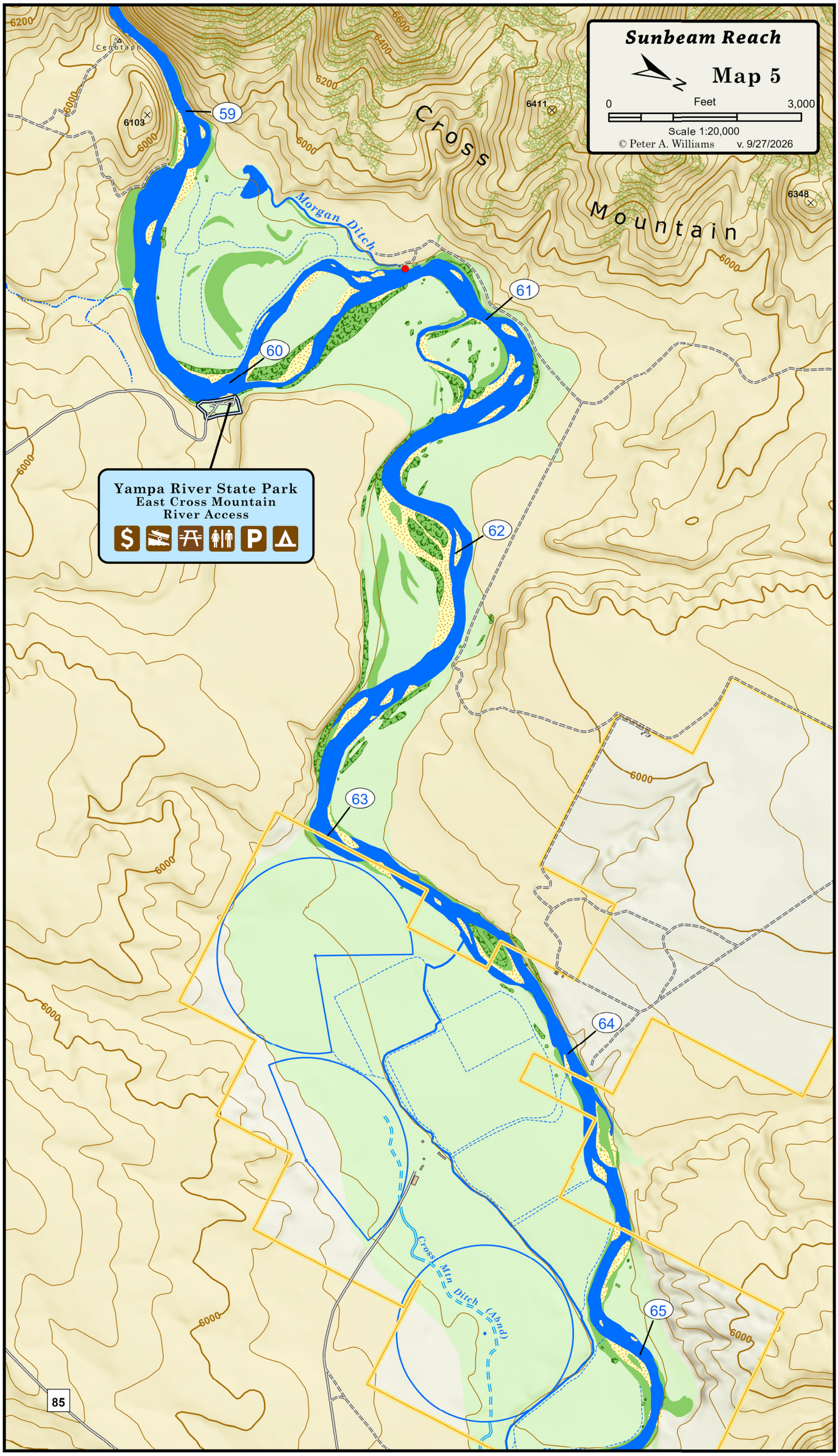
Whether we are referring to the whole valley, or just the modern town, why is it named "Maybell"? A variety of explanations have been offered over the past century or more, with the common thread that the first postmaster must have named the post office for a family member (or maybe two). A particularly tantalizing story has the town named for May and Bell Barber, who were the authentic, real-life daughters of postmaster Renness Jane "Jennie" Barber. It would appear to be a perfect match, except that the Barber family didn't arrive in the valley until 1891, and Jennie Barber didn't become postmaster until 1894 (she was actually the third Maybell postmaster, although the first to reside in the upper valley). Another version has John C. Banks, Wilson's son, as the first postmaster—but postal records clearly show that this was never the case (and neither did anyone in his immediate family ever go by May or Bell).

When Wilson Henry Banks is recognized as the first postmaster, the story becomes that he named the post office for his wife, May Belle (or sometimes it's Mary Belle, or even Mabel). Actually, her real name was Martha Jane. She had died eight years earlier, in 1876, during the Banks family's first winter in the Yampa Valley, near present-day Craig. She is notable as the first person buried in Craig's Fairview cemetery. Was Banks simply using a private pet name for his lost wife? It's a nice thought, but there is no evidence suggesting this could have been true. All we really know is that the post office name was originally entered on the application as two words, "May Bell." Why (or for whom) will probably always remain a mystery.

Information courtesy:

Burroughs, John Rolfe, *Where the Old West Stayed Young* (1962)
Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
National Archives, Records of the Post Office Department, 1773–1971
Western Rivers Conservancy, **Yampa River Cross Mountain Canyon**

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Sunbeam Reach
Map 5
N
0
Feet
3,000
Scale 1:20,000
© Peter A. Williams
v. 9/27/2026
Cenotaph
6103
6411
6348
Cross Mountain
Morgan Ditch
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
Yampa River State Park
East Cross Mountain
River Access
Cross Min Ditch (Abnd)
6200
6400
6600
6000
85

THE BACK PAGE

Sunbeam Reach Stream Gauge

RM 88.7 **USGS #09251000** Yampa River near Maybell

The **Yampa River near Maybell** gauge is just downstream of the Maybell Bridge.

Settling the Maybell Valley

The Maybell Valley covers much more terrain than just the open valley visible as you pass through the town of Maybell on U.S. Highway 40. Traditionally the valley was considered to be all of the lowlands located between Juniper Mountain and Cross Mountain, a total distance of roughly 30 river miles. The name actually originated in the lower valley, with the 1884 establishment of the first "Maybell" post office. On the crude map accompanying his application, prospective postmaster Wilson H. Banks put the location of the new office on the south side of the river, two or three miles east of the head of Cross Mountain Canyon. That was seventeen years before the Maybell townsite was laid out near the head of the upper valley.

As was true of other reaches of the Yampa River farther upstream, white settlement in the valley was slow to begin until the forced removal of the Ute bands from Colorado, following the violence at the White River Agency in 1879. The earliest homesteaders began arriving around 1882, and tended to settle first in the lower valley. Although there were exceptions, much of the desirable land in the upper valley was already owned by the State of Colorado, as "school" trust lands, which were acquired when it was granted statehood in 1876. In fact, many areas in the foothills shown on Maps 1–3, particularly on the north side of the river, remain state trust land today. (Colorado's trust lands are used to generate income, often as privately leased property, and are closed to the public unless access is specifically allowed.)

Transforming the sagebrush valley into cultivated ranch and farm properties had to await the availability of irrigation water, but providing that water valley-wide was deemed impractical until the population grew large enough to bear the communal cost. To remedy this, a few property owners in the upper valley organized the Maybell Canal Company. In 1899 they persuaded the Colorado State Land Board to sell them 2,000 acres of bottomlands (a little over three square miles), with the proviso that the property must be resold at cost to new settlers, and put under irrigation. The company then proceeded to broker 40- to 160-acre allotments to its shareholders. The promoters had already lined up a large group of potential shareholders—families recruited from elsewhere in Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas—and most of the existing landowners also invested in the company in return for future water shares. Along with the purchase of property and water rights, the shareholders promised to commit their labor to the construction of an ambitious 25-mile-long canal, with its headgate high above the valley in Juniper Canyon. The entire project was estimated to take three years to complete, so the new "Maybell colonists" were also required to arrive with sufficient means to support themselves on their not-yet-irrigated properties during those years of construction.

Construction on the canal began in 1900. It was not until late 1901, during a shareholder meeting attended by "a majority of the residents in the upper portion of the valley," that a vote was held to approve the location of a 20-acre Maybell townsite. Three separate individuals, each an early promoter of the project, owned portions of the approved location. In the spirit of the venture, they promised to "donate ground to anyone who desires to establish any business enterprise" in the new town, or who wishes to use it for "school and church purposes." Four acres were also donated at the center of the townsite for the future Maybell public park.

Three years proved to be a serious underestimation of the time and labor required for what was soon described as "the most difficult irrigation project attempted in the county." So it was not until 1911, after the colonists had endured fully "eleven years at hard labor," that they could at last celebrate the completion of their substantial project. As one newspaper columnist waxed hyperbolically, "there were heroes at Marathon, at Thermopylae, at Balaklava; but would any of these have withstood the toil and trials that have been the lot of these settlers?"

In the meantime, in 1901 the lower valley landowners—recognizing that the Maybell Canal would never extend to their properties—also organized and financed a ditch project. The Cross Mountain Ditch began lower, at a headgate in the flatlands close to the new townsite. With the aid of multiple hired work crews, and without the complications of excavating along the base of canyon walls, construction went much faster and was completed by the fall of 1904.

With valley-wide irrigation in place, a 1912 article in the *Craig Empire* could confidently declare that the "beautiful Maybell Valley" was "destined to be known in the near future as the most productive and consequently the most prosperous part of Moffat County."

Information courtesy:

Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection, Colorado State Library
National Archives, Records of the Post Office Department, 1773–1971
Reed, C.A., et al., "*The Maybell Canal*," **ArcGIS StoryMap**, (NRCS 2023)