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### **Beehive Archive**

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the Beehive Archive is a fun way to catch up on Utah's past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on [KCPW](#) and [Utah Public Radio](#).

### **The Hole-in-the-Rock: Utah's Most Treacherous Stretch of Road**

**Utah's most treacherous stretch of road was hacked from the rock with a few hand tools and a bit of blasting powder.**

Utah's rugged terrain often translates into treacherous roads. And the most precarious stretch of road might be the Hole-in-the-Rock passage through the rough cliffs of southeastern Utah.

In December 1879, a company of Mormon colonists heading toward the San Juan River were blocked on their route by the deep canyon of the Colorado River. They found a narrow crevice in the canyon wall, called the Hole-in-the-Rock, and spent six weeks hacking a road through it that led straight down 1,800 feet to the river below.

First, they widened the notch at the top of the crevice so that wagons could get through. Benjamin and Hyrum Perkins led the men who dangled from ropes over the rim and drilled holes that held black-powder charges. Exploding obstructions away was preferable, but with powder in short supply, much of the rock was chipped by hand. Tons of rock were broken and moved. To navigate one particularly difficult section, Ben Perkins engineered a road segment tacked onto the side of the cliff. Men, again on ropes, chiseled out a ledge and pounded oak timbers into the cliff face to create a path just wide enough for one wagon.

By January 26, 1880, the road was ready. Lizzie Decker wrote of her descent to the river: "If you ever come this way it will scare you to death to look down... The first wagon I saw go down put the brake on and rough locked the hind wheels and had a big rope fastened to [it] and about ten men holding back on it... and then they went down like they would smash everything. I'll never forget that day." When Lizzie and her son Willie walked down, the boy looked back and cried, wondering how they would ever get back home.

All up, 263 people, 83 wagons, and over 1000 head of livestock made the exciting – and terrifying – descent through the Hole-in-the-Rock to the Colorado River!

*Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council. Sources consulted in the creation of the Beehive Archive and past episodes may be found at [www.utahhumanities.org/BeehiveArchive.htm](http://www.utahhumanities.org/BeehiveArchive.htm). Megan van Frank © Utah Humanities Council 2014.*

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