

# Elephant Butte- Shunesburg

## Mail Order History

Researched and Written by  
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Special Thanks to:

My wife **Becky** for hours of work on the computer and following me all over Southern Utah.

**Kay Toone** for being my spelling, writing, grammar and proof reading specialist.

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**Jim Hicklin** for his expertise in processing the pictures.

**Kevin DeMille** for his hiking abilities and pulling me out of the river!

## **ELEPHANT BUTTE/SHUNESBURG "MAIL DROP" HISTORY**

This is a story and a history of the "Mail Carriers" and the area known to the ATV'ers as the "Mail Drop". The location is about 16 miles west of Coral Pink Sand Dunes and the GPS location is: N 37 08.153 W 112 55.366. The location of the "Mail Drop" staging area is: N 37 01.478, W11248.172.

Before I tell you the story I have researched I need to tell you what spurred my desire to know the "real" story.

I, along with my good friend, Harley Toone, have ridden our ATV's in the Mail Drop area for many years. We have guided a lot of groups and they all seem to have heard about the Mail Drop, but we really haven't known the whole story. So I felt it was time to do some research and get all the information into written form with the correct history. From several history books and from talking with many people I located who knew the facts about the Mail Drop, I learned more information than I ever thought possible!

This research took my wife and me all over 3 counties where we had interviews with about a dozen people. The way the information and contacts opened up to us was unbelievable. We talked with one gentleman who was 95 years old and his younger buddy was 93! We went to libraries in all the areas and to 3 museums, one of which wasn't even opened to the public yet. We got the lady to open the door for us at the Kanab Heritage Museum and Mrs. Deanna T. Glover ("Thank you Deanna") was so very helpful. We talked, letting her know what we were doing, and told her about W.M. Dobson, whose name is the name scratched into the rock at the Mail Drop. She thought for awhile and then took me into a closet area with numerous shelves full of old books. She found the book she wanted to show me and, lo and behold, she found a picture of W.M. Dobson and two of his friends. I was shocked to say the least. She made a copy of the picture for me and it is on the picture page. This picture shows each of the three boys with a big cigar in their mouth! I'll explain that to you later in the story.

The Mail Drop cliff, as you know if you have been there, is steep and solid rock. In many places in the books I read, the authors say it was a 1000 to

2000 foot drop. I used a Range Finder to measure the drop and found that it was only 650 feet - still too high to jump from! We have a better system to measure today! I have heard many times that there was a trail that went over the drop area and down to the bottom into Shunesburg. We have looked many times but couldn't see where there could possibly be a trail. But, after researching through books, I found where they mention about the "Wiggle" Trail being steep, rough and narrow. This "circuitous" trail, as they called it, was and is still there. We did some climbing and searching and found the remains of this unbelievable trail. It is in a recessed area to the north and up the hill from the "drop area". The trail was first used by riding on horseback, but continued use proved to be too difficult and dangerous. The carriers then started walking down the trail and then back up the trail. This was just too slow and tiring. A rope or cable was then built and was used until the late 1800's.

When we first started going to the Mail Drop there was a pulley and some cable in the tree at the top of the drop. Also, Harley talked to a man who said there was a bar or pipe with a pulley on the end of it hanging out over the top of the drop. The cable is still down at the bottom of the cliff. Too bad some people have to be so inconsiderate as to steal or destroy such historical items! The exchange of mail was done by the person at the top hooking his mail sack to the cable and lowering it down to the carrier at the bottom. Then the bottom carrier would hook his mail sack to the cable and the top carrier would pull the sack up to his location.

The carriers started delivering the mail in the mid 1800's. The service was started because of the influx of people who were members of the LDS Church. With over 500 settlements in the southern part of Utah and along the Arizona Strip, mail service was needed in order to keep in touch. This service was not part of the U.S. Mail System. The U.S. Government awarded contracts to private individuals who would then hire carriers to run the many different routes.

The man who had the contract for this area got about \$12,000.00 to take care of the Mail Drop run and to help with the telegraph line that was being installed at the time. The telegraph went from Pipe Springs to Rockville.

They also took care of parts of other trails in the southern area of Utah for mail service.

The carrier I will tell you about is W.M. Dobson. I am sharing his story because he is the carrier who scratched his name on the rock at the Mail Drop where we ATV.

W.M. Dobson's full name was William McIntyre Dobson. He was born February 12, 1861. His father was Thomas Frain Dobson and was born in England. William's mother was Annie Gordon McIntyre from Scotland. They immigrated to Spanish Fork and then to Bountiful and on to Kanab. Thomas Dobson and his 3 sons were called by the LDS Church to go to Kanab and help develop the area as brick makers. According to one story I read they ended up building rock structures. This kind of devotion to their Church is the reason I feel that the statement on the bottom of his picture where he has a big cigar in his mouth was a true caption... "the boys showing off"!

William, as a mail carrier, would ride 5 hours one way and sometimes would spend the night in a cave when the weather was bad. Walking down the side of the Mail Drop hill to the cave was not too far for a "dry" night. I found a description of the cave and when we took the David Little family with all his boys to the Mail Drop I told them the description of the cave and they all took off in different directions to see what they could find.

A short time later Chris Anderson and Kabe Little came up from the cliff area to the west of the Mail Drop hill and had located a cave. This cave was just a short walk down the rocks on the left side as you are going toward the drop trail. It was just as described in the book in which I originally found the description of this cave. The cave is about the size of a double bed and has a 6 inch layer of sand for sleeping. There is a hole in the top that you can just barely see light through, which I figure could be a vent for a small fire. There is also a 16 inch hole in the back of the cave and it goes inside quite a distance.

The cave now is about 10 feet above the rock bottom of the small canyon. By looking at the terrain it appears that it was probably 5 feet from the bottom in the 1800's. A lot of sand has been washed down the cliffs.

After talking with my neighbor, Kevin DeMille, who ran cattle on the hills around the Mail Drop area as a young man, he figured that the cave was probably William's winter hideout, but not likely a place he would stay unless absolutely necessary because his horse could not stay close by. Kevin and I searched the north side of the Mail Drop location and found a rock enclosure with no top, but could have had a top in the 1800's. Kevin felt that William could get his horse there with ease and wait till daybreak before heading back to Kanab.

William's route was from Kanab to the drop area that is 5 or 6 miles from where the original town of Shunesburg was located. I found in one book where they were paid from 75 cents to 1 dollar per ride for a round trip. It took several hours by horseback from St. George and the surrounding communities to get to the drop area. Carriers would ride from their town to the bottom of the drop area which now is just about impossible to traverse. It is overgrown with trees and brush.

The town of Shunesburg was named after "Chief Shones" who later sold the area to Oliver DeMille. In the books I read it is stated that the Chief still stayed in the area and gave the new owners a lot of trouble. The pioneers who lived in the area had a very hard time trying to make a living there. Since the Virgin River didn't have any dams or any way of controlling the river, floods washed out their crops many times. Travel away from the town also was very dangerous and deadly because of attacks by Indians. But even with these problems the area grew. As I stated before, there were reported to be over 500 communities in Southern Utah and the Arizona Strip.

"Shunesburg", as the Mormons called it, and the surrounding area was at one time home to almost 1000 people. Brigham Young stayed in Shunesburg and even "One Armed" John Wesley Powell used the area as his home while he explored and mapped out the Zion Park area. Some of the 500 towns that you never hear about anymore are areas like "Northrop", "Adventure", and "Johnson". The Oliver DeMille family was the last family to leave Shunesburg. They left in 1902. Only a two-story house made of cut stone is left in the area. The stone house has solid stones approximately 12" x 12" x 30". On the second floor of the building dances were held during the 1800's. The cemetery is still there, but very few head stones remain. There are still many rock fences dotting the area that once was a large community.

William McIntyre Dobson married Mary Alvira Eagar on March 19, 1882 in Kanab. His wife died in Kanab a month after giving birth to a son whom they named William Thomas Dobson. William was next located in Burlington, Big Horn, Wyoming. He later married Dinah Alice Neves on March 19, 1898. William died April 25, 1913 in Burlington, Wyoming.

The routes that the carriers rode were many and very different. The stories of the hard work and dangerous rides are numerous. The carriers delivered mail all year long in hot or cold weather. They were attacked by Indians, but they persevered and got the job done. The service slowed down after the telegraph line was in operation and the mail service was used for sending packages and larger mail items.

I must say that this research opened my eyes even wider about the trials and perseverance of the LDS pioneers. As I ride the Mail Drop trails on my ATV, I will now always remember the pioneers who settled this beautiful area. The time, trouble, and even the giving of their lives are hard to imagine as we ride so easily through this area.

The story of the Dobson family who came from England and Scotland to America is a very unbelievable account by itself. What they went through and the terrible sad times of tribulation and death are hard to comprehend. The long trips by ship and the weeks and months to get to America are now more than ever set deep into my mind.

I hope this gives you all a better understanding of the Mail Drop carriers, and when you see W.M. Dobson on the rock you will appreciate the pioneers even more, as I have learned to do.

In conclusion, I remind you that I researched many items, books and stories which had different tales about this subject. So please don't fault me if you read something that tells a slightly different tale. I tried to tell the story in a manner that was as close to "real" as I could uncover.

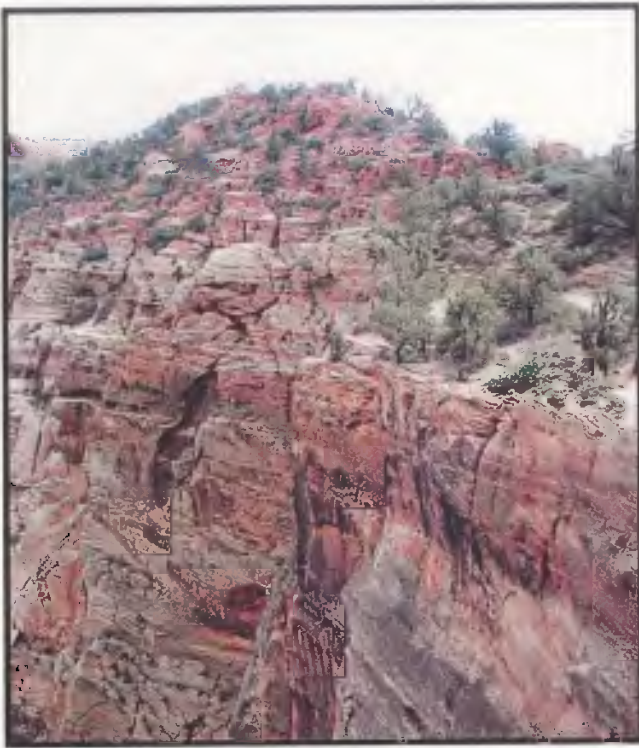
Enjoy! Thanks for reading..... Dale Brittingham  
drdalebritt@msn.com

Here is some additional Information I received from a person who found the above article on the internet.

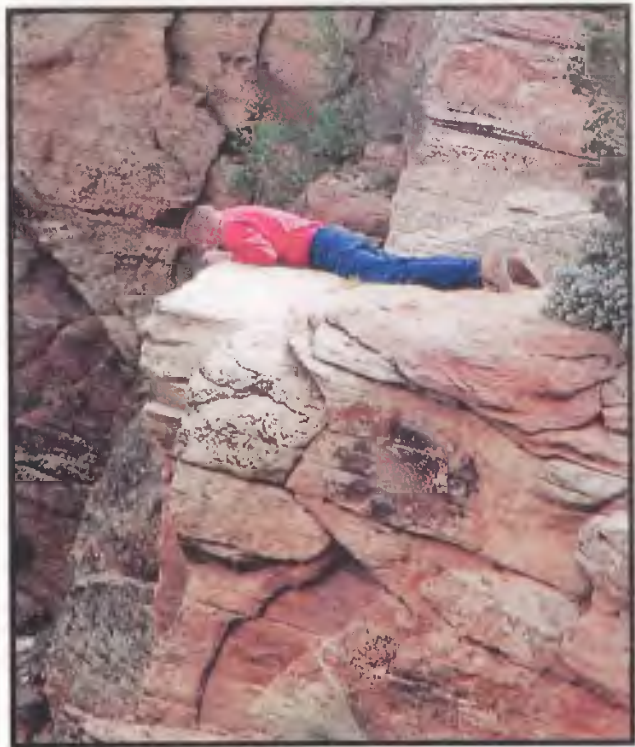
After printing the Mail Drop History, I was contacted by Wally Allred, the grandson of Edward Warren Allred an original mail carrier for Shunesburg. He sent me a copy of his grandfather's autobiography in which he shared a story regarding the "Mail Drop". Here is what he wrote.

"I, Edward Warren Allred, being born of humble parents in very humble circumstances in a little town of twelve families, called Shonesburg (Utah), which the people bought from an old Indian, for the sum of a pony and an old saddle and an old gun; a country about ten miles square on the Virgin River in Southern Utah where I lived with my parents unto twenty-one years of age.

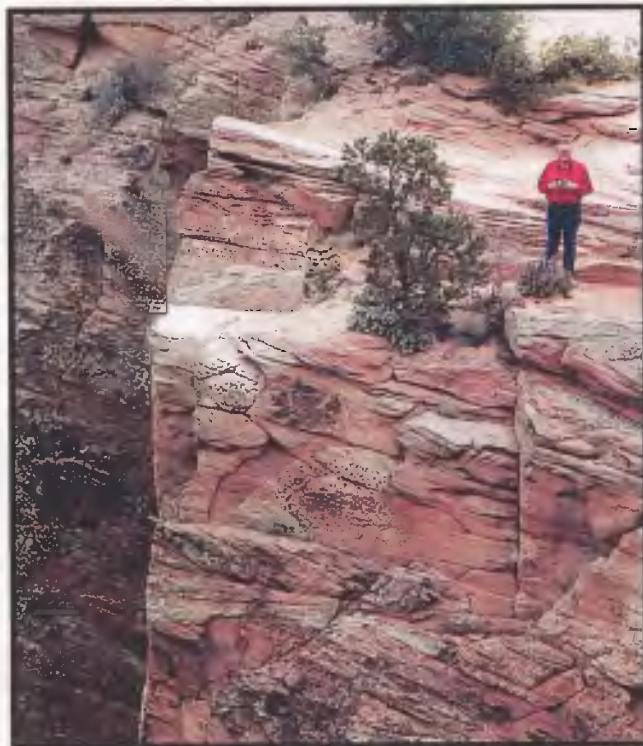
When I was about fifteen years of age I and my brother Parley took a contract of riding the Pony Express Mail for \$15 a month for the term of one year, which brought us \$7.50 a month apiece. We had to take this mail up a canyon called Shones Creek, named after the same old Indian, about four miles above town, where we met another rider from Kanab (Utah). Here we changed mail bags by passing them back and forth up a 1,000 foot cliff. He would let his mail sack down a long wire and I would take it off and fasten mine on and he and old wooden windless on top of the cliff that turned with a crank, would pull it up. I would go and leave him to wind up the 1000 foot rope. Then the mail contract changed hands and the people that got it were very fond of wine and they would stay in town and drink wine and I would take the mail sack up the wire and exchange bags for twenty-five cents a trip and was very glad to get the chance."



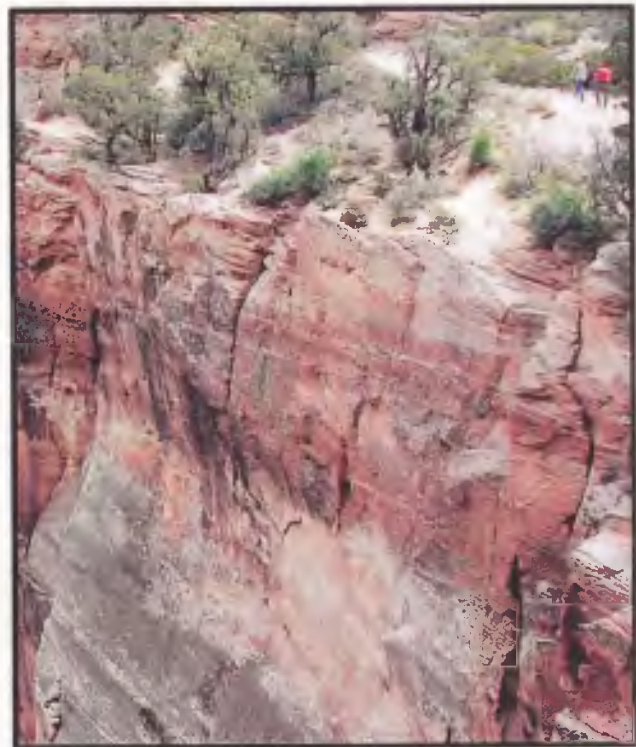
The two white sandy areas in the middle of this picture are the spots where William would lay down and look over the cliff for his mail buddy from St George to arrive. The entire mountain is about 1500' high.



Harley caught me looking over the edge where the mail was lowered. When I stood up I dropped my camera case over the cliff. Then when I tried to hike to the bottom to find it, I fell into the rocky river and ruined the camera. "KLUTZ"



A telephoto of Dale, taken by Harley Toone from the mountain west of the Mail Drop showing the two areas in the above picture. We guess that the mail was lowered from the bottom flat area with the pulley and cable attached to the tree. William's name is on the upper slanted rock.



Harley, myself and our wives got to take a special ride in the state helicopter. The pilot lowered the copter down into the Mail Drop canyon. We were face to face with the solid rock cliff. This is a small part of the area. Wow! What a ride!





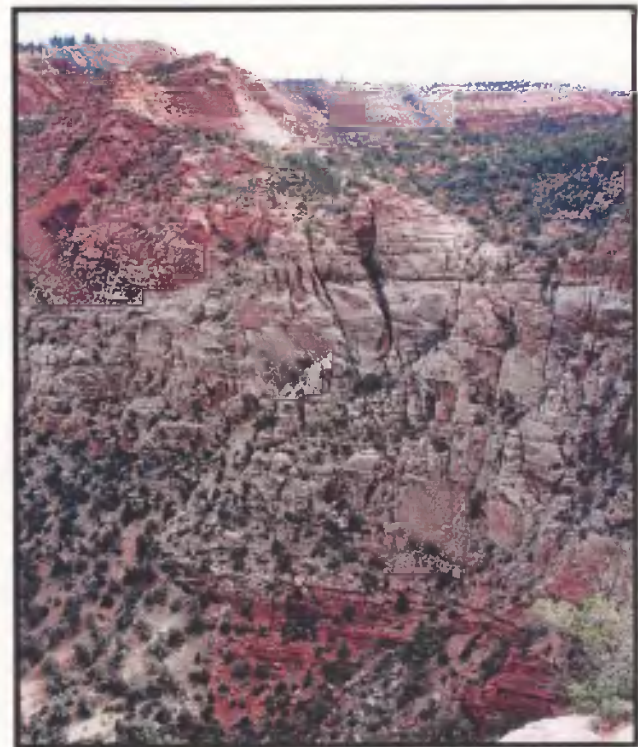
William's Cave? With help from friends we found this cave. It would be a great place to spend a rainy night. You can see Kevin DeMille is leaning on the overhanging rock.



William's cave from the inside. You can see the coverage the rock provides from the elements. It is about 10' up from the bottom of the canyon floor. Kevin is taking a rest from all the hiking I made him do!



This is a picture of William (top center) and his two friends, Dave Pugh and Gurnsey Spencer. On the bottom of the picture someone wrote the caption "showing off". I'm sure their parents never dreamt that this picture would circulate as far as it has.



The "Wiggle Trail" is shown here going from upper right to lower left. The trail is hard to see because it starts in a recess behind top of rocks and is hidden behind rock outcrops as it descends. At the bottom you can see dirt areas where the trail is not hidden.