Restored Otto Mears Monument

CDOT has just completed the first rebuilding of the Bear Creek Falls Bridge in almost 50 years. Spanning an approximately 300-foot drop into the Uncompanier gorge, the bridge has been under construction since July, 2010.

The newly repaired Otto Mears Monument, a familiar landmark that honors the famous road and railroad builder, has been placed near the pedestrian viewing platform. Mears is know as the *Pathfinder of the San Juans* for his toll road and railroad construction efforts. In 1881, Mears built the toll road between Ouray and Silverton that comprises part of what is now known as the Million Dollar Highway. His toll booth was located near the new Bear Creek Falls Bridge and two other versions that preceded it. Mears completed two other toll roads out of Ouray to the north and west and he built two railroads in Ouray County. In 1926, *The Silverton Standard* raised the money to place the marker in his honor at the site of his Bear Creek toll Booth.

The Mears Monument has endured several displacements due to bridge improvements. In 1963, the monument was damaged during bridge renovation and was absent from the site for nearly a decade. Last year, it was again removed from its home during construction and temporarily resided outside the Ouray County Historical Museum. This time it has returned to the Bear Creek Falls Bridge in much improved condition.

"Thanks to the efforts of Ouray's Public Works staff and other businesses, the monument has been permanently repaired," said Don Paulson, Ouray County Museum Curator. Daren Hinton, of Mountain View Surfaces in Palisade, repaired the area where a large piece of granite had broken off in 1963. Snyder-Grand Valley Memorials of Grand Junction did the engraving work on the repaired portion. American Civil Constructors (ACC), contractor to CDOT, and Speedy's Concrete in Ouray each donated \$100 toward the repair work.

Paulson also thanks Dan Fossey, City of Ouray Public Works Director, and Ed Witherspoon, Public Works Supervisor, for transporting the massive piece---which weighs over half a ton---between Palisade and Ouray. Curtis Gemaehlich and Ed Dillon, ACC, were also instrumental in accomplishing the transportation and repair work.

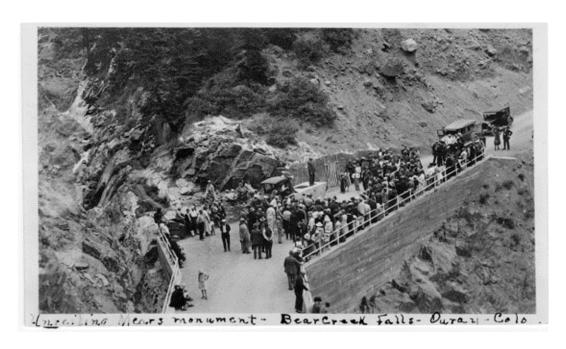
The new, wider Bear Creek Falls Bridge replaces a 47-year-old bridge that was nearing the end of its service life. The project also improved the parking area off the north end of the bridge and includes a pedestrian

overlook that affords visitors a better view of the falls, according to CDOT. Otto Mears would probably approve---although the bridge is toll-free.

Mears 1884 Bear Creek Falls Toll Booth



1926 Dedication of Mears Monument



Otto Mears at the Monument in 1927



Mears Monument in 2009



Repaired Mears Monument on October 18, 2011

