

REMEMBERING JACK HOLLEY 'THE GOAT MAN OF MOAB'

JIM STILES

NOTE: I'd like to offer a special 'thanks' to Lillie Keener of Salt Lake City for her contributions to this story. Lillie grew up in Moab and lived with her "Moab Mom and Dad," Troy and Jaunita Anderson. The Andersons became good friends to Jack Holley over the years and Lillie has shared many memories with us. In addition, many of the photographs in this article (some being published for the first time) come from Lillie's personal collection. We cannot thank her enough.

Also thanks to the Utah State Historical Society and Indiana University, who allowed us to share images from their archival collections...JS

In the summer of 2016, one of the busiest highway intersections in southeast Utah is the junction of US 191 and Utah State Road 128, just south of the Colorado River. The 'river road,' as it's been called for more than a century, parallels the Colorado for 30 miles and ultimately connects with I-70 to the north. Thousands of tourists, coming from the east, exit the freeway near Cisco, Utah and take the slower, winding "scenic route" to Moab. Many thousands more stick to the main highway, coming from all points north, west and east. They all converge on this beautiful junction.

A few years ago, the traffic coming from both directions became so congested that the Utah Highway Department installed a stop light. On busy weekends, traffic can be backed up for miles, in both directions, from that light. It's called gridlock.

Enhancing its 21st century appeal to tourists and recreationists, in 2013 the intersection officially became the "Lions Park Transit Hub." The multi-million dollar project provides a gathering point for bicyclists and links riders to the Colorado River Elevated Bikeway and points upriver. "Bouldering" rocks and other amenities were added to attract even more visitors. On busy weekends, the place is jam-packed.



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Moab itself resembles the highway these days. Overcrowded and overpriced, housing prices have skyrocketed and many of the town's lower income citizens struggle to find affordable living in a community overstocked with expensive homes and time-share condos. A few years ago, some Moabites sought some semblance of normalcy, setting up homes in trailers and old buses along the river and Kane Creek Road--the old "Egg Ranch Road." There was simply nowhere else affordable for them to go.

But the Grand County Council said they were in violation of its land use code and the trailers and buses had to go. The code requires sanitary facilities within 200 feet of primitive camp sites, but it was impossible to comply because the property where the old mobile homes were located is in the Colorado River's flood plain. The owner of the property appealed to the government on "humanitarian" grounds, noting "they're human beings. You've got to deal with them."

But rules are rules. Eventually at least twenty people were uprooted from their homes and forced to leave.

http://moabtimes.com/view/full_story/9633876/article-Buses--trailers-must-be-removed-from-Kane-Creek-property-by-Sept--30--county-officials-say?

It wasn't always like this.

In 2016, it's almost impossible to fathom how transformed---how transmogrified--- Moab has become in these last few decades. It bears little resemblance to the Moab that a dwindling few still remember, or the Lost Eden that so many still long for.

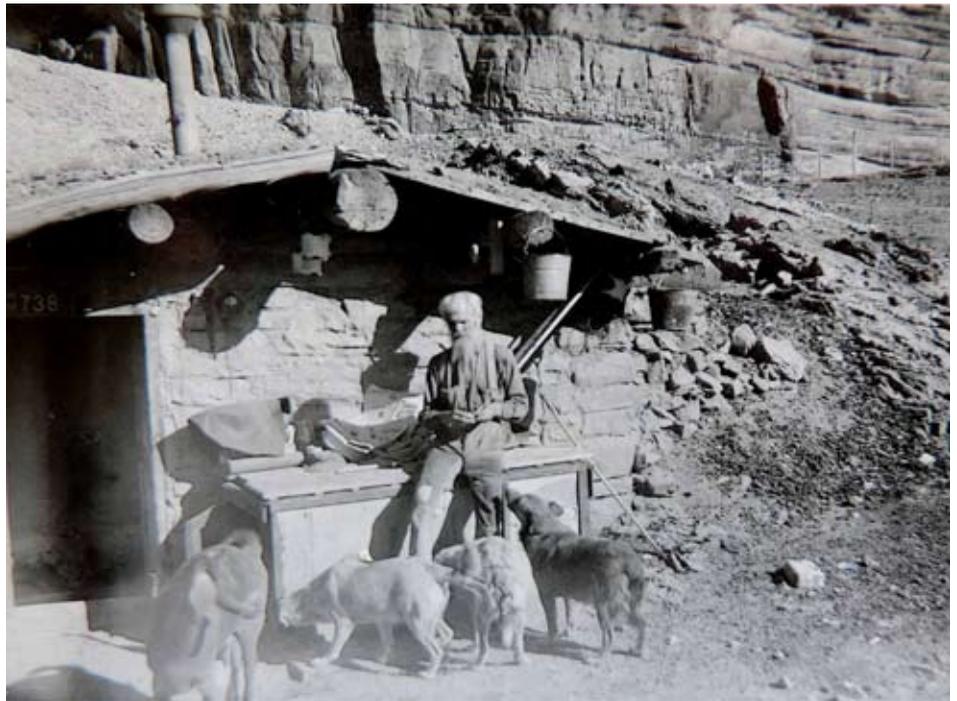
But go back eighty-five years, to the summer of 1930. And meet the "Goat Man of Moab."

His name was Jack Holley and for three and a half decades, he was the first man travelers saw when they came to Moab, and the last man they waved goodbye to when they left. Jack came to be known as the Goat Man for the small herd of goats that were always by his side.

Holley lived a hermit's life in a small stone and wood dug-out shack; he loved his peace and solitude, though he was dirt poor, even by the living standards of the 1930s and the Great Depression. His bare-bones existence meant he had no significant debts, no mortgages, no insurance payments, no credit cards, no utility bills. As far as we can tell, he paid no taxes and, other than a small veteran's benefit check that came each month to the Moab post office, he had no income.

And yet Jack Holley seemed at peace with the world. He lived a life as simple and free from the cares and woes of the world as is imaginable. He was always happy to visit with friends and strangers alike and waved to all passersby. He loved animals and surrounded himself with his beloved goats and a family of dogs as well.

He lived mostly on the wild plants and vegetables he found along the river and, in fact, probably devoured most of the wild asparagus that once grew prolifically upstream from his cabin. And, of course, the Goat Man depended on the generosity of his friends.



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in Moab, who regularly brought him food and clothing. He had many friends who cared about him and for him. For many Moabites, Jack Holley was 'family.'

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How did Jack Holley wind up in Moab? Over the years, Moabites who visited the Goat Man listened to his stories and pieced together a history of his life. No one spent more time with Jack than Jaunita Anderson. She and her husband Troy lived in Moab for almost twenty years and ran Vogue Cleaners on First East; Jaunita was a frequent visitor and a regular supplier of food and supplies for Jack. Over the years the Goat Man told Jaunita a remarkable tale of his extraordinary life. Whether these details are hard facts or his fanciful recollections, nobody can say. In the end, it doesn't matter

But according to Jaunita, Jack Holley was born in Crawford County, Arkansas on May 7, 1876, to Louis Burr Holley and Stella "X," a full-blooded Cherokee Indian. According to Jaunita's recollection, "Mr. Holley was one of the fighting forces during the Spanish American War, serving with the U.S. Navy during World War I, and spent many years with the Merchant Marine, transport service and various fishing operations. He had many stories to tell of his adventures on the high seas, sailing around the world three times, and three times surviving shipwrecks. He had also been a watchmaker in Switzerland at one time during his life."

He told her that he, "studied philosophy years ago in India, where he formulated his own philosophy of life; he was an avid admirer of India, acclaiming the peoples' wisdom. He was also a student of the Aztec civilization, and often commented their beliefs and customs could greatly benefit the Western World."

His knowledge and respect for these religions led some to believe that his ascetic Moab lifestyle reflected an emulation of those mystic faiths. And yet, when Holley first arrived in Moab with his brother, in 1935, they were not seeking spiritual enlightenment. The Holley brothers had come to prospect.

Jack and his brother arrived in Moab in 1930, in search of mining properties. But Holley's health even then was weakened by several bouts of malaria that he'd suffered during his world travels. Not long after they arrived in Utah, "the untimely death" of his brother (that's all we know of his passing) left Jack Holley stranded in Moab, in ill health and apparently penniless. In 1930, he would already have been 54 years old and after a hard life on the high seas, Jack Holley was an old man.

But somehow, by his own wits and the assistance of newfound friends in Moab, Holley hung on. He built a crude stone dugout cabin and scavenged enough wood and tar paper for a roof. Whether he constructed the cabin by himself or had help is not known. But clearly, from surviving photographs, Holley's cabin was tiny. For the next 25 years, it was home and Jack Holley became Moab's hermit greeter. Tourists frequently paused to say hello and to photograph this most unusual man, and in fact, he became something of a celebrity. Jaunita Anderson would later write, "Because of the pet goats he harbored as pets he had been affectionately christened 'The Goat Man,' by tourists and writers with whom he visited."

During that quarter century in Jack's first crude stone cabin, imagine how much the world changed. Just months before his arrival in Moab, the stock market had collapsed and the country spiraled into a Great Depression. In fact, millions of Americans, across the continent, would eke out similar lives on the margins. And yet, despite his isolation, Jaunita Anderson remembered that Holley was more informed about national and world affairs than many other Moabites she knew. Photographs of Jack taken in the 1940s reveal a stack of newspapers on the outside table by his front door. He read everything he could get his hands on. And Jack claimed he could fluently speak in several languages.

He had only been there a couple years when Franklin Roosevelt was elected president. In 1937, a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was established by FDR at Dalton Wells, a few miles north of Holley's shack. Less than a decade after Jack came to Moab, the planet erupted in world war and Holley found himself with a neighbor for the duration of the war.

The Colorado River Bridge was considered a possible target for an enemy attack, as it was the only river crossing downstream for more than 500 miles. A 24 hour a day security checkpoint was established on the north side of the river and a small shack was built to house the staff. Ironically, a freak rockfall killed the watchman. The local paper reported, "George Otto Ellis, 52, watchman at the Moab bridge over the Colorado river was killed instantly about 7 o'clock Tuesday morning when a rock weighing perhaps 50 tons fell from a cliff at the northern end of the bridge falling squarely on the watchmen's shanty and smashing it to kindling wood. Mr Ellis who had just gone on shift was reclining on a cot inside the house. He was killed instantly his body being terribly crushed."



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Holley's cabin was barely a hundred yards away. He must have heard the rockfall and was no doubt one of the first men on the scene of the fatal accident.

When the war ended in 1945, life returned to normal in Moab, at least for a few years. Southeast Utah remained one of the most isolated parts of the continental United States. Still, the more adventuresome wandered through Moab, including Herb Ringer (whose photography has been featured in The Zephyr for almost 30 years). In early June 1950, Herb and his parents, Joseph and Sadie Ringer, crossed the original river bridge and paused on the south side to take a few photographs. As he returned to his Ford Woodie, Herb turned to see an old man in faded blue overalls, with scruffy white hair and whiskers, surrounded by goats. Herb stopped to chat and Jack kindly obliged to be photo-

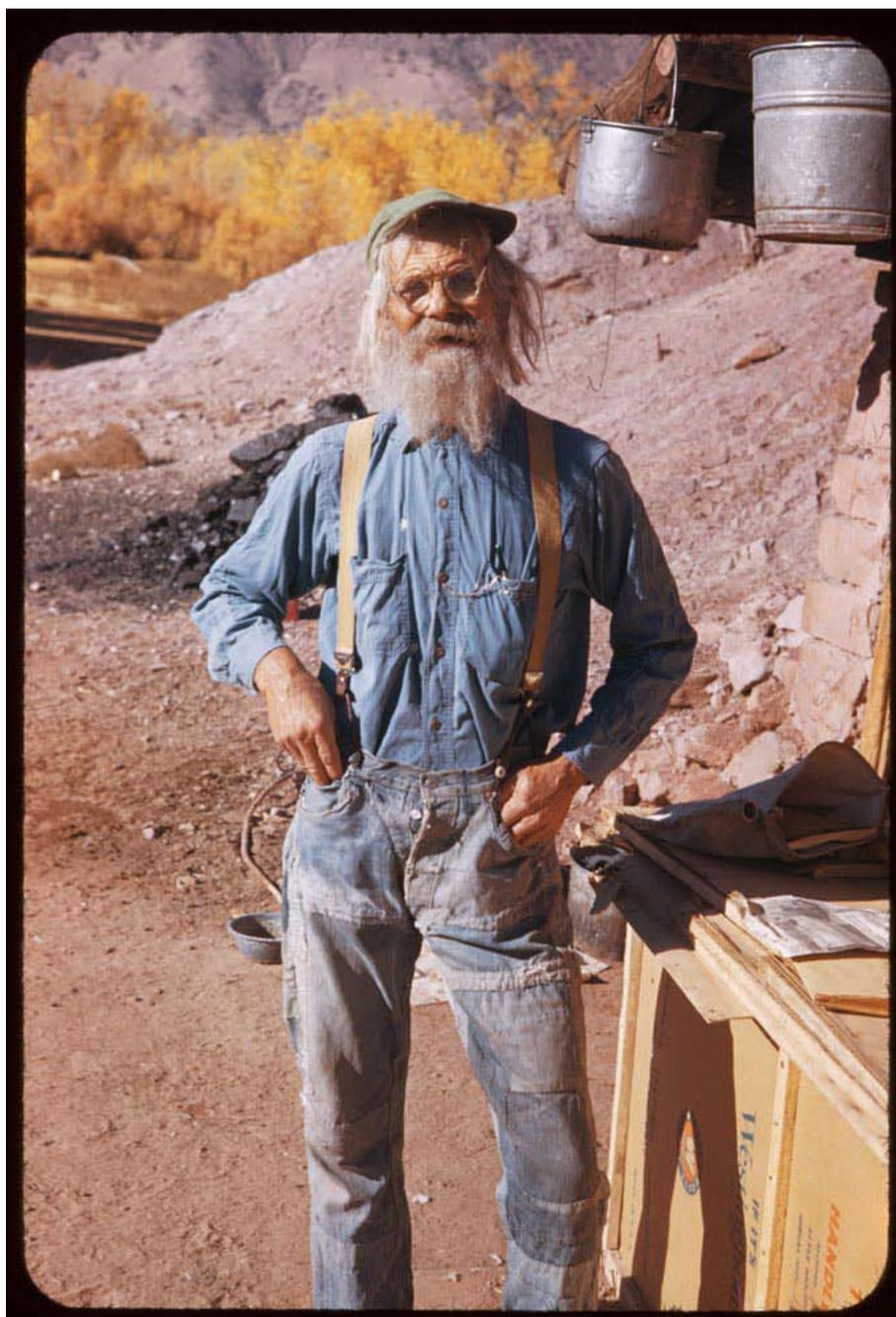
graphed.

A couple years later, Charles Cushman was traveling west through Utah and also encountered Holley. Cushman took several photos of the Goat Man and his clan. It was November 4, 1952. The nearby cottonwoods were still a brilliant gold, the air was cool but mild, the sky a brilliant blue. Later that evening, Cushman would learn that Dwight Eisenhower had been elected the country's 32nd President. No doubt Jack read about it the next day.

(Cushman's images of the West are catalogued at Indiana University. For more about Cushman and his remarkable collection: <https://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/cushman/>)

While Moab still seemed peaceful that late autumn afternoon, all hell was about to break loose. The previous summer, a Texas geologist named Charlie Steen had discovered uranium in the badlands northwest of Moab and by the following summer, Moab had become a boomtown. In a year the tiny community's population exploded beyond its capacity and prospectors and their families were setting up camp wherever they could find a level spot and a bit of shade. The edges of the old highway were choked with the temporary homes of wannabe mining magnates. Most left empty-handed, but the boom changed Moab forever.

For one thing, the heavy traffic quickly made the old one-lane bridge obsolete and, in 1955, construction of a new modern span commenced, a couple hundred yards down-



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stream. The new bridge meant re-aligning the highway and Jack's old cabin was in the way.

Had Jack's dilemma occurred in 2016, it's hard to imagine a happy outcome to this story. Like the Kane Creek residents a few years ago, who were removed from their homes for code violations, the Goat Man would have surely faced immediate eviction. But as we like to remind ourselves, "things were different back then."

Though in many ways life for many Americans was much worse in 'the good old days'--consider how well an African-American hermit with goats would have fared in 1930---life was at least less regulated and rule-happy. The Moab of 1955 found a way to resolve