

WATER IS LIFE... THE SHOVEL IS DIVINE

FROM DITCHES TO PIPES

THE USE AND CONTROL OF WATER CONTROLS THE FUTURE

The earliest settlers in Leeds used innovation and hard work to divert water from Leeds Creek to their homes, fields, and industry. The town pioneers carefully studied the lay of the land between the creek and the settlement and selected a route that would transport the water to Leeds. The lowly hand shovel was their “divine tool.” Digging ditches with pick and shovel and teams of work horses across the rocky terrain was hard and seemingly endless work. Ingenuity was required in keeping the path of the ditch in a downhill direction to maintain water flow. Building a good ditch system took clever minds, strong backs, and great determination.

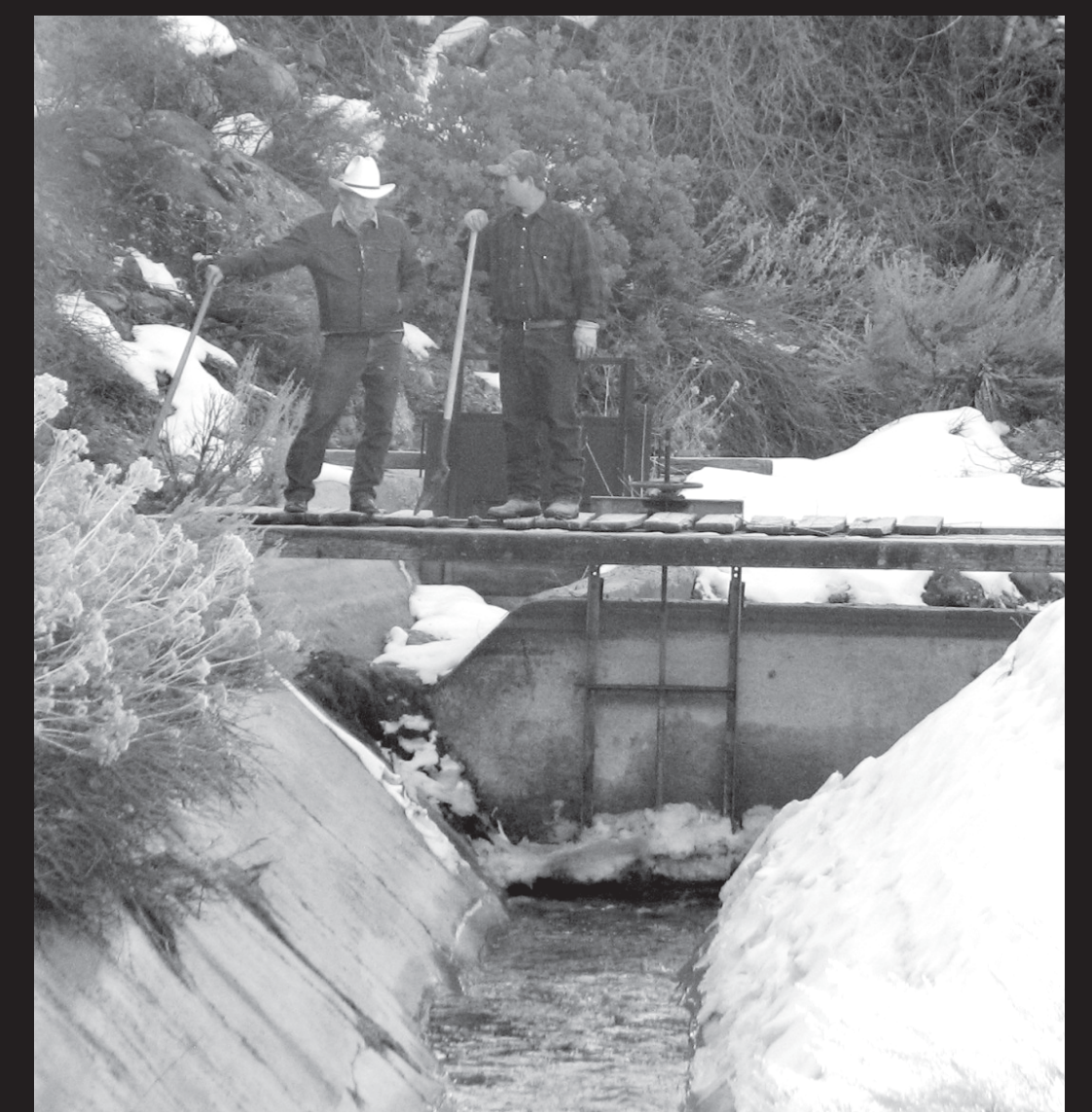
The Leeds Water Company was established in the late 1800s to legally secure and organize rights to use local water, a historically controversial and difficult task in the arid West.

The main ditch carried Leeds Creek water to the northeastern edge of the town. From that point, ditches conveyed the water to town lots and



In pioneer times, at the home of M. E. Paris, the ditch had a stream-like appearance as it entered northeastern Leeds. In 2009 this scene is located at the intersection of Vista and Main Streets.

beyond to the nearby agricultural fields. Prized lots in Leeds were those that fronted the ditch, especially lots that were closest to the beginning of the ditch, where pollutants from upstream use of the water were fewer.



Shovel-ready in 2009: Ned Sullivan and David Stirling are farmers, irrigators, and direct descendants of the settlers of Leeds. They are standing on the Leeds Ditch head gate at the point of diversion on Leeds Creek where the water is conveyed to the pressurized irrigation system.

DRINKING WATER

In 1954 the Leeds Domestic Waterusers Association, LDWA, made a bold move. They borrowed \$50,000 to build a 9-mile pipeline to bring drinking water to Leeds from a spring high above the town at the base of the Pine Valley Mountains. LDWA sought to remedy the obvious health hazard. The townspeople’s drinking water, although piped within the town, was being drawn from the open Leeds Ditch. Between the \$50,000 loan and the men of Leeds supplying much of the back-breaking labor in laying the pipeline, the citizens of Leeds finally had clean drinking water delivered in a secure system in January of 1956.

IRRIGATION WATER

The pioneer method of irrigation, flooding agricultural areas via an open ditch system, was sustained in Leeds until the 21st century. Historically, dirt ditches bordered Main Street until they were replaced with concrete lining in 1957. The “ditch” was a favorite play area for children and a place for socializing during the summer, but the “ditch” was also dangerous. Over the years, tragedy struck; two children drowned. In 2006, The Leeds Water Company or “the irrigation company,” replaced the open ditches with underground pipes and pressurized irrigation to increase community safety and efficient water management.

LOOKING BACK

Susan Savage, born in 1946, a fourth generation member of a Leeds farming family, recalls an arduous method of accessing water: “As a child, my family hauled drinking water from a spring near the CCC Camp in large metal barrels. We did not have piped drinking water in our home at the north end of town until the 1950s.”

Ray Beal, born in 1937, recalls another method of obtaining drinking water: “As a boy, when the ditch water was too dirty to drink, Mom sent me down a 90-foot ladder into a mine shaft to bring up a bucket of water. The open mine shaft was near our farm on the north end of town. The mine water was usable; at least we thought so in those days.”