

became interested in the county's iron ore deposits because of the close proximity of large coal deposits in Carbon County. L.F. Rains, president of Carbon Fuel Company, had already purchased or located iron-ore claims on the north side of Granite Mountain which were ultimately sold to the new Columbia Steel Corporation, merging the California facilities with the Utah iron and coal properties. Columbia Steel began building a blast furnace south of Provo near Springville, equidistant from coal and iron ore sources. Limestone was available nearby, as was an abundance of water at Utah Lake. The site became known as Ironton.

While the furnace was under construction, the coal mines readied and iron mines opened in Iron County, Union Pacific built a branch railroad from the main line at Lund, through Iron Springs Gap, to Cedar City. The tracks were brought to Cedar City in less than three months, April to June 1923. The Milner spur was also constructed to the Pioche Mining claim, about a mile south of Iron Springs Gap. By April 1924, coal and iron ore were being shipped to the Ironton plant. On 30 April 1924 the Columbia Steel Works furnace was charged; three days later, 150 tons of pig iron was on its way to the Pacific Coast. The commencement of Columbia Steel Works was celebrated at Utah Steel Day, 13 June 1924, and the old iron bell cast in 1855 in Cedar City was exhibited at the celebration.

Within a year, Columbia determined that the chemistry of the Pioche and Vermillion mine ore was not correct for the blast furnace. Investigations showed that the ore at Desert Mound was better, and in May 1925 Columbia Steel contracted with Archibald Milner and Brothers, principals in the Utah Iron Ore Corporation, for 1.5 million tons of ore to be furnished at the Ironton plant at a minimum rate of 500 tons per day. Utah Iron built a 3.5-mile branch railroad line to Desert Mound. Milner's reserves were estimated at 15 million tons within a depth of one hundred feet.

Utah Iron Company mined by open-pit blasting methods. The ore was loaded by a single small steam shovel onto cars on a narrow-gauge rail system and transported to a processing plant where the ore was crushed, screened, and shipped to Ironton. Eventually the grade out of the open pit became too steep for the railroad and dump trucks were used. The steam shovel was able to handle 300 tons per