

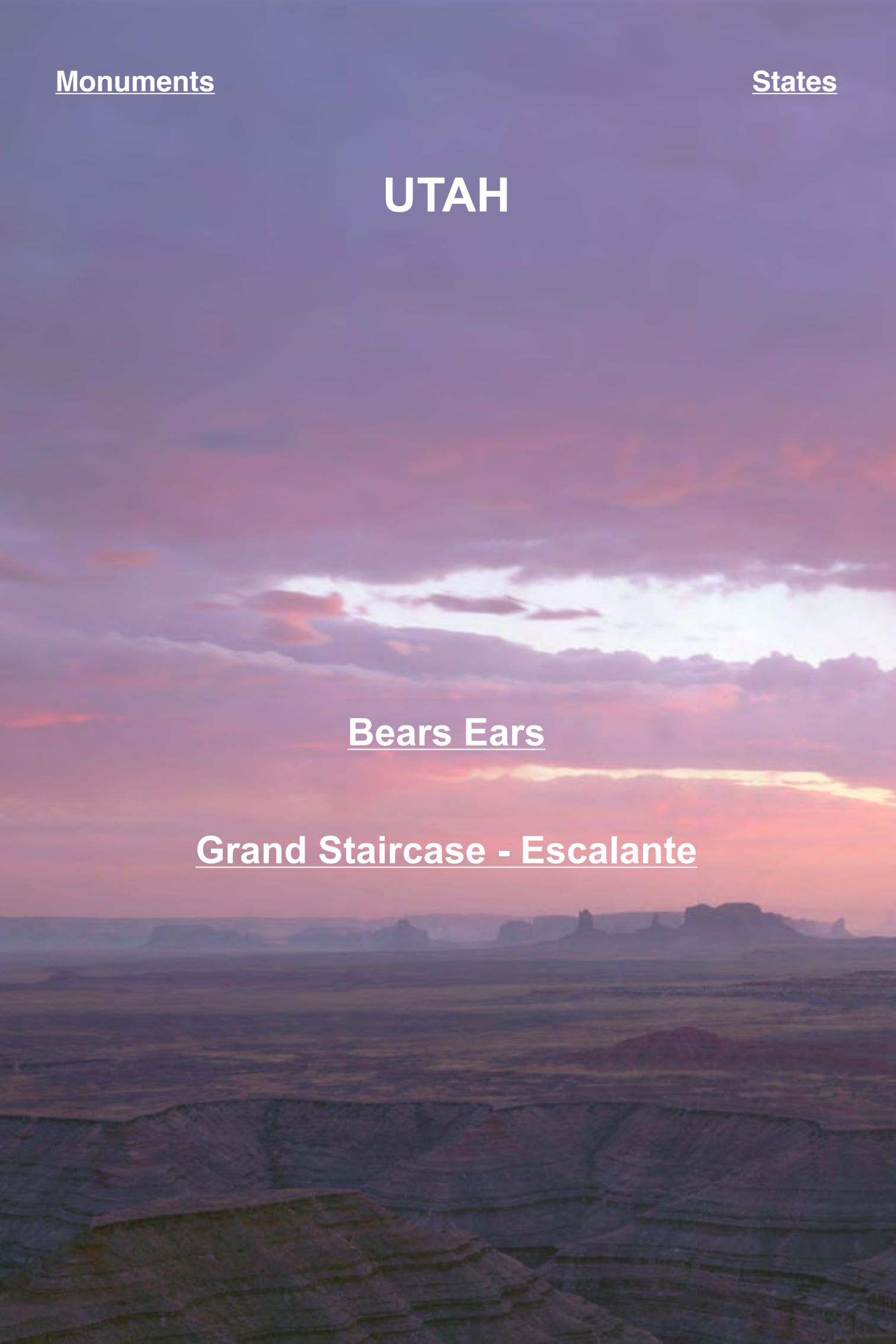
Monuments

States

UTAH

Bears Ears

Grand Staircase - Escalante



BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT/U.S. FOREST SERVICE

ESTABLISHED: 2016 • SQUARE MILES: 2,114

LOCATION: 300 MILES SOUTHEAST OF SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

HIGHEST POINT: WEST MOUNTAIN, 10,980 FEET



Bears Ears from Natural Bridges National Monument

Bears Ears National Monument spans wondrous red rock country with immense vistas. Hidden in its labyrinth of canyons and mesas, are more than 100,000 Native American archaeological sites. Protected in this monument are more cliff dwellings and tribal artifacts than any other area in the American West. This sacred land was the first native-driven and co-managed national monument.

Orientation Bears Ears National Monument spans a vast 2,114 square miles bordering Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and Canyonlands National Park in the west and the Navajo Reservation along the San Juan River to the south. The barren north includes the former Canyon Rims Recreation Area, reached by UT-211. The middle, encompassing Dark Canyon Primitive Area and the Abajo Mountains part of Manti-La Sal National Forest, forms the highest and least accessible part of the monument. Scenic UT-95, one of the monument's main roads, delimits this section. To the south, Cedar Mesa, a 6,500-foot high forested plateau incised by canyons with a high concentration of archaeological sites, is bisected by UT-261 and delimited to the west by UT-276. US-63 marks the southeast border, giving access to lower elevation sites near the San Juan River.

Logistics The monument is very remote and mostly undeveloped. Besides the highways listed above, roads are unpaved and best navigated with a high-clearance 4WD vehicle, although some are accessible to passenger cars in dry weather. The monument has no official visitor center, but the Bears Ears Education Center in Bluff operated by Friends of Cedar Mesa fills that role. *The Best Bears Ears National Monument Hikes* by Morgan Sjogren is an excellent guidebook to the area. There are several campgrounds in the monument and nearby public lands, including in Natural Bridges National Monument (13 sites, water available), Goosenecks State Park, and Sand Island Campground along the San Juan River, which has the notable Sand Island petroglyph panel. Dispersed camping is allowed in most places, but not in archeological areas, let alone inside structures. In some areas, overnight backpacking trips require a permit. Lodging and services are available in nearby towns in the east and south: Monticello, Blanding, Bluff, Mexican Hat, and there is a B&B in Valley of the Gods.

Seasons In mid-April, new leaves and flowers color the canyons. Spring rains end mid-May. The weather is hot from June through August, with highs above 110°F at lower elevations. Summer monsoon rains come in late July or early August, bringing flash floods and muddy roads. In late October, fall colors adorn the canyons, and temperatures begin to drop. During late fall, winter, and early spring, at higher elevations, snow or ice can make travel hazardous, and temperatures often fall below zero. Overall, March through May and September through October are the most comfortable periods to visit.

Information/contacts

Bureau of Land Management

blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/utah/bears-ears-national-monument

blm.gov/visit/bears-ears-national-monument

Kane Gulch Ranger Station (within the monument)

UT-261 about four miles south of UT-95

(open from March 1 to June 15 and from September 1 to October 31)

BLM Monticello Field Office, 435-587-1510

365 North Main Street, Monticello, UT 84535

US Forest Service

fs.usda.gov/detail/mantilasal/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd574113

USFS Monticello Ranger District, 435-587-2041

432 East Center St., Monticello, UT 84535

National Park Service

Natural Bridges National Monument Visitor Center, (435) 692-1234

Friends of Cedar Mesa (friendsofcedarmesa.org)

Bears Ears Education Center, 435-672-2402

567 W Main St, Bluff, UT 84512

bearsmonument.org

Bears Ears Intertribal Coalition: bearscoalition.org

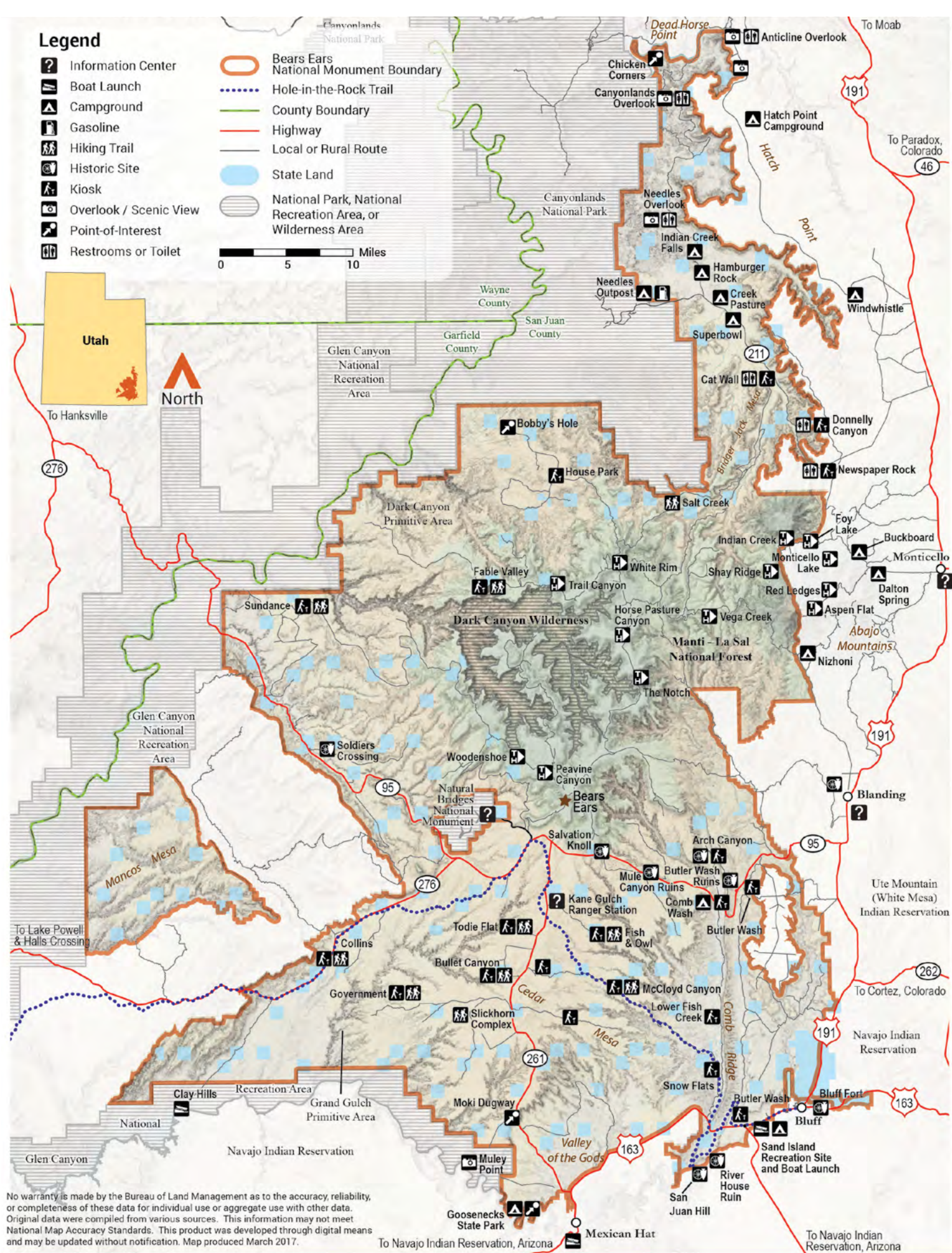
Utah Dine Bikeyah: <https://utahdinebikeyah.org>

Legend

- Information Center
- Boat Launch
- Campground
- Gasoline
- Hiking Trail
- Historic Site
- Kiosk
- Overlook / Scenic View
- Point-of-Interest
- Restrooms or Toilet

- Bears Ears National Monument Boundary
- Hole-in-the-Rock Trail
- County Boundary
- Highway
- Local or Rural Route
- State Land
- National Park, National Recreation Area, or Wilderness Area

0 5 10 Miles



General map (zoomable, limited resolution)

[*Download map with highlights from Friends of Cedar Mesa \(PDF\)*](#)



NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS



Bears Ears National Monument

Indian Creek and Shash Jaa Units - Recreation Opportunities

This map is georeferenced and is intended for mobile and online viewing only

BLM Monticello Field Office
365 North Main | 435-259-2100
Forest Service, Monticello Ranger District
432 E Center Street | 435-587-2041



Roads

- Highway
- Primary Road
- Secondary Road
- Unimproved Road

Historic Trail

- Hiking Trail
- Trailhead

Land Status

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- BLM Wilderness Study Area (WSA)
- State
- Forest Service (FS)
- Forest Service Wilderness Area
- Private
- National Park Service
- Indian Reservation
- Bears Ears National Monument Boundary

Visitor Information

- Ranger Station
- Hiking Trail
- OHV Trail
- Trailhead
- Check-out/Scenic View
- Historic Site
- Campground
- Primitive Camping Area
- Group Campsites
- Point of Interest
- Nestroom
- Boat Ramp
- Visitor Center
- Hospital
- Kiosk
- Gas Station
- Food Service
- Fee Tube

Roads Disclaimer
Roads and routes within the BLM Monticello Field Office are mostly dirt, clay, sand, gravel or rocky. These roads and routes are subject to flooding and may be impassable when wet. High clearance four wheel drive vehicles are recommended for most routes while others may require an AT Terrain Vehicle (ATV). Conditions change, so please inquire at the BLM Monticello Field Office for current driving conditions. Leave gates open or closed as you find them and please respect private property.

RESPECT PROTECT
Archaeological sites and artifacts are an important and irreplaceable part of America's heritage. Please visit these places respectfully. Fossils such as dinosaur bones and tracks can be fragile, please do not walk on them. Making fossil tracks is not permitted as it damages the tracks. For more information about the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, visit www.blm.gov or www.fs.fed.us. Please contact the BLM Monticello Field Office for more information.

What you can do to protect ancient and sacred places

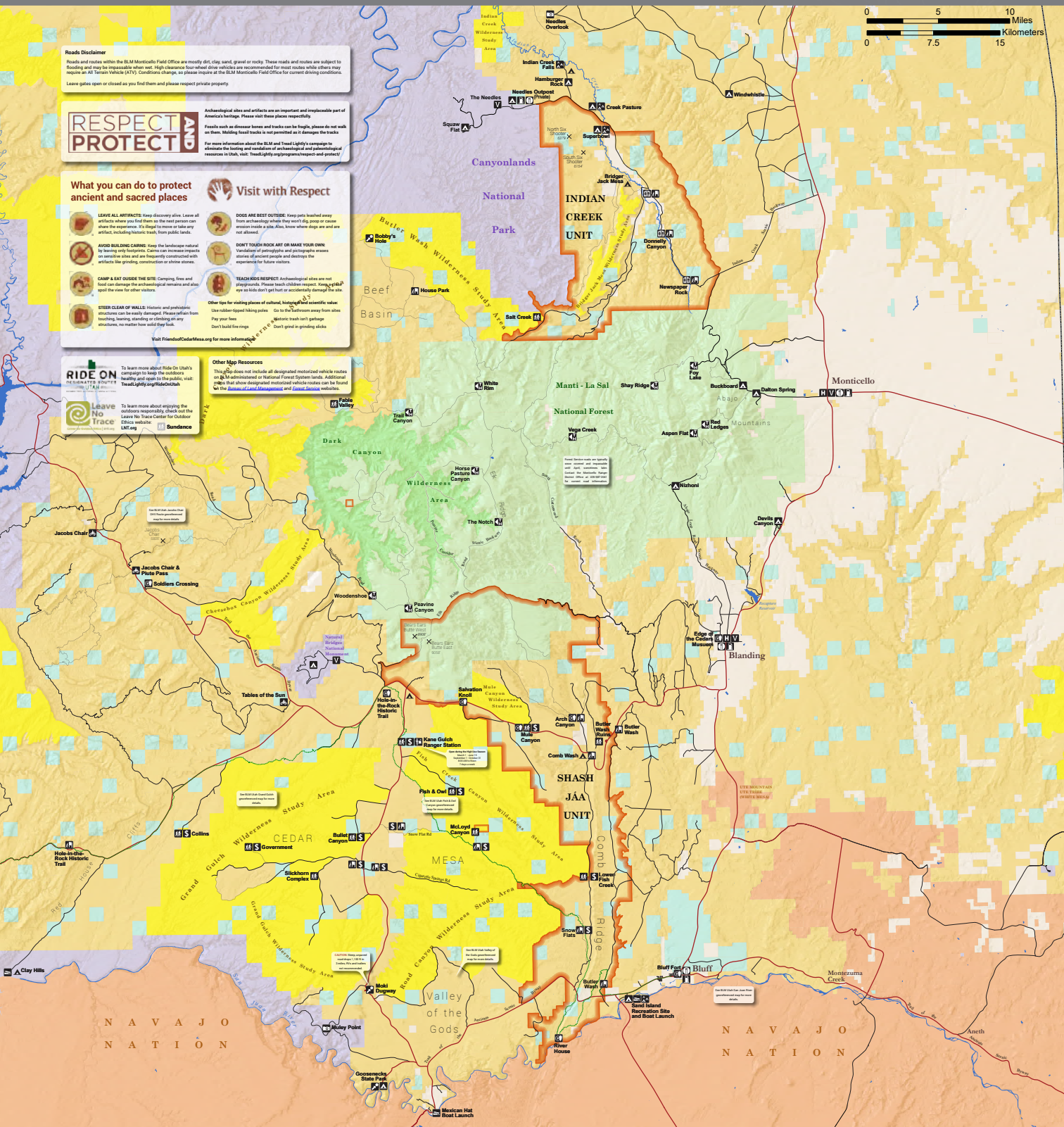
- LEAVE ALL ATTRACTS:** Keep discovery alive. Leave all artifacts where you find them so the next person can share the experience. It's illegal to move or take any artifact, including historic trash, from public lands.
- AVOID BUILDING CAMPING:** Keep the landscape natural by leaving only footprints. Campfires can increase impacts on sensitive sites and are frequently prohibited on public lands. Campsites are often marked with wooden posts or other markers.
- CAMP & EAT OUTSIDE THE SITE:** Carrying, fire and food can damage the archaeological remains and also spoil the view for other visitors.
- STEER CLEAR OF WALLS:** Historic and prehistoric structures can be easily damaged. Please refrain from touching, leaning, standing or sitting on any structures, no matter how solid they look.

Visit FriendsOfCedar Mesa for more information

RIDE ON DESIGNATED ROUTES
To learn more about Ride On Utah's campaign to keep the outdoors healthy and open to the public, visit www.rideonutah.com.

Leave No Trace
To learn more about enjoying the outdoors responsibly, check out the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics website www.lnt.org.

Other Map Resources
This map does not include all designated motorized vehicle routes on BLM-administered or National Forest System lands. Additional maps that show designated motorized vehicle routes can be found on the [BLM website](https://www.blm.gov) and [Forest Service website](https://www.fs.fed.us).



Boundaries from Dec 2017 to Oct 2021, (zoomable)

[Download Georeferenced PDF for use in navigation apps](#)

[Download Georeferenced PDF of Grand Gulch](#)

[Download Georeferenced PDF of San Juan River](#)

Bears Ears: 1. Bears Ears and Elk Ridge



Aerial view, West Bears Ears Butte, morning

The monument protects an entire watershed from the 11,000-foot Abajo Mountains down to the Colorado and San Juan Rivers below 4,000 feet. On top of the world at nearly 9,000 feet, with views up to 200 miles away, 48-mile Elk Ridge Road follows the Elk Ridge spine between UT-211 and UT-95. The dirt/gravel road is well maintained. Still, 4WD is necessary if there has been precipitation. Driving the southern end until the saddle between the two Bears Ears buttes is possible with a sedan and offers great views over Cedar Mesa. These twin namesake buttes standing at about 9,000 feet are visible from all over the monument. They are so distinctive that their name is the same in each of the native languages of the region. Since Bears Ears buttes are a sacred space for tribes and a medicinal gathering source, I refrained from hiking them and instead made an aerial photograph. At nearby Natural Bridges National Monument, I found an iconic perspective from the ground.

Bears Ears: 2. Indian Creek



Newspaper Rock

UT-211 crosses the monument for 20 miles. Sharp red Wingate sandstone walls popular with rock climbers line the road along Indian Creek's wide canyon. Called Tse' Hane ("rock that tells a story") in Navajo, the 200-square-foot Newspaper Rock includes over 650 designs of human figures, animals, and symbols. People from Pre-Puebloan and Fremont cultures and Navajo and Ute tribes made them by pecking through dark desert varnish to lighter rock beneath. Newspaper Rock is one of the largest petroglyph panels in the country and one of the most easily accessed. The site is roadside, next to UT-211, about 12 miles from US-191 (37.9883, -109.5185).

Bears Ears: 3. Needles Overlook



Indian Creek and Needles, sunset

The northern section of the monument forms a narrow strip of grassy flats above rocky basins. At Needles Overlook, the views encompassed more than 300-degrees, as a rim trail on a peninsula connected several viewpoints. They overlook a wilderness of rock 1,500 feet below, like Island in the Sky in Canyonlands National Park. The difference is that save for a couple of other visitors, I had the place to myself at sunset, the time with the best light. From US-191 32 miles south of Moab, turn west into Canyon Rims/Needles Overlook Road. After 15 miles, you arrive at a junction. Continue west on the paved road for 6.7 miles to Needles Overlook (38.2600, -109.6962). If you go north on the well-graded gravel road for 16.5 miles, you arrive at Anticline Overlook (38.46489, -109.6270). The Canyonlands Overlook (38.4045, -109.7087) may be the most interesting, but also most difficult to reach, as the last mile requires 4WD high clearance. The road branches from the Anticline Overlook road 8 miles from the junction.

Bears Ears: 4. Comb Ridge



Aerial view near UT-95, late afternoon

Cedar Mesa is a 400-square-mile plateau in the southeastern corner of the monument, delimited to the north by Elk Ridge and the east by Comb Ridge. The name of the 80-mile-long formation comes from the ridge's jagged appearance that evokes a rooster's comb. Tilted 20 degrees and over 1 mile wide, Comb Ridge is a classic example of a monocline, a step-like tilt of the earth's rocks. UT-95 traverses Comb Ridge at a spectacular artificial cut. Two unpaved roads starting from UT-95 follow Comb Ridge: Comb Wash, and Butler Wash. Ancestral Puebloans once found shelter in the Comb's numerous box canyons and alcoves you can explore through Butler's Wash.

Bears Ears: 5. Mule Canyon



House on Fire Ruin, late morning

Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon have famous massive multiroom Ancestral Puebloan ruins. When it comes to smaller structures, in addition to harboring the highest number of them anywhere, Cedar Mesa is home to some of the most iconic of them. House on Fire ruin, popularized by the great photographer David Muench, is now the most visited Cedar Mesa structure. The best light is in the late morning. One of the factors that draw me to these ancient structures is how they harmonize with their natural environment. Although the buildings are well-preserved, what makes them distinctive and iconic is the rock alcove roof. Mule Canyon stretches for a total of 3.5 miles and contains eight other dwellings. The trailhead is just 0.3 miles off UT-95, 19.5 miles west from US-191, 9 miles east from UT-261 (37.5376,-109.7319). After a straightforward 1-mile hike in shallow and level Mule Canyon, the structure is found about 25 feet above the canyon floor on your right.

Bears Ears: 6. Road Canyon



Fallen Roof Ruin, late morning

Fallen Roof Ruin is almost as iconic as House on Fire ruin because of the alcove's roof, but much less popular, probably because access requires a bit more effort. You have to drive on an unpaved road. Instead of being level and straightforward, the hike drops into a canyon, and the ruin also sits higher. Since it was in the shade of the alcove, it took me a while to spot it. I saw dozens at House on Fire, but for the entire duration of my visit, to Fallen Roof Ruin, I didn't see another person. Like House on Fire, the building faces west. It is in the shade without reflected light in the early morning or late afternoon, which makes the light flat and dull. In the afternoon, the sun reaches it partly, creating extreme contrast at unwanted spots. Only from mid-to-late-morning, sunlight reaches the canyon without shining directly on the structure, casting a soft and warm glow into the alcove. Reflected light is the main ingredient for many of the great compositions on the Colorado Plateau.

From UT-261, about 13.5 miles south of UT-95, turn left (east) onto Cigarette Springs Road (CR-239). Although the road is dirt, I was able to drive it to the trailhead in a Prius in dry weather. After 3.4 miles, take an unmarked short road toward the left (north) until a small trailhead with room for just a few cars (37.3904, -109.8886). The hike (3 miles round trip, 320-foot elevation loss) starts on top of a forested mesa before dropping into the large and deep Road Canyon that it follows for 0.75 miles. The structure is about 150 feet above the canyon floor and on the north side of the canyon.



Road Canyon, midday

Bears Ears: 7. Grand Gulch



Structures in Perfect Kiva alcove

Grand Gulch, a 50-mile canyon draining the western half of Cedar Mesa, is the archaeological crown jewel of the area. Occupied between 800 and 2,000 years ago, the canyon had the densest population in North America before the arrival of non-native settlers, resulting in a high concentration of well-preserved rock art and dwellings. Besides, with only unmaintained and unsigned rugged user trails in a pleasant and beautiful sandstone canyon, the wilderness experience in Grand Gulch rivals any other in the southwest. That combination attracts

many backpackers—permits are required. A dozen tributary canyons join Grand Gulch, making it possible to explore its parts on shorter loops and day trips. The most popular are those located close to UT–261: Kane Gulch, Todie Canyon, Sheiks Canyon, and Bullet Canyon.



Ladder inside Perfect Kiva

Bullet Canyon is the largest of those side canyons, joining Grand Gulch in 7.5 miles. The trailhead is a mile from UT–261 down 11 miles from UT–95 (37.4307,-109.9496). The trail, alternating between the wash and ledges, had many detours to circumvent pour-offs, boulders, and other obstacles. It led in 5.2 miles (800-foot elevation loss) to two fascinating ruins high on the north side of the canyon. Located beneath a large alcove among other structures, aptly named Perfect Kiva is a

well-preserved kiva with a ladder. Prehistoric structures are irreplaceable and can be easily damaged, so besides not touching, standing, sitting, or climbing on the walls, it is usually best to respect them by keeping out. However, a modern ladder installed by the BLM invited visitors to climb down into the kiva. In late October, as I made long exposures necessitated by dim light inside the kiva, I enjoyed surprisingly warm temperatures thanks to the subterranean setting. It was a welcome change from the freezing temperatures I endured all day due to a cold snap, and I reluctantly went back outside to eat a snack. I admired the wisdom of the ancient builders who had designed structures with such efficient insulation out of simple materials. Afterward, I went looking for the nearby two-level Jailhouse ruin so named because of its unusual lattice window.



Jailhouse Ruin at night

Common at medium elevations in the monument, the ground was covered by biological, or cryptobiotic soil crust. It looks like patches of

dark, knobby dirt but is a living community that takes up to 45 years to recover from trampling. I made sure to stay on existing user tracks to protect the cryptobiotic soil. I returned to Perfect Kiva for night photographs. Temperatures had dropped down to the tens. To evoke the time when Ancestral Puebloans lived there in a warm shelter, I placed a light inside the kiva and adjusted it to be slightly brighter than the moonlight.

[Download georeferenced PDF of Grand Gulch](#)



Perfect Kiva and moon

Bears Ears: 8. Cedar Mesa Edge



Valley of the Gods from Moki Dugway, afternoon

Driving north on UT-261, you get one of the best views of Bears Ears buttes. Going south, you see ominous signs discouraging large vehicles and warning the road will turn unpaved and steep. The road descending the Cedar Mesa plateau, called Moki Dugway, is impressive for its precipitous surroundings, 180-degrees switchbacks, and steep grade of 11%. “Dugway” is a term used to describe a roadway carved from a hillside, and indeed this stretch of road has literally been carved from the face of the cliff that delineates the Cedar Mesa plateau. The rest of UT-261 is paved, but that 3-mile stretch is unpaved. I found it well-graded, wide enough, and easily passable by a passenger car. The vista from there is immense, extending from Monument Valley to Valley of the Gods. The bottom is about 7 miles to US-163.

At the top of Moki Dugway, a secondary gravel road leads west in 5 miles to Muley Point (37.2382, -109.9808) after passing a first viewpoint about 3.7 miles out. Landscape features, including cliffs that form Cedar Mesa's edge and the meandering canyons of the San Juan River, are closer than from the Dugway. Muley Point is one of the best places in the monument to watch the sunset. There are several places where you can drive off-road and camp right at the edge of the cliffs at some of the most spectacular (and free) primitive campsites in the southwest.



Sunset, Muley Point

Bears Ears: 9. Valley of the Gods



Valley of the Gods, early morning

The southern edge of the monument consists of lower elevation lands between the Cedar Mesa cliffs and the San Juan River. A sandy plain dotted with sandstone buttes and spires, Valley of the Gods landscapes reminded me of iconic Monument Valley. While rock formations are smaller, Valley of the Gods is free from commercialization, tour groups, streams of cars, and heavy regulations. Instead, I found quiet, solitude, and freedom to explore. I could come and go as I pleased to catch sunrise and sunset, finding plenty of spots to camp for free. Without established trails, I could roam cross-country. Driving the 17-mile unpaved road presented no difficulty in a Prius. I found the most spectacular section at the midpoint. The southeast entrance is along US-163, 8 miles east of Mexican Hat or 16 miles west of Bluff. The west entrance is on UT-261 at the base of the Moki Dugway.

[*Download georeferenced PDF of Valley of the Gods*](#)

Bears Ears: 10. San Juan River



Goosenecks of the San Juan River

In geology, the term “goosenecks” refers to sinuous canyons resembling a goose’s curved neck. Goosenecks State Park directly overlooks incised meanders carved 1,000 feet deep as San Juan River twists and turns for over 6 miles in the space of just 1.5 miles. Rivers meander because of a low gradient. That gradient doesn’t give them the power to cut deep canyons. Typically, high-gradient rivers cut straight canyons. How did the San Juan River create such tightly wound and deeply incised goosenecks? Long after the river set its sinuous course, the Colorado Plateau uplift increased its gradient. From UT-261, about a mile from US-163, turn southwest on UT-316 and follow the road for 3.5 miles (37.1744, -109.9271). There is a primitive campground with no water, a vault toilet, picnic tables, and 8 designated sites. Goosenecks State Park has been officially recognized as an international dark sky park.

[Download georeferenced PDF of San Juan River](#)