

GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

ESTABLISHED: 1996 • SQUARE MILES: 2,938

LOCATION: 250 MILES SOUTH OF SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

HIGHEST POINT: AQUARIUS PLATEAU, 8,600 FEET



Metate Arch, Devils Garden, dusk

A wild and beautiful country of multicolored slickrock, Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument encompasses an area so remote it was the last region in the contiguous United States to have been mapped, while the Henry Mountains and the Escalante were the last mountain range and river to be named. When designated in 1996, the national monument was by far the largest. The crown jewel of conservation lands managed by the BLM, it is so vast, with possibilities for recreation so numerous that it requires a lifetime to explore. Stretching from Bryce Canyon National Park to the west to Capitol Reef National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area to the east, it forms a bridge that helps maintain the region's ecological integrity.

Orientation The main access is through two east-west highways bordering the monument: US–89 to the south and UT–12 to the north. Two major unpaved roads run north-south: Cottonwood Canyon Road that links US–89 to UT–12 and Hole-in-the-Rock Road that comes to a dead-end near Lake Powell. Together, they divide the monument into three sections, Grand Staircase, Kaiparowits Plateau, and Escalante Canyons. In the west, Grand Staircase refers to a series of uplifted and differently colored sandstone escarpments exposing in sequence 200 million years of Earth's history, cut by the Paria River and traversed by Johnson Canyon Skutumpah Road. The Kaiparowits Plateau, at the center of the monument, has been the scene of many paleontology discoveries and is its wildest, highest, most arid, and least accessible part—its main road, Smoky Mountain Road, is risky to drive. The east is dominated by the vast canyon system of the Escalante River, with its many tributaries and side canyons. It is linked to Capitol Reef National Park by the Burr Trail.

Logistics Cell service is unreliable, even in front-country areas such as sections of UT-12. The highway mentioned above skirt the monument, but most roads within the interior are unpaved, and their clay sections are unpassable when wet. It is always a good idea to inquire about road conditions before venturing inside the monument. The monument has three small campgrounds: Deer Creek on the Burr Trail (six sites, no room for trailers to turn around), Calf Creek (13 sites, water available except in winter) on UT-12, and White House on BLM751, 2 miles off US-89 (five sites). There is a larger campground in Kodachrome Basin State Park near Cannonville with full amenities, including showers and laundry, 47 sites, suitable for RVs up to 45 feet. Dispersed camping is generally allowed. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) visitor centers

are located in Escalante, surrounded by the monument, and in Kanab, 120 miles to the west. Both form an excellent gateway to the monument.

Seasons Spring (April–June) and early fall (September–October) both offer moderate weather. Summer temperatures can reach 100°F at lower elevations. July and August bring thunderstorms curtailing travel on dirt roads, with monsoon season sometimes extending into September. Late fall is colder but can be an excellent time for exploring before the arrival of winter storms. Snow and subfreezing temperatures can occur during the winter.

Information/contacts

Bureau of Land Management
blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/utah/grand-staircase-escalante-national-monument
blm.gov/visit/bears-ears-national-monument

Escalante Interagency Visitor Center
755 W. Main Street, Escalante, UT 84726
435-826-5499

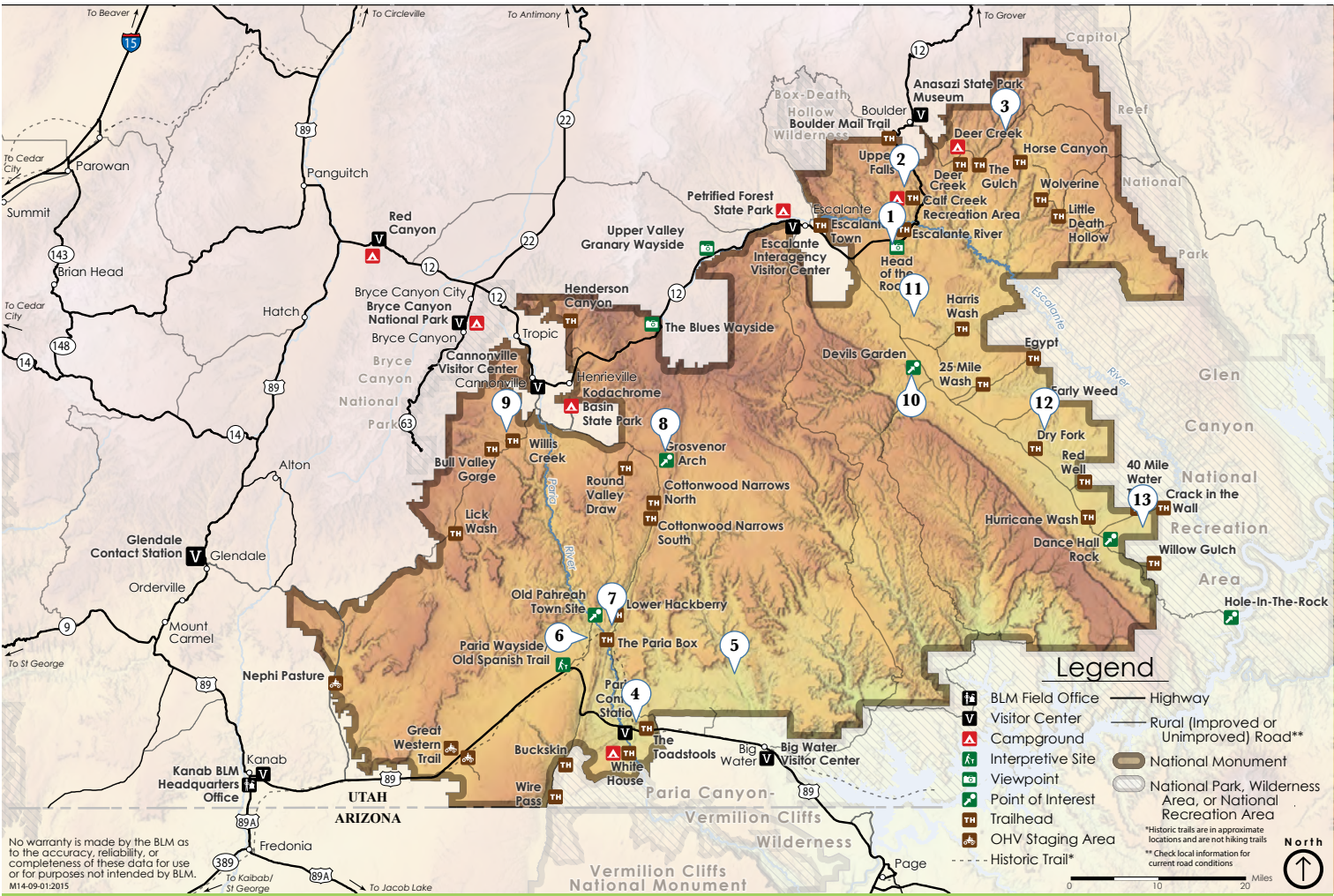
Kanab Visitor Center
745 US-89, Kanab, UT 84741
435-644-1300

Paria Contact Station
2040 Long Valley Rd, Kanab, UT 84741
435-644-1200

Big Water Visitor Center
20 Revolution Way, Big Water, UT 84741
435-675-3200

Cannonville Visitor Center
10 W Center St, Cannonville, UT 84718
435-826-5640

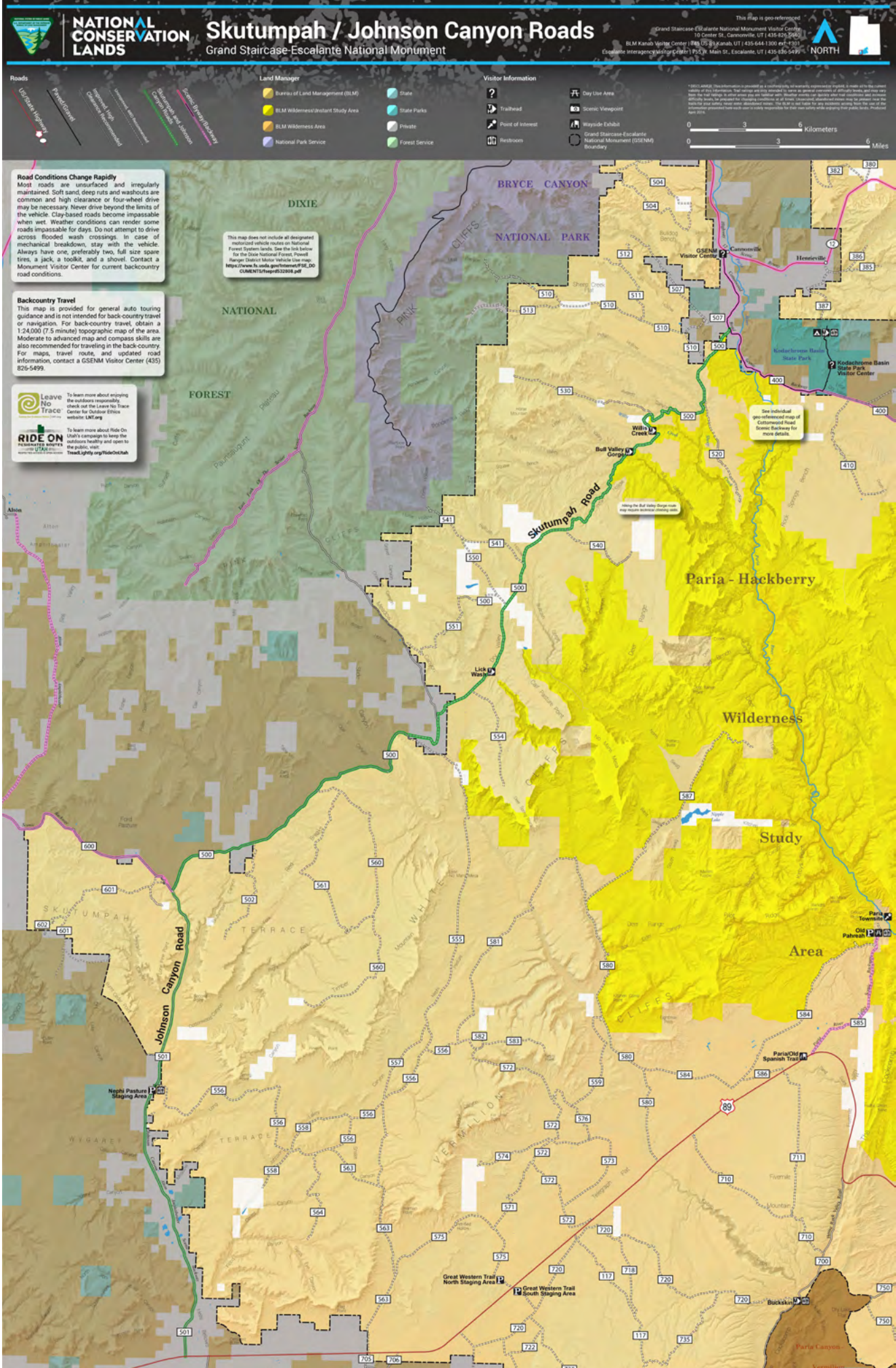
Grand Staircase-Escalante Partners
gsenm.org



General map (zoomable)

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

[Download detailed map](#)
(could not be embedded in high-res)



Map of Skutumpah/Johnson Canyon Road (zoomable)

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

Cottonwood Road

BLM Kanab Visitor Center | 745 US-89 Kanab, UT | 435-644-1300 ext. 1301
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument Visitor Center | 10 Center St., Cannonville, UT | 435-826-5640
Escalante Interagency Visitor Center | 155 W. Main St., Escalante, UT | 435-826-5499

This map is geo-referenced

Roads
Cottonwood Road
State Highway
Other
Unimproved road
Unimproved road with a permit
Unimproved road with a permit and a fee
Unimproved road with a fee

Trails
Unimproved trail
Unimproved trail with a permit
Unimproved trail with a permit and a fee
Unimproved trail with a fee

Land Manager
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
BLM Wilderness Study Area
National Parks Service
National Forest Service

State Park
State
Private
100 ft. Contours

Visitor Information
Visitor Information
Restroom
Day Use Area
Point of Interest
Wheelchair Accessible
Campground
Interpretive Trail

Arch
Drinking Water
Showers
Mileage Between Points
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM)

Legend
Cottonwood Road
Scenic Byway
Mileage Between Points
Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM)

Scale
0 3 6 Miles
0 3 6 Kilometers

North

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Road Conditions Change Rapidly
Most roads are unsurfaced and irregularly maintained. Soft sand, deep ruts and washouts are common and high clearance or four-wheel drive may be necessary. Never drive beyond the limits of the vehicle. Clay-based roads become impassable when wet. Weather conditions can render some roads impassable for days. Do not attempt to drive across flooded wash crossings. In case of mechanical breakdown, stay with the vehicle. Always have one, preferably two, full size spare tires, a jack, a toolkit, and a shovel. Contact a Monument Visitor Center for current backcountry road conditions.

Backcountry Travel
This map is provided for general auto touring guidance and is not intended for back-country travel or navigation. For back-country travel, obtain a 1:24,000 (7.5 minute) topographic map of the area. Moderate to advanced map and compass skills are also recommended for traveling in the back-country. For maps, travel route, and updated road information, contact a GSENM Visitor Center (435) 626-5499.

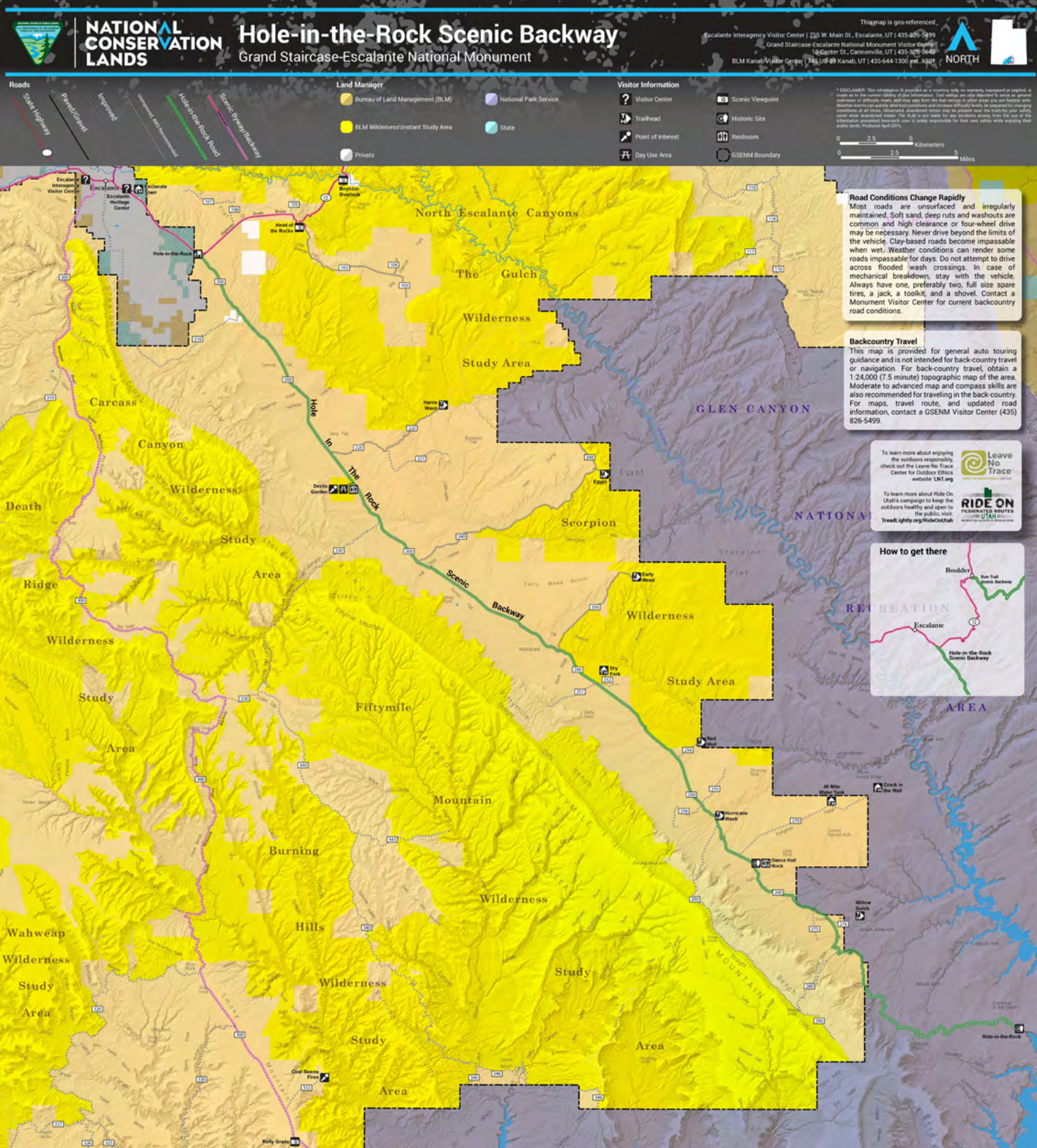
Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfire impacts
- Respect wildlife
- Be considerate of other visitors

RIDE ON
GENERATED ROUTES

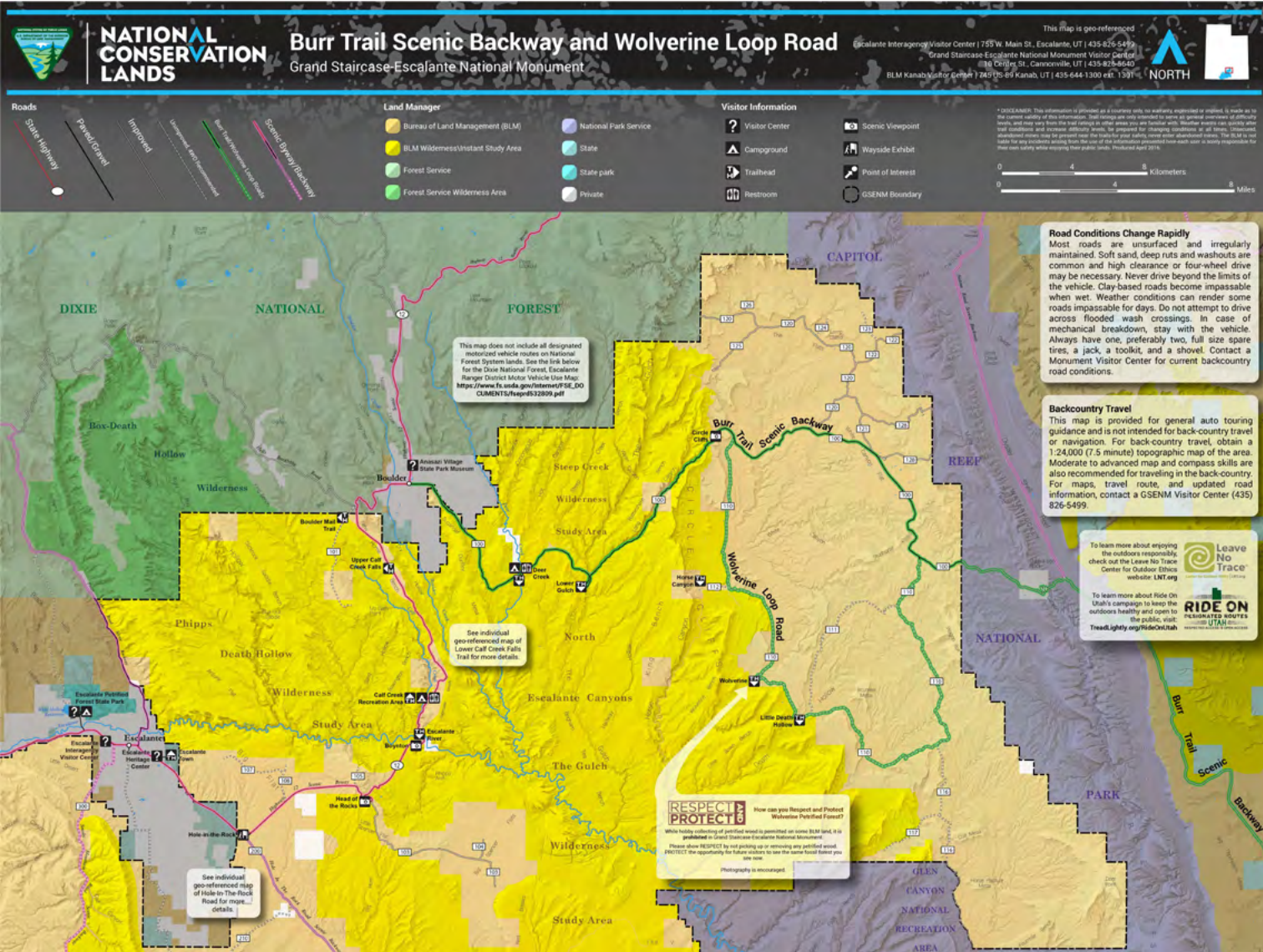
Map of Cottonwood Road (zoomable)

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



Map of Hole-in-the-Rock Road (zoomable)

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



Map of Burr Trail (zoomable)

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

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 1. Scenic Byway 12



Head of the Rocks, dawn

Although the monument is vast, most of it is roadless. UT-12, or Scenic Byway 12, one of the most spectacular roads in America, comes the closest to a scenic drive in the monument. My favorite section is between Escalante and Boulder. The highway traverses pastel-colored slickrock terrain, giving an excellent introduction to the monument's geology. I have photographed successfully from the Head of the Rocks roadside overlook, 10 miles east of Escalante (37.7465, -111.4539) at sunrise and sunset, when the air, clearer than at midday, allowed me to take in expanses of rock extending almost to the horizon.

Traveling east, UT-12 then descends into the canyon of the Escalante River. The Escalante River Trailhead is 15 miles east of Escalante. The pleasant hike along the river is maybe the most accessible of the Escalante River canyons, and along the way, you can see arches and ancient structures. Hundred Handprints panel, one of the largest pictograph panels in the monument, sits in the middle of a cliff high above the Escalante River Trailhead (37.776, -111.4198). It is possible to hike to the base of the cliff, 30 feet below the panel, in less than a mile by following a user trail that starts past a private property that you should make sure not to trespass on, but you'll still need binoculars or a telephoto lens. Along the way, you'll encounter more panels at a close distance.



Hundred Handprints panel

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 2. Calf Creek Recreation Area



Calf Creek Falls, late afternoon

Calf Creek Recreation Area (16 miles east of Escalante and 11 miles west of Boulder on UT-12) is the most popular place in the monument. With its thirteen sites, the campground is the largest in the monument and the only one with water. In a place generally arid, I was delighted by the lush environment of this desert oasis of grasses and trees along Calf Creek. Unexpected beaver dams created pools reflecting the canyon walls, where you can see rock art. The mostly flat, 6-mile round-trip self-guided nature trail starting near the campground (37.7958, -111.4136) ends at Lower Calf Creek Falls, a rare 125-foot desert waterfall plunging into a sizable pool. The absence of sunlight in the morning and late afternoon reveals subtle variations in color on its wall due to moss and rocks. A polarizing also helped by reducing glare on wet rocks.

[Download brochure for Lower Calf Creek Trail \(PDF\)](#)

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 3. Burr Trail / Long Canyon



Long Canyon, dusk

Formerly a track used by Mormon pioneers for seasonally moving cattle, Burr Trail is a backcountry road starting from Boulder and featuring remarkable domes and cliffs on its way to the southern section of Capitol Reef National Park. Its first 31 miles, up to the national park boundary, were paved in the 1990s, significantly increasing the area's visitation. Midway, past the small but delightful Deer Creek Campground, Burr Trail follows the bottom of aptly named Long Canyon for 7 miles. Desert varnish and unusual erosion patterns of Swiss cheese-like deep holes grace its sheer red walls of Wingate Sandstone.

[*Download georeferenced PDF of the Burr Trail*](#)

I strolled into a surprising small side canyon on the north side of the road, slightly more than a mile from Long Canyon’s southwestern end (37.8650, -111.3009). Called Singing Canyon because of its acoustics, this slot canyon is enlivened by photogenic trees and a beautiful glow in the early morning and late afternoon. As the sun reached the canyon, I used the play of light and shadow for images of a different character. As I exited the canyon to the east, red cliffs turn multicolored like those of the distant Waterpocket Fold. A saddle at the rim of the Circle Cliffs provided an excellent viewpoint over badlands, plains, and cliffs.



Singing Canyon, late morning

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 4. Rimrocks Hoodoos



Toadstool hoodoo, morning

The Rimrocks Hoodoos are easy to access, as the trailhead is just off US-89 on the north side (milepost 19.3, 45 miles east of Kanab: 37.1013, -111.8733). It is only a half-mile of hiking through a wash to the base of impressive red sandstone spires supporting massive boulders on their heads. Those formations came into existence after boulders of harder Dakota Formation rolled down-slope onto softer Estrada Sandstone, sheltering rock directly below from erosion. A more difficult hike starting from milepost 20.8 leads to distant white toadstools. The formations are fragile, so tread lightly.

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 5. Wahweap Hoodoos



Towers of Silence, early morning

The pedestal formations first named by Michael Fatali “Towers of Silence” display a particular elegance thanks to their slender white spires. The Wahweap Hoodoos area also has other pedestal rocks of diverse shapes and beautifully textured badlands, all in siltstone. The 9-mile round-trip off-trail hike along Wahweap Creek was easier than it sounds, as it took place entirely along a flat and wide dry wash along which I marveled at mud cracks and water erosion features. At sunrise in the summer months, the towers are directly lit and the cliff in the shade. In the winter months, they catch reflected light.

From Big Water off US-89, take Ethan Allen street opposite the Big Water Visitor center and turn into the gravel Fish Hatchery / Nipple Creek Road (BLM 327) heading northwest. After 3.2 miles, park at a lot on the right side of the road (37.1121, -111.6887) and follow the wide wash on the left side, looking for the hoodoos on its west side. There are three groups, and the last is the most interesting.

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 6. Paria Badlands and Canyon



Paria badlands, late afternoon

There are many badlands in the southwest, but the Paria Badlands are the most colorful I have observed. They are along BLM-585 (the Old Paria Road) starting north of US-89 about 40 miles west of Page (37.1856, -111.9958). Although unpaved and rough in places, I drove in a Prius without problems. From the end of the road, you can hike along the Paria River in a mile-long canyon called Box of the Paria. I experienced more of the Paria River Canyon by walking south from the White House Campground. Two miles of hiking led to Paria Windows, holes carved into canyon walls by wind and water. I continued to the Paria Narrows located in Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in Arizona.

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 7. Yellow Rock



Yellow Rock, late afternoon

The unpaved 40-mile Cottonwood Canyon Road is a very scenic drive. Despite sandy sections near US–89, I had no trouble with a passenger car. The southern section traverses colorful badlands and a river valley lined up with cottonwood trees. The highlight was Yellow Rock. I was astonished by the sudden sight of the massive dome of swirling and cross-bedded Navajo Sandstone, multicolored but mostly yellow as implied by the name. The formation loomed impressively and looked smooth from the base. Still, hiking to the top was straightforward. As the dome is higher than its surroundings and denuded of vegetation, the 360-degree panorama at sunset revealed so much of the area's exceptional geologic diversity. I wished I had come earlier in the day, as the rock and surrounding area are full of photogenic patterns and textures.

The pullout is located about 14 miles north of US-89, at the junction with Brigham Plains Road (37.2539, -111.9101). If you have 4WD, you can try driving the very steep beginning of the Brigham Plains Road up until the plateau on the east side for an excellent high view of the Cockscomb. The Yellow Rock is not visible from the pullout. On the west side of the road, you'll see two openings in the Cockscomb wall. Aim for the one half-a-mile west of the pullout - the one 300 yards further north is Huckleberry Canyon. After walking across a dry wash, a very steep trail leads to a plateau from which the Yellow Rock formation comes into view. From the pullout to the top of the formation it is 2 miles round trip, with an 800-foot elevation gain

[Download georeferenced PDF of the Cottonwood Road](#)



View from Yellow Rock at sunset

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 8. Grosvenor Arch



Grosvenor Arch, dawn

The northern section of Cottonwood Canyon Road follows a high plateau. About 30 miles north from US–89, or 7 miles from Kodachrome State Park, a turn-off leads to Grosvenor Arch (37.4543, -111.8332). It is the most accessible feature along the road, as a short, paved trail leads to its base. Spanning 90 feet and rising 150 feet, the west-facing double arch is one of the monument's landmarks. It is best lit in the late afternoon. A steep user trail on the east side leads to the top of the arch. About 3.5 miles further south, pinnacles and badlands so vividly colorful the area has been called Candyland line up the road's east side.

[Download georeferenced PDF of the Cottonwood Road](#)

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 9. Willis Creek



Narrows of Willis Creek, late afternoon

Near the west edge of the monument, Skutumpah Road, continuing south as Johnson Canyon Road for 46 miles, provides an alternative to Cottonwood Canyon Road for crossing the monument from north to south. Skutumpah Road is unpaved, and a few short rough sections may require a high-clearance vehicle. Although it traverses unspectacular wooded hills and valleys, the road provides access to exciting canyons. The most accessible of them is Willis Creek, 6.3 miles from the north end of the road. From the trailhead (37.4831, -112.0970) on the west side of the road, cross the road and follow the year-round stream towards the east. Curving walls distinguish its narrows starting just a quarter-mile from the trailhead. Shortly after the junction with Skutumpah Road, Johnson Canyon Road, one of the few paved monument interior roads, enters a special 4-mile section of white slickrock walls.

[Download georeferenced PDF of Skutumpah/Johnson Canyon Road](#)

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 10. Devils Garden



Swirls and hoodoos, late afternoon

Hole-in-the-Rock Road follows a path pioneered by Mormon settlers in 1879 on their way to establish the town of Bluff. The scenery along the 55-mile road doesn't change much, as it is bordered on one side by a grassy plain and the other by the well-named Straight Cliffs defining the eastern edge of the Kaiparowits Plateau. However, the road gives access to fantastic sights. Easiest to access is Devils Garden (mile 12: 37.5858, -111.4147). I wandered among a collection of hoodoos with whimsical shapes, also finding natural arches, such as the landmark Metate Arch. I made sure to stay on well-worn footpaths, washes, or slickrock in order not to trample delicate cryptobiotic soil. The road is gravel-covered and well maintained up to Devils Garden. Afterward, it deteriorates but remains passable in dry conditions by a carefully driven sedan until at least Dance Hall Rock (mile 37), the area's other roadside attraction.

[Download Georeferenced PDF of Hole-in-the-Rock Road](#)

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 11. Cottonwood Wash



Zebra Slot Canyon, late morning

Many trails leading to hidden canyons are the main draw of Hole-in-the-Rock Road. With its pillars, encrusted iron concretions, and multicolored striations that inspired its name, Zebra is one of the unique slot canyons I have seen. In November, I found it dry, but there might be ankle- to chest-deep standing water at other times. The canyon was so narrow I could not squeeze in with my camera backpack. I tried holding my pack above my head and also chimneying the slippery and steep walls. I eventually gave up on those awkward maneuvers. I left the pack in a corner, heading out with only a camera and tripod. The latter was necessary because blending several frames focused at a different distance was the only way to get everything in focus. Heading NE from the trailhead at mile 7.8 of Hole-in-the-Rock Road (37.6394, -111.4456), the hike is 5.2 miles round trip along a well-worn trail. You can combine it with nearby Tunnel Canyon, also located in Cottonwood Wash.

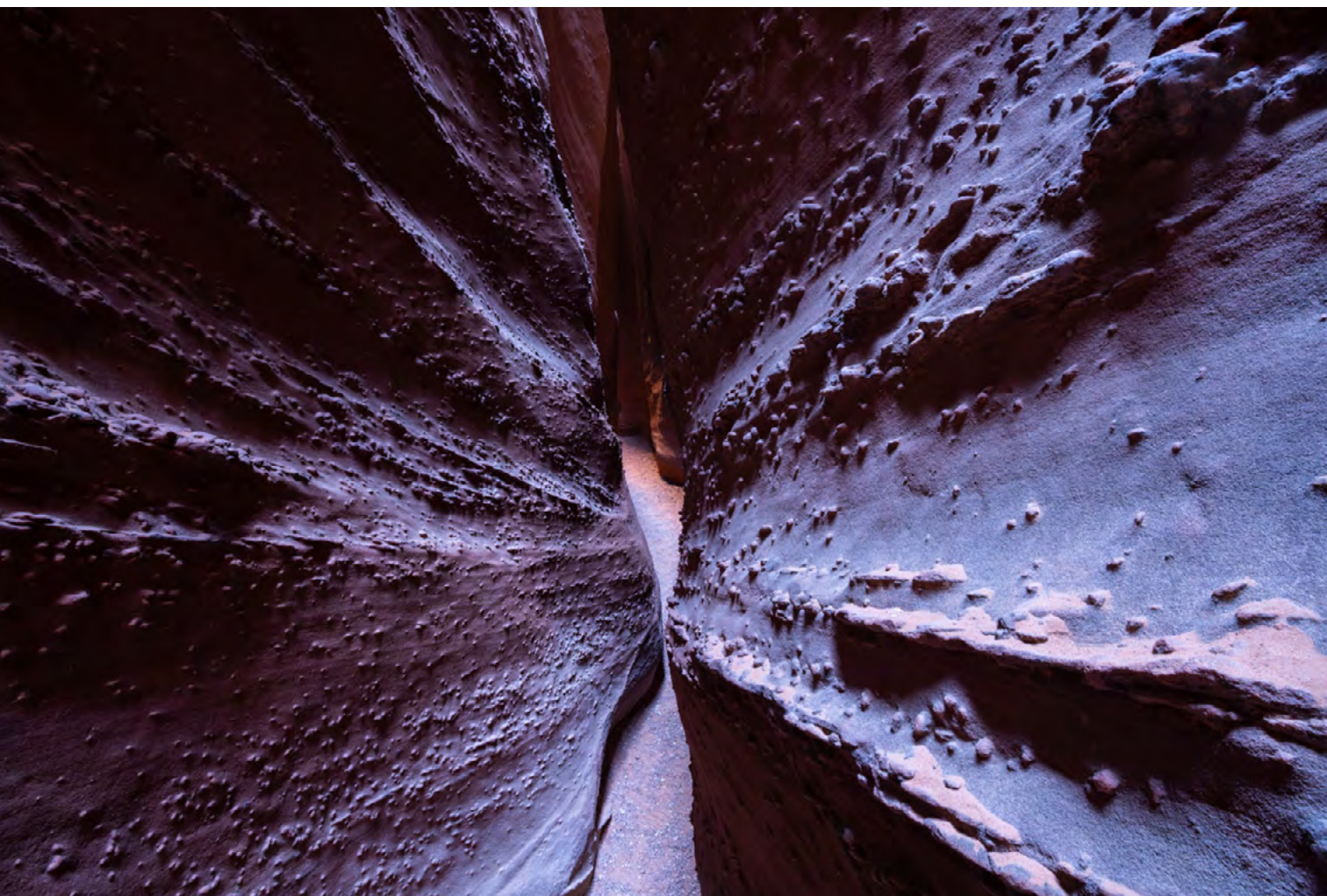
Grand Staircase-Escalante:12. Dry Fork Coyote Gulch



Peek-a-Boo Canyon, afternoon

Hole-in-the-Rock Road gives access to many unusual slot canyons. Dry Fork Coyote Gulch includes four beautiful slot canyons: Dry Fork Narrows, Peek-a-Boo, Spooky, and Brimstone. Several arches distinguish Peek-a-Boo Canyon. The largest is close to the entrance, where a 12-foot climb is required. Moving further up, I found a tiny arch that added interest to a beautifully sculptured section. The best time to photograph is late morning and early afternoon when sunlight reflects from the canyon's top into the bottom while not reaching it directly, creating a warm glow without excessive contrast.

While other canyons are narrow at the bottom but open up at the top, many Spooky Canyon sections had tall walls only 10 inches wide in some spots. As a result, even at midday, it was very dark. Combined with the knobby texture of its walls, it is deserving of its name. The newly built trailhead (37.4766, -111.2202) is at the end of BLM-252, a 1.7-mile track off mile 26 of Hole-in-the-Rock Road. With a low-clearance vehicle, use the first parking area after 0.7 miles, and walk the remaining mile. The trail scrambles down in 0.5 miles to the dry riverbed of Coyote Gulch. To your left (west) are the narrows of Dry Fork. The first slot canyon on the right is Peek-a-Boo, and Spooky is 0.5 miles further. You could walk the entire length up Peek-a-Boo, follow a user trail to the top of Spooky, then down that slot back to Dry Fork. That combined hike is 3.5 miles round trip.



Spooky Slot Canyon, midday

Grand Staircase-Escalante: 13. Forty Mile Bench



Sunset Arch, dawn

I started from the Forty Mile water tank, 4.3 miles on Fortymile Ridge Road off mile 36 of Hole-in-the-Rock Road (37.3926, -111.0487) an hour and a half before sunrise. I was planning to photograph Sunset Arch (3 miles round trip straight towards the south) illuminated by the setting moon. I began questioning my directions when I did not see anything other than featureless sandy terrain after a half-hour of cross-country hiking. Eventually, the sand gave way to sandstone slabs, but the arch itself did not come into view until I turned a corner and reached its span. By then, the sky was already too bright compared to the moonlight. I used a bright LCD light panel to add a glow to the arch's western side as a substitute for moonlight. After photographing the moonset and sunrise through the arch and starting the return hike, I realized finding it in the dark was not a given when I looked back at the arch from a distance.