

# VISITOR GUIDE TO THE ESCALANTE SCENIC AREA

## Bureau of Land Management

### ESCALANTE AREA VISITOR GUIDE

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#### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

##### Prehistory

Although little is known about the early prehistory of this area, most investigators assume that a sequence of human occupancy began prior to AD 1 and included Desert Archaic and Basketmaker cultures. For a period of several hundred years centered around 1100, both Kayenta and Fremont agricultural peoples occupied the area. The abandonment of a large Kayenta Anasazi village at Boulder in approximately 1275 ended the most significant period of prehistory. Hopi peoples apparently visited and hunted in the region for a period of 200 to 300 years. In the 1500's, Southern Paiutes began to visit the area and then occupied the region to historic times.

##### History

The Escalante River is generally considered to be the last major river to be "discovered" in the contiguous United States. In 1866 Captain James Andrus led a group of cavalrymen into the headwaters branches of the Escalante River near the present community of Escalante. This is the first record of Anglo presence. Members of the First and Second Powell Expeditions overlooked the mouth of the Escalante River when they passed through Glen Canyon in 1869 and 1871. In 1871, the Second Powell Expedition enlisted Jacob Hamblin of Kanab, Utah to resupply the expedition at the mouth of the Dirty Devil River. Hamblin mistook the Escalante River for the Dirty Devil River. Thus, in 1871, Hamblin became the first Anglo to travel through the Escalante River Canyon. In 1872, John Wesley Powell sent the Almon Harris Thompson-Frederick S. Dellenbaugh party to the mouth of the Dirty Devil River to recover a cached boat. Upon climbing the escarpment above Pine Creek and the present community of Escalante, the Thompson-Dellenbaugh party realized that the canyon was not the canyon of the Dirty Devil River. Thompson then credited the party with the formal discovery of the river. Thompson named the river the Escalante River and the surrounding canyon country the Escalante Basin in honor of the Friar Silvestre Valez de Escalante expedition of 1776. Escalante was first settled in 1876 by about a dozen Mormon ranchers and farmers and their families from Panguitch and elsewhere, who wished to find a climate more conducive to agriculture and to expand their grazing lands. In contrast, the town of Boulder to the northeast began not as a purposely established town but as a ranching settlement. Good grazing and water attracted a family or two from Richfield and the Rabbit valley area north of Boulder Mountain in the 1870's and late '80's. Not all of these early settlers lived year-round in the Boulder area. By the mid-1890's, Boulder seems to have become firmly established as a center for ranchers and dairy farmers. Many of the same family names that one heard in the 1880's and early 1900's are still present in the area. Many of the canyons and benches are named by or for livestockmen such as Llewellyn Harris, Reuben Collet, Sam Sheffield, John King, Charley Haymaker, Washington Phipps, William Spencer, John Moody and Will Bowns.

Since historic times, the Escalante River canyons have been a barrier to east-west vehicular travel in the region. The river is presently bridged only at its upper end. Much of the history and the present recreation access is associated with early attempts to pioneer routes around or across the river and the canyons. These include the Hole-in-the-Rock Trail, the Harris Wash-Silver Falls Canyon wagon route, the Boynton Road, the Boulder Mail Trail or Death Hollow Trail, and the Old Boulder Road. The Escalante River was not bridged until 1935. Boulder is often cited as one of the last communities in the United States to gain automobile access.

Attempts to gain access to the Circle Cliffs, Halls Creek, and the Waterpocket Fold from Boulder represent an important aspect of the history. In 1936, a road was constructed by Boulder Livestockmen to Brinkerhoff Seeps in the Circle Cliffs. The road followed the present Burr Trail Road.

#### RECREATION

The first significant recognition of the recreational resources of the area occurred in 1941 when the National Park Service studied the Escalante River in conjunction with a comprehensive study of water resources in the Colorado River basin. The study was published in 1946 and identified the Aquarius Plateau-Escalante River Basin as a "little-known but potentially important recreation area." The road between Escalante and Torrey was described as "the most scenic road in southeastern Utah" and Escalante was identified as a "gateway town" with great potential as an important recreation center. Within 100 miles of Escalante are Bryce Canyon N.P., Capitol Reef N.P., Zion N.P., Cedar Breaks N.P., Glen Canyon N.R.A., Petrified Forest State Park, Anasazi Indian Village State Park, Kodachrome Basin State Park and part of the Dixie National Forest. Due to the abundance of recreational opportunities in a relatively small area of the state, visitors often discover the Escalante-Boulder area without it being their original destination.

The Escalante area offers both primitive and non-primitive types of recreation. The Escalante River and its drainages provide an outstanding opportunity for backpacking. The area's national reputation and large numbers of hiking opportunities serves to yearly increase visitation to the canyons. Motor vehicle tourists enjoy the scenery on Highway 12, Hell's Backbone and in the Circle Cliffs. The color contrasts of the semi-arid canyon country to the pine and aspen covered mountains adds to the beauty of the area. Car camping is considered to be a major recreational use of the area. Both the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service offer camping areas that are in scenic locations and are well maintained. Camping fees are charged at some of the more developed sites. The most popular sites are Calf Creek, Posey Lake and Blue Spruce.

#### CULTURAL RESOURCES

Three areas of major historical significance are the Escalante-Boulder Mail Trail, Boynton Road, and Old Boulder Road. The Escalante-Boulder Mail Trail was used to carry mail and other small packaged goods between the towns of Escalante and Boulder. The trail traverses steep slickrock, deep canyons and large sandy areas. Sections of the trail are still visible where it was necessary to construct the trail through slickrock. The Old Boulder Road was a wagon road between Escalante and Boulder constructed in the 1890's. It used until the Civilian Conservation Corps built a better road in 1933. The Boynton Road was a wagon road shortcut to Salt Gulch used from 1909 to 1912. These two roads and the trail enable visitors to envision and appreciate the hardships of early pioneer life.

Archaeological sites include habitation areas, campsites, storage cists, petroglyphs, and pictographs. Little scientific research has been conducted since the University of Utah Glen Canyon Right Bank Survey in 1959. Much of this early work was exploratory and the conclusions reached are still somewhat tentative and subject to revision. The area is significant to the understanding of cultural relationships between variant groups of the Anasazi and between the Fremont culture and Anasazi. In areas that have been surveyed, site densities equal 22 to 60 sites per 50,000 acres. The state of Utah operates the Anasazi Indian Village State Park located in Boulder. This museum offers an excellent view of Anasazi culture. All archaeological sites on public lands are protected by federal law. Please don't harm or destroy a site with graffiti, or by setting on walls, or using ruins for shelter, etc.

#### CLIMATE

The climate in Escalante is temperate and arid with annual precipitation averaging about 10 inches. From June through early September thunderstorms will advance from the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Mexico and southern California. Frontal type storms out of the northwest move over the area from October through June. The highest amount of precipitation occurs from November through March. Summer temperatures in Escalante vary approximately 30 degrees F. with highs in the mid to upper 90's and lows in the mid 60's. Winters in Escalante have a temperature range of about 27 degrees F. with highs in the low 40's and lows about 15 degrees F. Snowfall in Escalante generally averages 28 inches and begins in October or November and ends in March or April. The best time to hike the Escalante River is late March through June and mid September through October. Weather conditions and water temperature are most favorable during these periods.

#### WATER

The developed BLM and Forest Service campgrounds have approved water systems. The Escalante River and the many lakes, creeks and springs provide backcountry users with water. These sources should be treated. The recommended method of treatment is boiling. The intestinal parasite *Giardia lamblia* may or may not be present, and boiling is the only sure way to kill this parasite. The use of chlorine or iodine has not always been effective. This parasite has been found in deer, rats, mice, livestock, beaver, coyote, cats, dogs and man. With this wide variety of possible sources of parasite transmission, all water sources are suspect of being contaminated and should be treated. *Giardiasis* is generally not life threatening. The symptoms include diarrhea, intestinal gas, loss of appetite, weakness, discomfort, nausea, weight loss, bloating and cramps.

#### RIVER CONDITIONS

Most of the river is slow and shallow, with depths ranging from ankle to knee deep. Some deep water occurs at the lower end, especially in the narrows above Coyote Gulch. The river must be crossed many times, so canvas shoes or Vietnam combat style boots are suggested. Normally there is not enough water to float the Escalante River. However, depending on the spring run-off it may be possible. The run-off can occur anytime from early April to late May. Contact the BLM office for more information.

#### SAFETY

The traveler is advised to be aware of developing weather before hiking or driving in this area. Mountain and desert roads can become impassable and flash floods are a possibility after rainstorms. Rainstorms far upstream can catch a hiker unprepared in a downstream canyon. Travelers off paved highways are advised to carry tow chains, a shovel, extra water and gas, food, a first aid kit, a flashlight, and other items necessary in case of an emergency.

If hiking you should obtain a free backcountry permit from the BLM or NPS. This will assist the agencies in conducting search and rescue operations if they become necessary. Always let someone know your itinerary before exploring the backcountry. It is advisable to not hike alone. Adequate preparation can be the key to survival in this remote country. To prevent thefts, do not leave valuables in vehicles. If you must leave personal items in your vehicle, keep them out of sight in your trunk.

#### PLACES TO SEE - BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

##### Calf Creek Recreation Site and Campground (elev. 5346)

Calf Creek Campground is located along Utah Highway 12, fifteen miles east of the town of Escalante. Facilities at this site include ten individual camping units, three individual picnic units, a group picnic area, and a 2 3/4 mile (one way) interpretive trail to the 126 foot Lower Calf Creek Falls. Other developments at this site consist of a culinary water system, playground equipment, a volleyball court, a paved road, paved parking area, log barriers, sanitary facilities, and a footbridge across Calf Creek. Camping fees are \$4.00 per night per camping unit.

##### Deer Creek Recreation Site (elev. 5800)

The Deer Creek Recreation Site is located about six miles east of the town of Boulder along the Burr Trail Road. Facilities at this site consist of three individual picnicking/camping units, a graveled access road, sanitation facilities. This is a good place to camp if you are planning to explore the Circle Cliffs area or the canyons on the east side of the river.

##### Wolverine Petrified Wood Natural Environmental Area (elev. 5400)

The Wolverine Petrified Wood Natural Environmental Area is located about thirty-two miles southeast of Boulder in the Circle Cliffs. Facilities consist of interpretive signs at two locations. Collecting is prohibited in the Wolverine Petrified Wood Area. However, collecting opportunities occur in the Morrison and Chinle Formations subject to federal regulations.

##### Escalante River Site (elev. 5300)

The Escalante River Site is located fourteen miles east of Escalante along Utah Highway 12. Facilities at this site consist of an interpretive sign, visitor register and trash cans. At this location, two well preserved Anasazi graineries can be viewed. This is a popular access into the Escalante River canyons and the Phipps-Death Hollow Outstanding Natural Area.

##### Devil's Garden Outstanding Natural Area (elev. 5280)

The Devil's Garden ONA is located along the Hole-in-the-Rock Road about nineteen miles southeast of Escalante. Facilities consist of three individual picnic units, a graveled access road, parking area, and sanitation facilities. There is no water available. Here you can explore and photograph the unique erosional sculptures of Devil's Garden. These sandstone arches and pedestals offer the visitor an opportunity for a short hike and excellent photography.

##### Batty Pass Caves (elev. 4880)

On the lower cliffs of Fifty-mile Mountain just south of Cat Pasture are several small caves in the Morrison Formation. Locally known as Batty Pass Caves, they were dug and furnished by the Lichtenhahn brothers in the 1950's. The two brothers lived in the caves for several years, did odd jobs and crafts, went to Escalante for supplies at times, and explored the cliffs, desert, and canyons on foot for miles around. The small caves are now abandoned but are vivid reminders of a very independent way of life.

##### Dance Hall Rock (elev. 4625)

Dance Hall Rock is located 42 miles from Escalante on the Hole-in-the-Rock road. This is a huge natural solid sandstone amphitheater. The pioneers of the Hole-in-the-Rock Expedition (1879-1880) held dances accompanied by violin music in the amphitheater to keep moral up (see additional information under Glen Canyon NRA section).

##### Barker Reservoir (elev. 9564)

A dirt road just west of Escalante leads to the Barker and Lower Barker Reservoirs in the North Creek area. Campsites are undeveloped and do not have drinking water. There is a toilet at each of the reservoirs. There is good trout fishing at both lakes. Several other lakes in this area are accessible only by foot.

##### Boulder-Grover Road and Lookout Point (Lookout elev. 9500)

Utah Highway 12 passes over the east side of Boulder Mountain to connect the towns of Boulder and Grover. The road offers a panoramic view of the multi-colored desert, Circle Cliffs, Henry Mountains, Little Rockies and the LaSala Mountains. Lookout Point is only a short distance off the road and provides an opportunity for an excellent view of the Bullfrog Basin area and the rough country of the Escalante and the Dirty Devil Rivers. The large mountain to the southeast is Navajo Mountain, which lies across Lake Powell. The mountains to the east are the Henry Mountains, home of one of the last free roaming buffalo herds in the United States. For more information about backcountry lakes and recreational opportunities contact the Forest Service office in Escalante.

#### PLACES TO SEE - GLEN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

##### Hole-in-the-Rock (elev. 4329)

Hole-in-the-Rock is located 62 miles east of Escalante on a dirt road called the Hole-in-the-Rock road. The site, just off the map area, is the site of the famous Mormon crossing of the Colorado River made in 1880. In October 1879 three camps were established between Escalante and Hole-in-the-Rock to build a wagon road down the desert and assemble materials for a crude ferry. Between November 6 and December 29, about 200 men and women, 50 children, 200 horses, and 1,000 cattle had reached the rim of the canyon. To cut this wagon road from Escalante, across the shaly Carmel Formation and the hard Entrada and Navajo Sandstones, and transport a colony across it and down the precipitous Hole-in-the-Rock trail seems impossible. The workers were plagued by a lack of wood, limited forage for cattle, bitter cold, and lack of food supplies. Blasting powder and picks were used to widen and fill various sections of the crevice. At the lower part of the Hole, a road was constructed on the side of a sheer cliff wall. Although a three foot shelf had already existed, an extension to the shelf was formed by driving two foot stakes into the rock and piling vegetation and rocks on top. This portion of the trail was named Uncle Ben's Dugway in honor of its engineer Benjamin Perkins. After six weeks of picking, chiseling, drilling, blasting and digging, the Hole-in-the-Rock road was completed.

##### Hiking Opportunities

Trailheads and register boxes are located on BLM land but many of the Escalante River hikes are in the Recreation Area. There are trailheads at Harris Wash; Egypt; Twentyfive Mile Wash; Cat Pasture; Scorpion; Red Well and Hurricane Wash. Other access points into the canyon include: Fortymile Ridge; Willow Creek; Davis Gulch; Silver Falls; Moody Creek. Contact the National Park Service for detailed hiking information.

##### Trailheads

There are several trailheads which are used for access into the Escalante River and its side canyons. These are located at: the Escalante River from the town of Escalante and at the Highway 12 crossing; Deer Creek Recreation site; The Gulch on the Burr Trail; Harris Wash at Corral Spring; Egypt; Twentyfive Mile Wash at the road crossing; Cat Pasture; Red Well; and Hurricane Wash. Most of these trailheads have a visitor register at the site.

#### PLACES TO SEE - UTAH PARKS AND RECREATION

##### Anasazi Indian Village State Historical Site (elev. 6600)

The Anasazi Indian Village is located in the town of Boulder. Facilities include a visitor center/museum and an interpretive trail. This site is on the National Register of Historic Places. Rangers are present year around.

##### Escalante State Park (elev. 5873)

The Escalante State Park is located about two miles west of Escalante. Existing developments are a campground with 22 camping units, one group picnic area, restrooms with showers, sewage disposal, and an interpretive trail. Recreation (fishing, boating and swimming) on the adjacent Wide Hollow Reservoir is managed by the ranger stationed on site year around. Camping fees at this area are \$6.00 per night per vehicle.

#### PLACES TO SEE - DIXIE NATIONAL FOREST

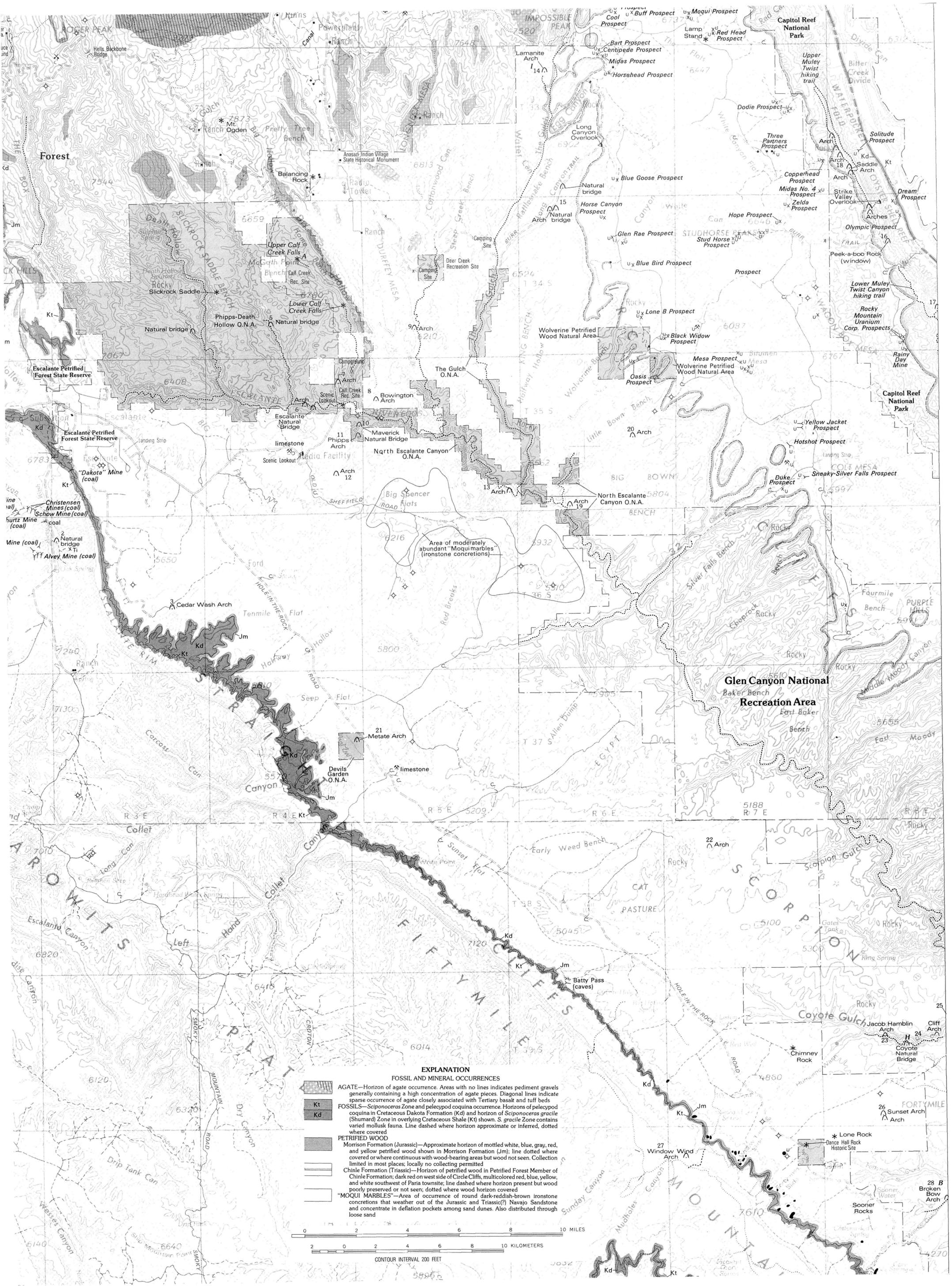
##### Hell's Backbone and nearby Campgrounds (elev. 8854)

Hell's Backbone was part of the old mule trail from Roger Peak to Death Hollow. A bridge now makes auto travel possible. Under the bridge are marks left by many years' of mule travel. This narrow ridge of nearly solid rock remains to form the "backbone" between two canyons resembling someone's version of Hell. This scenic trip leaving and returning to Escalante is 59 miles. It passes through stands of pine and aspen and offers spectacular views from the Hell's Backbone bridge. The deep chasms of Death Hollow and Sand Creek and the distant views of Fifty-mile Mountain, Navajo Mountain and the Henry Mountains offer excellent photography opportunities. Posey Lake (elev. 8676) is located about 16 miles north of Escalante. There are 23 campsites, toilets(no showers), and drinking water. The lake offers excellent fishing for rainbow and brook trout. There is a hiking trail west of the lake that leads to an old fire lookout tower used in the 1930's and 1940's. This offers a beautiful view of the lake and the area surrounding the lake. Round trip hike is 2 miles. Blue Spruce campground (elev. 7775) is another beautiful area. The campground is surrounded by numerous blue spruce trees. A stream running through the campground has good fishing for pan-size trout. This is a much smaller campground with six campsites, toilet facilities (no showers), and drinking water. Blue Spruce is located about 18 miles north of Escalante. There is a \$3.00 fee charged for camping at Posey Lake and Blue Spruce. These campgrounds are reached by dirt and graveled road from Escalante and may be impassable after a rainstorm. One should inquire at the Forest Service office in Escalante before traveling these roads.

#### PLACES TO SEE - ARCHES, BRIDGES AND WINDOWS

This area is justly famous for its beautiful arches and other rock openings. In common terms, a natural bridge spans a drainage, an arch does not, and a window opens above local ground level. In this area, these features commonly occur in thick sandstone beds, usually the Navajo and Entrada, and they attain many sizes and shapes. Most of the interesting and photogenic arches have been named. Many of the less spectacular ones remain unnamed, however. Some of the named arch structure are, Metate Arch (in Devil's Garden), and Sunset Arch, both accessible by car or a short walk. Others can be reached by easy walking or light scrambling. These include Escalante Natural Bridge, Bowington Arch, Maverick Natural Bridge, Phipps Arch, and Cedar Wash Arch. A detailed listing of these features is available at the BLM office in Escalante.

The map base and much of the information provided in this brochure came from a map published by the US Geological Survey in 1983. The Authors, L.M.H. Carter and K.A. Sargent, put together a well-done color map titled "Map Showing Geology - Related Scenic Features In The Kaiparowits Plateau Area, Utah." The Map #1-1033-K is sold by: Branch of Distribution, US Geological Survey, Box 25286, Federal Center, Denver, Colorado 80225 for \$4.60.



**EXPLANATION**

**FOSSIL AND MINERAL OCCURRENCES**

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**AGATE**—Horizon of agate occurrence. Areas with no lines indicates pediment gravels generally containing a high concentration of agate pieces. Diagonal lines indicate sparse occurrence of agate closely associated with Tertiary basalt and tuff beds
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**FOSSILS**—*Sciponoceras* Zone and pelecypod coquina occurrence. Horizons of pelecypod coquina in Cretaceous Dakota Formation (Kd) and horizon of *Sciponoceras gracile* (Shumard) Zone in overlying Cretaceous Shale (Kt) shown. *S. gracile* Zone contains varied mollusk fauna. Line dashed where horizon approximate or inferred, dotted where covered
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**PETRIFIED WOOD**  
 Morrison Formation (Jurassic)—Approximate horizon of mottled white, blue, gray, red, and yellow petrified wood shown in Morrison Formation (Jm); line dotted where covered or where continuous with wood-bearing areas but wood not seen. Collection limited in most places; locally no collecting permitted  
 Chinle Formation (Triassic)—Horizon of petrified wood in Petrified Forest Member of Chinle Formation; dark red on west side of Circle Cliffs, multicolored red, blue, yellow, and white southwest of Paria townsite; line dashed where horizon present but wood poorly preserved or not seen; dotted where wood horizon covered
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**"MOQUI MARBLES"**—Area of occurrence of round dark-reddish-brown ironstone concretions that weather out of the Jurassic and Triassic(?) Navajo Sandstone and concentrate in deflation pockets among sand dunes. Also distributed through loose sand

