



Weather and Road Conditions: The lower elevation trailheads in Dark Canyon are extremely hot in summer; spring and fall are the preferred times to travel. The upper trailheads, often inaccessible in spring due to snow or mud, are pleasant to hike in the summer, but the lower that one hikes into the canyon the more oppressive temperatures become. Seasonal rains come from mid-July to September. This may cause flash flooding and lightning.

Road conditions vary greatly with the weather. Generally they are slippery when wet. High clearance vehicles are recommended. Elk Ridge reaches 8800 feet and the road is generally open only from May through October. Certain portions of the road are in shade and snow melt comes late. Check first with the Forest Service or BLM before using these roads.

Road conditions vary greatly with the weather. Generally they are slippery when wet. High clearance vehicles are recommended. Elk Ridge reaches 8800 feet and the road is generally open only from May through October. Certain portions of the road are in shade and snow melt comes late. Check first with the Forest Service or BLM before using these roads.



Trailheads:

The Sundance Trail is the primary access route into the lower portion of Dark Canyon. (See map on reverse side.) Fable Valley is part of the BLM's Dark Canyon Primitive Area. The valley is approximately eight miles long and can be reached by one of two trailheads. The southern trailhead from Dark Canyon Plateau is more easily accessible; the northern trailhead from Beef Basin is very hard to reach. Fable Valley does not get extensive back country use. It has been historically used by cattle; currently livestock do not graze here on a regular basis.

Wildlife: Dark Canyon has many interesting wildlife species. At upper elevations, black bear, deer, elk and mountain lions may occasionally be seen. In the lower elevations there are desert bighorn sheep, ringtail cats and bobcats. Coyotes are found at all elevations as are many species of birds.



Jed Carling Photo



DARK CANYON



Area Information: Dark Canyon begins high on the edge of Elk Ridge at 8800 feet in elevation and ends at 3700 feet elevation in the desert environment of upper Lake Powell. The Dark Canyon drainage is primarily administered by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Forest Service manages the upper end of the canyon; The USFS Dark Canyon Wilderness Area comprising 45,000 acres. The BLM administers the lower end of the canyon as a primitive area; the Dark Canyon Primitive Area comprising 62,000 acres. The extreme lower end of Dark Canyon is within the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and is administered by the National Park Service.





SUNDANCE TRAIL ENTRANCE TO DARK CANYON

The Sundance Trail can be reached from Utah State Highway 95 (U-95) by a series of dirt roads. Although it is generally passable by car, these roads may at times require a vehicle with up to six inches of clearance. Roads may be muddy/impassable during and after rain. There are two possible starts:

1. From the turnoff to Natural Bridges National Monument, travel west on U-95 for approximately 35 miles, to the sign marking the Glen canyon national Recreation Area boundary. Drive about 1.4 miles further on U-95 and turn RIGHT onto the first dirt road after the White Canyon Bridge (just before milepost 53 on U-95). After you turn, you will see the San Juan Country road marker, "SJC 2731." Travel about 1.5 miles to an information kiosk on Bureau of Land Management land, and then an additional 3.5 miles on SJC 2731 to a Y-intersection with SJC 2081 (there is no sign County sign here).
2. If coming from Lake Powell on U-95, travel about 1 mile east from the Hite Marina turnoff. Turn LEFT onto a dirt road directly across from milepost 49. This road is marked with San Juan County road marker "SJC 2081." Travel about 4 miles to an intersection where SJC 2731 comes in on the right (you could miss this, as SJC 2731 some in at an acute angle from behind). Stay on SJC 2081.



This is where the two routes meet. From this point forward, the route to Sundance Trail is marked with brown carsenite posts, with the word "TRAIL" and an arrow. Be advised that due to the remoteness of these roads, route markers may not be as described here; therefore do not rely solely on these route markers – refer to the MAP!

Now, from either direction, after about 3 miles from this intersection where the two routes meet, there will be a Y-intersection where you keep RIGHT. In an additional .4 miles there is another intersection where you keep LEFT, but the road becomes SJC 256, and is signed with a road marker.

In .9 miles there is a Y in the road. Go LEFT, marked SJC 256. In another 2.2 miles there is a sign with a picture of a hiker and arrow pointing ahead. 100 feet further, there is a sign indicating "Sundance Trail 2 miles." (Over a mile before, you will have passed B2641 coming in from the left).

One mile ahead on SJC 256 there are two more signs pointing to a left hand (northerly) spur road for Sundance Trail, and indicating the Trail is 1 mile ahead. Turn LEFT and travel 1.1 miles to the trailhead.

At the trailhead, there is an information kiosk and registry box. Please sign in before your hike. The Sundance Trail begins as an old road immediately below and north of the parking area and continues along the canyon rim for about 1 mile before joining the single-track foot trail, which is marked with cairns for two additional miles around the canyon rim to a talus slope. From here, the trail descends a 50% talus slope and 1120 vertical feet into Dark Canyon.

This is a strenuous hike!!!

