

HIKING GUIDE TO THE ISLAND-IN-THE-SKY

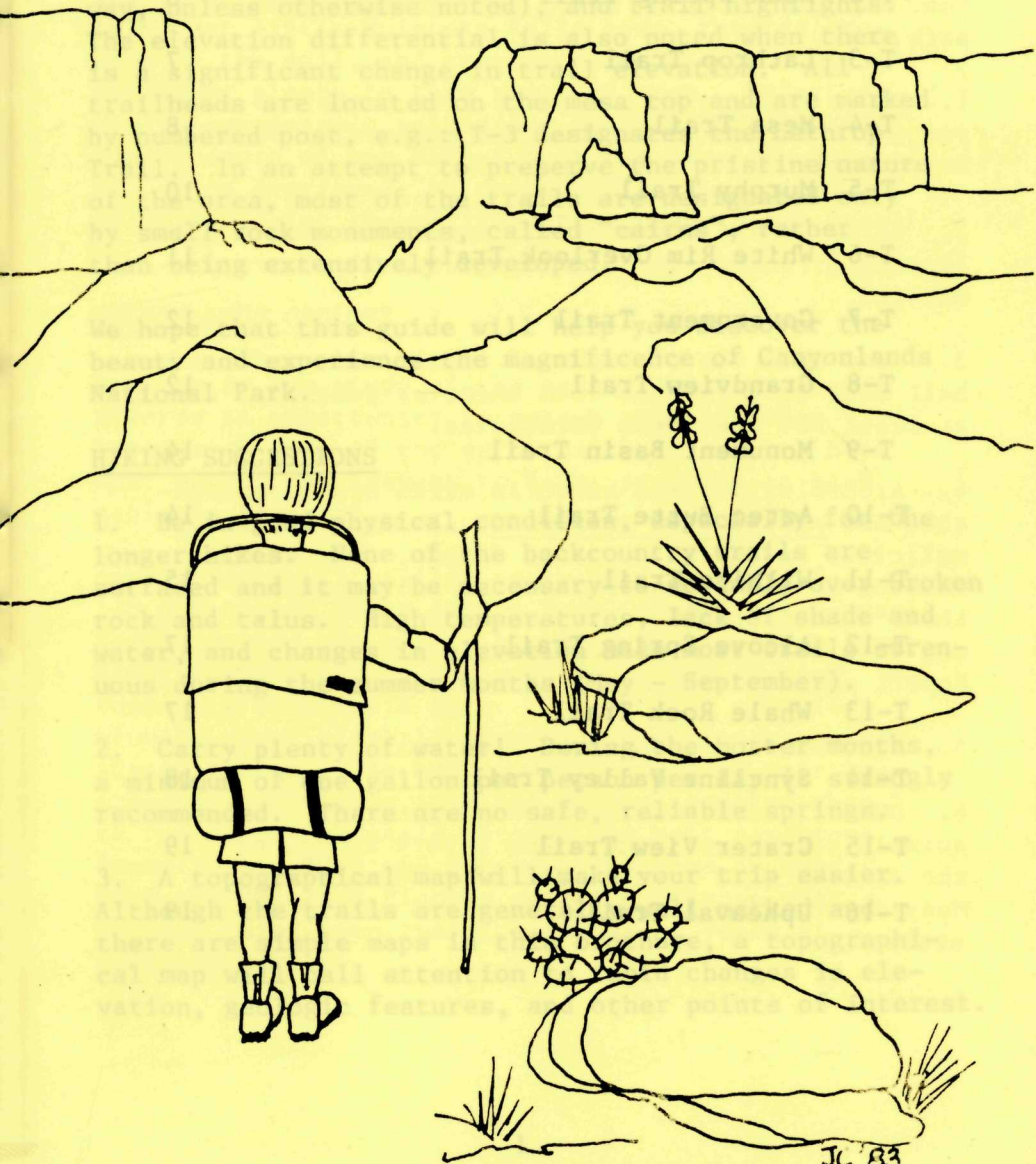


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HIKING IN THE ISLAND IN THE SKY DISTRICT CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK

One of the better kept secrets is that there are hiking trails in the high mesa country known as the Island in the Sky. The trails vary in length from short, easy, half-hour walks to extended overnight backpacking trips. This brochure gives the location of each trailhead, the length of the route, the average length of time necessary to hike the trail (one way, unless otherwise noted), and trail highlights. The elevation differential is also noted when there is a significant change in trail elevation. All trailheads are located on the mesa top and are marked by numbered post, e.g.: T-3 designates the Lathrop Trail. In an attempt to preserve the pristine nature of the area, most of the trails are designated only by small rock monuments, called "cairns", rather than being extensively developed.

We hope that this guide will help you discover the beauty and experience the magnificence of Canyonlands National Park.

HIKING SUGGESTIONS

1. Be in good physical condition, especially for the longer hikes. None of the backcountry trails are surfaced and it may be necessary to scramble over broken rock and talus. High temperatures, lack of shade and water, and changes in elevation make most trails strenuous during the summer months (May - September).
2. Carry plenty of water! During the hotter months, a minimum of one gallon per person per day is strongly recommended. There are no safe, reliable springs.
3. A topographical map will make your trip easier. Although the trails are generally well marked and there are simple maps in this brochure, a topographical map will call attention to rapid changes in elevation, geologic features, and other points of interest.

4. Wet or debris covered rock is slick. Use extra caution on wet trails or smooth sandstone. Wear sound footwear with good traction.

5. Let a ranger know your hiking plans. Back-country permits are highly recommended and can be obtained free of charge at the ranger station.

HELP KEEP YOUR PARK BEAUTIFUL. Your care in preserving the park will be appreciated by all who come after you. Several ways in which you can help protect your park are:

1. Leave a clean camp. Carry your trash out with you (it's lighter than when you started). DO NOT bury trash!

2. Carry a camp stove if you intend to cook. Collecting firewood and building ground fires are prohibited.

3. Camp well out of sight of trails and roads; one-half mile or more from them whenever possible. Camp at least 200 feet from waterholes.

4. Archeological and historic sites are irreplaceable and must not be disturbed. It does not take malicious intent to do great damage. For example, walking on the ground around the walls hastens their deterioration. So please DO NOT touch, climb on, or disturb the pictographs, ruins, or artifacts. Report acts of vandalism to the rangers.

5. Pets are not allowed on foot trails.

6. DO NOT disturb wildlife or vegetation. Wild animals are unpredictable and injury to you or the animal could result from disturbing them. Many desert plants are delicate and easily destroyed.

A WORD ABOUT THAT BLACK CRUNCHY SOIL

As you hike many of the trails, you may notice vast patches of what appears to be black, spongy dirt. This is cryptogamic soil crust, an important component of the ecosystem in this desert environment. Cryptogamic soil crust is a symbiotic plant community composed of lichen, mosses, fungi, and algae. These small plants take hold in barren, sandy areas and bind the soil together. This action helps retain what little moisture falls here, retards erosion of the soil, and creates favorable conditions for other plants to take root and grow. Unfortunately, cryptogamic soil crust is very fragile and the pressure of one hiking boot can severely damage it. Once destroyed, it could take as long as 10 to 20 years for the soil crust to reestablish itself.

CANYONLANDS GEOLOGY

Geology is the study of the earth, and Canyonlands affords an opportunity to pursue this activity because so much of the earth has been exposed here. What caused the canyons to form, exposing so much geologic history?

Approximately 11 million years ago, an area of 130,000 square miles in the Four-Corners region was forced upward one mile. Although it wasn't an overnight phenomenon, on the geologic scale of time, it rose at a very rapid rate. The rise in elevation brought about climatic changes and an increase in precipitation. The heavier rain and snow melt increased water flows into the rivers, causing them to cut deeper channels through the soft sandstone formations. Time and water worked hand in hand with the Colorado Plateau uplift to create what you see before you today; millions of years of geologic history.

The rocks are sedimentary; primarily sandstone with shale conglomerates, mudstone, siltstone, and limestone mixed in. The various rocks give clues to the environment which existed as they were formed.

The 195 million year old Navajo Sandstone is the youngest formation found in this region of the park. This whitish sandstone with pink and yellow tones dominates the northern portion of the Island in the Sky mesa. The Navajo Sandstone is believed to be wind deposited in an environment that resembled our present day Sahara Desert.

Below the Navajo formation is the burnt red sandstone of the Kayenta Formation. This formation represents a time when the canyon country was a sluggish, slow moving river delta area. The Kayenta is an erosion resistant formation which acts as a capstone for the underlying Wingate Sandstone formation. The Kayenta is the uppermost layer for the southern portion of the Island in the Sky.

The Wingate Sandstone is a product of a desert environment similar to that which deposited the Navajo Sandstone. The difference in colors - Navajo: White; Wingate: orange to red - is due to the presence of iron oxides found in the Wingate. Along with the overlying Kayenta Formation, the Wingate forms the sheer 500-700 foot cliffs of the Island in the Sky.

The lower base of the Island in the Sky is made up of two sedimentary formations, the Chinle and the Moenkopi. Together they form talus slopes 700 to 900 feet thick. The upper formation, the Chinle, is composed of sandstone and siltstone, with mixtures of limestone and volcanic ash. When it was laid down 210 million years ago, the area was a floodplain. The ash was transported by wind from volcanic eruptions in Arizona.

Five million years earlier, the area was a shallow sea. It was in this environment that the Moenkopi Formation

was deposited. Along with sandstone, a good deal of mudstone is evident in the Moenkopi. This formation is a dark chocolate brown on the east side of the Island in the Sky and grades into a yellowish-brown color on the west side.

Continuing to travel down vertically and geologically back in time, the 250 million year old Cutler Group lies below the Moenkopi. The Cutler is a complex group but can be divided into four formations, three of which are present in the Island in the Sky District. Of the three, the most visible is the White Rim Sandstone which forms the large plateau upon which the Island in the Sky rests. Most geologists believe the White Rim formed as the bed of a shallow marine sea. Others contend it was wind deposited. The four-wheel drive White Rim Trail travels along this formation as it makes a 100 mile (160 km.) loop around the Island in the Sky. Many of the major hiking routes go from the top of the Island in the Sky mesa down to the White Rim.

Directly below the White Rim is the Organ Rock Shale formation. These rocks are the remnants of ancient tidal flats of a retreating sea.

The third formation of the Cutler Group is the Cedar Mesa Sandstone. It is found only at the southern tip of the Island in the Sky District above the confluence of the Colorado and Green Rivers. To the south and southwest this formation dominates the Needles and Maze District of the park. The Cedar Mesa is of coastal marine origin. The interfingering of the White and red bands shows the advance and retreat of the ancient seas during that time.

The oldest rocks found in this part of the park belong to the Elephant Canyon Formation. The sandstones, conglomerates, and limestones which make up this formation were deposited approximately 300 million years ago. No trails in the Island in the Sky

District pass through this formation. It can be best viewed floating the lower reaches of the Colorado River or by hiking down the Spanish Bottom or Lower Red Lake Canyon trails located in the Maze and Needles Districts.

A detailed geologic map of Canyonlands National Park and vicinity is available for sale at all ranger stations and at park headquarters.

HIKING TRAILS OF THE ISLAND IN THE SKY DISTRICT

NOTE: All trail distances are one way unless otherwise noted.

T-1 SHAFER CANYON OVERLOOK (Wayside Exhibits)

Type: Interpretive
Time: 15 - 30 minutes
Length: 0.2 miles (0.3 km.)

Access: Trailhead is at the wayside exhibits parking lot located 0.5 miles (0.8 km.) south of the ranger station on the Island in the Sky road.

Trail Summary: The trail offers one a good view of the Shafer Canyon area and the Shafer Trail, a four-wheel drive road which winds down into the canyons. There are exhibits along the trail which call attention to some of the area's natural features. A separate footpath descends approximately 100 feet from the picnic area to the Shafer Trail.

HAZARDS: Steep cliffs at viewpoint.

T-2 NECK SPRING TRAIL

Type: Day use Loop Trail
Time: 3 - 5 hours (round trip)
Length: 5.0 miles (8.0 km.) with an elevation change of 300 feet (92 m.)

Access: The trailhead is opposite the wayside exhibits turnoff, 0.5 miles (0.8 km.) south of the ranger station on the Island in the Sky road.

Trail Summary: The Neck Spring Trail passes by the west side of "The Neck", a 40 foot wide sandstone ridge that separates Shafer Canyon from Taylor Canyon. The trail passes through the upper reaches of Taylor Canyon taking the hiker through the pinyon pine-Utah juniper ecosystem that dominates the mesa tops in Canyonlands. The trail goes by Neck Spring and Cabin Spring, areas which still contain watering structures left over from the earlier ranching period. Along the way, one gets an excellent view of upper Taylor Canyon. Eventually, the trail climbs back up and meets the Island in the Sky road. From there, it is a half mile walk north along the road back to the trailhead. A brochure that describes the Neck Spring environment is available at the trailhead.

T-3 LATHROP TRAIL

Type: Overnight or day use
Time: 4 - 7 hours
Length: 5.0 miles (8.0 km.) to the White Rim road.
9.0 miles (14.4 km.) to the Colorado River
with an elevation change of 2,100 feet
(641 m.)

Access: The trailhead is on the Island in the Sky road 1.8 miles (2.9 km.) south of the ranger station.

Trail Summary: The Lathrop Trail is the only marked route that goes from the Island in the Sky mesa top to the Colorado River. For the first mile and a half, the Lathrop Trail crosses Gray's Pasture, an open grassland with Navajo sandstone outcroppings. From Gray's Pasture, the trail follows the mesa rim before descending 1,600 feet (488 m.) in three miles. A portion of the trail follows an old mining road which will take you past several abandoned mine drifts. These are remains of the uranium boom that hit this area back in the early 1950's. In

Canyonlands, the search for uranium was concentrated in the Mossback member of the Chinle formation. This grayish-green strata, in the middle of the Chinle talus slope, usually proved to have payable amounts of ore and miners bulldozed roads into the canyons in search of the strike that would make them rich. Most didn't find it. When the price of uranium dropped in the late fifties, many of the mines were abandoned. Since the establishment of Canyonlands as a National Park, all mining claims in the park have been declared invalid and no mining or mineral exploration is permitted.

The trail leaves the mining road beyond the mines and descends into a wash, following the wash to the White Rim road. A short hike south on the White Rim road will take you to its junction with the Lathrop Canyon road. It is 3.5 miles (5.6 km.) from there to a primitive campground with pit toilets located at the mouth of Lathrop Canyon at the Colorado River.

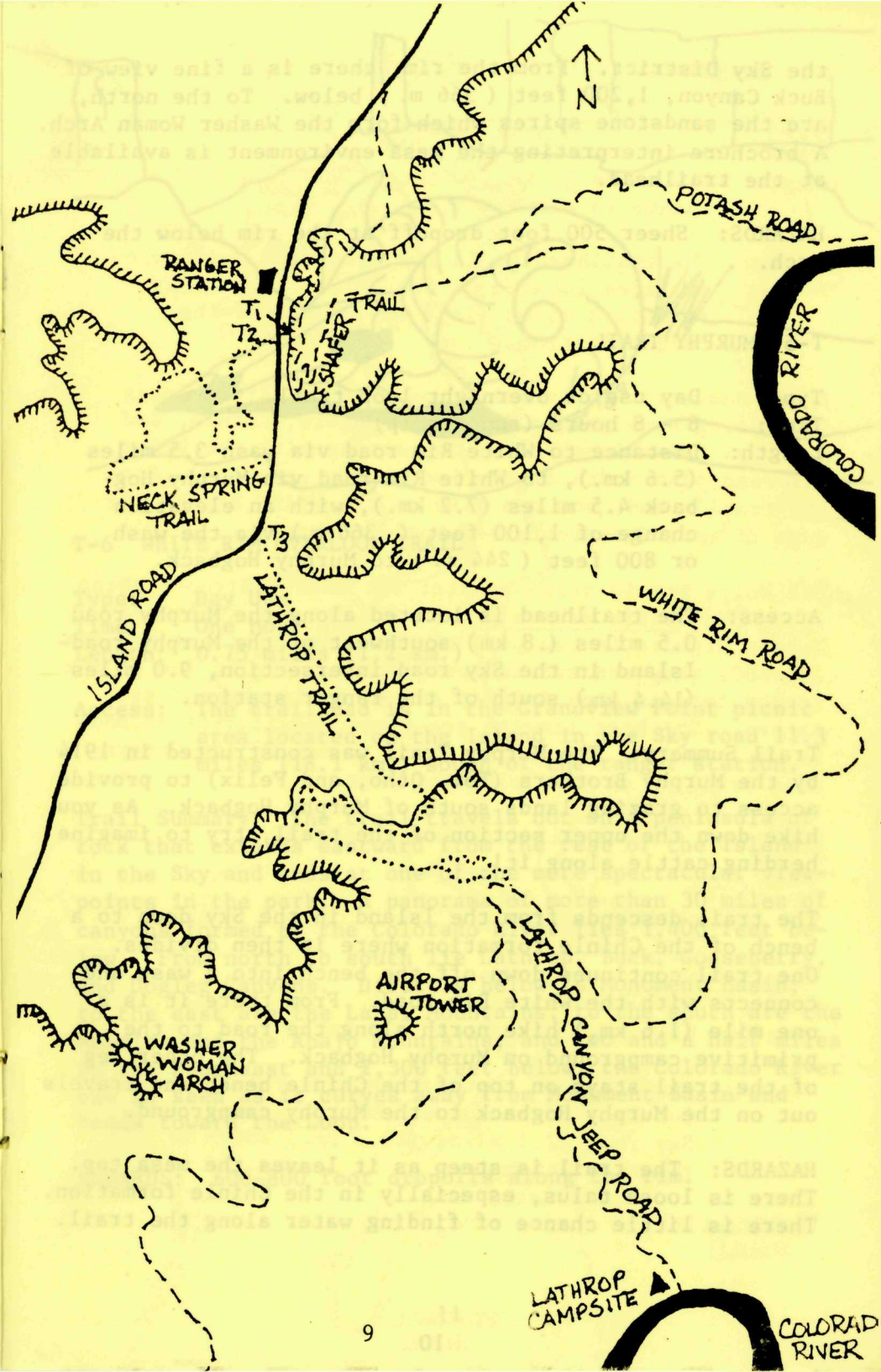
HAZARDS: The trail is steep and rugged from the mesa top to the White Rim. Fight your curiosity and stay out of the uranium mines. They contain noxious gases and are also in danger of collapse because they have not been maintained for the past 20-30 years. A map of Lathrop Canyon is on the following page.

T-4 MESA ARCH TRAIL

Type: Interpretive
 Time: 30 minutes (round trip)
 Length: 0.5 miles (0.8 km.) Loop

Access: The trailhead is located 6.0 miles (9.6 km.) south of the ranger station on the Island in the Sky road.

Trail Summary: The Mesa Arch Trail is a moderate, easily walked trail that leads out to the canyon rim and Mesa Arch, one of the few arches in the Island in



the Sky District. From the rim, there is a fine view of Buck Canyon, 1,200 feet (366 m.) below. To the north, are the sandstone spires which form the Washer Woman Arch. A brochure interpreting the mesa environment is available at the trailhead.

HAZARDS: Sheer 500 foot dropoff at the rim below the arch.

T-5 MURPHY TRAIL

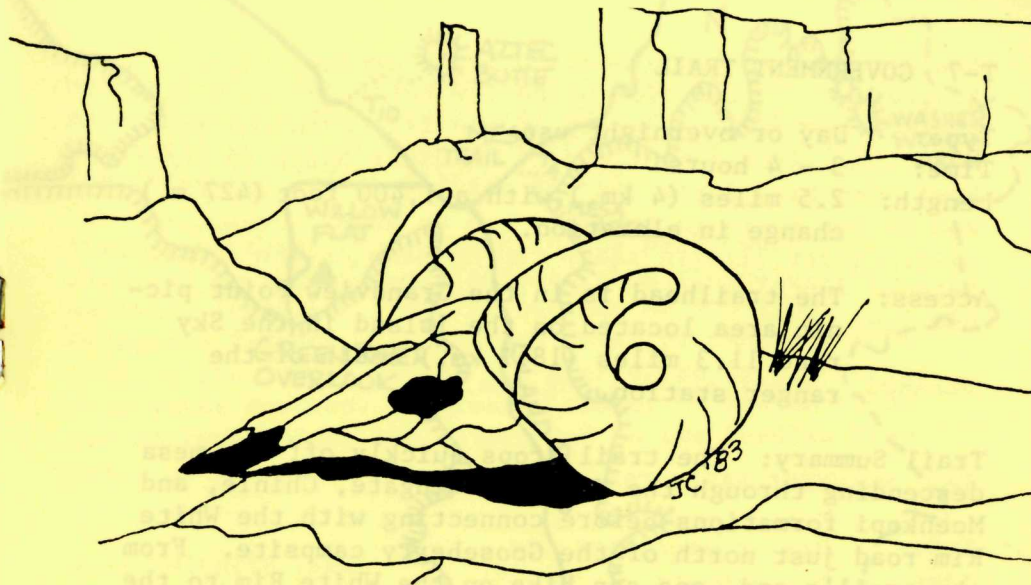
Type: Day use or overnight loop trail
Time: 6 - 8 hours (round trip)
Length: Distance to White Rim road via wash 3.5 miles (5.6 km.), to White Rim road via Murphy Hogback 4.5 miles (7.2 km.), with an elevation change of 1,100 feet (366 m.) via the wash or 800 feet (244 m.) to Murphy Hogback.

Access: The trailhead is located along the Murphy road 0.5 miles (.8 km) southwest of the Murphy road-Island in the Sky road intersection, 9.0 miles (14.4 km) south of the ranger station.

Trail Summary: The Murphy Trail was constructed in 1914 by the Murphy Brothers (Tom, Otho, and Felix) to provide access to grazing lands south of Murphy Hogback. As you hike down the upper section of the trail, try to imagine herding cattle along it!

The trail descends from the Island in the Sky down to a bench of the Chinle formation where it then divides. One trail continues down off the bench into a wash and connects with the White Rim road. From there it is a one mile (1.6 km.) hike north along the road to the primitive campground on Murphy Hogback. The other leg of the trail stays on top of the Chinle bench and travels out on the Murphy Hogback to the Murphy campground.

HAZARDS: The trail is steep as it leaves the mesa top. There is loose talus, especially in the Chinle formation. There is little chance of finding water along the trail.



T-6 WHITE RIM OVERLOOK TRAIL

Type: Day Use
Time: One hour
Length: 0.75 miles (1.2 km.)

Access: The trailhead is in the Grandview Point picnic area located on the Island in the Sky road 11.3 miles (18.1 km.) south of the ranger station.

Trail Summary: The trail travels out on a peninsula of rock that extends eastward from the rest of the Island in the Sky and ends at one of the more spectacular viewpoints in the park. A panorama of more than 30 miles of canyons formed by the Colorado River lies 1,400 feet below. From north to south lie Lathrop, Buck, Gooseberry, and Dogleg Canyons. Directly below is Monument Basin; to the east are the LaSal Mountains; to the south are the Needles and the Abajo Mountains; and two and a half miles to the southeast and 2,300 feet below, the Colorado River can be seen as it curves away from Monument Basin and heads toward the Loop.

HAZARDS: 600-800 foot dropoffs along the rim.

Trail Summary: The Grandview Trail extends three quarters of a mile from Grandview Point Overlook to the southernmost extremity of the Island in the Sky mesa top. Excellent views of Monument Basin to the east, Junction Butte and the Needles to the south, and Murphy Basin to the west can be seen. Occasionally, Desert Bighorn sheep can be seen on the saddle between Junction Butte and the Island in the Sky, 800 feet below.

HAZARDS: Sheer cliff along rim.

T-9 MONUMENT BASIN TRAIL

Type: Day or overnight use
Time: 3 - 4 hours
Length: 1.7 miles (2.8 km.) with an elevation change of 1,400 feet (427 m.)

This route is EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS, but does offer the experienced hiker/climber a means of access to the White Rim below Grandview Point. CONTACT A RANGER FOR DETAILED ROUTE INFORMATION AND EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS.

T-10 AZTEC BUTTE TRAIL

Type: Day use
Time: One hour
Length: 0.5 miles (0.8 km.) with an elevation change of 200 feet (61 m.)

Access: Trailhead is along the Upheaval Dome road one mile (1.6 km.) west of the Upheaval Dome road - Island in the Sky road intersection.

Trail Summary: Aztec Butte is one of the few areas on the Island in the Sky that has Indian ruins. A spotting tube at the trailhead pin points two granaries in a small alcove just west of Aztec Butte. The trail goes past these ruins and then climbs the southwest face of Aztec Butte. The climb is strenuous, but is not

overly difficult. The panoramic view from the top of Aztec Butte is spectacular and well worth the climb. The trail ends near the ruins of what may have been a prehistoric Indian signal location.

These structures, and others in the park, were constructed by the Anasazi Indians, whom archeologists estimate inhabited the area between AD 950-1200. Primarily farmers, the Anasazi never permanently settled on the Island in the Sky due to the lack of reliable water sources. A greater number of Indian ruins can be found along the rivers and in the Needles District of the park.

T-11 WILHITE TRAIL

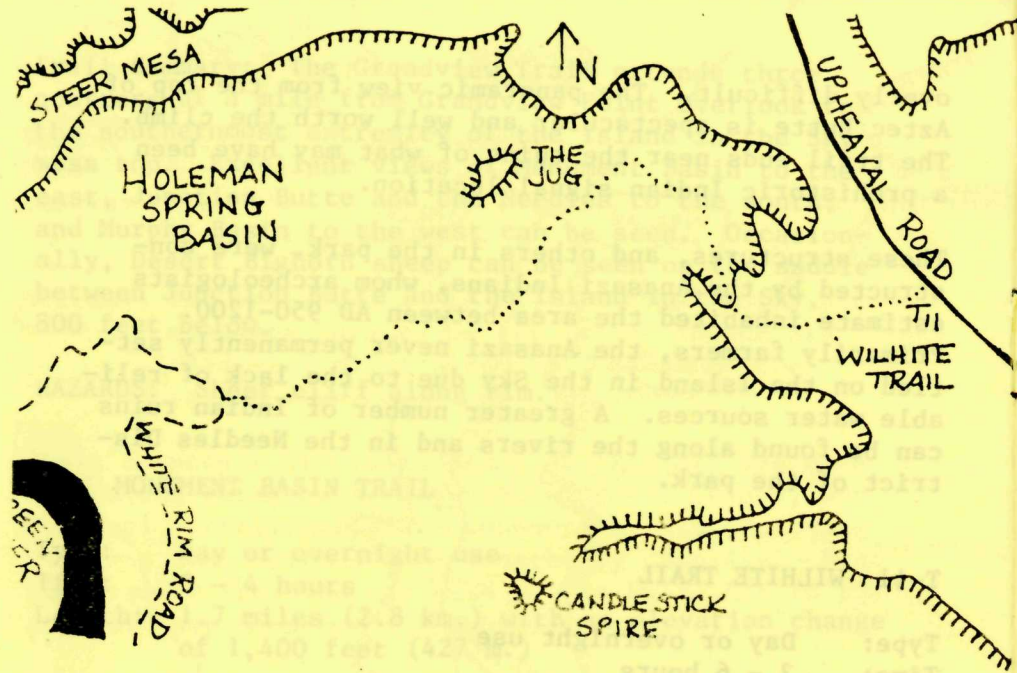
Type: Day or overnight use
Time: 3 - 6 hours
Length: 5 miles (8 km.) with an elevation change of 1,600 feet (488 m.)

Access: The trailhead is located on the Upheaval Dome road 2 miles (3.2 km.) west of the Upheaval Dome road - Island in the Sky road intersection.

Trail Summary: The Wilhite Trail crosses the mesa top for approximately one mile before dropping off the west side down into Holeman Spring Basin, and terminating at the White Rim road. The trail passes by a small Indian ruin about one-half mile west of the trailhead. Please do not enter or disturb this ruin.

A short hike from the end of the trail will permit a good view of the Green River. The closest access point to the river is at Queen Anne Bottom, located 5.5 miles (8.8 km.) north of the trail's end via the White Rim road. A map key for Wilhite Trail is located on the following page.

HAZARDS: Steep cliffs and loose talus are present from the top of the Island in the Sky down to the wash in Holeman Spring Basin.



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T-12 ALCOVE SPRING TRAIL

Type: Day use or overnight
 Time: 3 - 5 hours
 Length: 5 miles (8 km.) to the White Rim road - 11 miles (17.6 km.) with an elevation change of 1,300 feet (397 m.)

Access: The trailhead is on the Upheaval Dome road 3.6 miles (5.8 km.) northwest of the Upheaval Dome-Island in the Sky road intersection.

Trail Summary: The Alcov Spring Trail follows an old jeep road off the mesa, passes by Alcov Spring and continues down into Trail Canyon. Once down in the canyon bottom, the trail follows the wash to Taylor Canyon, 3.5 miles (5.6 km.) to the north. Upon reaching Taylor Canyon, two sandstone spires named Zeus and Moses may be seen just to the east. Moses, the taller of the two, rises 450 feet above its Chinle base.

The Alcov Spring Trail can be used in conjunction with the Taylor Canyon jeep road, the White Rim road, and the Upheaval Trail (T-16) to form an 18 mile (29 km.) loop trail.

HAZARDS: Steep cliffs and loose talus on the trail.

T-13 WHALE ROCK TRAIL

Type: Interpretive
 Time: 20 - 30 minutes
 Length: 0.25 miles (0.40 km.) with an elevation change of 100 feet (31 m.)

Access: The trailhead is along the Upheaval Dome road 4.1 miles (6.6 km.) west of the Upheaval Dome Island in the Sky road intersection.

Trail Summary: Whale Rock forms part of the outer rim of Upheaval Dome. The trail goes to the top of Whale

Rock and offers a good view of Trail Canyon to the east and the western portion of the Island in the Sky mesa top. To the north lies the inner rim of Upheaval Dome. A brochure explaining Upheaval Dome is available at the trailhead.

HAZARDS: Steep Cliffs dropping off from the top of Whale Rock.

T-14 SYNCLINE VALLEY TRAIL

Type: Day or overnight use
Time: 3 - 4 hours
Length: 4 miles (6.4 km.) with an elevation change of 1,300 feet (397 m.)

Access: The trailhead is along the Upheaval Dome road 4.7 miles (7.5 km.) northwest of the Upheaval Dome and Island in the Sky road intersection.

Trail Summary: The Syncline Valley Trail follows an old road for a short distance before dropping into the wash bottom. Approximately 1½ to 2 miles from the trailhead, one passes through a narrow portal (The Breech) and enters upper Syncline Valley. There is usually water in this portion of the canyon, except in the summer when the sources become unreliable. The trail descends quickly as it bypasses the "jump", or cliff, which separates upper Syncline Valley from lower Syncline Valley, and terminates a mile and a half later at a sign near the mouth of Upheaval Dome.

From this point, it is a 1.5 mile (2.4 km.) hike east up the wash to the heart of Upheaval Dome. This is the only non-technical route into or out of the Dome.

A short walk (one-fourth mile) west down the wash below the entrance of Upheaval Dome will connect the Syncline Valley Trail with the Upheaval Trail (T-16).

Combining the Syncline Valley Trail with the Upheaval Trail makes a loop trail approximately 8 miles long. It is a LONG day hike and is much more enjoyable when taken as an overnight campout.

HAZARDS: Loose talus, steep cliffs near "jump".

T-15 UPHEAVAL DOME OVERLOOK TRAIL

Type: Interpretive or day use
Time: 30 - 60 minutes
Length: 0.5 miles (0.8 km.) with an elevation change of 200 feet (61 m.)

Access: The trailhead is located at the west end of the Upheaval Dome picnic area.

Trail Summary: The Overlook Trail leads from the parking lot to a viewpoint on the south rim of Upheaval Dome. The trail continues along the southwest side of the rim to another overlook. A brochure describing the geology of Upheaval Dome is available at the trailhead.

HAZARDS: Sheer cliffs at the viewpoints.

T-16 UPHEAVAL TRAIL

Type: Day use or overnight
Time: 2 - 4 hours
Length: 3.5 miles (5.6 km.) to the junction with the Syncline Valley Trail with a change in elevation of 1,200 feet (366 m.) and 5 miles (8 km.) to the White Rim road with an elevation change of 1,600 feet (488 m.)

Trail Summary: The Upheaval Trail descends a side canyon on the southwest side of Upheaval Dome and curves north to join the Syncline Valley Trail (T-14) one-fourth mile west of the entrance to Upheaval Dome. It is a 4 mile (6.4 km.) hike down the wash from the trail junction to the White Rim road and the Green River.

Access to the river is difficult due to a dense growth of tamarisk along the river bank.

The Syncline Valley - Upheaval Trail Loop is approximately 8 miles (12.8 km.) long. It is a LONG day hike and is less strenuous if taken as an overnight campout.

HAZARDS: Steep initial descent, loose talus on trail until it reaches the wash.

