



# Canyonlands

**A Walk in the Park**  
WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR DAY

**Homecoming**  
AN INTERVIEW WITH  
SUPERINTENDENT JERRY BANTA

**The River Wild**  
RUNNING THE BIG DROPS IN '56

**Yee-Ha!**  
MEET VETERAN VIP  
BLACK GEORGE SIMMONS

**Thanks to You**  
FUNDING THE FUTURE

SUMMER 2001

## ROCK SPIRES AND SOIL CRUSTS

Spires like these can be seen in the Needles District, especially around Chesler Park. Cryptobiotic soil crusts (foreground) are a critical component of the ecosystem in Canyonlands. Please avoid walking on these fragile crusts, and stop by a visitor center to learn more about them.

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HISTORY ASSOCIATION



# Homecoming

IN 1969, JERRY BANTA ACCEPTED A TRANSFER TO THE NEEDLES DISTRICT OF CANYONLANDS, BECOMING ONE OF THE FIRST GENERATION OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RANGERS TO EXPLORE THIS REMOTE AREA. THIRTY YEARS LATER, HE RETURNED TO CANYONLANDS AS PARK SUPERINTENDENT. IN A RECENT INTERVIEW, JERRY DISCUSSED THESE APPOINTMENTS AND HOW BOTH THE LANDSCAPE, AS WELL AS THE AGENCY THAT MANAGES IT, HAVE CHANGED.

## What was the Needles District like in 1969?

It was an extremely pleasant place to work. Visitation was about a tenth of what it is today. There was much less need to worry about search and rescue or medical emergencies. Since Canyonlands was a fairly new park, we were still in the process of basic inventory. We spent more than half our time working on wildlife surveys, checking archeological sites, exploring canyons...activities close to the resource. Also, the small number of visitors also allowed us to have more personal contact with them. We'd often spend evenings with folks and share dinner at their campfires, or invite them to our own kitchens. It was a real one-to-one relationship. While we try to maintain that sort of contact now, we generally end up dealing with people en masse in entrance stations and visitor centers. Rarely do we talk at length about resources and their enjoyment of the area.

## What brought you back to Canyonlands?

I've always loved this area. I'm originally from Colorado and my wife is from Arizona. We enjoy the climate, the people and the wonderful resources here. When this position opened, I jumped at applying for it.

## What changes were you most struck by when you returned?

The change in the gateway communities, particularly Moab, was drastic in terms of development and the number of people and businesses focused on tourism. When I was here before, the town was much smaller and the economic base was broader. As far as the park is concerned, what hit me right away was the tremendous increase of exotic plant populations. The spread of cheat grass, knapweed, tamarisk and other exotics has significantly changed the landscape. In Salt Creek, for instance, there used to be very little tamarisk. Between Cave Spring and Peekaboo, the creek bed was broad and open. Now, it's like a canal through the tamarisk. That being said, I was surprised to find a lot of the backcountry in better shape. When I worked in the Needles, we still had grazing, which impacted soils and other resources. There also seems to be less off-road four-wheeling now, since routes and campsites are more established.

## Describe a day in the life of a superintendent.

I don't think there is a typical day. Like any business manager, I deal with legal, policy, personnel, budget and other management issues. A good part of my day is spent on the telephone with park visitors or public officials. I spend a lot of time attending meetings, reading outgoing correspondence and reviewing reports from division chiefs. I try to spend one day a week out in the park, though I probably average less than that.



## How has the NPS changed in 30 years?

It's changed in a number of ways. Our role has greatly expanded. The National Park Service is involved in a lot of new programs that deal with preserving resources under the management of other agencies, governments and private land-owners. The Park Service is also a much bigger organization. Many of us live in outside communities and have dual-career families, so the park itself isn't the lifestyle focus it once was for a lot of people. However, the commitment to preservation hasn't changed. Also, we've evolved into an agency of specialists. When I worked in the Needles, research and monitoring was undertaken by the same people who did law enforcement and evening programs. Now, most aspects of management and operation are in the realm of one specialty or another. Finally, park management has become more public. Thirty years ago, decisions were made internally and were generally accepted on that basis. With the National Environmental Policy Act and the Historic Preservation Act, the public has greater access to the decision making process. That's a major change and, I think, a good one. There are a lot of critical issues that need to have public debate and understanding in order to be resolved.

## Are management priorities different now?

I don't think our priorities have changed much, at least not in terms of protecting the resource. We've always emphasized making decisions based on science, but now we're a lot further along in terms of collecting information and perhaps understanding how things work. Our methods used to be very rudimentary since a lot of information was collected by park rangers with a general education. Many of the old issues, like the impact of backcountry roads or frontcountry development, are still relevant. However, changes in the political and social climate, as well as a dramatic increase in visitation, have raised the stakes of management discussions. Still, it's not so much a shift in priorities as an increase in complexity.

## Protect Your Park

- Protect cryptobiotic soil crusts by staying on trails.
- Protect water sources. Do not swim or bathe in potholes or intermittent streams.
- Pets are not allowed on hiking trails or on four-wheel-drive roads, even in a vehicle.
- Preserve your heritage. Do not enter, alter or deface archeological sites. Do not collect artifacts.
- All vehicles and bicycles must travel on designated roads.
- ATVs are not permitted.

## Protect Yourself

- Drink at least one gallon of water each day.
- Always carry a map, adequate clothing, and a flashlight in the backcountry.
- Remain in one place if you become lost or separated from a group.
- Never cross a canyon that is flooding.
- During a lightning storm avoid lone trees and high ridges. Return to your vehicle if possible.
- Be careful near cliff edges, especially when rock surfaces are wet or icy.



# A Walk Island in the Sky

THE ISLAND IN THE SKY MESA RESTS ON SHEER SANDSTONE CLIFFS. EVERY OVERLOOK OFFERS A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON CANYONLANDS.

## Basics

- Visitor center is open 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. from April to late October, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. the rest of the year. Features exhibits, book and map sales, audio-visual programs, backcountry permits, general information, and park rangers on duty.
- There are no free water sources at the Island. Water is sold in the visitor center at the front desk and at a vending machine outside.
- Orientation video: *Wilderness of Rock* is shown on request at the visitor center (15 minutes).
- Vault toilets are located at the visitor center, Grand View Point, White Rim Overlook, Upheaval Dome and Willow Flat Campground. The visitor center toilets are wheelchair accessible.
- Campground at Willow Flat has 12 sites available on a first-come, first-served basis. No water or hookups provided. Fee is \$5 /site/night.

## Scenic drive

A 34-mile (round-trip) scenic drive allows visitors to tour the entire mesa top. The *Road Guide to Canyonlands - Island in the Sky District* offers an insightful narrative for the trip and is sold at the visitor center. Wheelchair accessible overlooks include Grand View Point and Buck Canyon Overlook. There are picnic areas at White Rim Overlook, Grand View Point and Upheaval Dome.

## Interpretive activities

- Interpretive trails (with printed guides) are Mesa Arch, Neck Spring and Upheaval Dome Overlook.
- Ranger programs: Geology talks (20 minutes) are presented daily at 10:30 & 11:30 a.m. at Grand View Point (April to late October). Campfire programs are presented several nights a week at Willow Flat Campground (April - September). Check at the visitor center or campground for topics, times and special programs.

## For kids

Free Junior Ranger booklets are available at the visitor center. Kids age 6 - 12 can earn a Junior Ranger badge by completing five or more activities in the book. For hiking, kids enjoy peeking through Mesa Arch and climbing the back of the whale at Whale Rock. Use caution as there are unfenced overlooks on both of these trails.



Geology talk at Grand View Point





# in the Park

OVER 1,000 FEET ABOVE THE SURROUNDING TERRAIN. CANYONLANDS' SPECTACULAR LANDSCAPE.

## What to do with your day

First, stop at the visitor center for current information on trails, roads, interpretive programs, weather, or to watch the park orientation video.

### If you have 2 hours:

Drive to Grand View Point or Green River Overlook. Hike to Mesa Arch.

### If you have 4 hours:

Drive to Grand View Point, Green River Overlook and Upheaval Dome. Hike the Grand View Point, Mesa Arch, and Upheaval Dome Overlook trails.

### If you have 8 hours:

Visit every overlook. Hike several mesa top trails or one of the more strenuous trails descending to the White Rim. Enjoy lunch on the trail or at White Rim Overlook or Upheaval Dome picnic areas.

### If you are interested in geology:

View the exhibits at the visitor center and pick up a geology handout. Visit Grand View Point to see the rock layers. Visit Upheaval Dome and hike to the first overlook. There you can learn two theories about how the crater might have been formed.

### If you are interested in natural history:

View the visitor center exhibits and pick up a free natural history handout. As you pass through Gray's Pasture, keep an eye out for mule deer or bighorn sheep. Walk the Mesa Arch or Neck Spring trails and learn about native plants.

### If you are interested in human history:

View the visitor center exhibits and pick up a free handout. Hike the Aztec Butte Trail to see ancestral Puebloan ruins. Visit Buck Canyon Overlook and see the exhibit about ranching. Old fences and corrals are visible along the scenic drive and Murphy Point Road. Also, old mining roads are visible from most overlooks.

### If you are interested in watching sunrise/sunset:

Find out sunrise and sunset times at the visitor center. Visit Mesa Arch at dawn. Visit Green River Overlook at dusk for incomparable views of sunset over the canyons. Hike to the top of Aztec Butte for a spectacular view of the Island in the Sky and surrounding countryside.



Grand View Point

## Remote Areas

Much of the land in Canyonlands is undeveloped, a fact evident at any of the overlooks along the Island in the Sky's scenic drive. The park's primitive character has made it a popular destination for backcountry travel. In every district, rugged roads, trails and rivers provide paths into remote corners of the park.

The White Rim Road, a 100-mile loop below the Island in the Sky mesa, is a favorite of mountain bikers and four-wheel drivers. The Needles provides ideal itineraries for backpackers in search of solitude. The Maze offers opportunities for lengthy exploration by foot and vehicle, but is the least accessible district of Canyonlands. Due to its remoteness and the difficulty of roads and trails, travel to the Maze requires more time, as well as a greater degree of self-sufficiency.

Yet another way to see the park is on the rivers. Boaters can float down the flatwater sections of the Colorado and Green rivers to the Confluence, or continue downstream to face 14 miles of rapids as the river tumbles through Cataract Canyon.

Rock art enthusiasts should be sure to visit Horseshoe Canyon, a detached unit of Canyonlands northwest of the Maze. A moderately strenuous hike leads to a series of pictograph panels created by hunter-gatherers over 2,000 years ago.

If you're interested in planning a trip to any of these areas, request a copy of the *Canyonlands Trip Planner*, or visit our website at [www.nps.gov/cany](http://www.nps.gov/cany).

## Needles

THE NEEDLES FEATURES A NETWORK OF CANYONS AND ROCK FORMATIONS SCULPTED BY MILLIONS OF YEARS OF EROSION. THE DISTRICT'S ROADS AND TRAILS INVITE VISITORS TO DEVELOP A MORE INTIMATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PARK.

### Basics

- Visitor center is open 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. from April to late October, and 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. the rest of the year. Features exhibits, book and map sales, audio-visual programs, backcountry permits, general information, and park rangers on duty.
- Water is available year-round at the visitor center and at the Squaw Flat Campground.
- Orientation video: *Wilderness of Rock* is shown on request at the visitor center (15 minutes).
- Restrooms are available at the visitor center and Squaw Flat Campground (wheelchair accessible). There are also vault toilets at Elephant Hill.
- Squaw Flat Campground has 26 sites available first-come, first-served. No hookups. \$10 /site/night.

### Scenic drive

The scenic drive continues 7 miles past the visitor center, ending at Big Spring Canyon Overlook. Along the way are several pullouts for short hiking trails, viewpoints and a picnic area. Graded dirt roads lead to Cave Spring, where there is an interpretive trail, and to the Elephant Hill trailhead, where there is a second picnic area. The Elephant Hill access road (one mile from the pavement) provides excellent views of the Needles from a car.

### Interpretive activities

- Interpretive trails (with printed guides) are Cave Spring, Pothole Point, Roadside Ruin & Slickrock.
- Campfire programs are presented five nights a week at Squaw Flat Campground (April - October). Check at the visitor center or campground for topics and times.

### For kids

Free Junior Ranger booklets are available at the visitor center. Kids age 6 - 12 can earn a Junior Ranger badge by completing five or more activities. The Cave Spring Trail, featuring a cowboy camp and prehistoric pictographs, is always a hit with kids. Pothole Point is another popular hike, especially if the potholes are full of water. Before you set out, borrow a kids' discovery pack from the visitor center. Packs include a naturalist guide, binoculars, hand lens and more (small fee and deposit required).

## What to do with your day

First, stop at the visitor center for current information on trails, roads, interpretive programs, weather, or to watch the park orientation video.

### If you have 2 hours:

Drive to Big Spring Canyon Overlook and hike the Pothole Point trail along the way. Drive to a view of the Needles on the Elephant Hill access road.

### If you have 4 hours:

Explore the scenic drive and graded dirt roads. Hike the Cave Spring, Pothole Point and Roadside Ruin trails or the longer Slickrock trail.

### If you have 8 hours:

After exploring the scenic drive, hike to Chesler Park or around the Big Spring-Squaw Canyon loop. Enjoy lunch on the trail or at a picnic area.

### If you are interested in geology:

View the exhibits at the visitor center and pick up a free geology handout. Every Needles trail provides unique views of rock formations, and marine fossils are visible in the canyon below Big Spring Canyon Overlook (follow the Confluence Trail).

### If you are interested in natural history:

View the visitor center exhibits and pick up a free natural history handout. Bighorn sheep are seen most frequently from overlooks along the Slickrock

Trail. Squaw, Lost and Salt Creek canyons are great for early-morning birding.

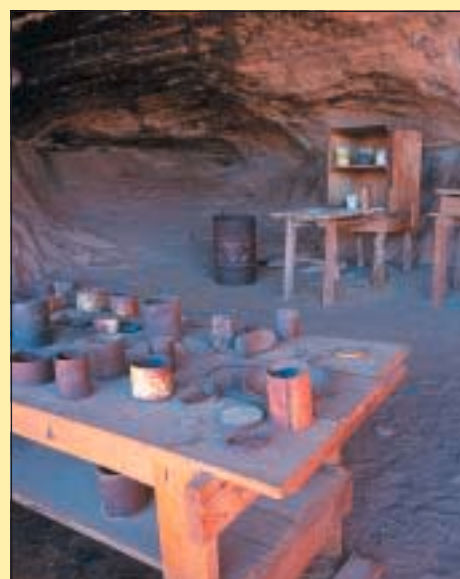
### If you are interested in human history:

View the visitor center exhibits and pick up the free human history handout. Hike the Roadside Ruin and Cave Spring trails. If time permits, visit the Peekaboo rock art panel in Salt Creek Canyon.

### If you are interested in watching sunrise/sunset:

Find out sunrise and sunset times at the visitor center. Sunrise is spectacular from

the campground area, especially along the short trail over the butte between Loops A and B. Visit Pothole Point or Wooden Shoe Arch Overlook as the glow of sunset washes over the Needles.



Historic artifacts at the Cave Spring Cowboy Camp



# The River Wild

IN THE SUMMER OF 1956, BLACK GEORGE SIMMONS (SEE SIDEBAR) WAS LEAD BOATMAN ON A USGS MAPPING TRIP THROUGH CATARACT CANYON. BELOW IS AN ENTRY FROM HIS JOURNAL, WHICH MAY BE VIEWED IN ITS ENTIRETY AT [WWW.NPS.GOV/CANY/RIVER](http://WWW.NPS.GOV/CANY/RIVER).

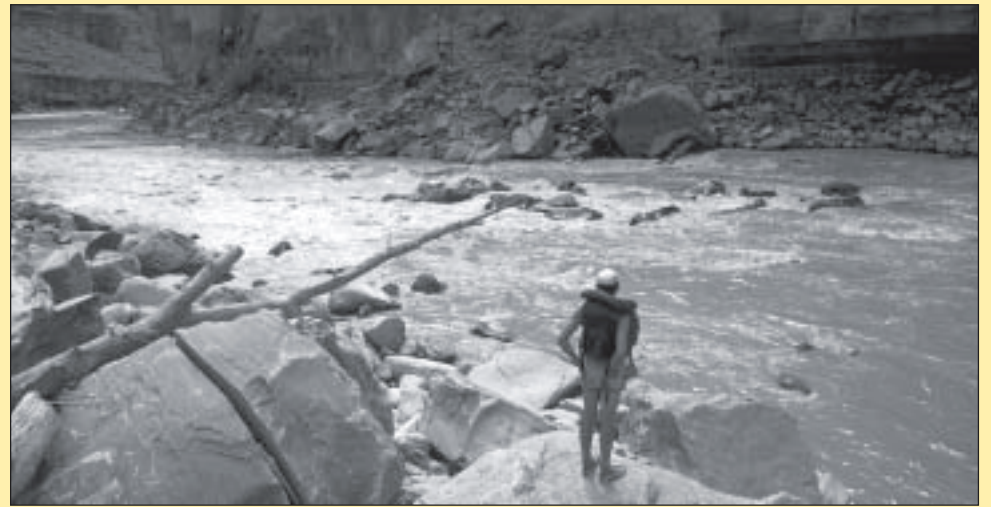
Wednesday, July 25, 1956

"The Big Drop" is the name applied to the rapids mapped between Miles 203 and 202. The lower part of the Big Drop is formed by a nearly solid wall of boulders behind which is impounded a wide body of water. It looks like a plan section of somebody squirting a mouthful of water through his teeth. After plunging over the sharp break the entire center is cluttered with fins, holes, churning foam, etc. Two routes seem possible. A narrow route on the right side has one big hole near the bottom, but the hole is partly shielded by a cushion of water pounding off of a boulder to its right. The left side route has a narrow slot between two big boulders that can be used as a guide over the first break that is followed by a series of short, fast plunges.

Looie tries the left route. The slot is hard to locate from the boat and he shifts right and left trying to find it. He hits the break about eight feet too far right, missing the slot. The bow of the boat drops over the break like a limp rag, pivots on the

bow, and slides into a hole. It looks like she will flip over in the hole, but up she bobs sideways to the current. Dick tries to straighten the boat, but the force of the water on one oar lifts him off the seat, then wrests the oar through its pins. The lost oar wedges in some rocks downstream from the swaggering boat. The boat dashes against a rock, and for a moment looks as if it will be impaled on the wedged oar. The oar washes free. The boat snakes to the left, sideswipes a boulder, pitches, and rolls 30 degrees, catapulting Dick into the water. Dick is on the far side of the boat and not visible from our vantage point. Our next view of him is Looie holding him by the collar of his life jacket with one hand and rowing with the other. You can almost hear Looie's, "What the hell ya' doin' out there? You better climb in the boat before you get killed on those rocks." The boat is soon out of trouble. Dick is aboard and the oar is picked up.

Frank and I decide the water cushion will keep us out of the hole on the right. We line the first 20 feet of the rapid to ensure hitting the



Scouting Dark Canyon rapid, which is now inundated by Lake Powell.

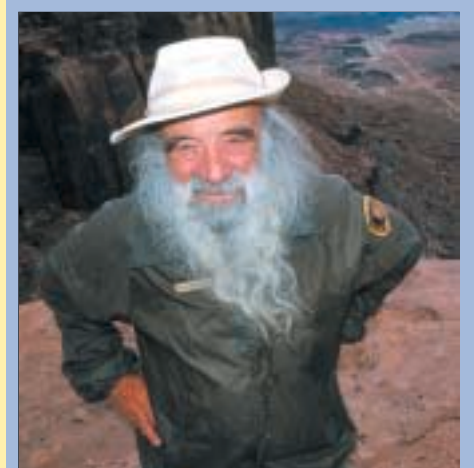
correct course. Hank snubs the boat to shore while Frank and I crawl aboard. The water is very fast. Our sudden start prevents Hank from throwing all of the mooring line aboard and it snags. Russ is shouting from the bank barely five feet away, but the water is so loud that I can hardly hear him. Frank cuts us free with his pocketknife and we streak into the cushion, spin around the outside of the hole, into a wave below, and into quiet water.

Russ duplicates our route, and even catches on the same rock with his bowline. Russ cuts the boat free, hits the cushion, spins around the hole, into the wave below, and all are through the Big Drop.

In 1921, the USGS lost a boat in Mile 202 Rapid. We look it over closely

so as not to make the USGS a two-time loser here. All boats take a break on the left side, then pull toward the center for fast water.

Camp is pitched on the island at Mile 201. In spite of the busy day we whoop it up with a beach party (till 9:30), telling stories, jokes, recounting the days adventures, and even reading some Robert Service poetry.



## Yee-Ha!

In west Texas, "Yee-ha!" is an enthusiastic greeting reserved for long-lost friends. In Canyonlands, it means you've just met Black George Simmons, expert adventurer, storyteller and NPS volunteer.

Black George has worked for the NPS Volunteer-In-Park (VIP) program since 1984. In six seasons at Big Bend National Park, "Yee-ha!" became his trademark salutation (he even uses it to answer the phone). For the last ten years, Black George has divided his time between Bryce, Canyonlands and Grand Teton National Parks, often working year-round. In 1999, he received the Honorary Park Ranger award, the highest honor given to citizens for supporting the NPS mission.

Prior to joining the VIP program, Black George worked for the U.S. Geological Survey. He traveled extensively, not only in the American west, where he floated the pre-dam Colorado River and most of its tributaries, but overseas to Liberia and Saudi Arabia. Including a brief stint in the Navy, Black George's career with the U.S. government spans over 50 years.

Why the moniker Black George? "It harks back to numerous dark pages in my past. Nothing too shameful, but nothing you'd want publicized if you were running for office." In 1939, for example, he played piano in a New Orleans bordello. Not the stuff of scandal, but he was only 15. If you see Black George in the park, ask him what he did when he was 64.

# Thanks To You

CANYONLANDS ENCHANTS VISITORS WITH ITS BEAUTY. HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS ARE DRAWN HERE EACH YEAR. THIS POPULARITY CREATES A CHALLENGE - TO ASSIST AND PROTECT VISITORS, WHILE PRESERVING THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL TREASURES THEY COME TO SEE. WITH YOUR FEES AND CONTINUED SUPPORT, WE CAN MEET THIS CHALLENGE TOGETHER.

In 1996, Congress authorized the Recreational Fee Demonstration (Fee Demo) Program to improve the scope and quality of federal facilities and address natural and cultural resource issues. Prior to this program, fee money was returned to the general fund of the federal government and parks were only reimbursed for their collection costs. Now, the park keeps 80% of camping, entrance and permit fees. During the last four years, over 1.6 million dollars in retained fee revenue has been put to work at Canyonlands.

The park has a trail crew for the first time in nearly 20 years. Major trail reconstruction projects have been undertaken at Grand View Point, Mesa Arch and Roadside Ruin. All of the paved roads at Canyonlands have received preventative maintenance that extends their life and makes travel safer. Visitor centers have received fresh paint and new carpets. A sprinkler system was added to the Island in the Sky Visitor Center. A Backcountry Information Office was constructed at Needles. An additional restroom was installed at Upheaval Dome. Campsites are being rehabilitated both in the frontcountry and along



Reconstruction of the Mesa Arch Trail at the Island in the Sky.

the White Rim Road. Finally, if you are headed into the backcountry, your fee dollars fund the permit system, including staffing the reservation office.

Many other projects are in progress. Throughout the park, informational signs are being replaced, power-generating systems are being upgraded, and critical research programs are being initiated. This summer, shade structures will be constructed above picnic tables at the Needles, and the amphitheater

at Squaw Flat Campground will be rehabilitated. Other less-visible projects, such as repairing park water and sewer systems, are crucial for guarding health and safety.

National Park Service employees strive to protect the natural and cultural resources of Canyonlands. Now you're a partner in this important work. Thanks to you, improvements are being made to park facilities and programs that will ensure future visitors are able to experience this national treasure.