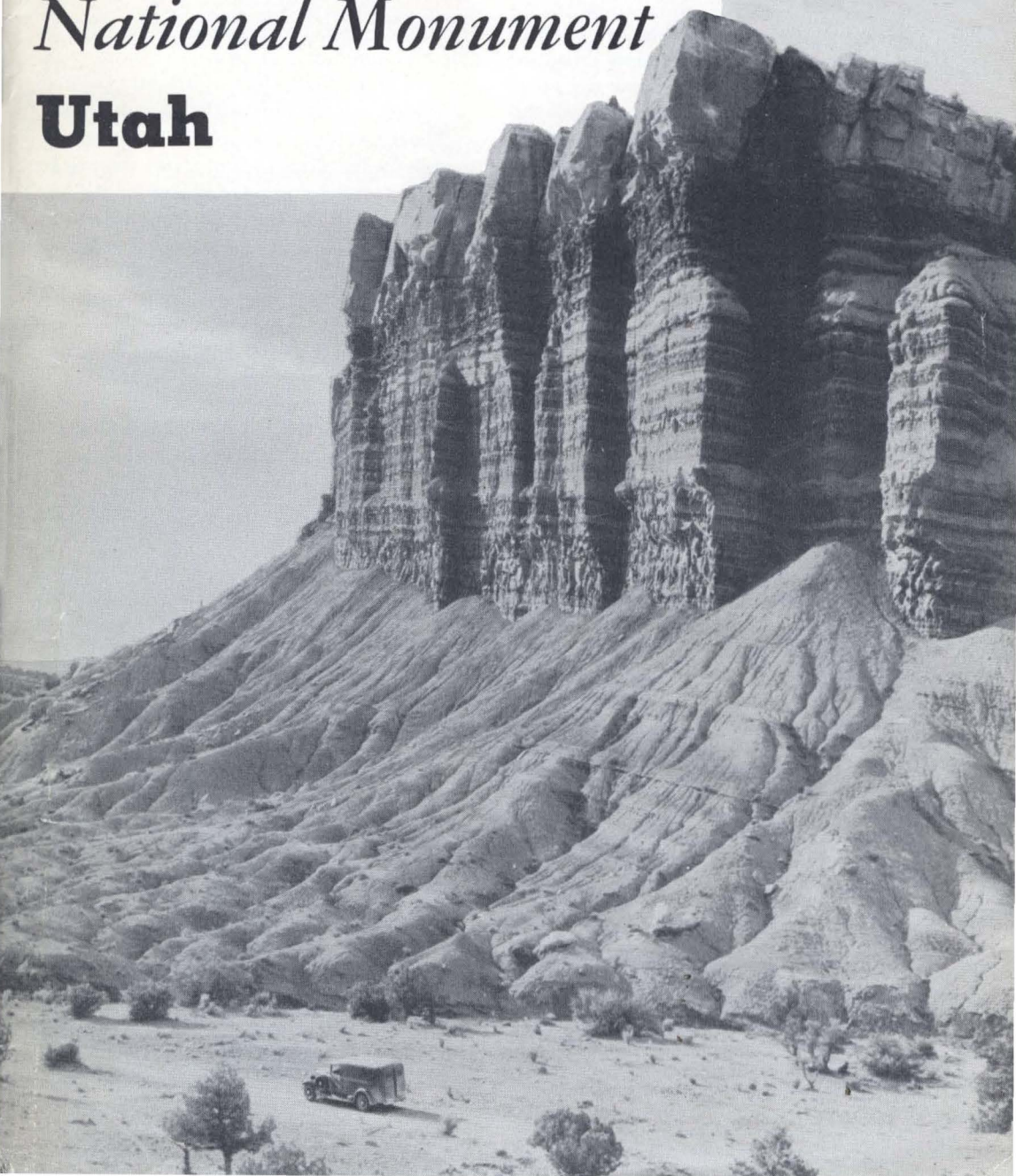


# **CAPITOL REEF**

*National Monument*

**Utah**



# CAPITOL REEF *National Monument*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, Oscar L. Chapman, *Secretary*  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, Arthur E. Demaray, *Director*

**A region of intricately eroded, brightly colored, and tilted, sedimentary rocks, awesome cliffs and canyons, and rock masses carved by the elements into weird and fanciful figures.**

Capitol Reef National Monument is located in the heart of what was formerly called the Wayne Wonderland, a vast scenic region in Wayne County, Utah. A large section of this Wonderland, some of which has never been explored, is included in the monument. The area was established as a national monument by Presidential proclamation in 1937 and embraces more than 33,000 acres of federally owned land.

The area includes an accessible section of the Waterpocket Fold, an unusual geological earth movement, the escarpment of which extends from Thousand Lake Mountain to the Colorado River, a distance of about 150 miles. In its entire length, this fold, or reef, can be crossed in

only three places on horseback and in only one place by automobile. Its western exposure is a line of high, sheer cliffs of brightly colored sandstone, fantastically eroded by rain and wind.

The region is poorly supplied with water, and, except for the stream bottoms in a few places, the aspect is desertlike and vegetation is scarce. Pinyons are found along the base of the cliffs on the Fruita-Notom Road, and a group of ferns, boxelders, and oaks afford a rare setting near a spring at the head of Cove Canyon.

## **History**

Because of its peculiar geographical isolation, the Fremont River drainage was the last section of Utah to be explored and settled. Pioneers

**Man is dwarfed by huge formations in Grand Wash.**



who came with covered wagons, in 1880, found so many difficulties to overcome in cultivating its scattered acres of tillable land that they had little time for appreciation of its scenic values. Its painted cliffs and deep gorges meant only days of hard riding, searching for strayed stock. Impassable roads discouraged visitors, and the area remained practically unknown to the outside world for another 40 years.

In January 1854, Col. John C. Fremont and his expedition looked down from Thousand Lake Mountain into the present monument, but little is known of this traverse. In 1866, a semi-military expedition of Mormons, under the leadership of Capt. James Andrus, came in from the south over the Boulder Mountain route. In 1871, two prospectors left their names in the Capitol Wash, and, in 1875, A. H. Thompson, geographer of the Powell Survey, made the first geographic and geologic reconnaissance of the area.

The first permanent settler at Fruita, Utah, was Neils Johnson who located a homestead, in 1880, and planted the first vines and fruit trees. The settlement has never supported more than 8 or 10 families. The road through narrow Capitol Wash was pioneered by Cutler Behunin, who was 8 days in traveling 3 1/2 miles.

### **Evidence of Prehistoric Indians**

There is every evidence that the prehistoric Indians, both Basket Makers and Pueblos, found this area attractive and raised corn on flat plots of ground near the river. Smooth cliff walls are covered with hundreds of petroglyphs of unusual size and style, attributed to Basket Makers of the Fremont River culture. Many of these ancient engravings were colored in various tints, some of the old primitive paint still adhering to the rocks. These Basket Makers lived in open caves, but built many small stone structures for storage of corn. When opened by the pioneers, these were found to contain numerous artifacts and other prehistoric relics.

### **Geological Significance**

Like other parts of the Colorado River Basin, the Capitol Reef region was once a low-lying, almost level country consisting of swamps, shallow lagoons, and wide, sluggish streams, and was inhabited by giant reptiles and amphib-

ians. During a long period of time, silt was deposited over this large area in thin layers, until several hundred feet of brown and red ripple-marked shale and sandstone, known as the Moenkopi formation, had accumulated. Over this was laid the sandstone of the Shinarump and the brown, red, and gray-green shales of the Chinle formation. Above this came the Wingate sandstone, deposited over a comparatively short period by continuous action and forming a monolithic stratum several hundred feet thick.

A rather reddish, shaly formation, known as the Kayenta, separates the Wingate from the great massive overlying deposit of sandstone called the Navajo, the upper section of which was deposited or disturbed by wind action, indicating somewhat desert conditions. Even above this there were deposited many of the Cretaceous formations, here eroded completely away, but still exposed a few miles to the east.

Following this long period of filling and settling, the region was slowly lifted by mountain-making forces. Erosion by streams, rain, and wind removed the softer upper formations and then cut deep channels and gorges into the more resistant rock. Erosion of these tilted beds has produced the high Capitol Reef, the great domes above it, and the innumerable towers and pinnacles in the valleys and along the cliffs.

Below are described the most conspicuous formations, which may be observed by the visitor who travels from west to east across the monument. The road through the monument lies principally upon Moenkopi shale, the dark red or brown ripple-marked rock showing unusual erosional forms along the cliff base between Torrey and Fruita. Above this is the thick exposure of Chinle shale, red or maroon in color, with a distinctive wide band of gray-green in the center.

In the upper part of this formation are found quantities of petrified wood. Above the Chinle lies about 600 feet of Wingate sandstone, forming the sheer red cliffs which dominate the landscape.

Finally, as a cap rock, the gray or white Navajo sandstone rests on top. It is eroded into pinnacles and rounded domes in striking resemblance to the rounded domes of many capitol

buildings. These features suggested the descriptive name of Capitol Reef.

### Places of Special Interest

Highly colored cliffs and fantastic erosional forms extend all the way through the monument and are visible from the highway. Colors appear best in early morning or late afternoon.

Three miles from Fruita is a natural bridge, an outstanding attraction, reached by foot or on horseback. The opening of this bridge is 72 feet high, with a span of 133 feet, and the 3 hours required for a round trip are well spent. A good 1-day horseback trip is from Fruita to the bridge, then down Fremont Canyon to Grand Wash and up this wash to the highway. A trail which can be negotiated on horse or on foot leads around and above the natural bridge to the rim overlooking Fruita from the west, but a guide is required for this trip.

Fremont River Canyon, east of Fruita, contains some very attractive scenery, but at present there is no marked trail, and a guide is advisable since the river must be forded many times.

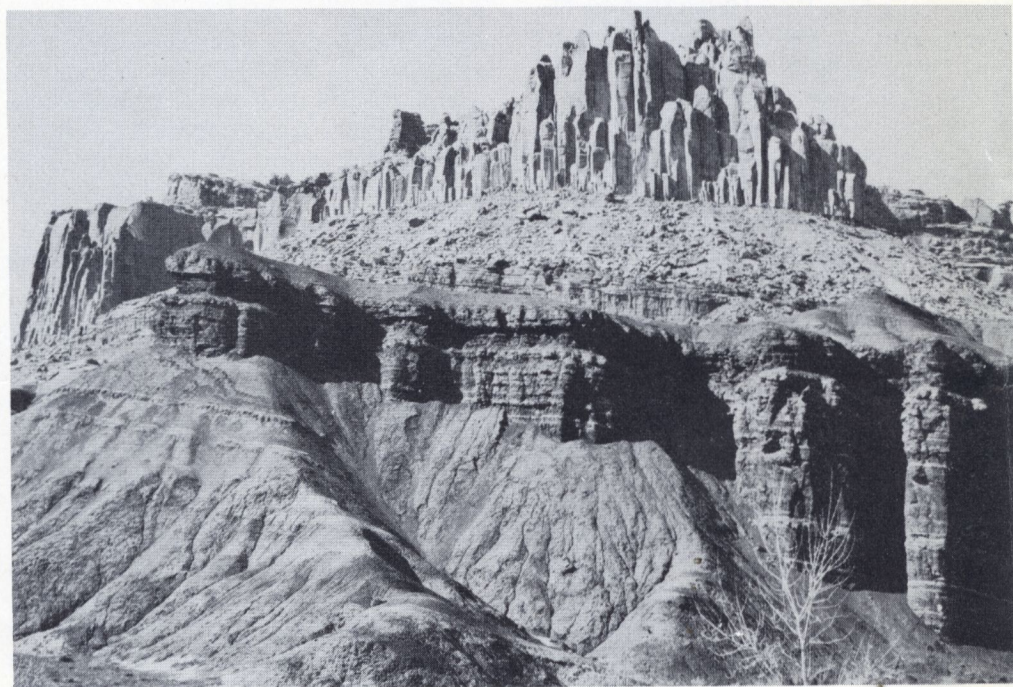
Just after crossing Fremont River bridge—going east—a foot trail leads up a steep slope into Cohab Canyon, a hanging gorge which received its name during the days of polygamy in Utah when men sought for “cohabitation with plural wives” used it as a hideout. Half a mile down this canyon a rock monument marks a trail to the rim overlooking the river. This point provides wonderful views of the upper reef (invisible from below), the canyon of Fremont River, the settlement of Fruita with its orchards, and Miners Mountain.

East of the highway, 2 miles south of Fruita, is the entrance to Grand Wash, containing some of the most spectacular scenery in the monument. With care, cars can be driven down this wash about 3 miles. A short hike brings one to the Narrows, where sheer sandstone walls rise 1,000 feet or more and the winding canyon narrows to about 16 feet.

Following the colorful cliffs 8 miles southeast of Fruita, a side road leads to Pleasant Creek Ranch.

Just beyond this side road, State Highway

**The reef front exposes tilted, colorful beds of ancient rocks.**



No. 24 enters Capitol Wash, the outstanding scenic attraction of the monument. For 3½ miles it winds through a deep canyon so narrow that cars can pass only in certain places, but every bend presents a new vista of beauty. This canyon is safe for travel, except during cloud-burst season. Entering the narrows of this gorge, about halfway through, Indian petroglyphs may be seen on the north wall. At the narrowest point, a large group of pioneer names have been carved, dating back to 1871.

About 2 miles from the west end of the gorge a dim trail leads to the top of the reef, below the Golden Throne, and down into Grand Wash. This is an interesting trip, but should not be attempted without a guide.

No trails have been built into the wild upper sections of Capitol Reef National Monument, and visitors are warned not to attempt hikes without a guide. Hikers and mountain climbers planning to leave the regular trails should notify the superintendent before attempting any explorations.

### **How to Reach the Monument**

The best approach to Capitol Reef National Monument is from United States Highway No. 89 at Sigurd, Utah. State Highway No. 24 leaves Sigurd and is paved through Loa, Bicknell, and to Torrey, a distance of 60 miles. The 12 miles from Torrey to Fruita, the headquarters of the monument, are graded and partly surfaced, but difficult to travel in wet weather or bad winters.

State Highway No. 24 continues on through the monument, through Capitol Wash, and via Hanksville to Greenriver, Utah, on United States Highway No. 50, a distance of 103 miles. From Fruita to Hanksville, the dirt road is kept in fairly good condition. From Hanksville to Greenriver, the road is fair in dry weather, but without water along the route. This route should not be attempted unless one is experienced in desert travel and carries extra gasoline, oil, water, and emergency food rations.

An unusually scenic approach is from Bryce Canyon National Park, via the towns of Escalante and Boulder, and over the Boulder Mountain Route which connects with State Highway No. 24, a mile east of Torrey. This road reaches an elevation of 9,500 feet and is usually free of

snow from June 15 to October 15; however, local inquiry should always be made before traveling this route.

### **Public Service and Facilities for Visitors**

Capitol Reef Lodge, which is on privately owned land, offers accommodations and meals for a limited number of guests. A few guest cabins are maintained by local ranchers. Although there is as yet no designated campground, campers are welcome and can get information on camp sites from the local superintendent.

Mulford's Store, half a mile east of the river bridge, carries a small stock of groceries, serves sandwiches and light meals, and carries gasoline and oil. Additional supplies can be had at Torrey, Utah.

### **Administration**

Capitol Reef National Monument is a part of the National Park System owned by the people of the United States and administered for them by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. No fee is required to enter the monument; however, the applicable National Park Service rules and regulations are in force throughout the federally owned area within the monument boundaries. The local administrative officer for the area may be reached either at the monument office near the west entrance or at his residence 1¼ miles east. For additional information, address the Coordinating Superintendent, Zion National Park, Springdale, Utah.

### **Please Help Protect This Scenic Area and Its Wildlife**

The use of firearms is expressly prohibited within the monument.

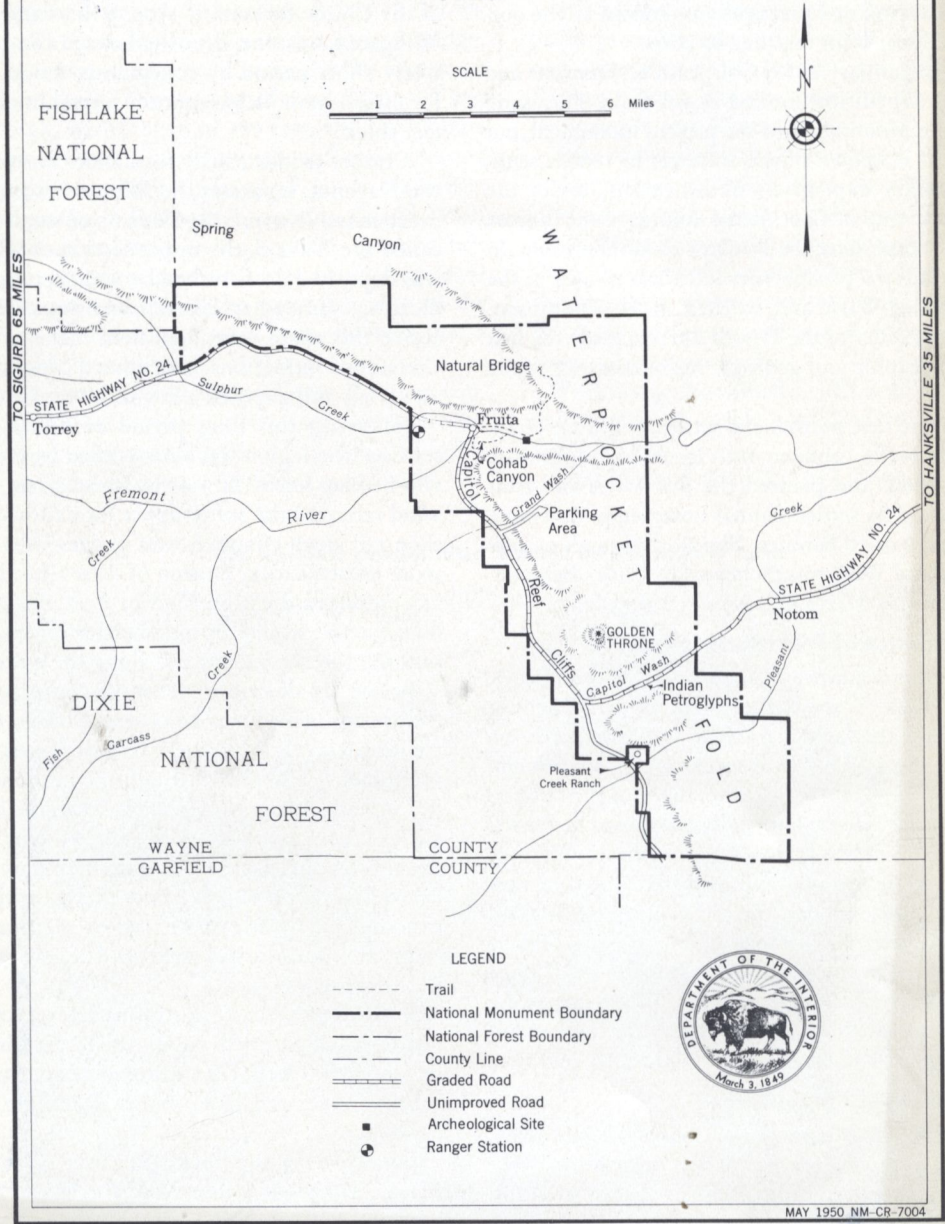
Dogs and cats must be kept in cars, on leash, or otherwise under physical restriction.

Extinguish fires completely before leaving. **KNOW THAT YOUR FIRE IS OUT.**

Do not carve initials or otherwise deface trees, rocks, or any natural features.

Much of the charm of a national monument lies in the natural surroundings undisturbed by man. Please do not pick flowers, dig up cacti or other plants, or harm or frighten birds or other wild animals.

# CAPITOL REEF NATIONAL MONUMENT UTAH



### LEGEND

- Trail
- National Monument Boundary
- National Forest Boundary
- County Line
- ==== Graded Road
- ===== Unimproved Road
- Archeological Site
- ⊙ Ranger Station



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**(Cover) Colorful geologic story portrayed in Capitol Reef.**

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