

CAPITOL REEF



NATIONAL MONUMENT • Utah

CAPITOL REEF

National Monument

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.

THIS STRIKING WILDERNESS area is in the heart of Wayne Wonderland, a vast scenic region in south-central Utah. A large part of this region, some of which has never been explored, is encompassed by the monument. The National Monument was established by Presidential proclamation on August 2, 1937, and covers more than 61 square miles.

Because it resembles domed capitol buildings, the great, 20-mile-long, buttressed sandstone cliff with its cap of white Navajo sandstone, was named Capitol Reef. Early geologists called such cliffs in this area reefs because of their visual resemblance to sea reefs composed of rock or limestone skeletons of coral.

The monument includes a section of the Waterpocket Fold, a great doubling up of the earth's crust, which was caused by an unusual geological movement. The western edge of this fold (of which Capitol Reef is a part) is exposed as a great cliff or escarpment of brilliantly colored rock layers. It extends from Thousand Lake Mountain southeastward about 150 miles to the Colorado River. The fold or reef, fantastically eroded by rain and wind, is a barrier to the traveler. It can be crossed in only 3 places on horseback. One of these passages also allows automobiles to cross.

The Fremont River and its tributaries, Sulphur Creek and Pleasant Creek, are the only perennial streams. Many of the waterpockets (large potholes in rocky gorges) retain runoff water for long periods. The vegetation is sparse and desertlike. Pinyons and junipers grow along the talus slopes of the

reef, with cottonwoods predominant along streams.

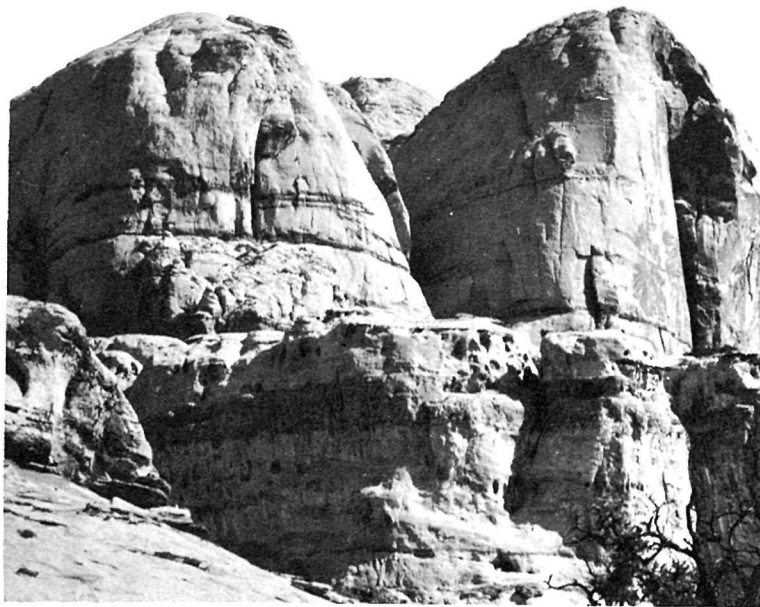
Prehistory and History

Prehistoric Indians known as the Fremont Basketmakers found this area attractive and raised corn on flat plots of ground near streams. Smooth cliff walls are covered with many petroglyphs of unusual size and style. The Indians colored these ancient engravings in various tints—some of their pigments still adhere to the rocks. The Basketmakers lived in open caves, but built small stone structures for corn storage. Artifacts and relics from some of these structures are on display at monument headquarters.

Because of its peculiar geographical isolation, the Fremont River drainage was the last section of Utah to be explored and settled. 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 journey. In 1866 a semimilitary expedition of Mormons, under the leadership of Capt. James Andrus, came in from the south over Boulder Mountain. Prof. A. H. Thompson, geographer of the Powell survey, made the first geographic and geologic reconnaissance of the area in 1875, applying many names still in use.

The first permanent settler was Neils Johnson who located a homestead near the junction of Fremont River and Sulphur Creek in 1880. The pioneers found so many difficulties to overcome in cultivating the tillable

Capitol Reef:
A geological story
written in
colorful stone.



land that the area has never supported more than 8 or 10 families. Impassable roads discouraged visitors, and the area remained practically unknown to the outside world until the 1930's.

Geological Significance

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

For millions of years, streams carried silt, sand, and mud into the swampy lowland. As these sediments were buried, they gradually hardened to become sandstone and shale. From the Moenkopi shale to the Navajo sandstone, the rocks of Capitol Reef record a period of earth history when dinosaurs first dominated the world.

When the Rocky Mountains began to form about 60 million years ago, the rocks of this area were buckled and folded. Streams, rain, and wind removed the softer upper formations and cut deep channels and gorges into the more resistant rock. Erosion is thus seen to be the sculptor that carved the innumerable towers, pinnacles, and great domes you see in Capitol Reef today.

the higher elevations, while foxes, bobcats, porcupines, and other smaller rodents make up the bulk of the mammal population. Lizards are numerous, but snakes are rarely encountered. Hawks, owls, ravens, and other birds of woodland and desert are common.

Places of Special Interest

You can see highly colored, grotesquely eroded cliffs along the entire length of the road running through the monument. Colors appear strongest in early morning or late afternoon.

If you travel from the west using State Route 24, you enter the monument some 6 miles before reaching the headquarters area. Soon after passing the entrance marker, you will come to a viewpoint near Twin Rocks. Three miles from the entrance, you turn left onto a dirt road which leads to Chimney Rock. A short walk across the main road down the arroyo, brings you to the Motorman, a naturally sculptured figure. About 1 mile beyond Chimney Rock, you turn right onto a dirt road. At its terminus, a short walk leads to the rim of spectacular Sulphur Creek Gorge.

Three miles east and north of the lodge is Hickman Natural Bridge, an outstanding attraction. It is reached by trail only, and the round trip requires about 3 hours. The bridge is 72 feet high and has a span of 133

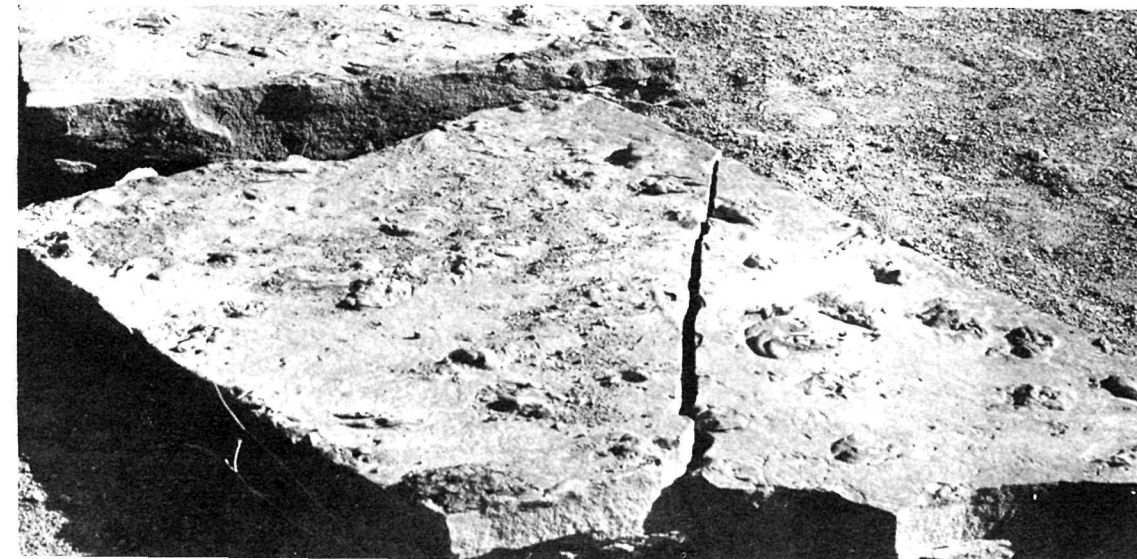
feet. The trail to the bridge is provided with self-guiding facilities which describe many natural features.

Just south and east of the Fremont River Bridge, a foot trail leads up the slope into a hanging gorge named Cohab Canyon because it was used as a hideout by early polygamists. Half a mile down Cohab Canyon, a rock monument marks a trail to the rim overlooking the river, where there are exceptional views of the upper reef which cannot be seen from below. Also spread before you will be the canyon of Fremont River with its orchards, and to the south the upper canyon which the river has cut through Miners Mountain.

State Route 24 enters Capitol Gorge about 8 miles from the Fremont River Bridge. The road down Capitol Gorge winds for 3½ miles through a deep canyon so narrow that cars can pass only in certain places. Do not enter this canyon during rainstorms, and use particular caution during the August cloud-burst season. Halfway through the gorge, Basketmaker petroglyphs about 1,200 years old may be seen on the north wall. At the gorge's narrowest point, pioneers carved their names, dating back to 1871.

Before reaching the petroglyphs, a trail leads to the top of the reef below the Golden Throne. An extension of this trail leads back into Grand Wash. This hike should be taken only with a guide.

Fossil footprints of reptiles and amphibians in the Moenkopi formation.



The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

Plant and Animal Life

The vegetation, mammals, and birds of the monument are typical of the pinyon-juniper belt of the Colorado Plateau. Sagebrush, saltbush, and squawbush form much of the shrubby ground cover. Deer are present at

Trails into the wild upper sections of Capitol Reef National Monument should not be attempted without a qualified guide. Do not crosscut or wander off the regular trails. Hikers and mountain climbers planning trips into the back country should notify the superintendent before and after each trip.

Two miles southeast of Fremont River is a side road turning left. This extends 2½ miles down Grand Wash, which is one of the finest attractions in the monument. From the parking place in the canyon, a half-mile easy hike takes you into the narrows where the 1,000-foot sheer walls are only 16 feet apart at the narrowest point. About 1½ miles from the parking area, Grand Wash joins Fremont River.

How to Reach the Monument

The best approach to Capitol Reef National Monument is from U. S. 89 at Sigurd, Utah. State Route 24 leads south and east from Sigurd and is paved to monument headquarters, a distance of 72 miles.

Monument roads are usually open all year, but the best time to visit is from May 15 to October 15.

State Route 24 continues on through the monument, through Capitol Gorge to Green River, a distance of 103 miles. The last 30 miles before connecting with U. S. 50 is now paved; the first 73 miles are on a dirt road, difficult to travel when wet.

An unusually scenic approach is through Escalante and Boulder and over Boulder Mountain, connecting with State Route 24 one mile east of Torrey. This graded road runs partly through spectacular red-rock country and partly through forests of pine and aspen. It is usually free of snow from June 15 to October 15, but local inquiry should be made before attempting this route.

About Your Visit

Capitol Reef Lodge offers sleeping accommodations and meals for a limited number of guests. Gifford Motel also offers modern accommodations, including two housekeeping apartments. Ranch-style meals and cab-

ins are available from local ranchers. These accommodations are all on private lands within the monument.

Camping space, tables, fireplaces, wood and water are provided near monument headquarters. Electricity, water, and utility service connections for house trailers are available at the lodge. Water from streams or irrigation ditches should be boiled before drinking.

Gasoline is available at the lodge, but there are no facilities for repair of automobiles.

Preservation of the Monument

Regulations have been designed for the protection of the natural features and for your safety and convenience.

Please do not damage the pictographs or petroglyphs or disturb the flowers, trees, wildlife, or other natural features. Use of firearms is not permitted.

Camp and picnic only in the established campground. **Help Us Keep Your Monument Clean!**

FIRES AND SMOKING. Be careful with all fires, including cigarettes and cigars. **Be Sure Your Campfire Is Out!**

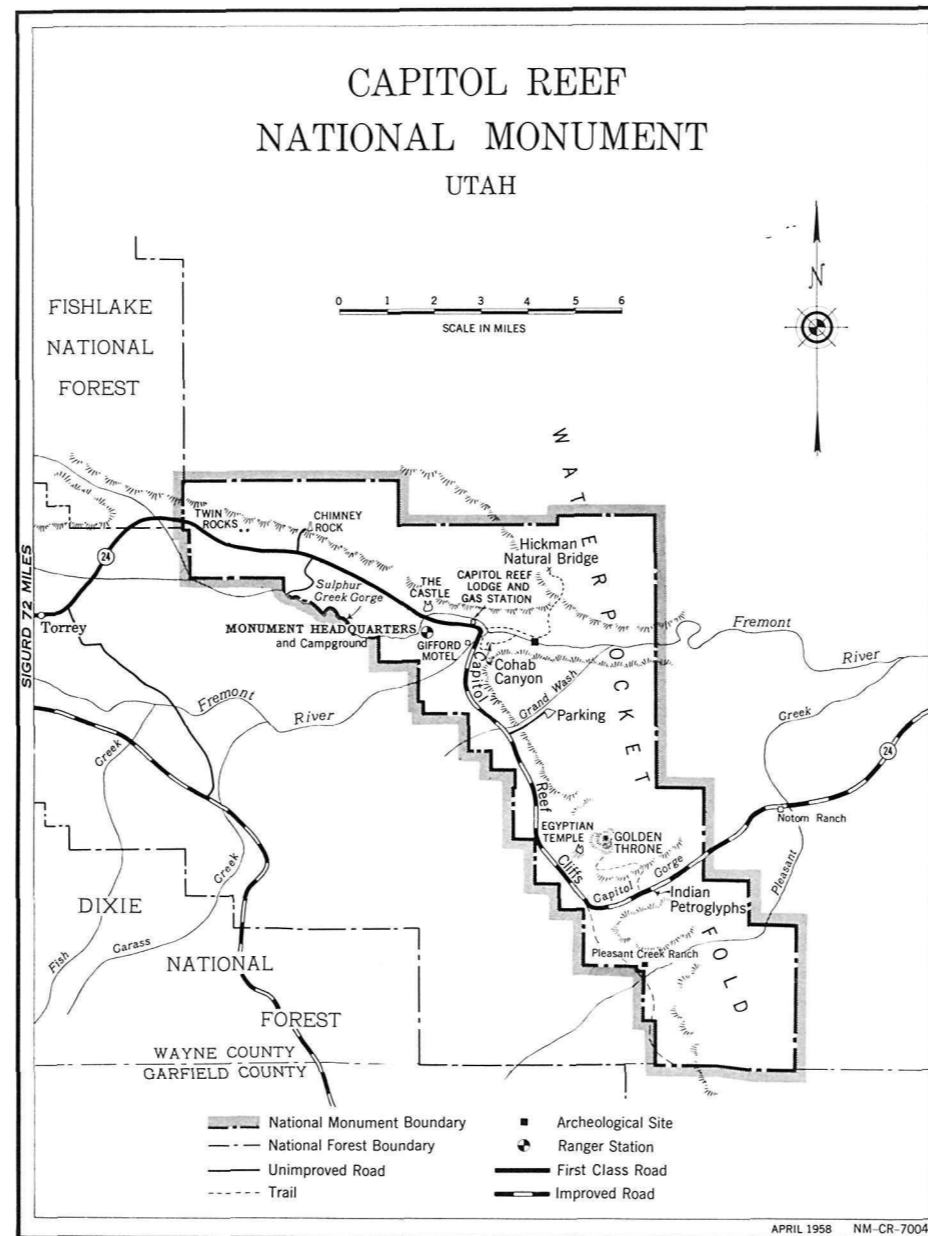
PETS. You may take a pet into the monument provided you keep it on leash or under other physical restraint at all times.

Mission 66

Mission 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Administration

Capitol Reef National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Torrey, Utah, is in immediate charge. He can usually be reached either at the monument office or at his residence 1¼ miles east.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fred A. Seaton, Secretary
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • Conrad L. Wirth, Director



COVER: Capitol Reef framed by Hickman Natural Bridge.

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