



Canyon Rim and Window Rock Trails



This hike along Canyon Rim Trail (1/2 mile one-way) leading to Window Rock Trail (1/4 mile one-way) provides an excellent introduction to the natural wonders of Colorado National Monument. Bold, big, and brilliantly colored, the steep-walled canyons and towering masses of naturally sculpted rock found here provide inspiration to hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

Beginning from the back porch of the Visitor Center, hike along the Canyon Rim Trail to the Bookcliff Overlook and continue on the adjoining Window Rock Trail. Both trails wind along the cliff edge with views of large, towering rock formations. It takes 30-45 minutes to walk both trails and return to the Visitor Center. Use the map on the reverse of this page for guidance.

Geology

The Canyon Rim and Window Rock Trails are situated on the Kayenta Sandstone Formation. This sandstone is more resistant to erosion than the formations above and below it so it forms ledges. The concave “smile” shaped layers seen along the trail are ancient stream channels. At the time these rocks were deposited, the climate was much different than today, rainfall became more abundant and shallow streams flowed across the area.

As you look south into Wedding and Monument Canyons, you will see large concentrations of freestanding rock formations called monoliths. These towering rock monoliths have descriptive names such as

the Praying Hands, Pipe Organ, Kissing Couple and Independence Monument (see above photo). Monoliths are the most dramatic rock features of the Colorado National Monument, resulting from differing rates of weathering and erosion in adjacent layers of hard and soft rock.

In the distance, on the north side of the valley, the Bookcliffs rise from the floor of the Grand Valley to make the north boundary of the valley all the way to Price, Utah. The arid sands of the Mesa Verde Formation form the protective cap layer that supports the steep, easily weathered soft Mancos Shale slopes from eroding away.

Flora

The dominate lifezone here is the Pinyon-Juniper Woodland - A plant community found throughout the Colorado Plateau between the elevations of 4,500 and 6,500 feet. The pinyon-juniper woodland consists of dwarfed, deep rooted, evenly spaced pinyon pine and Utah juniper trees separated by open areas with sparse vegetation: a landscape referred to as the pygmy forest.

The pinyon pine has short needles grouped in bundles of two and small cones bearing large, edible seeds. Drought usually limits the tree’s growth to heights of thirty feet or less, giving the tree a stunted appearance.

Like living sculpture, the gnarled form of Utah juniper is the other common evergreen in Colorado National Monument. The frosty blue berries of the Utah juniper are actually modified cones in which the seeds are encapsulated in a waxy, hard shell. The Utah juniper leaves appear as tiny overlapping scales along the branches, giving the tree a distinctive appearance.

Among the trees in the pinyon-juniper woodland are smatterings of cacti, yucca, grasses and semidesert shrubs such as cliffrose, Mormon tea, big sagebrush, rabbitbrush and mountain mahogany. This vegetation provides food and shelter for animals living in the Monument.



Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

After establishing of Colorado National Monument in 1916, this area was accessible only by foot or horseback for many years. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was created in 1933 during America's worst depression and dissolved in 1942. Across the nation from 1933 to 1942, approximately three million young men worked for various CCC projects. In 1933, Company 824 of the CCC and National Park Service employees built Camp NM-2-C near the present site of the Visitor Center (see above photo). Nothing remains of these buildings today, but see if you can determine

their location using the picture and the clues it contains.

The CCC worked in Colorado National Monument alongside Local Experienced Men (LEMs) and National Park Service employees to build the scenic Rim Rock Drive which included rock blasting, trail making, fencing and building structures. Some of the handiwork of Company 824 can still be seen today – along Rim Rock Drive, the Window Rock Trail and the caretaker's residency near the present day Visitor Center.

Conclusion

We hope you enjoyed your hike along the Canyon Rim and Window Rock Trails. Perhaps you saw lizards, heard the call of a red-tailed hawk or smelled the crispness of sage.

While Canyon Rim and Window Rock Trail offers many opportunities for stillness and solitude, they also offer a chance to reflect on the extraordinary examples of erosion seen here in Colorado National Monument.

Canyon Rim and Window Rock Trails/Saddlehorn Campground

