

Colorado

National Monument

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior





Illustration by Milton Kobayashi

Colorado National Monument preserves one of the grand landscapes of the American West. Bold, big, and brilliantly colored, this plateau-and-canyon country, with its towering masses of naturally sculpted rock, embraces 32 square miles of rugged, up-

and-down terrain. This is a special place, where you can contemplate glorious views that stretch to distant horizons; where you can discover solitude deep in a remote canyon; where you can delight in wild country where desert bighorn roam and golden

eagles soar. In the spirit of those with the foresight to create Colorado National Monument in 1911, and the many since who have sought to protect it, please treat the park with respect so you and others can share in its grandeur tomorrow.

Atop the Plateau



The Uncompahgre Plateau rose high above its surrounding terrain millions of years

ago during the gigantic upheaval that also created the Rocky Mountains.

The highcountry of Colorado National Monument rises more than 2,000 feet above the Grand Valley of the Colorado River. Situated at the edge of the Uncompahgre Uplift, the park is part of the greater Colorado Plateau, which also embraces such geologic wonders as the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, and Arches. It is a semi-desert land of pinyon pines and Utah junipers, ravens and jays, desert bighorns and coyotes. Magnificent views from highland trails and the Rim Rock Drive, which winds along the plateau, stretch from the colorful sheer-walled canyons and fascinating rock sculptures to the distant Colorado River valley, the purple-gray Book Cliffs, and the huge flat-topped mountain called Grand Mesa.

Backcountry Canyons



The many sheer-walled canyons were carved primarily by the erosive force of flood-waters

flowing over the plateau for millions of years. Recent rockfalls demonstrate that water,



Tom Till

In the deep canyons of Colorado National Monument, where vertical cliff walls and great natural rock sculptures tower overhead, the grand scale of the scenery is overpowering. Nowhere is this more true than in Monument and Wedding Canyons, where the giant rock forms of Independence Monument, the Pipe Organ, the Kissing Couple, Sentinel Spire, and the Praying Hands rise from the canyon floor like skyscrapers-in-stone.

But the canyons are places, too, where the cascading song of the canyon wren echoes; where small life-sustaining pools linger after summer rains; where cottonwood trees turn golden in autumn. The canyons can be explored along backcountry trails, on foot, or on horseback. On a slow and quiet journey, you might encounter mule deer, desert cot-

tontails, antelope ground squirrels, rock squirrels, chipmunks, lizards, or canyon birds such as pinyon jays, white-throated swifts, and rock wrens. Mountain lions, midget faded rattlesnakes, and other rare or secretive members of the canyon community are seen less often. In spring and summer, cactus, yucca, and other flowering plants bloom by the hundreds, many near springs, along seeps in rock walls, or near canyon pools and intermittent streams. These oases of water are lush compared to the sparse desert scrub life of pinyon, juniper, sagebrush, mountain mahogany, and rabbitbrush that inhabits the more common arid portions of the canyons.

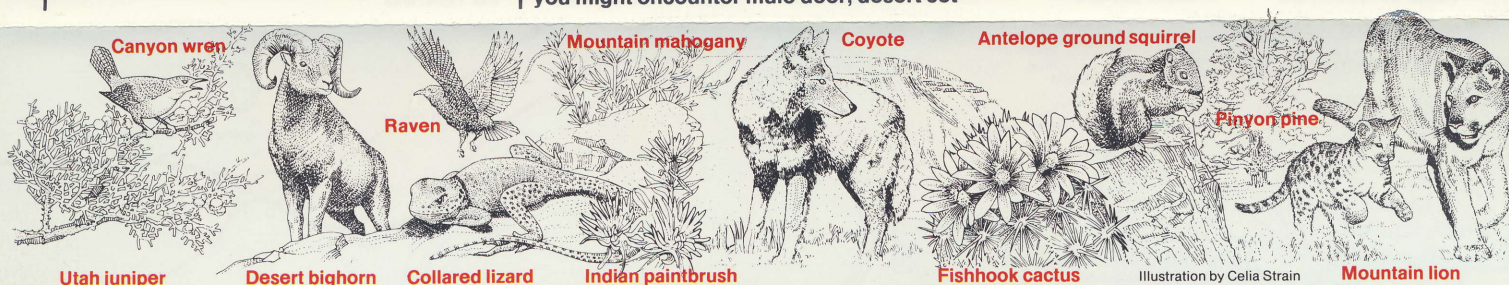


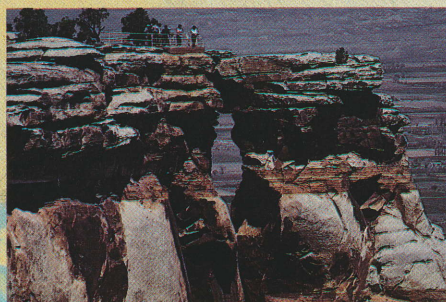
Illustration by Celia Strain



David Muench

Coke Ovens: a series of colorful rock domes created by the natural

sculpting forces of wind, water, and ice.



Window Rock: a hole carved out of a crack in a stone wall by thou-

sands of years of relentless erosion.

From 450-foot-high Independence Monument, the largest free-standing rock formation in the park, to the smallest detail carved in stone, the grand sculptor in Colorado National Monument has been erosion. Time—and lots of it—has been a loyal ally, for it has taken millions of years to carve the many massive rock spires, huge domes, balanced rocks, arches, windows, stone pedestals, and sheer-walled canyons that make up the scenic splendor of the park. The erosive forces of water, wind, and frost work very slowly. Differences in the characteristics of the many layers of sandstone, shale, and

other sedimentary rocks of the area help determine what form the rocks take. The harder rock layers are more resistant to erosion. One such layer—the Kayenta Formation—forms the protective caprock of Independence Monument and other bold, angular rock forms. Once it has been eroded away, rounded shapes like those of the Coke Ovens are formed from the less resistant underlying layers. Fractures in the rock also influence erosive forces. The remarkable colors—vivid reds, purples, oranges, and browns—are created by iron and other minerals in the rock.

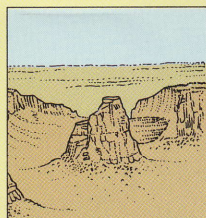
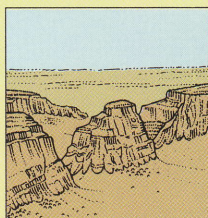
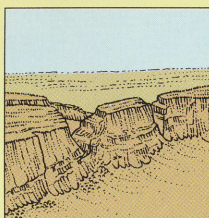
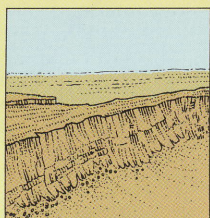


Illustration by Celia Strain

The Creation of Independence Monument

1 Independence Monument (shown on cover) was once part of a massive rock wall that separated Monument and Wedding Canyons.

2 Slowly, as the forces of erosion enlarged these canyons, the dividing wall was narrowed and weakened.

3 Weathering proceeded more rapidly in places where the rock was most vulnerable—along natural fractures. Eventually the wall was breached and parts of it collapsed.

4 Today a remnant of the once solid rock wall survives as Independence Monument, a free-standing monolith. In time, it too will succumb to the ravages of time and weather.

One Man's Dream

"I came here last year and found these canyons, and they felt like the heart of the world to me," John Otto wrote in 1907. "I'm going to stay . . . and promote this place, because it should be a national park." Some folks thought John Otto was crazy. He lived alone out in the wild and desolate canyon country southwest of Grand Junction, and he loved the land so much that he campaigned tirelessly for it to be set aside as a national park. Urged by Otto, the citizens of Grand Junction deluged politicians in Washington D.C. with letters and petitions in support of the proposal. Meanwhile, Otto built miles of tortuous trails through the proposed park area so others could appreciate its beauty. And he did it all without hope of any personal gain. It was, indeed, an unusual thing for a man to do. But in 1911, Otto's dream came true: Colorado National Monument was established. Otto was rewarded by being named the park's caretaker, a job he gladly did until 1927 for \$1 a month.

Illustration by Milton Kobayashi



Map and Guide

Visitor Center

The visitor center has information, exhibits, a slide show, maps, publications, and a bookstore. Staff is on hand to answer questions and help you plan your visit. Schedules of guided walks and campfire talks are posted. Programs are given every day in the summer and less often during the rest of the year. The center is open everyday except December 25.

Rim Rock Drive

Rim Rock Drive offers 23 miles of breathtaking views. The road climbs from the Grand Valley of the Colorado River to the park's highcountry, then winds along the plateau rim. The drive is ideal for bicycling as well as motor tours. A guide booklet is available at the visitor center. You can park at several roadside over-

looks along the way and enjoy panoramas of the park's great rock sculptures, canyons, and distant valleys and mountains. A loop tour can be made by driving Rim Rock Drive, Colorado Rt. 340, South Broadway, and South Camp Road. Obey speed limits on Rim Rock Drive and watch for wildlife, fallen rocks, and other hazards.

Camping

Saddlehorn Campground is situated near the visitor center. Campsites are available first-come, first-served. Each site offers a table, charcoal grill, and access to drinking water and restrooms. A fee is charged. Backcountry camping is free and is allowed anywhere more than ¼ mile from roads and 100 yards from trails. A permit is required; ask at the visitor center. Other

campgrounds are located near the park.

Picnicking

There is one picnic area near the visitor center and a second near the park's East Entrance. Both have tables, charcoal grills, water, and restrooms; the second also features a large shelter.

Other Activities

Hiking and horseback riding (see below), cross-country skiing, rock climbing, and bicycling are other popular pastimes. Wheeled or motorized vehicles are not permitted on trails or other off-road areas.

Area Services and Accommodations

Food, lodging, gasoline, and camp supplies are available in Grand Junction, Fruita, and other nearby communities.

Handicap Access

Some park overlooks, backcountry areas, and other park sites and facilities are handicap-accessible; check at the visitor center for information.

Safety and Regulations

The climate is normally mild, but beware of extremes. Lightning, high winds, and flash floods can accompany summer storms. During a storm, avoid open, exposed areas and low-lying areas such as canyon bottoms.

Removing natural or cultural objects, disturbing wildlife, and defacing rock exposures are not allowed. Guns and other weapons are prohibited.

Watch your step—and your children—at overlooks and other steep

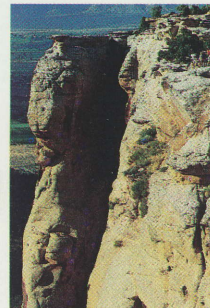
drop-offs. Do not throw rocks or other objects over cliffs; persons below may be injured.

Pets must be leashed at all times. They are not permitted in buildings, on trails, or in the backcountry.

Don't litter. In the backcountry, pack out trash: do not burn or bury it. Fires are permitted only in grills provided or in campstoves. Wood fires are prohibited. Carry water; groundwater may contain harmful substances such as selenium, or bacteria such as Giardia.

More Information

Colorado National Monument
Fruita, CO 81521-9530
970-858-3617
www.nps.gov/colm



Karen Kunzelman

Cold Shivers Point: one of many dramatic overlooks along Rim Rock Drive.

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Park Trails

Exploring by trail is a good way to see Colorado National Monument in any season. Choose short trails to spectacular overlooks or backcountry trails into canyons or across mesas. The chart below

describes trails, including undeveloped routes that follow canyon drainages or are marked by rock cairns. Plateau trails are level or gradually sloping; other trails may have short stretches requiring a

steep ascent or descent. Take your time, interests, hiking experience, and physical fitness into account. Carry plenty of water and wear hiking boots or other footwear appropriate for rocky or sandy surfaces. Pace

yourself if you begin to tire and watch the weather. If you hike the backcountry or off-trail, carry a topographic map and notify a ranger or friend of your plans. Mountain bikes, other off-road vehicles, and

pets are prohibited on trails or anywhere in the backcountry. Horse use is allowed on all backcountry trails except Serpents Trail. Some trails may be too steep or narrow for riding or leading animals

readily—or at all. For information on backcountry camping, see "Camping" above.

Short Trails

Window Rock

Level loop trail through pinyon-juniper woodland to overlook with excellent views of Monument and Wed-

ding Canyons and most of their major rock formations, including Independence Monument.

¼ mile

¼ hour

Canyon Rim

Level trail following the cliff edge above colorful

Wedding Canyon. Outstanding views.

½ mile

½ hour

Ottos Trail

Gently sloping trail that leads to overlook with

dramatic view of many monoliths.

½ mile

½ hour

Coke Ovens

Trail descends gradually to overlook above

the massive rounded Coke Ovens.

½ mile

½ hour

Devils Kitchen

Gradual descent to Devils Kitchen, a natural

grotto surrounded by huge upright boulders.

¾ mile

½ hour

Serpents Trail

Called "the Crookedest Road in the World," this historic trail has more than 50 switchbacks. The trail climbs steadily from east to west. Engi-

neered by John Otto in the early 1900s, this route was part of the main road into the highcountry until 1950.

2¼ mile

2 hours

Alcove Nature Trail

Self-guiding nature trail

on the Kayenta bench.

1 mile

¾ hour

C.C.C. Trail

Short trail connects the Monument Canyon and

Black Ridge Trails.

¾ mile

¾ hour

Backcountry Trails

Old Gordon Trail

Steadily ascending trail that follows the path of historic lumber and cattle drive road. The park's geologic story as told

through the layers of rock is naturally exhibited almost in its entirety along this largely undeveloped trail route.

4 miles

2½ hours

Black Ridge

Highest trail in the park with far-reaching views west to Utah canyonlands, east to Grand Valley, and south to the

San Juan Mountains. Follows up-and-down terrain of Black Ridge. Trail crosses Bureau of Land Management lands.

5½ miles

3 hours

Monument Canyon

Steep 600-foot descent from the plateau into Monument Canyon where many of the park's major rock sculptures—

Independence Monument, Kissing Couple, and the Coke Ovens—tower overhead.

6 miles

3½ hours

Ute Canyon

Rigorous descent into narrow Ute Canyon from the plateau follows a maintained trail. Undeveloped trail route then

follows streambed with seasonal stream and pools bordered by cottonwoods and willows. A few arches may be seen.

7 miles

4 hours

Liberty Cap

Trail winds across gently sloping Monument Mesa through pinyon-juniper forest and sagebrush flats for 5½ miles to Liberty

Cap rock sculpture. Ideal for horseback riding and crosscountry skiing. Last 1½ miles drops steeply to Grand Valley.

7 miles

4 hours

No Thoroughfare

Descent from plateau on maintained trail followed by undeveloped trail route through re-

mote No Thoroughfare Canyon. Canyon walls rise more than 400 feet above floor.

8½ miles

8 hours

Help the National Park Service maintain a cordial relationship with its neighbors by respecting private property owners' rights. Please do not trespass.



Trail



Overlook



Access gate



Ranger station



Campground



Undeveloped trail route



Unpaved road



Distance along Rim Rock Drive



Picnic area



Handicap access

