

Colorado

National Monument

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
Colorado





© ROB KURTZMAN

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 bighorns roam and golden eagles soar. In the spirit of John Otto and others with the fore-

sight to create Colorado National Monument in 1911, and the many since who have sought to protect it, please treat the park with respect so we can share in its grandeur tomorrow.

Atop the Plateau



© DARLENE MERKEL

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

during the gigantic upheaval that also created the Rocky Mountains.

The Colorado National Monument highcountry rises over 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 geologic wonders like the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, and Arches national parks. 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 stretch from the colorful sheer-walled canyons and fascinating rock sculptures to the distant Colorado River valley, purple-gray Book Cliffs, and huge flat-topped mountain called Grand Mesa.

Backcountry Canyons



© VERN HEROLD

The many sheer-walled canyons were carved primarily by the erosive force of floodwaters flowing

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



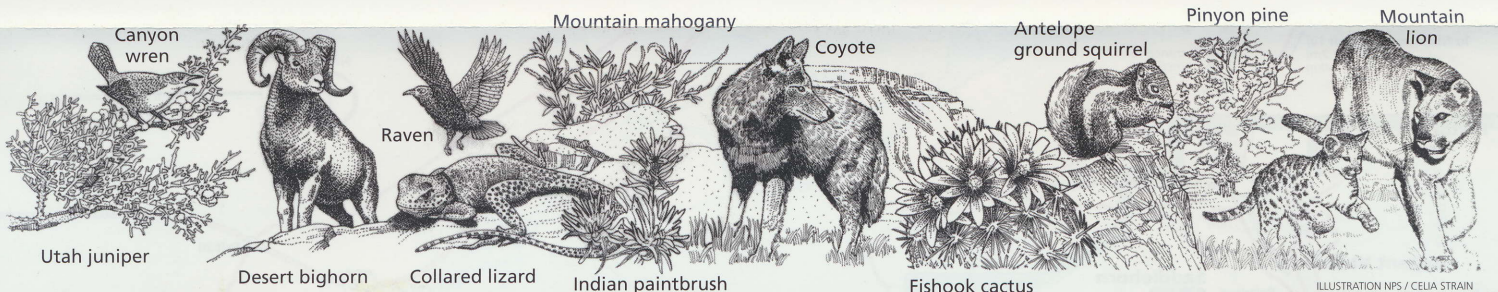
© JACK KINGSLEY

frost continue to cut the canyons wider and deeper today.

In the park's deep canyons, 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, Pipe Organ, Kissing Couple, Sentinel Spire, and 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 a slow and quiet journey you might encounter mule deer, desert

cottontails, antelope ground squirrels, rock squirrels, chipmunks, lizards, or canyon birds like pinyon jays, white-throated swifts, and rock wrens. Mountain lions, bobcats, midget faded rattlesnakes, and other rare or secretive members of the canyon community are seen less often. In spring and summer cacti, yucca, and other flowering plants bloom 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 pine, Utah juniper, sagebrush, mountain mahogany, and rabbitbrush that inhabits the more common arid portions of the canyons.

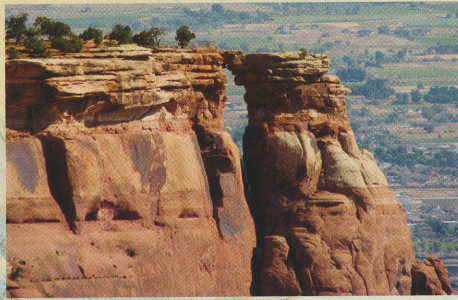


Masterpieces of Erosion



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 thousands

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 ice work very slowly. Differences in the characteristics of the many layers of sand-

stone, 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.

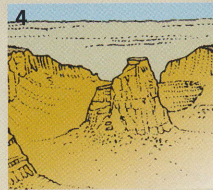
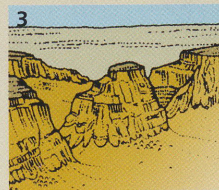
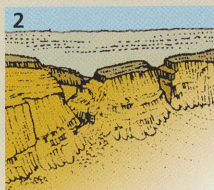
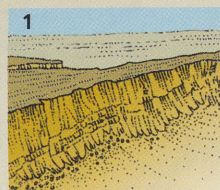


ILLUSTRATION NPS / CELIA STRAIN

The Creation of Independence Monument

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

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

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

Today a remnant of the once solid rock wall survives as Independence Monument, a free-standing monolith (4). It too will eventually 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. 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 NPS / MILTON KOBAYASHI

Balanced Rock: a 600-ton boulder perched atop a pedestal.

Planning Your Visit

Visitor Center

The visitor center has information, exhibits, two audiovisual programs, and a bookstore with maps and other publications. Staff is on hand to answer questions and help you plan your visit. Schedules of guided walks and talks are posted in summer. The visitor center is open every day 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 high country, then winds along the plateau rim. The drive is popular with bicyclists as well as motorists. A *Guide to Rim Rock Drive* can

be purchased from the store. Stop at the roadside overlooks along the way and enjoy panoramas of the park's great rock sculptures, canyons, and distant views.

For a loop tour, take Rim Rock Drive, Colorado Hwy. 340, South Broadway, and South Camp Road. Obey the speed limits on Rim Rock Drive and watch for wildlife, fallen rocks, and other hazards.

Camping

Saddlehorn Campground is near the visitor center. Campsites are available first-come, first-served. Each site offers a table, charcoal grill, and access to restrooms and drinking water. A fee is charged. Backcountry camping

is free and is allowed anywhere over 0.25 mile from roads and 150 feet from trails. A permit is required. Obtain one at the visitor center. Other federal, state, and commercial campgrounds are near the park.

Picnicking

There are three picnic areas: adjacent to the visitor center, near Saddlehorn Campground, and at the Devils Kitchen Picnic Area. All have tables, water (seasonally), and restrooms. The Devils Kitchen and visitor center picnic areas have shade shelters.

Other Activities

Hiking, rock climbing, and bicycling are other popular activities. Wheeled or motorized

vehicles are not permitted on trails or off-road.

Area Services and Accommodations

Food, lodging, gasoline, and camp supplies are available in the nearby towns of Fruita and Grand Junction.

Accessibility

Accessible restrooms are located at the visitor center, Devils Kitchen Picnic Area, and the campground. The Devils Kitchen and visitor center picnic areas, as well as some campsites and overlooks, are wheelchair-accessible. Service animals are welcome.

For a Safe Visit

The climate is normally mild, but be aware of extremes. • Lightning, high winds, and flash

floods can accompany thunderstorms. During a storm, avoid open, exposed areas and low-lying canyon bottoms. • Removing natural or cultural objects, disturbing wildlife, and defacing rock exposures are prohibited. • Guns are allowed in the park if carried in accordance with state law. 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 or on trails. • Don't litter. In the backcountry, pack out trash: do not burn or bury it. • Fires are per-

mitted only in charcoal grills provided. Wood fires are prohibited. • Carry your own water supply; springs, pools, and streams may contain harmful substances like selenium or bacteria like *Giardia*.

More Information

Colorado National Monument is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities.

Colorado National Monument
Fruita, CO 81521-9530
970-858-3617
www.nps.gov/colm
e-mail: colm_info@nps.gov

©GPO:2016—393-466/30798 Last updated 2010
Printed on recycled paper.

Park Trails

Exploring by trail is a good way to see Colorado National Monument in any season. Choose short trails leading to spectacular overlooks or backcountry

trails into canyons or across plateau country. 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 interests, hik-

ing experience, physical fitness, and time into account. • Carry plenty of water and wear hiking boots or other footgear appropriate for rocky or sandy surfaces.

• Pace yourself and watch the weather. • If you hike the backcountry or off-trail, carry a topographic map and notify someone of your plans. • Mountain bikes,

other off-road vehicles, and pets are prohibited on trails or anywhere in the backcountry. • Horse use is limited. Call the visitor center for information.

Short Trails	One-Way Distance	One-Way Avg. Time	Backcountry Trails	One-Way Distance	One-Way Avg. Time
Window Rock Trail Level loop trail through pinyon-juniper woodland to overlook with excellent views of Monument and Wedding canyons and most of their major rock formations, including Independence Monument.	0.25 mile	¼ hour	Corkscrew Trail Loop Originally built by John Otto in 1909. Follow Liberty Cap Trail to trail junction sign at 1.0 mile. Turn left and hike 0.2 miles to the Corkscrew Trail sign; descend steep "corkscrew" switchbacks. Follow Corkscrew Connector Trail signs back to the trailhead.	3.3 miles	2½ hours
Canyon Rim Trail Level trail following the cliff edge above colorful Wedding Canyon. Outstanding views.	0.5 mile	½ hour	Old Gordon Trail Follows path of historic lumber and cattle drive road in a steady ascent. Rock layers exposed along this largely undeveloped route tell most of the park's geologic story.	4 miles	2½ hours
Otto's Trail Gently sloping trail that leads to overlook with dramatic view of many monoliths.	0.5 mile	½ hour	Black Ridge Trail Park's highest trail follows up-and-down terrain of Black Ridge. Views west to Utah canyonlands and east to Grand Valley. Crosses McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area.	5.5 miles	3 hours
Coke Ovens Trail Trail descends gradually to overlook above the massive rounded Coke Ovens.	0.5 mile	½ hour	Monument Canyon Trail Steep 600-foot descent from plateau into Monument Canyon, where many of park's major rock sculptures—Independence Monument, Kissing Couple, and the Coke Ovens—tower overhead.	6 miles	3½ hours
Alcove Nature Trail Self-guiding nature trail into an ancient sand dune.	0.5 mile	½ hour	Ute Canyon Trail Rigorous descent into narrow Ute Canyon from plateau follows a primitive trail. Route then follows streambed with seasonal stream and pools bordered by cottonwoods and willows. <i>Unmaintained</i> .	7 miles	4 hours
Devils Kitchen Trail Leads to a rock room formed by huge upright boulders.	0.75 mile	¾ hour	Liberty Cap Trail Trail winds across gently sloping Monument Mesa through pinyon-juniper forest and sagebrush flats for 5.5 miles to Liberty Cap rock sculpture. Last 2.0 miles drop steeply to Grand Valley.	7 miles	4 hours
Serpents Trail This historic trail was at one time called "the Crookedest Road in the World." The trail climbs steadily from east to west. Built in the early 1900s, this route was part of the main road until 1950.	1.75 miles	1½ hours	No Thoroughfare Trail Descent from plateau on maintained trail followed by undeveloped route through remote No Thoroughfare Canyon. Canyon walls rise over 400 feet.	8.5 miles	6 hours

Some land outside the park boundary is privately owned. Please respect the owners' rights and do not trespass.



Trail



Access gate



Overlook



Unpaved road



Distance along Rim Rock Drive



Ranger station



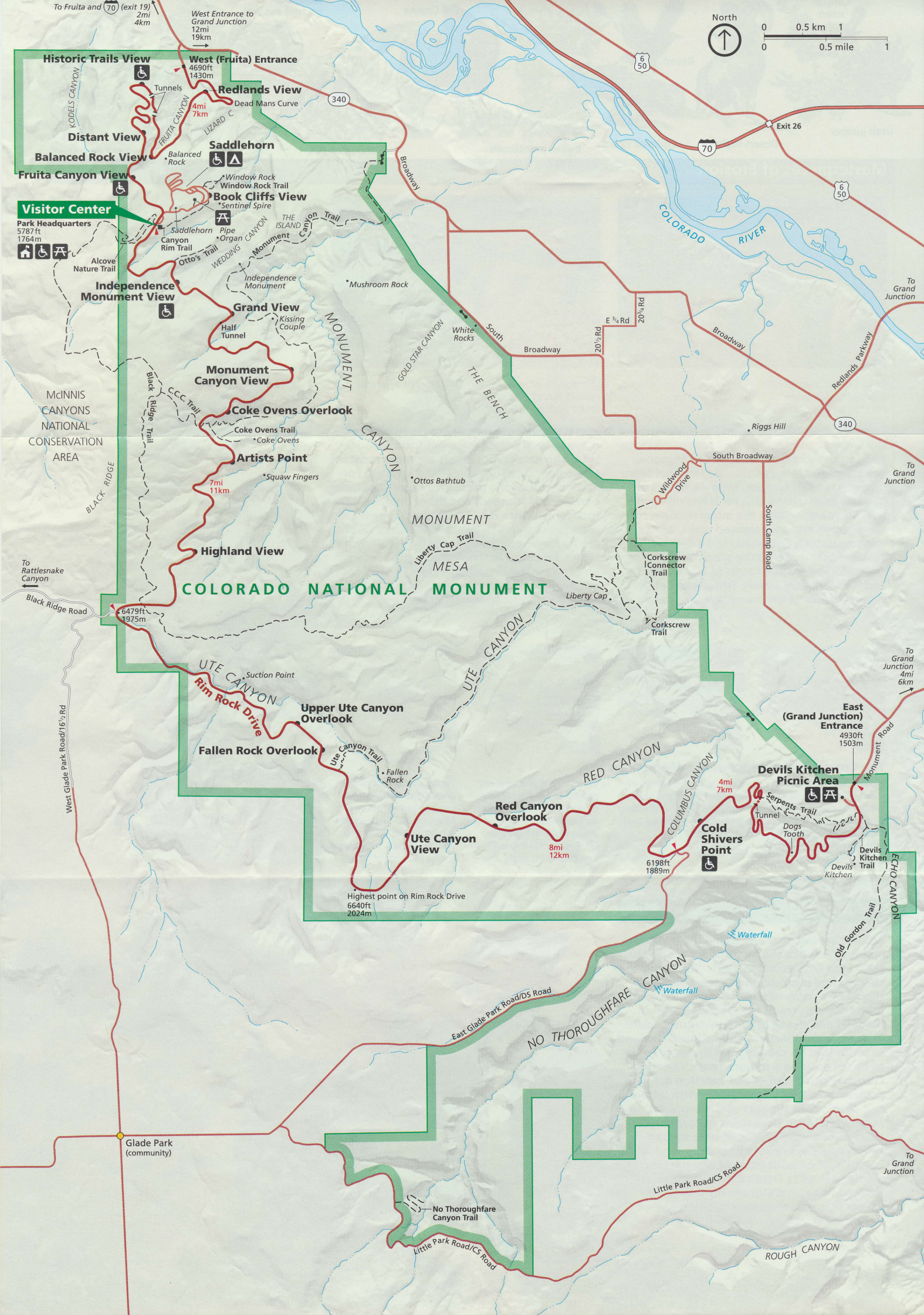
Wheelchair-accessible



Campground



Picnic area



0 0.5 km 1
0 0.5 mile 1

Visitor Center
Park Headquarters
5787ft
1764m

Historic Trails View
Distant View
Balanced Rock View
Fruita Canyon View

Independence Monument View
Alcove Nature Trail

McINNIS CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

To Rattlesnake Canyon

Black Ridge Road

West Glade Park Road/16 1/2 Rd

Glade Park (community)

Little Park Road/CS Road

No Thoroughfare Canyon Trail

Little Park Road/CS Road

West (Fruita) Entrance
4690ft
1430m

Redlands View
Dead Mans Curve

Saddlehorn
Window Rock
Window Rock Trail

Book Cliffs View
Sentinel Spire

Grand View
Kissing Couple

Monument Canyon View

Coke Ovens Overlook
Coke Ovens Trail
Coke Ovens

Artists Point
Squaw Fingers

Highland View

Upper Ute Canyon Overlook

Fallen Rock Overlook

Red Canyon Overlook

Ute Canyon View

Devils Kitchen Picnic Area
Serpents Tunnel
Dogs Tooth

Cold Shivers Point

East (Grand Junction) Entrance
4930ft
1503m

Devils Kitchen
Devils Kitchen Trail

Waterfall

Waterfall

Waterfall

Waterfall

Waterfall

Waterfall

Waterfall

Waterfall