



Independence Monument  
© ROB KURTZMAN

Colorado National Monument preserves one of the grandest 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 terrain.

Here you can contemplate the glorious views that stretch to distant horizons, discover solitude deep in a remote canyon, and delight in wild country that has roaming desert bighorns and soaring golden eagles.

In the spirit of John Otto and others with the foresight to create Colorado National Monument in 1911 and of 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 highcountry of Colorado National Monument 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, Arches, and Canyonlands national parks.

This is a semidesert land of pinyon pines and Utah junipers, ravens and jays, desert bighorns and coyotes. Magnificent views from the plateau rim feature 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



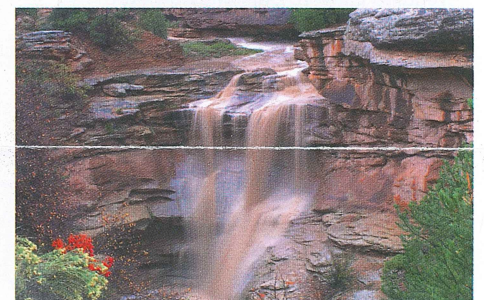
© VERN HEROLD

The many sheer-walled canyons were carved primarily by the erosive force of floodwaters flowing over the plateau for millions of years.

Vertical cliff walls and great natural rock sculptures tower over deep canyons. The scenery's grand scale is especially powerful in Monument and Wedding canyons, where giant rock forms of Pipe Organ, Kissing Couple, Independence Monument, Sentinel Spire, and Praying Hands rise from the canyon floor like stone skyscrapers.

The canyons are also places where the cascading song of the canyon wren echoes; where small, life-sustaining pools linger after summer rains; and where cottonwood trees turn golden in autumn.

Explore the canyons along backcountry trails. On a slow, quiet journey you might encoun-

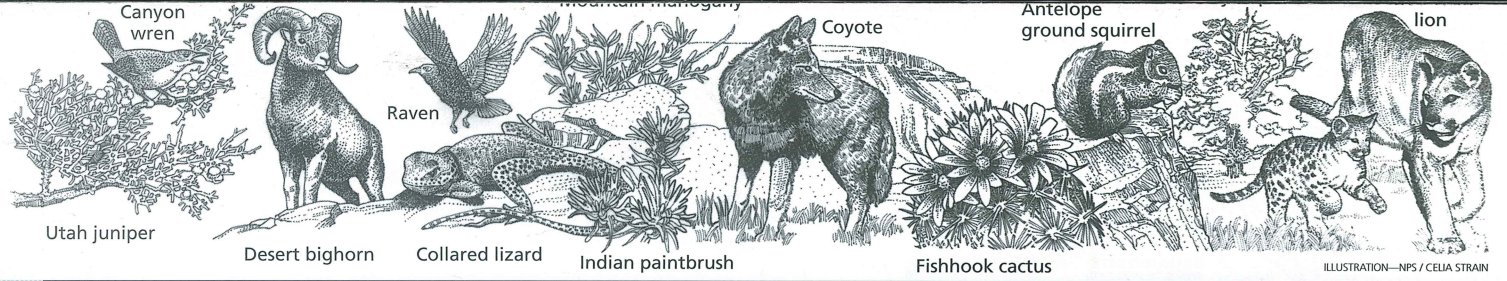


© JACK KINGSLEY

Recent rockfalls demonstrate that water, wind, and frost continue to cut the canyons more widely and deeply today.

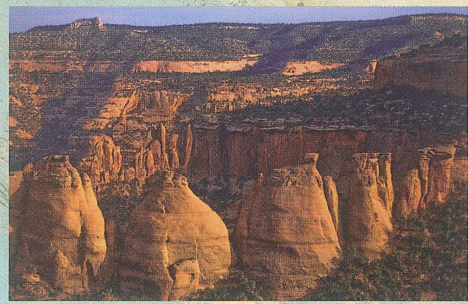
ter mule deer, desert cottontails, antelope ground squirrels, rock squirrels, chipmunks, lizards, or canyon birds like pinyon jays, white-throated swifts, and rock wrens. Mountain lions, bobcats, midget faded rattlesnakes, and other rare or secretive members of the canyon community are seen less often.

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 of the canyons' more common arid portions.

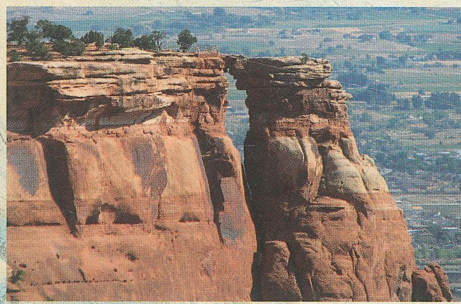


ILLUSTRATION—NPS / CELIA STRAIN

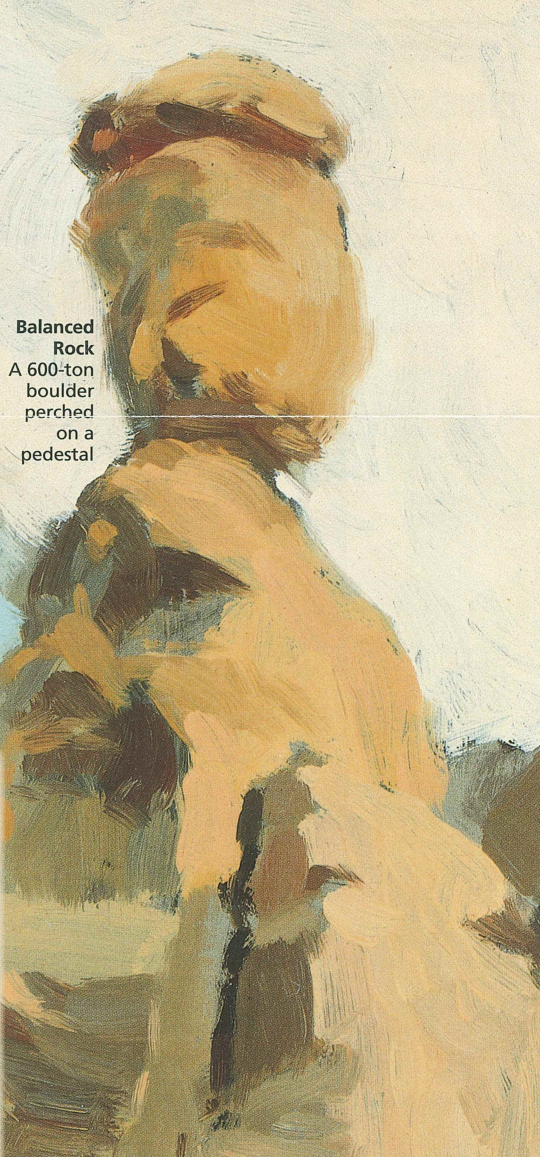
## Masterpieces of Erosion



**Coke Ovens** A series of colorful rock domes created by the natural sculpting forces of water, ice, and wind  
© KEN BIDDLE



**Window Rock** A hole carved out of a crack in a stone wall by thousands of years of relentless erosion  
© SALLY BELLACQUA

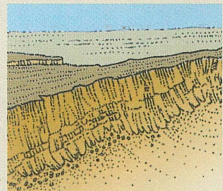


**Balanced Rock**  
A 600-ton boulder perched on a pedestal

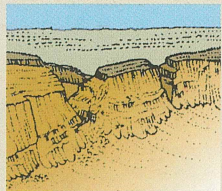
From 450-foot-high Independence Monument, the largest free-standing rock formation in the park, to the smallest detail carved in stone, the grand sculptor in Colorado National Monument has been erosion. Time—and lots of it—has been a loyal ally, for it has taken millions of years to carve the many massive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

sandstone, and the area's other sedimentary rocks 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 eroded, 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.

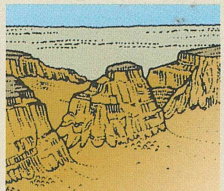
### The Formation of Independence Monument



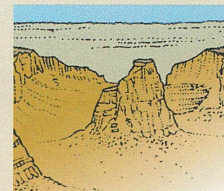
Independence Monument was once part of a massive rock wall that separated Wedding and Monument canyons.



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



Weathering and erosion proceeded more rapidly along natural fractures, where the rock was most vulnerable. 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 that will gradually succumb to time and weather.

ILLUSTRATIONS—NPS / CELIA STRAIN

### John Otto'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."

Otto lived alone in the wild, desolate canyon country southwest of Grand Junction. He loved the land so much that he campaigned tirelessly for it to be set aside as a national park. He urged the citizens of Grand Junction to deluge politicians in Washington, DC, with letters and petitions supporting his proposal. Meanwhile, he built miles of trails through the proposed park area so that others could appreciate its beauty—and he did it all without hope of any personal gain.

In 1911 his dream came true: Colorado National Monument was established. Otto was named the park's caretaker, a job he gladly did until 1927 for just \$1 a month.



ILLUSTRATION—NPS / MILTON KOBAYASHI

# Plan Your Visit

The visitor center is open daily with a few posted holiday closures. Come here for exhibits, audiovisual programs, and a gift shop. Staff can answer questions and help you plan your visit. Schedules of talks and guided walks are posted in summer.

**Popular activities** include rock climbing and hiking (*below*). For bicyclists and motorists the 23-mile **Rim Rock Drive** climbs the Colorado River's Grand Valley to the highcountry then winds along the plateau rim. Stop at roadside overlooks for breathtaking views of canyons and rock sculptures.

Guides and maps are available for purchase at the visitor center. Three **picnic areas** (see *map*) have restrooms, tables, and water (seasonally). The Devils Kitchen and visitor center picnic areas have shade shelters.

**Saddlehorn Campground** sites (fee) are available first-come, first-served or with reservations. Sites have a table and charcoal grill with drinking water and restrooms nearby. RV or vehicle-and-trailer is limited to 40 feet.

Obtain a required **backcountry camping** permit at the visitor center. Other federal, state, and commercial

campgrounds are near the park.

**Accessibility** Accessible restrooms are at the visitor center, Devils Kitchen picnic area, Saddlehorn Campground, and Liberty Cap trailhead. The visitor center and Devils Kitchen picnic areas, the first ¼ mile of Alcove Nature Trail, and some overlooks and campsites are wheelchair-accessible. Service animals are welcome.

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

**Safety** 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. • Watch your step—and your children—at drop-offs and overlooks. • Do not throw rocks or other objects over cliffs; persons below may be injured. • Obey speed limits. • Watch for wildlife, fallen rock, and other hazards. • Carry your own water supply. Drink one gallon of water per person per day in this semidesert environment. • Charcoal fires are permitted only in

provided grills. Wood fires are prohibited.

## Emergencies call 911

**Regulations** Guns are allowed in the park when carried in accordance with state law. Other weapons and hunting are prohibited. • Lights are required on bicycles. • Wheeled or motorized vehicles are prohibited on trails and off-road. • Pets are prohibited in buildings and on trails. • Drones are prohibited.

**Leave No Trace** Do not litter. In the backcountry pack out trash; do not burn or bury it. • Park features and artifacts are protected by law.

Do not remove or disturb natural or cultural objects. Graffiti (carving, scratching, chalking, or any type of marking) is illegal. Help us protect and preserve our natural and cultural resources for future enjoyment.

**More Information**  
Colorado National Monument  
Fruita, CO 81521-9530  
970-858-3617  
www.nps.gov/colm  
colm\_info@nps.gov  
www.facebook.com/ColoradoNM

Colorado National Monument is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. You can learn more at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

## Explore Park Trails in Any Season

Use this chart to learn more about the park's 45-mile trail system. Short trails go to overlooks. Backcountry trails go into canyons or across plateau country. Plateau trails

are level or gradually sloping. Other trails may have short stretches with steep ascents or descents. Undeveloped routes follow rock cairns or canyon drainages.

When choosing a trail, consider your time, experience, interests, and physical fitness. • When hiking in the backcountry or off-trail, tell someone your plans and carry

a topographic map. • Pace yourself, watch the weather, and carry plenty of water. • Wear proper footwear like hiking boots for rocky or sandy surfaces. • Off-road

vehicles, bicycles, and pets are prohibited in the backcountry and on trails. Horse use is limited.

For more information call the visitor center.

 **National Park Foundation.**  
Join the park community.  
[www.nationalparks.org](http://www.nationalparks.org)

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	Short Trails		Backcountry Trails		
	One-Way Distance (miles)	One-Way Avg. Time (hours)	One-Way Distance (miles)	One-Way Avg. Time (hours)	
<b>Window Rock Trail</b> Level loop trail through pinyon-juniper woodland to overlook. Excellent views of Monument and Wedding canyons and most of their major rock formations, like Independence Monument.	0.25	¼	<b>Corkscrew Trail Loop</b> Originally built by John Otto in 1909. Connects with Liberty Cap and Ute Canyon trails. Follow Liberty Cap Trail to trail junction sign at 1.0 mile. Go left. Hike 0.2 mile to the Corkscrew Trail sign. Descend steep "corkscrew" switchbacks. Follow Corkscrew Connector Trail signs back to trailhead.	3.3	2½
<b>Canyon Rim Trail</b> Level trail along the cliff edge above colorful Wedding Canyon. Outstanding views.	0.5	½	<b>Old Gordon Trail</b> Steadily ascending trail along historic lumber path and cattle drive road. Rock layers exposed along this largely undeveloped route tell most of the park's geologic story.	4.0	2½
<b>Otto's Trail</b> Gently sloping trail to overlook. Dramatic view of many monoliths.	0.5	½	<b>Black Ridge Trail</b> Park's highest trail. Follows the up-and-down terrain of Black Ridge and crosses McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. Views west to Utah canyonlands and east to Grand Valley.	5.5	3
<b>Coke Ovens Trail</b> Gradually descending trail from upper Monument Canyon trailhead to overlook. Dramatic view of many monoliths.	0.5	½	<b>Monument Canyon Trail</b> Steep 600-foot descent from plateau into Monument Canyon, where many of park's major rock sculptures—Independence Monument, Kissing Couple, and Coke Ovens—tower overhead.	6.0	3½
<b>Alcove Nature Trail</b> Level self-guiding nature trail into ancient sand dune to overlook. First ¼ mile of trail is crushed, compacted granite for accessibility. Guide sheet is available at visitor center.	0.5	½	<b>Ute Canyon Trail (unmaintained)</b> Rigorous descent from plateau into narrow Ute Canyon follows primitive trail then follows streambed with seasonal stream and pools bordered by cottonwoods and willows.	7.0	4
<b>Devils Kitchen Trail</b> Leads to a natural rock room formed by huge upright boulders.	0.75	¾	<b>Liberty Cap Trail</b> 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.	7.0	4
<b>Serpents Trail</b> Historic trail built in the early 1900s, once called "the Crookedest Road in the World" and part of the main road until 1950, climbs steadily east to west.	1.75	1½	<b>No Thoroughfare Trail</b> Descent from plateau on maintained trail then undeveloped route through remote No Thoroughfare Canyon. Canyon walls rise over 400 feet.	8.5	6

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



Trail



Overlook



Distance along Rim Rock Drive



Ranger station



Campground



Access gate



Unpaved road



Wheelchair-accessible



Picnic area



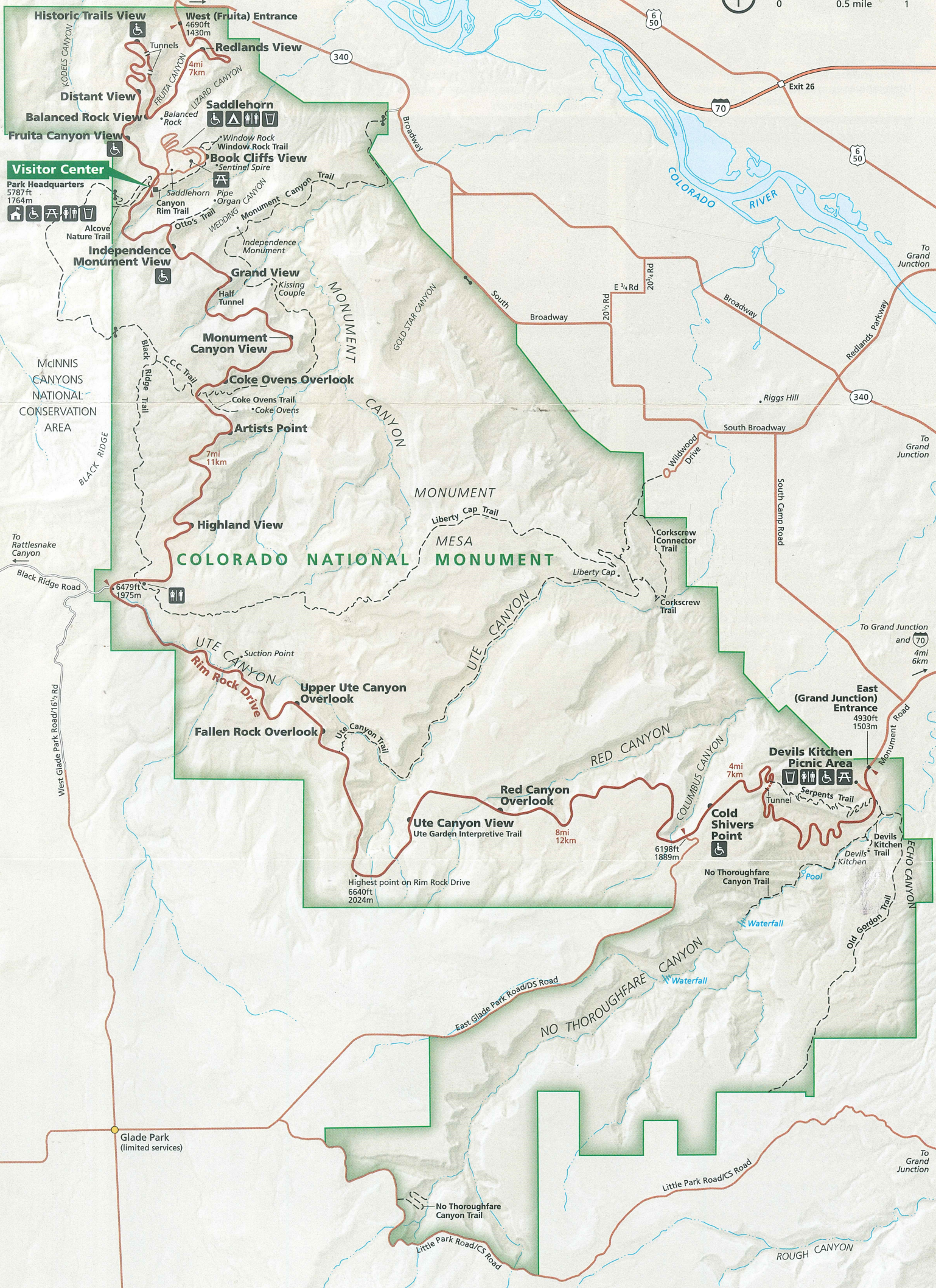
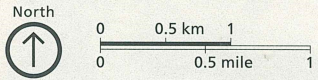
Restrooms



Drinking water

To Fruita and (70) (exit 19) 2mi 4km

West Entrance to Grand Junction 12mi 19km



**Historic Trails View**

**West (Fruita) Entrance**  
4590ft 1430m

**Redlands View**

**Distant View**

**Balanced Rock View**

**Fruita Canyon View**

**Visitor Center**

**Park Headquarters**  
5787ft 1764m

**Independence Monument View**

**Monument Canyon View**

**Highland View**

**Artists Point**

**Upper Ute Canyon Overlook**

**Fallen Rock Overlook**

**Red Canyon Overlook**

**Ute Canyon View**

**Cold Shivers Point**

**Devils Kitchen Picnic Area**

**East (Grand Junction) Entrance**  
4930ft 1503m

**Glade Park (limited services)**

**No Thoroughfare Canyon Trail**

**Little Park Road/CS Road**

**East Glade Park Road/DS Road**

**Black Ridge Road**

**West Glade Park Road/16 1/2 Rd**

**Black Ridge Trail**

**CCC Trail**

**Alcove Nature Trail**

**Saddlehorn Canyon Rim Trail**

**Window Rock Trail**

**Book Cliffs View**

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