

DARK CANYON

Scenic Values

Dark Canyon is huge and impressive, a canyon of changing varied scenery and an important physical landmark of the area. Approximately 50,000 acres of upper Dark Canyon and Wooden Shoe Canyon, within the Manti-LaSal National Forest, has been proposed for designation as a wilderness area. Lower Dark Canyon is an existing primitive area under study for wilderness by the Bureau of Land Management.

The upper reaches of the canyon are wide, with many large, open clearings. Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir trees give way to pinyon-juniper and cottonwood as one travels down Dark Canyon. The sense of being enclosed in numerous walls and ridges, each reaching higher than the one in front, stays with the hiker down the canyon but is gradually overshadowed in the lower reaches, as the innermost walls tower to a height of over 1400 feet.

Lower Dark Canyon is set apart by an abundant supply of clear, flowing water and deep crystalline plunge pools. The hiker walks to the music of water tumbling over pour offs and rolling gently downstream.

Geological Value

Dark Canyon is very interesting from a geological standpoint. The tops of the towering walls reflect the varied hues of the Cutler Formation. Cutting deeper, the stream bed flows down the stair-step sandstones, shales, and gray limestones of the Rico Formation, and the hiker is flanked by steep benches and slopes. Several small oil seeps are noted in this fossil-bearing layer. Still older are the cherty limestones, shales and sandstones of the Hermosa Formation. Many interesting ribbons and nodules of chert are observed in the gray limestone, including in one boulder, several chert nodules in the form of perfect cockleshells and crinoid stems.

Wildlife

A wide range of mammals will occasionally be sighted in Dark Canyon and the surrounding areas. Sightings include: Black Bear, Bighorn Sheep, deer, bobcat, mountain lion, coyote, Ringtail Cat, Cottontail Rabbit, fox.

As long as extended camping near water resources is avoided, there should be no conflict between wildlife and backpacking groups.

In addition there could be a problem with the Mule Deer and the water supply. In this dry area, these sources are widely separated and could cause a change in the habitat of the deer if they are not able to water in their usual areas. Here again, if extended camping near the water is avoided, there probably will be no problems.

Bird Life

Some of the documented sightings of birds are: Raven, Chickadee, Golden Eagles, Dipper, Red Shafted Flickers, Pinyon Jay, Red-tailed Hawk, magpie, grouse, and White Crowned Sparrows.

Historic Sites

Lower Woodenshoe Canyon

Horse and cattle use has occurred historically throughout upper Dark Canyon and Woodenshoe. The backpacker may encounter livestock in his travels through Dark Canyon.

Hiking Conditions

For the most part, hiking in Dark Canyon is fast and easy. The descent is gradual and most of the pour offs are easily negotiated over rock formations weathered into steps and ledges.

Hikers should be aware of the logistics involved in rescue operations in Dark Canyon. If a visitor were to suffer a broken leg, for example, he/she would have to be hauled out by hand. Also a time factor would enter in since Dark Canyon is so isolated. It is quite possible that rescuers could not reach an injured party before two or more days have passed. A word of caution is be careful and aware of how long a rescue might take. You will essentially be on your own while traveling in Dark Canyon.

There are two difficult spots in the trail worth remembering. The first of these begins at the mouth of the alcove to the south, about one and one-half miles above the mouth of Lost Canyon (see attached map). Here the hiker must go up on the left wall and stay high on the talus slope for about one half mile until access can again be gained to the streambed.

Just above the Lake about one and one-half miles, (see attached map) there is a series of pour offs that can be passed by going high on either wall and traveling along a steep talus slope high above the

drainage. On our trips we have gone up the right wall and followed an established path. This trail is reached by climbing up a series of red rocks marked with a single cairn. Access to this trail is about 50 yards upsteam from the point where the route along the streambed becomes impassable. After following this trail in the talus for about a mile, access can be gained to the streambed once more by following down a drainage choked with boulders. Both this route and the one on the left wall are extremely high and may pose a potential safety problem for hikers with fear of heights or those groups with small children.

Routes

The trailheads of Routes No. 1 through No. 7 are usually not accessible until June 1 in most years due to the snow and mud present along the roads to these points. These routes should be checked before attempting them during the spring and fall. Route No. 8 is accessible in most years as it is lower in elevation. Approximate mileage for each route is also listed in kilometers from the trailhead to Lake Powell.

The routes listed below (with the exception of Rig Canyon) have been checked by the Grand Gulch Rangers in 1977 and 1978.

1. Begin at the Little Notch, on Manti-LaSal National Forest down Kigalia Canyon to Peavine Canyon and down Peavine to upper Dark Canyon although the trail is not marked. A possible circle route would include Route No. 1 to Dark Canyon then down Dark Canyon to the mouth of Woodenshoe Canyon, then out Woodenshoe via Route No. 4. A party would then travel overland to their vehicle parked at the beginning of Route No. 1. Also Peavine can be traveled. 34.5 miles (55.5 Km).
2. Begin on Manti-LaSal National Forest at Cooper Spring on Dry Mesa and follow the trail down Rig Canyon to upper Dark Canyon 39.8 miles (64 Km).
3. Begin at the trailhead in Trail Canyon on Dark Canyon Plateau. Follow Trail Canyon in Manti-LaSal National Forest to it's intersection with upper Dark Canyon. 24.4 miles (39.3 Km).
4. Begin on Manti-LaSal National Forest at the corrals in upper Woodenshoe Canyon and follow Woodenshoe Canyon to the mouth in Dark Canyon. 35.2 miles (56.6 Km).
5. Begin on BLM Public Land at the drill pad in T. 34 S., R. 17 E., Sec. 25. Travel along the point to the northwest between Woodenshoe

Canyon and Black Steer Canyon. The route into Black Steer is hazardous and rough. This route involves an altitude loss of 2300 feet and should be used only by experienced backpackers in good physical condition. Rock cairns are not found on this route 16.1 miles (25.9 Km).

6. The route through Young's Canyon on BLM Public Lands has not been fully explored. The map shows a possible route out. Near the mouth of Young's Canyon is a large patch of Poison Ivy which the hiker must walk through. 14.8 miles (23.8 Km).
7. There is a possible route on BLM Public Lands through Lean-to Canyon. Several large pour offs must be circumvented. A way around the largest is to stay high on the up canyon side following the route marked with rock cairns until the pour off is passed, then to follow the streambed on out to the airstripe on Lean-To Point (see map). 9.6 miles (15.4 Km).
8. Begin at the register box at Sundance Trail in T. 33 S., R. 16 E., Sec. 31, north of the Indian Head Pass. This route travels down a 1120 foot talus slope to Dark Canyon and is well marked by rock cairns. This climb is fairly arduous. 4.6 miles (7.4 Km). Access to the Sundance Trail may be gained as early as mid February and as late as January 1st depending on weather condition.

Water Sources

Water sources in Woodenshoe and the upper section of Dark Canyon are limited and could pose a problem in dry years. A minimum of two quarts per person per day in cooler weather and one gallon in hot weather should be carried between these water sources. The areas listed below will probably be flowing in dry years, but caution should be used, and the water treated by boiling or iodine..

1. There are various seeps coming out in Peavine Canyon below Steamboat Point.
2. There is a good spring at the mouth of Peavine Canyon.
(Cattle may pollute the two above springs during summer months).
3. There are two good springs about one mile above the mouth of Warren Canyon in Dark Canyon.
4. There is a good spring at the mouth of Cherry Canyon in Woodenshoe Canyon.

5. There is an excellent flowing spring, which is marked on the USGS Fable Valley Quadrangle Map, about one and one-half miles up Woodenshoe Canyon from the mouth. In most years, there will be water in the streambed about one-quarter of a mile below the spring.
6. About two miles below Black Steer Canyon, the water begins to flow in the streambed, and water is plentiful from this point to the lake.

Soap should not be used in the water sources, even if it is biodegradable, for it causes rapid deterioration of the water and renders it unsuitable for wildlife and man.

Hikers should be aware of the possibility of flash floods during the spring, summer and fall and plan accordingly. This might include not camping in those areas which may be flooded in times of high run-off and being aware that routes may have to be varied during run-off periods.

If you find archaeological sites, please leave them as you find them. Please don't collect potsherds or lithic materials, and do not stack these items on rocks within the sites. Just leave them in place.

Please be sure to pack out what you pack in and try to clean up any trash that you may find. You should try to leave Dark Canyon as you found it or perhaps just a little bit cleaner.

In terms of campfires, try to build your campfire in the sand of the wash bottom and don't make a fire ring unless heavy vegetation is apparent then destroy the ring of stones before leaving. Let your fire burn completely so the ashes will be scattered by the winds.

Visitors are encouraged to contact BLM or Forest Service Offices in Monticello, Utah or BLM Kane Gulch Ranger Station for current information and conditions before entering Dark Canyon. Free Use Permits may be obtained both at the San Juan Resource Area Headquarters in Monticello or from Kane Gulch Ranger Station at the trailhead into Grand Gulch. There is no charge for non-commercial permits. At this writing, only commercial groups need obtain permits for travel over the USFS portions of Dark Canyon. These may be obtained from the USFS office in Monticello.

Please be aware that Dark Canyon is still an isolated canyon which is mostly untouched by man, and we hope that it will remain such. This will, however, require each visitor to treat it in such a way that it will remain in this condition. Both the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service ask your cooperation in this. Before

any extended trips are taken into Dark Canyon, it is advisable for the hiker to obtain the following USGS 15 minute quadrangle maps: Bears Ears, Utah - 1954; Fable Valley, Utah - 1954; and Mouth of Dark Canyon 1952. The quadrangles you need will depend, of course, on the routes you are planning on using.

Sundance Trail Entrance to Dark Canyon

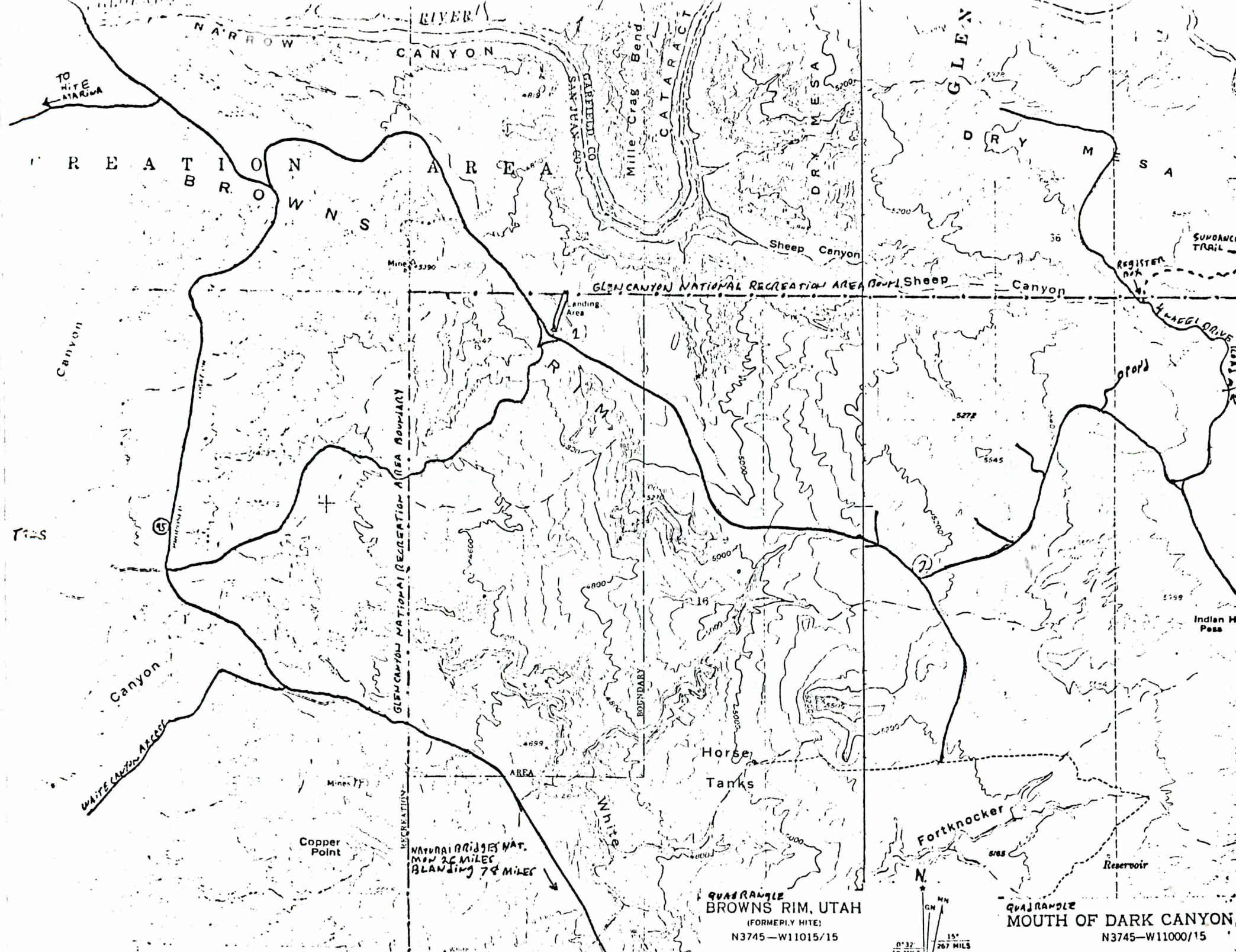
The Sundance Trail can be reached from Highway U-95 via a series of dirt roads which at times require 6" - 8" vehicle clearance.

There are two major approaches from U-95:

1. Travel northwest approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the (GCNRA) boundary sign on U-95. Make the first right turn after the White Canyon Bridge. Travel this road for approximately 5 miles, turn right at a major intersection. This road is the rougher of the two access roads. (1, see map)
2. Travel northwest approximately six miles after the Glen Canyon NRA boundary sign on U-95. As you cross a large rim or hill, make a right turn just after a set of guard rails. (If you reach the road to Hite Marina, you have gone too far--back-track $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles.) Travel this road four miles to a major intersection. (1, see map)

Both of the routes meet at the major intersection (1, see map). At the intersection travel the well-traveled road for four miles southeast to another major intersection (2, see map), take the left road for four miles traveling north east.

A small intersecting road to the Sundance Trail is marked with two rock cairns; turn left on this road for one mile to the rim of a side canyon of Dark Canyon; park your vehicle at this location. (3, see map) The remaining portion of this road is a 4-wheel drive road only. We suggest that you hike the 4-wheel drive road for $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles until the register box is reached (please register). From the register box, follow the rock cairn trail for approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the head of the Sundance trail. The trail is 1,120 vertical feet of 50% talus slope which leads into Dark Canyon.



CREATION
BROWNS AREA

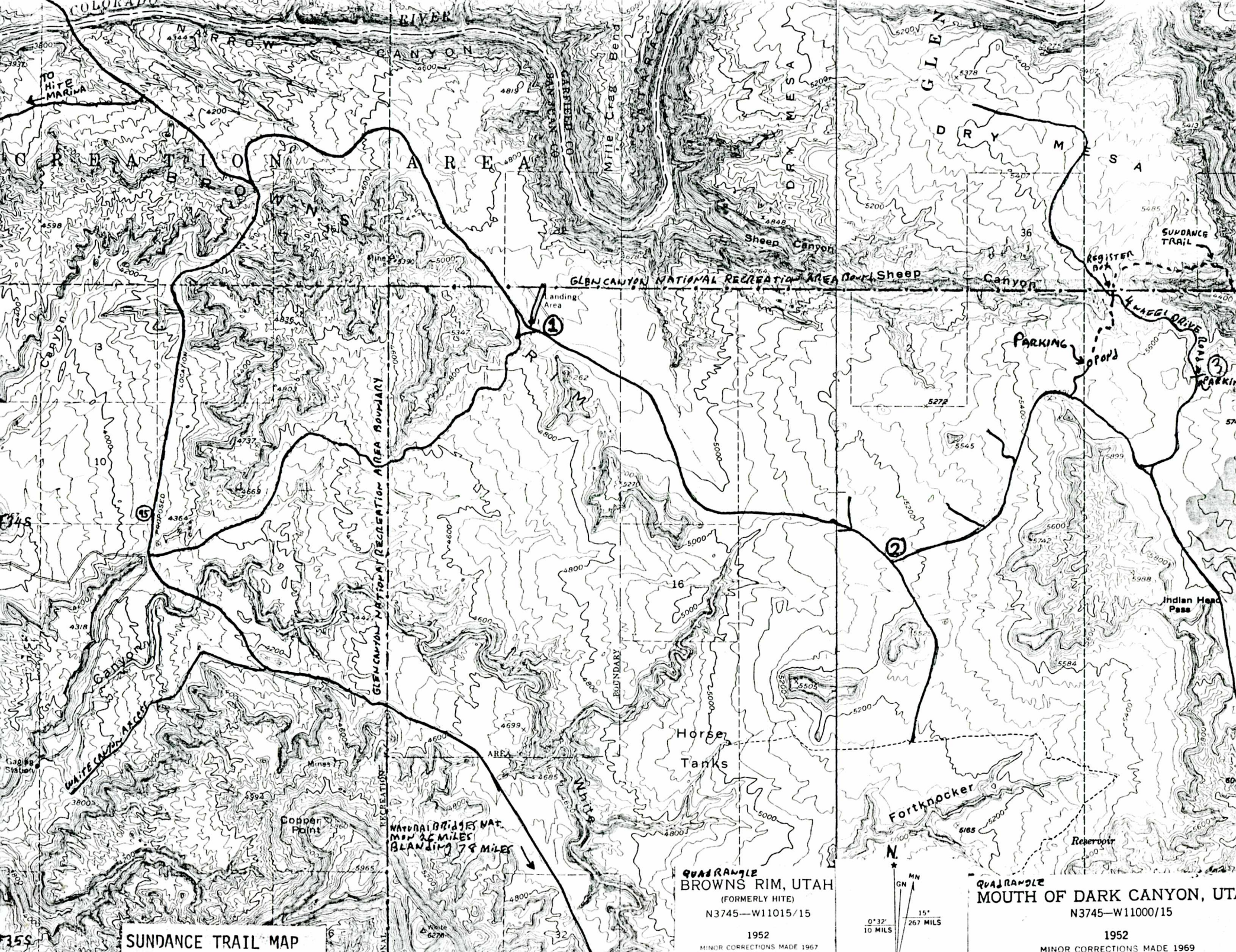
GLENN
DRY MESA

GLN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

GLN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA BOUNDARY

QUADRANGLE
BROWNS RIM, UTAH
(FORMERLY HITE)
N3745-W11015/15

QUADRANGLE
MOUTH OF DARK CANYON
N3745-W11000/15



TO HITE MARINA

GLACIERS NATIONAL AREA

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QUADRANGLE
BROWNS RIM, UTAH
(FORMERLY HITE)
N3745-W11015/15
1952
MINOR CORRECTIONS MADE 1967

QUADRANGLE
MOUTH OF DARK CANYON, UT
N3745-W11000/15
1952
MINOR CORRECTIONS MADE 1969



MAP KEY

Hatched line represents
proposed Wilderness Area
Boundary by the Forest Service

Solid line represents
BLM Primitive Area Boundary

Pouroffs
This map is taken from USGS
Fable Valley & Bears Ears quads

DARK CANYON PRIMITIVE AREA

South Side Access

<u>Miles Between Junctions</u>	<u>Description of Junctions</u>
0.0	Junction U-95 Natural Bridges Road
0.7	Natural Bridges Road, turn right at sign: Blanding via Bears Ears 45 miles
7.7	Proceed to pole corral, turn left at sign: Deer Flat 12, Twin Springs 4
2.0	Proceed to Twin Springs Junction, stay to the left on main road past pole corral
1.6	Woodenshoe Canyon stay to left on main road
4.4	Turn right at sign: Horse Flats 5
7.8	Turn right just past reservoir for Black Steer Trailhead. Proceed 1.7 miles to drill pad parking area.
5.3	Turn left on upper road at sign: U-95 28 miles, Dark Canyon Overlook
13.8	Turn right at faint road to Spanish Stairs Trailhead, Proceed from 0.9 to 1.4 miles depending on vehicle clearance. Road is washed out in gully just ahead. If on the right road you will pass a brush corral shortly after turning off.
2.5	Come to Y in trail, stay left
0.7	Duckett Crossing, Horse Tanks Junction Left 10.1 miles to U-95 via Duckett Crossing Right 8.2 miles to U-95 near Hite Junction