

SLICKHORN CANYON

Scenic Values

Slickhorn is a canyon of many shapes and colors - twisted and carved in eroded reds, browns and yellows. It is an impressive canyon, almost free of the signs of recent man's activities, where one can find solitude. The occasional disturbance of a jet overhead is far outweighed by the primitive beauty that surrounds the hiker in Slickhorn Canyon.

The sandstone walls of the canyon vary in height from 300 feet in the north end to 800 feet as the canyon approaches the San Juan River. The varying hues of the Cedar Mesa sandstone give way to the rugged red Halgaito sandstone and shale as the river nears.

Hiking Conditions

Hiking in this undisturbed canyon is rugged. Occasionally, a faint footpath or old stock trail is visible, but for the most part there is no trail to follow. The channel is frequently clogged with boulders, and there are many pouroffs and talus slopes to be negotiated, challenging even the experienced hiker.

All routes are impassable to stock animals. Any old trails that may have existed have since been blocked by the shifting boulders borne by flashfloods.

At least four days should be allowed to hike the entire canyon and explore the upper side canyons. The going is slow. It would not be wise to hike alone in Slickhorn, as falling rock and unsure footing are ever-present hazards on the many talus slopes.

Routes

All trailheads are accessible to 2-wheel drive vehicles during good weather conditions. After a heavy rainfall, or during the winter, the road can become quite slick, and 4-wheel drive is recommended.

The routes discussed below have been verified by Grand Gulch rangers. Visitors are encouraged to contact BLM offices in Monticello, Utah, or the Kane Gulch Ranger Station for current information and conditions. Free Use Permits may be obtained at either office.

Before entering Slickhorn, you should purchase the USGS topographic map of the area (Cedar Mesa quad), or pick up a free Grand Gulch brochure at the Kane Gulch Ranger Station.

For all access points, drive 9.4 miles south of the ranger station on Highway 261, turn right at the Cigarette Springs sign. In 2.5 miles, you will reach a major junction. Stay left, and you will be heading south, parallel to Highway 261.

1. Access No. 1 is 1.6 miles south of the major junction. Vehicles can be parked on a faint side road, approximately .1 mile further.
2. Access No. 2 is 1.3 miles further south of the first access. There is a side road just past the drainage, for vehicle parking.
3. Access No. 3 can be reached from No. 2 and walking southwest. A compass is highly recommended since you will be walking through trees without any reference points.
4. 1.4 miles south of Access No. 2, the road dips down into the wash, where you will see two old cattle watering troughs. This is Access No. 4. You can park on the north side of the hill in the small clearing by the left side of the road.
5. Access No. 5 can be reached from two points. Park at Access No. 4, follow the south rim about 2 miles, then turn south; or park at Access No. 6 (trail canyon), follow the north rim 2 miles, and head north (compass recommended).
6. Begin 1.2 miles from Access No. 4. You will pass over a cattle-guard, and enter an area where the trees have been chained off. The road will make a sharp bend to the east, and vehicles may be parked anywhere in this vicinity (compass recommended).
7. Access is from the San Juan River by raft, or hiking from Grand Gulch.

Hikers should also be aware of the possibility of flash floods, and plan accordingly. Camp high above the streambed, and vary routes when necessary.

Prehistoric and Historic Values

At the mouth of Slickhorn, there is some oil drilling gear left long ago. Cables, ropes and parts of wagons are scattered around the drill holes above the river.

If you find historic or pre-historic sites, please leave them as you find them. Federal law prohibits the collection and disturbance of these cultural remains. All sites are protected by the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and Antiquities Act. Report vandalism or disturbances to the Grand Gulch rangers or the Monticello BLM office.

Camping Etiquette

Soap should not be used in water sources even if it is biodegradable. Water should be carried in containers, away from the source, and poured into the soil after use.

Pack out anything that you have brought in and try to clean up any trash that you find. Items such as orange peels, aluminum foil, and eggshells should be carried out. Remember that you are hiking in the desert where the decomposition process is quite slow.

Campfires are allowed in Slickhorn, although stoves are preferred. If you decide to have a fire, try to build it in the sand of the wash bottom in an unvegetated area, and do not use a fire ring. Make sure your fire is completely out before you leave.

You can camp wherever you like, as long as it is not in an alcove that has an archaeological site. This includes cliff dwellings and rock art sites. Camping in archaeological sites is not allowed for preservation reasons. Some of the cliff dwellings are up to 800 years old, and are showing extensive wear from visitor use.

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