

Capitol Reef

National Park
Utah

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



An aerial view of the Waterpocket Fold; its orientation matches the illustration below, with east to left, west to right.

Michael Collier

A giant, sinuous wrinkle in the Earth's crust stretches for 100 miles across south-central Utah. This impressive buckling of rock, created 65 million years ago by the same tremendous forces that later uplifted the Colorado Plateau, is called the Waterpocket Fold. Capitol Reef National Park preserves the fold and its spectacular, eroded jumble of colorful cliffs, massive domes, soaring spires, stark monoliths, twisting canyons, and graceful arches. But the Waterpocket Fold country is more than this. It is also the free-flowing Fremont River and the big desert sky. It is cactus, jay, lizard, jackrabbit, juniper, columbine, and deer. It is a place where Indians hunted and farmed for more than 1,000 years and, later, where Mormon pioneers settled to raise their families. It is the inspiration for poets, artists, photographers, and those who seek only to re-create themselves in the solitude and splendor of its vastness. The world of the Waterpocket Fold stretches for 100 miles—and beyond.

Creation of the Waterpocket Fold

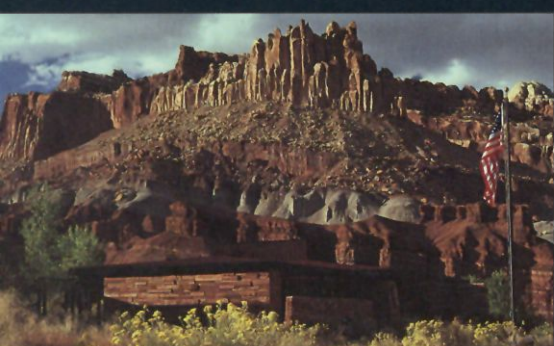


As this artist's conceptual drawing shows, Waterpocket Fold is made up of many layers of sedimentary rock. These layers, which were originally horizontal, were formed from sediments deposited over hundreds of millions of years in

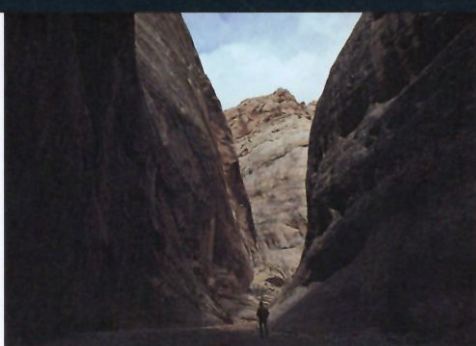
seas, tidal flats, deserts, and other ancient environments. Then, as an extensive regional mountain-building episode began, these rock layers were bent, or flexed, into a huge fold. Gradually, many of the uppermost layers of the ancient fold (restored in illustration)

were completely eroded away, leaving only a hint of the enormity of the Waterpocket Fold in its earlier days. As wind and water continue slowly to erode the fold, new features are created from the rock.

Exploring Highways and Byways



The Castle: a prominent landmark



Grand Wash



The life-sustaining Fremont River

The Waterpocket Fold country can be explored fleetingly along Utah 24, the major east-west highway through the park, and on the Scenic Drive, a narrow paved road that provides a 25-mile round trip of the park. Utah 24, built in 1962, follows the serpentine Fremont River as it winds its way across the Fold. Above the road tower the brilliantly colored cliffs and domes of Cap-

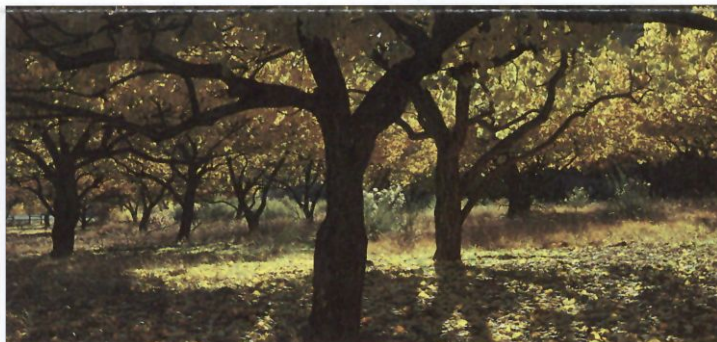
itol Reef, the park's namesake. This especially majestic part of the Waterpocket Fold is named for its vaulted white rock domes and its nearly impassable ridges (pioneers sometimes called these ridges "reefs"). The Scenic Drive follows the west face of the fold and leads into Grand Wash and Capitol Gorge, two deep, twisting, water-carved, sheer-walled canyons. Along the

Scenic Drive are trails that will lead you to overlooks, remote canyons, natural arches, and slickrock wilderness. There are spectacular views of the Waterpocket Fold country from highways and byways beyond the park boundaries, too. One such sweeping panorama can be seen along Utah 12 west of the park from an elevation of more than 9,400 feet.

Photographs above by Stephen Trimble



Fremont petroglyphs



Fruita orchard



Fruita schoolhouse



Mule deer



Indian paintbrush



Yellow-bellied marmot



Mountain bluebird

Life Along the River

Life in the Waterpocket Fold country is most abundant along the Fremont River. American Indians, early pioneers, moisture-loving plants, and many animals have all found refuge near its waters.

People of the little-known but widespread Fremont Culture lived along the river as early as AD 700, sharing the rugged slickrock wilderness of the Colorado Plateau with the Anasazi who lived to the south.

Fremont people hunted and gathered much of their food, and grew corn, beans, and squash as well. When they departed sometime after AD 1250, they left behind few traces of their life here. The images they painted (petroglyphs) and incised (petroglyphs) into canyon walls can still be seen in several places. Later, nomadic Utes and Paiutes hunted throughout the Waterpocket Fold country.

Explorers, Mormon pioneers, and others began to make their way into the valley of the Fremont River in the late 1800s. Settling beyond the valley required a trip across the rough terrain of the Waterpocket Fold. A narrow, rocky travel route that cut through the fold was called Capitol Gorge. One rock wall called the Pioneer Register is filled with the names of miners, settlers, and others who passed through this canyon beginning in 1871. By 1917, the tiny

Mormon community of Fruita was bustling on the banks of the Fremont. With skillful irrigation of the good soil of the valley, Fruita became well known for its productive orchards and the quality of its fruit. Flooding sometimes occurred but the town was spared any serious destruction. After Capitol Reef National Monument (later to become Capitol Reef National Park) was set aside in 1937, the farmers and their families gradually moved away.

The heritage of these pioneers is preserved in an old log schoolhouse, where socials, dances, and church meetings were once held; in the Gifford Farmhouse, the home of early settlers; and in other structures scattered around the still-thriving historic orchards and fields of Fruita.

Today, the life along the Fremont River consists of cottonwoods, willows, and ash which recreate

a fresh ribbon of green each spring, and of Indian paintbrush, golden-pea, and other seasonal wildflowers. Animals are drawn by the magnet of water: birds, from mountain bluebirds to migratory ducks, and mammals, from marmots to mule deer. But move away from the river—even just a few hundred yards—and the harsh, sparser environment of the desert dominates.

Photographs of orchard, deer, flower, and marmot by Stephen Trimble; schoolhouse by Laurence Parent.

In the Backcountry



Cathedral Valley: one corner of the backcountry



Golden eagle



Desert bighorn



Spadefoot toad

Miles of unpaved roads lead into remote areas of the Waterpocket Fold country that was once of interest only to cowboys, geologists, miners, and sheepherders. Today, these areas offer natural beauty and solitude to park visitors. In vast expanses such as Cathedral Valley golden eagles soar and solitary stone monoliths tower over sandy desert plains. In secluded canyons such as Halls Creek Canyon hanging gardens of monkeyflower and maidenhair fern grace canyon walls. You may find panoramic views on many roads, including the Burr Trail, where the views become ever more breathtaking as the road climbs to the top of the Waterpocket Fold. On roads or trails deep in the backcountry, the rugged splendor of Capitol Reef National Park is yours to enjoy.

In the backcountry the desert dominates, and it stands in stark contrast to the Fremont River valley, a rare oasis. Less than 8 inches of rain fall per year, most of it in late summer thunderstorms. These storms can turn dry, sandy washes into raging torrents, threatening some forms of life while sustaining others. Twisted, stunted juniper and piñon trees, which dot the landscape along with other hardy plants, are testimony to the severity of the desert. But many plants and animals are well adapted for life here. In different ways, kangaroo rats, lizards, cactuses, and saltbush cope with the perennial water shortage of the desert. Some are experts at collecting and storing water; others at water conservation; some at both. Many animals move only at night to escape the heat of day, so the casual

observer can easily underestimate the richness of animal life in the desert.

Occasionally, pools of rainwater collect in eroded bowl-like depressions in the rock called waterpockets. Oddly, the tiny waterpocket is the namesake of the massive fold that dominates this landscape. Bighorn sheep, bobcats, and even people have quenched their thirst at these holes. At least one animal, the spadefoot toad, uses the waterpockets as places to live and reproduce. Eggs laid in the water hatch into tadpoles within days of a rain. Tadpoles that reach adulthood before the pools dry up repeat the cycle when the pools fill again. And life in the Waterpocket Fold country goes on.

Photographs of eagle and toad by Stephen Trimble; bighorn by Tom Bean.

Exploring Capitol Reef

Visiting the Park

The Navajo call it the Land of the Sleeping Rainbow—a strange, beautiful landscape of multi-hued rock layers. Capitol Reef National Park lies in the heart of Utah's canyon country halfway between Canyonlands and Bryce Canyon national parks. Here at Capitol Reef you can see the geologic formations of the Waterpocket Fold and Cathedral Valley; archeological evidence of the ancient Fremont culture; historical vestiges of an old Mormon settlement; and a wide range of habitats supporting diverse plants and animals.

Facilities and Services

The park is open year-round. Stop first at the visitor center, open daily except December 25 from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (extended hours in summer). The park staff is on duty to provide information. There are exhibits, an orientation slide program, and a bookstore operated by the Capitol Reef Natural History Association.

Picnic Areas

The picnic area near the visitor center has grills, restrooms, drinking water, and shade trees. Picnic areas along Utah 24 and the Burr Trail Road offer only tables.

Camping

A fee is charged at the Fruita campground, a 71-site developed campground with picnic tables, restrooms, water, and an RV dump station. Sites are first-come, first-served and are limited to eight people per site. Cathedral Valley and Cedar Mesa primitive campgrounds (no fee) offer pit toilets, picnic tables, and fire grates, but no water. Camping in the backcountry requires a free permit.

Other services

Stores, food service, lodging, gas stations, and medical facilities are available in nearby towns.

Climate

Summer temperatures can reach into the 90°F during the day and cool down to the 50°s and 60°s at night. Humidity is low. Thunderstorms are common on summer afternoons. Spring and fall,

with milder temperatures, are ideal for long hikes and other strenuous activities. Winter brings cool weather and little snowfall. **Flash floods can occur at any time of the year**, but are most common in late summer and early fall. Always check at the visitor center for weather conditions and potentially dangerous situations.

Things to Do

Park Programs From May to September the park offers guided walks, talks, children's activities, and evening programs at the amphitheater near Fruita Campground. The visitor center has information and schedules.

Fruita Historic District Fruita was a Mormon settlement dating from the 19th century. The Fruita schoolhouse is a restored and refurbished one-room school located on Utah 24, 0.8 mile east of the visitor center. The blacksmith shop, 0.5 mile south on the Scenic Drive, dates from the Mormon pioneer days. The historic Gifford Homestead, one mile south on the Scenic Drive, has cultural demonstrations and handmade sales items.

Orchards

Apple, peach, cherry, pear, and apricot trees grow in the Fruita orchards. You may pick and eat fruit free of charge while visiting. There is a fee for fruit you take with you. Harvest times vary from year to year. Ask at the visitor center or call the fruit hotline at 435-425-3791.

Scenic Drive

You can see the Waterpocket Fold landscape close-up along the paved Scenic Drive. Allow about two hours for the 25-mile round-trip. A guide to the drive is available at the visitor center. An entrance fee is charged on the Scenic Drive beyond the Fruita campground.

Hiking

Ask at the visitor center for recommended routes and trail conditions. Trailheads for day hikes are located along Utah 24 and Scenic Drive. Longer, more rugged routes cross the northern and southern sections of the park. A free backcountry permit is required for overnight hikes.

Carry at least one gallon of drinking water per person per day. Water from backcountry sources should be boiled or filtered before drinking.

Ripple Rock Nature Center

The nature center, 0.75 mile from the visitor center, has interactive displays and exhibits—fun for the whole family! Check at the visitor center for scheduled hours and activities.

For a Safe Visit

All natural and cultural resources, and historic and archeological objects are protected by federal law. • Do not feed or disturb wildlife. • When hiking carry plenty of water, wear appropriate clothing and footwear, avoid hiking alone, and tell someone of your hiking plan. Be careful near cliff edges. Rocks can be slippery or can crumble under your weight. • When storms threaten, avoid canyons and dry washes where flash floods can occur suddenly. Avoid exposed areas, which are prone to lightning strikes. • Ground fires are not permitted in the park. Use the fire grates provided or campstoves. • Do not litter. Pack out all trash. • Pets must be on a leash and are allowed only in developed park areas, along roadways, and in picnic areas and campgrounds. Pets may not be left unattended in campgrounds or vehicles. • Off-highway vehicles (OHVs) are not permitted in the park. • Bicycles are restricted to maintained roads open to vehicle traffic. Hunting is prohibited in the park. Firearms must be unloaded, broken down, and cased; they may not be used or displayed.

More Information

This park is one of more than 380 National Park System areas preserving the nation's natural and cultural heritage. Visit our website at www.nps.gov. For information about this park, contact: Capitol Reef National Park HC 70, Box 15 Torrey, UT 84775 435-425-3791 www.nps.gov/care

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This map shows most of the prominent natural features, paved and unpaved roads, and visitor services in the park and nearby. Trails are

not shown. Trail information is available at the visitor center. Topographic maps are essential for hiking in the backcountry.

