

# Enjoy Sheer Wonders of the Colorado Plateau



PEREGRINE FALCON © GREG GARD  
DEVIL'S KITCHEN MONOLITHS © CHRIS EATON

*Inch by inch, foot by foot.* All around you, this dramatic landscape is always changing. Earth's powerful forces and past climates built the land up; erosion continuously wears it down. They tell a spectacular story of our dynamic planet.

Welcome to one of the great landscapes of the West, preserved since 1911 as Colorado National Monument. In this semiarid climate, a variety of life thrives, including desert bighorn sheep, golden eagles, and fragile biological soil crust. Hike along old-growth pinyon-juniper woodland, arid grassland, and upland shrub. Riparian habitats green up seasonally.

Explore a plateau-and-canyon country full of red rock geology. Vibrant colors of exposed rock reveal some of Earth's history at the edge of the Colorado Plateau. Travel up to 2,000 feet above the valley floor along the park's scenic drive. Enjoy the inspiring views of sheer-walled cliffs, deep canyons, and towering rock formations (monoliths). Camp in the wild backcountry under the stars. This is a land on the move.

How will it move you?

## How Did the Rock Layers Form?

Around 1.7 billion years ago, geologic processes and changing climates began to build this land. Over millions of years, layers of sandstone, shale, mudstone, and limestone covered basement rock of gneiss, schist, and granite. Gradually, some land was uplifted to over 6,000 feet.

The subtle strength of erosion whittled much of it away, revealing a colorful interior. Exposed rock layers (*right*) show us this area's past of oceans, marshes, and deserts. This spectacular peek inside our planet tells a story of ongoing transformation.

**Finding the Layers**  
You can see many rock layers throughout the park. To find the locations at right, fold this panel back to the other side of the brochure. Use it with the map to explore.

## This Soil Is Alive!

As you explore park trails, you may notice dark, bumpy soil lining the paths. This is biological soil crust—living soil.



Mosses, algae, lichens, fungi, bacteria, and cyanobacteria settle together to form a web. The web binds soil and sand and holds in water. This lets

seeds grow and plants root, adding life to the nourishing—though fragile—habitat.

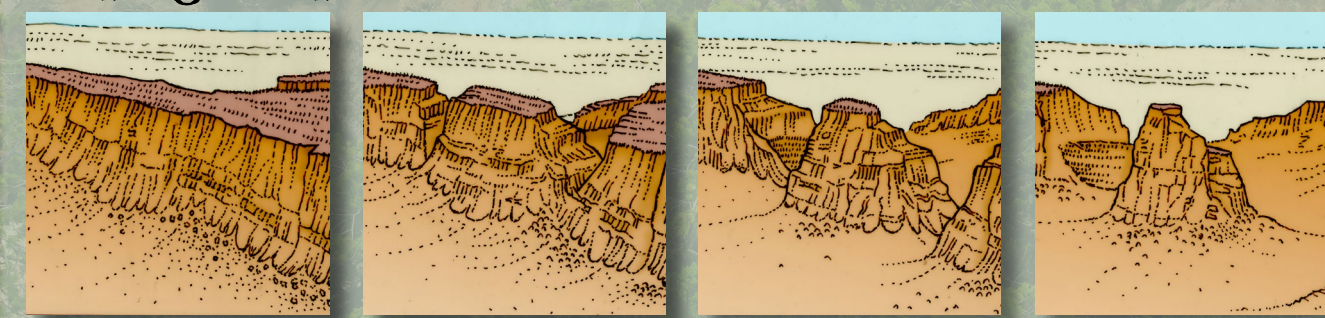
NPS / CARLA DEKALB



VIEW ACROSS MONUMENT CANYON FROM CANYON RIM TRAIL  
© CHRIS EATON

DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP  
© EUGENE BECKES

## Shaping Independence Monument



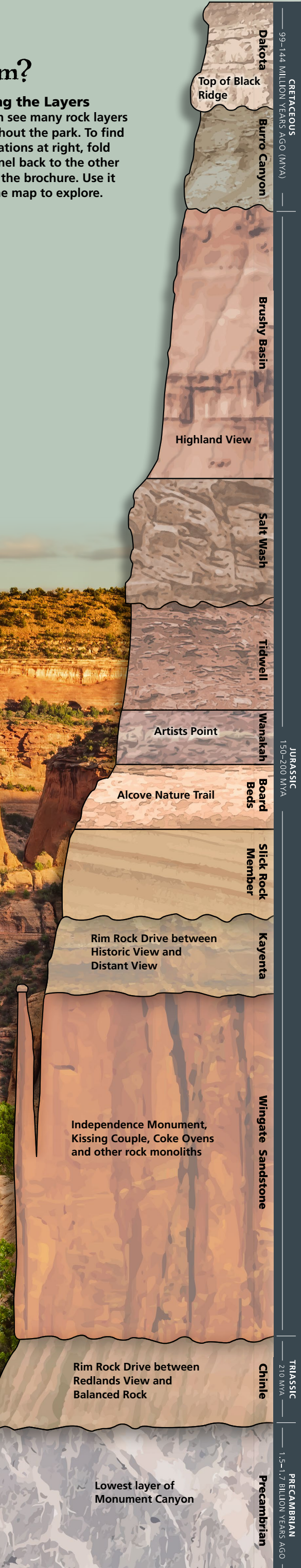
Natural forces continually change rock. Independence Monument was once part of a massive rock wall between Wedding and Monument canyons (*background*).

Soft layers of sandstone and shale left the rock vulnerable to erosion and weathering. They weakened the wall along natural fractures, and the canyons deepened.

Over time, parts of the wall broke and collapsed. This exposed many colorful rock layers (*right*) like the reddish-orange Wingate Formation dominating the scenery.

Today, a stout remnant of the rock wall survives as the 450-foot-tall Independence Monument. But don't get too attached. In time it, too, will succumb to erosion.

NPS



CRETACEOUS 99-144 MILLION YEARS AGO (MYA)  
JURASSIC 150-200 MYA  
TRIASSIC 210 MYA  
PRECAMBRIAN 1.5-1.7 BILLION YEARS AGO



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Colorado National Monument lies within several traditional American Indian homelands. Oral history of some descendant Tribal communities, including the Ute, claim affiliation with these lands since time immemorial. Their lives were changed in the 1880s when the US government forcibly relocated them to reservations.

Today, the people of the Navajo Nation, the Ute of Uintah and Ouray, Ute Mountain Ute, Southern Ute, and White Mesa Ute tribes maintain deep connections to these lands.

6,400-400 BCE People migrated seasonally for resources and hunting deer, elk, and bighorns.

**400 BCE–1300** Wild foods are supplemented with farmed maize, beans, and squash.

**1300-1881** Bands of Ute and Navajo forage, hunt, and trade furs across the region.

**1931-50** The Civilian Conservation Corps and other organizations build Rim Rock Drive.

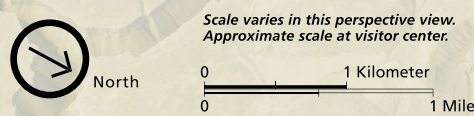
**1956-66** National Park Service Mission 66  
projects improve many areas of the park.

Navajo Nation

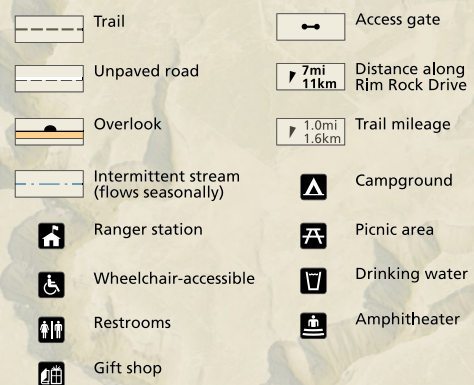
In the early 1900s John Otto (*right*) envisioned this land as a national monument and began tirelessly promoting it. He built miles of canyon trails and guided visitors to appreciate the landscape's beauty.

On May 24, 1911, President William Howard Taft established Colorado National Monument. Otto was the park's caretaker until 1927. Today, you can hike remnants of his hand-hewn trails.

Construction of a scenic drive along the canyon rim began in November 1931. In 1933 President Franklin Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Local men skilled in carpentry, construction, and masonry helped build the road (*right*) until 1942, when the CCC was disbanded. The National Park Service completed Rim Rock Drive in 1950.



Scale varies in this perspective view.  
Approximate scale at visitor center.



Enjoy exploring Colorado National Monument in all seasons through a variety of activities. Rock formations, geologic processes, wildlife, plants, habitats, and cultural imprints—the park is a living laboratory of educational and scientific value. It is also a place of beauty, wonder, wilderness, and recreation.

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**Accessibility** We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website. Service animals are allowed.

**Visitor Center** Check out the film, exhibits, and gift shop. Staff can help plan your visit and answer questions. In summer, attend ranger-guided walks and talks. Open daily except some holidays; call or check the park website before you visit.

**Rim Rock Drive** Bicyclists and motorists can drive this scenic, 23-mile road along the plateau rim. Park at roadside overlooks for spectacular panoramas.

**Hiking** Take the park's 45-mile trail system to scenic overlooks, into deep canyons, or across plateau country.

When choosing a trail, consider your experience, physical fitness, interests, and time.

**Hike Cautiously** Surfaces may be slippery or unstable. Stay on trails or hike on hard, dry surfaces. Some trails slope gradually; others are steep.

- When hiking the backcountry or off-trail, tell someone your plans and carry a topographic map.
- Wear sturdy hiking boots and sunscreen.

Bring and drink plenty of water.

**Picnicking** Picnic areas have tables, restrooms, and water (seasonally).

The Devils Kitchen and visitor center picnic areas also have shade shelters.

**Saddlehorn Campground** Sites (fee) are first-come, first-served, or reserve at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). Sites have a picnic table and charcoal grill. Restrooms and drinking water are nearby. RV and vehicle-and-trailer lengths are limited to 40 feet.

**Backcountry** Enjoy a wilderness experience. Get a camping permit at the visitor center.

**Stay Safe** Be "edge aware." Cliff edges are steep and unstable. Mind

your step and monitor your children at overlooks and drop-offs. • Rockfall is possible. Be alert. Stay on secure areas. • Do not throw rocks or other objects over cliffs; they can injure

persons below. • Drink one gallon of water per person per day. • Watch for weather changes, high temperatures, thunderstorms, lightning, high winds, and flash floods. During a storm, avoid exposed and low-lying areas. • Do not rely on GPS for navigation. • Observe wildlife from a distance. Beware of venomous, stinging, and biting animals.

**Emergencies call 911**

**Regulations** Federal law protects all natural and cultural features in the park; do not disturb, deface, or destroy. • Do not feed or disturb

wildlife. • Motorized vehicles must yield to bicyclists, pedestrians, and wildlife. • Wheeled and motorized vehicles are prohibited off roads and on trails. • Lights are required for bicycles and vehicles in tunnels. • Pets are prohibited inside buildings, on trails, and in the backcountry. Pets cannot be left unattended. • Follow state firearms laws. Other weapons and hunting are prohibited. • Wood fires are prohibited. Charcoal fires are allowed in provided grills. • Remotely piloted aircraft, including drones, are prohibited. • Practice Leave No Trace principles. • Biological soil crust is easily destroyed; don't bust the crust!

**Partnership** The Colorado National Monument Association (CNMA) partners with the National Park Service to inspire community and visitors to learn about, play in, and protect Colorado's geologic gem. Learn more at [www.coloradonma.org](http://www.coloradonma.org).

**More Information**  
Colorado National Monument  
1750 Rim Rock Dr.  
Fruita, CO 81521  
970-858-2800  
[www.nps.gov/colm](http://www.nps.gov/colm)  
[colm\\_info@nps.gov](mailto:colm_info@nps.gov)  
Follow us on social media.  
Use the NPS App to guide your visit.

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

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

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