

Recreation Guide to the San Rafael Area



Moab Area Travel Council
Internet Brochure Series
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INTRODUCTION

The San Rafael Swell, 2,000 square miles of public land, is known for its scenic sandstone formations, deep canyons, desert streams, and expansive panoramas. Aside from Interstate (1-70), only old uranium mines, dirt roads, livestock improvements, and simple recreation facilities are evident. Visitors should bring maps as many roads are not signed.

No permits are required for individuals and small groups for non-commercial, non-competitive use. Outfitters, guides, other commercial users and competitive event proponents should contact the Bureau of Land Management's Price Field Office regarding permits.

Areas North of 1-70

1. Buckhorn Draw / San Rafael Bridge

Once the scene of outlaw chases, Buckhorn Draw, a long, steep-walled canyon, is the main northern gateway to the Swell. A canyon highlight is the interpreted Buckhorn Draw Native American rock art site. These striking figures were restored as Emery County's Utah Centennial Project in 1996. From the south, the Buckhorn Draw area is accessible from the south from 1-70, Exit 129.

Camping facilities are provided at the San Rafael Bridge Recreation Site adjacent to the San Rafael River. The recreation site is bordered by a lofty escarpment to the north and large buttes to the east and west. Camping facilities at San Rafael Bridge

include tent pads, picnic tables, toilets, and fire rings. No drinking water is available. When camping at other areas, please use existing undeveloped campsites to avoid impacting new areas.

2. Wedge Overlook

The Wedge Overlook provides a striking view of the Little Grand Canyon, the San Rafael River, and the Sid's Mountain Wilderness Study Area. To protect the fragile resources, notably an endangered cactus species, use of motorized vehicles and mountain bikes is limited to designated roads and camping is limited to designated sites. To visit the overlook, drive from the town of Cleveland south towards the San Rafael Recreation Site. Continue beyond the Buckhorn Reservoir just over four miles to the water tank at the Buckhorn Flat Well. After passing the tank, go left at the next intersection and continue six miles to the overlook. An information board marks this canyon rim overlook.

3. Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry

The Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry, a National Natural Landmark, is one of the world's foremost dinosaur fossil sources. Recognized as the primary source of skeletons of the flesh-eating Allosaurus, the site features a visitor center, guided tours, dinosaur walks, and a picnic area. The Quarry is 30 miles south of Price.

From Highway 10, about 12 miles south of Price, follow the "dinosaur" signs at road intersections. The Quarry operates spring through summer. A visitor use fee is charged to visit the quarry. Contact the BLM or visitor center in Price for a brochure and to confirm opening times and dates.

4. Cedar Mountain Recreation Area

Cedar Mountain towers over the northern San Rafael Swell and is ideal for getting a "bird's eye" view. An exhibit at this cliff-top overlook summarizes area geology. Picnic tables and toilets are available. Cedar Mountain is southeast of the town of Cleveland.

Areas South of 1-70

5. Head of Sinbad / Swasey's Cabin

Just off 1-70, the Head of Sinbad area invites camping, hiking, and exploring. The elements have molded the buff-colored sandstone into pocketed watchtowers and other fanciful shapes.

Members of the Swasey family first grazed livestock in the area in the late 1800's. Today visitors may see the log cabin they built in 1921. Listed on the Utah State Register of Historic Sites, the cabin can be reached from 1-70 from ranch exit 129. Head west and south from exit 129 for four miles. Turn right and continue for 1.1 miles. Turn right again and travel in a northwesterly direction for about four miles. Continue along the road in a southerly direction for two miles. Then turn right (west) and drive 0.6 miles to the cabin. Site facilities are limited to a toilet.

6. Hidden Splendor

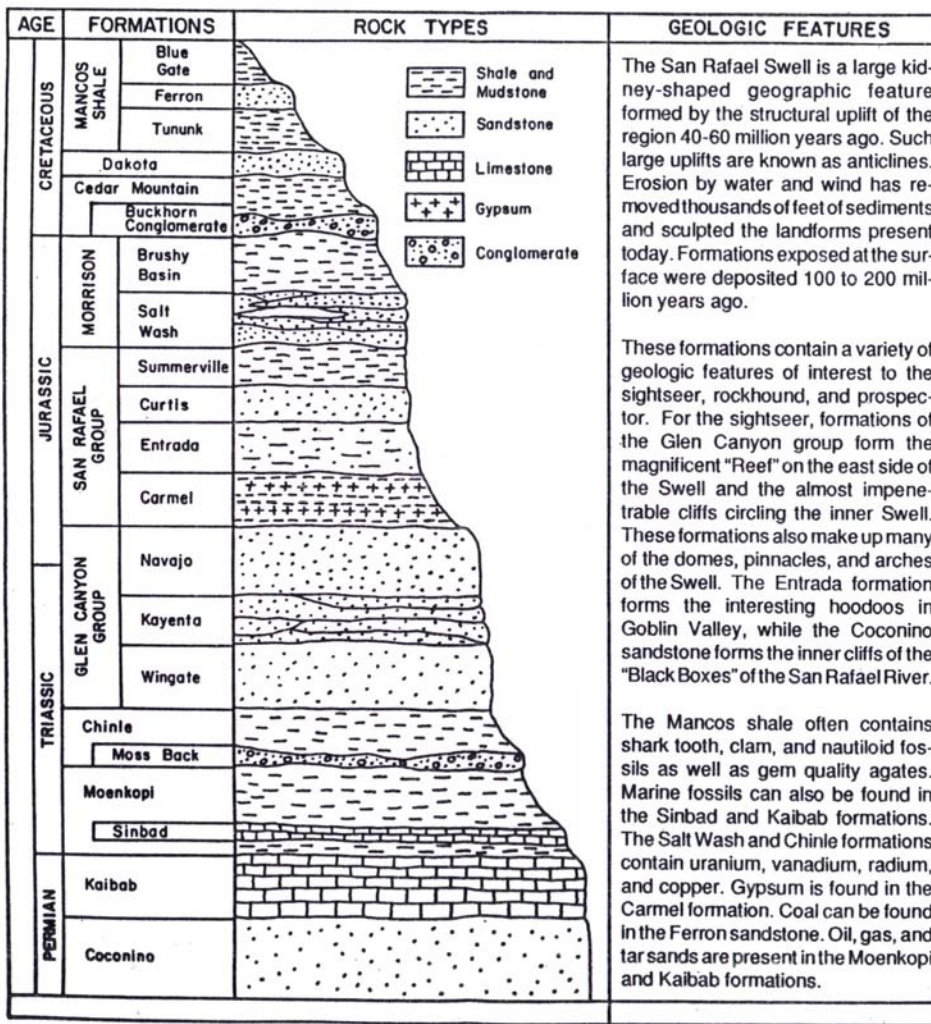
The Hidden Splendor uranium mine was famous in Utah. Originally named the Delta, it was started by Vernon Pick in 1952. He extracted a million dollars of ore before selling the mine. It closed in 1957 without reaching its estimated potential. The site of the old mine is tucked away in a canyon, at the southern end of the Swell. This remote, undeveloped area is best explored on foot. Hidden Splendor is 44 miles south by graded road from 1-70 ranch exit 129.

7. Hondu Arch and Tomsich Butte

Hondu Arch is a large natural opening that rests high above Muddy Creek. The abandoned Dirty Devil uranium mines at Tomsich Butte were started by W. J. Hanret and John Tomsich in 1951. The undeveloped Hondu Arch / Tomsich Butte area is rich in opportunities for hiking, camping, mountain biking and exploring. To reach this area, drive 29 miles south on graded roads from 1-70 ranch exit 129.

8. Goblin Valley State Park / Little Wild Horse Canyon

Goblin Valley is famous for its large collection of fancifully-shaped rock formations. To reach Goblin Valley from



Highway 24, turn right at the Goblin Valley turnoff onto a narrow paved road, drive west for 5 miles, then turn left onto a graded dirt road at the signed junction. Drive south for 6 miles to the state park entrance station. Facilities at the park include campsites with tables and grills, drinking water, showers, and flush toilets. An entry fee is charged.

South of Goblin Valley, Little Wild Horse and Bell canyons cut narrow slots through the San Rafael Reef. A popular hiking route loop starts in Little Wild Horse Canyon and returns to the Little Wild Horse Canyon Trailhead via Bell Canyon. The hike requires some scrambling over large boulders and squeezing through narrow spots. Do not attempt this hike if there is a possibility of flash flooding. The trailhead, with its bulletin board, parking area and toilet is 5.3 miles south of the Goblin Valley entrance station. The dirt road south of Goblin Valley is rough, sandy, and subject to washouts.

9. Keesle Country

Keesle Country is a maze of canyons in the southwest corner of the Swell. A short hike or horseback ride into this roadless area will provide an introduction to its primitive character. Keesle Country can be reached from 1-70 Ranch Exit 129. At the turn-off to the Hidden Splendor Mine, turn left and head toward the mine. After a short distance, you will see Keesle Country to the right.

10. Mussentuchit Sand Dunes

Although these dunes are relatively small in area, they provide interesting riding for off highway vehicle enthusiasts. The undeveloped dune area can be reached from 1-70 exit 97. Drive south for 8.2 miles to a junction, then go right (west, then south) 2.1 miles to another junction. At this second junction, go right (south) 1.5 miles to the dunes. Beyond the dunes to the southwest is the remote northern

end of Capitol Reef National Park. To the southeast are the even more remote upper Last Chance Wash and Moroni Slopes areas.

11. San Rafael Desert

The San Rafael Desert, accessible from Highway 24 on unpaved roads, is relatively flat with many areas of low sand dunes. Additionally, a main dirt road heads south into the desert from the town of Green River. Several spur roads lead from this main road to overlooks of the Green River's Labyrinth Canyon.

12. San Rafael Reef

The spectacular San Rafael Reef dominates the eastern side of the Swell. Erosion has smoothed the jagged, upturned Navajo sandstone face of the reef and cut deep canyons. These canyons are ideal for hiking, scrambling, and exploring.

13. Temple Mountain

Temple Mountain, located to the northwest of Goblin Valley, is the highest point along the San Rafael Reef. This area was once one of the most active mining operations during Utah's uranium boom days. Although the mines are now long closed, the numerous roads left behind by the miners provide access for off-highway vehicle riders. Abandoned mines are very dangerous and should never be entered. Temple Mountain is easily reached from 1-70. Drive Highway 24 south, turn right at the Goblin Valley turnoff, and then take the narrow paved road 6.4 miles west to the end of the pavement.

Off-Highway Vehicle Management

Motorized travel is limited or prohibited in certain areas to protect sensitive resource values or maintain specific recreation opportunities. Please contact the Price Field Office for current information about travel restrictions and comply with posted travel restrictions.

Enjoy the San Rafael Swell and help protect its scenic wonders.

Safety Tips

To help ensure a safe and enjoyable stay in the San Rafael area, please consider the following tips:

- Never camp or park your vehicle in a wash or stream bed and avoid hiking in narrow canyons when rain is a possibility. A dry wash can flash flood in a matter of minutes even if you don't see a cloud in the sky.
- Carry at least one gallon of water per person per day. There are very few sources of potable water in the San Rafael Swell.
- Take precautions to guard against heat exhaustion during warm weather. Avoid overexertion, drink plenty of fluids, and wear a hat.
- Let someone know where you're going and when you plan to return. If you should break down or become lost, stay with your vehicle.
- Exercise extreme caution when exploring around old mines. Besides the danger of being caught in a collapsing tunnel or falling into a hidden shaft, uranium mines pose an additional hazard. Heavy concentrations of radioactive radon gas are known to accumulate at the entrances to mines in this area.
- Many roads within the Swell cross soil types that are extremely muddy after storms and during periods when snow is melting. At such times, these roads become virtually impassable. Obtain a long-range weather forecast before traveling into the area.
- The Emery County Sheriff's Department has responsibility for search and rescue actions. Call 911 in emergencies. Cell phone service is limited.

**Canyon Country
Minimum Impact Practices**

1. Tread lightly when traveling and leave no trace of your camping. Drive and ride only on roads and trails where such travel is allowed. Hike only on established trails, on rock, or in washes. Camp at designated sites or, where allowed, at previously-used sites. Avoid placing tents on top of vegetation and use a camp stove instead of making a campfire. Unless signs indicate otherwise, leave gates open or closed as you find them.
2. Help keep Canyon Country clean. Pack out your trash and recycle it, clean up after less thoughtful visitors, and dispose of human waste properly.
3. Protect and conserve scarce desert water sources. Camp at least 300 feet from isolated water sources to allow for wildlife access. Where possible, carry your own drinking water. Leave potholes undisturbed and wash well away from pools and springs.
4. Allow space for wildlife. When encountering wildlife, maintain your distance and remain quiet. Teach children not to chase or pick up animals. Keep pets under control.
5. Leave historic sites, Native American rock art, ruins and artifacts untouched for the future. Admire rock art from a distance and never touch it. Stay out of ruins, leave artifacts in place, and report violations.

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