Dry Fork Narrows, Peek-A-Boo and Spooky Slot Canyons

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Overview

The hiking loop connecting the slot canyons of Peek-a-boo and Spooky are one of GSENM's most popular hikes. For how popular they are, they are fairly difficult. There is 12-foot climb to access Peek-a-boo, and Spooky is only 10 inches wide in places. On busy days there will be a traffic jam at the boulder jumble. There have been a lot of changes to the trailhead locations recently, so beware old maps. Especially from the Rim Trail and the Lower Dry Fork Trailhead, there are stunning desert vistas. The slot canyons feature beautifully carved sandstone. Many people appreciate the full-body experience of squeezing and scrambling through these fun canyons.

Driving directions

Access is via dirt roads – check with the visitor center for road conditions
High clearance vehicle suggested
Take Hole in the Rock Road 24.7 miles to the Upper Dry Fork Trailhead, just off the road. To get the the Upper Dry Fork Trailhead drive 26 miles to Dry Fork Road and take that to the end of the road, about 1 mile. These roads may be impassable when wet.

Hiking route

Strenuous hike with poorly defined trail, map and route finding skills necessary
5 miles round trip, 300 feet of elevation change
The routes are all pretty well defined, with visible trails and frequent cairns. However, it can still be easy to lose the trail so make sure you have a map.

Rim Trail

The Rim Trail connects the upper and lower trailhead and offers stunning views, but is not usually the reason people hike here. It follows the rim of Dry Fork Coyote Gulch, the contact of the Navajo Sandstone and Carmel Formation.

From Upper Dry Fork Trailhead

From the trailhead through Dry Fork Narrows is 1.5 miles. Cross Hole in the Rock Road and find the trail leading through the sagebrush. Eventually you will find a trail junction. If you're headed to the canyons take the left trail that descends. You'll join a wash that turns into a narrows (not a slot canyon because you can walk upright through it). The narrows will abruptly open and from here you're looking for Peek-a-boo Gulch just a short distance ahead on your left.

From the Lower Dry Fork Trailhead

From the trailhead to the slot canyons is 1.4 miles. Follow the rim trail for almost a mile before diverging down a pretty steep section of slickrock, guided by cairns. Follow a small wash except where there are obvious trails around obstacles. Soon you'll junction with Dry Fork Coyote Gulch and the route from the other trailhead. To your left will be an attractive canyon, that's Dry Fork Narrows. To the right/east/downstream just a few hundred feet will be Spooky coming in from the north/opposite side of the wash.

Peek-a-boo and Spooky Slot Canyons loop from either trailhead

This part of the hike is 1.7 miles around. Peek-a-boo will be easy to miss because you immediately have to climb a 12-foot wall. It may be intimidating, but it has well carved out foot holds. You will be immediately rewarded for your effort. It is strongly suggested you go up Peek-a-boo and down Spooky, otherwise passing other hikers will be very difficult. After a bit Peek-a-boo Slot opens up to reveal an overland route to the right/east to Spooky Gulch with many cairns along the way. The crux of the hike is at the boulder jam in Spooky. This can be intimidating also but descend through a hole in the boulders, and maybe help others do the same.

Hazards

Claustrophobia

Those with claustrophobia may not want to do this hike. Once you're in the slots they will be confined for an extended distance and other hikers may make it difficult to backtrack out.

Flash floods – Check with the visitor center for the daily flash flood rating

It would not be recommended to do this hike if the flash flood rating is at "possible" or above because you will spend a lot of time in confined canyons with few exits available.

Heat

It may seem like a good idea to do this hike when its very hot because the canyons do provide good shade, however, the approach is mostly devoid of shade with few junipers along the way. If doing this hike when it is hotter, do it early in the day to avoid the worst of the heat and/or take the Upper Dry Fork Trailhead and utilize the Dry Fork Narrows to approach the slot canyons.

Rattlesnakes

A rattlesnake can only strike a distance 2/3 the length of its body but this might still keep you from scooting around one in a narrow canyon. If the snake is not rattling and appears to be resting, you may be able to slowly walk past keeping as much distance as possible. You may be able to use a stick to gently convince a rattle snake to retreat under a rock, it will then be safe to pass, keeping distance from that rock. But if the snake is becoming agitated try something else. If the canyon is narrow and your confidence high, you may be able to stem over the snake. And if none of these seem like a good option, backtrack and look for a way up and around. If a snakebite occurs, request a helicopter to your location immediately. The person who was bit should do their best to keep their heartrate low, and if possible put ice on the wound or just proximal.

Regulations and considerations

Human waste disposal

Please use the bathrooms located at either trailhead if possible. Catholes are appropriate along this trail until you get into the slot canyons. They are relatively short so holding it until you get out should be feasible.

Dogs are not recommended as they will not be able to get through the slot canyons.

Along the trail

There are no trash facilities here so please pack it out. No collecting of any object other than trash is allowed. Do not build or destroy cairns. Bikes are not allowed off road in GSENM. It is suggested but not required to stay on the trail, just be considerate of the biological soil crust!

Camping and fires

No camping is allowed within 1/4 mile of the trailheads. This is not a common place to start a backpack trip, but overnight camping permits can be acquired at the trail register. No fires are allowed in the canyons. This includes Dry Fork Coyote Gulch. If having a fire elsewhere, be aware of any active fire restrictions.

Area restrictions

No bolting is allowed, not even for canyoneers.

Amenities

Bathrooms are located at each trailhead. There is no drinking water or trash facilities at either trailhead. Escalante has a small grocery store (closed Sundays) and Boulder only has a nice convenience store. For medical issues Escalante has a clinic (Kazan Memorial Clinic, open M 9a-8p, Tu-F 9a-5p, closed Sat-Sun) and the nearest hospital is in Panquitch (Garfield Memorial Hospital, 200 N 400 E). For search and rescue and non-emergency evacuations call the Garfield County Sheriff's Office: 435-676-2678. Even though you are on Kane County, because you are off Hole in the Rock Road, Garfield County Sherriff's Office will assist you. For emergencies call 911 or hit the SOS button on your inReach.

Geology

Along the rim trail you will be at the contact of the Page Sandstone and the Carmel Formation. From here you have excellent views to the east including numerous canyons, buttes and the Henry Mountains.

The Henry Mountains are the sharp peaks to the northeast on the horizon about 50 miles away. They are laccoliths, or hot spots of magma that pushed up and intruded into earths crust. As the earth eroded away, they remained because they are made of harder material.

Slot Canyons

Purist would say slot canyons have to be so narrow you cannot walk normally through them, instead they require walking sideways or contorting through them, but generally they are very narrow canyons. They are formed over millions of years where water rushes through exposed bedrock. Sandstone and limestone are the most prone to forming this type of canyon because of how they are eroded chemically and physically by water. Add to this the flash floods caused by monsoons over the desert and this is one recipe for slot canyons.

The Navajo Sandstone (about 185 million years old) formed on top of the Kayenta when the sand dunes overtook the streams. Sand dunes piled on a shallow water table as the water table

rose. Frequently the sand dunes would blow away down to the water table creating a break in the cross bedding. Imagine ridges of wandering dunes on a damp surface. Crossbedding here is a layering of sand at an angle that shows how the sand dunes were formed. Within the Navajo there are lenses of limestone formed by oases and ponds. Lenses are sections with limited width and thicker in the middle than the edges. The colors of the Navajo are formed primarily by iron in different forms.

Page Sandstone and Carmel Formation (about 175 million years old)

Between these formations and the Navajo Sandstone there is an unconformity of several millions of years, a gap in geologic record caused by a period of erosion. Above the Navajo Sandstone is shifting mix of the members of the Page Sandstone and Carmel Formation (member being a specific type of rock or deposition that extends for only part of the larger formation). At the time, the shallow Carmel Sea was transgressing and receding, forming deposits of limestone, sandstone, gypsum, etc. In the Escalante Canyons, typically the Harris Wash Member of the Page Sandstone sits on the Navajo but is almost indistinguishable except at the contact there may be bits of angular chert.

Flora

As you drive south on Hole in the Rock Road, the elevation drops slightly resulting in conditions that are not as favorable to pinyon and juniper trees. What trees there are sparsely scattered. Once in Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch, you'll see a slightly different mix on plants as the canyon walls provide shelter for some that can't brave the harsh open desert.

Salt desert scrub and pinyon-juniper woodland

Here you'll find a high desert community of plants capable of withstanding the fierce baking sun of the summer as well as freezing temperatures in winter. This region gets about 11 inches of rain per year, and supports pinyon and juniper trees as well as big sage and sand sage, all woody plants. Prickly pear (a group of species that all look similar) and claret cup are the most common cacti found here. Narrow leaf yucca, another succulent, is related to agave. Common grasses include needle and thread grass, Indian rice grass, cheat grass and blue grama. In this high desert, flowers typically bloom from April to June, potentially with a second showing following monsoons. Some common flowers are globe mallow, penstemon, evening primrose and hoary aster.

Fauna

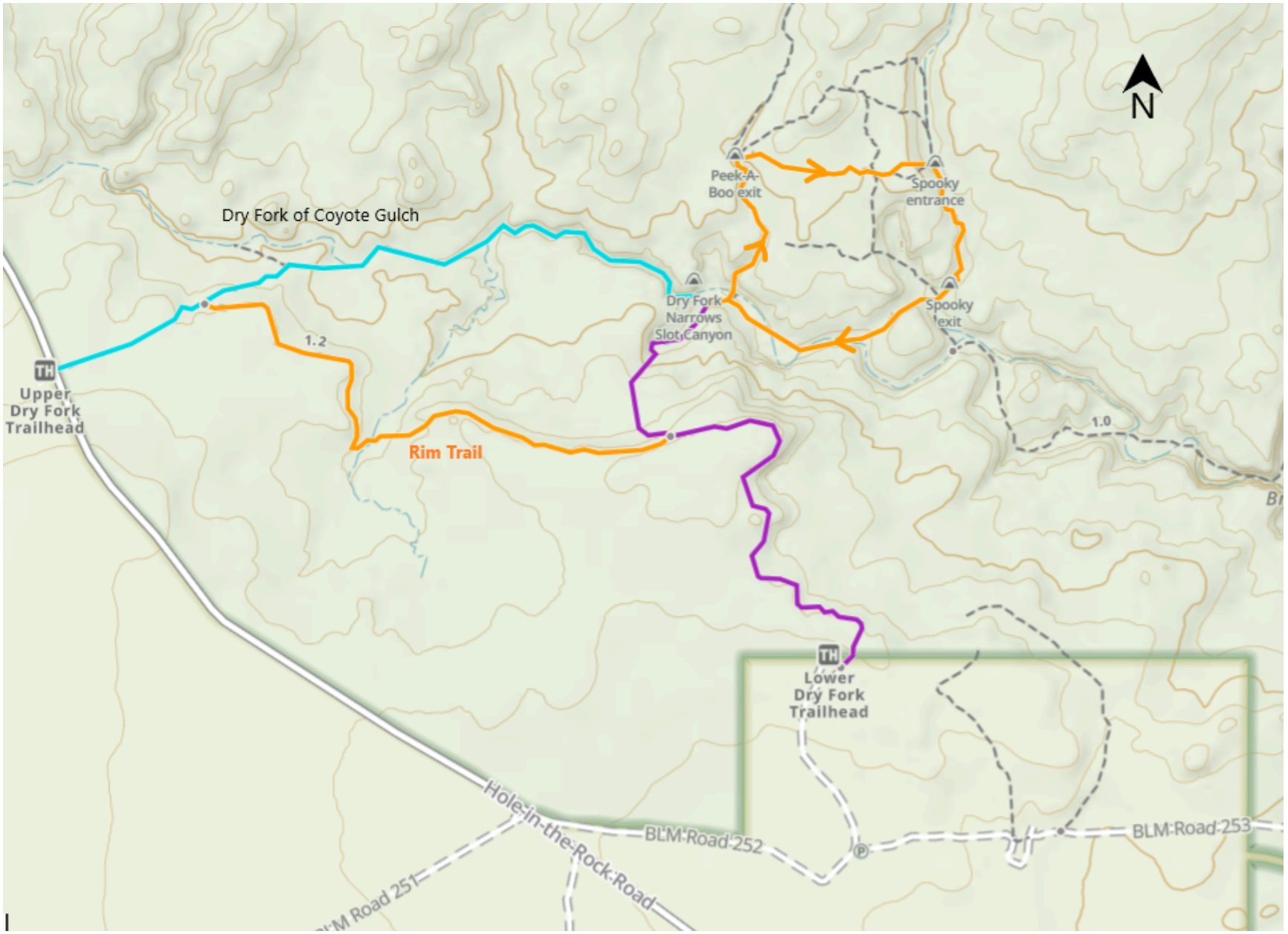
Mammals, fish, reptiles, birds and even amphibians all make their home in the desert and the streams that course through it. There are many species of birds in GSENM, some of the more notable ones include turkey vultures, ravens and pinyon jays. Mammals that roam these parts include coyotes, foxes, bob cats, mountain lions, badgers, mule deer, bighorn sheep and many species of mice. Some insects you may encounter are the creepy Jerusalem crickets and sand trap building antlions. Likely you will see collared lizards, with a black band around their neck and you may see whiptail lizards with tails up to 2.5 times as long as its body. Some poisonous animals to watch out for are rattlesnakes, scorpions, black widows, and velvet ants.

Rattlesnakes are not common and not aggressive but they will stand their ground. If they are rattling they're agitated and if they're also coiled up they're ready to strike. They can strike a

distance 2/3 the length of their body. If someone is bit, request a medical helicopter evacuation immediately.
Scorpions hide under rocks during the day and come out mostly at night. Their sting is painful similar to a bee sting. No medical attention is necessary, but if it's the first time someone has been stung, watch out for anaphylaxis. Just like with bee stings some people have severe allergic reactions. If their throat starts to swell administer Benadryl and, if possible, find an EpiPen in case its necessary. Get to a clinic unless the situation resolves itself.
Female black widow spiders have a distinct red hourglass shape on the back of their black body. They are not aggressive and build very sticky webs in nook of canyon walls. Their bite may require medical attention, drive to the nearest medical facility.
Velvet ants look like fast moving ants with a brightly colored patch of hair, however these are not ants. They are wasps and should be treated as such because they do have a powerful sting.
Ravens look very similar to crows but ravens are significantly larger. Their distributions overlap but crows are very rare in GSENM. Ravens often hang out in pairs and they are scavengers so don't leave your snacks unattended!
Turkey vultures have a wingspan of up to 6 feet and do not flap their wings very much. They are expert at finding rising warm air currents and gliding in circles all day as they look for carrion.
Pinyon jays, related to blue jays, like to hang in large flocks in pinyon/juniper forests. This species of jay is endemic to the Colorado Plateau, it doesn't exist anywhere else!
Flickers are related to woodpeckers
Mountain lions, like all large predators, were hunted and poisoned almost to extinction. Today, the best place to see one is in the desert southwest; however, you will be very lucky if you do. Mountain lions range far to find prey, mostly mule deer, and kill efficiently with a bite to the back of the neck. If you do encounter a mountain lion, do not run away! Make loud noises and raise your arms, fight back if necessary.
Bighorn sheep make their home in rugged rocky areas it would seem were impossible to navigate. They are excellent climbers and use this to their advantage to avoid predators. The males have very large horns which grow longer every year. They use these to establish dominance over other males during mating season. They charge each other at over 20 mph, the loud crack can be heard for miles. One nearly wiped out, bighorn are making a comeback.

Nearby attractions
Batty Pass Caves are enlarged caves by an eccentric pair of brothers in the 60s. You can drive to these along Road 251, across Hole in the Rock Road from the road to Lower Dry Fork Trailhead.
Brimstone, aptly named, is the next canyon down from Spooky. This canyon is very difficult to get through as it is very tight and sometimes full of water.

BLM Map: https://www.blm.gov/visit/dry-fork-road-peek-boo-and-spooky-gulch


N
Peek-A-Boo exit
Spooky entrance
Dry Fork of Coyote Gulch
Dry Fork Narrows Slot Canyon
Spooky exit
1.2
1.0
TH
Upper Dry Fork Trailhead
Rim Trail
TH
Lower Dry Fork Trailhead
Hole-in-the-Rock Road
BLM Road 252
BLM Road 253
BLM Road 251