# Escalante River Trailhead

**Table of contents**


| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Overview | 3 | Archeology |
| 1 | Driving directions | 3 | Geology |
| 1 | Hiking route | 4 | Flora |
| 2 | Hazards | 4 | Fauna |
| 2 | Regulations and considerations | 6 | Nearby attractions |
| 3 | Amenities | 6 | Maps |


## Overview

There are many ways to start an adventure from here, from a splash in the river in the shade of the Highway 12 bridge to a 90 mile boat trip ending in Lake Powell. Most people will be enjoying a hike up the river canyon or a scramble up to the 100 Hands Pictograph Panel.

## Driving directions

Accessible by paved roads

The Escalante River Trailhead is at the intersection of the Escalante River and Highway 12 between Escalante and Boulder. The exact location is on the north side of the road, on the Boulder side or east side of the bridge over the river. There is a private road on the south side, this is not for public access. From Escalante the trailhead is 14 miles away, from Boulder it is 12 miles.

## Hiking routes

100 Hands Pictograph Panel

Short, easy route with easy scrambling requiring basic trail finding skills

1 mile round trip, 300 feet elevation gain

Within the parking lot there is a private drive to a private residence. Please do not approach the house, but to access this trail start up the private drive a very short distance and you'll see a trail headed up the Kayenta ledges. Some winding and easy scrambling leads you to a bench and the base of the Navajo Sandstone. From here head west, away from the highway, to find a handful of pictograph and petroglyph panels associated with the Fremont people. The first few panels are the largest, but if you continue walking this ledge you'll find more. Return the way you came.

Up canyon

Easy route with river crossings, requiring some route finding

0-13 miles, minimal elevation gain

A common backpack trip is to hike between here to Escalante (13 miles) but this is also good as an out and back day hike. Please stay on the trail for the first 1/4 mile or so as there is private property to avoid under the house. Hiking upstream there are a variety of attractions to see (mileage is one way): 1.5 miles to Escalante Natural Bridge, 2 miles to an archeological structure in an alcove and an arch just beyond it, 2.5 miles to Sand Creek, 2.8 miles to the Bowington Wagon Trail, 6.2 miles to Death Hollow. Even if you don't make it to the natural bridge the scenery here is stunning. The farther up canyon you go the harder it is to find the trail and good river crossings. The first river crossing is almost immediate, the second is about 3/4 mile downstream, then they are irregularly spaced but fairly frequent. Crossings are about calf deep. Having footwear you can get wet is highly recommended.

Down canyon
Easy route with river crossings, requires route finding
0-90 miles, minimal elevation gain
Hiking downstream from this trailhead is less popular, but still beautiful. The first river crossing is about 3/4 mile down the trail, and before this there is one 6 foot ladder to climb. For the first 1.2 miles you will be on an easement trail on private property, please stay on the trail in this stretch. If you continue hiking downstream you will hit Lake Powell in about 80-90 miles. There are no roads crossing the Escalante River below this trailhead, but there are a variety of ways to exit the canyon and access a road up on the bench lands.
Boating the Escalante River
This is only enjoyable during spring with snow melt after a strong snow year. Even then the window is usually only a week or two long. There are no take outs below this point so boaters have 2 choices: hire a boat pickup in Lake Powell or pack their boats and gear out to (typically) Egypt Trailhead or 40 Mile Ridge Trailhead, each about 3 miles and 1000 feet elevation gain. To Egypt is 40 river miles, recommended 4-5 day trip. To 40 Mile Ridge is 80 miles, recommended 8-9 days. To Lake Powell is about 90 miles and 9-10 days is recommended. Entering Lake Powell on boat can be treacherous due to the shifting elevation of Lake Powell and the resultant mud flats. Boating the Escalante River is not for beginners and this document will not tell you what you need to know to prepare for this kind of trip.

**Hazards**
Flash floods – Check with the visitor center for the daily flash flood rating.
For hiking in the canyon, generally it would not be hard to find high ground if there was a flood, but you might not be able to cross the river for several hours or not until the next morning. This hike is not recommended with flash flood danger.
100 Hands has little risk from flash floods, but be aware that the cliffs will turn into dangerous waterfalls in many places during a thunderstorm.
Heat
100 Hands is not near water is very exposed to sun the whole day.
In the canyon, cottonwoods and canyon walls provide shade for much of your hike, and you will always be near water.
Deer flies
Biting deer flies can be voracious in the late spring/early summer along the canyon floor. Wearing long sleeves and pants is the best protection.

**Regulations and considerations**
Human waste disposal
You will not always be able to get 300 feet away from water or archeological sites, bring a wag bag. In highly trafficked areas consider using the wag bag even if you can get 300 feet from sensitive areas as these areas are limited and may experience concentrated use. There is no bathroom at the trailhead.
Dogs should be on leash and pet waste is to be disposed of the same as human waste.
Trail
No collecting of any object other than trash is allowed. Do not build or knock down cairns. At 100 hands it is suggested but not required to stay on the trail, just be considerate of the biological soil crust!

Water
The use of soap (even biodegradable soap) in or near the water is not allowed as this can reduce surface tension and dissolved oxygen in the water. Fishers must obtain a Utah fishing license. The Escalante River may be dry above Death Hollow.
Camping and fires
Camping within 1/4 mile of the trailhead is prohibited. Permits for overnight camping are located at the trail register. Camping in previously disturbed areas such as the flood plain, open sandy areas and washes (if flooding is not a concern) is best. Fires are not allowed within the canyons. If intending to have fires on the bench lands, be aware of current fire restrictions.
Area restrictions
Within 300 feet of an archeological site one cannot sleep, eat, have fires or bury human waste.

**Amenities**
There are no bathrooms or trash service here. The closest bathrooms are a mile toward Escalante at Kiva Koffeehouse, a private coffee shop with limited hours. The next closest are a few miles toward Boulder at Calf Creek Campground. 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. For emergencies call 911 or hit the SOS button on your inReach.

**Archeology**
The petroglyphs (images carved into stone), pictographs (paintings on stone) and structures you'll see at 100 Hands and along the Escalante River are associated with the Fremont People who left their traces in the Escalante Canyons from AD 100-1350. Ancestral Puebloans were also in this region in the latter half of this time period.

**Geology**
For 100 Hands you will climb out of the Kayenta Formation by winding through the ledges it forms and to the base of the Navajo Sandstone cliffs. Going upstream you will walk along the Kayenta with Navajo towering over you. Going downstream a couple miles you will drop below the layer of the Kayenta into the Wingate Sandstone, noticeable by its shear walls (here only 50 feet tall or so) with attractive wacos. As you continue downstream, due to uneven uplift, you will soon be back to hiking at the level of the Kayenta and eventually at the level of the Navajo Sandstone.
Desert varnish
Desert varnish coats some sections of canyon wall giving it a reddish brown to black color. The coating is mostly clay but the coloring comes from iron (reddish brown) and magnesium (black). It is not completely understood how the coating forms. It could be from rainwater creating a chemical bond, or from bacteria concentrating and cementing the oxides in place, or both!
The Kayenta Formation (about 190 million years old) was laid down when braided streams and temporary lakes intermixed with sand dunes, creating a mix of sandstone, siltstone, mudstone, limestone and conglomerate.
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.
The Wingate Sandstone (about 200 million years old) was deposited in sand dune and coastal salt flat conditions. It is remarkable for its uniformity along the thickness, resulting in very formidable cliffs. On the Grand Staircase section of GSENM there is the Moenave formation instead of the Wingate.

**Flora**
Hiking up to 100 hands you will see plenty of desert flora and fragile biological soil crust. Along the canyons you will see some desert plants as the trail cuts wide bends of the river and takes you through big sage fields. Mostly you'll be enjoying the wide cottonwood galleries and the rest of the lush riparian vegetation.
Biological soil crust
Biocrusts are complex communities composed of cyanobacteria, green algae, lichens, fungi and mosses that form a living cover. They can be identified as a dark, reddish or brown bumpy surface on otherwise barren ground. When first developing it can be nearly invisible. These crusts help stabilize soil, increase soil's water absorption and provide nutrients for other plants. They are extremely fragile and it can take decades, even centuries to recover from trampling. Stick to trails, washes, rock and other's footprints to avoid damaging this important part of the desert.
Salt desert scrub and pinyon-juniper woodland
Between the canyon walls and the riparian area, 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.
Riparian area
Riparian areas are defined by a soil type and plant community that is strongly influence by the presence of water. Cottonwoods lord over this zone growing to several feet in diameter while only living on average for about 150 years. In spring they release seeds that float in the air, like cotton, for a magical effect. Other woody species your find here are river birch, Goodings willows, yellow willow and coyote willow. You'll also find phragmite (a grass that will grow taller than you), sedges, rushes and horsetail (a living fossil which has been around for more than 100 million years) as well as many more species.

**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, pinyon jays and spotted towhees. You may also

hear owls at night including the great horned owl and the western screech owl as well as a variety of frogs croaking on for hours. Several species of bats also come out at night. As of now white nose syndrome, a fungus which is very deadly to bats, has not made it to Utah. Other mammals that roam these parts include coyotes, foxes, bob cats, mountain lions, badgers, ringtails, mule deer, bighorn sheep, beavers and many smaller rodents. The Escalante River is home to 6 native fish species. In some of the colder streams there are trout such as the Colorado River cutthroat trout and the invasive brook trout, and there are fish that prefer warm water such as the flannelmouth sucker and roundtail chub. Some insects you may encounter are the creepy Jerusalem crickets, biting deer flies, 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

Spotted towhees are a type of large sparrow that like brush in riparian areas. They scratch the ground looking for food. The scratching can sound like a fox or other animal moving through the brush.

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, make sure you don't have it cornered. Make loud noises and raise your arms, fight back if necessary, and do not run away!

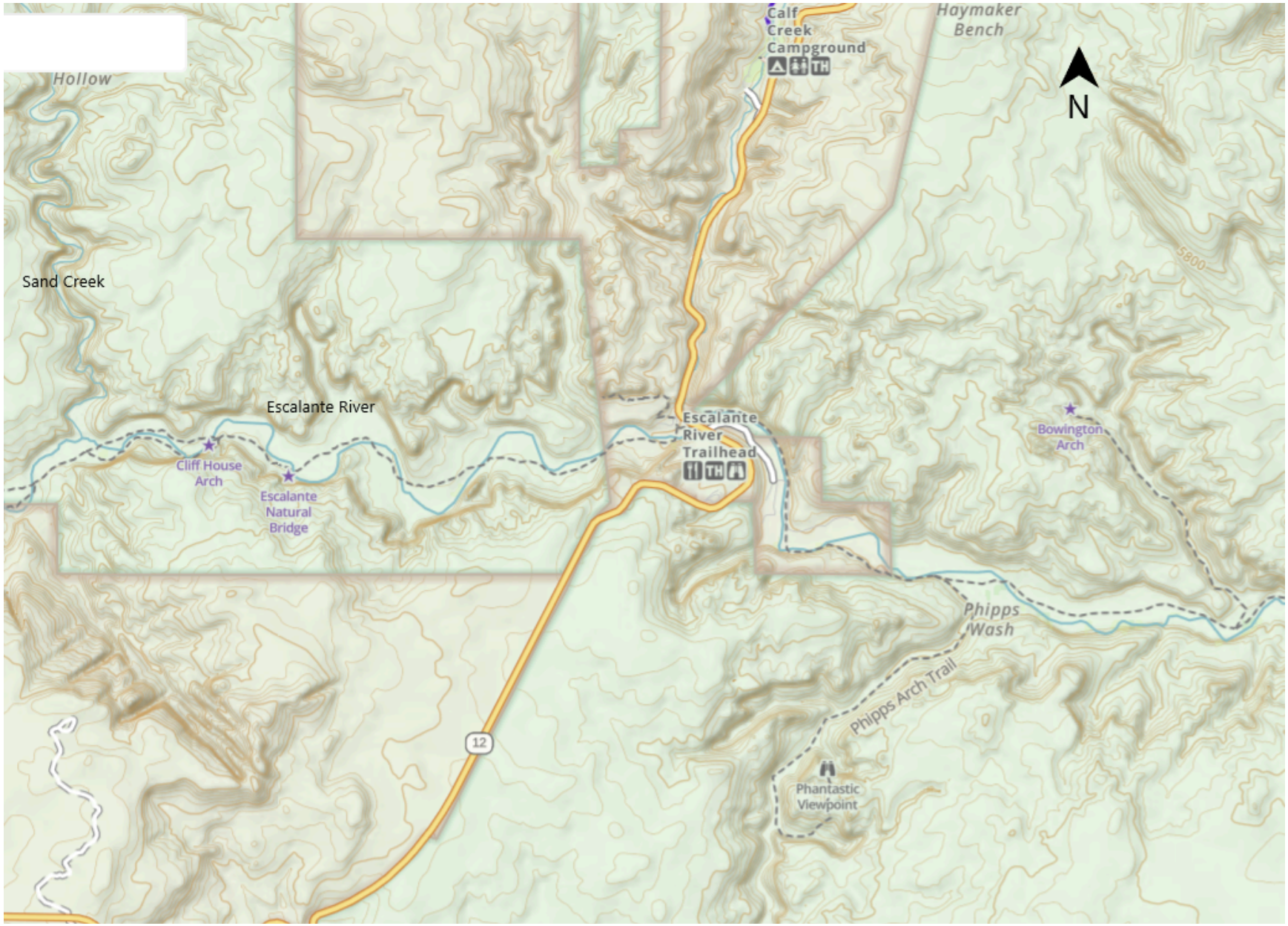
Beavers build dams in streams, or sometimes they don't! Sometimes beavers dig out lodges in the sides of banks and have decided not to build dams that continually get washed away in floods. In Calf Creek, which is relatively safe from flash floods, you will see classic beaver dams and lodges if you pay attention on the hike. Beavers do indeed eat wood, and they will cut down a whole cottonwood tree just by gnawing away at its stump.

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**

Highway 12 Hogback, a few miles east, is a great place to watch the sunset.
Lower Calf Creek Falls is a pleasant 6 mile round trip hike featuring a beautiful waterfall.
Bighorn is a nearby canyon that gives a slot canyon-like feel without the difficult maneuvering.




Hollow
Calf Creek Campground
Haymaker Bench
N
Sand Creek
Escalante River
Escalante River Trailhead
Cliff House Arch
Escalante Natural Bridge
Bowington Arch
5800
Phipps Wash
Phipps Arch Trail
12
Phantastic Viewpoint

7