Coyote Gulch

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Overview

Considered the crown jewel of the Escalante Canyons, this area sees a lot of visitation, up to 3000 people on a holiday weekend. In the offseason you can have this whole canyon to yourself. Spring and fall are the best times to visit as winter can be quite cold and summer very hot. Coyote Gulch is a deep canyon with a generally east-west axis which features a perennial stream, springs, waterfalls, majestic walls, spectacular arches and a natural bridge. There are many ways to access this canyon, a few are described below. Probably the most common access, Crack in the Wall, requires an easy and safe class 4 scramble (class 4 meaning you'll need the use of all 4 limbs to pass this obstacle) as well as a rope or length of webbing to haul your pack over a difficult spot. Another popular route, the Water Tank or Jacob Hamblin route, requires climbing skills and a climbing rope. Make sure to bring shoes that can get wet for this trip!

Driving directions

Access is via dirt roads – check with the visitor center for current road conditions
High clearance vehicle required
About 5 miles east of Escalante, turn down Hole in the Rock Road and then:
To Red Well Trailhead, drive 30 miles to the signed junction, then 1.5 miles to the end of the road.
To Hurricane Wash Trailhead, drive 33 miles to the parking area along Hole in the Rock Road.
To Forty Mile Ridge – Crack in the Wall, drive 35 miles to the signed junction, then 7 miles to the end of the Forty Mile Ridge Road. The last 2 miles of this road are through deep sand and will swallow low clearance vehicles.
To Forty Mile Ridge – Water Tank, drive 35 miles the signed junction, then only 4 miles to a large water tank on top of a hill next to Forty Mile Ridge Road.

Hiking route

Red Well Trailhead to Crack in the Wall Trailhead
Strenuous hike with route finding, easy class 4 scramble, 40 feet webbing
15.5 mile through hike, 1000 feet elevation
Hurricane Wash to Crack in the Wall
Strenuous hike with route finding, easy class 4 scramble, 40 feet webbing
15 mile through hike, 1000 feet elevation
Water Tank Trailhead to Crack in the Wall Trailhead

Long and strenuous hike with poorly defined trails and a 600-foot friction climb, class 5 for a short stretch. Map and route-finding skills necessary, as well as a 200 foot rope and basic climbing skills. Without climbing skills you will want a harness, rappel device and experienced guide. This route is not for the casual hiker.
10 miles round trip, 1000 feet elevation

Red Well to Jacob Hamblin Arch route description

Definitely should be done as an overnight trip, 3 day trip if you want to enjoy it. From the trailhead there will be an easy to find trail heading east. Surface water starts flowing one mile from the trailhead. Once in the canyon there will be a sometimes braided, sometimes brushy trail, but easy to find. From the trailhead to Jacob Hamblin Arch is 8 miles.

Hurricane Wash to Jacob Hamblin Arch route description

Definitely should be done as an overnight trip, 3 day trip if you want to enjoy it. From the trailhead, hop in the wash and go downstream. Surface water starts flowing 3.5 miles below the trailhead. The trail will be brushy and braided at times, but easy to find. Its about 7 miles from the trailhead to Jacob Hamblin Arch.

Fortymile Ridge – Water Tank Trailhead to Jacob Hamblin Arch route description

This route is fairly well defined when there is sand, but it is easy to loose the trail over the slickrock sections. GPS and map is highly recommended. From the water tank Coyote Gulch is about 2 miles, with the very last part being the difficult part. When it gets really difficult, look for a very small arch, this is typically where people tie ropes to. There may be a rope here already, make sure to evaluate it and its know before using it. Contrary to some websites, this rope is not maintained by the Park Service. In fact, they frequently remove ropes left here because ropes left here damage the anchor. So please make sure your rope is retrievable and take it with you. About 20 feet below this anchor is the main obstacle, a short very steep section of slickrock with a lot of exposure. Using the rope as a handline should be sufficient for the experienced. Below this is still a little tricky and requiring some zigzagging. This will still be dangerous for those not comfortable with slickrock.

Jacob Hamblin Arch to Escalante River route description

This is probably the most common hiking route through Coyote Gulch except for maybe an out and back via Crack in the Wall. It allows one to see the most spectacular parts of the canyon in a long day hike, although doing this as an overnight or 3 day trip is still recommended. The water tank route or Jacob Hamblin Sneak Route drops in just below Jacob Hamblin Arch. From Jacob Hamblin Arch to Coyote Nature Bridge is about 1.5 miles. From the natural bridge to Cliff Arch is about 2 miles. From here to the Crack in the Wall exit is about 2 miles. To get to the Escalante River there is one last obstacle, a virtually impassable boulder jam. Instead of going through the boulder jam, find a path on the south/right side of the canyon and follow it over some steep slickrock. This route is exposed and a little tricky. After this workaround the river is only a quarter mile away.

Coyote Gulch to Crack in the Wall description

The Crack in the Wall exit is right at this last boulder jam before reaching the Escalante River. From here the trailhead is 2.5 miles away. To your right/south is a 700-foot-tall sand dune you will be ascending. Luckily there is a wide path angling up the sand dune that will help immensely. Stay on the main path and it will take you to Crack in the Wall, a narrow fissure in the top of the wall, too narrow for a large pack. If you are a bold scrambler you can find a route

on the outside of this fissure and avoid hauling your pack up via rope, but this route is too uncomfortable for most. Most climb most of the way up through the crack, haul their packs to an obvious landing, and then pass packs up the final chimney. If you haven't hauled a pack up a cliff before, it's pretty difficult. If you have an overnight bag, having 2 people pull is highly recommended. Using webbing instead of a rope will minimize rope scarring of the sandstone. You will want 40 feet of rope/webbing for this.

Crack in the Wall to Fortymile Ridge – Crack in the Wall Trailhead description

From the top of Crack in the Wall, you can see vehicles that are parked near the trail register (if you're the only vehicle in this parking lot, make sure to park near the trail register). You can also see a wide path up the final sand dune. Know that at times you will dip into depressions and you won't always be able to see these features. It would be easy to get lost along this last section, GPS is highly recommended. Most cairns will lead you across slickrock to a sandy, well defined trail that takes you to the trailhead. Some cairns will lead you in completely the wrong direction. An alternative route is frequented by those weary of sand. Follow the cairns across slickrock but then veer to the right and around the sand flat as it presents itself to you. This is a slightly less direct route but keeps you mostly on slickrock instead of sand. There are no cairns or visible trail along this alternate route but the trailhead is in view for most of it.

Hazards

Getting lost

When you have a good viewpoint, look ahead and try to find the trail or imagine where the route should be by identifying features with the help of a topographic map. Also note alternatives, don't get fixated on only 1 possibility. Look for landmarks that may be helpful, but also realize that as you drop down into depressions or flat land those landmarks may disappear below the horizon. Look behind you at the route you came from frequently to remember how to get back. Don't trust cairns blindly, they are sometimes made by lost hikers, inducing you to get lost along with them. Have a map app on your phone and have the relevant maps downloaded. "Tracking" yourself can help keep you from getting lost but can take a big toll on your battery life.

Heat

This can be a relatively nice hike in the hot part of the season with a small stream near the trail and the waterfall creates a very cool microclimate in the final amphitheater (sp?).

However much of the trail is away from water and exposed to the sun, so still be prepared!

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

Flash floods occur mostly July-October but can occur during any thunderstorm. These floods can damage the road making it impassable. Flash floods in the Escalante River can rise quickly, stranding you

Regulations and considerations

Human waste disposal

Wag bags are required for the entirety of this hike as this is a highly used area. There is a vault toilet in Coyote Gulch, between Cliff Arch and the Crack in the Wall exit.

Dogs are not allowed in Coyote Gulch. Dogs may use the Crack in the Wall route and Coyote Gulch to access the Escalante River but may not go up Coyote Gulch. Even this is not

recommended because of the scramble at Crack in the Wall. Dogs must be on leash. Pet waste must be packed out.

Trail

Do not build or destroy cairns. Do not walk on or disturb the fragile hanging gardens. Stay on the trail whenever possible.

Water

The use of soap (even biodegradable soap) in or near water is not allowed as this can reduce surface tension and dissolved oxygen in the water. Fishers must obtain a Utah fishing license.

Camping and fires

Camping within 1/4 mile of the trailhead is prohibited. Permits for overnight camping are located at the trail register. Please camp in previously disturbed areas, such as washes and secondary channels (if flooding is not a danger) and where others have camped before. Fires are not allowed within the canyons. Outside of the canyons fires are allowed, but be aware of current fire restrictions.

Area restrictions

No bolting is allowed, not even for canyoneers. Packrafters must utilize wag bags.

Amenities

There are no bathrooms, drinking water or trash service at any of these trailheads. The nearest bathrooms are at Dance Hall Rock, about 1 mile further down Hole in the Rock Road beyond Fortymile Ridge Road. Another vault toilet is at Devil's Garden, 24 miles from Fortymile Ridge Road toward Highway 12. There is a toilet in Coyote Gulch described in the hiking description. 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. In this area even though you are in Kane County, call Garfield County Sheriff's Office anyway. For emergencies call 911 or hit the SOS button on your inReach.

Geology

From trailheads other than Hurricane Wash or from near them you have virtually a 360 degree view. To the east you can see the Henry Mountains against the horizon, the Escalante Canyons relatively near and between them the Circle Cliffs. To the north is Boulder Mountain, which looks more like east end of a very high plateau. To the south is Navajo Mountain and to the west are the straight cliffs.

At trailheads other than Hurricane Wash you are standing on the Carmel Formation, which erodes relatively easily leaving the flat mesa tops and bench lands. As you descend into the canyon or through the canyon you will pass the full thickness of the Navajo Sandstone, about 1000 feet thick here, which forms fairly shear walls with a few ledges here and there. Eventually you reach the ledge forming Kayenta. Springs often emerge near the contact of the Navajo and the Kayenta, as the Navajo is a porous aquafer and the Kayenta is interspersed with non-porous layers of mudstone and limestone. Toward the Escalante River the Navajo Sandstone will emerge, with its shear walls and wacos (strangely carved pockets).

The Henry Mountains are the sharp peaks to the northeast on the horizon about 60 miles away. They are laccoliths, or hot spots of magma that pushed up and intruded into earth's crust. As the earth eroded away, they remained because they are made of harder material. They are the second highest range in Utah.
The Circle Cliffs are between the Escalante Canyons and the Henry Mountains. The Circle Cliffs are formed by a large anticline, subtle on the near side and sharp on the far side. The sharper side of the anticline is also called the Waterpocket Fold and is protected by Capitol Reef National Park. The core of the Circle Cliffs has eroded out and is surrounded by imposing cliffs of the Wingate Sandstone. Caused by the uneven uplift of the Colorado Plateau, the center of the circle cliffs was pushed up higher than the surrounding area.
The Escalante Canyons are a web of narrow canyons in the drainage basin of the Escalante River, and the physiographic region includes the benches, mesas and slickrock surrounding them. These canyons are primarily carved out of the Glen Canyon Group: Wingate Sandstone, Kayenta Formation and Navajo Sandstone. The Escalante River is hidden from view but if you look carefully you can infer its location. On the far side of the river, predominantly exposed is the darker red Kayenta Formation with nobs and lumps of Navajo Sandstone on top. On the near side, its mostly lighter orange Navajo Sandstone.
Boulder Mountain is where much of the water for the Escalante River comes from. Boulder Mountain, which blends in with the Aquarius Plateau from this vantage, is at about 10000 feet above sea level and is the largest plateau at this height in the contiguous United States. Boulder Mountain used to be called Thousand Lake Mountain for its abundant lakes, until a map error swapped its name with a nearby mountain.
Navajo Mountain, a laccolith like the Henry Mountains, is on the south side of Lake Powell and the Colorado River, on the Navajo Nation. Depending on your cell phone provider you can get service if you can see Navajo Mountain. Navajo Mountain is sacred to the Navajo people and one should not summit it without going through proper ceremonies.
The Straight Cliffs is a cliff line that parallels Hole in the Rock Road (or vice versa really). The straight cliffs is also a formation named after this feature that is exposed widely across the Kaiparowits section of the monument. This cliff line is unusually straight, running south-southeast to north-north west and is rarely broken. It also features even banding of sandstone alternating with mudstones, coal and other slope forming deposits. At the base of the Straight Cliffs are a handful of other layers including Tropic Shale and the Morrison Formation. Fossils are common in some of these layers.
The Wingate Sandstone (about 200 millions 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. In the Grand Staircase section of GSENM there is the Moenave formation instead of the Wingate.
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.

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

Between these formations and the Navajo Sandstone there is an unconformity of several millions 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

The uplands above the canyon here are salt desert scrub, with brittle bushes up to your knee. In spring and after monsoons there may be an abundance of flowers, especially on the sand dunes. Once on the canyon floor you will be in the riparian zone. If you make it the Escalante River, notice how its riparian zone has a different character compared to Coyote Gulch's. The specific conditions of each canyon can have large effects on who can survive and who can thrive. Along Coyote Gulch you find different niches supporting different plant communities, notably extra lush areas surrounding springs and seeps.

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

Above the canyon walls 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 zone

Riparian areas are defined by a soil type and plant community that is strongly influence by the presence of water. This stretch of the Escalante River supports an impressive gallery of cottonwoods. Cottonwoods can grow 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. Coyote willows will dominate the margins of the river in this stretch of river. Also present are tamarisk and Goodings willows. You'll also find phragmite (a grass that will grow taller than you), sedges, rushes and horsetail (a living fossil which has been around more than 100 million years) as well as many more species.

Canyons and sheltered environments

Within the canyons you will find some plants that have found just the right environment for them, being drought resistant but too fragile for open desert, they thrive in the nooks and crannies of canyons, along the edges of riparian zones and on north facing slopes. Some of these plants may be common out in the open nearby but only at higher elevations where the weather is more moderate. Poison ivy, three-leaf sumac, netleaf hackberry (with its rough leaves full of galls) Gambel oaks and the herbaceous vine clematis all find their niche in these canyons. Three-leaf sumac, also called lemonade berry, produces bright red berries in the spring which are edible and have a strong but pleasant bitter sticky coating.

Hanging gardens

Underneath the waterfall you will notice a community of plants growing out of the shear sides of the canyon, clinging to the sandstone. This is referred to as a hanging garden! When floods rush through Neon Canyon some of the water is left behind in pools and potholes. From here it infiltrates into the sandstone because sandstone has gaps between the sand grains that allow water to pass, and flows (very slowly) down and then laterally through the rock until it can find a way out. You can see that it has found a way out in Golden Cathedral. Maiden hair fern, monkey flower, alcove columbine, and numerous mosses and liverworts have capitalized on this reliable source of water. The hanging garden environment is very fragile. It can be damaged easily and takes a long time to recover.

Fauna

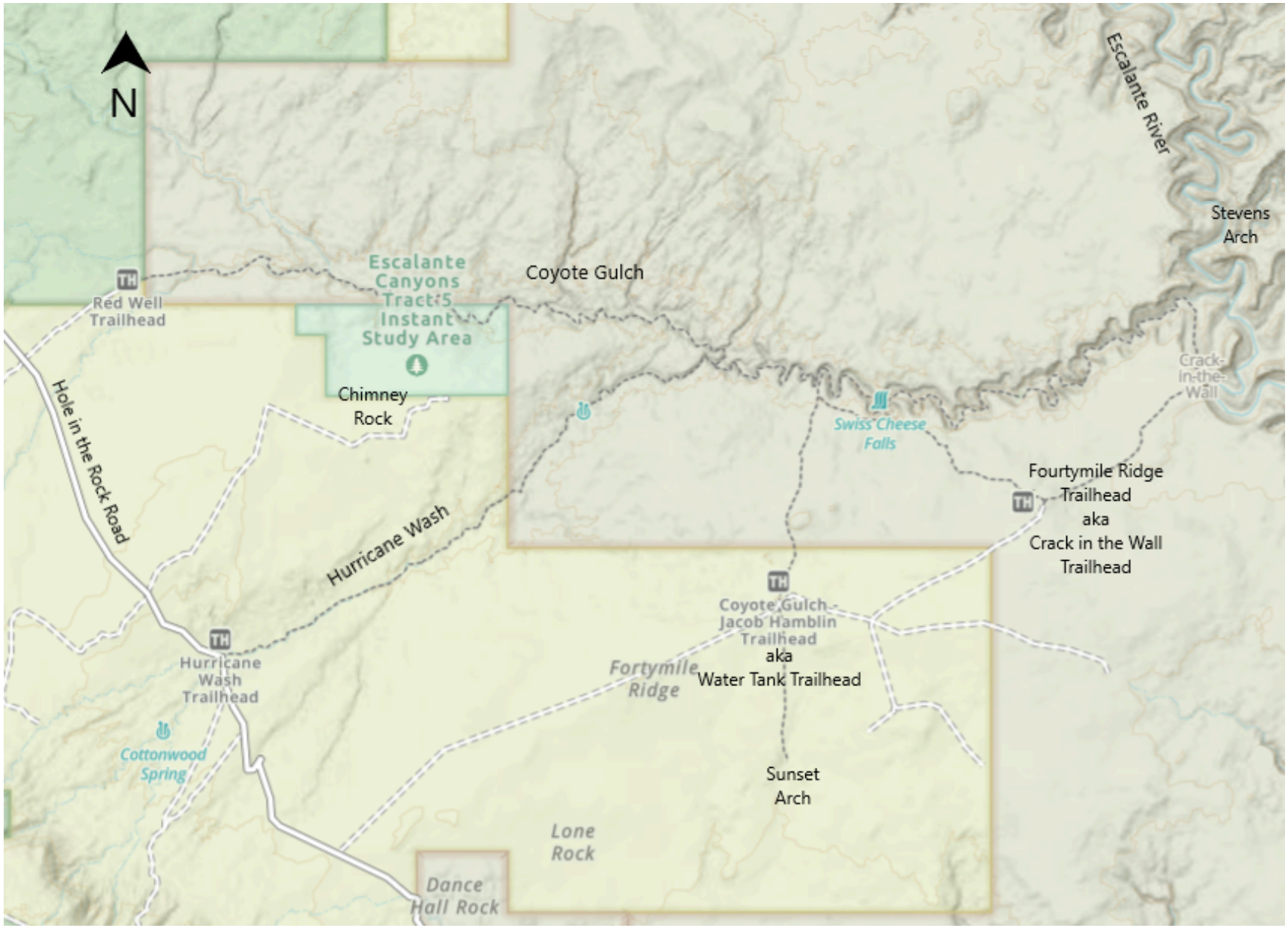
Mammals, fish, reptiles, birds and even amphibians all make their home in the desert and the streams that course through it. There are many species of birds in and above the Escalante Canyon. Some of the more notable ones include turkey vultures, ravens, pinyon jays and spotted towhees. You may also 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. Then 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 their bodies. Some poisonous animals to watch out for are rattlesnakes, scorpions, black widows, and velvet ants.

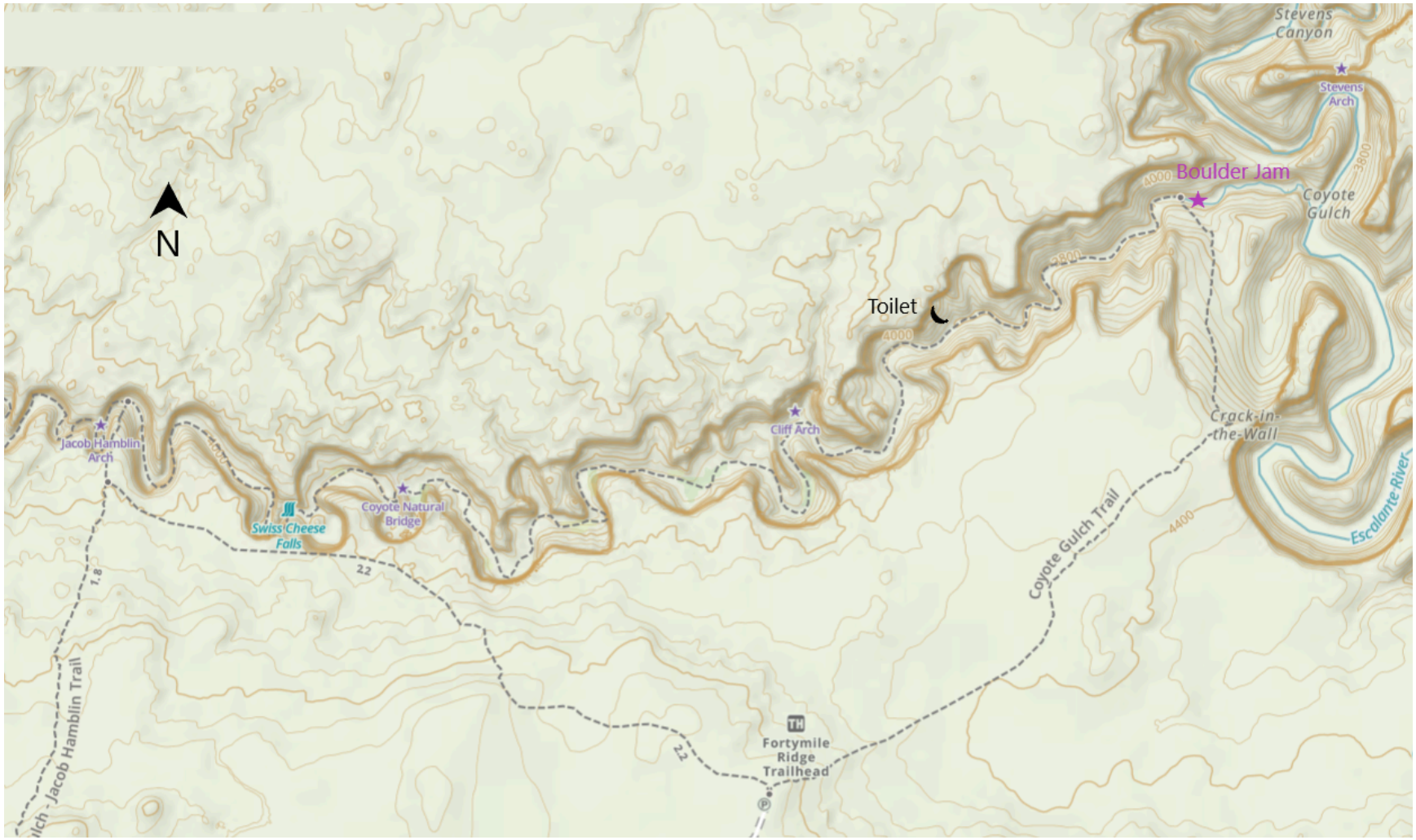
Rattlesnakes are not common and not aggressive but they will stand their ground. If they are rattling they're agitated and if they're also coiled up they're ready to strike. They can strike a

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!
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
Sunset arch is a short overland hike south from the water tank trailhead.
Stevens Arch is a spectacular arch you climb up under. This would be recommended as part of your trip, not before or after as you take Crack in the Wall to get to it.
Willow Gulch can be done as kind of long day hike loop, going down Willow and up 40 Mile Gulch. Be prepared to get wet!

National Park Service Information: https://www.nps.gov/glca/planyourvisit/coyote-gulch.htm


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Escalante River
Stevens Arch
Escalante Canyons Tract 5 Instant Study Area
Coyote Gulch
Red Well Trailhead
Chimney Rock
Hole in the Rock Road
Swiss Cheese Falls
Crack-in-the-Wall
Fourtymile Ridge Trailhead aka Crack in the Wall Trailhead
Hurricane Wash
Coyote Gulch Jacob Hamblin Trailhead aka Water Tank Trailhead
Hurricane Wash Trailhead
Fortymile Ridge
Cottonwood Spring
Sunset Arch
Lone Rock
Dance Hall Rock


N
Stevens Canyon
Stevens Arch
Boulder Jam
Coyote Gulch
Toilet
Cliff Arch
Crack-in-the-Wall
Jacob Hamblin Arch
Swiss Cheese Falls
Coyote Natural Bridge
Coyote Gulch Trail
Escalante River
Fortymile Ridge Trailhead
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