

Western Road Trip Newsletter



Let's start out with sunrise in Canyonlands

Day 16
Sunday
November 10th
Another day
in
Canyonlands N.P.
Needles District

Stats
296 miles today
2476 total miles this trip

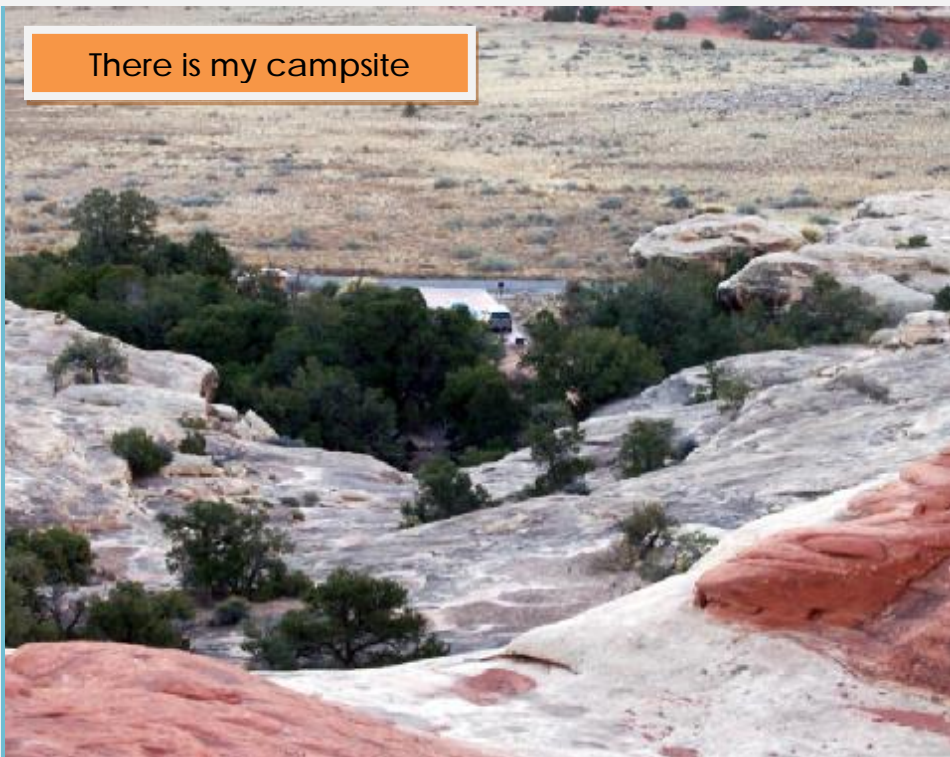
Weather
High Temp: 63
Low Temp: 30's
Conditions: Sunny

*"I thought it was
going to be a
cheesy tourist trap!"*

Hello to my Family and Friends!

I was up before the sun again and climbed the butte directly behind my campsite. A Canyonlands newspaper they gave me when I arrived listed this spot as one of the best in the park for sunrise photos. I had to wait a little bit, and since there were no clouds in the sky the photos are OK but not great.

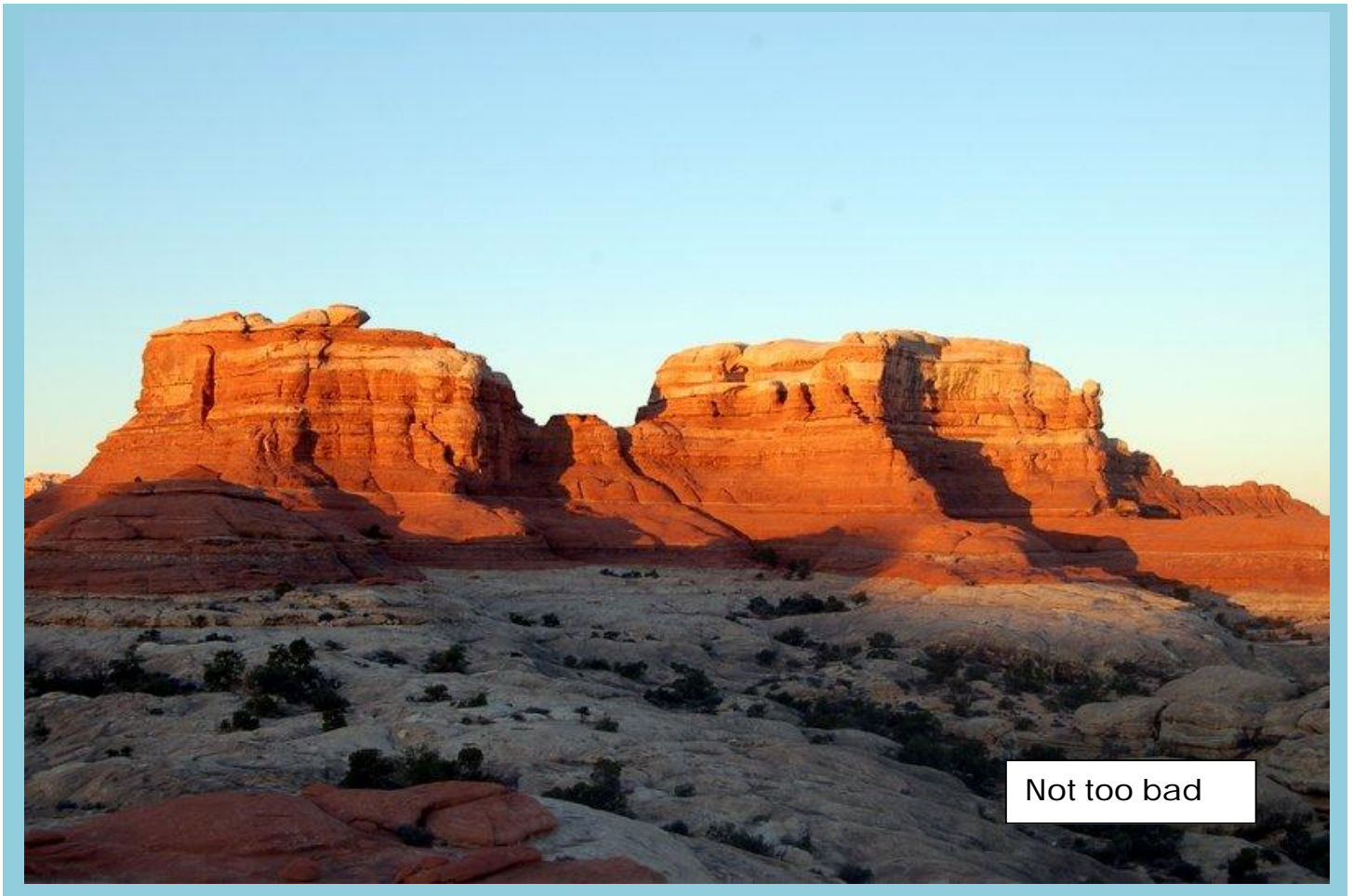
There is my campsite



Don't I climb
enough ladders at
home?

This one really shows the alternating color of the rocks





This is going to be a busy day. First stop is Roadside Ruins; Second stop is the Visitor's Center; Third stop is Cave Spring; Fourth – move the camper to a new site; Fifth is a drive to the Elephant Hill Trailhead and a 6 mile round trip hike to Chesler Park. Let's see if I accomplished all I set out to do.

Saw a lot of this in Mesa Verde

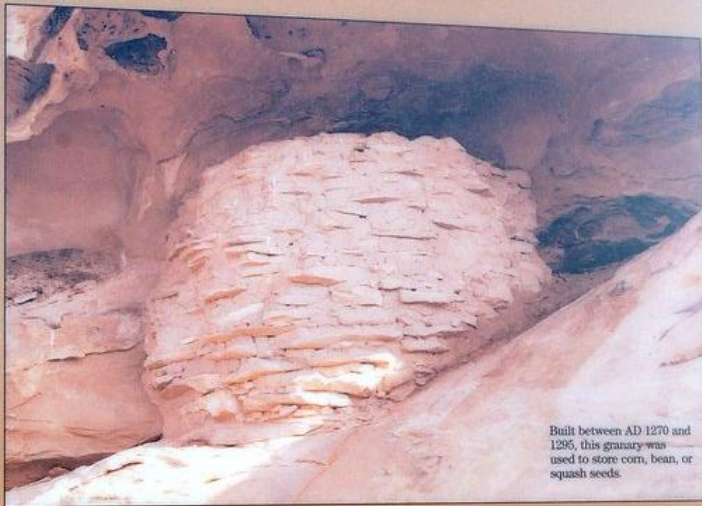
Roadside Ruin

This short trail passes an Ancestral Puebloan granary (grain storage bin) tucked into a ledge above a dry wash. In Canyonlands there are dozens of similar storage structures, but few dwellings.

This suggests that the early inhabitants of this area farmed intensively but lived here only seasonally.

Do not enter, alter, damage, or deface archaeological sites.

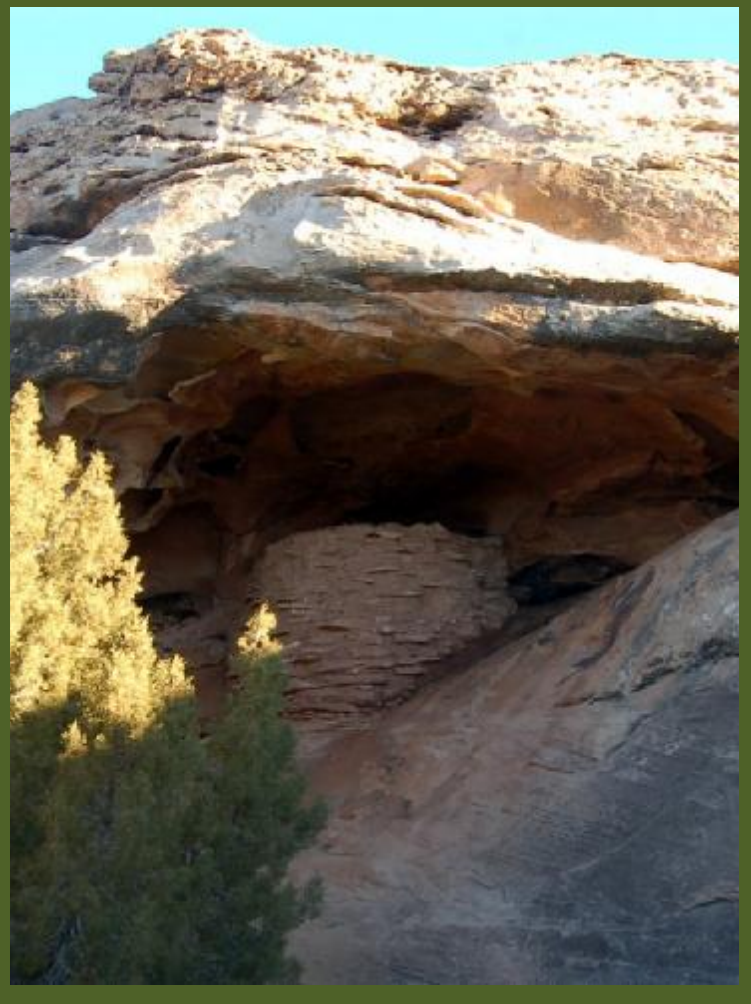
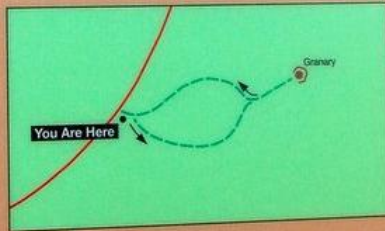
Without human impact, prehistoric structures can survive for centuries in the desert climate. Do not approach or climb up to structures. Any contact can erode foundations and weaken walls.



Built between AD 1270 and 1295, this granary was used to store corn, bean, or squash seeds.

0.3 mi/0.5 km Loop Trail

- Pets and bikes are not allowed on hiking trails.
- Protect cryptobiotic soil crusts by staying on designated trails.
- Trail is marked by cairns (small rock piles).



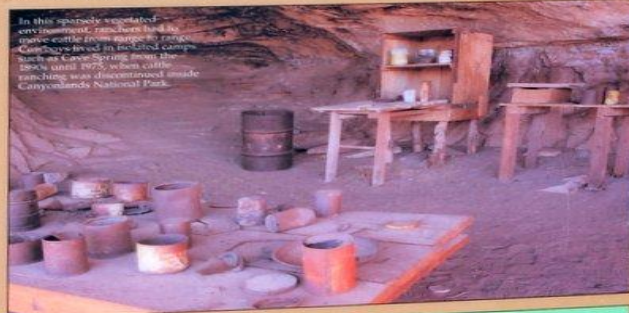
Cave Spring Trail

This short trail passes Cave Spring, one of the area's few year-round water sources. An excellent natural campsite, this location was first used by Ancestral Puebloan Indians and later by cowboys.

Remnants of a cowboy camp can be seen in the first alcove, which served as an open-air bunkhouse. In the second alcove there is evidence of earlier human use, including pictographs, grinding slicks, and a smoke-blackened ceiling.

Protect the human history of this area. Do not enter the cowboy camp or touch pictographs.

Hike the Cave Spring Trail clockwise to easily access the cowboy camp, spring, and pictographs. Past Cave Spring, two ladders ascend to the slickrock above, providing panoramic views of canyon scenery.



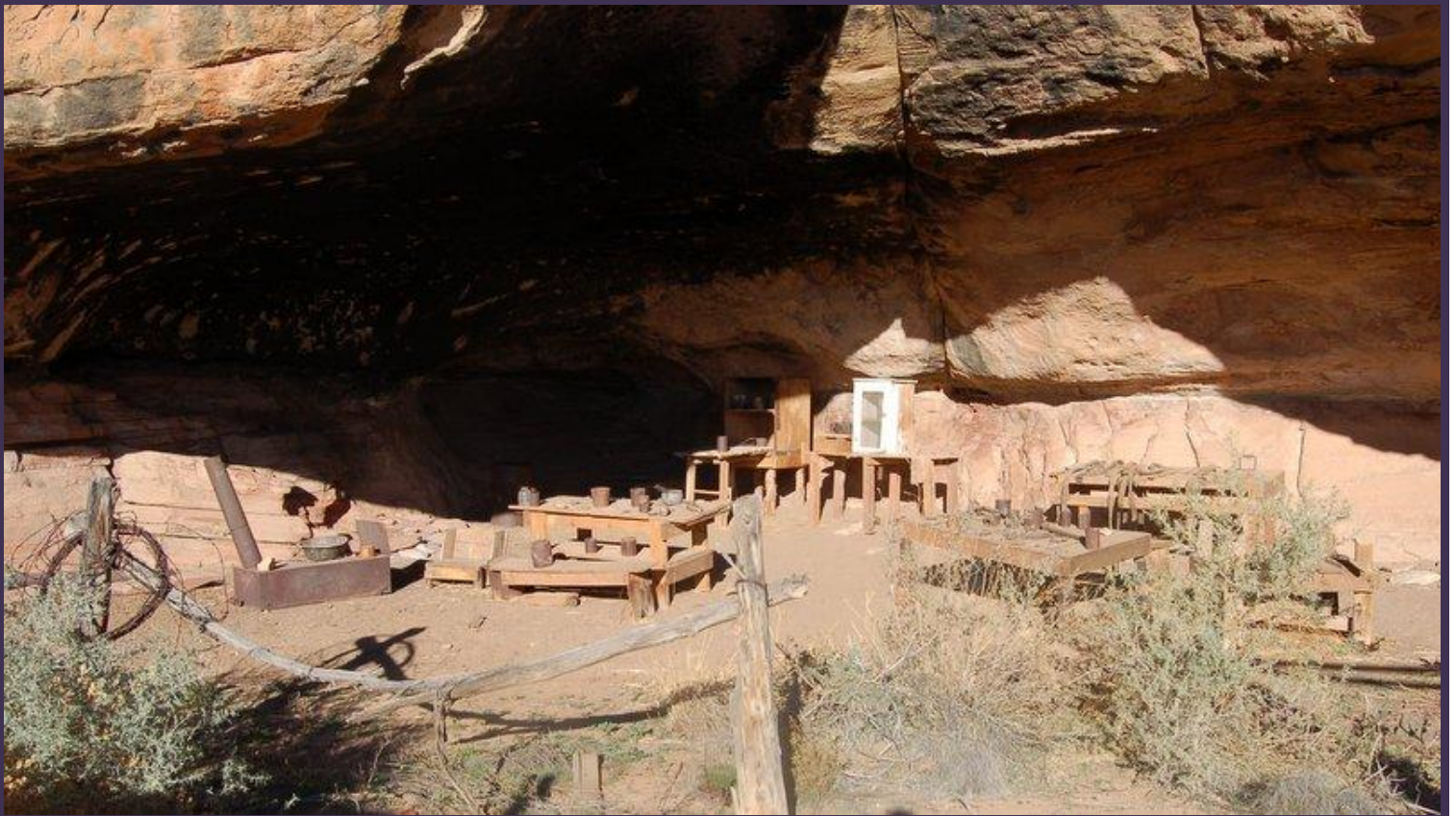
0.6 mi/1 km Loop Trail

- Pets and bikes are not allowed on hiking trails.
- Protect cryptobiotic soil crusts by staying on designated trails.
- Trail is marked by cairns (small rock piles).





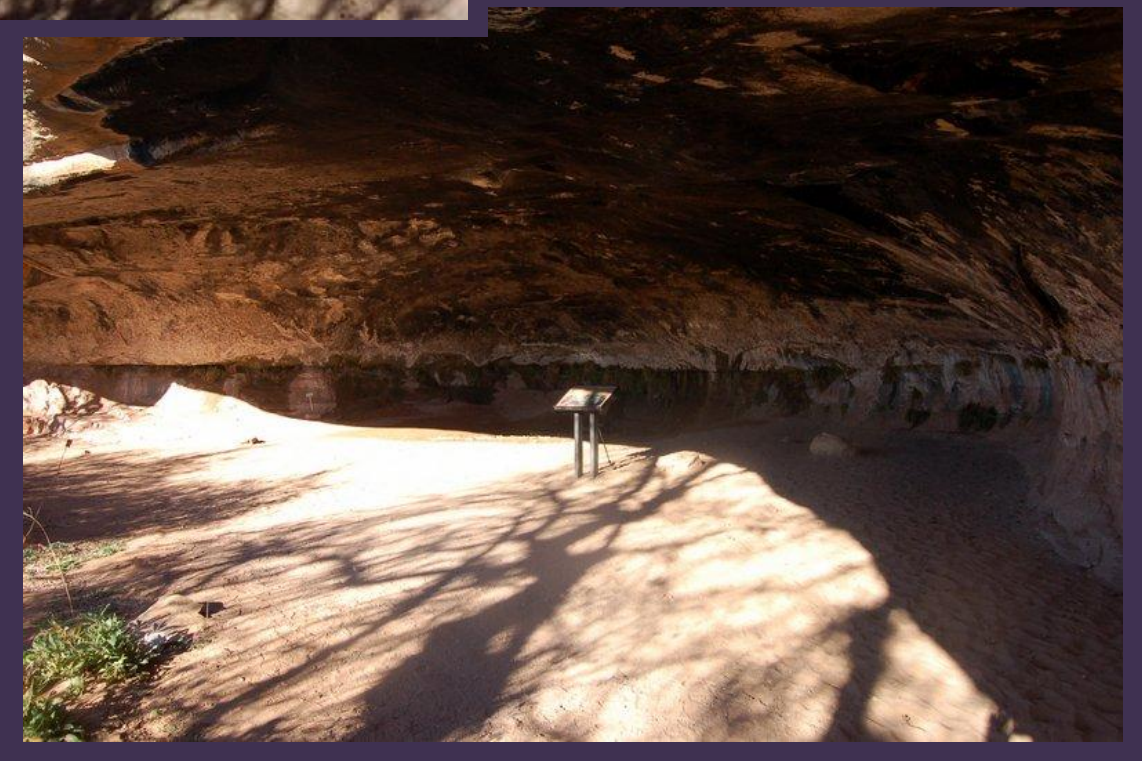
The trail starts out through the sagebrush. Below is an old cowboy camp from the early 1900's when cattle were grazed in the valleys. There is another Cowboy camp off the Hidden Valley 4x4 trail that I found a description of and coordinates for on the internet. When I mentioned it at the Visitor's Center, the Ranger told me she knew nothing about it. I am hoping to get there on Tuesday.





Left is an old feed bin, still in pretty good shape. Notice how they set everything under the overhang for protection from the weather.

Below is the actual Cave Spring. There are probably not a lot of places like this in the Park.



Water to Live By

All living things need water to survive. Reliable water is rare in this arid land. Cave Spring has provided people, plants, and animals with water for centuries.

Early humans at Cave Spring left handprints and rust-colored images on the alcove walls. More recently, cowboys camped nearby.

Water-loving plants such as maidenhair fern and gambel oak live next to the spring. Look in the mud for animal tracks and watch for birds drinking from the seep.

Do not touch or mark on pictographs. It is a violation of federal law to deface archeological sites.



The rust colored images



Cave Spring

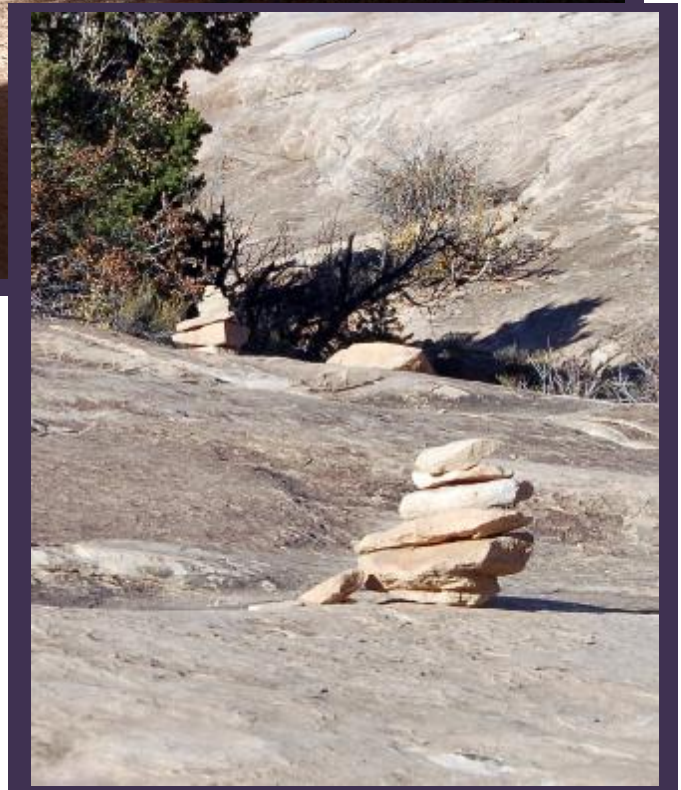
It seemed amazing how the rock split away and left the very different color underneath.



The whole butte was undercut like this.

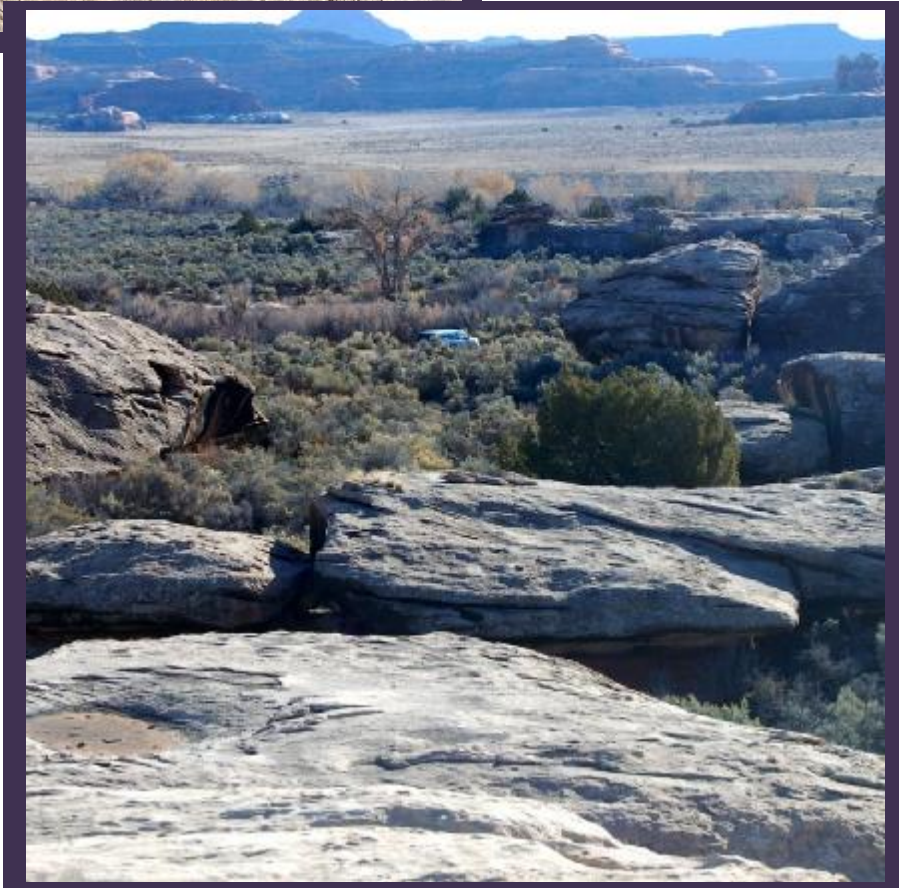


This was my first real experience following cairns as a hiking guide. Rock cairns are the pile of rocks that look totally unnatural to the surrounding landscape. This makes them easy to find and follow. If there is a question as to which way to go, the top rock has some sort of a point that sends you in the right direction. The point is to be able to see the next cairn from the one you are standing at. That way you never lose sight of the trail.

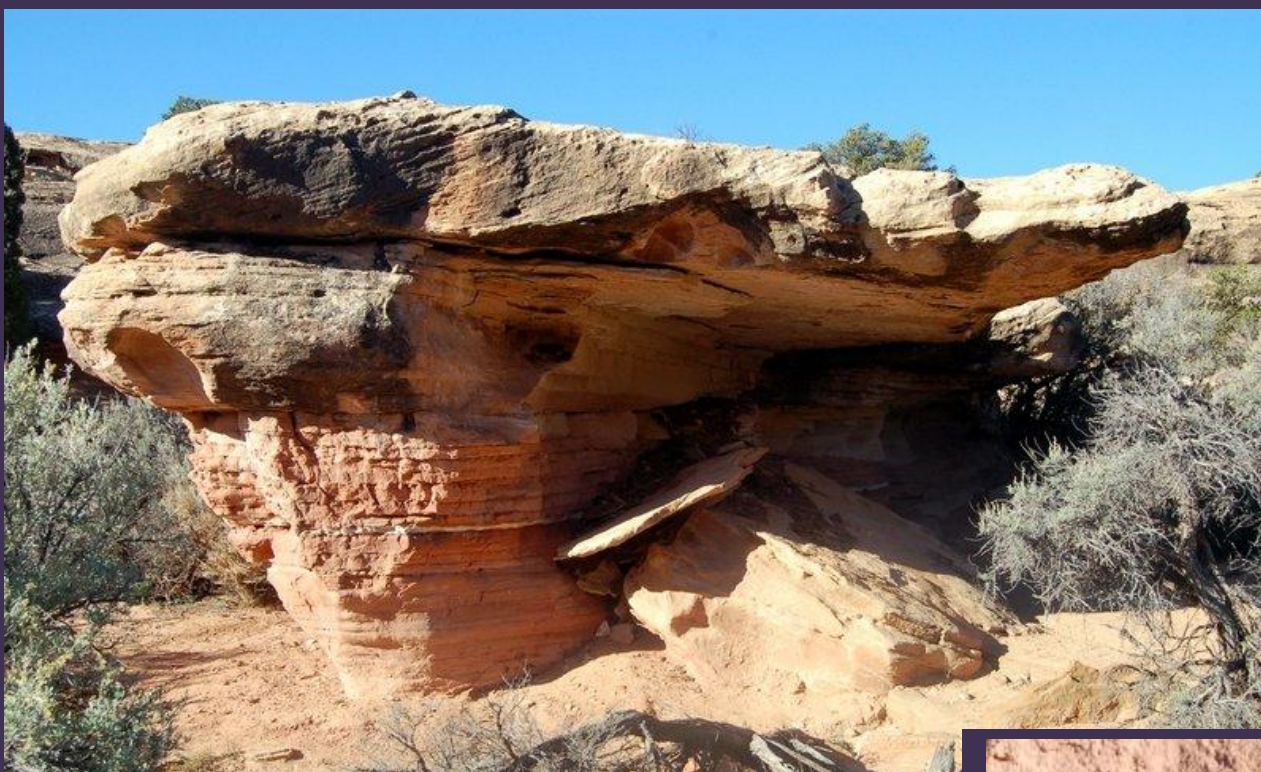




These cacti seem to spring straight from the rock.



There is my truck in the parking lot



There seems to be hardly anything holding this rock up

I made it back to the campground by 10:00, found that I liked site #4, and moved camp. All I did was put everything inside the camper, leave the beds out as they are, hitch it up and move three sites to my left. Put everything back out and I was ready for the next goal on my list.



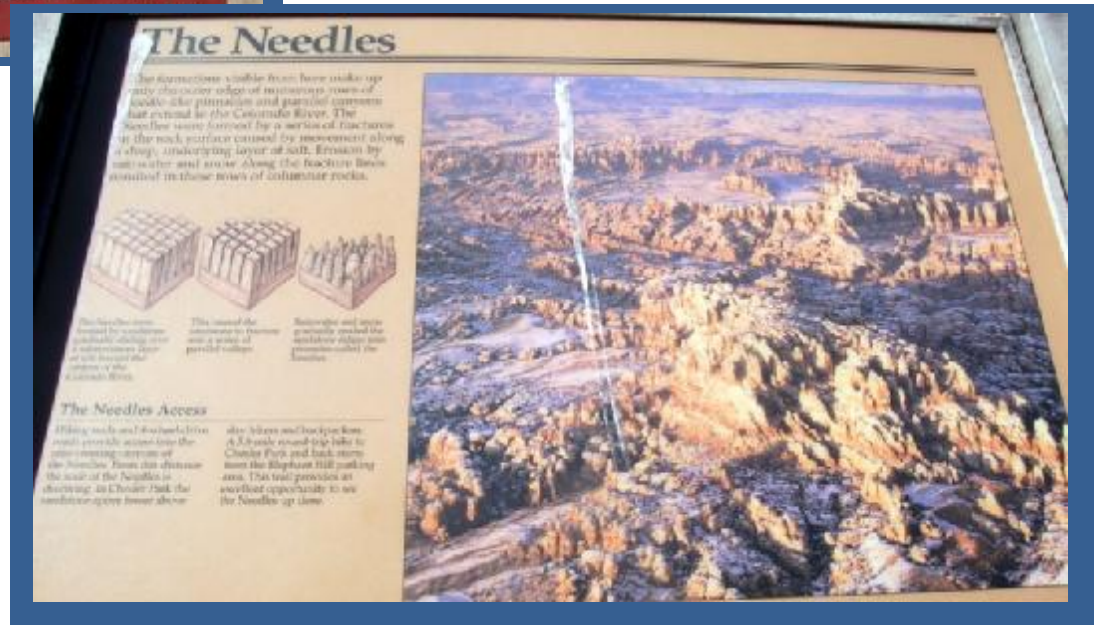
Anybody home?



Rather a cozy little set-up if I do say so myself.






Chesler Park has a lot of trails in and around it. It is supposedly the prettiest hike in the park. The trail to get there starts at the end of the road described to the left, about 3 miles long. As I mentioned yesterday, it is a weekend and its free. There were about 18 cars in the parking area when I arrived.

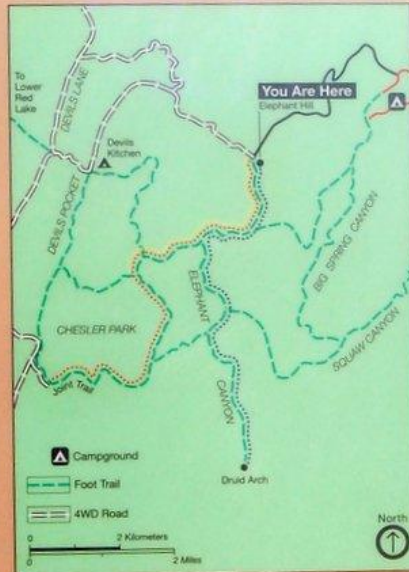
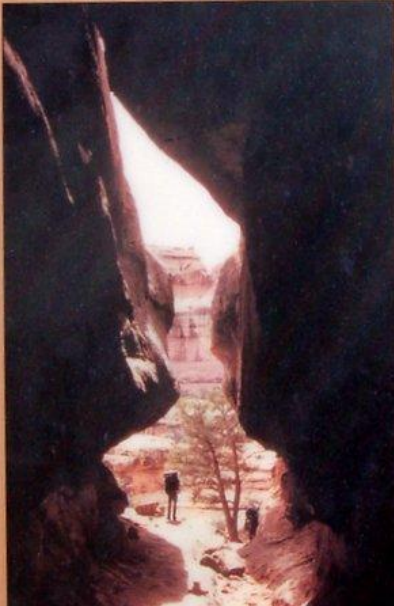


Elephant Hill Trailhead

These trails explore some of the most remote, seemingly impenetrable areas of the Needles backcountry. Colorful rock spires surround a grassland at Chesler Park, the nearest and most popular destination. Other points of interest include the Joint Trail, where canyon walls narrow to shoulder width, and Druid Arch, a spectacular block of eroded sandstone.

Numerous intersecting trails in this section of the park provide a variety of hiking and sightseeing opportunities. Trails are primitive, and may have ladders or steep sections along cliff edges.

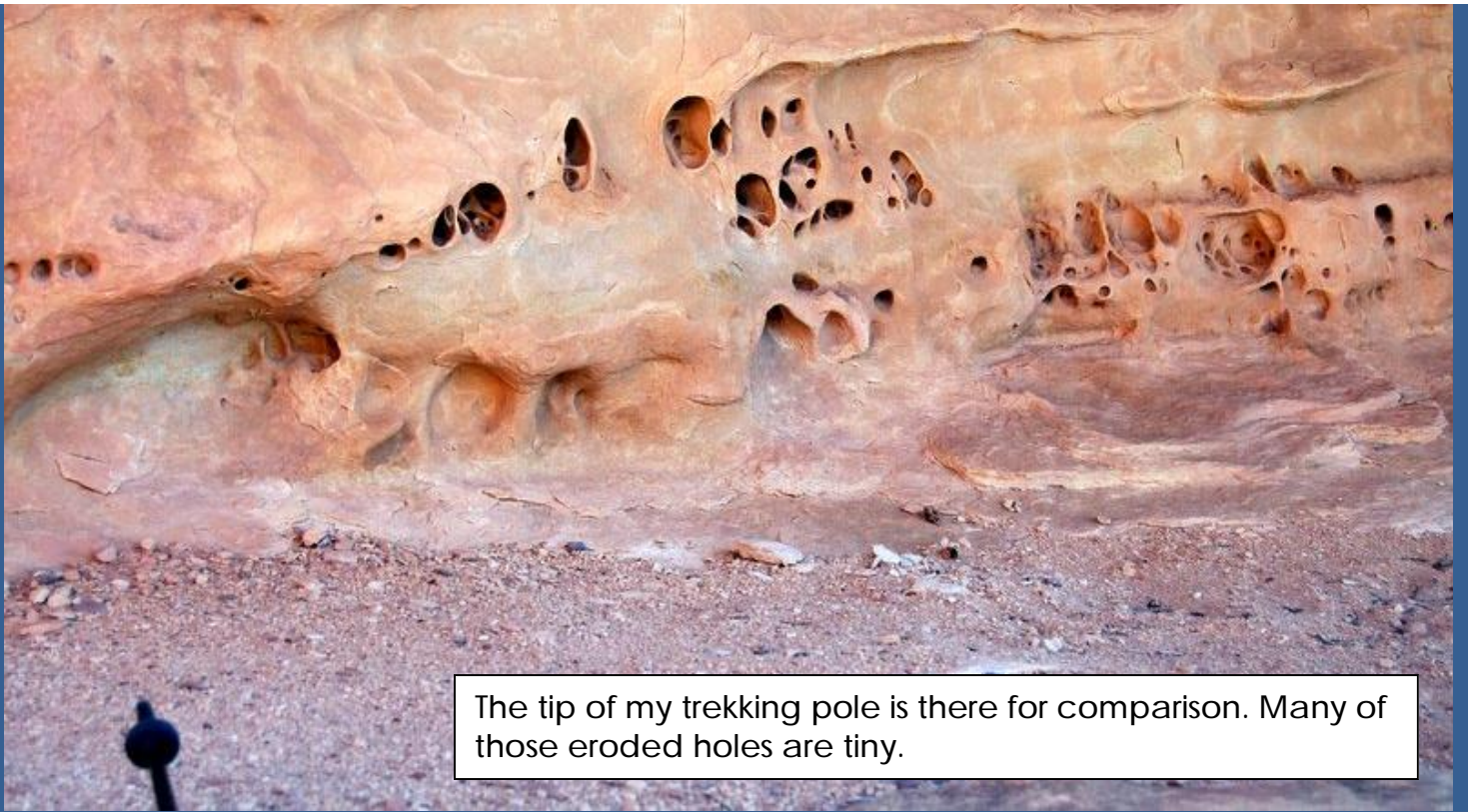
-  Chesler Park 2.9 miles/5 km (one way)
-  Joint Trail 4.9 miles/8 km (one way)
-  Druid Arch 5.4 miles/9 km (one way)



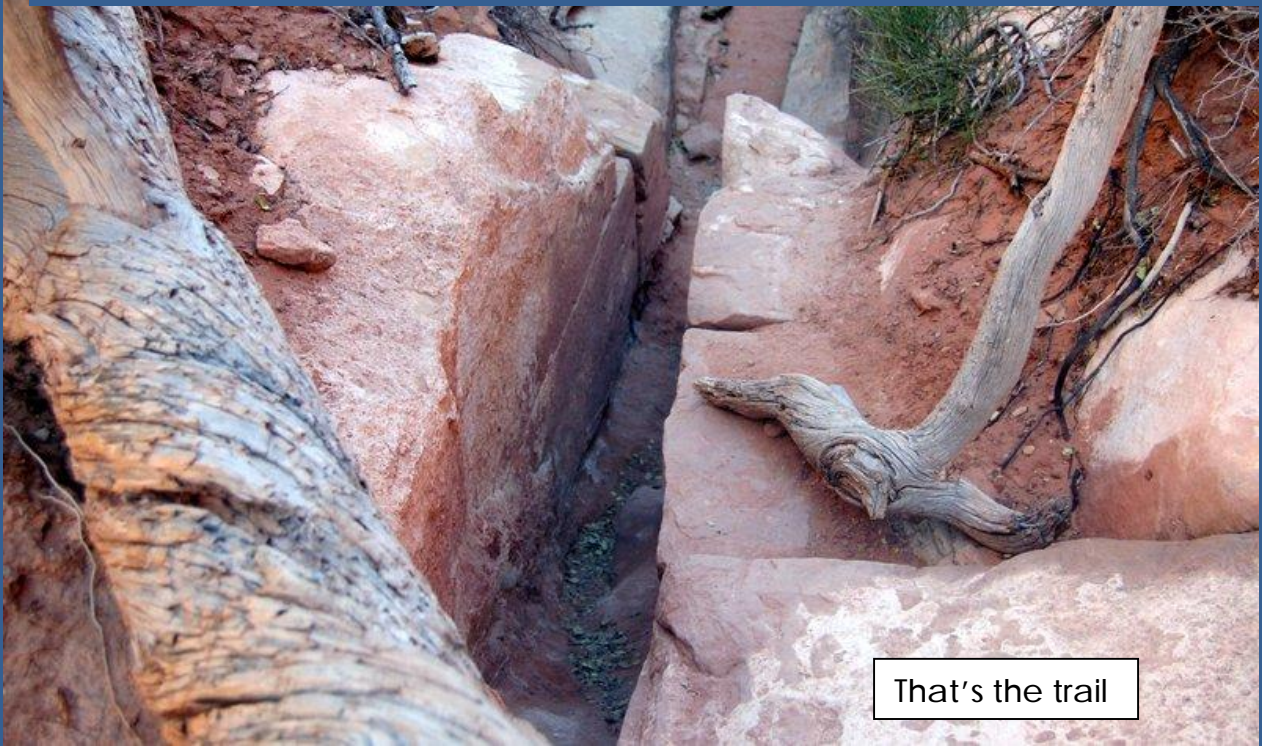
My goal is the Chesler Park Viewpoint, 2.9 miles one way. That makes 5.8 miles round trip, a pretty good hike for me. This is the first time I am using the backpack so I can carry water. Every other hike has been short enough not to worry about it.



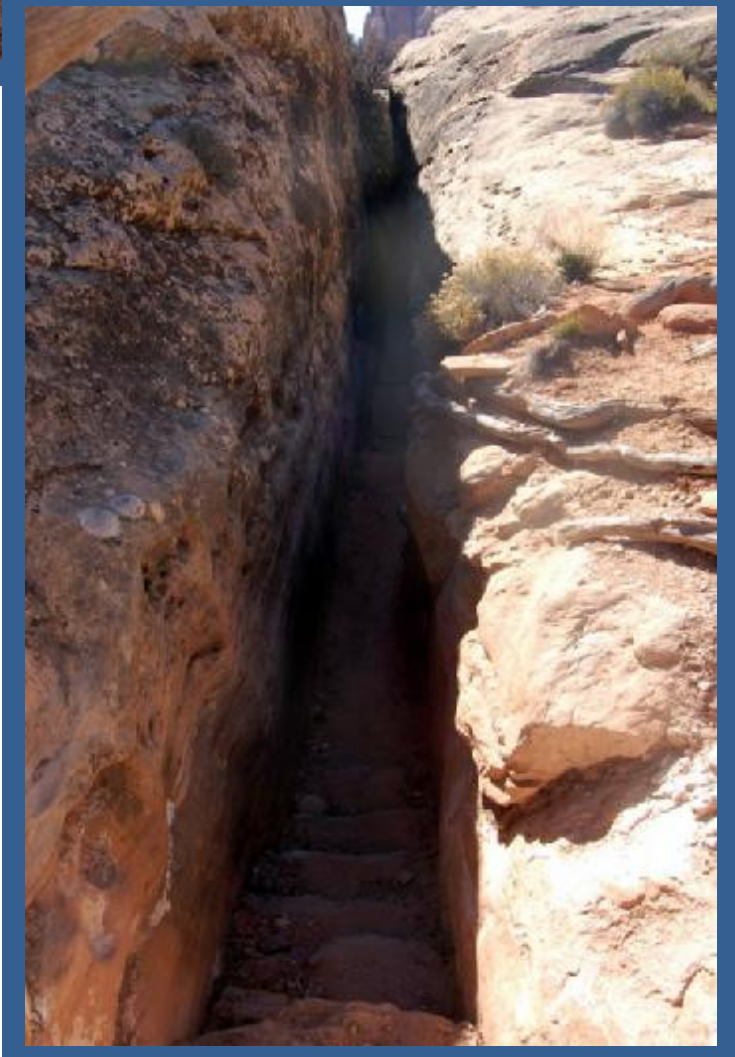
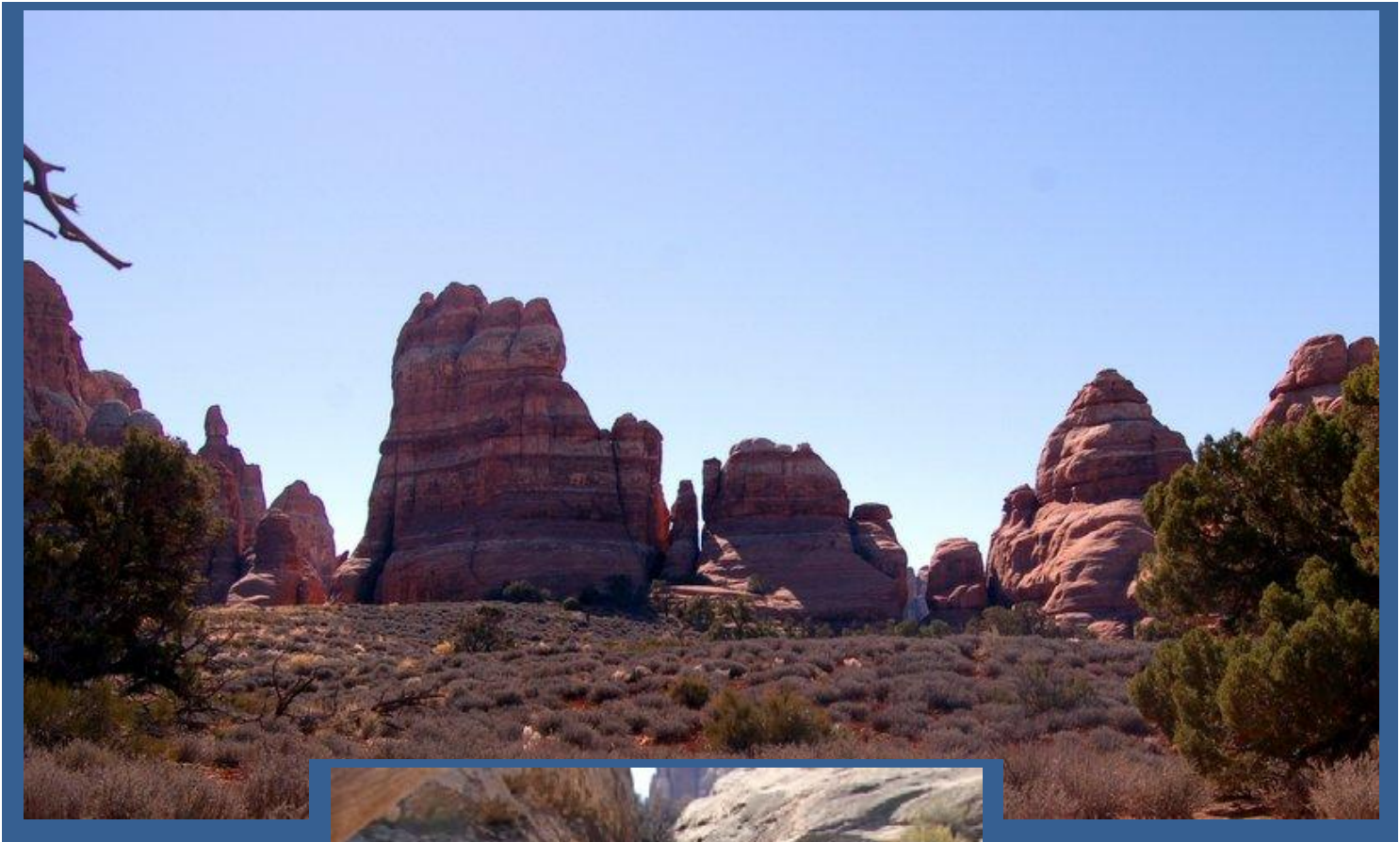


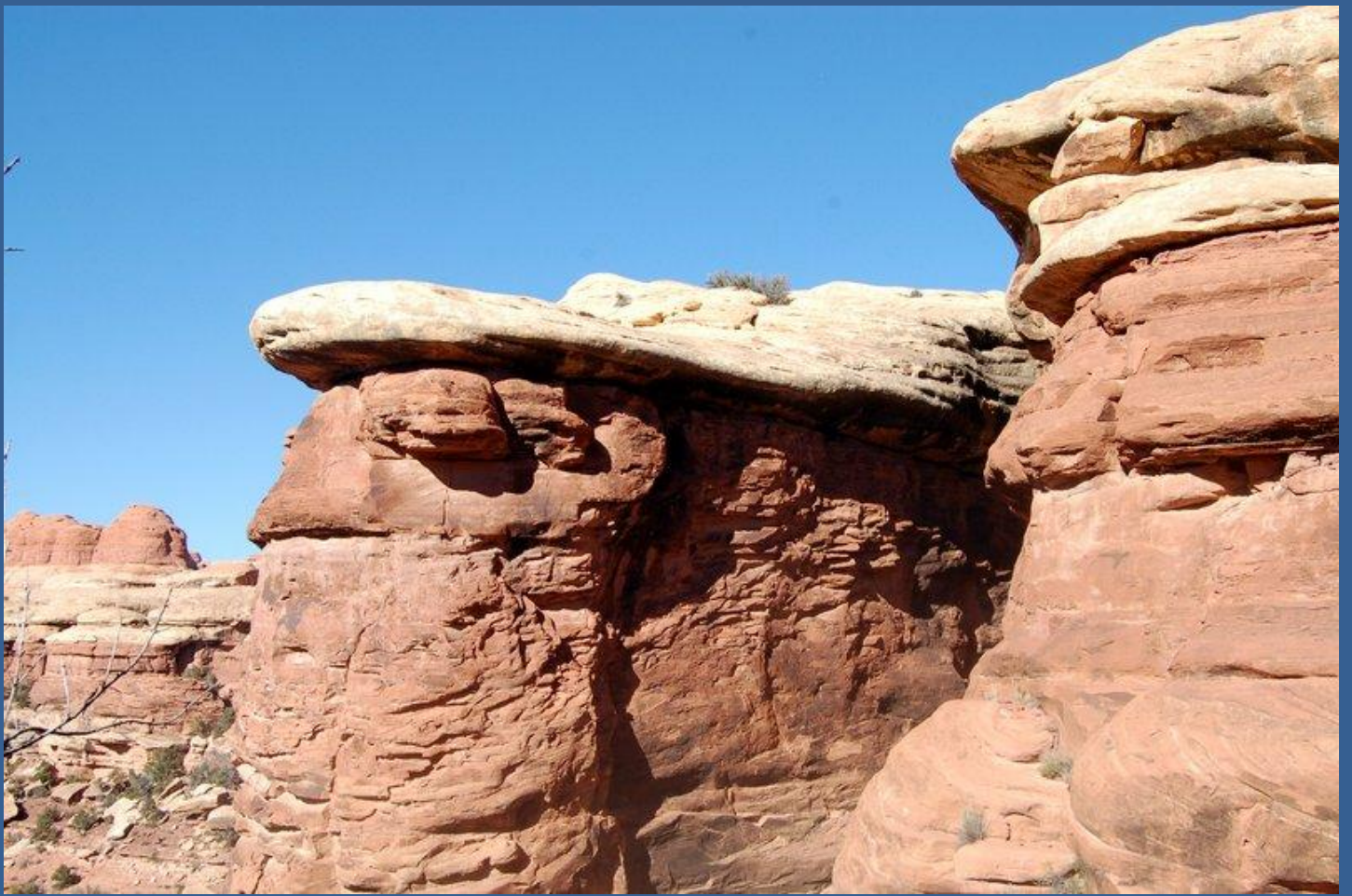


The tip of my trekking pole is there for comparison. Many of those eroded holes are tiny.



That's the trail





The Needles

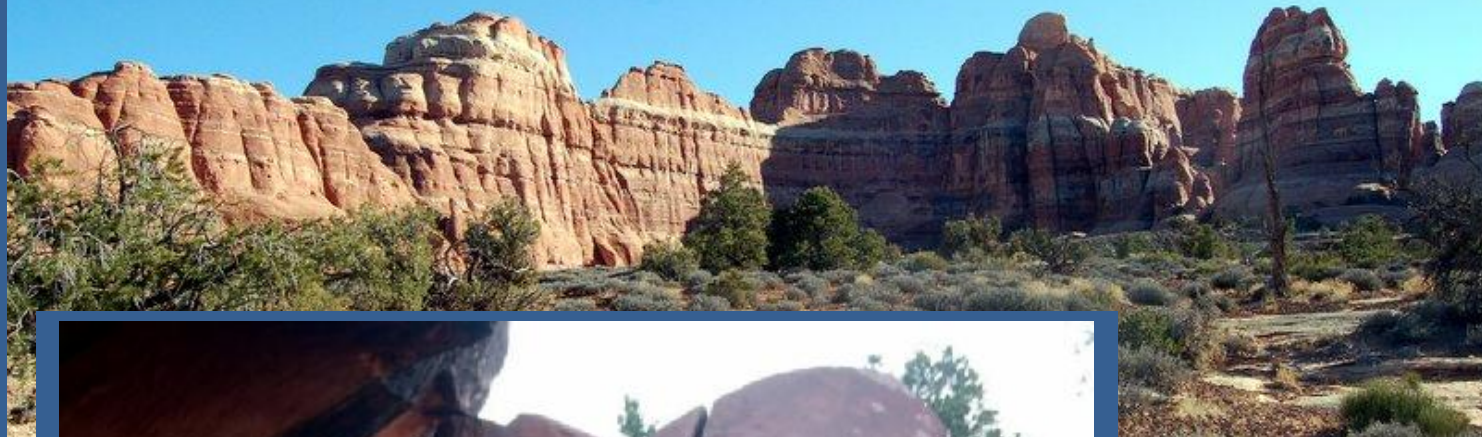


This is Chesler Park. A little disappointing because of the sun, can't really see much.

This however, is looking back the way I came. Much better with the sun behind me.



On the hike back



I had lunch at the camper after the move, so I only had a snack at the viewpoint. I talked to a couple ladies from Colorado then headed back.



Pothole Point Trail

This loop trail crosses slickrock dimpled with depressions called potholes. During periods of heavy rain, water collects in these natural basins. Within a few days a fascinating variety of invertebrates hatch from eggs or

emerge from dormancy to complete their life cycles. Pools teem with tiny animals dependent upon a puddle of water for their existence. Look closely but do not touch.



Adult talpoia skink (left) and clam skink (bottom) visit by their drought-resistant eggs before the pool dries up. Here a female talpoia skink digs in the soil to bury her eggs.

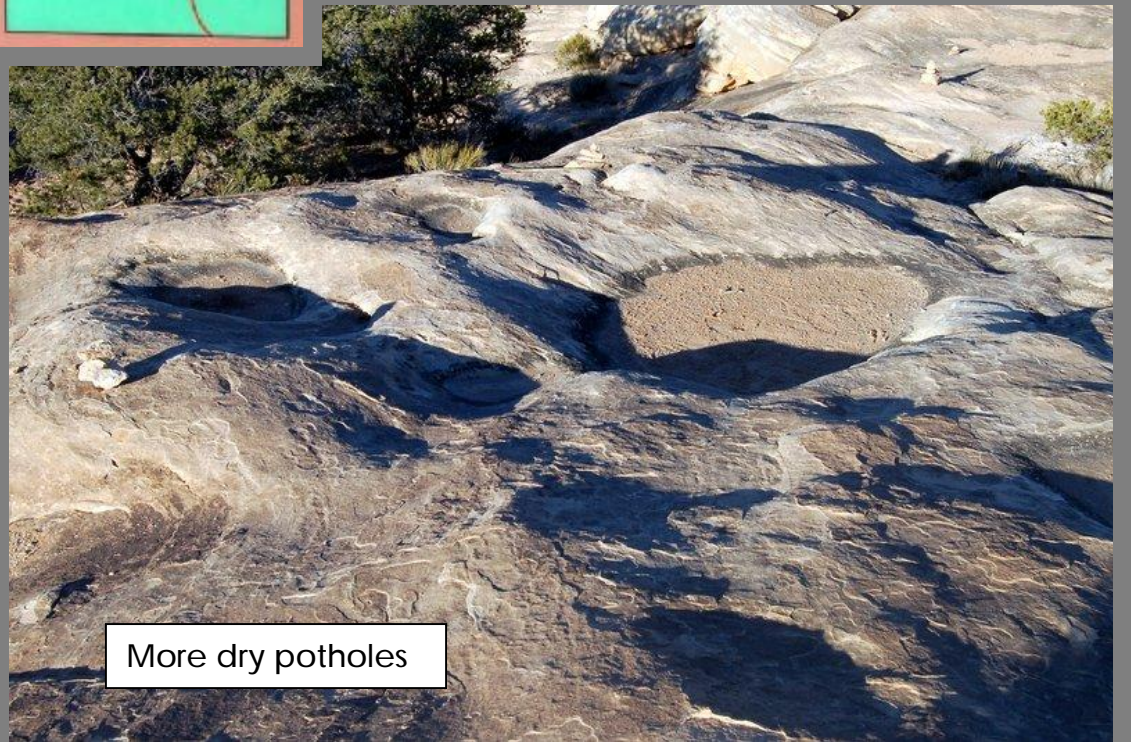
0.6 mi/1 km Loop Trail

- Keep hands and feet out of puddles.
- Pets and bikes are not allowed on hiking trails.
- Protect cryptobiotic soil crusts by staying on designated trails.
- Trail is marked by cairns (small rock piles).



I still had plenty of time and energy so I decided to cross one of tomorrow's goals off the list.

Below: These are dry potholes.



More dry potholes

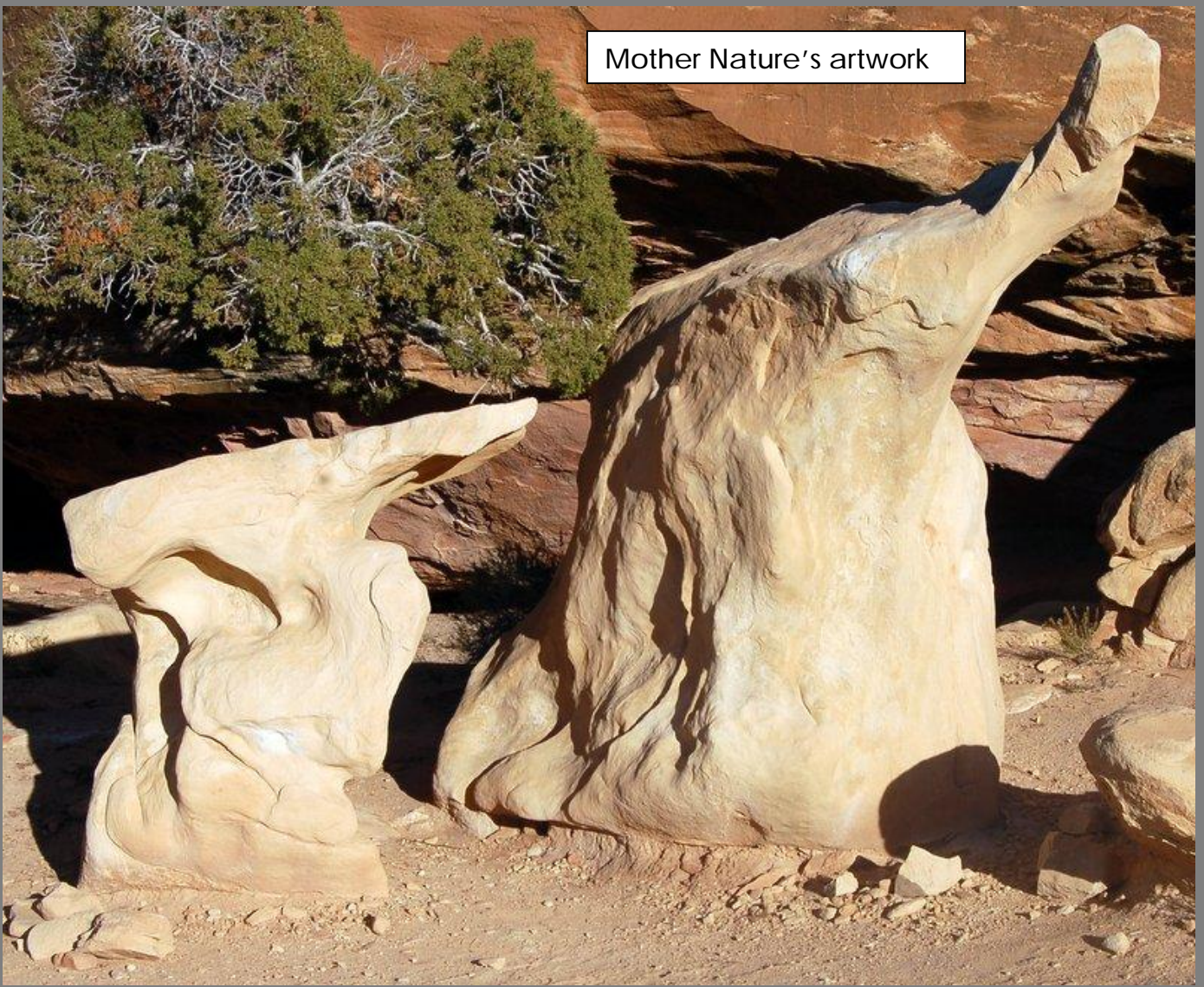


Aha! A couple potholes with water still in them. Let's see what kind of animal life I can find.



This is about the only animal life I have seen in the park. This is a Clam Shrimp. He must have seen me coming because he swam directly towards me then swam away. I saw a lot of non-moving ones in the pool, but this guy was the only live one.

Mother Nature's artwork



I took a spur trail to the top of the butte. I thought about waiting until sunset, but it was still an hour away, so I snapped this picture and headed back to the camper for dinner.

Tomorrow is the big challenge day. The confluence overlook trail. 11 miles round trip to the confluence of the Colorado and Green Rivers. The four hikes I did today totaled about 7.4 miles, but I had a little rest in-between each one. Tomorrow may be the longest hike I have ever taken. So if I pass out tomorrow, this may be the last newsletter you get.

I am sure this will be a couple days late. I plan on leaving The Needles Tuesday morning and heading for Moab where I should be able to get a signal and catch up on email.

Until next time....