

Western Road Trip Newsletter



An overview shot from today's trail

Day 17
Monday
November 11th
 Another Day
 In
 The Needles District

Stats
 26 miles today
 2484 total miles this trip

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

"in my mind I gave the two joggers a gesture they won't soon forget"

Hello to My Family and Friends

Today's challenge, as you know, is an 11 mile hike to the Confluence Overlook. I awoke early, mostly because without any power, once the laptop dies I have nothing to do but go to bed and read. So I am usually up just about the time of sunrise every morning.

A quick bowl of cereal, make sure everything I need is packed in the backpack, and hit the trail, literally, at

8:20 a.m. I am the first to arrive. The Big Spring Valley is mostly still in shadow as I make my way towards the bottom.



Out here even the trees grow in weird shapes

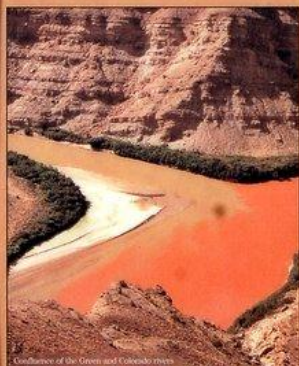
Confluence Overlook Trail

The Confluence Overlook Trail ends 1,000 feet/300 meters above the location where the Colorado and Green Rivers join. This confluence was first mapped in 1859 by U.S. Topographical Engineers of the Macomb Expedition.

Although they never reached the river junction, members of the expedition viewed the confluence from a point above. Appearing much as it does today, the confluence clearly showed the mixing waters of the two great rivers.



Confluence Overlook
 5.5 miles/9 km (one-way)

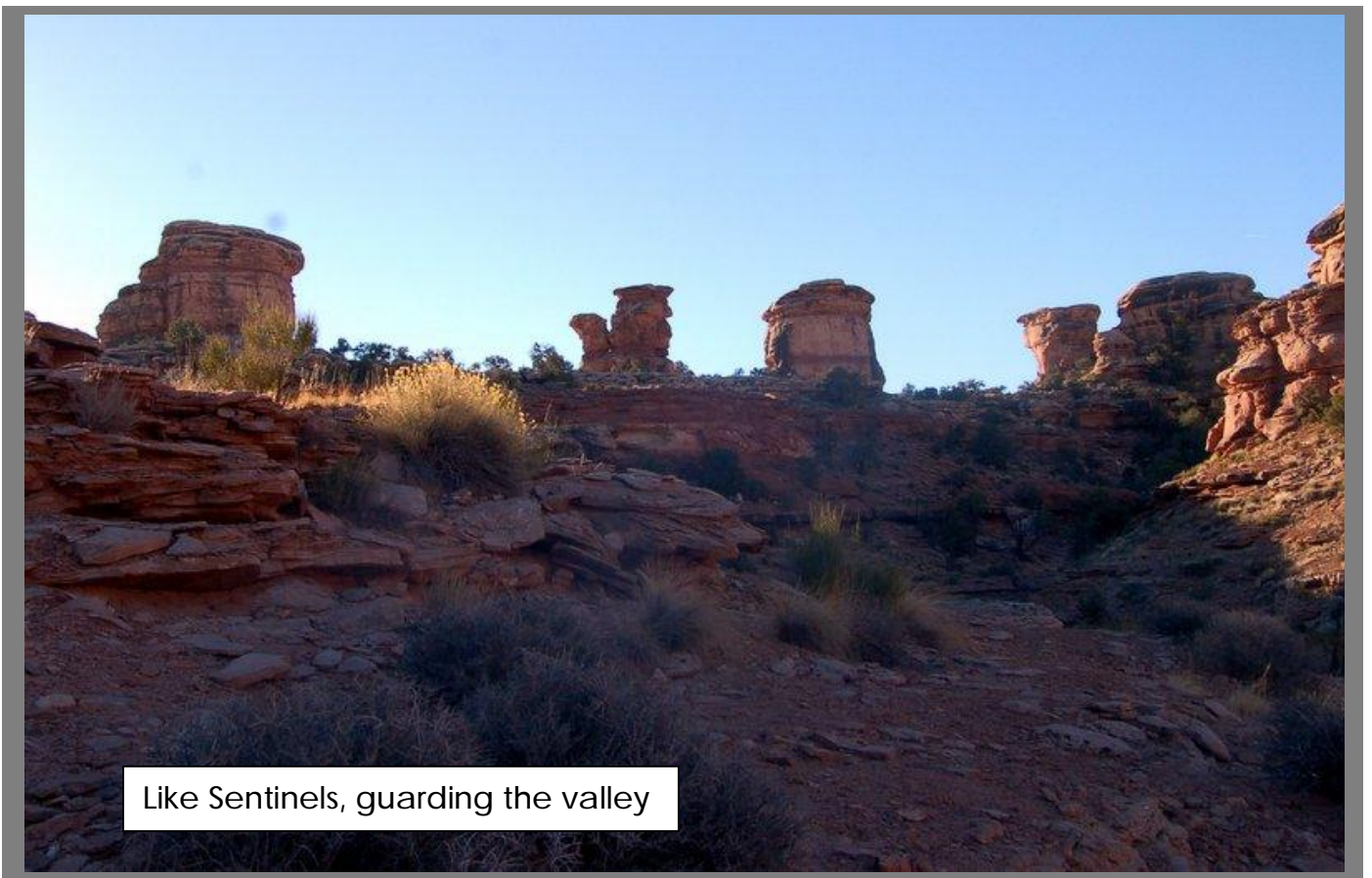
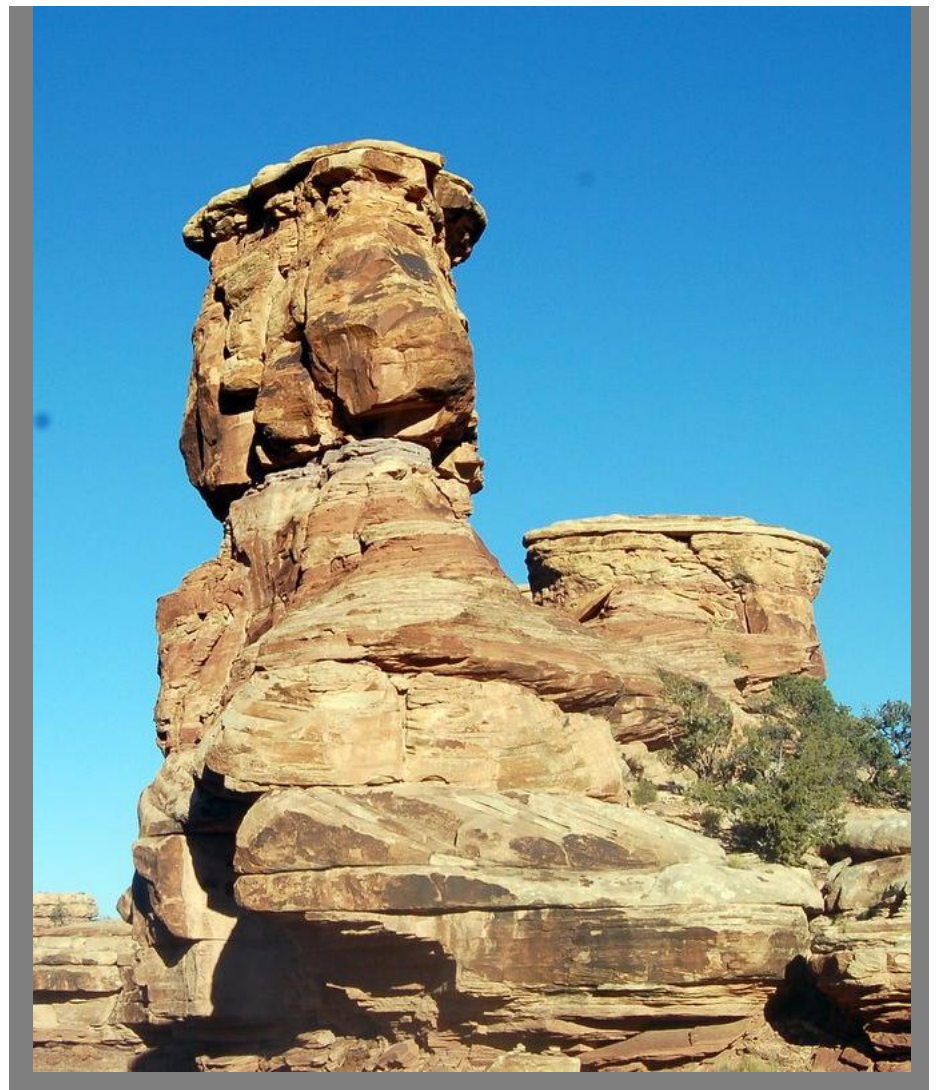


Near the overlook, explorer John Wesley Powell climbed out of the river gorge and viewed the Needles. A short distance downstream he and his associates entered the

Backcountry Use

- Permit required for overnight stays. Check for availability at Needles Visitor Center.
- No river access from Confluence Overlook.
- Pets and bikes are not allowed on hiking trails.
- Protect cryptobiotic soil crusts by staying on designated trails.
- No fires; stoves only.
- No backcountry water source near trail.
- Avoid dehydration; drink a minimum of 1 gallon/4 liters of water per day.
- Trails are marked by cairns (small rock piles).

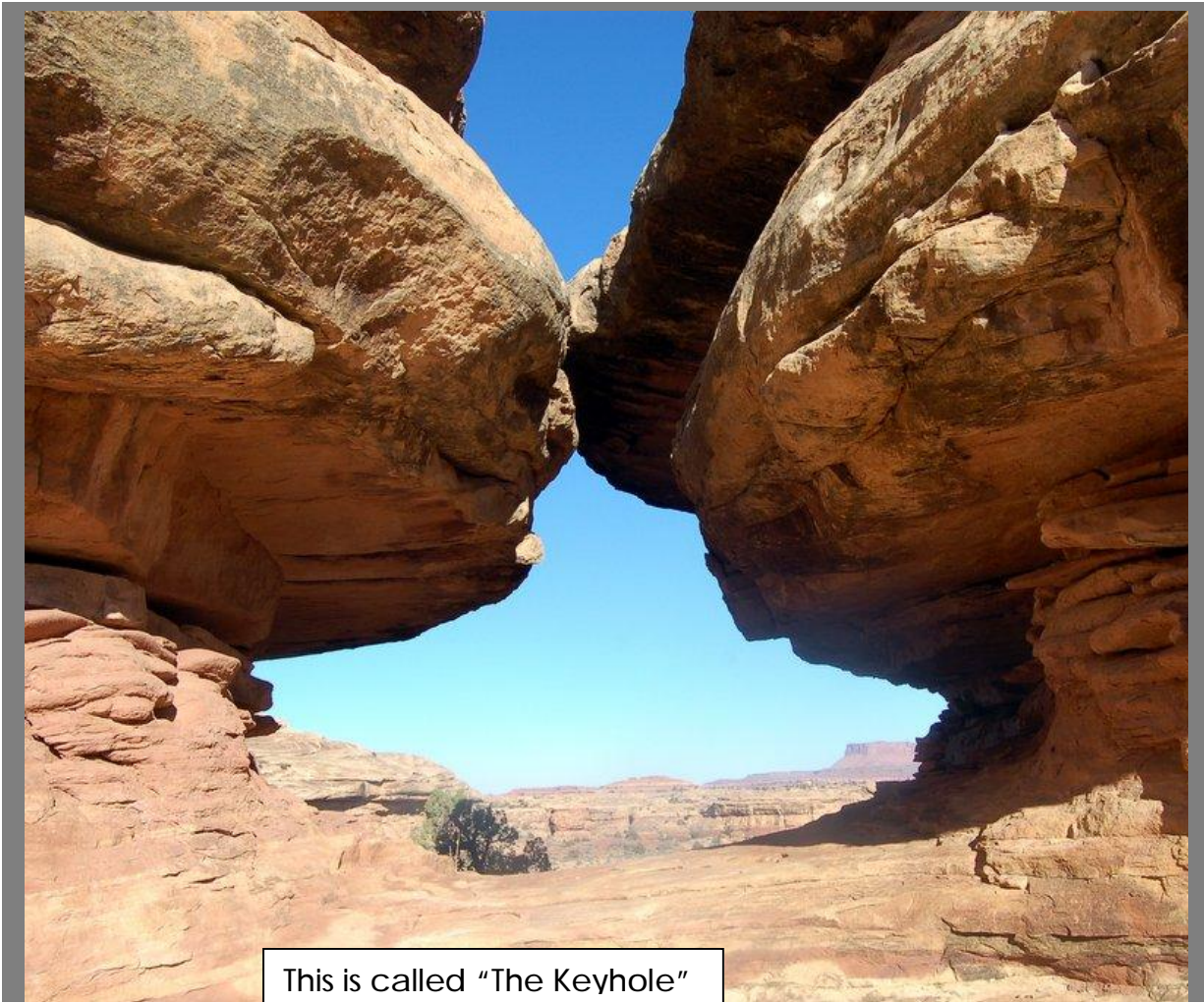
If you remember, I stopped here at the Big Spring Overlook on Saturday while I waited for a handicapped campsite. That was nearer sundown and I did not get around this side of the rocks. As I started out down the trail this morning, the sun was rising and showed how fragile this structure really is.



Like Sentinels, guarding the valley



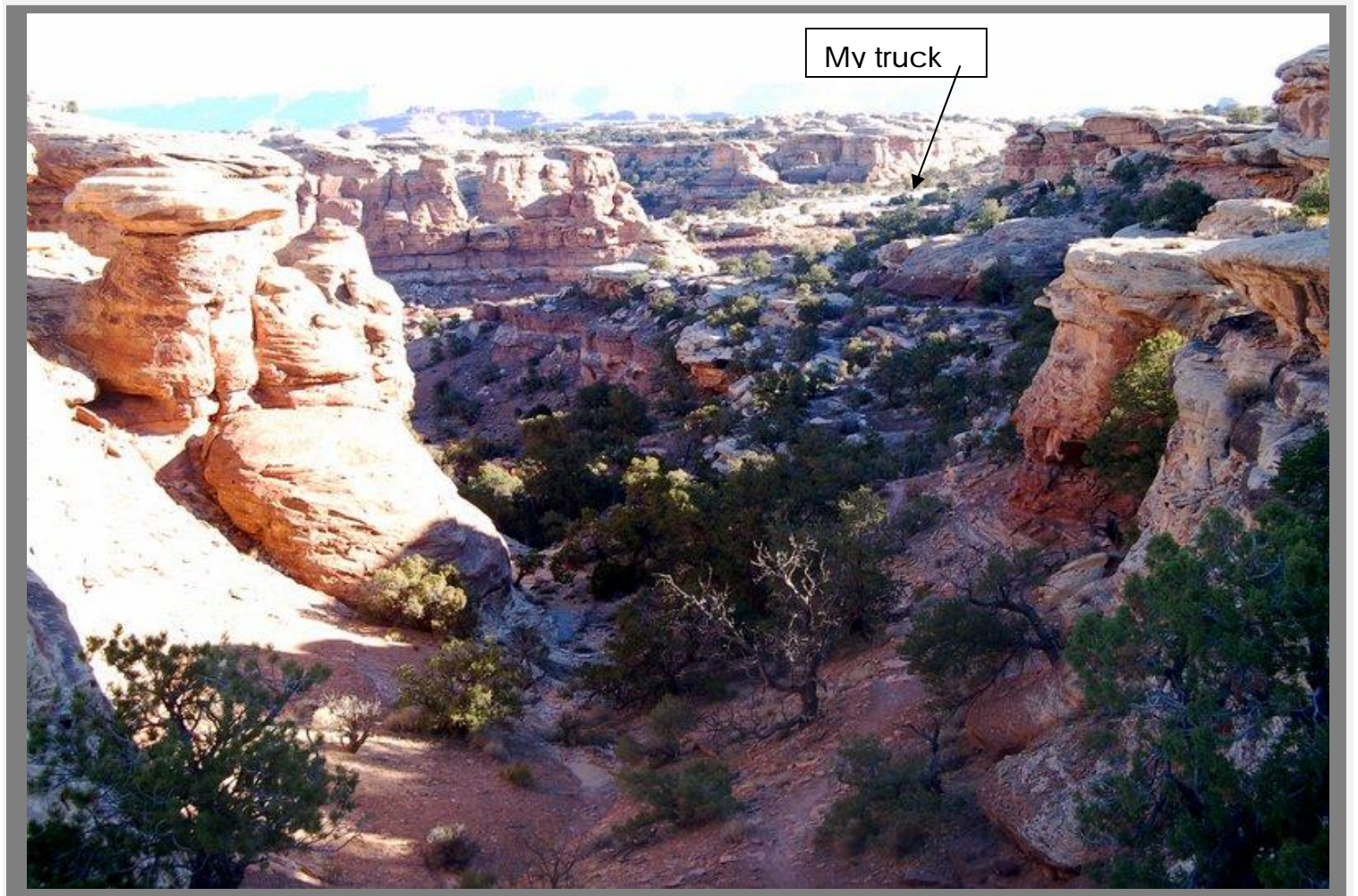
I am going up



This is called "The Keyhole"

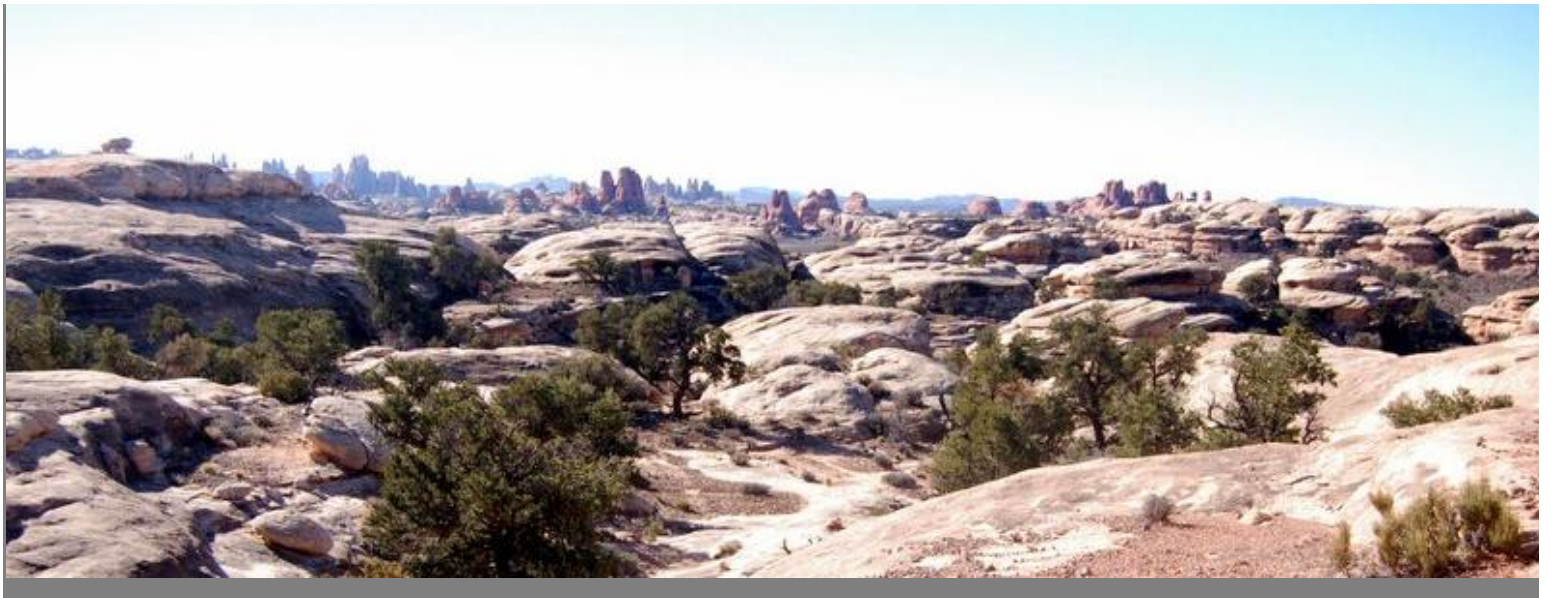


Through "The Keyhole", just like Alice went down the rabbit hole



You can just see the trail I took to get where I am





Welcome to the land of Needles and Mushrooms



I had a lot of trouble with my camera banging around when I had it around my neck, so I attached it to the backpack strap across my chest. This was better but it still swung back & forth. I finally put it through my belt and that was better. However, my shoulders began to ache considerably. It was with great relief that I arrived at the Confluence Overlook. The Green River from the left and the Colorado River from the right.

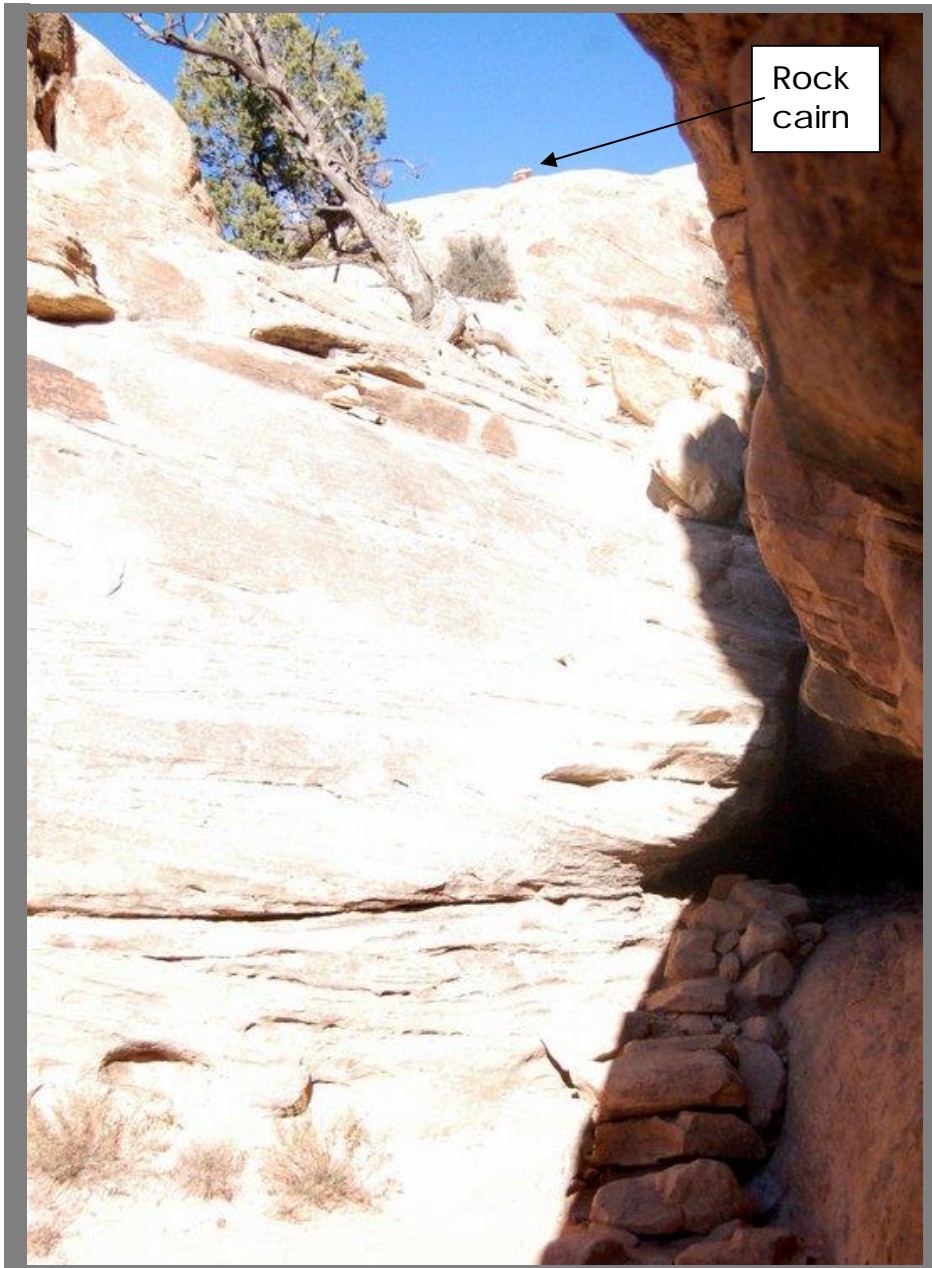




I know what you're saying, those pictures suck. I did not realize it until I downloaded them on 11/12 that the banging around of the camera must have rotated the setting knob from panorama to something else. I truly can't believe I walked all that way for a terrible picture. Ah well, live & learn. There were two German guys there when I arrived. I knew they would be because they passed me on the trail - they were jogging. Youth is wasted on the young.



So I ate lunch at the overlook. My shoulders were so sore that I wasn't sure I would be able to carry the backpack on my back the whole way to the truck. Since it was an out-and-back trail, and I had already seen what there was to see, I decided to put the camera in the backpack and see if that made a difference to my shoulders. It seemed the camera, even attached to the chest strap and my belt, might be causing the pain. I geared up and headed back. It had taken me 3.5 hours to get here. Thirty minutes for lunch. It was now about 12:15. With additional rest stops I thought it might take me 4 hours to get back. This put me about 40 minutes from sunset – cutting it close. It seemed that the trail was a lot of both up and down so I did not think I would pick up any time.



I did stop to pull out the camera for this shot. I am standing on a flat area. Note the rock cairn at the very top. This is not hiking as much as rock climbing or "scrambling" as they call it.

As I made my way back I started to feel a blister on the middle toe of my right foot; a blister forming on that area, I don't know the technical term and don't have internet access, for the largest part of the inside of your foot just behind the big toe; and my left knee also began to bother me. I think the blisters formed because I was favoring the knee, always making a conscious effort to step up with my right leg. But, on the plus side, it must have been the weight of the camera causing the shoulder pain, because with the camera in the backpack my shoulders began to feel fine.

At two points the hiking trail crosses or joins the 4x4 trail and I saw three 4x4's coming along the road. I had fantasies about them giving me a ride back to the truck.

The weather was actually great. Much of the time there was a nice gentle breeze and the temp stayed mostly in the 50's. I stopped at one point for a drink and checked the time – 2:20 – still two hours to go. Ten minutes later I popped back through "The Keyhole". You cannot realize how surprised I was to know I was only a mile from the parking lot. Sure, the trail led down into Big Spring Canyon and back up the other side, but I was close.

I guess it was mostly uphill on the way out and downhill on the way back, because it only took me 2 ½ hours to make the return trip. A 6 hour hike. Sources vary on the length – The guidebook says 9.6 miles; the Park description says 11 miles; the earlier photo says 1.1 miles to Confluence

Trailhead, 4 miles to parking lot and .5 miles to the overlook. Add that up and double it makes 11.2. So, split the difference at 15 (that's what it felt like) making the longest hike I can ever remember being on. I actually made it! I won't break my arm trying to pat myself on the back (although in my mind I gave the two joggers a gesture they won't soon forget).

My plan was to possibly do the Slickrock Trail today also – the heck with that. Since my plan called for hiking to the Hidden Valley Cowboy Camp tomorrow I drove down to the trailhead to see what I could expect. This hike would be 13 miles, 6.5 out and 6.5 back. The gate was closed as I was informed, so I stopped at the Visitor's Center to get some bandaids and ask about the trail. It is actually a 4x4 road, closed because of water. It is fairly flat because it follows the bottom of the canyon, but she told me it was a very tiring walk through sand, quick sand, water and so forth. If it was dry I might have attempted it. I guess I will just hit the road in the morning.

I took the pic to the right on my way to Hidden Valley. I wonder how long it will be before that mushroom topples.

Tomorrow I pack up and head north again. I will stop in Moab to get an internet connection, send the previous two newsletters, answer some emails, do some shopping, decide on a campground (Arches? Island in the Sky? Private with electric?) and check my phone messages. I have to call Goulding's Lodge. It seems I forgot my cell phone charger in my room. I still have the car charger, but I can't download any photos or video without that cord.

Until tomorrow...

