

# Western Road Trip Newsletter



The sun was coming up as I drove through Arches N.P.

## Hello to my Family and Friends!

WOW!! You will not believe the scenery that I saw today. There is no way a normal camera, even with a wide angle lense can covey the depth, width and colors of the Island in the Sky District. I think I actually did save the best for last. I finally realized I could keep my cell phone vertical to take the panorama photos and maybe they would be a little larger. But since I am pretty sure I forgot the cord at Goulding's Lodge I cannot download the photos to even see them on my laptop, much less send then out to you. I will have to get another cord when I get home and send out a final email with the panoramic photos.

I wanted to get an early start because I wanted to see as much as possible in Island in the Sky by 4:00 p.m. so I could get over to Deadhorse Point State Park for some sunset photos. The ones I had seen on the internet from there were fantastic.

I grabbed a couple pictures of the sunrise as I was leaving Arches, those are the one above and the one below. I arrived at Island before the entrance building or Visitor's Center were open, so I continued into the park. The temp was only in the 30's and the wind had to be gusting to 40-50 MPH, wind chill made it very cold. As I hiked the trails and walked to the scenic overviews, words like: Wow! Stunning! Amazing! Breathtaking! And Unbelievable! popped into my head without any conscious thought, like a word association game. I hope you enjoy them

Day 21

Friday

November 15th

Arches

to

Island in the Sky

To

Dead Horse Point

Stats

191 miles today

2972 total miles this trip

Weather

High Temp: 50

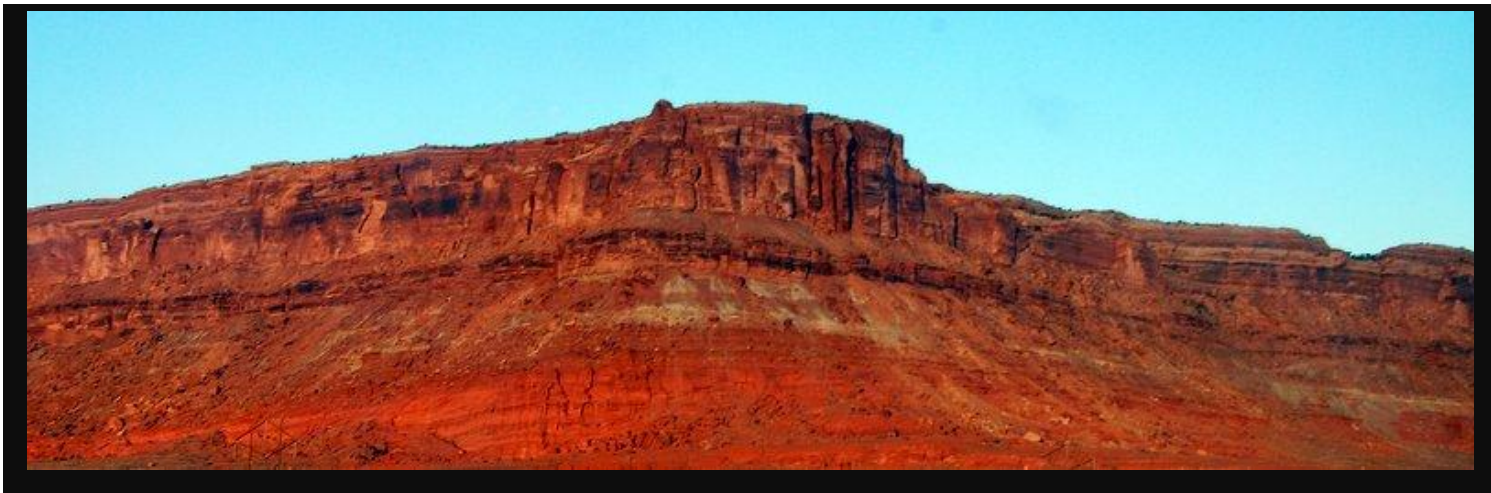
Low Temp: 30's

Conditions: Mostly Cloudy & Windy

"Breathtaking!"



It's called the  
White Rim Road.  
Looks like fun



I ate my breakfast at the Visitor's Center, enjoying the view below.

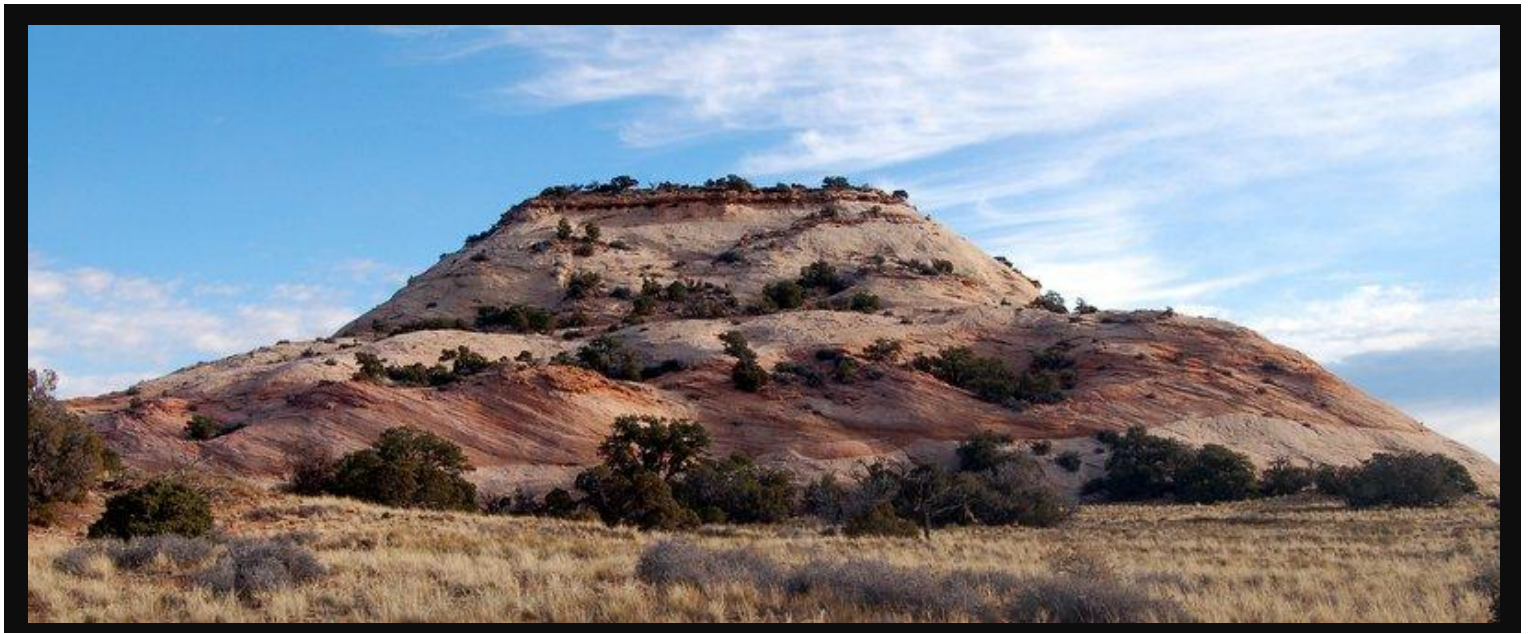




My first hike of the day.

# Aztec Butte

Rising above the mesa, Aztec Butte overlooks sheer cliffs and twisted canyons stretching in every direction. Hundreds of years ago, ancestral Puebloans survived here through hard work and ingenuity. Clad in yucca sandals and bearing baskets of seed and grain, they scrambled up these buttes to store their harvest in small stone structures sealed with mud. These granaries still stand today, a testament to the skill of the people who made this area their home.



The views from the top of Aztec Butte





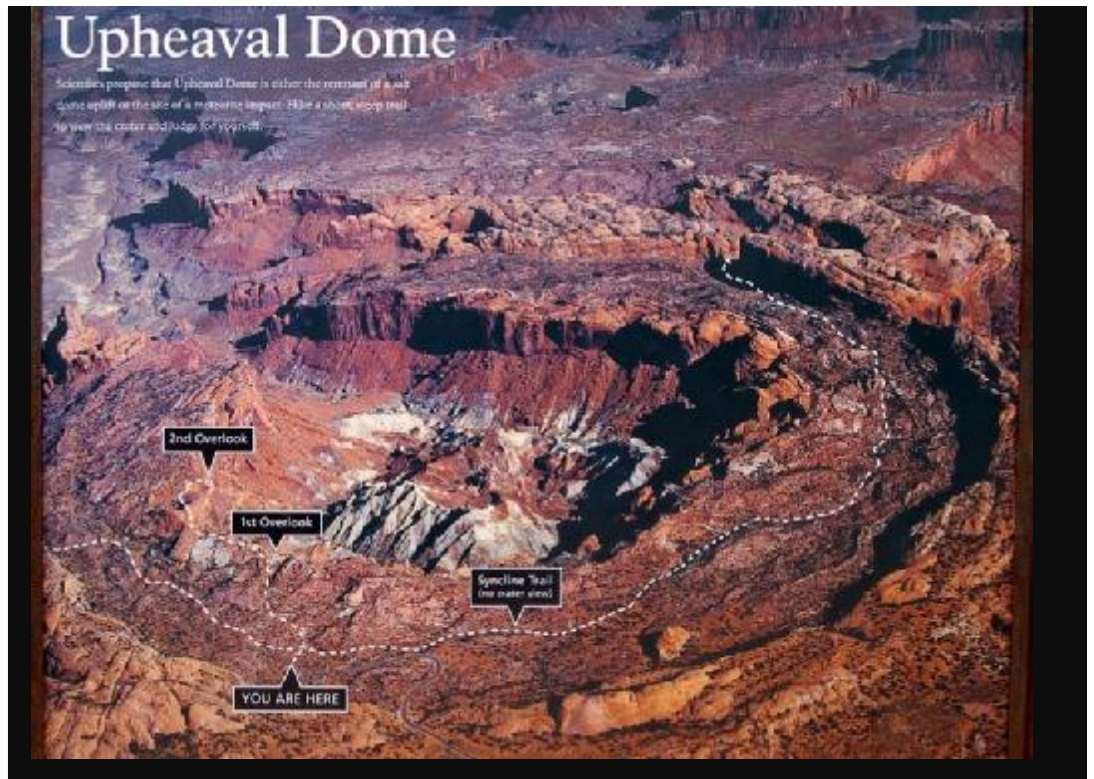
One of two ancient graneries built on Aztec Butte. I could not find the other one.



My truck in the parking lot



Above is Whale Rock. There is a hiking trail to the top here also, but since I climbed Aztec Butte, and the wind was so cold, I decided not to climb this one.



Canyonlands National Park

## A Mystery

Upheaval Dome is a mystery. The rock layers below you are fractured and tilted, forming a circular depression more than two miles wide. Scientists still debate what forces disrupted these once-orderly rock layers. Erosion exposed many clues, but others lie buried. The visible evidence supports different explanations. What makes sense to you?

*This aerial photo shows the pattern of rock layers visible at Upheaval Dome today.*

### An instantaneous meteorite impact?

About 200 million years ago, a meteor hurtled toward earth.

The meteor hit the ground with so much force, it vaporized on impact.

The force of the impact fractured the rock, creating a large crater.

Rock layers rebounded inward and upward to fill the void.

Erosion removed the top layers and exposed the tilted, broken core of the impact site.

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### A slow-moving salt dome?

About 300 million years ago, a salty inland sea covered the area.

The sea became trapped in a large basin, then evaporated, leaving behind thousands of feet of salt.

Wind and water deposited more sediment, pushing down on the softer salt layer and causing it to dome upwards.

Over time the salt rose, fracturing and distorting the rock layers in its path.

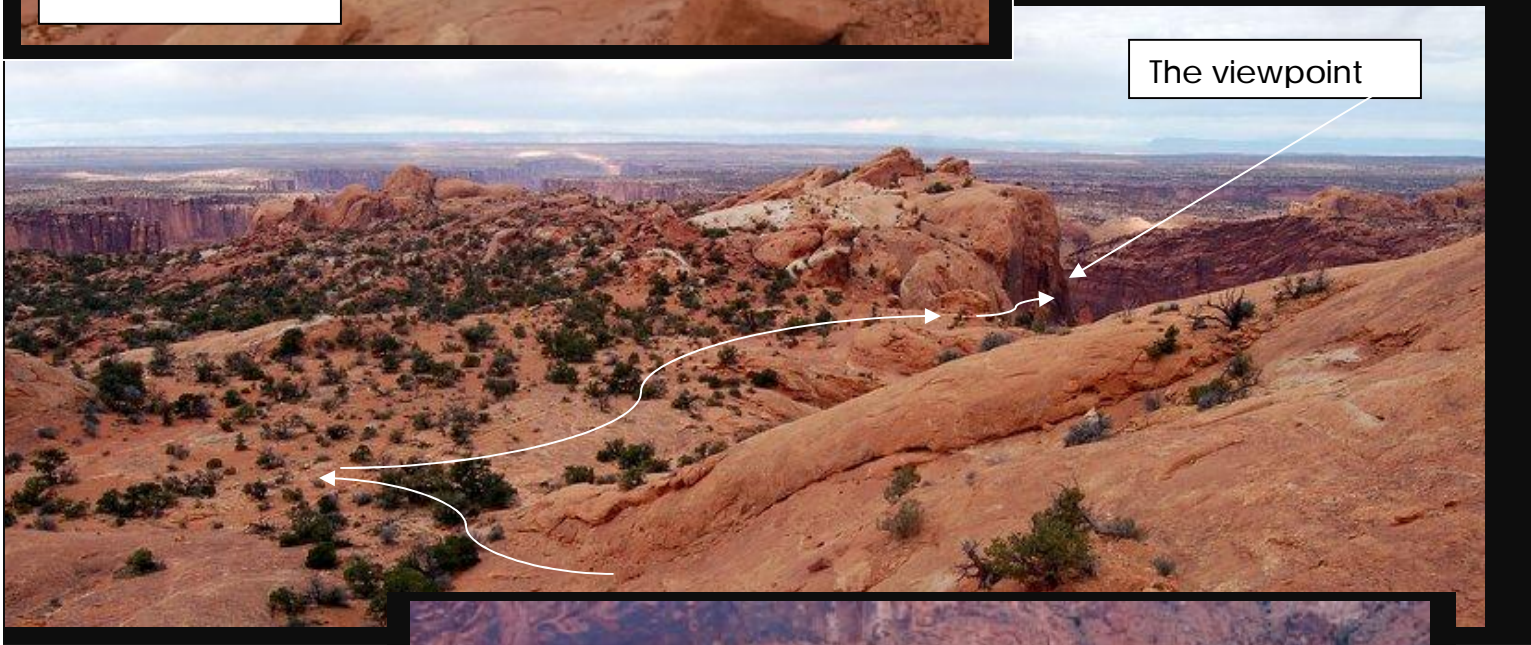
Water eroded the salt and overlying sediment, exposing the distorted crater visible today.







Follow the cairns



The viewpoint





I took this one while sitting on the tailgate of my truck eating lunch

# What Shall We Find?

In May 1869, Major John Wesley Powell set out on a remarkable mission: to explore the uncharted canyons and waters of the Green and Colorado rivers. Powell, a geology professor and one-armed Civil War veteran, began the journey with nine novice oarsmen and four wooden boats. He ended the journey three months later with two boats, six men and detailed knowledge of a unique landscape that would capture national attention.

As they first entered the wilds of canyon country, Powell wondered in his journal, "What shall we find?" When Powell's party reached this section of the river in July, he described a "strange, weird, grand region" of naked rock with "cathedral-shaped buttes, towering hundreds or thousands of feet, cliffs that cannot be scaled, and canyon walls that shrink the river into insignificance."

Powell's voyage opened a world of adventure and scientific discovery that continues today. Modern boaters float the rivers in the relative safety of rubber rafts, but they see a wild landscape that has changed little since 1869.

## Green River Overlook

Elevation 6000 FT.



This was the view that took my breath away

# Green River Overlook

Elevation 6,000 feet

**Land of Standing Rocks**  
 High plateaus and spires eroded from dark brown shale. Well-known rock formations include Lizard Rock, The Flag, Chimney Rock and The Wall. As the raven flies, The Land of Standing Rocks is 15 miles southwest of here.

**White Rim Road**  
 Park visitors with 4-wheel-drive vehicles or mountain bikes can experience Canyonlands' wilderness on this 100-mile backcountry road. Recommended driving time is two days. Stop by the visitor center for detailed information.

**Elaterite Butte**  
 A landmark in the Maze District named for the dark-brown mineral which occurs in this area. Elevation 6,552 feet.

**Ekker Butte**  
 Named for the Ekker family, who were pioneer ranchers in the area, this formation is just across the border in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. Elevation 6,226 feet.

**Orange Cliffs**  
 A prominent landmark named by explorer John Wesley Powell in 1869. Vertical rock faces of Wingate Sandstone tower 300 to 450 feet high.

**Turks Head**  
 Named by John Wesley Powell for its resemblance to a Turkish turban. White Rim Sandstone acts as a protective cap rock on buttes and spires throughout the park.

**Cleopatra's Chair**  
 A prominent skyline feature composed of Navajo Sandstone. Located in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

**Henry Mountains**  
 The last mountain range to be added to the map of the lower 48 states. Located 55 miles southwest of here, the highest peak is Mt. Ellen, elevation 11,506 feet.

**Green River**  
 Begins in the Wind River Range of Wyoming and joins the Colorado River 20 miles below this point at the confluence. The Green River divides the Island in the Sky District (this side) from the Maze District.

**The Maze**  
 A district of Canyonlands National Park west of the Green and Colorado Rivers, consisting of a 114-square-mile labyrinth of mesas, steep-sided buttes, and slender towers. Bands of red and white sandstone resemble stripes on a candy cane.

**White Rim Sandstone**  
 A hard layer of white sandstone that forms a sharply-defined rim above the lower level canyons. Made of ancient coastal sand dunes, the White Rim lies about 1,100 feet below this point.





The sun was making an effort to break through the clouds.



# Grand View Point

Elev. 6080 FT.

## Grand View Point Overlook

Elevation 6,080 feet

### La Sal Mountains

Located 35 miles east-northeast of here, near the Colorado border. The highest peak is Mt. Peale, elevation 12,721 feet.

### Colorado River Canyon

The river is cut so deeply into the landscape that it is not visible from here. It flows from left to right toward the Confluence. Before 1921, the portion of the Colorado River above the Green River was known as the "Grand River," hence the name "Grand View Point."

### Monument Basin

Vertical fractures in the sandstone have caused the rocks to erode into steep-sided walls, columns and pinnacles.

### The Needles

A district of Canyonlands located about 12 miles south of here. Up close, it's a land of colorful, sculptured rocks with arches, canyons and needle-like spires.

### Confluence

The Green and Colorado rivers join deep in the distant canyons. The Confluence was unknown until John Wesley Powell mapped the area in 1869. Today, viewing it still requires a long journey by foot or boat.

### White Rim Sandstone

A hard layer of white sandstone that forms a sharply defined rim above the lower level canyons. Made of ancient coastal sand dunes, the White Rim lies about 1,300 feet below this point.

### Abajo Mountains

Located 35 miles southeast of here. The highest point is Abajo Peak, elevation 11,360 feet.

### Totem Pole

This spire of eroded sandstone stands 305 feet high, making it the tallest feature in Monument Basin.

### White Rim Road

Park visitors with four-wheel-drive vehicles and mountain bikes experience the backcountry on this 100-mile road. Recommended driving time is two days. Stop by the visitor center for detailed information.

### Mining Roads

These road scars were made by uranium tracks and bulldozers before Canyonlands was established in 1964. The desert is surprisingly fragile; impacts like these may take decades to heal.

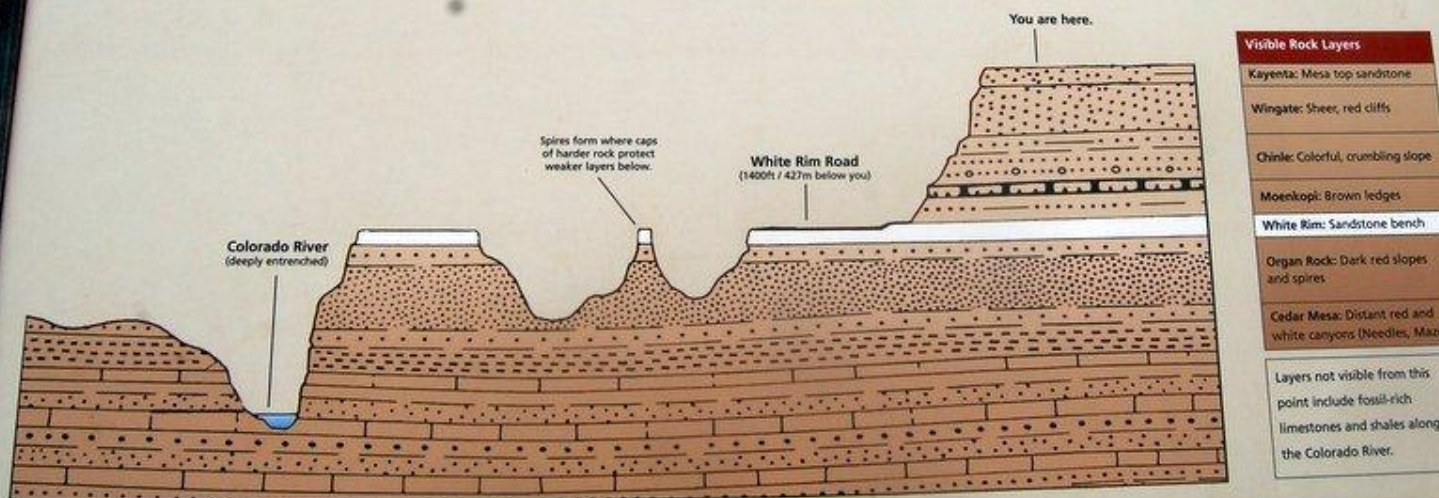
## Carving the Canyons

The relentless forces of water and gravity have slowly sculpted the vast canyons before you. How do mere drops of water chisel solid stone into dramatic cliffs, spires, mesas and buttes?

The story starts at your feet. Rainwater seeps into thirsty sandstone and collects in razor-thin cracks. In the chill of winter, water freezes and widens these cracks, splintering the rock into great slabs that tumble into the canyons. Sudden thunderstorms release torrents of water that scour

the land of loose pebbles and dirt, then stream over cliff edges as sandy brown waterfalls. Softer slopes of clay and mudstone crumble beneath the water's force. A stair-step shape emerges as water carves alternating layers of harder and softer rock.

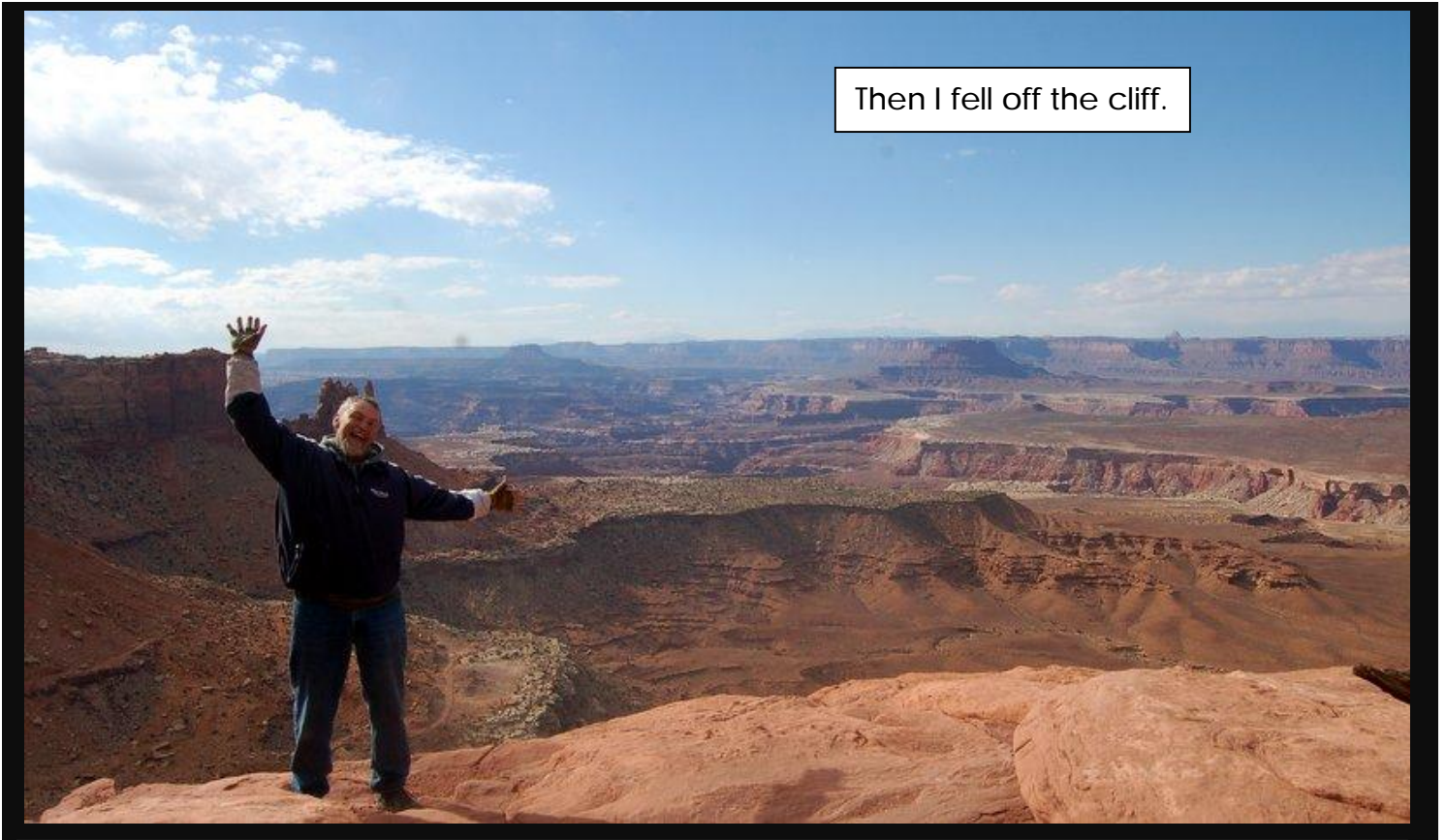
On this journey, much of the water evaporates or absorbs into the rock. Only some of it reaches the Green and Colorado rivers, unseen in the canyons below, carting away thousands of feet of rock, one grain at a time.



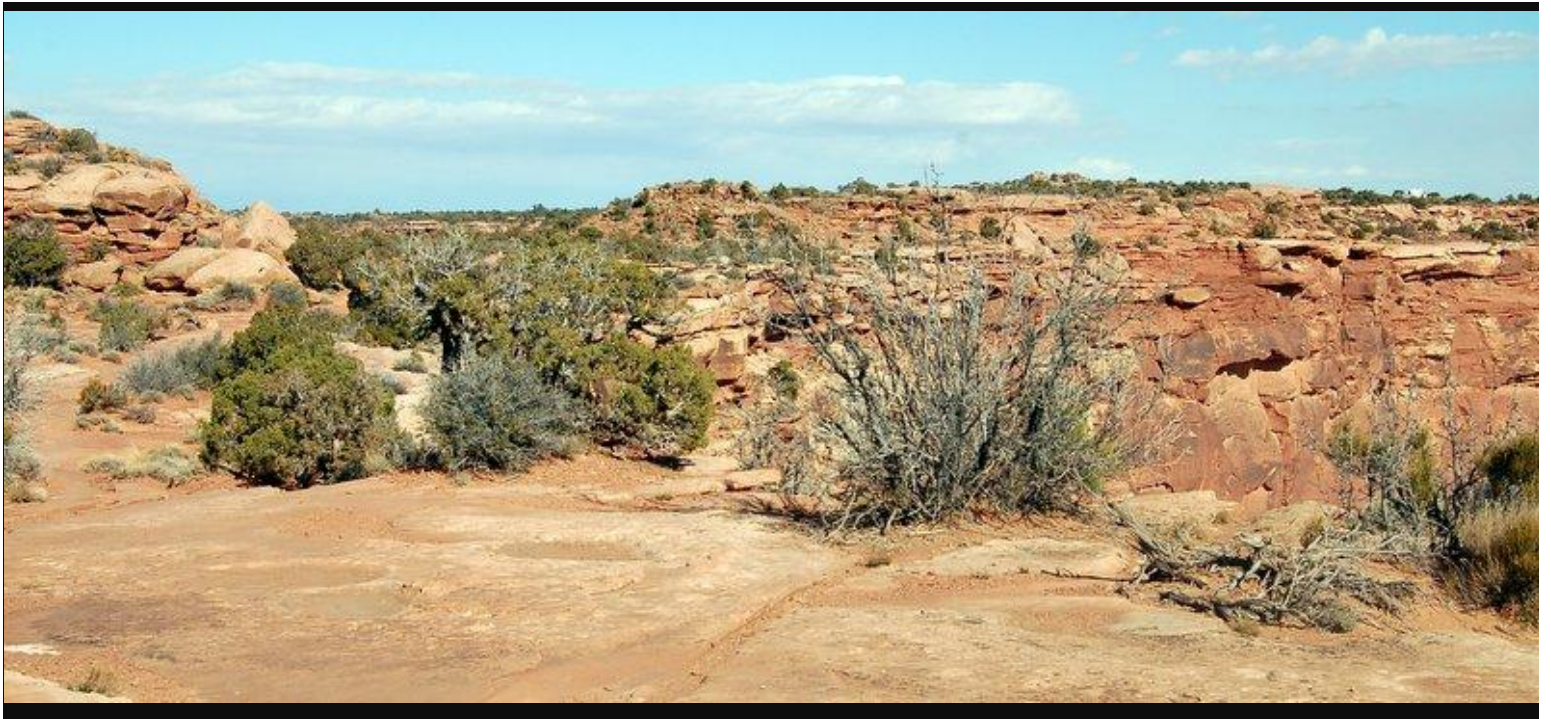


At the end of the trail I ran into Dave & Rita. They told me about their trip. I told them about my trip. I took their picture, they took my picture.

Then I fell off the cliff.



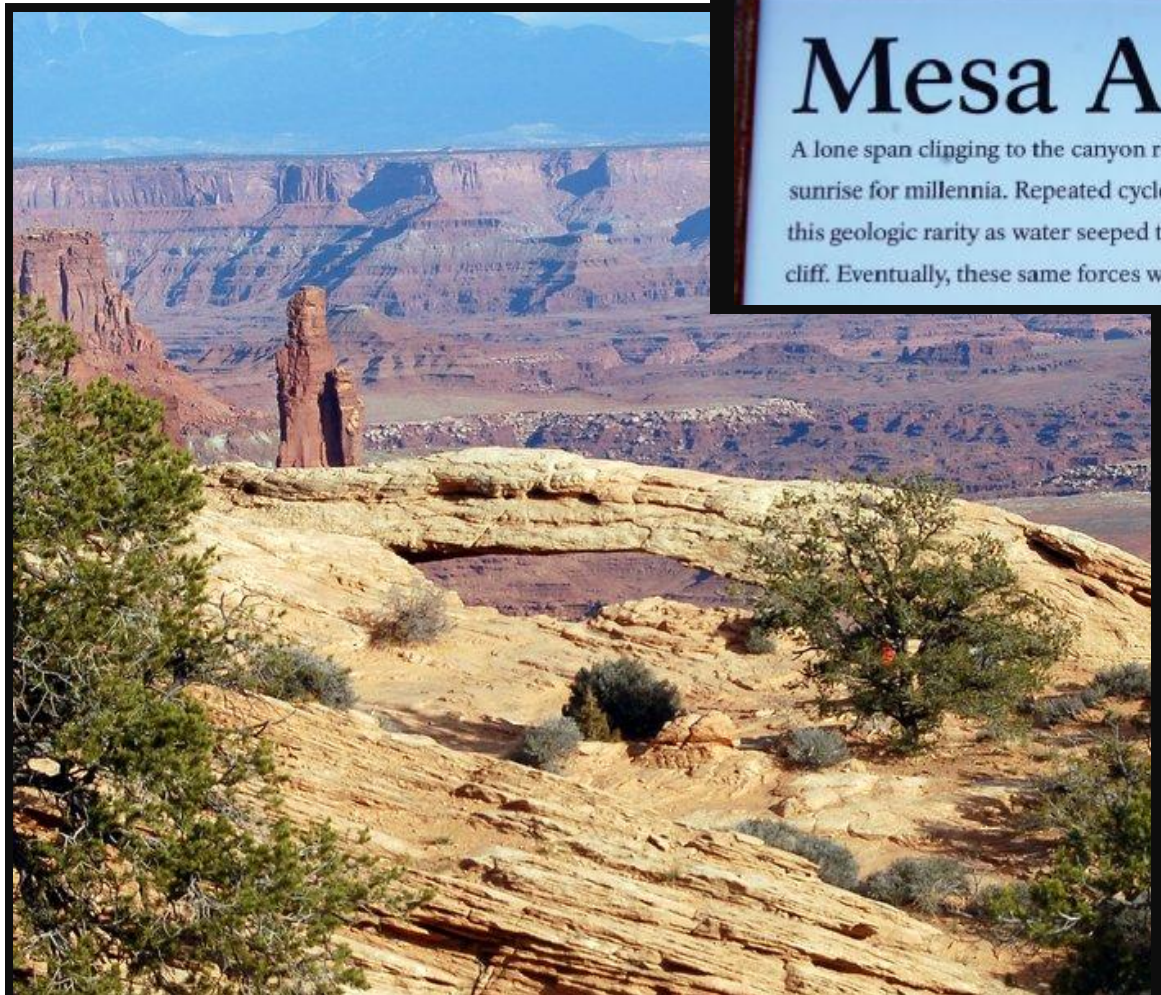
Turns out we were both on the Fiery Furnace hike yesterday but did not recognize each other. Rita remembered my comments about the beauty of the Tower Arch trail though.





Buck Canyon  
Overlook 200 Ft





# Mesa Arch

A lone span clinging to the canyon rim, Mesa Arch has greeted every sunrise for millennia. Repeated cycles of freezing and thawing created this geologic rarity as water seeped through cracks in the sandstone cliff. Eventually, these same forces will lead to its collapse.





## Geology Visible from Dead Horse Point

**Kayenta (K)**  
The Kayenta Formation was deposited during the Jurassic Period between 188 and 184 million years ago. River and flood plain deposits make up this rock formation.

**Wingate (W)**  
Wingate sandstone was deposited during the Jurassic Period between 200 and 190 million years ago. An ancient desert containing windblown sand dunes formed this layer.

**Chinle (Ch)**  
The Chinle Formation was deposited during the Triassic Period between 245 and 200 million years ago. Rivers, flood plains, and lakes deposited the sediment now contained in the Chinle Formation.

**Moenkopi (M)**  
The Moenkopi Formation was deposited during the Triassic Period between 251 and 245 million years ago. Vast tidal flats are responsible for the sediments left behind.

**Cutler (Cu)**  
The Cutler Formation was deposited during the Permian Period between 285 and 270 million years ago. Rivers and coastal sand dunes formed this layer.

**Did you know?**  
Biological soil crust is alive and consists of cyanobacteria, moss, fungi, lichen, and algae. This crust holds soil together preventing erosion and holds on to water like a sponge. The extra water helps plants survive the hot and dry summers here on the Colorado Plateau.

# The Colorado River

**T**he Colorado River, as seen here 2,000 feet below Dead Horse Point, carved out this entrenched meander of canyon walls over the course of 10 to 15 million years.

Relatively recent human activity has reshaped sections of the river. In 1869, a one-armed American Civil War veteran, John Wesley Powell, led the first successful expedition of the yet uncharted waters.

Later, advances in technology made it possible to dam the river's canyons, creating reservoirs such as Lake Powell (named after the famous explorer), and divert water to cities in the desert.

## A Long Journey

**S**tarting from snowmelt over 9,000 feet above sea level in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, the 1,450-mile-long Colorado River flows down through Utah and Arizona before reaching the Sea of Cortez.



*The invasive plant species, tamarisk, draws heavily from the river's finite water supply, consuming 170,000 acre feet more annually than the native vegetation.*





## The Origins of a Name

You are standing at the point where legends begin. This narrow neck of land is small in size but plays a giant role in the origins of the name Dead Horse Point.

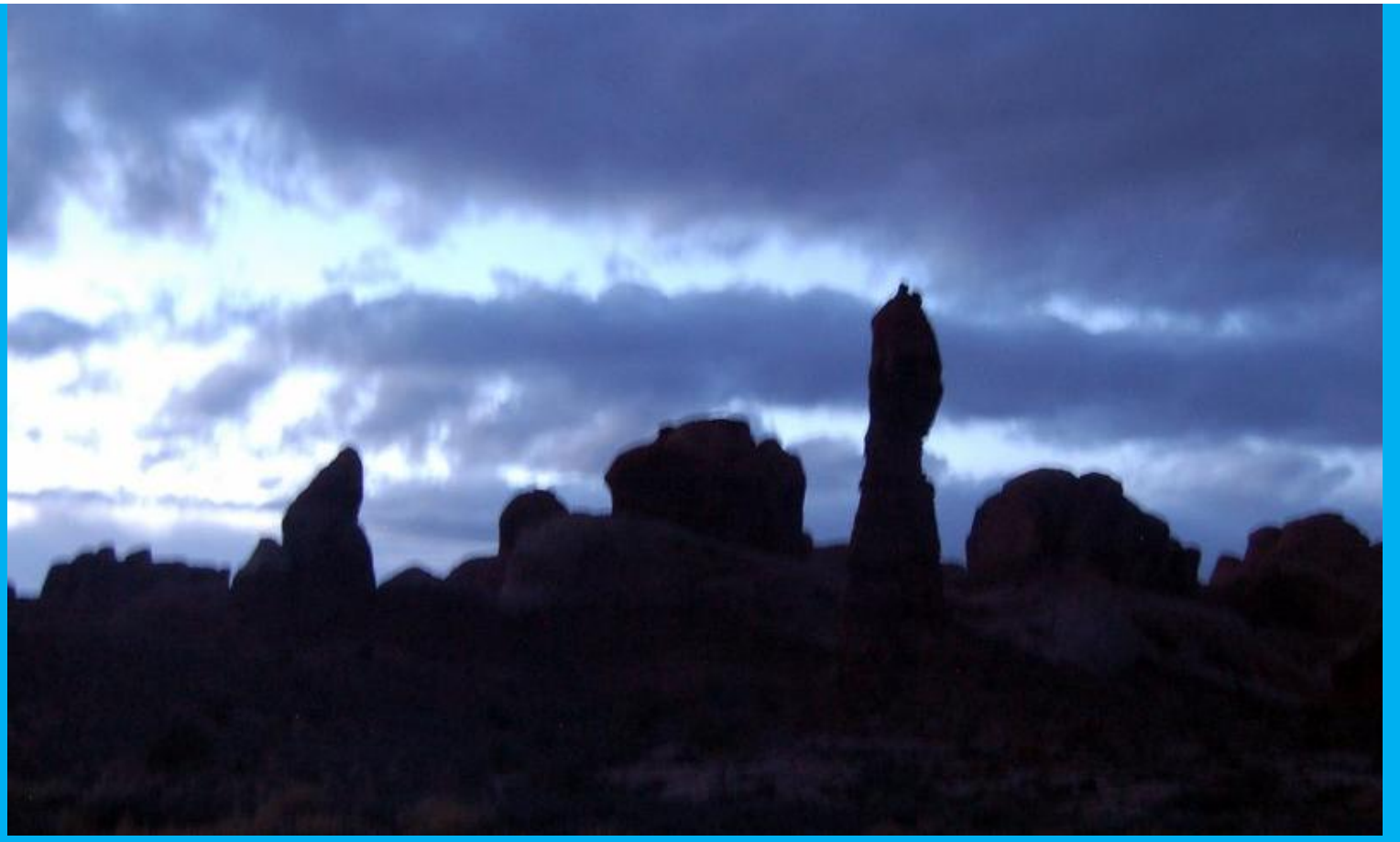
For decades, legends and myths about ghostly horses, cruel cowboys, and leaps of fate have surrounded this land and given it the name Dead Horse Point. Of those, the tale that best provokes the imagination is the legend of the cowboys who worked on this mesa during the late 1800s.

*According to the legend, wranglers often drove herds of feral horses across this narrow bottleneck leaving them corralled by the sheer cliffs. On one haunting drive, for reasons still unknown, the cowboys chose the best horses and left the others corralled on the point. With the gate across the neck closed, the remaining horses were trapped with no way out, no water and no hope for survival. Those who found the remains of the unfortunate horses gave this place the name Dead Horse Point.*



There are only about 8-10 feet on each side of the road before a 1000' drop-off.

The wind was so strong and cold at the overview that I only took a few quick pictures and got back in the truck. The heck with sunset. There were probably too many clouds anyway. I drove back to my camp at Arches and took the photo below on the way. A little out of focus, but driving and the darkness makes for a poor picture.



I arrived back at camp and opened the camper to put the laptop, camera, etc. inside and found a big pile of crumpled newspaper covering the floor. What the heck? Then I realized what must have happened. I had placed a paper grocery bag full of old newspaper, used for starting the campfires, on top of the campground grill, which I was not using. When I left before sunrise there was no wind. During the day the wind picked up and started blowing newspaper all over the campground. I waved down the Ranger when he went by, and he told me he spent half the day chasing newspaper and that some was probably at Delicate Arch by now (about 8 miles away). I apologized profusely and used the crumpled paper to start my cook fire.

Just as I finished eating it began to rain a little. The Ranger at Island in the Sky, when I stopped to pay my entry fee, said there was a forecast of possible snow for overnight. I kind of stowed everything under the beds of the camper and went inside to work on this newsletter. I started up the propane heater, now on the backup propane tank, and retrieved the backup, backup propane from the truck. This is one of those 14 oz bottles used for a stove. When I picked it up I realized it was a partially used bottle, the one I used for cooking up at Golf & Gulp. I had a premonition – I could see the 7lb tank running out at bedtime, and the backup, backup running out about 3 a.m. I flagged down the Ranger again and asked if he had any spare bottles. He said no, then returned with a full 14 oz bottle. A good thing too, my premonition was right-on. The 7lb ran out of juice at 11 p.m. The first bottle from the truck ran out at 3 a.m. and the Ranger provided bottle ran out at 7 a.m. I had also used the last of the firewood for my campfire. Almost perfect timing. My last night camping; no more firewood; no more propane. I had already decided not to camp in Colorado National Monument after checking the weather, low in the 20's and rain or snow. No Thanks!

Tomorrow I start for home...