

Hiking Happenings

A Cooling Respite on the Manti-La Sal’s Devil’s Canyon Interpretive Nature Trail

by Kathy Grossman

As afternoon temperatures in Moab were still reaching into the 90s and 100s, I was looking for some relief. Hiking in a pine forest sounded like just the thing. Driving south from Moab 54 miles on US 191 to Monticello (gaining 3,000 feet in elevation), I proceeded south another 13 miles and turned right/west at the sign to Devil’s Canyon Campground (elevation 7,400 feet).



The trail begins

After following the Abajo Loop State Scenic Backway 0.7 miles, I turned right/east into the campground, crossed a cattle guard, and turned left/north past the camp host’s site to follow the loop for sites #17–41. After less than a mile, I arrived at the very end of the lollipop at site #41



where the trailhead for the Interpretive Nature Trail begins. (For more hiking trails at higher elevations, you can continue on the Scenic Backway around the base of Abajo Peak.)

The trail drops down from the road and begins an easy graveled loop below the camp sites, great for many abilities, including my (human) hiking companion who was recently recovering from

back surgery. Fifteen numbered posts mark information in a brochure available in the trailhead’s metal box. The

campground sits in the Manti-La Sal National Forest at the foot of the Abajo Mountains, also known as the Blue Mountains, another Colorado Plateau sky island including the La Sals and the Henrys. Devil’s Canyon itself is a rugged serpentine gorge carved into the San Rafael Swell with a drainage that starts near San Rafael Knob (at 7,921 feet, the swell’s highest point), cuts through Estrada sandstone layers, featuring pour-offs, tributary canyons, and elevation changes in the canyon floor.

Ancient peoples used many of the forest’s natural resources including pine nuts, produced by pinyon pines (*Pinus edulis*), which were—and are today—roasted and eaten. Tribes also wove the fibrous leaves of the narrowleaf yucca (*Yucca angustissima*) into baskets, sandals, rope, and twine, also consuming the stalks, flowers, and buds. The roots were processed into soap and yellow dye to color yarn. The sap of the Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) was used for glue and waterproofing, and tribal peoples also ground the seeds into flour. The plump, blue female seed cones (misnamed berries) of the Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) were used



Looking down into Devil's Canyon

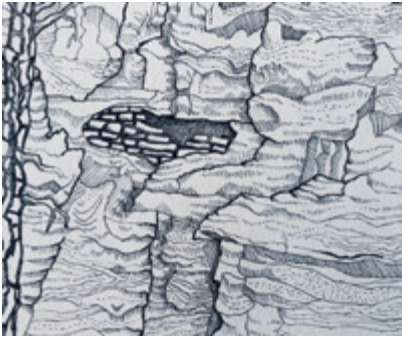
for medicines, its resin for tea and oil, and its drought-resistant wood for fence posts and firewood. The small red fruits of the bitter apple (*Peraphyllum ramosissimum*) are eaten by humans, elk, deer, and birds for their vitamin C, plus, the sweetened and cooked fruits can be made into jam. Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*), common across the Colorado Plateau, produce acorns, a food rich in fat and protein that can be stored for long periods, and, when

California beach girl **Kathy Grossman** is an artist, writer, and nature journalist who’s lived in Moab since 2011.



soaked or boiled to remove the bitter tannins, are roasted or ground into flour.

Ancestral Puebloans were in this area from about 50–1300 Common Era (CE). They then migrated away, mostly to what is now New Mexico and Arizona. Tribal descendants such as the Hopi, Zuni, Utes, and Diné still use these forest products. Other informational stops describe lightning strikes, bark beetles, barbed wire, and forest life cycles. A short side trail from station 11 leads east to a viewpoint of the Bitter Apple Ruin on the opposite side of the canyon. A granary sits in a small alcove high up on a cliff face. (I wish I’d brought my binoculars!) These granaries



Devil's Canyon Granary

protected caches of grain, beans, nuts, seeds, and corn from rodents and kept them dry from rains and floods. The harvest I preserved on this day was a refreshing respite from the Moab Valley heat, lovely rich scents of pinyon and Ponderosa pines, and the *ssshhhhhhhh* of the wind through their needles in this mountain foothill ecosystem just an hour from my desert home.

Grand County Trail Mix September Happenings

Progress continues at the new Mud Springs trail system south of Moab, which is a collaborative project with San Juan County and the BLM. Phase 1 of construction is underway, and public volunteer days are scheduled for September 27 (National Public Lands Day) and October 18. If you or your business are interested in volunteering to help build Mud Springs, please reach out to trailoutreach@grandcountyutah.gov.

Upcoming GCATT/Trail Mix Volunteer Days and Events:

- Volunteer Trail Ambassador Training - September 2nd and 4th, 5:15pm-7:15pm at the GCATT Office
 - Teach folks about Moab’s amazing desert ecosystem and how to stay safe while on trail.
- Adopt a Trail Training - September 3rd, 5:15pm-7:15pm at the GCATT Office
 - Adopt a section of Moab’s single track and help Moab’s trail team keep our trails in tip-top shape.
- September 4th Non-Motorized Trails Master Plan Open House- Grand County and the City of Moab are in the process of updating the Non-Motorized Trails Master Plan (last updated in 2011), which lays out a vision for a network of trails for non-motorized recreation and active transportation in Grand County. This will include a network of trails for walking and biking to get around town, as well as updates to our County’s recreational trail system (including trails for hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, runners, skiers, and climbers). After an extensive public input process this summer, we will be presenting our draft recommendations at a mid-term open house on Thursday, September 4th from 6:00-7:30 at the Grand Center. Come by to weigh in on our proposals before the plan is finalized! The draft recommendations will also be posted online on the Grand County Active Transportation and Trails Department (GCATT) website (www.grandcountyutah.net/971/Active-Transportation-and-Trails). Email trailplan@grandcountyutah.gov with any comments or questions.

- The next Trail Mix meeting will be held Tuesday, September 9, at the Grand Center. Meetings are open to the public, and public participation is encouraged.

- National Public Lands Day at Mud Springs - September 27th, 9am-5pm at Mud Springs Trail System

Learn more about volunteer opportunities and trainings at www.grandcountyutah.net/980/Volunteer, or email trailoutreach@grandcountyutah.gov.

And be sure to mention you read about it in *Moab Happenings*.

Locals and visitors - do you recreate on the Moab area's non-motorized trails? Do you walk, bike, or roll to get around town? Want to do that more? Do you have ideas for new trails, or ideas how to improve the trails system in Moab? We want to hear from YOU!



UTAHRAPTOR STATE PARK PRESENTS

MORNING QUARRY HIKE WITH A RANGER!

4-WHEEL DRIVE IS REQUIRED!

Join us for an exciting one-hour hike up to Dalton Wells Quarry - where they found the first Utahraptor bones! This guided hike will include history of the Quarry, information about the Utahraptor, and insight into what Moab looked like during the Early Cretaceous period.

The hike itself is 0.42 miles one-way with a 191 feet elevation gain. Bring water and sun protection, it is a moderate hike!

SATURDAY, SEPT. 6TH, 13TH, & 27TH

Meet at 9 a.m. at the entrance gate to Dalton Wells Quarry, (38.721952, -109.690499)

Questions? Call 435-259-3770

CANYONLANDS NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY CELEBRATION

LIVE MUSIC!

Thursday, September 25
5 pm - 7:30 pm
Moab Information Center

Join us for an evening of live music by David Steward and Friends, free swag, and community fun—featuring the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and local partners who help protect and share our public lands.

CANYONLANDS Moab Information Center FREE!