

## Big Dominguez Canyon by Dave Cooper

*The scenic Big Dominguez Canyon-small.JPG*

Justifiably a favorite with locals, Big Dominguez Canyon offers much more than just a scenic hike in one of Colorado's redrock canyons.

Part of the Dominguez Canyons Wilderness Study Area, the canyon contains a rich history, illustrated by the many petroglyphs found along the canyon walls. You may also be lucky enough to see some of the desert bighorn sheep that make the canyon their home.

The Bureau of Land Management encourages visitors to record the number of bighorn sheep and lamb sightings when they sign out at the end of their hike. This helps with the management of this

native species, which were reintroduced into the canyons in 1983. BLM literature indicates that the herd has grown to number 250 in recent years.

Until recently access to Big Dominguez Canyon from Highway 50 was limited, but a new footbridge across the Gunnison River and trail access along the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (for the first mile) has made this wonderful canyon a reasonable destination for day hikers, backpackers and horse riders.



**Getting to the Trailhead:** Drive to the Bridgeport Road junction on Highway 50, 11.3 miles south of the intersection of Highways 141 and 50. This is approximately 20 miles south of Grand Junction. Turn west and follow Bridgeport Road for 3.2 miles to the large parking area by the railroad tracks.

### Hike Description

**Hike Statistics:** The gentle trail gains 400 feet in 4 miles.

**Difficulty:** Easy walking on the sandy and occasionally rocky trail.

**USGS Quad:** Triangle Mesa, CO; Dominguez, CO.

From the parking area cross through the gate and walk south alongside the railroad tracks, which parallel the Gunnison River, following the public access signs. The footpath, initially on the left side of the tracks, crosses to the right side after one third of a mile.

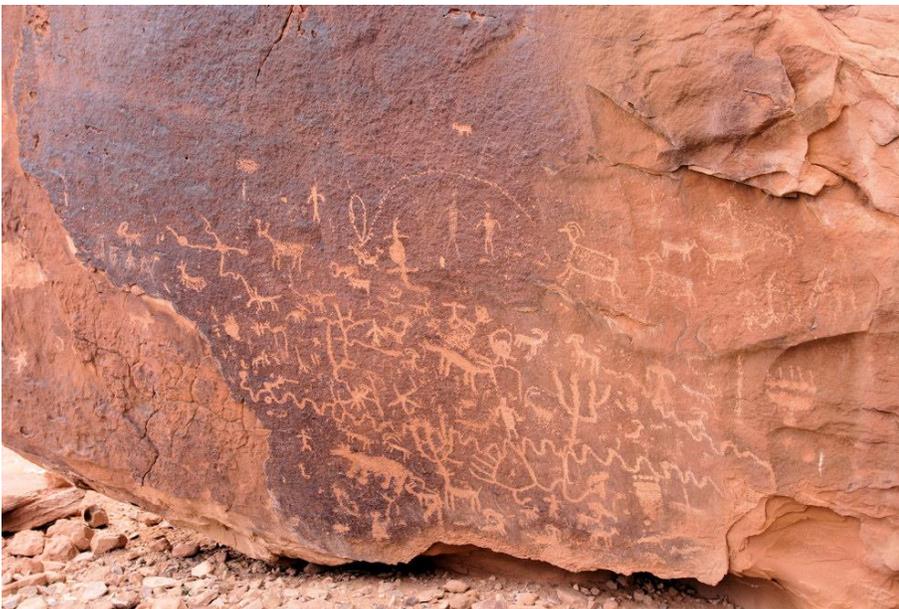
After one mile of pleasant walking beside the Gunnison River you'll reach the old bridge, which is closed to the public. Continue on for another hundred yards to the new footbridge and cross to the west bank. Continue south on the flat trail for a further half mile to the mouth of Big Dominguez Canyon and follow the wide trail as it turns southwest into the canyon. After hiking for a total of 2.25 miles the canyon divides. Big Dominguez Canyon turns west (right) while Little Dominguez Canyon lies straight ahead. For Big Dominguez Canyon, turn right on the stronger trail and cross into the Wilderness Study Area.

The hiking is easy as you continue into the canyon. Look for the waterfall soon after entering the canyon, keep an eye open for the desert bighorns and also for the many petroglyphs on the boulders along the trail. We enjoyed a few minutes trying to identify the objects depicted on these panels.

*The creek has cut through not only the soft sandstone but also into the granite bedrock to create a steep-walled inner gorge-small.JPG*

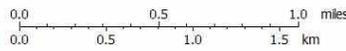
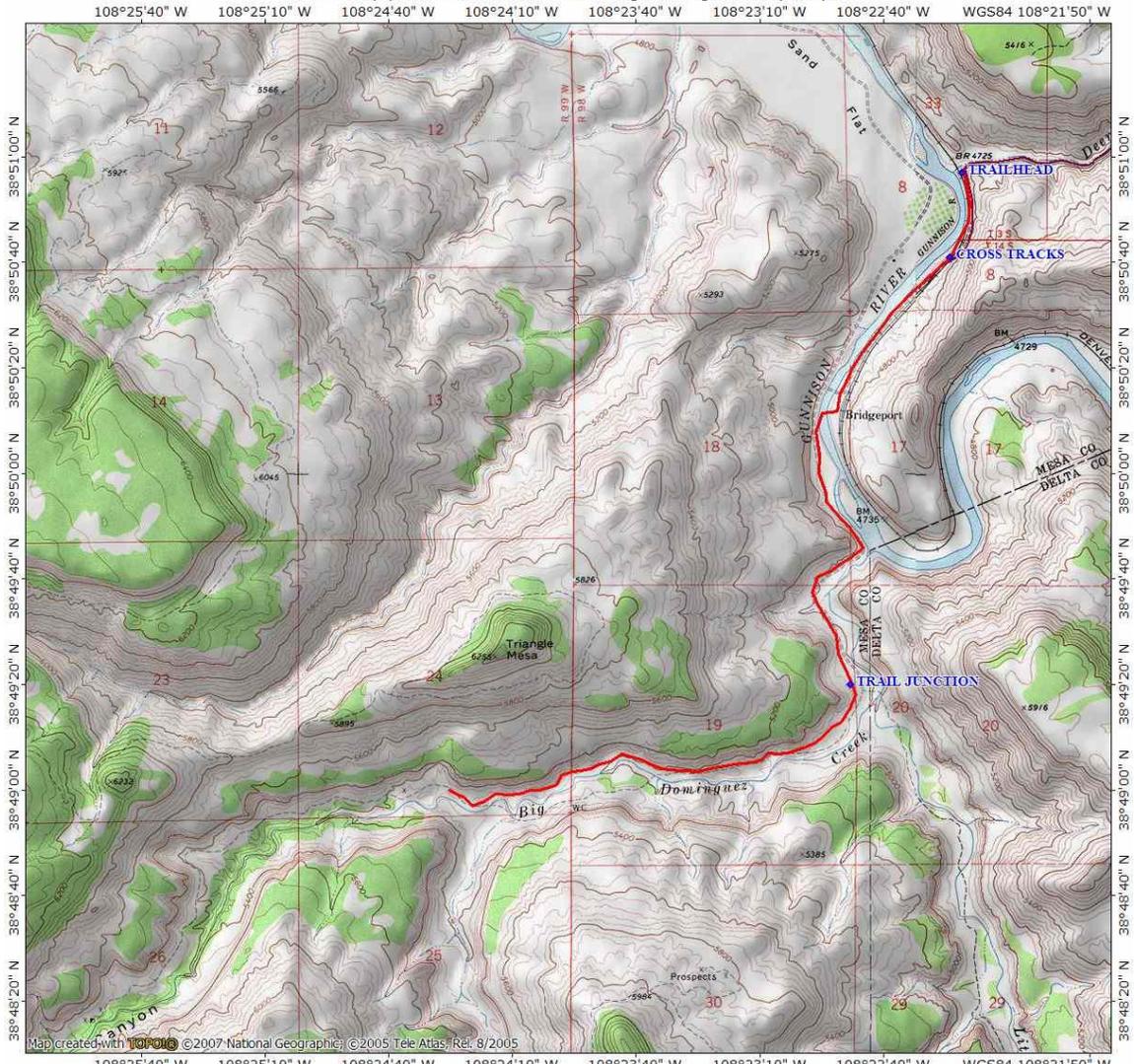


The trail continues for many miles. For a leisurely day hike, a turnaround point four miles from the trailhead seemed about right.



*Petroglyphs-small.JPG*

TOPO! map printed on 11/27/07 from "Big Dominguez Canyon.tpo"



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)

TRAILHEAD: 38,50,57N / 108,22,21W, 4724 feet  
 CROSS TRACKS: 38,50,41N / 108,22,24W, 4724 feet  
 TRAIL JUNCTION: 38,49,20N / 108,22,48W, 4764 feet



