

Skiing the Black Canyon of the Gunnison by Dave Cooper



The Painted Wall 2 - compressed

Friends have talked enthusiastically about this ski tour for years, but it wasn't until recently that I was able to experience it for myself.

What makes this ski trip special is the location. Paralleling the south rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River, you will be treated constantly to spectacular views of the canyon.

Closed to traffic during the winter months the South Rim Road becomes a ski and snowshoe trail where the visitor can cruise along for six miles each way, stopping at the many viewpoints. Bring your camera as well as your skinny skis.

Administered by the National Park Service, no entrance fees are collected during the winter. The South Rim Visitor Center is open year-round. Stop in and check out trail conditions.

Getting to the Trailhead: The south Rim is accessed from US Highway 50, 12 miles west of Cimarron or approximately 6.4 miles east of Montrose, via State Highway 347. From the intersection of US50 and SH347, signed to East Portal, drive north on SH347 for 7.2 miles to the South Rim Visitor Center. Park here and walk a few yards to the road closure. This is the start of the South Rim ski/snowshoe trail.

Statistics: Trailhead to High Point(8200 feet): 650 feet of total elevation gain and 520 feet of elevation loss (to be regained on the return leg) in 6.0 miles one way.

Difficulty: A long, easy ski or snowshoe.

USGS Quad: Grizzly Ridge, CO. The NPS Park map may suffice for this tour.

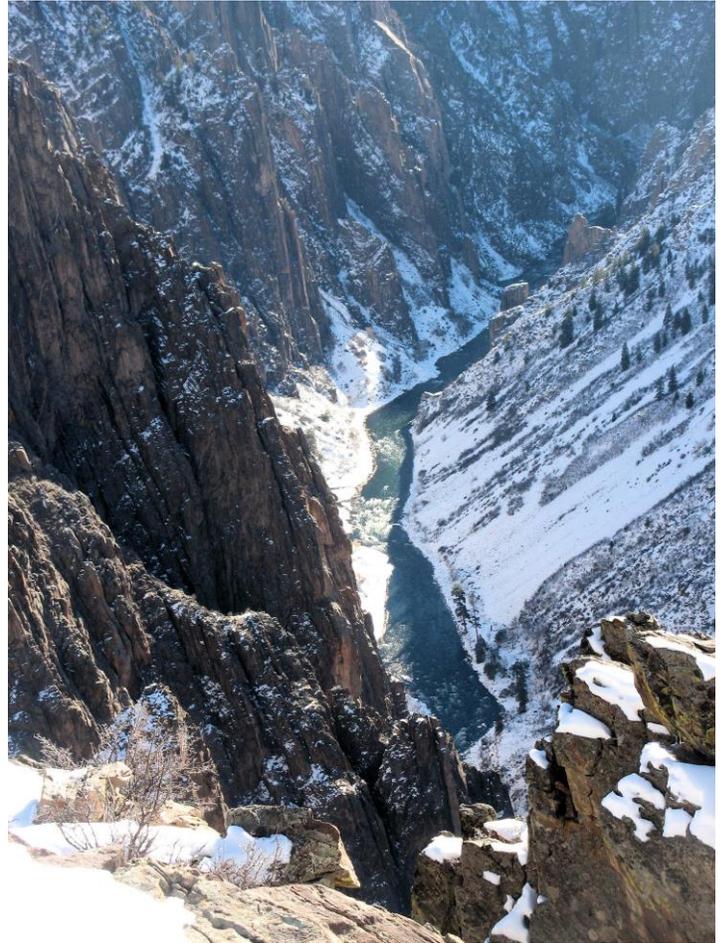
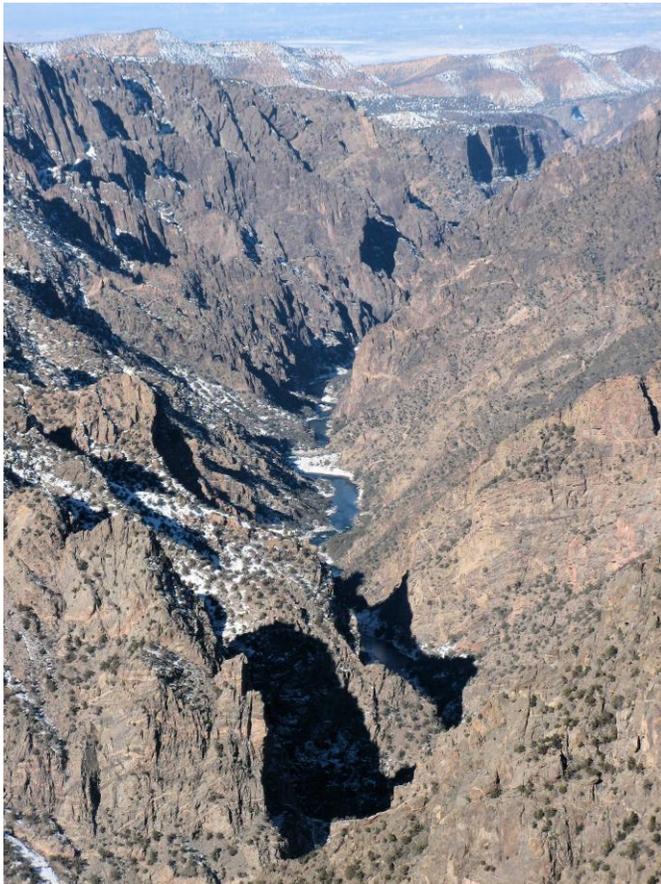
Trail Description

Start skiing from the gate closure, climbing gently before dropping quickly to the first major viewpoint - Pulpit Rock at 1.8 miles. This is as far as many people go, though when I was there the road was tracked all the way to High Point.

Continue dropping to the low point of the road at 3.6 miles. This is where you have some of the best views of the trip, at Chasm View and the Painted Wall Viewpoint.

Black Canyon in Winter 6-compressed

Gradually climb from here to High Point, six miles out, passing several more outstanding viewpoints, including Sunset View at 5.1 miles.



Looking west-compressed

The initial two mile descent back from High Point goes quite quickly, but then the climb begins, never steep but certainly continuous. By the time you get back to the Visitors Center you'll know you did 12 miles.

