

Cross and Spook Canyons by Dave Cooper



Anasazi ruin - small.jpg

Remote and with limited access, Cross Canyon is one of the most intriguing areas in the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument. There are no established trails along its 20+ mile length and none of the archeological sites have been developed. As the Monument's website says, "This is a place to explore on your own".

That's what we did earlier this year. Truly a ramble, with no destination in mind, we spent a day exploring the first few miles of Cross Canyon, then were sidetracked into Spook Canyon to check out some of the archeological sites there.

Most of the Anasazi (Ancestral Puebloan) sites are unmarked, except occasionally by a cairn placed near the streambed, so it's exciting to discover an ancient granary or living space literally covered in pottery shards. Even when we came across

Getting to the Trailhead: County Road 2031 (shown on some maps as the Cross Canyon Road) leaves County Road 10, 2.8 miles northeast of the entrance to Hovenweep National Monument. Since CR2031 is easy to miss, it's best to drive to Hovenweep and then backtrack the 2.8 miles to the road junction.

From the junction of CR10 and CR2031, drive northwest on CR2031 as it drops steeply to the valley floor before reaching a T-junction in 2.3 miles, immediately past a creek crossing. Turn right (northeast) at the junction and follow the rough road to the signed trailhead, 6.4 miles from CR10. On our spring trip a stream crossing a mile before the trailhead was a little intimidating, so check it out before entering. 4WD vehicle recommended.

To reach the Hovenweep Visitor Center from Cortez, drive north on Highway 491 (shown on older maps as Highway 666) for 18 miles. Turn left (west) on County Road BB and drive 6 miles to the intersection with County Road 10. Turn left (south) on County Road 10 and drive 20 miles to the Hovenweep National Monument headquarters and visitor center sign.

GPS coordinates for the trailhead (NAD83): 37°28'14"N, 109° 2'40"W, 5,085 feet.

Statistics: We hiked a little over 6 miles and gained a little over 200 feet, but anything from a short day hike to multi-day is possible.

Difficulty: A ramble along a wide canyon floor with no maintained trails and sometimes heavy brush to contend with. In the springtime, expect many stream crossings, some quite challenging.

A good map and preferably a GPS are recommended, since landmarks are few and far between.

USGS Quad: Ruin Point, UT/ CO.

one of these cairns it wasn't always obvious where the ruins were located. Especially fun was to try to locate sites that were unmarked and at one site, undisturbed. It takes a keen eye to see these spots.

The most prominent site we found was located on an outcrop 1.7 miles into the hike, near the confluence of Cross and Spook Canyons. This site consisted of many rooms and the pottery shards were so numerous that exploring the site demanded considerable care to avoid stepping on them.

Pottery shards 1 - small.jpg

The canyons are special places that are still unspoiled. It requires a commitment by all of us to keep it that way. The BLM suggests these guidelines (among others) for responsibly enjoying this area: Don't disturb artifacts. Stay off walls, and absolutely do not remove any artifacts. For more information visit their website



<http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nm/canm.html>

It's also a good idea to allow time to stop in at the Anasazi Heritage Center, 10 miles north of Cortez and three miles west of Dolores, before venturing into the Canyons. I've found them to be very helpful and can provide current information on access, road conditions, etc.

Hike Description

More than one guidebook describes alternate approaches to Cross Canyon. However a phone call to the Anasazi Heritage Center revealed that there is only one recommended way into the canyon that avoids crossing private property, and that's via the southern entrance. That's the approach I'll describe here.

From the parking area, cross through the gate, marked by a BLM sign.

BLM sign at the entrance to Cross Canyon - small.jpg

An old 4WD road leads north from the gate, but take a moment to look for some petroglyphs on the rocks on the right. After that small detour, continue on the road for 0.5 mile to a point where the road turns to the right. Leave the road here and head left towards a small sign



indicating the start of the Wilderness Study Area (WSA). Be careful not to go too far along the road or you'll find yourself at a dead end.

By the WSA sign is the first of many stream crossings that must be navigated. This is likely to be more of an issue in the springtime.

Carefully crossing the creek - small.jpg

Continue into the canyon, sometimes following faint trails through the scrub and thickets that can slow your progress. At mile 1.0 there is an extensive area of ruins at the base of the cliffs to your right.



Continue north to a point where the canyon widens, and look for the prominent island of rock towards the right side of the drainage. This outcrop, at mile 1.7, houses extensive ruins, both around the base of the outcrop as well as on top.

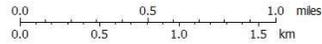
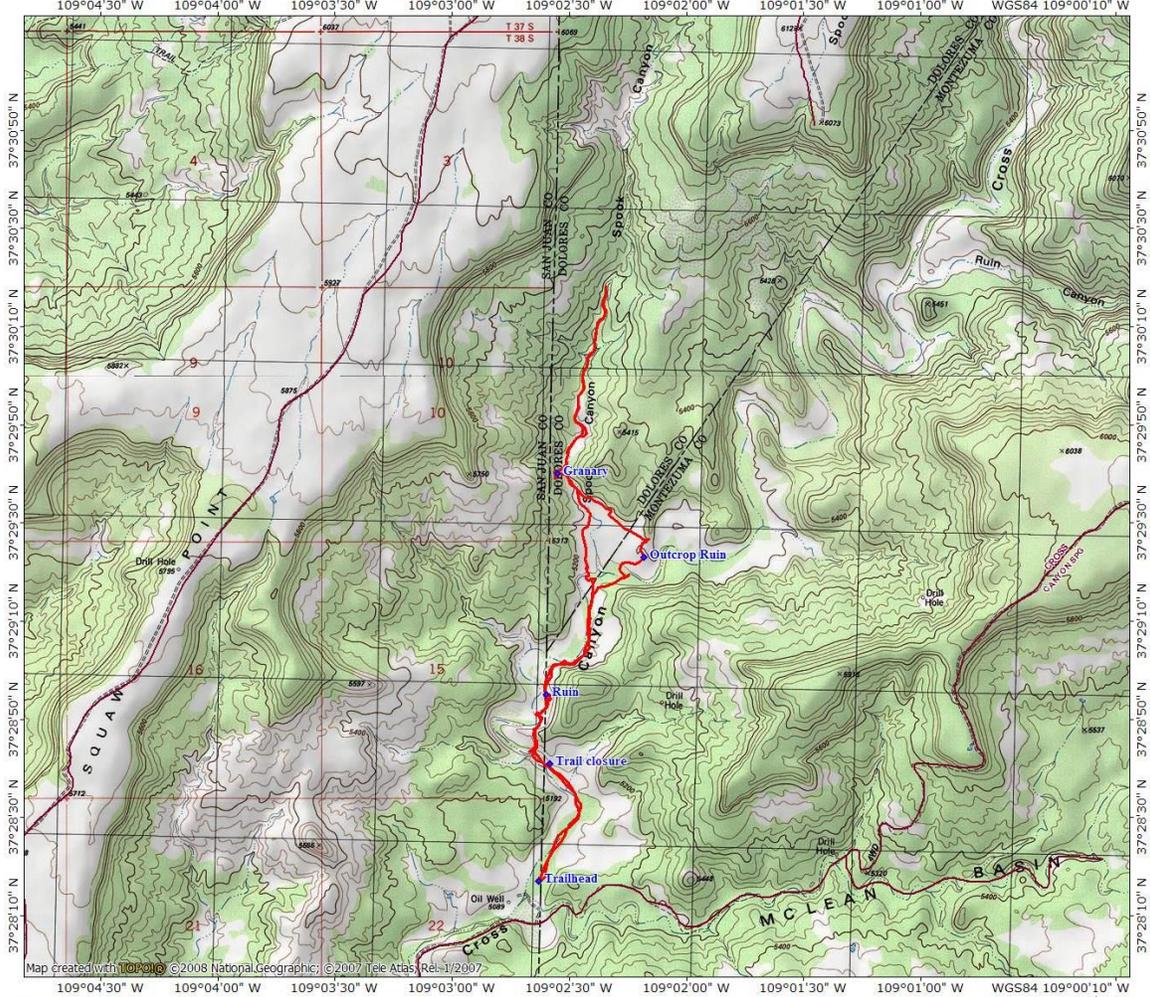
From this point you need to decide whether to continue along Cross Canyon or cut left (west) into Spook Canyon. We were attracted by the looks of Spook Canyon, so headed that way. This much narrower canyon was delightful, with varied flora in addition to many more archeological sites.

Varied Flora in Spook Canyon - small.jpg

We turned around at mile 3.2 and made our way back after an extremely enjoyable ramble, sure that we would return to continue our exploration.



TOPO! map printed on 10/22/10 from "Untitled2.tpo"



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

- Trailhead, 37°28'14", -109°24'05.85" feet
- Trail closure, 37°28'41", -109°23'55.105" feet
- Ruin, 37°28'55", -109°23'36.5128" feet
- Outcrop Ruin, 37°29'23", -109°21'15.177" feet
- Granary, 37°29'40", -109°23'33.5217" feet

