

# Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Area - Spring Creek Canyon

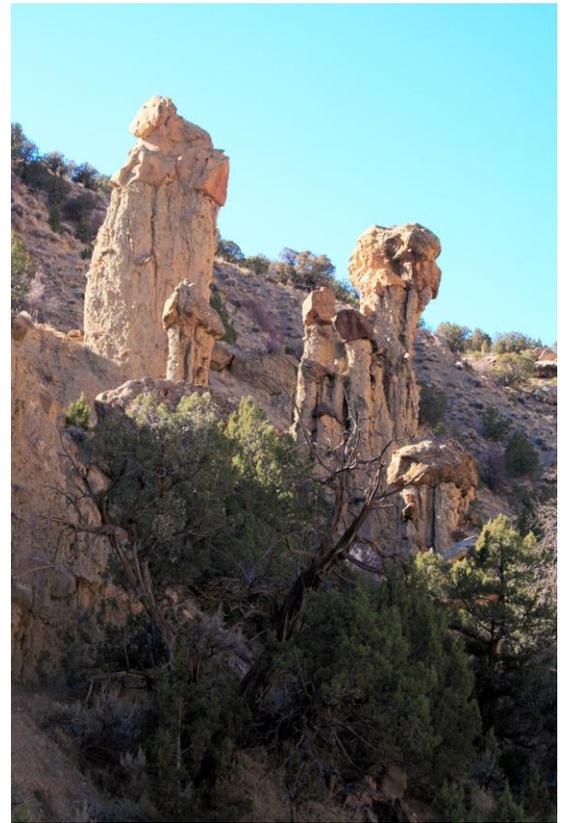
by Dave Cooper

Congress passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act in 1971. Quoting Bureau of Land Management (BLM) literature, this Act was designed to protect, manage and control wild horses and burros on public lands. The legislation declares that “wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the west.....”.

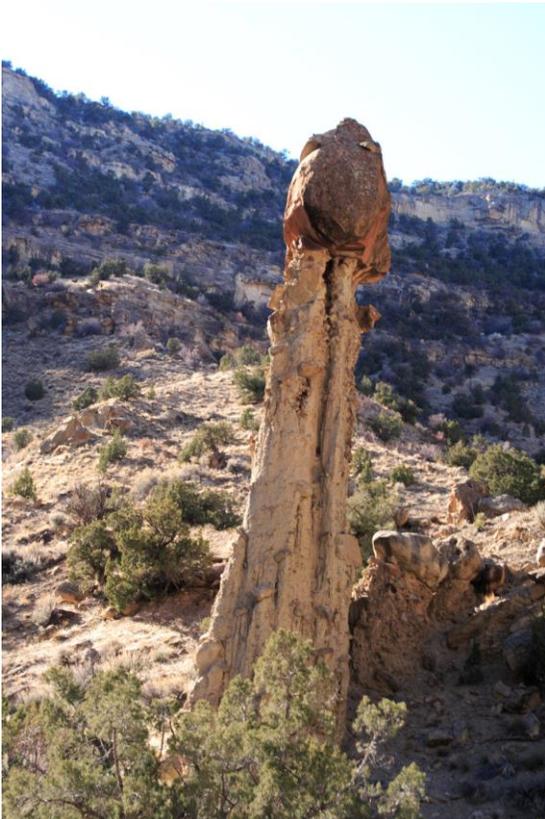
One of four wild horse herd management areas, the Little Book Cliffs offers the opportunity to see these wild horses in a spectacular canyon environment. Much of the area is designated as a Wilderness Study Area (WSA), hence motorized vehicles are not allowed. For our first exploratory hike into the area we chose a trail in the WSA which traverses Spring Creek Canyon. While we didn't see any wild horses on this visit we were treated to great hiking and excellent views in an unspoiled environment. It only whetted our appetites for a return visit in the future.

## Hike Description

From the Coal Canyon/ Main Canyon Trailhead, walk through the gate and immediately turn right on the trail signed to Main and Spring Creek Canyons. Follow the trail as it climbs steeply up and over a small ridge before dropping into Main Canyon. At mile 1.5 the Spring Creek Trail leaves the Main Canyon Trail to the left and heads southwest. Look for hoodoos above the trail. These are formed when a harder caprock protects softer rock beneath from being eroded, leaving columns behind.



*Hoodoos can be seen along the Spring Creek Trail-small.jpg*



**Getting to the Trailhead:** Take the Cameo exit from I-70 (Exit 46, 3.5 miles east of Palisade). Cross the river bridge and stay right as you pass the power plant, following signs to the Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Area. Follow the rough dirt road as it heads northwest into Coal Canyon, passing a boundary marker for the Little Book Cliffs Wild Horse Area at 2.3 miles from I-70 and reaching a parking area in a further 0.3 mile. The parking area, to your right, is immediately before a gate with road closure information posted.

**Hike Statistics:** The hike described here has a total elevation gain of 2560 feet in 13.9 miles round trip.

**Difficulty:** Mostly easy walking on the sandy and occasionally rocky trail, with a few steep sections. Good routefinding skills, including the use of map, compass and GPS are required due to the confusing abundance of wild horse trails.

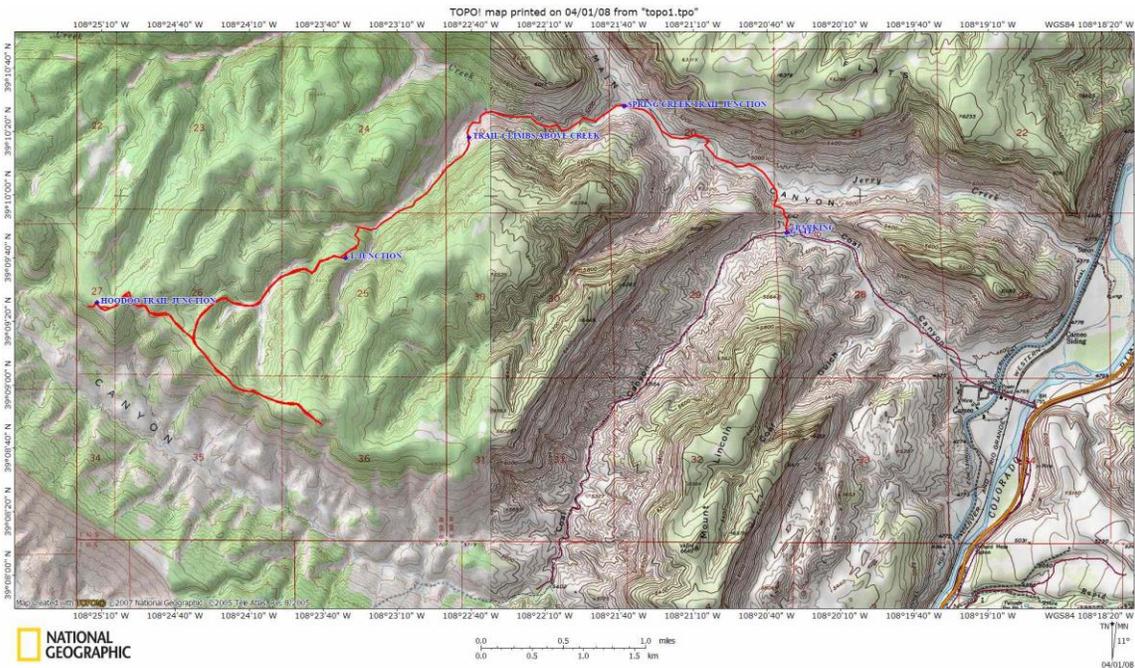
**USGS Quad:** Cameo, CO; Round Mountain, CO. Note that the trails are not shown on the USGS quads. The map we used (which shows most of the trails) is a Recreation Topo Map for the Fruita/Grand Junction area, published by Latitude 40 Maps, available at area outdoor stores such as REI in Grand Junction.

*Hoodoos are formed when a harder caprock protects the soft rock beneath from erosion-small.jpg*

The trail follows the creekbed until climbing steeply above the drainage at mile 2.6 and then gradually re-joins the creekbed. At mile 3.6 the trail again leaves the creekbed on the left and climbs the nose of a ridge before reaching a T-junction at mile 3.9. Turn right (west) at this junction, which is easy to miss on your return. The trail continues through forest until finally emerging onto the mesa top at mile 4.7. From this point on, the trail can be a little tricky to follow due to the many horse trails that criss-cross the area, even though there are quite a few trail markers,.

*The trail is generally well-signed-small.jpg*

At mile 5.1 you will reach a trail junction. This junction is easy to miss. Continuing straight will put you on a trail not shown on the Latitude 40 Map, but indicated on a BLM map as the Goose Trail. When we did this hike in late November we followed this increasingly faint trail for a short distance to a good lookout point shown on the topo map as elevation 6830, then backtracked to the last junction to explore the right hand fork. At 0.8 mile northwest of this trail junction we arrived at a major trail junction, with signs for the Hoodoo Trail, Ute Trail and several other destinations. This was a good point to turn around and retrace our steps back to Spring Creek Canyon, though the possibility of linking several trails and making a longer loop was enticing. Difficult routefinding on the Hoodoo Trail and the late hour convinced us to leave that option for another day. As it was, we reached our vehicle well after dark, using headlamps.



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)  
 PARKING: 39,9,49N / 108,20,30W, 4987 feet  
 GATE: 39,9,48N / 108,20,32W, 4984 feet  
 SPRING CREEK TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,10,28N / 108,21,38W, 5043 feet  
 TRAIL CLIMBS ABOVE CREEK: 39,10,18N / 108,22,41,5413 feet  
 T-JUNCTION: 39,9,40N / 108,23,31W, 6132 feet  
 HOODOO TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,9,26N / 108,25,12W, 6680 feet

