

McIntyre Hills by Dave Cooper

More a ramble than a scramble, this week's hike takes us into a proposed wilderness area near Canon City.

If you enjoy exploring rocky canyons where animal footprints are likely to outnumber the human variety, I think you'll like this remote area.

Starting in semi-arid desert terrain with cholla cactus, juniper and pinon, Five Points Gulch rises over 1200 feet and ends in an area of coniferous forest. Bighorn sheep are common near the mouth of the canyon, so bring your binoculars and cameras.

There is no maintained trail in this canyon so hiking is mainly in the wash. You should be able to identify many different footprints in the sandy streambed, including those of the elusive mountain lion.

As with any of our fragile wild places, please tread lightly.

It is worthwhile to take some time to read the information exhibit at the trailhead regarding the bighorn sheep in the area.

Getting to the Trailhead: The Five Points trailhead is located west of the Royal Gorge on US Highway 50. To get there from the Front Range, drive west to the intersection of US 50 and State Highway 9, approximately 9 miles west of Canon City. From this intersection continue west on US 50 for 9.1 miles.

The parking area is located on the north side of the highway, and is a State Fee Area. The use fee is \$2 per person for day use. A campground is located just south of the highway.

Hike Statistics: Trailhead to the major canyon junction: 1250 feet of total elevation gain in 3.9 miles one way.

Difficulty: A moderate hike, mainly following a streambed.

USGS Quad: McIntyre Hills, CO

Be aware that the area is home to mountain lions. Never hike alone in this area and know how to act if confronted by one. See the Colorado Division of Wildlife website: "<http://wildlife.state.co.us/WildlifeSpecies/LivingWithWildlife/Mammals/LionCountryPart2.htm>" for more information.



The mouth of the canyon is a good place to watch Bighorn sheep

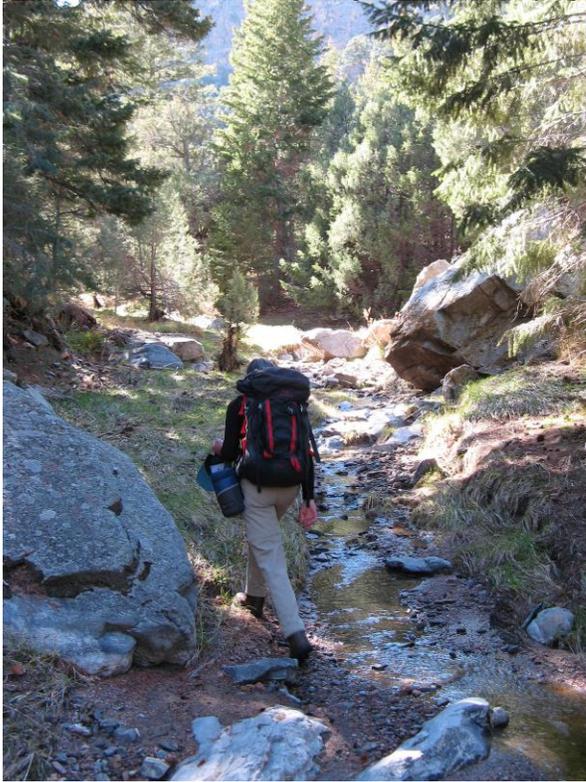


Hike Description

From the parking area, take the paved underpass towards the campground on the south side of the highway, and immediately look for a convenient place to drop into the sandy wash on your right. Walk up the streambed, initially dry but becoming intermittent as you hike further into the canyon.

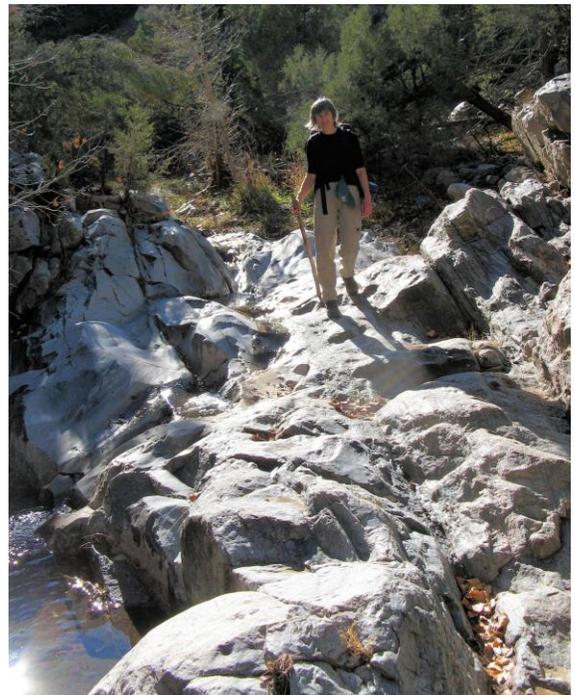
There are initially remnants of a water diversion system, but soon you will find yourself in a pleasant, unspoiled canyon environment, ducking under fallen trees and following the canyon as it wanders southwards, occasionally leaving the streambed to avoid obstacles.

After 0.8 miles the canyon widens and hiking becomes easier. Several tributary canyons join the main drainage. In general the main drainage is obvious, staying left in each case. The only one that requires a little extra care is at mile 1.8. Again, stay left. The streambed becomes progressively more rocky as you ascend, requiring a bit more easy scrambling.



Pleasant hiking along the streambed

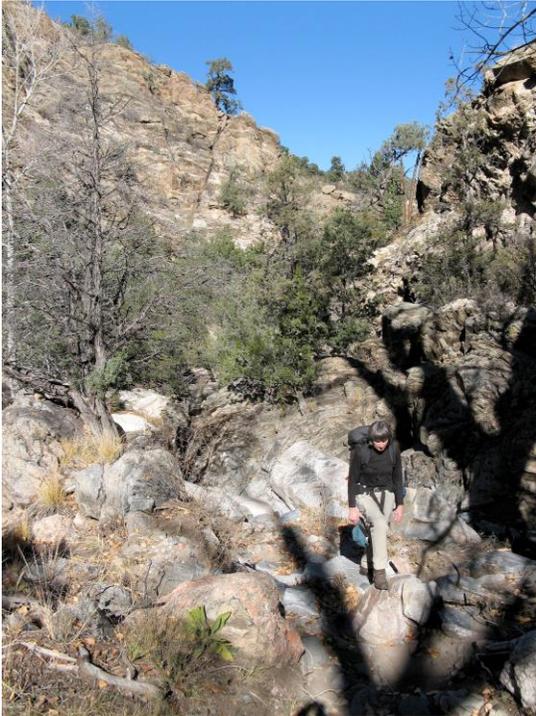
At mile 2.8 you will encounter a substantial log jam which can best be passed on the left. Shortly after the log jam, at 3.0 miles, the stream flows over solid rock where it has polished and carved the rock into interesting shapes and created small waterfalls. This section again requires a little easy scrambling.



The streambed becomes progressively more rocky



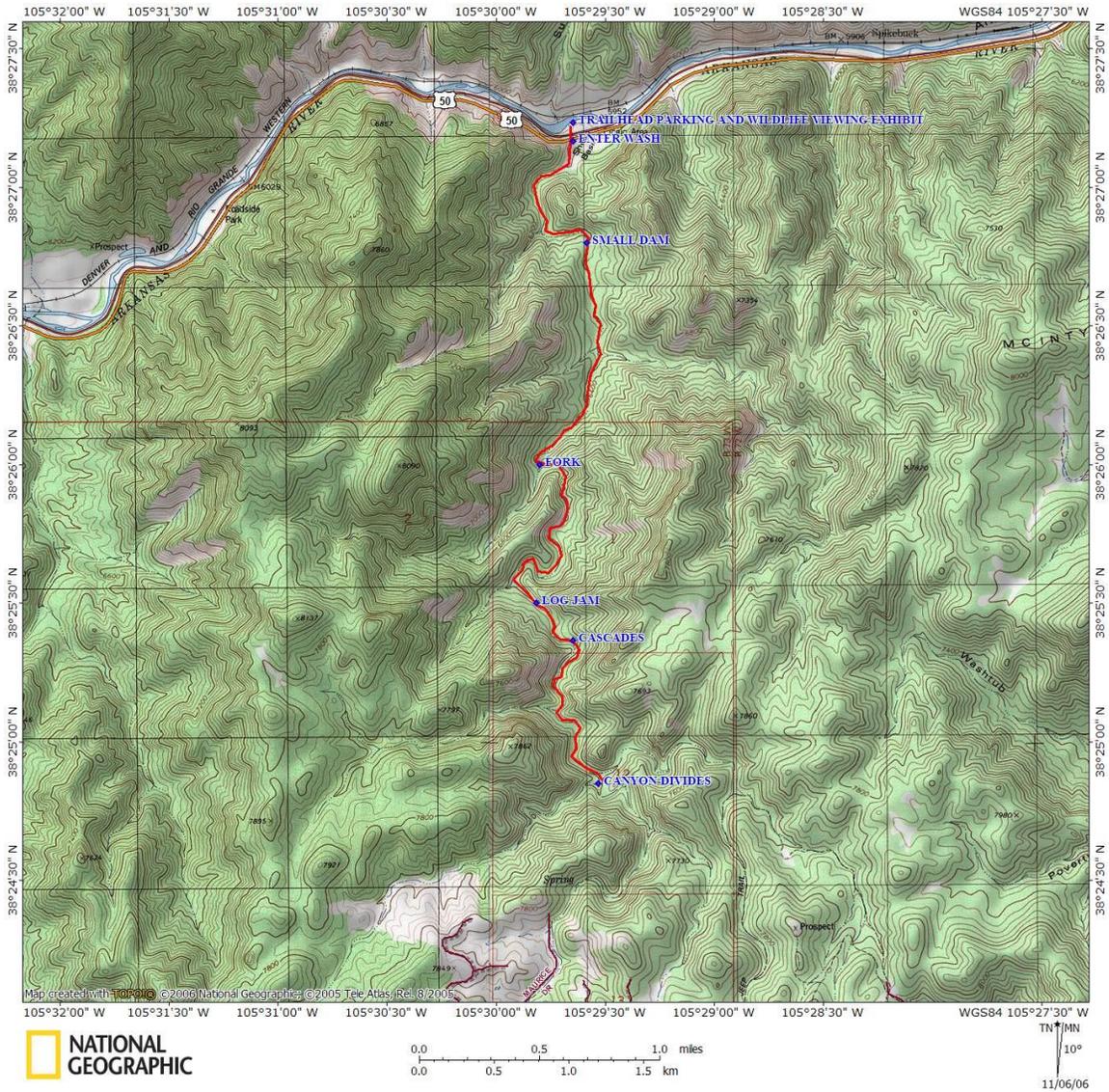
Interesting lighting on the canyon rim



Desert hiking near the start of the canyon

An essential ingredient to a true ramble is that there be no defined endpoint. We hiked as far as the large fork in the canyon at mile 3.9. This made a good lunch and turnaround spot.

If you were to continue south along one of the drainages you would eventually exit the canyon complex and reach one of several roads in the area after another mile or so.



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 TRAILHEAD PARKING AND WILDLIFE VIEWING EXHIBIT: 38,27,14N / 105,29,39W, 6001 feet
 ENTER WASH: 38,27,10N / 105,29,39W, 6001 feet
 SMALL DAM: 38,26,48N / 105,29,35W, 6204 feet
 FORK: 38,26,0N / 105,29,48W, 6549 feet
 LOG JAM: 38,25,30N / 105,29,49W, 6831 feet
 CASCADES: 38,25,22N / 105,29,39W, 6936 feet
 CANYON DIVIDES: 38,24,51N / 105,29,32W, 7215 feet

