

Paradox Valley - Nyswonger Mesa by Dave Cooper



The dramatic cliffs of the Paradox Valley's Sawtooth Ridge contrast starkly with the mountains beyond-2.jpg

We have travelled through the Paradox Valley on a number of occasions, marveling at the spectacular scenery. With towering sandstone cliffs along its margins and sandwiched between Utah's La Sal Mountains to the west and the San Juan and San Miguel Ranges to the east, the contrasts are striking. Is this the reason for the valley's name? No, the name refers to the fact that the Dolores River follows not along the valley, as you would expect, but crosses it at ninety degrees.

We recently had an opportunity to spend some time exploring the Paradox Valley and found excellent hiking. The low elevation and arid climate found here allow you to extend the hiking season through the winter months.

This week we take the high road on Nyswonger Mesa, a moderate hike offering outstanding views of the Dolores River Canyon as well as the surrounding mountain ranges.

Getting to the Trailhead: The Paradox Valley is located along Highway 90, west of Norwood. A scenic drive is to take Highway 550 south from Montrose to Ridgeway, turning west in Ridgeway onto Highway 62. Take Highway 62 over the Dallas Divide and continue to the junction with Highway 145. From this junction drive west to the town of Norwood. Pass through Norwood and reach an intersection with Highway 90. Turn left on Highway 90 and drive to the town of Naturita. Continue west on Highway 90 and enter the Paradox Valley, reaching the small town of Bedrock, 21 miles west of Naturita. Continue through Bedrock to an old jeep road on your left, 0.6 mile west of Bedrock. This rutted road is almost directly opposite 9 1/2 road. A small parking area is available at the start of the jeep road, just off Highway 90.

Hike Statistics: The trail gains 1550 feet and loses 280 feet in 3.6 miles one way.

Difficulty: A moderate hike on an old jeep road. Due to the confusing system of roads on the mesa, care is needed to stay on the correct trail.

Resources: "Colorado's Canyon Country - A Guide to Hiking and Floating BLM Wildlands" by Mark Pearson, photography by John Fielder. (Westcliffe Publishers).

USGS Quad: Paradox, CO.



Colorado has it all - Snowcapped peaks and dramatic red rock canyons-small.jpg

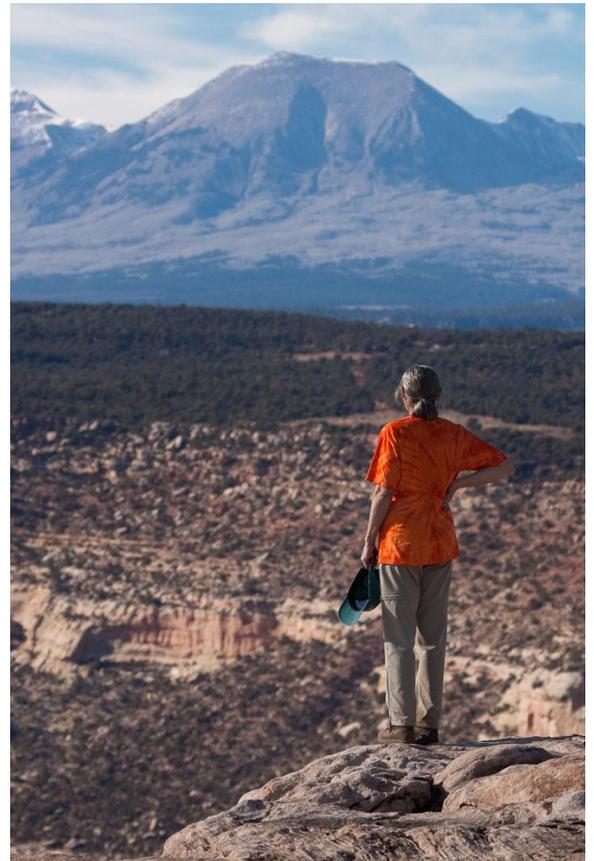
Hike Description

Start hiking up the abandoned jeep trail as it climbs steeply, first west then south, towards the top of the mesa. Shady sections of this trail hold snow and may be icy during the winter. There are several spur trails but it should be relatively easy to stay on the main trail as it zig-zags its way through sandstone rock formations. After 1.6 miles you'll finally reach the top of the mesa and the first major trail junction. Stay right and hike southwest. There is now a confusing mess of trails. Try to stay on the main track and take care to note any junctions along the way. On your return it's helpful to follow your footprints back. At times you will be able to see the trail stretching out in front of you as it drops gently towards the edge of the mesa.

At mile 2.6 there is another junction, where an old road comes in from your left. Bear right and continue southwest, passing a wooden post with an old metal can attached at mile 2.7. At mile 3.1 you'll leave the pinon pine forest and enter a sagebrush-covered meadow. Cross the meadow on the trail and continue to a viewpoint at mile 3.6.

You can look down into the deep canyon cut by the Dolores River and La Sal Creek, 1300 feet below. There are good views of the peaks of the La Sal Mountains off to the west.

The La Sal Mountains form a dramatic backdrop to the canyon country in this view from the Nyswonger Mesa-small.jpg



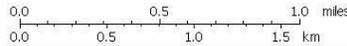
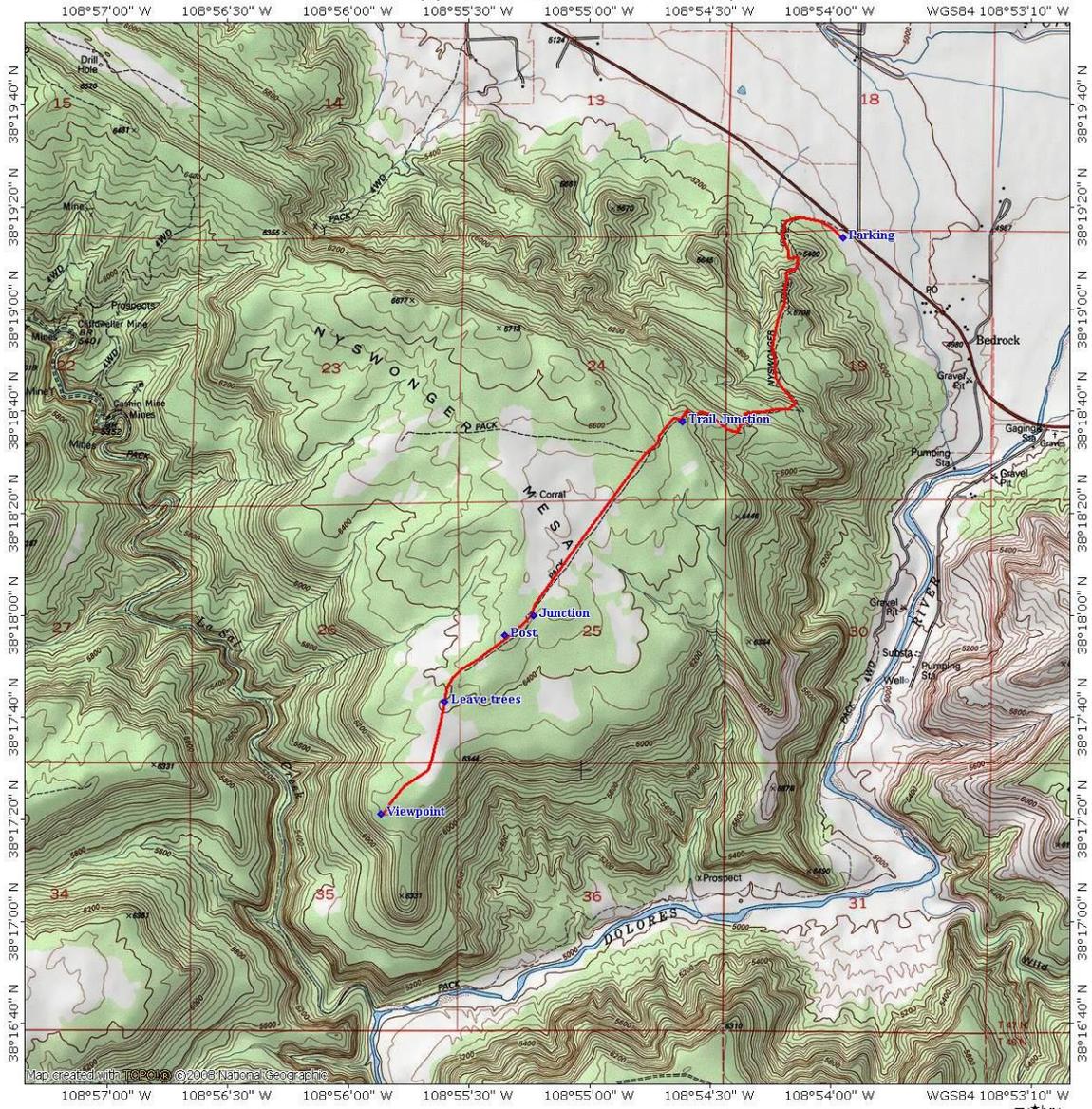


The La Sal Mountains seen from the viewpoint on Nyswonger Mesa-small.jpg



The snowcapped peaks of the Sneffels Range contrast with the sandstone of the canyons-small.jpg

TOPO! map printed on 11/10/09 from "Untitled.tpo"



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

- Parking, 38,19,14, -108,53,57,5115 feet
- Trail Junction, 38,18,38, -108,54,37,6447 feet
- Junction, 38,18,0, -108,55,14,6480 feet
- Post, 38,17,56, -108,55,21,6489 feet
- Leave trees, 38,17,43, -108,55,36,6381 feet
- Viewpoint, 38,17,21, -108,55,52,6352 feet

