

Rabbit's Ear Mesa

by Dave Cooper



Nice views of the Colorado River and La Sal Mountains from the top of the mesa-small.jpg

Recently I described a ski tour on Rabbit Ears Pass. This week we stay with the “rabbit” theme as we visit Rabbit’s Ear Mesa in the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area. The two locations may share related names but that’s where any similarities end. In

contrast to the rolling, snow-covered hills of the Pass, Rabbit’s Ear Mesa offers semi-arid canyonlands, Juniper forests and sandstone rock formations. Views of the Colorado River, Grand Mesa and the La Sal mountains, 50 miles away in southwest Utah, are a bonus on this hike.

Although the Rabbit Valley area is open to use by off-highway vehicles, the Rabbit’s Ear Trail is not, so on a recent visit we enjoyed spectacular scenery in a peaceful environment. The generally well-marked trail leads to the top of the mesa and then provides a nice loop hike around the mesa’s edge. I’d recommend hiking the loop section in a clockwise direction. That way, you have a choice between a shorter hike to a stunning overlook of the Colorado River in approximately 2 miles (4 miles round trip), or continuing around the loop for a total of 5.6 miles.

Hike Description

From the parking area the trail climbs steadily south up a broad ridge. After one third of a mile the trail flattens out and crosses a narrower area along an escarpment that connects to a second ridge. Follow the trail up this ridge to a narrow corridor at mile 1.0. Scramble up through this slot, then follow the trail as it loses a little elevation before contouring around a small ridge point to reach a saddle at mile 1.2. Near the saddle the trail divides at the two branches of the loop trail. Stay left and head up to the northeast margin of the mesa. Around mile 2 you reach the mesa’s edge

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive to Exit 2 on Interstate 70, just east of the Colorado-Utah border. Cross to the south side of the highway and drive to the information kiosk and ATV staging area. Continue south to a road junction 0.2 miles from the highway, signed to the Rabbit’s Ear Trailhead. Turn left and follow this well-graded and graveled road as it winds its way east, paralleling I-70, reaching an obvious trailhead parking area on the right, 4.7 miles from the highway. An information kiosk and trail register are located at the trailhead.

Hike Statistics: With the ups and downs along the trail the total elevation gain is 900 feet in a round trip distance of 5.6 miles.

Difficulty: A pleasant walk on a generally good but sometimes rocky and occasionally muddy trail. Some sections of the trail along the northwest edge of the mesa are a little more primitive.

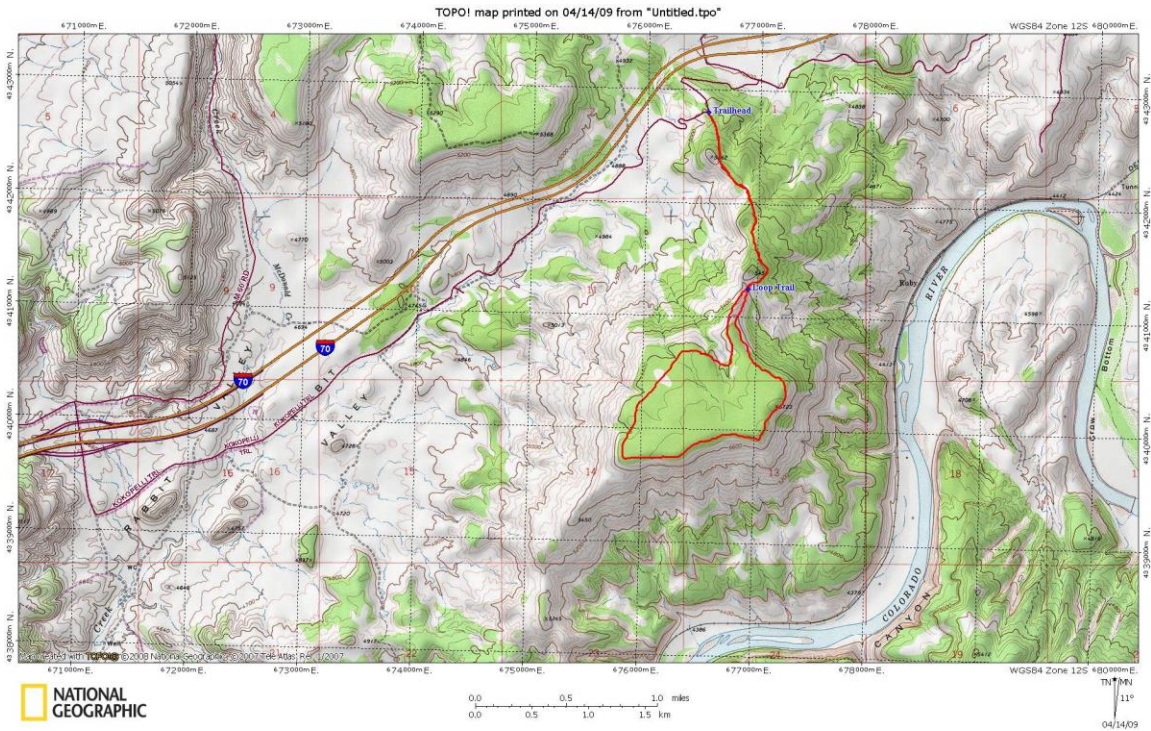
USGS Quads: Ruby Canyon, CO.



At mile 1.0 the trail heads up through this narrow rock corridor-small-9763.jpg

and can enjoy spectacular views of the Colorado River and Grand Mesa. For a shorter hike, this makes a good turning-around point from which to retrace your steps back to the parking area.

To continue along the loop, follow the trail as it skirts along the edge of the mesa, heading first southwest then west. As you head towards the westernmost point of the loop at mile 3.0, the La Sal Mountains of Utah come into view, forming a nice backdrop to the red sandstone canyons in the foreground. This section of the trail along the mesa rim is less distinct but easy to follow. As the trail turns back to the northeast, cairns appear again. Follow the slightly more primitive trail as it contours along the northwest edge of the mesa before dropping slowly back to complete the loop at the saddle mentioned earlier (mile 4.4). Turn left and continue along the trail back to the parking area.



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
Trailhead, 39, 13, 0, -108, 57, 18, 5023 feet
Loop Trail, 39, 12, 9, -108, 57, 4, 5395 feet



