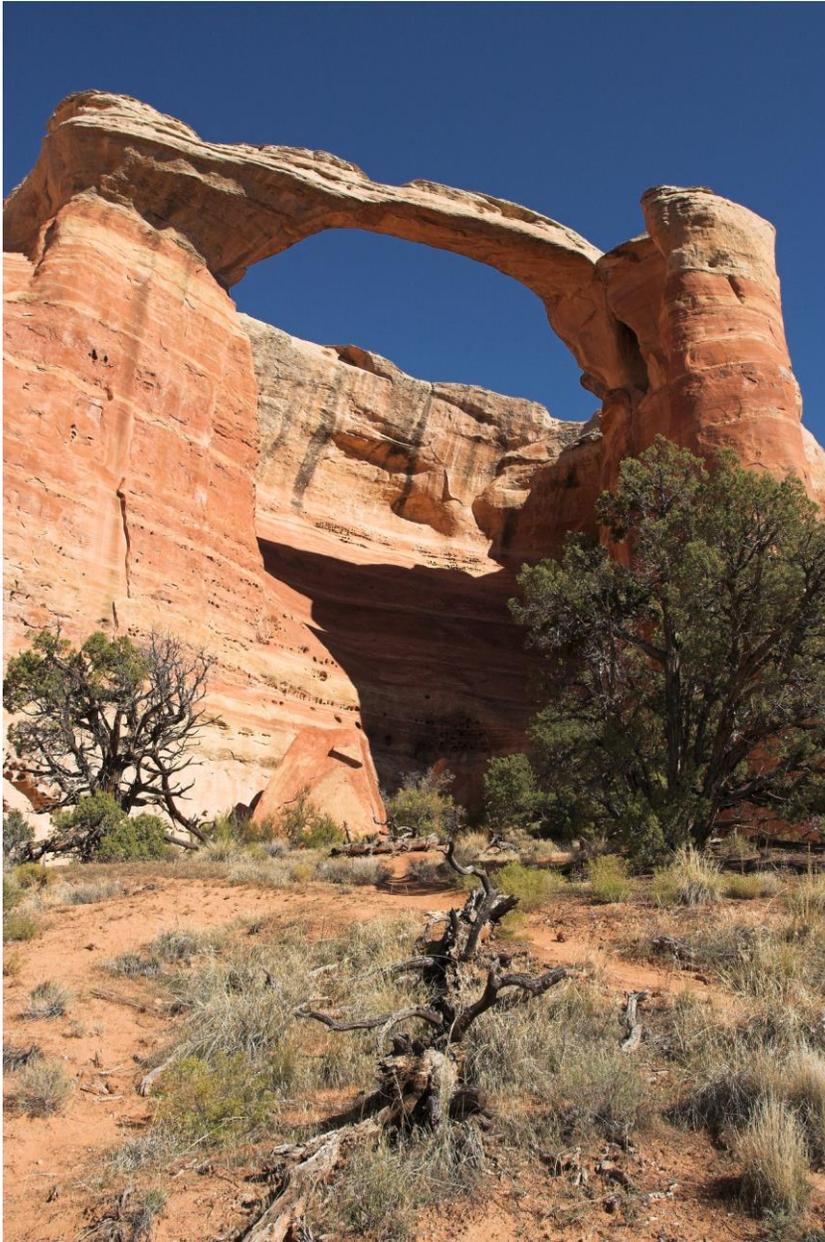


## Rattlesnake Canyon Arches

by Dave Cooper



*One of seven arches along this amazing trail*

Although some steps have been cut into the rock to facilitate this scramble, due to the nature of sandstone, which tends to be slippery when it is covered by a surface coating of sand particles (as is often the case), great care should be exercised if you decide to do the scramble. Unless you are secure with your climbing technique and comfortable with the exposure, hike the trail and turn around at the view points. If you do decide to attempt the scrambling, hike the loop in a counterclockwise

One of Colorado's best-kept secrets, the Rattlesnake Canyon Arches, offers seven spectacular natural arches in a distance of about 0.7 miles.

Located in the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area, you'll have to work a little to get there, but will be rewarded with a fine hike, optional fun scrambling and unique scenery.

The hike, as described by the BLM brochure "Rattlesnake Canyon Arches and Mee Canyon", is not a complete loop, the two ends of the trail being separated by a few hundred feet. The upper trail ends at an overview above the first arch while the lower trail ends just below this same arch. Connecting the trail involves scrambling up through the arch on steep sandstone.

**Getting to the Trailhead:** From Exit 19 on I-70 (Fruita), head south on SH340 for 2.4 miles to an intersection, the right fork signed to the Colorado National Monument (West Entrance).

From this junction, turn right towards the West Entrance to the Monument (Monument Road) and drive 11.2 miles into the Monument to the Glade Park Store Road. Turn right onto the Glade Park Road, then in 0.2 miles turn right onto the Black Ridge Trail Access Road. Measure from this point. Drive 1.3 miles on this access road to a junction signed to the Upper and Lower roads. At this time of year the Lower Road is open so turn right and drive to the next junction (at mile 1.6). Turn left and immediately pass through the closure gate. Drive on this road to a T-junction at mile 8.6, with signage indicating that you are entering a day-use only area. Beyond this point only high-clearance 4WD vehicles are recommended. (In fact, 4WD vehicles are best for the earlier part of the road too). From the T-junction drive or hike 2.4 miles on this rough road to the trailhead parking area at the end of the road (mile 11.0).

**Note:** The Lower road is open from August 15th to February 14th, while the Upper road is open from April 12th to August 14th. There is no road access by either route from February 15th to April 14th.

An alternate approach, via the Pollock Bench Trail, is possible. Check the BLM website or brochure for details.

direction. This will put you in position to climb up through the arch rather than trying to downclimb, which would be much more difficult.

### Hike Description

From the parking area the trail drops down gradually for 0.4 miles to a trail junction. If you head left at this junction, you will arrive at the First Arch Overlook in 0.4 miles. To continue to the Lower Rattlesnake Arches trail stay right.

From this first trail junction the somewhat rough trail drops rapidly for 300 vertical feet to a broad bench, where the second trail junction is located 0.6 miles from the parking area. The Pollock Trail comes into this junction from the right, but we stay left. From this point the trail is almost flat, winding gently along the bench, first in a northwesterly direction, then, turning south into Rattlesnake Canyon and continuing now in a southeasterly direction.

Shortly you will see the first of the arches above you, on your left, 1.7 miles from the parking area. Continue hiking southeast and see if you can find all of the arches. The trail terminates under the first arch (the last from this direction), 2.4 miles from the parking area.

**Hike Statistics:** Trailhead to the end of the Lower Trail: Lose approximately 500 feet in 2.4 miles one way (to be regained on the return leg of the hike).

**Difficulty:** A moderate trail hike with an optional, difficult scramble which avoids having to retrace your steps.

**USGS Quad:** Mack, CO

The BLM brochure “Rattlesnake Canyon Arches and Mee Canyon” is normally available at: the Colorado Welcome Center in Fruita and the Grand Junction BLM office. You can also order a copy online at: <http://www.co.blm.gov/mcna/rattlesnakecyn.htm>



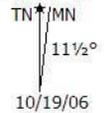
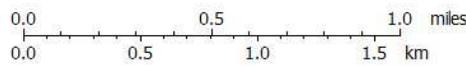
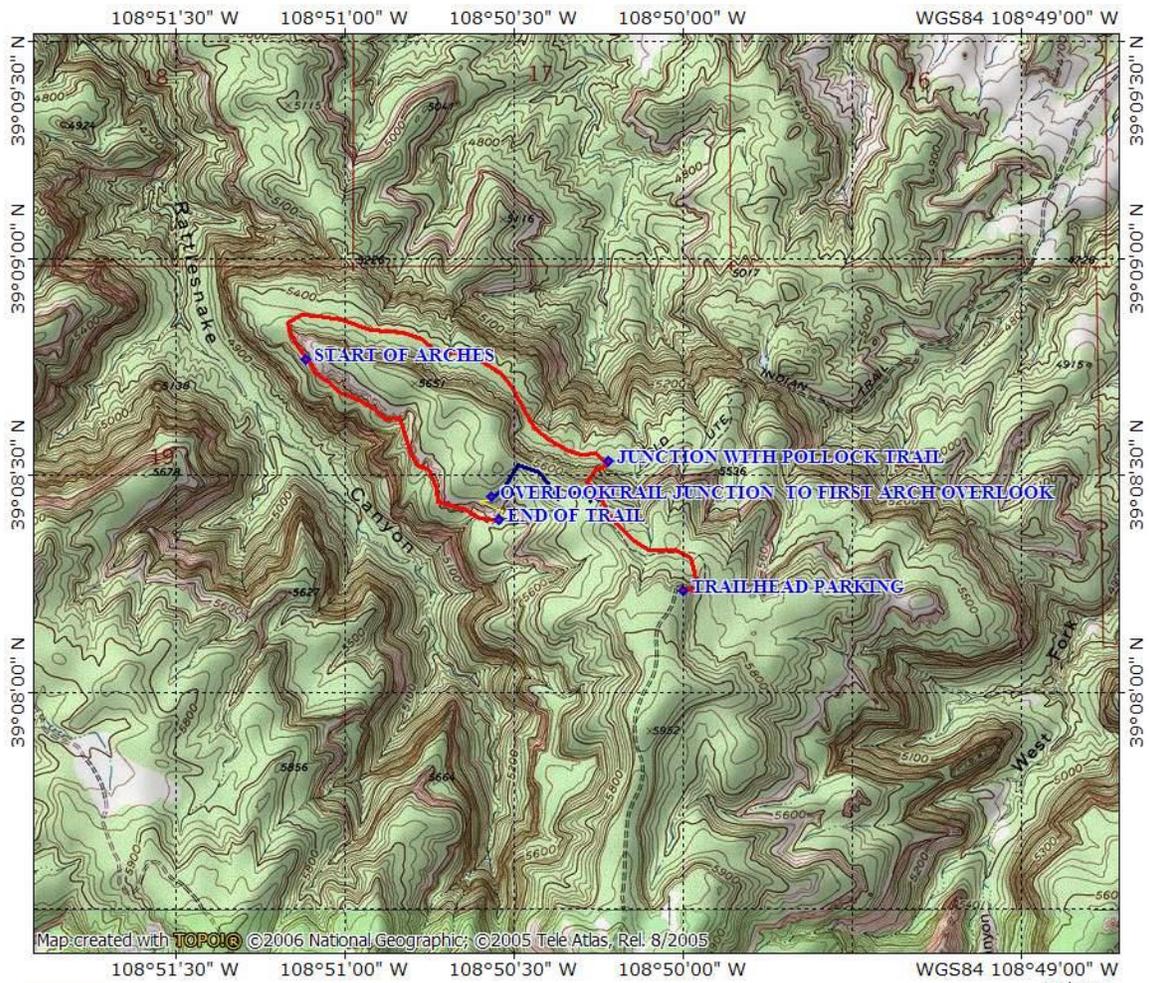
*IMG\_4421-02 more amazing arches*

If you decide to forgo the scramble through the arch, retrace your steps back to your vehicle, perhaps making the short detour out to the Overlook mentioned earlier.

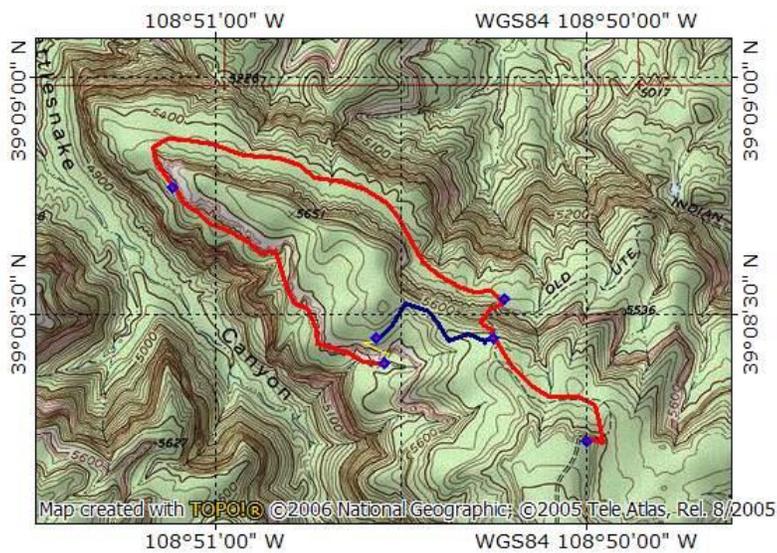


*IMG\_4428-01- this is the arch that offers a scrambling route. Some of the carved steps can be seen just above the tree in the center of photo*

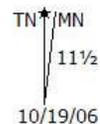
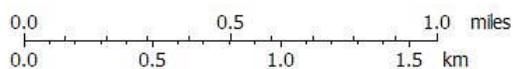
If you decide to scramble through the arch, I found it best to approach from the right side, then traverse left to some carved steps. Carefully ascend these through a short, steep section, then weave your way up less-steep rock, still requiring caution. After this section the rock flattens out before one more short step (left) puts you up on the caprock. Scamper from here over to the Overview point and continue back on the trail to your vehicle.



Lower Rattlesnake Arches trail shown in red. First Arch Overlook trail shown in blue. Scramble under First arch shown in yellow.



detail map



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

TRAILHEAD PARKING: 39,8,14N / 108,50,0W, 5863 feet

TRAIL JUNCTION TO FIRST ARCH OVERLOOK: 39,8,27N / 108,50,15W, 5722 feet

JUNCTION WITH POLLOCK TRAIL: 39,8,32N / 108,50,13W, 5477 feet

START OF ARCHES: 39,8,46N / 108,51,7,5456 feet

END OF TRAIL: 39,8,24,-108,50,33W, 5499 feet

OVERLOOK: 39,8,27N / 108,50,34W, 5624 feet

### Profile for Lower Rattlesnake Canyon Trail- one way

