

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is a vast area of sandstone canyons, plateaus, unique rock formations and cliffs in southern Utah. The 1.7 million acres of desert became the nation's newest national monument in September, 1996.

The monument extends eastward from Bryce Canyon National Park to Capitol Reef National Park and the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. It borders the Dixie National Forest on the north and extends southward to the Arizona state line. Scenic Byway 12 winds through the northern portion, and backways branching from Highway 12 provide access to trails and features in the monument.

The monument is partly named for the Escalante River, which flows from Boulder Mountain to the Colorado River. Deep canyons and gorges have been carved over eons of time. These sandstone labyrinths with unusual rock shapes and slot canyons offer some of the best hiking and backpacking in the world.

When early geologists saw the series of cliffs and plateaus rising 6,000 feet from the Colorado River at the Grand Canyon to Bryce Canyon, they called it the Grand Staircase. Three billion years of geologic history make up the layers of sedimentary rocks. Each of the five "steps" has been eroded, revealing cliffs of distinctive color. Travelers can see the Grand Staircase from some of the viewpoints in Bryce Canyon.

The new monument is a natural treasure of minerals, wildlife and plant life. It was home to the Anasazi Indians and remains of their civilization are scattered throughout the area. (Be sure to stop at the Anasazi Indian Village State Park in Boulder and tour the museum and exhibits). It is a place of breathtaking vistas, desert flowers, canyons and plateaus, and scenery that changes with every turn. It is a place of solitude. It is also a recreational paradise for outdoors enthusiasts offering hiking, backpacking, fishing, camping, horseback riding, ATV riding and mountain biking. Guided hikes and pack trips are available locally, as well as horseback riding, ATV, llama, and Jeep tours.

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is managed by the Bureau of Land Management. When planning to visit the monument, travelers should contact the Interagency Office in Escalante (435-826-5499). Current information on the monument, road conditions, maps, and hiking information is available.



The Escalante River is responsible for carving many of the canyons in the monument.



Hiking and backpacking are the best ways to experience the beauty of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The Burr Trail, which starts at Boulder, is one of the Scenic Backways that travels through the monument. Slot canyons are among the unique features to be explored in the monument. Hikers should be aware of weather conditions to avoid flash floods. Streams along the Escalante River provide habitat for trout and wildlife.

When visiting the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

- Stop at the Interagency Office in Escalante or call 435-826-5499 for current information, road conditions, maps, hiking information, etc.
- Most of the roads inside the monument are dirt roads and are impassable when wet. Some of the roads require high clearance four-wheel drive vehicles.
- No services are available inside the monument, so have plenty of gasoline in your vehicle, and take food, water and emergency supplies with you.
- The best way to experience the beauty of the monument is to get out of your vehicle and hike some of the trails. The area gets hot in the summer, so plan your hikes accordingly.

Photos courtesy of: Bureau of Land Management, Lynn Chamberlain, Steve Howe, James Howells, Brett Jorgensen, Janet Reffert, Jerry Sintz, Utah Travel Council / Frank Jensen. Drawings by Olinda Reynolds.

