

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Colorado River Valley Field Office
2300 River Frontage Road
Silt, CO 81652

Hiking

Rifle Arch

Length: About 1 mile, allow 1-2 hours for the hike

Elevation: About 520 feet elevation gain

Difficulty Level: Easy

Maps: 1:100,000 Glenwood Springs Map

Use: Moderate

Recommended Season: All seasons

Highlights:

This arch is 60 feet high and 150 feet wide and was formed by wind, water, and erosion. It is located on the sandstone formations of the Grand Hogback. The forces that created the Grand Hogback pushed a sandstone layer up to a steep pitch. Water then ran through the fracture lines, creating fissures. Once the fissures were wide enough, the wind went to work on them, widening them more. Freezing and thawing also played a role in creating this formation. The arch is unique because it stands alone. Utah's famous arches are different because they were formed from stratification that were nearly horizontal, and then were down cut vertically, and the erosion occurred on a vertical formation.

Caution: *There is private property west of the trail. Please do not bother the residents and stay out of the private property.*

The trail meanders across sagebrush flats before winding up a hill. You will then connect with an old road or jeep trail, and there are trail markers along the way. Take a good look when the trail joins the road, so you can find it when you return. The trail winds down the roadway and across a ditch before starting back uphill. The last stretch of the trail is through a pinyon and juniper forest. Enjoy the shade of the woods and just keep moving toward the hogback. You will have spotted the arch long before this time and can use it as your guide. The trail ends at a bench or you can clamber over rocks right up into the arch.

Keep an eye out for spring flowers in April and May, and cactus blooms. On warm days, look for playful little lizards, which dart about on the stumps and rocks. Down in the gully to your right, listen for the sound of running spring water. Enjoy the spectacular views of the Colorado River valley and the Battlements.

Access:

Take Highway 13 north of Rifle to mile marker 7. There is a parking area on the right and a gate with a Boy Scout sign that marks the trailhead.

Safety Concerns:

This can be a really hot hike in the summer or early fall, so come prepared with water and maybe a snack when you reach the arch. Also wear good hiking boots or shoes, and use plenty of sunscreen. Be sure to pack out your trash and leave everything the way you found it.