



# DARK CANYON



## Weather and Road Conditions:

The lower elevation trailheads in Dark Canyon are extremely hot in summer; spring and fall are the preferred times to travel. The upper trailheads, often inaccessible in spring due to snow or mud, are pleasant to hike in the summer, but the lower that one hikes into the canyon the more oppressive temperatures become. Seasonal rains come from mid-July to Sep-

tember. This may cause flash flooding and lightning.

Road conditions vary greatly with the weather. Generally they are slippery when wet. High clearance vehicles are recommended. Elk Ridge reaches 8800 feet and the road is generally open only from May through October. Certain portions of the road are in shade and snow melt comes late. Check first with the Forest Service or BLM before using these road.

## Trailheads:

1. The Sundance Trail is the primary access route into the lower portion of Dark Canyon. (See map on reverse side.)
2. Fable Valley is part of the BLM's Dark Canyon Primitive Area. The valley is approximately eight miles long and can be reached by one of two trailheads. The southern trailhead from Dark Canyon Plateau is more easily accessible; the northern trailhead from Beef Basin is very hard to reach. Fable Valley does not get extensive back country use. It has been historically used by cattle; currently livestock do not graze here on a regular basis.

More specific information about all trailheads on the BLM and U.S. Forest Service can be found in the Dark Canyon Trail Guide, published by Canyonlands Natural History Association.

## Sundance Trail Entrance to Dark Canyon

The Sundance Trail can be reached from highway U-95 by a series of dirt roads. These roads may at times require a vehicle with up to six inches of clearance. Four wheel drive vehicles are recommended. Roads may be muddy or impassable during and after rains.

1. From the turnoff to Natural Bridges National Monument, travel west on U-95 for approximately 35 miles to the sign marking Glen Canyon National Recreation Area boundary. Drive about 1.4 miles further on U-95 and turn right onto the first dirt road after the White Canyon Bridge (just before milepost 53 on U-95). Travel 5 miles on San Juan County (SJC) road 2731 to a Y-intersection with SJC 2081. Turn right onto SJC 2081.
2. If coming from Lake Powell on U-95, travel about one mile east from the Hite Marina turnoff. Turn left onto a dirt road directly across from milepost 49. this road is marked SJC 2081. Travel about four miles to a Y-intersection with SJC 2731. Stay on SJC 2081.

This is where the two routes meet, so from either direction travel about 3.4 miles where you will come to a Y-intersection. Do not turn, but this road becomes SJC 256. Stay on 256 for 3.5 miles until you see a wooden BLM sign for the Sundance Trailhead. Continue to the parking lot. Walk the two track road from the parking lot to the trailhead and to the edge of the canyon. From here, the trail descends a 50% talus slope and 1,120 vertical feet into Dark Canyon.



Jed Carling Photo



**Area Information:** Dark Canyon begins high on the edge of Elk Ridge at 8800 feet in elevation and ends at 3700 feet elevation in the desert environment of upper Lake Powell. The Dark Canyon drainage is primarily administered by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Forest Service manages the upper end of the canyon; The USFS Dark Canyon Wilderness Area comprising 45,000 acres. The BLM administers the lower end of the canyon as a primitive area; the Dark Canyon Primitive Area comprising 62,000 acres. The extreme lower end of Dark Canyon is within the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and is administered by the National Park Service.

**Wildlife:** Dark Canyon has many interesting wildlife species. At upper elevations, black bear, deer, elk and mountain lions may occasionally be seen. In the lower elevations there are desert bighorn sheep, ringtail cats and bobcats. Coyotes are found at all elevations as are many species of birds.



