



LOWER IRON WASH AND ERNIE CANYON - EASTERN REEF



Rating: Easy Hiking

Length: 4-6 hours (10 miles)

Gear: Standard Hiking Gear

Maps: Old Woman Wash, UT;

Water: A few seeps, bring all you need to drink.

Flash Flood Danger: Low

Season: Fall, Winter, Spring

Notes: Any vehicle can reach the trailhead. High clearance is needed if just visiting the panels from the lower Ernie Canyon trailhead.

Waypoints:

Trailhead	12S 541913mE 4284060mN N38° 42' 15" W110° 31' 05"
Down	12S 542137mE 4284194mN N38° 42' 19" W110° 30' 55"
Water	12S 543419mE 4287943mN N38° 44' 21" W110° 30' 01"
Lower Iron Wash	12S 544012mE 4288297mN N38° 44' 32" W110° 29' 37"
Lower Ernie	12S 543743mE 4288817mN N38° 44' 49" W110° 29' 48"
Pictograph	12S 543245mE 4288698mN N38° 44' 45" W110° 30' 09"
Panels	12S 543206mE 4288684mN N38° 44' 45" W110° 30' 10"
Biggest Panel	12S 543192mE 4288682mN N38° 44' 45" W110° 30' 11"
Bypass Botom	12S 542711mE 4288221mN N38° 44' 30" W110° 30' 31"
Bypass Top	12S 542758mE 4288233mN N38° 44' 30" W110° 30' 29"
Dryfall	12S 542815mE 4288167mN N38° 44' 28" W110° 30' 26"
Other Bypass Top	12S 542568mE 4288358mN N38° 44' 34" W110° 30' 37"
Road Junction	12S 541006mE 4286752mN N38° 43' 43" W110° 31' 42"

Hype

I've camped on the rim of Iron Wash many times over the years, and always wondered what the section of the canyon below Lost Spring was like. At Lost Spring, it begins cutting into the sandstone and looks potentially very interesting. It turns out to be charming, but not exceptional.

What does make an exceptional day in lower Iron Wash? Making a loop hike out of it and return up lower Ernie Canyon. Though also not exceptional as far as canyons go, lower Ernie Canyon does have a pretty good petroglyph panel that is well worth visiting.

Note: Not interested in the loop? It is easy to follow the directions in reverse and visit the panel alone in a much shorter 2-3 hour outing.

Tags: *hike, rock art, beginner, access: high clearance*

Trailhead

At mile marker 141.6 on highway 24, take the side road on the west side of the highway through the gate. This is about 26 miles north of Hanksville, or 18 miles south of I-70 if coming from Green River.

- Reset as you turn off UT-24. (12S 542367mE 4283583mN / N38° 41' 59" W110° 30' 46")
- 0.6 miles, the road descends into and crosses a wash (the lower end of Iron Wash). This section is generally the worst section of road and usually requires high clearance or a 4x4. The trailhead is just before the road crosses Iron Wash. The road directions below are for reaching lower Ernie Canyon. (12S 541854mE 4284066mN / N38° 42' 15" W110° 31' 07")
- After crossing Iron Wash, the road ascends out of the wash, reaching a junction at 0.9 miles. Go right. (12S 541359mE 4284116mN / N38° 42' 17" W110° 31' 28")
- The road crosses the open desert, coming to a minor junction at 2.8. This junction is where the return hike merges with the road. If just visiting the panels park here. The road can be driven a short distance, but is generally easier walked. (12S 541005mE 4286750mN / N38° 43' 42" W110° 31' 42")

Route

Rock Art and Historic Site Etiquette

Rock art and historic sites are fragile, non-renewable cultural resources that, once damaged, can never be replaced. To ensure they are protected, please:

- Avoid Touching the Petroglyphs: Look and observe, BUT DO NOT TOUCH!
- Stay on the Trails: Stay on the most used trails when visiting sites, and don't create new trails or trample vegetation.
- Photography and Sketching is Allowed: Do not introduce any foreign substance to enhance the carved and pecked images for photographic or drawing purposes. Altering, defacing, or damaging the petroglyphs is against the law -- even if the damage is unintentional.
- Pets: Keep pets on a leash and clean up after them.
- Artifacts: If you happen to come across sherds (broken pottery) or lithics (flakes of stone tools), leave them where you see them. Once they are moved or removed, a piece of the past is forever lost.

Down Iron Wash (4.5 miles / 1.5 hours)

From the trailhead make your way to the bottom of Iron Wash and head down the canyon. A dryfall appears almost immediately. Follow the right rim 1-2 minutes to an easy, slab scramble to the canyon floor. There is also a scramble route in on the left rim.

From the bottom of the dryfall, Iron Wash is easy walking as the canyon never gets particularly deep or impressive, but is still a fun amble. I had expected to find pictographs or petroglyphs in this section but my eye didn't uncover any. Keep an eye out.

When the canyon bottom turns from sandy and open to being tree filled and spring fed, you are nearing the end of Iron Wash to where it opens broadly onto the desert. When it opens, follow the fence line west 10 or so minutes to the next canyon, Ernie Canyon.

Up Ernie (3.25 miles / 1.5 hours)

Heading up Ernie is easy going. Keep an eye out on the right for the first red vertical cliff on the right. This stunning cliff is home to several large petroglyph panels.

Above the panels, easy hiking leads to a dryfall in about 20-30 minutes. From the dryfall, backtrack a minute to an obvious bypass on the right (looking down canyon). This slabby exit is possibly class 4-, and fairly straightforward. If it looks too difficult, continue down canyon a few more minute to an even easier exit on the left.

Once above the dryfall, the canyon passes through a short narrows section before becoming open and less interesting. Continuing along, the wash eventually is crossed by a road. Follow this road as it crosses the wash and continues to a major junction. Right goes to the Ernie Canyon trailhead where it cuts through the reef. Go left.

Back Along The Road (2.1 miles / 1 hour)

45 minutes or so of road walking reaches a junction at Lost Spring. Cross Iron Wash here and your back at the trailhead.

