Hype

Nine Mile Canyon is known as the world's longest art gallery. The canyon is about 40 miles long but became named Nine Mile Canyon when F. M. Bishop on Powell's expedition to the area did a nine-mile triangulation drawing he named Nine Mile Creek. For rock art enthusiasts, this is an absolute top of the list place to visit. The canyon is home to hundreds of rock art panels, as well as granaries, and other Native American sites. It is an astonishing place to visit.

History

Nine Mile Canyon shows evidence of Fremont occupancy from about 950-1250 AD. During their time in Nine Mile Canyon, Fremont set up villages, rock art, and sophisticated farming and irrigation along the creek in the canyon bottom. The more aggressive hunter and gatherer tribes Shoshoni, Paiute and Ute likely displaced the Fremont.

Utes are known to have inhabited the canyon from about 1600 onward. They added their own rock art, in their style. Some rock art, for instance, depicts horses which would show they were created more recently than Fremont.

The oldest confirmed white visitor is S. Groesbeck who carved his inscription in the canyon on August 19, 1867, though trappers and fur traders likely at least passed through the canyon before him.

In 1886 Nine Mile Canyon road was constructed through the canyon by Buffalo Soldiers. This was meant to connect Fort Duchesne to Price and allowed much easier access and settlement in the region. Farmers, ranchers, and other begin settlement of the canyon in earnest. With settlement came the small town of Harper in 1905 that boasted a population of 190 at its peak before declining to a ghost town in the 1920s.

Today the canyon is a mix of ranchers, visitors, and the oil and gas industry. Some conflict between visitors and ranchers over the years led the BLM to facilitate land swaps for several areas in the canyon. This has allowed greater access to visitors in exchange for other land for ranchers. The oil and gas industry has encroached in the canyon with several facilities now both in the canyon, and on the flat lands above the rim.

The sites described below are my favorites and ones that I think everyone should see and that I find particularly interesting. There are over 1000 petroglyphs in Nine Mile Canyon. Keep a sharp eye out as you
drive, and you will see many more than described below. You may find a favorite I missed in my travels. I have visited the canyon a half dozen times and am always amazed by rock art I see that my eyes had not seen on earlier trips.

Notes:

- Though many people visit for a day, if you enjoy rock art, it is a wonderful place to spend a couple of days.
- The Nine Mile Ranch in the canyon bottom is the only lodging in the canyon. It offers cabins and a campground.
- There is no camping allowed on public lands in Nine Mile Canyon. If camping, you will need to drive out of the canyon to camp.
- Have plenty of gas, water, and supplies. There are no services in the canyon.
- I highly recommend bringing binoculars.
- Visiting in the winter (if there is not heavy snow on the ground), is a lovely time to visit.

Tags: hike, rock art, indian ruins, dog friendly, family friendly, access: paved, access: 2wd

Trailhead

Nine Mile Canyon is reached from either Myton or Wellington. Starting from Wellington is the most common and what is described here. From Wellington, travel east on US-191 (Main Street). On the east end of Wellington, about 2 miles from the main town of Wellington is a Cheveron Station on the left.

There is an informational sign at the Cheveron for Nine Mile Canyon. The road to Nine Mile begins south of the Cheveron as Soldier Creek Road. Reset your odometer at the junction of US-191 and Soldier Creek Road, and head north on Soldier Creek Road. Nine Mile Canyon is well signed, with the first site being about 20 miles from the 191/Soldier Creek Junction.

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.

The numbers below are mile markers, with 0 being the mile marker at US-191/Soldier Creek Rd where you reset your odometer. A few of the mile markers are missing, but most are in place. Mile markers seemed off when I visited, so mileage posted are from the nearest mile post to minimize error. GPS useful for double checking you are in the correct spot.
20.45 - Side canyon on left. (Brundage Cove) The first panel of Nine Mile Canyon is 100 feet down the road on the left up the steep bank, somewhat hidden by trees. (12S 540848mE 4401548mN / N39° 45' 46" W110° 31' 23")

21.6 - Minnie Maud Creek (12S 541959mE 4402916mN / N39° 46' 31" W110° 30' 36")

24 - Nine Mile Ranch - This ranch, on the right side of the road, offers camping, showers, and cabins. It is the only lodging in or relatively near Nine Mile Canyon. They are (as of 2020), open all year. http://9mileranch.com/ (12S 545546mE 4403075mN / N39° 46' 35" W110° 28' 05")

24.2 - Nine Mile Ranch Second Entrance (12S 545849mE 4402981mN / N39° 46' 32" W110° 27' 53")
26.7 - First Panel (signed 26.4). Parking on the right. There are many petroglyphs at various levels here. (12S 549246mE 4403481mN / N39° 46' 47" W110° 25' 30")

27.7 - Cottonwood Glen Day Area - This stop, on the right side of the road, has restrooms and a picnic area. The day-use area is the site where Don Johnstun and his family initially homesteaded in 1896. The log home is not the original one built, but still quite old. (12S 550430mE 4404274mN / N39° 47' 13" W110° 24' 40")
29.4 - Panel up under a ledge. One of my favorites, with very long necked sheep and figures that are holding shields. (12S 552500mE 4405517mN | N39° 47' 53" W110° 23' 12")
30.2 - Park just after the trees on the left. The panel is up in the cliff band above the trees. One appears to be a sheep with a baby sheep under it, to the right of the sheep 100 feet or so are what appear to be horses. (12S 553249mE 4406276mN / N39° 48' 17" W110° 22' 41")
30.6 - Small panel on the left.  

12S 553846mE 4406010mN / N39° 48' 08" W110° 22' 16"

31 - Harper - Now signed No Trespassing, Harper was once the community center for those living in Nine Mile Canyon. The small community boasted a Post Office and 13 room hotel that burned down. Now a few dilapidated buildings are all that remain of this once thriving little community.  

12S 554072mE 4405792mN / N39° 48' 01" W110° 22' 06"
31.1 - Small panel with a person leading a horse. (12S 554455mE 4405870mN | N39° 48’ 04” W110° 21’ 50”)

31.8 - Argyle Canyon Jct (12S 555389mE 4406145mN | N39° 48’ 13” W110° 21’ 11”)

32.4 - Small pullout on the left. Good rock art just before and after the pullout. (12S 556151mE 4405749mN | N39° 47’ 59” W110° 20’ 39”)

Nine Mile Canyon - Wellington - Road Trip Ryan, LLC - Copyright 2006-2020
32.475 - Balanced Rock / Pig Head Rock - One of my favorite features. Balanced Rock is visible on the left side of the road. There is a small panel on the west side of Balanced Rock at its base, however, just past the Balanced Rock are many excellent panels on the low cliffs above the road. Be sure to walk about 200 feet past Balanced Rock to find the petroglyphs up on the cliff faces to the left. Parking just past Balanced Rock at a pullout. (12S 556286mE 4405790mN / N39° 48’ 01” W110° 20’ 33”)

32.6 - Pullout on the left. An excellent horned snake and many dots. Not far above the road. (12S 556385mE 4405937mN / N39° 48' 06" W110° 20' 29")

33.1 - Stone house on the right and old building on the left. No trespassing, but interesting to see from the road. This is referred to as Winn Rock House after its original resident Dennis Winn. (12S 556423mE 4406779mN / N39° 48' 33" W110° 20' 27")
33.6 - Harmon Junction. Park just after the junction on the right. Across and above the road is a long cliff band with many petroglyphs. The panels span a fair distance. (12S 557277mE 4406610mN / N39° 48' 27" W110° 19' 51")

35 - Owl Panel - Just past a building on the right is a short side road to a dirt parking area on the left. This is the owl panel, one of my favorites. Park in the parking area and follow a social trail. The trail crosses the wash and heads north to a rock face toward the back of the canyon. It is less than a 5 minute walk to a great panel. The bear claw on this panel is one of my favorites. (12S 558855mE 4407671mN / N39° 49' 01" W110° 18' 44")
35.2 - Snake Panel - A worn social trail climbs up to an interesting panel with many geometric and anthropomorphic figures. It is worth the walk up to view it closely. (12S 559158mE 4407601mN | N39° 48' 59" W110° 18' 32")

35.5 - There is a patina cliff band near the skyline. From the road a series of diamond shapes can just be made out. This is a steep, loose hike to reach the base, but there are many great figures on this section of rock. It includes one of the longest lines I have seen. (12S 559651mE 4407544mN | N39° 48' 57" W110° 18' 11")
35.6 - Panel up and right of a small tree. Binoculars from the road are probably the easiest way to see it. (32S 559825mE 4407450mN / N39° 48’ 54” W110° 18’ 04”)

35.9-35.97 - There is a bend in the road. Park just after the bend. There are several good panels before and around the bend on the cliff band above the road. This is just before Currant Creek and an oil facility on the left. (32S 560206mE 4407173mN / N39° 48’ 45” W110° 17’ 48”)

36.6 - Small pullout just before a side canyon. Panel above. (12S 561159mE 4407259mN | N39° 48’ 47" W110° 17’ 08")

37.05 - Just behind a boulder with more modern graffiti is a series of small red pictograph men. There are also remnants of a much larger pictograph that rock fall as removed most of. (12S 561989mE 4407212mN | N39° 48’ 45" W110° 16’ 33")
37.2 - Pullout on the right. A flat trail leads a short distance to pictographs and petroglyphs. Pictographs are less common in Nine Mile than petroglyphs, and this is a good one to visit. (12S 562196mE 4407118mN / N39° 48' 42" W110° 16' 24")

38.1 - Preston Nutter Ranch - The Preston Nutter Ranch was headquarters to the Nutters Corporation, a massive cattle operation with more than 300,000 acres under its control. Preston was often referred to as Utah's Cattle King! He settled down in the area after he married at 58 years old. Once a very bustling ranch, Nutters Ranch was the site of brief military occupation from about 1886 to 1892, and a relay station was set up during that time that was in use until 1907 to relay between Fort Duchesne and Price. The ranch structures have burned twice over the years, and what currently remains was built in the 1940s. The ranch must have been quite the social scene, as it was the site of a saloon built in the late 1800s. The Nutters were also known for the peacocks they kept. Peacocks and a saloon, what a scene! It is hard to imagine the hustle and bustle of the ranch given its current tranquility. The ranch is private property. (12S 563600mE 4406754mN / N39° 48' 30" W110° 15' 25")

38.5 - Gate Canyon Junction. The road to the left turns to dirt shortly and goes north to Myton Utah. Note: About a mile up Gate Canyon there used to be a rock arch that spanned the wash. It was destroyed in 1905 over concerns it would collapse from the vibrations of wagon wheels passing through it. (12S 564061mE 4407145mN / N39° 48' 43" W110° 15' 06")
38.8 - Park just after the cattle guard on the left. Go back across the cattle guard and follow a social trail up to an excellent panel with a variety of animal figures. There is also a panel north of the parking area on the right toward the back of the small side drainage. (12S 564543mE 4407030mN | N39° 48' 39" W110° 14' 45")

39.3 - Nutters Corral on the right, and oil well facilities on the left. There is a good panel across from the corral, before the cliff bends around toward the oil well facilities. The canyon, Water Canyon, has many panels around its confluence with Nine Mile. (12S 565215mE 4407041mN | N39° 48' 39" W110° 14' 17")
40.1 - Park on the right. After crossing some brush, a social trail goes up to an interesting panel that is carved around an outcropping. Unique. (12S 566250mE 4406356mN / N39° 48' 17“ W110° 13' 34“)

40.6 - Social trail to a small panel. (12S 566938mE 4405938mN / N39° 48' 03“ W110° 13' 05“)

41.1 - Cattle guard. Stop just after the cattle guard. Looking down the road, turn left until three trees near the base of the cliff are spotted. Right a little bit and up is a well-preserved granary. It can be frustratingly hard to spot, but obvious once you do! (12S 567358mE 4405409mN / N39° 47' 46“ W110° 12' 48“)
41.6 - Remains of a stone structure on the left, mostly in the ground. (12S 567859mE 4405005mN | N39° 47' 32" W110° 12' 27'"

43.7 - BLM Dry Canyon access road. This is the public right of way to Dry Canyon and requires a 4wd to cross Nine Mile Creek. (12S 570729mE 4404133mN | N39° 47' 03" W110° 10' 26"

44 - Dry Canyon Oil Well Road. This road is a much easier access road to Dry Canyon, if the gate is open and it is not signed No Trespassing. See Dry Canyon side trip below. (12S 571139mE 4404255mN | N39° 47' 07" W110° 10' 09"
44 - Rassmussen's Cave Side Road - A dirt road leaves the paved road to visit the large alcove. This alcove is known as Rassmussen's Cave. The cave, excavated in the 1930s, had many artifacts found at the time. Today you can see several worn areas in the rock where corn was ground. Rassmussen's Cave is also home to the famous "No Tresspassing" graffiti. You will likely recognize the pictograph and graffiti, as it is used prominently in many brochures and books about how NOT to treat rock art. According to a local we met in the canyon, the landowner became frustrated with visitors entering his land and enrolled the help of boy scouts to go to the alcove and write "Keep Out" and "No Trespassing" in the 1980s. He didn't accompany them and was a bit surprised at where they painted the warning. (and that they misspelled trespassing) The BLM now owns the property due to a land trade with the landowner. It is legal to visit. ( 12S 571119mE 4404267mN / N39° 47' 07" W110° 10' 10")
44.15 - Daddy Canyon Trailhead - This signed pullout has a picnic area (on the north side of the road) and a restroom (on the south side of the road). The Daddy Canyon Complex is one of my favorite areas to visit. Park on the north side of the road near the picnic area. A BLM trail goes north along the southeast facing cliffs visiting a few panels, then crosses the dry wash, and circles back along the southwest-facing cliffs to the road. The southwest-facing cliffs have many fascinating petroglyphs, and the trail goes near a pictograph in the wash. Note: A social trail continues up Daddy Canyon, passing through a fence. Though I have never found additional panels up Daddy Canyon, it is a beautiful place to hike if you are looking to get some energy out. The social trail deteriorates a bit, but the going is relatively easy. Historical Note: Daddy Canyon is said to have been named by Katherine Nutter, who often referred to her much older husband as Daddy. (12S 571349mE 4404318mN / N39° 47' 09" W110° 10' 00")

45 - Cottonwood / Nine Mile Junction. Stay right, but see below for Lower Nine Mile Canyon side trip. (12S 572712mE 4404103mN / N39° 47' 02" W110° 09' 03")
45.8 - Fremont Village Pullout - The next stop is the Fremont Village on the south side of the road. This short trail climbs to the remains of an old Native American village. As of 2019, one area is excavated, and you can see the remains of the walls in that area. Continue along the trail, and it climbs to an excellent overlook of the valley below and a large boulder. The boulder has several open cave areas under it and was used by native peoples. Looking across the canyon (north) from the upper section of the trail, you can spot structures on a ledge across the canyon. These cannot be visited in person but can be seen reasonably well with binoculars. (12S 573897mE 4404157mN / N39° 47’ 03” W110° 08’ 13”)
46.0 - Big Buffalo Panel Pullout - A short distance from the Fremont Village turnoff is the Buffalo Site pullout. The pullout is on the left (east) side of the road. From the parking area, the trail crosses Cottonwood Wash, which is generally dry or small enough to step over, then goes directly east to the petroglyph panel. Note: North of the Big Buffalo panel is a fence. Across this fence and around the corner is a petroglyph named the Pregnant Buffalo Panel. As of 2020, this was not posted no trespassing, and a social trail passed around the fence. The trail continues around to the panel where the trail ends. (12S 574122mE 4404055mN \(N39^\circ 46' 60"
W110^\circ 08' 04"\))
46.3 - The Great Hunt Panel Trailhead - The Great Hunt Panel is well known as one of the iconic petroglyph panels in Utah. It is a short walk on a flat gravel trail from the parking area to visit. The Great Hunt Panel is one panel not to miss, and one to plan on spending some time enjoying. From the parking area of The Great Hunt Panel, there is more rock art just up the road about 0.2 miles. Walk up the road a couple of minutes. There is a panel on the right a bit above eye level. The Hunter Panel is the last stop. (12S 574047mE 4403573mN / N39° 46' 44" W110° 08' 07")

Dry Canyon Side Trip

Dry Canyon is quite stunning. It is sheer walled and narrower than Nine Mile. Though there is only one panel in the canyon that I have seen, it is worthwhile to make the side trip. If not using the river crossing, the road is generally good and passable by 2wd vehicles most of the time.
Dry Canyon - 1.8 - Either using the oil well road, or the BLM creek crossing, reset your odometer at the oil facility. As the road heads up Dry Canyon, it passes The Mummy, a prominent spire near the road. It is 1.8 miles of generally good 2wd road to a small parking area on the right. A panel is visible from the parking area, as well as more along the cliff. ( 12S 570970mE 4401473mN / N39° 45' 37" W110° 10' 17")

**Lower Nine Mile Canyon**

Lower Nine Mile Canyon is mostly private land. It is signed No Trespassing, but the BLM has a public right of way to North Franks Canyon. You MUST stay on the road through the private property, but access is allowed if you stay on the road.

The lower canyon has two panels next to the road that are easily visible from the road. I enjoyed seeing Lower Nine Mile Canyon and North Franks Canyon but would rate most of the other sites described a bit more highly. I'd save this for last and do it if you happen to have time, but not put it at the top of your visit list.

Lower Nine Mile - 0.7 - Cattle Guard and No Trespassing sign. ( 12S 573749mE 4404323mN / N39° 47' 08" W110° 08' 19")
Lower Nine Mile - 2.25 - Excellent panel above the road. Stay on the road to avoid trespassing, but easily viewable from the road.  

(12S 57658mE 4404578mN / N39° 47' 16"  W110° 06' 59")

Lower Nine Mile - 2.7 - Gate and many No Trespassing signs. Public access is allowed as long as you stay on the main road. The gate should not be locked.  

(12S 576192mE 4404798mN / N39° 47' 23"  W110° 06' 36")
Lower Nine Mile - 4.4 - Panel next to the road. Not as striking as many of the panels in Nine Mile, but a lot of designs in a small area. Some of the panel has flaked off. Stay on the road to avoid trespassing, but easily viewable from the road. (12S 578239mE 4405763mN / N39° 47' 54" W110° 05' 10")
Lower Nine Mile - 5.2 - North Franks Canyon and gate. North Franks Canyon (left) is BLM land. The road continuing down Nine Mile Canyon is now private WITH NO PUBLIC ACCESS. North Franks is an interesting place to take a short side hike up the road among towering walls before returning. The road up North Franks is 4wd and continues all the way to the Sand Wash Road. (12S 578924mE 4406479mN / N39° 48' 17" W110° 04' 41")