



THE GREAT GALLERY - HORSESHOE CANYON



Rating: Moderate Hike

Length: 3-5 hours (7.8 miles)

Gear: Standard Hiking Gear

Maps: Sugarloaf Butte, UT

Water: None, bring all you will need.

Season: Fall, Winter, Spring

Waypoints:

Trailhead	12S 569738mE 4258674mN N38° 28' 25" W110° 12' 02"
Dino	12S 569903mE 4257933mN N38° 28' 01" W110° 11' 55"
High gallery	12S 570003mE 4257315mN N38° 27' 41" W110° 11' 51"
Horseshoe gallery	12S 569850mE 4257407mN N38° 27' 44" W110° 11' 58"
Alcove gallery	12S 569304mE 4256724mN N38° 27' 22" W110° 12' 20"
Great gallery	12S 568672mE 4255716mN N38° 26' 50" W110° 12' 47"

Hype

The Great Gallery is often referred to as the pictograph panel that all others are compared to, and the best preserved Barrier Canyon Style panel in existence today. If you are interested in Indian art, this is an absolute must see.

The Great Gallery is a single panel about 200 feet long with about 20 images, but the hike itself visits several other panels along the way as well, making for a full day with lots to see. The panels are believed to be between 1500 to 4000 years old, and were created during the late archaic period. Interestingly, The Great Gallery has been reproduced in both the Museum of Modern Art and the Denver Natural History Museum.

Canyonlands National Park was extended to include this area and insure the rock art is protected for future generations to see. As such, no camping in Horseshoe Canyon proper, no dogs, and no hunting. There is not a fee to visit. There is a "campground" at the trailhead which consists of a pit toilet and flat area with a few pullouts. There is no fee to use the camping area, but no picnic tables, firepits, or water. Finally, the dirt road out is long. **Stay out of this area if rain is expected, the road can become impassable quickly.** Generally a carefully driven car can reach the trailhead, but high clearance is recommended. The last mile or so from the main road to the trailhead has a few rough spots that may give low clearance vehicles pause.

For those visiting in spring or fall, there are ranger led tours on Saturdays starting at the trailhead at 9AM. **Visiting in the summer is NOT recommended, as temperatures easily top 100 degrees Fahrenheit. IT**

SHOULD GO WITHOUT SAYING, BUT DON'T TOUCH THE ROCK ART!

From the NPS:

Horseshoe Canyon

The isolation and remote nature of this desert environment was shattered during the 1920's with oil exploration. Roads followed and "Barrier" Canyon became more accessible. Today, a hiking trail follows the former road into the canyon. Be prepared for tough, high-altitude hiking with summer temperatures exceeding 100 F (38 C). Hike early or late in the day, taking ample breaks in the shade of the cottonwood trees.

Barrier Canyon

Since the turn of the century, visitors have been fascinated by the magnificent rock art site of Horseshoe Canyon, once known as Barrier Canyon. Barrier Canyon rock art is typified by large front-facing human figures. Most of the figures are colored a solid red by the mineral hematite and some are highly decorated with dots, spirals, wavy lines, and animals. The figures usually lack arms or legs. Figures with arms often hold plants like wild grasses, or snakes. Dogs and birds are sometimes painted near the human figures.

Barrier Canyon rock art was created by Archaic hunter-gatherers during 1,000-2,000 B.C. Clay figurines found in Early Archaic archaeological sites resemble the long, tapering bodies and rounded shoulders of the rock art. However the clay figures date several thousand years earlier. Split-twig figurines are also associated with Barrier Canyon rock art. While the figurines or the rock art mean remains a mystery.

For the academic minded, there is a great [paper on the age of the Great Gallery](#).

Tags: hike, rock art, family friendly, access: high clearance

Trailhead

A carefully driven car can reach the trailhead in most conditions. If wet, stay out of here, the roads are very difficult when wet.

Reach the trailhead by going west from Green River Utah on I-70 to the junction with highway 24 that goes south to Hanksville. Go toward Hanksville for about 25 miles to Mile Post 135.5.

- Turn left (east) onto a signed, graded road at mile post 135.5 and reset your odometer. (12S 537332mE 4275067mN / N38° 37' 24" W110° 34' 16")
- Follow this two-wheel-drive graded dirt road for 24.5 miles to an obvious junction with an information kiosk. Right goes toward Hans Flat. Straight/left goes to the Great Gallery/Green River. Reset your odometer at this junction. (12S 562756mE 4258500mN / N38° 28' 21" W110° 16' 50")
- Go straight/left on the main dirt road. It continues heading east, then turns north. Follow it for 5.1 miles to a side road on the right signed Horseshoe Canyon. (12S 569083mE 4261086mN / N38° 29' 44" W110° 12' 28")
- Follow the side road to its end and trailhead after 1.6 miles. There is a pit toilet and several spots for camping at the trailhead. (12S 569739mE 4258673mN / N38° 28' 25" W110° 12' 02")

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.

Follow the trail as it descends into Horseshoe Canyon. When a water tank comes into view part way down, keep an eye out for a dinosaur track at the edge of the trail. It is surrounded by a circle of rocks and easily visible.

Once at the bottom of Horseshoe Canyon, head up stream. The first panel, High Panel, is on the left 10 minutes up. It is named after its location a bit off the canyon floor. If you reach a side canyon coming in on the left (Water Canyon), you have missed it, backtrack down canyon a short distance. Water Canyon is a nice side hike on the way down if you have extra time.

Just up from High Panel is Horseshoe Panel on the right. (less than 10 minutes up canyon) Be sure to wander around the boulder pile on the trail, there is an interesting pictograph behind the boulders.

Next stop is the Alcove Panel on the right, 15 minutes or so above Horseshoe Panel.

From Alcove Panel, it is an easy 30 minutes / 1 mile or so amble up to the Great Gallery proper. Absolutely stunning! It receives good light in the morning, and shade in the afternoon, though I think it photographs well in most lights.

For the motivated, about 10 minutes or so further up canyon is an old horse trail visible leaving Horseshoe Canyon on the left. This makes a good turn around spot, and is interesting to see how they blasted a route out of the canyon for cattle.

Return the same way.

