

ARCHES NATIONAL PARK: BALANCED ROCK, NORTH AND SOUTH WINDOWS, TURRET ARCH, DOUBLE ARCH, LOWER DELICATE ARCH VIEWPOINT, AND FIERY FURNACE VIEWPOINT
AND
LA SAL MOUNTAIN LOOP ROAD: CASTLE ROCK, WARNER LAKE, AND OOWAH LAKE

The last time I had been to Arches National Park was in 2004, so it had been almost 11 years since I had done any hiking in the park. Thus we decided to do some of the shorter hikes in Arches, before driving the La Sal Mountain Loop Road. While in Arches, we first checked out the Balanced Rock, which we hadn't stopped at in 2004. Then, we hiked out to Turret Arch and the North and South Windows, which were quite crowded, so taking photos of these formations was difficult (in 2004 we had hiked these later in the evening, and there were very few tourists there then, but I didn't have a good camera at that time). We next began to hike over to Double Arch, but, as two tour buses worth of tourists were already there, we decided that we wouldn't be able to get any better photos than we were getting from a distance, hence we chose to continue along the main park road. Our next stop was at the Lower Delicate Arch viewpoint. As the park service was doing construction on the parking lot for the Delicate Arch hike, parking spaces were quite limited, so we instead stopped at the viewpoint of the arch which was located a short distance from the road. This actually turned out to be a good choice, as I remember when hiking to the arch previously I had wondered what the part of the park on the other side of the arch was like, and by checking out the viewpoint I was able to get a much better idea of the area surrounding the arch. Then, we continued on to the Fiery Furnace viewpoint. Due to conflicting information on registering for tours, we had not been able to get a spot on a Fiery Furnace tour, though we hope to do this sometime in the future. Finally, we drove on to the end of the main Arches National Park road and saw that there was absolutely no parking for any of the arches in the Devils Garden area, so we instead saw what we could see from the main road (we had done most of these hikes in 2004 anyway).

Next, we headed back out of the park and continued on towards the La Sal Mountain Loop Road, passing by Castle Rock and some viewpoints on our way to Warner Lake. We knew that we wouldn't have time for any hiking in the La Sal Mountains, but we wanted to see what the roads were like and what sort of hiking there was (as I hadn't been able to find much information online about the hikes which would be possible to do in the La Sal Mountains during this time of year). We briefly walked around Warner Lake, noting that we had gained a bit of elevation on the road and were up near some high mountains, but we would have to hike further to get out of the forest enough to see really good views. Then, we went back to the main road and checked out Oowah Lake, which doesn't seem to be as nice of a lake as Warner Lake and isn't as high up in the mountains, but has some short hikes to other lakes (note that Warner Lake Road goes along the side of the mountains to get to the lake, whereas Oowah Lake Road follows a river). Finally, we continued along the loop road, stopping briefly at an overlook for Mill Creek, which seems to be a popular rock climbing area in a relatively narrow canyon.

This is the view of the Windows Section of the park, where the North and South Windows are located (one of the windows can just barely be seen right of center in this photo):



We first stopped at the Balanced Rock trail:



The sun angle made for interesting HDR photography of the balanced rock:



Looking over across the Windows Section at the La Sal Mountains:



Panorama from the other side of Balanced Rock, towards where Pothole Arch is; note the little balanced rock in the center of the photo at the skyline:



Balanced Rock from the other side; the rock formation just underneath the balanced rock looks sort of like cement, but it isn't:



Panorama from near the parking lot looking towards the Fiery Furnace and Devils Garden areas of the park:



Balanced Rock and a monument of sorts behind it, with the La Sal Mountains off to the left:



Looking over towards Double Arch from the parking area for the windows:



It was interesting to see this photo of snow on Turret Arch; like Zion National Park, Arches would be an interesting park to visit in the winter:



Panorama of Turret Arch, with the North Window on the right and Double Arch just barely visible right of center:



I tried to get some HDR photos of the North Window while looking through Turret Arch, but the sun angle didn't work out for such a photo (there were too many people around to get a photo of Turret from the North Window, which seems to be a more popular photo to get):



Panorama from behind Turret Arch:



Turret has this smaller arch to one side:



I kept trying to get a HDR photo of Turret Arch like the one I did of the Balanced Rock, but they didn't work out as well:



Looking over towards the La Sal Mountains from this other side of Turret Arch, with the petrified dunes in between:



One last HDR panorama attempt of Turret Arch:



From here, we continued on to the North and South Windows; this is looking towards the southeast end of the Windows Section:



Photo of the North (left) and South (right) windows:



There were lots of these pink and white flowers around here; the pink ones were wilted, so it looked like they bloomed first and then the white ones were blooming while we were there:



The flowers photographed well with the North Window in the background:



HDR photo of the North Window, using the nearby plants to block out the tour bus worth of tourists congregated below the arch:



I didn't think the South Window was quite as photogenic as the North Window, though it's still very nice:



Looking back over at Turret Arch from here; these formations really are incredible:



One last photo of the North Window, after the tour bus group had left:



The next stop was Double Arch:



Looking over at Double Arch (to the right) with some smaller arches and alcoves off to the sides:



Looking back over at the North Window:



A closer view of Double Arch:



Panorama of the Windows Section from where we parked:



We stopped briefly at the Lower Delicate Arch Viewpoint, as we had hiked out to the arch itself back in 2004:



I needed a better zoom lens to get a good photo of the arch up on the hillside, but at least from this photo one can see that this is certainly an interesting area to hike in:



The Cache Valley Road isn't marked on park maps; driving over the sidewalk curb is probably the easiest obstacle encountered on this road, and the road supposedly gets substantially less maintained once it leaves the park, eventually becoming a difficult 4x4 trail:



Next, we stopped at the Fiery Furnace viewpoint:



Panorama of this lower part of the Fiery Furnace:



The aerial photo on this sign gives a better idea how extensive this formation really is:



Looking back over at the Windows Section from here:



Panorama looking closer in to the Fiery Furnace from the lower viewpoint:



We didn't have time to walk out to Sand Dune Arch; it can just barely be seen to the left in the photo:



Skyline Arch is easily visible from the main road:



We turned around at the Devils Garden parking area as the parking lot was full and we still wanted to see the La Sal Mountain Loop Road; this is the view looking over towards Herdina Park:



View of Courthouse Wash on our drive back out of the park:



More rock formations in the Courthouse Towers area:



These are the Three Gossips:



From here, we continued on to the La Sal Mountain Loop Road; on the left is the Priest With Ruins formation, and on the right is Castle Rock:



Looking down from an overlook on this valley we had driven up; note that Castle Rock and the Priest with Ruins are visible on the right:



Looking up at where the loop road is heading; there was a lot of greenery up on this road:



Another view back towards Castle Valley:



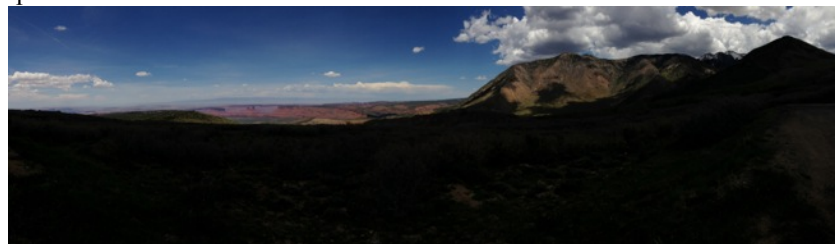
Panorama of the part of the La Sal Mountain loop road that switchbacks up and out of Castle Valley:



The views out towards Castle Valley were great from this part of the road:



Panorama from a larger viewpoint:



Arches National Park can just barely be seen far off in the distance:



There were lots of trails in this area, but unfortunately I hadn't been able to find a decent trail map thus we didn't do any hiking here:



Looking over at the tall, snowy peaks from further up the road:



Another view of these peaks, this time from the Warner Lake Road:



The Warner Lake Road is well graded and seemed to be passable in a passenger car when we were there:



The road ends in the forest seen in the left side of the photo:



There looked to be lots of great hiking at this trailhead:



It was pleasantly different scenery from the nearby national parks:



Panorama of Warner Lake:



We took a short walk through this nice forest in hopes of getting more views of the nearby peaks:



The trail looked like it was popular with mountain bikers:



Crossing a meadow and getting a brief view of one of the snowy peaks:



Then, the trail re-entered the trees, so we decided to cut cross-country to try to get a view:



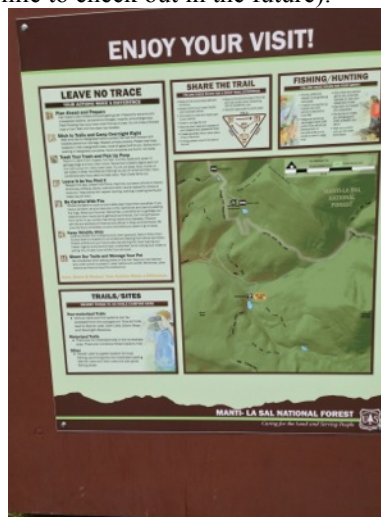
Panorama from a high point near the meadow we crossed earlier:



From here, we headed back down the Warner Lake Road towards the La Sal Mountain Loop Road; looking down on the loop road before descending the last switchbacks of the Warner Lake Road:



Our next stop was at Oowah Lake; the road to this lake seems to be popular with ATV drivers as we saw a lot of them when we drove up. There was a short trail to nearby Clark Lake, and also a trail which connects to the Geyser Pass Road (this road appeared to get way up into the mountains and would be worthwhile to check out in the future):



The trailhead to Clark Lake, 1.2 miles away (we decided not to check it out on this trip):



Oowah Lake:



The lake seems to have been created/enlarged by a dam:



From there, we headed back to the main road. This is the best view of Mill Creek that we could get from the road:



Looking back up towards the Warner Lake Road (which ends in the patch of green seen in the middle of the photo) and the Oowah Lake Road (which goes up the valley seen to the left of center in the photo):



Looking out towards Moab from here:



One last photo of a snow covered peak from the La Sal Mountain loop road:

