

ISLAND IN THE SKY DISTRICT OF CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK: MESA ARCH, GRAND VIEW POINT, GREEN RIVER OVERLOOK, AZTEC BUTTE, UPHEAVAL DOME FIRST VIEWPOINT, AND SHAFER TRAIL OVERLOOK

The Island in the Sky district of Canyonlands has many spectacular viewpoints located on the main park road. Other viewpoints are located off of the White Rim Road, which can be completed as a multi-day drive on a 4WD road; we didn't have time to drive any part of this road, but we were able to get good views of it from most of the viewpoints we did check out. Our first stop was Mesa Arch, a half-mile loop to a very nice arch on the cliff edge, from which excellent photos can be taken in the morning lighting. Then, we continued on to the Grand View Point trail, to get views before the weather got too hot. This point seems to be where the most spectacular panoramas can be taken of the White Rim Road and of the formations near the confluence of the Colorado and Green Rivers. We next stopped at the Green River Overlook, which has much better views than may appear from a map, and overlooks Soda Springs Basin. After that, we checked out the Aztec Butte trail, which climbs up a slick-rock butte to a few granaries, and the first Upheaval Dome viewpoint, which overlooks this interesting formation. We had considered doing more hiking around the Upheaval Dome area, but as it was starting to get too hot for us to be in the sun for more than a couple mile hike, we decided to only check out the first viewpoint. On the drive out of the park, we stopped at the Shafer Canyon Viewpoint to photograph the views of this canyon and the Shafer Trail switchbacking steeply down it.

Mesa Arch spectacularly frames nearby formations such as the La Sal Mountains, Washer Woman Arch, and Monster Tower:



Because of the cryptobiotic soil, one must be very careful to walk only on trails, slickrock, or streambeds here:



Our first view of Mesa Arch (to the left) and the Buck Canyon area of Canyonlands:



We would probably have gotten better photos had we arrived here earlier, nearer to sunrise, but the morning lighting was still great for photography:



As seen through Mesa Arch, Washer Woman Arch is on the left and Monster Tower on the right:



This panorama shows just how close the arch is to the cliff face:



Next, we stopped at the Grand View Point overlook; this view is into monument basin. It would certainly be amazing to drive the White Rim Road and see all those monuments down there closer up:



Looking over at Junction Butte:



From Grand View Point, one can see all the way down to the Needles District:



The views of this part of the park are spectacular:



Here we can see the White Rim Road winding its way up and out of Murphy Basin; it looks like it might be possible to do a (very long) day trip out to Murphy Basin, but it would require a lot of research before our next trip:



Panorama of Junction Butte and the Murphy Basin Area:



Many of the roads visible from this viewpoint are old mining roads, which were in place long before Canyonlands became a national park and are no longer drivable:



Another panorama looking towards Junction Butte:



Looking out at the White Rim on our way back along the Grand View Point trail:



The views of Monument Basin and the La Sal Mountains from here are spectacular:



The White Rim Road crosses very close to the edge of Monument Basin in one spot, and it's typically wise to ensure that only one vehicle attempts to cross that spot at a time:



The next stop was at the Green River Overlook:



Powell explored this area of the Green and Colorado Rivers in 1869 :



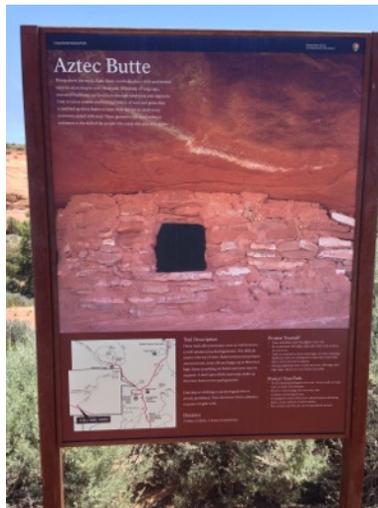
Looking out towards Soda Springs Basin from here:



The large rock to the right is sometimes called the halfdome:



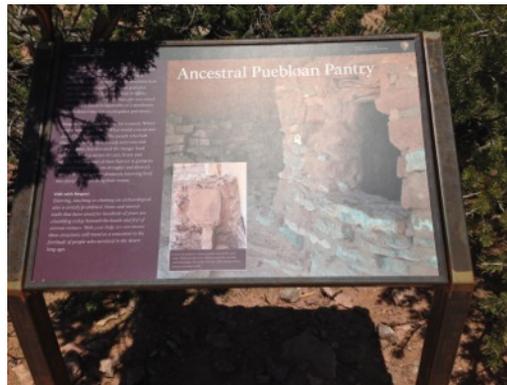
We then continued on to the Aztec Butte trailhead:



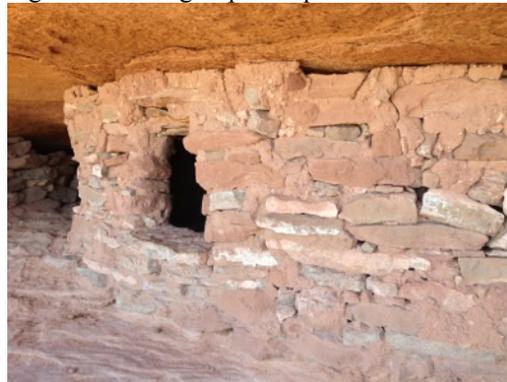
I think the name of this butte comes from how it has the shape of an Aztec temple:



The first stop on the trail was at two granaries:



I was only able to get a photo of one of these granaries as a group had spread out in front of the other granary:



Looking up the route to the top of Aztec Butte; the slickrock isn't as steep as it looks, and the well-made trail really helped in the ascent, though I wouldn't recommend this trail to people who don't have much experience with this kind of terrain:



The rock structure at the top:



Panorama of upper Trail Canyon from above the other rock structures on this butte:



There were some smaller rock structures and interesting little arches on the other side of this butte:



Lots of alcoves here on a side trail off of the main trail:



The terrain is steep through here:



Panorama looking back towards the halfdome and Soda Springs Basin:



View back down the Aztec Butte trail:



There were many of these small yellow flowers along the trail near the trailhead:



Our final short hike was to the first Upheaval Dome viewpoint:



The trail here has little to no shade but is very well maintained:



The formation of Upheaval Dome still remains a mystery:



It is certainly a very nice natural formation:



View back over towards Aztec Butte (center of photo, at skyline) from here:



The last stop was the Shafer Trail Overlook; this panorama is very distorted, but I managed to get the entire road in the image:



We saw a few small SUVs drive this road while we were here (it had recently been graded); there appeared to be some nasty bumps in the road that would prevent a low clearance vehicle from driving it, though with proper tire placement I would guess that most crossovers should be able to do the road when it is in this excellent condition:



View of the La Sal Mountains on our drive back to Moab from the Island in the Sky District of Canyonlands:

