

We soon reached the main road; looking up the road, towards where Horsehoof Arch is located:



These are more of the interesting hoodoo-shaped rock formations that we've been seeing so many of. The sign states that from here it's 10 miles to Beef Basin (though park maps and topographic maps state that some stretches of this route are frequently impassable to 4WD vehicles). There is another route into Beef Basin from further back along the main park road, before the visitors center; this route appears to be generally an easy road, except for a few rougher spots, so it may potentially be a better way to access the basin (depending on current road conditions):



One thing I found interesting about this stretch of the road (so I'm not sure if it is true for more of the road, that which we didn't hike) is that it is mostly hard-packed dirt and no rocks, except for patches which are very sandy and have this sort of sharp rock steps (which is what would probably prevent us from driving this road):



Looking along the road up ahead at more needles formations, with the white flowers we'd seen previously in Chesler Park in the foreground:



This is the start of the next section of the loop trail through Chesler Park; there were lots of the white flowers through here, though they'd been overshadowed by the orange and other flowers in Chesler Park earlier:



I didn't get many photos of the next section of trail as it was starting to get hot (the clouds we'd seen earlier had moved north, to be replaced by more later) and the trail was very exposed, over lots of slickrock:



The view looking back towards the 4WD road and further out into the needles was again spectacular, and reminded me of our view looking the other direction, away from Chesler Park, at the saddle on the way in to the park:



Looking up ahead at this wall which the route seemed to be heading towards:



This is one of my favorite panoramas of this part of the Needles District, with the typical spires off to the right, slickrock to the left, and toadstool-like hoodoos receding off into the distance:



Panorama looking up at the wall of needles; this certainly is an amazing place:



The wall we had noticed that we were heading towards turned out to have a passageway which we could walk through; this brought us closer to the main part of Chesler Park (with the "needle island"):



We were now in an area of slickrock, and the needle island we had been photographing so much previously is up ahead:



Looking back at the crack in the wall that we just walked through:



Looking out towards where the Joint Trail drops into the slot (the needle island is to the left, and the viewpoint above the slot must be towards the right):



Panorama of this lower part of Chesler Park:



Looking back at the saddle where we crossed into Chesler Park; interestingly, once we went through the passageway in the wall, we only had a short amount of trail to get back to the saddle, whereas we were hiking through the Chesler Park for a while before we got to the Joint Trail. So, I think we took the best direction around the loop, as we got to see more of the park earlier in the day when the lighting was better and the weather was cooler:



The saddle is off to the left, and the needle is far away now to the right:



Looking down from the saddle at our route back:



Note all the amazing toadstool/hoodoos that can be seen from here! I thought that this direction was the better view from the Chesler Park viewpoint, rather than the view into Chesler Park (and that the best views of Chesler Park are from the route over to the Joint Trail):



This is part of the section of trail between the first slot and the turnoff to Druid Arch which I hadn't gotten photos of on the way out; when hiking to Chesler Park, one can get confused as to where the trail goes when it drops down these steps, hence the nearby cairns:



Looking up the side-canyon towards the slot, in better lighting than we'd had in the morning (earlier, this had been partially shaded and partially in the sun, with the sun blazing down on where I am standing here):



Looking at the lower entrance to this slot-like formation; the clouds in the afternoon really seemed to make my HDR photos look better:



As we exited the slot, we noticed that the thunderclouds were now congregating over the Chesler Park area:



Up ahead on the route back to the Elephant Hill Trailhead, the thunderclouds hadn't yet reached us:



This zoomed-in photo was taken near the first fork we reached in the trail, where the trail goes off to the Squaw Flat camping area, looking back at the saddle crossing the needle formations at the boundary of Chesler Park (center of photo, partially blocked by the rock formation in the center foreground):



Panorama from where the previous photo was taken, looking towards Chesler Park. Compare this photo with the one taken earlier in the day, when we had clear blue sky—the weather can change quickly here:



Looking towards the La Sal Mountains on our way back to the trailhead:



These rock formations near the trail were very interesting, and if we hadn't been concerned about the clouds we would have been tempted to try to climb up on some of them:



Looking down into a deep wash shortly before getting to the descent to the trailhead, and noticing all the toadstools/hoodoos nearby:



Looking down this nice wash, which is one wash to the south of the wash containing the Elephant Hill Access Road:



This nice little arch is just left of center in the previous photo; here's the zoomed-in image:



Approaching the short descent to the parking area for this trail as the clouds begin to move away and the sun starts to come out:



From here, since it didn't look like it would rain right away, we decided to walk up Elephant Hill to see the worst stretches at the beginning of this part of the road. Walking these parts of the road is very highly recommended before considering driving it. At first it was steep and narrow but looked like something we would have little difficulty with. Then, all the sudden, the road got steeper and rougher. It's actually steeper than it looks here, though if it had been relatively level and smooth above this obstacle it wouldn't be quite so bad:



Unfortunately, however, the next (and in my opinion worst, though not having driven it my opinion may likely be incorrect) obstacle was just ahead:



Beyond that, the road was incredibly rough, and I'm figuring that one would have to be very careful of each dip and rock in the road if one didn't have exceptionally high clearance and enormous tires, and extreme care would still be needed even with these:



This is the turnaround area, because the next turn is even tighter (too tight to simply take a few swings at it, as we would do at the lower Black Bear Pass Switchbacks later in the trip, so one has to turn around in this spot):



The upper part of the switchback (left) is easily as rough as the lower part (right):



The road briefly becomes more manageable here, but not for long:



Looking back down at the switchback and turnaround area; having done some hiking in this area, it seems amazing that a road could actually be put in through here:



The road resumes its rough character, and the next stretch is more difficult than it may appear in this photo (so drivers can't let their guard down after completing the switchback):



The road finally flattens out at the top of Elephant Hill, and seems to become (at least for the short distance we could see) hard-packed dirt like we had walked over previously. We didn't hike any further, but it looks like from reports on [TrailDamage.com](http://TrailDamage.com) and on topographical maps that Switchback Hill on the other side is a bit worse than this stretch, and there are a lot more obstacles further along the loop route through Devil's Lane:



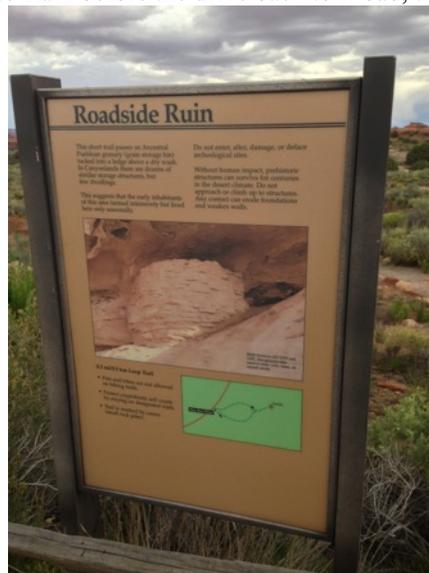
We didn't have a lot of time left to explore this area as we still had to drive back to Moab; here's a view of a nice hoodoo/rock pillar from the dirt road to the Elephant Hill area (note this road is narrow and has some blind curves, so it seems best to arrive early and leave late so as to not have to pass too many vehicles traveling in the opposite direction):



There was still a bit of the main road we hadn't seen, such as the road to the confluence overlook trail beyond the turnoff to the Elephant Hill Access Road. Here we are looking over at the Peekaboo and Salt Creek areas on our way out of the park; the dirt road to the Horse Canyon arches takes off from near here. As with the Elephant Hill Road, a permit is required to drive out there; we had considered visiting that area instead of Chesler Park if the weather turned out to be too hot, but as we had been reading reports that the road was exceptionally sandy, and as we are not familiar with the best tires etc. to have when driving on sand, we decided not to drive out that way:



We did decide to briefly check out the Roadside Ruin before the drive back to Moab, though:



This granary is neatly tucked into this overhang; it's well sheltered and quite hidden, so that's likely why it has survived so well:



Looking out towards the Indian Creek Wilderness Study Area and the Needles Overlook from the loop trail back to the Roadside Ruin parking area:



Our last stop before returning to Moab was Newspaper Rock, the "rock that tells a story," which is an impressive collection of petroglyphs chipped into desert-varnished rock under an overhang. I didn't get a lot of photos here as our time was limited, and (despite being sunny) it was raining quite steadily while we were here, but this is indeed a spectacular work of art and I wish we'd been able to spend more time here:

