

NORTHERN SAN RAFAEL SWELL: WHITE ROCKS, RED KNOLL, THE WEDGE OVERLOOK, BUCKHORN WASH PICTOGRAPHS, AND SAN RAFAEL RIVER SWINGBRIDGE

We started on the road through Buckhorn Wash at Castle Dale, and followed it out to Hwy 70. There are some interesting landmarks on the way to The Wedge Overlook, such as White Rocks and Red Knoll. I found Red Knoll to be more interesting than it sounded, whereas the White Rocks, despite being an easily identifiable landmark, didn't seem as interesting. The Wedge Overlook was quite spectacular, and provided an amazing view of the "Little Grand Canyon" of the San Rafael River. As it had rained while we were driving to the overlook, and it appeared to be raining near Buckhorn Wash, we chose not to take the 4WD road to nearby Good Water Canyon, which we had heard gives even better views. On the way back to the main road, we took the shortcut turnoff back, which is labeled as a 4WD road on some maps but was in good enough shape when we drove it that any vehicle which could get to the Wedge Overlook could also drive this road. From there, we drove to the parking area for the first set of petroglyphs in Buckhorn Wash; these petroglyphs were quite nice, despite not being as popular as the main Buckhorn Wash panel. There is a trail to a dinosaur footprint located back up the road from this petroglyph site, but we were unable to spot the trail from the road when driving through while it was raining, so we didn't get to see the footprint. Then, we continued on to the main Buckhorn Wash petroglyph and pictograph panel, which has some incredible pictographs (the petroglyphs are faded and many have been damaged). After checking out these nice petroglyphs and pictographs, we continued on to the San Rafael River Swingbridge, before heading to the main road.

The first interesting formation we saw was the White Rocks, which are noted on most topographical maps. Apparently they were used as a landmark by early travelers:



Our next stop was at Red Knoll, which is a very photogenic area at which some photography tours stop. To get to where this and the other Red Knoll photos were taken, drive out the short road just west of the western-most turnoff to The Wedge Overlook:



The rock from which these hoodoo-like shapes were formed is of the same formation as the hoodoos in Goblin Valley, in the southern part of the San Rafael Swell:



The tip of Red Knoll can be seen to the left, with The Red Ledges in the center of the photo (there is a road on top of those ledges, which we didn't have time to drive) and Little Cedar Mountain to the right:



These were the most interesting hoodoos (which really looked like mushrooms/toadstools) here:



This arch-and-hoodoo formation at the southernmost end of Red Knoll would be interesting to someday hike out to, and to see what is around the other side of Red Knoll:



This hoodoo-arch at the northern end of Red Knoll seems to be the remnants of a larger hoodoo formation, given the number of large grey rocks nearby:



Looking up towards the top of Red Knoll; we didn't see much of the grey rocks elsewhere, and I think the history of Red Knoll is that it was topped by a harder bit of rock, this grey rock, which prevented the knoll from being eroded when the surrounding rock was eroded:



Looking through this arch towards where the toadstools were, near where we parked (better photos could be taken of this arch from further back, but it had started raining at that point):



One last panorama of Red Knoll, as the dark clouds started to roll in and bring lots of rain:



We then drove out to The Wedge Overlook. It was pouring rain when we were driving out here, so the road was very wet and muddy. We discovered later (at a self-car-wash in Ouray) that San Rafael Swell mud is very difficult to get off of a vehicle, and it requires lots of water at high pressure to loosen the chunks of mud from the paint. From the map at the overlook, there appears to be quite a bit of good hiking in this area:



The view from The Wedge Overlook is spectacular, and I can see why this part of the San Rafael Swell is called The Grand Canyon of the San Rafael:



We walked along the road towards the Good Water Canyon overlook to get some better views (we decided not to drive out that way because of the storm and subsequent mud):



Zooming in on the bottom of the canyon and a trail that winds its way just above the river, through the grassy area:



Looking down the canyon, out towards where the San Rafael River joins Buckhorn Wash:



From here, we drive back north (into the storm); here is our first view of the beginning of Buckhorn Wash:



Driving down the beginning of Buckhorn Wash in the rain, which is a very nice canyon and is somewhat reminiscent of Left Hand Collet Canyon in the Grand Staircase, though Buckhorn has a much nicer road and not as steep:



This was our first stop in Buckhorn Wash, a petroglyph site which is not listed on most maps but we had heard about at the BLM office in Price:



Looking up-canyon; there were lots of nice reddish wildflowers through here, though they didn't show up well in the photographs because of the dark lighting:



This petroglyph site was exceptionally nice; I really liked how clear and easy to see the designs were (though I think that means they aren't as old as the more faded ones at the main Buckhorn panel), and the clouds made my photographs turn out better as the rock wasn't bleached out by the sun:



Panorama of the Buckhorn Wash Road from the petroglyph site; this is a very scenic road, and I highly recommend driving it (though I haven't seen many other roads in the area and there might be lots of others that are as nice or nicer):



Looking along the wall of petroglyphs; it seems the petroglyphs have been well preserved due to the overhanging rock:



Continuing down-canyon, past more of the nice reddish wildflowers on the sides of the road:



This is certainly a very scenic drive with many rock "monuments" in the canyon:



Arriving at the Buckhorn Wash Pictograph and Petroglyph site; these petroglyphs had different designs from the ones we had seen previously (I think these petroglyphs here must be quite a bit older):



Many of the petroglyphs are extremely faded and can only be seen on a closer inspection; here there are some sheep and dancing figures:



The pictographs are very well preserved at this site:



The informative signs at this rock art panel discuss some specific pieces of the art:

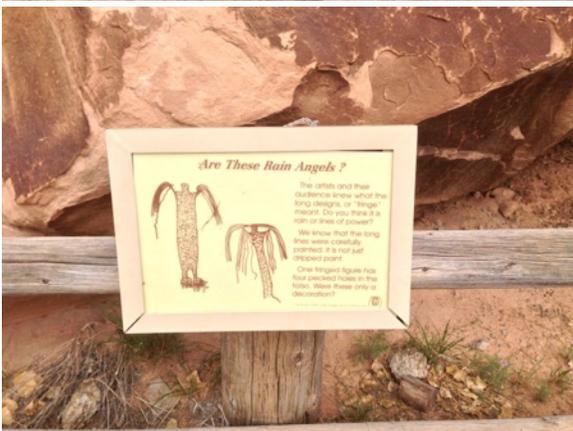




There are lots of pictographs at this location, many more than I had expected to see:



All this rock art certainly must have taken a long time to make:





Unfortunately, much of this rock art appears to have been vandalized at some time:



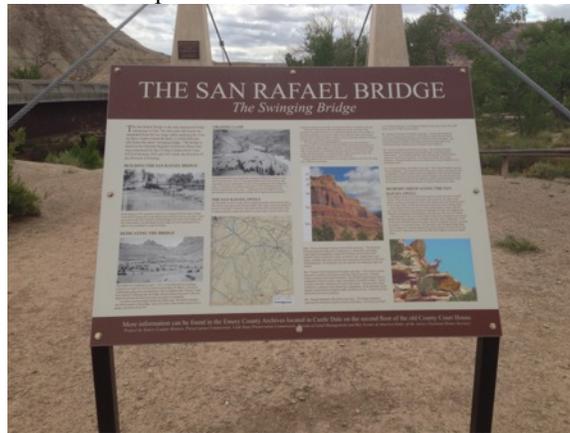
It's hard to believe that the pictographs are actually much older than the petroglyphs:



Our last stop was at the San Rafael Swingbridge, which can be crossed on foot:



The bridge was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps between 1935 and 1937:



There were lots of formations around here that were somewhat reminiscent of Monument Valley; Assembly Hall Peak is on the right, with Window Blind Peak to the left:



The prominent formation one sees to the southwest after crossing the bridge is Bottleneck Peak:



There was one part of the road where lots of gigantic boulders (many the size of a small cabin, and all bigger than an SUV) appeared to have broken off of and rolled down from the top of a peak:



Looking out at the interesting formations located across Hwy 70, when we are approaching this main road:



Driving through Spotted Wolf Canyon on our way towards Moab via Hwy 70; I had forgotten how nice the views of this canyon are along this road:

