

TELLURIDE AND OURAY (LOWER BRIDAL VEIL FALLS, LOWER YANKEE BOY BASIN ROAD)

After leaving Moab, we headed to Ouray, which has hiking trails and difficult 4WD roads passing by amazing snow-topped peaks. Unfortunately, there was too much snow when we were here to do most of the trails or the drives that I had looked at before arriving. The best map I found for this area is the Telluride/Silverton/Ouray Latitude 40 map (typically I like the National Geographic topographical maps, but the Latitude 40 map here gives very accurate road and trail difficulty ratings).

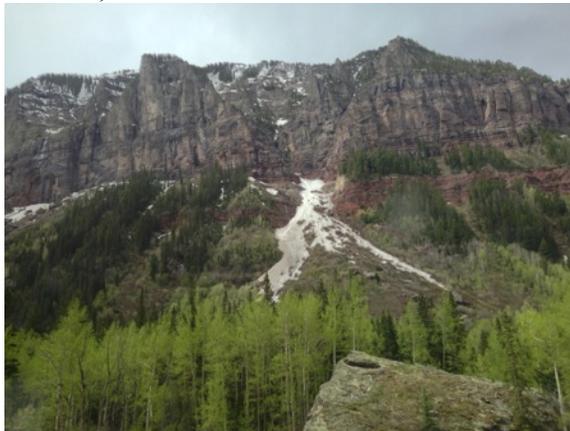
Our first stop was Telluride, where we first rode the gondola over to Mountain Village to get some views of the area. Then, since the Black Bear Pass Road was open to the top of Bridal Veil falls, we headed up that road. We ended up stopping at the base of the falls because we quickly got tired of needing to take multiple swings at each of the tight switchbacks (thus we don't plan on doing the upper switchbacks, which I hear are much narrower and form the one-way section of the Black Bear Pass Road). We got some great views of the area, however, and were glad that we had checked it out.

From Telluride, we drove around to Ouray (as Imogene Pass Road was closed all the way, and Ophir Pass Road was closed to the pass from the Ophir side), and, after stopping at the visitor information center, headed up towards Yankee Boy Basin. The road is well graded and seems to be passable in a passenger car up to the Camp Bird Mine (as we saw lots of them coming from the mine). It's a very scenic road, and the only stretches that we weren't too excited about were the ones where the road was narrow with cliffs on both sides (not a good place for two large vehicles going in opposite directions to pass) and water was coming down and crossing it from the hillsides. Beyond the mine, the road stayed nice and we got to the Governor/Yankee Boy Basin fork easily. At that point, we decided to turn around because it was starting to get late and there was a surprisingly deep stream crossing the Governor Fork, while the Yankee Boy fork appeared to get narrower and rougher than we wanted to take the time to explore. On the way back, we noticed that there was a raging river crossing the turnoff to Imogene Pass.

On our drive to Telluride from Moab, we got to see lots of tall snowy peaks in the distance:



Looking up at some nice peaks while in Telluride; I think this is Ballard Mountain:



This was our first view of the Black Bear Pass Road switchbacks while in Telluride; they certainly play a large part in the spectacular scenery of the town, and to travelers visiting the area they often look very intriguing to hike or drive:



At the top of the tramway from Telluride over to Mountain Village there were a bunch of information signs:



This is the view over towards Telluride from the St. Sophia station at the top of the gondola going over into Mountain Village:



Looking over towards the peaks behind Mountain Village from here; this is an amazing part of this mountain range and seems to require lots of hiking and driving to explore it relatively thoroughly:



This sign discusses the geology of the Telluride area; this valley was glacially carved, and the nearby hanging valleys were carved by "smaller glaciers that could not keep up with the bigger ones":



Panorama looking down at Telluride from here, with the Telluride side of the Imogene Pass Road just barely visible making its way up towards the reddish cliff band at the center of the photo, then beyond and up into the Savage Basin:



This gondola is the first gondola to be used as free public transportation in the US:



Looking down at Mountain Village on our gondola ride into the town; there is so much amazing hiking in this area:



Looking down at Telluride from our ride back on the gondola, with the Imogene Pass Road more prominently visible than in the panorama above:



After lunch, we headed up the Black Bear Pass Road to see how many of the lower switchbacks we wanted to drive:



There are lots of nice views along the road of Bridal Veil Falls and the building at the top:



We were continually impressed by how nice the scenery is here, especially with all the water coming down the cliffsides from the melting snow:



The road wasn't all that difficult on these straighter stretches of the switchbacks, and photos only of these parts of the road might lead visitors to believe that vehicles with lower clearance and/or no 4WD could make it up this road:



Looking back out at Telluride from here; there was one stream which we needed to cross to get to this spot, which required reasonable vehicle clearance since there was so much water crossing the road:



We turned around at the base of the falls, but couldn't see the falls, and there was a no trespassing sign (probably related to some nearby mining operations) which prevented us from getting any closer to the falls than if we continued up the road (I wasn't able to get any photos of where we stopped or the road beyond as I was helping to spot the turnaround process of the vehicle):



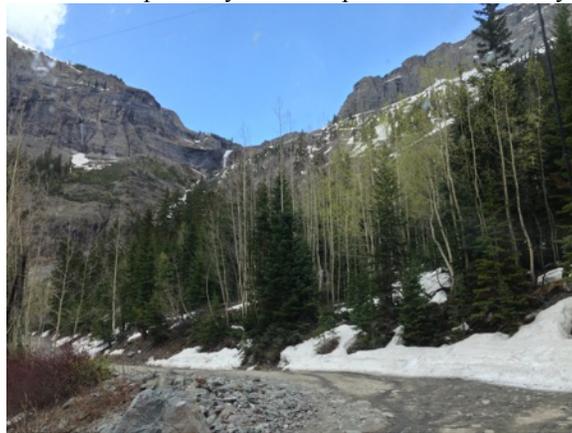
As we still needed to drive to Ouray and wanted to do some exploring there too, we drove back down. Note that the apparently nice parking areas on the side of the road through here are actually there for larger vehicles trying to make the sharp switchback turns or for vehicles going opposite directions on the two-way part of the road to pass, and are generally not for use as parking for hiking:



Looking up at the nice peaks above us:



The waterfall coming down that we could see here is probably not as impressive later in the year when more of the snow has melted:



Continuing down one of the easier stretches of the road; note how there is some water crossing the road, which can cause erosion and perhaps make the road more difficult if not well kept up:



Simply hiking up this road would make for a great walk, and lots of visitors were doing just that:



Looking up at the nice waterfall again, which seems to be coming down from between Ajax Peak (on the right) and a smaller unnamed peak:



This stream crosses the road and must be forded; it was deep enough to prevent any smaller (i.e., lower clearance) cars that had somehow gotten up the first few switchbacks from getting up to the switchbacks below the falls (which are a bit more difficult, in my opinion), though luckily it wasn't particularly deep (compared to other river fords in the area) when we crossed it:



The road is well graded here; it wasn't really all that rocky on this straight stretch, but on the tight turns the road quality degraded and it became very rocky (generally requiring high clearance):



Looking back across where the stream crosses the road; it is deeper than it looks (reaching about halfway between the edge of the wheel rims and the center of the wheel, or, equivalently, about 3/8 of the way up the entire tire plus wheel):



Panorama of this nice spot, showing Ingram Peak to the left of the Bridal Veil Falls and Ballard Mountain to the right:



One last view of Bridal Veil Falls, with the Black Bear Pass Road switchbacking up off to the left; we stopped at the switchback that can be seen to the left of the base of the falls, just before the road leaves most of the trees. It looks like just beyond the place we stopped is where one encounters more snow:



From here, we headed towards Ouray. This is where the Last Dollar Road can be accessed:



Looking over at part of the Mount Sneffels Wilderness and the Uncompahgre National Forest:



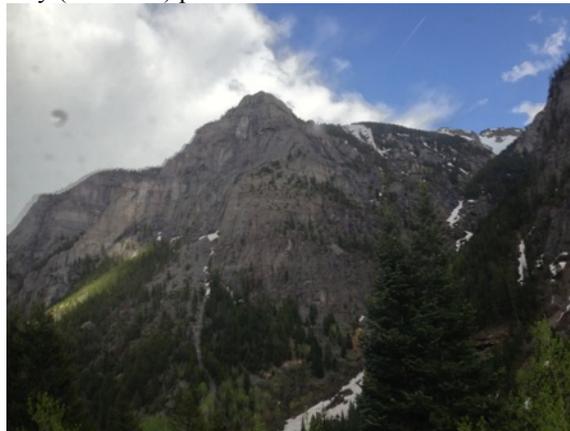
After stopping at the Ouray visitor information center, we headed up the Yankee Boy Basin Road; this is the view of Ouray from the start of this road:



There were many waterfalls to be seen along this road:



Looking across the valley and up at a nearby (unnamed) peak:



The turnoff for Imogene Pass was a good place to stop briefly and get some photos looking up the valley:



Looking across at where the Imogene Pass Road runs along the hillside; there was lots of snow piled up on the road at this time so it was clearly impassable:



Continuing up towards Yankee Boy Basin through this amazing scenery:



We were surprised at how nice this area is, as the hiking here doesn't seem to be highly publicized. This is the view up towards Potosi Peak (left):



There are many private roads that turn off the Camp Bird Mine/Yankee Boy Basin (access) Road:



Continuing on, with the tall snowy peaks getting closer:



There is a turnout for a nearby mining ruin here:



This is where the Governor Basin (left) and Yankee Boy Basin (right) roads split:



We continued on the Governor Basin Road:



There were so many snowy peaks up here:



We ended up turning around where the Governor Basin Road crossed the creek coming down from Yankee Boy Basin, as it was deeper and a more abrupt dropoff into the creek than we'd expected (the only place we'd needed 4WD so far was actually getting the front wheels back out of the creek. This photo was taken on our way back out the road, of (I think) a different angle of Potosi Peak:



Looking down the road near the Revenue Mine:



Panorama with mining ruins to the left, Stony Mountain to the right, and a sign reminding drivers to stay on the designated routes because of the fragile tundra ecosystem:



Heading back down the road towards a mining operation:



From this angle, the Imogene Pass Road can be seen to be flooded; the water height looked to be way too dangerous for anything but a very heavily modified vehicle to cross:



Continuing down the road, towards the Camp Bird Mine:



We drove back across this section of road, which was the most unnerving part of the road, because of the big dropoff on one side:



There was so much water coming off the overhang that when we drove under it we felt like we were driving through a big downpour in a major storm:



Looking up at a valley coming in from the south, which is where the Imogene Pass Road goes (the line of snow seen below center in the photo is where the road cuts across the hillside, as the snow is piled up along the road):



Here we are passing through a very nice stand of small trees:



Here is the Camp Bird Mine, with the Imogene Pass Road seen crossing below the cliff in the distance (again, where the line of snow is). The shortcut road to the Imogene Pass Road that looks to take off from here on most maps seems to be a private road (though I'm not absolutely certain) as there is no sign for the pass at the turnoff but there is one at the turnoff further up. The prominent peak seen here is the United States Mountain:



Past the mine, we approach the view looking down the Sneffels Creek Canyon and out towards Ouray; I think right about here is where the creek marked Waterhole Slide on topographical maps comes down:



This was the other narrow section of the road, where it's ideal not to encounter a vehicle going the other direction (though there are a few turnouts where vehicles can pass):



The river can be seen far below the road in this photo; we were mostly concerned because our vehicle is wider than we were used to:



Looking across this gorge-like area at a very nice, small waterfall:



Looking out and over at Fall Creek:



This narrow section of the road does go on for some distance:



We were lucky not to encounter any other vehicles on our drive down this stretch, though we had encountered quite a few on our way up. The views from this road are very nice, but while we were driving we were mostly focused on where the edge of the road is:



This was an amazing HDR photo which I took as we were driving across Sneffels Creek a bit further down the road:



Mirror view looking back up at the valley we had just come out of and the incredible peaks up there:



We are now approaching where the Yankee Boy Basin/Camp Bird Mine Road meets the main road from Ouray to Silverton; the prominent formation in this photo is appropriately called The Amphitheater:



Looking into the canyon gorge from the bridge over the Uncompahgre River on the road to Yankee Boy Basin:

