

COLORADO

ROAD TRIP

Glenwood Springs Field Office



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Rifle Arch Offers Easy Hike and Scenic Views

By the Glenwood Springs Field Office staff

The canyon country of southern Utah is not the only place to find scenic geologic “arches.” Rifle Arch is a well-known local arch found on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management’s Glenwood Springs Field Office.

At 150-feet wide and 60-feet high, Rifle Arch is worth the relatively easy one mile or so hike it takes to see it. You’ll have great views of the Colorado River valley and the Battlements, and possibly see a variety of wildlife.

Spring and early summer are great times for this short hike because the weather is not yet too hot and the wildflowers are in bloom. Keep a particularly close eye out for cactus blooms. By summertime, temperatures are fairly high, so be sure to bring plenty of water and sunscreen.

Rifle Arch is part of the sandstone formations of the Grand Hogback, a scenic uplift that extends between the towns of Meeker and Redstone. The same forces that caused the general uplift of the Grand Hogback pushed a sandstone layer up to a steep pitch. As water ran through the fracture lines of the uplift, it began creating long, narrow cracks called fissures. Over time these fissures continued to grow from erosion, freezing and thawing, and eventually combined into the beautiful arch we can see today.

Rifle Arch differs from the famous southern Utah arches because it is in a vertical formation. The arches in Utah were formed from stratification that was horizontal. Rifle Arch is also the only arch in the immediate area. In Utah, arches are relatively concentrated (geologists have catalogued more than 2,000 arches in Arches National Park) so Rifle Arch’s solitary existence makes it unique.





To get to Rifle Arch take I-70 west from Denver or east from Grand Junction to Rifle, then Colorado Highway 13 north of Rifle to mile marker 7. You'll see a parking area on the right and a gate with a Boy Scout sign marking the trailhead. The trail meanders across a sagebrush flat before winding up a hill. Take a close look around when the trail joins an old road – you don't want to miss this junction on your way down! By the time the trail reaches the shade of the piñon-juniper forest, you'll be able to see the arch. The trail ends at a bench with a good view of the arch. If you like, you can keep going to the arch by climbing over the rocks. This will give you a vantage point to look through the arch to the southwest over the Colorado River valley.

In all you'll have gained about 520 feet in elevation over about 1.5 miles. In addition to water, a snack and sunscreen, you'll want a good pair of boots, a hat and dress in layers. Allow up to three hours for the hike. Visitor use is moderate but increasing, with higher use on the weekends. Late afternoon and evening light are often best for photographs.

You can find more information about Rifle Arch at <http://www.co.blm.gov/gsra/arch.htm>

