



Guides to:

Dark Canyon

and

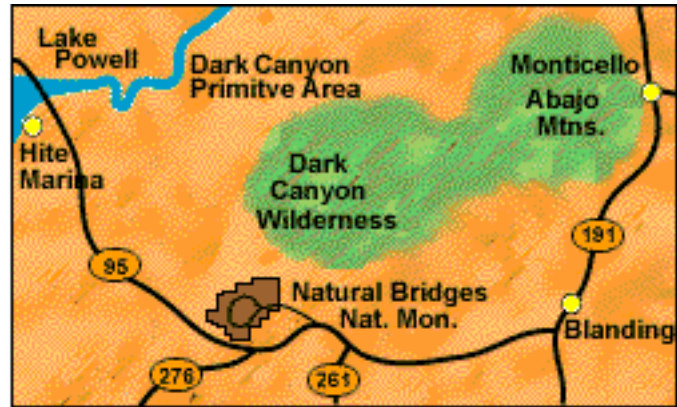
Natural Bridges National Monument



Dark Canyon

DARK CANYON is rugged, pristine and beautiful. It is an excellent destination for those seeking to hike and camp in the wilderness in relative isolation. Though a day hike is feasible, multi-day trips are really necessary to adequately experience this area.

Dark Canyon is located in southeast Utah, east of Hite Marina on Lake Powell and west of the Abajo Mountains. It is about 25 miles northwest of Blanding and 15 air miles north of Natural Bridges National Monument. To plan your route by car or RV, select Utah Map or Southeastern Utah Map.



Presented below is information on:

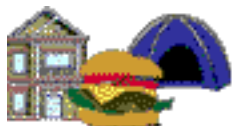
- Exploring Dark Canyon
- Camping/Lodging/Dining
- Miscellany



Dark Canyon is comprised of two areas. Upper Dark Canyon is a designated wilderness area in the Manti-La Sal National Forest. The canyon here is fairly open with stands of Douglas fir and ponderosa pine. Elk Ridge at 8,200 feet forms its eastern and southern border and is the source of the numerous tributaries feeding the upper canyon. It is generally hikeable from late-May to October, though it is generally wet and subject to flooding in spring. Summer temperatures are moderate and water is abundant.

Lower Dark Canyon is a designated primitive area lying mostly on BLM land. The canyon deepens and narrows as you head down canyon until its orange-red walls tower nearly 1,500 feet overhead. The environment here is more desert like with pinion pine, juniper and cottonwood. It is hikeable year round, though temperatures are most pleasant in the spring and fall. Water is available throughout the lower canyon.

The Dark Canyon SuperMap shows hiking routes and access points.



CAMPING/LODGING/DINING

There are no designated campgrounds within Dark Canyon, but dispersed camping is allowed throughout. You'll need a permit to camp on BLM lands in the lower canyon.

There are no lodging or dining establishments at Dark Canyon. There is a small store w/prepared foods at Hite Marina on Lake Powell and a small motel and cafe at Fry Canyon (a stop on Hwy 95 about 25 miles south of Hite Marina).

Fry Canyon Lodge, Cafe & Campground Hwy 95; Box 200 435-979-4298 6 rooms \$\$-\$\$\$

A variety of dining and lodging choices are available in Blanding.



MISCELLANY

Helpful Publications

- **Manti-La Sal National Forest Map -- Trails Illustrated**

Good quality plasticized map showing trails in Dark Canyon, the Abajo Mountains and Natural Bridges National Monument. (Scale: 1:90,000; Map# 703)

- **Dark Canyon Trail Guide -- Canyonlands Natural History Association**

Call 435-259-6003 to order.

See Utah Publications for a complete list of publications covering activities and destinations in Utah.

Useful Addresses

For Upper Dark Canyon:

Manti-La Sal National Forest
Box 820
Monticello, UT 84535
435-587-2041

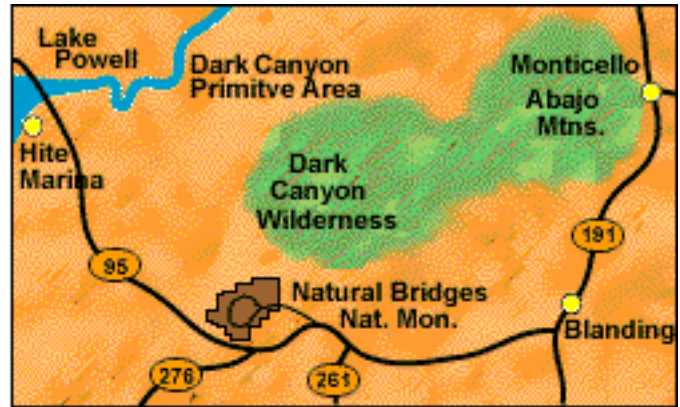
For Lower Dark Canyon:

Bureau of Land Management
Box 7
Monticello, UT 84535
435-587-2141
(or visit the BLM office at Kane
Gulch Ranger Station)



Natural Bridges National Monument

NATURAL BRIDGES NATIONAL MONUMENT is a pleasant, well-kept small park featuring three large natural bridges attractively set at the bottom of two adjacent canyons. A paved road along the edge of the canyons provides good views of the bridges. Hiking trails wind down the canyon walls to the bridges and run along the canyons floors between them. There are also views of some interesting Indian cliff dwellings built high into the canyon walls above the bridges.



Natural Bridges National Monument is located 47 miles west of Blanding and 43 miles north of Mexican Hat in the southeast corner of Utah.

Presented below is information about:

- Exploring the Park
- Camping
- Lodging/Dining
- Other Information



The Scenic Drive

A 9 mile paved loop road runs along the mesa above the bridges. You should plan on stopping for a view of each bridge and the Indian cliff dwellings, for which binoculars are useful. You should also try to make time to hike down to at least one bridge to gain a much better appreciation for the beauty of these structures. The Natural Bridges SuperMap shows overlooks, trailheads and picnic areas.

The Bridges

The three bridges represent three different stages in the life of a natural bridge.

- **Sipapu** is a middle aged bridge, with a smooth, strong span. With a height of 220 feet and span of 268 feet, it is the largest of the three and the 2nd largest natural bridge in the world. Only Rainbow Bridge at Lake Powell is larger.
- **Kachina** is a young bridge, with a thick chunky look. It measures 210 feet by 204 feet.
- **Owachomo** is an older graceful bridge, time having reduced its span to a precariously thin 9 foot thick ribbon. In geological time, it hasn't long to live. At 106 by 180 feet, it is the smallest of the three.

Hiking Trails

There is a separate trail down to each bridge.

- The steep Sipapu Bridge Trail (1.2 miles round-trip) descends 600 feet to the base of Sipapu Bridge.
- The equally steep Kachina Bridge Trail (1-1/2 mile round-trip) drops 650 feet to the Kachina Bridge.
- The Owachomo Bridge Trail is an easy (.5 mile) walk. Elevation change is less than 200 feet.

A hiking trail also runs along the canyon bottoms between the bridges. Most hikers hike down the Sipapu Bridge Trail and come up the Owachomo Bridge Trail, since the grade up from Owachomo Bridge is considerably easier than the others. The round-trip distance of 8.2 miles includes a 2-1/2 mile trail through woodland along the top of the canyon back to the Sipapu Bridge trailhead. (It can be eliminated by using a car shuttle.) Many hikers omit the Owachomo Bridge segment and climb up the Kachina Bridge Trail. This shortens the loop to 5.4 miles, which includes a 2 mile hike on the mesa top. The Natural Bridges SuperMap shows routes and distances.



LODGING & DINING

There are no lodging or dining facilities at the monument. The closest restaurant and motel is at a stop on Hwy. 95 called Fry Canyon. It is 25 miles northwest.

Fry Canyon

Hwy 95; Box 200

435-979-4298

6 rooms

\$\$-

There are also dining and lodging options in Blanding (47 miles east), Mexican Hat (43 miles south) and at Hite Marina on Lake Powell (45 miles northwest).



In the Park

There is a small, attractive campground next to the visitor center in a pleasant shaded area. 13 sites (21 ft. RV limit); drinking water (at the visitor center); vault toilets; elev. 6,500 feet; open year round; first-come, first-serve; \$10.

Because the campground is often full, there is designated overflow site a few miles away. It is essentially a gravel parking lot with vault toilets.

Nearby Private Campgrounds

There are private campgrounds in Blanding and Mexican Hat, and in Fry Canyon, 25 miles northwest of the park on Hwy 95.

Cross Canyon Ranch Campground	Box 324, Blanding	435-_____	
Kampark	861 S. Main St., Blanding	435-678-2770	
Burch's RV Park	Hwy 163; Box 337; Mexican Hat	435-683-2221	8 sites
Valle's Trailer Park	Hwy. 163; Mexican Hat	435-683-2226	
Fry Canyon Campground	Hwy 95 - Fry Canyon	435-979-4298	

Nearby Public Campgrounds

- Goosenecks State Park is a undeveloped park with an outstanding view of gooseneck turns in the San Juan River 1,000 below. Camping is available in the park's desert terrain around the gravel parking area. 8 sites; vault toilets; [no water](#); elev. 5,000'; open year round; reservations: 800-322-3770; no fee.
- Hite Marina Campground is an unshaded dirt parking area near the lake. It has lots of open sites available on a first-come, first-serve basis at no charge. There is no water or other amenities, but it is within walking distance of vault toilets and the marina.



OTHER INFORMATION

The park is opened year round, but the most pleasant time to visit is from late April through October. It's hot in the summer, but not oppressive. In winter, snow sometimes temporarily blocks access, but the park remains open.

The modern visitor center is opened daily from 8-5 from Mar-May and in Oct; 8-6 from Jun-Sep; and 9-4:30 in winter. The gates to the scenic drive stay open from dawn to dusk. An entrance fee of \$6 per vehicle is charged, unless you have a National Park Pass.

For more information, contact: Superintendent, Natural Bridges National Monument, Box 1, Lake Powell, UT 84533; 435-692-1234.

