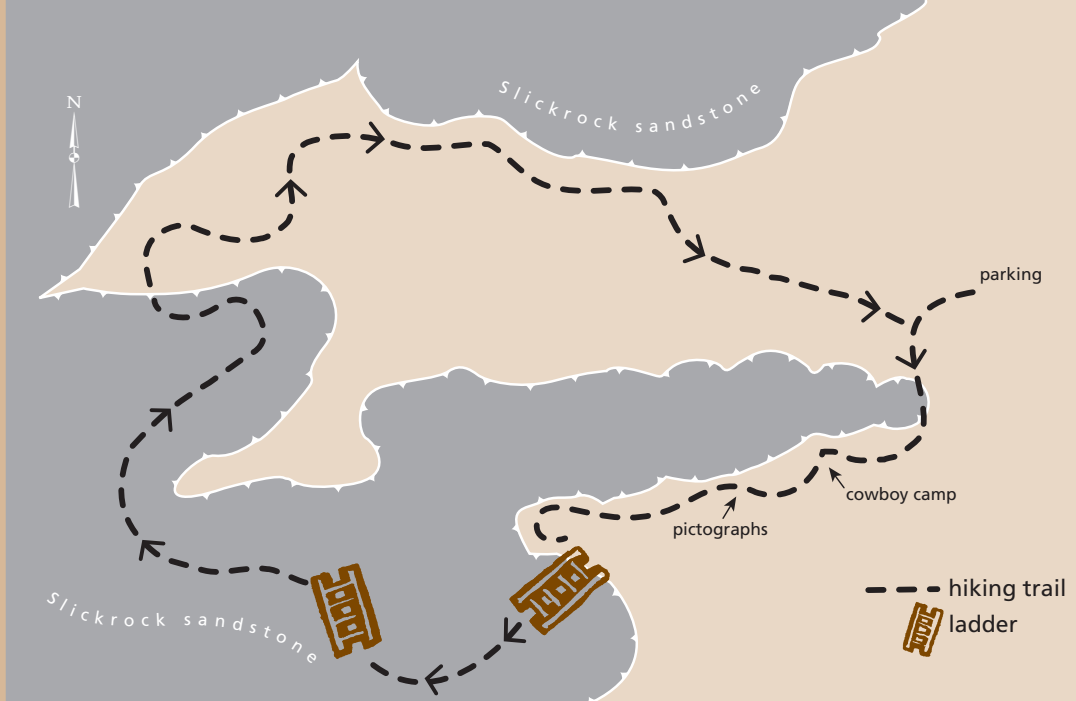


Cave Spring

TRAIL GUIDE



This 0.6-mile (1 km) loop trail leads to a cowboy camp, rock paintings, a perennial spring, up two wooden ladders onto slickrock sandstone, and back to the parking area. Take the left fork at the trail intersection and hike clockwise around the loop.

Climate isn't the only factor that has changed the canyons. Upstream erosion, hastened by cattle grazing, created deeper soil in this area, allowing the sagebrush and rabbitbrush that you see near the trailhead to flourish. They probably have thrived since the days when Cave Spring was an active cowboy camp.

Canyon Country

The geology and climate of Canyonlands have created an unusual landscape characterized by maze-like canyons, sheer cliff faces, strange rock formations, deep crevices, and alcoves. Some areas are hospitable to life; some are not. Water plays a major role in determining suitable habitat for humans as well as plants and animals. As you hike Cave Spring Trail, notice how the presence of water has affected each area. Plants, animals, and people have all played a part in shaping the environment we see today. In turn, the canyons have molded the behavior, adaptations, and character of the inhabitants.

On the cover: The Flying V Bar, Lazy TY, and Bar X Bar cattle brands were used by the Scorup-Sommerville Cattle Company.

The Three Swipe is still used by the Dugout Ranch. The Nature Conservancy purchased the ranch from the Redd family in 1997, and the 5,200-acre property is now managed by Heidi Redd as a working ranch. She calls the brand the Bear Claw.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Canyonlands National Park
2282 SW Resource Blvd.
Moab, UT 84532

Published by Canyonlands Natural History Association

Printed on recycled paper

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0.6-mile loop (1 km)

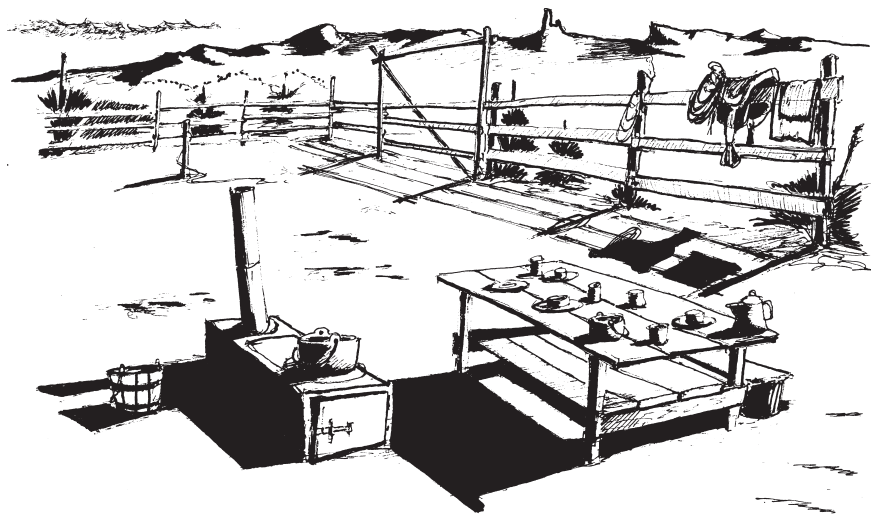
THE NEEDLES DISTRICT
CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Cowboys

In the late 1800s pioneering cattlemen settled in canyon country and carved successful cattle operations out of this desert. In 1926 John Albert Scorup and his partners formed the Scorup-Sommerville Cattle Company, which grew to be the largest in Utah. As many as 10,000 head of cattle ranged over 1.8 million acres. This area included The Needles district of Canyonlands National Park.

Widespread ranching required cowboys to stay on the open range with their cattle. They lived in isolated outdoor camps such as this one near Cave Spring. They used these camps from the late 1800s through 1975, when cattle ranching ended inside the park. Many original items left by the cowboys remain. Please do not enter the camp, touch, or remove the objects.

Cowboys usually worked for several weeks or months at a time. From daylight until dark, the men watched the cattle and moved them to feed and water. Since it took 200 acres to feed one cow, and water sources were many rugged miles apart, the life of a cowboy was difficult. Each cowboy packed his belongings, clothes, and bedding on a mule. Other mules carried food, water, and grain for the horses.



The cowboys cooked over an open fire, using Dutch ovens and other simple cookware. Usual cowboy fare included beans, bacon, potatoes, canned goods, sourdough biscuits, and the ever-present coffee.

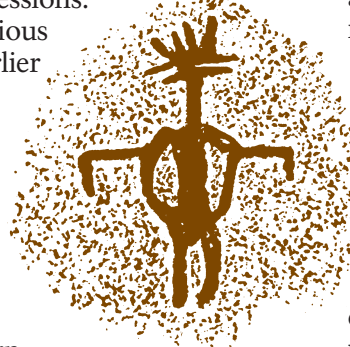
Cowboys established the camp at Cave Spring because of the reliable water source. Rainwater percolating through layers of porous sandstone forms these seeps. Moisture hastens erosion of the rock face and carves alcoves.

Sacred Water

Springs are rare in the desert. In the alcove beyond the cowboy camp, you'll notice soot-blackened ceilings, handprints, painted figures, and grinding depressions. These tell us that this precious resource also attracted earlier people. Ancestors of today's American Indians occupied these canyons six millennia before the cattlemen arrived, about 6,000 to 700 years ago.

Before the adoption of corn agriculture, American Indians kept on the move. They followed the annual migrations of their prey and camped near areas with fresh water and plants they could use.

Once they domesticated foods like squash, corn, and beans, they moved less and began farming. They left the area when the water table dropped following prolonged drought, making farming difficult.



Descendants of these people still live in the region and consider the spring a sacred place. Help protect our heritage by not entering the spring.

Do not touch or mark the rock art. It is a violation of federal law to deface pictographs.

Plants and Animals

Few plants can survive the intense heat and dryness of bare rock. Shallow pockets of soil support the growth of biological soil crust. This crust is made up of cyanobacteria, lichens, moss, fungi, and algae, and it is an essential component of the desert ecosystem. It protects soils from wind and water erosion and enriches them with nitrogen and other nutrients. Biological soil crust can take years to grow, and careless footsteps can crush it. Tracks remain visible for decades. Please stay on established trails or bare rock.

Gaps in the sandstone provide shelter for snakes, lizards, bats, and rodents. Packrats leave untidy nests called middens, which are composed of sticks, debris, and dung. Their concentrated urine deposited on and around midden sites congeals these materials into a hard brown substance that preserves organic matter, often for thousands of years.

Remains of plants and animals found in ancient packrat middens provide evidence that species and climate have changed significantly since the last Ice Age, 11,000 years ago. Changes during the last 100 years show dramatic and accelerating human impacts, such as the introduction of non-native plant species.