

Trip 7

Gooseberry Trail to White Rim Trail 4WD Road

Distance: 6.0 miles round trip to White Rim Trail 4WD road

Low/High elevations: 4740'/6270'

Suited for: Dayhike or backpack

Difficulty: Strenuous

Best seasons: April through mid-June; mid-September through October.

Map/Trailhead: 38/5

Hazards: No water; poor trail; steep dropoffs.

Introduction: The Gooseberry Trail is the shortest way to reach the White Rim Trail 4WD road on foot, but its route is very steep and rocky, and the footing is poor. Once below the cliffs, hikers have the option of following the White Rim to various glorious overlooks or exploring remote desert basins.

Description: Our trail departs from the parking area (0.0; 6270) on a cairned route across potholed Kayenta slickrock, reaching the mesa rim within 175 yards. We may wish to pause here to enjoy the expansive vistas that stretch across the Colorado River canyon. As we gaze northeast along the square-edged mesa, we see the erosion-isolated buttes of Monster Tower, The Washer Woman, and Airport Tower, and still farther north we see Dead Horse Point, the Potash millsite, and a vast expanse of Navajo Sandstone domes that separate the Canyonlands Basin from Moab/Spanish Valley. A broad bench, edged by the White Rim, lies below us, and beyond is the vast basin carved by the Colorado, a redrock landscape that rises in a series of benches eastward to the tall Wingate cliffs and wooded mesas on the eastern skyline.

Presently the trail plunges below the rim, taking advantage of a precipitous chute carved by erosion into the barrier cliffs. A variety of plants inhabit this sheltered, north-facing chute, including a scattering of

pinyon and juniper, Indian ricegrass, single-leaf ash, broom snakeweed, mormon tea, Utah serviceberry, buckwheat, haplopappus, and resinbush.

The trail becomes exceedingly steep as it passes through the Wingate cliff band, but soon we enter Chinle slopes, winding among boulders into the head of the wash below. We follow its course cross-country down the remaining distance into the broad basin below, finally joining the White Rim Trail 4WD road 0.3 mile north of the Gooseberry vehicle campsite. Here (3.0; 4740) we are just above the point where our wash pours over the White Rim Sandstone. Huge slabs of White Rim Sandstone litter the red slopes below the rim, and balanced rocks protect the underlying Organ Rock Shale in places. Redrock benches and slopes drop in stepladder fashion into the canyon below.

Hikers can now retrace their steps. Those wanting a campsite will find broad benches within 2 miles of the wash, both north and south along the 4WD road. These benches spread eastward from the road, and although they are exposed, with no shade, they offer fine views up and down the Colorado River, with a backdrop of lofty cliffs and mesas. Backpackers must make the extra effort to camp out of sight of the road and at least 1 mile away from it.

