

One Day in Capitol Reef

A natural bridge before breakfast, fruit you pick yourself, and the quietest of Utah's Mighty 5 — one day genuinely covers it.

QUICK FACTS BEFORE YOU GO

- No reservation or timed entry. None is needed to enter Capitol Reef.
- \$20 per private vehicle on the Scenic Drive. The fee station is south of Fruita Campground.
- Highway 24 runs through the park without passing the fee station.
- NPS lists trail distances ONE WAY — the single easiest number to get wrong here.
- Nothing inside the park: no lodge, no restaurant, no fuel, no cell service.
- Torrey is 11 miles west and is where you'll sleep and eat.

△ THE THING EVERYONE GETS WRONG

Do you have to pay to visit Capitol Reef? It depends where you drive. The self-pay fee station sits on the Scenic Drive, just south of Fruita Campground. Highway 24 runs straight through the park and does not pass it.

So you can drive Highway 24, stop at the visitor center, walk to Hickman Bridge, see the petroglyph panel and visit the orchards without going through the fee station. Drive the Scenic Drive and you pay \$20 per private vehicle.

Worth being precise about: NPS's own pages differ. The Roads page calls it a Scenic Drive fee; the Fees page calls it a park entrance fee and says passholders must show a pass on request. We're telling you where the booth is — not advising you to skip a fee.

FEES & PASSES

What It Costs

Capitol Reef is the Mighty 5 outlier

- \$20 per private vehicle on the Scenic Drive. Motorcycles \$15, valid seven days.
- Capitol Reef annual pass: \$35. One vehicle and all its occupants, for US citizens and residents.
- Not in the Southeast Utah pass. That \$55 pass covers Arches, Canyonlands, Natural Bridges and Hovenweep — Capitol Reef is not included.
- No \$100 non-resident surcharge here. It applies at Zion and Bryce Canyon in 2026 but not at Capitol Reef.
- America the Beautiful is accepted, and at \$80 it beats individual entry across the Mighty 5.

PRO TIP

Start on Highway 24 and save the Scenic Drive for the middle of the day. Hickman Bridge and the petroglyph panel are both off the highway, so you can be hiking at first light without stopping to pay anything.

MORNING

Highway 24 First

Hike before it warms up, then the orchards

1 **Hickman Bridge**

The signature hike, and the one to do before the day warms up. A natural bridge 133 feet across, reached by a climb up from the Fremont River and a short loop beneath the span. The trailhead is on Highway 24, east of the visitor center, and there's no water here.

1.8 MI ROUND TRIP • 400 FT • MODERATE

2 **The Petroglyph Panel**

Fremont rock art along Highway 24, reached by two wooden boardwalks. Wheelchair accessible, with parking for cars and RVs. NPS suggests five to thirty minutes depending on how long you look.

BOARDWALK • ACCESSIBLE • 5-30 MIN

3 **The Visitor Center**

Worth stopping even if you don't need a map. It's the only place in the park with Wi-Fi, there are flush toilets, and rangers will tell you what the backcountry roads are doing today — which changes constantly.

FREE WI-FI • OPEN 8-4:30

4 **Fruita Orchards @ the Gifford House**

The thing that makes Capitol Reef different from every other park in Utah. Historic orchards planted by Mormon settlers, and you can pick the fruit. There's a self-pay station with a scale at the entrance — fruit you eat inside the orchard is free. The Gifford House sells fruit pies and homemade ice cream, and the pies sell out.

ASHLEY'S PICK SEASONAL

HARVEST WINDOWS

Apricots late June to mid-July. Peaches late July to early September. Pears early August to early September. Apples mid-August to mid-October. Timing shifts several weeks with the weather.

AFTERNOON & SUNSET

The Scenic Drive

Then back west for the last light

5 The Scenic Drive

7.9 miles one way, paved, and where the \$20 is collected. It runs south along the base of the Waterpocket Fold with the cliffs rising the whole way. A dead end — you drive it out and back, and the two canyon spurs branch off it.

7.9 MI ONE WAY • PAVED • \$20

6 Grand Wash

A flat walk up a canyon that narrows to a slot barely wider than your arms. Almost no elevation, and the easiest way to get inside the rock rather than looking at it. Do not enter if storms are possible anywhere upstream — vehicles were washed down this wash in a 2022 flood.

4.4 MI ROUND TRIP • 200 FT • EASY

7 Capitol Gorge @ the Tanks — or Cassidy Arch

Capitol Gorge is the easier option: a flat walk past pioneer signatures carved into the wall, with a short scramble to natural water pockets called the Tanks. Cassidy Arch is the hard one, ending on top of an arch you can walk out onto. Check current road conditions before counting on Capitol Gorge — the dirt spurs close after storms.

2 MI • EASY

OR 3.4 MI • STRENUOUS

8 Panorama Point, the Goosenecks @ Sunset Point

Back west on Highway 24. Panorama Point is a very short walk for a 360-degree view. From there a one-mile dirt road leads to the Goosenecks Overlook, a tenth of a mile from the car, looking down at Sulphur Creek a thousand feet below. Sunset Point is the finish — nearly flat, and the best light in the park lands here.

0.8 MI ROUND TRIP • EASY

BEST PHOTO SPOT

PRO TIP

One day gets you the Fruita district properly. It does not get you Cathedral Valley or the Waterpocket Fold — those need a second day, a high-clearance vehicle, and a look at the road report first.

EVERY TRAIL

One Way vs Round Trip

NPS publishes these one way — here's both

TRAIL	ONE WAY	ROUND TRIP	ELEVATION	NPS RATING
Goosenecks	0.1 mi	0.2 mi	<50 ft	Easy
Sunset Point	0.4 mi	0.8 mi	<50 ft	Easy
Hickman Bridge	0.9 mi	1.8 mi	400 ft	Moderate
Capitol Gorge	1.0 mi	2.0 mi	80 ft	Easy
Cassidy Arch	1.7 mi	3.4 mi	670 ft	Strenuous
Cohab Canyon	1.7 mi	3.4 mi	440 ft	Moderate
Grand Wash	2.2 mi	4.4 mi	200 ft	Easy
Rim Overlook	2.3 mi	4.6 mi	1,110 ft	Strenuous
Chimney Rock	— loop	3.6 mi	590 ft	Strenuous
Navajo Knobs	4.7 mi	9.4 mi	1,620 ft	Strenuous

PLANNING NOTES

- No water at the trailheads. Fill up at the visitor center or Fruita Campground and carry it all.
- Flash flood season runs mid-June to mid-October, peaking July to September. Water arrives from storms miles away — clear sky above you means nothing.
- "High clearance" isn't always enough. Cathedral Valley roads can defeat 4WD after rain, and the Hartnet route fords a river with no bridge.
- Trails start around 5,000 feet. NPS says its Easy hikes feel harder if you've come from sea level.
- Best months: March–June and September–October. Summer averages 87–91°F with very little shade.
- Fruita Campground: 71 sites, 65 reservable up to six months ahead at \$25 a night. No first-come sites.

Map This Route

Scan the QR code below to open the live, interactive Google My Map with all eleven stops in order, with driving directions built in. Tap any pin for distances, elevation and what to watch for.



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE CAMERA

BEFORE YOU GO OFFLINE

There is no cell service anywhere inside Capitol Reef. Open this map and download it before you leave Torrey — and check the NPS road report the morning you go, because the dirt spurs close after storms.

Capitol Reef National Park — the quiet one, and the only one with an orchard

One road through, one road in, and fruit you pick yourself.

STEALTHEITINERARY.COM

Steal the research. Keep the adventure.