

Glen Canyon Slot Hikes

Canyons Calling This Land is Your Land - Glen Canyon Slot Hikes By Julia Cozby
Trickling streams. The song of a Canyon Wren. Towering, sheer rock walls of red, orange, and peach laced with black streaks. Delicate, lacy ferns and gigantic cottonwood trees. Overpowering quiet sounds of nature. All this can be found within the Canyons of the Escalante—the most beautiful canyons in the entire southwestern United States. This claim is not made lightly; the Grand Canyon may be a vision of grandeur, but the truly beautiful canyons are all upstream along the Escalante River drainage. Glen Canyon National Recreation Area holds claim to the Escalante River's canyons. Many think Glen Canyon NRA is all, and only about Lake Powell. They would be mistaken. There are several excellent high desert hiking opportunities within the Canyons of the Escalante that are accessible from the small southwest Utah towns of Boulder and Escalante. In order to see and experience the most incredible places on the most amazing subdistrict in Glen Canyon, an overnight backpacking trip is in order. Pack your water filter and bring your sandals—the canyons are calling! .

The Escalante Subdistrict is clearly marked on most Escalante-area maps. It is a boundary line that zigzags on the eastern-most side of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The Monument may get heavy press, but the Escalante Subdistrict of Glen Canyon has always been its lovelier sister. If you've seen an article in any of the national outdoor magazines profiling southern Utah, chances are that the photos came from the sublime scenery of the Escalante Subdistrict in Glen Canyon NRA. Neon Canyon has become one popular destination. This famous double pour-off in a secluded alcove is a perfect one-night backpacking trip, about eight miles of hiking, round trip. To get there, drive down Hole-In-The-Rock Road 16 miles to the Egypt Trailhead turn-off. Turn! The road out to Egypt has some dicey spots—high clearance and four-wheel drive might be necessary. Hike down the Egypt Trail into Fence Canyon and on to the Escalante River. Fence Canyon has a nice spring running year round and the spring is a good place to filter water since the sediment in the river can jam up a filter quickly. Once you get down to the Escalante, you'll see many places for prime backpacking base camps along the river's edge. Walk down river about a mile (the path is fairly clear, but you will get in and out of the river a few times) to the first canyon on your left, Neon Canyon. There's a clearing shaded by large cottonwood trees at the entrance. Walk into the canyon almost a mile. Your hike will end with the stunning double pour-off alcove. When hiking back upriver to your campsite, stop and take a look (please, don't touch) at the pictographs just upriver from Neon. There are ancient and, unfortunately, more recent cowboy-era carvings. In the summer months, the Neon Canyon hike can be done in one very long day. The hike back up and out to the parking area will be brutal, though, unless you are a marathon runner or hiking as the sun sets. However, hiking in the dark is never a good idea, particularly in this remote backcountry. Another fantastic hike that is a wonderful first backpacking trip in the Canyons of the Escalante is Coyote Gulch. Within this canyon the magnificent spirit of Glen Canyon is alive, which now lies hidden beneath the waters of Lake Powell. Coyote Gulch will steal your heart; its beauty is beyond compare. The canyon has large grassy glens with huge cottonwood trees. As you hike on the trails, the leaves rustle a few yards away. Is it a bird? A raccoon? No! There are whole deer herds living quite nicely within Coyote's huge red walls. Incredible springs, arches, alcoves of cathedral-like proportions, and lush hanging gardens will make you a canyon-country backpacking addict. Once you've tasted Coyote Gulch you'll crave it forever. There are many ways to get into Coyote Gulch. Some entries are tougher than others, especially on a vehicle, so going in at the first access point available is a good idea. Red Well is 30.4 miles down Hole-In-The-Rock Road from Highway 12. Once you turn off, the trailhead is about one mile east. As you hike in, you will get to Red Well's first spring after about a mile. Hiking in seven miles will place you at Jacob Hamblin arch, formerly known as Lobo Arch. The last wolf in southern Utah was killed underneath the arch by area ranchers, hence its original name. At this point you are deep within the heart of Coyote Gulch. Down canyon from Hamblin Arch is Coyote Natural Bridge and Cliff Arch along seven more miles of deep red and black streaked walls until you reach the Escalante River. There is so much to see and love about this canyon. Waterfalls, slot canyons in the making, hanging gardens, deep dark niches and grottos around every bend. By base camping anywhere, you can day hike, then come back out to your car at Red Well. This way, you can make your hike into Coyote Gulch as long or as short as you desire. There are many springs to filter water from, and many places along the banks of Coyote's year round running creek that are great base camping spots. A guarantee. You will be blown away hiking back out as you were blown away hiking in. Here are some rules and tips to help make hiking in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area more enjoyable. Staying overnight requires a free backcountry permit. Pick one up at the Red Well Trail Head Register, or at the Escalante Interagency Office in Escalante. Call 435-826-5499 for more information. The hikes described are all overnight backpacking experiences. There is no camping at the trail heads and no improved, drive-in campgrounds anywhere near either of these trail heads. It is imperative that you strictly observe Leave No Trace rules when in these canyons. For more information regarding backcountry ethics, visit www.lnt.org. If you're a climber, do not damage or deface any rocks or vegetation with your equipment, and do not leave anchors. Dogs are welcome, but must be on a leash. Fires are not permitted, so you must bring a stove. Keep your group size to twelve people or less. There are pit toilets within Coyote Gulch—use them if you can. If not, bury your waste 6-8 inches deep and pack your paper out. Or, use a waste containment hiking pouch as required at Paria Canyon or at Zion National Park's Narrows. These containment pouches actually work much better than you'd suspect and by using them you are really leaving no trace in the fragile canyon ecosystem. Stay out of archaeological sites. On National Park administered lands, violations can be a federal misdemeanor or felony. You will want to bring a water filter or water treatment tablets—try to use a seep or spring source, much easier on your filtering equipment since there is so much sand, silt, and dirt running in Coyote Gulch's creek. If you'd like more information, go to www.nps.gov/glca. The National Park Service web site is very user-friendly and up-to-date. For road conditions, visit www.ut.blm.gov/monument. To contact the Escalante

Interagency Office for backcountry permit information, road conditions, or other Escalante and Boulder, Utah information, call 435-826-5499. Enjoy your visit, but please, keep this beautiful place pristine for the rest of us to enjoy! Julia Cosby is another long-time contributor to the Guide. She and husband Drew operate Escalante Outback Adventures, a guide service with permits for hiking, backpacking and canyoneering in the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument