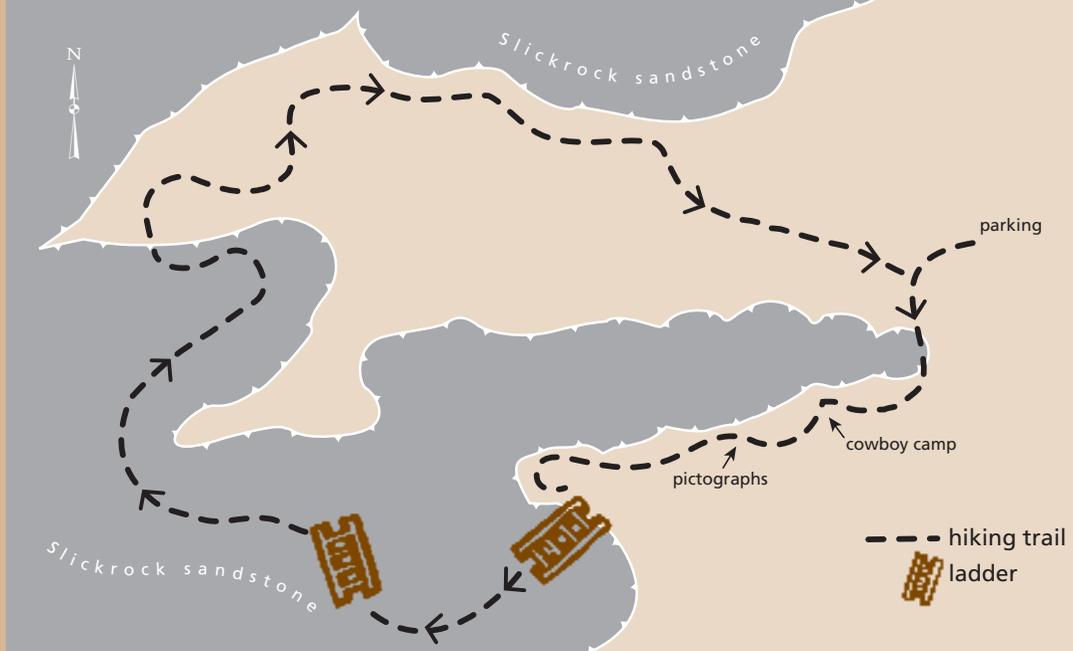


# Cave Spring

TRAIL GUIDE



This 0.6-mile (1km) loop trail leads to a cowboy camp, ancestral Puebloan rock art, 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, strangely shaped 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 the environments. 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 Dugout Ranch, which was owned by the Redd family for generations. The Nature Conservancy purchased the ranch 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.*



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0.6-mile loop (1 km)  
NEEDLES DISTRICT  
CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK

# Cowboys

In the late 1800s pioneering cattlemen settled in canyon country. John Albert Scorup was one of the best known. Through hard work, determination, and the ability to meet the demands of the land, he was able to establish a successful cattle operation. In 1926, Scorup and his partners formed the Scorup-Sommerville Cattle Company, which eventually grew to be the largest in Utah. Their herd varied from 7,000 to 10,000 head and ranged over 1,800,000 acres, from the area now encompassed by Natural Bridges National Monument to the Needles District of Canyonlands National Park.

This widespread ranching operation required cowboys to stay out on the open range with their cattle. They lived in isolated outdoor camps such as this one near Cave Spring, which was used from the late 1800s through 1975, when cattle ranching was discontinued inside Canyonlands National Park. Numerous 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, drinking water and grain for the horses. The cowboys cooked over an open fire using dutch ovens and other simple cookware. Food was the usual cowboy delights: beans, bacon, potatoes, canned vegetables and fruits, sourdough biscuits and the ever-present coffee.

The camp was established at Cave Spring because of the reliable water source. Seeps such as this are formed by rainwater percolating down through layers of porous sandstone. When the water reaches an impermeable rock layer, it flows along that layer until it reaches an opening such as a cliff face. Moisture hastens erosion of the rock face and carves alcoves.

## Ancestral Puebloans

Springs are rare in the desert. Beyond the cowboy camp, soot-blackened ceilings, handprints, painted figures and grinding depressions on boulders indicate that earlier people were also attracted to this precious resource. Ancestral Puebloan Indians occupied these canyons six centuries before the cattlemen arrived, from approximately 700 to 1,000 years ago. The ancestral Puebloans did not live continuously in what is now Canyonlands National Park. They left the canyons

seasonally or during periods of drought and returned when conditions were more favorable for growing their crops of corn and beans. When they were here, they lived in alcoves like Cave Spring. They left the area and moved on when, because of prolonged drought, the water table dropped.

*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 slickrock. Shallow pockets of soil support the growth of lumpy black biological soil crust. This crust is made up of cyanobacteria, lichens, moss, fungi and algae, and 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 grows very slowly, however, and is easily crushed by careless footsteps. Tracks remain visible for decades. Please stay on established trails or slickrock.

Cracks and crevices in the sandstone provide shelter for snakes, lizards, bats and rodents. Packrats leave untidy evidence of their presence in nests called middens, which are composed of sticks, debris and dung. Their highly concentrated urine deposited on and around midden sites congeals these materials into a hard brown substance that effectively 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 from the Ice Age, 11,000 years ago, to the present. Changes during the last 100 years may ultimately be the greatest because of accelerating human impact, climate change, and the introduction of non-native plant species.

