

## A Guide to I-70 Through Southeastern Utah



**Moab Area Travel Council  
Internet Brochure Series**  
Available from:  
**discovermoab.com**

### INTRODUCTION

Interstate 70 (I-70) through southeastern Utah is a journey through fascinating landscapes. The route reveals vast deserts, deep canyons, sheer cliffs, and unique rock formations. This guide covers 175 miles of Interstate 70 from the Colorado state line to Salina. From east to west, the highway travels through the Cisco Desert, the San Rafael Desert and the San Rafael Swell. In these regions, most of the land is managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Utah Division of State Lands and Forestry. The highway then passes through the higher elevations of the Fishlake National Forest. No services are available on I-70 between the cities of Green River (Milepost 158) and Salina (Milepost 53), a distance of 105 miles.

The guide is keyed to a series of visitor centers, rest areas, and view areas that are located and numbered on the map. All of the rest areas have either modern rest rooms or vault toilets and several have picnic tables, shelters, and water. Not all of the rest areas are accessible for both eastbound and westbound traffic. For example, a site listed as "1W" is accessible only to westbound traffic. The highway exit numbers are based upon the mileage marker posts. The mileage markers begin at the junction with I-15

**John Wesley Powell River History  
Museum & Visitor Information**  
885 E Main, Green River, UT 84525  
435-564-3427 (*Museum Fee*)

**Moab Information Center**  
Main & Center, Moab, UT 84532  
435-259-6622 800-635-6622

and increase to Milepost 227 near the Colorado border. Mileage marker posts (or Mileposts) and Exit numbers correspond, and both are used in the descriptive text which follows.

Although the scenery is spectacular as viewed from the highway, you are encouraged to stop at the sites described below to see even more. Other nearby points of interest accessible from I-70 are briefly noted and located on the map. More detailed information on these sights can be obtained by contacting the appropriate agencies listed in this brochure.

### 1W - Harley Dome View Area Milepost 228

The Harley Dome View Area is located on a rise along the route of the freeway. From the parking area, a short walk up to a sheltered viewing platform offers views of the Book Cliffs mountain range to the north. To the south, hidden from view, is the Colorado River and its narrow, black gorge through Westwater Canyon, a whitewater rafting area for expert boaters.

The major landforms observed while traveling this stretch of I-70 are the Book Cliffs to the north and the relatively flat Cisco Desert through which the freeway travels. Although the Book Cliffs look stark from the highway, they have abundant meadows and forested areas at the higher elevations, and they harbor black bear and mountain lion. Portions of the Book Cliffs are being considered for wilderness designation.

At the turn of the century, the Cisco Desert was used extensively as a grazing area for sheep. The town site of Cisco was a major sheep shearing center. In those days, more than 100,000 sheep were driven here to be shorn and shipped to market every spring. While grazing continues at reduced levels, the Cisco Desert is now valuable for oil and gas. The field is unusual in that most of the gas wells are quite shallow (1,000 to 1,400 feet deep).

The Cisco exit (Exit 204) provides access to Highway 128, a Utah Scenic Byway that follows the Colorado River to the City of Moab. No services are available at the town site of Cisco.

### 2W - Thompson Springs Welcome Center Milepost 189

This rest area welcomes westbound visitors with free brochures and maps. The center, operated by the State of Utah, is open all year. From Memorial Day through Labor Day, personnel are on duty from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. to answer your questions. The rest of the year the center is operated from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Indoor rest rooms, water, picnic shelters, and a public phone are available at all times.

Food and fuel are available at Thompson Springs (Exit 187), which provides access to a panel of Native American rock art in Sejo Canyon. To visit this site, follow the signs from the north side of town. Be sure not to touch or alter these fragile remnants of North America's heritage.

Exit 182 to Highway 191 serves as a gateway to Moab and many of the scenic wonders in southeastern Utah. Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, Dead Horse Point State Park, the Manti-La Sal National Forest, and Canyon Rims Recreation Area are just a few of the fascinating areas in this region. Food and fuel are available at Exit 182.

### 3E - Crescent Junction Rest Area Milepost 181

This rest area gives the eastbound visitor a bird's eye view of the Cisco Desert, the red rocks and mesas of the canyon country to the south, and the Book Cliffs to the north. Indoor rest rooms, water, and picnic shelters are available year-round.

### 4 - City of Green River Mileposts 160 and 164

At this town, I-70 crosses the Green River. The Green is the largest tributary of the Colorado River system and the last major river to be explored in the United States. In 1869, Major John Wesley Powell and a party of nine men made an historic voyage of exploration from Green River, Wyoming to near the settlement of Las Vegas, Nevada. The John Wesley Powell River History Museum, located on the bank of the Green River, commemorates his explorations with

exhibits, slide shows, and artifacts from early river days. The museum also houses the Green River Visitor Center, which provides brochures and information about the area. Also in the City of Green River is Green River State Park, with its campground, golf course, and launch area for float trips through Labyrinth Canyon.

The 100-mile San Rafael Desert Loop Auto Tour heads south from the City of Green River and can be used to access the Horseshoe Canyon section of Canyonlands National Park. Stop at the Green River Visitor Center to pick up a brochure and to check road conditions for this backcountry loop drive.

The area between the Green River and the San Rafael Reef is known as the San Rafael Desert. Early travelers of the Old Spanish Trail considered this one of the most desolate portions of the 1,200-mile trading route between Santa Fe and Los Angeles. After crossing the Green River just north of the present day City of Green River, the Old Spanish Trail skirted the north side of the San Rafael Swell and then swung south to rejoin the path of present-day I-70 near Fremont junction (Exit 91).

Highway 6 (Exit 158) heads north between the Book Cliffs and the San Rafael Swell to the town of Price and on to I-15. Price area attractions include the College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum, Native American rock art in Nine Mile Canyon, and the Helper Mining and Railroad Museum.

Exit 149 is the northern terminus of Highway 24, which heads south parallel to the San Rafael Reef and can be used to reach Temple Mountain, Goblin Valley State Park, Canyonlands National Park's Maze District, Hanksville, the Henry Mountains, Lake Powell and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

### **5W & 5E - San Rafael Reef Rest Areas Milepost 146**

Dominating the landscape with its sawtooth ridge of giant flatirons is the San Rafael Reef. The San Rafael Reef is the dramatic eastern boundary of the San Rafael Swell, a large, kidney-shaped topographic feature that began as an uplift

of rock 40 to 60 million years ago. Erosion left the canyons and cliffs that have been barriers to travel by man.

The San Rafael Reef is called a monocline by geologists, and such structures are known to be good places to seek mineral deposits. Several valuable deposits of uranium have been located along the length of the San Rafael Reef. Joe Swasey, an early-day rancher, once mined uranium from Temple Mountain near the middle of the Reef and used the ore as an ingredient in pottery glaze. Uranium from Temple Mountain was later used to make one of the first atomic bombs.

### **6W & 6E-Black Dragon and Spotted Wolf View Areas Milepost 142**

I-70 slices through the Reef via Spotted Wolf Canyon. From the Spotted Wolf Canyon View Area (6E), you can walk out to a point which overlooks I-70 as it descends through the Reef. Several of the major rock formations of the Reef are readily apparent here with the upturned Navajo, Kayenta, and Wingate sandstone formations exposed to view. The area to the south of this view area is part of the San Rafael Reef Wilderness Study Area.

Native Americans of the Fremont Culture inhabited the Swell between 700 and 1250 A.D. They left considerable evidence of their Occupation, including campsites, stone granaries, and artwork painted (pictographs) or carved (petroglyphs) on canyon walls. Black Dragon Canyon, just north of Spotted Wolf Canyon, is named for one such pictograph which resembles a large winged reptile or pterodactyl.

Exit 131 provides access to the central portion of the San Rafael Swell. The area to the northeast of Exit 131 is known as Jackass Benches, home to both wild horses and burros. These hardy animals are protected under the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Management Act of 1971, Twenty miles north of the freeway on a maintained gravel road is a small Bureau of Land Management campground at the San Rafael River (no drinking water available).

North of the campground, the road passes through precipitous Buckhorn Draw with its pictograph and petroglyph panels

(restored in 1996 as Emery County's Utah Centennial Project). At the north end of Buckhorn Draw is the turn-off to the Wedge Overlook where there is a panoramic view of the San Rafael River's Little Grand Canyon. South of Price is the Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry and Visitor Center (open seasonally; contact the Bureau of Land Management in Price) from which more than 18,000 bones, mostly Allosaurus, have been taken. The route from I-70 to the Wedge Overlook and the town of Castle Dale has been designated a Utah Backcountry Byway.

The area to the south of Exit 131 provides the traveler with many opportunities. The historic mining areas of Temple Mountain, Tomsich Butte, and Hidden Splendor are accessible from here, as is Swasey's Cabin, used historically by the Swasey family as part of their livestock operation.

### **7W & 7E-Ghost Rock Rest Areas Milepost 123**

An early-day rancher gave this rock formation the name "Ghost Rock" one day when fog obscured the base and gave the crown the appearance of a ghost floating in the air. Because it often stood out in bad weather, the Ghost Rock was an important landmark for stockmen.

The landscape seen to the east of these rest areas is known as "Sinbad Country." Although there is no documentation as to how this name came about, it seems reasonable to assume that the name was given because the rock formations reminded someone of scenes described in *The Arabian Nights*.

The canyon-cut tableland north of I-70, viewable from the westbound Ghost Rock rest area, is known as Secret Mesa (eastbound travelers can see this area from the truck parking lot). The maze of canyons, rock monuments, and wooded tablelands here made it an excellent hiding place for those "on the dodge" from the law.

Most individuals who came here for that reason simply were avoiding the authorities after some minor infraction, but others have become famous in outlaw history. In 1897 Butch Cassidy and Elza

Lay stole the mine payroll at Castle Gate, Utah (north of Price), making off with \$10,000 in loot. They eluded two sheriff's posses in the canyons of the Swell.

### **8 - Eagle Canyon Rest Area/Moore Exit** *Milepost 116*

This rest area provides an excellent overlook of Eagle Canyon and the Sids Mountain Wilderness Study Area. The Canyon was named by the Swaseys, who said it was so deep that an eagle could not fly out of it. The bridges built for the 1-70 crossing of the canyon (Milepost 120) are almost 300 feet above the rock-strewn, sandy bottom.

The Copper Globe Road (4-wheel drive vehicle required) at Exit 116 is named for an abandoned mine. The mine was discovered prior to 1900 and eventually became the property of US Commissioner Edward Pike. Although several shipments of copper ore were pulled from the mine during World Wars I and II, the mine's remote location and skimpy ore supply hampered serious development.

The maintained gravel road going north from 1-70 is called the Moore Road and intersects Highway 10 near the tiny settlement of Moore, between the towns of Emery and Ferron. The road was built in 1902 to connect the Copper Globe Mine with Moore. Miner Pike paid \$3,000 for the road, which was built by local residents with work horses and scrapers. Gypsum is now mined in the area.

### **9E - Devils Canyon Rest Area** *Milepost 115*

This rest area overlooks Devils Canyon, another wilderness study area, to the south. A short, unmarked trail leads to a viewpoint at the edge of the canyon (there are no railings or barriers, so use caution in approaching the point). The small cliffs seen to the northwest across 1-70 are the Red Ledges.

South Salt Wash Exit 108 provides four-wheel drive access to the Copper Globe Road and to Mussentuchit Sand Dunes, a small area of dunes that offer off-highway vehicle enthusiasts some interesting riding.

### **10W-Sand Bench Rest Area** *Milepost 106*

The overlook at this rest area features a view of the gentle slopes of the western edge of the San Rafael Swell. Geologists call the Swell an asymmetrical anticline because its strata have been folded unevenly. The eastern fold tipped the strata almost vertical, forming the San Rafael Reef, while the other margins are tilted much less severely.

### **10E-Sand Bench Rest Area** *Milepost 104*

This rest area provides the traveler with interesting studies in color, particularly in the spring and fall. The white sandstone on top caps off red siltstone, which, in turn, contrasts with the bright green vegetation along South Salt Wash. To the south, the distant Henry Mountains serve as the backdrop for Hebes Mountain and Cedar Mountain, and, to the west, the desert colors blend into the dark, forested areas of the Wasatch Plateau and the Fishlake National Forest.

The road heading north from Exit 99 parallels Muddy Creek for several miles before entering Miller Canyon and connecting with Highway 10 at the town of Emery. The dirt road south from Exit 99 provides another access route to Mussentuchit Sand Dunes.

### **11 - Ivie Creek Rest Area** *Milepost 86*

Located within Fishlake National Forest, this wooded rest area provides the traveler with rest rooms, water, picnic shelters, and a short hiking trail.

Highways 10 and 72 intersect 1-70 at Fremont Junction (89). Highway 10 heads northeast to the towns of Emery, Ferron, Castle Dale, Huntington, and Price. Many recreational areas and points of interest are accessible along the way including: Millsite State Park, the Manti-LaSal National Forest, Huntington State Park, the Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry, the Emery County Museum, and the CEU Prehistoric Museum.

Highway 72 goes south from 1-70, climbs into the Fishlake National Forest, then drops down into the towns of Fremont and

Loa, where it connects with Highway 24. From there, the towns of Bicknell, Teasdale, Torrey, Hanksville, Boulder, and Escalante can be reached. Recreational attractions south of 1-70 include Capitol Reef National Park, Dixie National Forest, and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

1-70 continues west into Fishlake National Forest over Emigrant Pass to Salina, a distance of 33 miles. This highway follows the approximate route of the Old Spanish Trail.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Moab Area Travel Council**  
84 North 100 East  
Moab, UT 84532  
435-259-8825 or 800-635-6622

**Castle Country Travel Council**  
CEU Prehistoric Museum  
155 E. Main \* Price, UT 84501  
435-637-5060

**Bureau of Land Management**  
**Moab Field Office**  
82 E. Dogwood \* Moab, UT 84532  
435-259-6111

**Bureau of Land Management**  
**Price Field Office**  
125 South 600 West \* Price, UT 84501  
435-637-3600

**BLM Internet Information:**  
[www.blm.gov/utah/](http://www.blm.gov/utah/)

**Arches National Park**  
P.O. Box 907  
North Hwy. 191 \* Moab, UT 84532  
435-259-8161

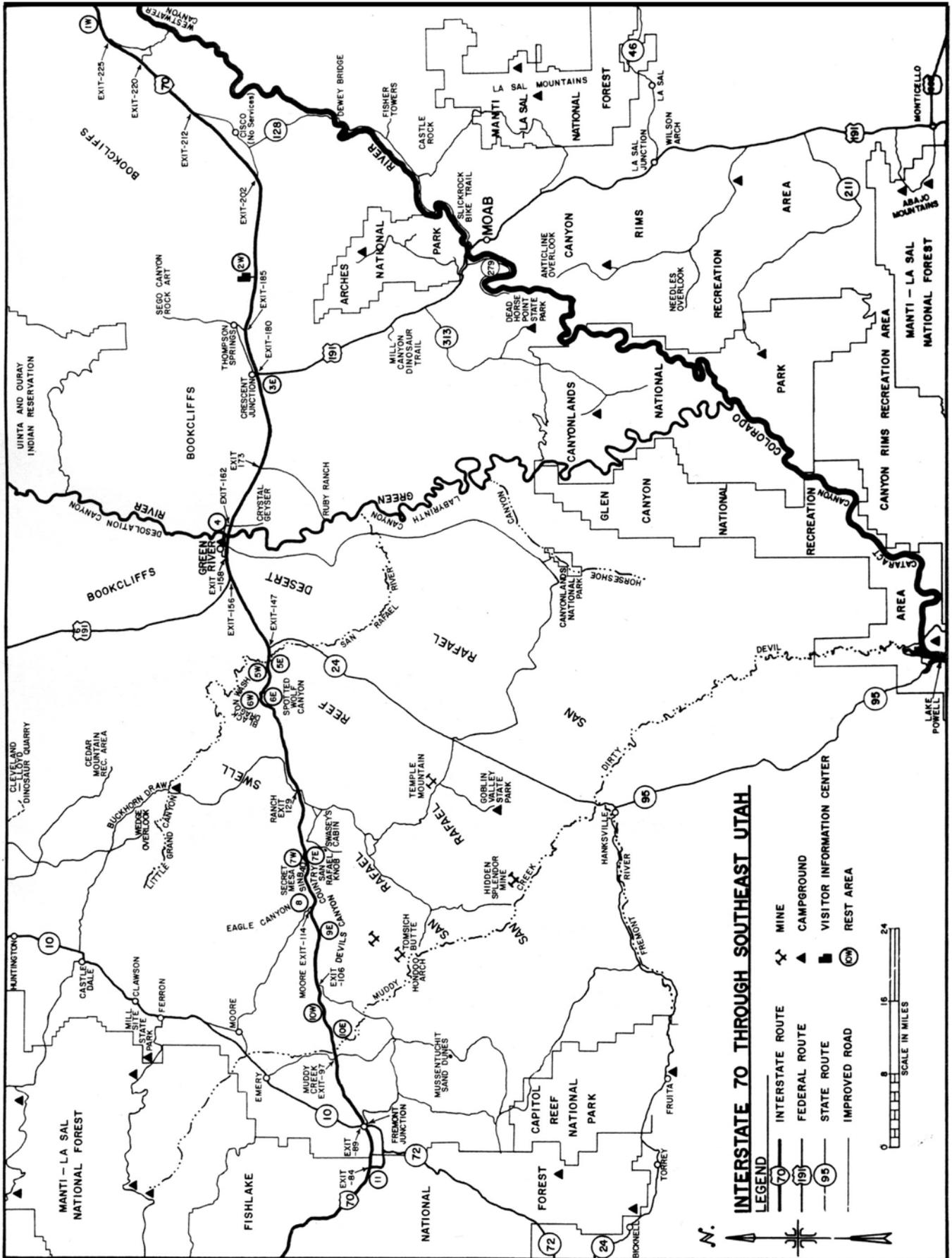
**Canyonlands National Park**  
2282 SE Resource Blvd.  
Moab, UT 84532  
435-719-2313

**Capitol Reef National Park**  
Torrey, UT 84720  
435-425-3791

**Glen Canyon National Recreation Area**  
P.O. Box 1507 \* Page, AZ 80040  
520-645-6404

**Manti La Sal National Forest**  
599 Price River Dr. \* Price, UT 84501  
435-637-2817

**Fishlake National Forest**  
115 E. 900 N. \* Richfield, UT 84701  
435-896-9233



**INTERSTATE 70 THROUGH SOUTHEAST UTAH**

- LEGEND**
- INTERSTATE ROUTE
  - FEDERAL ROUTE
  - STATE ROUTE
  - IMPROVED ROAD
  - MINE
  - CAMPGROUND
  - VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER
  - REST AREA

