

# EXPLORING THE VALLEY

## Fun on the river

## Trekking on foot

**LEAH JANE DAVIDSON,  
TY FIFE**

ljdavids@mavs.coloradomesa.edu,  
tfife@mavs.coloradomesa.edu

Getting wet and wild in Grand Junction is easy. The Gunnison and Colorado River combine to create a confluence, thus giving the city the name Grand Junction.



COURTESY PHOTO JOSH ERVIS



Students floating through Desolation Canyon on an O.P. trip (top). Students floating through Glenwood Canyon on a separate O.P. trip (bottom).

Intense white water segments and relaxed day-trip floats allow everyone to find a personal river nirvana.

Regardless of experience, getting out on the water can be a blissful and exciting adventure. Local rafting companies offer professional guided trips down the river while the Outdoor Program offers common-adventure trips led by CMU students. Not to mention, within 100 miles of campus there are enough river segments to do a different one every weekend of the entire year.

### Green River

Along with amazing opportunities on the Colorado, the Green River in Utah holds excellent opportunities for boating. There are long, floatable stretches of river that are lined with beautiful canyons. There are many floating options available, from just a night or two to boating for almost as long as you could handle.

### Glenwood Canyon

It is only 90 minutes away and is a good place to get crazy easily -- with proper safety of course. At the right times of the year, the canyon has one of the most turbulent sections of white water, known as Barrel Springs, in the state. It is not for the light-hearted, but there are two sections of rapids below the gnarly section, Shoshone and Grizzly Creek, that still throw Category III and IV rapids.

### Local Float

If you aren't up for quite as much adventure, there is the option of grabbing an inner tube and floating the Colorado River through town. There are several different possible floats depending on how long you want to spend on the water. You can unload/load at Riverbend Park in Palisade, Corn Lake in Clifton, the Botanical Gardens in Garden Junction or several other locations all the way to Loma. Just make sure you check with a local raft shop or the O.P. to check water levels before you head out.



**At first glance, the old people and thermometer might make you think, "What is there fun to do here?" Well, Grand Junction is a mecca for outdoor recreation, having access to both desert and mountain terrain. Moab is only 90 minutes away, and the Grand Mesa is even closer than that. This means there are year-round hiking and biking options in the desert and tons of seasonal opportunities in the national forest. The mesa is home to over 300 lakes, hundreds of miles of hiking trails (some of which double as cross-country ski trails) and Powderhorn Ski Resort.**

**CHARLIE BLACKMER**

cbblackme@mavs.coloradomesa.edu

In his 1912 book, "The Yosemite", famed American naturalist John Muir tells us, "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike."

As the fall semester begins to quickly pick up pace and stress levels rise, it can become all too easy to trick ourselves into thinking that our world is made up of mostly campus and classroom.

However, the playgrounds that Muir speaks of, those which we can turn to when our spirits need lifting and our minds need a break, surround us on all sides. For any weary student willing to take them on, two local hikes in particular are sure to provide all the elements necessary to break out of the school cycle and soothe one's soul.

### Crag's Crest Trail

Located atop the Grand Mesa, this 10 mile loop is at the top of the list because it is one that needs to be tackled before cold weather kicks in. The trail starts by winding through towering pines and slender aspens, works its way across a pristine meadow, then begins to ascend higher to a narrow hogback ridge. Three miles of the ten mile trail are spent walking along this crest, which lies above tree line, giving a view of over 100 miles in all directions on clear days. The trail then makes its way back through the trees, eventually descending upon a large lake that is only a few miles from trail's end.

Expect to take four to six hours to conquer this loop.

### Otto's Staircase

This trail climbs steeply at first through sandstone boulders and pinyon pines, then levels out long enough for hikers to get used to dodging the ever-present cacti and taking in the rich smell of juniper trees. After three miles you'll come face to face with a steep wall of slickrock that has had a veritable ladder carved into its face -- this is Otto's Staircase. Climb the stairs, perhaps with the help of a handily placed metal pole, and you'll eventually make your way to the top of Monument Mesa, overlooking Monument Canyon and Independence Rock.



BY CHARLIE BLACKMER



BY CHARLIE BLACKMER

Blooming cacti along Otto's Staircase (top). You continue on this spine for three miles of the Crag's Crest hike exposing spectacular views from all angles (bottom).

## A different kind of golf

**JACK KIRK**

jkirk@mavs.coloradomesa.edu

There are a few sports that in recent years have been gaining in popularity. Lacrosse and shooting might come to mind, however, disk golf is right up there as well. Many of the courses in the area seem to go unnoticed by a lot of people, so here is a list of them.

There are eight courses registered with the Grand Valley Disk Golf Club. These courses are as close as in town to all the way out in the town of Mesa. The closest to campus are West Lake Park and Matchett Park, both located within city limits. However, the best courses are Fruita Riverside in Fruita and Riverbend Park in Palisade.

### West Lake Park

West Lake Park is about two miles from campus and is a very good course for beginners or casual players looking for

a fun afternoon. It is short and does not have much of a technical challenge to it.

### Matchett Park

Matchett Park is a bit farther but is still reachable without a car. It offers a good variety of hole locations and uses elevation to increase the difficulty. The downside is that much of the course's elevation comes from mini-canyons, which causes disks to be easily lost.

### Fruita Riverside

Fruita Riverside is set near the Colorado River and has a good combination of distance and technical holes, allowing both new and skilled players find a challenge. It is located a decent distance from Fruita though, so bring water and be prepared to hike a bit.

### Riverbend Park

Riverbend Park has many open distance holes and is a bit lighter on the technical side. It also has great signage, with pictures of the entire hole, and most of the holes have concrete tee boxes.



A group of disc golfers playing at the Fruita Riverside course.



A view of the Colorado River from the Kokopelli Trail.



COURTESY PHOTO BLM FLICKR

Blooming cacti are a common site in the spring.

**ALLISON ILDEFONSO**

arildefonso@mavs.coloradomesa.edu

Biking is not only a great workout for your legs -- on the Western Slope, it's also a chance to see spectacular views, get your adventure on and experience some of the best biking terrain the country has to offer. Many trails in and around the area stretch from Junction all the way to Moab or Montrose, depending on the direction you're taking. Although the Western Slope offers countless trails for bikers of different levels of

## Two-wheeling it

experience, here are a few well-known trails to get you started.

### Kokopelli's Trail

Kokopelli's Trail begins in Loma, Colo., and stretches 142 miles to Moab, Utah. Although primarily for mountain bikes, the trail makes use of dirt roads, paved roads and even a narrow track. Be aware that Kokopelli's Trail definitely requires planning ahead of time if you want to spend several days completing the entire thing. There are eight small camping areas with access to a toilet and picnic tables. However, there is no water along the trail, so begin your journey well-prepared. Elevations range from 4,000 to 8,000 feet.

### Tabeguache Trail (TAB-a-watch)

This trail has a total distance of 142 miles from Grand Junction to Montrose and is of moderate difficulty, depending on your experience as a biker. Tabeguache is located mostly on more remote lands, with a guarantee of adventure. Again, water is not readily available to users, which means carrying ample amounts of drinking water is a must.

This trail is not for using during wet weather conditions. Bikers completing the entire trail will pass through the Uncompahgre Plateau, which is a nationally renowned hunting area. Make sure to wear orange if you're biking during hunting season.

### Palisade Rim Trail

The Palisade Rim trail is not for the weak. Although it is much less of a distance than Kokopelli and Tabeguache, the 12-mile stretch is anything but easy. It can take anywhere from 2-4 hours to ride, depending on your experience and endurance. There is no bailout point on the trail, so carry enough food and water to last the entire ride. After a few miles of riding along the mountains, the trail descends to an abandoned coal mine. Palisade Rim is more of a technical trail with many steep miles that make the downhill ride even more of a treat.



Scan to access maps and info about these locations.

**The O.P. has everything you need**

Along with being blessed with all of the great opportunities to go and explore the wild, CMU students have the advantage of having access to the Outdoor Program on campus. The good people at the O.P. have something going on almost every day of the week, whether it is a Thursday outing to the Mesa, a kayak session in the pool or a weekend desert backpacking trip. The program also rents out bikes, rafts, backpacks, tents and virtually anything else you could need for an outing of your own.

BY CHARLIE BLACKMER