

Take your time on this moderately accessible trail which will take about 15-30 minutes. The air is thin at 10,000 feet elevation and in the shade during the midsummer you may encounter mosquitoes. Along the trail you will be directed to some examples of nature's wonders, and a chance to get some fresh air.

Look and listen for pine squirrels and Canada Jays, commonly called camp robbers, as you make your way along the trail.



Here on top the worlds largest flat-top mountain, fishing is popular on the lakes and reservoirs. Rainbow, Brook, Cutthroat and Brown trout are found in these waters.



STOP 1:

This rotting stump will eventually decompose and become part of the soil on the forest floor,

providing many of the nutrients that flowers and trees need to grow. This process can take many, many years and will reach a point when you notice nothing more than spongy step when walking in the forest. Can you find something like this along the Discovery Trail?

STOP 4:

Notice the bright green, pale green and grey material on this rock. This material is called lichen, which is a primitive type of plant similar to moss. Lichens are sensitive to air pollution which can kill them. There are five different types of lichens on rocks along the trail. Can you find them all?

STOP 5:

Take a break at this switchback and notice tree stumps from past forest management efforts. Careful cutting is very important to the growth and health of the forest. Some trees are thinned to improve the growing conditions for the remaining trees. When the forest is too dense, there is not enough sunlight for plants to grow on the forest floor.

STOP 9:

You will see Quaking Aspen trees often referred to as "Quakes". Aspen trees have thin light colored bark and the leaves turn a bright yellow in the fall. Where do they get their name? Their leaves have extra long stems which are oval instead of rounded and cause them to flutter or "quake" in a light wind.



STOP 2:

As you reach this switchback in the trail, take a moment to catch your breath and look around at the different types of trees here.



There are several Engelmann Spruce which have orange scaly bark and one Subalpine Fir which has smooth grey bark. You will find two inch cones from the spruce, but the fir tree produces a cone that points upward and comes apart as it leaves the tree, Can you find the Subalpine fir tree?

STOP 10:

From here you can view the West Elk mountains approximately 30 miles to the east. This area is within the West Elk Wilderness which is managed much differently than the Grand Mesa with its many multiple uses producing timber, forage, water, wildlife and recreation.

STOP 3:

Look up in the tree. Can you find the unnatural looking cluster of small branches? This is called a "witches broom" resulting from a fungus called broom rust. It lives off the tree and slows down its growth. No, there is not a witch living nearby!

STOP 6:

Openings in the forest canopy provide a place for young trees to get established in the available sunlight. Small trees less than one inch in diameter are called seedlings and trees between one and five inches in diameter are often called saplings. When trees are this small you have to identify the spruce by shorter and more "prickly" needles and the fir by longer, more flat and "smoother" needles. Try it for yourself!

STOP 7:

This overlook shows Deep Slough (slew) Reservoir on the right and Ward Lake on the left. These are only two of more than 300 lakes and reservoirs that can be found on Grand Mesa. This stored water is used by nearby towns to provide water to houses and by farmers to irrigate orchards, hayfields and vineyards in the dry areas below the mesa top.

STOP 11:

The somewhat scary tree before you is sometimes called a "wolf tree". It grew up in the open with no neighboring trees resulting in many large uneven branches. Have you ever seen knot holes in lumber? They come from tree branches and therefore a "wolf tree" produces poor quality lumber with many knots.



STOP 12:

Look at this seedling trying to survive as it grows out of this rock! Actually, it is using the rock as an anchor and its roots have burrowed into the soil.

STOP 13:

Where did all the rocks on Grand Mesa come from? People who study rocks say they are called basalt and came from the lava of old volcanic activity. Can you find some more lichens here?

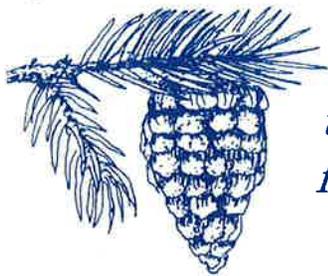
STOP 14:

Across the road is Cobbett Reservoir, which is covered by 5-10 feet of snow in the winter. This amount of snowfall provides opportunities for snowmobiling, cross country skiing, snowboarding and other winter recreation.



STOP 15:

This standing dead tree, often referred to as a "snag", still provides home and perches for many small birds and mammals. Snags can stay standing for many years and once they do fall, the log continues to provide shelter to plants and animals.



*thank you
for joining
us today!*

This trail is located on Grand Mesa. It starts behind the Grand Mesa Visitors Center near the intersection of Hwy 65 and the Trickel Park Road. This nature trail is a good location to start exploring the mesa. Have a good trip. For more information stop by the Visitors Center.



This brochure was printed by Western Colorado Interpretive Association and the Grand Mesa Scenic and Historic Byway Association in cooperation with the Grand Mesa National Forest, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Discovery TRAIL

