

# Hiking Happenings

## A Grand County Almanac: Nature Journaling at Skyline Arch

by Kathy Grossman

I love Arches National Park in the winter. From November into March, we have fewer visitors and more privacy on the trail. (The timed entries start April 1.) Today I'm hiking to Skyline Arch, so I drive towards Devil's Campground, taking my time driving the 18 miles



up the scenic road to its far northern end, rounding the dizzy, red hoodoos that are Fiery Furnace. I now have choices to make as to how I approach this arch: its south face by a trail from the road or its north face from the campground itself.

Route #1 goes to Skyline's south face. After the righthand turnoff to Sand Dune Arch from the main drive, I reach the Skyline Arch Trail pullout also on the right. (Another pullout is on the opposite side of the road.) The arch is in full view for almost all of this well-traveled trail of a fifth of a mile. Chilly temperatures and wind gusts over pockets of last week's snow compel me to wear gloves, cover my ears with a headband, and carry an extra jacket. I hike north up a moist wash into what looks like



Mormon tea at south face



Skyline's north face

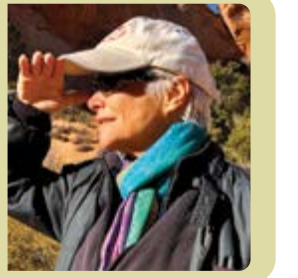
a giant's pottery studio, circled by huge terra cotta slabs. These sandstone towers and fins surround caramel-colored beaches of saltbush, juniper, and messy clumps of Mormon tea. I then swing left around a mighty fin, some picturesque dead trees, and follow a quiet canyon up to a jumble of large boulders, the scattered remains of an original chunk that originally filled half the arch. On one November night in 1940, that chunk detached and fell, doubling the arch's opening to 71 feet, morphing from the shape of a gumdrop to that of an SUV.

Route #2 goes to Skyline's north face via pavement and humpy slickrock. I drive into the snow-dotted campground, occupied today by only a few hardy souls camping among the junipers. I park across from campsite #23 in front of the Road Closed sign and walk toward the amphitheater. Skyline Arch's north face rises huge and magnificent behind the benches that face a projection screen. I walk the path, then scramble up some rocks until it feels too icy to safely go further. Looking up at Skyline's underbelly, I take photos for future sketches in my nature journal. Every week I paint a page with watercolors and outline with pen to describe our flora, fauna, geology, and natural changes.

Aldo Leopold wrote of the natural seasons of his fictional "Sand County," a melding of several Wisconsin counties around his home in Baraboo. His writings were published in 1948 under the title *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, becoming an environmental classic. My own, weekly Grand County almanac pages predict with reasonable



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confidence what to expect throughout the year in my garden, in town, in Arches, Canyonlands, and Sand Flats. Siberian elms make my boyfriend sneeze in early spring, plum trees flower in April, showy milkweed burst out in May, and monsoons sweep through in the summer. Mule deer bachelor groups will start breaking up in the fall, while blue asters, ruby-crowned kinglets, and white-crowned sparrows will return in the winter.

Just as I turn to head back to my car, my ears catch the excited, typewriter-like chitterings of a flock of birds. A shallow rock pool 25 feet away and in full sun is suddenly full of hopping dark-eyed juncos. I've stumbled upon bath time as these charcoal-and-white sparrows chase and splash, continuing their staccato chatter. Even Aldo Leopold saw these "snowbirds" every winter. I stand mute and still for a good ten minutes, absorbing the unexpected exuberance. Even in winter Arches is full of wonder, and juncos are part of the show. And certainly worth a page in my almanac.

## First Annual Moab Spring Spruce-Up April 12-13

Trail Mix invites the public to participate in the Moab Spring Spruce-Up inaugural volunteer event held to maintain, build, and clean up non-motorized trails and other highly-impacted areas in Grand County to help offset impacts in the 2024 season.

Volunteers will be working on equestrian, hiking, mountain biking, and climbing approach trails throughout Grand County. The event is all day Saturday, April 13



**Mar 13 Trails & Tales Series**- Friends of Arches and Canyonlands Parks monthly hiking program starting in March. Inaugural hike features Biologist Sarah Karinen. Registration with spots available for 10 participants. Learn about the diverse environments our Friends Group serves. Tickets available through Friends of Arches and Canyonlands Parks Facebook page.

with a variety of work projects followed by a volunteer appreciation party with drinks, food, and music. Orientation and registration will be the evening of Friday, April 12. Colin Topper, chair of the TrailMix committee, said of the event: "Moab is known for our world-class non-motorized recreation. Grand County's TrailMix is dedicated to making sure these trails are well-built and accessible to everyone. Last year, we had a great response from Moab visitors and residents alike who wanted to contribute to the improvement and maintenance of our trails in Grand County. If you'd like to spend a beautiful April weekend getting dirty and making a difference for the trails you love, please join us at Spring Spruce-Up!"

Interested volunteers can pre-register for the event at <https://www.grandcountyutah.net/1284/Spring-Spruce-Up>. Registration for specific projects will take place from 5pm to 7pm on Friday, April 12 at the MARC (111 E 100 N, Moab UT). Volunteer projects will run from 9am-3pm on Saturday, April 13, with a breakfast from 7am-8:45 am beforehand at the MARC. Participants will have the opportunity to make their own brown-bag lunch. At 9am, participants will board a shuttle van for transportation to their respective volunteer project location. Volunteers will be returned to the MARC around 3pm. Later Saturday evening from



5pm-6pm there will be a social and snack hour for volunteers to get to know each other and relax after a long day of volunteering. At 6pm, there will be a celebration for all volunteers including live music, food, drinks, raffle prizes, games, and more!

Projects for Moab Spring Spruce-Up will be led by Trail Mix, the City of Moab, Grand County Active Transportation and Trails, Grand County Weeds,

Friends of Anonymous Park, Rim to Rim Restoration, and Backcountry Horsemen Canyonlands Chapter. All volunteers must register prior to participating in the event. Participants under the age of 18 will need to bring a parent or guardian to sign activity waivers.

For a complete event schedule and more information, visit the <https://www.grandcountyutah.net/1284/Spring-Spruce-Up> or email [moabtrailmix@gmail.com](mailto:moabtrailmix@gmail.com)

