

# Hiking Happenings

## An Obsession of a Different Kind at Eye of the Whale Arch

by Kathy Grossman

Arches National Park lies on top of an ancient seabed, thousands of feet thick in some places, deposited across the Colorado Plateau when the Western Interior Seaway (WIS) covered much of North America, 320 to 285 million years ago, including the area near Moab. For 34 million years this seaway, up to 2,500 feet deep, 600 miles wide, and over 2,000 miles long, split the North American continent into two landmasses: Laramidia to the west and Appalachia to the east. From the names we give to some of our parks' formations, you'd think there was whaling done in this prehistoric sea. From Whale Rock in Canyonlands to the Whale and Eye of the Whale arches in Arches NP, we do seem to see cetaceans here! The WIS waters did include sharks, mosasaurs and pleiosaurs, plus the ray-finned Xiphactinus (the "X-fish") which measured up to 18 feet in length. But no whales.

Eye of the Whale Arch is located in southwest Herdina Park. This "park" is a desert plain of pinyon, junipers, and black brush surrounded by a reef-style outcropping of Estrada sandstone fins and arches. Jerry Herdina was a steel engineer of Czech ancestry from Chicago who wandered southern Utah, including around Arches and Canyonlands,

looking for fossils. The fossils he collected, plus his photographic slides and reference library, are now housed in Chicago's Field Museum.

On a frosty winter morning, my friend drives us from Moab north for 15 miles up U.S. 191, then turns right/east into the brand, spanking new Utahraptor State Park entrance. (As of



From the north side

this writing its visitor center is not yet open but will soon add dinosaur models plus CCC and Japanese Internment camp exhibits). Signage and paved roads lead to the state park boundary where, after viewing theropod and sauropod impressions at the BLM's Willow Springs Dinosaur Tracksite, we connect to the original western "backdoor" entrance to Arches, Willow Springs Road, and enter the national park. This is when the going gets a bit gnarly. Our high-clearance SUV makes it fine, however, with the help of companions suggesting various tricky wheel placements. After traveling through Willow Flats, we turn left/north (Park Road 19, BLM 378, or Herdina Park Jeep Road) and travel northwest for a little over two miles to the signed Eye of the Whale Trailhead and small parking area. We shoulder our packs and walk through sandy washes, pin ball up rocky grades, and traverse sloping slickrock to stand under the arch, 37 feet wide, 12 feet tall, and 25 feet thick. We then hike east and down and around to the southwest, where we get a southern perspective of the eye and its distinct brow ridge. We spread sitting pads and lunches on the warming slickrock under the arch's unblinking cetacean gaze, snow-capped waves of the La Sal Mountains rising in the distance. To finish our trip loop, we backtrack the Jeep Road, go east



Small critter tracks

Kathy Grossman is an artist, writer, and film aficionado who's lived in Moab since 2011. For the true story that inspired *Moby-Dick*, she recommends the 2015 movie *In the Heart of the Sea*.



From the south

at Willow Springs Road to Balanced Rock, then turn right/southwest onto Arches Scenic Drive toward the Visitor Center and home.

Looking up at the squinty, sandstone eye, I remembered Captain Ahab's words from Herman Melville's 1851 novel, *Moby-Dick*; or, *The Whale*, as he grimly addresses the white whale, "Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart, I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee." However, because I'm a Star Trek fan, I also recalled Khan Noonien Singh's cold anger aimed at James T. Kirk, in the 1982 movie *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, "To the last, I grapple with thee; from hell's heart, I stab at thee . . ." But their obsessions were of a different kind: Khan's with a Starfleet Admiral, Ahab's with an albino sperm whale, revenge fueling their fury. My obsession is calmer though no less focussed: seeking secluded red rock splendor. Besides, my friend and I had brought no harpoons, only trekking poles.



Start of the trail

## Hike to Delicate Arch or Landscape Arch

by Moab Adventure Center

There are so many rock features to explore in Moab, both inside and outside of National Parks that you may be wondering why it would be worth hiking up to 3 miles from the parking lot to see yet another. It's a good point, being that so many incredible features and overlooks require nothing more than a "window shopping" stroll. But in the case of Delicate Arch and/or Landscape Arch, you may want to plan half a day into your vacation for hiking. Prepare properly with shoes, jackets, adequate water, and a good camera. Even a bad camera will take an incredible photo of Delicate Arch. It's got a drop-dead gorgeous stance, backdrop, and angle to the sun that makes it so iconic for license plates, Olympic Torch parades, and countless postcards. It's such a good visual landscape it makes you wonder if it ought to be called "Landscape Arch".



Things to do in Moab

The real Landscape Arch is an easier hike, but much more difficult to size up in a camera frame, and with such a fragile, slender and, well... delicate profile it seems to defy gravity. It ought to have the name "Delicate" but we didn't assign the names! Visually, and in person these two arches that require a bit of hiking are well worth the effort.

Photo courtesy of Moab Adventure Center



## Second Annual Spring Spruce Up, April 11-12

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 2025 season.

Volunteers will be working on equestrian, hiking, mountain biking, and climbing approach trails throughout Grand County. The event is all day Saturday, April 12 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 11.

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 and additional resources 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 and recreational areas 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 11 at the MARC (111 E 100 N, Moab UT).

Volunteer projects will run from 9am-3pm on Saturday, April 12, 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.

by Grand County Active Transportation and Trails

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, 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 [trailoutreach@grandcountyutah.net](mailto:trailoutreach@grandcountyutah.net)

