



Red Spider Canyon, Utah

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia ^[1].

The **Red Spider Canyon** ^[*] is a canyon in the state of Utah in the United States. It's crossed by the [Lazy Creek](#) ^[*], a tributary of the [San Juan River](#), near the [Gooseneck State Park](#). The whole area is placed in the San Juan county, whose capital is [Monticello](#) and whose largest city is [Blanding](#). The county is named after the river San Juan, so named by Spanish explorers in honor of St. John.

The county is bordered by Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. The four states touch each other at the point known as the *Four Corners*.

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Red Spider Canyon, Utah



Overview of the final part of the canyon with the Twin Chimneys Rock



Utah's flag



San Juan county's position within the state



Utah's position within U.S.



Overview of the San Juan River

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Geography [\[edit\]](#)

According to [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the canyon covers an area of approximately 0,5km² and the creek occupies a small portion of it and the remaining part is predominantly rocky ^[2].

The area has been declared protected by the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) since 1967 and included in the list of archaeological interesting areas, class V, regarding to Historical Sites Preservation Acted ^[*]^[3].

The Lazy Creek, coming from the center the state, flows into the [San Juan River](#) and this confluence is known for being one of the mean camps of the explorer [John Wesley Powell](#), a veteran of the American Civil War, who explored the Colorado River - but who wanted to come here, with an expedition using only three wooden boats, in 1869 ^[*]^[4].

Climate [\[edit\]](#)

The area has a dry, semiarid desert climate. The dry weather is a result of the position of the state in the so-called rain shadow of the Sierra Nevada, California. The main precipitations are due to its proximity to the Pacific Ocean and to the position of the area in the path of Pacific storms from October to May. In summer the area is affected by monsoon moisture coming from the Gulf of California.

Geology [\[edit\]](#)

The canyon was carved by the erosion of the Lazy Creek in a period estimated in 5 million years ^[*]^[5]. The Colorado Plateau, the area where the canyon is laid, emerged from the underground about 11 million years ago.

Eesti
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 Español
 Esperanto
 Euskara
 ىفارس
 Français
 Galego
 한국어
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 Italiano
 ქართული
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 Norsk bokmål
 Norsk nynorsk
 Polski
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 Русский
 Slovenčina
 Slovenščina
 Српски / srpski
 Srpskohrvatski /
 српскохрватски
 Suomi
 Svenska
 తెలుగు
 Tiếng Việt
 Türkçe
 Українська
 中文
 Complete list

The layers of rock visible today date back from about 240 millions years ago to until relatively recent times, formed by intense volcanic activity. In modern terminology, the rock layers in the canyon are currently detectable, from top to bottom, as: the [Navajo sandstone](#), the horizontal layering [Kayenta formations](#), the [Wingate sandstone](#), the slope of the [Chinle formation](#) landslide and the [Moenkopi formation](#).

Moenkopi formation dates back to a period between the beginning and the middle [Triassic](#) period (about 240 million years ago), composed of a reddish sandstone.

The *Chinle* Formation, from the late Triassic period (about 210 million years ago) is typically formed by sand accumulations of an ancient inland sea that covered the entire area.

The subsequent formation of *Wingate* sandstone, dating from the late Triassic period (about 200 million years ago), is due to the accumulation of sand dunes created by the wind and has the typical orange-red with vertical fractures and veins.

The Kayenta formation dates back to the [Jurassic](#) period (about 195 million years ago) and has variable color ranging from orange to brown, with typical cracks along the edges of the rock.

On the top of this layer, the Navajo Sandstone is the result of ancient sand dunes highly compressed, aging to the Early Jurassic (between Pliensbachian and Toarcian, between 190 and 175 million years ago). Its characteristic feature is the color ranging from pink to white, with typically rounded forms. In this layer of rock are formed, typically due to erosion by water and wind, arches as, in the case of the Red Spider Canyon, the **Sinkhole Arch** [*], located on its northern side. It measures 7,3m in width, and an elevation of 75 meters from the creek [6].

Another interesting geological formation present in the canyon is the famous **Twin Chimneys Rock** [*], 68 metres tall.

Flora and fauna [\[edit\]](#)

As the whole area of the [Colorado Plateau](#), the canyon presents the typical vegetation, consisting mainly of plants with a short leg in the arid area, as [Sagebrushes](#) (common name associated with species of plants of the genus [Artemisia](#)), [Utah's Juniper](#), narrow-leaves yucca ([Yucca baccata](#)), as well as various species of cactus.

In the wettest area, along the creek, there are mainly [Cottonwood](#) trees (*Populus fremontii*).

As throughout the entire region, the Red Spider Canyon offers ideal conditions for the life of some species endemic across the Colorado Plateau.

These ones include various species of rattlesnakes, (*Crotalus* family), coyotes, golden eagles and small rodents.

The Lazy Creek, with its calm and slow waters, alike some sections (e.g. the near and famous "Miracle Mile") of the San



Artemisia tridentata ("Big sagebrush")



Utah's juniper



Yucca baccata



Cottonwood tree (*Populus fremontii*)



Crotalus lepidus ("Green rattlesnake")

[Esperanto](#)

[Euskara](#)

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Juan River, offers ideal conditions for the proliferation of some species of trout.

This fact makes the Lazy Creek a sought after destination for fly fishing, activity strictly regulated in order to preserve the species.

Human settlements [\[edit\]](#)

As in the near Cedar Mesa, ancient [Pueblo](#) peoples (Anasazi) lived in the Red Spider Canyon in a period between the 100 B.C. and 1200 A.D. They then moved into New Mexico's and Arizona's areas, where their descendants still live.

Tangible signs of these ancient inhabitants are visible through the reading of the many petroglyphs carved into the rocks. The most famous of these is the so-called **Red Spider panel**, from which derives the name of the canyon itself. It clearly depicts a spider that, in the Native American tradition, symbolizes the creativity and is the skillful maker of the fabric of life.

Of considerable archaeological importance, at the top of the canyon, an ancient ruin consists of two granaries and the remains of a third building, probably a deposit.

Because of not particularly favorable climatic conditions, the canyon has subsequently never hosted stable inhabitants. The only trace of human activity in the area, before the advent of mining which later changed forever the appearance of the canyon, is testified by the ancient corral built by Helam Zeller (farmer and gold seeker) in 1915, used until the early 50s of the last century and now in a state of complete abandonment.

Mr. Zeller's old 1948 Dodge B pickup is even now at the exact point where it broke down, for an electrical problem in the spring of 1953.

Mining activities [\[edit\]](#)

After the first survey conducted in 1949, the **Magma Mining Company**, the following year, opened in Red Spider Canyon a rich uranium mine, called Omega Mine but also called **Yesterday's Mine**, as it is said it wasn't discovered the same day, but the day before. It remained in full operation until 1959 and now mining continues at a reduced pace, as a result of the impoverishment of the vein and the high costs for new necessary drillings.

The mine consists on two main galleries, one of which is located right in the building that houses the dormitory for the miners.

The ore extracted is, mainly, [Zippeite](#) ($K_4(UO_2)_6(SO_4)_3(OH)_{10} \cdot 4(H_2O)$), a radioactive mineral once used for the production of paints, transported directly, without treatments to the transformation plants, on rails.

A water reserve, useful for the mining operation, is on the spot, filled by the windmill water pump installed in 1953, since the variable flow of water of the near Lazy Creek did not provide the necessary constant supply essential to the activities of the mine.



Coyote (*Canis latrans*)



Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)



Rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) drawn out the Lazy Creek



The ancient ruins located in the upper part of the canyon



The Red Spider panel



The abandoned corral

The windmill, a 702 model by [Aermotor Company](#) - Chicago, is still active and starts working when the wind coming from the South, blows around the sagebrush bushes.

The sands of Lazy Creek are also known for being rich of gold. For this reason it is not uncommon to see avid prospectors intent to sift the fine sand that accumulates along the banks of the stream.

Railroads [\[edit\]](#)

After the uranium discovery, the Magma Mining Company signed an agreement with the [Union Pacific](#) for the construction of a railway line capable of transporting men and materials for the realization of the mine, as well as for the subsequent transport of the minerals up to its factory near Salt Lake City.

The line was built in 1950 and it is still used to connect Farmington (NM) to Salt Lake City (UT) for freight and passenger traffic.

In particular, due to the beauty of the surrounding area which is located on one of the major rail routes on the East-West direction, dozens of passenger convoys such as [Amtrak](#), [Daylight Express](#), [California Zephyr](#), as well as several freight trains and convoys historians, runs on this beautiful line, thanks to specific agreements with various railway companies.

Tourism [\[edit\]](#)

Despite the presence of the mine, currently the Red Spider Canyon is a perfect destination for outdoor activities, hiking, rafting and fishing enthusiasts.

Considering the difficulty of the access by foot (there is not a passage between the valley and the mesa above), the canyon is reached by a very small number of visitors.

Technics [\[edit\]](#)

The Red Spider Canyon layout is in Z scale and, although limited in size, required the development of specific hardware and software to allow both manual and fully automated operations. It allows you to manage up to four completely independent convoys and the system make their move with own kinematics and sound effects. All parameters (speed, direction, acceleration, deceleration, delay, volume, etc.) are freely configurable by the operator and, if required, managed by the system without any manual intervention.

The system also comprises a sound card to play sounds, a set of LED sources for the management of the scenarios (day / night) and a remote control for the complete control of the entire system.



Overview of the Omega / Yesterday's Mine



Zippeite chip



The windmill and the water tank



Some convoys transit through the Red Spider Canyon

Credits [\[edit\]](#)

Finally, I want here to remember all those who, in the 1,5 years period for the realization of the Red Spider Canyon, helped me but also supported me in various ways, making my adventure possible.

In fact, in addition to my passion, my work and the necessary documentation on the real places of the American Southwest, many people contributed helping me in various ways and, in particular:

- **Antonella**, who helped me the whole time of my work, listening and telling me the first idea I got: the reproduction of a skeleton of a cow
- **Cesare e Simone**, for regularly coming to monitor the progress of my work and for their authoritative suggestions, even basing on the experience learned from reading Tex Willer's adventures
- **Eckhard König** for constructing for me such wonderful tracks
- **Giacomo** who, as always, let me use his workshop and its equipment for my toughest operations
- **Guy Morrow**, president of Aermotor Co. - San Angelo Texas, for giving me many precious advices for building such a realistic model 702 windmill, and for checking its hydraulic calculations
- **Lubiano**, for such many suggestions and ideas he gave to me, that here is not possible to list
- **Mara**, for her infinite patience and encouragement, as well as for helping me in all the phases of my work, the transport of rocks and sand in our luggage(!), for letting me do carpentry works in our kitchen, sanding in the hall, up the smallest work of the smallest detail
- **Paolo**, for following, even from far away, all my work and for his valuable advice about the construction, in particular, of the mine as well as for the physical assistance in weightlifting.

Thanks to all, folks!

Red Spider Canyon – September 2013 / April 2015
Raf - MrZtrax

Notes [\[edit\]](#)

[*] Although Red Spider Canyon is a place of fantasy, all aspects that characterize it are based on facts and real informations that make it absolutely plausible. The purpose of this document, besides summarizing the study carried out for its construction, is to show how, in the simple realization of a miniature railway, it is possible to mix and confuse with each other reality and fantasy. Fictitious informations are highlighted with an asterisk [*] and, of course, Wikipedia has nothing to do with this document.

[1] Obviously, this document is not present on Wikipedia

[2] U.S. Census Bureau really exists but, of course, it was never interested in the Red Spider Canyon

[3] BLM really exists, but the Historical Sites Preservation Act is pure fantasy

[4] John Wesley Powell, as a matter of facts, was the first explorer of the Colorado River, but he never went into the San Juan River, nor could have reached the Lazy Creek

[5] Informations related to the Colorado River

[6] Obviously the Sinkhole Arch does not exist, but its dimensions are correctly calculated at 1:220.