

# Arches & Canyonlands National Parks

## Full Day 4x4 Backcountry Tour

**Meeting Place:** Adrift Adventures, 378 North Main St. Moab, Utah

**Age Limit:** 4 years and up

**Vehicle Type:** Jeep Wrangler

### **Special Attractions:**

- Possible, alternative entrance and/or exit for Arches National Park.
- Hiking trail to Tower Arch.
- Only 4x4 trail completely within Arches National Park
- Eye of the Whale Arch
- Island in the Sky region of Canyonlands National Park.
- Steep climb up tight switchbacks to mesa rim.
- Switchbacks that climb almost 2,000 feet from the canyon floor to the mesa above (talk with our staff to be sure this is the trip for you if you have an anxiety towards heights)
- Views of Colorado River and canyon country.

### **Tour Description:**

Our experienced and knowledgeable guides will show you parts of Arches & Canyonlands National Parks seldom visited/seen by other visitors on their own. Our guides will show you how much of Arches' & Canyonlands' beauty is tucked away beyond the main paved roads. You'll witness breathtaking views while learning about the history, archeology, and geology of how the rock formations you will see were formed and about the people who inhabited the area over 1000 years ago. There are ample photo opportunities, so be sure to bring your camera. Be amazed by the mazes of side washes and canyons formed after thousands of years of erosion. Witness the natural marvels hidden from the roads, when you experience Arches & Canyonlands National Parks via a 4x4 tour.

### **Vehicle Type:**

We run our guided backcountry tours in our recent model Jeep Wranglers, which will comfortably seat 4 passengers plus our guide. Jeeps are equipped with air conditioning for your touring pleasure.

### **Sample Itinerary:**

Meet at our office located at 378 North Main Street in Moab, Utah, at your scheduled time. The tour will set out heading north on US 191 out of Moab until we reach the Arches National Park entrance. We will work our way through the park, back to the Devil's Garden where we will then take off on the backcountry dirt road, heading to Tower Arch. Along this route you will have spectacular views not only of the park but also the La Sal Mountains, Klondike Bluffs, and the Devil's Garden. There will be the opportunity to take a brief hike to see Tower Arch. As we continue, after the optional hike, we will take another route that will bring us to the Eye of the Whale Arch. Along this route there will also be views of Marching Men and Klondike Bluffs. After viewing the Eye of the Whale Arch, we will continue our journey south, taking another trail that will take us out of the park and back to US 191. After that we will reconnect with US 191 to continue the tour onto the Potash Road, or Utah 279. This road parallels the Colorado River and will offer you views of such locations as Wall Street, petroglyph panels, and the Potash Plant, as well as other beautiful sights. This paved road will turn to dirt at the Potash River Ramp, which is used as the entry point for the infamous Cataract Canyon. The trail will gradually start to climb in elevation and away from the Colorado River. As we continue to traverse deeper into canyon country, we will visit viewpoints like Fossil Point – more recently dubbed Thelma and Louise Point, for its famous \*Please note that this itinerary is subject to change or

be cancelled completely due to: weather conditions, road conditions, time of year, number of scheduled guests, and any other unforeseen factors that may affect the trip in any way.

use in the similarly named 1991 movie. Continuing on our journey we will enter Canyonlands National Park and make the steep climb up the Shafer Trail switchbacks, which will take us from the bottom of the canyon up to the rim of the mesa. Enjoy stunning views as you look back down the canyon that we have just climbed. Our last stop along the trail will be the famous Island in the Sky region of Canyonlands National Park. Here we can gaze upon the vast red rock desert sprawled out in all directions. On a clear day, you should be able to see over 100 miles in every direction! From here we will leave the National Park and make our way back to Adrift Adventures via Utah 313, concluding your tour.

\*This tour maybe ran in reserve, with Canyonlands National Park being the first park we visit instead of Arches.

### **History:**

The small settlement of Valley City, located along US 191 and Thompson Road, was abandoned by 1930. In 1908, the settlement was flooded by a burst reservoir, which is accessible from the top of the trail, and continued flooding caused the demise of the town.

The reservoir was an important watering point for cattle driven from Dugout Ranch in the south up to the railroad at Thompson. The town charged a fee per head of cattle – the Valley City Reservoir was the last watering point before the railroad, and often 2,000 to 3,000 head of cattle were driven along the stock route. Albert and Dubinky Anderson (of Dubinky Well fame), lived here for a while, and Valley City was reputed to be one of the sites of a bootleg liquor operation, for which Albert did jail time.

The Shafer Trail was named after Frank and John Shafer, ranchers in the area in 1914. Along with their family, they cut a steep stock trail into the cliffs of the canyon so they could drive their cattle down from the top of the mesa to graze by the river in winter. In summer, cattle grazed on the mesa tops. In the 1950s during the uranium boom, the trail was widened to allow the ore trucks to drive to Moab, carrying ore from the uranium mines in Lathrop and Taylor Canyons.

Today, the Shafer Canyon area is often used by the movie industry. Many car commercials are filmed in the area, and the heroines in the movie Thelma and Louis took their famous final leap into Shafer Canyon from Fossil Point, now renamed Thelma and Louise Point.

At the base of the trail, there is an active potash mining operation. Utah is the nation's leading producer of phosphates, 95 percent of which are used in fertilizer. Solution mining replaced the more dangerous underground mining in 1972. The potash layer is leached out in a salt solution and the resultant sludge is pumped to the surface into settling ponds, which can be seen beside the trail. The combined surface area of the ponds is over 400 acres. The vivid blue color of the ponds is actually a dye that is added to speed evaporation. As the water evaporates the salt and potash remain. The by-product salt is not wasted; it is used for highway deicing and industrial purposes.

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