



Southwest Utah Road Trip (K19B)

With a rare week this summer without any appointments, I decided to take a short road trip up to southwest Utah, including a night in Cedar City followed by two nights in Kanab. This would let me do some sightseeing and get in some hiking, too.

On the first day, I drove from Las Vegas up to St. George via I-15. There I left the interstate and took a western route to Cedar City, checking out a few ghost towns along the way. There wasn't much to see at Holt or Hamblin, but Old Iron Town was a good stop.

It had been established by the Mormon pioneers when iron ore was discovered in the area. Ruins of the old foundry, a furnace, one of two charcoal kilns and other features can be seen here.



Ruins of the old foundry



Only one of the site's two charcoal kilns survives



Nearby is the Columbia Steel Mine, a much more modern mining operation



Another stop was at the Jefferson Hunt Memorial, pictured here, along the Old Spanish National Historic Trail. The Old Spanish Trail was a trade route that connected what is now Santa Fe, New Mexico to Los Angeles, California. Because of the mountains, deserts and canyons between the two, the route (routes, actually) passed through parts of Utah. In 1849 a group heading west to the newly discovered goldfields of California joined a party led by Jefferson Hunt and took a southern route into California in order to avoid the fate of the Donner Party (cannibalism) caught in Sierra Nevada mountain snows.

But many in the party lost confidence in Hunt, and it was at this site that they separated, thinking that they would find a short cut. But this group found itself crossing Nevada deserts and then Death Valley. The “short cut” would take four months, and many of the separators did not survive their trek.

No short cuts for me. After all, it’s only 80 miles from Cedar City to Kanab, my final destination for the second day. I had a number of sightseeing stops planned for the route that day, including a return to Cedar Breaks National Monument, located on the western edge of the Colorado Plateau’s Markagunt Plateau.

I headed up to Cedar Breaks’ 10,000 feet elevation via Highway 14.



One of my stops on the way up was for a short hike along the Bristlecone Pine Trail. The trail features a small grove of bristlecone pine trees – these trees (one is pictured here) live as much as 4,500 years or more.



The trail also features this view looking south towards the headwaters of the Virgin River and the canyons it has carved into the White Cliffs of the Grand Staircase. These canyons and associated formations are among the highlights of Zion National Park.

I describe Cedar Breaks as a poor man's Bryce Canyon. Both parks feature the colorful Claron Formations. The Claron Formations comprise the Pink Cliffs step of the Grand Staircase, home to Bryce Canyon, although Bryce's amphitheatres are much more extensive and generally more elaborate – and somewhat warmer due to their lower elevation. But Cedar Breaks is far less crowded.

I first visited and camped at Cedar Breaks back in 1994. I canceled my first attempt to return there some years later due to bad weather. I did make it back in 2011, but that day I had overcast skies and off and on rain. It took me 25 years to see Cedar Breaks again on a sunny day.



Point Supreme Overlook



Point Supreme Overlook



A weathered arch visible from Point Supreme Overlook



Sunset Overlook



Chessmen Ridge Overlook. The grey patches in the middle of the picture are from a small but active forest fire.



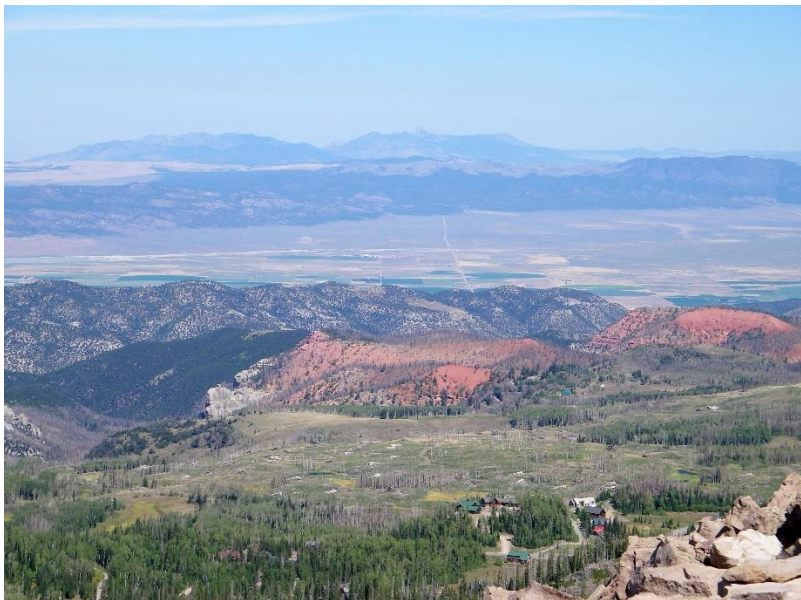
From Chessmen Ridge I hiked the Alpine Pond Trail



North View Overlook. You can see some smoke from the forest fire just above the center of the picture.



Just to the north of Cedar Breaks is Brian Head. A road leads to the top for some great views from its 11,312 feet elevation summit.



Looking to the west from on top of Brian Head Peak. The Hurricane Fault cuts south-southwest through this part of Utah. The land to the west has dropped along this fault, and is part of the Basin and Range Geologic Province. The land to the east of the fault has risen, and is part of the Colorado Plateau, a large uplift region centered on the Four Corners area. Brian Head and Cedar Breaks are along the western edge of the Colorado Plateau and its Markagunt Plateau. So, this is the view from the Colorado Plateau towards the Basin and Range Province.

Brian Head is capped with ancient lava flows. Lava flows are a key feature of the Markagunt Plateau.



An ancient cinder cone visible from Highway 14 east of Cedar Breaks



An extensive area of lava flows. These flows are believed to be only about 1,000 years old. Early on in my explorations of the West I was surprised not only by how extensive and recent such volcanic regions are, but also by the fact that many are considered to be dormant rather than extinct.



Even nearby features such as Navajo Lake are the result of volcanic activity. Lava flows here blocked off the ends of a valley, so it now captures rain and snowmelt. Water from Navajo Lake actually feeds into two watersheds, the Colorado River (via the Virgin River) and the Great Basin (via the Sevier River).



This “ice cave” is another feature. Elevation and the angle of the opening relative to the cave (a lava tube) result in ice being found in this cave nearly year-round. Nearby Mammoth Cave is a lava tube that has more than 2,200 feet of passages.



A couple years ago I took the Johnson Canyon-Alton Amphitheater Scenic Backway, but the sky clouded over by the time I got to its views of the west face of Paunsaugunt Plateau, home of Bryce Canyon.



The backway also features some of the region's volcanic landscape, including this cinder cone.



Mmmm. "Ho-Made" pie. (Mt. Carmel Junction)



The Cockscomb, part of the East Kaibab Monocline (a tear/tilting in the earth's crust that runs for 150 miles). I like hiking at sites along the monocline and the adjacent Paria River valley. Great scenery, interesting geology, and usually no other people.



You may recall that in April of this year I hiked the nearby White House Trail, which follows the Paria River southeast towards Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness. The wilderness starts just a little past where those powerlines cross the river canyon.



I noticed on one of my more detailed maps a dirt, clay and sand road leading to a two-track road (the left and right tires of the vehicle create their own two separate but parallel tracks, often with plants growing in-between) to a spot above the Paria River Canyon. That's the canyon below. Just to the left of the big juniper center-left in the picture you can see one of the powerline towers.

On a short hiking trip to Kanab a month earlier, I took a Forest Service road to the southeast of nearby Fredonia, Arizona to check out the ghost town of Ryan, Arizona. Along the way I spotted a sign for Gunsight Point 17 miles to the southwest. I looked it up when I got home from that trip, and decided to check it out on this trip on my last day before heading home.

Gunsight Point is the southern tip of a wedge of land that sits between and above two canyons.



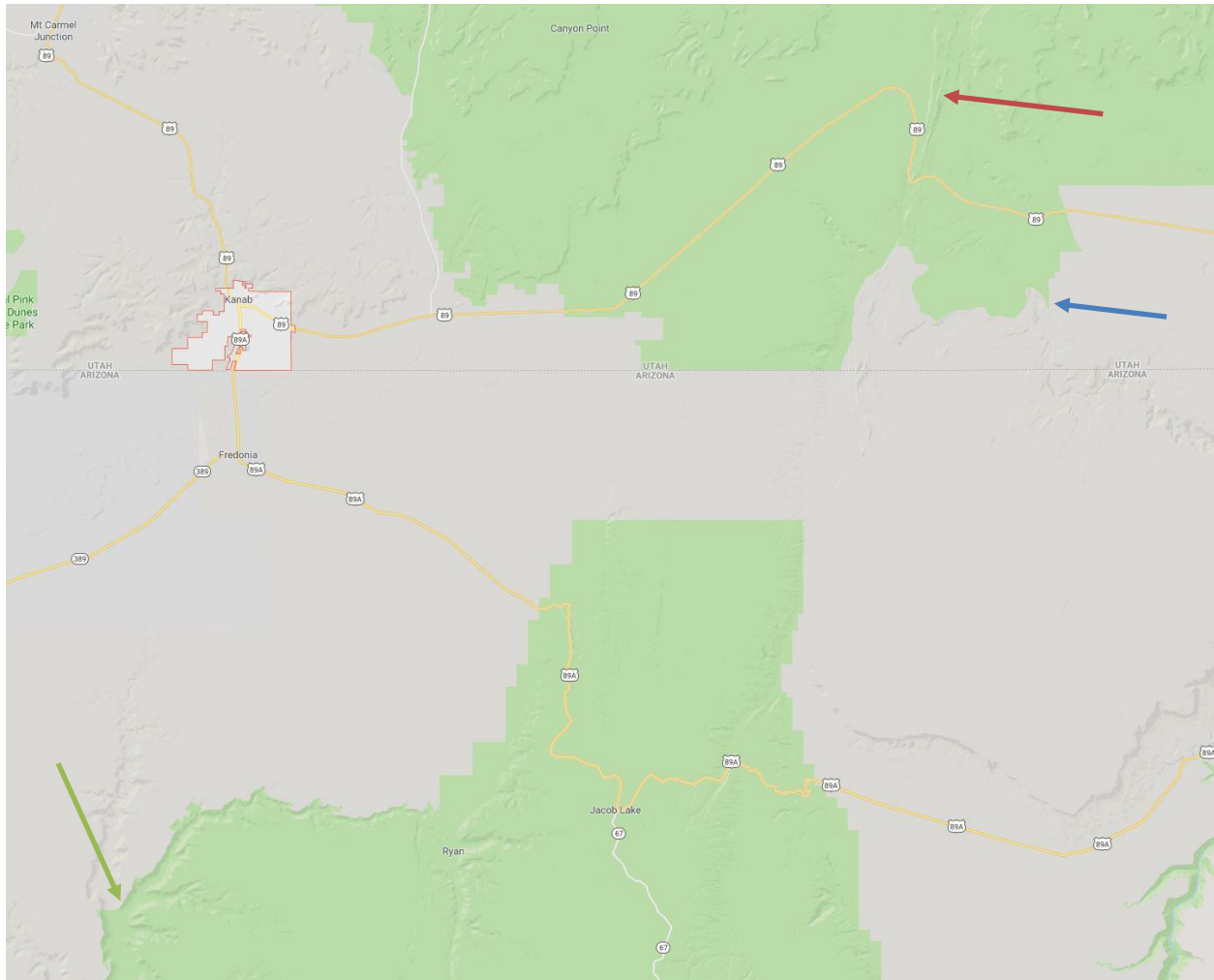
Coming from the northeast is Snake Gulch.



And from the north is a canyon carved by Kanab Creek.



Now looking south from Gunsight Point, where Snake Gulch Canyon meets Kanab Creek Canyon. Kanab Creek and its canyon continue south to the Grand Canyon. It's the biggest source of water running into the Grand Canyon from the north (aside from the Colorado River itself).



© Google Maps

- Red Arrow – The Cockscomb
- Blue Arrow – Paria Canyon View
- Green Arrow – Gunsight Point

Pavement is for weenies. 😊



Leaving Gunsight Point, I found that I had a decent view of some of the “steps” of the Grand Staircase.

Furthest/highest step is the Pink Cliffs, home to Bryce Canyon National Park.

Next step down are the White Cliffs, home to Zion National Park

Next step down are the Vermilion Cliffs. the thickest of the steps from this perspective.

The nearest/lowest step is the Chocolate Cliffs.