Song of the Gunnison  
Black Canyon’s natural music can be percussive, gentle, or raucous. Over the rim at Gunnison Point, where you are mindful of loose rock that could send you diving into the blackness, a muffled sound reaches up to you. You listen, hard. Is it the wind or the river 1,800 feet below you? Close your eyes, and the sound gently envelops you. Open them, and a violet green swallow passes but adds no sound, or did it? A white-throated swift swoons within arm’s reach, riding a thermal, its wings adding the slightest bit of flutter to the river’s distant rush. A wind gust hits your cheek. From below comes the sound of a peregrine falcon perched beneath a sheltering rock.

Abraham Lincoln Fellows, 1901

You sleep that night beneath the Milky Way, frosty with stars, as you’ve never seen it before. In the morning, despite being warned of the steep grade, poison ivy, and heat, you hike to the river. In time the roar builds to a crescendo, the river’s distant rush. A wind gust hits your cheek. From below comes the sound of a peregrine falcon perched beneath a sheltering rock.

The roaring of the river reverberated and echoed like demons howling over their prey. Abraham Lincoln Fellows, TBE

A Powerful Partnership  
John W. Gunnison, an explorer and engineer seeking a Pacific railroad passage in the 1850s, judged Black Canyon impenetrable and difficult to cross. He could not have known that the river had hewn the canyon walls from a dome of extremely resistant crystalline rock nearly two billion years old. A geological event now known as the Gunnison Uplift had raised the canyon’s rock from deep in Earth’s basement.

Time is the Gunnison River’s unseen but equal partner. Two million years ago, its course determined by the location of high mountain ranges (below), the river began cutting through the uplift’s core with rocks, gravel, and sediment. Empowered by foodwaters, it gained speed through a steep descent from the surrounding mountains. It wielded huge boulders that scattered trees and reshaped the canyon bottom—what had not yet been reached.

Vertical Views  
Black Canyon has some of the darkest skies over the United States. The skies cross a silver of habitat for nocturnal animals and plants that need the darkness to survive. Pinon-juniper and Gambel oak woodlands grow near the canyon rims and on the gentler slopes, while lone trees occupy crevices and narrow gorges. Some pinon and juniper trees are centuries old. Dark spires of Douglas-fir rise from inner canyon ridges. In full aspect trees glow yellow. Mosses and ferns attach to cool, shaded, moist walls. Box elders cling defiantly to river banks, while most plants struggle at the bottom. You’ll mainly find rocks there, as explorer Abraham Lincoln Fellows did in 1861. “Gigantic boulders had fallen in from the cliffs, the water flowing 100 feet [30 m] or more beneath these boulders ... smooth and polished to such an extent that it was only with the greatest difficulty they could be surmounted.”

Expanses of silver-blue sagebrush, grasses, and forbs at the North Rim support the Gunnison sage-grouse, a threatened species. Bobcats, mountain lions, and black bears are among the mammals that roam both rims. Bighorn sheep delicately balance on the inner canyon’s ledges. American dippers share the water with beavers and river otters. Nocturnal ringtails may nestle among boulders at the canyon bottom.
Visiting Black Canyon of the Gunnison

**Park Roads**
In winter South Rim Road beyond Gun- nison Point is closed to vehicles, usually reopening in mid-April. Roads closed for snow remain open for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

East Portal Road (paved) closed in win- ter leads to the Gunnison River and Curecanti National Recreation Area. It has 10 percent grades and hairpin curves. Vehicles over 23 feet (7 m), including trailers, are prohibited.

**Kayaking and Rafting**
The Gunnison River is for experienced kayakers. Rafting in the park is strongly discouraged. For an intermediate run through the lower canyon rafters can put in at Chukar Trail in Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area; for information contact the Bureau of Land Management or visit Alamo gorge.

**Fishing, Hunting, and Firearms**
A Colorado fishing license is required. Colorado Gold Medal Waters principles apply. Hunting is prohibited. For fire- arms regulations ask at ranger or check the park website.

**Accessibility**
We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the website.

**Safety**
Water is NOT AVAILABLE in the park November through April. Many plants have no guardrails. Loose rock makes canyon rim edges hazardous. Supervise children closely. Stay on designated trails. Never throw anything from the rim into the canyon. Even a small stone can be fatal to someone below.

The canyon rim is 6,000 feet (2,438 m) above sea level. Watch for signs of altitude sickness. Drink plenty of water; use sun protection, and pace yourself. Bears are present. Store food properly.

**Emergency**
General: The nearest hospital is in Montrose. Emergencies call 911.

This International Dark Sky Park offers astronomy programs seasonally. Check the website for opportunities to observe the stars, galaxies, and planets. Rangers offer interpretive programs year-round. Use schedule at visitor center or website.

**Regulations**
Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park. The inner canyon is designated wilderness. You must have a permit for all wilderness activities including climbing, hiking, and kayaking. Kicked cans, cars, and other items are prohibited on most trails and in the inner canyon and wilderness. Build campfires only in campground grates. Never leave a campfire unattended. It is prohibited.

**More Information**
For information about the park or to make a reservation contact the Bureau of Land Management or visit www.nps.gov/blca.

**Footer**
American wilderness permits, and Junior Ranger booklets. Check the website for hours. Visit www.nps.gov/blca.

**Plan Your Visit**
Start at the South Rim Visitor Center for information, exhibits, publications, wilderness permits, and Junior Ranger booklets. Check the website for hours. Visit www.nps.gov/blca.

**Accommodations**
The park has no campgrounds for overnight accommodations. Sites at Curecanti National Recreation Area, www.recreation.gov are allowed at most overlooks. Pets are allowed at most overlooks. Pets are prohibited in the wilderness. Campsites are in nearby towns. Discouraged. For an intermediate run through the lower canyon rafters can put in at Chukar Trail in Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area; for information contact the Bureau of Land Management or visit Alamo gorge.

**Getting Here**
The park is 25 miles (40 km) south- west of Denver. The South Rim is 15 miles (24 km) west of Montrose via US 50 and CO 347. Lat., long.: 38.55056, -107.68667

The North Rim is 11 miles (18 km) south of Crawford via CO 92 and Black Canyon Road. Lat., long.: 38.58702, -107.68667

**Cell Service**
Cell service in the canyon bottom is limited. To contact a ranger, call, or check the website. Never leave a campfire unattended. It is prohibited.

**Water Availability**
Water is NOT AVAILABLE in the park. Use the official NPS App to guide you. Keep your distance. Never approach or feed wildlife.

**Flooding, Lightning, and High Winds**
In winter, South Rim Road is closed to vehicles, usually reopening in mid-April. Roads remain closed for snow.

**Emergencies**
Emergencies call 911. Never leave a campfire unattended. It is prohibited.

**Traffic**
The North Rim is far from the highway, and services are limited. No bridge spans the Gunnison River. To drive from one side to the other, allow 2 to 3 hours.

**Finding Wildlife**
You'll find more solitude and self-reliant adventure here. Keep your binoculars handy. Camp in one of the few sites at North Rim. Take the easy Chestnut View Nature Trail through groves of aspen and Gambel oak. Rocky outcrops offer habitat of the prairie falcon and its fast-moving raptors.

**Enjoy the Stars**
This International Dark Sky Park offers astronomy programs seasonally. Check the website for opportunities to observe the stars, galaxies, and planets. Rangers offer interpretive programs year-round. Use schedule at visitor center or website.

**Wilderness**
Congress has protected over 17,000 acres of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park as wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act. For information about the National Wilderness Preservation System visit www.wilderness.net.

**East Portal**
East Portal Road carried equipment and crews that built the Gunnison Tunnel from 1905 to 1909. Outdoor exhibits tell more of the story. Pets are prohibited in the wilderness. Campsites are in nearby towns. Discouraged. For an intermediate run through the lower canyon rafters can put in at Chukar Trail in Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area; for information contact the Bureau of Land Management or visit Alamo gorge.

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**Visiting Black Canyon of the Gunnison**
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**Features to See**
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**Trails**
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