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Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Colorado National Parks

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### Sheer Pleasure: Black Canyon in Colorado Attacks Increasing Number of Tourist

New York Times

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# SHEER PLEASURE

## Black Canyon in Colorado Attracts Increasing Number of Tourists

By SUSAN MARSH

**M**ONTROSE, Colo.—Although this country's most crowded national parks and monuments deserve their due recognition, sometimes it is a relief to tour one of the lesser-known sites. One still worth visiting, yet uncrowded and able to handle more visitors than it gets, is Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument.

Black Canyon is situated about 15 miles northwest of Montrose. Attendance last year totaled 131,213, and, since this year's opening in April, there has been a 26.5 per cent rise over the figures for the same period in 1962. Suggestions have been made that, if Colorado, so rich in mountains and canyons, could give Black Canyon to some deserving state like Kansas, the site might be better appreciated.

One of Black Canyon's major claims to fame is that it is said to be the only canyon in North America whose depth is greater in some places than its width. At their narrowest point, the rims of Black Canyon are only 1,300 feet apart, while the dark, shadowy depths range from 1,730 to 2,725 feet.

### River's Deep Path

The Gunnison River winds through the canyon. Through the ages, it has worn down through the now-vanished sandstone and cleaved its way through the earth's hard pre-Cambrian core.

The great strength of the rocks here makes the exceptionally tall, narrow and free-standing pinnacles look as if they have steel supports holding them up. The almost sheer walls of the canyon, which are of dark gneiss, schist and granite, are often riddled by intrusions of a different type of rock that probably was forced up as molten material by great pressure.

In some parts of the walls, the intrusions make horizontal stripes of pink, gray or black rock. The stripes are several feet wide or, in some places, as thin as a delicate tracery.

Although both rims along the steepest 10 miles of the canyon are within the national monument boundaries, the eight overlooks on the northern side can be reached only on dirt roads and by driving 100 miles from the South Rim. Some side canyons, especially on the South Rim, lead down to the Gunnison.

The Department of the Interior has authorized the expenditure of \$2,000,000 for building a trail down to the river. During the summer, a new campground containing 100 sites was opened at a point 8,100 feet above sea level.

### One Faucet

Water has to be hauled by truck from Montrose, so there is just one faucet for tourist use in the entire monument. There is no electricity, but the restrooms are adequate.

A campfire circle, with enough room for 350 singing campers, is now under construction. At present, about 100 visitors can gather at the temporary spot to hear a ranger tell about the history of Black Canyon.

Although the Grand Canyon's awesome depths appear far away when viewed from the rim, the recesses of Black Canyon seem to be underfoot. A newly installed aluminum railing may not fit into the landscape as well as the older rock barriers, but it adds to the thrill of looking down into the canyon's dark mouth.

Half-hour guided nature tours are available daily at 10 A. M. and 2 P. M. Three hours are needed to drive the seven-mile rim trail and to see the views of the canyon from the 11 overlooks.

Some of the most interesting stopping places are Gunnison Point, Rock Point, Dragon Point and Chasm View. Since the early morning and late afternoon hours are usually dominated by heavy shadows, picture taking is recommended at midday.