

Oil Well Flats

Oil Well Flats is one of Fremont County's "hidden Jewels", and has long been one of our club's favorite hiking areas. Located within an easy twenty-minute drive from downtown Canon City, Oil Well Flats is located on Public Lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The area offers an expansive network of single-track trails that guide the traveler through a fascinating geological landscape of towering cliffs and rugged canyons.

According to Rosemae Campbell's seminal history of Fremont County, **From Trappers to Tourists**, in 1860 Gabriel Bowen discovered a natural oil seep located along a creek six miles north of Canon City. Today the creek is known as Fourmile Creek, but in the early days of settlement, and for decades afterwards, it was known as Oil Creek. Two years after discovering the seep, Bowen sold his claim to Alexander Cassidy, who dug a shallow well on the site to increase the flow of the natural crude, which he then processed and sold as partially refined coal oil. Soon others began sinking wells nearby in hopes of tapping into a larger pool, which explains how Oil Well Flats got its name. It is worthy to note that the wells sunk here in the 1860's were the first oil wells drilled west of the Mississippi.

In 1876, the year when Colorado was granted statehood, a local school teacher named Oramel Lucas discovered some fossilized dinosaur bones along the western edge of Garden Park. Since this discovery, the Garden Park Fossil Beds, which includes Oil Well Flats, has been recognized as one of the most prolific producers of dinosaur bones in the world, and has provided numerous important dinosaur discoveries, including three specimens of the official dinosaur of the State of Colorado, the Stegosaurus stenops.

Today, Oil Well Flats is fast becoming a popular destination recreation area for mountain biking, hiking, and horseback riding. Thanks to the efforts of several volunteer user groups*, over a dozen miles of single-track non-motorized trails have been developed here in just a few years, and the construction of additional trails is expected to be completed in the near future. The layout of the roads, trails, and trail heads offers users a variety of loops and options of varying distances and levels of difficulty. The following hike descriptions are just two of many possibilities that are available in the Oil Well Flats area.

*The volunteer groups that have assisted with construction of the trails in Oil Well Flats include: Lower Arkansas Mountain Bike Association (LAMBA); Rocky Mountain Backcountry Horsemen; Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC); and Canonland Walkers and Hikers.

Island in the Sky Loop

Driving Directions to Trail Head – Starting at the intersection of US 50 East and Dozier Avenue (near Walmart), go north on Dozier Ave. for 1.6 miles to the 4-way stop signs at Field Avenue. Turn right (north) onto Field Ave. and go 2.3 miles to where Field merges with Red Canyon Road. Continue north on Red Canyon Road 3.6 miles to BLM Road 5940. Turn right (east) onto 5940 and go 0.8 miles to BLM Road 5941. Turn right (south) onto BLM 5941 and go 0.6 miles to BLM 5941A. Turn left (east) onto BLM 5941A and go about 0.25 miles to the small parking area at the end of the road. The lat/long coordinates of the trail head are 38.532154 N. by 105.203279 W.

The BLM roads are single lane, graveled or native surfaced roads. The roads in Oil Well Flats are open all year; however, the main access road into the area (BLM Road 5940) may be closed when conditions are wet and muddy. Before visiting the area it is a good idea to contact the BLM office in Canon City to make sure that the roads are open. Low-clearance vehicles should have no difficulty driving on Road 5940 to the first two trail heads; however, taking sedans or other low-clearance vehicles beyond the second trail head is not recommended. When conditions are dry, most of the road system beyond the second trail head can be safely driven with 2WD, high-clearance vehicles.

Hiking Directions – The names of the trails in the area are identified with signs and many are named for geological terms; such as Unconformity, Fracture, Anticline, and Tectonic Shift. Please refer to the Island in the Sky map, which shows the hiking route and way points (WPs) described in the following narrative. If you have a GPS and internet connection, the tracks and waypoints for this hike can be downloaded from our website at www.canonlandwalkershikers.org. Or if you do not have internet available, you can manually enter the Way Point coordinates into your GPS.

From the trail head, go northeast on the Unconformity Trail for 0.20 miles (1200 feet) to the trail junction with the Anticline Trail (WP1-lat/long 38.533306 N. by 105.201240 W.).

Take the Anticline Trail eastward 0.29 miles (1524 feet) to the trail junction with the Fire Canyon Trail (WP2-lat/long 38.530617 N. by 105.198479 W.).

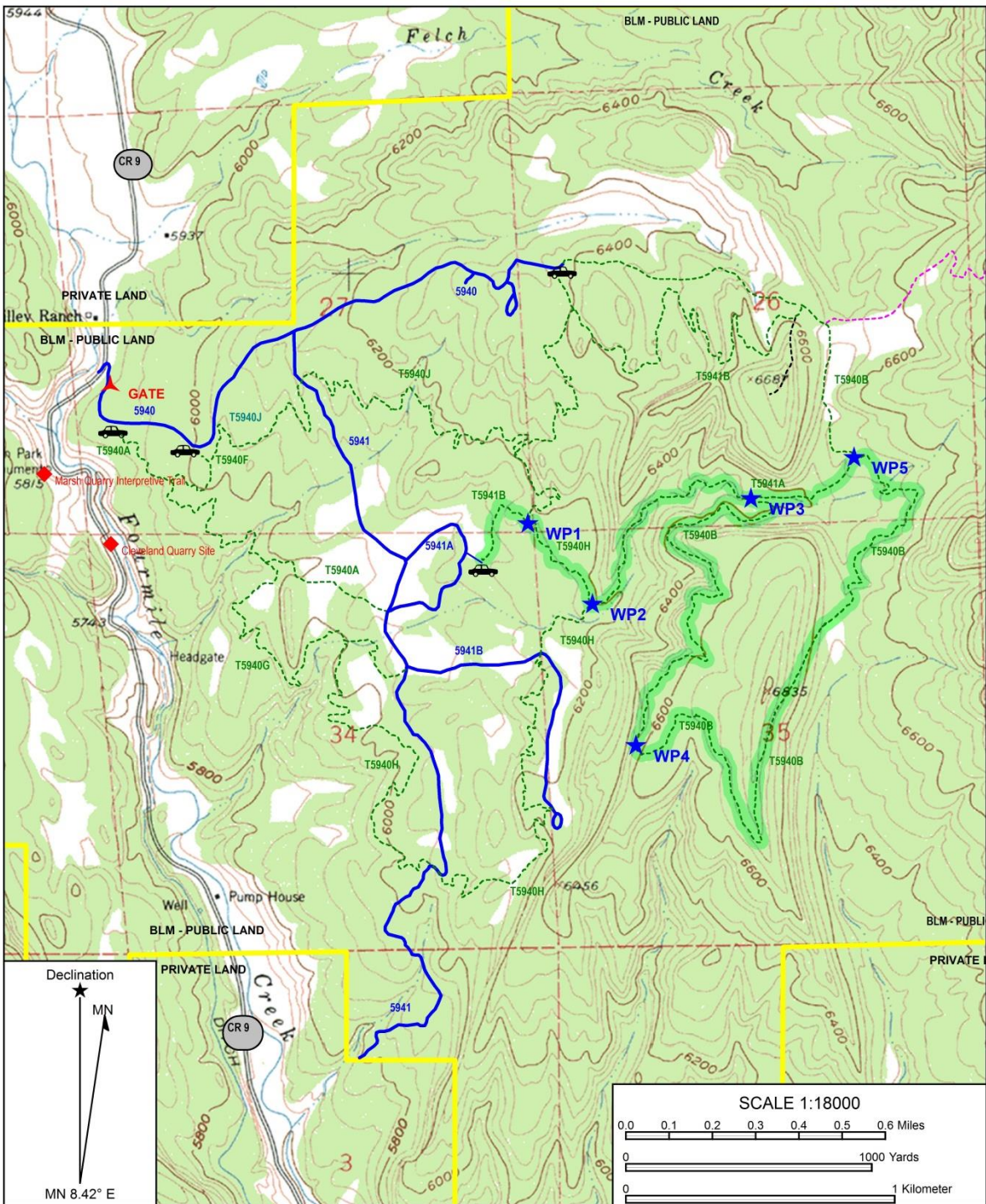
Turn left (eastward) onto the Fire Canyon Trail and follow it 0.62 miles to where it joins the Island in the Sky Trail (WP3-lat/long 38.534138 N. by 105.191713 W.).

Take the Island in the Sky Trail southward 1.15 miles to the top of the escarpment overlooking Oil Well Flats and the Fourmile Creek drainage (WP4-lat/long 38.525897 N. by 105.196625 W.) The overlook is the perfect place to take a break to view the surrounding landscape.

Continue eastward on the Island of the Sky Trail 1.85 miles to the junction with the Unconformity and Fire Canyon Trails (WP5-lat/long 38.535502 N. by 105.187305 W.) This leg of the hike crosses from the western to the eastern sides of the high mesa for which the Island in the Sky Trail owes its name. The highest point of the hike (6760 feet) is reached on the east side of the mesa where the trail begins its descent to the valley below.

Turn left (westward) onto the Fire Canyon Trail and go 0.27 miles to the junction with the Island in the Sky Trail (WP3-lat/long 38.534138 N. by 105.191713 W.). This is the same trail junction where you turned off earlier to climb to the top of the high mesa. From here, continue westward on the Fire Canyon Trail and retrace your steps 1.14 miles to the trail head.

The total distance of the Island in the Sky Loop is 4.5 miles, and involves an elevation gain of 640 feet. Much of the route passes through areas burned over by a large forest fire that occurred in 1988 (Dinosaur Fire). The trail, "Island in the Sky", derives its name from the high mesa that it traverses. The views from the top of the mesa are extraordinary; and the Cretaceous and Jurassic rock formations provide a magical quality to area. If possible, try to do this hike either early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when the rising or setting sun casts that special light that dramatically enhances the colors of the landscape. The beauty of the area at those times is absolutely indescribable.



Name: Island in the Sky Loop
 Date: 03/15/16
 Scale: 1 inch = 1,500 ft.

Location: Oil Well Flats
 Caption: Canonland Walkers & Hikers

Dinosaur Fire Loop

Driving Directions to Trail Head – The driving directions to the trail head for this hike are the same as described for the Island in the Sky Loop.

Hiking Directions – Please refer to the Dinosaur Fire map, which shows the hiking route and way points (WPs) described in the following narrative. If you have a GPS and internet connection, the tracks and waypoints for this hike can be downloaded from our website at www.canonlandwalkershikers.org.

From the trail head, go northeast on the Unconformity Trail for 0.20 miles (1200 feet) to the trail junction with the Anticline Trail (WP1-lat/long 38.533306 N. by 105.201240 W.).

Take the Anticline Trail eastward 0.29 miles (1524 feet) to the trail junction with the Fire Canyon Trail (WP2-lat/long 38.530617 N. by 105.198479 W.).

Turn left (eastward) onto the Fire Canyon Trail and follow it 0.62 miles to where it joins the Island in the Sky Trail (WP3-lat/long 38.534138 N. by 105.191713 W.).

Stay on the Fire Canyon Trail and continue eastward 0.27 miles to the intersection with the Unconformity and Island in the Sky trails (WP4-lat/long 38.535502 N. by 105.187305 W.).

Turn north onto the Unconformity trail and go 0.45 miles to the junction with T5940 (WP5-lat/long 38.540617 N. by 105.189562 W.). Note: T5940 is road which is closed to motorized uses by a locked gate located about 0.60 miles west of here).

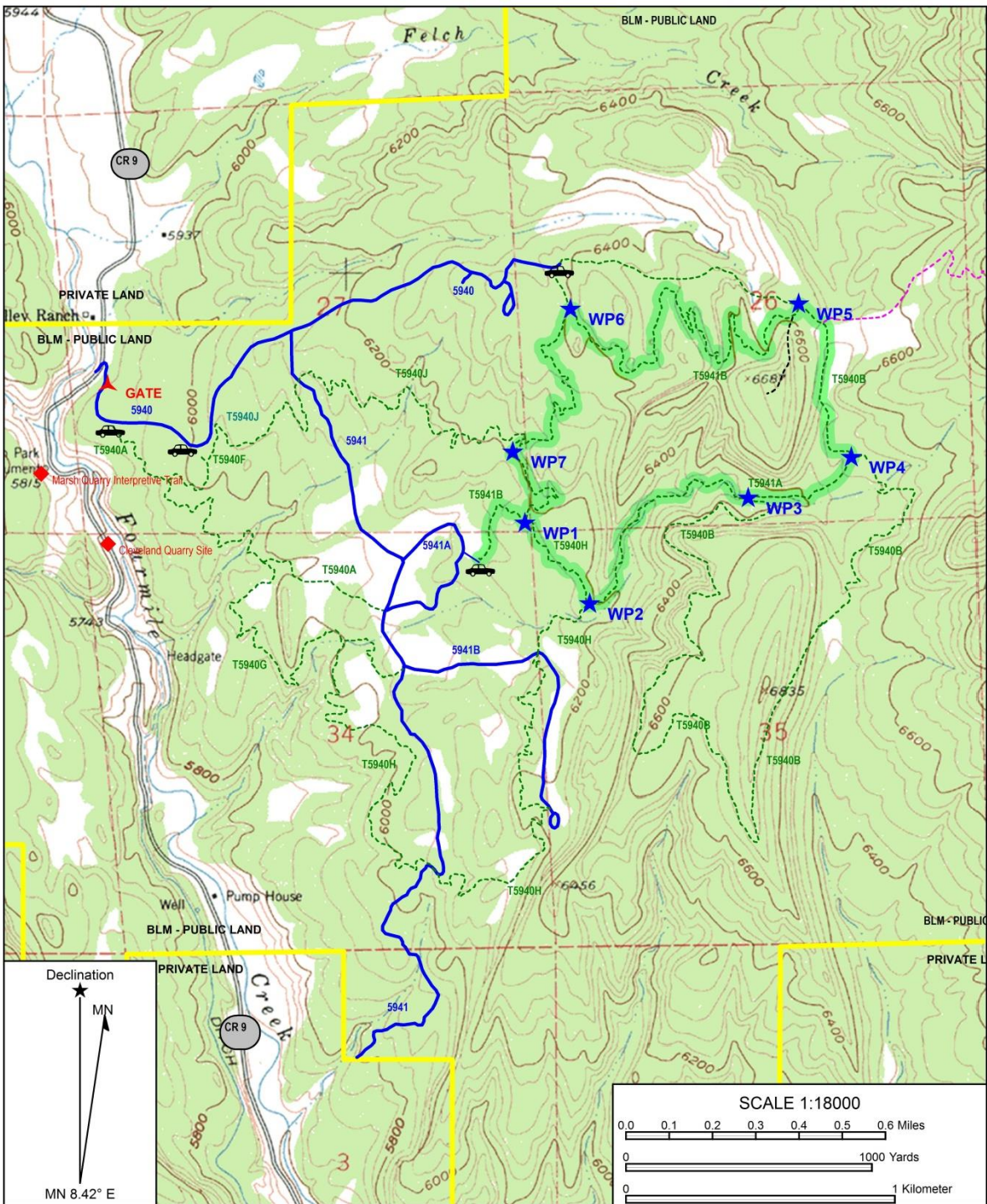
Turn south and continue on the Unconformity trail and go 1.35 miles to the junction of trail that leads to the trail head for T5940 joins the Unconformity trail (WP6-lat/long 38.540443 N. by 105.1999297 W.).

Stay on the Unconformity trail and hike south 0.60 miles to the junction with the Fracture Trail (WP7-lat/long 38.535681 N. by 105.201757 W.).

Continue southward on the Unconformity Trail 0.35 miles to the junction with the Anticline Trail. This is the same trail junction that was passed earlier on the hike (WP1-lat/long 38.533301 N. by 105.201240W.).

From here, turn right (northwest) and follow the Unconformity Trail 0.25 miles to the trail head.

The total distance of the Dinosaur Fire hike is 4.4 miles, and has an elevation gain of 440 feet. Most of the hiking route passes through areas burned by a large forest fire that occurred here in 1988 (Dinosaur Fire).



Name: Dinoraur Fire Loop
 Date: 03/15/16
 Scale: 1 inch = 1,500 ft.

Location: Oil Well Flats
 Caption: Canonland Walkers & Hikers