

Natural (Granite) Arch - San Isabel

Direction to trailhead: From Canon City drive east on Royal Gorge Blvd./US 50 to Colorado (CO) 67. Turn right (south) onto CO 67 and drive through Florence to Wetmore. Turn right (west) onto CO 96 and continue for about 11.1 miles to CO 165 (Greenhorn Highway). Turn left (south) and continue on CO 165 past Bishop's Castle to San Isabel. Continue south past San Isabel and Lake Isabel for about 1 mile to Old San Isabel Road then turn left (East). Follow Old San Isabel Road for about 2.06 miles to Forest Service Road (FSR) 320. Turn left (north) onto FSR 320 and drive down to the bridge. Cross the bridge and continue up FSR 320 for about 0.4 miles to the parking/picnicking/camping area on your right. About 53 miles one way from Canon City.

Length of hike: About 4.1 miles (round trip)

Beginning elevation: 8220 feet at trail head; 7741 at overlook; 7633 at St. Charles Creek adjacent to Granite Arch

Elevation Gain: -587

Difficulty: Moderate

Description: From the parking area walk about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile up FSR 320 to the trail head on your right. It is recognizable because of the two earthen berms located parallel to the road. (Figure 1). The purpose of these dams and others scattered along the trail is to deter motorized vehicles. You also will encounter cairns that help you stay on the trail. The trail descends gradually for 0.27 miles through a forested area to a large grassy meadow (Figure 3). The trail is confusing in this meadow since the trail is faint in some locations. If you lose site of the trail, head for the southeastern side of the meadow where the trail will become evident. An easily missed side trail heads southeast (WP1).

Continue east on the main trail for 0.78 miles to where the trail makes a sharp turn to the southeast. This turn is marked by a large cairn. After 0.1 miles another side trail goes to the southwest. Continue on the main trail as it descends about 255 feet in elevation and about 0.23 miles to the creek below and the arch. This very large arch is located on the other side and is oriented parallel to the creek (Figure 4). The creek is not very wide at this location and can be crossed on a log or by stepping carefully over stones. You can climb to the arch but the climb up of approximately 40 feet of loose rock extending from the bottom of the arch can be treacherous when wet or snow covered. Return the way you came to the parking area.

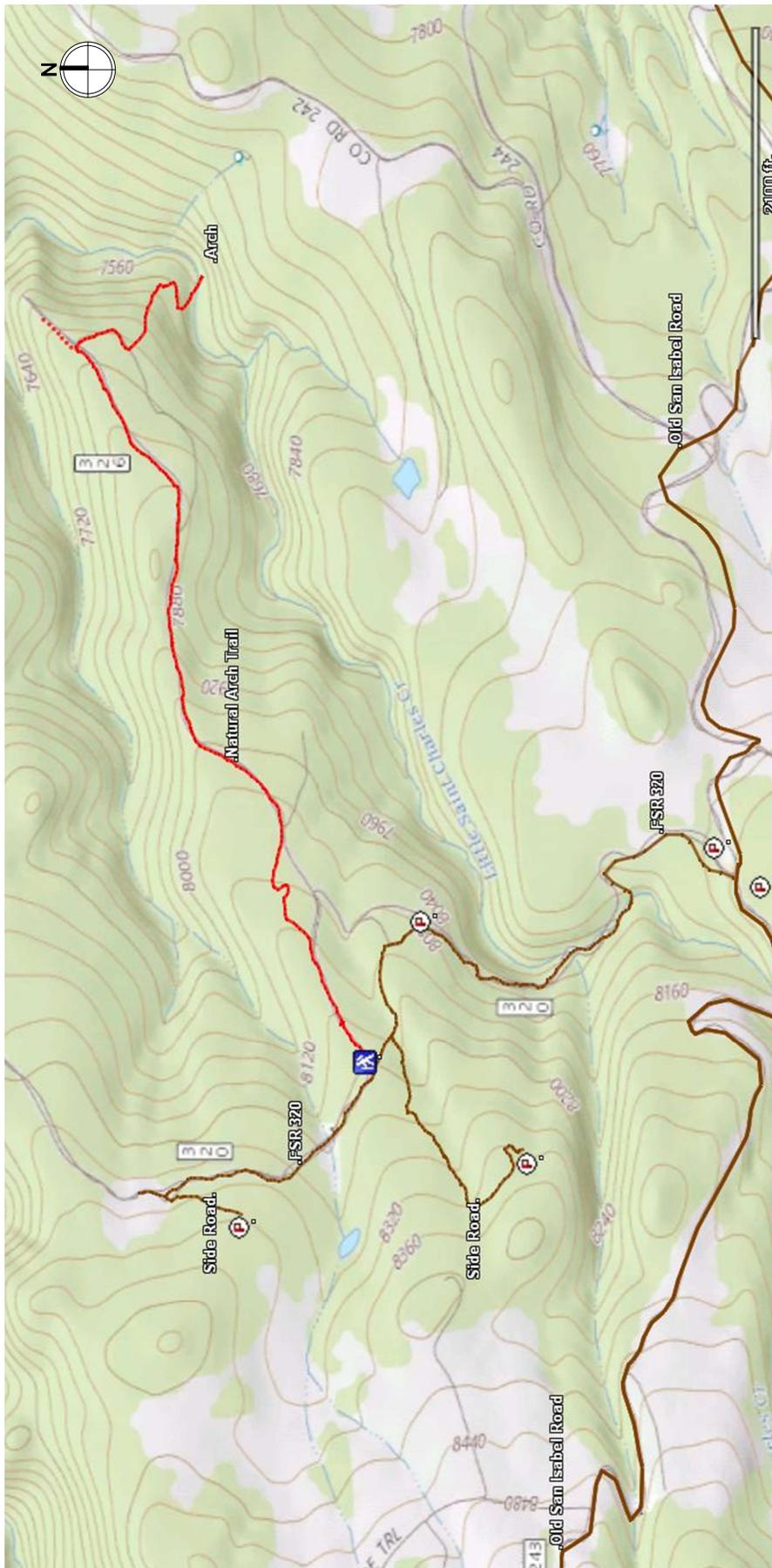


Figure 1. Map of Natural (Granite) Trail



Figure 2. Forest Service Road 320



Figure 3. Meadow along Granite Arch Trail



Figure 4. St. Charles Creek at Arch



Figure 5. Granite Arch