



*Monument Valley*  
*Valley of the Gods*  
*Goosenecks State Park*

*Photographs by Rolf Brauch ~ September 1997*





*Sentry of the valley — when coming from the south, this is the first monolith you see as you drive up route 163.*





*Located on the border of southeastern Utah and northern Arizona, Monument Valley contains some of the most dramatic rock formations on the Colorado Plateau. These large blocks of sandstone were compacted during the Paleozoic era, while the effects of differential erosion through exfoliation, wind, and water started during the Cenozoic era. The reddish hues in the sand and rock of this twenty-five-mile valley come from iron oxide, while the black streaks (also called desert varnish), that course down the cliffs are manganese oxide.*

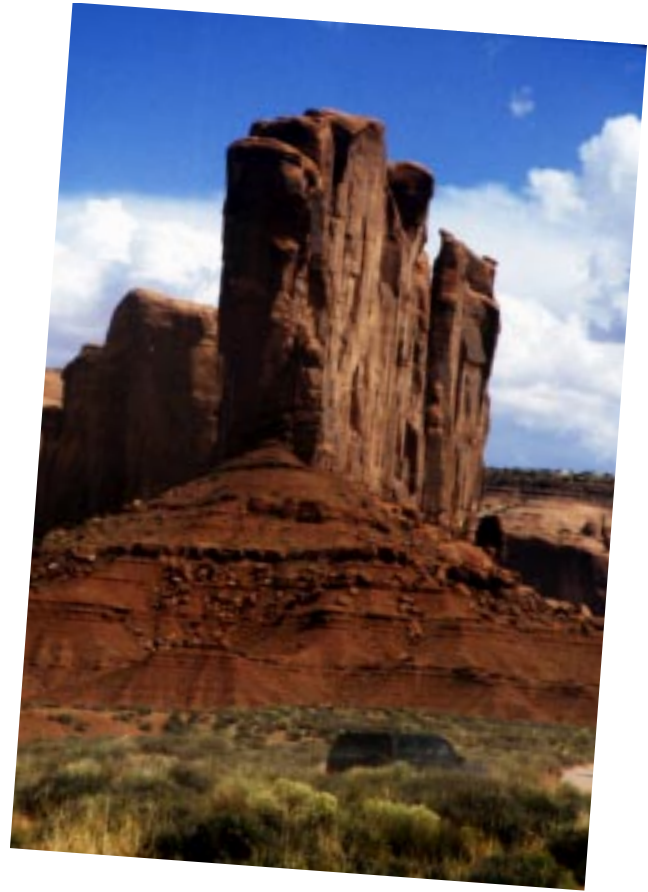
*In addition to sandstone formations, there are also remains of volcanic activity, El Capitan being the most famous.*



*The valley's earliest inhabitants include the Ice Age Paleo-Indian hunters (12,000-6,000 B.C.), Archaic hunter-gatherers (6,000 B.C.-A.D. 1), and Anasazi farmers (A.D. 1-1300). The latter group's pottery styles reflect a regional variation known as Kayenta Anasazi.*

*As early as the 1300s, San Juan Band Paiutes frequented the area as temporary hunters and gatherers. They named it "Valley or Treeless Area Amid the Rocks" and vested the landscape with supernatural qualities and mythological stories.*

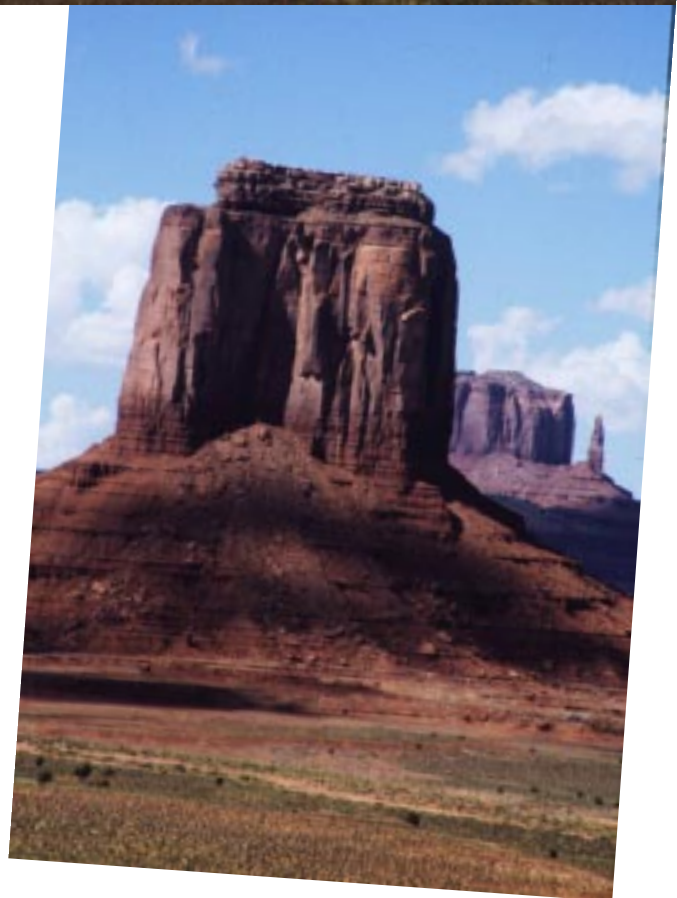
*For example, Totem Pole Rock is said to be a god held up by lightning, El Capitan a sky-supporter, and all of Monument Valley near Goulding's Trading Post a hogan that faces east.*





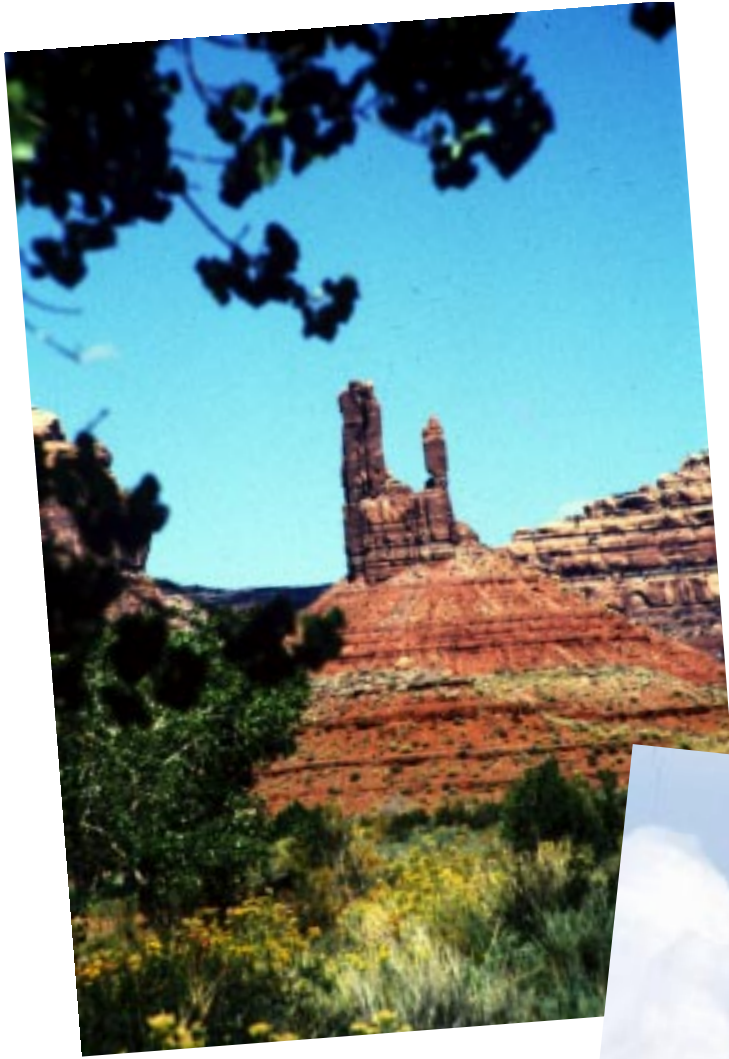
*Spanish and Mexican incursion into the area was either exploratory or punitive (in their attempts to control Navajo raiders). In the early 1860s Kit Carson followed suit by sending Utes into the region to capture Navajos, who fled to peripheral areas such as Navajo Mountain.*

*The majority of the Navajos returned from captivity in 1868 and soon confronted miners seeking silver. Ernest Mitchell and James Merrick, two of the most notable, were killed by Utes or Paiutes near monoliths that still bear the miners' names.*



*In 1884 President Chester Arthur added this region to the Navajo Reservation, but white men's interest in the area did not wane. Prospectors continued to search for silver, and in 1906 John Wetherill and Clyde Colville established a trading post at Oljeto. This post remained in operation for four years until Wetherill moved to Kayenta. In 1924 Harry Goulding established a post which is still in operation today, although under different management.*





*During the 1950s Goulding encouraged the employment of Navajos in the uranium industry as well as in holding parts in the movie industry. Monument Valley became known throughout the world when it was featured in such western film classics as John Ford's Stagecoach, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, and Cheyenne Autumn.*

*The Navajo tribe has also established a tribal park that includes some of the most dramatic monoliths, making the area accessible to thousands of tourists who visit the region each year.*





*The Valley of the Gods is just a few miles up the road from Mexican Hat, and southwest of Bluff, along route 191. There's no entrance fee and you don't need a four-wheel drive vehicle.*

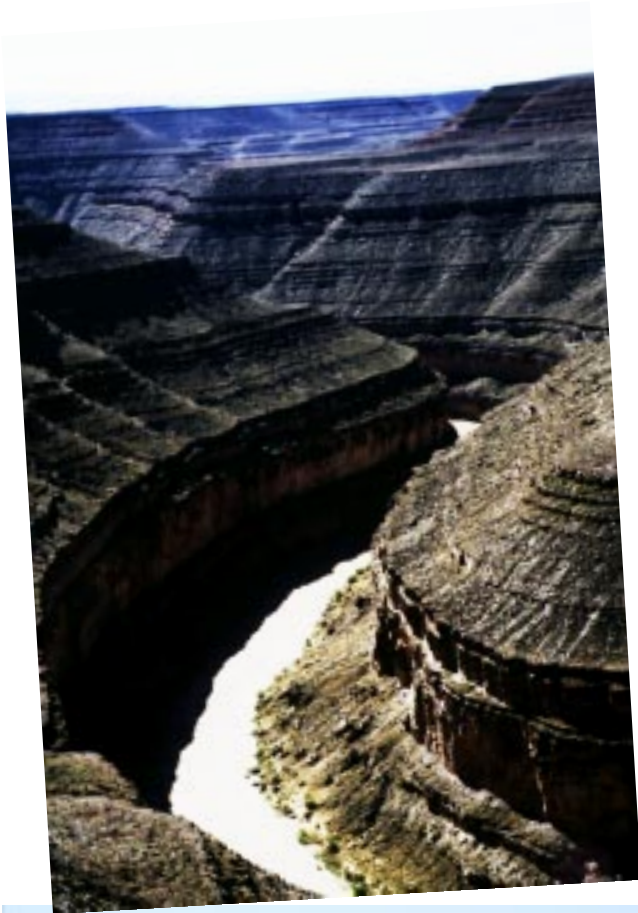
*If you enter the valley from route 191, you come out on route 261. You'll notice from the map (last page), 261 is a short cut to the Natural Bridges National Monument. Be forewarned, before you get to Muley Point Overlook, 261 climbs almost 2,000 feet up a sheer, vertical cliff; a harrowing ride on a very narrow, switchback gravel road blasted out of the side of the cliff. You may have to back up now and again to make the turns, and will encounter the odd idiot trailing a large boat or house-trailer coming down the other way (this is illegal and extremely dangerous of course, but they do it anyway).*





*The rock formations found in the Valley of the Gods are completely different than Monument Valley and just as breathtaking.*



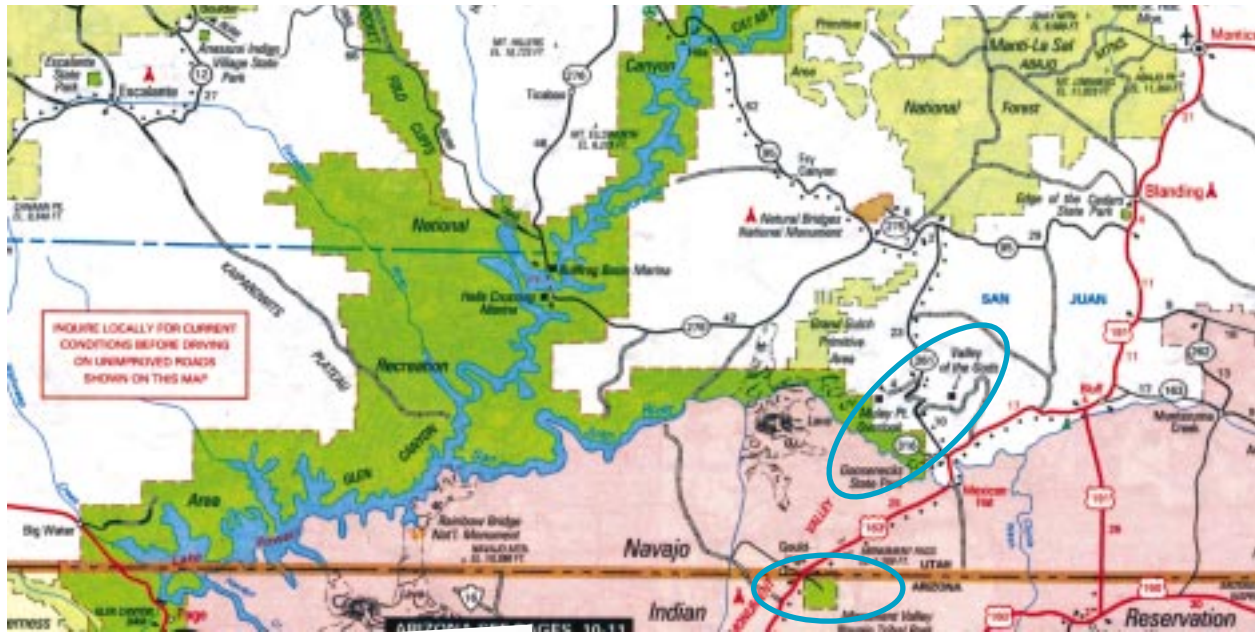


*Goosenecks State Park ~ an incredible series of tight switchbacks of the San Juan River gives the area its name. It offers a close-up view of an entrenched river meander, the most striking and impressive example on the North American continent. The 1,500 foot deep chasm meanders 6 miles while advancing only 1.5 miles.*



*We ran across this interesting rock formation after visiting Goosenecks State Park. The different layers of volcanic ash and deposits when this region was alternately under and above water, are clearly visible.*





*Even our trusty 4WD Explorer couldn't cross this washout in a gulch just west of Bluff ~ checking on the weather is essential before setting out ~ flashfloods are swift and deadly.*

*For more information take a peek at this site:*

*<http://hanksville.phast.umass.edu/geology/monval.html>*

*From Durango, the shortest route to all three sites is west on Highway 160, northwest on #41 ~ just before the four corners. Once across the Utah state line its called 262.*

*At Montezuma Creek pick up the 163 and head west to Bluff, Utah ~ a great, but tiny little village with a surprisingly superb restaurant. We stayed at the Recapture Lodge (801 672-2281) ~ nothing great to write home about, but clean, quiet and a pool.*

*From Bluff it's not quite 20 miles to the Valley of the Gods, then comes Goosenecks Park and Monument Valley.*

