

# THE RIMROCKER TRAIL



## Part 2 – Nucla to Highway 141

Traveling south through Nucla you will pass the Fifth Avenue Grill, a small grocery store, and further on a gas station. Additional services such as a motel, convenience store, car wash, and visitor center are available about 4.5 miles further south in Naturita. **Note: if you will be continuing on beyond Highway 141, this is your last chance for gas. Considering filling up in either Nucla or Naturita.** To continue on the Rimrocker Trail turn right (west) on West 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue at the City Park ( GPS N38 15.694 W108 32.762) and reset your trip meter to follow mileages in this article.

From Nucla City Park head west out of Nucla, at which point the road changes to CC Road. From there the Rimrocker Trail makes a series of 90 degree turns (2700 Road, AA Road, 2600 Road, and Z26 Road) before the pavement ends at 6 miles from Nucla City Park. There is an important left turn at 7.7 miles, where Z26 continues north and the Rimrocker Trail turns west on V19 Road. The turn is well marked even though V19 is not as well maintained. This part of the Rimrocker Trail crosses areas known as Second Park and Third Park, through both public land and private property. Please respect the landowners' rights and stay on the designated road. As you travel north and west along the mesa top, there are views of the Uncompahgre Plateau to the east, red rock canyons to the west and the La Sal Mountains farther west in Utah. Although you can't see them, you are paralleling Highway 141 and the San Miguel River. As a side note, an informative pamphlet about the scenic drive Highway 141 from Naturita to Gateway is available. This guide is available in the visitor center at Naturita.

There are a couple of other important turns along the way – the trail continues down into a canyon after a sharp right at 15.3 miles, and at 22.3 miles continue to follow the signs to the left onto a less maintained road.

At 26.5 miles from Nucla you will to enter the Uravan mining area, which extends west across Highway 141 toward Utah. In fact, the namesake of the trail, “Rimrocker”, was a name given to the people who worked the many mines in this area. The mines included the Joe, Sandy, Fox, Dolores, Club Sandwich, Last Chance, and the Ophir, to name only a few. At this point, I would be remiss if I did not say a few words about the mining. The area is rich in carnotite ore, which contains radium, vanadium and uranium. The name Uravan is derived from a combination of the words uranium and vanadium. In the early to mid 1940s, the U.S. Vanadium corporation built a mill at Uravan to process carnotite ore into uranium oxide, aka yellowcake. The yellowcake was sent elsewhere in the country where it was enriched into pure uranium, some of which was used in the atomic bombs that ended World War II. Because of the mining and the mill, Uravan continued to prosper until 1971, when the federal government stopped acquiring uranium and the price of yellowcake began a steady decline. Additionally, construction of new nuclear power plants declined and uranium stockpiles were sold, both of which contributed to a further decline in the price of yellowcake. With the uranium mining industry in a bust, the Uravan mill was closed in 1984 and a Superfund cleanup was begun to mitigate the radioactive town and millsite. The town closed in December 1986 and was entirely razed. Today you can drive through the townsite and up past the mill site, seeing only faint hints of what was once there.

Continuing north and west toward Highway 141, the Rimrocker Trail drops down into a 50 foot thick layer of Navajo Sandstone, which is the same frozen-sand-dune rock layer in Utah and other Colorado Plateau scenery. The trail continues to parallel Highway 141 and eventually the Dolores River too. The views to the north and west really open up and the erosion of the river through the sandstone is amazing. Next are a short section of shelf road, a couple of sharp turns, a downhill section, a flat area, and 34.5 miles after leaving Nucla you are at the intersection of Highway 141 and Q12 Road (GPS N38 25.573 W108 49.39).

Driving time from Nucla City Park to Highway 141 is about 2 1/2 hours.

Just as in Part 1, the Rimrocker Trail in Part 2 also provides access to many other roads and trails which adventuresome folk will find worth investigating. Among them are the Monogram Mesa Loop / Bull Canyon Tour; EE22 Road, which will take you through the Uravan townsite and millsite near the San Miguel River; and Y11 Road, which will take you along the San Miguel River past the Hanging Flume, to the confluence of the San Miguel and Dolores Rivers, and west through the Dolores River Canyon and into Paradox Valley.

With so much rich history, a mining past, and exposed layers of sandstone geology, it's no wonder this area is so reminiscent of Moab, UT. The next time you're headed to Moab, consider starting in Montrose and running the Rimrocker Trail. With access to many side trails and the other trails in the Montrose and Nucla / Naturita areas, you just may not get to Moab at all!