



TREK THE FORTIFICATION RANGE

If you happen to be driving U.S. 93 south of Ely as the sun is setting toward the horizon, you'll learn quickly how the Fortification Range got its name. Glowing steep and bright in the setting sun, the range's sheer western cliffs indeed resemble a great golden castle. But this is the just beginning of the beauty the Fortification Range has to offer. On the range's northeastern flank, Cottonwood Canyon will give you a good sense of the area's true diversity and beauty.

Once you're on the jeep track leading into Cottonwood Canyon, it will quickly become apparent why this canyon is different from so many others in the area. Thanks to water draining from the higher reaches of the canyon, and from Cottonwood Spring, the drainage is choked with a thriving tangle of ash, willow and cottonwood - a beautiful respite from the normally arid terrain.

Park your vehicle at a convenient turn-around spot, grab some food, water, sunscreen, sunglasses and sun hat, and maybe a windbreaker in case you plan to hike to the top of the ridge, and set out for a wonderful hike up the canyon.

The tight pinyon-juniper forest can get disorienting. Luckily, the canyon is relatively narrow, so you shouldn't worry about getting lost. As you hike, you'll get glimpses of tangled rock formations rising above the trees. Soon, you'll see a crown of golden rock along the top of the canyon. Although the climbing is steep at spots, you should be able to pick your route up to the crest of the range. Determined hikers should aim for Fortification Peak rising to over 8,200 feet to the south of the canyon. An unnamed peak over 8,000-feet tall makes a good goal to the north. Both will reward you with stunning views of the range's wonderful terrain, the valleys below, and Mount Grafton rising to the east.

Anyone who visits the area will learn the truth about what wonders wait here and why it's worth protecting.

FORTIFICATION RANGE - COTTONWOOD CANYON

DIRECTIONS: Roughly 18 miles south of Major's Place (the intersection of U.S. 93 and U.S. 50/6), and ½-mile north of the Lake Valley Summit, turn east onto a well-graded dirt road. A sign will point to Atlanta. Drive about 15 miles southeast, then south along the east of the range. After about 12 miles, the road will split at a fence. Continue driving straight south three miles until you find a jeep trail heading west (right) up into Cottonwood Canyon. Enter the canyon, then park at a convenient place where you'll be able to turn around. The route quickly gets too narrow to turn around.

FACILITIES: None.