

## In Bologna, Italian food is worth a theme park

BY VICKY HALLETT  
*Special to The Washington Post*

Everyone eats food. What makes Italians special is that they also live food.

Their cultural identity is wrapped up in tagliatelle, sprinkled with Parmigiano-Reggiano and paired with a Barolo. They talk about food even when they're not talking about food. To say "cool" in Italian, you can use the word "fico," which also means "fig." (That's so fig, you guys!)

This language lesson is particularly important before a visit to FICO Eataly World, an enormous theme park on the outskirts of Bologna, Italy, that's dedicated to understanding and experiencing all of the delicious ways you can stuff your face. In this case, the word has another meaning: It's an abbreviation of Fabbrica Italiana Contadina (basically, "Italian Farming Factory"). In the logo, the "O" is designed to resemble a plump, purple fig. A cutesy, anthropomorphized version of the fruit is FICO's mascot. Think Mickey Mouse, but edible.

Since its grand opening last November, the place hasn't gotten the greatest press. Mostly, people don't understand why anyone going to Bologna — which arguably has the best eats in all of Italy — wouldn't just learn about food by meandering through markets and tucking into local specialties in a trattoria or enoteca. Critics dismissed the theme park as a "giant foodie Ikea" (Bloomberg News) and "a U.S.-style megamart" (the Guardian). But as an American who has been in the country for more than two years and still feels like a bit of a dummy about Italian cuisine, I figured I could use extra instruction. Plus, I heard there was mini golf.

So, early on one recent Wednesday morning, I'm across the street from the Bologna Centrale train station boarding the FICObus, a 20-minute shuttle that zips passengers directly to the 328,000-square-foot complex. It looks like an airport, just one with welcoming fig trees and a "selfie podium." At the entrance, which is lined with dozens of shelves of colorful apples, a bilingual sign reads: "In Europe there are 1200 varieties of apple . . . 1000 in Italy and 200 in the rest of Europe. That's why we made FICO." I'm still digesting that boast when a voice announces that it's time to come on in.

EATALY CONTINUED ON F5



## An appetizing time in Utah

Drawn by a top restaurant, a foodie encounters unique and protected beauty

BY DINA MISHEV  
*Special to The Washington Post*

Like most hikes and drives in south-central Utah, Lower Muley Twist Canyon is both heavenly and hellish for someone curious about what's around the next corner — and I definitely am. It's possible to hike down the canyon, in Capitol Reef National Park, for 12 miles and turn at least three times as many corners.

I'm in this part of Utah because it's still snowing where I live in northwest Wyoming and, in late March, the temperatures are in the 60s, maybe even the 70s. I'm

already somewhat familiar with the area, but there are plenty of hikes and back-road drives I haven't yet done. Also, one of my favorite restaurants, Hell's Backbone Grill — in its 19th season — is here.

Doing pre-trip online reconnaissance, the full 12-mile Lower Muley Twist endeavor piques my curiosity. I don't have the physical fitness to do it in a single day, though. Still, I don't trust that this is reason enough to make me turn around, so I make a 6:15 p.m. dinner reservation at the farm-to-table restaurant in the traditional Mormon town of Boulder (population about 250). Hell's Back-

UTAH CONTINUED ON F4



### NAVIGATOR

The genealogy craze is spurring the latest trend in travel: DNA tourism. F2

### WEST VIRGINIA

In Weston, a landmark 19th-century asylum tells a sobering story. F3

### ARIZONA

Row, row, row your boat — and be nice. A guide to rafting etiquette. F6



PHOTOS BY DINA MISHEV

The author, top, admires Lower Calf Creek Falls at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah. Each spring, the desert in the south-central portion of the state blooms. It's a good time to visit.

# Twists to shout about in Utah

UTAH FROM F1

bone Grill serves “four corners cuisine,” which draws from Mormon pioneer recipes, Puebloan cultural dishes, cowboy fare and whatever grows on its farm at 7,000 feet in elevation.

I figure if I hike about two miles down the canyon from the trailhead on the Burr Trail Scenic Backway and then retrace my route, I’ll have just enough time to drive back to Boulder, check in at the Boulder Mountain Lodge — which is the only lodging “downtown” — and shower before dinner.

## Solo surprises

Mine is the only car in the small trailhead parking lot. The trail immediately descends about 40 feet through Utah juniper trees and onto the canyon floor, which is a dry creek bed. I’m quickly dwarfed by undulating red sandstone formations. The canyon lives up to its name; every twist reveals another twist. And every corner reveals a surprise.

One corner delivers a section of narrows, where the canyon walls suddenly come together and the sandy path down the middle shrinks to a width of 20 feet. Coming around the next corner, there is a “weeping wall,” where seeping minerals make the otherwise vermilion, 500-foot-tall sandstone wall look like it is crying soot-black tears. And then comes a corner that is itself a corner: an undercut, 300-foot-long, 90-degree bend in the canyon that, when Lower Muley Creek floods, is obviously the scene of much violence. The bottom 15 feet of the sandstone here bears the scars of all manner of injury. There are holes, dents, dings, scratches and scrapes.

Before I know it, I am one mile past my planned turnaround distance and have a blister on my left foot. But I’m not yet ready to turn around. After all, Hell’s Backbone Grill, and pretty much everywhere for several hundred miles in every direction, doesn’t care if I shower before dinner.

I get around two more corners before I realize I’ll miss my meal if I don’t turn around and run back to the car. But the extra corners are worth it. The last opens into a blocky rock garden at the base of Zionlike sheer cliffs that appear to be illuminated from within. I first think that my polarized sunglasses are playing tricks on me; when I take them off, the cliffs have every bit as much glow.

Driving back to Boulder on the Burr Trail Scenic Backway, a 66-mile paved and dirt road between Boulder and Bullfrog Marina on Lake Mead passes petrified sand dunes, soaring red sandstone cliffs and the Waterpocket Fold as it travels through Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Capitol Reef National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. Only the first 36 miles are paved. Free.

Lower Muley Twist Canyon, 35 miles south of Boulder, Utah, on the Burr Trail Scenic Backway 435-425-4111

Capitol Reef National Park, 35 miles south of Boulder, Utah, on the Burr Trail Scenic Backway 435-425-4111

Hike as far as 23 miles down this mellow, circuitous canyon, which cuts lengthwise along the spine of Waterpocket Fold and was formerly used as a wagon route by Mormon pioneers. Free.

For the author’s full list of recommendations for Utah, visit [washingtonpost.com/travel](http://washingtonpost.com/travel)



PHOTOS BY DINA MISHEV

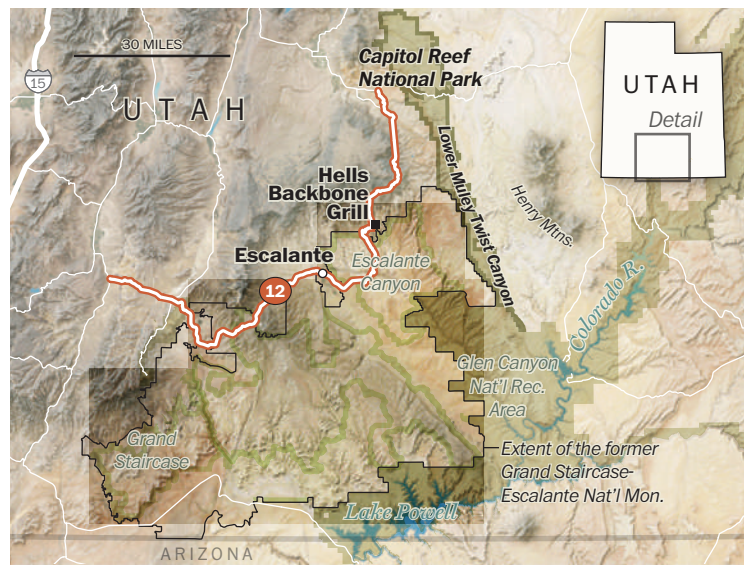
The clouds, like overstuffed down pillows, split the evening sun into biblical beams.

You might think that no restaurant could be worth a popped blister and speeding through the Burr Trail’s landscape. You’d be wrong. I talked myself into missing the surprises around future Lower Muley Twist corners because the constantly changing menu at Hell’s Backbone Grill is a guaranteed good surprise. I’ve eaten there four times before.

## Monumental eating

When President Bill Clinton established the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in 1996, it was big news, but it wasn’t until the grill opened in 2000 that the monument, and Boulder, came onto my radar.

At the turn of the millennium, there were about 100 national monuments, but the grill was the Rocky Mountain West’s only woman-owned, chef-owned restaurant operating its own farm. In 2002, it made national news by obtaining Boulder’s first liquor license. That was when I took the time to look it up on a map. My



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search revealed that Boulder was in the booniest of boonies, off Highway 12 and on the way to nowhere. The nearest airport was 4½ hours away.

Someday I’d get there. Maybe. As it turned out, that day was more than a decade later, in 2012, and it happened more because of Highway 12 than the restaurant. It

might be a road to nowhere, but it is a gorgeous road to nowhere, one of only 29 All-American Roads in the country. Its 124-mile pass through two national parks, three state parks, the Dixie National Forest and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. It sounded like the perfect road trip

UTAH CONTINUED ON F5

If you go

## WHERE TO STAY

### Boulder Mountain Lodge

20 N. Hwy. 12, Boulder, Utah  
435-335-7460

[boulder-utah.com](http://boulder-utah.com)

Spacious rooms with private decks and patios on a lush, 11-acre bird sanctuary in “downtown” Boulder. Rooms from \$140.

### Boulder Mountain Guest Ranch

3621 Hell’s Backbone Rd., Boulder, Utah  
435-335-7480

[bouldermountainguestranch.com](http://bouldermountainguestranch.com)

Cabins, bunk rooms, “glamping” in a canvas wall tent or Native American tepee, hiking, horseback riding and croquet on a ranch four miles out of town. Lodge rooms from \$90.40.

## WHERE TO EAT

### Hell’s Backbone Grill

20 N. Hwy. 12, Boulder, Utah  
435-335-7464

[hellsbackbonegrill.com](http://hellsbackbonegrill.com)

The often-changing menus here focus on fresh ingredients, most from the grill’s own organic farm. Open daily for breakfast (7:30 to 11 a.m.), lunch (11 a.m. to 2 p.m.) and dinner (5 to 9 p.m.) through Thanksgiving. Dinner entrees from \$22.

### Burr Trail Outpost

14 N. Utah Hwy. 12  
435-335-7565

[burrtrailoutpost.com](http://burrtrailoutpost.com)

A full coffee menu, loose leaf teas, smoothies, baked goods and breakfast bagels surrounded by work from local artists. Open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Items from \$4.

### Escalante Outfitters Cafe

310 W. Main St., Escalante, Utah  
435-826-4266

[escalanteoutfitters.com/restaurant](http://escalanteoutfitters.com/restaurant)

Drink one of the several Utah microbrews on tap while eating pizza, salads and subs. Open 7 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. daily. Lunch and dinner entrees from \$9.95.

## WHAT TO DO

### All-American Road Scenic Byway 12

Between Torrey and Panguitch, Utah

[scenicbyway12.com](http://scenicbyway12.com)

A 124-mile drive on a two-lane highway past (or through) two national parks, three Utah state parks, the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and the Dixie National Forest. Free.

### Burr Trail Scenic Backway

Starts in Boulder, Utah

435-826-5499

[nps.gov/gca/planyourvisit/driving-the-burr-trail.htm](http://nps.gov/gca/planyourvisit/driving-the-burr-trail.htm)

This 66-mile road between Boulder and Bullfrog Marina on Lake Mead passes petrified sand dunes, soaring red sandstone cliffs and the Waterpocket Fold as it travels through Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Capitol Reef National Park and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. Only the first 36 miles are paved. Free.

### Lower Calf Creek Falls

Calf Creek Recreation Area, 15 miles east of Escalante, Utah, on Highway 12

435-826-5499

[blm.gov/visit/calf-creek-recreation-area-campground](http://blm.gov/visit/calf-creek-recreation-area-campground)

A six-mile, out-and-back, mostly flat hike past Navajo sandstone cliffs and granaries and pictographs left by the Fremont people who inhabited the area from A.D. 700 to 1300, as well as a 126-foot waterfall with a swimmable pool at its base.

### Lower Muley Twist Canyon

Capitol Reef National Park, 35 miles south of Boulder, Utah, on the Burr Trail Scenic Backway

435-425-4111

[nps.gov/care](http://nps.gov/care)

Hike as far as 23 miles down this mellow, circuitous canyon, which cuts lengthwise along the spine of Waterpocket Fold and was formerly used as a wagon route by Mormon pioneers. Free.

## INFORMATION

Scenic Byway 12 Foundation:

[scenicbyway12.com](http://scenicbyway12.com)

Bryce Canyon Country:

[brycecanyoncountry.com](http://brycecanyoncountry.com)

D.M.

For the author’s full list of recommendations for Utah, visit [washingtonpost.com/travel](http://washingtonpost.com/travel)

# In one theme park, a world of Italian food. And mini golf!

EATALY FROM FI

**10 a.m.:** It's free to enter, so I march through the doors — along with a throng of Italian retirees — and survey my overwhelming surroundings. FICO Eataly World bills itself as “the largest agri-food park in the world,” but I'd describe it as a mega food court and food production facility combined with a farm, school, museum, shopping mall and rec center. This is my thought process: “A moving diorama thing! A playground! Fig merchandise! BREAKFAST!!” As I devour a pistachio-cream-filled pastry from Bell'Italia (one of more than 40 on-site restaurants), I enjoy the motley view, including a promotional display advertising “Calabria: Longevity Trendy Land.”

**10:30 a.m.:** Next stop, info desk. A guy at the counter with impeccable English hands over a map and a catalogue of course offerings. I'm all set to sign up for truffle hunting when he sadly informs me: “There is a problem with the dogs today. They are not well.” So, I register instead for a morning cheese-making lesson (\$24), and pick up keys for a FICO Bike. There's no charge to borrow the blue tricycles — designed specifically for the park by Italian manufacturer Bianchi to carry hefty purchases.

**10:40 a.m.:** Unlocking from the outdoor rack is a cinch. And I'm soon steering myself along the dedicated bike lanes that cut through the middle of the complex, which you can pedal across in a couple of minutes. Bike parking is plentiful, so I pick a spot conveniently located near a gleaming bathroom (equipped with a diaper-changing table). Then I hoof it to the dairy.

**11 a.m.:** Like all of the production facilities here, Caseificio Valsamoggia is set behind big windows so anyone can watch what's happening. But for class, my two classmates and I are invited to the other side of the glass and offered gauzy coats, hairnets and blue slipcovers for our shoes. The cheery cheesemonger takes us on a detailed tour of the equipment and explains that we're making squacquerone, a soft, spreadable variety that is typical of the Emilia-Romagna region. While he lectures, he and his assistant do most of the actual work — stirring a huge milk tank, checking acidity levels — but we novices get to flip some cheese molds. Then we're ushered to a seating area for a tasting that's more like a feast: squacquerone plus two other cheeses (raviggiolo and caciotta), pear jam and fried bread strips. Yum.

**12:45 p.m.:** Since I'm already feeling cheesy, I figure it's time for that mini golf (\$8). On this drizzly day, no one else agrees. So I get the outdoor 18-hole, Italian-themed course to myself. Tiny versions of the Colosseum, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and trulli (the conical-roofed huts of Puglia) dot the greens. Other embellishments include wheels of cheese, strings of lemons and sheep statues that look particularly disapproving when I miss a shot.

**1:15 p.m.:** Just beyond a picket fence is where FICO's very real farm animals live. I wander by the free-range geese, and check in with some muscular draft horses. As I peruse the stalls — all of which appear to offer ample living space, but a somewhat depressing parking lot view — I take in the accompanying signage. I learn that the Bergamasca sheep with adorably droopy ears are “considered the best Italian breed for meat production,” and that the Nero di Calabria in the pigpen are “typically used for traditional products such as sopressata Calabrese.”

**1:45 p.m.:** That's probably why I avoid the many, many restaurants inside with prosciutto legs hanging from the ceiling, and



FICO EATALY WORLD



FICO EATALY WORLD



VICKY HALLETT



VICKY HALLETT



VICKY HALLETT

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** At FICO Eataly World in Bologna, Italy, there's no charge to borrow these blue tricycles — designed specifically for the park by Bianchi to carry hefty purchases. A cheesemaker works a vat at Caseificio Valsamoggia. A shopper investigates the pork products at Suino Nero. Greenery dominates the decor at Giardino, a restaurant that specializes in vegetarian Mediterranean cuisine. Visitors begin their walk into the 328,000-square-foot complex, which opened in November.

instead wind up eating lunch at Giardino (it means “Garden”), which boasts an all-vegetarian, Mediterranean menu among a tasteful jungle of plants. The woman at the counter sells me on the “jar” of the day (\$11), a bowl layered with creamy spreads made from beets, chickpeas and Jerusalem artichokes. On my way to seek out dessert, I pause at the nearby beach bar, which welcomes visitors to relax — and recharge their cellphones. I run my fingers through the sand, marvel at the indoor volleyball and soccer pitch and think about how much my kid would dig that slide and balance beam. Down the hall, I find something she would like even more: gelato! The treats (\$3) are beside an outpost of Carpigiani Gelato University, Bologna's famed frozen dessert school, where I spy a sorbet class in action.

**3:15 p.m.:** Back at the info desk, I make afternoon plans, including buying a \$12 wristband granting access to FICO's six “carousels.” They're not rides, but rather enclosed rooms featuring interactive, multimedia experiences exploring the history and culture of food. How does that work? Bizarrely! That's what I learn upon entering “Man and



Source: Maps4News/HERE



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Fire,” which starts with a circular chamber that holds a timeline depicting important moments in burning stuff, from the Big Bang to Apollo 11. Just past a virtual hearth is the cinema, where the audience perches on fake tree stumps to watch a series of fire-themed shorts. In the back are touch-screen quizzes asking questions such as which country exports the most matchsticks. (It's Sweden!) On my way to another carousel — “Man and Earth,” which similarly celebrates veggies — a rep from rice brand Grandi Riso pulls me toward a display of various grains and gives me an unexpected but awesome lecture on when to use

arborio vs. Carnaroli.

**4:30 p.m.:** My education continues at a one-on-one tutorial all about extra-virgin olive oil (\$24). Mattia, the guide, ushers me into the full on-site production facility — where FICO olive oil will be pressed this fall — and dives into a theatrical interpretation of the entire process, emphasizing steps where things could go horribly wrong. Then it's on to the olive grove, part of an outdoor ring of agriculture that also includes orchards and vineyards, to see an open-air museum of antique harvesting equipment and a variety of trees brought to FICO from across the country. (The

ones from Puglia are huge!) Finally, it's sample time, with extra attention to olives grown in different climates: beach, valley, forest. And I learn proper tasting technique, which requires keeping your mouth open and your tongue up while you inhale. According to Mattia, “it's like whistling backwards.”

**6 p.m.:** Evening brings in a whole new crowd of visitors. Elementary school kids buzz around the amphitheater for a cooking competition. A bunch of dudes in gym shorts have taken over the functional fitness-training area. Academic types seem to have come to see “Bologna in Miniatura,” a pop-up exhibit featuring replicas of the town's most important landmarks. After I duck into another carousel, “Man: From Soil to Bottle,” which traces the development of olive oil, wine and beer, I realize what I really need is a drink.

**7 p.m.:** I grab a stool at Birreria Baladin, an outpost of Italy's foremost craft brewer, and order an Isaac, a citrusy wheat beer (\$6). Just after I finish up, I pass by a wine store, where I'm offered a complimentary glass of FICO prosecco. That may explain why I find myself really enjoying

If you go

**WHERE TO STAY**  
**Hotel Touring Bologna**  
 Via De' Mattiiani 1/2  
 011-39-051-584-305  
[hoteltouring.it/en](http://hoteltouring.it/en)

Tucked away on a quiet street, this mod hideaway offers spectacular views from its rooftop terrace. It's also well located for starting the popular hike along the Portico di San Luca, the longest covered sidewalk in the world. (The hour-long uphill walk makes up for almost all overeating.) Rooms from around \$125.

**WHAT TO DO**  
**FICO Eataly World**  
 Via Paolo Canali 8  
[eatalyworld.it/en](http://eatalyworld.it/en)  
 011-39-051-002-9001

Open from 10 a.m. to midnight every day, the park offers free admission to all. Parking is free for the first two hours, then costs about \$1.80 per hour. The FICO bus shuttle, which picks up from the train station in downtown Bologna, operates from 9:30 a.m. to midnight, every 30 minutes, on weekdays and every 20 minutes on weekends. Round-trip tickets cost about \$8.50. (Find more information at [fibus.it/en](http://fibus.it/en).)

**Mercato delle Erbe**  
 Via Ugo Bassi 25  
[mercatodelleerbe.eu](http://mercatodelleerbe.eu)

It's on a smaller scale (and there's no mini golf) but downtown Bologna's favorite covered market is the original must-see for foodie-minded travelers. In addition to the stalls and shops to buy stuff to take home, there are plenty of restaurants that will do the cooking for you. Open 7 a.m. to midnight six days a week. Closed Sundays.

**INFORMATION**  
[bolognawelcome.com/en](http://bolognawelcome.com/en)

V.H.

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the final trio of carousels. In “Man and Sea,” I take the helm of a ship in a video game that involves sailing around the coast of Italy to discover a variety of seafood. “Man and Animals” translates each visitor's height into creatures: I'm four chickens, three rabbits and two snails. And “Man and Future” is a hydroponics project that gets visitors to plant a seed in a small box on a conveyor belt. I can track my basil's progress online.

**8:30 p.m.:** After crisscrossing FICO Eataly World for hours, I've seen every possible aspect of Italian cuisine — Neapolitan pizza, an all-potato joint, truffle everything, fried seafood, Mortadella World. So what to get for dinner? It's inevitable as soon as I lay eyes on the menu for SfogliAmo, which specializes in handmade fresh pasta: cappelacci stuffed with candied figs and ricotta, in an orange sauce with toasted almonds.

**9:30 p.m.:** My plate is finished and so am I. There's no sleeping here. (At least, not yet. A hotel is in the works.) So I ride my nearly forgotten bike back to the entrance, head to the shuttle stop and ponder the last 12 hours. It's been a nonstop smorgasbord of delicious and fascinating things, and although not every element was exactly to my taste, there's plenty to like. And there's still so much I didn't sample — the movie theater, Zumba classes, balsamic vinegar.

Leaving me wanting to come back for more? That's pretty authentically Italian.

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## Along Utah's Highway 12, scenery, switchbacks and a celebrated restaurant

UTAH FROM F4

for my first brand-new car, a Nissan Xterra.

From that trip, my strongest memories are of the restaurant's and Highway 12's “stars.” At the former, it was the spicy meatloaf, which was every bit as good as the reviews said it would be. On the latter, it was the hogback, a section of road about two miles long with sheer drop-offs of more than 1,000 feet on both sides.

I have returned to Highway 12 and Boulder several times since. I

now make an effort to search for subtler joys, even though the hogback was recently repaved and the restaurant has gained more and more recognition. (It has been named Utah's best restaurant several times and, last year, co-owners and co-chefs Blake Spalding and Jen Castle were semifinalists for a James Beard Award for best chef in the Southwest region. Also last year, Spalding and Castle published their second cookbook, “This Immeasurable Place: Food and Farming from the Edge of Wilderness.” (Former secretary of

the interior Bruce Babbitt wrote the foreword.)

It has a 6½-acre farm — named Blaker's Acres after Spalding — that annually grows about 23,000 pounds of produce and keeps more than 150 chickens, and the farm staff tends about 150 fruit trees (including five different kinds of apricot trees), so the menu continually changes. And of the ones I'd seen before, I wanted to order and eat at least half of what was on each of them.

This evening, as I am dining alone, choosing is more excruciat-

ing than usual. How to pick between goat-cheese fondue and a steamed artichoke served with lemon aioli made from eggs laid by Blaker's Acres' own chickens? A family of five is seated next to me and puts in their entire order before I settle on the artichoke. And that's just the appetizer.

There's the spicy chipotle meatloaf entree — a few things on the menu are constant — but I instead order a New York strip steak. The beef is from a cow that grazed in Grand Staircase-Escalante. (Unlike national parks, national mon-

uments, especially this one, are sometimes managed for multiple uses and not just protection of the land.)

It might just be my imagination, fueled by driving through the forest on the way back from Lower Muley Twist Canyon, but when the steak arrives and I begin to eat, I taste notes of pinyon and juniper.

The next morning, I drive my favorite section of Highway 12, the 28 miles between Boulder and Escalante, which, with a population of about 800, is the largest city in the area.

The hogback is in this stretch, but this time the corners on the road as it descends to the Escalante River and the Calf Creek Recreation Area really enthrall me. Unlike Lower Muley Twist Canyon's corners, I know what's around these. Still, I grin, giggle and press harder on the gas pedal as I go into each one.

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