

## **Bonanza Herd Area**

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### **Description**

Moonscape isolation, chalky desolation, soul-sucking industrialization, and a couple of beautiful fantasies.

The BLM's 2015 herd population survey indicated zero horses remaining in this huge area south of Vernal. Officially, the mustangs were removed over a decade ago due an outbreak of Equine Infectious Anemia and long-term concerns for population viability in this nutrient-challenged terrain. I might have abandoned all thoughts of visiting this location had I not heard about Fantasy Canyon, an outcropping of weirdly eroded rock formations occupying a space about the size of a city block in the northwest section of this herd area. Why not check it out and see if I can spot any evidence that mustangs still roam this region?

With this in mind, I took the long way home from an August 2016 visit to Winter Ridge, choosing a 30-mile northeasterly stretch along Kings Wells Road through gorgeous country including the Book Cliffs Wildlife Management Area. The White River defines the southern border of the Bonanza herd area, some 10 crow-flight miles north of this road, but I found myself thinking that mustangs would look about as natural in this beautiful and well-vegetated landscape as anywhere I have seen. Not the slightest indication that the horses know anything about that, however – and of course, if they did, the powers-that-be would have none of it. And that's really a shame. Of all the locations I have visited on this project, Kings Wells Road would easily be on my short list of absolute favorites ... if only there were mustangs.

Crossing the White River, then turning westward just south of a microscopic non-community called Bonanza (official population: 1) to head toward Fantasy Canyon, the scenery quickly morphs into an uninviting expanse of chalky knolls and monochromatically coordinated petroleum holding tanks. What if the moon exploded, raining down on a section of the Earth, and extraction companies hurried out to jab their pumps into the gray silt and suck out all the moon juice? Well, it might look a lot like this. Even the ubiquitous sage looks like it could benefit from a Zoloft prescription. I found myself hoping I would not find mustangs here. But I did.

I found this band grazing a vegetated patch about four miles east of the tribal border – almost certainly migrants from that area. They look reasonably healthy, despite the deathly pall of their surroundings, but I desperately wish they could migrate about ten miles south.

### **Directions**

I have sincere reservations about recommending anyone to this area: 1) aesthetically, it's the least appealing herd area I have seen yet; 2) one could easily get lost in the maze of uncharted well roads winding and branching every which-way; 3) the horses, when you find whatever few may be scrapping for an existence in this bleak terrain, might just break your heart. But I committed to documenting every defined herd area when I started this site, so I'll offer directions to Fantasy Canyon, which is worth a visit for the sheer other-worldliness of it.

Fill your tank in Vernal and head east (or south, depending upon exactly where you begin) on US-40, turning right onto SR-45. Follow this paved highway 20.3 miles, turning right on Glen Bench Road. Continue south and west 12.8 miles. You'll pass through tribal territory on the final 3.1 miles of this leg, turning right onto Coyote Wash Road. Follow this graded dirt road 3.2 miles (leaving tribal land about halfway along) and turn right to remain on Coyote Wash Road. Continue another 0.5 mile and turn left. Watch for the small sign indicating the parking area (with restrooms) on your right about 0.4 mile up this road.

#### **Key Coordinates**

- a. Exit US-40 to SR-45: 40° 24.881' N 109° 29.991' W
- b. Glen Bench Rd from SR-45: 40° 11.126' N 109° 19.797' W
- c. Coyote Wash Rd from Glen Bench Rd: 40° 3.733' N 109° 27.483' W
- d. Turn right to remain on Coyote Wash Rd: 40° 3.711' N 109° 24.464' W
- e. Turn left toward Fantasy Canyon: 40° 3.290' N 109° 24.385' W
- f. Fantasy Canyon entrance: 40° 3.485' N 109° 23.979' W

#### **Nearest Herd Areas**

Hill Creek: 40 miles southwest

Winter Ridge: 60 miles southwest