



Arizona Rocks 64

Text and photos by Ray Grant

An interesting place to visit that is not very well known is Coal Mine Canyon located on Black Mesa. It is about 15 miles south of Tuba City on route 264 on the north side of the road. It was somewhat visible from the highway and a track leads to the edge of the canyon, I somehow found my way there some years ago. Here are directions that I found on the internet: drive 15.2 miles from Tuba City, turn left onto an unmarked dirt road, drive 0.5 miles, straight ahead at the first junction, bear right at the second junction, and then straight at the third junction to the picnic area on the rim. Also, they state a guide is needed to go into the Canyon. Note there are steep cliffs at the edge of the canyon so, be careful.

The rocks in the canyon are Jurassic in age and the rocks on the rim are Cretaceous. This top formation is the Dakota Formation and is older than the coal being mined today (Wepo Formation). The rocks in the canyon are sandstones and siltstones spectacularly eroded into badlands type topography. There was a coal layer near the top that has burned. It was likely ignited by lightning and has burned the rocks above it, so they now look like products of a blast furnace. There are also some oyster fossils in the area in the top layer. So 100 million year ago the oysters lived in shallow bays when the ocean was present and the coal formed in swampy areas along the coast.



Coal Canyon, top layer has coal and burnt rock (Dakota Formation - Cretaceous Age) lower rocks (sandstone - Jurassic Age)



Rock from above the burning coal layer at Coal Canyon, has partially melted like slag



Another view of the Slag like rocks at Coal canyon