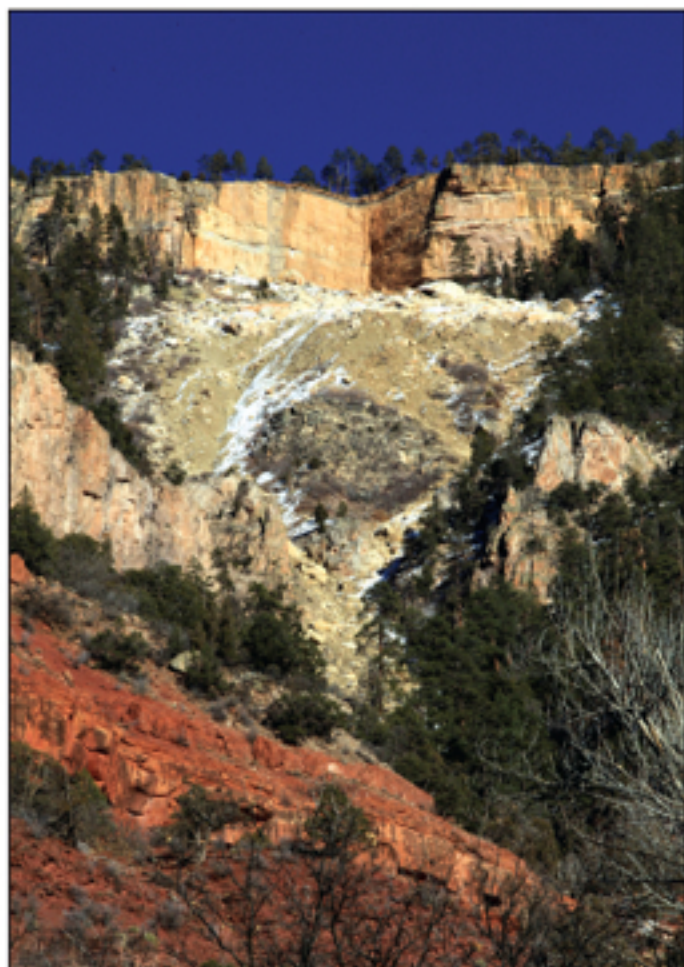


Rock on!

by Steve Egiroire

Winding canyons, high mesas, lofty mountains and deep valleys – Durango is located in the heart of one of the most geologically diverse regions in the country. The mosaic of strata within the ever-changing landscape is a veritable treasure trove for understanding the history of the Earth as it once was. The Animas Valley in particular is a great place to take a peak back into geologic time, as it staircases from the rim all the way to the valley bottom. Here's a look at just a few of the notable locations spread around town:



The very top layer of the valley is Cretaceous Dakota Sandstone. Sandstones are not particularly known for stability, indicated here by the massive rockslide on the east side of the valley.



The band of rock along the Animas River behind Home Depot known as The Purple Cliffs is a unique area of eroding igneous rock rich in iron and manganese.



A huge section of missing geologic history: what is known as a "nonconformity" can be observed just west of Baker's Bridge. Spread between two hands is the 400-million-year-old Elbert Formation and the older 1.72-billion-year-old Baker's Bridge Granite...representing a time gap of 1.3 billion years!



Along 32nd Street, glacial deposits known as the Animas City Moraines can be seen right from the road. Relatively new to the geology scene, they range from 18,000 to 20,000 years old.



The large picture cliffs prominent on both sides of the valley are composed of 150-million-year-old Junction Creek Sandstone from the Jurassic Age. This layer is also a favorite among local rock climbers.



Where the red rocks meet the grey rocks: The Hermosa Formation (grey) is made of alternating shales, limestones and sandstones and are a great place to discover fossilized marine life.



Widespread across the Colorado Plateau is Entrada Sandstone. Jurassic in age, it is the lowest white layer in the valley. These petrified dunes are known for their striations, due to variable wind patterns during their formation.