

Trail Description | Nankoweap Trail

[Source: http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/Nankoweap_Trail.pdf]

During his famous early explorations in the region, John Wesley Powell became fascinated with the area's complex geology. His continuing interest ultimately prompted him, in the 1880s, to send a geologist and trail crew to improve an old Native American route to the river. Subsequently, the trail became the northern terminus of the "Horse Thief" route. It's difficult to envision a horse traveling this trail now but, according to legend, outlaws would steal horses in Utah and drive them to the bottom of Grand Canyon, then across the river and out the Tanner Trail to ultimately sell them in southern Arizona.

This is a mostly waterless trail, with significant exposure in places. This trail is not recommended for people with a fear of heights. The majority of hikers take two days to complete the journey, spending the night on the way down at either Marion Point or Tilted Mesa; to do so requires carrying plenty of extra water. Hikers up to the challenge are rewarded with magnificent views, excellent chances for solitude, and fascinating human history.

Mileages

West Access | Highway 67/FR 610/Trail #57 (8800 ft) to Nankoweap TH (7640 ft): 3 mi

North Access | Highway 89A/FR 445/Trail #57 (6800 ft) to Nankoweap TH: 3.5 mi

Nankoweap trailhead (7640 ft) to Colorado River (2760 ft): 11 mi

Water Sources

A very small seasonal seep is located just above the trail approximately 150 yards past where the trail passes Marion Point. Permanent water sources include Nankoweap Creek and the Colorado River. It is advisable to cache one half to one gallon of water per person along the trail for the hike out. Be sure to label all caches with names and dates and place in a location that is not visible from the trail. Remove all caches when you leave the canyon.

Campsites

Camping is available in the Kaibab National Forest near the National Park Service trailhead, at Nankoweap Creek (AE9), and at the Colorado River. There are 4-5 small sites located along the trail in the Supai rock layer between Marion Point and Tilted Mesa. For more river privacy, camp near the delta in the smaller beach areas and you won't be invaded by raft trips.

Trailhead Access

The Nankoweap Trail can be accessed from the west via Forest Road (FR) 610 (4.6 mi / 7.4 km north of the North Rim entrance station) or from the north through House Rock Valley via FR 445 (south of Lees Ferry along Highway 89A). FR 445 is a lower elevation access and more reliable year-round. Note that both trailheads are called Saddle Mountain AND that both USDA Forest Service trails are numbered 57.

Trail Description

FOREST SERVICE TRAILHEADS TO NPS BOUNDARY

Both Forest Service trails #57 merge at the canyon rim, National Park Service boundary (trail 57 actually connects the two trailheads). The trail from FR 610 is straight forward. Long pants are advised because of dense, thorny brush. The trail from FR 445 leaves the parking lot and follows an old road south (uphill). It soon becomes a proper trail and descends into a deep ravine. At a fork in the trail at the ravine bottom, bear right to follow the creek. The trail crosses the creek several times over the course of about a half mile, then exits the creek bed to the south and travels continuously upward through forest toward the saddle.

NPS BOUNDARY TO MARION POINT

As you enter the canyon you enter the Supai Formation. The trail turns south and descends quickly through the uppermost Supai cliffs (Esplanade Sandstone). At the bottom of the switchbacks you begin a lengthy traverse, remaining immediately below the Esplanade for the next five miles or so. On a map it appears to be fairly level, but in reality the trail continuously ascends and descends and there is much exposure. The trail is often only one footprint wide, loose and gravelly, with a 10-150+ feet of drop off. This trail is not recommended for people with a fear of heights. One place that may be confusing is where the trail passes Marion Point. Here it makes an immediate turn to the north continuing the traverse and does NOT continue out to Marion Point. Just beyond where the trail passes Marion Point, near the head of a canyon, it passes just below a very small seasonal seep under a ledge.

MARION POINT TO TILTED MESA

The traverse continues in a rising and falling pattern until it approaches the ridge leading down to Tilted Mesa. There it begins a gradual descent through the remainder of the Supai and becomes more steep on the ridge. Two short cliffs are descended with the aid of a couple of trees. Excellent campsites are located at the top of each of these cliffs. The trail soon reaches the top of the Redwall limestone on the isthmus between Nankoweap and Little Nankoweap Canyons. The trail continues on or near the ridge until dropping off to the southwest and beginning the descent through the Redwall.

TILTED MESA TO NANKOWEAP CREEK

The trail in the upper Redwall is clear and relatively well constructed. Where it is gravelly, the rocks are angular and large enough to be stable. Things deteriorate when the trail makes a couple of loose traverses, then a couple more, then descends straight down a loose ridge of yellow shale. A walking stick is helpful. At the base of this distinctive yellow shale slope, the trail then turns back to the northwest and onto a plunging ridge of semi-stable, conglomerate boulder debris. Though more stable than the shale, the trail down this ridge is VERY steep. When it approaches a large colorful knob the trail turns back to the southeast onto another narrow and loose traverse through the Bright Angel shale. This lasts about 1/3 to 1/2 mile. After traversing the lower reaches of Tilted Mesa, the trail continues a mild descent down the top of a wide, round, stable ridge. It goes through the Tapeats Sandstone via a few switchbacks and some multiple trailing. Then it drops into a small saddle and off to the southwest down a ravine separating the gray Nankoweap Formation and Black Cardenas Lavas. This ravine empties onto a large alluvial terrace above Nankoweap Creek. The trail stays on the terrace until dropping down to the creek.

NANKOWEAP CREEK TO COLORADO RIVER

There are large springs above and below the point where the trail meets the creek. Those upstream provide tastier drinking water (this must be treated of course) than those below. There is an excellent campsite here but watch out for flash floods. From the campsites at the trail's first junction with the creek, the remainder of the trail follows Nankoweap Creek to the river. Once you reach the river, please stay on the established trails to decrease the erosion and confusion (beach trails are outlined by rocks).

Important Notes

This trail is classified as MOST difficult of the named trails in Grand Canyon. It has the largest total rim-to-river drop (5640 ft) and is one of the longest trails. Hikers must be experienced in canyon route finding; this trail is not recommended for inexperienced or solo hikers. The Nankoweap Trail is not enjoyable as a summer hike as there is no water and little shade until Nankoweap Creek. The hike will require a minimum of 4 to 6 liters of water per person, per day.

Trail Description | Beamer Trail

[Source: http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/Beamer_Trail.pdf]

The Little Colorado River joins the main stem of the Colorado at river mile 61.5. Since Powell's voyage of exploration in 1869 this confluence has marked the end of Marble Canyon and the formal commencement of Grand Canyon proper – the threshold of Powell's "Great Unknown". The setting is remarkable. When unstained by floodwater, the Little Colorado is the color of the sky. Huge unbroken sweeps of vibrant vertical stone range 4000 feet up to the rim as two monumental canyon systems merge into one. The Grand Canyon is a place where the extraordinary is routine, but even here, the Beamer Trail to the mouth of the Little Colorado River represents choice canyon décor.

The Beamer Trail was named for Ben Beamer, pioneer, farmer, and miner active in eastern Grand Canyon during the early 1890s. Beamer tried, unsuccessfully, to grow crops and live near the mouth of the Little Colorado.

The mouth of Palisades Creek provides a backdrop for other human activities. The legendary Horsethief Route forded the river a short distance down canyon. Useable only during the pre-dam low water of winter, this crossing made it possible to move stolen stock from Utah across the canyon for eventual re-sale in Arizona. Seth Tanner (of Tanner Trail fame) discovered and maintained a number of active silver and copper mining claims on both sides of the river. Other early pioneers also became involved with these efforts, including George McCormick who optimistically changed the name of the mine from Tanner to Copper Blossom.

The section between the Tanner Trail and Palisades Creek offers a chance to inspect some of the oldest sedimentary rocks exposed in Grand Canyon. Known collectively as the Grand Canyon Supergroup, these colorful rocks and dark lava flows are thought to be between 800 million and 1.2 billion years old. The Supergroup is easy to spot by its distinctive 20 degree tilt.

Mileages

Tanner Beach (2700 ft) to Palisades Creek (2700 ft): 2.9 mi

Tanner Beach (2700 ft) to Little Colorado (2700 ft): 9.5 mi

Water Sources

The Colorado River is the only reliable source of quality drinking water. The shoreline can be accessed almost anywhere between the Tanner Trail and Palisades Creek and near the mouth of the Little Colorado River. The Colorado frequently carries a heavy sediment load and is difficult to purify under those conditions. There is permanent water in the lower reaches of the Little Colorado but the mineral and/or sediment content make it practically undrinkable.

Campsites

The Beamer Trail falls within "at-large" use area BA9. Please use existing campsites whenever possible. There is one closed area: The mouth of the Little Colorado River represents sensitive wildlife habitat so the area within ¼ mile of the confluence is closed to overnight use. The best campsites are located between the Tanner Trail junction and Palisades Creek on beaches adjacent to the Colorado River. Campsite selection along the Tapeats rim between Palisades Canyon and the Little Colorado River is limited (at best) for a small party, and nonexistent for a large group. Visitors camping at the Colorado River are reminded to urinate in the river. The scent of urine and associated algae growth quickly foul beaches for other hikers. Human feces should be buried 4-6 inches deep in a cat hole a minimum of 200 feet from water, camp and trails. Carry out toilet paper and all other trash.

Trailhead Access

The Tanner Trail provides access on the south. The Beamer Trail joins the Tanner Trail just above Tanner Rapids. It is possible to access the Beamer Trail at the north end by way of the Little Colorado River, but rim-to-river routes in this seldom visited gorge are, without exception, rough and possibly dangerous wilderness routes. The Little Colorado drains most of northeastern Arizona and has the potential to produce sediment laden floods of massive proportions. A current weather report, careful campsite selection, a conservative attitude, and a vigilant eye on the sky are essential for safe travel through this confined, flood-prone canyon system. Visitors accessing the area via Little Colorado River routes will need a permit to cross Navajo land.

Trail Description

Walk the Tanner Trail to the river and start up-canyon. Small outcroppings of Dox Sandstone present minor obstructions (with obvious solutions) at a couple of spots along the way, but in general the route between Tanner Canyon and Palisades Creek is straightforward. Riparian vegetation is dense near the shoreline so the trail tends toward a line a short distance above the water where the brush starts to give way to rocky slopes.

The character of the Beamer Trail changes dramatically at Palisades Canyon. A relatively easy, straight-line stroll across sandy slopes becomes a tedious, demanding trek along narrow, exposed ledges at the very brink of high cliffs.

Tapeats Sandstone outcrops emerging from deep water make it impossible to stay near the river above the mouth of Palisades Creek. Climb about 300 vertical feet up the talus immediately north of the mouth of Palisades to the top of the Tapeats. This slope offers the only break in the sandstone cliff in the general vicinity so the place to start up should be obvious. The top of the Tapeats is the route all the way to the Little Colorado. The trail is badly eroded, narrow, and, in places, remarkably exposed at the edge of an impressive precipice, so hikers should walk carefully. Hikers with a known fear of heights may find this trail segment difficult. It's almost like a junior version of the Tonto Trail, contouring around each of the many small, steep gullies that drain Palisades of the Desert. The trail is reasonably well-defined, but if there are to be route finding problems they will probably occur at the point the trail crosses the drainages. It is possible to scramble down to walk the shoreline ¼ mile below the confluence, but the main trail stays on the Tapeats rim all the way to the Little Colorado River.

Important Notes

If you encounter remnants of mining or other historic activities, please leave artifacts in place for other visitors to enjoy and historians to interpret. The stories of these places and people can be lost when objects are moved.

Trail Description | Escalante Route: Tanner Trail to New Hance Trail

[Source: http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/Escalante_Route.pdf]

Among the commonly hiked sections below the South Rim, the Escalante Route has a reputation for requiring a bit extra from Grand Canyon hikers. Several passages encountered along the way require exposed hand and toe climbing. A feel for the route ahead will save time at the difficult spots. The Colorado River is usually the only reliable source of water, so fool-proof methods of turbid water purification are a real necessity. On the other hand, you are presented with a delightful variety of canyon environments, ranging from the wide open spaces of Furnace Flats, to the slot-like confines of lower Seventyfive Mile Creek. Hance Rapids at the mouth of Red Canyon represents the premier stretch of whitewater in the upper reaches of the Grand Canyon. Changing geology, as the sedimentary Supergroup gives way to the ancient Vishnu Complex, combine with remarkable views from a variety of elevations to produce a Grand Canyon experience of the first order.

Mileages

Tanner Beach, BB9 (2700 ft) to Cardenas Creek, BC9 (2650 ft): 3 mi
Cardenas Creek, BC9 (2650 ft) to Seventyfive Mile Creek, BC9 (2580 ft): 7 mi
Seventyfive Mile Creek, BC9 (2580 ft) to Hance Rapids, BD9 (2550 ft): 2 mi

Water Sources

The Colorado River represents the only reliable water. Hikers can access the shoreline many places between Tanner Beach and Cardenas Creek, at the mouths of Escalante Creek and Seventyfive Mile Creek, at several spots between Seventyfive Mile and Papago Creeks, and near Hance Rapids. The Colorado River is often silt-laden and difficult to purify.

Campsites

Most hikers utilize beaches along the Colorado River for camping. Good beach camps are located at the mouths of Tanner Canyon (BB9), Cardenas Creek (BC9), Escalante Creek (BC9), Seventyfive Mile Creek (BC9), Papago Creek (BC9), and Red Canyon (BD9). Encounters with river trips are possible at Cardenas and Red Canyon; please yield large camps to large river trips. A dry camp is located west of Cardenas Creek near the head of the unnamed drainage.

Trail Description

The route can be hiked in either direction, but traveling with the flow of the land is appealing so this passage will be described from the perspective of a down-canyon hiker. Follow the Tanner Trail to the shoreline. Rocks placed at the trail margins make it easy to see the way across Tanner Beach and up onto the bench above the river that forms the route downstream towards Cardenas Canyon. A well-trodden trail works its way along the foot of the Supergroup slopes above the shoreline. Shallow gullies must be crossed at intervals; but generally speaking, the route from Tanner to Cardenas is straightforward.

Cardenas Creek is almost always dry, but there is easy access to the Colorado River via the bed of the drainage. This is the last reliable water source until one reaches the river at the mouth of Escalante Creek. The trail crosses Cardenas Creek about two hundred yards above the shoreline and climbs the Dox Hill immediately west. There are a couple of ways to do this, but these route options ultimately converge into a single trail immediately south of the Dox Hill. The correct path, however, follows the rising slope of red sandstone toward and up the unnamed side canyon between Cardenas and Escalante Creeks and reaches the bed of the drainage above the cliff bands that block access to the Colorado River.

The route crosses the unnamed drainage and traverses west toward the crest of the ridge north of Escalante Creek. Caution is indicated throughout this area, as there are many places where you will want to avoid a misstep at all cost. Some sections offer a walking surface about a boot-sole wide while traversing slopes that fall steeply away for hundreds of feet. Take your time and walk with care. The exposure may appear dramatic but truly is comfortable hiking. The trail seems to traverse west forever, finally going to the top of the ridge just short of the west end. A fine view in all directions is the reward for all the side hill walking. (This is also the location of the steep bypass through "Butchart's Notch".)

The trail crosses the ridge and descends rapidly to the bed of Escalante Creek. A barrier fall in the main arm prevents direct access to the river, so the route crosses to the south side of the wash and around into the short arm of Escalante. Well developed route-finding skills will help here. The canyon bottom forms the route for a short distance but soon the trail traverses west to pass a high pour-off, crosses a bit of talus and descends to the creek bed below the fall. Both arms of Escalante Creek are normally dry, but once established below the fall it's an easy walk to the shoreline.

The trail climbs away from the river below the mouth of Escalante Creek and follows a rising ramp of Shinumo Quartzite down canyon. Walk the top of this formation around into Seventyfive Mile Creek. Though there is a route directly down the cliffs to

the creek bottom, a less thrilling (and probably safer) option is to walk the top of the Shinumo all the way to the bed of Seventyfive Mile Creek and continue down the drainage bottom to the river. A couple of minor obstacles present themselves but the solutions are obvious. The Shinumo Quartzite section of Seventyfive Mile Creek is a real treat - deep and narrow. Watch for some neat slickensides near the river, the results of ancient faulting. Nevills Rapids provides a backdrop for several nice camping spots. The area is equally popular among river runners so you may encounter other groups. Seventyfive Mile Creek is normally dry in its lower reaches, but there is access to the river at various points throughout the stretch from Escalante to Papago Creeks. Note: Seventyfive Mile Creek, in particular, is prone to flash floods. These flood events regularly change the structure of the drainage and, in kind, the route. Hikers should be wary of drainage travel during rain events.

Trails along the beach form the route downriver towards Papago Creek. Eventually sand gives way to rock and a series of ledges require a bit of attention to avoid being rimmed up. In general, stay as close to the river as is conveniently possible. The trail goes up and over a small outcrop of sandstone before dropping back to river level at the mouth of Papago Creek. A high route is also possible and may be cairned.

A cliff emerges from deep water below the mouth of Papago Creek. A significant detour is necessary to bypass a relatively short river stretch. Exit Papago on the west and work up a series of tall ledges. A short rope to better facilitate pack handling will prove a worthwhile accessory, especially for a solo walker. Start up immediately west of the mouth of the drainage. The holds are big and secure, but as one gains height the perception of exposure is hard to avoid. The route leads up from ledge to ledge, so it's never more than a move or two between resting places if you have chosen the line of least resistance. The climbing is easy, but no mistakes are allowed. About 35 feet up the angle relents and one can scramble up the talus toward minor cliff bands above. There are several ways to surmount these little crags, all with obvious trails giving access. Climb the slopes to a (more or less) horizontal trail about 300 vertical feet above the river.

The trail traverses less than 100 yards down-canyon before coming to the top of a talus filled runnel that allows passage back to the shoreline. This gully seems dangerous - steep, with lots of big boulders in precarious balance. Large groups are more at risk because more people moving around means increased chances of dislodged rocks. Large groups should hike VERY close together, or VERY far apart. The immediate shoreline forms the most efficient route between bottom of this treacherous little gully and the mouth of Red Canyon. The walk downstream through riparian vegetation is a real pleasure. The river flows quietly through the large pool above Hance Rapids, and beaver or waterfowl are occasionally encountered. A down-canyon walker arriving at Hance Rapids could continue west via the Tonto Trail toward Mineral Canyon, the Grandview Trail and points beyond, or ascend to the rim via the bed of Red Canyon on the New Hance Trail.

Trail Description | Grandview Trail and Horseshoe Mesa

[Source: http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/Grandview_Trail.pdf]

Impressions of the dazzling topography of Grand Canyon have changed and shifted since that day in the summer of 1540 when Garcia Lopez de Cardenas gazed out from the South Rim. The conquistador saw a worthless desert wasteland, nothing more than a barrier to political expansion. At the opposite extreme, the modern view tends toward the romantic, reveling in what we today perceive as the remarkable spirituality of the gorge. Products of the age in which they lived, American pioneers arriving in the 1890s were more practical and utilitarian: they assumed with so much exposed bedrock inevitably there had to be mineral riches waiting to be claimed by those willing to go below and look. Would-be miners fanned out across the inner canyon, probing everywhere, and at a place called Horseshoe Mesa found what they sought. Rich copper deposits initially averaging 30% pure promised wealth, but only if transported from the depths. Optimism reigned supreme, a route was scratched out, and in February 1893 an endless succession of mule trains began moving raw ore to the rim along a rough canyon track originally known as the Berry Trail, more recently as the Grandview Trail. More than any other canyon trail, the Grandview is steeped in the legacy of the mining days at Grand Canyon. Numerous small artifacts associated with these halcyon days are scattered across the top of Horseshoe Mesa, providing a link across the years. Hikers can inspect the physical remains of this bygone era while enjoying canyon scenery at its finest.

Mileages

Grandview trailhead (7400 ft) to Horseshoe Mesa, BF5 (4900 ft): 3 mi

Horseshoe Mesa to Cottonwood Creek, BG9 (3900 ft): 1.5 mi

Horseshoe Mesa to Page Spring (4400 ft): 0.8 mi

Horseshoe Mesa to Hance Creek, BE9 (3700 ft): 3.5 mi

Horseshoe Mesa to Hance Rapids, BD9 (2608 ft): 9.9 mi

Water Sources

Hance Creek and Page Spring (aka Miners Spring) are permanent, year-round water sources. The southernmost spring in Cottonwood Creek is reliable during cooler seasons but occasionally runs dry during hot weather. O'Neill Spring and the northern spring in Cottonwood are undependable at best. There is no water available between the rim and Horseshoe Mesa, nor between Hance Creek and Hance Rapids.

Campsites

Backpackers camping on Horseshoe Mesa (BF5) must camp in the designated campsites. Three small group sites are located east of the standing masonry structure. The large group site is further north, east of the little butte that caps Horseshoe Mesa. Toilet facilities are located at both areas. Camping is not allowed in or near the historic mines or structures. Camping in the Cottonwood (BG9) and Hance Creek (BE9) Use Areas is "at-large". All hikers should bring animal proof food containers; mice and ravens are especially adept at stealing food and opening packs and bags in this area.

Trail Description

The original Grandview Trail was created to connect the rim with the copper mines on Horseshoe Mesa. The well built trail eventually provided access to more tourists than miners, as the Grandview trail provided one of the best access routes into the canyon for its time. The undamaged segments of the pioneer trail in the upper half of the canyon testify to the engineering prowess of the builders as they devised solution after creative solution to the problems posed by the landscape.

Start off the rim from the established Grandview Point overlook. The Kaibab/Toroweap section traverses steep ground and the old trail is eroded so attention to the problems at hand is essential. Vertical steps were surmounted by construction of log "cribs" that were chained or pinned to the cliff face to provide a foundation for the trail where nature provided none. The exposure here impresses some hikers as hazardous. Unfortunately, several of the historic cribs were swept away by landslides during the winter of 2005. Trail crews restored the trail, but not the historical context of the old logs. A series of sloping ledges at the top of the Coconino cliff demands caution especially when icy or wet. Be careful throughout the Kaibab and Toroweap - a fall here could have catastrophic consequences.

Original "cobblestone riprap" trail construction shows throughout most of the Coconino. Large slabs of sandstone placed edgewise provided a durable (albeit labor intensive) walking surface. The trail comes to the top of a dramatic east-facing gully at Coconino/Hermit contact (known locally as Coconino Saddle) that offers tantalizing views into the upper valley of Hance Creek. Steep cobblestone switchbacks below Coconino Saddle dispense with most of the Supai Formation before the walking moderates and the trail begins a gradually descending traverse across the slope to Horseshoe Mesa.

Horseshoe Mesa offers a myriad of attractions. The campsites are located east of the historic masonry structure. Remnants of mining operations, including rusty cans, nails, tools and structures are protected as archeological resources. Please leave these objects as you found them, where you found them. Backpackers headed deeper into the canyon can choose between three trails that link the rim of Horseshoe Mesa and the Tonto Trail. The northernmost trail that descends the east side of the western arm of the "horseshoe" is the most civilized of these options. Most of the original switchbacks have survived so this route is relatively straightforward, intersecting the Tonto Trail north of Horseshoe Mesa. Hikers can continue along the Tonto about 1.5 miles west to Cottonwood Creek or about 2.2 miles east to Hance Creek. The trail down the west side of the mesa is more demanding, severely washed out in the Tonto Group above the bed of Cottonwood Creek. The path off the east side to Page Spring and Hance Creek is probably the most difficult and exposed. Recent trail work has rendered the hardest place a bit easier, but the potential for a nasty fall exists throughout the Redwall descent. Watch for the spur trail to Page (aka Miners) Spring near the bottom of the Redwall.

Modern backpackers use the Tonto Trail to connect the Grandview Trail with points beyond. An established trail follows the bed of Cottonwood Creek to the top of the Tapeats Formation where the Tonto heads west toward the South Kaibab Trail. Hikers walking east from Hance Creek can follow the Tonto Trail toward Mineral Canyon. The Tonto Platform starts breaking down near the west rim of Mineral Canyon causing the trail to drop below the Tapeats Sandstone to descend Supergroup slopes to the bed of Mineral Canyon. Exiting at the mouth of Mineral Canyon on the east side is a bit tricky. The trail splits as it rounds the point before starting down the slope to Hance Rapids. The upper trail is straightforward, but the lower option requires walkers to bend low and traverse a narrow and exposed ledge. There are a couple of ways across the talus to the shoreline at Hance Rapids and the foot of the New Hance Trail.

Important Notes

THE GRANDVIEW TRAIL IS DANGEROUS IN WINTER. HARD ICE OFTEN SHEATHES POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS PASSAGES MAKING SOME SORT OF TRACTION DEVICE (I.E. INSTEP CRAMPONS) MANDATORY. Use extra caution around mines. The rim of the open pits is often unstable. Rotting support timbers in the tunnels pose an obvious hazard. The many artifacts scattered about are protected by federal law. Enjoy what you find but leave it as found. With the exception of "Cave of the Domes", permits are required to enter caves in Grand Canyon National Park due to the extremely sensitive nature of cultural and natural resources inside. Contact the Backcountry Information Center for further information.

Trail Description | Tonto Trail: Grandview Trail to South Kaibab Trail

[Source: [http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/Tonto-Grandview to South Kaibab.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/Tonto-Grandview%20to%20South%20Kaibab.pdf)]

The dynamic interplay of soft and hard layers of stone creates an open benchland at the rim of the Inner Gorge called the Tonto Platform. Easily visible from several South Rim overlooks, the greenish Tonto rocks have eroded into an obvious exception to the striking vertical cliffs that characterize most of Grand Canyon. The Tonto Trail follows this natural transcanyon route for 95 rough, unmaintained miles, from Red Canyon on the east to Garnet Canyon on the west. All of this makes the Tonto Trail unique among Grand Canyon pathways. Most descend from the rim towards the Colorado River, but the Tonto Trail offers passage by foot up and down the canyon, parallel to the course of the river. Because of its length, most hikers approach the Tonto Trail not as a single unit, but rather as a series of installments, breaking the route down into four or five sections defined by rim to river trails and the natural lay of the land. The trek along the Tonto Trail between the Grandview and South Kaibab Trails offers experienced canyon walkers a representative introduction to the pleasures, as well as the problems, associated with travel along this important inner canyon feature.

Mileages

Grandview Point (7400 ft) to Cottonwood Creek, BG9 (3690 ft): 4.5 mi
Cottonwood Creek (3690 ft) to Grapevine Creek, BH9 (3550 ft): 5.5 mi
Grapevine Creek (3550 ft) to Lone Tree Canyon, BJ9 (3680 ft): 8.7 mi
Lone Tree Canyon (3680 ft) to Cremation Creek, BJ9 (3650 ft): 3.5 mi
Cremation Creek (3650 ft) to South Kaibab trailhead (7200 ft): 6.5 mi
Grandview Point (7400 ft) to South Kaibab trailhead (7200 ft): 28.7 mi

Water Sources

The Tonto Trail is notorious for its lack of reliable water sources, and this section is no exception. Do not expect the river to be a water source in this area; river access via side canyons in this segment ranges from extremely difficult to impossible. Heavy water loads are the norm and dry camps almost inevitable. Check with the Backcountry Information Center for the latest water reports before embarking, know where your next drink is coming from, and have enough water to get you there. The combination of open, sunny country, lack of shade, many dry miles and only a single reliable water source makes this hike dangerous during hot weather. The issue of water in your pack vs. distance to the next reliable spring is one to always keep in mind along the Tonto Trail.

Cottonwood Creek (BG9): Cool weather: Southern spring is usually reliable. Northern Spring and O'Neill Spring are unreliable at best. Hot weather: May be dry.

Grapevine Creek (BH9): Cool weather: Water in the east arm at the Tonto Trail crossing and from the spring on the east side of the drainage. Hot weather: Water normally available in the east arm above or below Tonto Platform level (but sometimes dry at the Tonto Trail) and usually a small trickle from the spring on the east side of the drainage. Further down canyon water abounds.

Boulder Creek (BH9): Cool weather: Dry at the Tonto Trail crossing. Small amounts are occasionally found above Tonto Platform level. Water may also be found downstream about 20 minutes. Hot weather: Dry.

Lone Tree Creek (BJ9): Cool weather: Small amounts at or below Tonto Trail crossing (the most reliable water source is a half hour walk below the Tonto crossing near a lone cottonwood tree). The spring originates in the Muav. Hot weather: Dry.

Cremation Creek (BJ9): Dry all year. Occasional potholes in the Tapeats (down the west arm of the drainage).

Emergency Water Sources: Page Spring and Hance Creek (east of Horseshoe Mesa), Burro Spring and Pipe Creek (west of the Tip-off) and Bright Angel Campground (at the bottom of the Kaibab Trail) are reliable. Any of these sources would represent a major detour and will only be utilized by the truly desperate.

Campsites

"At-large" camping is allowed between Cottonwood and Cremation Creeks (see above for use area codes). Hikers should follow Leave No Trace guidelines when selecting campsites to minimize group impact. Campsites are often located where the Tonto Trail crosses the drainages and often on the Tonto Platform between the side canyons. Some regularly used campsites, especially near water, support a resident population of rodents, ravens and other canyon residents; take steps to protect your food and gear.

Trail Description

The Tonto Trail is like a contour line on your map. The trail descends into the side canyons only when there is no other option, preferring to traverse into the drainages at a consistent elevation. It is often indirect, but Tonto Trail hikers would be well advised to have faith and follow the trail - it almost always represents the most efficient way across the landscape, and one quickly discovers that a trail, any sort of trail, makes for much easier forward progress. Shortcuts will not save time. The trail is not signed.

The Tonto Trail leaves the bed of Cottonwood Creek near the top of the Tapeats Formation, contours around the west arm, and heads west toward Grapevine. Entering Grapevine from the east involves a short section of narrow, eroding trail with significant exposure. The views down into the lower reaches of Grapevine are wonderful, but watch your step. Grapevine is, by far, the largest and most complex side canyon between the Grandview and the South Kaibab Trails. Looking across the mouth of the drainage from the Tonto Trail the distance seems short, but plan on at least 2-3 hours of steady hiking to cross. The small unnamed drainages between Grapevine and Boulder and Boulder and Lone Tree will slow progress, and a little confusion on the west side of Lone Tree is normal, but generally speaking the route between Grapevine and Cremation Creek is straightforward.

Cremation is tough. It has formed along a major fault zone called the Grandview Monocline which has distorted the west side. Folding and displacement related to the fault are obvious within the Tapeats Formation in both western arms of Cremation. Crossing these canyons involves significant elevation change, something of an exception to the (more or less) level nature of the Tonto Trail. There is no river access at Cremation Canyon. A short climb up the slope of the monocline west of Cremation brings hikers to the South Kaibab Trail at the Tip-off.

Important Notes

The dry, hostile nature of the Tonto Platform belies the fact that this desert landscape has been utilized by prehistoric populations for thousands of years. A trained eye can detect archaeological sites in many of the side canyons, sites that testify to the creative intelligence that sustained these people over many generations living out their lives within the harsh, unforgiving world of inner Grand Canyon. If you should find or visit such sites, please leave everything in place, exactly as you found it.

Trail Description | South Kaibab Trail

[Source: http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/South_Kaibab_Trail.pdf]

Hikers seeking panoramic views unparalleled on any other trail at Grand Canyon will want to consider a hike down the South Kaibab Trail. It is the only trail at Grand Canyon National Park that so dramatically holds true to a ridgeline descent. But this exhilarating sense of exposure to the vastness of the canyon comes at a cost: there is little shade and no water for the length of this trail. During winter months, the constant sun exposure is likely to keep most of the trail relatively free of ice and snow. For those who insist on hiking during summer months, which is not recommended in general, this trail is the quickest way to the bottom (it has been described as "a trail in a hurry to get to the river"), but due to lack of any water sources, ascending the trail can be a dangerous proposition.

The South Kaibab Trail is a modern route, having been constructed as a means by which park visitors could bypass Ralph Cameron's Bright Angel Trail. Cameron, who owned the Bright Angel Trail and charged a toll to those using it, fought dozens of legal battles over several decades to maintain his personal business rights. These legal battles inspired the Santa Fe Railroad to build its own alternative trail, the Hermit Trail, beginning in 1911 before the National Park Service went on to build the South Kaibab Trail beginning in 1924. In this way, Cameron inadvertently contributed much to the greater network of trails currently available for use by canyon visitors.

Mileages

Rim (7260 ft / 2213 m) to Cedar Ridge (6120 ft / 1865 m): 1.5 mi (2.4 km)

Cedar Ridge (6120 ft / 1865 m) to Skeleton Point (5220 ft / 1591 m): 1.5 mi (2.4 km)

Skeleton Point (5220 ft / 1591 m) to the Tipoff (4000 ft / 1219 m): 1.4 mi (2.3 km)

Tipoff (4000 ft / 1219 m) to Bright Angel Campground (2480 ft / 756 m): 2.6 mi (4.2 km)

Rim (7260 ft / 2213 m) to Bright Angel Campground (2480 ft / 756 m): 7.0 mi (11.3 km)

Water Sources

There is no water on the South Kaibab Trail. From early May to mid-October there is water near the trailhead (from a spigot near the bus stop). Potable water is available year round at Bright Angel Campground, however, please note that due to occasional pipeline breaks water at Bright Angel Campground is not guaranteed: bringing an alternative form of water treatment, such as iodine tablets or a water filter, is essential. During hot weather, take at least 4 liters of water.

Campsites

At-large camping is not permitted on Corridor Trails; visitors must camp in designated campgrounds. Along the South Kaibab Trail, the only camping option is at Bright Angel Campground (CBG) located immediately adjacent to the Colorado River at the bottom of the canyon.

Trail Description

When camping at Bright Angel Campground, many hikers prefer to hike down the South Kaibab Trail and up the Bright Angel Trail. Though the South Kaibab Trail has an almost identical maximum grade compared to the Bright Angel, it is more consistently sloped but does not have water or shade. The hike down South Kaibab Trail typically takes 4-6 hours.

The trail begins with a series of tight switchbacks. This is where ice will most likely be encountered during the winter months. After these initial switchbacks, the trail traverses below Yaki Point to the aptly named Ooh Ah Point (the first panoramic view of the canyon). From Ooh Ah Point on, the trail follows the top of a ridgeline and is consequently without shade. Several broad and steeply-plunging switchbacks later, hikers reach Cedar Ridge. There are pit toilets at Cedar Ridge, but no water or emergency phone.

From Cedar Ridge, the South Kaibab Trail traverses below O'Neill Butte without a single switchback to Skeleton Point. At three miles from the rim, Skeleton Point is the maximum distance recommended for a day hike. The trail goes directly off the end of Skeleton Point and here, where the trail has been blasted directly out of the limestone cliffs, hikers will encounter the most dramatic sense of exposure. The trail descends rapidly via a series of switchbacks to the Tonto Platform and Tipoff. There are pit toilets and an emergency phone at Tipoff, but no water. For hikers who will be utilizing the Tonto Trail to the east or west, the intersection is located fifty feet or so up-trail from the pit toilets.

Below Tipoff, the South Kaibab Trail loosely follows the course of an earlier trail called the Cable Trail (built in 1907 to accommodate access to the old cable car system across the river that existed before construction of the present suspension bridge). Vestiges of this earlier trail can be seen as the South Kaibab Trail descends toward the Colorado River. Access to Bright Angel Campground is via the black bridge (built in 1921).

Important Notes

Grand Canyon is, above all else, a place of extremes. It is necessary to take appropriate precautions depending on seasonal variations in trail conditions. During winter months, the series of tight switchbacks near the top of the South Kaibab Trail will be icy for days or even weeks after a snowstorm. For hikers who insist on entering the canyon from May to September, it is critical to begin hiking well before dawn or in the late afternoon: Success depends upon staying off the trail between 10 in the morning and 3 in the afternoon (average descent time is 4 to 6 hours). Failure to arrive at Bright Angel Campground by 10 in the morning during hot weather can result in ill health or even death; at the very least, it will be a miserable experience. Ascending the South Kaibab Trail in hot weather is not recommended. Carefully study the National Park Service "Hike Smart" pamphlet issued with summer permits and always practice Leave No Trace.