



a Sense of Nature

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our Inaugural Newsletter!

Staying Safe When Hiking into the Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon is an inverted mountain sinking over 5,000 vertical feet in depth. It is 18 miles wide, 277 river miles long, and the remote North Rim is nearly 1,200 feet higher than the popular South Rim.

The first time you approach the rim you're surprised as the flat plateau you were just strolling on ends abruptly as you gaze down into the various multi-colored, multi-layered rock formations. On a partly cloudy day as shadows undulate in and around the diverse geology of the canyon it is incomparable in its beauty.

To venture below the rim of the canyon is to gain a perspective that very few of the estimated 5 million annual visitors realize, but hikers and backpackers should be aware that there are over 240 rescues inside the canyon each year. All trails into the canyon are relentlessly steep and blisters, ankle sprains, and dehydration are common problems that hikers could face any time they enter the hot desert environment of the canyon.

The top three tips for hiking into the canyon include, 1) drinking plenty of fluids, 2) resting often, and 3) taking your time. You should carry a minimum of one quart of water and/or sport drink for every hour you plan to hike. Take a break every hour for ten or fifteen minutes—take off your pack and rest. And try to pace yourself so you are not consistently out of breath when hiking or your chances of suffering the effects of exhaustion or leg fatigue increase.

For any and all hikes into the canyon you should carry a small pack containing the following items: ample water (at least a quart for every hour of hiking), food (salty snacks/trail mix, energy bars), first-aid supplies (blister treatments, ibuprofen), compass, map, trail description, sunglasses, hat, sunscreen, small flashlight, whistle, and extra clothing (appropriate for the season).

When day hiking the canyon it is also important to remember to turn around before you get tired—since it is climbing back up to the rim when the work really begins. Also, permits are required for all overnight hikers. If you are day hiking no permit is required.

A few of the problems hikers should try and avoid include:

Blisters: Make sure your shoes are well broken in, and stop and treat any hotspots immediately.

Dehydration: Drink plenty of fluids and mix in sport drinks too!

Lightning: When storms are prevalent stay away from exposed cliffs and isolated tall objects, if you feel the hair rise on the back of your neck, squat down quickly!

Snake & Insect Bites: Clean the wound and evacuate all snake bites.

Water Intoxication: You need to drink plenty of water, but you must also eat meals and salty snacks. The effects of water intoxication are similar to that of dehydration.

Plan an Outdoor Escape – Visit the North Rim

While the masses pack the South Rim for its easy highway access and stellar views, it is the North Rim that I love the best. You have few of the classic rim to river views, (okay just one), but what you do have is a fairly quiet, quaint experience in line with the smaller National Parks. When South Rim visitation is consistently over 5 million people each year, only one tenth of those folks visit the North Rim.

The Grand Canyon Lodge at the North Rim has a rustic, inviting comfort, free of the pretensions one might feel at the El Tovar. And since the lodge rests on the Rim's ledge it also has the most beautiful views into the Canyon when compared to all of the other Grand Canyon lodges.

Again, there are two drawbacks to the North Rim – its views and that it is very remote. The South Rim has steeper, more awe inspiring views, and can be easier to photograph, since the sun is usually behind you, whereas the North Rim keeps the sun more in your face. Plus the North Rim is well out of the way, up and along the higher plateau; about four hours drive from the South Rim (the short way).

The North Rim is home to more adventurous types, yearning a more natural Canyon experience on rougher trails. The North Rim is free of the various curio shops, has less culinary choices, and offers fewer visitor services, but it has a more relaxed atmosphere, and since it is over 1,000 feet higher than the South Rim it offers cooler temperatures.

Remember that the North Rim lodge and most visitor services close in mid-October and reopen in mid-May, while the main access road, Highway 67 from Jacob's Lake, is closed from December through mid-May (sooner if pre-December snowfall shuts down the unplowed road).

Bottom line, if it's your first time visiting the Canyon and you want to see the best views, and have a wide selection of various stores and services, then visit the South Rim. If you are visiting the Canyon again, then you should consider the North Rim for a relaxing experience that will be much different from what you had at the South Rim.

Hike the Rim Trail to Escape the Inner Canyon Heat

As the Inner Canyon bakes in summer heat (like, over 115 degrees in the shade) why not take an easy day hike along the Rim Trail? This thirteen mile trail offers easy hiking along a mostly paved walkway while also providing some of the most spectacular views into the Grand Canyon. Plus there are plenty of shady areas while you pass amid juniper and pine forests.

The trail has no beginning or end since most people access the trail from somewhere in the middle and follow it until they reach their own turn around point. From that self determined place visitors either turn around and retrace their steps or jump on a shuttle bus and return to their starting point.

From the east, the trail begins at Yaki Point. There the route is a narrow dirt trail until reaching Pipe Creek Vista where the asphalt pavement begins. The trail is then paved along the next 6 miles, passing through the busy Mather and Yavapai Point areas, then past the Rim lodges. From the lodge area the trail curves north following near the Hermit Road until reaching Powell Point. At that junction the trail returns to being a dirt pathway for just over 3 miles until reaching the Monument Creek Vista. There, the trail changes to a nine foot wide paved trail named the Hermit Greenway. The Greenway section then follows along the South Rim until reaching the western end of the trail at Hermit's Rest. Access to the trail can be made at any given viewpoint along the route.

Some of the route is in disrepair, especially the section between the Bright Angel Trailhead and out to Powell Point, where you'll find large chunks of the asphalt have fallen away. There are also some diversions around Maricopa Point to help preserve an endangered plant species called the sentry milk vetch, and Powell Point has been diverted as recent reparations have been made to remove damage done by the old Orphan Mining Operation.

Beware of lightning during monsoon season, which occur regularly in afternoons between June 15th and September 30th, and in winter the trail is icy and slick so extra care must be taken. As with any hike, make sure you

have sun protection, and good map, some salty snacks, and plenty of water, since there is no water available along the trail.

Rim-to-Rim Checklist

- 13 Months Prior** : Make Reservations at Phantom Ranch for Lodging and/or Meals
- 8-9 Months** : Make Lodging Reservations at South Rim and/or North Rim
- 8-9 Months** : Reserve Trans-Canyon Shuttle (unless dropping off vehicle)
- 5 Months** : Apply for Permits (Cottonwood, Bright Angel, Indian Garden CG)
- 4 days** : Call to Confirm Phantom Ranch reservations (if made) with Bright Angel Travel Desk
- 3 days** : Check NOAA website for Weather Updates; Check Grand Canyon NP website for Trail Closures/Updates. Trim toe nails and pack your gear. Remember, if taking the shuttle, that whatever you take with you on-board the shuttle, you'll have to carry through the canyon.
- Day of Transit**
 - Check-in with Trans-Canyon Shuttle (Bright Angel Lodge).
 - Check-in at Bright Angel Lodge Travel Desk for any Phantom Ranch Reservations.
 - If shuttling to North Rim – Call For Dinner Reservations at Grand Canyon Lodge (otherwise you'll be relegated to the Snack Bar). If traveling from the South to the North Rim there is no need to make dinner reservations at the South Rim, there are plenty of food choices).
 - Take Shuttle to North Rim (or South Rim).
 - Check-in at Campground or Grand Canyon Lodge & make shuttle arrangements for the next morning to take you to North Kaibab trailhead. OR, the Bridle Path Trail (1.1 miles) also connects the Trailhead to Grand Canyon Lodge; the campground is about a half-mile from the trailhead.

A Mule Story

On February 18th, 2009 my wife La Quita and I were coming out from a two night visit at Phantom Ranch, hiking up the South Kaibab Trail. All was well and we were nearly out of the Canyon when a situation occurred... The last steep pitch before topping out at the trailhead is a series of tight switchbacks, each one maybe sixty feet in length. Just as I had begun this last climb a mule train came up in back of me, so I stepped far off the trail, found a rock to rest on and waited. It was the supply mules coming up from Phantom Ranch with two mule skinnners, each controlling a string of about six mules all loaded for bear. They stopped about fifty feet away and rested the mules. The lead mule skinner said they would be out of my way in a minute, and I responded that I was in no hurry and we talked for a few minutes before they and I subsequently headed back up the trail.

I was keeping a pace just a bit slower than the mule train when I heard a ruckus going on ahead. It seems that one person in a group of about six folks coming down the trail had reached out trying to pet one of the mules as they passed by, that misguided action had in turn caused the second mule skinner to be thrown off his mount, and kicked in the hip by the same. As I got closer I could see the skinner was trying to get the last two mules turned back around since they were now heading back down the trail. The skinner had untied the two wrong-way mules from the rest while the tourists who had initiated the situation clung to the Canyon walls being chastised by the lead skinner for their actions. At about this time the two skittish mules start acting up again, knocking rocks off and down the switchbacks, and pushing the skinner off the trail. Catching himself about three feet down the side of the trail before tumbling another 10 feet or so down onto the lower switchback.

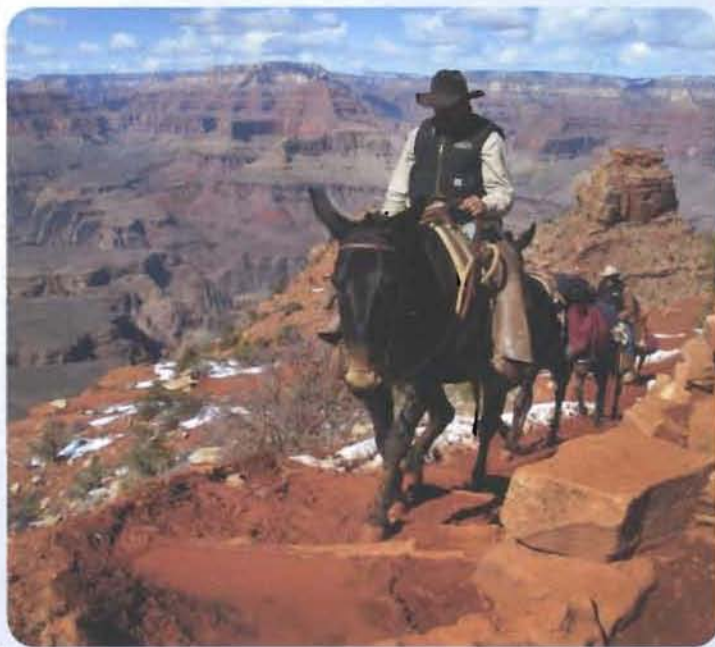
He then got up; the other skinner asked if he was alright and he grumbled a bit as he headed back up the trail to get his mules and turn them around. The lead skinner could sense the second string of mules getting antsy and started heading up Canyon, as he did you could hear the second 'free' string of mules start to pick up speed while the lead skinner repeatedly yelled "whoa," with more urgency reflected in his voice each time he'd yell. The second string of mules was getting so close they were beginning to pass the first line. If allowed to get inside and begin to pass the first line of mules, the second string would push them off the trail and ultimately cause a massive accident. The lead skinner was yelling ahead for people to clear the trail, and they made it up to the top just in the nick of time – narrowly avoiding a catastrophe.

Meanwhile, I had moved back down the trail, knowing the skinner with the two errant mules would have to come down the trail to the end of the switchback I was on, where there was just enough room to get them turned around. He got them turned, then again headed back up the trail with the two skittish mules in tow. It was slow going as the skinner, wearing cowboy boots kept slipping in the icy snow that covered the trail, along the way he picked up a huge leather satchel and had to throw that over his shoulder and try to get the whole disheveled mess up the trail. After getting past the tourists who caused the mess, the skinner continued up the trail, falling, getting up, and continuing on. At one time I was close enough that I told him to let me know if I could be of any help, but he didn't answer, I'm pretty sure he was running on steam about that time. Luckily the trail was very quiet and the skinner finally got his two obstinate mules back up to the top of the trailhead without further problems.

As I passed the folks that initiated the mess they seemed to be rather oblivious to the problems they had caused, and amazingly, they were on a guided day hike. Although their guide didn't have much to say as I passed. Once on top I did go over and verify what had happened with the lead skinner and commended them for the excellent job they did in avoiding what had the potential of being an extremely harmful situation to both man and mule.

I had always thought the mule skinnners had such an easy job, riding in and out of the Canyon – just along for the ride, hauling supplies and tourists around in this spectacular setting. After being witness to what can go wrong the skinnners have really earned my utmost respect.

Please remember; always step off to the inside of the trail whenever a mule train approaches, do not reach out, do not take flash photos, and listen to, and do exactly what the mule skinnners tell you.



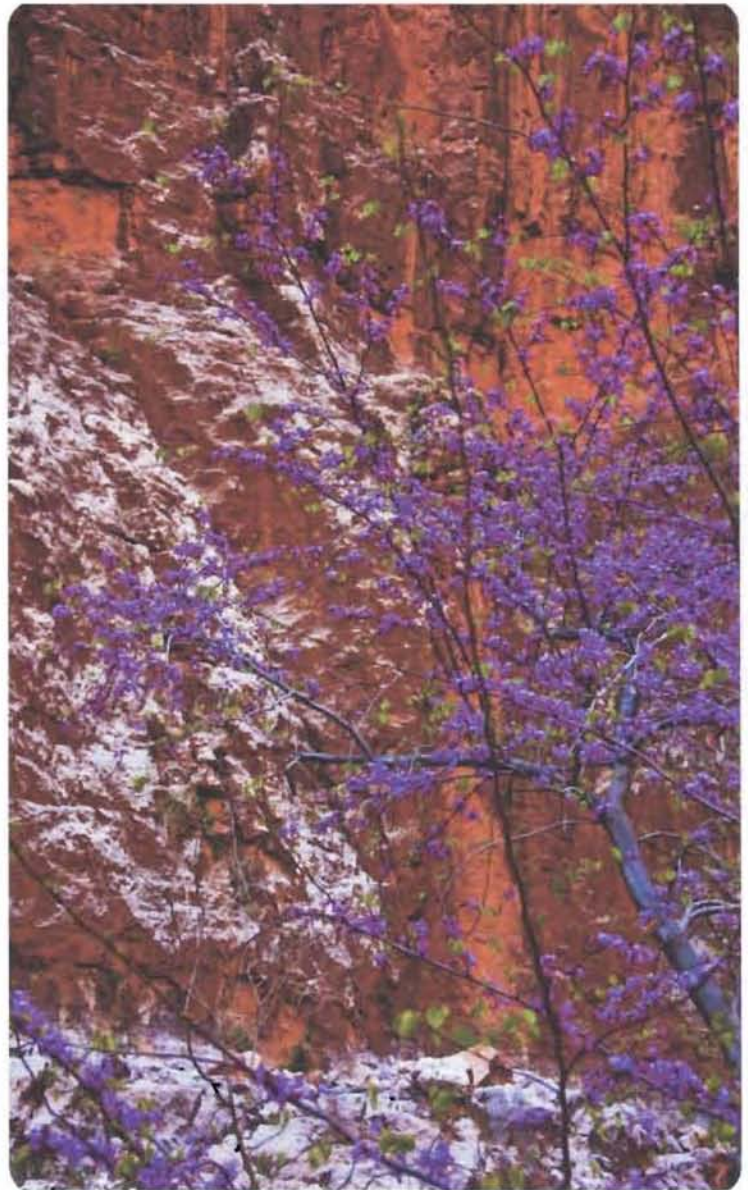
My Gear

Many people ask what kind of backpacking gear I usually carry into the canyon, so what follows is a quick list of some of my favorite outdoor equipment.

Backpack:	Osprey Aether
2 Person Tent:	Big Agnes Seedhouse 2
1 Person Tent:	Black Diamond Lightsabre Bivy
Sleeping Bag:	Mountain Hardware Phantom 32°
Sleeping Pad:	Therm-a-Rest
Stove:	Snow Peak LiteMax
Water Purification:	SteriPen Adventurer
GPS/Radio:	Garmin Rino 530
Hiking Sticks:	Leki Super Makalu
Shoes:	Merrill - Moab or Phaser Peak
Shorts:	Royal Robbins Backcountry Shorts
Shirt:	North Face El Cap
Hat:	Sequal River Rat (no longer avail), and the OR Sun Runner
Jacket/Vest:	GoLite Windproof Jacket
Insulated Jacket:	Mountain Hardware Chugach
Energy Bar:	The Cookie-Queen's Backcountry Bar
Trail Camera:	Nikon Coolpix
Hi-Quality Camera:	Nikon F-300 with 18-200 VR Lens
Crampons:	CMI Instep (4 point) Crampons

Summer Hiking Tip:

During the extreme summer seasonal heat do not hike the Inner Canyon Trails between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Consider hiking at night during the months of June, July, and August.



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