Grand Canyon, AZ



Vicinity Location:
About 850 miles southwest of Portland, OR in Grand Canyon National Park.

Length and Elevation:
33.3 miles roundtrip + 7.3 mile car shuttle. Elevation at Bright Angel Trailhead is 6,835 feet. Total gain is 10,310 feet and loss is 10,178 feet for backpacking. Car shuttle ascent is 659 feet and descent is 466 feet. Highest elevation is 7,071 feet and the lowest elevation 2,297 feet.

Trails:
Bright Angel Trail, Plateau Point Trail, Tonto Trail, West Tonto Trail, Hermit Creek Trail, Hermit Trail with connections Monument Creek Trail.

There is a geocache along the trail at: **N 36° 05.890 W 112° 06.683** Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file, Open Garmin .gpx file

Review: October 15, 2023
We met in Flagstaff and did our final packing and drove the van to the entrance at Grand Canyon National Park. The lines to get in were kind of long and it took us about 15 minutes to get into the park. Since we had an overnight permit we were allowed to drive to Hermit's Rest and park.

Once we got all organized we caught a shuttle bus to the Bright Angel Trailhead. Since October isn't the high season we didn't have any problems getting seats on the shuttle bus.

Once we got dropped off we took some photos at the trailhead then started descending moderately steeply down hundreds of steps and dozens of switchbacks. You really want trekking poles to ease the jarring on your knees.

Coming down the trail, we soon went through a little tunnel blasted into the rim of the canyon. Stop just after the tunnel and look up to the left under a rock overhang. You will see some ancient petroglyphs that were made by the first people. To make the paint they ventured further down into the canyon, where there's a layer of red rock, pulverized the red rock, and mixed it with water; then used that red rock to paint petroglyphs on the beige sandstone.

After about 30 minutes you descend into the Coconino sandstone. This came from giant sand dunes and is called one of the cake layers. A lot of the trail is in the shade in the early part of the day which makes it a pleasant descent. There will be lots of people, maybe hundreds, that you meet on this trail. Most are day hiking.

At the switchback past the second tunnel, if you stop and look up above your head, you will see where some early trail builders carved their names into the rock. These were men from the Santa Fe Railroad who helped build the tunnel you just passed through.

In the 1800's If you had a mining claim you could patent the land and own it, Miles and Ralph Cameron realized tourism was where the money was and filed thousands of false claims. They charged $1 per set of eyes so they could charge for horses too.

The Santa Fe Railroad sued the Camerons to use the trail and finally won in 1922.

We stopped at 3 miles down the trail for a rest, a bathroom break, and a snack. There are very nice views into the canyon as there are just about everywhere on this trail.

Danni told us that the red wall limestone is normal colored limestone that has been colored red from water coming down from the rocks above.

At 5.25 miles elevation we had dropped down to 3,790 feet in elevation and we reached Havasupai Gardens. There are a lot of picnic areas and places to find shade though this area is well shaded on October afternoons. Here we had to fill 4 liters each for camp and the next day.

Many parts of the year there may be no good water on the trail until the camp for night two.

You are now so deep into the canyon that you feel like you're in the mountains with sheer cliffs rising more than 3,000 feet above you. The views continue to be amazing and the trail is pretty easy to walk on.

In the lower portions of the canyon there are six kinds of rattlesnakes. They do have a tendency to hang around the lower campgrounds like Havasupai Gardens because there's lots of people which means lots of mice for food.

Also beware of a shrub called Cat's Claw Acacia. They are large green shrubs, growing along the trail, which will snag you, your clothes. and gear, and either rip them or stop you from going forward.

We passed by a place where you can see a layer of black rocks that reach down to the river and they are the oldest rocks in the canyon, about 1.6 billion years old.

We wound around on the Tonto Trail for about 2 more miles before reaching our campsite nestled in the trees. We pitched our tents at Horn Creek Camp without rain flys to better fit in the small campsites. The water here at Horn Creek Camp is above EPA standards for radioactivity so it is not safe to drink except in a dire emergency.

Danni fixed us a delicious dinner of stir-fry and rice served on a tortilla. She had fresh limes, packages of guacamole and some hot sauce.

We retired a little after 8 pm for a 4am wake-up call.

We woke up at 4 AM to get out of camp early and get to the next night's camp before the midday heat because the forecast was for a 95 degree day. It took longer than expected and we left about 6:15 AM. We got a good walk in before the sun shone into the canyon a little after 7 AM. Good morning light made beautiful shadows on the walls of the canyon.

After about 2.4 miles of walking through fantastic scenery we took a rest break on an outcrop at the edge of the Horn Creek drainage. Great views all around and walking out towards the edge of the outcrop you can get a glimpse of the Colorado River.

We walked another two miles and took a break in a shady canyon at Salt Creek Camping area. There

was just a trickle of water in the canyon but this water is drinkable. We had our water from yesterday so we didn't have to get any water from the tiny pools here.

After our break we went through a section called "The Inferno". Then after a few more miles we climbed one last hill surrounded by amazing scenery then down a crummy trail into a little canyon for Monument Creek. John Wesley Powell named this area when they saw a tall sandstone pillar in a creek canyon.

We set up in a campsite with some shade from the mesquite bushes and Sean and I walked upstream to find some pools to soak in. We only found ankle deep pools but they felt great.

By the time we walked back to camp the sun had slipped behind the South Rim and put our campsite into the shade.

Danni made another wonderful dinner with rice, vegetables, and yellow curry. She packed ice to keep the chocolate truffles cold that we had for dessert.

The camp is big so invariably there are loud people but after dark the camp area quieted down.

We made sure everything was off the ground because this area has aggressive mice that will chew through your pack even if they smell old food smells. We made sure all our chapsticks, sunscreens, and food was in metal mesh rat sacks and everything else was hung in trees to keep it off the ground.

Day 3

Serena was sick today so we had a very chill morning. Breakfast was pancakes with pecans and syrup along with bacon.

After breakfast we explored downstream, without Serena, in the canyon a bit and hung around until lunch. Danni made us English muffins with cream cheese, pepperoni, fresh guacamole, and cucumber slices.

Later we left Serena in camp and explored downstream through the slick-rock canyon. It was fun stepping down the little waterfalls. The views in the canyon are quite beautiful and I really enjoyed seeing how the slot canyon opens out to the greater vistas towards the Colorado River.

We got back and I scoped out places to take star photos from after dark. Danni made us macaroni with sun-dried tomatoes, other vegetables, and some kind of meat but Serena was still feeling sick and only ate a bite.

After dark Sean and I took some star photos and went to bed. We were a little worried about rattlesnakes but we didn't see any.

Day 4

We woke up about 5:30 and left Camp about 7:55, about 20 minutes later than planned.

Today we had grits with chili peppers and cheese.

This morning I thought of a new trick. I wanted to keep my hands clean after I washed them so when I went to the bathroom for the last time, I took a stick and was able to open the door with the stick and lift the toilet lid with a stick and put it back down again. I didn't have to touch anything in the

bathroom.

We went down the streambed to a set of rapids on the Colorado River where we sat on boulders and took pictures. After that we went upstream about 500 feet to a nice narrow sandy beach. Looking upstream you can faintly see where the trail to Monument Camp crosses a rubble field below cliffs of red sandstone.

After some swimming and relaxing we went back up the canyon trail to camp. Across the river Osiris Tower is very prominent when you look north.

The mice were very aggressive in camp. They occasionally jumped on someone and you couldn't set your food down for long without a visitor.

Day 5

For our last day Danni fixed us oatmeal with freeze dried blueberries, and hot coffee. We broke camp just before 5:30 AM and headed out in the dark.

We climbed and climbed up out of the hermit Creek drainage. It was beautiful walking up the trail as the sun slowly lit up the canyon. In a few hours we reached the red wall layer and started traversing along the edge of the Hermit Creek drainage.

Parts of the trail wind almost at the cliff edge. It is amazing to think you are essentially walking on the edge of 1000 foot cliffs. There are several rockslides to negotiate on the trail. None are really difficult to cross though there are some large boulders to skirt and some to climb over.

We stopped at the Santa Maria shelter and sat on the benches inside. There were big wasps outside including a Tarantula Hawk, a wasp that grows to be about two inches long. They weren't aggressive because they were interested in the ivy flowers. At the break we talked about how Hyponatremia is when you drink too much water without added electrolytes. There are springs here where you can filter water because this is the last water until the parking lot.

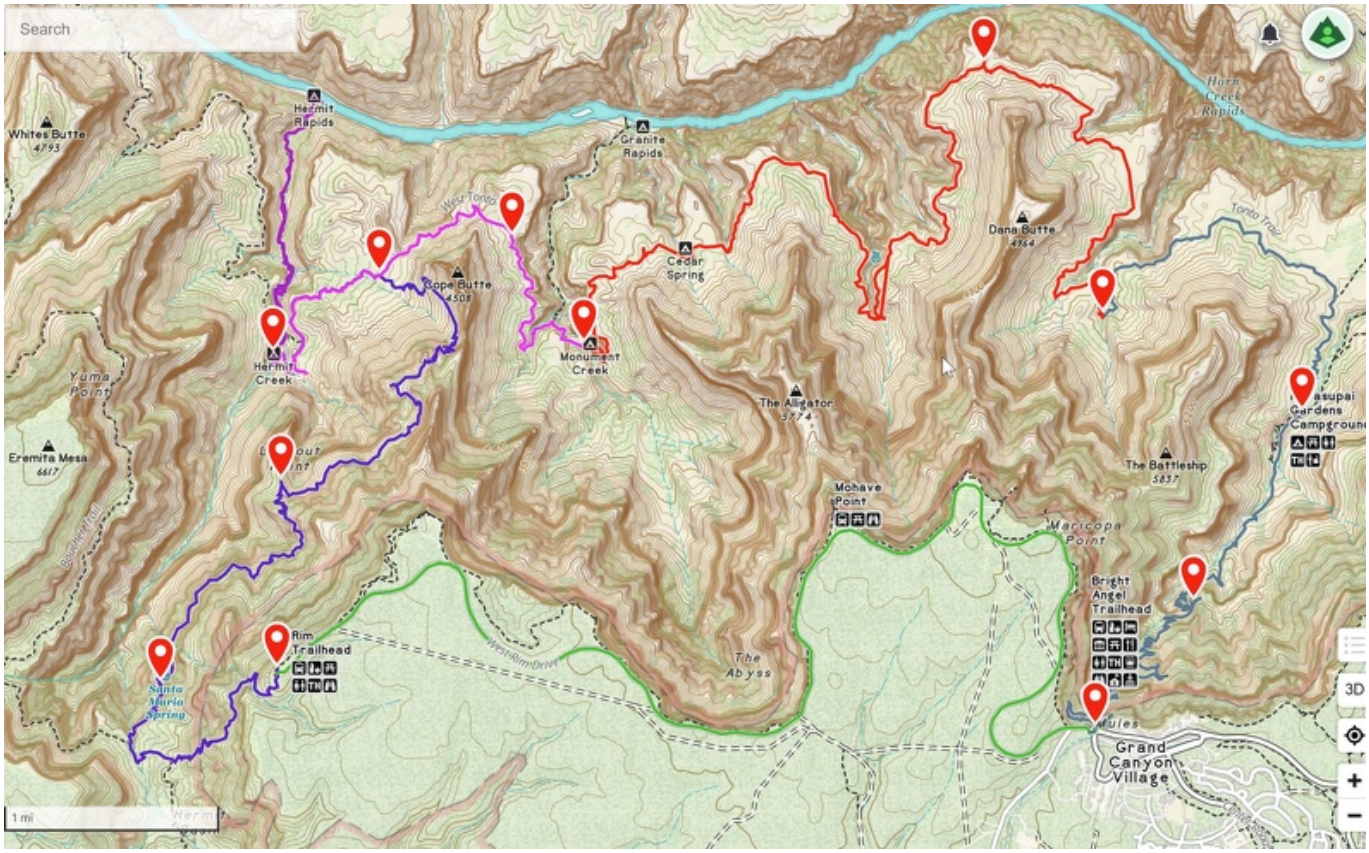
We continued our climb up and it wasn't long before we left the shade behind. We will be in the sun for the remainder of the trip and the day was heating up. We started encountering day hikers and saw more and more as we got closer to the top.

On the way up there are a lot of stone stairs to climb up and they are made for pack animals and each step is about 12 inches tall. There are a few places where you can see fossil footprints from lizards. One set of tracks even has the imprint from where the lizard drug its tail,

We finally made it to Hermit's Rest picnic area about 12:30 and celebrated with lunch from the ice chest and cold sodas. We were slow to get to the top and Serena and Peter had to get to the Phoenix airport that evening so we didn't have time to stop in at Hermit's Rest. It was straight back to Flagstaff, only stopping at a tourist trap halfway there.

I'm glad we used a guide service but I wasn't happy that I expected only experienced backpackers on the trip and one person had never backpacked before.

Enjoy the photos!!
Gallery Pics
Switchback Steve


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