

**Buckskin Gulch
& Paria River
Canyon**

**With Zion's
Angels Landing
& Vermillion
Cliffs Toadstools**

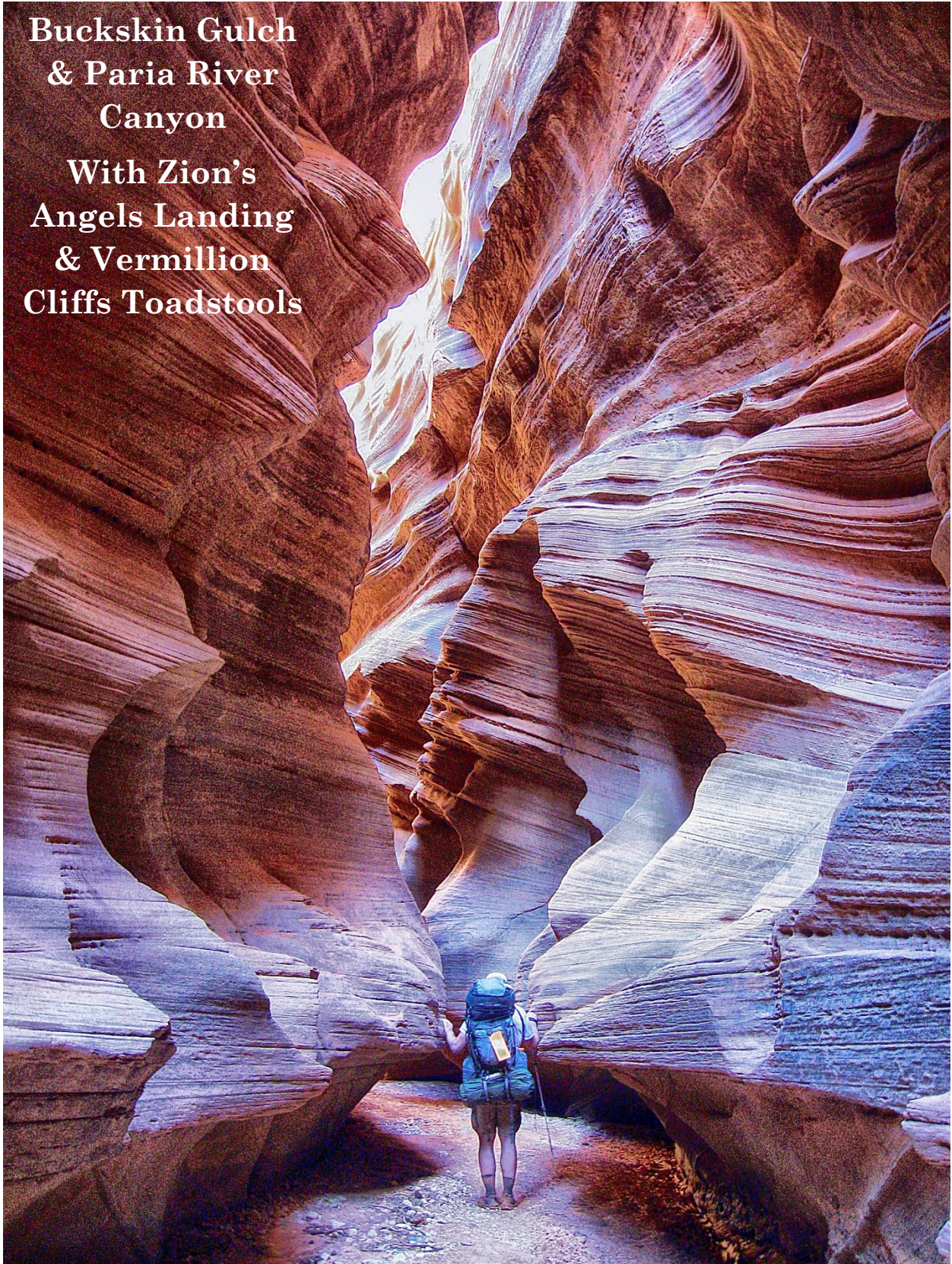
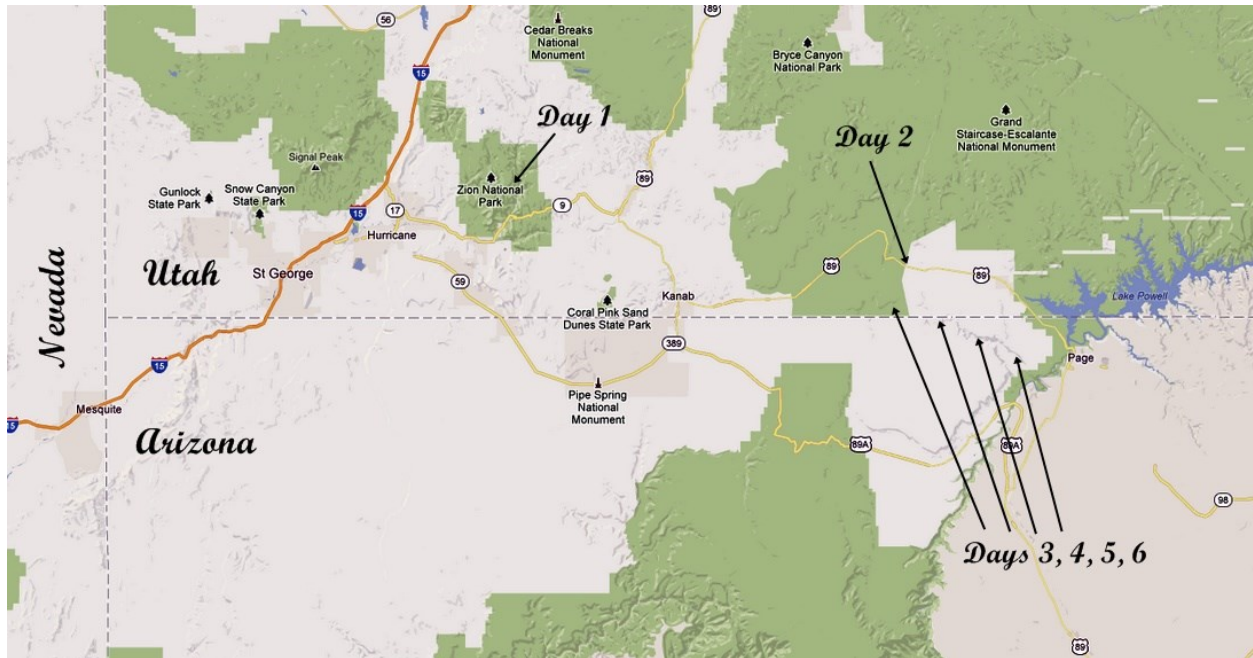


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Buckskin Gulch & Paria River Canyon With Zion's Angels Landing & Vermillion Cliffs Toadstools.....	3
Southern Utah & Northern Arizona: April 20 – April 27, 2013: Gary and Rod.....	3
Day 1: Angels Landing and Zion National Park (Southern Utah).....	5
Day 2: Paria Rimrocks Toadstool Hoodoos in Southern Utah	8
Buckskin Gulch & Paria Canyon – Wire Pass to Lee's Ferry (Southern Utah & Northern Arizona)	15
Day 3: Buckskin Gulch (Wire Pass to Almost The Confluence).....	17
Day 4: The Confluence to Wrather Canyon	24
Day 5: Wrather Canyon to Bush Head Canyon	31
A few more pictures from Day Five	37
Day 6: Bush Head Canyon to Lee's Ferry	38

BUCKSKIN GULCH & PARIA RIVER CANYON WITH ZION'S ANGELS LANDING & VERMILLION CLIFFS TOADSTOOLS

SOUTHERN UTAH & NORTHERN ARIZONA: APRIL 20 – APRIL 27, 2013: GARY
AND ROD



Saturday evening, April 20 Gary and I landed in Las Vegas, NV, Gary coming from Massachusetts and I from Oregon. It was a real culture shock for me getting into Las Vegas. At Portland I had enjoyed a latte at my gate while listening to a young woman play the guitar and sing folksy songs. There weren't many people and those that were there were quietly reading, listening to the singer or snoozing. It was all very "Portlandy." At the Las Vegas airport there were slot machines, thousands of people decked out in all kinds of garb to include some with almost no garb at all, and huge jumbo screens blaring to come visit this or that casino to gamble, drink, eat, watch dancing girls and boys and otherwise have a wild and wonderful time. Definitely not Portland.

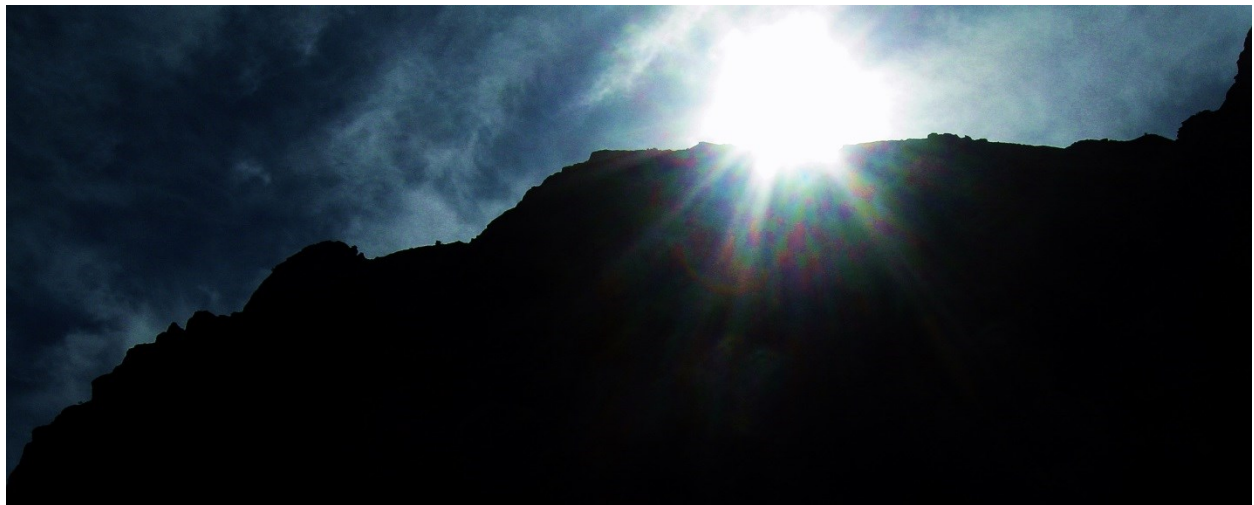
Gary and I met up in the car-rental location, I convinced the girl at the counter that I didn't need or want the extra car insurance ("only \$200 for the basic insurance"), got into our car (a Chevy Tahoe SUV gas guzzler) and headed northeast for Zion National Park on I-15. We made it to Mesquite, NV where we stayed overnight at Virgin River Convention Center Hotel for \$82 + taxes.

We ate, slept and woke up around 7:00 or so to get on the road to Zion. But first, I managed to try to get into a car that looked exactly like our rental and set off all kinds of alarms. The poor guy that owned the car came out, stood on the walkway with his underwear on and patiently (much more patiently than I would have) told me that I was trying to get into the wrong car. Oops. He turned off the alarm with

his key and went back to bed. Unfortunately, I had somehow turned on the emergency blinkers when I got into his car (yes, the key to the other car actually let me into his) and when we left, I noticed that they were still on. Gary asked if I should go tell the guy but I was too embarrassed to wake him up yet again and figured his patience had been exhausted earlier. I rationalized that he would be up before the battery went dead (I hoped), nor did I want to test his patience; he was a pretty big guy.

All clean from the last shower we would take for the next six days, we made it to Zion in less than two hours, which included a stop at a store to get breakfast. We got some bagels, peanut butter (although we had some for backpacking), yogurt and strawberries. We discovered this was an excellent breakfast and far cheaper (we figured Marguerite – the banker – was watching every swipe of my credit card with a critical eye as to where and how much; this would please her) and healthier than stopping at a restaurant.

There was a small car line at the Zion Park South Entrance. We waited maybe five minutes and paid our \$25 park entrance fee (which lasts a week) and parked at the Visitor Center overflow parking (busy day at the park), found the restroom for me (there are no rest areas except the side of the road between Mesquite and Zion so don't drink too much coffee), and got some info from the Visitor Center. There were two or three hundred people milling about getting their bearings just like we were. We filled a couple of water bottles, threw some trail bars and the water into our day packs, I ran back to the restroom for good measure, we jumped on the next shuttle and the first day of the real outdoor part of our adventure was underway.



DAY 1: ANGELS LANDING AND ZION NATIONAL PARK (SOUTHERN UTAH)

From the *Zion National Park Home web site*: “The *Angels Landing Trail* is one of the most famous and thrilling hikes in the national park system. Zion's pride and joy runs along a narrow rock fin with dizzying drop-offs on both sides. The trail culminates at a lofty perch, boasting magnificent views in every direction. Rarely is such an intimidating path so frequented by hikers. One would think that this narrow ridge with deep chasms on each of its flanks would allure only the most intrepid of hikers. Climbers scale its big wall; hikers pull themselves up by chains and sightseers stand in awe at its stunning nobility. The towering monolith is one of the most recognizable landmarks in the Southwest.”

Trailhead

Usually from April 1st until October 30th Zion Canyon is accessed via the shuttle. Private cars are allowed in Zion Canyon the rest of the year. Park at the Zion Canyon Visitor Center to ride the shuttle and get off at The Grotto shuttle stop. The rest of the year, when the shuttles are not operating, drive into the canyon and park at The Grotto.

From The Grotto, cross the Zion Canyon Road. Head toward the footbridge that passes over the North Fork of the Virgin River. On the other side of the bridge, take the north (right) fork to the West Rim Trail. A steady 2-mile uphill trek on the paved trail ascends a series of switchbacks up the steep West Rim Trail. Follow this trail to Scout Lookout. Then you have another ½ mile along the narrow ridge with chains if you choose to go all the way to Angels Landing.

History: A group of four (F. Fisher, V Fischer, E. Bingham, C. Hirshi) were exploring Zion in 1916 when upon looking up at the great monolith, Frederick Fisher exclaimed, "only an angel could land on it."



Angels Landing. We walked up that narrow ridge.

Let's do this thing

Wow! This is a thrilling hike. It gets you up there. If you are afraid of heights or are unstable when looking way down, then you likely want to take pictures of it from below and take the shuttle to some other Zion Hikes that might be less thrilling; there are a bunch of them at all skill and fitness levels, and any hike in Zion is a great hike. And if you aren't feeling up to hiking at all, then you can stay on the shuttle. There is a tape recording that is synchronized with your current location that gives you a lot of information about the history and prehistory of the area, rock formations, flora, fauna, etc. The bus drivers are great about stopping the bus from time to time to point out rock climbers dangling halfway up the side of a sheer cliff, animals, and other interesting things along the way. It's free with the price of admission into the park.

The first two miles of the hike are a paved switchbacks that go up several hundred feet. Just doing those two miles can get a fit person breathing hard. The last ½ mile of the trail to Angels Landing proper follows a steep ridge drop-off of up to 1200 feet straight down in places. Most of the last ½ mile has heavy chains anchored into the sandstone to give you something to hang onto. You will use them. The reward at the top is definitely worth the effort as long as you are comfortable enough with heights to do it. Otherwise, you can follow the trail to Scout Lookout where the chains begin. The view from Scout Lookout is also worth the trip up.

Gary and I followed the chains all the way to the top and reached Angels Landing in less than two hours. We hung out for about an hour, taking pictures, eating and just taking in the view. We didn't have any trouble with the chains or the height and found that we became more comfortable the longer we were up there; even commenting on how it was easier to stand near the edge – within about two feet – of a 1000 foot drop-off after an hour or so at the top than on the trip up.



Yes, Gary, we are going up there. Gary stands on the trail pondering the climb ahead. This was the only flat part of the trail – at the very beginning.



This is not Angels Landing, but we get a much better view of it once we do get up to the Landing. In fact, we look straight across at it. The striations on the rock tell quite the story to any budding geologist as to how it was formed.



Above: Maybe halfway up the trail. Zion Canyon starts stretching out below us. See the trail below? Also, the cliff behind the wall Gary is leaning against protects you from a sheer fall of several hundred feet. Be careful.



Right: Angels Landing to Gary's right. Behind Gary's rear end you can see the first chains up to Angels Landing anchored in the stone. Yes, the trail goes up that narrow ridge. Where Gary is now is a great place to stop your ascent if you are not comfortable with heights or are uncertain about your balance.



Zion Canyon from Angels Landing Trail: One last shot with dad before the ascent up the chains. I think this is the only picture we took together the entire trip.



Near the top of Angels Landing the view of The Organ: If Gary was to drop a pebble here, it would go about 1,000 feet down without hitting anything. That is a sheer drop!

Zion Canyon North and The Organ from Angels Landing Trail

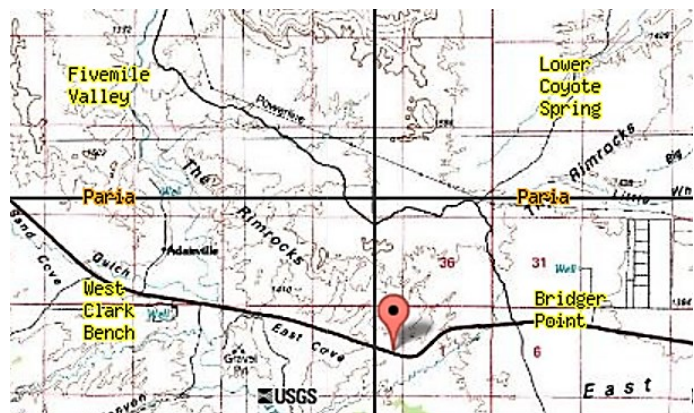


DAY 2: PARIA RIMROCKS TOADSTOOL HOODOOS IN SOUTHERN UTAH

The Toadstools, in Southern Utah near the Paria Ranger station, is a short and relatively easy desert hike but with some great scenic rewards. You can also make it a very long hike (as we did) and explore. There are the Red Toadstools and the White Toadstools. We went to the Red Toadstools, which was an easier hike (assuming you just do the Toadstools and back).

A note: the toadstool to the right is a much bigger version of what that complete moron toppled over because he was being an ass but said he was doing it to keep people safe from having a boulder fall over on them. What a complete moron!

Caution: Don't climb on the formations. They are fragile. You could also jar loose one of those boulders, I would think. You don't want to be under one of them when



they fall.

Critters: Lots of harmless lizards to include chuckwalla, side-blotched lizard, leopard lizard, desert spiny lizard, and collared lizard. No insects to speak of. A few flowers and brush along the way, but nothing to really get too excited about. We were drawn to the toadstools and other rimrock formations. I am, however, continually amazed at how plants can make a home for themselves in the harshest of conditions.



Trailhead: To get to the Toadstools from Kanab, head east out of Kanab on Highway 89. About 40 miles east of Kanab, at milepost 19.3 is the Red Toadstool Trailhead on the north side of the road. This is signed with a trailhead sign and register.

Let's do this thing

The Toadstools are sandstone formations (hoodoos) that have a harder rock cap that protects a cone of the underlying softer layer from erosion. Continued erosion of the soft layer causes the cap to be undercut, eventually falling off, and the remaining cone is then quickly eroded. In the case of these toadstools, harsh winds and blowing sand also cut and sculpt the softer stems over time. (That blowing sand also did a good job on our skin often requiring that we cover our eyes and turn our backs until a particularly hard gust had passed.) The “stem” of the larger toadstools are over



25 feet high. In some cases, the sandstone boulders sitting on top of these are the size of your kitchen or bigger. Hoodoos are found in several places around the world.

Gary and I are point-and-shoot photographers; we must have snapped over a hundred pictures on this hike. There are hundreds of opportunities for some real good photographs and a professional or serious armature could easily spend a day there. I would think that getting to the Toadstools at the crack of dawn, or even a little before, would afford some incredible shots.

Again, The Toadstools proper is a very easy hike and a lot of “bang for your buck.” This is an excellent starter hike for kids.

Now, if you are adventurous and want to do some exploring, there is plenty of opportunity. Just be careful and don't try to scale some of those crumbly rock faces. There are no trails when you explore, but as long as you have a decent sense of direction you should be okay. And if you do decide to explore, take more water than we did – one quart. We did not plan on exploring, but were drawn to see what was around that next bend or over that little rise, so stretched the 1.5 mile easy hike to a six mile march – but definitely worth the effort.

Our exploration entailed following a ravine to the east of the Toadstools as it wound north for a mile or so. During the rainy season, it is undoubtedly the drainage for much of the area. During our hike, it was bone dry and sandy, but with many beautiful formations. It eventually led to a dead end, that we skirted and made it to the top, which then flattened out into a long, hot desert. We then followed the ridge west that overlooked the valley where the Toadstools resided and made our way to the overlook onto the Red Toadstools area. This overlook had even more toadstools (some call it a mushroom field) that ranged in size from 20 feet or more to the size of a pop can. The sand up here was so fine from years and years of blowing and thrashing that it was almost like baby powder in your hands. We never got lost but got stuck once or twice so that we had to backtrack to get back to our original ravine, which eventually led us back to the Red Toadstools and the trail to our car.



Before we got to the big Red Toadstool other slightly smaller toadstools started popping up.



And then, bright and beautiful, the Red Toadstool jumped up over the next rise.

The Red Toadstool



Above Left: We took the ravine to the east of the Red Toadstool. It started out shallow and barely discernible from the surrounding desert. But as we followed it, it got deeper and deeper, and formed some beautiful structures along its walls, some just as impressive as the Toadstools.

Above Right: The end of the line for our ravine, about a mile from the Toadstools. Looking straight up maybe 20 feet where water accumulates and falls from the desert plateau above. No climbing out of this, at least for us. We had to backtrack and find another passage to the top.

Below Left: After finding a relatively easy way to the top (backtrack a few hundred yards and do a little climbing), we topped the rim above the small valley of the Toadstools into desert. That is a telephone pole on the edge of Cottonwood Canyon Rd behind Gary.

Below Right: This is one weird little Toadstool and made it definitely worth the hike. The top boulder is not much bigger than a thick garbage can lid, but it had enough impact to make a very impressive base.



South from the Rim



The Red Toadstool and his buddies are on the other side of that table. The Paria River Canyon is a few miles further towards the horizon.



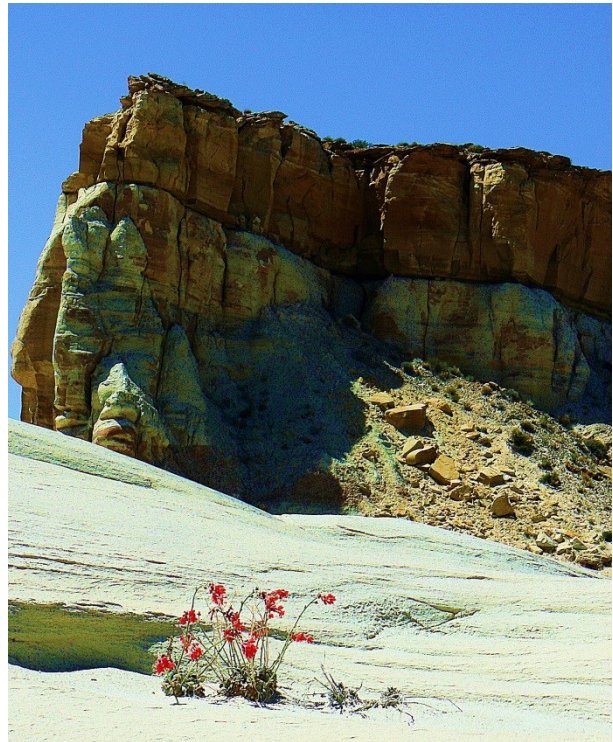
Well, I hate to admit it, but I really like Gary's pictures (I think) more than mine. He has a good eye. All the pictures on this page were taken by him. This is a very easy hike (as long as you take plenty of water) and really worth it. The mushrooms are simply stunning in their beauty.



Toadstools were everywhere on the rim.



And the sand is nearly as fine as baby powder.



Gary took more pictures than I, but I thought it was interesting to take a picture of a toad and a toadstool at the same time. It amazed me how life could carve out a meager existence in the harsh blowing sand and grow from what appeared to be no foothold at all.



Flowers making a home at the craziest places. This is an Indian Paintbrush.



How tall are these toadstools? Pretty tall. See Gary?

BUCKSKIN GULCH & PARIA CANYON – WIRE PASS TO LEE’S FERRY (SOUTHERN UTAH & NORTHERN ARIZONA)

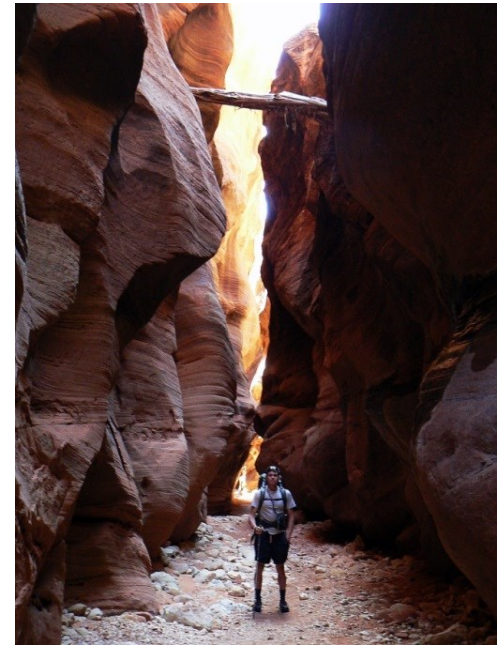
Buckskin Gulch is a minor tributary of the Paria River and the Paria River is a minor tributary of the Colorado River. The Paria River enters the Colorado at Lee’s Ferry, which is also an entry point for rafters shooting the Colorado River. Buckskin Gulch is a slot canyon and is the longest and deepest in the United States and is a candidate for being the longest in the world. The trip from Wire Pass to Lee’s Ferry is about 44 miles. We did it in four days, but should have taken longer to explore; we couldn’t get permits for more than four days. Each day of the trip presents a new and different landscape, from a narrow shoulder-width slot to wide-open desert. This is one of the best backpack trips I have taken; it is right up there with the High Sierra.



Caution

- ***Quicksand.*** I don’t think you are going to sink up over your head, but if you find yourself sinking, then don’t just stand there and sink – move. Poles can definitely help.
- ***Lack of sunlight in the slot canyon and narrow canyon*** definitely makes it cooler and darker than the surrounding rim. If you are wet from hiking all day, you will want some good warm clothes. I love my Under Armor Cold Gear. It is light but warm.

- ***In Buckskin Gulch there is no clean, drinkable water***, only stagnant pools to include “The Cesspool” (picture right). On this trip the Cesspool was only up to our crotches. At other times, it is a swim. Nasty! Stay to your left against the wall.
- ***There is a pretty ugly 15-foot drop-off*** (what I call the rock jumble) that had rope when we were there, but it is a good idea to bring at least 30 feet of rope to navigate just in case. These can be tough to get down, so take your time and figure it out.
- ***Flash floods are a reality and extremely dangerous.*** Check at the Paria Ranger Station to check latest weather conditions and predictions. Do not go into the canyon if a lot of rain is predicted. The picture to the right shows a log stuck crosswise left by a flash flood. That log is well over 25 high.



Critters

- We saw very few critters. A couple of Golden Eagles in Wrather Canyon, deer tracks (a very big deer), lots of lizards, and a smattering of insects (no mosquitoes to speak of). Although we didn't seem them, the Paria Canyon has all kinds of wildlife, to include:
 - Birds: Bald and Golden Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Red-tailed Hawks, Great Horned Owl, Cooper's Hawk and California Condors released in 1996 in an effort to reintroduce them to the wild.
 - Mammals: mule deer, bobcat, fox, mountain lion, porcupine, beaver, coyote, jack rabbit, cottontail rabbit, ground squirrels, kangaroo rat and other rodents. The Desert Bighorn Sheep were reintroduced in the 1980s.
 - Reptiles and Amphibians: rattlesnakes, chuckwalla, side-blotched lizard, leopard lizard, desert spiny lizard and collared lizard.

Let's do this thing

Starting with Day 3 and through Day 6, we got into our backpack trip proper – no more day hikes. We started our four day-three night trip on the morning of April 23, Tuesday. We spent Monday night at the Lee's Ferry campground. We could see the Colorado River from where we car camped. Lee's Ferry is where people rafting the Colorado River start their journey.

After a crazy-windy night where I gave up trying to put up my tent and slept in the back of the car and Gary joined me in the middle of the night because the wind was

whipping so hard he couldn't sleep, we drove to the long-term parking area a couple miles from the campground and met our shuttle ride at 7:00AM. Steve Dobson, from Paria Outpost, shuttled us from Lee's Ferry to Wire Pass.

At first, Steve was a little quiet and maybe a little grumpy (he had to get up at 5:00 or earlier to meet us), but opened up as we made our way along 89A towards Wire Pass trailhead. After a quick stop to – sort of – fix a tire that was going flat with a can of flat-fixit, we were back on the road and as I asked questions about the area, Steve started telling us about the Indians in the area, the pre-history, great places to hike that didn't require permits – go up this road and walk over to those cliffs and you will see cave dwellings and petroglyphs 800 to 1300 years old, secret areas, places to take great pictures, and other goodies that whetted Gary's and my appetite to come back. All we would need would be a four-wheel, high clearance rig. My 1999 Chevy Silverado would be perfect. We mentally marked the area for future trips. Gary was big-time sold and was ready to come back later this year in August. I, on the other hand, don't like fighting the 110 degree weather, so will opt to convince him that next year in April would be preferable. At about 8:15 Arizona time (9:15 Utah time because Arizona doesn't recognize Daily Savings Time – all very confusing on the border of the two states) we arrived at Wire Pass Trailhead. I offered Steve a \$20 trip but he didn't take it. Good; I was still reeling from the \$200 for the shuttle ride. That, by the way, is pretty much the going rate, so just factor it into your budget.

After a few minutes of futzing around with our packs, going to the last bathroom we would see in four days, divvying up our daily supply of our favorite hiking candy – Jolly Ranchers – we tossed our 45 pound (12 pounds being 1.5 gallons of water each) packs on and crossed the road for the barely discernible low ravine that would soon narrow into the longest slot canyon in the world, Buckskin Gulch.

DAY 3: BUCKSKIN GULCH (WIRE PASS TO ALMOST THE CONFLUENCE)

Buckskin Gulch, at about 15 miles long, is the longest slot canyon in the Southwest United States, and is a candidate for the longest in the world. At the confluence of Buckskin Gulch and Paria Canyon the canyon wall reaches up to 500 feet (straight up!). Smooth black-veneered sandstone (perfect for making petroglyphs 100s of years ago) mix with the gold, orange, brown, red sandstone cliffs. A photographer could have a field day here.

It begins: About ½ mile into the hike the trail passes the junction trail to *The Wave*, a beautiful swirl of carved and etched sandstone that requires a permit to explore. We didn't have a permit for the Wave so continued on down the sandy trail.



The Wave

Slot canyon: As the canyon walls narrowed we quickly realized how flashfloods could become so dangerous so very quickly. Narrowing to less than five feet across in many places and 200 to 300 feet or more high a heavy rain will be funneled from the surrounding miles of desert into this narrow slot and fill it in little time to up to 30 feet or more of raging torrent for miles on end. Don't get caught in this.

We started out in a pretty narrow slot canyon and then it opened up a bit and then we got into the slot canyon proper that went for a good 12 miles or more.



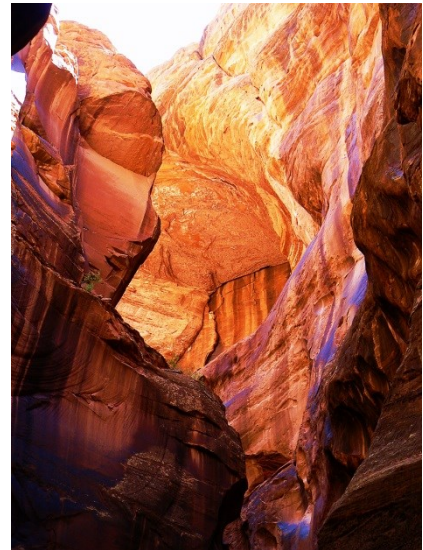
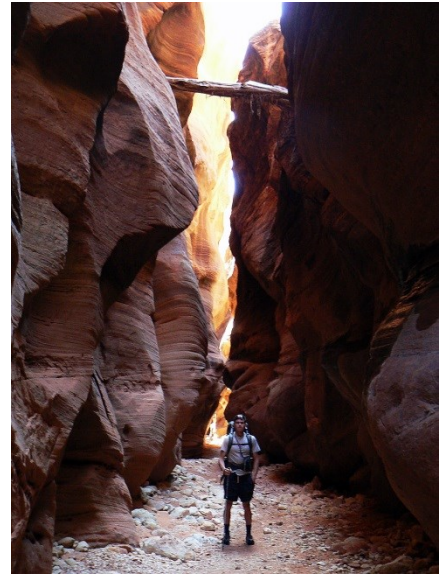
Counter clockwise from top left: The first slot canyon narrowed quickly and lasted perhaps ½ mile. Gary takes the first (of many) pictures.

The first canyon opened up a bit into a pretty, almost snake-like sandy trail through the rock before going back into the deep slot that lasted forever.

That is a log up there that was washed up by a flashflood.

Colors...

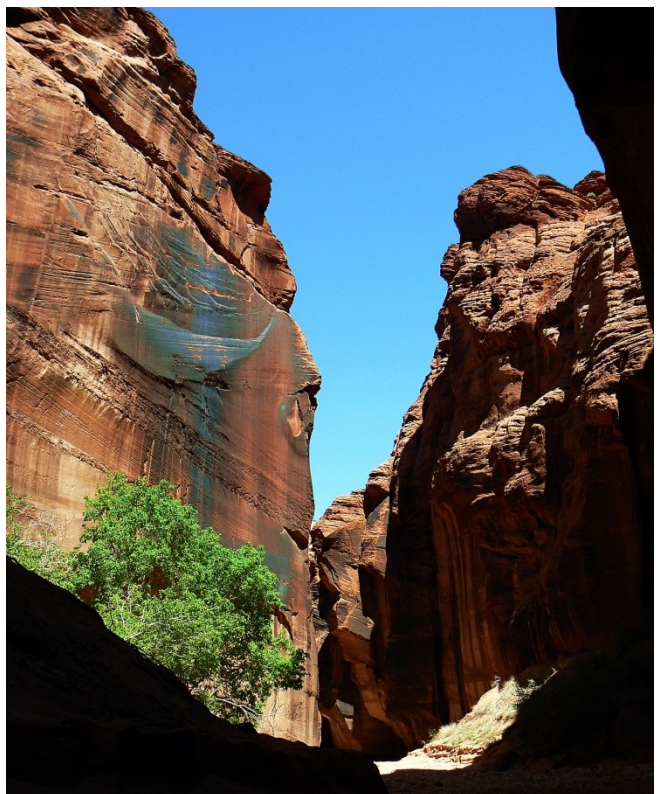
And the potholes we had to walk through were not stunning. Thank goodness we had those walking poles. Rocks under the water were invisible.





The colors were astounding. The black on the walls is a veneer formed over thousands of years. Great for doing petroglyphs.

Yes, the blue was that blue.



The Cesspool: Water doesn't run through Buckskin Gulch year round so the flash floods leave behind stagnant pools that lie in your path that stretch from wall to wall. You have to wade. Depending on when you go, you will wade ankle deep up to swimming in some places. On our trip in late April we had no real issues and, except for *The Cesspool* we never got past our knees. But at the Cesspool we had to take off our packs and the water got nearly to our wastes. I am 6'1", so if you are 5'8" then expect a wet belly.

Hiking poles are a must: We discovered that the very best piece of gear that we brought was one collapsible [hiking pole](#) each. Now, we have *never* used a hiking pole before but decided that it would be good to have them to help balance us in the muddy pools and also be able to poke about for hidden rocks, drop offs and determine how deep a pool is. Bingo! Best new piece of gear award! The poles were life savers (well, at least dry clothes and dignity savers). At each pool we used the poles to feel our way across. We would have surely fallen without them. After day one through Buskin Gulch the poles stayed in our packs the next three days. But the few ounces of weight were well worth the price to get us through that first day.

The hiking is really quite easy and we made excellent time so were able to stop and take hundreds of pictures. Rocks varying from pea-sized to as large as my desk are strewn along the way and there is a lot of mud so be careful, of course, but just pay attention and you should be fine. There is one spot, however, that can pose a challenge and you need to be aware of it.

The rock jumble: Perhaps nine miles in you will come to a rock (boulder) jumble. These boulders are huge and probably don't do too much moving during flash floods. If anything, they will get piled on and made harder to navigate. When you come to this jumble take your time and plan you descent. The fall is from 15 to 20 feet high. There was a rope there when



The cesspool and Gary after going through it.



Yes, go through that very narrow little slit to stay on the trail.

we went so we used it to help us lower our packs. We managed to scramble down without rope. Still, make sure to carry a 30 foot rope just in case and if you need a rope to help yourself down, use yours and don't trust a rope that has been hanging there for who knows how long. There are also hand holds carved into what appears to be the main descent (although I went around to the right and found an easier one – at least easier to me). The hand holds were shallow and had dry, slippery sand in them. Too slick for my taste.

Clear sailing: After the rock jumble, it is only about a mile until you start seeing some camp sites on sand benches. Pick one and camp. We chose one on the left (north) side of the Canyon. It is the campsite you will see in *Hiking and Exploring the Paria River* (by Michael R. Kelsey). Good thing too

because it was getting dark fast. In the canyon it gets dark much faster than above the canyon; once the sun goes down find a campsite if you haven't already.

Smart aleck 23 year old: Because Gary was curious and also 23 years old, he decided to run (yes, *run*) down the canyon to see if we were close to *The Confluence*. *Fine, I'm 60; you just go and do that. I, on the other hand will set here and bask in the glory of having successfully packed for over 12 miles.* He put down his pack and was gone.

About 10 minutes later Gary walked into camp, barely breathing hard. "What happened?" I asked, wondering why he was back so quickly.

"Nothing. I found The Confluence. It's about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away." Smart aleck 23 year old!

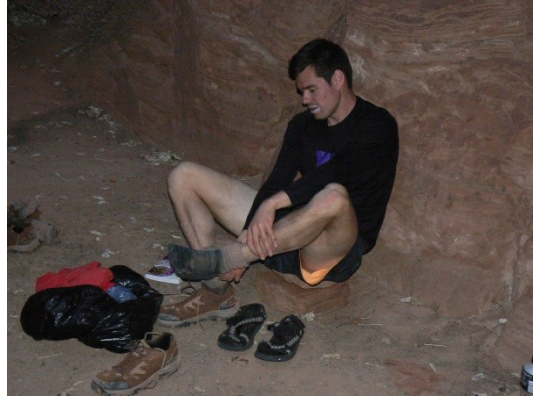
Socks of stone: While Gary was running I took off my clay-mud caked shoes which had dried stiff as a clay urn (no wonder they used clay to make pots). After that, I tried to take my socks off. It was like trying to peel dried clay (which is exactly what it was) from your feet. It took a good five minutes or more to work those socks off. They were a pair of my good backpacking socks. I didn't want to ruin another pair so opted to wear that one pair the whole trip. Surprisingly, they survived but I can



I like to call this passage Skull Passage.

still tell which pair it is in my backpacking clothes drawer from the faint red tint and that Buckskin Gulch/Paria River odor that just does not go away.

We set camp, I watched Gary struggle with his socks, we ate a bit, and then we hit the sack. We slept pretty well. It is tremendously quiet in that canyon except for the occasional call of a bird (large bird, I would think) that echoed up and down the canyon walls. We saw only two guys at the *Escape* which looked daunting to climb in my opinion. In fact, they had tried to climb it and got stuck, so if this is indeed the *Escape*, it seems like an emergency escape only. No animals other than the bees at the Cesspool and not one mosquito. It was a good first day.



Stunning colors around every bend. The water rushing through the gulch has carved and sculpted for centuries.



Water Crossings





It just makes you feel a little bit on the small side.

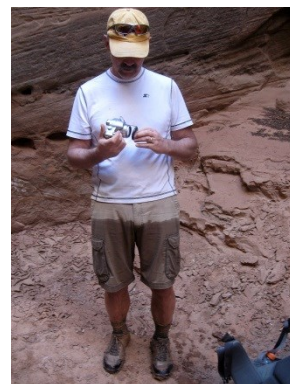
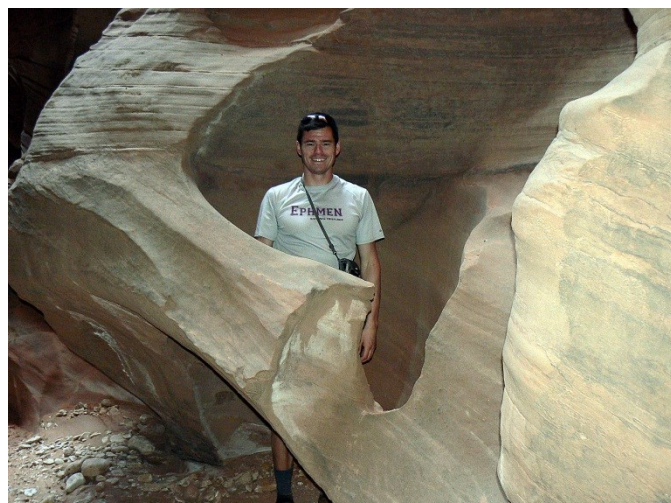


Navigating the Rock Jumble. We only used ropes to lower the packs.



Sculptures, stunning beauty and pool after pool of mud.

Marguerite would not want us to track into the house with these babies.



DAY 4: THE CONFLUENCE TO WRATHER CANYON

Wake up and morning prep: We woke up bright and early this morning, had a bite to eat and I had a cup of coffee. Ahh....I love my morning coffee out on the trail. I also got to use my poop bag which generally would not be of note (and won't be again, I promise) but this was the first time I have ever used one of those contraptions. I am not a fan, frankly, but I also understand why it is an absolute necessity in the canyon. Flash floods coming along from time to time would wash up stuff, no matter how well it is buried, and having raw sewage in the Paria, which then runs into the Colorado is just not the right thing to do. Use the bag and carry it out. It really is not that much of a pain.

The Confluence: After a short hike we reached The Confluence and I got my first look at the chalky water of the Paria River. What makes the river a light chalky is a calcium sulfate solution from the sediment that is washed along as it carves its way through the surrounding regions. At the Confluence, the walls are nearly 500 feet high. We joined the flow of the river which would be our constant companion for the next three days. And when I say "joined" it is not just figuratively; over the next three days we did nearly as much walking in the river as we did on dry land. So, be prepared for wet feet all day long.

Water: We still had not refilled our water bottles and were beginning to run a bit low. We only wanted to use the water in the Paria River if we had to and knew from our guide book that

Wall Spring was only about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile below the Confluence. We saw small springs often this day but most were too small to get any significant amount of water from. Wall Spring, while presenting several photo ops, was a little disappointing in terms of water flow. It was dripping water but we knew that Big Spring was less than $\frac{1}{2}$



Day 4 – packing up. This is Gary's Where is that? I know I packed it Look.



The Confluence: Go left to follow the Paria River to the Buckskin Trailhead. Go right to Lee's Ferry, about 30 miles away. We went right.

mile away, so opted to only take pictures at Wall Spring and fill out bottles at Big Spring. Good call.

Big Spring: Big Spring lived up to its name, and we could hear its flowing water before we recognized it as Big Spring. It was here that we filled up all our water bottles straight from the flow that ran out of the base of the towering canyon walls. surely, if there was a perfect natural filtration system, this had to be it. No iodine or pumping here – drink up. The water was delicious and the spring afforded me several opportunities at my 2nd – only to wildflowers – picture taking loves : flowing water.

Quicksand: During this stretch we also ran into our first serious quicksand. While we had gotten stuck a few times by some sucking sand, we were never in any danger. But at one place we found a small hole of water and mud that looked intriguing to explore. But Gary quickly discovered that the entrance was deceiving and a test with a three foot section of stick showed that the bottom was definitely deeper than three feet. We took pictures and decided not do any exploring in that direction.



Wall spring is named appropriately. A wide spring coming out of the bottom of a huge wall of rock.



Big Spring to the left. We heard it before we saw it. This, I think, was the best water supply of the trip. It poured out of that rock like a faucet.



Inviting alcove, but don't go there. Deep Quicksand!

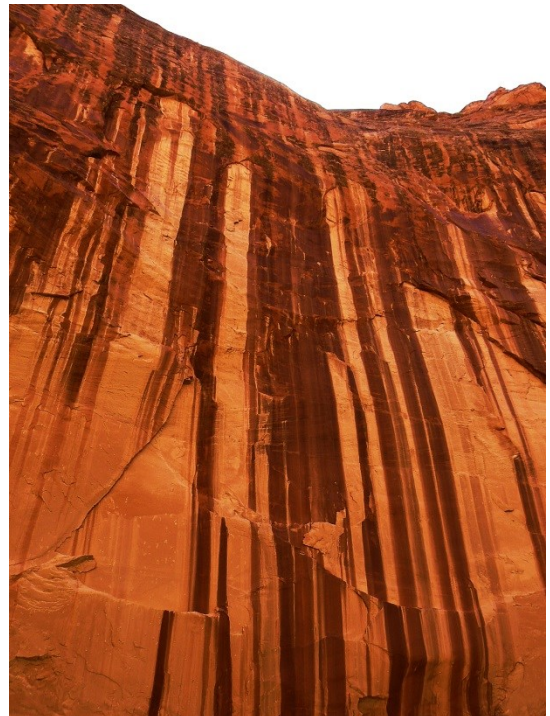
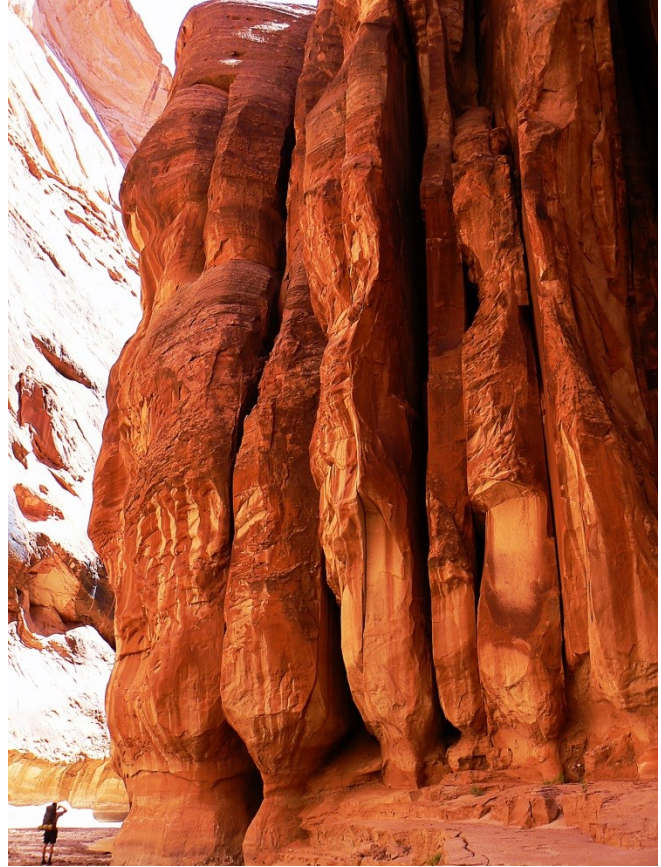


Big spring up close.



I think of the rock formation to the right as Cathedral Rock.

The walls of Paria Canyon to the right. And an old friend from the Strawberry Mountains in Oregon showed up.

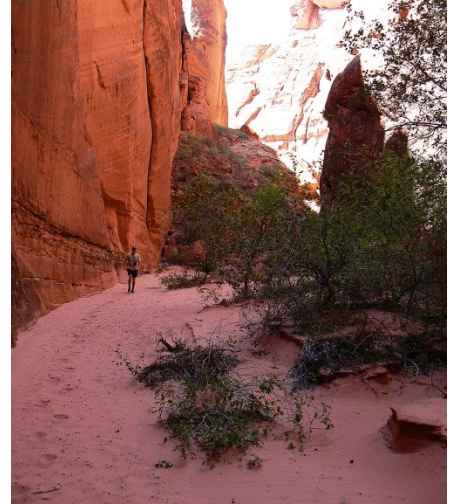


Meander: The walls of the canyon were spectacularly beautiful with the layers of orange, black, red all etched, carved and painted by thousands of years of wind and floods. From time to time you will come to what is called a meander, where hundreds or thousands of years ago, the river had “meandered” around the rock in its way until it finally cut through it and left a dry river bed. These meanders are excellent to explore. About a half mile below the first of four crack canyons (minor faults that you sometimes really have to pay attention to or you walk right by them) we came to a meander on the north (left) side of the canyon. Gary climbed a small wall to get into the meander, but I couldn’t manager to drag myself up (smart-alec 23 year old!). He explored and I waited. After a bit of waiting, I decided to walk a ways down the river to find the other end of the meander. Lo and behold, I found it and it was just a simple hike in. I went back, got Gary and we entered together from the easier side.

We left our packs in the entrance to the meander and took a walk along the dry river bed. We discovered things for Gary to climb and a big cactus clump for me to take pictures of. I could *sense* the guardian eyes of ancient artists of rock art hidden in the surrounding walls. After exploring for an hour or more, we moved on down the river and about ½ mile below our meander, came to Big Spring.



This is the first entry (and the most difficult to enter) to the first significant meander we discovered. Gary was able to climb up into it after taking off his boots to get better traction. I never made it up this end.

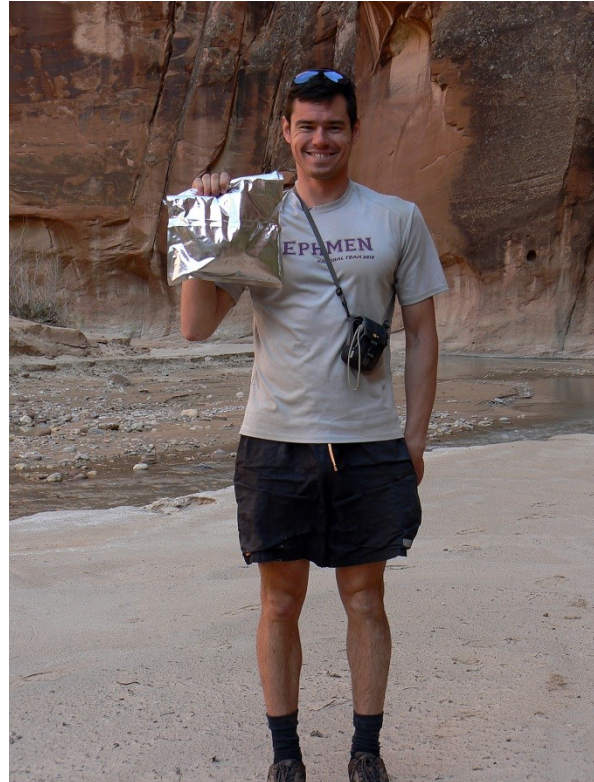


*In the bowels of the meander.
Paria River used to run
through here.*

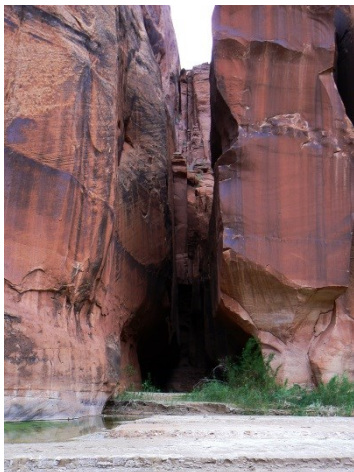


*See that spec in the lower left corner? Yeah, that is Rod. Sometimes the
enormity of the canyon is quite overwhelming.*

Lunch: At about 2:30 I could sense that I was getting a bit worn out. I needed food. We stopped for almost a full hour to let me rest, eat, and let Gary enjoy using his special bag. Soon after lunch we hiked pretty hard for several miles passing the remaining three cracks and came to Adams Water Pump.



Adams Water Pump: Adams Water Pump was a failed attempt to pump water from the Paria River, up the steep canyon walls to provide water for cattle on the canyon rim.



The Hole: About 1.5 miles beyond Adams Water Pump you will find a minor side canyon on the right. It is a box canyon and is called "The Hole." You can fill up bottles here from a seep, but we didn't. It was very dank, filled with algae and just didn't smell good. But I know several folks that have written about this trip say they filled their bottles there. You can recognize the entrance to The Hole because it is shaped like an upside down key hole.



Petroglyphs: Right after the water pump on a sharp bend there is supposed to be a very good panel of petroglyphs. We must have spent an hour searching, but just couldn't find them. We were disappointed. There was a bench above the canyon. We should have been on that bench and we think that is where the pets are. Since this first trip was more exploratory and next time we will spend at least six days in the canyon, we figured we would find them next time when we have more time. It was starting to get a bit dark.

Camp: We decided to camp on a long stretch of sand on the right side perhaps a mile beyond The Hole after I started getting worn out again (it had been a good 11 or 12 miles that day) and tripped and fell into a mud flat coming off another long sandy stretch. Covered with mud, I looked



at Gary, who was doing a very good job of not laughing – I think he was actually concerned about the old man – and said I was ready to call it a day. He agreed. We set camp less than ½ mile from Wrather Canyon, ate, boiled water for hot Tang which was very good. We were 20 miles from the nearest significant trailhead. Felt pretty darned good.

Planning: Of note that day was our agreement to get up before light on our last day and hike in the dark. “Sure,” I told Gary. “I’m game if you are.” Given that we had another full day before we had to make that decision and I have chosen to pump the day’s supply of water for the family instead of trying to wake Gary up a dawn, much less an hour before dawn, the former being far easier and *safer*, it seemed like something I could agree to with no consequences.

A few more notes on the day:

- Saw a hawk moth. Gary accidentally stepped on it. This is the same moth we got a good picture of in Strawberry Mountains in Oregon.
- Walking through the Paria River you get white silky calcium sulfate on your bare skin and it dries white. I guess some folks have complained that it irritates their skin. It didn't bother us.



Somewhere right here there are petroglyphs, but we just couldn't find them...on this trip.

DAY 5: WRATHER CANYON TO BUSH HEAD CANYON

Today's hike was about 10 miles. It is very difficult to keep track of both time and distance in a canyon. But then again, perhaps it is why we go backpacking, to lose track of both time and distance.

Wrather Canyon: We broke camp around 8:30 and barely had time to get the juices flowing before we reached Wrather Canyon. We left our backpacks concealed at the mouth of the canyon, (I really doubt that anyone in the area would be of the mindset to steal someone's gear) and started on the narrow trail up the canyon to Wrather Arch.

I found the hiking in the canyon rather unspectacular, since most of the hike is working your way alongside a narrow trickle of water for about ½

mile before it takes an ascent up toward the cliffs above. From our angle of ascent it was hard to discern the arch from the surrounding rock, since the arch comes down from the rim towards the canyon, so that it appears to blend in with the rock surroundings. But finally, after I was nearly ready to turn around and look in some other direction, Gary said, "No dad, it's right there." I couldn't see it, although I was less than, say, 200 feet from it. "Trust me, just keep going the way you're going." I have learned over the years that I should trust Gary. While I will not yet relinquish my title of *alpha male* to him, I will concede that he is next in line and almost ready to challenge the old bull. But not quite yet. A minute or so more of climbing and the arch stretched out in front of us.

Wrather Arch: Wrather Arch was once estimated to be in the top five longest arches in the world at 246 feet by span size, but after closer scrutiny NABS (Natural Arch and Bridge Society) determined that it is about 180 feet. The more recent measurement kicked it off the top ten list of world's longest natural arches. No camping is allowed in Wrather Canyon because of its fragile nature. Wrather Arch is the least accessible arch in the United States, as it can only be accessed by hiking at least 20 miles. We felt fortunate to be some of the few (relative to the population of the country anyway) that have seen it.



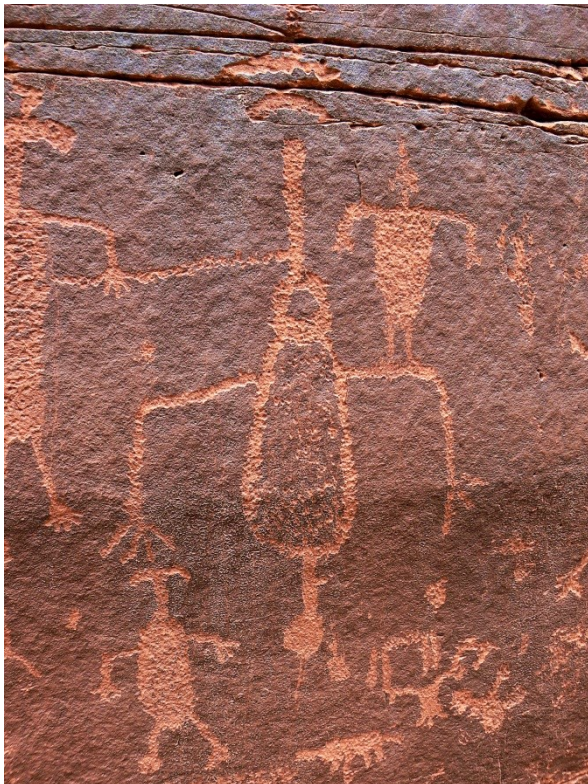
While I found the hike up unspectacular it was the exact opposite looking down on Wrather Canyon from Wrather Arch.

Two Golden Eagles: While at Wrather Arch we heard screeching high in the sky. Above us, above the cliffs, and seemingly above the sky itself, two Golden Eagles were circling and diving at each other apparently fighting.

Father and Son Moment: After taking a bunch of pictures, one of which is an awesome shot of Gary sitting on a boulder looking out over Wrather Canyon, we were standing below the arch and I said to Gary, “Stop and listen a moment. Hear that?” He listened intently and answered, “I don’t hear anything.” I answered, “Exactly,” and he smiled. “That’s why we’re hear.” We stood side by side just below Wrather Arch, looking down Wrather Canyon towards the Paria River and listened to nothing.

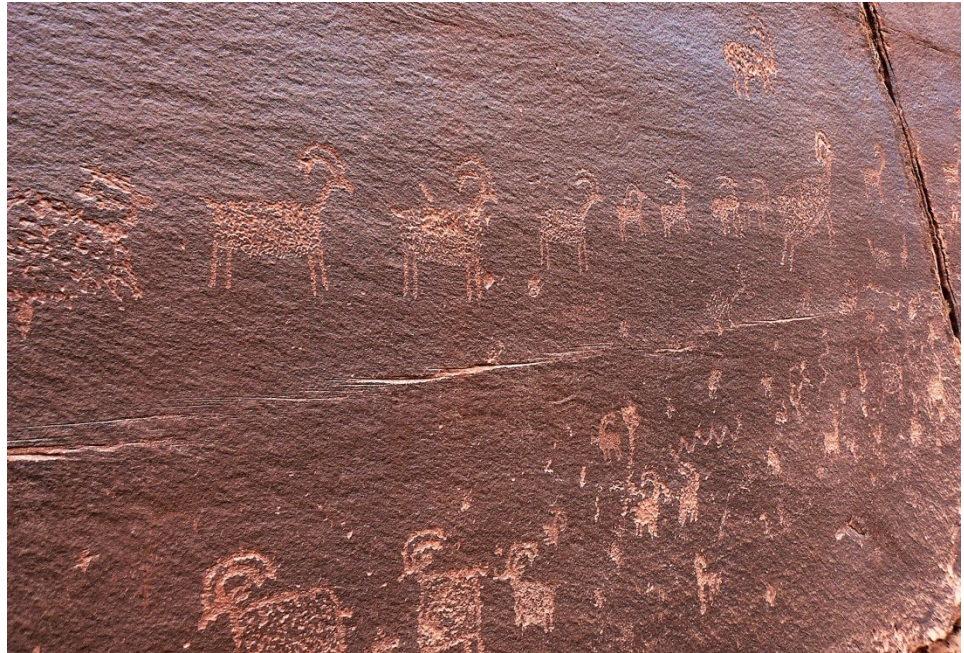


Wrather Arch



Big Horn Panel: After a frustrating day yesterday, we finally found a significant petroglyph: Big Horn Panel about halfway between Wrather and Bush Head Canyons. To find this petroglyph you will come to a huge hanging sand dune on the right (south) side of the river in a basin above the river. As you get near this sand dune, there will be a bench on the left. Get on this and travel along it and look up to your left for a black-varnished sandstone for the petroglyphs. They are very well preserved and definitely worth the slight climb. The key is the sand dune.

There were not only goats, but bizarre etchings of things (I guess people?) that really make you wonder what was going on and who or what might be the models.



Big Horn Panel



Goat tied to big ball (out of picture), tied to man/thing in the middle tied to man/thing at the end. What on earth is going on here?



Flowers and “Oh my God! What is that smell?”: I had never seen wild cactus flowers before, that I can recall. Today, we found cactus flowers galore. They are quite beautiful. After the petroglyphs, the canyon continued to open up and the cacti fruitfully spread across the canyon floor with shade blooming more and more as we traveled down the river in brilliant pinks and lighter reds. Early on we found a cactus with three yellow flowers. I took a few pictures since it was our first yellow cactus flower. This turned out to be a good call on my part since it was *the only yellow flower we found the rest of the trip.*



We also discovered the, “Oh my God! This is the best smell I have ever smelled in my life” tree. We kept getting a faint whiff of something sweet, almost orange smelling. As we progressed down the river the smell got strong and stronger. It was truly a delicious smell. About 50 yards from a light green tree we got a strong blast of this fragrance. As we continued to walk towards the tree it got stronger. Then, at the tree, we discovered it was covered with very small yellow-orange blossoms, which were producing this truly heavenly smell. We discovered several more of the trees this day and often stopped to hold a blossom-covered limb up to our noses and take a deep inhale. Ahh... Heaven! Sweet, Citrusy, just like a ripe orange that has just been broken open to let the juice splash all over your hands. If you could bottle that fragrance...



Critters: We saw several deer tracks as we got closer to Bush Head Canyon but never saw the deer. They were huge tracks so must have belonged to a very good-sized buck. Other than the Golden Eagles in Wrather Canyon, hundreds of lizards (one of which was a beautiful brilliant orange with pea-sized brown spots that we just couldn't get the camera on before he scurried away) and one little toad, we saw no other critters.



Camp: After about 10 miles we set camp just above the entrance to Bush Head Canyon very close to the river on another sandy bench. We agreed that we would not be exploring Bush Head Canyon this trip and would save it for next time.

Moonlight was beautiful.

Gary took lots of pictures of the moon, which illuminated the canyon so that headlamps were not necessary to see to do our evening chores. The moon acted as a heavenly torch whose rays played off the canyon walls dancing in and out of crevices, off steep smooth-varnished

sandstone cliffs and skated in the rippling river. The gurgling rush and dance of the Paria River was cradlesong to two weary travelers.



Those are cactus needles in the pack. Better than in our skin.

Yucca Plant right.



A FEW MORE PICTURES FROM DAY FIVE



DAY 6: BUSH HEAD CANYON TO LEE'S FERRY

4:00 AM – UGH! Although we planned our early morning escape by having all gear strategically placed, packed and otherwise organized for a quick getaway before dawn, I knew my son. Gary is not known for his bright-eyed, bushy-tailed approach to the day and takes several hours to mentally get into the game, especially on backpack trips. I have tossed a truckload of pine cones, small sticks and pebbles at Gary's tent over the years on our backpacking trips to try to wake him up. But to be honest, I have no real issues with him sleeping in; it gives me time for sipping a second cup of coffee while basking in the cold warmth of the wilderness. But eventually, he will crawl out of his tent like a grumpy old bear – you'll probably be safe as long as you don't attract his attention. But this morning he was up at 4:00 and out of his tent before I, and I even got a picture of him with a smile on his face. This was a first: Gary smiling on a backpack trip before 8:00 AM. He was excited about backpacking in the dark and having dawn overtake us on the trail. I, on the other hand, was less excited what with being pretty close to night blind. But, getting up with your son at 4:00 AM, miles away from civilization, hefting packs and being on the trail before the sun comes up, watching it peek over multi-colored canyon walls in the desert is an experience that, if ever presented, you do not forego.



Pre-dawn hike: Our headlamps lead our way down the Paria River, with Gary's headlight gradually getting further ahead of mine, waiting for mine to catch up and then his getting ahead again. If one had been standing on the canyon rim watching our progress, I think it would have looked something like a lighted yo-yo, Gary being the hand, and I being the yo-yo being pulled back to the hand, and then released again, over and over. We scrambled over boulders in the river, tracked on sandy beaches and waded. I loved the wildflowers and found that hanging out on the sandy flats where the hiking was relatively easy, compared to



wading through streams with hidden rocks, was much easier hiking. I opted to loiter on those flats and take flash pictures of wildflowers in the dark. Gary stayed closer to the stream watching for the break of dawn. We both found our separate niches that morning and were quite content enjoying it in the way we each found most enjoyable.

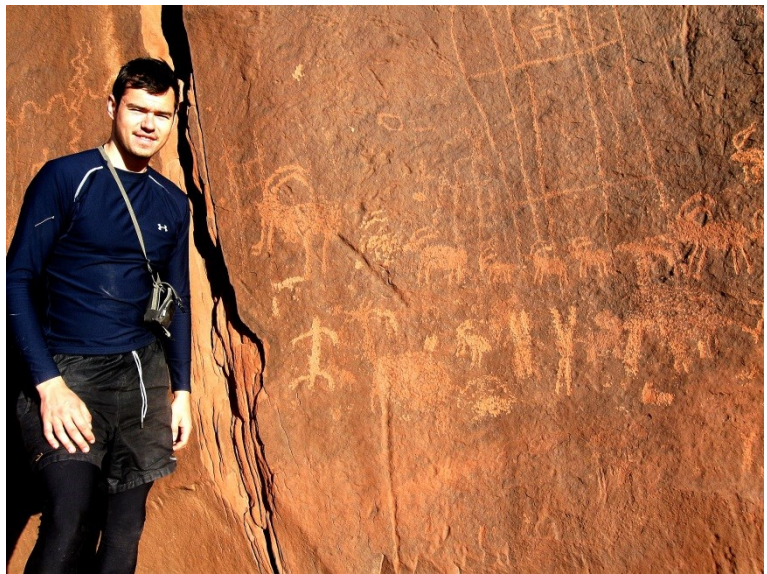


Nature's Paintbrush will always get several pages of any backpacking book I write. These are just a sampling of the flowers we found along the way.



More Petroglyphs: The canyon continues to widen as we progressed down the river so that I felt like I was more in desert than canyon and the proliferation of cacti painting their pink and red flowers across the canyon floor added to that impression. Still, along the river there are benches of rock that often looks very “petroglyphy.” Gary had fallen behind me on the trail, occupied with taking pictures. I took off my pack and sat down on a small sandbar on the edge of the river to wait for him and take a load off. I noticed on the other side of the river, perhaps 50 yards up a rocky bench, several large black-varnished boulders – very “petroglyphy” indeed. When Gary joined me I pointed to the rocks and said, “You see those boulders? I bet there are petroglyphs up there. You leave your pack here and run up and see. If there are, I will come up.” And off he ran – showoff 23 year old.

In just a few seconds he had climbed the rocky hillside with the agility of a Billy Goat. He yelled down, “Yep. This is 10 Sheep Rock. Come on up.” *Crap!* I said to myself, not really that anxious to climb up there, but I also had to see 10 Sheep Rock. And indeed it was 10 Sheep Rock. It was worth the effort. It also dawned on me how ironic it was that I had decided to sit and wait for Gary exactly below this very nice petroglyphs.



End of the trail: after visiting 10 Sheep Rock we put our hiking into an extra gear to reach Lee's Ferry and the car. We were in full desert now and the direct sun was starting to take its toll, at least on me, although it was still no more than 85 degrees, if that. regardless, I was tired and foot-weary. We passed several points of interest to include an old ranch and old house that had nearly been reclaimed by the elements. All were worthy of at least a passing glance and picture.



The old house and one more critter before the end of the trail.

Lee's Ferry: We reached the car around 1:00 and dumped out, let us say, *garbage*. We headed towards Las Vegas and found a nice place to have our traditional post-backpack trip repast – pizza. It was gooooodddddd!!!

Las Vegas again: We spent the night at La Quinta in Las Vegas for a great price, finished the pizza and hit the sack. Bright and early Saturday morning Gary boarded his plane for Williamstown and about an hour later I was on a plane bound for Portland.



We both agreed that this was one backpack trip that we weren't ready to have end. Usually, after we have packed for several days and are near the end of our trip, our minds turn to being done and back in civilization. But not this time; this time we both agreed that we weren't ready to leave yet. There will be a next time though; this was just a scouting trip.



