Sulphur Creek

Sulphur Creek has cut a deep canyon that passes through the oldest rocks exposed at Capitol Reef. It is a perennial stream with a flow that varies significantly in response to upstream water usage, snowmelt, and heavy rain. There are about two miles of scenic narrows and three small waterfalls. Bypassing the falls requires the ability to scramble down 12-foot (3.6 m) ledges. The route usually requires some walking in shallow water, but it is not uncommon for there to be much deeper water that might even require swimming. This route may be difficult for children if deep water is present. Ask at the visitor center for the latest condition report. Dangerous flash floods are an occasional hazard on this route—do not hike the Sulphur Creek route if there is a chance of rain.

The 5.8-mile (9.3 km) one-way hike through Sulphur Creek Canyon involves leaving a shuttle vehicle at each end. If you don’t have two vehicles, a 3.3-mile (5.3 km) hike along Highway 24 is required to return your starting point. Vehicle shuttles are not provided or facilitated by the park. Though legal, hitchhiking is not recommended.

This route is not an official, maintained trail. Route conditions, including obstacles in canyons, change frequently due to weather, flash floods, rockfall, and other hazards. Routefinding, navigation, and map-reading skills are critical. Do not rely solely on unofficial route markers (rock cairns, etc.); they are not maintained by the National Park Service (NPS), may not indicate the route in this description, or may be absent.

Hike Description

For those wishing to hike a short section of the canyon to a small waterfall, begin your hike at the visitor center and follow Sulphur Creek upstream 0.7 mile (1.1 km). However, many hikers choose to hike the entire route in the downstream direction, starting at the upstream trailhead and ending at the visitor center. This description details the hike in that direction.

Just over the hill next to the parking area is a short hiker-made trail that leads down into a small wash after 0.1 mile (0.16 km). Walking in the wash bottom reduces hiker impacts on the sparse plant community. Continue downstream in the small wash for 0.4 mile (0.6 km) until it reaches a larger wash. Bear right (south) and follow the wash downstream for another 1.3 miles (2.1 km). Before the confluence with Sulphur Creek, the wash narrows and there are two 6-foot (2 m) pour-offs to downclimb. If you are hiking in the opposite direction (visitor center to Chimney Rock) the exit wash is at UTM 0473452mE, 4239348mN (NAD27 datum).

Once at the creek, turn left (east) and walk downstream. The canyon quickly deepens. A 0.3 mile (0.5 km) west of the Chimney Rock parking area is a short hiker-made trail that leads down into a small wash after 0.1 mile (0.16 km). Walking in the wash bottom reduces hiker impacts on the sparse plant community. Continue downstream in the small wash for 0.4 mile (0.6 km) until it reaches a larger wash. Bear right (south) and follow the wash downstream for another 1.3 miles (2.1 km). Before the confluence with Sulphur Creek, the wash narrows and there are two 6-foot (2 m) pour-offs to downclimb. If you are hiking in the opposite direction (visitor center to Chimney Rock) the exit wash is at UTM 0473452mE, 4239348mN (NAD27 datum).

Once at the creek, turn left (east) and walk downstream. The canyon quickly deepens. A half mile (0.8 km) along is the first view of the fence at Goosenecks Overlook, about 800 feet (244 m) above. From here it is another mile (1.6 km) of creekside walking to the first falls and the beginning of the narrows section.

To pass by the falls, keep to the right (south) and cross angled slickrock. Next to the wall, scramble down a 10-foot (3 m) pitch; this will require the use of hands to negotiate. Below the falls, the canyon tightens with undercut walls. Note that flash floods rearrange Sulphur Creek significantly and have, in the past, created six-foot-deep (1.8 m) pools that cannot be avoided. It is only 750 feet (229 m) to the next falls, also passed on the right of the creek. The bypass eventually descends back to creek level well beyond the falls.

The lower 0.7 mile (1.2 km) of the route follows the creek toward park headquarters and the visitor center. When the cliff to the north of the stream ends, find a hiker-made track that leads to that point, where there is an old lime kiln built and used by the early residents of Fruita. Please preserve this fragile historic relic by not climbing on or inside the kiln. The trail continues over a low hill and down to Sulphur Creek behind the visitor center. Go around the left (north) side of the buildings to the parking area.

Note: Capitol Reef National Park recommends hikers do not ingest water from Sulphur Creek because E. coli bacteria are occasionally detected at frequencies greater than Utah water quality standards. Sources of E. coli bacteria in Sulphur Creek may include runoff from upstream agricultural, grazing, and urban land, and human and wildlife waste.

Route Distances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance Description</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trailhead/parking area to Sulphur Creek confluence</td>
<td>1.8 miles (2.86 km)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulphur Creek confluence to first waterfall</td>
<td>1.5 miles (2.4 km)</td>
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<tr>
<td>First waterfall to second waterfall</td>
<td>0.3 mile (0.5 km)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second waterfall to third waterfall</td>
<td>1.7 miles (2.8 km)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third waterfall to lower end of route (visitor center)</td>
<td>0.7 mile (1.2 km)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total route distance (Trailhead to visitor center)</td>
<td>5.8 miles (9.3 km)</td>
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</table>
**Additional Information**

**Best season:** Spring and fall during warm weather, and summer if there is no chance of rain.

**Maps:**
USGS 7.5-minute series: Twin Rocks. Maps available at the visitor center.

**For more information:**
Contact the Capitol Reef Visitor Center at 435-425-4111.