



Hiking Grand Canyon

Inner Canyon Trails Update: April 17, 2009 by Park Ranger Lon Ayers

Greeting from the Grand Canyon Backcountry Office on the South Rim.

My name is Lon, and it's been my privilege to live on the rim for many years. Today we'd like to bring you up to date on what's been going on in the world of the inner Canyon. We'll touch on the arrival of spring at the park and the unique conditions of the season, current conditions along the cross Canyon corridor trail system, and then go on to the situation in the more remote sections of the park.

First, the arrival of Spring at Grand Canyon.

Fast moving cold fronts are bringing unsettled conditions to the rim with windy days and the continued possibility of snow on the rim but on a clear sunny day the canyon floor seems hot. Spring is a time of transition at Grand Canyon so backcountry travelers must be prepared to deal with a wide variety of conditions. You could potentially encounter almost anything, from wind and cold to dry and hot. On stormy days hypothermia continues to be a major issue this time of year and hikers must take active steps to combat its effects. This may include waterproof foul weather gear and insulation that will keep you warm even when wet, a warm hat, a sleeping bag adequate for expected nighttime temperatures and possibly a tent. On the other hand, sunny days may create hot afternoons low in the Canyon which may force hikers to carefully consider water and food requirements to avoid heat related injuries. Springtime at Grand Canyon can offer many different experiences, some quite pleasant, some not so pleasant. A [recent weather forecast](#) is critical information during this dynamic season of the year.

Summer heat will soon dominate the world of the inner Canyon.

Another thing: We're only a couple of weeks away from May so it's definitely not too early to start talking about the summer heat that dominates the world of the inner Canyon 7 months of the year. Daytime highs below the rim could exceed 100F anytime and by early May the lower Canyon will, once again, be in the grip of dangerously hot summer conditions. During the summer it's hot like Death Valley is hot-daytime highs could exceed 115F. When confronted with such hostility hikers must take active steps to prevent heat stroke and other heat related injuries. The most important of these steps is to take full advantage of the hours between first light and mid-morning. Set up an itinerary that will allow you to arrive at your destination by 10am and avoid hiking altogether between 10am and 4pm. Avoid synthetic clothing. Wear cotton and take advantage of any water you encounter to wet yourself, your hat and your clothing as well as a towel or bandana to place around your neck. A spray bottle to mist your face is invaluable. Everyone knows you need to consume water to stay hydrated, but food intake supplemented by salty snacks is every bit as important to the maintenance of proper electrolyte balance. Other hot weather essentials include proper pacing of the walk, protective clothing and sunscreen and a brimmed hat. During hot weather we encourage hikers to contact the Backcountry Office to check on current trail and weather conditions. prior to starting down Canyon trails.

We'd like to make everyone aware of current conditions in the backcountry. I'll take the cross Canyon corridor first, then we'll turn our attention to the more remote sections of the Canyon.

The South Kaibab trail and the Bright Angel trail have emerged from the icy coating of winter and are currently dry and passable with normal footgear. The North Kaibab Trail is still icy and snow packed in spots in the upper half mile or so. All three corridor trails are in reasonable condition, but, as always, caution is certainly indicated. Steep descents, rocky surfaces, and big step downs at the water bars mean constant attention to your footing is required. If you want to admire the view, stop walking. If you try to walk and look at the same time a nasty spill is probably in your immediate future, there are about one million things you could trip over. Drinking water is currently available at three locations along the cross Canyon corridor, at Indian Garden campground, Bright Angel campground, and Roaring Springs. All other sources of drinking water remain shut off for the winter. Hikers camping at Indian Garden, Bright Angel or Cottonwood campgrounds should be sure to use the provided food storage boxes. Each campsite will have a couple of these boxes and it's essential that campers use them. Nylon poses no barrier at all to the local animal population so it's use the boxes or incur damage to your gear and the loss of your food.

I'll shift your attention now to the more remote part of the Canyon and we'll start with current backcountry trail conditions.

As of this date all wilderness trails originating from the South Rim are open and passable. The Tanner, New Hance and Grandview trails may still retain a vestige of last winter's ice in shady areas, but it's melting fast and it is possible, with care, to walk around any remaining slick places. The Hermit, Boucher and South Bass trails are dry and ice free. We've received no reports regarding the condition of the Nankoweap North Bass or Thunder Rive trails. A disclaimer is in order here: It is still possible that spring storms will produce snow in sufficient quantities to change conditions for the worst so again hikers should check current conditions at the Backcountry Office if there's any doubt.

A few words about Road Access to Remote Trailheads.

In general we can say backcountry roads at elevations at or below 7000 feet are, for the most part, dry and passable. On the South Rim, Forest Service Road 328 and the Pasture Wash road to the South Bass trailhead is currently dry but still requires a high clearance vehicle and possibly 4 wheel drive. On the North Rim Forest Service road 22 and 425 to the Monument Point and Indian Hollow trailheads for the Thunder River/Deer Creek area still has snow drifts in the shade and muddy sections so any access to that area for the next few weeks will be require a competent 4 wheel drive vehicle. Contact the North Kaibab Ranger District at 928 643 7395 for current conditions. Forest Service road 8910 to the Trail 57 trailhead and the Nankoweap area is dry. The Swamp Ridge road to the North Bass trailhead is always the last to open and will probably be accessible sometime around the end of May. As previously stated, all of northern Arizona has the potential for additional snow or rain until sometime in May so current road conditions could change for the worst-again, contact the Backcountry Office for the current situation.

Next today I'd like to say a few words about Water Availability At Springs Outside the Corridor Area.

Spring normally offers the greatest possibility of finding water at the ephemeral springs in the backcountry and right now most seasonal springs are active. Water is currently flowing in Boucher Creek, Hermit Creek, Monument Creek, Pipe Creek Lone Tree Canyon, Grapevine Creek, Cottonwood Creek, and Hance Creek. Recent reports indicate the possibility of water between the Boucher Trail and the South Bass Trail in Slate Creek, Turquoise Canyon, Ruby Canyon and Serpentine Canyon. Many of these sources will dry up as spring starts to turn toward summer so hikers expecting to take water from these remote sources should confirm availability through the Backcountry Office before starting.

And finally today I'll mention a couple of other factors that might influence your visit to the Grand Canyon.

North Rim Closure.

Highway 67 and most North Rim facilities remain closed for the winter. The campground and ranger station remain open for hikers, cross country skiers and snow machine operators. Highway 67 and all North Rim facilities will open for the 09 season on the morning of May 15, and that date is set in stone. Access to the developed section of the North Rim will began on May 15.

We'll also mention the Closure of the Hermit Road to Private Vehicles.

The Hermit Road and it's spectacular viewpoints and Hermits Rest area are accessible by shuttle bus only. The Hermit Shuttle operates throughout the day and it's free-you can see the Guide Newspaper or the park website for the current schedule. Hikers holding valid overnight camping permits involving the Hermit or Boucher trails can obtain a combination to the access gate from the Backcountry Office which will allow private vehicle access the Hermit Trailhead.

And lastly today, Shuttle Bus Access to the South Kaibab Trailhead.

Hikers using the South Kaibab Trail can access the trailhead by two different shuttle systems. The most efficient way is to use the Hiker Express bus. The Hiker Express departs the Bright Angel Lodge at 6, 7, and 8am in April, 5, 6, and 7 a.m. in May. The Hiker Express picks up passengers at the Backcountry Office about 5 minutes after leaving the Bright Angel Lodge before going on the South Kaibab Trailhead. Hikers can also get to the South Kaibab trailhead via the regularly scheduled Kaibab Trail shuttle that departs the Canyon View Information Center every 15 minutes throughout the day.

If you need additional details about these or other backcountry related matters you can go the park web site at <http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/backcountry.htm> or contact the Backcountry Office by phone at 928 638 7875, Mon-Fri, 1-5 pm local time. Be forewarned: this is a busy information phone line and you may have to try more than once to get through.

So, that's the view from the South Rim of the Grand Canyon as spring signals the start of another travel season. The Canyon is still here in all its remarkable glory, offering the chance for deeply personal interaction with perhaps the finest landscape on the face of the planet. We'd like to invite you visit the Backcountry Office when you get here to chat about your canyon concerns. **Happy Trails to all.**