

## **Grand Canyon National Park Backcountry Information Center Winter 2009 Trails Update Podcast Transcript: November 4, 2009**

Hello again from the Backcountry Information Center on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. I'm ranger Lon (Ayers). Today is November 4, 2009 and signs of winter are everywhere along the rim. As of this date there are no special road or trail closures in effect that require specific discussion. The big change we'll be emphasizing this morning is the annual winter shutdown of most of the inner canyon drinking water system as freezing nighttime temperatures become the norm. We'll also mention a few of the usual milestone events that mark the progress from fall into winter and finish up with the current situation out along canyon trails. As always, anyone needing additional information about these or other concerns is welcome to contact the Backcountry Information Center directly, by phone at 928 638 7875 Mon-Fri, 1-5pm local time, by email at [grca\\_bic@nps.gov](mailto:grca_bic@nps.gov), or in person upon arrival. The South Rim Backcountry Information Center is open 8am to 5pm every day, weekends and holidays included. We close for the lunch hour from 12 – 1pm.

First this morning, the big news: the drinking water piped into sources in the upper section of the canyon has been turned off for the winter. This shutoff includes Mile-and-a-Half and Three-Mile Resthouses on the Bright Angel Trail as well as Supai Tunnel, Roaring Springs Picnic Area, and Cottonwood Campground along the North Kaibab Trail. This means the only year-round sources of purified drinking water below the rim are Indian Garden Campground on the Bright Angel Trail, Bright Angel Campground on the canyon floor, and the pumphouse residence between Roaring Springs and Cottonwood Campground on the North Kaibab Trail. Potential problems with the pipeline remain an ongoing possibility so hikers are urged to make a last-minute check to confirm availability of drinking water prior to starting down.

### **Next we'll touch on a few signs of the season.**

The onset of winter brings a predictable series of events to the canyon which will affect backcountry travelers in several ways. We've already had a couple of fast moving Pacific cold fronts move through bringing much colder temperatures, wind, and the chance of snow. Eventually sometime in the next few weeks one of these will bring enough moisture to blanket the rim with snow and close the North Rim for the winter. Access to the remote trailheads served by rough dirt roads will become increasingly problematic and if snowfall persists some backcountry roads, like the Pasture Wash Road, could become temporarily impassable. As the days shorten and the sun sinks lower in the southern sky, chilly winter temperatures will gradually creep lower into the canyon and hikers will find themselves packing more of everything, more layers of clothing,

proven rain gear of good quality, warmer sleeping bags, backpacking stoves, and maybe even tents. Adequate supplies of food and water will become critical for maintaining bodily warmth. December usually sees a significant winter storm or two bringing heavier snowfall and the north-facing trails such as the Bright Angel or the Grandview will assume their armor of hard, slick ice necessitating such devices such as instep crampons and trekking poles. When winter rules the canyon, weather and good quality, proven gear are the name of the game and interaction between the two will largely determine the quality of the backpacking experience. Conditions can, and will, change rapidly during the course of the winter and generalizations about potential conditions are nothing more than generalizations so hikers need make a point to check current conditions prior to departure. The National Weather Service website, "weather.gov" offers daily seven-day forecasts for both rims and the canyon floor.

**Next we'd like to update hikers on the current situation out there below the rim in the ultimate world of Grand Canyon backcountry. I'll deal with the commonly used cross-canyon corridor trail system first, then we'll turn our attention to the more remote sections of the canyon.**

All three Corridor trails, that is the Bright Angel Trail and the South and North Kaibab Trails, are open and in reasonable condition, but, as always, caution is certainly indicated. Steep, rocky, unrelenting descents that seem to go on forever mean constant attention to your footing is required. If you want to admire the view, stop walking. Trying to walk and look at the same time is a sure way to a nasty fall. Trekking poles increase security significantly. As previously mentioned, drinking water is available at Indian Garden Campground, Bright Angel Campground and the pump house residence above Cottonwood Campground. All other sources have been turned off until spring. The South Kaibab Trail is, as always, bone dry-no water of any kind along the South Kaibab. Even with the availability of piped in drinking water, Corridor hikers still need to carry extra water. We recommend at least three quarts per person during the cooler months. This should be adequate to get you between the water sources and allow a little extra against the unforeseen. Hikers are encouraged to carry some form of water purification as a back up system against the possibility of water pipeline problems or in case natural water from creeks is needed to supplement the supply in your pack. And, last but not least, we want to be sure and mention the potential critter problem in the campgrounds and urge hikers to be sure to use the provided food storage boxes. There's nothing there that will hurt you-it's just small mammals of various sorts-but they are ruthless and relentless in pursuit of your food. Each campsite will have a couple of these boxes

and it's pretty much use the boxes or incur certain damage to your gear and the loss of your food.

The South Kaibab Trail is currently closed to stock use to allow much needed trail maintenance work. All horse and mule traffic in and out of the canyon is being routed along the Bright Angel Trail so expect unusually rough going. Hikers using the Bright Angel should be prepared to yield the right of way when horse or mule operations are encountered.

**I'll shift your attention now to the more remote parts of the canyon:**

As of this date all wilderness trails are open and passable. All backcountry roads to remote trailheads on both canyon rims are currently passable for competent backcountry vehicles but we've already had a couple of dustings of snow on the North Rim so this could change for the worse any day. The Swamp Ridge Road to the North Bass trailhead will probably be the first to close, followed by Forest Road 610 to the Nankoweap trailhead. Hikers considering traveling dirt road to remote trailheads should contact the North Kaibab Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest at 928 643 7395, the Tusayan Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest on the South Rim at 928 635 4061 or the Backcountry Information Center for current conditions.

And we've got one minor issue involving the Nankoweap Trail: The Nankoweap Trail has, once again, been damaged by significant rockfall in the Supai traverse west of Marion Point. The affected area is passable but hikers will need to exercise extra caution when crossing a jumble of rocks that has covered the original trail for a short distance.

**Next, a few words about water availability at springs outside the Corridor area:**

The seasonal intermittent sources such as Lone Tree Canyon or Cottonwood Creek have started to produce water and hikers have recently reported enough water to allow collection emerging from both of these sources. Boulder Creek remains dry or almost dry as of this date, but should start to produce small amounts of water soon. We have received no reports of water in the side canyons between the South Bass and Boucher Trails as so those sources remain suspect at best. Anyone expecting to take water from such sources should make every effort to obtain recent confirmation of availability and become familiar with routes to the river before starting the hike.

**And finally, today I'll mention a couple of other factors that might influence your visit to the Grand Canyon:11/5/2009**

The Hermit Road and its spectacular viewpoints are accessible by shuttle bus only through November. The free Hermit Shuttle operates throughout

the day-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 the combination to the access gate from the Backcountry Information Center which will allow private vehicle access to the Hermit 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 7, 8, and 9am in November. The Hiker Express picks up passengers at the Backcountry Information Center about five 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 Canyon View Information Center every 15 minutes throughout the day.

If you want to hit the trail before the shuttle routes began service you can arrange taxi transportation 24-7. Call 928 638 2631.

We normally update this message only as significant changes occur. If you need more immediate information the best source is the park website: [www.nps.gov/grca](http://www.nps.gov/grca). Look for the "Backcountry Updates and Closures" section (marked by a red exclamation point) in the Backcountry Hiking section. You can phone the Backcountry Office directly at 928 638 7875, Mon-Fri, 1-5pm local time, but be forewarned: you may have to try more than once to get through. Or contact by email at [grca\\_bic@nps.gov](mailto:grca_bic@nps.gov). A response to email may require a few days.

So that's the view from the rim as fall fades into winter. As always, the Backcountry Information Center staffs extends an open invitation to visit our office to chat about your canyon hiking experience when you arrive. Happy Trails to All!