

Grand Canyon National Park Backcountry Information Center Spring 2010 Trails Update Podcast Transcript: April 1, 2010 with Park Ranger Lon Ayers and Park Recreational Planner Vanya Pryputniewicz

Hello again from the Backcountry Office on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. I'm ranger Lon, today is March 29. The winter of 2010 was remarkable, with more snow than we've seen for at least 25 years. But the days are getting longer, a few brave plants are starting to show and, for today anyway, spring seems just around the next bend. Most of the snowpack has melted along the South Rim and backcountry travel is becoming easier, but 8 to 10 feet of snow, more in places, remains on the North Rim and the runoff over there has only just begun, so access to remote north side trailheads will open late this spring. As of this date there are no special road or trail closures in effect on the south side of the Canyon that require specific discussion, but there are a number of closures we should mention on the snowy North Rim. On the other hand, the Canyon floor is presenting the usual remarkable contrast with the high elevations of the rim and near the Colorado River spring is in full swing. Stay with us today as we say a few more words about these and other factors that are affecting backcountry travelers 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 Office directly, by phone at 928 638 7875 Mon-Fri, 1-5pm local time, by email at www.grca-bic@nps.gov, or in person upon arrival. The Backcountry Office is open 8am to 5pm every day, weekends and holidays included. We close for the lunch hour from 12 – 1pm

The first big story of the day is the huge snowpack on the North Rim and the effects this will have on access to backcountry roads and trailheads this spring. Much depends on unpredictable factors such as daytime high temperatures and the potential for additional precipitation. In general, North Rim hikers can assume vehicle access along dirt roads to remote trailheads will open later than usual this year and that travel along the upper few miles of Canyon trails may be snow covered or icy for the next several weeks.

The Swamp Ridge road to the North Bass trailhead, famous for deep drifts and downed trees across the road might not open until late May or even early June.

Forest Service road 610 to the upper Nankoweap trailhead may open a little sooner, but not much. Forest Service road 22 and 425 to the trailheads at Monument Point and Indian Hollow may open by sometime in late April or early May, but at this time all we can do is guess. Anyone thinking about vehicle travel along the system of backcountry roads managed by the Kaibab National Forest should contact the North Kaibab Ranger District in Fredonia, AZ at 928 643 7395 for current conditions as the spring runoff progresses.

All commercial facilities on the North Rim, Highway 67 south from Jacob Lake, the North Rim Visitor Center, and the North Rim Backcountry Office are scheduled to re-open for the 2010 operational season on May 15, 2010. The campground remains open throughout the winter for the occasional cross Canyon hiker, snow machine operator or cross country skier. Obtain a camping permit for the North Rim campground through the South Rim Backcountry Office before starting. The Administration Office located north of the campground offers the only public point of contact or source of drinking water on the North Rim until opening day on May 15.

Be advised, potential North Rim campers should be prepared for *extremely* cold temperatures, as the North Rim is at elevations between 8 and 9 thousand feet. It's cold over there, colder than anywhere else in the park.

The situation is a little more encouraging on the South Rim. Vehicle access along Forest Service road #328 to the South Bass trailhead has become pretty reasonable for a competent high clearance backcountry vehicle, although all it would take is additional snow or rain to make this road difficult for even the best 4 wheel drive. Most south side Canyon trails face more or less north so melting is not as far along as on the rim. The upper half mile or so of the Bright Angel is snow packed and potentially icy and we're still recommending traction devices and trekking poles. The Grandview, New Hance and Tanner trails are worse. The north facing aspect means melting is slow and the narrow, exposed nature of these trails, especially the Grandview, make crampons and poles essential. The South Kaibab and Hermit trails are mostly dry with only small amounts of ice near the rim. Every sunny day brings small improvements but a chance of addition snowfall exists for the next several weeks. Conditions can, and probably will, change rapidly as spring grades off into summer and generalizations about potential future conditions are nothing more than generalizations so prudent hikers will make a last minute check for the current situation before starting. As always, hikers will do well to keep an eye on the National Weather Service website, "weather.gov" which offers daily 7 day forecasts for both rims as well as the Canyon floor.

The other big news of the day is the onset of spring on the Canyon floor. Daytime highs are running in the 70's, and on sunny days, highs in the 80's are possible.

Conditions below the Rim are close to ideal right now, and, as a result, demand for permits is at an all time high. Advance reservations for the primary "corridor" campgrounds, such as Bright Angel or Indian Garden are fully booked through about the middle of June and the demand for last minute "walk up" permits far exceeds the supply. As the result, hikers wishing to obtain "walk up" permits should contact the Backcountry Office upon arrival to get their name on the waiting list. Assume the strong possibility of a two to three day wait before actually getting a permit.

Oppressive summer temperatures are just around the corner. As May fades into June, taking precautions against the heat is essential. It could even become a matter of life and death, but we've got a few more delightful weeks of spring to enjoy before the arrival of extreme heat.

Regardless of the season there are critical things hikers need to be aware of. **All** inner Canyon trails are characterized by steep, rocky, unrelenting descents that seem to go on forever/ so constant attention to your footing is required. If you want to admire the view, stop walking. Trying to walk and gawk at the same time is an invitation to a nasty fall. Trekking poles significantly reduce strain on knees and legs and are always a good idea. When the trails are slick poles are invaluable. Even with the availability of piped in drinking water on the Bright Angel and North Kaibab trails, corridor hikers still need to carry extra water. We recommend at least 3 liters per person during spring and as the days warm up this recommendation will increase to 4 liters. This should be adequate to get you between the water sources while allowing a little extra for unforeseen circumstances. 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 ground water 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 primary corridor campgrounds and urge hikers to be sure to use the food storage boxes provided at each campsite. 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 and it's pretty much a question of use the food boxes or risk damage to your gear and the loss of your food. No food boxes are provided at more remote campsites outside of the corridor trail system but the animal problem will almost certainly persist so campers at commonly used threshold and wilderness campsites will need to provide their own animal proof food storage.

Next up today we'd like to bring you up to date on the drinking water situation along the main drag corridor trails. 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 cg on the North Kaibab trail. The drinking water piped into sources in the upper section of the Canyon will remain off for the next few weeks until the threat of freezing nighttime temperatures passes. This shutoff would include the 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. 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. And last but not least, as always, the South Kaibab trail is bone dry-no water of any kind along the South Kaibab, ever.

The moisture laden winter has produce one very positive effect: the ephemeral, seasonal springs that dot the inner Canyon flowing now and will probably continue to flow for the next few weeks so water issues in most parts of the Canyon have temporarily receded into the background, with one important exception: the side canyons between the Little Colorado River and Mineral Canyon are dry, leaving the Colorado River as the primary source, and the spring snowmelt is introducing heavy sediment loads creating a brown, muddy, difficult to purify Colorado.

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

The Hermit Shuttle between South Rim Village and Hermit Rest and the Hermit trailhead is operational and will continue to run each day until the end of November. The bus runs every 30 minutes between 4:30am and 9:30am, every 15 minutes between 9:30am and sunset, and every 30 minutes between sunset and one hour after sunset. The Hermit Shuttle is free.

Hikers planning to use the South Kaibab Trail can access that trailhead by using one of two shuttle systems. The easiest way is to use the Hiker Express bus. Departure times for the Hiker Express will be 6, 7 and am in April, 5, 6 and 7am in May. The Hiker Express originates at the Bright Angel Lodge, then picks up passengers at the Backcountry Office before going on to the Visitor Center and the South Kaibab trailhead. The South Kaibab trail can also be accessed via the regular Kaibab Trail shuttle runs between the Visitor Center and the trailhead throughout the day. And 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. Look for the

“Backcountry Updates and Closures” section in the Backcountry Hiking section marked by a red exclamation point. 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 www.grca_bic@nps.gov . A response to emails may require a few days. And as always, the Backcountry Office staff extends an open invitation to visit our office to chat about your Canyon adventure when you arrive. Happy Trails to All !