

## **Grand Canyon National Park Backcountry Update Podcast for July 1, 2009**

Hello from the G. C. Backcountry Office on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. It's July 1, 2009. There are currently no road or trail closures in effect that require special discussion but we would still like to bring you up to date on what's been going on in the world of backcountry Grand Canyon. First and most importantly I'll talk in depth about the potentially dangerous summer conditions that dominate the inner Canyon and the things you can do to protect yourself in that hostile environment. We have already seen signs of the developing summer monsoon flow and the thunderstorms that result so I'll touch on a few of the dangers associated with the rainy season of late summer. Then we'll go into the current conditions along the heavily used cross Canyon corridor trail system, then on to the situation in the more remote sections of the park.

### **First off, the big issue of the day, the arrival of Summer in the Canyon.**

Summer has arrived on the Canyon floor, bringing with it triple digit temperatures and the dangers of heat related injury. Forecast daytime high for the next few days are hovering around 110F and as we move into July the heat situation will only intensify. Daytime highs could potentially top 120F. These temperatures are beyond unpleasant or uncomfortable-they are, in fact, dangerous and if you fail to factor the heat into your plan the results could be tragic. When confronted with such hostility hikers must take active steps to prevent heat stroke and other heat related injuries and there are several things hikers can do to help mitigate the damage the heat will inflict on the human body. Most important among these is to take full advantage of the hours between 4am and 9am. Set up an itinerary that will allow you to start your hike in the cool of the pre-dawn darkness and arrive at your destination by 9am and avoid hiking completely between 10am and 4pm. 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. 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. Other hot weather essentials include proper pacing of the walk, protective clothing and a brimmed hat. Don't forget the sunscreen.

As we work through July and August the seasonal winds shift to the south to bring increased moisture from the tropics, kicking off the summer monsoon throughout the desert southwest- thunderstorm and flash flood time at the Canyon. The season brings two obvious hazards: lightning on the high points and flooding in the drainages. Hikers will need to consult the weather forecast before starting and monitor developing storms as the day progresses. If clouds build into towering thunderheads, if lightning can be seen in the distance or if you can hear thunder extra vigilance will be required. Avoid high points or ridgelines and if there is any chance whatsoever of heavy rain higher in the Canyon avoid narrow confined drainage bottoms. If confronted with rapidly rising water climb the slopes to safety. Never attempt to outrun a flash flood down the drainage bottom.

During the volatile summer season we encourage hikers to contact the Backcountry Office to check on current trail and weather conditions prior to starting down Canyon trails.

**Next we'd like to bring everyone up to date on the current situation out there below the rim in the ultimate world of Grand Canyon backcountry.**

I'll take 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, the Bright Angel and the South and North Kaibab trails, are open and in reasonable condition, but, as always, caution is certainly indicated. Steep rocky descents 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. Trying to walk and look at the same time is a sure way to a nasty fall as there are about a million things you could trip over. Trekking poles increase security significantly. Purified drinking water is currently available at the following locations along the cross Canyon corridor: The 1.5 Mile and 3 Mile resthouses and at Indian Garden campground along the Bright Angel trail, at Bright Angel campground on the Canyon floor, and at Cottonwood campground, Roaring Springs picnic area and Supai Tunnel on the North Kaibab Trail

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 hikers still need to carry extra water and during hot weather we recommend one gallon per person. 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 the natural water from the creek between Cottonwood and Bright Angel campgrounds or below Indian Garden is needed to supplement the supply in your pack. On a different note, 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.

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 hikers using the Bright Angel should be prepared to yield the right of way mule operations are encountered.

**I'll shift your attention now to the more remote part of the Canyon.**

As of this date all wilderness trails are open and passable. Backcountry roads to remote trailheads are currently passable for competent backcountry vehicle. 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. On the North Rim Forest Service road 22 and 425 to the Monument Point and Indian Hollow trailheads for the Thunder River/Deer Creek and Forest Service road 8910 and Forest Service road 610 to the

Nankoweap trailheads are all passable. The Swamp Ridge road to Swamp Point and the road to Pt. Sublime are open as well. These conditions could easily change for the worst as the summer monsoon develops. If we receive significant precipitation dry dirt roads could change to a sea of impassible mud so feel free to contact the North Kaibab Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest at 928 643 7395 or the Backcountry Office for current conditions.

**Next on the program today, We'll say a few words about Water Availability At Springs Outside the Corridor Area.**

As we slide into the summer months the ephemeral seasonal springs become more and more suspect and eventually many will dry up completely. Water flows permanently in Boucher Creek, Hermit Creek, Monument Creek, Pipe Creek, Grapevine Creek, and Hance Creek and Clear Creek. Recent reports indicate water is still flowing in Lone Tree Canyon and Cottonwood Creek as of this date, but these sources will soon become unreliable so make a last minute check before starting. Recent reports indicate a chance for water above the Tonto crossing in Slate, well below the Tonto crossing in Turquoise and possibly at the Tonto crossing in Ruby and Serpentine. These sources will almost certainly dry up sometime within the next few weeks so hikers expecting to take water from these remote sources should confirm availability through the Backcountry Office before starting and become familiar with potential routes from the Tonto Platform to the Colorado River.

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

The Havasupai Reservation and the remarkable waterfalls has reopened to tourist visitation. No permit is required, but hikers will need to contact the Tribal Offices for reservations. Call 928 448 2121 or visit <http://www.havasupai-nsn.gov/>

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, a few facts about the 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 4, 5, and 6 AM . 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 Canyonview 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 podcast every few weeks. If you need more immediate information for the next week or so the best source is the park website:

<http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/trail-closures.htm>

Look for the "Backcountry Updates and Closures" in the Backcountry Hiking section marked by a red exclamation point. For up to date information for the next couple of days phone directly at 928 638 7875, Mon-Fri, 1-5pm local time. Be forewarned: you may have to try more than once to get through. Contact by email at [grca\\_bic@nps.gov](mailto:grca_bic@nps.gov). A response to emails may require a few days.

So, that's the view from the rim of Grand Canyon, out across the finest landscape on the face of the planet. As always, the Backcountry Office staff invites you to come by the office to chat about it when you get here.