



Hiking Grand Canyon

Inner Canyon Trails Update: May 20, 2009 by Park Ranger Lon Ayers

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

My name is Lon. 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 summer in the inner Canyon and the unique conditions presented by the Canyon during hot weather, the opening of the North Rim for the 2009 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 summer in the lower 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 102F and as we move toward June the heat situation will only intensify. Daytime highs in June and July could 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 first light and about 10:30am. Set up an itinerary that will allow you to start at dawn and arrive at your destination by 10am and avoid hiking completely during the hot hours of the day. 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. 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. A [recent weather forecast](#) is critical information during this season of the year.

Another sign of summer:

The North Rim, including the hotel, restaurant, visitor center and backcountry office opened for the 2009 season on May 15 and will continue to operate throughout the summer months. What's not open yet are the backcountry roads out to remote viewpoints such as Pt. Sublime and Swamp Point. Access to these seldom visited viewpoints is still at least a couple of weeks away due to extensive mud bogs and downed trees

Next this morning 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 cross Canyon corridor trail system first, then we'll turn our attention to the more remote sections of the Canyon.

All three corridor trails, and by that we mean the Bright Angel and the South and North Kaibab trail, 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. 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. Purified drinking water is currently available at the following locations along the cross Canyon corridor: The 1.5 Mile and 3 Mile rest houses 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 in case you meet someone who has run out of water or if you need to wet yourself to cool down. 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 below Indian Garden or Colorado river 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.

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 although, as previously noted, vehicle access to the North Bass trailhead will probably be impossible until sometime around the first of June. Most other 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 and 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. These conditions could easily change for the worst if we receive significant precipitation 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. Water is also flowing in Lone Tree Canyon and Cottonwood Creek as of this date, but these sources will probably dry up by sometime in early June. The seasonal sources west of the Boucher Trail are rapidly become unreliable. Recent reports indicate a chance for water above the Tonto crossing in Slate and Turquoise and 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.

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.

Here's some information about the Closure of the Hermit Road to Private Vehicles.

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

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 5,6, and 7am in May. It will be 4, 5, and 6 AM in June. 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 Plaza 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 another summer season begins. 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, but during summer it would be well to remember those wonderful experiences come at a price in terms of preparedness and responsibility. We'd like to invite you visit the Backcountry Office when you arrive to chat about your Canyon experience and your concerns. Happy Trails to all from the Backcountry Office Staff.