



Bright Angel Trail

The Bright Angel Trail is considered the park's premier hiking trail. Well maintained, graded for stock, with regular drinking water and covered rest-houses, it is without question the safest trail in Grand Canyon National Park. There is a ranger station located at the trail's halfway point (Indian Garden) and one at the bottom of the canyon (Bright Angel Campground). Visitors hiking for the first time at Grand Canyon often use this trail in conjunction with the South Kaibab Trail. Particularly during hot weather, it makes sense to ascend via the Bright Angel Trail because of potable water, regular shade and emergency phones.

Following a natural break in the cliffs formed by the massive Bright Angel Fault, today's Bright Angel Trail approximates a route used for millennia by the many Native American groups that have called the Grand Canyon home. Early western pioneers at the canyon first built a trail in 1891 to reach mining claims established below the rim at Indian Garden. Recognizing that the true worth of the claims would be measured in visitation by tourists, these pioneers immediately registered their trail as a toll road and extended the trail to the river. The mining claims and use of the trail as a toll road would be the source of much controversy, first in legal battles with railroad companies that wanted to control tourism and later with the federal government. The trail was turned over to the National Park Service in 1928. Though it has been rerouted and improved considerably over the years, present day visitors on the Bright Angel Trail can sense its rich history from ancient pictograph panels and historic structures, and by marveling at the trail's construction over some of the roughest terrain in North America.

Locations/Elevations

Rim (6860 ft / 2093 m) to Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse (5729 ft / 1748 m):
Mile-and-a-Half (5729 ft / 1748 m) to Three-Mile Resthouse (4748 ft / 1449 m):
Three-Mile Resthouse (4748 ft / 1449 m) to Indian Garden (3800 ft / 1160 m):
Indian Garden (3800 ft / 1160 m) to River Resthouse (2480 ft / 756 m):
River Resthouse (2480 ft / 756 m) to Bright Angel Campground (2480 ft / 756 m):
Rim (6860 ft / 2093 m) to Bright Angel Campground (2480 ft / 756 m):

Mileages

1.6 mi (2.6 km)
1.5 mi (2.4 km)
1.7 mi (2.7 km)
3.2 mi (5.2 km)
1.5 mi (2.4 km)
9.5 mi (15.3 km)

Maps

7.5 Minute Phantom Ranch Quad (USGS)
Trails Illustrated Map, Grand Canyon National Park (National Geographic)
Sky Terrain Trails Map, Grand Canyon (Sky Terrain)

Rest Stations

Drinking water: From late April or early May to early October, potable water is available at Bright Angel Campground, Indian Garden Campground, Three-Mile Resthouse, and Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse. From mid-October to early May, water is only available at Bright Angel Campground and Indian Garden. There is never potable water available at the River Resthouse. Please note that, due to the remote conditions, potable water is not guaranteed: bring a backup method to treat water. **Toilets are located at:** Bright Angel-Phantom area; also on the Bright Angel Trail near the River Rest Station, at Indian Garden, Three-Mile and Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse.

Campsites

Camping in designated campgrounds only. Indian Garden Campground (15 small group sites, 1 large group site, no stock). Though not technically along this trail, Bright Angel Campground located on the north side of the Colorado River (30 small group sites, 2 large group sites, stock allowed).

Trailhead Access

The Bright Angel trailhead is located just west of Bright Angel Lodge. To reach the trailhead park at the Backcountry Information Center (Lot D) and walk 5 minutes to the trailhead or park at the Grand Canyon Visitor Center and catch the free shuttle bus (:20 minute one way trip).

Trail Description

While the South Kaibab Trail follows a ridge line, the Bright Angel Trail conforms to a fault, keeping to the back of the canyon during the first few miles. Views on the Bright Angel Trail are framed by massive cliffs, and by virtue of being a shadier trail with natural water sources, there is more plant life and animal life along the Bright Angel Trail than on the South Kaibab Trail. These features make the Bright Angel Trail appealing to those interested in geology and in viewing wildlife.

The majority of this trail's elevation change takes place in the upper four miles of trail via a series of switchbacks that can seem endless. Be sure to utilize the resthouses and seasonal water sources along the way. Whether ascending or descending, it is worthwhile to take breaks regularly. Approaching Indian Garden, the trail flattens out considerably as it crosses the shale dominated Tonto Platform.

Indian Garden is an oasis in the canyon used by Native Americans up to modern times. Ralph Cameron, one of the early pioneers who built the Bright Angel Trail (and who would later become an Arizona senator), by 1903 had come to an agreement with the resident Havasupai allowing him to build a camp for tourists. He staked mining claims to secure the site, built tent cabins, and planted the enormous cottonwood trees still present today. Hikers camping at Indian Garden should consider the mile and a half side trip to Plateau Point.

Below Indian Garden, the trail follows a creek through a meandering gully of water-sculpted stone and shimmering cottonwood trees. The trail becomes steep once again where this gully empties into the broad, bowl-shaped Pipe Creek drainage. This section of trail, affectionately referred to as the Devil's Corkscrew, is brutally hot during the summer months and should therefore only be attempted during the early morning or late evening hours. There are no potable water sources between Indian Garden and Bright Angel Campground. A composting toilet is located near the River Resthouse.

From the Pipe Creek/River Resthouse area to Bright Angel Campground, the trail traverses exposed sand dunes for over a mile until reaching the silver bridge across the Colorado River. Again, during hot weather, these sand dunes become a dangerous slog.

Important Notes

Grand Canyon is, above all else, a place of extremes. It is helpful to plan according to seasonal norms and to take appropriate precautions depending on seasonal variations in trail conditions and weather. During winter months (most pronounced December through February), the top 2 miles are often icy. Because the wintertime sun never reaches the trail, it can remain slick for weeks or even months after a snowstorm, so over shoe traction and hiking poles are recommended. During times of scorching temperatures when the bottom of the canyon is most likely to reach at least 100 deg F (which is most likely to occur between early May and late September) it is critical that hikers depart before dawn or wait until late afternoon. Hiking through the midday hours of 10am and 4pm is not recommended. Hike Smart.