



Tonto Trail: Grandview Trail to South Kaibab Trail

The Tonto Trail gently rolls in and out of seemingly innumerable drainages along its 95 mile length from Hance Rapid to Garnet Canyon. Deep inside the canyon, the distinctive Tonto Platform towers 1200 vertical feet above the level of the river, but a series of springs makes it possible to walk the length of this trail roughly parallel to the river. Because it is so long, it is not typically done in one through hike. The trek along the Tonto Trail between the Grandview and South Kaibab Trails offers experienced backpackers an excellent introduction to the magic of the Grand Canyon, with magnificent sweeping views, quiet desert streams, and a chance for solitude in a most wild and beautiful place. (This hike is very exposed to the sun, and definitely not recommended from May to September).

Locations/Elevations

Grandview Point (7400 ft / 2256 m) to Cottonwood (3690 ft / 1125 m):
Cottonwood (3690 ft / 1125 m) to Grapevine (3550 ft / 1082 m):
Grapevine (3550 ft / 1082 m) to Lone Tree Canyon (3680 ft / 1122 m):
Lone Tree (3680 ft / 1122 m) to Cremation (3650 ft / 1113 m):
Cremation (3650 ft / 1113 m) to South Kaibab trailhead (7200 ft / 2135 m):
Grandview Point (7400 ft / 2256 m) to South Kaibab trailhead (7200 ft / 2135 m):

Mileages

4.5 mi (7.2 km)
5.5 mi (8.8 km)
8.7 mi (14 km)
3.5 mi (5.6 km)
6.5 mi (10.4 km)
28.7 mi (46 km)

Maps

7.5 Minute Grandview Point, Cape Royal, and Phantom Ranch Quads (USGS)
Trails Illustrated Map, Map 261 or 262 (2009) (National Geographic)
Sky Terrain Trails Map, 4th Edition, Grand Canyon (Sky Terrain)

We Need Your Help

The transition from corridor hiking to wilderness hiking is abrupt as one leaves the South Kaibab Trail and enters the Cremation Use Area (BJ9). Extra care and planning is warranted when heading into this area, as there is limited shade, limited camps, and no reliable water. Additionally, the boundary delineating where hikers are allowed to camp (located on page 2) within the Cremation Use Area was changed in the spring of 2014, please take this into account and realize that commercial maps have yet to be updated.

Trailhead Access

To start this section of the Tonto Trail from the east, walk the Grandview Trail to Horseshoe Mesa (the parking lot closest to Grandview Point is day use only; the overnight lot is located just beyond the day use lot). Trails through the Redwall on the west and north flanks of Horseshoe Mesa provide ways to reach the bed of Cottonwood and the Tonto Trail. Western access is from the Tip-off, five miles down the South Kaibab Trail.

Trail Description

The Tonto Trail generally follows the path of least resistance as it meanders, sometimes very deeply, back into drainages. It is generally not cairned, but if you lose the trail, as is inevitable, you'll find it again if you know your overall direction, grateful to be back after having been shredded by the merciless blackbrush, which forms the dominant plant cover on the Tonto platform.

The Tonto Trail leaves the bed of Cottonwood near the top of the Tapeats Formation, contours around the west arm, and heads west toward Grapevine. Entering Grapevine from the east involves a short section of narrow, eroding trail with significant exposure. The views down into the lower reaches of Grapevine are wonderful, but watch your step. Grapevine is, by far, the largest and most complex side canyon between the Grandview and the South Kaibab Trails. Looking across the mouth of the drainage from the Tonto Trail the distance seems short, but plan on at least 2-3 hours of steady hiking to cross. The small unnamed drainages between Grapevine and Boulder and Boulder and Lone Tree will slow progress, and a little confusion on the west side of Lone Tree is normal, but generally speaking the route between Grapevine and Cremation is straightforward.

Cremation is deceptive because it traverses the Grandview/Cremation monocline. This faulting creates significantly more elevation change than previously encountered along the route, which can be especially tough because of the total lack of water. There is also no river access at Cremation Canyon.

Water Sources

The Tonto Trail is notorious for its dearth of reliable water sources, and this section is no exception.

Cottonwood (BG9): Cool weather: Southern spring is usually reliable. Northern Spring and O'Neill Spring are unreliable at best. Hot weather: May be dry.

Grapevine (BH9): Cool weather: Water in the east arm at the Tonto Trail crossing and from the spring on the east side of the drainage. Hot weather: Water normally available in the east arm above or below Tonto Platform level (but sometimes dry at the Tonto Trail) and usually a small trickle from the spring on the east side of the drainage. Further downcanyon water flows perennially.

Boulder (BH9): Cool weather: Dry at the Tonto Trail crossing. Small amounts are occasionally found above Tonto Platform level. Water may also be found downstream about 20 minutes. Water is often reported as salty and unpalatable. Hot weather: Dry.

Lone Tree (BJ9): Cool weather: Small amounts at or below Tonto Trail crossing (the most reliable water source is a half hour walk downstream of the Tonto crossing near a lone cottonwood tree). Hot weather: Dry.

Cremation (BJ9): Dry all year. Occasional potholes in the Tapeats (down the west arm of the drainage).

Emergency Water Sources: Page Spring and Hance Creek (east of Horseshoe Mesa), Burro Spring and Pipe Creek (west of the Tip-off) and the Colorado River at the bottom of the Kaibab Trail. **River access in each of the side canyon's is not realistic with some like Cremation plunging 100 or more feet prior to reaching the Colorado River.**

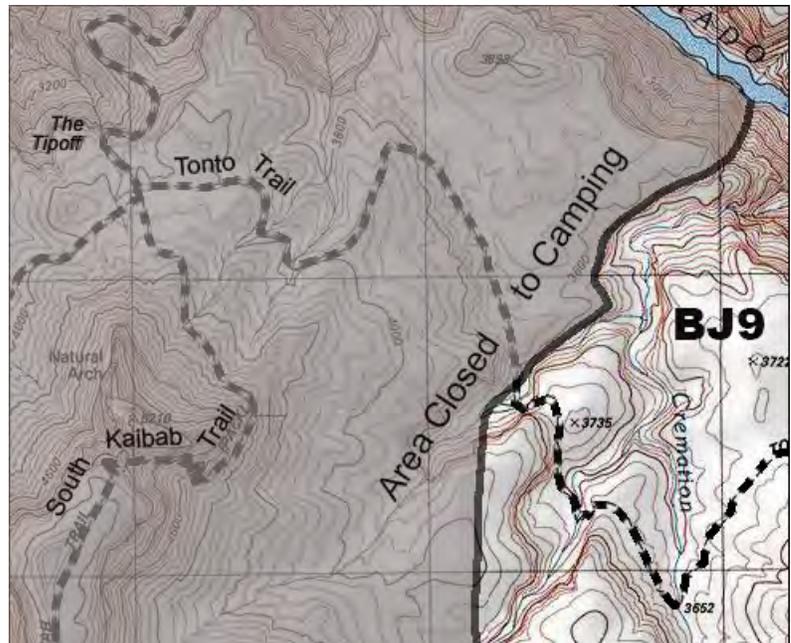
Campsites

"At-large" camping is allowed between Cottonwood drainage and Cremation drainage. Campsites are located where the Tonto Trail crosses the drainages (often better shade and access to seasonal water) and also 1 to 2 miles on either side of the drainages, out on the Tonto Platform (more sun- so nice winter camps).

In spring of 2014, the western boundary of the Cremation Use Area (BJ9) was adjusted in order to protect sensitive resources. Camping is no longer allowed west of the west arm of Cremation drainage. The area closed to camping is shaded grey on the map.

Important Notes

You must pack out all toilet paper. Bury human waste, and go as far away from people and water as possible. Despite the dry, hostile nature of this area, the archaeological record shows that it has been used for thousands of years. If you should find such sites, please leave everything in place, as you found it, and take only pictures.



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