Tuckup Trail / Route

Locations/Elevations	Mileages
West end of Tuckup: (4000 ft / 1219 m) to Willow Spring	20 mi (32 km)
Willow Spring to (4000 ft / 1219 m) to Cottonwood Spring	8 mi (12.9 km)
Cottonwood Spring (4000 ft / 1219 m) to Schmutz Trailhead	4 mi (6.4 km)
Schmutz Trailhead (4000 ft / 1219 m) to Cork Spring	17 mi (27.3 km)
Cork Spring (4000 ft / 1219 m) to Hotel Spring	8 mi (12.9 km)
Hotel Spring (4400 feet) to 150 Canyon trailhead: (5600 ft / 1706 m)	3 mi (4.8 km)

Mileages are very difficult/impossible to gage because the terrain is so convoluted, and routes vary. Total distance east to west is around 60 miles.

Trailhead Access

BLM Road 109 (The Sunshine Road) is the primary access road to Tuweep and all destinations on the Kanab Plateau. To reach the western terminus of the Tuckup Trail follow Road 109 until 4.7 miles south of the Tuweep Ranger Stations, turn left. To reach the Schmutz Spring trailhead (Tuckup Canyon), 150 Mile trailhead, Kanab Point or SB Point then turn left from Road 109 at June Tank. This is about midway between H389 and Tuweep Campground. The National Park Service does not maintain these roads; conditions are significantly worse on park service land. Check with the Fredonia Ranger Station for road conditions at 928-643-7395.

Water Sources

Willow and Cottonwood Springs are unpalatable, mineralized, and will likely cause short-term gastrointestinal problems. Cork, Hotel, Buckhorn, and Little Joe Springs are reliable. Water can be found at the top of the Redwall in Tuckup Canyon and usually at the top of the Redwall in 150 Mile. Pothole water is often preferable, which reinforces the need to do this hike when it's cool, and preferably after a rain.

Campsites

There are abundant campsites on the sandstone slickrock throughout the area. Do not camp on cryptobiotic soil.

Important Notes

Water availability and quality is always a concern in this area, trip reports are greatly appreciated. You may send information to grca_bic@nps.gov or call 928-638-7875.

Please remember to travel and camp on durable surfaces. Cryptobiotic soil is an important, yet fragile, part of the ecosystem. Make every effort not to 'bust the crust'. Plants, especially grasses, are more resilient than these soils. Minimize impact by camping on slickrock.

You may encounter evidence of human activity going back thousands of years. Protect the canyon's valuable archaeological resources by leaving what you find. Report any abuse of this resource to park dispatch at 928-638-7805.

Trail Description

Most people access the canyon from just north of the Tuweep Campground. Since the Tuweep road descends to the Esplanade layer, the trail begins deceptively easily as three miles of winding dirt road. At the road's end, there is a cairned trail through the blackbrush. Once you reach the vast Esplanade bench into Cove Canyon, the overall

aim is to stay high on the slickrock. It's pretty well marked through this area, but the farther you are from the Tuweep area, the fainter the trail becomes. It is possible to cut off time by going up and over the high mesa protruding below Big Point.

The first perennial water source in this area is Willow Spring, in Fern Glen Canyon. The water here is very poor quality, with a high mineral content, and has caused gastrointestinal problems for many hikers. There is a route to the river in Stairway, and also a route out to the rim from Willow Spring. The top of the Redwall in Stairway requires some careful route finding and is a route for experienced off trail canyon hikers. If possible, it is preferable to find pothole water both as an alternative to both Willow and Cottonwood Spring, which is also highly mineralized. Ranchers from the Arizona Strip have a long history of grazing this area. Feral cattle roamed the esplanade for many years until the National Park Service removed the last vestige of a bygone era, setting the stage for a slow ecosystem recovery.

Look for an abandoned mine shaft on the north side of Cottonwood Creek. This was a copper claim dating to 1907. There is a loop trail around the Dome, and pockets of water can be found in this area. The trail fades in and out north of Cottonwood, but the trail up to the rim near the head of Tuckup Canyon is very distinct. Crinoid fossils are abundant near the historic fence that crosses the trail near the midway point up.

Hikers often miss Schmutz Spring because of its odd location. At the northwest end of Tuckup Canyon, the trail veers northwest of the basalt narrows; look for the spring on a cutbank in the arroyo to the northwest. It's really more of a minor seep that was dynamited open by some enterprising cowboy. It is possible to walk down Tuckup Canyon to the river, but there are several climbs which involve significant exposure.

The route continues on the Esplanade in the eastern arm of Tuckup Canyon. Again, the farther you walk away from the established trailhead, the fewer trails and cairns you'll find. After the large side drainage flowing east/west into Tuckup, there is no trail at all, and the terrain becomes significantly more unforgiving, as you must descend and re-ascend a seemingly endless maze of arroyos. Cork Spring is reliable, but the access to the spring in the eastern arm is blocked by a huge pouroff, which can be bypassed by contouring into the next drainage and downclimbing to the right. 'The Cork' is a distinct butte with a solitary cap of basalt. The terrain is very open through this area, and there are no visible signs of volcanism for many miles from this feature.

Hotel Spring is reliable, and there are abundant remnants of old cowboy activity throughout the area. The route out to the rim at Buckhorn Spring in Hundred and Fifty Mile Canyon (150 Mile Canyon) has a few cairns, and some vestigial trail remains, but is mostly a scramble through a ravine in the Coconino. Up from the Coconino, follow the historic fence line and then traverse west. Once around the ridgeline, head up and out on a faint trail in the small ravine west of the historic corral.

There is a route down 150 Mile Canyon to the Colorado River at Upset Rapid, but it requires several rappels, possible swimming, and excellent canyoneering skills. Cowboys referred to the drainage as 'S.O.B' canyon, but according to longtime Tuweep ranger John Riffey, prudish cartographers changed it to 150 Mile Canyon.

General Information & History

The Tuckup area is a remote, vast expanse of labyrinthine gorges, sandstone slickrock, and fascinating history. However, the unique combination of heat, unreliable water sources, and inaccessibility, makes this one of the most challenging and least visited of Grand Canyon's named trails. In summer the sun and sandstone would cook even the hardiest desert creature, and winter access may be impossible due to heavy snow or mud. Spring or fall; after a rain is the best time to go, if you can get your vehicle out there. The easiest way to access this area is on the Tuweep road, just north of the Tuweep Overlook. The road descends into the Esplanade layer within the canyon, so it's one of the few Grand Canyon hikes that begins without a steep descent. This beginning is deceptively easy, and the terrain soon necessitates a seemingly endless variety of choices for navigation. There are numerous possibilities for trips in this area; this description gives information on main access points going west to east. The eastern portion really has no trails, and excellent route finding skills are essential.

Maps

7.5 Minute Tuckup Canyon, National Canyon, Kanab Point, Mt. Trumbull Quads (USGS)

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