



Hermit Trail

Much pioneer period history of northern Arizona revolves around various schemes of development designed to promote and capitalize on the indescribable but undeniable magic of the Grand Canyon. The Hermit Creek basin was the scene of one of the most aggressive of these improvement efforts. Initiated by the Santa Fe Railroad in 1911, this program involved much development on the rim and also included the construction of what was, at the time, a state of the art rim-to-river trail. The Hermit Trail was built to serve a luxury campsite near Hermit Creek. Hermit Camp predated Phantom Ranch by 10 years, and in its heyday was complete with a tramway from the rim, a functional automobile for transportation within the facility, and a Fred Harvey chef. Operations ceased in 1930, but for two decades Hermit Camp was the last word in gracious tourism below the rim. As is always the case at Grand Canyon, time and erosion have taken a heavy toll. The old Hermit Trail is today a mere shadow of its former self, but for experienced, knowledgeable canyon backpackers the walk offers a direct link to the excitement and romance of the early days at Grand Canyon.

The “hermit” of the Hermit Creek basin was Louis D. Boucher who lived in the area for 20 years. Boucher built the Boucher Trail (west of the Hermit Trail) and seasonal residences at Dripping Springs and near Boucher Creek. Labeled a hermit because he lived alone, Boucher was in fact socially active within the South Rim community.

Locations/Elevations

Hermit trailhead (6640 ft / 2024 m)
Santa Maria Spring (5000 ft / 1524 m)
Breezy Point (4420 ft / 1347 m)
Tonto Trail Junction (3210 ft / 978 m)
Hermit Creek (2900 ft / 884 m)
Colorado River at Hermit Rapids (2300 ft / 701 m)

Mileages

0 mi
2.2 mi (3.5 km)
5.5 mi (8.8 km)
7 mi (11.2 km)
8.2 mi (13.1 km)
9.7 (15.5 km)

Tonto Trail Junction (3210 ft / 978 m) to Monument Creek, BL7 (2995 ft / 913 m):	2.3 mi (3.7 km)
Monument Creek, BL7 (2995 ft / 913 m) to Granite Rapid, BL8 (2330 ft / 710 m):	1.6 mi (2.6 km)
Hermit trailhead (6640 ft / 2024 m) to Monument Creek, BL BL7 (2995 ft / 913 m):	9.3 mi (15.0 km)
Hermit trailhead (6640 ft / 2024 m) to Granite Rapid, BL8 (2330 ft / 710 m):	10.3 mi (16.6 km)

Maps

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

How You Can Help

Legions of small animals (squirrels, mice, ringtails, ravens) will devote much attention to separating you from your food during your stay. An animal proof food storage system is a necessity; bring heavy gauge plastic containers, metal tins or purchase a metal mesh food storage bag (available in the park).

Trailhead Access

Restricted access to the Hermit’s Road occurs annually from March 1 through November 30. Backpackers with a valid backcountry permit for the Hermit or Boucher Trails are allowed access during this time. Drive 8 miles west along Hermit Road to Hermits Rest then continue on the dirt road ¼ mile to the trailhead.

From December 1st through the end of February the Hermit Road is open to all traffic (during this time the park shuttle bus does not operate).

Trail Description

The upper section of the Hermit Trail is steep and sustained, dropping almost 2000 vertical feet in the first 2.5 miles. Passage through the Kaibab and Coconino Formations is via well-defined switchbacks. Most of the Hermit Trail was originally surfaced with large hand-fitted rock slabs that created a smooth walking surface. Ongoing

erosion has claimed much of this remarkable labor-intensive paving, but a few isolated fragments survive, especially in the Coconino. Fossilized animal tracks have been noted in many locations throughout the canyon but they were first studied in detail along the Hermit Trail. A few of these fossilized lizard-like tracks can be seen by observant hikers in the lower half of the Coconino.

Pass the Waldron Trail junction and then the Dripping Springs Trail junction near the bottom of the Hermit Shale (stay right at both junctions) and drop into the Hermit Creek gorge. Santa Maria Spring is soon reached offering a trickle of water and a historic masonry rest house.

Between Santa Maria Spring and the top of the Redwall at Cathedral Stairs the Hermit Trail is characterized by long traverses. This section of the trail is tucked up against the west facing walls of the south rim and thus offers hikers a period of extended shade during the hotter months.

At Cathedral stairs the descent becomes unrelenting. An endless series of rocky switchbacks eventually leads hikers through the Redwall cliff and down the west facing talus below Cope Butte to the intersection with the Tonto Trail. The Tonto Trail is an important inner Canyon route that allows access in both directions along the Tonto Platform, east to Monument Creek, west to Hermit Creek. Turn left (west) and follow the Tonto Trail about a mile to the Hermit Creek campsite. Be sure to walk downstream a short distance during your stay at Hermit Creek. The little Tapeats gorge is a real gem.

The Hermit Trail continues another 1.5 miles beyond the established campsite at Hermit Creek to the Colorado River and Hermit Rapids. Follow your nose down the bed of Hermit Creek or take the cut-off from the Tonto Trail that drops to the drainage bottom below the campsite. A little of the original trail construction shows in the Vishnu Formation, but today the lower section of this once impressive trail is mostly a little foot path winding quietly through riparian vegetation to the shoreline. Hermit Rapids is a big one, well worth the trip if time and energy allows.

Water Sources

Santa Maria Spring, 2.5 miles below the rim offers year round spring water. Hermit Creek is a permanent water source that flows all the way to the Colorado River. All water sources require purification.

Campsites

The only legal places to camp within the Hermit Creek drainage are the designated campsites at Hermit Creek (BM7, toilet on site) and Hermit Rapids (BM8, no toilet). A sign with a prominent 'L' marks the Large Group site near the toilet at BM7. Large groups of 7 to 11 people must use this site.

At-large camping is not permitted along the Hermit Trail.

Important Notes

At Hermit Rapids abundant sand and rocky cliffs surround the camp area. Appropriate locations to bury waste are non-existent. Never deposit waste in sand or sand dunes. Please carry out your toilet paper and urinate directly into the river.