



North Bass Trail

The North Bass Trail is possibly the quintessential Grand Canyon trail combining thrusting faults, diverse geology, and an introduction to one of the region's mythic pioneers: William Wallace Bass. Explorer, trail builder, miner, family man, and tourist entrepreneur, in many ways Bill Bass personified that rugged breed that ventured into the unknown to claim a life from the wilderness. Walking in the footsteps of a man like Bass is humbling. His trail will quickly confuse the unprepared and inexperienced, but strong and knowledgeable canyon hikers will appreciate the woven complexity of the area's history, geology, and ecosystems. Forest and upland shrub frame white hoodoos near the rim, while slickrock sections and small waterfalls wait to enchant the hiker further down. As the trail approaches the canyon floor, the canyon widens to offer stunning views and the vegetation shifts to a combination of riparian and low desert scrub. Hikers headed to the Colorado River will have to crisscross Shinumo Creek several times before reaching the historic Bass camp. The profusion of artifacts is startling—household implements, mining tools—each telling a story about the lives that Bill Bass touched. Nearby, Bass tended a canyon orchard filled with fig, peach, and apricot trees. Sit for a spell and imagine the aroma of sun-drenched peach trees. How many hikers have eaten a fresh peach at the bottom of the Grand Canyon? The North Bass Trail has a well-deserved reputation as one of the most difficult and demanding canyon trails, enjoy with caution.

Locations/Elevations

Swamp Point (7500 ft / 2286 m) to Muav Saddle (6700 ft / 2042 m):

Muav Saddle (6700 ft / 2042 m) to top of the Redwall Descent (5000 ft / 1524 m):

Redwall Descent (5000 ft / 1524 m) to Shinumo Creek (2800 ft / 853 m):

Shinumo Creek ((2800 ft / 853 m) to Shinumo Camp (2400 ft / 732 m):

Shinumo Camp (2400 ft / 732 m) to Colorado River (2200 ft / 671 m):

Swamp Point (7500 ft / 2286 m) to Colorado River (2200 ft / 671 m):

Mileages

1.0 mi (1.6 km)

3.5 mi (5.6 km)

5.8 mi (9.3 km)

1.7 mi (2.7 km)

1.5 mi (2.4 km)

13.5 mi (21.7 km)

Maps

7.5 Minute King Arthur Castle and Havasupai Point Quads (USGS)

Trails Illustrated Map, Grand Canyon East, Map 262 (National Geographic)

Trailhead Access

The remote North Bass trailhead is located at Swamp Point. Though it is possible to access the trailhead from the North Rim Village by taking the Point Sublime and Kanabownits Roads through the park, it should be noted that passage is much easier using the Forest Service Roads from the north. A North Kaibab National Forest map is essential. The Swamp Ridge Road is gated and is not accessible by vehicle from first snow (often in Nov or early Dec) until the National Park Service fire crew has cleared it of down trees. In some years this road is not open until late May or early June.

Trail Description

From Swamp Point it is a mile via switchbacks to the Muav Saddle trail junction. The middle trail continues south and ascends to Powell Plateau. The trail to the right leads to an old patrol cabin. The North Bass is to the left and contours the base of the Coconino Sandstone for approximately quarter mile to the fairly reliable Queen Anne Spring.

The one mile descent from the spring to a benchmark in White Creek (BM 5692') was restored to the historic trail alignment and completely rebuilt in 2005. Continue down White Creek until you reach a waterfall. The bypass is on creek right about 50 feet before reaching the waterfall. Continue down the bed of White Creek until you come to the large pour-off in the Redwall.

The cairned trail to the right crosses four drainages as it traverses along the Redwall rim. Several nice campsites can be found along this stretch of the trail. After crossing the fourth drainage the trail continues along a cliff to the start of the Redwall descent. The descent through the Redwall to the bed of White

Creek is steep and rocky, but well marked. Continue down the drainage to a pour-off in the Bright Angel Shale which can be bypassed on creek right. The bypass is approximately half mile in length and contours along the Tonto before dropping back into White Creek.

The trail continues down the drainage until intersecting a cairned route near the top of the Tapeats that leads out of Whites Creek and up onto the tonto. The trail follows the tonto platform a couple of miles before the final quick descent drops hikers alongside Shinumo Creek about a quarter mile downstream of the White-Shinumo confluence. There is a nice campsite at the bottom of the descent that would fit a good number of tents.

The trail follows Shinumo Creek downstream for approximately one and half miles to the remains of Bass's tourist camp. Hikers heading to the river will exit the canyon a quarter mile downstream of Bass's Camp on creek left (east side). A climb of approximately 700 feet is required to reach a saddle before the trail descends to a large beach and terrace above the Colorado River.

Water Sources

Water is available seasonally at the spring southeast (down trail) of Muav Saddle. White Creek is perennial but flows are intermittent (water usually available in the Supai). Shinumo Creek is perennial. High flows in Shinumo Creek during spring runoff make crossings extremely hazardous or impossible. Water is always available at the Colorado River. Purify all water.

If a dry camp on the hike out is planned then think about caching water on the descent. Caches should not be visible from the trail; other hikers do not want to see it and unscrupulous hikers will drink your water. Write your name on your cache and date it. **REMEMBER TO PACK OUT UNUSED CACHES!**

Campsites

First and last night camps exist near the top and bottom of the Redwall. Nice camps also exist where the trail meets Shinumo Creek and upstream from there at the confluence of White and Shinumo. Limited sites exist along Shimuno Ck. There are sites available at the river but be prepared to share the popular beach camp with river runners and ringtail cats. Ringtails can be very aggressive about getting into your pack and looking for food, so be sure to have a way to safely store your provisions! The entire North Bass Trail is in the North Bass Use Area (AS9).

Important Notes

In 2005 the National Park Service trail crew restored several miles of this trail to its historic alignment. This alignment may be different from what is shown on some maps.

Do not drive off-road to go around fallen trees.

The lower mile of Whites Creek is worth exploring for its lovely Tapeats narrows. Additionally, a cairned route on creek left allows hikers to exit the canyon. The adventurous can use this exit point to gain the Tonto bench and loop back around to the Bass trail.

The North Bass Trail follows the White and Shinumo Creek drainage and is susceptible to flash floods. Shinumo Creek may be dangerous to cross during weeks when the North Rim snow pack is melting. Much of the trail is marked by cairns. Follow cairns at your own discretion...in doing so, you assume that the person who placed them was not lost.