

Descents

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Photo: John Hart

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Descents Magazine
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Editor: Michael Dallin

The Descents Magazine is a non-profit, free quarterly publication by canyoneering enthusiasts around the globe. It was established in 2006. Current and back issues can be found at www.coloradocanyons.org.

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Cover Photo: “Descending a Tributary of West Clear Creek, Arizona,” by John Hart

A Note From The Editor

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Descents Magazine! This magazine is a digest of various internet-based canyoneering discussion groups, news sources and web pages. It is made possible by the many kind canyoneers who post their writings and photographs on the internet, and who have given me permission to reproduce them here. A very heartfelt thanks to you all!

This magazine is simply a tool for canyoneers to keep up on the latest news, trip reports and techniques, particularly for those who don't have the time or inclination to participate on the various internet-based discussion forums.

There is no set schedule for publishing – rather, I'll publish a new issue when it gets long enough (20-30 pages).

I try to publish articles covering as wide a geographic diversity as possible, both throughout the US and, hopefully in the near future, across the globe. If you have anything to submit, please drop me a line. You retain the copyright to your work, and nobody ever pays for a copy of this magazine – it is distributed electronically for free, and it is a volunteer effort to edit it together.

Thanks for reading, and I hope you enjoy the magazine!

Michael Dallin, 12/19/2005

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Disclaimer: Canyoneering may subject you to various hazards, including, but not limited to, falling, rock fall, injuries from exposure, such as hypothermia, hyperthermia and dehydration, drowning, flash floods, equipment failure, and many other hazards. You should only descend canyons that are within your ability, after carefully judging the safety of the route and your personal preparedness. Do not attempt any of the canyons described in this magazine unless you have obtained qualified professional instruction or guidance, are knowledgeable about the risks involved, and are willing to assume personal responsibility for all risks associated with these activities. We make no warranties, express or implied, of any kind regarding the contents and descriptions of canyons in this magazine, and expressly disclaim any warranty regarding the accuracy, completeness or reliability of the information contained herein. Use this information at your own risk and do not depend on it as your sole source of information for personal safety or for determining whether to attempt any canyon descent.

Important Stuff

Keyhole Access (Zion National Park, UT)

To reduce impact to the canyon, Rich Carlson is working with the National Park Service to standardize the approach to Keyhole Canyon in Zion National Park. Review the photos and beta on the ACA forum, via:

<http://www.canyoneering.net/forums/showthread.php?p=3141#post3141>

Shenanigans Update (North Wash, UT)

Via Ram:

This reminds me that I never reported the log gone from the 4th narrows in Shenanigan's [aka, the Middle Fork of Butler's West Fork – ed]. It was about 6 inches in diameter and created a drop of 4 feet, right in the tight area. It was always OK to go down there, dark and scary as it was, but often one would try and stem. It was too narrow and down you would go. This spot often held water. In fact, I tried to drown myself there once, when the buckle on my shoe caught on the log and I tried to release it by leaning down canyon. I went to horizontal and less than a foot from the water, when I realized that I was in peril, as I am not too good at breathing water and the shoe was still stuck. A touch of adrenaline and some skin loss on the elbows led to a rapid righting of the ship.

What intrigues is that this narrows is flat now, on the bottom. It was divided into 2 tiers in the past, 4 feet different in height. Both sections long. Maybe 100 feet long. What level is it now? Has it filled in or emptied out? Found a level, uniform, in between? Is there such a thing as "angle of repose" for sandy bottomed canyons? And can it shift? A narrow canyon can look the same, but be several feet higher or lower,

depending on the sand level. If Shenanigan's became a foot lower than it is now, it would be made easier. Many of the squeeze throughs were easiest with bent knees. If 2 feet were added? Another story. Probably much harder. That is way I am so terrified to drop down anywhere, including Scott's spot in Trail. Scour 2 feet out of certain canyons and it would be a nightmare, if not very dangerous. I have started to mentally mark notable spots in canyon narrows and record the height compared to my body, to see if there is real changes, upon my return.

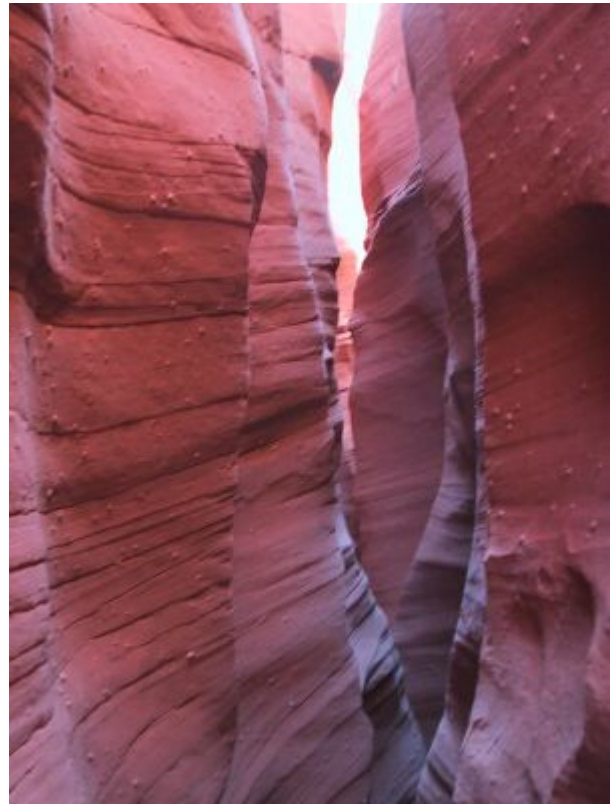


Photo: Narrows in upper Shenanigans, by Michael Dallin

I enter all narrow canyons, with it in mind, that past experience and knowledge of the place may be obsolete and useless. That and the rock fall in Belfast Ave, in the Leprechaun system, that Dave reported from our trip through together, are

fresh reminders that change is a given, in Canyon Country....and that it matters.

Safe Passage
Ram

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26054>

McCoy Creek Update (Colorado)

The Jennings Creek trail, used to access the 14ers Tabeguache and Shavano, along with the McCoy Creek canyoneering route, is closed for restoration. The standard route to these areas is now the Blank Cabin route. You will likely have to set up a car shuttle from the Blank Cabin trailhead, with a second vehicle at the primitive campground where canyoneers exit McCoy Creek (this spot is 6.1 miles up Chaffee County Road 240, from where it meets US 50). More route information is available at:

<http://estes.on-line.com/rmnp/advguide/mccoy.html>

Any current Colorado 14ers climbing guidebook will have in depth information on the Blank Cabin route.



Photo: Fifth falls in very low water, McCoy Creek, by Michael Dallin

Ram tells a story about finding this high mountain gem:

In October 1975, 6 months before I discovered canyons, I was doing these peaks with a fella named Dave Panter. Short on daylight, I implored him to hurry, as I sprinted down the slopes. Into McCoy Gulch I did go. When it started to get rowdy, I saw my "out" on the right and made it to the rim of the gorge and waited for my pal. And waited and waited and waited. Darkness started to descend and I wasn't descending. Call and yell and all. Being a young and foolish whippersnapper, I did not have a flashlight. I waited to the last minute and sprinted home to our makeshift campsite. Started the fire and waited and waited and waited (he had a light) and finally dozed off. It got down to 20 degrees that evening. I was in a panic the next AM and went to a nearby residence, to call for help, when our hero strolled on in. He got gorged out and laid down on a gravel filled ledge and passed the night. Now I was kinda chilled in my bag near the fire, but I could get nothing from him except a casual stoic shrug. Tough dude.

Glad he was with me when we encountered the pack of wild dogs on the side of that Mexican volcano... but that's another story... ;-)

Ram

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26334>

Barney Springs Canyon (AZ)

By Todd Martin

For those that don't know, there is basically one canyoneering book on the market covering AZ. It's called "Canyoneering Arizona" by Tyler Williams. The book mainly contains canyon "hikes", with a few technical things thrown in. Williams recently issued a 2nd edition of this book that includes three new technical canyons:

Lower Waterholes – This is in Kelsey's book, but Williams describes the big drop and the canyon below to the Colorado River. Black Canyon – I haven't done this one yet, it looks like a basalt canyon with flowing water. Barney Springs Canyon – A side canyon of the West Fork of Oak Creek Canyon.

For the most part I think Williams showed good judgment in the canyons he chose to include in his book with the exception of Barney Springs. This one requires a long hike in a remote area, the rappels have awkward starts and it has one large and very difficult to escape keeper pothole. The canyon is currently (as of 7/05) bolt free. The risk of the keeper, I believe, is very much downplayed in the Williams book – he avoids the keeper by climbing out on the side and rappelled around it. My concern is that because the keeper pool is not obvious (you can't see it from the rappel point at the top because of a bend in the canyon), and because the water is incredibly cold year round, someone could find themselves in trouble if relying only on the Williams description.

With that in mind – if you plan to attempt this canyon, please read my write up at:

<http://www.toddshikingguide.com/Hikes/Arizona/Prescott/Sedona7.htm>

I would also advise the following:

Plan on a long day (10 hours minimum with a very fast group, more likely it will take 12+ hours).

Wait until summer.

Bring a small, capable, and fast group. Identify and avoid the keeper (I've always gone through the pothole, but can say from experience that this is a real challenge if water levels are low). Please don't be the first to place bolts; obvious natural anchors are available at each drop.

After having said all that, the canyon really isn't one of my favorites. There is one nice section, but it is short. Our nickname for the canyon is Deadwood due to the many fallen and rotting trees that must be climbed over, under and through.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26104>

Descents

Gorge Creek (WA)

In summer, 2003 Steve Brezovec and Ram visited Gorge Creek and attempted a descent.



Photo: Gorge Creek from the bridge, by Robert Cobb

Steve Brezovec writes:

RAM was on his 16th (?) day in the Cascades. I had joined him for the first four (Harrowing! Mt. Torment, Shark's Fin, Mt. Sahale, and down the Sahale Arm in 3 1/2 days - scary crap, read RAM's upcoming TR for more info). Now we thought we'd cap the trip with a canyon descent.

RAM and I are idiots. We assessed Gorge Creek from the Road and rationalized ourselves capable. Fools. The wetsuit I brought for RAM didn't fit, so he went without. I wore a drysuit. We brought one 200' rope. We forgot a knife (we ended up trading some people in the parking lot a beer for a micro-cheapie Swiss army - thanks folks!) Neither of us had neoprene socks. RAM had no canyoneeros. Inadequate webbing. No bolt kit (only had a hammer anyway, we need a power drill).

Fortune favors the brave (and the foolish). We begin up the ascent route on a social trail, quite a bit past noon (closer to 2pm?). RAM casts some foreshadowing "I'm sure glad I won't be coming back down this way"....

1/2 way up, I spot what I think is a sling on the higher of two 100+ falls. Guess this ain't a first descent, I reckon. Good sign? We soon find the drainage access - we consider rapping this less-than- 200' falls slightly to the side off a tree, but we lack the adequate pull cord. Doh! Would be beautiful with two 200'. D/C a vegetated nose LDC right instead. Boulder hop, boulder hop. Wow this is a lot of flow. More than I was interested in. 100 cfs? Eek. Both of us know we are woefully inexperienced for these conditions but we don't acknowledge it out loud.

First mandatory rap off a chockstone, RAM wearing only layers of capilene stays dry by bypassing the waterfalls over the chockstone. I do the drainage in my drysuit. Point of no return? Maybe.

Around the corner. Confluence. More CFS. Main falls is out of the question. No bolts. Drat. Maybe no one has been dumb enough to do this before. RAM comments that even though flow is high, this is certainly lower than the flow

normally gets at this time of year, exceptionally low. I shudder.

Down a flume LDC right. Lower flow than the main falls, but 1/2 way down the rap it receives about 1/2 of the main falls water volume. Head-pounder. RAM goes first. Hand signals used to equalize rope length. We tie every single sling and cordelette together on the pull cord side to get enough rope to make the pull. We are idiots. Beautiful, fun 150' rappel. Point of no return? No says RAM, dirt slope up right.



Photo: Ken Leibert in Gorge Creek, by Robert Cobb

We D/C to what, from the road, looked like a series of short drops. In the Cascades, glacier run-off flow is lowest in the early morning and highest at sunset and shortly after (glaciers upstream have been melting most severely and now that water is reaching our vicinity). It is near 5pm and flows are only increasing.

These drops are severe hydraulics. I am no bolter in the CP, but for the Love of Pete, if I ever come back here, I am bringing a very big Bosch hammer drill and scores of bolts. With properly placed bolted anchors, we could have correctly aligned the rappel routes to bypass the deadly hydraulics and come down on the edges of flow, though still in the drainage. The chockstone anchors we had to work with would have killed us. This rap would have necessitated someone

rappelling down into a dangerous hydraulic (perhaps inescapable - we were both thinking "Kolob disaster?"), swimming across to safety, rigging a tyrolean for packs and then a guided rap for the second. And there were probably six more drops like this one. And we were almost out of webbing. And this one and the next had rock anchors, but the next ones didn't.

How would we pull the rope? When it dropped into the hydraulics behind us, it would tangle & lodge and we'd be screwed. Where would we find the next anchor? Building deadmen is fine and good in dry canyons but no way was that going to fly here. 100 Cfs pumping through a 8'-20' wide slot. Yuk. This canyon was overflowing. We were under skilled and under equipped. Wetsuit-less RAM was shivering. We are such idiots.

Run away, run away! RAM suggested a retreat up a dirt slope up canyon. I think it looked good he said...

First 100'-200' is about MIA 2+, maybe 3. (remember, MIA 3 = the difficulty of the actual MIA [exit route out of Kolob Canyon in Zion - ed]). Nasty dirt, no rock, loose trees and entire pine boughs that resemble trees but are actually just broken off branches, tricking you into grabbing them. 200' up RAM says "we better rope up and trade lead"... er what for? This is dirt, there's no pro. I rig two cordelettes and take the first lead. This is MIA 4d - I suggested MIA 5 (hardest know dirt routes) but RAM downgraded when he seconded. I am clearing off inches of heather and moss, digging holds in 70 degree dirt. Any rock to be found is easily pulled apart and thrown down hill. My only pro is a tree 60' above me. Must make Tree! An eternity later I am setting belay, RAM follows then takes the next lead on what I thought would be an easier slope - RAM concurs that it was easier but it looked like a bold lead to me. One pro (several small plants slung together as a unit) and than a

sketchy rock horn anchor at the top. I was happy for a belay.

One more dirty, rope-tangling, slings-tied-together-into-a-pull-cord rappel and were in the upper canyon again. Up a steep dirt exit that RAM finds (MIA 2+) and we are now reversing our route, bushwhacking the trees to the road. A narrow escape.

SteveeB

In 2005, after a dry winter, Gorge Creek saw its first descent. A week later, on Monday, July 25th, a party consisting of Rob Cobb, Joe Bugden, John Hart, Ram, and Charly Oliver completed the second descent.

Charly writes:

After the phone call from Ram at baggage claim in the SeaTac airport on Friday we managed to play “message tag” back and forth and determined a time and place to meet Monday morning. We drove back from Silver Creek Sunday evening and made another visit to SeaTac to pick up John Hart. The next morning we got an early start, hit Starbucks for coffee and rolled out of Seattle to North Cascades National Park where we spotted Ram at our pre- arranged meeting place. We found him sitting at a sunny picnic table, pouring over maps and books, his other favorite pass time. Warm greetings and introductions were followed by a brief recon of one of the Northwest’s “Seven Undescended”, Ladder Creek.

Now there’s a good reason Ladder Creek has yet to see a descent. And it’s not because of lack of desire. Let me give you an idea what it looks like. Imagine a sinuous, twisting slot, featuring pothole after pothole similar in width to many of the narrow slots you’ve seen in southern Utah. Only instead of sandstone it’s granite, and instead of dropping 100 feet in one mile it drops hundreds of feet in less than a mile and oh yeah,

it has a torrent of clear, icy water raging through it. Did I mention it is perched on a steep hillside covered in old growth forest with so much pine duff under foot that walking uphill off the trail is not a whole lot unlike hiking up loose scree? Good thing there was a trail.



Photo: Gorge Creek, by Robert Cobb

The trail offers numerous vantage points from which to view this spectacular slot. “So this is a draught year” I said, or something to that affect. You really couldn’t tell. There was so much water pounding its way through the slot that the whitewater boils at the bottom of each waterfall only just settled into cold black pools before immediately plunging madly over the next drop. It looked like certain death. We could identify great stances at the lip of almost every drop. Problem is, how would you get there from the stance above? “Let’s see, rap into the pool, swim to the edge. Wait a minute. How can you swim to the edge of the pool when the waterfall will

just pound you to the bottom of the pothole and keep you there?" HMMMM...



Photo: Jumping in Gorge Creek, by Robert Cobb

"Wait 'till you see the upper part" Rob said with an evil glint in his eye. But to get there we'd have to leave the trail. Striking uphill following the remnants of an old trail we steadily made progress to our next viewpoint behind an old dilapidated building. Picking our way around the building through the undergrowth Rob and Joe disappeared behind a moss covered boulder as big as the structure next to it. I couldn't help but think this boulder would be awesome sitting in my back yard. Dry it off in the sun, clean off all the moss... "Charly, come here and check this out". Rob called. I carefully picked my way around the boulder painfully conscious of the fact that the pine duff I was walking on was just barely supported over the edge of the void by rotting roots and leaves. I've heard stories of people hiking steep trails in Hawaii only to

disappear through a hole in the undergrowth hanging hundreds of feet above the pounding surf. This stuff didn't look a whole lot more solid. Carefully picking my way down to Rob I leaned out and gazed into the abyss. "That's *****ed up" was all I could come up with to say. The canyon was no more than ten feet across and easily fifty feet deep. It was so dark down there you couldn't see the water except for the fact that it was churned into a white roiling froth. "That's *****ed up!" I managed to say again. Rob just cracked up laughing. It's pretty obvious why this canyon has yet to see a descent. It's going to take a lot of skill and nerves of steel to go down in there. Ok, so Gorge Creek should be a piece of cake, right?

Gorge Creek is a narrow gash in the side of a mountain just a stone's throw from the highway bridge. In fact you can walk out to the middle of the bridge and look strait up the slot. Waterfall after waterfall dropped from above. From this angle they appeared to totally fill the narrow defile. This canyon had been the scene of hasty retreat a few years before when Ram and Steve B made the prudent choice to bail out via a desperately loose gully (I think Ram rated it MIA 4) to avoid the rising water of the afternoon snow melt. Their gallant effort sans wet suits and a bolt kit was worthy of pioneering exploration status. The canyon would have to wait until another time.

In comes Rob, fresh out of a canyoneering course, ticking a season's worth of canyons in Utah and Colorado, realizing on the drive back to Seattle his home turf was chock full of this kind of terrain. Somehow Rob found Ken Leibert, another Seattle local. Ken had turned his interest in southern Utah canyons into an unquenchable thirst (so to speak) for exploring wet canyons in the Pacific Northwest. So earlier this season, in a draught summer with water levels dropping steadily, Rob and Ken went in. They managed to fix a deviation avoiding the murderous waterfall in the tightest part of the narrows but still had to

bail before finishing. Just a week earlier Rob finally made it back with partner Chris Hood from Vancouver and ticked the route. Ecstatic and anxious to see what canyons from different turf thought Rob brought the four of us here first. Joe, (the hotshot from OZ), John (who has done canyons all over the world including Reunion Island), Ram (need I say more) and I were to be the guinea pigs. Would the canyon stand up to our collective critical eye?

What seemed like thousands of feet of steep uphill thrutching (“don’t slip here”) through the dense undergrowth of Washington forest (“is this devils club?”) found us slinging a sturdy pine tree allowing a 100+ foot rap down into the upper gorge. Ram pointed out the down-climb (of course) but we all agreed rappelling in was appropriate. Once in the bottom of the canyon we sorted out gear, donned wet suits and walked down to the first anchor. Blazing hot summer sun reflected off white granite boulders and in no time we were all sweltering in our wetsuits and begging to get into the water. The first drop was over 100 feet down the side of a beautiful horses tail of a waterfall that made the otherwise high friction granite “slick as owl shit on a barn floor” under foot. Committed, we were now ready to drop into the maw.



Photo: Gorge Creek deviation, by Robert Cobb

Rob lead the deviation wanting to test three different solutions for dealing with the problem at hand. In high water rappelling directly down the waterfall is simply out of the question (as Steve B and Ram can attest) so the deviation offers a way to avoid certain drowning. A fifty foot, fifth class traverse leads out to an airy stance on the nose of a prow that hangs directly over a huge chockstone blocking the slot the waterfall conveniently runs behind. A solid anchor on the other side allowed us to rig a guide line and by pulling the deviation rope allowed the remainder of the party to avoid actually getting in the waterfall. High-water problem solved. Unfortunately, the guide rope seemed to be rubbing across a rough edge and each consecutive rappel had to be adjusted to avoid a core shot. (Yes, Koen it was an 8mm rope. Will these yanks ever learn?) As the last guy to come down I was more than a little concerned about this situation. So concerned in fact that I forgot to re-rig the set up to move the knots joining our two ropes to the correct side of the anchor. I clipped in and gently rappelled down careful not to bounce and scrape the rope across that rough edge. Once down of course, this oversight completely prevented retrieval of the rope. Well, I may be slow, but at least I’m stupid.

Rob graciously volunteered to ascend back up, fixed the problem and was back down in no time. This time he rappelled directly through the waterfall, which turned out to be less of a problem than expected. In these conditions the force of the water was significantly diminished and the rap only briefly exposed him to the icy face shot before dropping him in behind the waterfall. Nice. This set of drops look directly out to the highway bridge which by now featured a number of spectators and even a car or two. Great. We’re going to get busted for creating a disturbance and blocking traffic. Oh well, might as well continue on. “Shall we?” Rob said, and off we went.

Another drop into a cave behind a waterfall, a few down-climbs and swims and we were in walking territory. With the bridge directly over our heads we poked through the trash people can't seem to resist dropping. Coins, cans, and old highway sign identifying "Gorge Creek" and three of those big plastic orange highway barriers, you know, the ones with the flashing yellow lights on top? Those must have been fun.

A brief walk out to the lake to change out of wetsuits and fairly painless scramble back up the steep hillside through the forest and talus to the road and we were back at the car. "Well, what did you think?" queried Rob. All we could do was grin.



Photo: John Hart in Gorge Creek, by Robert Cobb

Ram's perspective on the canyon:

I have a day to kill and I solo a moderate mountain named Snowking. Moderate in

difficulty, but long on ascent. With ups and downs, 7,400 feet of climbing. The high ankle sprain, up high on the peak, reminds me that even the easy ones are still places to respect! Eleven hours and ten minutes round trip. I am no Buzz Burrell, but I can still pull a hill.

A check of my message phone confirms. Not only can I join them canyoneering on my last day in Washington, they can fully outfit me in wet suits, neos, shoes. Now the prize.....They are coming up to me, to do the canyon Stevie B and I tried 2 years earlier, Gorge Creek. I am disappointed to hear that they had finished this virgin just the week before, but hey, beggars can't be choosers.

Nine AM the next day and they join me a few miles from the canyon. Out of the car pours some familiar faces. Charly Oliver, John Hart and a fellow I will call the "RC" Cola man. Another of those publicity shy fellas, The RC man is a local pioneer (Along with Dave, Ken, Chris and others). He goes out and finds good canyons. Scouts from the rim, enters from the top and bottom and generally scours the turf until a canyon is anchored and established, all the time displaying a huge child like passion, belying his 40 plus years. Gotta love it. Also joining us, from down under, Aussie 'DD'. I had never met 'DD', but we had chatted and I was looking forward to our day together. Poor 'DD' humors us old timers. In his 20's, he is hanging with the balding and white hair crowd.

Stevie and I had entered Gorge Creek, in high water, under equipped and had danced up to the precipice and then danced back, using a steep dirt gully as an exit. What would we find now?

Water was lower than anyone could recall. A big plus in the great northwest, where it can easily be unmanagable high. Water was still pouring in hard. We did a low angle 100 foot rap into the channel and over to the top of the biggest falls. Another 100 foot rap, with water spraying you

on its second half. Now around the corner to Stevee's and my low point. A quarter mile away, the highway spans the large gorge and we would be spied upon, by tourists, the rest of the way.

The next rap was tricky. You could not tell what the bottom of it looked like. Perhaps a deadly maelstrom? The RC man led out on a ledge and was lowered down to the top of some chockstones, at the next anchor. A guided rap was set and off we went, gliding above the pounding waterfall. When it came time to pull the ropes.... oops... guess it won't pull when a knot is on one side and a biner block is on the other. Such experienced folks as us, making such a basic boo boo. I will take credit for the screw up, as I have no reputation to lose.

Energy surging thru RC man, he insists on the jug up to fix the mess. Awkward getting past those big chockstones. Fortunately, he was not in the main flow of the creek. After the next rap, a sound from above and the cry of ROCK! echoes. You don't look up. Make yourself small and look down or over. It was in this position that I saw a rock hit the wall 25 yards over and head directly at 'DD' and I. Like a guided missile. It hit a few inches from 'DD' and shattered. Granite souvenirs for the taking. Earlier in the week, I was plucked on the helmet by a fist sized rock on Mt. Forbidden's north ridge. Helmets, my friends. Helmets, work.

The next drop threatened to have the full force of the falls get ya, but you slip underneath and into a spray filled waterfall room of amazing beauty. The echoes and the lighting!! Some down climbs and several swims come next. The canyon eases, as you pass under the bridge and head down toward Diablo Lake. Humans can be such pigs. The garbage we picked up.....and the 5 foot high road cones that someone enjoyed letting fly. 'DD' and I wrestled a pair of cones, while rock hopping, a few hundred yards and placed them out of sight of the road. Hopefully fellow descenders will take them a little further toward

civilization. A steep climb up forest and talus and we are done.

Man, Oh man, did I have a ball. The Pacific Northwest is an area full of canyons waiting for the right spirit to own its secrets. Thanx to all and the RC man in particular, for outfitting me....and no, I didn't pee in your new wet suit.



Photo: Gorge Creek bridge and sign, by Robert Cobb

Gorge Creek Beta

This beautiful and challenging canyon is readily accessible from the North Cascades Highway. A highway bridge crosses the gorge far above the creek providing an outstanding view of several waterfalls cascading through a narrow slot. Gorge Creek is recommended only for experienced canyoneers who are comfortable with rappels in swift water canyons. Plan on doing five or six rappels, a few short swims, and some belayed downclimbing. The water shed is

quite small, but high elevation snowfields insure a steady water flow through the summer. Gorge Creek has been significantly altered by recent floods. Photos of the slot taken five years ago look much different from the canyon today. It is possible that future flooding may alter the canyon again, wiping out anchors, and rendering this route description obsolete.

Gorge Creek has two forks. The route description below is only for the lower part of the canyon, most of which can be seen from the bridge. Above the confluence of the two forks, the canyon continues steeply up the mountain side for another mile. We have little beta on the upper section, but there are definitely more falls. To get there take state highway 20, (The North Cascades Highway) two miles east of Newhalem. There is a large signed parking area right before the bridge.

Cross the bridge and hike up through the forest on the east side of the canyon. It is quite steep at first. The brush is minimal, and you might find some game trails. After 15 minutes you will be hiking near the east rim of the upper canyon. A waterfall spilling down the east wall of the canyon comes into sight. This is the confluence of the two forks. About 100 yards down stream of the water fall you can rappel 130 feet down slabs to the canyon floor. If you would prefer a longer trip, then hike upwards in the forest for as long as you like before descending into the canyon.

Once on the canyon floor you soon reach the top of the first major waterfall which is visible from the road. There is a pinch on the right side of the canyon and a two bolt anchor on the rock face next to it. The anchor is well situated to make rope retrieval easy. It is a 160 foot rap down the right margin of the waterfall. Next the creek drops down a waterfall in a narrow slot, flows under a chock stone and drops in another waterfall. There are three ways to handle this. On the right side there is a ledge system that slopes

outward and sharply downward. There is a belay anchor at the beginning of the ledge. Traverse the exposed ledge (there are bolts for protection). The climbing is easy, but the rock may be wet and slippery. Follow the ledge down past a sloping platform to a two bolt anchor at an airy perch which can hold three people. Rap about 40 feet to the top of the chockstone. To the left of the chockstone there is a two bolt anchor.

The second option (if the water is low enough) is to rappel down the water fall starting on the right and then going through and behind it. The third option is to set up a guided rappel from the bolt anchor at the top to the two bolt anchor next to the chockstone. When you reach the chockstone rappel about 35 feet into a narrow slot which requires swimming. The next waterfall has an even bigger chockstone wedged right in front of it. There is a two bolt anchor on the left. You can do a thirty foot rappel right through the top of the waterfall into the overhang behind it. This is a really cool spot. A less interesting, but safer option if the water is too high is to rap in front of the chockstone from a ledge on the left. There is no anchor for this, so you will have to add one if you choose this route.

Swim down canyon to a 15 foot high cascade. This has been downclimbed, but it is easier to make a short rappel. A rock on the left can take a sling. Where Gorge Creek flows into the lake, scramble up steep wooded slopes on the left. It takes about ten minutes to reach the highway. Allow four to six hours round trip.

You will need wetsuit, helmet, two 60 meter ropes, 30 to 40 feet of webbing, and five or six runners with carabiners for protection on the ledge traverse.

Map: USGS Diablo Dam quad

Beta courtesy of Ken Leibert and Canyoneering Northwest:

<http://www.canyoneeringnorthwest.hopto.org/>

Canyon Day Of The Year

By Amy and Ram

Just back from some work. My job often has times where my mind can drift to places that I would rather be. I know you're supposed to stay in the present, but with a good memory, sometimes it is more fun to be "other places" in my mind. Another fun adventure season is winding down (Although I have one more trip left) and like many folks, I am making my lists of adventures past, and checking my list twice



Photo: Swimming before the second log jam, May 2004, Black Hole, by Michael Dallin

The Canyon day of the year for me was hard to pick. A dozen or more stand out. I'll pick one now....The family descent of the Black Hole, in March. It was just us 4 and the conditions were still challenging and not without some risk. With apprehension before, we pulled it off in style.

Wonderful. What were everyone else's "Day to Remember?"

Family Hole story below. These stories were posted in March. Ten year old Amy first:

You folks wanted another story well here it is.

My whole body was shaking like jiggly jell-O. As my brother announced that we were trapped by a log jam in the Black Hole!

It was a beautiful winter day in Utah, and I was sitting motionless in the car thinking hard about the stories and rules my dad had told us last night. They were about the Black Hole. Fear spread through out my body, and streams of tears came from my eyes. My dad noticed me in the car and asked what was wrong. I told him all my fears, worries, and concerns. He made me feel a lot better. He even offered to do another canyon, but I shook my head vigorously. I at least wanted to know if I had the potential to do it. We packed up and left for the Black Hole. We plopped our backpack on and stumbled down the rocky down climb, and through the White canyon. We suited up near the entrance. I wore 3 wetsuits. I was trembling all over. There was a couple down climbs. When I looked ahead I saw about 100 logs jammed and ten feet below it was an open area were you could walk. Then there was a down climb with a curved log, but we made it down no problem. My brother peeked ahead and there were logs. My brother told my dad that we were stuck. So my dad leap into the little water area and started to dig at the logs. I clenched my moms hand because I was scared that the logs might claps on my dad, but he managed to make a hole big enough for mom, Aaron, and me. Swimming took a lot out of me and finally we found the second log jam. There was a rule for this one it was don't go on any logs that were near any one else. We carefully walked on the logs. Then my dad digged again, and we crammed food in are mouths. After, we kept on walking. Till we reached another log jam that if

you put your foot in the wrong place you could fall six feet into water. There were a couple more swims, but we were mostly down the canyon. The only thing left was the hike out the high canyon wall.

Even though it was an extremely cold canyon it was also the most beautiful canyon I have ever done. I felt really good about doing that canyon because I thought I couldn't do it at first, but now I know I can.

Amy Ramras

What WAS I thinking? And worse, what was I planning? This 10 year old girl had tears streaming down her face. As she walked about, her eyes averted mine, shame and fear evident. Her shoulders and head lurched up and down as she tried to suppress the volcano of emotion, screaming to loose itself. The family was preparing for the days canyon, having just awakened an hour earlier. And I knew I had created the agony...for her and me.

The day before had dawned very cold and windy. It was mid March, after all. We had set up tarp shelters in the lee of the wind, behind a small knoll, facing the early morning sun. Felt snug and warm, until you moved a few yards away from our controlled environment. Back to the bags. It would be Noon before we would start our day's canyon. We did East Blarney, the lesser and more distant of the two Blarneys and found it delightful. The day warmed, the wind quit and a turn for the better, weather wise was at hand. Aaron and I would roll back up the hill and tag West Shillelagh, in the late PM. I played the part of instructor, teaching him "the ropes." Talk about endangering children! What do they say? Those that can't do, teach! I am smart enough not to overreach. The day brought us all closer and had a warm glow to it.

The weather stayed warm, as the evening approached. The Ram Family Canyoneers had

one more day alone, before the canyoneering friends of the family, would swell our ranks again. Tomorrow promised to be, aside from Day 1's Cheesebox, the trips warmest. What to do? Lots of places on the list, but we keep coming back to the Black Hole. Bucky was coming in a few days. He wanted to do this gem. We would have liked to save it for him, but you must do the canyon that "fits" the conditions and so it is decided. The Hole it would be.

Aaron had done the Black Hole four years earlier, when he was 10, with Pitney and I, on a 4 day trip of Cheesebox, The Hole and a 5th class route on Longs Peak in Colorado. Judy had done the Hole on a cool April day, with only a shorty wet suit, back in 1986. My last 3 visits had all been on New Year's Day. Amy had heard of the place for years and coveted the experience. But things had changed. A year and a half earlier, a series of monster flash floods had swept through the canyon, depositing huge log jams and laying logs, weighing tons about, like match sticks, easily dislodged with even a gentle push. But I had been through twice, the last time just 10 1/2 weeks earlier and conditions had improved in the canyon, to such a degree, that I felt, with the correct precautions, that it would be safe for the Ram Clan. Was this arrogance? Or recklessness? Or foolishness? Perhaps. And so, after dinner and around the fire, the "night before," I laid out the rules of engagement.

The most important thing to remember is that two people cannot be on the same log or the second person cannot even be next to log that someone else is on. We had seen logs roll with potential crushing force. One must stay in the channel. To go up onto benches, near the water course, puts you among big and unstable logs. When one is swimming and the water in full of logs, what has become known as log soup, we must, as a group, pass the logs back, person to person, to make room to swim forward. And finally, no one can refuse any food. Finicky, youthful eaters be damned, full calories ahead!

After my presentation, the rules were agreed upon. Perhaps, if I had been watching more carefully, I would have seen that my dramatic approach, meant to drive home the importance of the rules, had cast doubt into my young one's heart and mind. To bed we went and when we awoke and started making preparations, I came face to face with the tearful and fearful young lady, whose night's sleep I had infected with reservations.

I played at ignoring her reaction, at first, but what I was really doing was thinking it through. Buying time. Could I bring her back on program and alleviate her fears? And should I? Finally, I asked Amy to have a seat in the car and I sat nearby. The volcano erupted as a lava flow of tears accompanied a strongly stated desire to GO HOME! I gently asked her to put words to her concerns. Lets just say, that the dangers I had warned her of, the night before, had grown in her mind to such an extent, that doom was the only result she could foresee. At this point, we worked through each of the concerns, one at a time. Taking the big monster and slicing him into digestible parts and soon the confidence was born again. As she walked away, all smiles and enthusiasm again, I felt a weight and a doubt about what I had just done...then I let it go. Time to adventure.

We had come out in 2 cars. How utterly American, but what a relief not to be 4 people crammed into one car for 9 days. We spotted a car at the bottom, and started our walk to the entry canyon. I hung out with Amy, as we chatted our way down the hill, in full, windless sun. The canyon bottom was dry and we made a left turn at White Canyon, full of enthusiasm, with stories flowing freely back and forth. Checked out the abundant petrified wood, talked about quicksand and enjoyed a canyon whose beauty is often missed and underrated, due to the emphasis on the wet and cold of the Black Hole section proper.

Finally we came to the suit up spot. Out came the wetsuits and we crammed ourselves, sweating, into them. Amy had a full suit, a jacket and a shorty. All 2 mm. She looked like a mummy. Aaron and Judy had killer jackets to supplement their 3mm full suits. I was in a hole laced 3mm, with a shredded 2mm jacket, but hey, I love to suffer. We ate as much as we could stomach. The swimmer hole in front of us...wasn't. It had changed since January. Waist deep and on we went. The 1st swim was at the bottom of the "barrel" section's downclimb.



Photo: First log jam, Black Hole, in May 2004, by Michael Dallin

The first log jam, rising 40 feet up in the air, is an awing sight. I kept silent about it as we approached it, keeping an eye on everyone, waiting to see the look in their eyes and their exclamations when they first noticed it. Amy saw it first, with a WHOA! Aaron turned and looked at me slack jawed. Judy was all smiles.

Good news. The path under the jam is wide open and I sit back taking silhouette photos of my children under a mountain of logs. We are entering the Hole proper now. Judy and Amy downclimb the chimney and Aaron and I do the jump over. A couple of quick swims ensue. We arrive at the spot where the long swim starts. Big logs jam and block the way. Debris clogs the gaps. It would be a 12 foot climb up, and an awkward pirouette, and then an overhanging downclimb, into a swim. Too dangerous. I start to doubt the wisdom of being here, for the first time since we have entered the canyon. Retreat would be possible, but difficult. I check the debris piles and guess that the upper logs are independently wedged. I drop into a swimmer and start to tunnel, holding my breath, as my startled family looks on. I tear at logs big and small, pushing the debris behind me and a hole opens up and the big logs above remain stable. Into the gap we go, feet first and under the limbo stick. Swim.....The sounds of youthful joy echoing in our wet cavern. It is working again.

I am in the rear and 15 minutes later I hear Aaron, out front, proclaim loudly, with certainty and anxiety. The way is blocked. We will have to go back, he declared. I try, with some effort to slip past folks and investigate. It is the same crux as last January, but conditions appear worse. Gulp. I carefully help the brood up onto a rock and break out the food barrel. EAT, I demand and they comply. I look at the problem. In January, all I had to do was slip down into the water and dig out some debris and a tunnel appeared, albeit filled with log soup. This time, a pile of logs 4 feet thick blocked the access to the tunnel and obscuring any view of the critical doorway to the lower canyon. While they focused on eating, I, with careful consideration, untangled the log jam, hoping to avoid the straw that could break the Ram's... errr... camel's back. Finally, I could descend to the water and was able to dig out the passageway. What I saw inspired. No log soup, just a 25 foot long, dark tunnel of swimming, with light from down

canyon reflecting off the water. It was so beautiful....and relieving. I climbed back up, snacked quickly and helped them down, one by one. Each in turn let out a "WOW" when they came into view of the tunnel.



Photo: Logs at the end of the Black Hole, May 2004, by Michael Dallin

The Hole section had some more swims and one difficult downclimb, but the mood lightened, as the worst was behind us. We walked smartly through shallow pools that reflected the hidden sunlight. The Minihole section, a wader in January, was a full and long swimmer now. We found our way to some dim sunlight, as the day had grayed up, and off went the wet suits and huge amounts of snacks were consumed. Deep fatigue was present, but pride and joy ruled. Aaron's jacket was so tight that his circulation was hindered and he had useless hands for another half hour. A tad chilled, we moved briskly to the canyon end and the climb out. Finally warming on the upclimb, we arrive at the

car, gather our cached change of clothes and deposited a ton of wet neoprene on the desert floor. We packed it all up into large garbage bags, did the car shuttle and drove to Hite. Using the picnic table, the nearby building blocking the wind and pumped out a chili dinner, to the delight of all....except the clean up crew. A warm glow, gentle smiles and satisfaction ruled the mood. We had pulled it off.



Photo: Below the Black Hole, in May 2004, by Michael Dallin

Back in the car, we drove hard, back to the campsite, arriving 8 minutes late (6:08PM) for our meeting with friends, who had traveled for a social evening. Ryan Cornia was back. Mike "the Skunkman" Putiak and his friend Gary came down from Hanksville lodging to share a fire with us. When we arrived, we became a whirlwind of activity, hanging wet gear everywhere, gathering kindling for the fire and setting up the "circle." Gary having just met us, was dazzled by our frenzied focus. But 15

minutes later, our tasks done, we settled down and exhaled, in a way, for the first time all day. A magic night around the fire, with friends, old and new. But we didn't stay up too late. More canyons were on the docket, for the next day.

Conditions in the Hole continue to improve, but each flood brings more debris into the few remaining snags. As long as this condition exists, each passage will bring its own set of surprises. Big floods will shuffle the deck. I consider it safe enough for experienced canyoneers, as long as they follow the rules that the canyon spells out for you. Or write Amy and she can review them for you.

We knew it that very evening. A week after the trip, it is confirmed, in all our minds. The Ram Clan is in agreement. The Black Hole was the trips centerpiece. A thrilling, chilling day, laced with beauty, challenge and uncertainty. It left a great taste in our mouths.

Please.....

I beg you.....Don't tell Social Services!

Ram

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26316>

An Unexpected Sleepover

By Eric Godfrey

School has started and it is time to sneak in a quick trip over the holiday weekend, since trips will become even less frequent now that I am doing school full time. I contacted a few different people about taking a trip down to the Swell or the Roost to do some canyons, but everyone seemed to be too busy to fit it into their schedules. I started to think that I would end up spending the weekend watching season openers for college football instead of Canyoneering... what a tragedy. Then came a phone call, a group

of guys from St. George that I met at the ACA canyoneering course gave me a call at the last minute and invited me to come down to Zion. I did Spry with them back in the spring shortly after taking the ACA course but hadn't done a canyon with them since (they hadn't done another canyon since period). They are a nice group of guys and considering the alternative it wasn't much of a choice. I was off to Provo to meet up with them.

We raced down to Cedar City to pick up wetsuits before the Mountain Shop closed. We missed it by about 10 minutes, but luckily I know the girl that was working that night and she hung around to ring us up. We hoped to make it to the backcountry desk to get our permits before 7 pm, but started the drive too late and didn't even come close. I was a little nervous of the fact that I didn't really know a couple of the guys going with us or their actual ability. I was assured that one of the two I didn't know was an experienced rock climber and had a lot of experience rappelling and all that, so that made me feel a little better, but it sounded like I was by far the most experienced in the group (a little scary in itself) and they were trusting me to take charge and get everything figured out. (I was the only one that brought maps and route descriptions... what they were planning on doing if I didn't come I don't know.) I was also nervous of the fact that we were going to start late due to having to stand in line for a permit in the morning.

Five thirty a.m. the alarm rang out. We threw down a little breakfast, packed our gear in the car and headed out of St George (where most of the group was from, we stayed at their parents houses). We reached the permit window a few minutes before 7:00 and sure enough the line was long as ever. An hour of waiting and talking to the guys in front of us in line about mine and theirs recent trip down Heaps (they did it in shorty's by the way. Did it in one day and reached the last rappel by 2:30, needless to say they moved QUICK because they were freezing

their butts off. The one guy said he shivered for five hours straight. They were doing it again on Sunday with shorty's. I guess some people enjoy being miserable in the canyons... I don't get it).



Photo: Roland rappelling, Nate providing backup, in Kolob, by Eric Godfrey

An hour passes and as eight o'clock rolls around we finally have our permits. We hop in the car and drive to the West Rim Trailhead to find our way into the canyon.

Nine o'clock we start hiking down the old logging road. I am the only one with a map and route description so I am automatically in charge of finding the way into the canyon. We are looking for a fork in the road but never see it. I can tell from the terrain that we are past the pass we are supposed to go up so we stop to do some situational assessment (that's for you Ben). One of the guys was debating whether he should bring his GPS or not, but luckily decided to bring

it. I had him pull it out since we have it and we confirm from the coordinates that we are slightly off track. We backtrack a little and find our way over the pass and down to the road we were supposed to follow in the first place.



Photo: Dustin on the 2-tier waterfall, Kolob Canyon, by Roland Miguel

After a bit of hiking we make our way down to Kolob Creek. The water district said they were releasing 3 cfs from the reservoir, but Ray at the permit window advised us that with added spring flow this year plus possible water coming over the spillway because of rain, the flow could be higher. At first glance the flow looked fairly significant. Shane's description said if it is flowing more than a trickle, don't go. This looked like more than a trickle so we all stopped and assessed the situation again. We pulled out

our amazing mathematical skills and did what was suggested on the canyons/canyoneering forums, we found in one spot the average depth was about 3 inches. The creek was around 9 feet wide, and by throwing a stick in the water it moved about one foot in one second, so from that we figured it is running around 3 cfs. Perfect! Exactly what we were hoping for.

We continued on until we came to the first rappel. It was great fun watching Jessie, a BYU student from Texas who had done a lot of climbing and rappelling but had never been to Zion, get overly excited about how awesome and beautiful the canyon was. He was getting really excited already, and we hadn't even dropped into the canyon yet... this was going to be fun.

Before suiting up we ate a little lunch then threw on our gear and headed down. I went down first so I could set up the next rappel while everyone else went down. Dustin wanted to be last so he could get some experience with making sure the rope will pull etc etc... So we stayed in this order throughout the rest of the trip. Looking at the first waterfall from above and now from below it was easy to determine that our calculation was correct and that the flow in the canyon was not at all too much, it was just right.

The technical section was full of rappel's down waterfalls, swimming through frigid pools, a few fun jumps, at least one good downclimb, and a really fun waterslide (the first time down I held on to the rope to make sure it was ok to slide, then I climbed back up the rope and slid down it three more times while waiting for everyone to finish the big rappel above). One of the members of our party I learned as beginning the canyon had only rappelled one time in his life, this slowed us down slightly but he did a great job. Another thing I learned after doing the first 140+ foot rappel, one friend who claimed he had a 60 meter static rope, actually had a 60 meter dynamic rope. He still claims it's static, but that thing was like rapping down a bungee cord by

the time you reached the bottom of the long raps! This slowed us down slightly also. Some rappels seemed to take quite a while because of the fact that there were six of us that needed to make our way down the rope at each drop too.

After finishing the technical section the long scenic hike along the slippery rocks of Kolob Creek began. The tall waterfall dropping into the canyon from the rim was very impressive as it had a decent flow coming down it. Some of the members of the group were not used to the slippery rock hiking and there was a lot of slipping and falling going on. Some guys seemed pretty frustrated, but with the late start and all the time it took us to get through the technical section, we needed to move as quickly as possible. Three of us took the lead, and three others would fall behind. Occasionally we would stop and wait ten minutes or so to let the others catch up. The hike out seemed extra long because of the added stress of trying to make it to the exit before dark, everyone was hungry and tired but we really didn't have time to rest so we kept on hiking. After a couple of hours we finally reached the MIA exit. It was about 7:30 and I pulled a little food out of my pack and threw it down as fast as I could while we waited for the lagging three to catch up. Everyone was starving and we needed to refill water before climbing out so as quickly as we could we did all that and started our way up the MIA around 8:00.

The MIA was everything everyone said it was, we followed the instructions in our description as best we could. The first exit canyon started to steepen up quite a bit and we looked desperately for the pass we were supposed to locate and climb over. It was getting dark at this point and was hard to see much. We searched high and low trying to find footprints or something we could follow to the pass. Two of us went down to scout out a trail while the others waited. We looked for a bit and finally found a decent social trail going in the direction we wanted. We called the others over and started up the trail with our headlamps

ablaze. The trail ended with a 5.something exposed section and we all decided maybe this trail wasn't the best one to follow. We started to make our way across back to the main drainage where I found another set of footprints and decided to give them a try. Luckily this set took us to the pass, with the hoodoo we had been searching for, for the last hour or so. Now our next task was to make our way down to the actual exit drainage. I again took the lead and followed another social trail into a side drainage. I was worried that we were on the wrong trail because this side drainage wasn't mentioned in the description I had. We hoped for the best, thinking if we are lucky this will drop us easily into the drainage we needed to get into to hike out. It soon slotted up and had a couple minor downclimbs. Once again I took off while everyone else waited, to see if we could follow this to the exit canyon. I climbed down 4 or 5 easy spots and came to a section of two ten or fifteen foot drops. They looked downclimbable, but I didn't know if I would be able to get back up them very easily. We could rap them, but we knew there was a better way, plus who's to say what's below. Didn't look to smart to continue down this slot in the dark. I turned around, climbed back up the slot and told everyone it was a no go. We then went back up the way we came, looking high and low for footprints or something that would indicate a trail into the main drainage, but we couldn't find anything so we opted to climb back up where we came from to the pass with the hoodoo and figure out what we wanted to do from there. By now it was around 11:00 pm and everyone was tired, no one felt like dropping into that canyon again when there was a good chance we would run into another dead end and have to start over again. We all opted to spend the night, the sun would be up in six hours or so, and we knew it would be so much easier to hike out when its light again then trying to find social trails with our headlamps all night. The air temp was fairly warm all night luckily, but most of us were still slightly wet so it was a long cold night for all.



Photo: Top of the MIA Exit, Kolob Canyon, by Roland Miguel

Finally the sun came up; we woke up from our sandy beds, threw our packs on and started up the rest of the MIA once again. We dropped into the side canyon we were in the night before, only this time noticing a trail about fifteen feet from where we were wandering earlier. We followed this trail and it lead straight into the main drainage and it was straightforward climbing to the rim from there. After reaching the rim we ate what little food we had left then hiked the road back to the cars. When we reached the cars we saw multiple park ranger vehicles and wondered if we had started a panic and they were looking for us. There was a note on our car from Ray on Zion's search and rescue squad telling us to call ASAP. As we were driving out we passed one of our group members dad's who was very pleased to see us ok. He informed us that the park vehicles were for a rescue taking place in Imlay, I guess someone broke an arm or leg (I forget which) and they weren't really going to worry about us until they got that person out. I missed my ride back to Salt Lake because of the ordeal, but other than that everyone had a great time. I spent the weekend hanging out with my friends family's until they headed back to Provo Monday night.

Kolob was awesome with all the water flowing,

one of the prettiest canyons around for sure! This story will be included (a MUCH shorter version of course) in my letter to Zion about why I hate the permit system. Of course that wasn't the only reason we spent the night, but if we had one more hour of daylight we would have at least made it to the road, and I think we could have handled the roads a little better with headlamps. Live and learn I guess, it was a good experience and luckily I slept better than most on our unexpected night in the canyon, although I did shiver quite a bit. Can't wait for my next adventure!

http://utoutdoors.blogspot.com/2005/09/unexpected-sleepover-kolob-canyon-trip_11.html

The Smell of Winter

By Dave Chenault

Post Thanksgiving in the Roost, my wife Meredith and I are off to enjoy the rest of our temporary retirement. In almost a year living in Moab, we never made it to the Escalante, and I am determined to continue to do what I want, when, despite the conditions. Davis is far easier, technically, then expected (all that rope and harness is good training ballast), but is stunningly scenic and an instant favorite. Neon I solo, because Meredith's judgment says no, and my ambition cries yes. We make an uneasy compromise, and I enjoy full water, swimming in ice, and a fully shattered neck gasket (when I took it off!).

Southern Utah is beautiful this time of year; the daytime temps were great, only issue being (for folks living in a truck) the looong nights. Possible solution, trips extending into the night.

Meredith begs off Birch, after seeing the amount of snow on the ground and ice in the creek. We retreat, and decide that my ambition is still hungry. I'll head down Birch, down Orderville, and she'll pick me up at the Temple

after dark, I say around 7. It's noon. Off I go. Birch is lovely. The first rap is an ice route, which I bypass, and the first rap for me (first bolts) has a small pool at the base. A tension traverse solves this. The rest is excellent, until the penultimate rap brings a 1/2" powers hanging most of the way out (still slung for use). I try to unscrew it, hit it with a rock a few times, no luck. I'm afraid a hacksaw might be necessary for this one. Instead, I move a 12' by 18" pine log into position between a boulder and the canyon wall, and equalize it and the remaining bolt with 50' of webbing. Pity that canyon has bolts, as it's obvious that none of them are needed.

Upper Orderville had me wanting ice skates, or at least crampons. I granny shuffle along, thinking that if this keeps on for long I am in for a long evening. A ways before the first "rap", I drop below the snow line the stream rocks cease their glint. With traction improved I amp up the pace, trying to make as good a time as possible. Am I worried about being out late? Not really, I have more than enough food to stay safe, and it would be quite impossible to get lost. Moving fast gives me something to do, action is the distraction. Ironical, given that I solo to confront my loneliness and then spend the whole time running from it (sometimes quite literally).

The first rap is an indeterminate marker, given that I don't have a map. I slow down slowly, cut natty slings of the two huge bolts, and decide to actually rappel the ice lined chimney. Out of mischief I install a bomber knot chock next to the bolts, with my brightest purple webbing. To cause passersby to think. The base of the rap has one inch ice, frozen a foot about a pool of waist deep water.

Later the drysuit (with blown neck gasket) proves its weight in running water and gorgeous ice flows in the lower reaches. I am entertained by skirting short waterfalls (really don't want to swim in this suit) on ice covered slabs. The only

other moment of note came a quarter mile above Mystery, when a 100' by 40' by 1" sheet of ice cuts loose off the curving slab above slab and shatters at my feet. I was truly stricken dumb and immobile, watching it truck at me. I arrive at the parking lot in time to peel off the suit top and layer up a fleece before Meredith arrives and I inhale food, basking in the metabolic glow of hours and hours on the move.

Two days later, Hidden. A cool ice flow is forming off the west side of Cable Mountain, seems like it must touch down and be climbable most of the time. We found no footprints headed towards Hidden, sun, and a series of an 85 and 60 footer to get into the canyon (the first one ghosted to deprive enterprising tourists of a souvenir). On down Hidden reveals itself to be very straight. No bends. An interesting peculiarity of faulting?

We find lots of fun climbs, a short handline, and two raps. Both raps are ~50', and off fattie logs. The first in particular was a monumentally undercut chockstone system. Very cool. The second had a superfluous bolt, 3/8 powers, easily unscrewed (it was almost there by itself). Note to bolt placers (first, look for options): TAKE THE BLUE BITS OFF BEFORE YOU TAP IT INTO THE STINKING HOLE! Don't carry gear (be it a compass, electric shaver, or bolt kit) you don't know how to use!!!!

Hidden was cool. Casual, long (on hiking), and scenic. Recommended; like everything.

Next to the Grand Canyon. Our truck choose the day of my rim to rim to rim hike (15 hours or so) to not start (corroded cable clamps), thus stranding me (and Meredith who did her own rim to river to rim) in the El Tovar cocktail lounge at 8 pm, 7 miles away from the car. (The shuttle don't run past five.) Do we get the car she says? Hell no I say, my feet and legs hurt more than they ever have (marathon, WRIAD, 18 hour days

lost in the Swell), I want a bath and room service (the cranberry and banana cake is excellent)!!

We leave the big ditch, as ever, knowing and wanting more than when we came. As I progress in knowledge, I find that always I need a bigger cup.

Thanksgiving In Behunin

By Tom Jones

Seems to come up a fair amount this time of year - what can we do that is not too hard or strenuous, in Zion, in the middle of winter? We're not real experienced, so...

My advice is to begin or extend your canyoneering career in the summer, when nature is more forgiving. Here is a repeat of a rescue report from last year:

Ranger Jill Woods was just settling down with a book and an evening cup of tea when the callout came. Employees from the Zion Lodge had been hiking up by the Emerald Pools, heard shouts for help coming from the end of Behunin Canyon, and alerted the Zion SAR team. With snowmelt adding a little flow to the canyon and temperatures on this night in the twenties, this callout in late November, 2004 was much more serious than a similar callout would be in the middle of summer.

Behunin is a moderately difficult technical canyon with ten rappels and is usually dry, making it a popular choice with experienced canyoneers in late fall. With a bit of snow, the canyon runs with water that gets canyoneers and their gear wet, and seriously complicates a descent.

The SAR team assembled, grabbed gear and hiked the mile or so to the bottom of the last rappel. What they found was chilling, literally.

A little water was flowing out of Behunin and forming ice, including icicles hanging off the backpack of the young canyoneer hanging on a rope, halfway down the last rappel.

Jason and Sarah (not their real names) had started the descent that morning, expecting a dry canyon and few difficulties. Close to dark, when setting up the rope for the last rappel, Jason had secured one end of the rope to the anchor, and then tossed the rest of the rope into the air. The other end of the rope, which should have reached the ground, had stuck itself in a crack a few feet below the top. Jason had rappelled halfway down the last drop before noticing that the rope end was stuck, and was unable to pull it free. Without the tools or training to ascend the rope, the canyoneer was left hanging in space, 80 feet above the ground and 80 feet from the top.

At the top of the rappel, Sarah had been unable to assist her friend other than by shouting for help. With the waterfall flowing a few feet away, ice had formed on Jason's back and backpack. Only a stint in the Army gave him the toughness to hang there for four hours, and only luck had their calls for help heard by some of the few people in Zion Canyon that evening.

Luck was on their side that night in another way. Hiking around to the top and descending the canyon to reach the stranded canyoneers would have taken four hours at least - time Jason did not have. By a stroke of luck, hanging from the anchor was a second rope left by another party earlier in the month. The rope had an inch-thick coating of ice on it, so Jason and Sarah had not thought of using it, but it now provided a way to send gear up to Sarah.

The SAR team quickly got to work. They sent a radio up to Sarah and determined she was in good enough shape and competent enough to help with the rescue. They then sent up a large rescue pulley, loaded with a 300-foot rope that Sarah secured to the top anchor with locking

carabiners. Jason was still coherent enough to clip himself into the end of the 300-foot rope, and the rangers lifted him a few feet so he could unclip from his tangled rappel rope. They lowered him to the ground and wrapped him in blankets. The team then pulled the rope up and lowered Sarah to the ground. Pulling the rescue rope was easy, but the tangled rope, the ice-covered rope that saved Jason's life, and the pulley were left to winter-over at the end of Behunin, and provoke curiosity in the first canyoneers to descend the canyon in the spring.

(c) 2005 Tom Jones. Rescue in late November 2004. Information from Zion NP Staff.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26180>

The NEW Escape From Heaps - Isaac Canyon

By Ram

This last weekend, Bucky, Stevee B, Tom and I descended Isaac Canyon. I will be writing up a short report on the trip in the next day or two. Of importance is that we have found an easier and relatively safe way to escape Heaps Canyon, from Crossroads, which is a common camping location, half way through the canyon.

Heaps, with its cold water and climbing challenges, is among, if not, the most challenging canyon in Zion. Below Crossroads, is 4-5 hours of wet and challenging canyon, followed by a 525 foot wall to descend back into the "land of the living."

If a group is hypothermic upon arrival at Crossroads, they are likely to have even more trouble down canyon. Also, a major dry suit failure could also lead someone to consider escaping by another route. Over a decade ago, I escaped Crossroads in very icy conditions, one March, but my exit up Phantom and down

the Right Fork took about 2 full days and was quite complex.

We found our route up into Isaac Canyon and out the Court of the Patriarch's reasonable and mostly dry. I am going to give a route description. I am also going to send it to the Park staff.

From Crossroads, ascend up the South Fork of Heaps. The climbing move at the first dryfall, is the most challenging part of the ascent. A gymnastic mantle move, just 5 feet up, that is aided up with partner assist quite easily and safely. Two other short and safe moves, higher up canyon, are made easy by lifting one's pack up first. Once over the pass and into Isaac Canyon, one rap of 50 feet is encountered quickly and then several moderately difficult downclimbs, with abundant natural anchors available. The final wall starts with a 70 foot free rap off of a log, over a boulder. Avoid the ancient pins. A short downclimb leads to the final drop, which is about 270 feet. It has one bolt and a small corner that takes webbing, for back up, as anchors. The bolt is in the watercourse, so it is vulnerable to flood forces. The final drop can likely be broken into 2 raps, as there is a ledge almost half way down with webbing nearby, although none of us inspected this option carefully. Below the big wall, a landslide and cliff band is passed on the left, looking down valley, after 150 feet of "side of the hill" bushwhack and then down to the social trails and out the Court of the Patriarch's.

This escape route is largely in its wilderness state, so it should not be taken lightly and the final drop is serious and will likely not be set by a series of passing canyoneers, but it offers a drier and easier exit from Heaps, for those in trouble. Also it needs to be considered, that if a party is well behind it's time, that no one will look for you on this bail out route, so consider you options carefully. Still, it is a nice alternative to be aware of.

[Addendum, when asked if this escape route would be an option in the rain, if flash flood conditions hit:]

Both the trip up SF Heaps and the way down Isaac has a few slot sections, but a lot of areas where one can get out of the bottom easily. The canyons were quite vegetated and don't flow

often. There is a section, leading into the grand finale rap in Isaac that would be committing. It is only 100 yards long. Aside from that one section, the route is a sound escape option in all but biblical rains.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26538>

Gear, Technique and Reviews

Rope Marking Tip

By Charly Oliver

Re: Marking the mid-point of a rope:

I know a lot of people don't like using it but after trying numerous options over the years I have settled on plain old coach's tape. You know, the white cloth tape you use for bandages or to tape up for crack climbing.

I peel a piece off the roll about a half inch wide and two inches long. Find the center of my rope. Tie an overhand on a bight about three feet from center (either direction) and clip it to something I can pull on. Weight the rope (to stretch it just a little). Then tightly wrap the tape around rope center. Make sure to stretch the tape as you put it on.

The combination of stretching both the rope and the tape help the tape stick better and not get caught in rap devices etc. as easily. The stuff will still come off (I get up to half a dozen canyons pretty easily) but it's easy to replace, even in the field.

Works pretty good.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26213>

Clip Into The Belay Loop!

By Charly Oliver

Many canyoneers use a canyoning harness with a steel D-ring or clip-in loop specifically designed to conveniently orient the Descent Control Device (DCD). Canyoners who use a climbing harness **MUST** clip their DCD into the belay loop that connects the waist belt and leg loops only. This is recommended by all climbing

harness manufacturers and is completely safe. It does however, turn the DCD 90 degrees out of its most convenient orientation. (see diagram on the Petzl website <http://tinyurl.com/bm7x9> under "3. Use a belay device. Abseiling"). Good reason to get a canyoning harness.

Whether for convenience or a misguided distrust of the belay loop, some people still insist on clipping their DCD carabiner through both the waist belt and leg loops of their climbing harnesses completely avoiding the belay loop. **THIS PRACTICE IS UNSAFE AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS!**

(See the last two diagrams Petzl website <http://tinyurl.com/bm7x9> under "Misuses").

This practice sets the DCD carabiner up to be dangerously cross loaded. A figure 8 or rappel rack can easily apply enough leverage to break the locking barrel on the carabiner allowing the DCD to unclip itself resulting in catastrophic failure. Cross loading the carabiner when using a tube style device could have similar results.

If you are in the habit of clipping into your climbing harness this way to belay or rappel **STOP NOW!** If you see any of your climbing or canyoning partners attach their DCD in this way, explain the problem and insist they clip in properly. Please note: All climbing harness manufacturers specifically recommend the belay loop as the primary attachment point for rappelling.

IF YOU USE A CLIMBING HARNESS FOR CANYONING, CLIP YOUR DCD DIRECTLY INTO THE BELAY LOOP ONLY! DO NOT CLIP YOUR DCD THROUGH THE WAIST BELT AND LEG LOOPS!

<http://www.canyoneering.net/forums/showthread.php?t=656>

Ask The Expert

This is the place for you, the reader, to ask an expert any question about canyoneering. Your question will be forwarded to a group of industry representatives, guides and teachers. Look for the answer in the next issue!

Send your questions to: descents@coloradocanyons.org

Point/Counterpoint

Periodically, we will invite two contributors with opposing viewpoints on a canyoneering-related issue to state their case. Topics will range from fixed anchors to wilderness to techniques, and more. If you are interested in contributing, send a note to descents@coloradocanyons.org with a topic idea. Or, if you are interested in writing an editorial for the magazine, let us know! We are always interested in hearing from you.

In the News

Lonely At The Bottom

The LA Times contained a feature story about local canyoneering in their November 15, 2005 edition.

“THE first step backward over the cliff is always the hardest. Chris Brennen checks his harness and peers over his shoulder at the canyon below. Brilliant yellow leaves dapple the surface of the clear, chilly stream that plunges down through Little Santa Anita Canyon.

”Brennen is going to rappel beside a 40-foot waterfall. At the lip of the fall the wet granite is smooth and greased with brown and green lichen; an unroped slip could be fatal. But the rocket scientist has stepped into thin air many times before...”

Read the full article at:

<http://www.latimes.com/travel/outdoors/la-os-canyoneering15nov15,0,3427816.story?coll=la-home-outdoors>

Pilcher Canyon (Australia) Rescue

SUNDAY 4 DECEMBER 2005.

A 35-strong rescue party toiled all afternoon to carry an injured man from a remote canyon north of Katoomba in the Blue Mountains National Park today.

Strong winds made it unsafe for NRMA CareFlight to winch out the man from Pilcher

Canyon, north of Medlow Bath, in the upper Blue Mountains.

The NRMA CareFlight doctor said the 60-year-old man, from Loftus in Sydney's south, suffered back injuries when he fell down a five-metre embankment at about 10.30 am while walking with a group in the canyon.

While some members stayed with the man, others walked for almost two hours to trek out to alert ambulance officers to his plight at midday.

The NRMA CareFlight doctor and duty SCAT paramedic joined other ambulance officers, Blue Mountains Police Rescue Squad officers and volunteers from the Rural Fire Services in walking in to the man. Because of his injuries the man was stabilised, given pain relief and placed on a stretcher.

Under the supervision of the ambulance and police officers the fire volunteers took two hours to haul the man up four sections of the canyon, each about 30 metres high before he could be carried to Medlow Bath airstrip.

The NRMA CareFlight helicopter defied strong

winds to return to the area and fly the injured man to Nepean Hospital where he was in a serious but stable condition on arrival at 8 pm. The crew doctor praised the efforts of the ambulance and police officers for their rescue skill, and the determination of the fire volunteers in carrying the man out of the canyon.

Posted by Ram, via

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26021>

Desert Highlights

Desert Highlights, Matt Moore's canyoneering guiding service out of Moab, UT, has become the first guiding service in the United States to receive American Canyoneering Association accreditation. Congrats to Matt and the Desert Highlights Team!

<http://www.canyoneering.net/forums/showthread.php?p=3166#post3166>

A discussion on ACA Accreditation can be found at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26351>

On The Web

UT Outdoors Blog

Eric Godfrey has set up a blog with lots of trip reports and photos. It can be found at:

<http://utoutdoors.blogspot.com/>

He also has an online image gallery, at <http://shaggy125.zoto.com/galleries>

AZ Trip Report and Beta

Here's a link to a canyon Tom W and I did over the weekend near Tucson. Nothing exceptional, but some nice scenery and we had perfect weather. Just about right for these short days and cool temps.

<http://www.toddshikingguide.com/Hikes/Arizona/Southeast/Southeast19.htm>

-Todd Martin

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26193>

TurkeyFest 05 Trip Report and Photos

The trip report and photos from Turkeyfest are finally done. See the link below:

<http://www.toddshikngguide.com/TripReports/TripReports.htm> or <http://tinyurl.com/9jrxu>

-Todd Martin

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/message/26009>

Upcoming Events

January 20, 2006: ACA Technical Canyoneering Course, Phoenix AZ. Contact Rich Carlson, www.canyoneering.net.

January 27, 2006: ACA Technical Canyoneering Course, Phoenix AZ. Contact Rich Carlson, www.canyoneering.net.

February 17, 2006: ACA Technical Canyoneering Course, Chatsworth, CA. Contact Rich Carlson, www.canyoneering.net.

February 26, 2006: ACA Technical Canyoneering Course, Chatsworth, CA. Contact Rich Carlson, www.canyoneering.net.

April 08, 2006: International Canyon Rendezvous, Crete. Contact Koen Viaene, pocoloco@skynet.be

June 08, 2006: ACA San Gabriel Canyon Rendezvous, Pasadena CA

October 4, 2006: ACA Fall Canyon Rendezvous, Zion Ponderosa. Contact Rich Carlson, www.canyoneering.net.

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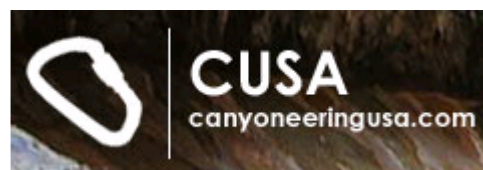
Descents Magazine would like to thank our submitters, as well as three organizations that have been a great help along the road that leads to publication:

The Canyons Group

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/canyons/>



The American Canyoneering Association
www.canyoneering.net



CanyoneeringUSA
www.canyoneeringusa.com