

October 23, 2008

SUMMARY

Nankoweap is rated the hardest Rim-River trail in the Park, and has the biggest vert (at least from one of the two trailheads). It definitely is maintained, but not a lot; mainly it was very minimally constructed to begin with, supposedly by a member of the Powell party, which I find hard to believe, as I do of its reputation as a horse rustling trail. It is done regularly, but not by tourists. The granary at the bottom is the largest Anasazi site in the Canyon. There's good water and a campsite at the Creek. It's hard to approach in the winter. Highly recommended.

APPROACH

There are two completely different approaches, which are a little confusing to understand when reading the online descriptions. I went from the Saddle Mountain TH, which is the highest.

- From Jacob Lake (nice lodge, cafe, and gas station, closes 9PM. About \$100, no 'Net, no cell phone, seasonal USFS VC). Drive 27.3 mi on pavement to FS 611. Go left .8 mi, then right/south at sign "Saddle Mt TH 14 mi". Good gravel rd thru aspens. 1 hr 15 min to TH with sign. Spectacular; the best legal car camping in the Canyon. Start hiking by going 3 mi mostly downhill to NPS TH.
- The Buffalo TH is driven from US 89; it is much lower so easier to access in the late winter/spring. Hike starts by going 3.5 mi all uphill to NPS TH.
- To clarify: from FS 610 (Saddle Mt TH) one takes FS Trail 57 three miles to official Nankoweap TH. Confusing aspect is FS 57 continues 3.5 mi to the other TH, so both TH's start on FS 57.
- The road/conditions/info situation is confusing. From 5/15 - 10/15 call USFS in Jacob Lake. Before/after that the phone rings but no one answers; call the USFS in Freedonia. Calling the NPS BCO at the South Rim usually doesn't work.
- The NPS and all facilities at the N Rim close 10/15 no matter what. The road however stays open until they close it due to snow, which can be anytime after that (usually 11/15). When the gate is up, the NPS says they will give you a ticket for driving around it, but the USFS doesn't care if you use FS roads; figure that out if you can.

TRAIL

- Trailhead (FS 610 or "Saddle Mt), 8800' - Great car park, sign, fire ring. Steep down then up, then down, flat, slightly down; 3 mi.
- NPS Trailhead (Start of Nankoweap Trail), 7560' - sign. Good place to stash water, food, clothes. (I stashed one liter, one burrito, windbreaker, hat, gloves). 11 mi to River
- Marion Point - Quick down, then traverse along Supai to Pt. which has obvious campsite. Rumored seep is 200 M past this point, on left wall just before Tr reaches inside corner. Slow drip - one drop/minute. 1 gal jug filled with water under the drip.
- Tilted Mesa - After more nice traversing, the real business starts as the Tr finally drops off to the West.
- Nankoweap Creek - The trickiest to navigate section is in the gravel slopes with the Creek in sight. Very loose stuff. Good flow in the Creek, with a big spring just below the camp, which is nestled in Cottonwoods. Cottonwoods extend .5 mi downstream, and all the way upstream, but this is the main grove, and adjoins a black lava outcropping. I drank straight out of the Creek.
- River 2760' - No trail to River, but stay mostly on right. 3 mi. At delta, a good trail suddenly forms on right and goes up bank. This goes to granaries and River campsites, which seem more popular downcanyon of delta.
- Granary - Can't miss it, but be prepared to hike fairly high back up above River. A spectacular spot; worth it.
- Supposedly 28 mi RT.

ME

- 23 degrees on top. Took light clothes, dropped most of it at Nankoweap TH, put some of it back on upon return.
- 2 bottle fanny pack, plus dropped 1 liter at N TH; didn't need it but would have on warmer day.
- Filled at Creek (no filter).
- No trouble navigating, but missed trail briefly in gravel slopes low down.
- Started first light - 6:50 AM (AZ time); finished last light - 6:10 PM. No flashlight needed.
- 11.5 hrs going easy. 9:10 R/T on N Trail. Spent time at granary and River; 3:15 R/T from Creek campsite.

NEXT

- Probably not worth running this trail for time; it's too spectacular, loose, and with an uneven gradient.
- Better: saw one other party entire day (Grand Canyon Field Institute). They reported a 300' waterfall with intact Anasazi site 6 miles up right fork of Creek.
- Best: backpack down Nankoweap, connect to Clear Creek Trail, up North Kaibab; beginning/ending with not a bad hike back across rim.
- I find it hard to believe rustlers drove horses stolen in Utah, down Nankoweap, across the river, along river, then back up Tanner, to sell in Arizona. That's a very hard way to make a living. If they want to steal, it would have been much easier to start a hedge fund or sell Credit Default Swaps.