

Grand Canyon Hike: 8-18-06

I started the hike at 6:01am from the South Kaibab Trailhead. I timed it to roughly coincide with the sunrise at 5:43am. Cathy drove me from the Bright Angel Lodge to the trailhead in about 10 minutes.

Confusingly, the turnoff from South Entrance Road (just beyond Mather Point and the Visitor Center) is not marked to indicate that it leads to Yaki Point and the South Kaibab Trailhead. Rather, it just says "Cameron" and "East Entrance". After making the left turn onto Desert View Drive and going for about a mile, there is a sign for the trailhead and Yaki Point. Turn left here and in about a half mile there is a sign for the road to the trailhead. Turn left and proceed to the small parking area at the end. The problem is that you're technically not allowed to drive on this road during the high season. We did anyway and it was okay because we were early enough that the park busses were not yet running. I would not try to park there for any length of time.

There are a couple of Port-A-Potties at the trailhead. The views from the rim are outstanding and the start of the trail is well marked.

At the time I started, the temperature was about 60F and I opted to keep the bottoms to my convertible pants on. I carried my small Marmot backpack and brought my wind-shirt, a wash cloth, two Nalgene's of water, a full bag of beef jerky, a bag of fruit jelly candies, a few Hershey nuggets and a Snackables lunch. My pack was very light, maybe 10 pounds in total. I also wore a tube of sunscreen and Carmex on a cord around my neck. I used both to good advantage. I carried my trekking poles for use later on.

I did the descent at a very controlled pace, with my goal being to get to the Bright Angel Campground in under 2 hours. There was light traffic on the trail: from top to bottom I passed perhaps ten descending hikers. Apart from a mule train of tourists and a pack mule train, I don't remember encountering any ascending hikers.

On the way down I trotted less than a quarter of the way. The trail was pretty well chopped up by mule traffic and not conducive to running. Also, I was trying to be careful and conservative, fearing that the return trip up Bright Angel Trail would be very hot and tiring.

I made rest stops at both Cedar Ridge and Tonto Trail Junction. At Cedar Ridge I removed the bottom portion of my pants. It felt good to be in shorts and I actually should have stripped down before starting. I was extremely grateful for the nice facilities at these stops. Curiously, the Park Service map does not show restrooms at Tonto Trail Junction.

With more than 20 minutes worth of stops on the way down, I was a bit behind schedule in getting to the Black Bridge and the Bright Angel Campground. Still, I was pretty

happy with my pace. The last time I did this route it took me a full 3 hours to get to the Black Bridge.

I had one small mishap on the way down. On a nice running section between Skeleton Point and Tonto Trail Junction, I inexplicably stumbled and skinned my knees. It was no big deal but left me with embarrassing battle scars. I cleaned up at the Tonto Trail rest stop and was glad I brought the wash cloth along.

Route finding on the South Kaibab is no problem at all. If you are paying attention you can't possibly go astray. I had one moment of indecision at Skeleton Point where I overshot a hairpin turn to the right and proceeded to the end of the point. This was quickly corrected and only cost me a couple of minutes delay.

I was surprised at how long the tunnel before the Black Bridge is. It is interesting to go from bright sunlight to darkness in the tunnel. After a few seconds of darkness, you pick up the light at the end of the tunnel and are soon back in dazzling light.

It is an amazingly quick trip from the bridge to Bright Angel Camp. I was happy to get there, fill my water bottles and use the excellent facilities (flush toilets and running water!). Bright Angel Camp is a nice oasis of cool and shady places to sit and relax. While there I ate my Snackables lunch and a few candies and tanked up on water. On the way down I used less than one Nalgene of lemonade-flavored water. It was a good choice to rely mainly on my sipper-bottle for hydration; no sloshing or dripping!

I felt very good at Bright Angel Campground and only rested there long enough to eat something and get water. I more or less forced myself to hang out rather than continue on through. Since I arrived at just a little after 8am, the temperature was still entirely pleasant in spite of full sunlight. I'm glad I stopped but unquestionably could have abbreviated my stay to 10 minutes without any problem. Next trip I'll keep this in mind!

The Silver Bridge is barely a stone's throw from the Campground. It is about the same startlingly short distance as the Tonto Trail to Tipoff leg. It was fun to go over the Bridge and see the Colorado River rushing below. The water was moving fast and looked to be fairly deep. It is a great luxury to have a bridge over this obstacle.

The River Trail traverse to Bright Angel Trail was very enjoyable. It was more up-and-down than I remembered but the River Rest House soon came into view and the ascent up Bright Angel Trail began. It was still a little before 9am and not yet hot. Happily, a few clouds had rolled in by this time and helped keep things reasonably cool. I passed a guy who remarked that he wouldn't want to be there at noontime. Doubtless true!

At 3.1 miles and 1250 vertical feet, the pull up to Indian Garden is the longest stage of the trip. I didn't find the Devil's Corkscrew section to be too bad and it was nice to hop over three small streams and see a refreshing-looking waterfall. The water in the streams looked clear, clean and cool.

It was encouraging to see a few hikers on the way down the trail but I was surprised that the traffic was so light. At Indian Garden there were quite a few people hanging around, including a mule train of tourists on the way down. However, there looked to be lots of open camp sites.

The facilities at Indian Garden are good and plenty of water is available. I filled my water bottle and departed for 3-Mile Rest House after just a quick stay. Once underway and out of the Garden's shady precincts the trail steepened and for the first time I put my trekking poles to work. I had been bemused by the fact that for the last 4 hours I had been uselessly toting the things. After about five minutes I went back to carrying the poles because they weren't properly adjusted for an uphill slog. I resolved to adjust them at the next stop.

Foot-traffic remained light on the way to 3-Mile Rest House. I passed a couple of hikers and for a while thought that I'd have to be quick on my feet to keep up with two young guys who saddled-up 50-feet before I got to their resting place. I kept pace with them for about 10 minutes before they stopped and inexplicably headed back down. Too bad, I would have liked to have had a bit of competition.

I was thrilled to pull in to 3-Mile Rest House less than 5 hours into the trek. At this point, I was tired but knew the remaining distance wasn't bad and felt I had a reasonable chance of finishing within 6 hours. I refilled my water bottle and shortened my trekking poles by about 4 inches during my 5 minute break at the Rest House. I remembered the place fondly from last time; then I was considerably more tired than I was on this trip.

While I felt quite good, I was soon reminded that my legs were no longer as springy as they were at the start of the day. I stumbled a bit and noted that in arresting the lurch my legs were reluctant to cooperate. It took disconcertingly longer than usual for the legs to react and get me back on even keel. In any event, the trip to 1.5-Mile Rest House went quickly despite the fact that the trail was in rotten condition. Once again, I think the mules are to blame. I don't think much maintenance goes into the trails during the high season.

I was disappointed when I saw that it was already 11:30am when I passed 1.5-Mile Rest House. I knew that my chances of finishing in under 6 hours were not good. However, by this time I was extremely happy I had my trekking poles with me. The poles helped me motor up the trail and paid for the trouble of carrying them along.

There were lots of people on the trail to-and-from 1.5-Mile Rest House. It is the most frequently traveled section of the Bright Angel Trail and, in many ways, the toughest. It ascends 1130 feet and reaches to almost 7000 feet above sea level at the top. It pays to overnight on the Rim before hiking the route. I was glad that I had done so.

One wonderful feature of the last mile-and-a-half of the trail is that it is very open and provides a number of places where you can see far up the route. It was great to pick

out the familiar landmarks (tunnel, rim wall, etc.) and steadily pull up to them. Amazingly, just before the end of the trail at Kolb Studio I saw Cathy, who was just finishing the hike back up from 1.5-Mile Rest House. I caught up with her and punched the “stop” button on my watch a minute later. I completed the route at 12:12pm with an elapsed time of 6:11:42. This was far better than my original estimate of 8 hours and all the more encouraging because I know that there’s plenty of room for improvement next time round.

Rim-River-Rim is a classic and completely satisfying extreme hike. I’m thrilled I did it so well this trip and look forward to doing it again. My stretch goal for next time will be sub-5 hours. Based on my performance this trip, I think I’ve got it in me!

Note on footwear: I wore my Merrell hiking shoes and they were perfect. It definitely pays to have some toe protection and a firmer foot-bed than running shoes provide. However, even in its worst sections the route is good enough that true hiking boots are unnecessary.

Note on strategy: Next trip I’ll ditch the backpack and use a fanny pack only. I’ll carry only one Nalgene (the sipper-bottle) and maybe a dozen Power-Gels. The goal will be to go extremely light and rely on the plentiful water at the rest stops. I’ll do stops at Bright Angel Campground, Indian Garden and 1.5-Mile Rest House. I’ll limit these stops to about 5 minutes each and should be able to substantially reduce the 58 minutes of down time I had on this trip. I’ll also ditch the trekking poles. While it was nice to have them, my run up Pikes Peak teaches me that if I’m traveling light I don’t really need them. Starting early and avoiding the heat of the day is an excellent idea.

Note on weather: I was very concerned about attempting the hike in mid-summer. However, the early start and quick pace got me out of the Canyon well before the heat had a chance to build up. Getting an early start is essential. I started fairly late the first time I hiked this route and even though it was in March, it was plenty hot down at Bright Angel Camp.

Note on post-hike condition: I was very happy to get back to the “Bucky O’Neill” suite and crash after the hike. There is no question that this was a major physical effort for me. My calves hurt for the next couple of days and didn’t feel completely better until a full three days had elapsed. I had some bruising under my left big toenail but otherwise my feet were unscathed. It pays to have roomy and comfortable shoes!

Grand Canyon Hike: Rim-River-Rim (8-18-06)

<u>Waypoints</u>	<u>Cum Mileage</u>	<u>Altitude</u>	<u>Stage Miles</u>	<u>Alt Change</u>	<u>Stage Time</u>	<u>Rest Time</u>	<u>Hiking Pace/mi</u>
South Kaibab Trailhead	0.0	7200	0.0	0			
Cedar Ridge	1.5 Cedar Ridge	6060	1.5	-1140	0:21:02	0:10:00	0:14:01
Skeleton Point	3.0 Skeleton Point	5200	1.5	-860	0:21:34		0:14:23
Tonto Trail Junction	4.4 Tonto Trail	3890	1.4	-1310	0:25:33	0:10:20	0:18:15
Tipoff	4.6 Tipoff	3870	0.2	-20	0:02:00		0:10:00
Black Bridge	6.7 Black Bridge	2470	2.1	-1400	0:31:35		0:15:02
Bright Angel Campground	7.1 BA Camp	2461	0.4	-9	0:06:33	0:21:49	0:16:23
Silver bridge	7.4 Silver Bridge	2470	0.3	9	0:02:00		0:06:40
River Resthouse	9.1 River RH	2550	1.7	80	0:23:59		0:14:06
Indian Garden	12.2 Indian Garden	3800	3.1	1250	1:06:23	0:10:42	0:21:25
3 Mile Resthouse	13.8 3-mi RH	4760	1.6	960	0:37:23	0:05:05	0:23:22
1.5 Mile Resthouse	15.3 1.5-mi RH	5720	1.5	960	0:35:25		0:23:37
Bright Angel Trailhead	16.8	6850	1.5	1130	0:40:14		0:26:49

5:13:41 0:57:56 0:17:00

Cumulative ET=> **6:11:37** **0:14:41** <=Down
0:19:20 <=Up

