

## **Grand Canyon Hike: 5/10/2013**

After a hiatus of five years I finally made it back to the Grand Canyon for another go at the wonderful Rim-River-Rim hike. I did this hike for the first time in 2004 and took all of nine hours and twenty-five minutes to do it. Surprisingly, this, my fifth trip up and down the canyon, was more like the first time than any other.

In recent years I have viewed Rim-River-Rim as an opportunity to push the pace and see how fast I could complete the circuit. This has been very satisfying but by concentrating on going fast you subordinate your appreciation for where you are to fretting about how quickly you can finish the thing. Speed gives you tunnel vision.

On my first leisurely exploration of the Grand Canyon I was thoroughly astonished by the grandeur of the place and every turn in the trail brought new wonders to behold. This trip was just like that. Better still, for the first time ever this was a “we” Rim-River-Rim excursion instead of just “me”. With me were my three daughters, Germaine, Amanda and Maggie and Maggie’s husband, Charles. This was the first trip into the canyon for each of them.

We arrived at the Grand Canyon the afternoon before the hike in rainy and chilly weather. Fortunately, by delaying the start of the hike until 7am we saw the last of the rain move away and enjoyed sunny skies and warm temperatures all the rest of the day. It was a real pleasure to begin without the pressure of a specific time goal and I was delighted that the kids would get to do the route in favorable conditions.

On the way to Cedar Point it was great to see that the National Park Service had finally erected a sign to officially locate Ooh-Ahh Point. There are a million places along the South Kaibab Trail that provide “ooh-ahh!” moments for the traveler and where Ooh-Ahh Point really is has been the subject of debate for years. I think that NPS’s choice is outstanding.



*South Kaibab Trail rest stop*

We breezed along at a comfortable pace and passed lots of other hikers. Somewhere between Skeleton Point and Tonto Trail Junction we passed a young guy who was hiking alone and doing his first Rim-River-Rim. Hearing the happy banter of our group he quickly caught up with us and joined right in. He was a sociable, fun guy and fit in perfectly. We had Alex with us for the rest of the day and were happy for the company.

It took us about two and a half hours to make it to Bright Angel Campground and everyone survived the downhill journey in good shape. Still, that is a long time to be on your feet and it was nice to be able to take a twenty minute break, drink plenty of water and eat some of the snacks we had brought along. Underlining the seriousness of the Rim-River-Rim hike we discussed the meeting we had along the trail with an NPS ranger who quizzed the girls at length about the amount of food and water they carried and their fitness to undertake the route. He relaxed when he learned that we were all together and that I was a veteran of the hike. I do not blame him for his concern; every year the NPS expends considerable resources rescuing people who are not up to the challenge. More often than not the folks that have to be rescued are guys in their twenties who look fit enough to conquer the world.

I was very happy to have the downhill portion of the trip behind us and the flattish, rolling terrain between Bright Angel Campground and River Resthouse was a perfect segue for the uphill stage to come. Along the way we were amused by signs strictly warning hikers to not go into the Colorado River "...or YOU WILL PERISH!!!" due to the cold water temperature and swift current. Once again, this was probably very sound advice.

All day long I had been pleased by the condition of the trail and the recent rain had made everything look uncommonly green. Both going down and coming up we met several mule trains of tourists and all appeared to appreciate the fine weather, spectacular views and abundance of little critters (mostly lizards and squirrels) going about their business.

Everyone in our group did just fine negotiating the infamously switchbacked Devil's Corkscrew and not long after the cottonwoods and shrubbery of Indian Garden welcomed us to that pleasant oasis. We rested for fifteen minutes in the shade, had plenty of water and snacks and enjoyed the buzz of activity that Indian Garden always provides. It is there that hikers who come down the Bright Angel Trail have their moment of truth and decide whether or not to go all the way to the bottom. Also, in various states of fitness or disarray are Rim-River-Rim day-trippers like us and backpackers who overnighted at the Bright Angel Campground or Phantom Ranch.

The final 4.6 mile stretch to the rim passed pleasantly but with over three thousand feet of vertical gain it definitely demanded a lot of effort. We took a short break at 3 Mile Resthouse and a longer one at 1.5 Mile Resthouse. As is always the case, distances that are trivial at sea level and on the flat seem monumentally long when you are going uphill. The final mile and a half push was not exactly a death march but we were all very happy to top out and join the sea of humanity at the rim. Better still, the finish line for the hike is just a stone's throw from the Bucky O'Neill Suite where Maggie and Charles were staying and a short walk to El Tovar where the rest of us were.

We finished the hike in just under seven hours which was excellent given our deliberately modest pace and close to an hour's worth of rest stops along the way. I have no doubt that Germaine or Maggie might return to the Grand Canyon someday to claim the family record for the hike. Also, it could be that the next time we visit as a group Germaine's husband, Matt, will come along. He did not join us on this one because he is uncomfortable about height and thought that the trail would be too exposed. However, while we were on our journey Cathy gave him a tour of the upper Bright Angel Trail and he saw that it is not the least bit unnerving. They actually went all the way down to 1.5 Mile Resthouse and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

For me, this was the best Rim-River-Rim hike ever.



*At the finish line: Tom, Maggie, Charles, Alex, Amanda, Germaine*

## Grand Canyon Hike: Rim-River-Rim (5-10-2013)

| <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             | 0:33:07           |                  | 0:22:05               |        |
| Skeleton Point          | 3.0 Skeleton Point | 5200            | 1.5                | -860              | 0:27:54           |                  | 0:18:36               |        |
| Tonto Trail Junction    | 4.4 Tonto Trail    | 3890            | 1.4                | -1310             | 0:33:59           |                  | 0:24:16               |        |
| Black Bridge            | 6.7 Black Bridge   | 2470            | 2.3                | -1420             | 0:45:07           |                  | 0:19:37               |        |
| Bright Angel Campground | 7.1 BA Camp        | 2461            | 0.4                | -9                | 0:06:24           | 0:18:11          | 0:16:00               |        |
| River Resthouse         | 9.1 River RH       | 2550            | 2.0                | 89.0              | 0:31:00           |                  | 0:15:30               |        |
| Indian Garden           | 12.2 Indian Garden | 3800            | 3.1                | 1250              | 1:07:36           | 0:15:23          | 0:21:48               |        |
| 3 Mile Resthouse        | 13.8 3-mi RH       | 4760            | 1.6                | 960               | 0:37:41           | 0:05:45          | 0:23:33               |        |
| 1.5 Mile Resthouse      | 15.3 1.5-mi RH     | 5720            | 1.5                | 960               | 0:36:59           | 0:13:38          | 0:24:39               |        |
| Bright Angel Trailhead  | 16.8               | 6850            | 1.5                | 1130              | 0:45:47           |                  | 0:30:31               |        |
|                         |                    |                 |                    |                   | <b>6:05:34</b>    | <b>0:52:57</b>   | <b>0:21:40</b>        |        |
| Cumulative ET=>         |                    |                 |                    |                   | <b>6:58:31</b>    |                  | <b>0:20:07</b>        | <=Down |
|                         |                    |                 |                    |                   |                   |                  | <b>0:23:12</b>        | <=Up   |

