

Grand Canyon

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park
Arizona



South Kaibab Trail

Locations/Elevations

South Kaibab Trailhead (7260 ft / 2213 m) to:

Cedar Ridge (6120 ft / 1865 m)

Skeleton Point (5220 ft / 1591 m)

Tipoff (4000 ft / 1219 m)

Bright Angel Campground (2480 ft / 756 m)

Mileages

1.5 mi (2.4 km)

3.0 mi (4.8 km)

4.4 mi (7.1 km)

7.0 mi (11.3 km)

Trailhead Access

The South Kaibab Trail is located near Yaki Point. Parking is not permitted at the trailhead. To access the trailhead, hikers will need to utilize either the Hiker Express shuttle, which picks up from the Bright Angel Lodge and Backcountry Information Center, or the Kaibab Rim shuttle (orange line), which picks up from the Grand Canyon Visitor Center.

Water Sources

There is no water on the South Kaibab Trail. From early May to mid-October there is water near the trailhead (from a spigot near the bus stop). Potable water is available year-round at Bright Angel Campground, however, please note that due to occasional pipeline breaks, water at Bright Angel Campground is not guaranteed. Always carry an alternative form of water treatment, such as iodine tablets or a water filter. During hot weather, take at least 4 liters of water.

Campsites

At-large camping is not permitted on Corridor Trails; visitors must camp in designated campgrounds. Along the South Kaibab Trail, the only camping option is at Bright Angel Campground (CBG) located immediately adjacent to the Colorado River at the bottom of the canyon.

Important Notes

Grand Canyon is, above all else, a place of extremes. It is necessary to take appropriate precautions depending on seasonal variations in trail conditions. During winter months, the series of tight switchbacks near the top of the South Kaibab Trail will be icy for days or even weeks after a snowstorm. For hikers who insist on entering the canyon from May to September, it is critical to begin hiking well before dawn or to wait until late in the afternoon. Success depends upon staying off the trail between 10 A.M. and 4 P.M. Failure to arrive at Bright Angel Campground by 10 A.M. during hot weather can result in hikers having a miserable experience, with some requiring medical intervention and rescue. Every hour that you are on the trail past 10 A.M. exponentially increases your chance of becoming a statistic! Heat-related fatalities occur every year in the Grand Canyon. Ascending the South Kaibab Trail in hot weather is not recommended. Carefully study the National Park Service "Hike Smart" pamphlet issued with summer permits and always practice Leave No Trace.

Trail Description

When camping at Bright Angel Campground, many hikers prefer to hike down the South Kaibab Trail and up the Bright Angel Trail. Both trails are similar in grade, but the South Kaibab Trail is lacking in both shade and water. The hike down South Kaibab Trail typically takes 4-6 hours.

The trail begins with a series of tight north facing switchbacks. This is where ice will most likely be encountered during the winter months. After these initial switchbacks, the trail traverses a west facing slope until reaching the top of the Coconino Sandstone and the aptly named Ooh Aah Point (the first panoramic view of the canyon). From here, the trail transitions to the dominant ridgeline, descending on its east and west sides before reaching Cedar Ridge. There are pit toilets at Cedar Ridge, but no water or emergency phone.

From Cedar Ridge, the South Kaibab Trail traverses below O'Neill Butte to Skeleton Point. At three miles from the rim, Skeleton Point is the maximum distance recommended for a day hike. A short jaunt on the spur trail heading

west from Skeleton Point will offer hikers their first view of the Colorado River, as well as a view of the Phantom Ranch area. The trail goes directly off the end of Skeleton Point and here, where the trail has been blasted directly out of the limestone cliffs, hikers will encounter the most dramatic sense of exposure. The trail descends rapidly via a series of switchbacks to the Tonto Platform and Tipoff . There are pit toilets and an emergency phone at Tipoff, but no water. For hikers who will be utilizing the Tonto Trail to the east or west, the intersection is located fifty feet or so up-trail from the pit toilets.

Below Tipoff, the South Kaibab Trail loosely follows the course of an earlier trail called the Cable Trail (built in 1907 to accommodate access to the old cable car system across the river that existed before construction of the present suspension bridge). Vestiges of this earlier trail can be seen as the South Kaibab Trail descends toward the Colorado River. Hikers will pass through a tunnel blasted out of the rock of the canyon before crossing the Colorado River via the black bridge (built in 1921) and reaching Bright Angel Campground.

General Information & History

Hikers seeking panoramic views unparalleled on any other trail at Grand Canyon will want to consider a hike down the South Kaibab Trail. It is the only trail at Grand Canyon National Park that so dramatically holds true to a ridgeline descent. But this exhilarating sense of exposure to the vastness of the canyon comes at a cost: there is little shade and no water for the length of this trail. During winter months, the constant sun exposure is likely to keep most of the trail relatively free of ice and snow. For those who insist on hiking during summer months, which is not recommended, ascending this trail should be avoided due to the dangerous heat and lack of water.

The South Kaibab Trail is a modern route, having been constructed as a means by which park visitors could bypass Ralph Cameron's Bright Angel Trail. Cameron, who owned the Bright Angel Trail and charged a toll to those using it, fought dozens of legal battles over several decades to maintain his personal business rights. These legal battles inspired the Santa Fe Railroad to build its own alternative trail, the Hermit Trail, beginning in 1911 before the National Park Service went on to build the South Kaibab Trail beginning in 1924. In this way, Cameron inadvertently contributed much to the greater network of trails currently available for use by canyon visitors.

Maps

7.5 Minute Phantom Ranch Quad (USGS)

Sky Terrain Trails Map, Grand Canyon (Sky Terrain)

Trails Illustrated Map, Grand Canyon National Park (National Geographic)

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