

Inner Canyon Hiking

Hiking into the depths of Black Canyon, federally designated as wilderness in 1976, is a very strenuous experience. Access is via scrambling over loose rocks on steep, unmarked routes, not trails. A limited number of permits are available daily—by reservation only via Recreation.gov in summer, first-come first-served in the off-season.

Wilderness requires self-reliance. Safety is your responsibility. Exploring wilderness also demands sensitivity. Please follow Leave No Trace principles, and leave the canyon as you found it. Bring a bag to pack everything out, including food scraps and used toilet paper. You are responsible for knowing and following human waste regulations.

Regulations

- All hikers must possess a completed Wilderness Use Permit and follow all conditions listed on the permit.
- No pets, glass containers, collecting, hunting, or fires (only camp stoves are allowed).
- Follow Leave No Trace principles; continue to steward and protect the wilderness.
- Fishing requires a valid Colorado fishing license. Colorado Gold Medal Waters regulations apply.

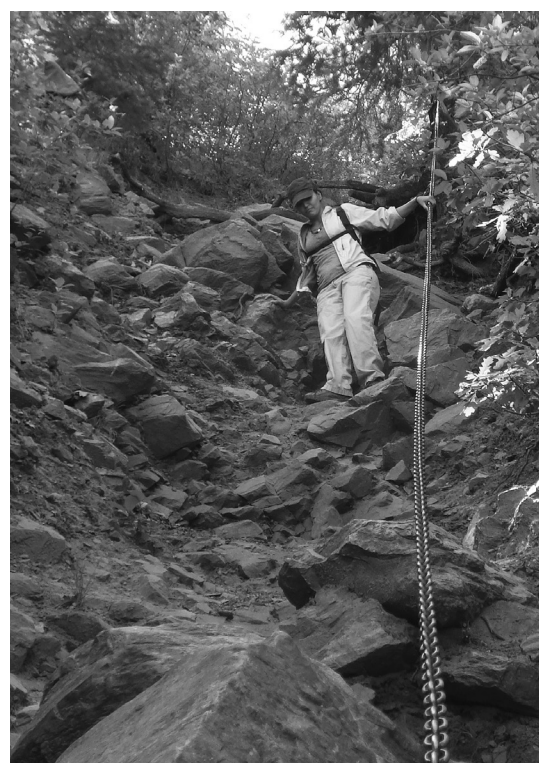
Safety

- Wilderness routes into the canyon are not maintained or marked. Continually look behind you for recognizable landmarks. It is easy to get off-route, particularly during the ascent.
- Wireless communication is unreliable; signals are rare. Do not expect cell phone, GPS, or satellite devices to work in the wilderness.
- Keep your group together and don't be afraid to TURN BACK. Keep an eye on changing weather, signs of physical stress, and heat illness.
- Canyon rims are at high elevation (above 8,000 feet [2,439 m]) and routes are very steep. Rest often and stay hydrated.
- Watch for changing conditions. Strong storms with heavy rain, wind, and lightning can move in quickly.
- Avoid hiking in the hot midday sun.
- Watch your footing on the loose, unstable rock. Yell "ROCK" to warn others if you dislodge or drop anything downhill.
- Poison ivy, stinging nettle, and ticks are commonly found along wilderness routes. Wear long pants to avoid exposure.
- Be cautious around steep cliffs and the extremely cold and swift river water. Do not wade or swim.
- If you encounter a black bear, back away slowly, and never run. Keep scented items, including food and trash, properly stored and secure.
- Never leave packs or food unattended. Use bear canisters for scented items.

Gear Recommendations

Pack lightweight gear for your trip and have contingency supplies. Consider bringing:

- 4 quarts of water per person per day, or a water filter if filling up at the river. **Drinking water is not available in the park October through April—plan ahead.**
- "WAG Bag" or personal waste pack-out system.
- Sturdy hiking boots or shoes.
- First aid kit; you must be prepared for self-rescue for at least 24 hours.
- High-energy food, enough for the planned trip plus an extra day.
- Flashlight or headlamp, with extra batteries.
- Sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat for sun protection.
- Bag for packing out trash, food scraps, and used toilet paper.



South Rim Routes

GUNNISON ROUTE

This is the most traveled route; however, it is still very strenuous. An 80-foot (24 m) chain is located a third of the way down on a steep, loose section.

To find this route: Start at the South Rim Visitor Center, follow the Oak Flat Trail, and turn right at the first junction. Take a right off of the switchbacking trail when you see the “Wilderness Permit Required” sign. This marks the start of the route. Continue the steep descent to the chain down the drainage. A pit toilet and campsites are located at the river.

WARNER ROUTE

This is by far the longest route.

To find this route: Hike along the Warner Point Nature Trail. Near the end of the trail (past post #13), look for a post marking an indistinct trail junction. Behind the post, a “Wilderness Permit Required” sign marks the start of the Warner Route. The path leads off to the left; continue west to the lowest saddle on the ridge before descending. A pit toilet and campsites are located at the river.

TOMICHI ROUTE

This is the steepest South Rim route. The entire route is loose rock and receives full sun exposure. Requires two downclimbs of 40 feet (12 m) each. Use of WAG bags strongly encouraged for overnights.

To find this route: Park at Tomichi Overlook. Take the Rim Rock Trail southward about 300 feet (91 m) to a short post. Below the post, a “Wilderness Permit Required” sign marks the start of the Tomichi Route. Descend the route until the junction with another draw is reached. Continue to follow the main drainage down the slope to the river.

North Rim Routes

PINYON DRAW

At lower flows this route provides the most river access. Pinyon Draw is known for its abundant poison ivy.

To find this route: Park vehicles in the pull-through near the campground registration board, or at the North Rim Ranger Station. The route begins on the north side of the road between the ranger station and campground. Look for the “Wilderness Permit Required” sign. Follow the path to the top of the drainage and descend the right-hand side of that gully. The route has short ledges (8-12ft/3m) to climb. Campsites are located downstream.

LONG DRAW

Long Draw brings the hiker into one of the narrowest parts of the canyon where canyon walls tower above the swiftly moving Gunnison River. Poison ivy is abundant at the base of this route. Requires negotiating one ledge of 6-8 feet (2 m).

To find this route: Park at Balanced Rock Overlook, then walk northeast to the bend in the road, which is the head of the draw. A “Wilderness Permit Required” sign located in the draw marks the start of this route.

SLIDE DRAW

This route is extremely steep with loose rock and poor footing. Slide Draw requires a 30-foot downward climb to start the route.

To find this route: Park at Kneeling Camel View, then walk east on the road until you reach the head of the draw. Follow the draw to the river, taking extra caution due to the abundance of loose rocks underfoot.

East Portal Routes (begin next to river at the bottom of East Portal Road)

DEVIL'S BACKBONE ROUTE

Hike downstream on the south side for about 0.5 mile (0.8 km) until you reach the ridge that runs down the cliff. The top 30 feet (9.1 m) of this 400 foot (122 m) scramble is exposed and a rope could be useful. The rocks can be slippery with gravel at the top. You can hike another mile (1.6 km) downstream scrambling over smaller ridge lines.

NORTH RIVER ROUTE

There is a small boat launch at the riverside wilderness permit box that provides a good landing for boating across the river to reach this route. Once across the river, you can hike nearly 2 miles (3.2 km) downstream to a cliff at Flat Rock Rapid. There is one low ridge to scramble over at Deadhorse Gulch.

Red Rock Canyon Route

Reservations are required for hiking this route and/or camping at the bottom. Visit www.recreation.gov for more information.

Total Hike From Parking Access

Descent: 2 hours
Ascent: 2–3 hours
Vertical Drop: 1800 feet (549 m)
One-way Distance: 1.5 miles (2.4 km)
River Access: 0.75 mile (1.2 km)
Campsites: 3

Descent: 2–3 hours
Ascent: 4–6 hours
Vertical Drop: 2722 feet (829 m)
One-way Distance: 3.5 miles (5.6 km)
River Access: 1 mile (1.6 km)
Campsites: 5

Descent: 2 hours
Ascent: 3–4 hours
Vertical Drop: 1960 feet (597 m)
One-way Distance: 1 mile (1.6 km)
River Access: 0.5 mile (0.8 km)
Campsites: 2

Descent: 2 hours
Ascent: 3–4 hours
Vertical Drop: 1800 feet (549 m)
One-way Distance: 1.75 miles (2.8 km)
River Access: 2 miles (3.2 km)
Campsites: 6

Descent: 2 hours
Ascent: 3 hours
Vertical Drop: 1800 feet (549 m)
One-way Distance: 1 mile (1.6 km)
River Access: 0.25 mile (402 m)
Campsites: 0

Descent: 2 hours
Ascent: 4 hours
Vertical Drop: 1620 feet (494 m)
One-way Distance: 1 mile (1.6 km)
River Access: 0.75 mile (1.2 km)
Campsites: 2