

Grand Canyon

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park
Arizona



Clear Creek Trail

Locations/Elevations

Phantom Ranch (2500 ft / 762 m) to Clear Creek Trail Junction (2600 ft / 792 m)

Clear Creek Trail Junction (2600 ft / 792 m) to:

Sumner Wash (3750 ft / 1143 m)

Clear Creek (3600 ft / 1097 m)

Clear Creek (3600 f / 1097 m) to:

Colorado River (2480 ft / 756 m)

Cheyava Falls (4875 ft / 1486 m)

Mileages

0.3 mi (0.5 km)

1.7 mi (2.7 km)

8.4 mi (13.5 km)

6.0 mi (9.7 km)

5.0 mi (8.0 km)

Trailhead Access

The trailhead is approximately 0.3 miles (0.5 km) north of Phantom Ranch on the North Kaibab Trail. The junction is marked by a wooden sign

Water Sources

Phantom Ranch, Clear Creek, Colorado River, and seasonally at Sumner Wash (potholes). **THERE IS NO RELIABLE WATER SOURCE BETWEEN PHANTOM RANCH AND CLEAR CREEK!**

Campsites

The Clear Creek Use Area (AK9) is zoned as "at-large" camping with the following exceptions: No camping in the Clear Creek drainage from its mouth at the Colorado River upstream to the first major side canyon entering from the east, nor between the North Kaibab/Clear Creek Trail junction and Sumner Wash, a distance of two miles. Two large trailside cairns mark the first legal camping on the west end of the Clear Creek Use Area. There are several campsites along the Clear Creek Trail on the Tonto Plateau. At Clear Creek, there are four campsites along the creek. They are not designated, but are recognizable. Bring an animal-proof container, such as a metal mesh sack, to safeguard your food. A toilet is located at the established camps at Clear Creek. **BE AWARE THAT THIS AREA MAY BE SUSCEPTIBLE TO FLASH FLOODING!**

Important Notes

Clear Creek is extremely popular in the spring and fall and permits may be difficult to obtain. Plan ahead! Many first-time backpackers to Clear Creek attempt to hike from the South Rim to the Clear Creek Use Area at Sumner Wash, however by the time they arrive at Bright Angel Campground they are exhausted. Bright Angel is the most popular backcountry campground in the park and space for overflow hikers may not be available. It is recommended that you obtain a permit with Bright Angel Campground as your first and last nights.

The nine-mile stretch from Phantom Ranch to Clear Creek is south facing and consequently is in the sun from sunrise to sunset. Expect neither shade nor water for the entire length of the trail. During the hot months, often mid-April through the end of September, it is best to hike this trail in the extremely early morning or in the evening.

Trail Description

From the junction with the North Kaibab Trail, the Clear Creek Trail climbs through a series of switchbacks to the southeast towards Phantom Overlook (a sharp switchback with a landing where there are a few stone benches;

from this point there is a good view looking straight down at Phantom Ranch). After passing Phantom Overlook, the trail continues up to the base of the Tapeats. While walking along the base of the Tapeats, hikers are exposed to the Great Unconformity, a gap in the geologic record spanning more than 1 billion years. The trail then traverses east for another mile, ascending up to the Tonto Platform, then contours along the Tonto Platform, crossing Sumner Wash and two minor drainages.

The trail turns to the north when it intersects the Clear Creek drainage below Demaray Point: When Clear Creek Canyon appears on the right, hikers are still only halfway to their destination. From here, the trail crosses shallow Zoroaster Canyon, then continues over an unnamed drainage to the north. Finally, at the end of the Tonto traverse, the trail drops into a drainage by traversing a long slope of brilliantly orange-colored Hakatai Shale. The trail ends at a dry tributary creek bed. Looking up this drainage, one can see Brahma Temple. From here, there is no trail, so it is necessary to hike down the drainage for approximately 150 meters to its confluence with Clear Creek. Most backpackers camp at the many impacted sites just downstream from the confluence.

A faint route continues downstream to the confluence with the east fork of Clear Creek. Hiking to the Colorado River via the creek requires scrambling and numerous creek crossings. It is approximately six miles one way. There is a pour-off ¼ mile from the river that requires a fifteen-foot down climb. This climb can be wet and icy, so use extreme caution, and don't attempt if you don't feel comfortable with free climbing. Allow a full day to complete the hike from Clear Creek to the Colorado River.

Many hikers also day hike up Clear Creek toward Cheyava Falls. This hike requires many creek crossings, especially in the spring. Check for creek depth and safety. This is a five mile hike one-way and follows the creek bed. Allow a full day to complete the hike from Clear Creek to Cheyava Falls. Cheyava Falls only flows in the spring after winters with high snow fall.

General Information & History

The Clear Creek Trail was built in 1934 and 1935 by the Civilian Conservation Corp (Company 818). It was originally built as a mule trail so visitors at Phantom Ranch would be able to gain access to a scenic side canyon. At the same time, Clear Creek was stocked with trout so that visitors could do a bit of fishing. All mule activity to Clear Creek ceased with World War II, a period when the park experienced extremely limited visitation. Today, this is the only trail traversing the Tonto Platform on the north side of the Colorado River. Because the slope is south-facing, the hike from Bright Angel Campground to Clear Creek is warmer than similar trails in the fall and spring; with the summer typically being too hot to hike.

Clear Creek experiences its highest visitation in March and April by hikers interested in seeing Cheyava Falls. The falls were first discovered in 1903 when a prospector saw what he thought might be a sheet of ice coating the cliffs up the northeast arm of Clear Creek drainage. The Kolb brothers, famous photographers who lived at Grand Canyon Village on the South Rim, caught wind of this and decided to investigate. They found a nearly 800-foot waterfall, Grand Canyon's tallest. Though perennial lower down, the 'high spout' flows in spectacular fashion only after snowmelt, usually in springtime; in drier years, it does not flow at all. Cheyava is a Hopi word meaning "intermittent waters."

Maps

7.5 Minute Bright Angel Quad (USGS)

Sky Terrain Trails Map, Grand Canyon (Sky Terrain)

Trails Illustrated Map (261 and 262), Grand Canyon National Park (National Geographic)

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