

Grand Canyon

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park
Arizona



Escalante Route: Tanner Trail to New Hance Trail

Locations/Elevations

Tanner Beach, BB9 (2700 ft / 823 m) to:

Cardenas Creek, BC9 (2650 ft / 807 m)

Seventyfive Mile Creek, BC9 (2580 ft / 786 m)

Hance Rapids, BD9 (2550 ft / 777 m)

Mileages

3 mi (4.8 km)

10 mi (16.0 km)

12 mi (19.2 km)

Trailhead Access

Access is via the Tanner Trail on the east. The New Hance Trail and the Tonto Trail provide access on the west. Please see these route descriptions for more information on these trails.

Water Sources

The Colorado River represents the only reliable water. Hikers can access the shoreline many places between Tanner Beach and Cardenas Creek, at the mouths of Escalante Creek and Seventyfive Mile Creek, at several spots between Seventyfive Mile and Papago Creeks, and near Hance Rapids. Unfortunately, the Colorado River is often silt-laden and difficult to purify

Campsites

Most hikers utilize beaches along the Colorado River for camping. Good beach camps are located at the mouths of Tanner Canyon (BB9), Cardenas Creek (BC9), Escalante Creek (BC9), Seventyfive Mile Creek (BC9), Papago Creek (BC9), and Red Canyon (BD9). Encounters with river trips are possible at Cardenas and Red Canyon; please yield large camps to large river trips. A dry camp is located west of Cardenas Creek near the head of the unnamed drainage.

Trail Description

The Escalante Route can be hiked in either direction but traveling with the flow of the land is appealing. This passage will be described from the perspective of a down-canyon (down-river) hiker. Follow the Tanner Trail to the shoreline. Rocks placed at the trail margins make it easy to see the way across Tanner Beach and up onto the bench above the river that forms the route downstream towards Cardenas Canyon. A well-trodden trail works along the foot of the Supergroup slopes above the shoreline. Shallow gullies must be crossed at intervals, but the route from Tanner to Cardenas is relatively straightforward.

Cardenas Creek is almost always dry, but there is easy access to the Colorado River via the bed of the drainage. This is the last reliable water source until one reaches the river at the mouth of Escalante Creek. The trail crosses Cardenas Creek about two hundred yards above the shoreline and climbs the Dox Hill immediately west. There are a couple of ways to do this, but these route options ultimately converge into a single trail immediately south of the Dox Hill. The correct path, however, follows the rising slope of red sandstone toward and up the unnamed side canyon between Cardenas and Escalante Creeks and reaches the bed of the drainage above the cliff bands that block access to the Colorado River.

The route crosses the unnamed drainage and traverses west toward the crest of the ridge north of Escalante Creek. Caution is indicated throughout this area, as there are many places where you will want to avoid a misstep at all cost. Some sections offer a walking surface about a boot-sole wide while traversing slopes that fall steeply away for hundreds of feet. Take your time and walk with care. Though the exposure may appear dramatic, the footing is generally good. The trail seems to traverse west forever, finally going to the top of the ridge just short of the west end. A fine view in all directions is the reward for all the side hill walking. (This is also the location of the steep bypass through "Butchart's Notch").

The trail crosses the ridge and descends rapidly to the bed of Escalante Creek. A barrier fall in the main arm prevents direct access to the river, so the route crosses to the wash's south side and around into Escalante's short arm. Well-developed route-finding skills will help here. The canyon bottom forms the route for a short

distance, but soon the trail traverses west to pass a high pouroff, crosses a bit of talus, and descends to the creek bed below the fall. Both arms of Escalante Creek are typically dry, but once established below the pouroff, it's an easy walk to the shoreline.

The trail climbs away from the river below the mouth of Escalante Creek and follows a rising ramp of Shinumo Quartzite down-canyon. Walk the top of this formation around into Seventyfive Mile Creek. Though there is a route directly down the cliffs to the creek bottom, a less thrilling (and probably safer) option is to walk the top of the Shinumo to the bed of Seventyfive Mile Creek. There comes a point where the trail seems to end, and a peek down below will reveal a short slope that can be easily descended to the bottom of the drainage. Follow the base of this drainage all the way out to the river. A couple of minor obstacles present themselves, but the solutions are obvious. The Shinumo Quartzite section of Seventyfive Mile Creek is a real treat - deep and narrow. Watch for some neat slickensides near the river, the results of ancient faulting. Nevills Rapids provides a backdrop for several nice camping spots. The area is equally popular among river runners so you may encounter other groups. Seventyfive Mile Creek is also normally dry in its lower reaches, but there is access to the river at various points throughout the stretch from Escalante to Papago Creeks. Note: Seventyfive Mile Creek, in particular, is prone to flash floods. These flood events regularly change the drainage structure and, in kind, the route. Hikers should be wary of drainage travel during rain events.

Trails along the beach form the route downriver towards Papago Creek. Eventually sand gives way to rock and a series of ledges require a bit of attention to avoid being rimmed up. In general, stay as close to the river as is conveniently possible. The trail goes up and over a small outcrop of sandstone before dropping back to river level at the mouth of Papago Creek. A high route is also possible and may be cairned.

A cliff emerges from deep water below the mouth of Papago Creek. A significant detour is necessary to bypass a relatively short river stretch. Exit Papago on the west and work up a series of tall ledges, often called the Papago Wall. Some hikers may prefer to navigate these ledges without wearing their packs, so a short rope will prove a worthwhile accessory for hauling up gear, especially for a solo hiker. Start up immediately west of the mouth of the drainage. The holds are big and secure, but as one gains height the perception of exposure is hard to avoid. The route leads up from ledge to ledge, so it's never more than a move or two between resting places if you have chosen the line of least resistance. Staying generally to the left (east) will avoid the worst of the exposure. The climbing is easy, but no mistakes are allowed. About 35 feet up the angle relents, and one can scramble up the talus toward minor cliff bands above. There are several ways to surmount these little crags, all with obvious trails giving access. Climb the slopes to a (more or less) horizontal, exposed trail about 300 vertical feet above the river.

The trail traverses less than 100 yards downcanyon before coming to the top of a talus filled runnel that allows passage back to the shoreline; this is known as the Papago Slide. This gully seems dangerous - steep, with lots of big boulders in precarious balance. Large groups are more at risk because more people moving around means increased chances of dislodged rocks. Large groups should hike VERY close together, or VERY far apart. The trail is less clear in the upper section of the Slide, but becomes more clear in the lower section where the larger boulders peter out and the trail becomes simpler switchbacks within the talus slope. The immediate shoreline forms the most efficient route between bottom of this treacherous little gully and the mouth of Red Canyon. Pick the path of least resistance through the shoreline vegetation, which is choked with camelthorn and tamarisk. The beach above Hance Rapid is popular with river camps, so be prepared to share this beach. The river flows quietly through the large pool above Hance Rapids, and beaver or waterfowl are occasionally encountered. A downcanyon walker arriving at Hance Rapids could continue west via the Tonto Trail toward Mineral Canyon, the Grandview Trail and points beyond, or ascend to the rim via the bed of Red Canyon on the New Hance Trail.

General Information & History

Among the commonly hiked sections below the South Rim, the Escalante Route has a reputation for requiring a bit "extra" from Grand Canyon hikers. Part of the route (the Papago Wall) requires an exposed vertical climb. A feel for the route ahead will save time at the challenging spots. The Colorado River is usually the only reliable water source, so fool-proof turbid water purification methods are a necessity.

On the other hand, you will be rewarded with a variety of canyon environments, ranging from the wide-open spaces of Furnace Flats to the slot-like confines of lower Seventyfive Mile Creek. Hance Rapids at the mouth of Red Canyon represents the premier stretch of whitewater in the upper reaches of the Grand Canyon. The geology changes as the sedimentary Supergroup gives way to the ancient Vishnu Complex. They are combined with remarkable views from various elevations to produce a Grand Canyon experience of the first order.

Maps

USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle: Desert View, Cape Royal, & Grand View Point, AZ

Sky Terrain Trails Map, Grand Canyon

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

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