

Hiking Southwest Utah and Adjacent Areas

Volume One

3 Kanarra Creek Canyon Trail: The Perfect Hike

General Description: A moderately difficult hike to a spectacular slot canyon.

Trailhead Access (Roads) and Vehicle Recommendation: Easy access in a standard vehicle.

Average Hiking Time: Three to four hours at a leisurely pace.

Distance: Approximately four miles round trip to the second falls.

Fee and Permits: \$10 per vehicle at the parking area near the trailhead and a \$4 per adult (\$3 per student and \$2 for children) entrance fee. No permit is necessary. While the access road is maintained by the Bureau of Land Management, the hike is on land owned by the Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration—be respectful.

Elevations: The trailhead is approximately 5,600 feet elevation with a 500 feet elevation gain.

Best Season: March through November. December through February may have snow and ice and very cold water in the creek. The summer months are best since the water is warmer and the water level should be low.

Trail Rating (Difficulty): Moderate due to 500 feet elevation gain and some of the hike being in cold water, sometimes waist deep after precipitation or during spring runoff. The water level was mid-thigh during our June hike.

Type of Hike: Out and back.

USGS Topographic Map(s): Kanarraville, Utah Quadrangle: 7.5 minute series, 2014

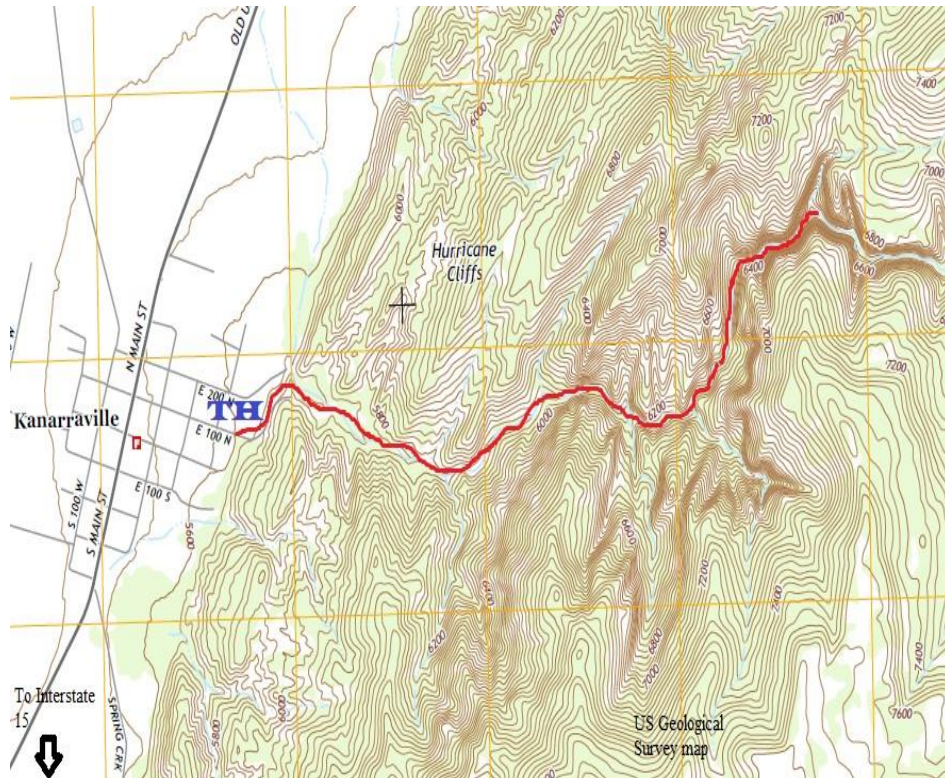
Finding the Trailhead: Begin by driving to Kanarraville, about 35 miles north of St. George on Interstate 15. Leave the blacktop ribbon at Exit 42 and drive about three miles (north) on Old Highway 91 into the town. Continue on Old Highway 91 (known as Main Street in town) and turned right (east) at 100 North where a sign directs you to the trailhead. After a few blocks, park in the designated dirt parking lot.

Love Zion National Park? Who doesn't, excepting perhaps the most retrograde, concrete-loving, nature-avoiding, urbanite. If you read any further, most likely you are not one of those urbanites and I have the hike for you.

Zion's Virgin River Narrows/Riverwalk is the famous hike in the Virgin River (yes, in not by) into a magnificent slot canyon. Want to try Virgin River Narrows "Lite"? Then you must hike Kanarra Creek Canyon Trail. This adventure pushes the envelope into the perfect hike realm. Don't believe me? Does your perfect hike include a four mile round trip trek, far enough for a workout but not exhausting; hiking up a stream through a typical southern Utah multi-hued, twisting, slot canyon; an element of danger in scrambling over 10 foot waterfalls via log ladders; several species of butterflies, birds, rattlesnakes, and lizards; and lush riparian vegetation? Of course it does.

Deb and I began our trip by driving to Kanarraville, about 35 miles north of St. George on Interstate 15. We left the blacktop ribbon at Exit 42 and drove about three miles (north) on Old Highway 91 into the town. Kanarraville is a typical quaint Utah small town of around 300 souls, horses, and some chickens. No need to roll up the sidewalks at nightfall since there are no sidewalks.

Kanarra Creek Canyon Trail



We continued on Old Highway 91 (known as Main Street in town) and turned right (east) at 100 North where a sign directed us to the trailhead. After a few blocks we parked in the designated dirt parking lot. Be aware that parking costs \$10 per vehicle and there is an entrance fee (\$4 for adults, \$3 for students, and \$2 for children). The well-worn trail is easy to find. The first ¼ mile of the hike is uphill, the most strenuous part of the entire trip.



Canyon entrance on Kanarra Creek Canyon Trail.

We walked along snapping photos of the gorgeous red mountains, peppered with the green of trees, capped by swiftly moving puffy white clouds, and crossing Kanarra Creek several times before reaching the mouth of the slot canyon. Be on the lookout for small rattlesnakes in the first part of the hike. We saw a polite one on the trail, he gave us a rattle and slithered off. (Also be warned that the water is cold and, in places, came to mid-thigh. You may want to use water shoes or wading boots.) Continuing on we entered the creek, slipping into the slot canyon. We immediately stepped into another world, hundred foot high red, yellow, and grey rock walls, twisting and scooped—the power of erosion at work. The sun's rays played off the surfaces, creating different hues around each bend. A couple of hundred meters (a meter is roughly equivalent to a yard) further along came our first major obstacle—a huge slippery log with 2 X 4 rungs creating a rough ladder wedged beside a ten foot waterfall. A rope attached with bolts to the adjacent rock wall makes the climb much easier than it initially looked.

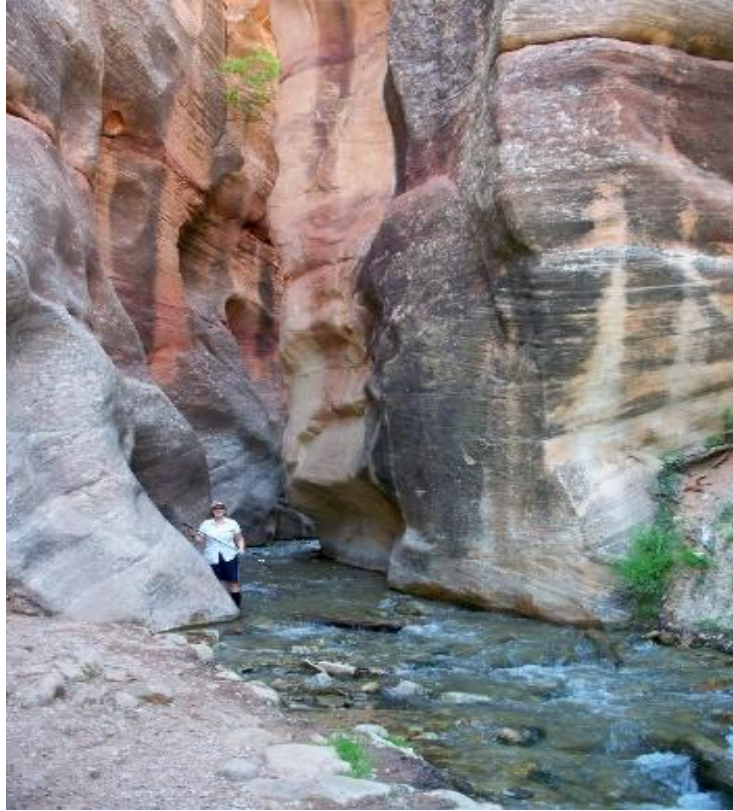


Ladder at first falls.

After conquering this we did some rock scrambling around another waterfall a few meters on. The slot then widened and provides several open areas in which to enjoy the scenery, lay on the rocks and dry your feet, have a snack (no snack bar here, bring your own and carry out all your trash), and contemplate nature, your navel, whatever. Be especially respectful on this hike, the creek provides drinking water to Kanarraville. Do you want your drinking water polluted?

Another couple hundred meters upstream is a continuation of the narrow slot canyon. This is as dramatic as the first narrows—a plethora of photo opportunities. Then came, for us, the end of the line—another ten foot waterfall with a Gerry-rigged ladder. Unlike the first ladder, this one requires you to be directly under the fall as you climb; the structure itself would make Rube Goldberg wince. We decided that while the spirit was willing, our 60 year old bodies might have a problem.

Of course, the return trip downstream featured different, yet equally spectacular, lighting as the sunlight filtering through the fluted slot canyon creates an ethereal beauty. About four hours after we began this adventure, we bid adieu to Kanarra Creek Canyon and headed home.



Deb at narrows entrance.

Deb and I have explored many slot canyons in southern Utah and northern Arizona. Kanarra Creek Canyon is as impressive as any and more accessible than most. At a leisurely pace it was a four hour, about four mile roundtrip break from concrete, asphalt, people, and heat. Keep that promise to enjoy the outdoors and experience this close to perfect hike.

This story was first published in print under the title “The perfect hike” by *The Spectrum* on July 29, 2011.

Resources

Zion National Park website. “Kanarra Creek.” Last modification unknown.

<http://www.zionnational-park.com/kanarra-creek.htm>

For more information or to purchase *Hiking Southwest Utah and Adjacent Areas, Volume One*, follow this link to Amazon:
https://www.amazon.com/Hiking-Southwest-Utah-Adjacent-Areas/dp/1503304841/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1423002972&sr=1-1