

Grand Canyon National Park Toroweap 20120309 - 12

Toroweap is a very remote part of the Grand Canyon National Park northern portion accessible only via dirt roads. The shortest dirt road originating from Las Vegas is the 56 mile option from Colorado City, AZ (FLDS territory). Keep in mind, the conditions of the road change frequently depending on the weather. It can be impassible in the winter due to snow, ice and snow melt while interesting in the summer due to flash flooding. An off-road capable vehicle is highly recommended, but not necessary (I'll explain later). I've visited the area often as a tour guide with Pink Jeep Tours considering many places to explore I can't and won't take tourists. This trip provided me an opportunity to share that exploratory interest. We didn't get to do everything I wanted out there so more trips will be necessary in the future.

I picked early March for this trip so the odds of issues with mud from snow melt would be minimal and the temperatures at the river would be reasonable. The day time temperatures at the rim would be comfortable at around 60 to 65 while 70 to 75 degrees by the river. Although, the night time temperatures got down to the mid-30s. There is a road from St. George, UT that is longer and would take less time to get to Toroweap. Although, that route is covered in snow, ice and mud since higher in elevation. That route is great in the late Spring to early Fall. My last trip of mine down the Lava Falls Trail consisted of a large group that was spread out along the route. I didn't want a repeat so I opted for a small group. I'm sorry several people didn't get to go on the trip.

We started the trip at my house loading up in two vehicles. Jenn and Lehman Pyeatt, rode with me while Mark Rosen rode with Luba Leef and Ed Forkos. There are no water sources at Toroweap so we needed to bring enough water for the four day trip for each of us. It took us about 5 hours to drive to the Toroweap campground making one stop at the Little Creek Chevron gas station in Apple Valley, UT to top off our tanks. The road starts off smooth and level allowing you to drive quite fast at up to about 50 mph or more. Although, you have to be careful as there are ruts and bumps that sneak up on you. The closer you get to the canyon the worse the road requiring you to slow down considerable. The worst part of the road starts when you officially enter the Grand Canyon National Park. Because of it's remoteness, there is no fee to enter. Although, the road gets worse until you need to travel quite slow over basically sandstone rock. A tough interesting road.

After setting up the campsites, we went to the overlook to enjoy the scenic views and pictures. On the way back we hiked the short Saddle Horse Trail to an overlook for Saddle Horse Canyon. We scanned the canyon looking for possible ways down on Day 3 to consider to the next plateau towards a cliff we could not descend down to the Colorado River. Since Ed and I drove to that trailhead, we had to go back to the cars to drive to the campground. Luba joined us while Jenn, Lehman, and Mark continued the loop trail back to the campground. On their way back, they found recent mountain lion tracks. We enjoyed the sunset from the campground. After the sun set, we heard a motorcycle approaching that stopped short well before the campground. Several minutes later, we hear a hello from a familiar voice. Ranger Todd Seliga came by to say hi. I had contacted him prior to our trip inviting him to stop for a visit. We had great visit and conversation. I asked him for some recon to reach the Toroweap Point on our Day 4 discovering there is only one way up through a break in the cliff band. While talking, we all stopped to view an amazing near full moon rising over the canyon. Never got to see that again for our other two nights.

The next morning we drove to the Lava Falls trailhead. Upon arriving, I was surprised to see there was no longer a sign identifying the beginning of the trail. Instead, there was a sign for Vulcans Throne. I knew where to start the hike (starting at 08:00) so we continued. About 20 minutes and a third of a mile along the route we came across the sign I remember the last time I did this hike three years ago. I then realized the reason the sign was moved was to discourage people from this route since three people have died since that time in separate instances. One due to a fall and two due to

dehydration. All occurring in the summer heat and within about ¼ mile from their vehicle. The park service instead want to encourage people to enjoy the Vulcans Throne hike that also has a registry on the peak for further enticement. You are really in the middle of nowhere on the route down with lots of loose volcanic rock. Gloves are a necessity for protection. The route descends 2,500 feet in 1.5 miles. Although, considering the route has become “popular” there is a fairly well defined trail along with spray painted markers with white arrows and white dots that were not visible on my last trip. I later talked with the ranger to discover they were not placed by him and he is not happy about the markers. I imagine sometime in the future the markers will be removed by the park service. Even with the markers we got off the trail and had to navigate over some interesting terrain. On the way down about 1000 feet from the river we came across a deflated inner tube. Very odd place! I noted the coordinates with my GPS and told the ranger later. He then responded “I thought I got all of them”. Our group then were perplexed “...all of them?!?!?!?” It turns out people have soaked inner tubes in kerosene, lit them on fire, and rolled them down the hill. Ranger Todd will later remove that inner tube. On the way down, we passed by a number of ocotillos and barrel cacti, climbed down several rocks, and enjoyed the great views. There were a few class 3 sections with only one exposed option. Otherwise, almost all class 2, but slippery and loose. At that point, the group understood why I wanted a small number of people.

It took us about 2.5 hours to get to the river. We followed the trail to Lava Falls. One of the most difficult rapids in the Grand Canyon. While having lunch, a large group of private oar rafters stopped by to recon the rapids. I offered them a rare opportunity to take pictures and video of their trip through the rapids and email to them. We managed to forward them over 1 GB of video and pictures. I was able to take a series of pictures of one group giving a thumbs up, entering the rapids, getting hit by a wave engulfing the raft, flipping over, and then floating upside down. Others in our group got the entire sequence on video. Those rafters were uninjured. All of them were very happy and appreciative with the footage I emailed them later and thanked all of us immensely. We then started the 2.5 hour hike back up. It was slow going due to the loose steep rock. We pretty much managed to follow the route using the arrows and dots making the trip easier.

After this tough hike, we all decided to punish ourselves even more by doing Vulcans Throne. The trip was only 1.5 miles round-trip with 1000 feet elevation gain taking 1h 15 m, but we were basically going up 35 degree grade of ball bearings for almost a half mile. Lots of loose volcanic pebbles. It was hard! Although, very easy on the way down. I have to say the views on Vulcans Throne were amazing. This is the place to visit for sunset photos of the Grand Canyon Toroweap. We soaked in the view, signed the registry, and then headed back quickly. Upon arriving at the campsite, we were very tired and hungry.

The next morning we started our exploratory of the Tuckup Trail area heading east. I've never been there before and I've really wanted to check it out. We started on the trail and then went down Saddle Horse Canyon. We soon found a rock with lots of fossils and after that we surprisingly came across an area with cattails. We had also found a watering hole in an area carved by water causing a concave section with a small ceiling where a couple significant sized plants were growing down. Very very interesting place. We then cliffed out at drainage a little beyond that area. I was able to scramble down to check it out seeing we would have to jump about 8 feet to get down further. The next issue would be how to get back up after exploring that layer further. I decided not a good idea so I aborted. I'll have to come back on a future trip to explore. My next problem was that I couldn't climb back up since it was too slick with very few holds. Ed had to lower some webbing using himself as a body belay so I could climb back out. We continued looking for another way down. We all climbed down to another layer while Ed continued further to find a way down without luck. We aborted and went back to the rim looking around. Found several neat vantage points relaxing taking in the scenery. Came across lots of potholes/tenajas in the rock with water and desert shrimp growing along with worms and other insects. We were careful not to step on the abundant cryptobiotic soil found throughout the area. It was challenging in some sections making sure we step on rocks along with other sections with big

cracks between boulders requiring us to jump or climb down. We even came across a radio controlled shark air swimmer. We collected the trash to dispose properly later.

The last side canyon we came across was later discovered to be Covington Canyon. We found an easy scrambling way down through another surprisingly vegetative section and pretty colorful views. We reached a cliff about 1/3 mile into the canyon descending about 500 feet. It didn't look down climbable so I took pictures later noticing Luba scrambled down finding a way down to a ledge. I followed her with Ed telling both of us to come back. We noticed a short old historic wood and wire ladder. We could have used the ladder to explore further to a cliff that would have been neat to visit, but it would have been difficult to not damage it. Also that ladder was blocking the best way down. We could have set up webbing if we carried some, but it was getting late and the others couldn't see us. We thus turned back. I'll have to come back on a future trip to explore. I later discovered from Ranger Todd that Henry Covington mined the area until the 1960s for gold, silver, lead, and other valuable minerals including uranium. I'm amazed anything could be mined here, but hardy individuals found a way. We then called it a day heading back to the campsite returning via the trail. Upon arriving we discovered a young man actually drove a Honda Civic sedan to the campground. We were amazed he made it. He thought it was tough and realized he probably shouldn't have made the trip. Although, I have seen worse out here....a Toyota Prius. Of course, that vehicle did scrap it's underside on numerous occasions. Not very smart!

The next day we headed back home. One last hike was to Toroweap Point. It is a high plateau visible from the overlook. Todd had told me the route starts from the Ranger Station which is also his home. He also told me out of respect for the fact it is special spot, he requested I keep the route on the down low. Therefore, no details about the route nor posted pictures have been posted. While we were getting ready for the trip a group of young people drove up in an SUV around 09:00. They were walking around like they were looking for something. I asked if they needed anything only to discover they wondered where there was some water. They were surprised when I told them there was none. They indicated they had some and were going down Lava Falls trail. Our group discussed that was a bad idea since they are starting late, don't have enough water, and don't realize the terrain to get to the river. They later actually (learning from Ranger Todd) knocked on the Ranger's door asking for water. He told them he only had enough until his next delivery. I wonder if they continued their hike?

We hiked to the plateau above the Ranger Station noticing only one set of footprints. Turned out they are the ranger's. We also noticed a lot of cattle tracks. We were perplexed as to how cattle got up there understanding the plateau is very large so they started at a lower section and walked to this point. I didn't end up researching exactly where to go when up here so I referred to the highpoint marker on my GPS. It turns out we reached that highpoint, but were about one mile away from the actual Toroweap Point that offered views of the Grand Canyon. I'll have to come back on a future trip to explore. We enjoyed the views and then went back to the vehicle.

Upon arriving Ranger Todd came out of his home saying goodbye. We had another good conversation. He is an ideal individual for this remote assignment. He also greatly enjoys the area and assignment. We then drove home very tired. It took me several days before my legs stopped hurting. Another great trip. I'll definitely need to go back again to explore more.

Sometime after this trip, I came across a short National Geographic article (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/02/vermillion-cliffs/klinkenborg-text>) about the Vermillion Cliffs with some very interesting quotes from a BLM official. "Exit the car, enter the food chain, The predators here are sun, heat, thirst, ignorance, and isolation." I thought about that quote and integrated it into my tours to make guests realize their severity of the situation in the region especially during the summer. Although, I build upon it with the following result:

- ^ Sun - UV index of 10 - 12 out of 10.
- ^ Heat - temperatures over 120 degrees.

- ⤴ **I**gnorance - clueless as to the situation you are getting yourself into.
- ⤴ **I**solation - something goes wrong, no one will be passing by to help.
- ⤴ **T**hirst - where are you going to get water.

The conclusion to my point is to take the first letters of each word to really describe your situation and how you'll feel! I get a number of laughs or sighs of understanding from my guests.

Thinking about the group we met at the Ranger Station intending to hike down the Lava Falls trail unprepared and the unfortunate individuals who have died on that route, I email the info to Ranger Todd for consideration to post at the Ranger Station to further warn the unprepared. He loved it and actually asked if the NPS could borrow from it!