

# Hiking the Grand Canyon Part Two

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I have hiked the Grand Canyon three times. Once was the Bright Angel Trail down and back in one day way back in the 80's. The next time was October 2017 when Cait was doing an FKT attempt of Rim<sup>3</sup> (South Rim to North Rim and back). The third time was June 2019, Cait, Mike and I did an overnight trip into the canyon and back. I write about the 2019 trip here.

## OVERNIGHT HIKE INTO THE GRAND CANYON

On this trip to the canyon we decided to stay overnight. The advantage of staying overnight is that you aren't under the gun to do a strenuous 23+ mile hike in one day and you can really enjoy the beauty of the canyon. The disadvantage of doing the overnight hike is that you have to carry more with you. So, the most important tip I would give here is to *practice hiking (walking, really) with weight*. What seems like a reasonable amount of weight walking around for a couple of hours will sap your energy climbing uphill in the heat for several hours.

This time Mike was coming with us and we decided to do the hike at the end of June because Mike would be out of school, but it was before he had to go to work at the Celtic's camps. We were able to get a reservation to camp at the Bright Angel campground in the Grand Canyon on June 20, 2019 – the longest day of the year in terms of sunlight. If you act quickly enough, you can also make a reservation for dinner at the Phantom Ranch, but these sell out months in advance. We couldn't get reservations for 3 at the same time (they do 2 seatings), so we decided to bring our own food. Most people don't hike the canyon in June because of the heat, so we knew it wouldn't be overly crowded, especially as we got further into the canyon.

We prepared for our hike as we had the last time: Cait was living in Boulder, so she had easy access to the most amazing hiking trails. Mike and I decided to make it easy and just do long, hilly walks. We had invested in good backpacks for our hiking trip through Italy in 2017 and we wanted to use those again. We figured out what we would need to take with us and then divided the packs up as equitably as we could. Here is what we packed:

- 3 liters of water each
- Sunscreen and lip balm
- Small first aid kit
- Electrolytes
- Sleeping pad (one each)
- Food
- Biodegradable soap
- Change of clothes
- Tent (one)

I can't remember exactly how we divided it up, but I know Cait carried the tent, and I somehow had the lightest pack. There is no getting around the weight of 3 liters of water which is nearly 7

pounds. Not terrible, but not nothing either. The food we brought with us was trail mix, a couple of bars, and some pretty tasty looking camping meals from REI: Himalayan lentils and rice, Mexican style veggie bowl, and white bean and kale stew. We wore our performance shorts and tops, hiking sneakers (for me, Inov-8 Women's Road Claw 275 Trail Running Shoe which are grippy but flexible), and wide brimmed hats to block the sun.

Even though most people want to avoid the hottest part of the day, I really didn't want to hike in the dark, so we left just as the sun broke. Because we hadn't started in the dark, we moved



faster than I had during our last canyon hike and despite encountering more than one mule train on the trail, we were at the Skeleton Point by 9 am where we stopped to use the facilities. There were some folks there who had signed up for the horse-back tour of the canyon. Although that sounds like a fun idea, I've seen a few of those groups and there are always one or two people who are terrified.

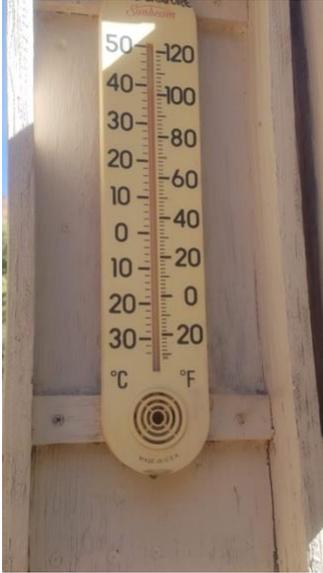
I'd suggest that if this interests you, make sure everyone in the group knows what they've signed up for.



Just after leaving Skeleton Point, we rounded a corner and Cait saw a guy who looked like he was lying face-down on the ground. He looked up when he saw her and said that he had just seen a rattle snake and he was leaving a note so no one would startle it by mistake.

We reached the Colorado River by 11 am but. We made our way to the Bright Angel campground, picked out a site and set up our tent. It was already over 100 degrees at the bottom of the canyon, so we laid our camping meals on a rock to heat in the sun, left our packs in the tent, and headed back to the beach area that is just after you cross the bridge over the Colorado to go for a swim. The water was freezing! You'd think that if it was 100 degrees out and you were hot and sweaty and covered with salt that you could at least dip into the 42-degree water, but it was nearly impossible. Instead, we splashed off and then walked back to our site, stopping now and then to sit in one of the streams for almost a half hour at a time. More like it!

When we got back to our campsite, we found that some animal had feasted on our dinner. Rooky mistake on our part, but fortunately the Phantom Ranch was open, and we found the most awesome lemonade we'd ever had. It was \$2 per 10 oz. cup, with free refills! I made a pig of myself drinking more lemonade than I thought possible. We left a hefty tip because they really weren't charging enough for this liquid gold.



When the sun began to set, we decided that we should try to settle down since we wanted to head out early in the morning. It never really cooled off – it remained over 100 degrees in the shade. But there is something to the ‘dry heat’, and there was a nice breeze, so we managed to sleep as well as you can on a sleeping pad on the ground. Although it might have been weird to sleep on the ground out in the open, we really didn’t need the tent and it certainly would have been easier to hike without it.

We had decided to go back up the Bright Angel Trail because this was Mike’s first hike in the canyon, and we wanted him to see as much of it as possible. Personally, I prefer the Kaibab Trail, but there is more water on the Bright Angel Trail and it’s slightly shorter.

A lot of people wonder if it’s possible to get lost in the canyon and I will tell you that the answer is yes. Many years ago, my brother-in-law’s brother and a friend were lost in the canyon overnight. It all ended up ok, and if you stay on the trail, you shouldn’t have any problems. There are a few signs on the trails, but there aren’t a lot of options to turn off the trail either. Kaibab is really straight-forward and because it’s so open you can see where you are headed. Bright Angel is not as open, so there might be times when you are asking yourself if you are going the right way. But of course, you are, as there is nowhere else to go.

On the Bright Angel Trail, you will need to do a few water crossings (streams, really). Your feet will get wet and it’s up to you if you want to wear your sneakers when crossing the stream or take them off. There are also water stops and there is more shade. There are also more people on Bright Angel than Kaibab (especially near the top), but it’s never overly crowded.



The last couple of miles on the Bright Angel Trail are fairly steep, and you will be at elevation. When you are carrying weight, the hike can be strenuous. This is me talking, not Mike. Mike didn't seem to have any problems with the weight. Not sure how many of you have hiked or done bike-packing with another person, but it's not unusual to start with your packs done one way, only to end up adding, subtracting, repacking, and swapping items with one another. One time when Mike and I were biking across Texas we were so close to our destination for the day, but his back was killing him from the weight of his pack, so we had to keep stopping. On our last stop I said, "Let me see your pack. Maybe we can rearrange, or I can take some of your stuff." I couldn't imagine what we could ditch. Besides the basics, the only thing I could think of was an expensive tire (he was riding on tubulars). When I started looking through the pack, I noticed a slew of hotel shampoo that he had been collecting at each stop. We aren't talking pounds of shampoo, but when you are hiking or biking and carrying stuff with you, every bit adds up.

Anyway, I didn't have any shampoo at all with me on our canyon hike, but Mike did take most of the weight out of my pack during the last mile to the top, and it was a lifesaver! Cait has 'ant strength'. She isn't much bigger than I am, but she can carry much more weight.

From the bottom to the top of Bright Angel Trails it is 9.5 miles with an elevation gain of 4,380 feet, and there are three places to get water. Once you get to the top, there are shuttle buses to take you back to your car. This is what most people do, and it is what we had to do this time because we went down one trail and up another.



The funny thing about hiking, most people (triathletes, especially) think that it's just walking. No big deal. I've even thought that myself, before I started doing it. And there are certainly trails that you can do that only take a couple of hours, are not technical and don't involve a lot of elevation.

But we've done several longer hikes now and I've found them to be the perfect combination of seriously challenging and entirely doable, and the Grand Canyon is the perfect example.

An Ironman triathlete certainly wouldn't need to do a higher volume of training to be ready for the hike, but it would be a good idea to do some training with at least 10 pounds of weight evenly distributed in a pack. If you are in reasonable shape and your joints are ok, hiking all the way in and out – either staying overnight or doing it in one day - should definitely be on your bucket list.

**CANYON STATS:**

	Elevation	Distance from Trailhead
South Kaibab Trailhead:	7260 ft	n/a
Ooh Ah Point:	6660 ft	1 mile
Skeleton Point:	5200 ft	3 miles
The Tip-off:	4000 ft	4.4 miles
Bright Angel Campground:	2480 ft.	7 miles
		Distance from the campground
River Rest House	2480 ft	1.5 miles
Indian Garden	3800 ft	4.7 miles
3-mile Rest House	4748 ft	6.5 miles
Bright Angel Trailhead	6860 ft	9.5 miles

If you decide to go up the North Rim from the Bright Angel Campground/Phantom Ranch, it is another 14 miles. If you go Rim2Rim, it is ~23.5 miles. Rim<sup>3</sup> is ~46 miles.