


TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Grand Gorge of Muddy Creek San Rafael Swell, Southern Reef

Rating:	II-III Class 2 
Best Season:	Spring, summer or fall.
Time:	2 to 4 hours.
Access:	Route starts and ends at the Hidden Splendor airstrip; or, with a 4WD high clearance vehicle, about a mile further down the creek.
Permit:	Not required.
Equipment:	A hiking stick or pole is helpful, wading shoes.
Map:	USGS 7.5' Hunt Draw.
Cold Protection:	Wading shoes and dry bags.
Drinking Water:	Bring plenty. Potholes could be pumped in an emergency.
Flash Flood Risk:	Low; but if Muddy Creek flash floods, you will be unable to return upstream to Hidden Splendor.
Skills Required:	Much wading in murky water.

Huge sandstone walls, a twisted canyon, a pleasant stream. The Grand Gorge of Muddy Creek is an easy way to while away a day in the Southern Swell. Driving to the "Motel 6" is advantageous, cutting out 1 mile of non-spectacular hiking each direction. This is a 4WD road, but can be driven by 4WD cars with aggressive drivers.

Approach (4WD): From the Hidden Splendor Airstrip drive south on a very rough road, in and out of washes, then down to the floodplain and past a cottonwood. Continue south to an old miner's shack ("Motel 6") and park a few feet further. This is the end of the road. **(2WD):** From the Hidden Splendor Airstrip head east to Muddy Creek. Walk or drive down the switchbacks to the river, then walk down the river into the Gorge.

The Stuff: walk and wade downstream into the Grand Gorge. The walls rise 1000 feet on both sides, first Wingate (dark red, smooth, sweeping), then Kayenta (horizontally bedded), then Navajo sandstone (smooth, sweeping walls, white to tan in color). There is an occasionally used ATV/Dirtbike track in the canyon. It takes an hour and a half at a brisk pace to get to the front of the reef, where a good view of Factory Butte and the Henry Mountains presents itself.

There's no reason to rush, though. There is a lot to see and explore. A huge gooseneck turn creates some lovely, sweeping walls. Below the gooseneck, a canyon comes in on the left that is well worth exploring. The front is blocked by vegetation, but the pool at the end is fabulous. A little further down, a less fabulous canyon comes in on the right. But an interesting arch is found at the mouth of this canyon. Return the way you came.

A few things to consider: • A couple of weekends a year, Muddy Creek runs high, making this trip difficult to impossible. Check the Muddy Creek water level on the [USGS Streamflow Data Site](#). A normal flow level is 50-200 CFS. • During the summer (esp. July and August), green flies along the Muddy can be atrocious, and make the entire area uninhabitable. Starting in May, gnats are prolific and annoying. • Flash Floods on the Muddy are fairly common during the monsoon

season. The headwaters of the Muddy are 50 miles away and quite widespread. Stay out of here when the thunderheads are forming. A flash flood would probably not be life-threatening, but would prevent you from returning to Hidden Splendor.

