


TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Knotted Rope Canyon, Ridgewalk and Canyon San Rafael Swell, Southern Reef

Rating:	3A 4 th Class III 
Best Season:	Spring or fall. The return hike is in full sun, so high summer is very HOT.
Time:	6 to 10 hours.
Access:	Route starts at the Quandary Canyon branch road, 2.2 miles east of Hidden Splendor Mine, and ends returning up the Muddy River Gorge. Spot a car if possible.
Permit:	Not required.
Equipment:	2-50m ropes, a few long slings, wading shoes.
Map:	USGS 7.5' Hunt Draw. Knotted Rope is the canyon draining south of the "ADIT" mark above the Hidden Splendor Mine area.
Cold Protection:	Wading shoes, drybags.
Drinking Water:	None, bring plenty.
Flash Flood Risk:	Moderate.
Skills Required:	A lot of 4 th class climbing to gain the ridge, and to descend the lower canyon. One 50 meter rappel off natural anchors in a wilderness setting.

The Ridgewalk and Canyon route gains the top of the escarpment, then follows it along the rim, before dropping into Knotted Rope. The Canyon is quickly exited up a steep slab, then a slickrock ridge is traversed and a gully descended to a dramatic overlook of the Grand Canyon of Muddy Creek. A 4th class ridge is then followed to a long rappel back into Knotted Rope, which is then followed to the front of the reef.

Getting There: Spot a car at the Air Strip, or as far down Muddy River Gorge as common sense allows. Drive 2.2 miles northeast from the Air Strip at Hidden Splendor Mine. A small parking lot and mining road appear on the right side of the road. Cars park here, 4WDs can go another 3/4 mile. Drive or walk the road past one 4WD section, toward the obvious opening in the reef, Ramp Canyon. The road forks - turn right, past a dead car (park here) and toward a gunsight notch between the reef (on the left) and a very large Wingate tower on the right. The road disappears into the wash. Follow the wash. The canyon steepens and narrows, and an old mining track appears on the right. Follow this right and then left, easily up to a notch in the Wingate wall on the left, and into a delightful bowl at the top of Quandary Canyon.

Climbing the Gully: Follow the wash. It turns left and narrows. (This is Quandary Canyon). Don't follow it, instead, go straight ahead up a gully with a large rock blocking it near the top. Climb steeply up the gully, cut around the rock and into Wayne's Wriggle, a steep little chimney at the very top of the gully. Climb through this section (Class 4, but not exposed). (60 - 80 minutes to top of the Wriggle.)

Note the cairns marking the top of the chimney. Turn right and follow the crest of the ridge directly to the edge of the escarpment. Enjoy the views. Follow the rim of the escarpment to the left. (Route 1: return at your leisure).

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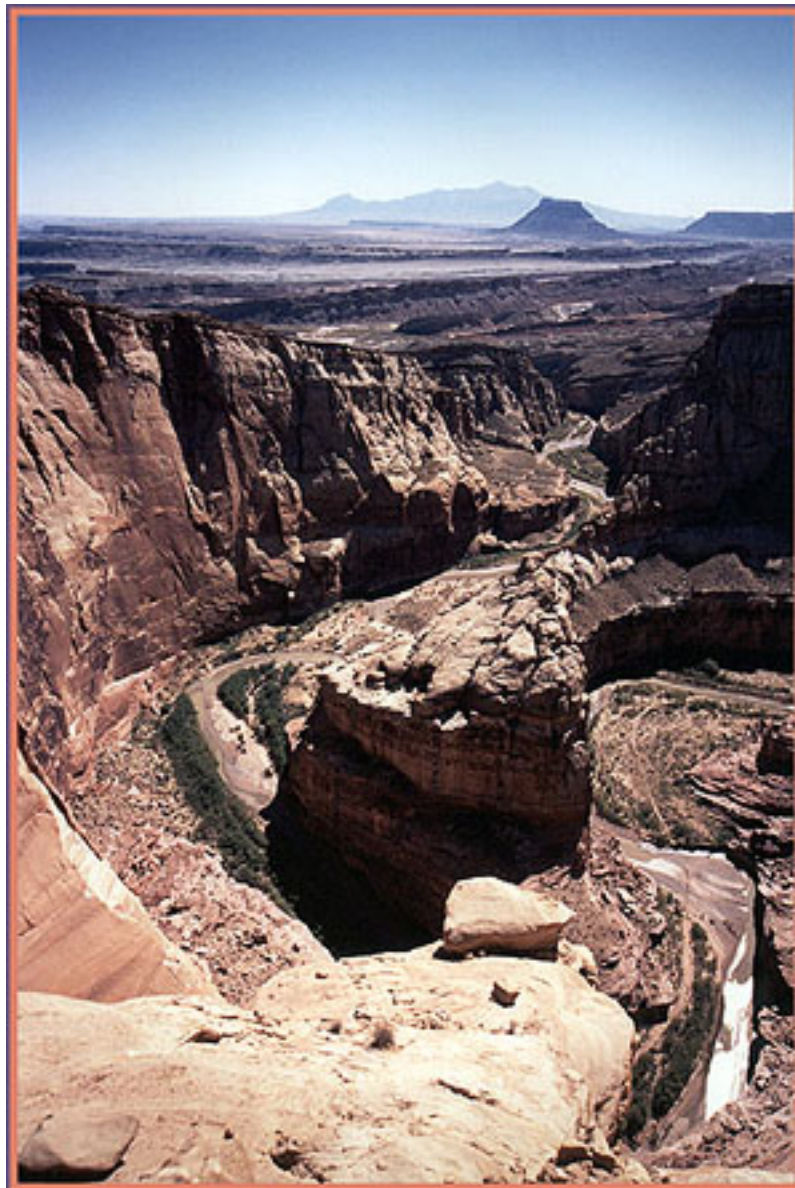
Follow the edge of the escarpment to the left. Eventually, the edge runs into some Navajo sandstone towers. About 1/4 mile before the towers, cut down and to the left, into the Knotted Rope drainage and locate some mining ruins, 1/4 mile from the rim. There are several ruins of shacks, and an iron pipe heading off across the landscape. Apparently, the miners planned to pump water 1000 feet up the escarpment from the Muddy River!

Follow the pipe over to the base of the towers, then descend a slickrock ramp toward the bottom of the canyon.

The Ridgewalk and the Directissima divide here.

For the Ridgewalk: Descend almost all the way to the canyon floor, staying right, against the canyon wall. Locate a fairly smooth wall with a shallow corner that leads to a notch in the canyon wall above. Climb the wall (3rd to 4th class). This is the lowest place in the canyon where it is possible to surmount the canyon wall. Follow the ridge down and left to the next notch. Traverse left on easy ledges back out to the edge of the canyon. Traverse slightly down but at the same level past the next gully and into a lovely sandstone bowl. From here, ascend steeply up a slabby ridge directly toward a white pinnacle. Pass the white pinnacle and drop into the top of a secret canyon.

A nice little pocket canyon is found, behind a ridge of pinnacles. Follow this to where it drops into a steeper gully. Follow to a dramatic viewpoint at the edge of the Muddy River Gorge.



Cross the head of a gully and onto the extension of the ridge. This is very exposed but not too difficult. Scramble along the ridge, looking for a way to get down into the canyon on your left. Traverse across, then descend a steep, unlikely looking gully. Rappel off a slung rock 50 meters into the canyon bottom, out near its mouth. Walk to the main canyon, intersecting it just down from the last of the potholes.

The Business: well, here we are, aren't we. Enter the potholes. Thrash. The potholes are narrow, convoluted, interesting, and fun. Recent placement of a section of pipe allows one to tightrope-walk over the most difficult section. Often there is so little space to maneuver, it is hard to downclimb into the next pool. Some of the pools are deep - most are shallow. **If the pools are not very full, some of them could be real difficult to get out of.** Check out this [Cautionary Tale](#). The canyon in some places is so narrow, large people could have real problems getting through.

After an hour or two of thrashing and near-hypothermia, you (hopefully) pop out at the other end.

Knotted Rope is now a modest, open canyon with some beautiful dunes to one side. Follow the wash until it steepens and becomes a slickrock chute. Carefully pick your way down the steep canyon, staying generally left to find the easiest path. At some places, climb the left side to avoid the

steepest places, and traverse until re-entering the canyon. Near the bottom, cross the bottom of the canyon and slab down the right side.

The slickrock section ends at a sharp right hand turn. Do not follow it right, instead, find a faint trail that climbs the cliffband directly ahead. At the top, turn right and follow the ridge to the southwest, then down the wide ridge to eventually find Muddy Creek where it exits the Gorge. Voila. Return up the Gorge of Muddy Creek.

(Var-1): A 300' rappel can be made out the end of Knotted Rope Canyon into the Muddy Creek Gorge. There is a large boulder about 40 feet back from the edge that can be rigged as an anchor. The rock in the area is super-super soft - do NOT try to drill an anchor here, it won't work. The rope cannot be pulled from below - 1 person de-rigs the rope and anchor, and hikes around.

