

# Pine Creek Canyon • Zion National Park

<b>Rating:</b>	<b>3B II</b>
<b>Best Season:</b>	Spring, summer or fall
<b>Time:</b>	2 to 6 hours (or more for a large or novice group)
<b>Longest Rappel:</b>	100 feet (30 m)
<b>Access:</b>	Requires a car spot or short hitchhike.
<b>Permit:</b>	Required. Available at Visitor Center.
<b>Seasonality:</b>	<b>Spring</b> —Highly variable conditions exist. Melting snow can cause high flowing water and Class C conditions. Check the flow BEFORE you enter the canyon. <b>Summer and Fall</b> —A usually good, easy time in this canyon. Be careful of late summer monsoons and expect variability in pools full of water or a dryer canyon if it has not rained recently. <b>Winter</b> —Can be fun, but VERY difficult and scary with flowing water and icy conditions. Be prepared for flowing water and falling ice hampering your descent. Also expect VERY cold temperatures; watch out for flooding due to snowmelt.
<b>Equipment:</b>	Helmets, Rappelling gear, webbing and rapid links.
<b>Cold Protection:</b>	Variable, but wetsuits generally required. Drysuits recommended in winter or cold conditions.
<b>Drinking Water:</b>	Bring your own. Filterable water available.
<b>Flash Flood Risk:</b>	Moderate
<b>Anchors:</b>	Bolted anchors
<b>Skills Required:</b>	A serious canyon with serious obstacles. Bring the right equipment, right people and do not underestimate the need for wetsuits.

Rapid-fire rappels, beautiful soaring walls, and constantly changing conditions of light and water make Zion's Pine Creek a wonderful learning experience for the intermediate canyoneer, or a delightful jaunt on a summer evening for the grizzled veteran.

Pine Creek is divine, though the thunder of traffic in the tunnel kind of cuts into the wilderness experience. The technical section is done by competent small parties in an hour or less, and struggled through by large groups of incompetents in 12 hours or more. Expect to encounter other parties when descending Pine Creek.

**Spotting Cars:** Pine Creek is the drainage that follows the famous Zion Tunnel. From Springdale drive north a few miles to Canyon Junction. Follow Rte 9 up Pine Creek Canyon to the second switchback and park. This is where you will exit. Continue up the road and through the tunnel. Park at the east end of the tunnel in a small parking lot on the right. If you have only one car, park at the top and have one person hitch back to the car after completing the canyon.

**The Approach:** From the parking lot, follow a small trail close to, then under, the bridge to the canyon bottom. Five minutes of walking and downclimbing leads to the first rappel. Wetsuits and harnesses are commonly put on in the shade of the canyon a few meters short of the first rappel. **First Obstacle:** A short drop and pool must be dealt with before getting to the first rappel. There are several options depending on water level and skills. Straight down the watercourse often is the best choice. An exposed climb up left, then down on a ramp can work better when the pool is full.

**R1:** 70 feet (20m) Rap from a bolt anchor to a pothole. Walk to the exit of the pothole and continue the rappel another 20 feet (6m) to the ground (sometimes pool). The last person should flip the ropes left around a horn, to avoid sticking the rope in the crack on the last part of the rappel. Pull the rope carefully, slow and steady.

**Historical Note:** In ancient times, the first few rappels were avoided by walking the rim of the canyon and rappelling from a tree. **Don't do this.** The possibility of knocking rocks onto canyoneers below is too high, and you miss some nice canyon.

Walk 20 meters, then downclimb a log under a rock.

Walk 20 meters past a small arch.

**R2:** 10 feet (3m) off a log into a pothole.

**R3:** Great Cathedral Rappel. Walk carefully out a slippery ramp to the anchor. (May require a belay in some conditions). Rap 65 feet (20m) off a bolt anchor past 2 arches.

Walk or swim out the end of the pothole (through arch). Walk down a beautiful fluted corridor 100m to the next obstacle. Downclimb a log into a slot (and often a swim), or follow the rim on the right up and over to a bolt anchor and short rappel (20 feet, 6m), avoiding the deepest part of the swim. Walk or swim a long corridor. The canyon turns sharply right. Walk and downclimb 100 meters or so to a short drop.

Carefully downclimb some logs into a pool. Walk 200 yards (200m) to one last swim where the canyon turns sharply right. Downclimb a log and make your way to where the canyon opens up. This is a good place to have lunch and warm up.

Work through large blocks 200 meters, trending right near the end to a flat ledge and a bolt anchor near a small tree.

**R4:** Rap 65 feet (20m) down a corner. Pull the rope carefully to avoid getting it stuck in the corner crack. Walk through a neat keyhole to an open area. Climb slabs left to a bench, then walk down to an arch and a bolt anchor for the final rappel.

*Safety Note: The canyon "floor" in the open area is debris wedged in-between giant boulders, and is unstable. It forms the roof of a cavern below. Use caution when moving across this possible collapse area.*

**R5:** Rap 100 feet (30m). A spectacular free rappel leads to a rocky area that used to be (and will be again) a delightful Fairy Glen with a small spring.

(Variation, Rap 5): Use a long sling to anchor off the top of boulder that blocks the canyon, then rap off the front 90 feet (27m) into the chamber under the rock. Downclimb/scramble down to the ground - easier than it looks. Convince the party behind to remove the sling for you.

Relax, drink some water, remove harnesses and pack the rope. Sometimes it is best to wait until the canyon goes into the shade for the walk out. Descend the canyon. The floor of the canyon is littered with large blocks and the walk out is strenuous. Very difficult in the dark. Take it slow and have fun. It usually takes at least an hour, not including time for playing in pools. The masonry wall of the 2nd switchback is clearly visible from the canyon bottom just before the largest and best swimming hole. Find a small trail in the woods from just above the pool, or from the level of the pool, leading to the road.

**Alternative (but NOT alternative) Exit:** It is possible to follow a traversing trail across to the end of the top switchback of the Pine Creek road. **The trail is closed except for emergencies, REAL**

**emergencies.** The ongoing use of these trails is easily seen from the Canyon Overlook trail and has a huge impact on the sandy hillside. Following the drainage is a low impact exit, so please use it.

