

# Behunin Canyon • Zion National Park

<b>Rating:</b> 3B III ★★★
<b>Season:</b> Spring or Fall.
<b>Length:</b> 5 to 9 hours
<b>Longest Rappel:</b> 165 feet (50 m)
<b>Equipment:</b> Wet suits advisable in cold weather.
<b>Drinking Water:</b> None available in the canyon.
<b>Map:</b> Temple of Sinawava
<b>Logistics:</b> Starts and ends at The Grotto.
<b>Permit:</b> <b>Required.</b>
<b>Flash Flood Danger:</b> Moderate. Weather Report available at Visitor Center.

Behunin is one of the more straightforward of Zion's backcountry canyons, and is popular. Those with good anchor and rappelling skills will find it pleasant and easy; for those without, this is not a good choice. Many rappels provide numerous opportunities to get the rope stuck, and the backcountry nature of Behunin means you are on your own. This is not a good canyon for groups larger than six.

Behunin has become popular in winter and spring, because people think it is dry. Sometimes it is, but in winter and spring, melting snow water vastly complicates the descent. At least one canyoneer recently spent a few hours stuck on a rope under a waterfall, contemplating his fate. **Luck was in his favor, as the Zion SAR team responded in time to save his life.**

The popularity of Behunin is also its curse, and makes it a showcase of the impacts canyoneers have in the fragile desert environment. As you descend, notice the eroded social trails in several places, cutting around drops and pools. Where possible, avoid further erosion by travelling in the watercourse, rappelling and downclimbing rather than scrambling around. Many of these eroded areas are returning to a natural state since canyoneers have stopped using them.

**Approach:** From the Grotto shuttle stop, head up the West Rim / Angels Landing Trail to the top of the Scout Lookout ridge. Turn left (north) toward the West Rim. The trail follows the crest of the ridge with spectacular views, then cuts left and down to cross a branch of Telephone Canyon. Following slabs around the north end of Mount Majestic, the trail crosses slickrock and works its way into a steep-walled north-facing canyon, then up to a pass. The West Rim Trail continues to the right, switchbacking up the steep sandstone on cut steps. The canyon over the west side of the pass is Behunin.

The approach is 3.8 miles (6.0 km) with 2000 feet (600m) of altitude gain. Allow 2 to 3 hours.

**Canyon:** Drop over the pass and follow trails down and right about 120' (40m), then cut right

and carefully traverse across the top of steep slabs, then down to the base of a striped wall and the crease of the watercourse. Follow the bottom of the drainage, occasionally scrambling left to avoid the worst of the brush. After about 45 minutes, the canyon turns left and starts to descend. A short section of slickrock leads to pools and the first drop.

**R1:** from the lip of the drop, follow a narrow ledge right 30 feet (10m) past a tree to a larger ledge and a two-bolt anchor. Rappel two short steps for a total of 90 feet (30m) to a flat area.

(Var-1a: from the lip, look up and left - find a large ponderosa pine with slings around it. Climb up and traverse over (4th class, exposed) to the pine, possibly belaying off an intermediate tree. Rappel 165 feet (50m) off the large tree to a flat

area). (Var-1b: from the lip, traverse left 60 feet (20m) to a one-bolt anchor, and an 80-foot (25m) rappel down a slab).

**R2:** from a large ponderosa, rappel slabs and a few short, steep walls 150 feet (45m) to a small tree and ledge at a rollover. The course of the water can be slippery, so stay on-rope all the way to the tree.

**R3:** from a small tree, rappel 150 feet (45m) down a slab, then steeper down a banded sandstone wall to a bowl/ledge. When wet, this rap can be difficult to retrieve.

**R4:** rappel 120 feet (40m) from a bolted anchor to the canyon floor.

Hike downcanyon ¼ mile (400m).

**R5:** from a bolted anchor right of the watercourse about 50 feet (15m), rappel 90 feet (30m) to the edge of a pool.

Hike downcanyon ¼ mile (400 m). The watercourse comes to a complex small drop.

**R6:** From a large rotten log, rappel 60 feet (20m) into a pool. Swim across the pool (10 feet, 3 m). Packs can be lowered on a zip line to avoid immersion. A guided rappel can be set up to avoid the swim, for all but the first and last people.

(Var-6: Pass the drop and climb a small trail into the woods. After 40 feet, a trail leads left and down to a tree with slings. Rappel 50 feet back into the canyon at the edge of the pool.)

Hike downcanyon. A small drop is downclimbed directly - much easier than it looks. Continue downcanyon through some nice narrows.

**R7:** the canyon turns left in a complex series of short drops and pools. Rappel 80 feet (30m) from a bolted anchor following the watercourse. The first part rappels to the edge of a pool. The second

part rappels into a knee-to-waist-deep pool - take a few giant-steps right (rappeller's right) to avoid the deeper part of the pool, and to place the rope over a gentler edge. A guided rappel can be used to avoid the deep wade (or swim, in winter and spring). (Do NOT take the trail up and left to a dirty and thoroughly annoying 2-stage rappel).

Avoid a pool by traversing a narrow ledge on the right. Continue downcanyon. The end of the canyon appears shortly. Scramble through large blocks to avoid pools, climbing to the top of a large boulder that blocks the end of the canyon. Climb carefully down the right side of the boulder on large holds to a sloping, insecure stance under the boulder.

**R8:** Rappel 130 feet (40m) from slings around a pinch, down a steep wall, over some steps and down to a ledge above a slot on the left. (The final person may want to pull the rope from the ledge above the slot, then downclimb into the slot). This is a common place to get ropes stuck – be careful.

(Var 8a: (150 feet (45m)) with a large group, or when the pool at the end of the canyon is full, a rappel anchor up and left, 20 feet above the big boulder (a small tree and a single bolt) can be used).

**R9:** Climb down into the slot, then under a chockstone to the front. Clip into the bolt garden under the chockstone, then set your rope off a bolt anchor around the corner a few feet on the face. Rappel 165 feet (50m) mostly free to a wet nook in the talus below.

If you have trouble pulling the rope, walk away from the cliff as far as possible, down to "The Beach".

**Exit:** Pack up the gear and shoulder the packs. From the shallow pool or sand flat below the large rock, boulder-hop directly down the streambed to the Middle Emerald Pool and the trail. Turn left to return to The Grotto.

