

# Heaps Canyon • Zion National Park

<b>Rating:</b>	4B VI 5.4
<b>Best Season:</b>	Summer or Fall
<b>Time:</b>	12 to 20 hours
<b>Longest Rappel:</b>	280 feet (90 m)
<b>Access:</b>	Heaps can be approached either from the Main Canyon Floor via the West Rim Trail, or from Lava Point. Both approaches take about 4 hours, but the Lava Point approach uses considerably less energy than climbing 3000 feet (900m) from the main canyon floor.
<b>Permit:</b>	Required. Available at Visitor Center.
<b>Seasonality:</b>	Summer and Fall are the only practical times to do Heaps. Once it stops flowing from snowmelt in the Spring, it can be done (but then we call that Summer).

The big variable for Heaps is the current water levels and how it affects pothole escapes. Snowmelt fills the canyon in the spring, and thunderstorms refill it. Hot summer weather will pull the water out of it, and several weeks without rain can result in difficult conditions. Ask the Wilderness Desk and other knowledgeable sources for “current conditions”.

**Equipment:** Helmets, rappelling gear, slings and rapid links. Drybags for your gear. A hooking kit should be carried at all times. Family Band Radios can be extremely helpful on the final rappels.

## Cold Water

**Protection:** Thick wetsuits or Drysuits required at all times.

**Difficulties:** A long and physical canyon, with sometimes many challenging pothole escapes.

**Drinking Water:** Water available to filter in the canyon.

**Flash Flood Risk:** High—long sections of unrelenting narrows and a large watershed above combine to make this a canyon only to be done with a totally clear forecast.

**Anchors:** Natural and bolted.

Heaps is a truly wonderful canyon, but it is also BIG. Deep inside the mountain, it is dark, wet, sinuous and moody. When really wet, it is fast and cold, and such a blast! When the water levels go down, keeper potholes start appearing, and as the level continues descending, more and more potholes require effort to get out of. I have seen as many as 14 potholes that required significant effort to get out of.

Heaps can be very physical, which is why a one-day descent with less gear makes a lot of sense to me. The extra 5 or 6 lbs to bivy, carried through the canyon, adds up to a greatly increased effort over the course of the day. There are decent bivy spots in Phantom Valley before suiting up, at the Crossroads and near the end, on flat sandy shelves above the watercourse.

Heaps saves the best for last – a series of raps culminating in a 280-foot free-hanging the whole way rappel, with the wall at least 50 feet away. AWESOME, and something you want to be alert for.

**Approach: (Variation Note)** Heaps can also be accessed by Canyon, via The Gunsight for description. descending The Gunsight, rather than through Phantom

Valley. Follow the description for the Gunsight, then head **From Lava Point:** This approach uses less energy, but does down Heaps from the Crossroads. This route bypasses some require a car spot. Follow the West Rim Trail south 6.5 miles of the best, and most challenging narrows of Heaps. See Isaac (10.4 km) past Potato Hollow to a trail junction. The West

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Rim Trail splits here – take the right branch that continues along the West Rim. Walk 1.5 miles (2.4 km) to around campsite #4. Leave the trail and follow the edge of the escarpment another 1/8 mile to the top of a ridge between an amphitheater on the left and Phantom Valley on the right.

**From the Main Canyon Floor:** From the Grotto, skip up the Angels Landing / West Rim trail 4.3 miles (7 km) with 3000 feet (900m) of gain to West Rim Spring. This is a very small spring that provides reliable water, but requires treatment. Take the "Rim Route" (left fork) of the West Rim Trail 1.3 miles to around campsite #4. Leave the trail and follow the edge of the escarpment another 1/8 mile to the top of a ridge between an amphitheater on the left and Phantom Valley on the right.

The ridge is at UTM NAD83: 12S 323930mE 4128070mN

### From the Ridge

Work your way down the ridge, carefully following small social trails to avoid the worst of the brush. Progress on the ridge is soon blocked by a short cliffband. A small tree with slings above a dirt and gravel slope provides a possible rappel anchor, but a cleaner rappel can be found by stepping west 10 feet (3 m) over a rock ridge and slinging a block (may require a long sling). Rap 65 feet (21 m) to the ground. Continue down the ridge, downclimbing on the left side when needed. Delicately climb an exposed, crumbling knife-edge ridge to a large tree on the right. Rap from tree 205 feet (62 m) to the high point of the ground, 20 feet (6 m) right of a large Ponderosa Pine. Alternatively, rappel to a tree on the face below, and rappel from there to the ground. Bag the ropes and walk down the slope to the slickrock, then follow the ridge all the way to the bottom of the wash. Walk the wash one hour to where it drops into a dark slot, and suit up.

**Canyon – the Phantom Valley Narrows:** After a few walking and wading sections, the real fun begins with a rappel through a series of beautiful pools. After a few rap 'n swims, the canyon opens up briefly, before closing in for another pool-drop section. When full, this section is easy and fun. When the water is a little lower, as many as eight challenging pothole escapes may be required.

The canyon then opens up and works its way through a section with canyons coming in on both sides. This is "The Crossroads". Escape to the south out Isaac Canyon is possible here, if needed. Traverse around a pothole and rappel off a tree. A few minutes of hiking takes you to the Long Sandy Corridor. At the end of the Corridor, the canyon turns sharply left and plunges into darkness.

The next section of narrows is long and intense. Work your way through it. Near the end, there are potential bivy spots high and left, above the streamcourse for most conditions. Strenuous climbing, pack tosses, ingenuity and, as a last resort, drilling and hooking may be required to pass the numerous difficulties.

Many hours later, the intense narrows relent and the huge, smooth face of Lady Mountain can be seen on the right. A flat sandy corridor leads to a flat rock and a plunging slot on the left. The flat rock is often used to remove dry suits and prepare for the final rappel sequence.

Take a look down the slot on the left. This is NOT the exit – a rappel from the lip is about 500 feet. Instead, climb a sandy chimney on the right (30 feet (10m), 5.4) to the crest of a lump. Downclimb a slot over the other side to a small tree. Rap carefully 60 feet (18 m) down a slot to an exposed sloped ledge at a large tree. Be careful not to release any of the loose blocks perched in the slot – there are tourists below.

From the large tree, rappel 165 feet (50 m) to a small ledge in the chimney. There is some loose rock on this rap too. Do NOT underestimate this rappel – it is vertical the entire length and very exposed.

From the small ledge, rappel 280 feet (90 m) free to the talus below. Carefully rig the final rappel. There is a lot of poison ivy at the base of the rappel - avoid touching it.

**Exit:** Stroll down the Upper Emerald Pools Trail to Zion Lodge, about 30 minutes.

**Note:** There is an "Escape from Heaps", via Isaac Canyon from the Crossroads. See Isaac Canyon via the The Gunsight for the description.



# HEAPS CANYON & ISAAC CANYON

