

Grand Canyon

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park
Arizona



Bright Angel Trail

Locations/Elevations

Bright Angel Trailhead (6860 ft / 2093 m) to:

Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse (5729 ft / 1748 m)

Three-Mile Resthouse (4748 ft / 1449 m)

Havasupai Gardens (3800 ft / 1160m)

River Resthouse (2480 ft / 756 m)

Bright Angel Campground (2480 ft / 756 m)

Mileages

1.5 mi (2.4 km)

3.0 mi (4.8 km)

4.5 mi (7.2 km)

7.7 mi (12.4 km)

9.5 mi (15.3 km)

Trailhead Access

The Bright Angel trailhead is located just west of Bright Angel Lodge. There is limited parking at the trailhead (behind the Bright Angel Lodge cabins) though the Backcountry Information Center recommends to park at the Backcountry Information Center (Lot D). Leave your vehicle and walk over the railroad tracks, following the sidewalk past Maswik Lodge. After crossing another set of railroad tracks, the trailhead is to the right of the Hermit-Interchange shuttle bus station (Red Route). This paved walk takes most visitors about 7-minutes in total. Another option is to park at the Grand Canyon Visitor Center and catch the Village Loop (Blue Route) shuttle bus (about 20-minute ride).

Water Sources

From early May to early October, pre-treated drinking water is available along the trail at Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse and Three-Mile Resthouse. Drinking water is available year-round at Havasupai Gardens and Bright Angel Campground. There is never drinking water at the River Resthouse. Due to the remote conditions, pre-treated drinking water is NOT guaranteed: ALWAYS BRING A BACKUP METHOD TO TREAT WATER.

Toilets are located along the trail at Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse and Three-Mile Resthouse, at Havasupai Gardens, near the River Resthouse, and in the Bright Angel Campground / Phantom Ranch area.

Campsites

Camping in designated campgrounds only Havasupai Gardens Campground (15 small group sites, 1 large group site, no stock). Though not technically along this trail, Bright Angel Campground is located on the northside of the Colorado River (30 small group sites, 2 large group sites, stock allowed).

Important Notes

Grand Canyon National Park is, above all else, a place of extremes. Therefore, it is helpful to plan according to seasonal norms and to take appropriate precautions depending on seasonal variations in trail conditions and weather. During the winter months (most pronounced December through February), the top 2 miles are often icy. Because the wintertime sun never reaches the trail, it can remain slick for weeks or even months after a snowstorm, so over shoe traction and hiking poles are recommended. During scorching temperatures, when the bottom of the canyon is most likely to reach at least 100 deg F (which is most likely to occur between early May and late September), hikers must depart before dawn or wait until late afternoon. Hiking through the midday hours of 10 am and 4 pm is not recommended. Hike Smart!

Trail Description

While the South Kaibab Trail follows a ridge line, the Bright Angel Trail conforms to a fault, keeping to the back of a side canyon during the first few miles. Massive cliffs frame the views on the Bright Angel Trail and provide a

shadier trek. Its natural water sources benefit the abundant plant and animal life. More so here compared to the South Kaibab Trail. These features make the Bright Angel Trail appealing to those interested in geology and in viewing wildlife.

Most of this trail's elevation change occurs in the upper four miles of the trail via a series of switchbacks that can seem endless. Be sure to utilize the Resthouses and seasonal water sources along the way. Whether ascending or descending, it is worthwhile to take breaks regularly. Approaching Havasupai Gardens, the trail flattens considerably as it crosses the shale-dominated Tonto Platform.

Havasupai Gardens is an oasis in the canyon used by Native Americans up to modern times. Ralph Cameron, one of the early pioneers who built the Bright Angel Trail (and who would later become an Arizona senator in 1903), had agreed with the resident Havasupai, allowing him to build a camp for tourists. He staked mining claims to secure the site, built tent cabins and planted the enormous cottonwood trees still present today. Hikers camping at Havasupai Gardens should consider the 3-mile round-trip trek to Plateau Point.

Below Havasupai Gardens, the trail follows Garden Creek through a meandering gully of water-sculpted stone and shimmering cottonwood trees. Then, the trail again becomes steep, where this gully empties into the broad, bowl-shaped Pipe Creek drainage. This section of trail affectionately referred to as the Devil's Corkscrew and is brutally hot during the summer months. Therefore, hike during the early morning or late evening hours. Unfortunately, there are no potable water sources between Havasupai Gardens and Bright Angel Campground.

From the Pipe Creek River Resthouse area to Bright Angel Campground, the trail traverses exposed sand dunes for over a mile until you reach the Silver Bridge and cross the Colorado River. But, again, these sand dunes become a dangerous slog during hot weather.

General Information & History

The Bright Angel Trail is Grand Canyon National Park's premier hiking trail. It is well-maintained, graded for stock, has regular drinking water, covered rest houses, and emergency phones. Located at the trail's halfway point lies Havasupai Gardens Ranger Station and Campground. Then, after crossing the Silver Bridge over the Colorado River to the canyon's northside is the Phantom Ranch Ranger Station and Bright Angel Campground. Visitors hiking for the first time at Grand Canyon often use this trail in conjunction with the South Kaibab Trail. Therefore, it makes sense to ascend via the Bright Angel Trail during hot weather because of potable water, regular shade, and emergency phones.

Following a natural break in the cliffs formed by the massive Bright Angel Fault, today's Bright Angel Trail approximates a route used for millennia by the many Native American groups that have called the Grand Canyon home. Early western pioneers later built a trail in 1891 to reach mining claims established below the rim at Havasupai Gardens. Recognizing that the "true worth" of their mining claims would be measured in tourist visitation, these pioneers immediately registered their trail as a "toll road" and extended it to the river. The mining claims and toll would be the source of much controversy, first in legal battles with railroad companies that wanted to control tourism and later with the federal government.

In 1928 the Bright Angel Trail was taken over by the National Park Service. Though it has been improved upon and considerably rerouted over the years, visitors on the Bright Angel Trail can sense its rich history from ancient pictograph panels and historic structures and marvel at the trail's construction over some of the roughest terrain in North America.

Maps

7.5 Minute Phantom Ranch Quad (USGS)

Trails Illustrated Map, Grand Canyon National Park (National Geographic)

Sky Terrain Trails Map, Grand Canyon (Sky Terrain)

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