


TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Knotted Rope Canyon, the Directissima San Rafael Swell, Southern Reef

Rating:	3B III 
Best Season:	Spring or fall. The return hike is in full sun, but the potholes are cold, so hot weather is recommended.
Time:	About 6 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:	Drybags, a short rope for moving packs or assisting people out of potholes
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:	Wetsuits recommended for most conditions, dry bags, wading shoes.
Drinking Water:	None, bring plenty.
Flash Flood Risk:	Moderate.
Skills Required:	A lot of 4 th class climbing in the lower canyon. Cold, wet, technical potholes through the narrows with no escapes.

The Directissima route drops into Knotted Rope, and follows the Canyon through a difficult and interesting technical pothole section. The beautiful lower section of Knotted Rope is followed to the front of the Reef and a return up Muddy Creek.

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 Gulley: 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).

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 Ridgwalk and the Directissima divide here.

For the Directissima, follow the slickrock ramp down to the sandy bottom of the canyon, which quickly closes into a tight canyon. The first potholes can be bypassed by climbing up slickrock to the left, then dropping back into the canyon 100 feet further down.



First Pothole, Knotted Rope Canyon

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.

