


TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

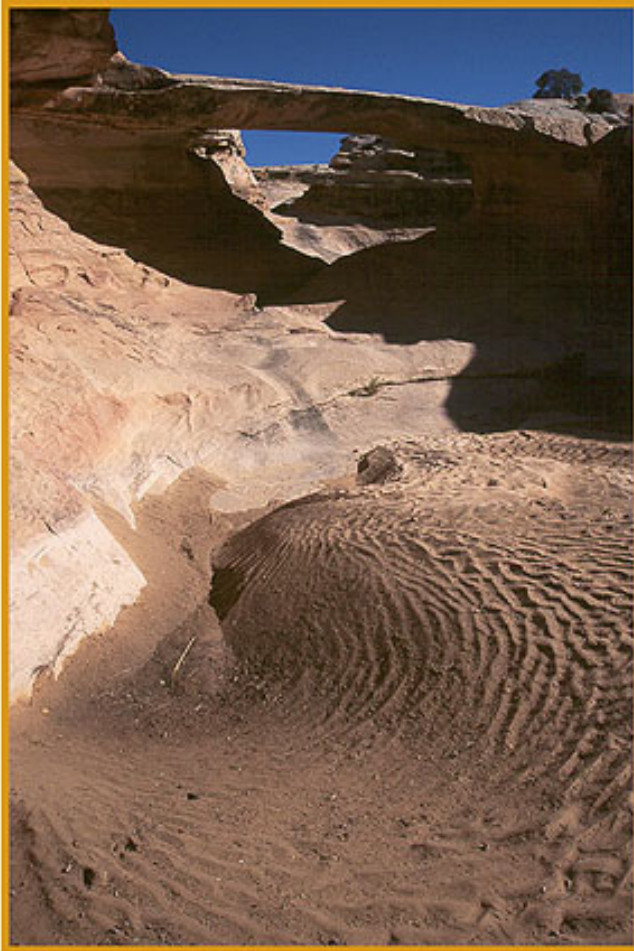
Archive

Quandary Canyon San Rafael Swell, Southern Reef

- Rating:** 3B III 
- Best Season:** Spring or fall. The return hike is in full sun, so high summer is very HOT.
- Time:** 6 to 8 hours.
Direct Route: 8 to 10 hours.
- Access:** A car spot is useful. Route starts at the Quandary Canyon branch road, 2.2 miles east of Hidden Splendor Mine. Route ends at Hidden Splendor.
- Permit:** Not required.
- Equipment:** 1-50m rope, a few slings. *Direct Route:* Add advanced anchor material.
- Map:** USGS 7.5' Hunt Draw. Quandary Canyon is shown, but not labeled. It is the first canyon to the east of elevation 6245.
- Cold Protection:** Wading shoes and dry bags. *Direct Route:* Shortie wetsuits, even in the hottest weather.
- Drinking Water:** Bring plenty. Potholes could be pumped in an emergency.
- Flash Flood Risk:** High; once entering the canyon, escape is difficult.
- Skills Required:** Rappels up to 50 feet, potholes to swim and wade, some downclimbing.
Direct Route: Advanced natural anchor skills are required and good canyoneering experience/Common sense.
- Special Note:** The Swell is a natural anchors only area. However, for better or worse, many of the canyons have quite a few bolts. Please do not place any more.

Quandary is an entertaining canyoneering adventure, or challenging pothole thrash. Take your choice, but choose wisely. The regular route makes a good introduction to technical canyoneering in the Swell. The direct offers a good chance to get into trouble.

The route uses the same start as Knotted Rope Canyon, ascends a mining road to the top of the reef, then descends an interesting and somewhat technical canyon. After a few raps and a couple of potholes, the Normal route takes a gully out of the canyon and bypasses the most difficult section. The Direct pushes through a technical pothole section requiring advanced skills, then reunites with the regular route. We then follow the canyon more easily to the front of the reef. Return up the Muddy River Gorge or, for even more fun, up Ramp Canyon. *Note: Returning up the Muddy River Gorge could be difficult if the Muddy River is running high.*



Natural Bridge, Quandary Canyon

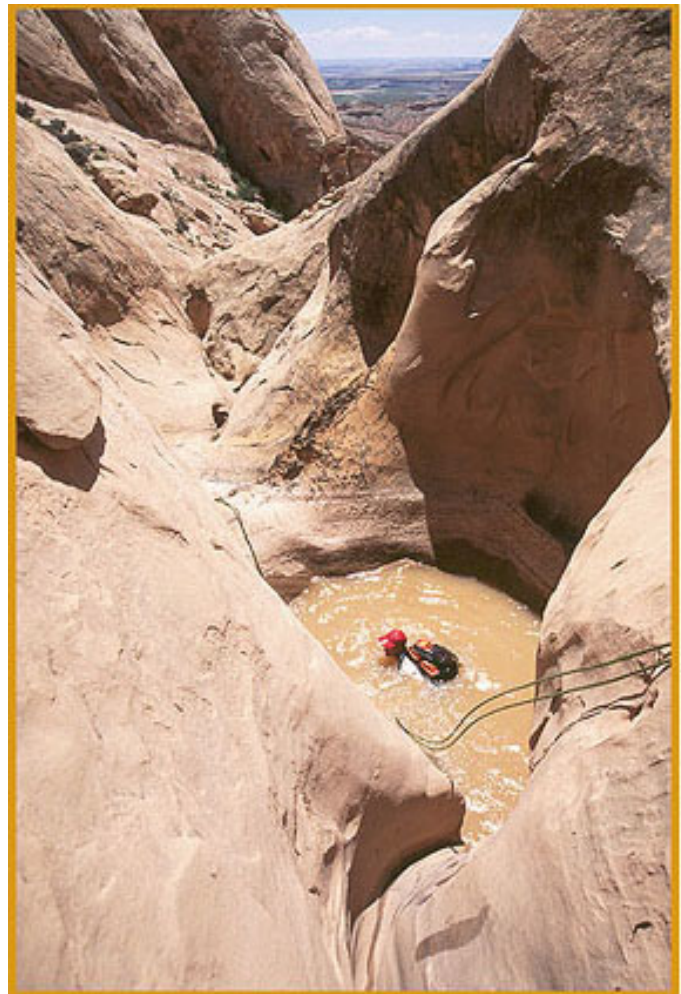
The glen focuses back into a narrow canyon. Follow it. A pothole and fall are usually bypassed by climbing up and right, then back into the canyon. (Or, can be rappelled directly - but the pothole can be difficult to escape. Use a pack toss or a cheater hook). Then a 30' chute leads into a pothole. Though the climb down is not as bad as it looks, there is an anchor up and left from which one can rappel. Be sure to check its solidity. Some interesting and fun narrows follow.

After an easy section, the canyon turns sharply right, to a small pothole leading to a big drop. Back up to the sharp turn, and climb a gully straight ahead. From the top of the gully, do NOT drop back into the canyon at the next gully, instead, cross through a small saddle and traverse along the top of a steep slab. Intersect a wall and descend a steep gully down to, then under and through some very large blocks, and back into the main canyon.

Direct Route: *rappel the big drop off natural anchors and continue down the canyon. Several deep and difficult potholes present significant difficulties. Allow 2-3 extra hours to work through this section. Check out trip reports if*

Getting There: Spot a car at the Air Strip, or as far down Muddy River Gorge as you can. 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.

Start of the Canyon: The bowl quickly turns into a narrow canyon. Follow it. A small drop immediately appears. Most people will downclimb and drop, but there is a rock bollard that allows a quick rappel. Shortly thereafter, a more severe second drop is passed by a quick rappel off a wedged beam. The canyon then opens into a beautiful glen. Low down in the glen is a great natural bridge. *Just for fun, figure out how they got a mining track into this section of the canyon!?*



Pothole, Quandary Direct

you plan on doing the Direct.

After a few more fun obstacles, the canyon swings right into a transverse canyon, ending in a drop. Climb the slope to the left and traverse around and down into the new main canyon. **Two large pools are passed on the left - while the right hand bypass looks inviting, it ends in steep technical dirt, and is ill-advised.**

This spits you out at the front of the reef. Two returns are possible. Turn right to go to the Muddy River Gorge and a pleasant, shaded wade back to the airstrip. Or turn left for an hour and a half of being baked by the sun, then a scary 5.6 move 20 feet off the deck, to return somewhat closer to your vehicle.

