


TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Upper Straight Wash San Rafael Swell, Central Swell

Rating:	III Class 4 
Best Season:	Fall, winter or spring.
Time:	3 to 8 hours.
Access:	Out and back hike.
Permit:	Not required.
Equipment:	No technical equipment required.
Map:	USGS 7.5' Arsons Garden.
Cold Protection:	None.
Drinking Water:	None, bring plenty.
Flash Flood Risk:	Moderate—the canyon has few exits.
Skills Required:	Some 4 th class scrambling is required to get in and out of the canyon.

Variations on a Theme. It worked for Bach, it worked for Beethoven, it worked for Charles Ives. It works in the Swell, too. In Straight Wash, the theme is *sandstone narrows* and the variations are splendid. Straight Wash is within easy reach of I-70. Because the canyon is not really deep, it's probably best to avoid it in high summer. This day hike requires a little 4th class scrambling to drop into Straight Wash, then follows the canyon deep into the stone. Turn around and return when your time is up.

Getting There: Take Exit 129 off of I-70. Follow the access road on the NORTH side of the highway 3.1 miles to a dirt road on the right. There is a sign here for "Red Draw". Follow this .2 miles then turn right and cross under I-70. On the south side of I-70, turn left. 1.5 miles further take the right fork. Cross a larger flat field and follow a straight section that marks the former airstrip. Where the road meets the trees, follow the main track around to the left, then out a progressively rougher road. When you can see the edge of the escarpment, find a place to park.

Take a good look at the view. Note how Straight Wash cuts into the rise of the Swell. Also note the canyon below and to the right that provides access to Straight Wash.

The Business: Drop off the escarpment to the Pinyon-Juniper forest on the platform below. Trend right and drop into the head of the canyon that leads toward Straight Wash. This is a nice little canyon with some interesting little sections. The first obstacle can be passed by cutting over a notch to the left and into the next gulley over (3rd class). The 50 foot drop into Straight Wash is again passed by cutting up to the left, then down the next gulley past a little climbing spot (4th class). 1 hour to here.

Alternative Start: The next canyon west offers an entrance of similar difficulty. The hardest spot is about 50' back from the bottom of the canyon, where some very steep dirt must be descended to get down into the canyon (4th class). Once in the canyon, turn left and head downstream. The canyon starts dry and rocky, but soon narrows and becomes more gravelly and interesting. Straight Wash offers an outstanding variety of narrows—some thin, some wide, some deep, some shallow. Traipse downcanyon and enjoy the scenery.

About 2 hours downcanyon is where the first water appears, starting as quicksand and a tiny trickle. Tremendous cottonwoods begin to appear. But, it's about time to turnaround and head back. Return as you came.

