



TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Wild Horse Canyon and Skylight Arch San Rafael Swell, Eastern Reef

Rating:	II Class 2 ★★☆☆
Best Season:	Year-round, but exposed to full sun; in summer it makes a good early morning or late evening hike.
Time:	1 to 3 hours.
Access:	Out and back hike.
Permit:	Not required.
Equipment:	No technical equipment required.
Map:	USGS 7.5' Temple Mountain.
Cold Protection:	None required.
Drinking Water:	Bring plenty.
Flash Flood Risk:	Moderate.
Skills Required:	A bit of slickrock scrambling.
Special Note:	ORV use in this area could be dangerous if you are caught in the narrows at the wrong time.

Wild Horse Canyon / Skylight Arch is a quick wonderful jaunt for a few hours, or a half day walk with car or bike spot. This is a delightful way to spend a few hours. Unfortunately, ORVers are common in this area, and caution should be used, especially if hiking with young children.

A nice little canyon with a fun narrows section, plus a very interesting arch. Close to the Temple Mountain Road Junction, it is easy to get to and makes a great way to begin or end your trip to the San Rafael Swell. Easy walking suitable for the whole family. Allow 1 to 3 hours.

From Temple Mountain Junction, take the Goblin Valley Road south about 1/2 mile then take any of several small dirt roads off to the west. There is a network of roads here, suitable for 2wd vehicles, that lead to several parking spots overlooking the wash of Wild Horse Creek. Wild Horse Canyon is the obvious canyon cutting through the reef just to the left (south) of a prominent cave half way up the reef that is easily seen for quite a ways. One of these parking spots provides a particularly good view of the coming route.

Descend to the wash below and find the branch leading toward the reef. The canyon quickly enters a section of really cool, kid-sized narrows. (ATV's and dirt bikes sometimes race up this section. If caught in the narrows by a dirt bike, you could be killed. Use common sense).

The narrows takes a distinct jog to the right, with a brushy, narrow side canyon continuing straight ahead. The route up to Skylight Arch heads up the slick rock to the right. Let's do that first. JUST as the narrows opens up, find an easy way up the slickrock to the right. After gaining a few hundred feet of altitude, work your way North, then back west toward the prominent cave. Find a small canyon heading toward the cave - all roads lead to Rome. Follow this canyon to the alcove in front of the two caves. If you approach quietly, you may see an owl that frequents the area. A little puddle just before the

alcove may need to be waded. Enjoy the beautiful Skylight Arch (dull, official name: 'Wild Horse Window'), then return to the main wash.



wash crossing, then turn left down the wash/road toward the reef. Follow as far as seems wise in your vehicle and park. (Stop before a quite narrow and rough section - the road ends only 100 yards further).

Under an alcove by the furthest parking lot, there is some rock art and gringo inscriptions. Or maybe all gringo inscriptions, hard to say. Head down the canyon - it's difficult to get lost.

One can continue up Wild Horse Canyon for quite a ways. There is some nice Rock Art in this canyon if you can find it - good luck, I've spent a lot of time looking. Above the Cool Narrows, the canyon opens into a vale, then the walls grow larger and the canyon heads back into the swell. Tramp as far as you want, then return to the car.

Part II: A Through Hike II or III Class 2 *A nice through-hike done in either direction. A car or bike spot is pretty much required.*

Getting There: To find the trailhead behind the reef, drive through the reef on the Temple Mountain road, then take the first dirt road to the left, 'Behind the Reef Road'. Resist the first turnoff southeast that leads to the 'fake Wild Horse Canyon' (also a worthy starting point that gets you to much the same place). Continue on the BTR Road to the prominent



Skylight Arch (Wild Horse Window)



Hanging Out at Skylight Arch

The Business: This is a pretty interesting canyon. It first cuts partway through the reef, then traverses about a mile between sections of the reef, before cutting through to the front. There is a grand variety of forms from rocky narrows to broad, flat sections. In no place is it difficult. It does not get much shade for most of it's length. Wander through the landscape. The entrance to the "Cool Narrows" is pretty obvious, and is the first place to easily surmount the wall on the left. This leads to Skylight Arch, should you choose to visit it on your way out. Enjoy.

