



Tonto Trail: Grandview Trail to South Kaibab Trail

The dynamic interplay of soft and hard layers of stone creates an open benchland at the rim of the Inner Gorge called the Tonto Platform. Easily visible from several South Rim overlooks, the greenish Tonto rocks have eroded into an obvious exception to the striking vertical cliffs that characterize most of Grand Canyon. The Tonto Trail follows this natural transcanyon route for 95 rough, unmaintained miles, from Red Canyon on the east to Garnet Canyon on the west. All of this makes the Tonto Trail unique among Grand Canyon pathways. Most descend from the rim towards the Colorado River, but the Tonto Trail offers passage by foot up and down the canyon, parallel to the course of the river. Because of its length, most hikers approach the Tonto Trail not as a single unit, but rather as a series of installments, breaking the route down into four or five sections defined by rim to river trails and the natural lay of the land. The trek along the Tonto Trail between the Grandview and South Kaibab Trails offers experienced canyon walkers a representative introduction to the pleasures, as well as the problems, associated with travel along this important inner canyon feature.

Locations/Elevations	Mileages
Grandview Point (7400 ft / 2256 m) to Cottonwood Creek, BG9 (3690 ft / 1125 m):	4.5 mi (7.2 km)
Cottonwood Creek (3690 ft / 1125 m) to Grapevine Creek, BH9 (3550 ft / 1082 m):	5.5 mi (8.8 km)
Grapevine Creek (3550 ft / 1082 m) to Lone Tree Canyon, BJ9 (3680 ft / 1122 m):	8.7 mi (14 km)
Lone Tree Canyon (3680 ft / 1122 m) to Cremation Creek, BJ9 (3650 ft / 1113 m):	3.5 mi (5.6 km)
Cremation Creek (3650 ft / 1113 m) to South Kaibab trailhead (7200 ft / 2135 m):	6.5 mi (10.4 km)
Grandview Point (7400 ft / 2256 m) to South Kaibab trailhead (7200 ft / 2135 m):	28.7 mi (46 km)

Maps

7.5 Minute Grandview Point, Cape Royal, and Phantom Ranch Quads (USGS)
Trails Illustrated Map, Grand Canyon National Park (National Geographic)
Sky Terrain Trails Map, Grand Canyon (Sky Terrain)

Water Sources

The Tonto Trail is notorious for its lack of reliable water sources, and this section is no exception. **Do not expect the river to be a water source in this area; river access via side canyons in this segment ranges from extremely difficult to impossible.** Heavy water loads are the norm and dry camps almost inevitable. Check with the Backcountry Information Center for the latest water reports before embarking, know where your next drink is coming from, and have enough water to get you there. The combination of open, sunny country, lack of shade, many dry miles and only a single reliable water source makes this hike dangerous during hot weather. The issue of water in your pack vs. distance to the next reliable spring is one to always keep in mind along the Tonto Trail.

Cottonwood Creek (BG9): Cool weather: Southern spring is usually reliable. Northern Spring and O'Neill Spring are unreliable at best. Hot weather: May be dry.

Grapevine Creek (BH9): Cool weather: Water in the east arm at the Tonto Trail crossing and from the spring on the east side of the drainage. Hot weather: Water normally available in the east arm above or below Tonto Platform level (but sometimes dry at the Tonto Trail) and usually a small trickle from the spring on the east side of the drainage. Further downcanyon water abounds.

Boulder Creek (BH9): Cool weather: Dry at the Tonto Trail crossing. Small amounts are occasionally found above Tonto Platform level. Water may also be found downstream about 20 minutes. Hot weather: Dry.

Lone Tree Creek (BJ9): Cool weather: Small amounts at or below Tonto Trail crossing (the most reliable water source is a half hour walk below the Tonto crossing near a lone cottonwood tree). The spring originates in the Muav. Hot weather: Dry.

Cremation Creek (BJ9): Dry all year. Occasional potholes in the Tapeats (down the west arm of the drainage).

Emergency Water Sources: Page Spring and Hance Creek (east of Horseshoe Mesa), Burro Spring and Pipe Creek (west of the Tip-off) and Bright Angel Campground (at the bottom of the Kaibab Trail) are reliable. Any of these sources would represent a major detour and will only be utilized by the truly desperate.

Campsites

"At-large" camping is allowed between Cottonwood and Cremation Creeks (see above for use area codes). Hikers should follow Leave No Trace guidelines when selecting campsites to minimize group impact. Campsites are often located where the Tonto Trail crosses the drainages and often on the Tonto Platform between the side canyons. Some regularly used campsites, especially near water, support a resident population of rodents, ravens and other canyon residents; take steps to protect your food and gear.

Trailhead Access

To start this section of the Tonto Trail from the east, walk the Grandview Trail to Horseshoe Mesa (the parking lot closest to Grandview Point is day use only; the overnight lot is located just beyond the day use lot). Trails through the Redwall on the west and north flanks of Horseshoe Mesa provide ways to reach the bed of Cottonwood Creek and the Tonto Trail. Western access is from the Tip-off, five miles down the South Kaibab Trail.

Trail Description

The Tonto Trail is like a contour line on your map. The trail descends into the side canyons only when there is no other option, preferring to traverse into the drainages at a consistent elevation. It is often indirect, but Tonto Trail hikers would be well advised to have faith and follow the trail - it almost always represents the most efficient way across the landscape, and one quickly discovers that a trail, any sort of trail, makes for much easier forward progress. Shortcuts will not save time. The trail is not signed.

The Tonto Trail leaves the bed of Cottonwood Creek near the top of the Tapeats Formation, contours around the west arm, and heads west toward Grapevine. Entering Grapevine from the east involves a short section of narrow, eroding trail with significant exposure. The views down into the lower reaches of Grapevine are wonderful, but watch your step. Grapevine is, by far, the largest and most complex side canyon between the Grandview and the South Kaibab Trails. Looking across the mouth of the drainage from the Tonto Trail the distance seems short, but plan on at least 2-3 hours of steady hiking to cross. The small unnamed drainages between Grapevine and Boulder and Boulder and Lone Tree will slow progress, and a little confusion on the west side of Lone Tree is normal, but generally speaking the route between Grapevine and Cremation Creek is straightforward.

Cremation is tough. It has formed along a major fault zone called the Grandview Monocline which has distorted the west side. Folding and displacement related to the fault are obvious within the Tapeats Formation in both western arms of Cremation. Crossing these canyons involves significant elevation change, something of an exception to the (more or less) level nature of the Tonto Trail. There is no river access at Cremation Canyon. A short climb up the slope of the monocline west of Cremation brings hikers to the South Kaibab Trail at the Tip-off.

Important Notes

The dry, hostile nature of the Tonto Platform belies the fact that this desert landscape has been utilized by prehistoric populations for thousands of years. A trained eye can detect archaeological sites in many of the side canyons, sites that testify to the creative intelligence that sustained these people over many generations living out their lives within the harsh, unforgiving world of inner Grand Canyon. If you should find or visit such sites, please leave everything in place, exactly as you found it.