



North Bass Trail

The North Bass Trail is possibly the quintessential Grand Canyon trail combining thrusting faults, diverse geology, and an introduction to one of the region's mythic pioneers: William Wallace Bass. Explorer, trail builder, miner, family man, and tourist entrepreneur, in many ways Bill Bass personified that rugged breed that ventured into the unknown to claim a life from the wilderness. Walking in the footsteps of a man like Bass is humbling. His trail will quickly confuse the unprepared and inexperienced, but strong and knowledgeable canyon hikers will appreciate the woven complexity of the area's history, geology, and ecosystems. Forest and upland shrub frame white hoodoos near the rim, while slickrock sections and small waterfalls wait to enchant the hiker further down. As the trail approaches the canyon floor, the canyon widens to offer stunning views and the vegetation shifts to a combination of riparian and low desert scrub. Hikers headed to the Colorado River will have to crisscross Shinumo Creek several times before reaching the historic Bass camp. The profusion of artifacts is startling—household implements, mining tools—each telling a story about the lives that Bill Bass touched. Nearby, Bass tended a canyon orchard filled with fig, peach, and apricot trees. Sit for a spell and imagine the aroma of sun-drenched peach trees. How many hikers have eaten a fresh peach at the bottom of the Grand Canyon? The North Bass Trail has a well-deserved reputation as one of the most difficult and demanding canyon trails, enjoy with caution.

Locations/Elevations

Swamp Point (7500 ft / 2286 m) to Muav Saddle (6700 ft / 2042 m):

Muav Saddle (6700 ft / 2042 m) to top of the Redwall Descent (5000 ft / 1524 m):

Redwall Descent (5000 ft / 1524 m) to Shinumo Creek (2800 ft / 853 m):

Shinumo Creek ((2800 ft / 853 m) to Shinumo Camp (2400 ft / 732 m):

Shinumo Camp (2400 ft / 732 m) to Colorado River (2200 ft / 671 m):

Swamp Point (7500 ft / 2286 m) to Colorado River (2200 ft / 671 m):

Mileages

1.0 mi (1.6 km)

3.5 mi (5.6 km)

5.8 mi (9.3 km)

1.7 mi (2.7 km)

1.5 mi (2.4 km)

13.5 mi (21.7 km)

Maps

7.5 Minute King Arthur Castle and Havasupai Point Quads (USGS)

Trails Illustrated Map, Grand Canyon National Park (National Geographic)

Water Sources

Water is available seasonally at the spring southeast (down trail) of Muav Saddle. White Creek is perennial, though flows are intermittent in the Supai section and from the base of the Redwall to Shinumo Creek. Shinumo Creek is perennial. High flows in Shinumo Creek during spring runoff make crossings extremely hazardous or impossible. Water is always available at the Colorado River. Purify all water.

If a dry camp on the hike out is planned then think about caching water on the descent. Caches should not be visible from the trail; other hikers do not want to see it and unscrupulous hikers will drink your water. Write your name on your cache and date it. **REMEMBER TO PACK OUT UNUSED CACHES!**

Campsites

Several small campsites are located in the Supai and along the Redwall traverse. A series of slickrock camps exist a half-mile or so below the base of the Redwall. More sites are available along White Creek at the Tonto level. There are sites available just above the river on a mile-long terrace. Be prepared to share the popular beach camp with river runners and ringtail cats. Ringtails can be very aggressive about getting into your pack and looking for food, so be sure to have a way to safely store your provisions! The entire North Bass Trail is in the North Bass Use Area (AS9).

Trailhead Access

The remote North Bass trailhead is located at Swamp Point. Swamp Point is at the end of Swamp Ridge Road. Though it is possible to access the trailhead from the North Rim Village by taking the Point Sublime and Kanabownits Roads, it should be noted that passage is much easier from the west via Forest Service Roads. A North Kaibab National Forest map is essential. The Swamp Ridge Road is gated and is not

accessible by vehicle until the National Park Service fire crew has cleared it of down trees. In some years this road is not open until late May or early June.

Trail Description

From Swamp Point the trail drops nearly a mile via switchbacks to an intersection at Muav Saddle. The middle trail continues south and ascends to Powell Plateau. The trail to the right leads to an old patrol cabin. The North Bass is to the left and contours the base of the Coconino Sandstone for approximately ¼ mile to the fairly reliable Queen Anne Spring.

The one mile descent from the spring to a benchmark in White Creek (BM 5692') was restored to the historic trail alignment and completely rebuilt in 2005. Continue down White Creek until you reach a waterfall. The bypass is on creek right about 50 feet before reaching the waterfall. Continue down the bed of White Creek until you come to the large pour-off in the Redwall.

The cairned trail to the right, crosses four drainages as it traverses along the Redwall rim. After crossing the fourth drainage the trail continues along a cliff to the start of the Redwall descent. The descent through the Redwall to the bed of White Creek is steep and rocky, but well marked. Continue down the drainage to a pour-off in the Bright Angel Shale which can be bypassed on creek right. The bypass is approximately ½ mile in length and contours along the Tonto before dropping back into White Creek.

The trail continues down the drainage until reaching a benchmark (BM 3480') at the top of the Tapeats Sandstone. At the mouth of Redwall Canyon a large pour-off in the Tapeats prevents further travel in the drainage. In 2005 the trail was restored to its historic alignment and today bypasses this fall approximately ¼ mile above the Tapeats pour-off, contouring along the Tonto to the west of White Creek. A final quick descent drops the hiker alongside Shinumo Creek about ¼ mile downstream of the White/Shinumo confluence. (See the King Arthur Castle 7.5 Minute quad map.)

Alternate route to Shinumo Creek: For several decades hikers have used a route that roughly follows the bed of White Creek to the confluence with Shinumo Creek (shown on most modern maps) and that offers an alternative to the historic alignment. The Tapeats pour-off at the mouth of Redwall Canyon can be bypassed on creek left. The route involves a decent into an adjacent drainage and a 15 foot down-climb back to the bed of White Creek. A short rope for the packs may prove a worthwhile accessory. The trail continues down creek through an impressive and narrow Tapeats gorge. The Vishnu appears above the confluence with Shinumo Creek. A pour-off about ½ mile above Shinumo Creek can be passed on creek left. Avoid this route during wet periods when flooding is a possibility. The historic alignment is safer and easier to follow and is recommended when flash floods threaten.

The trail follows Shinumo Creek downstream for approximately one and half miles before abruptly exiting the drainage on the east side of the creek. A climb of approximately 700 feet is required to reach a saddle before the trail descends to a large beach and terrace above the Colorado River.

Important Notes

In 2005 a National Park Service trail crew project restored several miles of this trail to its historic alignment. This alignment may be different from what is shown on current maps.

The Swamp Ridge Road is subject to closure during autumn fire activity. Do not drive off-road to go around fallen trees.

The North Bass Trail follows the White and Shinumo Creek drainage and is susceptible to flash floods. Shinumo Creek may be dangerous to cross during weeks when the North Rim snow pack is melting. Much of the trail is marked by cairns. Follow cairns at your own discretion...in doing so, you assume that the person who placed them was not lost.