



JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH: Admiring an underground sculpture garden inside the Buckskin Gulch

THE SUPERSLOT
Buckskin Gulch
 SOUTHERN UTAH

From start to finish, the Buckskin Gulch offers a subterranean tour of the layer cake that is the Colorado Plateau, beginning with the dramatic red rock of the Navajo sandstone and ending with the strata of the Moenave and Chinle formations. Traveling downstream through each layer, it meanders between fluted rock walls that reflect indirect sunlight in quintessential desert hues. Buckskin is the most impressive slot canyon hike in

North America and likely anywhere: a 13-mile corridor of stone so deep you can barely see the sky and so narrow it sometimes forces you to remove your pack to get through.

The gulch lies near Kanab, Utah, smack in the middle of the nation's finest region for desert hiking: It's north of Grand Canyon National Park, south of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, east of Zion National Park, and west of Lake Powell. But in the entire region,

there's no start to a hike as dramatic as Buckskin Gulch's two-mile squeeze through the two-foot-wide passage of Wire Pass. Hikers then follow the sandy bottom of the gulch 13 miles to its confluence with the Paria River Canyon, a bizarre underground intersection of two drainages that's as hauntingly beautiful as it is abrupt. Hiking upstream, the narrows of the Paria River extend another five miles before widening and returning hikers to blue sky at the trail's end. In both the gulch and the Paria River Canyon, obstacles like deep pools, rock jams, and quicksand come and go, created and cleared by the frequent flash floods that make the Buckskin different each time you descend it.

STAGING AREA:
Kanab, UT

DISTANCE:
20
 MILES

TRAIL TIME:
3-4
 DAYS

TOTAL TRIP:
One Week

DIFFICULTY
 (SCALE OF 1 TO 5,
 5 MOST DIFFICULT):

3

DIY COST
 (EXCLUDING AIRFARE):
\$150-\$250



INSIDER ADVICE: Bring a 20-foot rope to lower your packs when descending rock jams.
WHEN TO GO: April to June or September to October
LOGISTICS: Kanab, Utah, the closest town to the trailhead, is about a four-hour drive from Las Vegas. The BLM Kanab Field Office has up-to-date information on gulch conditions and issues permits (\$5 a day; 435-644-4600). Start your hike with enough water for two days (two gallons per person); you'll be able to refill once you reach the Paria River. All slot canyon hikes are inherently dangerous because of the potential for flash floods. Check the weather forecast before leaving, and don't go into the gulch if rain threatens.