

Coyote Gulch, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Utah, Spring Break 2009

This year, Jen and I decided to revive a tradition begun in our early years together: a yearly Spring Break trip to southern Utah's desert country. The success of last year's May excursion to Canyonlands National Park made us anxious to return.

This time we started further west in Zion National Park, where we spent two nights and a day hiking the awesome (though busy) trails in Zion's famous Virgin River Canyon. We then made our way east, breaking up the three hour drive to Escalante, Utah with a day hike in Bryce Canyon National Park. From there, a thirty-one mile drive on a dirt road got us to the Coyote Gulch trailhead, where we set out on a three night backpack the next morning.

Coyote Gulch is a tributary of the Escalante River and is a part of the massive Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GCNRA). The GCNRA borders the Escalante-Grand Staircase National Monument (created by Bill Clinton in his final days in office) to the west and Capitol Reef National Park to the northeast. Other wilderness study areas, unpopulated national forest lands, and national parks are nearby (as the crow flies anyway) making this region the most Wilderness-soaked of any in the lower forty-eight.

For the desert hiker used to the well-worn trails of Arches, Bryce, Zion, and Canyonlands National Parks, Coyote Gulch is a different experience. From our start at the Redwell Trailhead, we followed the canyon downstream for two days. There were foot prints (both human and cow), but no established trail.

The scenery started out noticeably less dramatic than in the national parks, but by the time we reached Jacob Hamlin Arch (7-8 miles in) for our second night's stay, this had changed; from about the 6 mile point (the confluence with Hurricane Gulch) the canyon rivals any in the desert southwest. And, unfortunately, at the arch there were crowds to match; we had at least 20 fellow backpackers within a mile of us that second night.

Late on day 2, I took a quick trip downstream to Coyote Natural Bridge, and then a bit further to a cliff dwelling and petroglyphs. With more time, I would have continued to the Escalante River confluence, but this will have to wait for another trip. The lower canyon is awesome.

On the return walk upstream, we pushed to within one mile of the car before setting up camp for night three. We found a great (and unused) camping spot up on the mesa, had our finest meal and evening of the trip, and then were tent bound for two hours in a vicious windstorm that eventually forced us back down into the canyon in a midnight dash. This was a particularly exciting experience for the kids.

Early on day four we were back at the cars, no worse for the wear (though poison ivy would rear its ugly head a couple of days later). We high-tailed it to Salt Lake City that night, where we went out for Chinese and had our first showers and beds in a week—a luxurious treat.

The trip was a success, even though the weather was less than ideal: temps were mostly in the low 60's, with a day or so of both warmer and cooler weather. I hope to go back down to the area next spring break, though having had missed the best skiing of the season this year while we were gone, and given the struggles with poison ivy that we are currently going through, it might take some effort to convince Jen.



Looking down canyon from the last bit of the Angle's Landing Trail, Zion National Park.



Another Angel's Landing shot looking up canyon.



Ellie and Alex (geeking out) in Bryce National Park, where at 8000ft there was still plenty of snow.



Ellie with her pack in Coyote Gulch, day one. She carried her sleeping bag, pad, and clothes.



Exploring a side canyon near camp on the first night.



Alex, Jen, and Ellie on the frigid and windy morning of day two. Alex also carried his clothes, bag, and pad, in addition to some water and a pair of camp shoes.



Jacob Hamlin Arch looking down canyon from near our camp (left) and looking up canyon (right).



Two shots from the same spot, near Jacob Hamlin Arch.



Walking and looking in the evening.



And some more Coyote Canyon curves.



Cooking dinner at our last night's camp—note the weather coming in, 40 Mile Bench on the horizon.



Not your traditional family photo (left), and a perfect sunset/sandstone combination.



And a more traditional family photo. Another desert trip and good clean family fun, poison ivy excepted.