


TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Box and Double Arch Canyons Reef Walk San Rafael Swell, Northern Reef

Rating:	III Class 4 
Best Season:	Fall, winter or spring.
Time:	6 to 8 hours.
Access:	Route starts and ends at the mouth of Box Canyon.
Permit:	Not required.
Equipment:	No technical equipment required.
Map:	USGS 7.5' Spotted Wolf Canyon.
Cold Protection:	Expect some wading through pools.
Drinking Water:	None, bring plenty.
Flash Flood Risk:	Low.
Skills Required:	Navigation and route finding is difficult. Sections of 4 th class slab climbing with a lot of exposure; not a good tour for acrophobes.

Reef Walking is an interesting side-discipline of canyoneering. From a distance, the reef looks like an extended monolith of Navajo Sandstone, but from up-close, it is a slanting complex of deep canyons and steep cliffs. Climbing into the complexity and travelling around is called "reef walking", and is somewhat like canyoneering in reverse. The terrain is technical, and generally you stay on top of ridges. Often, the difficulty is finding a reasonable way back down to the front of the reef.

The Box and Double Arch Canyon Reef Walk is an interesting journey up the reef to the crest, and back down. After following an intricate route to the crest of the reef (with a great view of Black Dragon Canyon), you traverse a knife-edge ridge with hundreds of feet of exposure on both sides. You then hike down the reef to a dryfall with an up-close view of an unusual double arch, then work your way up to, then down a ridge, and find an unlikely-looking exit to the front of the reef. You will be in the sun 100% of the time, so pick a pleasantly cool day.

Getting There: Turn north off I-70 onto a short dirt road at about milepost 144.8. If coming from Green River, the road is tucked behind a hill just after a "Jesus is Coming" boulder, so watch carefully. There are crossroads between the eastbound and westbound lanes at this point. Drive through a cattle gate and re-latch it. Drive .6 miles on a good dirt road to a smaller dirt road on the left. Follow this 1/4-mile to the end - a small parking lot next to a creek bed.

The Goods: The creek bed belongs to Box Canyon (aka Box Spring Canyon). Follow a distinct trail along the creek up the canyon as it enters the reef. Nice walls rise up on both sides, and the bottom is somewhat swampy and brushy. The canyon ends in 1/2 mile with an interesting dryfall. After enjoying the acoustics, return back down canyon until the canyon wall on the right (south) can be ascended. Climb to the crest of the ridge, then follow the crest up and right (west) to the top of a sub-peak.

Immediately behind the sub-peak is a steep gully/slot canyon that descends to the floor of Box Canyon above the dryfall. From its head, descend the slot (4th class), at one point tunneling under boulders to pass a steep drop.

Take a quick glance down the dryfall, if you wish. Proceed up Box Canyon, staying in the wash bottom to avoid the brush. Note the nice dryfall coming in on the left - this is the Left Fork of Upper Box Canyon. After a short pleasant section, the canyon ascends a painfully obvious steep talus pile. By staying left, you can use a ramp to climb past much of the talus. Ascend the talus to a flat wash above. Follow the wash to the base of a gray slab, then upward, straight ahead (northwest) up the face of the long slope above, picking the easiest path to the crest. Your reward is a great view 1000 feet straight down to Black Dragon Wash, and to the Wingate ridge across the way.

Now comes the fun part. Turn left and follow the edge of the escarpment across a "knife-edge" ridge. At places, the ridge is but 6 feet wide, with an 800 foot drop on one side, and a 200 foot drop on the other. Yum!

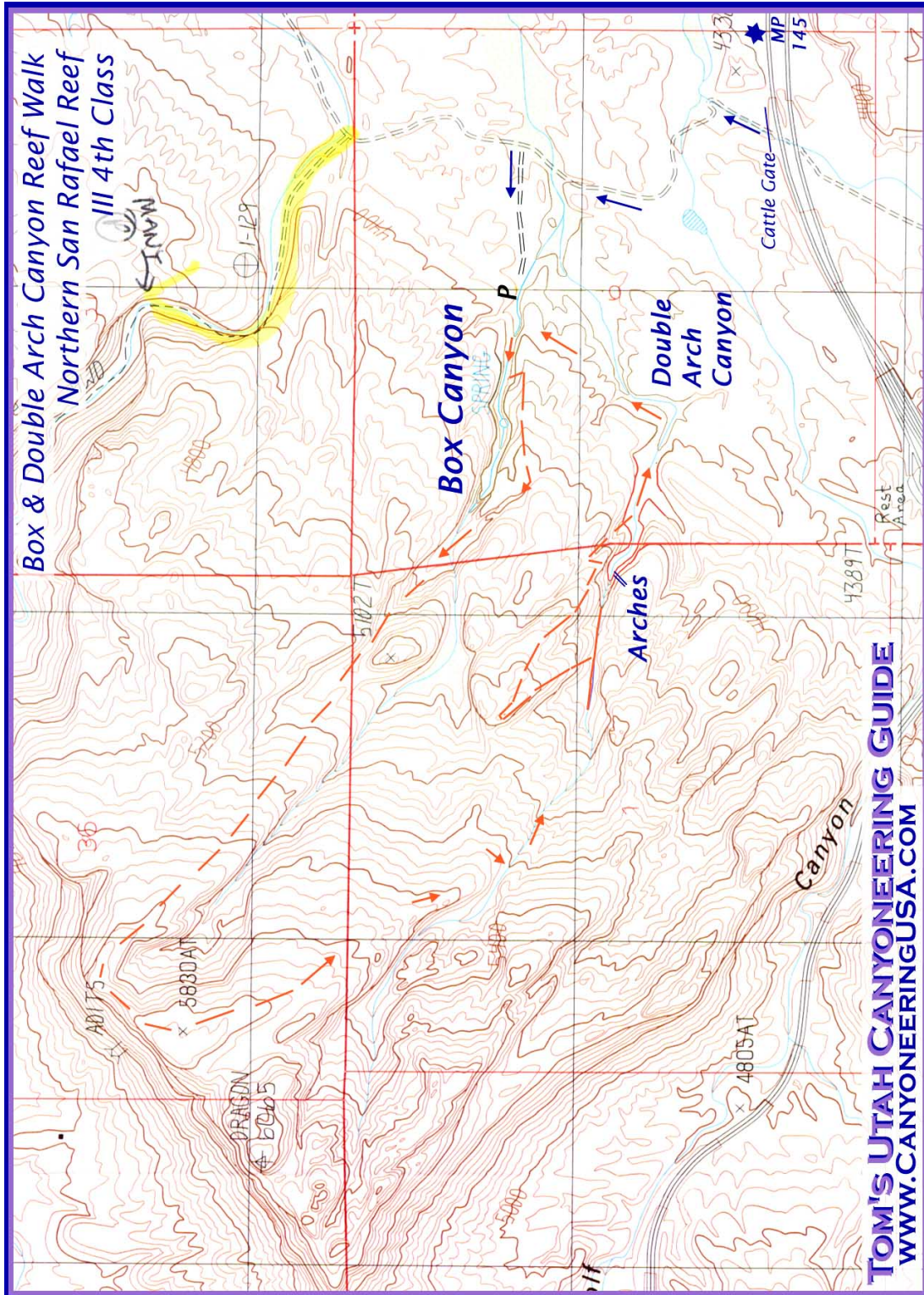
Follow the edge to the summit of a sub-peak, which provides an interesting view of sandstone castle Dragon Point, 6065', and the canyon between you and it - a lovely, pink-floored canyon with a slot running through it. This drops into Double Arch Canyon.

Descend south-southeast, past the top of the pink-floored canyon, down the ridge staying right, and through a small notch, reaching a view of the big canyon on your right, Double Arch Canyon. Descend the ridge, staying within spitting distance of Double Arch Canyon, about 2 miles (40 minutes). The left side of the ridge leads obviously into the Left Fork of Box Canyon. Do NOT go this way. The right side of the ridge leads into Double Arch Canyon. Cross the ridgeline at a saddle before a prominent tower in front of the main mid-reef escarpment. Descend a steep slab to the canyon bottom.

Follow the floor of the canyon through a charming section of open potholes to a small flat spot. Past the flat spot, the canyon slots up and the potholes become steeper and more difficult. Descend the slotty potholes to get to a drop-off with a good view of Spirit Arch - but make sure you can re-ascend the potholes - it's a little tricky.

Now the problem is to get back to the front of the reef without killing yourself. From the drop-off, return up through the slotty pothole section almost to the flat spot. From the flat spot, a deep, obvious slot leads right toward a ridge. Before the slot, a steep ramp leads up the slickrock to the right, above the slot, allowing access to the top of the ridge. Ascend the ramp - the steepest place is at the bottom (4th class).

The ramp takes you to a pass in a ridge. Cutting left, descend 40 feet or so on the other side of the pass to a wide ridge leading right (southeast). Follow the ridge until you are across from Spirit Arch. Climb north (left) away from Double Arch Canyon, until it is possible to drop into the red-walled canyon on the left. Turn right and follow this canyon southeast to a steep talus pile leading down to the floor of Double Arch Canyon. (Across the canyon is Petroglyph canyon with an interesting rock art panel). Turn left and follow the drainage and a small trail back to the mouth of Box Canyon.



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