

Fat Man's Misery • Zion National Park

Rating:	3B III
Season:	Spring, Summer or Fall
Time:	6 to 8 hours
Longest Rappel:	40 feet (15 m)
Access:	Starts and ends on East Side of Zion, with parking along Hwy 9 near Checkerboard Mesa.
Permit:	Not Required.
Seasonality:	<u>Spring</u> --Highly variable. Check for high snowmelt flows in the East Fork before descending, and expect cold pools after rain or snow. <u>Summer</u> --is HOT! The hike out is in full sun; not a canyon to do on very hot days. <u>Fall</u> --The preferred season, with nice temperatures and scenery. <u>Winter</u> --Hard to access due to snow/ice and long approach.
Equipment:	Helmets, rappelling gear, webbing and rapid links.
Cold Protection:	Wetsuits recommended in cool weather.
Drinking Water:	Bring plenty; drinking water is not available in this canyon.
Flash Flood Risk:	High--due to East Fork drainage.
Skills Required:	Difficult navigation, high water, long approach and exit.
Anchors:	Natural anchors for all rappels.

Fat Man's Misery (West Fork of Misery Canyon) is a canyoneering adventure just outside the east boundary of the park on BLM land. Getting to the canyon and escaping back to your car requires good navigation skills – have a map and use it. The Trails Illustrated Zion National Park Map does not cover this area, so the USGS "The Barracks" and "Springdale East" quadrangles are required.

A cross-country route is followed to Misery Canyon, then the canyon followed through a series of short, interesting narrows with a few rappels and swims. Misery then drops into the East Fork of the Virgin River through a beautiful grotto – the highlight of the trip. The East Fork is followed briefly, then a steep climb up a ridge leads back to civilization. The climb out can be scorching in summer, so Fat Man's is best reserved for spring and fall. Water can be filtered from the East Fork.

In several places, single old bolts COULD be used for rappels. These things are dangerous – please admire their antiquity, but rig your rappel off more reliable (typically natural) anchors. The technical sections of Fat Man's are entirely outside the park, so a permit is not required.

Exiting from Misery Canyon requires a short walk down the East Fork. If the Canyon is in flood stage, this short walk could be difficult or impossible. Check the level of the river before starting on this adventure, especially in the spring.

Driving: Fat Man's starts by ascending the canyon west of Checkerboard Mesa. From the East Entrance, drive into the Park $\frac{3}{4}$ mile and find a safe place to park on the edge of the highway.

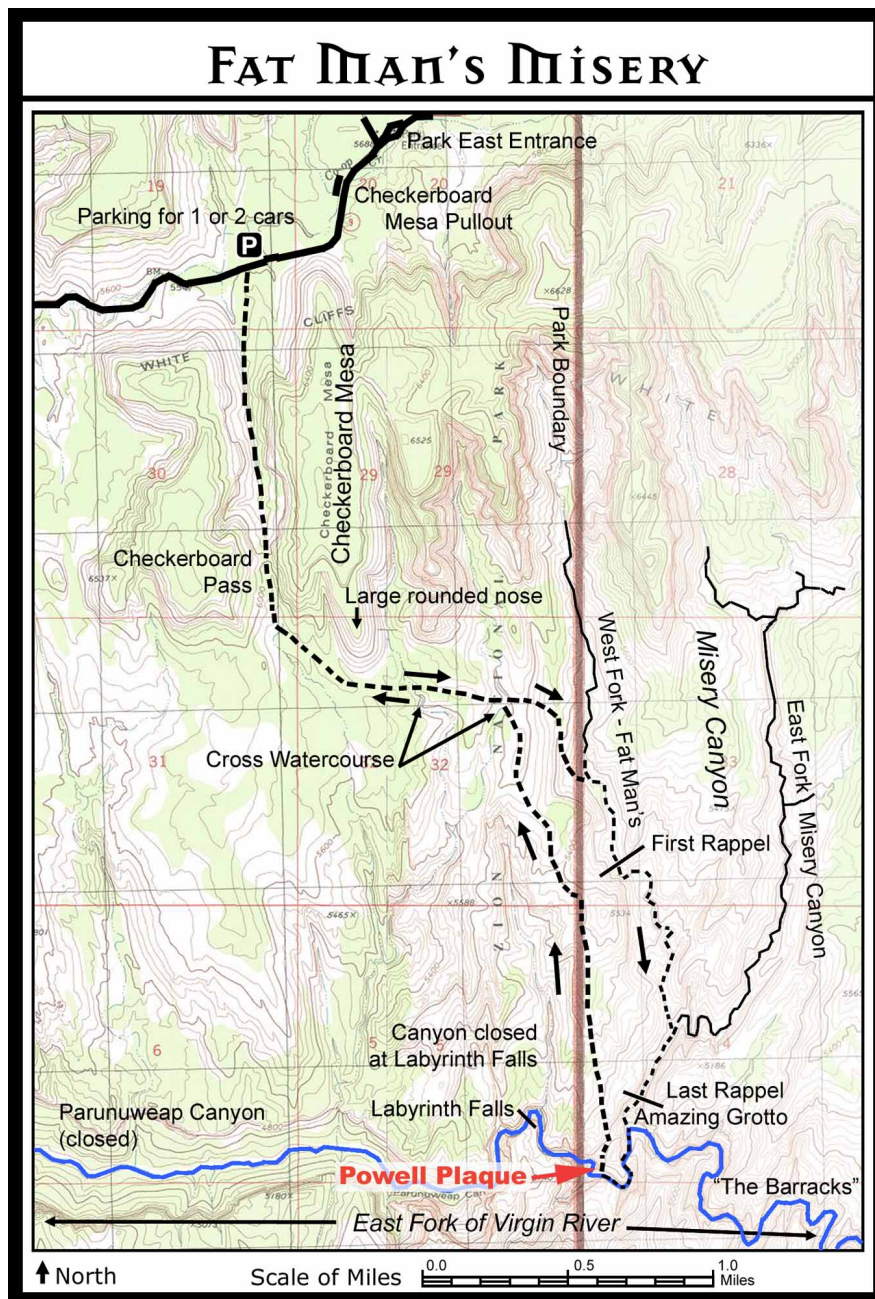
Approach: Your objective is the west fork of Misery Canyon, the north-south running canyon just east of the park boundary. The canyon runs south from just west of Pt 6445.

Ascend the canyon west of Checkerboard Mesa to a sandy pass, then descend the other side about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to where the canyon flattens out. Traverse left (east) around the nose of a round sandstone buttress. Cross a shallow drainage, then cross a second, larger drainage. Ascend the ridge on the far side, then descend into the Misery Canyon drainage. A 200-foot cliff blocks access to the canyon floor – traverse the rim downcanyon, then descend a steep slickrock bowl to reach the watercourse.

Canyon: Open, sandy wash alternates with lovely, sculpted narrows. A few rappels are required – avoid using the single, ancient bolts and find safer, natural anchors instead. One section of narrows is a good place to practice your partner-assisted downclimbing skills. There are four natural bridges, and often swimming or deep wading. Please do NOT use the natural bridges as rappel anchors, to avoid scarring them with rope-pull grooves.

After several narrows, the canyon intersects the East Fork of Misery Canyon. Avoid small potholes by traversing slabs left, then re-enter the canyon near the big drop, downclimb or rappel a short chimney (tricky!) to a large flat ledge overlooking the East Fork. Rappel 20 feet (7m) from a tree to the slabs below.

Below the confluence, the canyon soon narrows up. A dirty section of canyon usually requires a rappel – this is where the "Fat Man's" down-crawl used to be. Choose your anchor carefully – the canyon is eroding rapidly and the rocks might be unstable.



Shortly past this obstacle, the canyon enters an amazing grotto, its deepest and neatest section. The grotto leads to the East Fork of the Virgin River. A warm, sulphurous spring creates an interesting and fragile riparian area - minimize your impact here. Enjoy the coolness and soaring walls of the East Fork.

Exit: From the Misery/East Fork confluence, wade downcanyon about 1/3 of a mile (500m), 10-15 minutes. On the inside of a sweeping bend to the right is a grassy/reedy/brushy area. This is the exit. It is the first possible-looking exit you see on the right. Don't miss it! If you do, get out at the grassy peninsula and hike bushwhack back upstream. Take a trail into the grass, then climb a steep gully toward the rim. (A plaque commemorating the Powell expedition of 1872 can be found on the downstream side of the grassy area, behind some brush).

The East Fork is closed to public access at the park boundary, 1/10 mile west of the Powell Plaque, near Labyrinth Falls.

Above the gully, follow a ridge north toward Checkerboard Mesa. Approaching the mesa, trend left to the round sandstone buttness, then cut left into the approach canyon. Follow this back to the road.