

# Imlay Canyon Sneak Route • Zion National Park

<b>Rating:</b>	4B IV R
<b>Best Season:</b>	Summer or fall.
<b>Time:</b>	9 to 14 hours.
<b>Longest Rappel:</b>	130 feet (40 m)
<b>Access:</b>	Starts by hiking up the West Rim Trail at the Grotto; finishes hiking out the Narrows to the Temple of Sinawava. Use the free shuttle April-October, and in late fall, a short car shuttle is required.
<b>Permit:</b>	Required—Available at the Visitor Center. If seeking an early morning start, be sure to ask for a White Pass that allows parking at The Grotto.
<b>Seasonality:</b>	<b><u>Summer and Fall</u></b> —The preferred seasons, with nice temperatures and scenery. <b><u>Winter and Spring</u></b> —Ice, snow and snowmelt conditions persist through the spring—making the approach inaccessible or present dangerous conditions. <b><u>Pothole levels</u></b> —The real variable. High water=fast, cold and easy escapes. Low water=slow, difficult and not so cold. Snowmelt and thunderstorms fill the potholes. Knowledge of recent weather or trip reports can give you a clue, but you should ALWAYS be prepared to hook out of potholes.
<b>Equipment:</b>	Helmets, rappelling gear, lots of webbing and rapid links.
<b>Cold Protection:</b>	Thick wetsuits or drysuits required at all times of the year.
<b>Drinking Water:</b>	Sparse—there is some filterable water, but not recommended.
<b>Flash Flood Risk:</b>	High—there are long sections of narrows and a large watershed above.
<b>Skills Required:</b>	Efficient travel, problem solving, pothole escapes, long exposure to cold water.
<b>Anchors:</b>	Natural and bolted.

Imlay is one of the best canyons in Zion, if not THE best. The first descent required three days and was a feat of amazing bravery and chutzpah. With knowledge of the route, plus modern techniques and equipment, it is now a wonderful journey inside the stone, with pothole challenges that add spice.

The Sneak Route enters the canyon near the halfway point, gaining the very best canyon sections with minimal effort (though the Sneak Route itself is rather rugged). It is sometimes used as a day-and-a-half route, bivying at the alcove before getting wet, or it is done by skilled parties in a reasonable day, with an early start.

From the main canyon, the West Rim Trail is followed about half way to the rim, then a cross-country route is followed over two passes and into the Imlay drainage. The Imlay is followed through its two fabulous narrows to The Narrows, and a hike out to the Temple of Sinawava. Getting a "White Pass" allows parking at The Grotto before the buses run in the morning.

**The Approach:** From the Grotto Picnic Area, ascend the West Rim Trail to Scout Lookout. Follow the trail left along the ridge, then down the end to a small wooden bridge crossing a branch of Telephone canyon. Continue along the trail 2 minutes until a zero-impact slickrock route can be found that takes you down and right toward the canyon bottom. Social trails have formed in several locations – follow these down to the edge of the slot, then down into the slot. Cross the canyon and proceed up slickrock and onto the south ridge of PT 6630.

Follow the ridge until 100 yards short of where it steepens up, the last saddle before it steepens up, then find an easy way down slickrock and open steep dirt east (right) to the canyon floor (see Var-1). Climb up the canyon to a pass, then down the other side. Continue straight ahead and climb to a second pass. A steep and dirty slab can be bypassed by backtracking 100 yards, climbing steeply among small oaks to the west to the base of a steep, clean slab. Ascend the slab 10 feet (3m), then traverse upcanyon to the top of the dirty slab and continue up the watercourse to the pass. Descend the canyon on the other side, until it makes sense to climb out right onto the slickrock buttress (see Var-2). Follow the slickrock buttress down, then right to the edge of the inner gorge across from a deep alcove. Work carefully down very steep slabs to the alcove. This makes an excellent bivy site.

(Var-2) – after stepping right onto the slickrock buttress, descend the buttress following the edge of the slot you just left. When overlooking Imlay canyon, find a place to cross the aforementioned slot easily and traverse slickrock onto a steep, sandy, tree-covered ridge beyond. Descend until possible to traverse into a steep sandy bowl on the left, then down to the canyon floor. This variation accesses 4-5 more interesting potholes.

(Var-1) – It is also possible to Sneak the route between PT 6630 and the West Rim, the Left Sneak Route. Follow the ridge until it steepens, then find a way down into the canyon on the left (west). Follow this canyon up over a pass and down the other side. A steep, broken up area about halfway down the approach canyon can be descended without rappels, but it may be easier to just rappel. There is a hidden natural bridge in this section. This variation accesses Imlay canyon a little higher than Variation-2 above.

Whatever Sneak Route used, continue downcanyon to the Extreme Narrows.

**The Crossroads and Extreme Narrows:** The Crossroads is a complex area where numerous canyons come in from both sides. The Sneak Routes comes in on the right, in several places. After The Crossroads, the canyon provides about an hour of moderate canyon with rappels and swims. Near the beginning of this section, after a couple of nice pools, is a large overhang sheltering a sandy beach with easy access to higher ground - a good place to bivvy.

A half hour later, the first section of extreme narrows begins. Work your way through this section, enjoying the beauty of these deep, dark and heavily sculpted narrows. Strenuous climbing, pack tosses, ingenuity and, as a last resort, drilling and hooking may be required to pass the numerous obstacles. After an hour or two or three, the canyon relents and opens up briefly. A safe bivvy can be found by climbing slabs out of the canyon to the left.

Note: it is possible to exit the canyon right at the start of the first section of extreme narrows, and proceed overland to bypass them – but it is reported to be ugly.

The second extreme narrows (the Terminal Narrows) is somewhat shorter, but still takes an hour or two to traverse. It culminates in a long rappel (60 feet, 20m) to a long pool. At the end of the pool, the canyon jogs left to a large ledge overlooking the North Fork Narrows. Rappel 130 feet (40m) to the river.

**The Exit:** Hike The Narrows to the Temple of Sinawava (about 2 hours).

