

Keyhole Canyon • Zion National Park

Rating:	3B I
Best Season:	Spring, Summer or Fall
Time:	1 to 2 hours
Longest Rappel:	30 feet (10 m)
Access:	One vehicle required.
Permit:	Required. Available at Visitor Center.
Seasonality:	Keyhole is almost always fun, but of course changes season to season: Spring- Sometimes means melting snow and flowing water through the canyon. Rappels may be flowing and some downclimbs become a little to a lot harder. And of course, the water is COLD! Summer and Fall- Usually a good time for Keyhole. Be careful of late summer thunderstorms and expect stagnant, smelly water with frogs and varying degrees of decaying plants if it has not rained in awhile. Winter- Can be really fun in Keyhole. Be very prepared for ice, ice, ice! Icy canyon floor and sides makes for a harder descent, as well as VERY cold temperatures.
Equipment:	Helmets, rappelling gear, webbing and rapid links.
Cold Protection:	Wetsuits recommended, even in summer.
Drinking Water:	None, bring plenty.
Flash Flood Risk:	Low, but thundershowers can flash Keyhole.
Skills Required:	Awkward 1 st rappel, and cold water exposure.
Anchors:	Bolted anchors

A brief, wonderful and definitely chilly canyon involving a few rappels and a long swim, Keyhole (aka Starfish Canyon) is a good introduction to technical canyoneering and a delightful way to spend an hour or two on a hot summer day. It is often combined with Pine Creek - no need to strip off the wetsuit and harness in-between.

Bring as little gear as possible. It's not unusual to put on wetsuits and harnesses at the car and dash up the approach as fast as possible, before being overcome by heatstroke.

Driving: Keyhole is a small canyon north of Highway 9, just west of Pt 5538 on the Springdale East quadrangle. It is 2.1 miles west of the East Entrance, or 1.9 miles east of the small tunnel. Park where the drainage crosses the road.

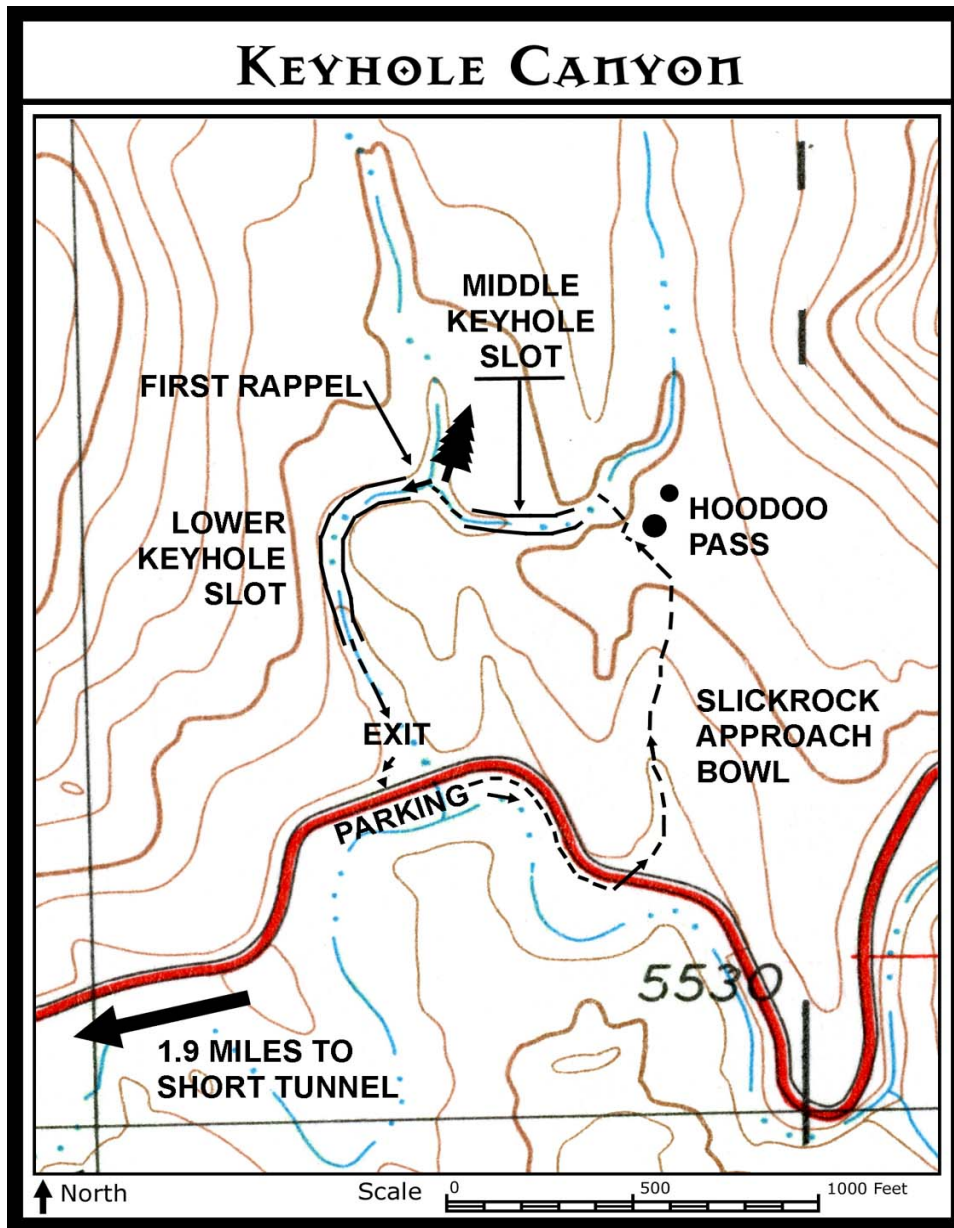
Approach: The narrow nature of the canyon makes carrying a pack difficult, so bring a minimum of gear. Walk east on the road 1/4 mile and around the corner, then cut left and climb slabs in a beautiful slickrock bowl to a pass at the top. The pass is distinctive, as it has a nice Hoodoo right in the center. Cut left of the Hoodoo and descend a steep gully on the other side to the canyon bottom. Total approach about 15 minutes.

Please be certain you are on the correct approach trail. The Park has been concerned about erosion in this area. Canyoneers and the Park have identified the best approach, hardened the preferred route and restored the eroded areas next to the route. Please do your part and STAY ON THE TRAIL.

Canyon: Descend the canyon. The first section requires a little downclimbing and some wading up to waist deep, before coming out into the open. This section is called "Middle Keyhole".

A little further, the fun resumes. The broad, sandy watercourse feeds into a narrow slot on the left, and drops 15 feet to the edge of a pool. This is "Lower Keyhole". Rappel from the bolt anchor into the darkness. Clever rappellers can swing around to a shelf to land on, out of the water, but you still have to swim the pool.

A short distance downcanyon, the second drop can be rappelled by throwing a rope over an overhead log, or by downclimbed with care. The third drop is rappelled from a bolt. The fourth drop can be rappelled from a single, suspect bolt on the right, or downclimbed to a ledge, then down a crack in a slab to the edge of a pool. Put away the ropes and get ready to swim.



The canyon continues with deep, dark, twisty and very cool narrows. Downclimbs are interspersed with walking sections until the dreaded "slanted corridor" is reached. A slot is downclimbed (very dark, headlamp helpful) to the start of the long, slanted corridor. Swim the corridor, then wade and swim the following pools to attain the delightful heat of the full sun at the end. Traipse downcanyon to the road.

Exit: Short and sweet. Your car should be about 50 yards ahead of the end of the canyon. To minimize impact, walk through the tunnel under the road and ascend the slickrock slab on the other side.