



TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Neon Canyon, Fence and Ringtail • Canyons of the Escalante

Rating:	3B III ★★☆☆
Best Season:	Spring or Fall recommended. Also possible in summer if you can manage the sun exposure.
Time:	From Egypt Trailhead: Approach 2 hours; Canyon 4 hours; Exit 3 hours.
Access:	Route starts and ends at Egypt trailhead off the Hole in the Rock Road.
USGS 7.5' Map:	Egypt
Permit:	Not Required for day use. Free overnight permits required for overnight backpacking, available at trailhead.
Equipment:	Ropes for rappels to 80' (25m). Wetsuit or drysuit. 40' of webbing. Good shoes.
Drinking Water:	Bring plenty, or be prepared to pump the very silty Escalante River.
Flash Flood Risk:	Moderate.
Difficulties:	3 rappels to 80' (25m). Quite a few long swims: requires a wetsuit or drysuit even in summer. Easily rigged natural anchors.
Local Ethic:	The Escalante is a natural-anchors area. Please use bolts only in an extreme emergency.

Neon. Oft sought, not nearly so oft descended. Like many, we succeeded on Neon only on our third try. Like many classics in the area, the canyon is not conveniently located next to a road, so the trick is to figure out logistics that work for you.

Like all canyons, Neon changes dramatically from time to time. Neon has TWO keeper potholes that demand respect. The first is upstream of the Sport Entry, between the More-Fun Entry and the Sport Entry, and is easily passed using basic canyoneering Pothole escape techniques. The second is very close to the Golden Cathedral and not so easy. When the pothole is fairly empty of sand, but just at the right level of water, it is resistant to most pothole escape techniques. However, from this point, it is usually possible to climb, with difficulty, back up-canyon and escape out. A three-person shoulder stand often is enough to get one person out, though in some conditions this might involve the dreaded underwater shoulder stand. So, be careful out there. Be more clever than the canyon you are in.

Plan A: In a day: get up early, hump it down to the Escalante, bust the canyon, and tramp up to the trailhead in time for the sunset.

Plan B: Backpack down to the Escalante and have time to enjoy more of Neon, plus Fence Canyon, Ringtail and a great Pictograph panel.

Quite a Canyon is to be found, here in the heart of the Escalante. A sinuous little slot ends in the famous Golden Cathedral, dropping through one of three holes in the ceiling into a large pool. Glorious. The astute canyoneer will wander a bit further up Neon and enjoy more slot canyon experience. Nearby, Fence and Ringtail Canyons offer

more fun, if you have the time.

Getting There: from Highway 12, drive south down the Hole in the Rock Road 16.9 miles to a dirt road on the left, usually well signed for Egypt. Follow the dirt road 9.9 miles to the Egypt Trailhead. There is rough camping in the area, but no shade. There is a BLM trail register.

The Trail leads down the slickrock and is well cairned. It was used for cows, so is easily followed. Before heading down, look out across the landscape and espy a few landmarks. The slickrock of Egypt sweeps down to a large, red, sandy flat - Egypt Bench. Three miles away, to the ENE, is a distinctive rounded dome (5270). This marks the mouth of Neon. Somewhat to the north of this, the branches of Fence Canyon are visible, as big gashes into the bench. Three options for getting to Neon are available:



Beeline: You can beeline across the bench toward the rounded dome (5270). It gets lost behind the rise on the bench (5179), but just slog in that direction. Near the river, an easy descent is found about 100 feet downstream from the mouth of Neon. Though direct, this route is the least interesting.

Left-Hand Route: One can stay left of the Fence wash on the bench, then follow the left edge of Fence as it becomes a serious canyon. Descent down the ridge between the branches of Fence is easy. Follow Fence to the Escalante, then follow that south to the mouth of Neon. This route is well-cairned and popular.

Fence Canyon Route: More fun, and more scenic, Fence Canyon forms an interesting play-slot cutting through the sandstone hills on the Egypt Bench. From the trail, follow the wash until it starts to form a canyon. Exit right onto sand and rock on the right side of the canyon, and follow the edge for 1/2 a mile or so, until an easy descent into the canyon can be made. Dump the packs and wander up-canyon, stemming and climbing as far as time, and your tolerance for swimming, allows (30-60 minutes round trip). Return to the packs. Continuing

downcanyon, Fence turns into a wide slot (with shade - this is good) as it pierces a bluff and opens to a slickrock valley. There is a hidden arch on the left, and the slickrock area ends in a big drop to the bottom of Fence. Traverse the right edge of the slickrock (exposed, 4th class, but doable with big packs) and gain the bench beyond. Turn right, and climb sandhills until the rounded dome can be seen. Beeline to the river, and descend via a wide, moderately-steep sandy slope.



Photo: The Fence Canyon slot makes a delightful diversion from the arduous backpack along the Escalante.

Photo: Sight on the rounded dome that marks the mouth of Neon. Slightly downstream from the mouth, sand dunes allow easy access down to the river.

A Few Things to Do.

Camping Please do not camp in Neon Canyon. Camping here is a desecration and destroys the "Golden Cathedral" experience for other people. There is OK camping at places along the Escalante river, and near the mouth of Fence Canyon; water is less silty here.

Rock Art There are interesting rock art panels on the Neon side of the Escalante River both up and down-stream from Neon. Watch out for the Rattlesnakes!

Neon - Non-technical Stroll up gorgeous Neon canyon for 1/2 mile to the Golden Cathedral. Enjoy the play of light on the walls and water. Return.

Neon - Technical OK, here's what you came for.



Approach: grab your wet suit and start hiking up Neon. After the first turn, find a path up the lefthand side of the canyon up the obvious broken and grassy area. Follow paths to the top, and a nice view up the Escalante. Follow the well-defined path at this level, easily traversing the side of the canyon on one of those "sidewalk" layers. Watch the canyon below, and make an educated guess as to where the Golden Cathedral is. Continue upcanyon, enjoying fine views of the narrow slot below. About 1/2 mile upcanyon from the Cathedral, the canyon opens somewhat, and a few small trees can be seen in the canyon bottom. Work your way down through the layers to the canyon bottom. Some people will rappel. This is the "normal entrance".

Normal Entrance Route From the canyon bottom, head down into the slot. At the first drop, put your wet suits on. Rappel off any of several chockstones down a v slot and into a pool. Swim like heck! Some of these long swims are quite tiring. Non-Olympic-caliber swimmers will want some floatation in their packs. The swims are really cool, down long fluted corridors. A second rappel can be done from chockstones, floral debris or, as a last resort, off the bolts that occasionally mysteriously appear. Swim more. *Photo: The "normal entrance" to Neon descends this complex of sandstone layers. Some folks will end up rappelling here.*

Keeper Pothole (Seasonal) Scramble downcanyon through an interesting slot, and you might discover a keeper pothole blocking your way. Figure out your strategy of choice (three person pyramid, toss a bunch of debris into the pool, Greg Ostertag) and rappel into the pool off debris in one of several neat windows. Escape the pothole and live to tell your tale another day.

The Big Drop

The big drop - the Main Event. The canyon opens out, then closes sharply and drops through the floor. A huge chockstone can be used for a rappel anchor, though it requires about 40' of webbing to get the rappel point to the edge of the drop. Please be a good citizen, and cut away (and carry out) slingage that is not worthy. Inspect that stuff carefully - kids do some whacky stuff out here in the wild. Rappel about 80' to the pool below. Swim to shore.

The More Fun Route

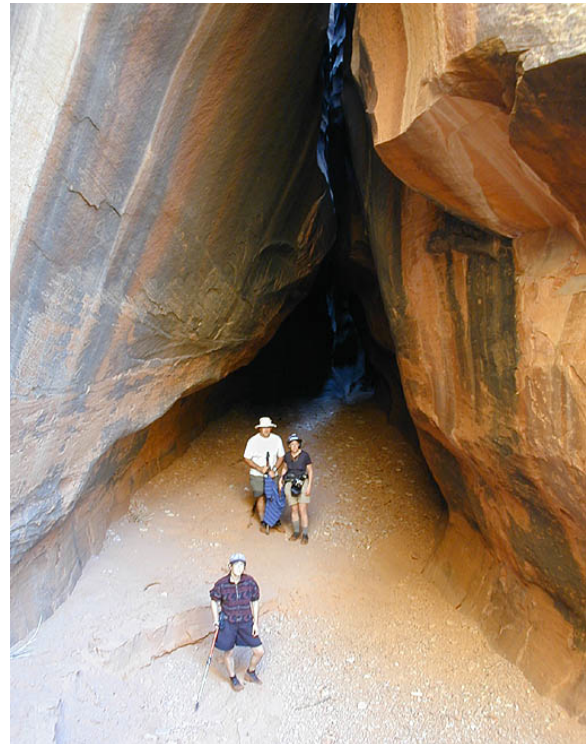
Up for more fun? Neon above the "Normal Route" is quite entertaining. Instead of descending to the canyon floor, continue traversing along the rim of the canyon. Find a place to walk, climb or rappel in. Go down canyon. About a

mile up from the Normal Route, several easy ways in are possible. Walking down from this point requires no extra ropework, but is wet, so put your wetsuits on when you get to the first substantial puddle. (Rumor has it further upcanyon is more good stuff, some of which requires some rappels from natural anchors). (p.s. if you need more description than this, choose a more civilized objective. Exploring upper Neon requires good natural anchor skills).



Ringtail - Non-Technical Grab your headlamp and let's head down to Ringtail. This is one of the darkest canyons in the Escalante.

Hike down the Escalante for about 15 minutes, until a little wash comes in on a very overgrown sandy area on the left. Follow the wash back through the willows to where it kinda becomes a canyon. Hike and climb quietly up the slickrock canyon to the mouth. If you are exceptionally quiet, you might see the namesake Ringtail. Enter the darkness and scramble as far as you can (15 minutes to 1 hour round trip).



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NEON canyon 3B III ***

Wet & cold, rappels to 80' (25m)