

Zion National Park: Observation Point Canyon (December 2015)

Beta courtesy CanyoneeringUSA.com

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Observation Point Canyon is a fun adventure, a canyon many people SEE (from the East Mesa Trail and Observation Point), but few have descended. Not destined to be a classic, but a good day out with a bunch of long rappels. It faces south, so it IS oven-like in hot weather, but in cooler weather, a pretty nice canyon.

Overall, not too scary and pretty clean, but be ready for extensive downclimbing in the middle section, and building your own anchors. The last 300 foot rappel beside the Weeping Rock wall takes some special attention as well.

It is important to get the correct point to rappel in. Rappel too high in the canyon, and you will end up in a steep, bushy gully. Rappel too low, and the drop is longer than 300 feet. There is a good place to rap in just downcanyon of a shallow corner, which raps down into a sparse clump of trees. Make a good effort to find this exact spot.

LOGISTICS

Rating	4A/B III
Season	Fall, Winter*, Spring* (*no snow)
Time Commitment	6.5 to 9 hours
Longest Rappel	300 feet (92 m)
Access	Begins and ends at Weeping Rock Trailhead (one car), or you could hike the Observation Point trail from the East Mesa Trailhead and exit at Weeping Rock (requires car spot or shuttle service)

Permit Required? YES
Zion Wilderness Desk: 435-772-0170
Zion EMERGENCY: 435-772-3322

EQUIPMENT

Essentials	Helmets, rappelling gear, webbing and rapid links.
Cold Water Protection	None. Canyon does not normally hold water.
Drinking Water	Bring plenty for the day.

DIFFICULTIES

Flash Flood Risk	Moderate – The catchbasin is small.
Skills Required	Anchor building skills, competence on long rappels, extensive downclimbing.
Anchors	Mostly natural anchors, be prepared to build your own.

TYPICAL TIME SCHEDULE

0:00	Weeping Rock approach
2:00	R1 to suitup spot
5:00	Suitup spot to end
7:00	Weeping Rock parking lot

Alternative Approach: East Mesa

0:00	East Mesa approach
1:00	R1 to suitup spot
4:00	Suitup spot to end
6:00	Weeping Rock parking lot

SEASONAL COMMENTS

Summer - The canyon faces south and acts as a reflector oven, so in any heat at all, it is unbearable.

Fall and Spring - Cool days in the fall.

Winter - Significant snow could make the canyon very difficult. The narrow section at the bottom will hold snow and be very cold.

APPROACH

From Weeping Rock, hike up the Observation Point Trail; 4 miles long with 2,100 feet of elevation gain. Once at the Point, check out the canyon to the east and south, this is Observation Point Canyon.

Alternative Approach

You can evade the elevation gain of the Observation Point Trail by parking or shuttling to the East Mesa trailhead on Zion Ponderosa

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Ranch and hiking in on the East Mesa Trail, (3.1 miles, 300 feet gain).

THE BUSINESS

From Observation Point, backtrack along the trail to the sharp notch where the very head of the canyon is closest to the trail. Continue on the trail another 100 feet, then cut over to the rim. The watercourse itself could be descended, but looks very brushy. Select a tree on the rim that offers a clean rappel down steep rock and into a grove of trees. Make sure your rope reaches.

R1: Rap about 250' to a grove of trees.

Hike down a broad, rough gully to slickrock. Follow the low-angle slickrock to where it steepens. Cut right, then downclimb steeper rock to a series of ledges. Follow the ledges back left, then all the way left, until you can downclimb easily to the next level. Follow the watercourse down 100 feet. As it starts to drop off steeply, traverse right to lower angle slabs past a ridge, then down to the edge. Select a sturdy bush with a clean line of pull, as low as possible.

R2: Rappel 260 feet to the canyon floor. You might rappel past an old RT (Royce Trappier) bolt, 20 feet short of the canyon floor (bad day out for RT). Rig carefully! The many plates and loose rock make rope retrieval a bit tricky. Continue down canyon through trees and brush. The canyon then slots up 100 feet from the end.

R3: Short rap from a chockstone.

R4: Rap into a slot. Walk along the slot and continue the rappel into a keeper pothole. (The keeper can be avoided with some fancy rappelling skills). Downclimb into another pothole (waist deep?).

R5: 120 foot rappel from bolts.

R6: 80 foot rappel down to an exposed ledge, big enough for four people.

R7: Rap from the anchor station (two pins and a bolt), 300 feet to the ground, to the left of the Weeping Rock wall. Careful throwing the rope - there is a tree 30 feet from the bottom that can make things difficult.

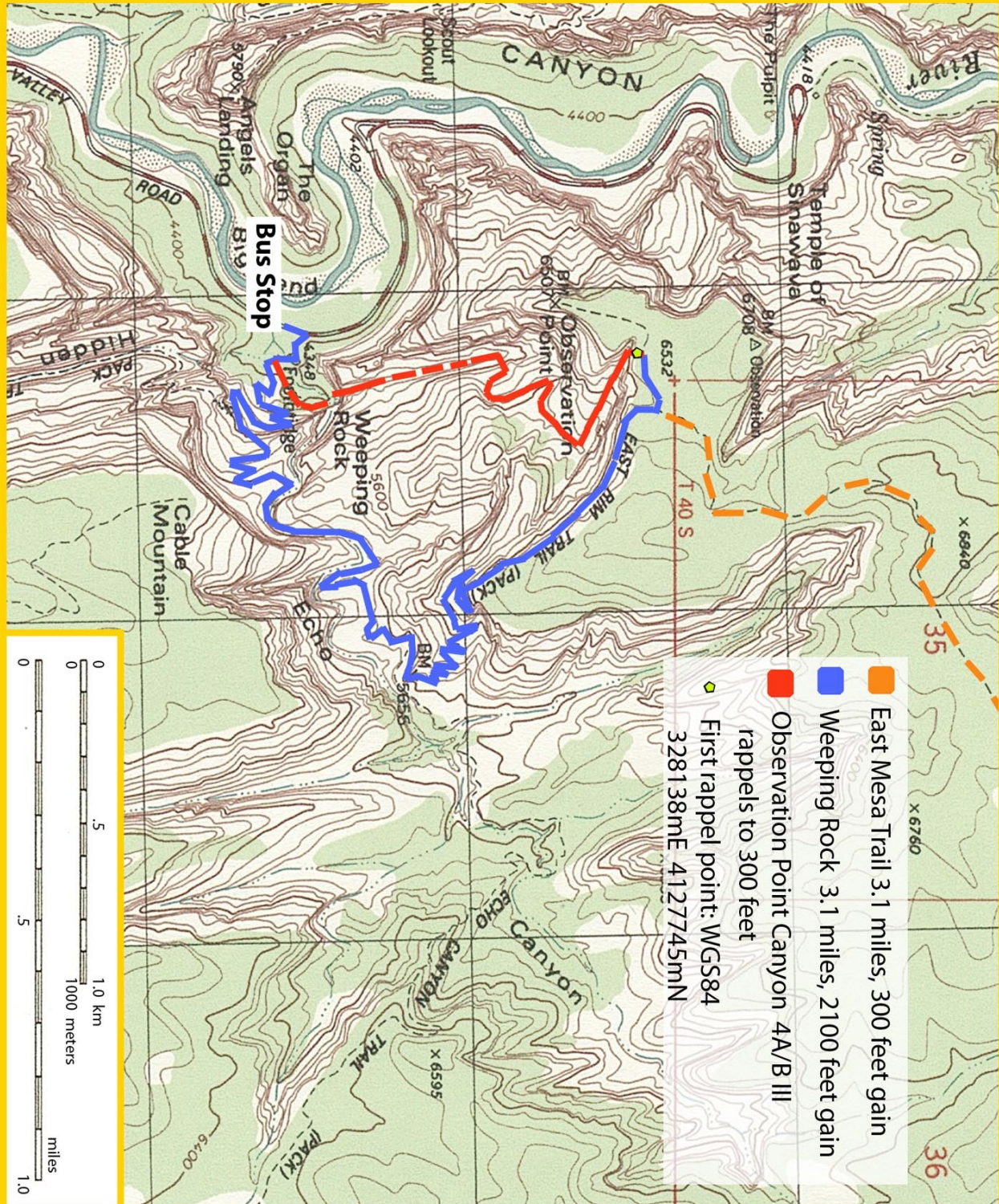
EXIT

Carefully climb up to the Weeping Rock observation platform. Follow the trail to the Weeping Rock trailhead. Do NOT traipse through the riparian zone.

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Observation Point Canyon 4A/B III rappels to 300 feet. South-facing, very hot.



beta courtesy CanyoneeringUSA.com
Use beta as a guide. Deal with reality.

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