

Zion National Park: Pipe Spring Canyon (October 2015)

Beta courtesy CanyoneeringUSA.com

Short & Sweet.

Pipe Spring is an interesting little canyon in an unusual location, down from Lava Point, next to the MIA Route. It is at a higher altitude than most canyons, thus might be good when it is too hot elsewhere. Though admittedly, the 2-mile, 900-foot of gain exit will discourage many people.

We had admired the slot from the bottom for many years, and I finally decided to drop it from the top in October 2009. Not every day does one get to do a 'new' canyon in Zion, but that was one of those days. Pipe Spring is near the top of the MIA Exit, a rugged, backcountry route which can be used to exit Kolob Canyon after descents of Kolob, Oak Creek and Boundary Canyon. The exit include the top half of the MIA, then the hike back up to the West Rim Trailhead.

Because the canyon is rarely done, bring plenty of webbing and rings to re-rig many of the anchors. The approach and the canyon are on MIA Camp land (private land), though on the edge of the actively used area. You are a guest on the Camp's land; be a good guest.

GPS: WGS84 12S: Pipe Spring: 323580mE 4138758mN

Top of MIA: 323762mE 4138921mN

LOGISTICS

Rating 3A III
Season Summer or fall
Time Commitment 6 to 8 hours
Longest Rappel 180 feet (55 m)
Access Begins and ends at Lava Point.
Permit Required? NO
Zion Wilderness Desk: 435-772-0170
Zion EMERGENCY: 435-772-3322

EQUIPMENT

Essentials Helmets, rappelling gear, webbing and rapid links.
Cold Water Protection None.
Drinking Water Available at Pipe Spring.

DIFFICULTIES

Flash Flood Risk Low-the drainage is small and wooded.
Skills Required Navigation, anchor building techniques.
Anchors Mostly bolted, with a few large trees thrown in

SEASONAL COMMENTS

The Lava Point and MIA Camp areas are inaccessible until spring snowmelt is finished.

APPROACH

To get to the "Pipe Spring", you must follow the MIA Exit road-walk section backwards. It is very helpful to have done the MIA Exit BEFORE attempting this canyon.

Park at the West Rim Trailhead and head down the MIA Road -- the gated road on the north side of the parking area. If the gate is open, still do NOT drive down the road. It might be locked by the time you get back. There is a maze of roads in this area, and some details on the USGS topographic map are out of date. Follow my approach map carefully to reach the Pipe Spring 'picnic area'.

Follow the road next to the watercourse below the pipe spring, to the developed rappelling area for the camp. Descend the trail down in that the camp has established to the bottom of the canyon. Hike downstream. In a few minutes, the bottom drops out of the wash, with twists and

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turns down below. Looks like a rope might be necessary!

THE BUSINESS

Rap lengths listed are estimates. I usually bring 200 foot ropes, and I suggest doing the same.

Most of the raps are bolted, and might require being re-rigged.

R1 - Pick a stout tree on the left and rap in, about 80 feet. This is a good one to rap with the ropebag clipped to your harness to avoid tangling the rope with the trees.

R2 - About 100 feet down a flute, off a 2-bolt anchor.

R3 - 80 foot rap down another flute.

The canyon opens up for a bit, and a class 3 exit can be made up the edge to the left.

R4 - 20 foot downclimb or rappel.

R5 - 180 foot (or less) rappel down a steep wall off bolts to a small ledge with a two-bolt anchor.

R6 - 100 feet to the ground of a two-bolt anchor.

A wonderful, narrow slot and a couple short raps and fun downclimbs complete the technical part of the upper canyon.

It is possible to continue with a couple more raps all the way to Kolob Creek. Rap lengths are around 100 feet. (Bring a longer rope than that).

EXIT

From the bottom of Pipe Spring Canyon, called the "MIA Slot" in the MIA Exit Description, you "get" to "enjoy" the top half of the MIA Exit, a steep backcountry route that some have mistakenly labelled a "trail". The route is sometimes difficult to follow - but finding and following the easiest route is quite important, as

off-route, the terrain is even steeper and more hazardous. The MIA route has changed in the last couple of years, and become easier, though still steep. And easier to follow.

Three snags mark the very top of the route, and can be helpful for navigation at several points.

MIA EXIT DESCRIPTION

(Top Half)

Follow the main watercourse up canyon past automotive debris washed down from above. Follow this canyon five minutes along the basin floor, until it turns right and heads for the right-hand wall and slot. Climb steep dirt on the left directly up the fall line. The trail has developed cut-in steps. Follow the steep steps up to the base of the cliff above, then traverse right.

The trail crosses a side-drainage and climbs straight up the steep hillside. The trail is well-defined. Near the top, the trail is less well-defined and climbs a few sections of steep, loose rock. Be careful of partner-generated rockfall. In the last few years, a few sections of fixed ropes sometimes make the final, steep section faster and less-scary. Ascend to the road.

Back to the West Rim Trailhead

At the top of the MIA Route is a logging road. Turn left (south) and hike about 200 feet (60 m) the top of the hill. The exit road goes up and right. You may want to visit the picnic area with water coming from a pipe, that is 200 feet (60m) ahead on the main road. This is the Pipe Spring.

From the top of the hill, hike up. Follow the roads (generally north and west, but always up) to the West Rim Trailhead. Allow a half-hour for the top half of the MIA Route and an hour for the roadwalk back to the Trailhead. First time MIA'ers are likely to take longer.

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