

Right Fork of North Creek• Zion National Park

Rating:	3B IV
Best Season:	Summer or early fall.
Time:	1 to 3 days.
Longest Rappel:	Standard route—60 feet (20 m) Hammerhead—165 feet (50 m) Direct—80 feet (25 m)
Access:	Requires car spot, shuttle service or short hitchhike.
Permit:	Required. Available at Visitor Center.
Seasonality:	Spring —With any snowpack, the conditions are unpredictable. Better to wait for the upper elevation and drainage to clear of snow. The Hammerhead will typically hold snow well into June. Summer —The preferred season. The lower part of the canyon is in full sun and HOT. Fall —The preferred season, with nice temperatures and scenery. Winter —Snowpack blocks the access to trailheads and canyons.
Equipment:	Map (USGS Quad: The Guardian Angels), helmets, rappelling gear, webbing and rapid links.
Cold Protection:	Full wetsuits or drysuits are generally required—drybags for your gear.
Drinking Water:	Limited. Carry your own and a pump to filter. Pumpable water is found at the seep seasonally, and springs start at the Grand Alcove.
Flash Flood Risk:	Moderate—there are only a few sections of continuous narrows.
Skills Required:	Difficult backcountry navigation.
Anchors:	Natural and bolted anchors.

The Right Fork offers outstanding beauty as it crosses a remarkable swath of the Zion backcountry, but it also extracts a considerable price in sweat and toil to sample its wonders. Rather long and hot, it can be done as a one-day, two-day or a three-day hike. Lack of palatable water for the first 2/3 of the hike will deter some. There are rappels and swims – enough to put off the non-technical hiker but not enough for it to be a technical test piece.

For many people, finding the correct route is the crux. Many an adventurer, paying insufficient attention to the map and the route, has found themselves unexpectedly in technical terrain beyond their skills. Follow the route carefully. If you do not read and understand topographic maps, pick another adventure.

The middle section of the canyon (between the turn southwest and double falls) is where the "goodies" are. The Grand Alcove and several lovely waterfalls are often the highlight of the trip, though many will also enjoy The Black Pool. Many parties bivvy at the Grand Alcove and this is where the first springs appear, offering high-quality water.

Two variations are available that add more technicality and more spice to the trip. The Hammerhead has six rappels that connect the West Rim trail with the Right Fork, and is the true start of the Right Fork drainage. The Upper Right Fork Direct continues from there through the series of potholes previously avoided so carefully – they turn out to be way fun, a bit wet and a bit technical. It is possible to bivvy at the start of the Right Fork Direct in all but the driest conditions by pumping from potholes.

Getting There: From Springdale, drive south and west 14 miles to the town of Virgin. Turn right on the Kolob Reservoir (KR) road. The paved KR road winds through town, then climbs a dramatic ridge in making its way to Kolob Terrace. Six and a half miles from Virgin, the road enters the park and three trailheads are soon encountered - Right Fork being the first. Park at the Right Fork Trailhead, 7.0 miles from the town of Virgin. The trailhead is not shown on many maps, but is close to the Bench Mark labeled BM 4501. Driving time from Springdale is 45 minutes. This is your exit point, leave a car here.

The top of the route can be accessed from either the West Rim Trailhead or from the Wildcat Canyon Trailhead. The first is a shorter hike, but a longer drive, and will be described here. Wildcat Canyon Trailhead will work better if you have only one car, or if the Lava Point road is closed. If you have one car, leave it at the Right Fork Trailhead. Or, arrange a shuttle.

West Rim Trailhead: From the Right Fork Trailhead, continue up the KT road 13.3 miles. Turn right between two fenced fields onto the Lava Point Road. Follow the Lava Point road 0.9 miles southeast to a Y. Take the left fork signed for the West Rim Trailhead. Drive a further 1.4 miles to a small parking lot before a gate at the West Rim Trailhead. Do not park blocking the gate, and do not drive beyond the gate. (The Wildcat Canyon Trailhead is 8.8 miles up the KT road from the Right Fork TH, and can be used, though the approach hike is longer).

Approach Hike: Hike down the West Rim Trail 500 feet (150 m), then branch right onto the Wildcat Canyon Trail. Follow this 15 minutes (0.7 miles), then drop south off the trail through brush to the bottom of Little Blue Canyon (not labeled on the map). Follow the bottom of Little Blue southwest until it drops steeply into Wildcat Canyon. Two 75-foot (20 m) rappels pass this section into a lush glen.

Alternatively, stay on the trail another half mile and drop into Wildcat Canyon where the trail crosses the visible drainage, avoiding two rappels.

Wildcat Canyon is an open, rugged and dry canyon with large cliffs on both sides. Follow easily the bottom of the canyon, for a mile and a half, until it becomes more rugged and brushy. Avoid difficulties by staying right of the canyon bottom on the benchland where the walking is easier.

Follow the bench for 3.2 miles, crossing a wash. Just short of where Wildcat Canyon turns right and joins the Left Fork, follow social trails that find a ramp that leads easily down into the canyon. Follow the canyon bottom for 1/10 mile (160 m) to an easy exit up slabs on the left (east) where The Seeps come in. This is the first water found on the hike, so stock up.

Up to the Pass: Hike south-southeast, climbing up a wide, open and dry valley. There are some incredible Ponderosa Pines in this canyon, protected by the very large sandstone walls on each side. Cresting the pass, the canyon to the south is a neat slickrock canyon of great rugosity. A bivy site near the pass offers excellent views.

Descend The Valley and Climb to The Shelf. Stay to the right to avoid the rugged canyon on the left. Follow game trails down and into a small drainage, that in thirty minutes joins with the main canyon on the left. Follow the main drainage for only a few minutes, to where it becomes slickrock and starts to slot up and form potholes. This is the start of the more-technical Direct Upper Right Fork section that most parties will wish to avoid.

Backtrack a few minutes and find a social trail or game track ascending the steep, wooded slope to the west. Climb several hundred feet to the crest. Once atop of the ridge, a good trail-of-use makes travel easy. Follow the crest of the rib, then drop into a shallow, beautiful slickrock canyon on the right, and follow this remarkable "Giant Staircase" to its end. (This is the last place to bivy before dropping into the narrow canyon). Where the canyon drops precipitously, downclimb steeply to the left, using the trees and carefully searching out the easiest route. Rappels should not be necessary. Near the bottom, cross the watercourse and follow a shelf 40 feet above the watercourse, until it is easy to drop into the canyon. You may need to use a handline or lower packs to get to the canyon floor. Some people bivy in this vicinity. Water may be available in potholes. **The Right Fork:** Finally! we're in the cool confines of the Right Fork. The canyon is deep and shaded with a rocky bottom – but also quite rugged and downstream travel is slow. The wise canyoneer will hunt for options at each obstacle, choosing the fastest and safest route down. This stretch to the Grand Alcove is only 1.3 miles (2 km) long, but takes 2-3 hours to traverse.

Hike downcanyon under a giant boulder. A few minutes later, the canyon turns sharply right. In about 20 minutes, the Black Pool is encountered.

The Infamous Black Pool is a nice way to cool off. Drop into the pool, and swim 50 feet to 100 yards through a sinuous sandstone slot. Brrrrrrr. Rumor has it the pool can be avoided by a traverse on the left, then rapping off a

tree into the end of the pool. But what's the point?

Walk briskly to warm back up. Other obstacles are overcome, rappels are made, pools are swum. Close to the Alcove, a little flow starts up in the canyon bottom. After several hours of rugged canyon, you arrive at:

The Grand Alcove, a magnificent overhang with multiple colorful tiers. The canyon cuts through the aquifer layer and copious quantities of clear, clean water burst out of the walls. This makes a splendid camping place - requiring your best minimum impact camping technique.

The Grand Alcove comes with a cliff obstacle that can be rappelled on the left at the far end of the ledges off a fixed anchor. A second, short rappel is made off a tree to the canyon floor. The streambed flume can be slid and downclimbed directly to the pool at the bottom - makes for a refreshing morning swim, and is a wonderful section of canyon.

Barrier Falls: One hundred yards below the Grand Alcove, a 60-foot (20 m) waterfall is rappelled from bolt anchors. Barrier Falls represents the furthest the canyon can be hiked from the bottom. There is a lot of Poison Ivy from Barrier Falls out to the trailhead. Heading down canyon soon leads to...

More Waterfalls: A splendid waterfall appears difficult, but is easily passed by a trail to the side. The next fall is Double Falls - passed on the left. A ledge passes behind the twin waterfalls, allowing the adventurous canyoneer to dive through the waterfall into the pool beyond. Big boulders and rugged terrain make this section slow going.

Approach var-1, The Hammerhead - The hammerhead shaped canyon 0.2 miles SE of PT 7325 on the West Rim makes a reasonable, though more technical entrance to the Right Fork. Bushwhack to the northern end of the hammer: the best route follows the trail south from Potato Hollow, then cuts right and follows grasslands up a wide valley, then right again up to a shallow pass overlooking the south end of The Hammerhead. Traverse the rim till above the north end and work your way down the slope to the first rappel. The brush is terrible and the terrain hard to read, so a GPS is recommended. Six rappels to 165 feet (50 m) from natural anchors, and several downclimbs, are required to reach the Right Fork. At the intersection with the main canyon, descend the steep nose on canyon left to reach the floor of the canyon. (For a small, skilled group, the Hammerhead will be just about as fast as the normal approach. For larger, less-skilled groups it could take MUCH longer).

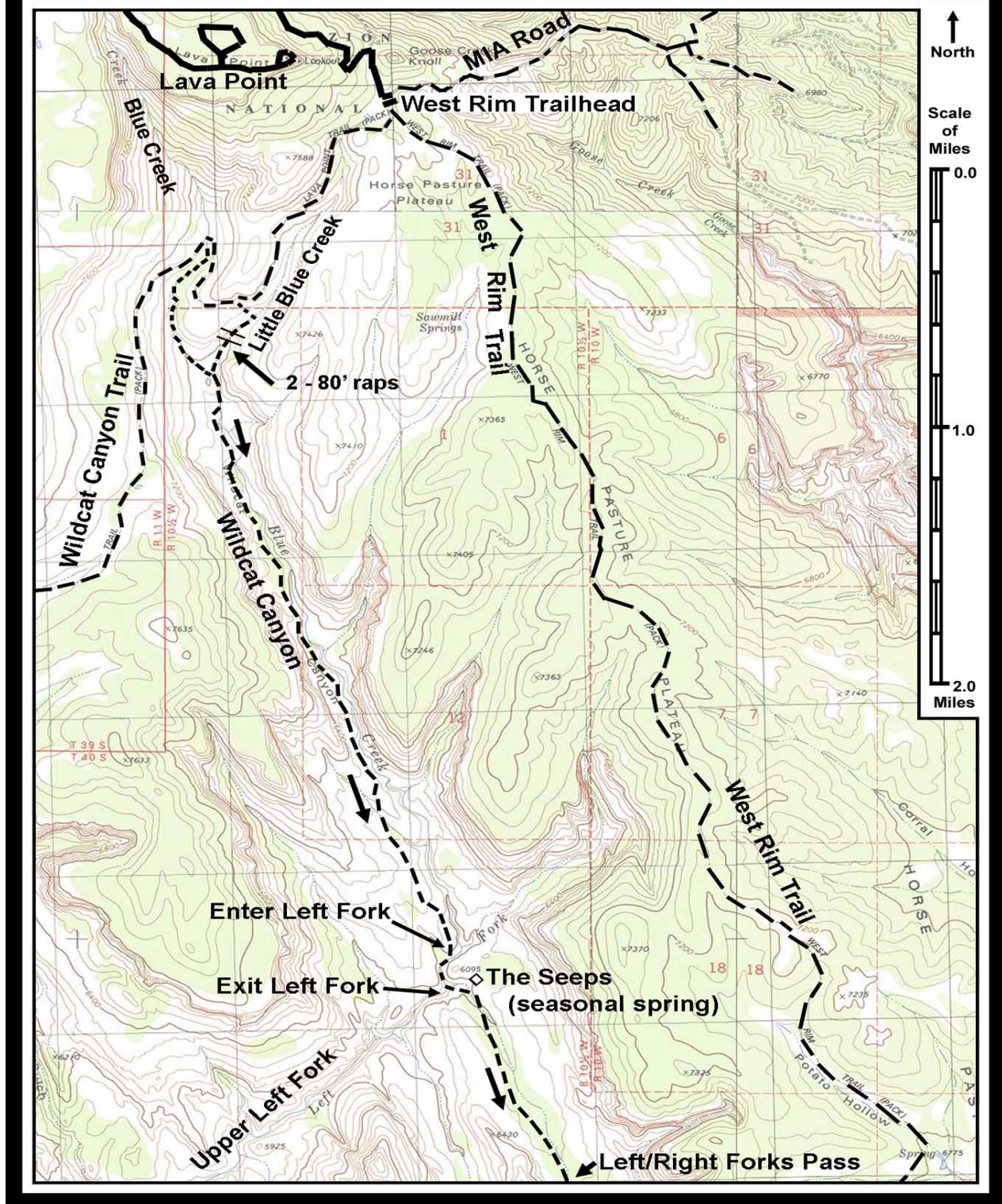
Canyon var-2, Upper Right Fork Direct - The series of linked potholes in the Upper Right Fork can be descended directly. Climbing skills may be required to exit one or two of the potholes, and rappels up to 80 feet will be found, all from natural anchors. The series of linked potholes calls for greater protection from cold water than the regular Right Fork route. This variation adds 1-2 hours to the normal descent.

The Slog: Unfortunately, Double Falls represents the end of the 'goodies', and the beginning of the slog out. The streambed is kinda like the end of The Subway, but twice as long, and a lot more interesting. Follow the streambed and side trails west for 4 miles to the junction with the Left Fork. Where the stream cuts an "inner gorge", follow along inside the gorge.

Poison Ivy is prevalent in this part of the canyon, so keep a keen eye and stay away from vegetation as much as possible.

From the junction with the Left Fork, cross the stream and head south (left) on the opposite bank. A quarter mile below the junction, a path heads up and right to the lava cliffband. Keep your eyes peeled - while the path is marked, it is still an unofficial trail, and can be easily missed. Follow the trail up through the steep talus, then up through the cliff band of black lava to the Right Fork Trailhead. Near the base of the trail up, a great swimming hole is available and recommended. The last three miles to the road were impacted by a large fire in June 2006, and the trail may be difficult to find and follow through this section.

KOLOB TERRACE - RIGHT FORK, UPPER



KOLOB TERR.: RIGHT FORK - MIDDLE

