

Russell Gulch • Zion National Park

Rating:	3B III
Best Season:	Summer or fall.
Time:	7 to 12 hours including The Subway.
Longest Rappel:	100 feet (30 m)
Access:	If continuing through the Subway, requires car spot, shuttle service or short hitchhike.
Permit:	Required—Separate permits are required for the Subway and Russell Gulch. Available at Visitor Center.
Seasonality:	Spring —In early spring, winter conditions apply. For several more weeks in spring, water levels are too high to safely descend due to snowmelt. There is no gauge on the stream, so hard to judge these conditions remotely. Summer —HOT! An early start will allow the sunny approach to be completed before its too hot out. The hike out is also in full sun and very hot. Fall —The preferred season, with nice temperatures and scenery. Bring a headlamp for the shorter daylight hours. Winter —Generally, snowpack blocks the access to trailheads and canyons. May be a reasonable venture if the area is clear of snow.
Equipment:	Helmets, rappelling gear, webbing and rapid links.
Cold Protection:	Wetsuits or drysuits in all but the hottest weather. Drybags for your gear.
Drinking Water:	Clear spring water available to filter once in the main Left Fork drainage.
Flash Flood Risk:	Moderate—there are only a few sections of continuous narrows.
Skills Required:	Careful navigation, and good rappelling skills.
Anchors:	Natural and bolted anchors.

While the normal route into The Subway is often called the "Russell Gulch Approach", it actually only crosses Russell Gulch rather than descending it. This variation descends the canyon with three rappels of 100 feet (30 m), adding a little technical interest and another nice section of canyon to the normal Subway Route. This alternate Subway approach adds about an hour to the route, for small groups. While the route is fairly straightforward, the rappels themselves have awkward starts and are not suitable for beginners.

Overview: Russell Gulch is a variation that branches off the normal Subway approach before getting to the slickrock pass. It ends where Russell enters the Left Fork, just past where the normal approach descends a steep, sandy gully. Driving and most of the approach hike are the same as for the Subway from the Top – please refer to that description.

The Approach: Follow the normal approach to the Subway to where it crosses Russell Gulch. Don't cross. Instead, traverse right (west) across the top of slabs, then down slickrock shelves and slabs to the canyon bottom. Find the path of minimum impact--stay on the slickrock as much as possible. Generally, the further you traverse to the right, the easier it is.

Traipse down Russell Gulch, occasionally wading through knee deep pools or scrambling over logs and rocks. The first rappel is soon found--100 feet (30 m) over a pothole and to the edge of a pool. Expect wading up to waist deep in all these pools. All rappels are bolted.

Continue downcanyon. A second rappel of 100 feet (30 m) is made down a steep wall and into a shallow pool.
Continue downcanyon. A third rappel may require some effort to get to. Steep slabs can be downclimbed on canyon left, or a short, dirty rap made from a large tree. Rappel the overhang to the slab below, about 100 feet (30 m).
Continue downcanyon. The last drop ends in a large pool near the confluence of Russell Gulch and the Left Fork. There is no convenient anchor, and the pool is often a skanky swimmer, so it is rarely done. From the top of the drop, follow a small trail up and left through the woods that leads to the bottom of the steep, sandy gully that is the normal Subway approach. Descend to the canyon floor, and continue down The Subway.

The Exit: If exiting before the Subway, find the Subway approach trail as it descends on the right side. Follow the trail (well-cairned) back to the Northgate Peaks trail and the Wildcat Canyon trailhead. It is steeply uphill, and longer than you might expect.

If continuing through the Subway, use the canyon description for the Subway from the Top.

