

Grand Canyon Toroweap Trip Report March 7–9, 2008

Ever since I started leading day-trip tours for Pink Jeep Tours to the Grand Canyon National Park Toroweap Overlook last September and after learning there is a route to the Colorado River, I have been interested in leading a trip to this location. The trip involves traveling on almost 60 miles (each way) of dirt road to the most remote way of viewing the Grand Canyon. The last time I took a tour to Toroweap was early Feb after big storms dumped a bit of snow out there. I traveled on 4 to 8 inches of snow for most of the trip with a number of areas having ice underneath the snow. I was able to make it to and back using the company's Chevrolet $\frac{3}{4}$ ton Suburbans in 4-wheel drive without any problems. Although, the next week one of our guides got stuck in the mud and had to be pulled out by a tow truck. There was also another rainstorm about a week later. Therefore, I was concerned we would encounter very muddy conditions for this trip.

A total of 12 people joined me on this trip. We made sure to only have 2 or 3 people in each vehicle in case something went wrong so we have space in other vehicles. In any case, we were carrying a lot of supplies for a 3-day/2-night camping trip. We used five vehicles for the following people to enjoy this trip - Roy Trafton, John Dagit, Candace Wise, Dave Luttmann, Peppe Sotomayer, Harlan Stockman, John "Snafu" Mueller, Joel Brewster, Alan Nakashima, Colin Okada, and Doug & Maxine Hladky.

We met at 07:00 on March 7 at the top of the Cannery Row parking garage to caravan to Mesquite for a quick bathroom break. We then drove through St. George to travel east on Hwy 9 as if we were going to Zion. When in Hurricane we turned right onto Hwy 59 towards Colorado City, AZ. Before entering Hildale, UT we stopped at the first and only Chevron to top off our tanks. We then traveled through Colorado City which is the city for the FLDS whose sect leader Warren Jeffs was recently sent to prison. Soon after passing mile marker 4 on the Arizona side we turned right for the dirt road to the Toroweap Overlook. We then stopped so I could brief everyone about the dirt road since I was the only one who has ever gone this route.

The road was not muddy at all. It was bumpy in many areas with some very deep ruts in several areas. We found the area where that guide got stuck with about 15 inch deep ruts.

We reached the campground grabbing the first three sites on the right. We all set up camp and then went for a walk to the viewpoint. The views were amazing. John Dagit (a fellow tour guide) and I had our picture taken showing our one finger salute to the Hualapai Indian Reservation on the other side of the canyon. Tour guides have a bit of disdain towards the Hualapai operation at the West Rim of the Grand Canyon. We all got really close to the edge. If anyone fell in this area it would not be a rescue operation. The views of the canyon were phenomenal. We also admired the massive lava flows that at one time blocked the Grand Canyon.

Ironically we were visiting the area at the time of the "big flush" in which the Bureau of Reclamation released a large amount of water from Lake Powell via the Glen Canyon Dam on the east side of the Grand Canyon to try to rejuvenate the river beds in the Grand Canyon. There was a noticeable difference in the level of the water from the Toroweap Overlook. To top it off we were hiking down to the river the next day.

Colin and I went exploring down into the canyon to an area I've wanted to explore for a while. Everyone else admired the views from the edge. It was really nice being on our own in the middle of nowhere. I

noticed a brushy chute that would be fun, but we didn't have time to explore. I wonder if eventually we could have possibly found another way down to the river. I'll have to wait to explore that area on another trip.

We went back to the campsite to set things up and enjoy a good meal. Two backcountry rangers drove up to see how everyone was doing. They were making their rounds as part of their normal patrol of the backcountry. Ironically they were also hiking down the Lava Falls route the next day to check it out as part of the patrol responsibility. What a shame being paid to hike!

The next day we drove to the trailhead. The road was bumpy and rough with some very worn sections. There is really no trail down to the river, but simply a lot of different routes depending on your interest. Most of the routes are heavily cairned, but still at times hard to notice considering the immensity of the canyon. Most of the trail has loose rocks and scree. The big scree slope required us to spread out as everyone was causing rocks to slide down. Part of the way down we saw the two rangers waiting off to the side for our large group to pass through. After I passed the rangers continuing down I heard a loud yell "ROCK!!!" The rangers were actually yelling towards me. I looked up see Candace had dislodged probably a hundred pound rock. It was rolling towards my direction. It was really hard to try to move because of the loose rocks. Thankfully the rock moved in another direction a couple dozen feet or so up the slope from me. There were many areas where we have to down climb. Essentially, this route is a class III scramble with most of the trip a steep class II with about 2500 feet elevation change in 1.5 miles. Wearing layers and gloves were a plus for this trip.

Most of the group took the same route down. Although, Harlan followed a GPS track of Nick Nelson's from an earlier trip. Since we were all spread out along the route, we used walkie-talkies to communicate with each other. The rangers were also taking a different route down. It was quite interesting having so many people in the area going down three different routes. It took our group about 2 to 4 hours to reach the river. Most of us then followed a path down the river towards the Lava Falls Rapids. Although, most of the path was underwater because of the high water level from the man-made flood. We managed to find a way to the Lava Falls Rapids. There was a large boulder that offered much needed shade for a lunch rest break. The views of the area were great. We were even fortunate to watch a raft with two people navigate the rapids.

The temperature was in the low 70's and fully exposed to the sun for the entire trip up the canyon. Most followed the same route up the canyon as on the way down. Harlan followed another route a little further up the canyon. I decided to follow another route between the two that looked fine. Although, my route was up loose rock and scree at an angle of about 50 degrees for several hundred feet up. It was physically draining going up this loose crap. I was then thinking to myself I should not have gone this way. I had also reached some class III rock I didn't like too much. I kept going up as it looked like there was a good way to cut across. Harlan and I were in sight of each other as we went up. At one time Joel peered over the side from his rock and thought to himself that my way didn't look very good at all. I finally yelled to Harlan to wait, as I wanted to get over to him somehow because I was over the idea of climbing out of this on my own. I had to stop for a while to rest and to eat something. I also asked Harlan if he can see a good way for me to cut across. He yelled that the way over looked very loose and steep, but there was a spot I could get across if I was careful. He also said he would wait for me if I wanted to climb back down and hike up his route. I told him no way as I would most definitely slip and slide down the canyon and I would probably get hurt. I checked out his suggested path telling him this is a lot easier than what I just came up. We then went up the canyon via a route that was better than the original one I came down with the rest of the group. We avoided that steep scree slope. Again, the entire way we all maintained radio contact.

Peppe was the fastest up the canyon completing the climb up in about 1.5 hours. Harlan and I took 3 hours with everyone else finishing the same time or within the next 2 hours. It was definitely a rewarding experience. We also were still at the trailhead by the time the two rangers finished the hike. It turns out the rangers have to wear a sidearm while on duty even during such a difficult hike. I commented to the ranger about the sidearm strapped to the leg. Their response was that it is like having an anchor tied to your leg, but required issue.

I had originally wanted to also hike to the top of Vulcan's Throne which was an old volcano along the road to Lava Falls trail for another 1000 feet. Although after this hike most of us were whipped and didn't want to hike more. Therefore, we drove back to the campsite for a well deserved meal and relaxation. There were storms in the area to the west. I was starting to worry those storms would move our direction. I remember before this trip that there was no forecast for rain so this storm really made me wonder. The winds were getting stronger. When we returned to the campsite I discovered my tent was on its side. I'm glad I had weighted down the sides with rocks otherwise it would have blown away. The storm never moved our direction and fizzled. I then wondered if we were going to encounter more snow for the next day's hike.

The next day we packed up and headed out to tackle Mt. Trumbull and Mt. Logan. We took another road heading higher in elevation. Since we were heading higher we now encountered snow and ice with some mud. There was some mud, but not too much because the snow and ice had not melted yet. We found the trailhead for Mt. Trumbull that is well marked with a parking area. We all started up the trail that was a little muddy. Quickly we encountered patches of snow on the trail that soon turned into only snow on the trail. As a matter of fact there was no longer a trail. Peppe, Harlan, and Roy went ahead of everyone else. Harlan had a GPS track to the peak. The rest of us simply followed the other's footprints in the snow. Although, at one point we completely lost their tracks. We finally found the tracks and continued to the peak. We maintained radio contact with Harlan and the entire group to coordinate our path. Eventually we found Harlan and the peak. It was cold up there with all the snow. The route down was a lot easier as there were plenty of tracks. Snafu took his time and came down by himself. We asked if he was fine on his own. He indicated he should not have a problem following the tracks in the snow of a dozen people. The route down was more difficult because the snow was melting and it was softening. We postholed often. The trail was now muddy.

We then wanted to tackle Mt. Logan, but we all concluded such an endeavor would not be in our best interest. The road (if you will call it a road) was a deep mud bath. I also realized we would not be able to complete the hike and get off the dirt before dark. Therefore, we abandoned the last peak and headed home. The shortest distance to the end of the dirt would have been to continue along the same road we used to reach Mt. Trumbull, but I knew from past experience that portion was muddier than the route up. Therefore, we went back the same way we came up. The road was now quite muddy because the ice had melted. We all made it out fine with a bit of mud on our vehicles.

The trip was a great experience. No one got hurt and there was no damage to any of our vehicles. Everyone had a great time. I really want to come back again. I'm sure I'll coordinate another trip to Toroweap in the future. Thanks a lot to those who drove as the rest of us could not have enjoyed the trip without you!