

BUCKSKIN GULCH

Paria River Wilderness

*Southern Utah,
United States*

DISTANCE: 24 miles (38½ km) one-way

TIME: 3-4 days

PHYSICAL CHALLENGE: 1 2 3 4 5

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGE: 1 2 3 4 5

STAGING: Kanab, Utah, or Page, Arizona

Imagine a corridor of stone so long it snakes through the red rock of southern Utah for more than 15 miles (24 km), so deep you cannot see the sky, and so narrow you have to remove your pack in places to get through. This could only be Buckskin Gulch, the most impressive slot canyon in North America, perhaps anywhere. Hiking the length of this sinuous defile is a backcountry experience that will amaze you, and challenge you in unexpected ways.

Centrally located in a fertile area for desert hiking, this surreal set of narrows lies north of the Grand Canyon, east of Zion National Park, and west of Lake Powell. From start to finish Buckskin Gulch takes you on a subterranean tour of the layer cake of the Colorado Plateau, starting in the Chinle and Moenave formations and proceeding upstrata as it travels downhill, so it finishes in the dramatic red rock of

Navajo sandstone. The beauty here is varied, both magnificent and subtle, but always changing. Sections of rock walls are sculpted and fluted, reflecting the bright, indirect southern Utah sunshine in a warm red hue, while in other places the canyon walls are dark and high, even intimidating. But found along its great length are a few delicious surprises. You can suddenly come around a corner to find a fairy tale grotto, a short section aligned just right to make the walls

OPPOSITE: *With more than 18 miles (29 km) of narrows, Buckskin Gulch takes the hiker into an unforgettable corridor of red rock.*

PHOTO BY PETER POTTERFIELD.

Stopping for lunch where the canyon briefly opens up, half a day down the gulch from the Middle Route. PHOTO BY PETER POTTERFIELD.

