



TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Mud Canyon San Rafael Swell, Southern Reef

Rating:	2A II-III ★★
Best Season:	Fall, winter or spring.
Time:	5 to 7 hours.
Access:	If possible, spot a car or bike near the Quandary Canyon side road/parking lot. Otherwise, you will walk the road back to Hidden Splendor airstrip.
Permit:	Not required.
Equipment:	No technical equipment required.
Map:	USGS 7.5' Hunt Draw.
Cold Protection:	None required.
Drinking Water:	None, bring plenty.
Flash Flood Risk:	Moderate
Skills Required:	One 3 rd class boulder problem, and a steep section of 3 rd /4 th class dirt to exit the canyon. You must wade across the Muddy River twice at the very beginning.

Mud Canyon is a great little canyon: scenic, interesting, well shaded, mostly dry, and just hard enough to make it interesting. It's not too long either and makes a good Sunday stroll.

Great sweeps of solid, orange monolithic sandstone? Nah. This one is dark, crumbly and sharply layered. A rock-climber's nightmare. Beautiful lush gardens and a lovely little stream? Nada. How about gravel, sand and a large variety of crumbling rock.

Approach: Mud Canyon starts just up the Muddy River from the airstrip at Hidden Splendor. If you can, spot a car or mountain bike on the main road, 2 miles up from the strip, where the side road for Quandary branches off.

Start: Drop down to the Muddy from the airstrip, and head up-river. The first big turn to the left will force you to cross the creek. There is a nice canyon on the far side that's worth a few minutes of exploration. Cross back and plod upriver a few more minutes. Mud Canyon is the large canyon coming in from the right. Hike up this canyon.

Hard to get lost here. The canyon winds its way into the Moenkopi formation. After half an hour, the canyon divides at a red mud tower. Take the main canyon to the left. Another half hour gets to another divide. Drop your pack and scramble up the narrow slot on the right - a 15 minute diversion.

Twenty minutes further, the canyon divides again, this time more equally. Take the slightly smaller branch on the right. You will, of course, have to explore the left hand branch, at least for a few minutes.

The right branch, after surmounting a large boulder (3rd class), ends at a 50' dryfall. Backtrack around the corner and climb the left hand wall (left facing down canyon) up steep dirt and scree at the obvious spot (3rd/4th class). Go straight up to a flatter layer - a bench halfway up the canyon. Traverse up canyon and find a break in the cliff layer above and to the right. Work your way up to get a clear view across the landscape.

Exit: Your goal is the closest chunk of the reef escarpment, the large detached tower where Quandary Canyon starts. The terrain is well cut up immediately in front of you. Heading slightly to the left, work your way across numerous small canyons and gulleys to the tower and the Hidden Splendor Road. You'll probably hit the road about a quarter mile down from the Quandary Canyon side road. Return to the airstrip.

Doing Mud Canyon in reverse (finding the correct route into the top of Mud Canyon) cannot be recommended.

