

DISTANCE: 3 miles

ELEVATION GAIN: none

ROUTE TYPE: Line

Finding the trailhead:

From UT 12 in the Bryce Valley town of Cannonville, Utah, 33 miles east of Panguitch, Utah, and US 89 and 36 miles west of Escalante, Utah, turn south onto Cottonwood Canyon Road (the Cottonwood Canyon Scenic Backway), signed Kodachrome Basin-9. Follow this paved road south through Cannonville, then through the broad valley of the upper Paria River. You pass the junction with southwest-bound Skutumpah Road after 2.9 miles, and after 7.4 miles you reach the end of pavement on Cottonwood Canyon Road and the entrance to Kodachrome Basin State Park is on the left. Continue straight ahead on the graded dirt surface of Cottonwood Canyon Road.

This road is infrequently maintained and subject to washouts. Throughout much of its course, this undulating winding road traverses bentonite clay, which when wet can become impassable and, at best, is very dangerous to drive. A high-clearance vehicle, preferably with 4WD, is recommended, though not required unless runoff has damaged the road.

After 1.5 miles avoid a left-branching ranch road, and soon thereafter dip into the wash of Rock Springs Creek, fording its shallow stream. Enter Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, 4.9 miles from the pavement, then ascend a steep grade to a saddle at 5.8 miles. Avoid the left-branching graded road immediately beyond the cattle guard at the saddle and continue straight ahead.

A very steep grade soon leads down to the crossing of Round Valley Draw at 7.6 miles. You reach the junction with the signed left fork to Grosvenor Arch after 8.5 miles (15.7 miles from Cannonville). Few travelers forgo the 2-mile round-trip drive to that unique arch and picnic site.

Continuing south on Cottonwood Canyon Road, you soon begin following The Cockscomb. The road crests a saddle 13 miles from the pavement, then begins an exceedingly steep downgrade into the drainage below. En route you can see the road cresting another prominent saddle 0.4 mile to the south. Between the two saddles at the bottom of the grade, the small portal of Cottonwood Wash Narrows opens up through The Cockscomb just west of the road. A small pullout on the left (east) side of the road affords the only available parking, 0.25 mile south of the north saddle, 250 yards north of the south saddle, and 20.5 miles from Cannonville. Another short spur road branches right 0.9 mile ahead, offering access into the mouth of the narrows.

The trailhead can also be reached from US 89 in the south. Find the southern end of Cottonwood Canyon Road (between mileposts 17 and 18) 2.2 miles east of the Paria Contact Station or 26.3 miles west of Page, Arizona. The turnoff is indicated by a large Bureau of Land Management (BLM) destination and mileage sign pointing to Cottonwood Canyon, Grosvenor Arch, and Cannonville.

As the road leads north away from US 89, it is sandy at first as it ascends over the Rimrocks. The road passes the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument boundary after 1.4 miles, then skirts the dramatic gray shale badlands at the foot of the Kaiparowits Plateau. After curving northwest to the broad valley of the Paria River, the road then begins to ascend the course of Cottonwood Wash.

After 14.1 miles, a dirt road branches right (east) to ascend The Cockscomb. Continue north along Cottonwood Wash for another 11.4 miles to the aforementioned trailhead, 25.5 miles from US 89.

Hike Information

Cottonwood Creek, an often dry stream course has, over the ages, carved a long, deep, and winding canyon through the steeply tilted rock beds of The Cockscomb, ranging from the shadowed confines of narrow slots to a broad open wash. This fine short hike leads through the final narrow gorge of Cottonwood Creek before the canyon opens up and begins its long, straight journey to the confluence with the Paria River. The hike leads through the most easily accessible section of narrows along Cottonwood Creek, offering a rewarding scenic diversion for anyone taking a drive down remote Cottonwood Canyon Road.

Opposite the small parking area, you will find a brown BLM post on the boundary of the 136,322-acre Paria-Hackberry Wilderness Study Area. From there a path leads into the narrow wash just below, at the portal to the Cottonwood Canyon Narrows. There are three ways to enter: 1) follow the small wash for 50 yards down to an 8-foot pour-off, which requires one Class 4 move to get up or down; 2) take a steep rocky path that appears just to the right (north) of the pour-off and descends briefly into the wash; or 3) take a shallow draw, located about 100 yards north of the parking area, that offers easy, trouble-free access into Cottonwood Creek.

Once you reach the wash of Cottonwood Creek, you may choose to turn right and explore the slot upcanyon. Chockstones and boulders make travel there challenging, and muddy pools persist in the gorge long after significant rainfall. Heading downcanyon, the walking is easy and passable to any hiker.