

## Canyon Log 2018

The snowfall in the Wasatch was pretty meager this winter. It was difficult to get high enough to where there was snow. After the amazing ski season last year it was quite a let down. Kathy, my sister, and I bought some property in Loa, Utah, 8 miles from where she lives in Bicknell and 30 miles from Capital Reef National Park. To top it all off my mom spent the winter in one of Kathy's houses in Bicknell so she was there too.

All this added up to me spending a lot of time down in the Capital Reef area this winter and spring. The hiking and canyoneering started off slowly and built to a long 10 day multi-canyon adventure the second half of April. Mark, my ski partner of the last few years and who has been an avid canyoneer for several year, was also disillusioned with the skiing and came down to the desert as well. We joined forces and did a number of great adventures.

I am starting this story in April but I had already done fourteen or fifteen days of hiking/canyoneering by that time. I'm starting with a weekend when Jen and Addison and a couple other friends from Heber came down to play.

4/8/2018

**Fern's Nipple with Na-Gah Canyon** for a descent,  
6 hours

I had been looking at Fern's Nipple for a few years planning to someday climb it. Addison had been planning a trip south with a friend earlier this spring. I told her it would be fun for them to try to climb it but the trip fell through. Now both Addison and I had the chance to do it together.

Addison, Jen, Alicia and I started a little after 8 AM on a nice cool morning. Addison was our navigator. It was kind of a test to see if she and her friend could have made it up. There's not really a trail but she was able to find the route pretty well. We dropped off most of our ropes and other technical gear at the top of Na-Gah Canyon so we didn't have to carry it up to the top of the nipple and back down.



Fern's Nipple



As we approached the final slickrock pitch to the summit we encountered high winds which made the climbing much more difficult. We moved around to the east side

to escape the wind but the climbing was steeper and more difficult. We finally resorted to using a rope which slowed our ascent but was much safer. Even though the sun was shining it was cold and not very welcoming on the summit. We descended the west-northwest side which was easier climbing but windier. Once down off the summit it was once again pleasant and warm and we cruised on down to Na-Gah Canyon.

The canyon started slowly at first. We chose to do a 60 foot rappel even though we could have walked around it. After that things slotted up a little but not very deep. Then, all of a sudden, we dropped down into a deep, dark crack, very cool. We did a few nice rappels before popping out a window in the middle of a sandstone wall. We did a 165 foot rappel out of the window to the wash below. It's well worth doing again but there are two more slots into the same wash that I haven't done so I will have to do one of them next.

**4/9/2018**

### **Rotary Dial Canyon Exploration**

I found this canyon while flying over the reef with Google Earth and decided it might be a cool canyon. I told Mark about it and he said it had just been published on the internet as Rotary Dial Canyon but there was very little said about what it was like. I decided I should go check it out, not thinking I would descend it but hoping to get a good look at it and determine if it was something I might be able to do. This canyon is just south of the end of Lower Muley Twist Canyon pretty far south along the Waterpocket Fold. The round trip hike took me 8 hours and was almost 12 miles.

The night before starting this adventure I loaded up several coordinates in my GPS so the navigating would be easy but somehow they all disappeared when I tried to use them the next day. It made the route finding much more challenging. I did have a map and my GPS to help.

I had planned to go up the north side of the canyon but when I reached the Muley Tanks I decided to go straight up across the slickrock to the middle of the canyon rather than going all the way around to the other side. It was a quick and easy way to get there from where I had entered Hall's Wash.

Normally people do a 5 mile walk down from "The Post" to get into this area but it didn't sound very interesting to walk 5 miles in the sand so I determined that I could find a way down off the cliffs that form the east side of the wash. I was able to pick my way down ledges to the bottom of the cliffs only 2 miles from the end of Muley Twist and only 1.7 miles from the Muley Tanks. On my return it only took me an hour and ten minutes to get back to my car from the tanks.

Back to the approach of Rotary Dial, mostly by luck I came out at just the right point in the canyon where the technical canyon starts. I was looking down 80 feet into the bottom of the canyon and the wall was too smooth to climb down or up. I found a little tree to anchor off and rappelled into the canyon. I landed on a cool little arch that spanned the canyon six feet above the sandy floor. There was a big pothole full of water down canyon and a narrow squeeze section full of water up canyon.



The cliff dropping into Hall's



Muley Tanks

I could have passed the pothole below by sliding down off the wall below it but I was afraid I might not be able to climb back up so I didn't go past it. I was able to go up canyon pretty easily to get above the squeeze by climbing up above it on the north side. I could see that it would be easy to go up canyon from there but my backpack was still at the top of the wall I had rappelled down. Instead I entered the little squeeze section and was able to work my way back down to the arch.

I felt sure I could climb out the north side of the canyon so I could pull my rope and not worry about getting out on the south side anymore. I ascended my rope back up to my pack and "Fiddled" the tree. I rappelled back into the canyon with all my stuff and then dropped the rope. I pack everything up and headed up the canyon.

There is an upper part to Rotary Dial and I wanted to see if it would be an interesting place to come back too. There was quite a bit of water in the canyon but the walking was really pretty easy. I got high enough to see that the upper was very steep but not deep. It seemed unlikely to hold much of interest. I considered going on up and out the top but that meant almost a thousand vertical feet of difficult travel and I would be in unknown territory all the way. If I went back to the little arch I could get out pretty easily and could check out the canyon below the arch. I turned around.

Some of the canyon looked very narrow, too narrow to squeeze through. It seemed like a long way to stem. All the way there were potholes, some small but also some very big ones that look quite deep. At first I thought it would be very difficult. But after looking closely at my pictures I think it could be done. I guess I'm going to have to go back.

#### **4/19 to 23rd**

#### **The Poe Expedition**

#### **Mark, Anthony, Jeremy, Jared, Kevin and I**

As I became more interested in this serious canyoneering thing I started looking up some of the more serious, difficult canyons and of the ones you can look up (new canyons are being explored all the time and lots of people don't believe in publishing their data so you can't look them up) Poe seemed to be one of the really big names. I read up on it and thought, "Maybe some day I will do that". Then on April 18<sup>th</sup> Mark told me he might be able to get me onto a trip to the southern Capital Reef area and Poe Canyon starting on the 19<sup>th</sup>. I had already told him I would meet him for Rotary Dial and

Choprock Canyons later in the month and I jumped at the chance to get in on a Poe trip. Adding Poe and it's neighbors would put me in the desert for the rest of the month. I raced around pulling food and gear together and the next morning we were driving south. Jen would come down and meet us for the last few days to do Choprock and Neon Canyons.

Mark had never met the people we were going to be going with but another canyoneer Mark did know had made the connection. They had a few people back out therefore had spaces available, so we were both invited even though they didn't know either one of us. They all had real jobs and couldn't leave northern Utah until 3:00 pm. They would have to find their way across 5 miles of non-descript sand, rock and washes in the dark. Mark and I didn't have the work limitation and preferred to do the 5 miles in the daylight so we agreed to meet them in the bottom of Hall's Wash sometime in the middle of the night. In fact they showed up just a few minutes before midnight.



Mark and I had wasted enough time driving down that we were racing the darkness on our way in also. To make it more difficult it was very windy and the air was filled with dust making for low visibility. To get into Hall's Wash we had to down climb a 500 foot wall of rubble and cliffs. We picked our way down in the last of the fading light. It was dark by the time we reach the designated meeting point/campsite but well before midnight.

#### **4/20/18 Rain and Laughing Baboon**

At first light I woke to the sound of raindrops on my sleeping bag. Of course I had not brought a tent because we were going to the desert. I got up and hastily build a shelter out of a poncho before crawling back into my sleeping bag for another hour of sleep.

As the morning went on the rain picked up. It's a bad idea to enter a three foot wide slot between two 300 foot tall slabs of sandstone during a rain storm so we couldn't enter any of the canyons we had planned but we were all too restless to just lie around so we took a walk up Miller Canyon mainly for something to do. The creek was rising and waterfalls were running off cliffs everywhere. By the time we made it back to camp we were all soaked. Jeremy, Anthony, Kevin and Jared all stripped off their wet clothes and crawled into their tents to take naps. Mark decided he was already wet and would keep hiking to stay warm. I huddled under my little poncho tarp trying to keep my stuff dry.



By mid afternoon the rain let up and blue sky started showing through the clouds. Mark had returned from his hike and the four tent dwellers suddenly appeared and said “Let’s do it”. We pick up our packs and headed up the smooth, sloping slab of sandstone toward the top of the canyon about 3:00 in the afternoon.

Baboon Laughs or Laughing Baboon is the shortest of the three canyons we had scheduled and I don’t know about the baboon part but it was a lot of laughs. The potholes were overflowing with the morning’s rains and we splashed our way through plenty of potholes and rappels but nothing hard. It did have some keeper potholes so not a place for a solo.

We got back to camp around 7:00 pm, made dinner and I went to bed while the youngsters stayed up a while and played cards. At 61 I was by far the oldest member of the team. Mark, at 36, was the next oldest.

#### **4/21/18 Into Poe Canyon for some Pits and Pendulums**

We got up at first light and headed back up the slickrock that would lead us to the head of Poe Canyon. It is also called Smiling Cricket. The first people to descend the canyon, 30 years ago, named it Poe because they had to cross several of the massive pothole (pits) by penduluming over them on ropes reminiscent of Edger Allen Poe’s story. I also found this quick summary of the story. I’m guessing the first people to descend the canyon (Mike Bogart and Jenny Hall) felt a little like the guy in the story.

”Imagine being sentenced to a torturous death without any insight into when or how it is going to happen. In Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Pit and the Pendulum’, the unnamed narrator finds himself in a terrifying situation after ‘the robed judges’ sentence him.”



The pit of Despair

In the canyoneering world Poe is somewhat famous for being difficult and dangerous. More than one party has ended up taking ridiculous amounts of time to get through it and some have had to spend the night in there. I had read the description a month or two before this trip and thought it might be something to do in a few years. But then Mark asked if I wanted to try to get on this trip and here I was.

It was a bigger deal for the others. They had been planning this trip for a long time. It was a test of their skills. It's also more than just the difficulty of the canyon it's the whole package. It is remote, five miles in from the car then a couple more to the start of the canyon and there are at least two other canyons that should really be done at the same time, Laughing Baboon and Happy Dog. It takes several days to get it all done so that means time off from work for most people.

I had spent no time worrying about whether I had the skills to do Poe. I was going with an experienced group and they had done all the worrying for me. This kind of canyoneering is very much a team sport. I was pretty sure I was as strong and most of them so I could keep up but they would be the ones testing themselves and solving the problems.

Mark was the only one stronger than me on the approach so all went well there. We suited up in full gear before even dropping into the canyon and soon we were swimming through potholes. At first it looked like the canyon was going to be full of water but as we moved down canyon there was less and less water in the potholes. If it is really full of water it will make the potholes easy because you can just swim across and out the far side. If it is dry it's easier because you can stand in the bottom to help each other. It's hardest when it's half full, not full enough to swim out but to full to touch bottom. Lucky for me it was pretty empty.

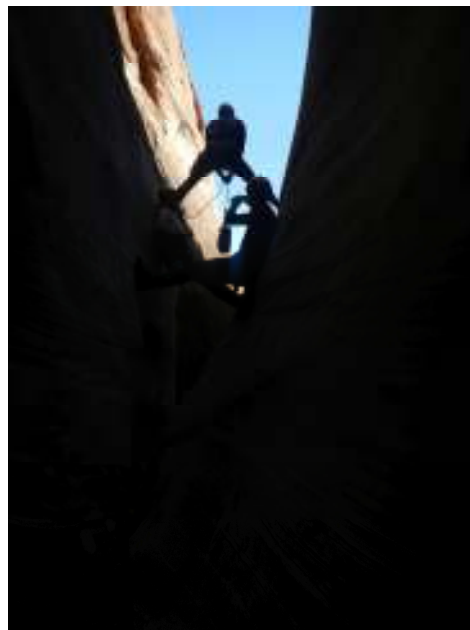
The big obstacle is a keeper pothole called "The Pit of Despair". It's an amazing hole drilled into the rock by water. It's lower exit is about 25 feet above the floor of the hole. That means you would have to climb a slimy, completely smooth, completely vertical 20 foot rock wall starting from waste deep water to get out of the pit.

The standard technique to overcome this obstacle is to throw sand bags (potshots) with ropes tied to them 50 feet across the hole and over a lip in the rock on the far side. The throwing has to happen while stemming 12 feet up across a crack in the rock. It is apparently pretty hard to do. Everyone else wanted to try so I sat back and let them while I took pictures.

The cool thing was that Anthony, the leader of this group, had come up with a new idea on how to make the throw easier. He forgot he had this idea until the last two bags but when he tried it worked well. Normally one guy stems the canyon and swings the potshot between his legs then launches it as it is coming forward. No one in our group made their first try. It took several tries to get them across.

Anthony's idea was to have a second person pull the potshot back and up and on the count of three throw the bag down and forward between the thrower's legs getting it up to speed very quickly. The thrower just had to aim and time the release. It worked really well.

There were several other major potholes, one was called "The Worm Hole", another "The Wart Hole". We were able to overcome these with minimal difficulty. We had a very strong team.



The final obstacle was a whole lot of poison ivy at the end of the canyon. To avoid some of it we climbed a tree to get up a rock wall and out of the canyon.

Everyone was excited and please that we had made it through Poe in just 10 hours, camp to camp, with no issues.

#### 4/22/18 Happy Dog Canyon



The next day was the last of the happy canyons, Happy Dog. All three are lined up in a row just above where we were camped. For me Happy Dog was the hardest canyon. It wasn't just about the team, it required more of the individual, mainly squeezing through tight spots and stemming over too tight of spots. The squeezing was the hardest on me. I would have been better going high than going into the tightest spots.

It was a great day, almost as long a Poe, 9 hours. It had a wider variety of obstacles and scenery but still plenty of poison ivy.

We got back to camp around 2:30 and Mark and Anthony decided they needed to go to one more canyon to get them all in. The rest of us were too tired but Mark and Anthony talked Anthony's brother, Jeremy, into go along and they ran up and did one more canyon. I don't

remember the name of it.

#### **4/23/18 The hike out.**

We had been completely successful now all we had to do was make the long hike back out to our cars. We had to go a mile or so up Hall's Creek and then climb 500 vertical feet up over the canyon edge. Then trek four more miles across the seemingly flat plateau. Seemingly flat because it has deep washes hidden in the landscape that we had to drop into then climb back out of. It wasn't that long or hard but with the accumulated exertion of the last 4 days I was feeling pretty tired by the time we got to the cars.

Mark and I had the rest of the day and the next day to kill before we were to meet another canyoneer to do more stuff 15 mile north along the Waterpocket Fold. We had talked about doing another canyon but I was just too tired. I needed rest. I also needed to charge my camera battery and get more food. It seemed like a long way to drive but we ended up driving up to Bicknell for food, electricity and showers.

#### **4/24/18 Scary Movie and Rotary Dial Canyon**

##### **Mark and Tom Collins**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we drove back down the Notom Road and Mark did a hike up to look at a canyon he thought could have potential. I rested. We walk to the back of Headquarters Canyon but the round trip was only a mile. Then we went and found the campsite where we were to meet Tom Collins, the guy we would do the next few canyons with.

He showed up after Mark and I had gone to bed but he wasn't all that late, maybe 10:00. We were up at dawn and soon on the trail. Once again we had to drop down into the Strike Valley, otherwise known as the Hall's Creek Canyon. Tom had done this hike before but couldn't remember it very well. We did a little wandering around to get down and that stressed Mark a bit. He had relied on Tom knowing where he was going and hadn't studied the data for the hike.

We then entered the bottom of the Lower Muley Twist and up a side canyon to the start of a thing called Scary Movie. It was a lot of work getting there and I didn't think it was really that great a canyon. I don't think I will be going back there.

Scary Movie drains into a more major canyon that has been named Rotary Dial. Rotary Dial is much easier to get to and a lot more fun. We didn't need our wetsuits in Scary Movie but we put them on at the top of Rotary and started using them right away.

A few weeks earlier I had come and taken a look at this canyon (see above) it had seemed very difficult to me at first look but then I decided maybe not so bad. Now here I was going for it all the way.

It had lots of water in it. The potholes were overflowing. We were moving along well. Then we came to the squeeze part I had thought would be difficult. It turns out I was right and wrong.

We started the tight section stemming above it but Mark knows I have trouble stemming for a long time and Tom said the one time he had done the canyon he had gone low through the squeeze part. So Mark dropped down into the tight slot and I followed. Mark is only five and Tom ten pounds lighter than me and they were both grunting and struggling ahead of me. I was having to let the air out of my lungs to get my chest through some of the narrowest spots. We had gone 30 feet or so when my butt stuck and I couldn't move forward anymore.





I didn't know how to make my butt smaller. Mark said to get it lower where it was slightly wider. How do you get your butt lower when you are squeezed between two rocks 10 inches apart? Perhaps his knees are more flexible than mine. I couldn't do it.

I could feel panic building up inside me but I knew it would be bad so I forced myself to be calm. I tried backing up. It took a lot of effort but I squeezed myself back up canyon a few feet. Mark and Tom squeezed themselves a bit farther down canyon and it got wider. They were through the hard part and could get above me and drop me a rope to pull me out. I worked on staying calm.

It took maybe ten minutes to get me out. It seemed much longer. I couldn't find a place that was big enough for all of me to be able to go up the 8 to 10 feet to where it got wider. I struggle back and forth several minutes. I finally found a place I thought might work. I had the rope hook into my harness and they started pulling. I wiggle upward as best I could. I move up maybe 8 inches. I was using so much energy. I let the air out of my lungs and wiggled again. They pull as hard as they could. I moved upward another 8 inches.

My mouth was so dry I could hardly talk. I had to rest a few seconds before wiggling some more. Finally I found enough room to actually get a real push up. They pulled. This time I move upward 12 inches. I was going to make it. A few wiggle more and I was stemming across the crack beside Mark and Tom. It took so much out of me I dripping with sweat and felt like I had just run a four minute mile. We stemmed across the top to the crack another minute then dropped back down to the bottom but it was wider and soon we were back to swimming.

There were only a few rappels and none were more than 30 feet. We did use a Waterpocket, a bag filled with water, for an anchor at one point. It was mostly jumping into pools, swimming and climbing out. My squeeze event took so much out of me that swimming and climbing out seemed hard but it was really quite fun. I think I need to go back and do this one again.

At the end of the canyon we stripped off our canyon armor and loaded it all into our backpacks. We still had a lot of work to do. We crossed the Strike Valley and started up the wall on the far side. When looking from the bottom the wall seems

impassible, vertical cliffs for as far as you can see. By winding back and forth on little ledges we picked our way slowly up and finally out the top of the wall. We trotted the mile across the flat top back to the car as the sun was setting.

I was really tired. I made myself some dinner and went to bed. During the night I got up to pee and as I limped across the sand it felt like I had something stuck under the arch on my left foot. When I crawled back into my sleeping bag I felt the arch and could feel pea size lump on the tendon under my arch. It hurt but it wasn't the only thing hurting. I hurt all over, especially my feet.

We were supposed to do another canyon in the morning. I really wanted to do it because it would put us at Brimhall Arch which had been on my radar for a while. The canyon was called Jungle Love and it dropping in almost right below Brimhall Arch one of the biggest arches in Utah. When I got up in the morning I was still hurting all over. I could see the lump on my arch. I reluctantly told Tom and Mark that I wasn't going to be able to hike.

The hardest part of telling them was that it meant they couldn't do it either. They need at least three people to do it safely.

#### **4/25/18 Hiking into the Escalante River**

It wasn't really a day off. I hiked a mile into the top of Elevator Canyon to retrieve the 300 foot rope for Mark and Tom. Then I drove to Bicknell to pick up Jen who was at Kathy's. Then Jen and I drove back to Boulder, Utah to meet Mark, Mark's dad, Scott, Tom and Tom's friend John. We had dinner at the restaurant in Boulder before driving 20 miles of dirt road out the Hole-In-The-Rock Road to the Fence Canyon trail head. We all loaded up our backpacks and started down into the canyon just as the sun set. It was three miles to our campsite on the banks of the river. We did the three miles with headlamps. My feet were still very sore when I crawled into the tent that night.

#### **4/26/18 Choprock Canyon**

##### **Me, Jen, Mark, Tom, Scot, and John**

We were up before dawn. It was going to be another big day. We had 5 miles to hike to the top of the canyon and the canyon would be long with many difficulties. The good thing for me was this group was much closer to my age. Tom and Mark (in their 30's) were the youngsters, then Scot 65, John 61, me 61 and Jen 54. I felt pretty good about being able to keep up.

Apparently when Choprock is full of water it can be quite a difficult canyon but for us it was low water and pretty easy. It has some unique obstacles. It also has a lot a variety of terrain; potholes, squeezing, rappels, twisty and poison ivy. For me it was really fun because we went slower than usual so I got to look around, take pictures and enjoy being there. In a lot of the other canyons I was just working on keeping moving. Another benefit of going slower was it wasn't so tiring. It was a long day but I wasn't so wasted at the end. I still hurt all over, not from the day but rather the build up of all the days.

I only had to make it through one more canyon. Just one more day and I would be able to rest. We still had Neon Canyon to do in the morning.



#### **4/27/18 Neon Canyon Jen, Tom and Me**

Mark and his dad had planned all along to hike out the next morning but John was supposed to do Neon with us. Apparently Choprock had proved to be too much for him, he was feeling sick and would hike out with Mark and Scot. That left just the three of us to go to Neon.

It was an easier approach this time, not so far and the elevation gain wasn't bad. A lot of it was on big sandstone slabs along the top edge of the canyon. We finally came to a small side arm of the main canyon. It cut deep and narrow into the red sandstone. Tom told us this was the place to get in. Jen and I both brought our wetsuits but Tom had not. He didn't think we would have water deeper than our wastes.



Tom called Neon a "Trade Route" canyon because it's well known and lots of people come and do it. All the drops have standard anchors or bolts, no need for Sand Traps or Waterpockets. It made it easy, there were webbing slings even on small, down climbable drops. Even so it was just as beautiful as any of the other canyons and we saw no one until we drop off the last rappel.

We never put our wetsuits on. The deepest water we encountered was hip deep. The final rappel into the "Golden Cathedral" was spectacular and well worth the hike up from the bottom just to see it. Even the hike on down to the river was very beautiful.

We were back to our camp around 2:00, all we had left to do was pack up and hike the three miles and 1,200 vertical feet back up to the car.