

Capitol Reef National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Pleasant Creek



Pleasant Creek is a year-round stream that has cut a deep, scenic canyon through the heart of Capitol Reef. Exploring the length of the canyon requires numerous creek crossings; it is often possible to jump over the creek, but stepping into the water may be necessary at times. *Dangerous flash floods are an occasional hazard on this route. Do not hike the Pleasant Creek route if there is a chance of rain. Do not camp next to the creek.*

Unmaintained yet noticeable footpaths exist along much of the route—please stay on these paths where they exist in order to protect biological soil crusts. Do not walk or camp on areas of this fragile soil crust. It has a lumpy, gray appearance, and helps prevent erosion of soft, sandy soils.

It is possible to explore the canyon in either direction from the trailhead as a day hike. Suitable locations for backcountry campsites can be found in some sections of the canyon. Backcountry permits are required for all overnight trips and can be obtained at the visitor center. Portions of the Upper Pleasant Creek route are outside the park, on lands administered by the US Forest Service (Fishlake National Forest).

When hiking and camping along Pleasant Creek around mid-October, be advised that local ranchers have permits from the park to herd cattle through Pleasant Creek Canyon at that time of year. Choose campsites carefully, and stand clear of approaching cattle herds.

This route is not an official, maintained trail. Route conditions, including obstacles in canyons, change frequently due to weather, flash floods, rockfall, and other hazards. Routefinding, navigation, and map-reading skills are critical. Do not rely solely on unofficial route markers (rock cairns, etc.); they are not maintained by the National Park Service (NPS), may not indicate the route in this description, or may be absent.

Note: Capitol Reef National Park recommends hikers do not ingest water directly from Pleasant Creek because *E. coli* bacteria are occasionally detected in water samples taken from the stream. Sources of *E. coli* bacteria in Pleasant Creek may include runoff from upstream agricultural and grazing land, cattle trailing, and human and wildlife waste.

Trailhead Locations

From the visitor center, travel 7.9 miles (12.7 km) south to the end of the paved portion of Scenic Drive. Continue south for 2.8 miles (4.5 km) on the unpaved Pleasant Creek Road to a small parking area and vault toilet adjacent to Pleasant Creek. This is the trailhead; **do not** continue on the rough road that crosses Pleasant Creek (a rugged, unmaintained, four-

wheel-drive track known as South Draw Road).

It is also possible to access the upper end of the Pleasant Creek route from the Tantalus Flats area, west of the park boundary. This requires travel on rough roads with high-clearance vehicles; four-wheel drive may be required. The road may be impassable at times, especially in winter.

Route Distances (one-way)

From the trailhead at Pleasant Creek Road to:

- turnaround point at fence near east park boundary..... 3.4 miles (5.4 km)
- west park boundary..... 2.3 miles (3.7 km)
- Pleasant Creek cascades, west of park boundary (Fishlake National Forest)..... 3.8 miles (6.1 km)

Hike Description: Lower Pleasant Creek to east park boundary

From the trailhead next to Pleasant Creek, follow a footpath leading to the east from the parking area. Cross to the south side of the creek after 0.3 mile (0.5 km), near a tall grove of cottonwoods. From this point onward, continue eastward along sandy benches and streambanks, following informal trails and crossing the creek as necessary, as the waterway meanders between the canyon walls. About 2.1 miles (3.5 km) from the trailhead, the creek flows over slickrock into a short, narrow chute of red sandstone. About ¼ mile (0.4 km) past the chute, the main canyon widens and a large side canyon joins Pleasant Creek from the

right (south); it is possible to explore the side canyon for a short distance before obstacles block passage. Around 0.5 mile (0.8 km) beyond the side canyon, the route bypasses a large southward meander in the main canyon by crossing over a low sandstone saddle next to the north wall of the canyon. After crossing the saddle, return to the creek and follow it for another 0.5 mile (0.8 km) to a fence that crosses the creek bottom. Shortly beyond the fence is the park boundary and private property. This fence marks the end of the route. To return to the trailhead, retrace your route westward up the canyon to the Pleasant Creek Road.

Hike Description: Upper Pleasant Creek to west park boundary (and beyond)

From the trailhead next to Pleasant Creek, follow a footpath leading west along the north side of the creek. After about one mile (1.6 km), the canyon deepens and narrows, requiring numerous creek crossings to continue further up-canyon. Remnants of an old dirt road continue up-canyon to the park boundary, about 2.3 miles [3.7 km] from the trailhead; it is possible to use these segments of eroded, unmaintained road as a route of travel (and as potential campsites). Continuing outside the park onto US Forest Service property, the canyon remains scenic and becomes somewhat narrower. About 0.7 mile (1.1 km) west of the boundary, the route passes through a narrow,

sharp curve in the canyon. Beyond this curve, the landscape broadens somewhat, and the route continues south along the west side of Pleasant Creek. About ¼ mile (0.4 km) upstream (south) from the narrows, a small stream joins Pleasant Creek from the right (west). About 0.3 mile (0.5 km) beyond this confluence, another stream joins Pleasant Creek. At this second confluence, follow Pleasant Creek (the right-hand stream) to the west about ¼ mile (0.4 km) to a series of small cascades in a sandstone chute under ponderosa pines. This destination serves as a turnaround point. To return to the trailhead, retrace your route down-canyon to the Pleasant Creek Road.

Rules and Regulations

- Free permits are required for backcountry camping, and are available at:
 - ◆ Capitol Reef Visitor Center
 - ◆ Bullfrog Visitor Center (Glen Canyon NRA)
 - ◆ Anasazi State Park (Boulder, UT)
 - ◆ Escalante Interagency Visitor Center
- Dispersed/at-large camping with vehicles is prohibited within the park, including at or near trailheads. Dispersed/at-large camping is allowed on federal lands (USFS, BLM) adjacent to the park.
- Pets are not permitted on trails or in off-trail or backcountry areas. Pets are permitted on roads and in designated campgrounds.
- Fires are prohibited.
- Collecting or damaging any park resource (plants, animals, wood, rocks, bones, antlers, artifacts, etc.) is prohibited.
- Violation of these regulations may result in a citation.*

Additional Information

Best season:

Spring and fall, and summer if there is no chance of rain.

Maps:

USGS 7.5-minute series: Golden Throne.
Maps available at the visitor center.

For more information:

Contact the Capitol Reef Visitor Center at 435-425-4111.

