



# Spring Canyon



Spring Canyon is deep and narrow with towering Wingate cliffs and Navajo domes. It originates on the shoulder of Thousand Lakes Mountain and extends to the Fremont River. The route is marked with rock cairns and signs in some places, but many sections are unmarked; carrying a topographic map and GPS unit is recommended. It is extremely hot in summer, and potential water sources are rare and uncertain (see hike descriptions for details). Use caution in narrow canyons, particularly during the flash flood season (typically July–September).

The canyon route is divided into Upper and Lower Spring Canyon sections. It can be accessed midway via Chimney Rock Canyon. The entire canyon is best done as a three- to four-day trip. Upper Spring Canyon is a good two- to three-day trip, while Lower Spring Canyon can be done as an overnight or long day hike. At the lower end of Spring Canyon, fording the Fremont River is necessary; there is no bridge over the river (see page 2 for details). Free backcountry permits are required for all overnight trips and can be obtained at the visitor center. Portions of the Upper Spring Canyon route are outside the park, on lands administered by the US Forest Service (Fishlake National Forest).

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.

## Trailhead Locations

- Upper end of Spring Canyon: Holt Draw, which is a dirt track on the right (north) side of Hwy 24, 0.9 miles (1.4 km) west of the park boundary (just west of mile marker 73, on US Forest Service land) and 7.0 miles (11.3 km) west of the visitor center. The road is closed to vehicle traffic beyond the gate at the forest service boundary near Hwy 24.
- Midway, for access to the lower end of Upper Spring Canyon and to the upper end of Lower Spring Canyon: The Chimney Rock trailhead, located 3.0 miles (4.8 km) west of the visitor center on Hwy 24.
- Lower end of Spring Canyon: Across the Fremont River 3.6 miles (5.8 km) east of the visitor center on Hwy 24 (just east of mile marker 83). Look for unmarked parking areas on both sides of the highway.

## Route Distances

- Upper Spring Canyon from Holt Draw to Chimney Rock parking area.....18.7 miles (30.1 km)
- Upper Spring Canyon from Holt Draw to Chimney Rock Canyon and back to Holt Draw via Hwy 24..... 22.7 miles (36.5 km)
- Lower Spring Canyon from Chimney Rock parking area to the Fremont River/Hwy 24..... 9.7 miles (15.6 km)
- Lower Spring Canyon from Chimney Rock parking area and back to Chimney Rock parking area via Hwy 24..... 16.3 miles (26.2 km)
- Upper and Lower Spring Canyon from Holt Draw to the Fremont River and Hwy 24..... 22.6 miles (36.4 km)
- Upper and Lower Spring Canyon from Holt Draw and back to Holt Draw via Hwy 24..... 33.2 miles (53.4 km)
- Access to Spring Canyon from Chimney Rock parking area via Chimney Rock Canyon.....2.9 miles (4.7 km)

## 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.

**Maps:**  
USGS 7.5-minute series: Torrey, Twin Rocks, and Fruita. Maps available at the visitor center.

**For more information:**  
Contact the Capitol Reef Visitor Center at 435-425-4111.

*(continued)*

## Hike Description: Upper Spring Canyon

Upper Spring Canyon is a strenuous hike of approximately 18.7 miles (30.1 km) from Holt Draw to Chimney Rock. Route-finding skills and the ability to read and use a topographic map are necessary. Only experienced canyon-country hikers should attempt this route. Portions of this route are outside the park, on lands administered by the US Forest Service (Fishlake National Forest).

To reach Upper Spring Canyon, park at the gate and follow the old Holt Draw Road until it ends near Sulphur Creek, approximately 1.3 miles (2.1 km) from the trailhead. Here you will find a horse trail angling north toward Sulphur Creek. Follow this trail a short distance to the creek, then walk upstream in the creek bed approximately 2.2 miles (3.5 km). This section may take about 1¼ to 1½ hours. Then, at UTM coordinates 0463757mE, 4244743mN, the red Wingate cliff will tower directly over you, and there is a small drainage on the right (north-east) side of the wash that may be marked with rock cairns. Follow this drainage, and climb a low rib approximately 0.3 mile (0.5 km) to a bench above the wash; you will be on the soft, gray-green Chinle Formation below the Wingate cliffs. There is a USGS brass marker nearby, marking the four-corner meeting point of sections 24, 25, 19, and 30. Follow the bench in an easterly direction around two prominent points in the Wingate cliff. As you round the second point, you will see two deep clefts cutting down through the Wingate wall at the top of the talus slope ahead. This is called the “W”, at UTM coordinates 0464424mE, 4245349mN. The distance from the bed of Sulphur Creek to the “W” is about one mile (1.6 km) and is sparsely marked with rock cairns. Climb the talus slope up the left (west)

cleft of the “W” to pass through the Wingate, then follow the steep gully down into Spring Canyon. The route through the “W” does not require ropes or climbing.

Once you reach the drainage in Spring Canyon at UTM coordinates 0464499mE, 4245647mN, continue downstream (east). In approximately one mile (1.6 km), you will encounter a pour off which can be bypassed on either side of the canyon; follow the canyon rim and you will find several places where you can climb back down to the canyon bottom. A large side canyon joins the main drainage on the left (north) after another mile (1.6 km). From this point on, the route has no distinctive landmarks until you reach the spring, about 7.8 miles (12.4 km) down canyon (see map). The spring is marked by large cottonwood trees growing in an alcove on the left (north) side of the canyon. Please use this water sparingly and do not pollute it with soaps or bathe or swim in it. Camp a minimum of 300 feet (91 m) away from the spring area. The springs and seeps in this canyon may be seasonal in nature, and may not be reliable sources of water.

From the spring, the junction of Chimney Rock Canyon is 1.7 miles (2.8 km) downstream. At this point you can continue down canyon 6.8 miles (11.0 km) through Lower Spring Canyon to the Fremont River or you can exit via Chimney Rock Canyon to the Chimney Rock parking area. If you left a vehicle at the Chimney Rock parking area, your hike will end there. If you left your vehicle at the Holt Draw gate, hike right (west) along Hwy 24 for four miles (6.4 km) to your starting point.

*Note: The UTM coordinates used here correspond to the NAD27 datum grid (Zone 12S).*

## Hike Description: Lower Spring Canyon

Lower Spring Canyon is a strenuous 9.7-mile (15.6 km) hike from the Chimney Rock parking area to the Fremont River. From the Chimney Rock parking area, follow the Chimney Rock Trail to the top of the switchbacks. Take the left (more northerly or eastbound) side of the loop trail and follow it 0.9 mile (1.4 km) to Chimney Rock Canyon, which is marked with a sign to Spring Canyon. Walk down Chimney Rock Canyon 1.5 miles (2.4 km) to Spring Canyon. While in Chimney Rock Canyon, three large side canyons will join the main drainage on the left (west) before reaching Spring Canyon.

When you reach the junction of Spring Canyon, continue downstream (straight/east) to access Lower Spring Canyon. From the junction, it is 6.8 miles (11.0 km) to the Fremont River. Approximately one mile (1.6 km) down canyon, you will encounter a short section of narrows with two 10–15 foot (3.0–4.5 m) dry falls. The two dry falls can be bypassed by following a hiker-made route on the left (north) side of the canyon. The bypass route is extremely narrow and has steep, loose sections, including a 100-foot (30 m) section with severe exposure. Use caution, especially if wet, snowy, or icy conditions exist.

Below the bypass, continue down canyon approximately 5.5 miles (8.8 km) to the Fremont River. **Hikers must ford the river to reach Highway 24; there is no bridge over the river. The river level varies, but is usually about thigh-deep and can be difficult to ford. Use caution if flood conditions are present as they will produce swift, deep water and floating debris.** If you left a vehicle at the pull-out on Hwy 24, it will be located a short distance upstream from the point you exit the canyon. If you left your vehicle at the Chimney Rock parking area, hike right (west) along Hwy 24 for 6.6 miles (10.6 km) to your starting point.

The hike can be done in the opposite direction, hiking up the canyon from the river. To do this, park at the pull-out on Hwy 24 approximately 3.6 miles (5.8 km) east of the visitor center (just east of mile marker 83) and walk across the road and several hundred feet downstream to find the mouth of Spring Canyon.

The only potential water source in Lower Spring Canyon may be a spring found about 3.3 miles (5.4 km) below the Chimney Rock Canyon junction (see map).

# Upper Spring Canyon route

# The "W" FORES

1.9mi  
3.1km

Upper

7.8mi  
12.4km

Spring

4.4mi  
7.1km

Upper

4.0mi  
6.4km

Holt Draw  
Trailhead

24

To Torrey

Chimney Rock  
Trailhead

Chimney Rock Canyon route  
joins Chimney Rock Trail

1.4mi  
2.3km

Chimney Rock  
Canyon joins  
Spring Canyon

1.5mi  
2.4km

Chimney Rock Canyon

Lower Spring  
Canyon route

1.7mi  
2.8km

Spring

Torrey

To  
Visitor  
Center

- Hiking route
- Park boundary
- Paved road (Highway 24)
- Distance between points

0.5mi  
0.8km

North



Contour interval - 40 feet



