Hiking The Grand Canyon Essay, Research Paper

Hiking the Grand Canyon

I spent 5 years traveling America and have been to 40 states. I kept a detailed

journal of my travels. One of my favorite places I visited was the Grand Canyon.

My husband and I took an 18-mile day hike. We spent the night in Flagstaff and

arrived early at the South Rim entrance. Of all of the pictures I have seen of the

Grand Canyon, I was truly surprised by how many trees and how green the Grand

Canyon was! I was really expecting a big barren red hole, but trees were

everywhere. The panorama over the edge of the rim was overwhelming.

We wanted to start our hike from Yaki Point at the South Kaibab Trailhead a few

miles east of Bright Angel, and hike back up Bright Angel Trail, which emerges at

Bright Angel Lodge. We took the free shuttle bus, which 45 minutes later took us to

within 2 miles of the trailhead. We hiked from there until reaching Yaki Point at an

elevation of around 7,200 feet.

Once there, looking over the edge of the Grand Canyon is amazing,

breathtaking, and unbelievable! I didn’t get a true feel for how large and astounding

the Grand Canyon is until I started to hike into it. South Kaibab Trail is 6.3 miles to

the bottom and is one of the few trails in the park that follows the ridge lines instead

of the canyons, it is very steep. This allowed us to see up the top and below to the

bottom almost the whole way. In fact, just a few hundred yards into the descent, we

saw the Colorado River almost a mile below.

It made me feel like I had been thrust into the middle of the Canyon very quickly.

The trail was not on the edge of a sheer cliff drop-off, but injury was certainly likely

if one took a tumble off the trail. The terrain is rugged, but the trail is well groomed.

As we descended further, we encountered markers that had been placed by the

Park Service providing geology lessons as we passed from one layer of rock to

another layer. The two changes that struck me the most were a brief white strip

that contrasted sharply against the bright red layer below it. The other was an area

near the bottom where lava had filled fissures of previous rock formations leaving a

striking vertical red-and-black striped pattern. All together, in our hike from top to

bottom, we traveled 6.7 miles, 5,000 vertical feet and 1.5 billion years of geological

history.

Upon reaching the bottom, we crossed over the Colorado River on a suspension

footbridge. Once on the north side, the trail runs west to where we came upon an

Anasazi Indian site. Only the foundation of some buildings and some old stone tools

remained. The Anasazi were the ancestors of the Hopi and other modern Pueblo

Indians.

Further along River Trail, we came upon a marker relating the adventures of

Captain John Wesley Powell, the leader of the first expedition to explore the Grand

Canyon. Powell accomplished this feat by traveling in small boats down the

Colorado River.

We crossed back over the Colorado River via the second suspension footbridge

where we could see through the bottom directly into the river. Once across the

bridge, we found ourselves a few rocks to sit on, ate lunch, watched the river rafters

go by, and rested.

Then we continued west for another mile or so. The trail remained level, and at

first, we spent a lot of time walking along the river’s edge through sand deposits left

from centuries of water pounding on the rocks. Actually, all of the trails were rather

sandy, much to my surprise. This was due, we later learned, to the many sandstone

formations comprising the Grand Canyon geology. Finally, Bright Angel Trail broke

off to the left (south) and we began ascending. Once we started up the trail, we

entered what seemed like a whole new world. When we began the ascent I had

forgotten we had run into some fairly steep switchbacks because I was too busy

looking around at the scenery. It was spectacular looking down at the trail we had

already climbed.

Bright Angel Trail follows Garden Creek, which flows, from the South Rim, running

through its own little “mini” canyon within the Grand Canyon — Garden Creek

Canyon. We lost sight of the Colorado River pretty quickly. Bright Angel Trail was so

green. The canyon was filled with Cottonwood trees for miles of the trail, which

crosses over Garden Creek several times.

One time, I crossed over the creek for a picture next to an old ranger station that

was not in use anymore. The area looked like a scene described in a romance novel

or a travel brochure. The creek was just shallow enough with little rocks protruding

from the water to allow me to cross to the other side without getting my shoes the

least bit damp. The little crooks in the red walls of the Canyon were filled in with

young cottonwood trees providing ample shade and contrasting colors. Even the old

Ranger station looked like it was posing for a postcard picture.

There are apparently not many indigenous animal species viewable in the Grand

Canyon because of the many people. However, we saw big-eared deer, I think they

are really called mule deer and big-eared squirrels, too. I wanted to see some of the

Bighorn Sheep to see if they had big ears, too, but none appeared.

We rested and refilled our water at Indian Gardens. It was a wonderful little rest

stop/campground about 4.5 miles from the top.

The last three miles of the hike were really amazing. Sometimes I wondered how

we were going to get over that cliff that was overhanging us, and then I would look

at where we had come from. We saw the trail we had just hiked descending for

what seemed like miles. The last mile and a half Mother Nature really saved the best

for last and put on one of the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen!

We were on the last set of switchbacks, so we were able to watch over our

shoulder as the long rays of light from the sun were turning everything red, pink,

and fuchsia. Cameras cannot capture what the eye can see. I had seen some of the

rock formations before in pictures, but the splendor of the real thing is unbelievable.

We arrived at the top just as the sun went down.

Hiking the Grand Canyon was an amazing experience I recommend to anyone who

has the ability to do it. One cannot see what the Grand Canyon is about from the

top. When you hike into the Canyon you come to fully appreciate the awesomeness

of it.