



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 and carrying a topographic map and GPS unit is recommended. It is extremely hot in summer, and the only usually reliable water source is at the spring in Upper Spring Canyon, 1.5 miles (2.41 km) west of the junction with Chimney Rock Canyon. 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. Backcountry permits are required for all overnight trips and can be obtained at the visitor center.

Location of Trailheads

1. Upper end of Spring Canyon: Holt Draw, which is a dirt track on the right (north) side of Hwy 24, 0.9 miles (1.44 km) west of the park boundary and 7.2 miles (11.59 km) west of the visitor center. The road is closed to vehicle traffic beyond the gate at the forest service boundary near Hwy 24.
2. 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 3.2 miles (5.15 km) west of the visitor center on Hwy 24.
3. Lower end of Spring Canyon: Across the Fremont River 3.6 miles (5.79 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.



Chimney Rock trailhead

Mileages

- Upper Spring Canyon from Holt Draw to Chimney Rock parking area.....18 miles (28.98 km)
- Upper Spring Canyon from Holt Draw to Chimney Rock Canyon and back to Holt Draw via Hwy 24.....22 miles (35.42 km)
- Lower Spring Canyon from Chimney Rock parking area to the Fremont River and Hwy 24.....9 miles (14.49 km)
- Lower Spring Canyon from Chimney Rock parking area and back to Chimney Rock parking area via Hwy 24.....16 miles (25.76 km)
- Upper and Lower Spring Canyon from Holt Draw to the Fremont River and Hwy 24.....22 miles (35.42 km)
- Upper and Lower Spring Canyon from Holt Draw and back to Holt Draw via Hwy 24.....33miles (53.13 km)
- Access to Spring Canyon from Chimney Rock parking area via Chimney Rock Canyon.....2.5 miles (4.02 km)

Upper Spring Canyon Hike Description

Upper Spring Canyon is a strenuous hike of approximately 18 miles (28.98 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. To reach Upper Spring Canyon, park at the gate and follow the old Holt Draw Road until it ends near Sulphur Creek, approximately 1.5 miles (2.41 km) from Hwy 24. 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 three miles (4.83 km). This should take 1¼ to 1½ hours. Here, 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 (0.48 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 S24, S25, S19, and S30. Follow the bench in an easterly direction around two prominent points in the Wingate cliff. As you round this point, you will see two deep clefts cutting down through the Wingate wall at the top of the talus slope ahead. This is the “W” at UTM coordinates 0464424mE, 4245349mN. The distance from the bed of Sulphur Creek to the “W” is about one mile (1.61 km) and is

sparsely marked with rock cairns. Climb the talus slope up the left (west) cleft of the “W” to pass easily through the Wingate, then follow the steep gully down into Spring Canyon. The route through the “W” is easy and 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 (1.61 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 (1.61 km). From this point on the route has no distinctive landmarks until you reach the spring, approximately eight miles (12.88 km) down canyon. 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 in it. Camp a minimum of 300 feet (91.50 m) away from the spring area.

From the spring, the junction of Chimney Rock Canyon is 1.5 miles (2.41 km) downstream. At this point you can continue down canyon 6.5 miles (10.46 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 parking area, your hike will end here. If you left your vehicle at the Holt Draw gate, hike right (west) along Hwy 24 for four miles (6.44 km) to your starting point.

Lower Spring Canyon Hike Description

Lower Spring Canyon is a strenuous nine-mile (14.49 km) hike from the Chimney Rock parking area to the Fremont River. 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 (5.79 km) east of the visitor center and walk across the road and several hundred feet downstream to find the mouth of the canyon. From the Chimney Rock parking area, follow the Chimney Rock Trail to the top of the switchbacks. Take the left (more northerly or east-bound) side of the loop trail and follow it one mile (1.61 km) to Chimney Rock Canyon, which is marked with a sign to Spring Canyon. Walk down Chimney Rock Canyon 1.5 miles (2.41 km) to Spring Canyon. While in Chimney Rock Canyon, three large side canyons will join the main drainage on the left (west). When you reach the junction of Spring Canyon, continue downstream (straight/east) to access Lower Spring Canyon. From the junction it is 6.5 miles (10.46 km) to the

Fremont River. Approximately one mile (1.61 km) down canyon, you will encounter a short section of narrows with two 10–15 foot (3.05–4.57 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 with severe exposure. Use caution, especially if wet, snowy, or icy conditions exist.

Below the dry falls, continue down canyon approximately five miles (8.05 km) to the river. The river level varies but is normally 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 seven miles (11.27 km) to your starting point.

Additional Information

Maps:
USGS 7.5 Minute Series:
Twin Rocks and Fruita Quads
Available at the visitor center

Best Seasons:
Spring and fall

For more information and backcountry permits, contact
Capitol Reef Nation Park Visitor Center at
435-425-4111