

## Backcountry Rides in the Kanab Area

Following is general information about good rides in the Kanab Area. One can ride anywhere on BLM land but the following are some good routes/trails to start using. Check with the **BLM Visitor Center** on Kanab's east side along U.S. 89 (near Wendy's Restaurant) or the USFS office in south Fredonia for maps and up-to-date info. Unless noted, probably the two best maps are the National Geographic Trails Illustrated Maps or the *Arizona Strip Visitor Map*, produced by BLM. The *Paria Canyon Kanab Trails Nat'l Geographic Illustrated Map* shows all of the following rides, **except the #1 East Virgin River Canyon Ride and the #6 Cottonwood Canyon Ride.**

All of the trails, except "East Virgin River Canyon Ride" have complimentary 1-page flyer complete with a map and narrative text. This 1-page flyer is found at the Kanab Visitor Center, 78 S. 100 E. in Downtown Kanab on Highway 89 across this highway from the Hampton Inn. This Visitor Center will have the best supply of 1-page flyers and there is plenty of parking, even for horse trailers. Most Kanab restaurants, lodging units, stores, shops have 1-page flyers available.

With today's technology and cell phone capability, equestrians can usually find local maps online, through Google Maps or specialized apps.

**1. East Virgin River Canyon Ride.** ((The best map for this trail is the USGS Mt. Carmel Junction 7.5-minute Quad map.) The access is just south of Mt. Carmel Junction community on Highway 89. Approximately ¼ mile south of Mt. Carmel highway junction, turn west off Highway 89 onto the dirt road. There is a good parking/camping place within a ½ mile of the highway at the Historic Barracks Corrals. Look for extensive set of corrals. There are two smaller corrals for horses, water for horses from the stream and plenty of places to park. If you drive further there are signs warning you not to park on private property along the dirt road.

It is best to ride your horses down the dirt road as there is no good place to turn a horse trailer around or to park for the ride. Parking at the corrals adds 2 miles to the ride, but there is no good place to park that isn't on private property. There is considerable ATV traffic on the dirt road but once you get into the canyon stream bottom, you can find horse/cow trails to ride on away from the road. Several fences to go through and you might have to search for the gate as there are cattle guards along the road. A beautiful canyon with water in the riverbed. Beautiful Spring *leafing-out* colors and Fall colors. Ride as far as you want and return back up the canyon to your trailer.

Don't miss riding into Bay Bill Canyon, 3rd major canyon on the left going downstream. Bay Bill Canyon is within a Wilderness Study area and, therefore closed to motorized vehicles. There is a cable fence across the entrance and signs prohibiting motorized vehicle. There is access for horses to ride around each end of the cable fence. Ride up Bay Bill Canyon about 30-45 minutes. Stay in the main wide canyon on the way up Bill Canyon. You'll note the canyon gets narrower the further you ride and eventually you will be in the Bay Bill Slot Canyon. I recommend you only take 5-6 horses into the "Slot" at a time. In places you can reach out from the saddle and touch both walls at the same time. (Thus, the informal definition of a Slot Canyon.) Take photos of touching the walls! After 15 minutes riding into the slot canyon, look for a place wide enough to turn your horses around. Don't enter this slot canyon if thunderstorms are threatening or predicted, as a flash flood would ruin your day and probably your life.

As you head back down the Canyon, if you want to spend more time in Bay Bill Canyon there is another small canyon that enters Bay Bill on the right about 1/3 of the way down from the Slot Canyon. A 15-minute ride up this canyon will take you to another Slot Canyon that has a natural bridge at the beginning. Because of all the rocks, you can not enter this Slot Canyon on horses but you can take turns holding

other's horses and walk up under the natural bridge and back into the "Slot" a short distance. This is unique because of the natural bridge associated with a Slot Canyon..

2. **Paria River Canyon.** From the junction of US89 & 89A at the stoplight in Kanab drive east 33 miles on Highway 89 as if you are going to Page, to a well-marked junction that says Paria Townsite. The dirt road from the highway to the old movie set location usually has washboards. Because of washboards, you **must have 4-wheel drive** to pull the horses & trailer back up the steep hill from the Paria River trailhead. If you don't have 4-wh drive, park at the large parking lot next to the Highway 89 and ride an extra 5 miles into the trailhead. If you have a smaller rig and trailer drive north until just before the dirt road drops into the canyon. There is a small re-vegetated area and pulloff. Park in pulloff.

Dispersed Camping is permitted outside the day-use picnic area to the north and along the Paria River. If that is your plan, fill out the camping permit in the Trailhead Box. Unload beyond the day-use picnic area and ride down the road past the historic cemetery. You can ride north up the Paria River, water available, at least in places. The wide canyon gets narrower as you ride north. Some interesting side canyons to explore. Come back the same way.

3. **Paria Box & Hackberry Canyon.** Another interesting ride out of the Paria Trailhead is to go immediately across the Paria River to the east and look for the old stone buildings on the east side of the river, leftover from a "flour" gold mining era. Then go downstream along the Paria River through the "Paria Box", a narrow gap in the canyon walls where the Paria cuts through the sandstone walls. After going through the "Box" you are within ½ mile of the confluence with the Cottonwood Wash. It was in the narrow Paria Box walls where McKenna's Gold was predominately filmed. Clint Eastwood also starred in the "Outlaw Josie Wales, "with several scenes shot along the Paria River

If you want, at the confluence of Cottonwood Wash and Paria River, you can ride up the Cottonwood Wash into a different type of scenery about 2-3 miles to Hackberry Canyon. Then ride up the beautiful, narrow Hackberry Canyon about 3 miles to an old Homestead Cabin. (A second way to access Hackberry Canyon is to drive Highway 89 to the Cottonwood Wash dirt road junction and drive up the road to Hackberry Trailhead. Get information on road conditions at BLM visitor center. The Cottonwood Wash Road is mostly clay and if there has been any rain, don't use the Cottonwood Wash Road.)

4. **Buckskin Gulch.** Drive 4.5 miles beyond Paria turnoff to House Rock Valley Road junction with 89. (Total of 37.5 miles from Kanab stoplight.) At the big curve and before entering the "Cocks Comb (local name for the high narrow ridge) leave 89 and go south 4.2 miles on House Rock Valley Road to Buckskin Gulch Trailhead. A slow, dirt road but passable with horse trailer.

There is a day-use fee for the Gulch of \$6.00 per person and another \$6.00 for a dog. Deposit the fee in the Iron Pipe. Thus, no change given back. About 1 hour ride through a scenic wide canyon and several crossings back and forth through the dry wash. The Buckskin Gulch becomes a spectacular, narrow canyon. **Do not enter this narrow canyon if there is any possibility of rain. A flash flood will ruin your day, the horse's day and probably both your lives.**

If you found a lot of pools of water in the wash when you were in the wide canyon or if there is flowing water in the wash, I would not enter the narrow portion of Buckskin Gulch. Standing water means there will be soft mud and maybe even quicksand present in the narrow 8-to 12-foot-wide canyon that has walls 40 to nearly 100 feet high. If you do enter the narrow canyon and find a pool or several pools and decide to cross the pools, have the lead horse go completely across the pool and hold the other horses back. Then have one horse at a time go through the pool.

The confluence of Buckskin Gulch and Wire Pass Slot Canyon is about 4.5 miles or 1.5 hr. ride from the trailhead. Have lunch at the confluence and look for small, but beautiful petroglyphs on the south canyon wall of Wire Pass Slot Canyon (petroglyphs are low on the wall). Beyond this confluence, Buckskin becomes real rocky. Horses cannot go beyond the Confluence. Wire Pass is too narrow for horses but fun to explore on foot. Have someone hold horses out of the way of hikers while you walk up Wire Pass.

The confluence is a gathering place for lots of hikers. Please keep your horses away from large number of people. If your horses dump manure, clean it up and/or bury it in the sand away from hiker walking areas or scatter it away from the central part of the confluence. Remember to Stop, Smile and Speak – the “3 S’s”. You’ll find a lot of international visitors present, so welcome them to America. They’ll probably want to pet the horse or take photos of the “cowboys.”

Return back up Buckskin with your horses to the trailhead. You’ll probably find day-hikers walking the loop from Wire Pass to Confluence and up the Buckskin to the trailhead to meet their driver. (3-S’s)

**5. Snake Gulch.** Take Highway 89A (alternate) south out of Kanab through Fredonia, AZ. About 1 mile south of Fredonia, turn right (south) onto FS22, a paved road. Take FS22 several miles south across the desert. When the pavement ends, continue a short distance to FS423 – turn west (right) onto FS423. Go about 1.3 miles and turn north (right) onto FS642 and go about 3 miles to the trailhead. Be sure to pack plenty of water as there is no water available in the main canyon.

From the trailhead ride into the canyon. Ride about 45 minutes and start looking for rock art on the canyon walls as you ride down the canyon. Further down there are pictographs (painted pictures) and petroglyphs (pecked on writing by Indigenous Tribes) on both sides of the canyon. Most are on the north wall. **Take photos but DO NOT touch with your hands. Oil from our skin damages the writings. Respect these writings and the 800 to 1000+ years they have been here. Do not add graffiti.**

Go as far as you want down-canyon and return back up the canyon to the trailhead. If you go as far to see a flat, mesa-type rock protruding from the left side of the canyon onto the canyon floor this feature is called “Table Rock.” If you or your horses are extremely thirsty, go around the Table Rock onto the back side and ride or walk up the canyon to a small spring. There may not be any water because of continuing drought.

Snake Gulch is a beautiful canyon with little visitor use, but it gets unbearably hot from June through the summer. Not recommended that time of the year.

**6. Cottonwood Canyon.** (The best map is the one page trail flyer labeled “Cottonwood Canyon/Bunting Adventure Map” produced by the Kane County Visitor Center and available at Kanab Visitor Center or at various businesses in Kanab.)

Go south 0.8 miles from the Kanab stoplight at the junction of Highways 89 and 89A. Look for the “KTown89 Food and Fuel” Station on the left (east) side of 89A Highway, plus a large sign on the west side of 89A that says “Kanab Creek Ranchos.” Turn right (west) onto Kanab Creek Drive, go down into Kanab Creek and back up. Continue up the hill straight through the 4-way stop. As Kanab Creek Drive turns to the left (south) turn right on the next street, Stansfield Drive, and continue to the west. You go down the hill to Bunting Trailhead (hiking only) and back up the hill to the Cottonwood Canyon Trailhead (hikers and horses only) and city water tank. Large parking area with a trailhead sign and a beautiful picnic area with a great view of the landscape.

Study the map before starting on the Cottonwood Trail. Use the unlocked swinging gate to start the ride. Be sure and fasten the chain clip to keep the cattle from getting out of the BLM pasture. You will see the hiker-horse trail signs. Pay attention as you ride and look for rock cairns along the trail. There are not a lot of cairns on the trail but the trail is well used. The first part of the trail includes a lot of steep ups and downs. Eventually you will come to a small ride-through **Iron Gate**.

Go through this iron gate, ride south a short distance watching for the trail that leaves the old abandoned road and go westerly down into a drainage and back out. You will cross three old roads but stay on the trail, enjoying a beautiful ride from below the Vermillion Cliffs. As you get out into flatter country with blue-gray soils, pay close attention to following the trail. There are a few large cairns and smaller cairns that will help guide you. If cairns have been toppled, feel free to get off the horse and re-stack the cairn, but don't build new cairns. After about an hour ride you will come to a wooden sign indicating the end of the trail at a two-track road headed north into Cottonwood Canyon **or** south to the State Line Road.

**Here you have a decision to make.** (1) Go north into Cottonwood Canyon; (2) go south down to the State Line Dirt Road; or (3) turn around and follow the trail back to the trailhead.

1. Going North into Cottonwood Canyon: This 2-track road also has a Fredonia City buried water line and occasionally you will see evidence of the water line. Eventually you will join the Cottonwood Canyon Road and continue north to the locked gate. At this gate, follow the fence line west down to Cottonwood Wash where you can get around the fence and follow the fence back uphill to the Cottonwood Canyon Road. You are entering private property. Please respect the landowner's requests that horse riders stay close to the fence and when you reach the road, please stay on the road. The further north you ride the prettier the canyon gets. But you need to turn around at some point as there is no northern horse access out of Cottonwood Canyon because of private property locked gates.

2. Going South toward the State Line Dirt Road: **This is the quickest and easiest way back to your trailer.** It is a few minutes ride south to the State Line Road. As you approach the road, there is a cattle tank that may have water for the horses. Get on the 2-track dirt road and follow the double fence line to the east. This fence is the UT-AZ border. No need for passports. Please stay on the State Line Road as you are on private property. You will come to an area that has some remains of development and the landowner might be camped in this area. In the middle of the junk, take one of the 2-track roads to the north and go pass the Old Movie Fort Site. Numerous movies filmed here. The last movie filmed here was "*Apple Dumpling Gang Rides Again, Part II*" in 1979. Do not enter any of the buildings as it is dangerous. Watch out for rattle snakes as they are common around collapsed buildings. Also watch for barbed wire and lumber with nails protruding. Immediately north of the Movie Fort there is an old dirt race track for ATVs and motorcycles. On the north end of this track there is the abandoned 2-track road that will lead you northwards back to the **Iron Gate**. From the Gate your horse should find the way back to your trailer at the Trailhead.

3. Turning around and going back on the same trail is a nice option. It will look different going back.

7. **K-Hill Trail.** One of the first things you see when entering Kanab from either the north or south is the large "K" on the slopes of a large sandstone bluff. There are 2 trailheads for K-Hill Trail. One on the east end at the beginning of Pugh Canyon. The other the West-End Trailhead that joins the Tom Canyon Trail and leads up into Toms Canyon. I recommend using Pugh Canyon Trailhead as there is more room for parking horse trailers. Using the Pugh Canyon Trailhead, you will have two choices when you ride the length of K-Hill Trail and meet the Toms Canyon Trailhead.

**First choice,** is to turn around and go back to the trailer for a ride-length of just over one hour.

**Or second choice,** take the Toms Canyon Trail and go out to the end of the Toms Canyon Trail, then turn around and ride back to the trailer for a 3-hour ride.

**Notes About K-Hill :** This trail was constructed for equestrians, hikers, runners and dog walkers but dogs need to be on a leash. There are 17 blind curves on the 2 to 3 mile trail. The trail is narrow in places and follows sandstone ledges with steep drop-offs of numerous feet on most outward edges. If an equestrian and biker met on a blind curve with a steep drop-off, and the horse is spooked there could be serious injuries to the horse and rider and quite possibility a fatality(s) because of the drop-off.

Because Mountain Bikes travel fast, particularly downhill, and with little noise that increases the lack of potential collision on a curve. "No Mountain Bikes" have been prohibited by the BLM on K-Hill trail for several years. Prohibition was relatively easy because when this trail was constructed in 2011 there was very little mountain bike traffic anywhere in Kanab or surrounding area. However, be aware, mountain bikes and even motorcycles now frequently use this trail. There have been a few close-calls on the blind curves.

Currently at the 2 major Trailheads and where access points meet the K-Hill Trail, there are carsonite posts with stickers that state "No Mountain Bikes" and have photos that ATVs are prohibited. However, E-Bikers and OneWheel riders are becoming common and these riders do not think they are in the same category as mountain bikes and thus don't have to obey the "No Mountain Bikes" signs.

As you ride K-Hill watch for bicycle activity. If you have an uncomfortable experience with a bicycle(s), E-Bikes and OneWheels, please contact me with the details at 435-899-0467 (Noel Poe), and I'll take that information to the BLM. HDBCH is working with BLM in February 2022 to get permission to post trailhead signs that say something similar to "*Motorized Vehicles and All Bicycles Prohibited on K-Hill Trail because of Safety Hazards*".

**Back to K-Hill Trail:** This is a beautiful trail right among the cliffs and spectacular views. You will enjoy it and in the mid-afternoon to early evening you are not likely to experience bikers or motorcycle riders. There are numerous sandstone benches along the trail, so if you want to stop and watch the beautiful western sunsets, do so but please select the appropriate benches so that you don't block the trail for runners, hikers, and dog-walkers. They are our friends!

To get on the Pugh Canyon and K-Hill Trailhead parking area, go east on Highway 89 toward Page, AZ. Before you leave town, you'll see the Wendy's sign and 7-11 gas station, turn there. Go right on the paved road that leads eastly toward Pugh Canyon. At a "T" intersection turn right. You will end up at a dirt trailhead parking area and looking eastward toward Pugh Canyon. Park, unload, and saddle-up. Follow the Carsonite Sign posts. At first, you'll be on a wide, dirt-road for ¼ mile. Watch for a carsonite post on the right that will point to a 2-track road that goes a short distance and more carsonite signs that lead you onto the K-Hill Trail. Enjoy the ride and the spectacular views of the Vermillion Cliffs, Kanab City and Kaibab Plateau to the south. The K-Hill Trail is well-signed. Remember the 3 Ss --- Stop, Smile and Speak to hikers and dog walkers.

8. **Toms Canyon Loop Trail:** Toms Canyon Trail is in the same vicinity as K-Hill Trail. However, K-Hill trail is in Pugh Canyon on the south side of Savage Ridge, the name given to the tall ridge that separates Pugh and Toms Canyons. (The letter "K" is on Savage Point.) Toms Canyon Trail is in Toms Canyon on the north side of the Savage Ridge.

To get to the most popular Toms Canyon Trailhead: Get on Highway 89 and at the large curve next to Parry's Lodge, turn North on 100 East Street (the street between Parry's Lodge and Kanab Center) continue going north on 100 East Street for 3 blocks. Turn right onto 300 North. When you see the water wheel and Round-About, take the first right-turn in the Round-About onto Ladera Street. Park at the curve along Ladera Street as it curves left. Unload trailer, saddle-up and ride up the dirt grade past the kiosk sign and get on the trail pointing to Toms Canyon and K-Hill Trails. Ride about 100 yards and the Toms Canyon Trail separates from K-Hill Trail and goes back to the north up a rather short, steep hill.

Follow the primary trail that goes past many homes in the La Estancia Subdivision and looks down on their back yards. You will come to a swinging gate in a fence line. Open, if closed, and close if originally closed.

In 2021, the BLM with a positive recommendation from HDBCH , allowed the construction of several mountain bicycle trails also in the Toms Canyon. The primary trail in Toms Canyon is open to horses and hikers, there are a couple short sections that are open for mountain bikes. E-Bikes were prohibited through negotiation anywhere on BLM land in Toms Canyon and mountain bikes are allowed on selected bike trails that are not used by the equestrians.

This ride is about a 1-hour ride to a large sandstone picnic table at the end of the Toms Box Canyon. There are several Tie-down posts to tie horses to while the riders have a picnic or go for a walk to the weeping rock ( a mild spring in the box canyon). Trail in and out is well marked. Please do not take your horses on the trails that are obviously signed for bicycles. Thank you.

**9. Greenhalgh Trail in Trail Canyon:** The Greenhalgh Trail is open to hikers and equestrians. However, it should only be used by experienced trail riders with experienced horses. This trail is north of Kanab on Highway 89. After mile post 65 turn onto a dirt road leading west to a large parking area used by horse trailers and motorized ATVs & SUVs. Park in this obvious large, parking area. After mounting, ride your horses down the Kanab Creek ATV Trail. This trail is a shared trail that includes motorized OHV vehicles and horse use. As you know, these two recreational uses are sometimes not compatible.

For the equestrian, the first curve is a blind curve. Fortunately, motorized vehicles make noise and the equestrian and their horses can sense an OHV coming up the hill. Horses & riders should wait in the parking lot, yielding the right-of-way. As the equestrians' progress on what is known as the Kanab Creek ATV Trail, the rider should try to be aware of oncoming motorized vehicles. There are two hazardous portions of this trail where horses and motorized use do not see or hear each other: (1) One is the long-grade coming around the initial blind curve below the parking area, and (2) is the long, narrow hogback grade up the hill above the Kanab Creek crossing. This hogback ridge trail is extremely narrow with blind spots on both the upper end and the bottom end. One of the trail users will have to turn the horses around and ride back to their beginning or the OHV driver attempts to back up his/her machine to the top of the hill and yield the right-of-way to the equestrian riders. This depends where you meet the motorized vehicles on the hogback.

Once the equestrians are on top of the hogback ridge, there is a marked road going west to the Greenhalgh Trailhead that is no more than ¼ mile from the main Kanab Creek ATV Trail. Take this spur 2-track and ride to the trailhead. Go through the open gate and ride up the defined trail to the bottom of the cliff.

The Greenhalgh Trail starts at the bottom of the northern cliff face. The trail is only for experienced equestrians and their horses. The trail is steep with many switchbacks. The edge of the trail in several places is on an exposure edge of the trail with hundreds of feet falling distance should the horse spook and jump off the trail.

Once you are on top, the formal trail ends. Eventually we will have a trail wayside exhibit panel to provide information. The BLM has decided the top of the mesa is an “*explore and discover*” opportunity in which the equestrians/hikers may enjoy the mesa and ride anywhere in any direction in the sand. The best travel may be to stop and look down on the Trail Canyon to the south, then ride counter-clockwise around the mesa rim to look down on the Kanab Creek Canyon to the east, and the Tiny Canyon to the north. We are hopeful to formally extend a developed trail to the top of the Bunting Mesa and a long, loop trail back to the south.

Once again, I need to stress that the ride up Greenhalgh Trail climbing the northern ridge is only for experienced riders and horses. Meeting hikers coming down or going up the trail will require negotiation. The trail is beautiful and well-constructed by Conservation Crews, but the trail requires equestrians to be careful and safe.

The best trail flyer available from Kane County is one called "Greenhalgh Hike/Equestrian Flyer." If you can't locate such a flyer in Kanab businesses, please go to the Kanab Visitor Center across Highway 89 from the Hampton Inn. The map on the back will be useful.

Hopefully the above trail information will give you some encouragement to come to Kanab in Southern Utah and experience the High Desert Backcountry.

Compliments of the High Desert Backcountry Horsemen Chapter.  
Kanab, Utah 84741