



ROB JONES/COURTESY

Jeremy stands behind the Lower Ribbon Falls.

A second ribbon oasis

Hidden Upper Ribbon Falls has as much to offer as its lower, bigger cousin.

ROB JONES
Special to the Daily Sun

The wind-lifted spray from Lower Ribbon Falls splatters on my face as Jeremy, Dan, and I hike in the hanging canyon 100 or more feet above Lower Ribbon Falls on the trail to Upper Ribbon Falls.

We're on a day jaunt after nine days of volunteering with the Grand Canyon Hikers and Backpackers Association, where we rehabilitated Cottonwood Ranger Station with Rangers Elyssa and Erika. Packing back to the Phantom/Bright Angel area after our VIP (Volunteer In Park) experience, four of us have just warmed up the hiking legs after hiking the 1.6 miles from Cottonwood Campground when we cross the narrow bridge over Bright Angel Creek and drop packs near Lower Ribbon Falls. Barry decides to stay at Lower Ribbon soaking up the desert ambiance and guarding the packs from the rapacious rats (rock squir-

rels) and ravens. Thanks, Barry. Jeremy, Dan and I tour into the upper canyon on a decent trail, to where it ends in a rock box. Here, Upper Ribbon cuts through layers of rock and drops 50 feet in a splendid falls of crystal Canyon water.

Planning your trip

https://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/upload/corridor_map.pdf

Off to the south, tucked carefully under a low ledge, are some ancient Pueblo structures, including perhaps remnants of a Kiva. Glorious. Dan and Jeremy climb into the lower bowl of Upper Ribbon for adventure and a photo opportunity.

Wait, yes, we're talking about an upper and a lower Ribbon Falls, both refreshing oases in Grand Canyon.

Lower Ribbon is the Ribbon Falls



Jeremy stands in he Upper Ribbon Falls.



Granaries that reside near Upper Ribbon Falls.

OUTDOORS

From B1

with which most hikers are acquainted and sports a 30-foot-high cone of travertine deposit. Travertine is essentially limestone (aka calcium carbonate), and in the case of Ribbon Falls, it's covered with emerald green moss. The stream creating the falls flows through limestone layers, dissolving calcium carbonate and re-depositing it on the cone. Upper Ribbon is a more classic falls, and the upper canyon is lined with water-loving cottonwood trees. Both falls produce rare desert oases.

The Zunis, who now mostly live in western New Mexico, are one of several tribes with a historic link to the Grand Canyon. According to Zuni mythology, their place of origin was Chimik'yana'kya dey'a, known to hikers today as Ribbon Falls, which feeds into Bright Angel Creek along what is now the North Kaibab Trail.

Emily Omana Smith, of the Park Service's fisheries

program, tells me that the invasive trout removed via weir and electro-fishing from Bright Angel Creek as part of a restoration of native fish are cleaned, vacuum packaged, and sent to beneficial use and to the Zunis for their ceremonial eagles. She also reports that no electro-fishing now occurs in the Ribbon Falls Creek because of tribal concerns.

Getting there

Visiting Ribbon Falls is best enjoyed as part of a backpack trip involving the Grand Canyon corridor trails. It's an approximately 17-mile round-trip hike to Ribbon Falls from the North Rim, on the North Kaibab Trail, losing (and gaining! on the return) about 4,500 feet. From the South Rim, one hikes down the South Kaibab (7.5 miles to The River, then 5.6 miles up the North Kaibab; cumulative elevation change of 6,280 feet) or the Bright Angel Trail 9.5 miles and up the North Kaibab 5.6 miles. The round trips are 26 and 30 miles, respec-

tively.

Close in

When you reach the signed junction to Ribbon Falls, cross the narrow bridge across Bright Angel Creek. As soon as you reach the west side of the creek, look for the social trail to your right (north). This is the historic CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) trail to Upper Ribbon, now in need of some repair. You can see the faint track of the trail switching back through the gap above the hillside to the west. It's about a mile to Upper Ribbon Falls. From the bridge, the obvious and worn level path straight ahead, then left for about half a mile or less, goes to Lower Ribbon Falls. Caution, don't leave your packs unattended in the Ribbon Falls area — the ground and aerial pack predators are well trained.

Rob Jones is a Flag-staff-based outdoors writer. Visit his blog at <http://wildernessvagabond.com/index.html>



A view from Upper Ribbon Falls from a distance.

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The Lower Ribbon Falls.