



Photos by Rob Jones/Courtesy

Butchart Nat Bridge viewed into the room from the east side.

# A bridge not too far

Harvey Butchart Natural Bridge in the Grand Canyon is a magical destination after a tough, final bushwhack.

**ROB JONES**

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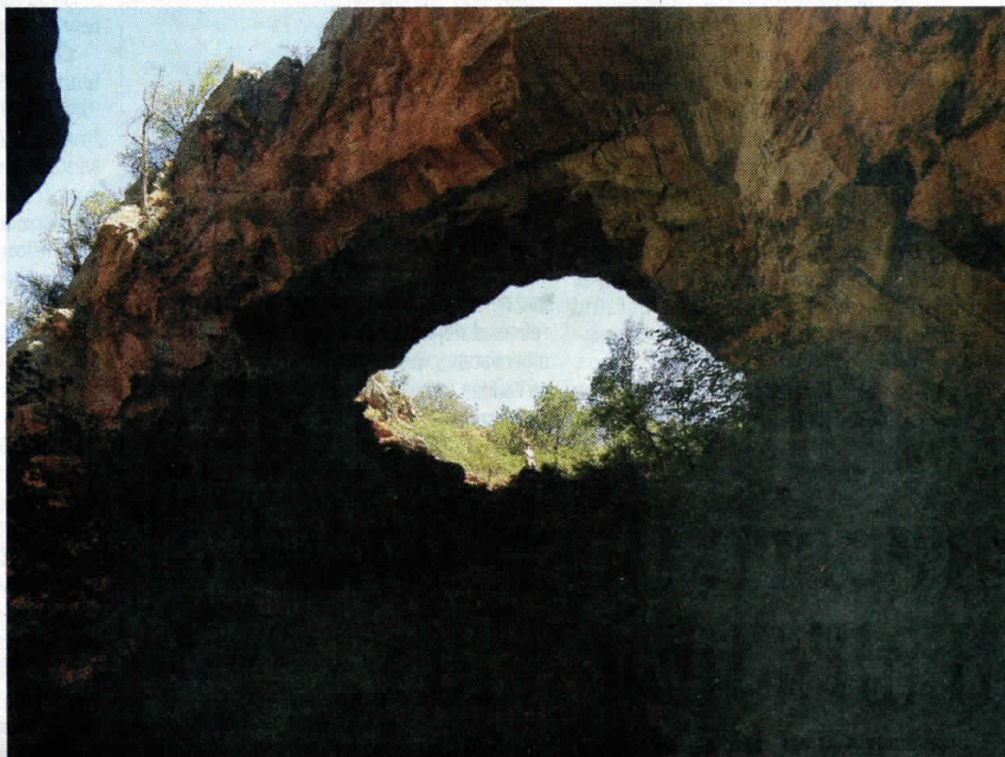
The bulky span of the natural bridge looms above the cool darkness of the room nestled in Muav Canyon. Like a flying but-tress, Harvey Butchart Natural Bridge braces the canyon walls carved from redwall limestone, pierced by what appears to be a sinkhole.

## OUTDOORS

Just upstream, the North Bass Trail crosses Muav Canyon above a series of canyoneering drops to this room. Peering down into the canyon depths at the start of these falls, the canyon glows a sunny disposition.

Zig and I have dropped our packs after climbing the North Bass Trail from the Colorado River toward the North Rim of the Grand Canyon and bushwhacked through a nearly impenetrable jungle of trees and brush to where one can carefully clamber through the natural bridge and into the room. Yowee! It's either this route or several canyoneering rappels.

Rich Rudrow, a prolific area canyoneer, coined the unofficial name for Butchart Natural Bridge during a canyoneering



The Harvey Butchart Natural Bridge



## OUTDOORS

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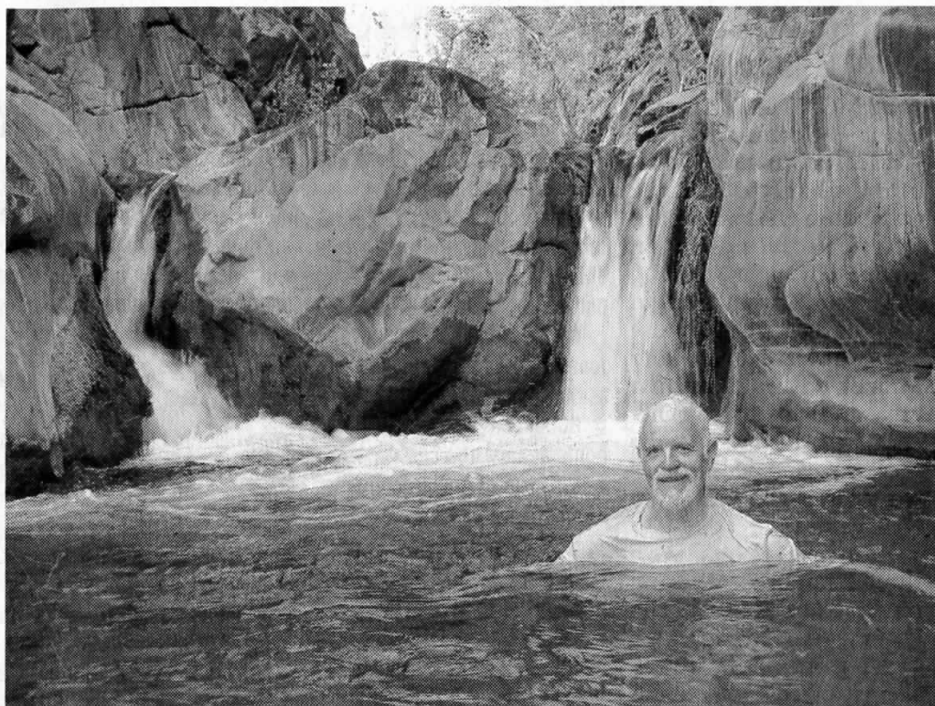
trip several years ago. It's labeled "natural bridge" on the King Arthur Castle USGS quadrangle map.

Harvey Butchart (1907-2002) was a fabled Grand Canyon hiker and NAU math professor who hiked some 12,000 miles on foot in the Canyon, pioneering hundreds of new routes from rim to river and recorded ascents of dozens of buttes. He wrote three famously cryptic backcountry guidebooks. Many consider Harvey to be the father of canyoneering. Butchart reportedly documented this natural bridge in 1967, which has a span estimated at 40 feet.

William Wallace Bass (1849-1933) built both the North Bass and South Bass Trails, which he used to guide tourists into the Canyon and over to the North Rim. The trail was also used to haul asbestos out from his mine and to tend his garden near Shinumo Creek.

This hike loses (and gains coming out) 2,300 feet in elevation. From Swamp Point, it is about 2.7 miles to the natural bridge, one way. The last 600 feet to the sinkhole presumed to form the natural bridge is in very thick brush. The route down into the "room" at drainage level is dangerous because of loose rocks and steep angles.

Starting at 7,500 feet at Swamp Point, the North



Zig swims in Shinumo Creek near the bottom of N Bass Trail.

Rob Jones/Courtesy



## GETTING THERE

The ideal time to visit Butchart Natural Bridge as a day hike (or as part of an overnight backpack - NPS permit required) is mid-September through the end of October. How come? Because, in the spring, the Swamp Point Road is often closed by snow or down trees and isn't opened until the fire crews cut their way out to the Point. The rest of the year, it's either too hot or too cold or impossible to get out to the Point.

Starting from Jacob Lake, drive south on Arizona Highway 67 toward the North Rim of the Grand Canyon for approximately 26 miles. Take a right turn (west) onto Forest Service Road 22, just past DeMotte Campground and the Kaibab Lodge. After a mile, turn hard left onto FR 270. Drive FR 270 for 2.2 miles, then turn right (West) and follow FR 223 for

approximately 5.8 miles to FR 268. Drive approximately 0.25 miles to FR 268B (goes left at fork), then approximately 0.7 miles to the Park Boundary. Drive the rough Swamp Ridge Road 8.0 miles to Swamp Point and the trailhead for the North Bass Trail.

Note that these roads are not all well-marked or maintained. The Swamp Ridge Road is especially slow-going and prone to closure by snow and falling trees. This route to the trailhead climbs to over 9,000 feet - keep this in mind. You will need an NPS permit to camp in the park, which you entered at the start of the Swamp Ridge Road. Of course, you can camp at-large on the Kaibab National Forest. Call the Kaibab National Forest at Jacob Lake (928-643-7298) and the North Rim of Grand Canyon NP (928-638-7868) for road conditions prior to leaving home.

—Rob Jones



Rob Jones/Courtesy

Teddy's Cabin is easily visited by turning right at Muav Saddle junction.

rocks and steep angles.

Starting at 7,500 feet at Swamp Point, the North Bass trailhead, hike the trail down through the Kaibab, Toroweap, and Coconino layers to Muav Saddle over 0.8 miles. Take the right fork of the three-way junction at the saddle to see Teddy's Cabin (named after Teddy Roosevelt – and worth a visit on your trip out). The center trail climbs to the Powell Plateau, where invasive hybrid beefalo are devastating numerous surface ruins. Our natural bridge is to the left at the junction.

After about 2.6 miles, the route reaches the top of the Redwall Limestone (actually a native gray color where not stained by oxides from the Supai Formation) and a series of increasing ghastly dry falls. You are near BM 5175 marked on the King Arthur Castle USGS quad; this is marked 5181 on the actual



Canyon glow above canyoneering drops to the room.

BM monument.

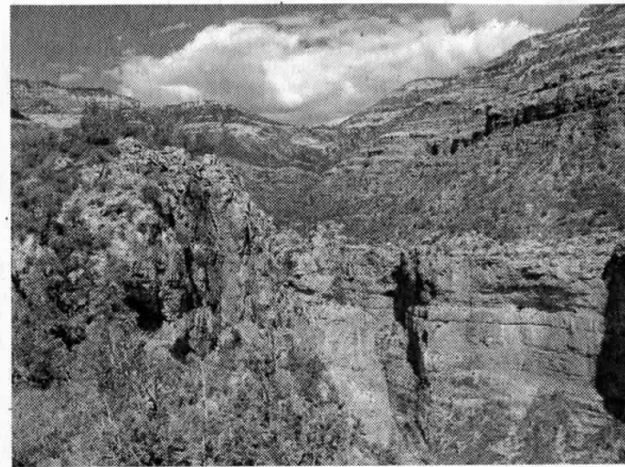
From the top of the dry falls in the Redwall, the Supai Traverse (trail) goes right (West). I suggest that you hike the Supai Traverse for about 600 feet to get a view of where the natural bridge

might be in the narrow yet deep canyon, and determine a possible route through the brush on the other side of the canyon. The axis of the natural bridge is parallel to the main creekbed. Don't look up, the natural

bridge is below you, spanning a sinkhole side canyon to the east.

Return to where the traverse climbs out of the creekbed. The natural bridge unmarked route goes left, to the east side of Muav canyon, entering

Teddy's Cabin is easily visited by turning right at Muav Saddle junction.



Rob Jones/Courtesy

The Supai Traverse viewed from the North Bass Trail.

thicker and thicker brush as one works toward the side drainage and then to the sinkhole beyond it. Stay back from the canyon edge and take your time. This 600 feet is slow going.

At the sinkhole, you have arrived at Butchart Natural Bridge. Enjoy the view. Travel into the

room at the canyon bottom is possible, yet not recommended.

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Rob Jones is a retired school psychologist (Ph.D. from the U of Utah) who writes about self-propelled recreation on what's left of our precious public lands. See his commercial-free Wilderness Vagabond reports at: <http://wildernessvagabond.com>