



TOM'S UTAH CANYONEERING GUIDE

Archive

Phipps Canyon and Arch • Escalante Canyons

2 Routes described

Phipps Canyon and Arch, 2A III ★★

Phipps Canyon to Deer Canyon, 2A IV ★★

Rating: III Class 4 or IV Class 3 ★★

Best Season: Fall, Winter or Spring.

Time: Route 1, to Arch: 5 to 7 hours
Route 2, to Deer Canyon: an easy 2 days.

Access: Hike begins and ends at a spot off the Old Sheffield Road.

USGS 7.5' Map: Tenmile Flat and Calf Creek

Permit: Not Required for day use. Free overnight permits available at VC or trailheads.

Equipment: No special equipment needed.

Drinking Water: Bring plenty. Water for pumping is found in the Escalante River and in some parts of Phipps Canyon and Deer Canyon.

Flash Flood Risk: Low.

Difficulties: Route 1 requires some 4th class slab climbing to exit the arch area to the ridge. Route 2 requires route finding skills.

Who would know that such a treat is hidden right next to Highway 12. This is a charming canyon with a great arch, nice narrows, a wide variety of interesting features and a little bit of route finding to spice it up. Route 1 is a dayhike out to Phipps Arch, then up some slickrock ridges and along a high ridge to return. The spicy 4th class slab climbing can be avoided by returning the way you came. Route 2 continues past the Arch and follows Phipps Canyon to the Escalante River, explores Deer Canyon across the way, then return by climbing to a high ridge and following this back to the Old Sheffield Road. This makes an easy 2 day hike, suitable for those shorter days in the fall or early spring.

Steve Allen has many interesting historical notes that go with this canyon, in [Canyoneering III](#).

Getting There: The Phipps Canyon hikes start off the Old Sheffield Road, an unmarked dirt road that heads south off Highway 12 between Escalante and Boulder. The turnoff is in an awkward place partway down (or up) a steep hill - 6 miles from the main turnoff to Hole in the Rock Road; 3-1/2 miles south of the Escalante River crossing; and about 1 mile below a radio tower. Drive 1/2 mile out the Old Sheffield Road and take a two-track turnoff to the left, and follow 1/4 mile to a small parking area.

Part 1: Down Phipps Wash From the parking area hike south-south-east to the edge of the escarpment, then down (right) across a small bowl. Stay to the right of the wash bottom and descend the beautiful red and white banded, cross-bedded Navajo slickrock slab (3rd class) on a large rib. Remember this slab - it is an important landmark on the return trip. Follow the drainage down the slab and find a way to the wash below. Note the interesting slit

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canyon behind you. Follow the wash down and out to the main canyon.

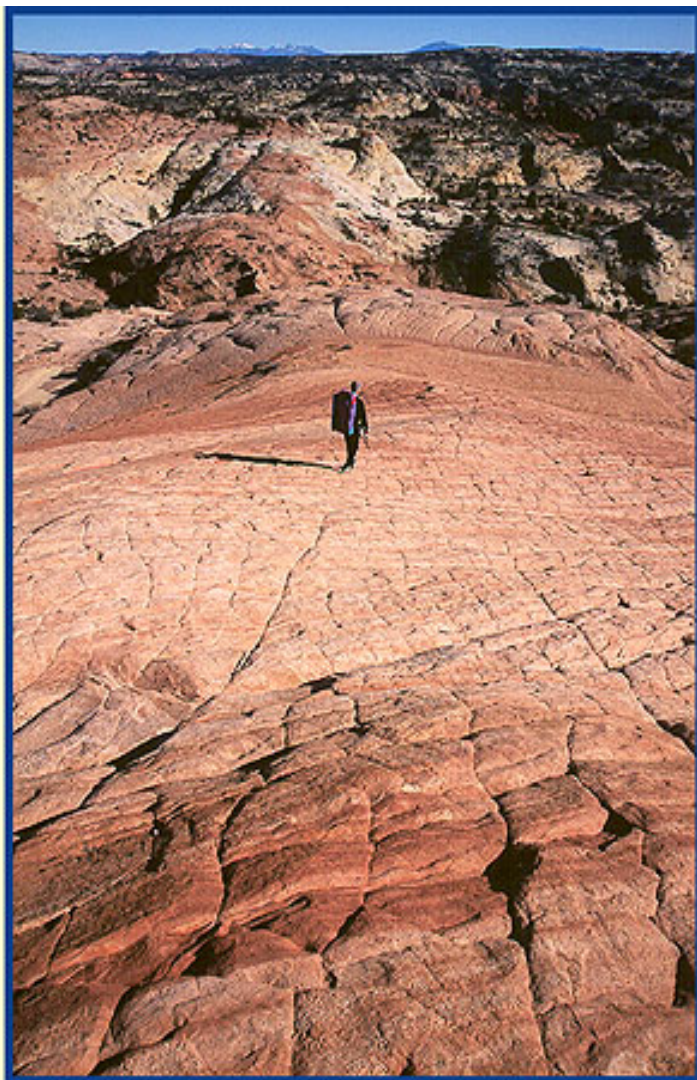
In a couple of minutes, the wash exits through two sandstone towers (the 'Gates') and opens up. The North Fork of Phipps Wash comes in on the left (N). Note also the Big Red Dome to the left (NW). Noting these features will help you return to this point. (1.0 - 1.5 hours to this point).

Continue down canyon. Phipps Arch is a tiny bit tricky to locate. Pay attention to the following details. Ten minutes downcanyon, the first side canyon enters on the right (E).

Another five minutes downcanyon, the second side canyon comes in on the right (E). Phipps Wash narrows into a deep-walled canyon, with a fine trickle of water and wonderful large trees. This is a glorious area and offers many fine campsites.

Thirty minutes from the second side canyon, after a long section without sidecanyons, the third side canyon enters on the right (SE). This marks the start of the trail to Phipps Arch. For those doing Route 2, the hike up to the arch is a digression. Leave your backpack at the base of the trail. Those doing Route 1 will not return to Phipps Wash. (2.0 - 2.5 hours to this point).

To Phipps Arch A small but obvious trail starts on a slickrock hill on the downcanyon (N) side of the mouth of the side canyon. Follow a heavily cairned trail northeast up steep slickrock (Class 3) to the arch. (The arch is shown on the map.)



Heading into the Escalante

Route 1 Finish: Back to the trailhead Walk through the arch, then go north (R) for 200 yards to a short steep slickrock gully that drops from the wall on the right. Scramble up the gully (Class 4) to a small saddle. Climb Right (southeast) up a steep slab (Class 4), cross the top of a dome, and scramble down its far side (Class 4). Select a route east across astounding slickrock to the rim of the canyon, then head 1 mile southeast to the height of land and a big pinyon/juniper ridge. (If this route is too difficult, simply reverse the hike back to the trailhead.)

Turn right. Follow the height of land Southwest for about 1-1/2 miles to where the view opens up. You can see the escarpment where you started, the slit canyon and the big red dome. Follow directions at the end of this hike to get back to your car.

Route 2: To the Escalante River From the base of the trail to Phipps Arch, fifteen minutes downcanyon a side canyon comes in on the left (W).

Digression: The rather unimpressive Maverick Natural Bridge is a ten minutes up this narrow, tree-lined canyon. The bridge is incorrectly marked on the Calf Creek Quadrangle.

It takes another thirty minutes to reach the Escalante River. There is good camping in the area. You are about 1-1/2 miles down the Escalante River from Route 12.

To Deer Canyon Follow the right side of the river until it encounters a wall, then cross. Deer Canyon comes in on the left (NW) in ten minutes. There is good camping in the vicinity. (Deer Canyon is not named on the map. It contains Bowington Arch. Do not confuse Deer Canyon with Deer Creek.)

Explore Deer Canyon Deer Canyon is a wonderful, pastoral slickrock canyon. Lush vegetation in the bottom leads to several interesting waterfalls and pools. About a half mile up, on the right, some pictographs are found under an alcove. Look sharp to find these. Where the canyon divides, continue on 100 yards, then look up at the head of the gully on the left to discover the charming Bowington Arch. A trail leads to the arch.

The canyon shortly boxes out in all branches. An exit (4th Class) can be made to the slickrock terrain above. This may allow access to the Petroglyphs marked at the base of the large white bluff to the North. Explore at will, then return to the river.



Phipps Arch

Escaping the Escalante River From the mouth of Deer Canyon go down the Escalante River for two minutes and get a clear view of the other side. A break can be seen in the lowest cliff band slightly downriver, right next to where a small stream comes in. Cross the river and head to the break. (Last chance to fill up on water).

The break has been enhanced with logs, and makes for easy 3rd class passage through the cliffband. This is the only break in the cliff in this vicinity.

You are now at the bottom of a steep ridge heading up and right toward a large Navajo tower. Climb the slope up and right to the base of the tower at the right hand skyline, then follow the edge of the tower around left to the narrow ridge connecting

the tower to the land behind. Follow the narrow ridge (Class 3) and then continue straight ahead (SW) and climb to the height of land.



Back to the Trailhead Follow the top of a broad pinyon-and-juniper forested ridge on a bearing of magnetic south for about 2 miles. Expansive views are to be had in every direction. You can now see the escarpment of white sandstone you started on. The red-and-white-banded slab should be visible, and the slit canyon and large red dome in front of it. Follow the big ridge and height of land all the way to the closest point of the escarpment, generally staying left. The ridge intersects the escarpment about 1 mile east of the starting point, and about 1/2 mile in front (N) of the main line of the escarpment. From this point, traverse down and right toward the red dome, the Navajo towers and the 'Gates', weaving in and out of a few washes, until easily reaching the canyon floor at a wide open area. There are few possible descents into Phipps Wash, but this one is not hard to find and is very easy (Class 2). Retrace your steps to the trailhead.

