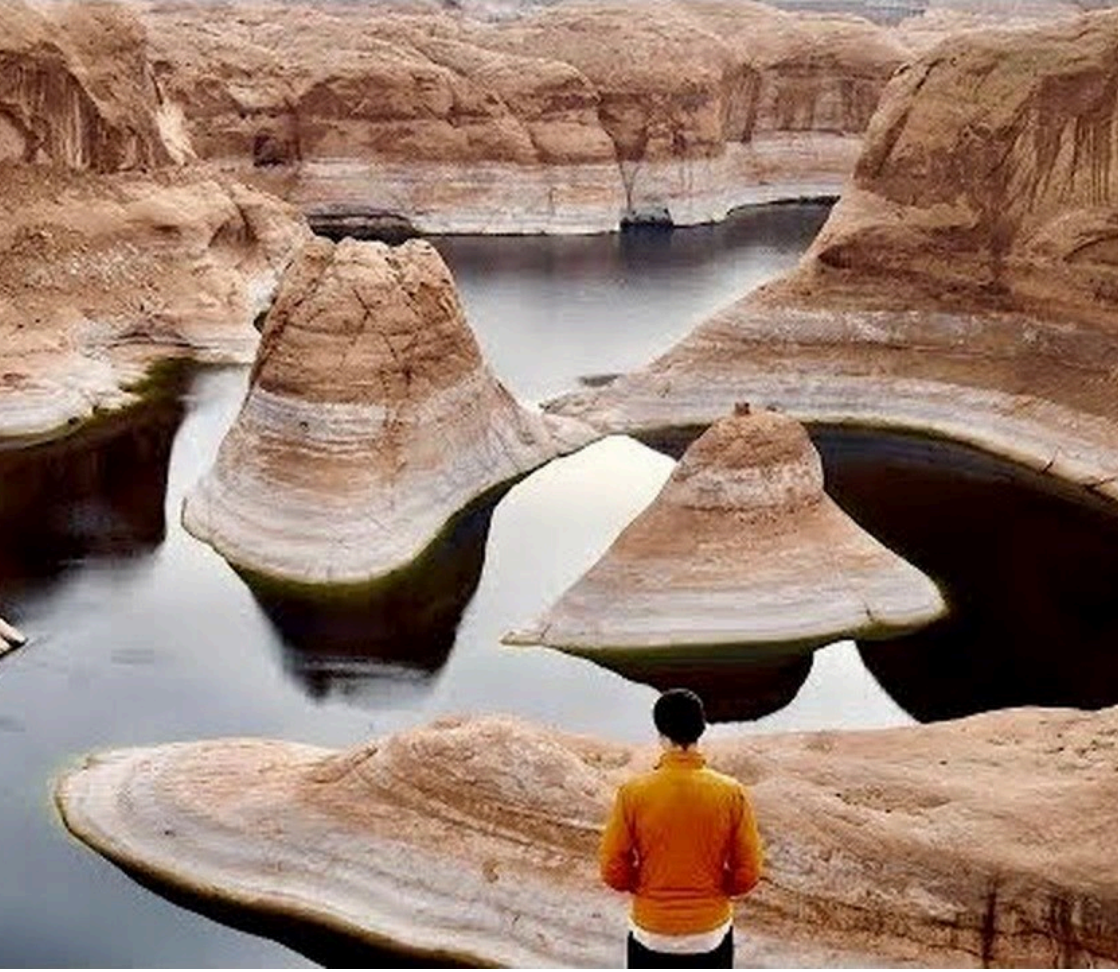


KRAIG ADAMS

Reflection Canyon Hiking Guide

Hole-in-the-Rock Road to the rim above Lake Powell in 2 days

2027 season edition · updated October 2026

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Welcome

In November 2020 my brother Kurtis and I hiked out to Reflection Canyon, the famous view of Lake Powell's meanders in southern Utah, and camped on the rim. We drove down Hole-in-the-Rock Road from Escalante in a rented Jeep, walked about 8.4 miles across the desert and the slickrock to the rim in an afternoon, camped there for the sunrise, and walked the same way back the next morning. About 17.1 miles round trip by my GPS: 8.4 out and 8.7 back. It's the trip from my film Hiking 20 Miles to Reflection Canyon Utah.

It's isolated. There's no water, no cell service and barely anyone out there, and for a good part of it there's no trail you can see. You won't see the canyon until the last second.

Good to know first (October 2026). You need a free backcountry permit to camp, from the visitor center in Escalante. Hole-in-the-Rock Road was passable to high-clearance cars in September 2026, with 4WD recommended near the end, and it's impassable when wet. Lake Powell is at a record low in 2026, so the water in the canyon sits much lower than in my photos. See Is it open?.

What's inside

- Where things stand in October 2026, and straight answers to the questions people ask about Reflection Canyon
- When to go, the permit and camping rules, and the drive down Hole-in-the-Rock Road
- Both days: my notes, the route, where to turn back, maps with elevation profiles, and links to that day in my film
- Other ways to do it, where we slept, food and water, what it costs, what I carried
- Heat, water and safety, one page of things to check before you go, and a printable trip sheet

How to use it offline

Save this PDF to your phone's Files or Books app before you leave home. Load the GPX files and download offline maps in Escalante: there's no cell service on Hole-in-the-Rock Road or on the route. Each day starts on a new page. The film links need a connection; everything else works in airplane mode.

When I say "I," it's my own trip. Rules and prices change, so they're dated, and the checks are collected on one page: Before you go, check these. Times are Utah time (Mountain Time). Prices are in US dollars.

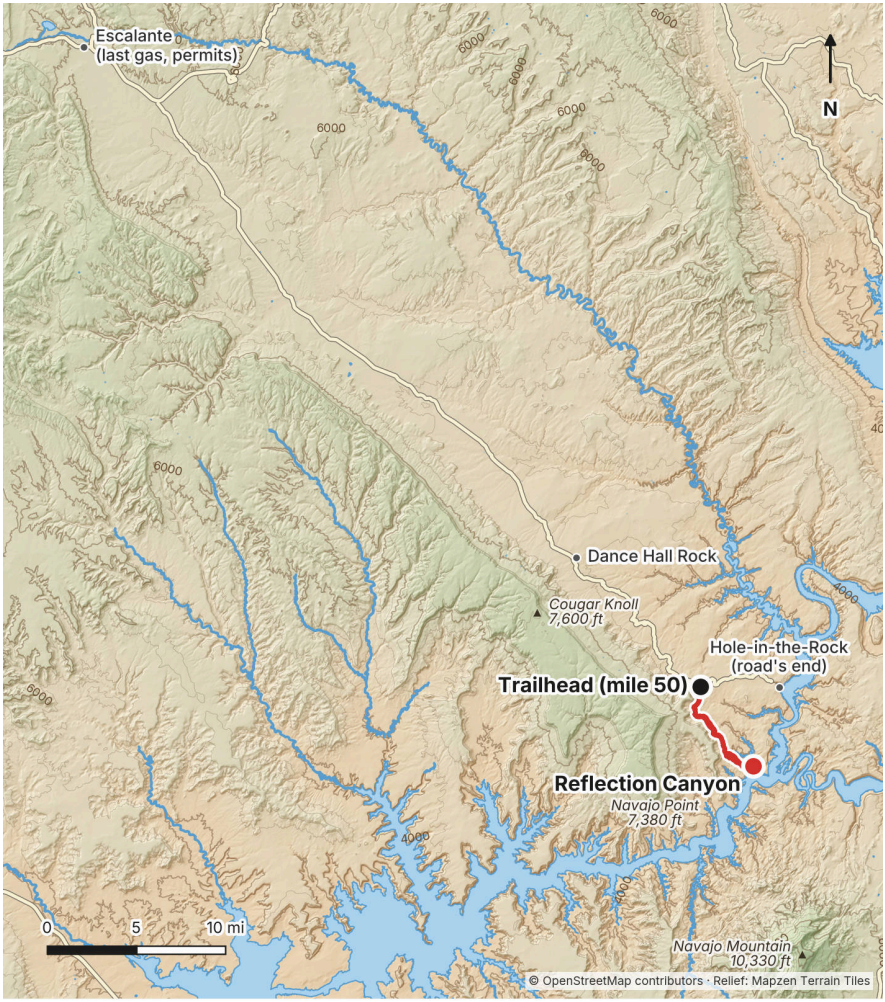


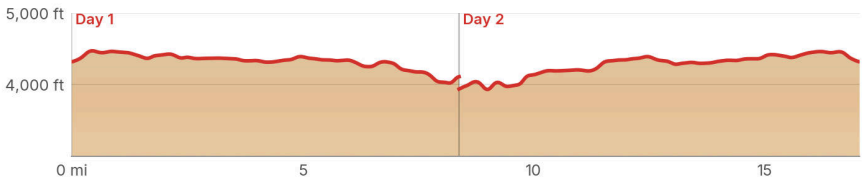
Reflection Canyon from the rim, Day 1 at mile 8.3.

At a glance

QUICK FACTS	
Distance	17.1 miles (27.5 km) round trip by my GPS: 8.4 out, 8.7 back. Other sources give 15.6 to 18 miles, depending on the line you take
Climbing	About 1,480 ft (450 m) up and 1,320 ft (400 m) down in all, by my GPS. It's mostly flat, with gullies to cross
Days	2: an afternoon out, a morning back
Start and finish	An unsigned pullout on Hole-in-the-Rock Road, about mile 50 from Highway 12, about 4,310 ft (1,315 m)
High point	About 4,480 ft (1,365 m) by my GPS, early on the benches
Sleep	Our tents on the slickrock rim above Reflection Canyon, about 4,110 ft (1,254 m)
Difficulty	Not steep, but long, hot and off trail: much of it is cairned slickrock with no path. GPS needed
Water	None on the route. Carry all of it
Permits (2026)	A free backcountry permit to camp; Glen Canyon's entrance fee

DAY	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)	SLEEP
1	Trailhead to the Reflection Canyon rim	8.4 (13.5)	544 / 758	Our tents on the rim, about 4,110 ft
2	The rim back to the trailhead	8.7 (14.0)	937 / 561	





The drive from Escalante down Hole-in-the-Rock Road to the trailhead, and my route to Reflection Canyon above Lake Powell. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Is it open? (October 2026)

Checked on the National Park Service's pages for Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (permits, camping, hiking, fees, alerts and the 2026 Superintendent's Compendium) and the Bureau of Land Management's road report for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, on October 3, 2026.

Open. Glen Canyon's three current alerts (a Lake Powell water advisory, launch ramps and a campground at Lees Ferry) don't touch Hole-in-the-Rock Road or the Escalante District. Reflection Canyon isn't a maintained trail, so the Park Service doesn't list its condition.

The road. The BLM's road report of September 18, 2026 rates Hole-in-the-Rock Road "2WD High Clearance," with flooded areas in places, heavy washboard to Dry Fork, and high-clearance 4WD recommended for the last 7 miles (the trailhead is about 12 miles before the end, so most of that stretch is past it; hikers still advise high clearance and 4WD for the last miles to the trailhead). The BLM also says it isn't updating the report as often as it would like, so call the visitor center for the latest. Garfield County chip-sealed about the first 10 miles of the road in spring 2026, as reported; the rest is gravel and dirt.

Lake Powell is at a record low. The lake was at 3,518 ft on September 30, 2026, by the Park Service's count, after a modern record low in mid-September. The view is still there, but the water in the meanders is lower and narrower than in my November 2020 photos, with more bleached "bathtub ring" on the walls. Check the lake level on the Park Service's Lake Powell page before you go.

What to do. The week before you go, check the BLM road report and the Glen Canyon alerts page, and look at the forecast: rain makes the road impassable.

Straight answers

How hard is it? Not steep, but it's long and hot, and the navigation is the hard part. We were definitely booking it: about three hours out and two and a half back, with only water breaks and stops to film. The first part follows a path through the sagebrush. Past that it's bare white slickrock with no trail you can see, just cairns, and it's easy to get a little lost. That part was kind of fun: it's like running up and down really smooth rock faces, finding the best way across.

How far is it? 8.4 miles out and 8.7 back by my GPS, about 17.1 miles. My film title says 20 miles, and in the film I say eight and a half each way. Other sources give 15.6 to 18 miles for the round trip.

Do I need a permit? Yes, to camp: a free backcountry permit for any overnight stay in Glen Canyon's Escalante District, from the Escalante Interagency Visitor Center (closed Sundays and Mondays), the BLM visitor centers in Kanab or Big Water, or by self-registering at a trailhead (no source confirms a registration box at the Reflection Canyon pullout, so get it in town). There's no quota. A day hike needs no permit. Glen Canyon's entrance fee applies too, and there's no fee station on the road: carry an America the Beautiful or Glen Canyon pass, or buy a 7-day pass online (see What it costs).

Do I need four-wheel drive? We did. My brother's Honda Fit was definitely not an all-terrain vehicle, so we rented a Jeep with real off-road four-wheel drive in Escalante, and we absolutely would not have made it in his car. The road was very bumpy, with a lot of dips through little gullies and big rocks. In September 2026 the BLM rated it passable to high-clearance two-wheel drive, with 4WD recommended for the last 7 miles. Normal rental car contracts don't allow unpaved roads.

Is there water? No. Not on the route, and not from the rim: the canyon walls are massive, smooth and sheer, and there's no way down to the lake. We looked all around. We each carried four or five liters and didn't use it all, but it was November, and the morning walk out was overcast.

Can I fly a drone? No. Drones are banned in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, which includes the rim. I wish I could have flown one there.

Can I have a campfire? Don't. Glen Canyon bans fires in the Escalante drainages, hikers report fires aren't allowed here, and there's no wood anyway. Bring a stove.

Can I bring my dog? Dogs are allowed in Glen Canyon on a 6-foot leash, but there's no water and no shade, and slickrock and sand get very hot. It's not a good hike for most dogs.

Is there a phone signal? No. Not on the road and not on the route. Carry a satellite messenger and leave your plan with someone.



My camera on the rim on the morning of Day 2.

When to go

Early November. We went on November 5 and 6, 2020. The walk out started hot and sunny, but we got lucky with the shade: the sun was behind the ridge for a good part of the afternoon. The next morning had cloud cover, and the walk back was overcast, so the heat was no problem.

The best months. Spring (late March to April) and fall (October to early November). From May to mid-October it's very hot, with no shade anywhere on the route. Glen Canyon reaches 110 °F (43 °C) in summer.

Monsoon and floods. Thunderstorms are most likely from mid-July to September, but they can come at any time. Rain turns parts of Hole-in-the-Rock Road to impassable mud and can strand cars for days. Don't camp in a wash.

Winter. Short days and freezing nights, and snow or rain can close the road.

Weather. Normals for Bullfrog, 4,167 ft (1,270 m), on Lake Powell, about the height of the route (NOAA, 1991 to 2020, as published on Wikipedia):

MONTH	HIGH / LOW °F (°C)
March	63 / 36 (17 / 2)
April	72 / 44 (22 / 7)
May	82 / 53 (28 / 12)
September	88 / 60 (31 / 16)
October	74 / 46 (23 / 8)
November	58 / 34 (14 / 1)

July averages 100 °F (38 °C). Escalante, at about 5,800 ft, is roughly 7 to 10 °F cooler than the trailhead.

Light. We showed up to the canyon just a little late, at about 4:40 p.m. If we'd been there 30 minutes earlier, the sun would still have been on the water, which is what you want. In early November 2020 the sun set at about 5:20 p.m. there (standard time; before the clocks change in early November it's about 6:20 p.m.), and the canyon walls put the water in shade well before that. The next morning the sun rising behind the clouds gave them a lot of red, orange and yellow. Camp on the rim and you get both.

The rules and camping

These were checked on the Park Service's Glen Canyon pages and its 2026 Superintendent's Compendium on October 3, 2026.

The permit. Backcountry permits are required for all overnight stays in the Escalante District of Glen Canyon. They're free and there's no quota. Get one at the Escalante Interagency Visitor Center (755 West Main Street, Escalante, 435-826-5499; its published summer hours are Tuesday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., closed Sunday and Monday; it lists no fall or winter hours, so call ahead), or self-register at a trailhead. Any Grand Staircase-Escalante visitor center can issue it: the ones in Kanab (745 East Highway 89) and Big Water (20 Revolution Way) were open daily, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., in 2026, which helps if you arrive on a Sunday or Monday. It's not on Recreation.gov. The start of the route is on BLM land in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, where the BLM encourages a free permit too, for search and rescue.

Where to camp. Anywhere in the backcountry away from roads, trailheads and developed areas. There are no campsites at Reflection Canyon. People camp on the flat spots of slickrock on the rim, as we did; hikers report only a few small flat spots near the classic view, and the rim is exposed to wind.

Groups. At most 12 people and 3 vehicles. Bigger groups split up and camp at least half a mile apart.

Human waste. Every overnight group must carry a WAG bag or a portable toilet. Pack out all toilet paper; burning it is banned. Within a quarter mile of Lake Powell's shore, solid waste must be packed out, and on bare slickrock you can't dig a hole anyway: pack it all out.

Other rules. No campfires: bring a stove (Glen Canyon's ban covers the Escalante drainages, and fire restrictions can come at any time). No drones anywhere in Glen Canyon. Dogs on a leash of 6 feet or less. Store food and trash where ravens and rodents can't get it. Don't build cairns: the Park Service asks you to rely on your map and your GPS. Take nothing, and carry out all your trash.

Getting there

My way in, 2020. This was the second hike of a trip through the Southwest, after the Grand Canyon. My brother was driving his Honda Fit, so we rented a Jeep with off-road four-wheel drive in Escalante and drove from there along the ridge all the way to the trailhead. It took forever, about three and a half hours by my count, and it was very bumpy. We set off on foot at 1:42 p.m.



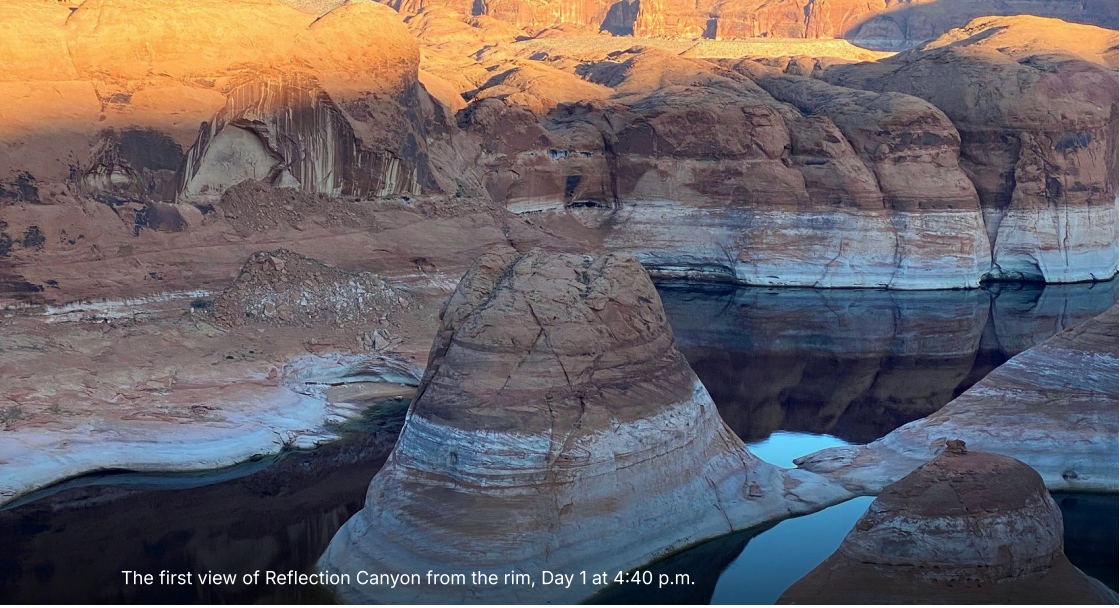
Setting out from the trailhead, Day 1 at mile 0.

Escalante. The town on Highway 12 is the last gas, food and water. The visitor center is there for permits and road conditions. Escalante Outfitters (310 West Main Street) sells maps and gear and has a café; Griffin Grocery is the grocery store and is closed on Sundays, as reported.

Flying in. Las Vegas is about 4 hours 40 minutes from Escalante and Salt Lake City about 4 hours 45 minutes. Cedar City has the nearest airport with scheduled flights, about 2.5 to 3 hours away (estimated). From Page, Arizona, take the paved road through Kanab, about 3.5 hours (estimated); mapping apps may send you down dirt roads that were impassable in September 2026. Arizona doesn't change its clocks, so from March to early November Page is an hour behind Utah.

Hole-in-the-Rock Road. Leave Highway 12 about 5 miles east of Escalante and drive south. The road runs 62 miles to Hole-in-the-Rock above Lake Powell; the trailhead is an unsigned pullout at about mile 50 by my GPS (others give 50.5 to 50.7), at 37.2522, -110.9734. There's no gas, no water and no cell service anywhere on the road. Most people take about 2 to 3 hours from town; we took longer. Don't drive it when it's wet or storms are coming.

The car. High clearance at the very least, and four-wheel drive is the safe choice. Epic Jeep Rentals in Escalante rented lifted four-door Wranglers in 2026 for $345 a day (8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.), from April to October only, with a $500 deposit and multi-day rentals allowed. Its terms don't say whether you can keep one overnight at a trailhead: ask before you book. In November you'd need your own high-clearance car or another rental. Standard rental contracts ban unpaved roads, so a tow or a repair would be yours to pay, and reports put a tow off this road at $500 to well over $1,000.



The first view of Reflection Canyon from the rim, Day 1 at 4:40 p.m.

DAY 1

Contents

The trailhead to Reflection Canyon

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
8.4 mi (13.5 km)	**544 ft** (166 m)	**758 ft** (231 m)	**3.2 hours** (1:42 p.m. to 4:51 p.m.), about 2.9 of them moving

HIGH POINT

about 4,480 ft (1,365 m), early on the benches

ON THE WAY

sagebrush benches below the cliffs, then the slickrock from about mile 5.8, the overlook (mile 8.2)

SLEEP

our tents on the rim, about 4,110 ft (1,254 m)

WATER

none; carry it all

My day

We arrived at the parking area and set off on foot at 1:42 p.m., in the sunlight. It was pretty hot. We brought a lot of water, because we didn't expect any refills.



Sagebrush below the cliffs, Day 1 at mile 2.9.

The first few miles follow a path along one side of the canyon, across a couple of gullies. You can see where you're supposed to hike. We were definitely booking it: no food breaks, just quick stops to film and drink.



The path below the red cliffs, Day 1 at mile 4.1.

Then the dirt runs out. Past this point it's bare white rock and dryness, and the trail is hard to see, so you follow cairns. This part was fun, running up and down really smooth rock faces and finding the best way across. You can get a little lost, so keep checking your GPS.



Onto the slickrock, Day 1 at mile 5.8.



Crossing a slickrock gully, Day 1 at mile 6.5.



Climbing the slickrock, Day 1 at mile 6.6.

Eventually you come up a hill, and you don't see it until the last second: Reflection Canyon. The water is very still, because it's a reservoir. The hills pop out of it, the rock is really white near the water, and then stratified in different colors above. It really is a beautiful and unique place. We got there at about 4:40 p.m., about three hours from the car. The sun had already left the water.



The last miles to the rim, Day 1 at mile 6.7.

We camped on the rim with our tents, at the spot we found had the best view of the whole area. By the time we got up higher for more shots, everything below was in shadow.

The route

The benches. From the pullout the route heads south along the foot of the cliffs, on a path through sagebrush and sand, and crosses the heads of a couple of gullies. It's high, about 4,300 to 4,480 ft, and gently up and down. This is where we had shade from the ridge in the afternoon.



Slickrock country, Day 1 at mile 6.1.

The slickrock. From about mile 5.8 by my GPS the dirt ends and you're on bare sandstone: smooth white and pink rock, with dips and gullies to cross and no trail you can see. There are cairns in places; other hikers report anything from occasional cairns to none for miles. This is where people get lost. Follow your GPS line rather than the cairns, and don't build new ones.



A sandstone fin, Day 1 at mile 6.5.

The rim. The ground drops gently toward the lake, and the canyon appears only at the edge, at about mile 8.2 by my GPS, about 3,970 ft (1,211 m). The walls drop sheer to the water. Our camp was a little higher, about 0.15 miles on, about 4,110 ft (1,254 m). You can walk farther along the rim to other high points for a completely different view.



The slickrock in the low sun, Day 1 at mile 6.2.

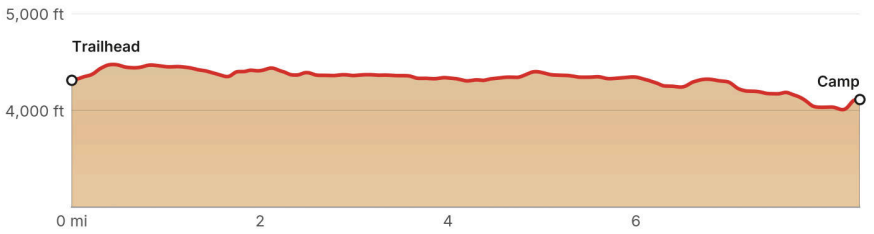
Where to turn back

There's only one way: back the way you came. Turn back if you're behind your plan when you reach the slickrock, if you've already drunk half your water, if storms are building (the road is the bigger danger), or if you've lost the line and can't find it again on your GPS. Arriving in the dark on slickrock near a cliff edge is a bad idea: leave time to reach the rim in daylight.

Watch this day

Day 1 · The drive and the route on the map (from 7:58)





Day 1 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Sunrise over Reflection Canyon, Day 2.

DAY 2

Reflection Canyon back to the trailhead

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
8.7 mi (14.0 km)	**937 ft** (286 m)	**561 ft** (171 m)	**2.9 hours** (8:32 a.m. to 11:26 a.m.), about 2.7 of them moving

HIGH POINT

about 4,480 ft (1,365 m), near the trailhead

ON THE WAY

the slickrock to about mile 2.9, then the benches

FINISH

the pullout on Hole-in-the-Rock Road, about 4,310 ft (1,315 m)

WATER

none

My day

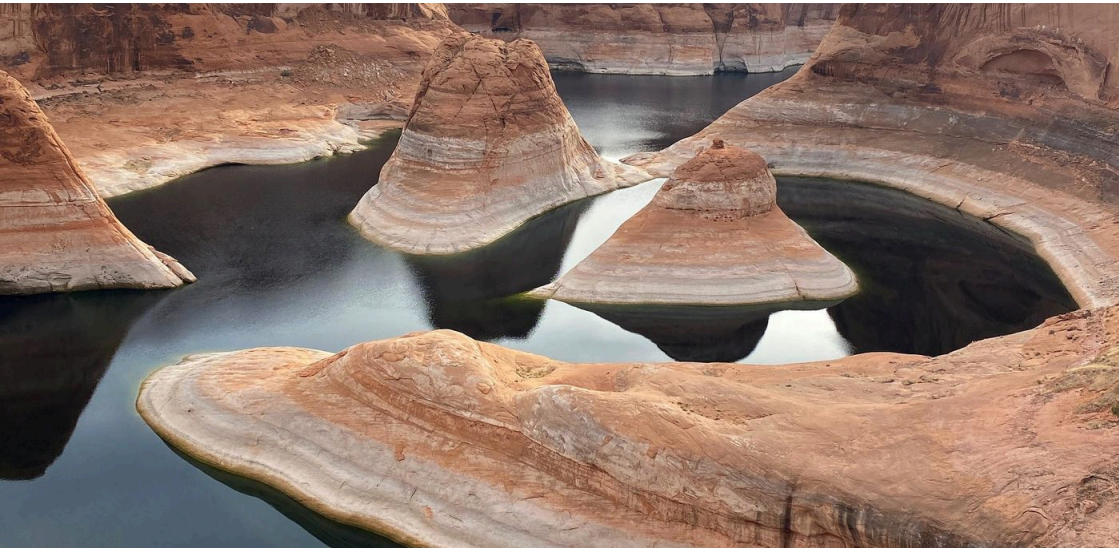
The next morning had some cloud cover, and the sun rising gave a lot of color to the clouds: red, orange and yellow. We took our time getting up, getting sunrise shots and wandering around the rim a little.



Watching the sunrise from the rim, Day 2.



A cloudy morning on the rim, Day 2.



Still water in the morning, Day 2.

We left at 8:32 a.m. and made our way back the same way. It went quicker: we'd already seen all of it, so we stopped less, filmed less and just booked it back, about two and a half hours of walking. Going back there's a little more climbing, but it's pretty flat for most of the hike. It was overcast, so the temperature wasn't an issue.



Slickrock on the way back, Day 2 at mile 2.8.

We were back at the car at 11:26 a.m. There were a couple of other people in the parking area; other than that we didn't see anybody. Then we made the long four-wheel drive back to Escalante and had tacos at a taco stand in town (it has since closed; Escalante's taco place in 2026 is Chihuahua Garcia Mexican Grill on Main Street, as reported).



The path back to the trailhead, Day 2 at mile 4.2.

The route

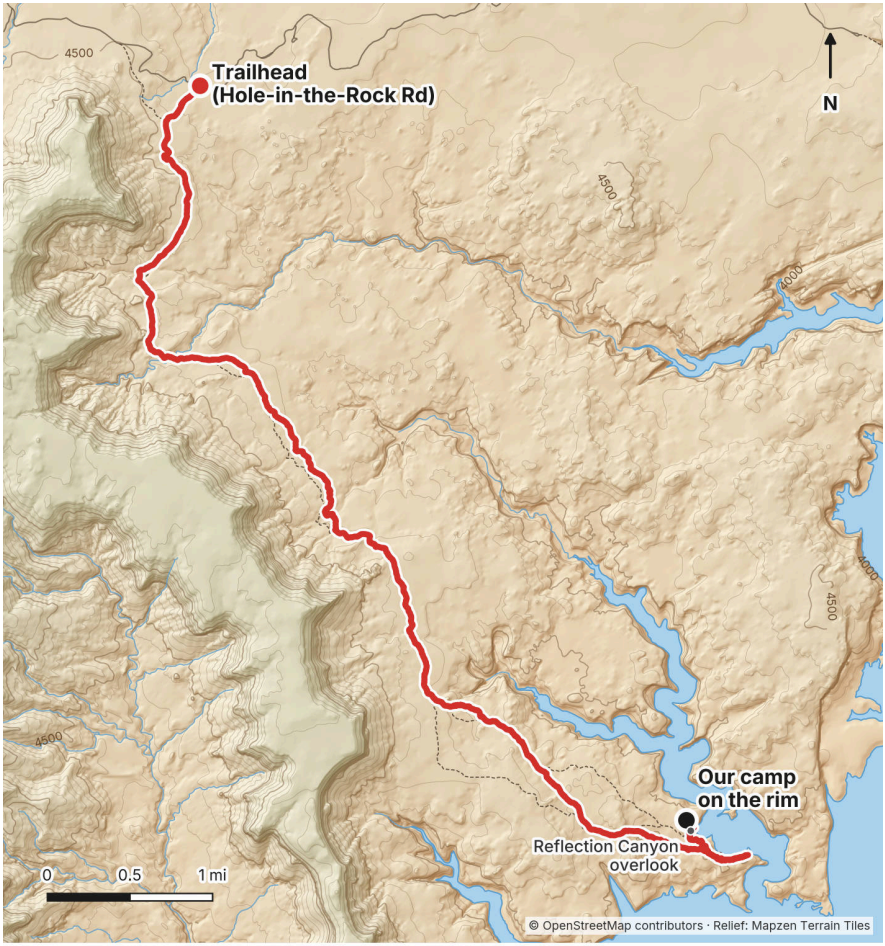
The same line in reverse: the slickrock from the rim for about the first 2.9 miles by my GPS, then the path along the benches. The climbing is a little more than on the way out, about 940 ft by my GPS, most of it gentle, as the ground rises from the lake back up to the road. Watch for where your Day 1 line leaves the slickrock: if you miss it you'll end up on the wrong side of a gully.

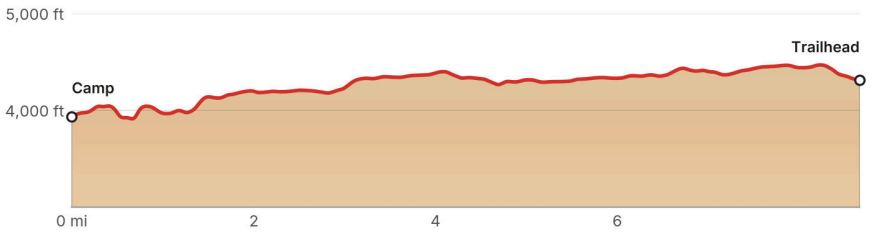
Where to turn back

You're heading out, so the question is when to wait instead. If a storm hits, wait it out on high ground away from the washes and the rim edge. If you run out of water or someone is in trouble, use your satellite messenger: there's no signal anywhere.

Watch this day

Day 2 · Water, safety and the sunrise (from 10:45)





Day 2 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Other ways to do it

Earlier on Day 1

Start in the morning, not after lunch like we did, and you're on the rim with time to spare for the afternoon light on the water. In warm months, start at first light, rest through the heat, and walk the last stretch in the evening.

As a long day hike

It's possible: about 17 miles with no water, no shade and the hardest navigation in the middle. You'd miss the sunset and the sunrise, which is most of the point. The permit isn't needed for a day hike, but sign a trail register if you find one.

Two nights

With enough water, a second night on the rim gives you two sunsets and two sunrises. Water is the limit: plan at least a gallon (4 liters) a person a day, more in warm weather.

By boat

Reflection Canyon is a side canyon of Lake Powell, about lake mile 57. In September 2026 the Halls Crossing ramp was closed and the Bullfrog ramps were limited by the low water, and from the water you don't get the view down onto the meanders. The rim is the way to see it.

Where we slept, food and water

Where we slept

NIGHT	WHERE	HEIGHT
Before	Escalante	
1	Our tents on the rim above Reflection Canyon (Day 1 mile 8.4)	about 4,110 ft (1,254 m)
After	We drove back to Escalante	

Our camp. A spot on the slickrock rim with the best view of the whole canyon we could find, a short walk past the overlook. It's bare rock, so bring a tent you can pitch with rocks or a free-standing one, and expect wind. Stay well back from the edge, especially in the dark.



Our camp on the rim, Day 1 at 5:21 p.m.

Food and water

Food. We didn't stop to eat on the way out: we were booking it. We ate on the rim. Afterward we had tacos in Escalante.

Water. We carried four or five liters each for the overnight in November, with cool weather, and didn't use it all. The Park Service says at least a gallon (4 liters) a person a day; hikers commonly carry 6 to 8 liters each for the overnight in spring and fall, and more in warm weather. Leave extra water in the car for the drive back. There's no water on the route and no way down to the lake from the rim.

What it costs

I didn't keep a list of what this trip cost me.

For your budget (US dollars, as checked in October 2026):

ITEM	COST
Backcountry permit	Free
Glen Canyon entrance	$30 a vehicle for 7 days, or free with an America the Beautiful pass ($80 for US residents, $250 for non-residents in 2026) or a Glen Canyon annual pass ($55). Cashless
A Jeep from Escalante, 2 days	About $690, plus a $500 deposit, if they'll rent it overnight (Epic Jeep Rentals, $345 a day, April to October)
Gas on Hole-in-the-Rock Road and back	About $25 to $50 (estimate)
A night in Escalante	From about $30 for a tent site in Escalante Petrified Forest State Park to $120 to $140 for a motel
A WAG bag	A few dollars each

That's about $100 to $200 for two people with your own high-clearance 4WD and a park pass, or about $800 to $1,100 with a rented Jeep, a motel and meals out, before flights or the drive to Escalante.

What I carried

From my film and photos (I have no full gear list for this trip):

- **Water:** four or five liters each
- **Sleeping:** a tent each, pitched on the slickrock
- **Camera:** my Panasonic Lumix S5 with the 20 to 60 mm lens on a tripod, and a Rode VideoMic NTG with a dead cat for the wind. My full gear kit is on kraigadams.com
- **Navigation:** the AllTrails app with an offline map, which recorded both days
- **Layers:** a warm puffy jacket for the morning on the rim in November

What this hike needs:

- All your water (at least a gallon a person a day; 6 to 8 liters each for the overnight in spring or fall), plus more in the car
- A stove (no fires), and a WAG bag for each person
- The offline map and GPX files, a charged phone and a backup battery, and a satellite messenger
- Sun protection: a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen; there's no shade
- Warm layers for the night: it freezes in November
- A headlamp, in case you walk out at dusk or wander the rim before sunrise

Heat, water and safety

Emergencies. Call 911 if you can get through; there's no cell service on the road or the route, so carry a satellite messenger. County sheriffs run search and rescue on Hole-in-the-Rock Road, with the BLM and the Park Service. Leave your plan, your route and your return time with someone at home.

Heat. Summers reach 110 °F (43 °C), and there's no shade at all. Hike in spring or fall, start early, and rest in the heat of the day. For dizziness, nausea or a headache, get out of the sun, drink, and wet your clothes.

Water. The rule: carry it all, and more than you think. One hiker carried three gallons a day in September and still ran out a mile from the car, as reported.

Navigation. There's no official trail. The Park Service doesn't maintain or describe the route, and much of it is slickrock where footprints don't show. Have the GPX on your phone and check it often, especially on the slickrock.

The rim. The canyon walls are sheer and very high. Stay back from the edge, especially in the wind, the dark or the morning dew.

Flash floods and the road. A storm miles away can send water down the washes you cross. The bigger risk is Hole-in-the-Rock Road: rain can turn it to mud and strand cars for days. Check the forecast before you drive in.

Wildlife. Rattlesnakes, scorpions and black widows live here. A scorpion sting is usually like a strong bee sting; a rattlesnake or black widow bite needs a doctor right away. Watch where you put your hands.

Using the GPX files

My own GPS recordings, with all timestamps removed.

FILE	WHAT IT IS
reflection-canyon-day-1.gpx	Day 1: the trailhead on Hole-in-the-Rock Road to our camp on the rim, 8.4 mi
reflection-canyon-day-2.gpx	Day 2: the rim back to the trailhead, 8.7 mi
reflection-canyon-full-route.gpx	Both days in one file, with waypoints for the trailhead, the overlook and our camp

The tracks show where we actually went: a record of my trip, not an official trail, because there isn't one. The two days don't follow exactly the same line, since on the slickrock you pick your own way. My Day 2 recording has a 15-second break, so it's two pieces almost touching.

AllTrails: on alltrails.com, create a new map and use Import (offline maps need a paid plan). **Gaia GPS:** open the file on your phone and choose Gaia GPS, or Import on gaiagps.com. **Garmin:** Garmin Connect on the web, Training, Courses, Import, then send it to your watch. **Organic Maps** (free): download the offline map for Utah, then open the GPX file with it.

Before you go, check these

These change every year. Everything else in this guide stays the same.

Is it open?

- The BLM's road report for Grand Staircase-Escalante, and the Glen Canyon alerts page
- The forecast for Escalante and Bullfrog: don't drive the road when it's wet or storms are coming
- Lake Powell's level (the Park Service's lake-level page), so you know what the water will look like
- Whether the permit is still free, and the visitor center's hours that season (435-826-5499)

Getting there

- A high-clearance 4WD, booked if you're renting, and whether you can leave it overnight at a trailhead
- A full tank in Escalante
- Your park pass, bought online or an America the Beautiful pass, since the park is cashless

Your stuff

- All your water, plus extra in the car
- A stove, WAG bags, warm layers, sun protection and a headlamp
- Offline maps and the GPX files on your phone, and a satellite messenger

One-page trip sheet

DAY	MI (KM)	FROM, TO	SLEEP	NOTES
1	8.4 (13.5)	Trailhead to the Reflection Canyon rim	Our tents on the rim, about 4,110 ft	Path on the benches to about mile 5.8, then slickrock and cairns; the overlook at 8.2. No water
2	8.7 (14.0)	The rim back to the trailhead		Slickrock to about mile 2.9, then the benches. No water
Total	**17.1 (27.5)**			**About 1,480 ft up, 1,320 ft down**

Miles, climbing and heights are from my GPS; other sources give 15.6 to 18 miles round trip. Peak heights on the maps are OpenStreetMap's.

Places: Escalante (last gas, permits) · Hole-in-the-Rock Road · the trailhead, about mile 50, about 4,310 ft · the benches below the cliffs · the slickrock · the Reflection Canyon overlook, about 3,970 ft · our camp on the rim, about 4,110 ft

Status (October 2026): open. Hole-in-the-Rock Road high-clearance 2WD in September 2026, 4WD recommended for the last 7 miles, impassable when wet. Lake Powell at a record low.

Permit (2026): free backcountry permit for any overnight stay, from the Escalante Interagency Visitor Center. Glen Canyon entrance $30 a vehicle, cashless.

Rules: no fires, no drones, WAG bags required, pack out toilet paper, dogs on a 6-foot leash, groups of 12 or fewer.

Water: none. At least a gallon a person a day.

Emergency: 911, with a satellite messenger: no cell service.

About this guide

Reflection Canyon Hiking Guide: Hole-in-the-Rock Road to the rim above Lake Powell in 2 days, by Kraig Adams. 2027 season edition, updated October 2026.

I hiked it with my brother on November 5 and 6, 2020, and made a film about it: Hiking 20 Miles to Reflection Canyon Utah. Everything in first person comes from that trip: the film and its description, my GPS recordings and our photos. Rules, access and safety facts were checked on October 3, 2026, and anything that changes yearly is dated.

Updates and contact. If something has changed, or you spot a mistake, email me at kraig@kraigadams.com.

No affiliate links. There are none in this guide, and nobody paid for a mention in it.

Safety. Reflection Canyon has real risks: heat, no water, no trail, sheer cliffs, a long dirt road that floods, and no phone signal. This guide describes my trip, not current conditions. Check with the visitor center, carry more water than you think, and turn back when conditions aren't right. You're responsible for your own safety.

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Credits. Photos are from the trip, taken by me and my brother; the cover is my film's YouTube thumbnail. GPX files are my own recordings. Maps © OpenStreetMap contributors, openstreetmap.org/copyright (ODbL). Relief: Mapzen Terrain Tiles. Facts from the National Park Service (Glen Canyon National Recreation Area), the Bureau of Land Management (Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument), NOAA, and the businesses named.