



THE SUBWAY (FROM THE TOP) - ZION WEST SIDE



Rating: 3B

Length: 6-8 hours

Gear: Standard Technical Gear

Maps: The Guardian Angels, UT

Rappels: 3+ to 15 m (50 ft.)

Water: Generally quite a bit, wetsuits required in all but the hottest conditions

Flash Flood Danger: High

Season: Spring, Summer, Fall

Notes: This canyon can be difficult and dangerous in early spring when snow melt is causing the canyon to flow.

Waypoints:

Trailhead	12S 316118mE 4134612mN N37° 20' 24" W113° 04' 33"
Leave Northgate	12S 317571mE 4134480mN N37° 20' 21" W113° 03' 34"
Subway Bottom	12S 319191mE 4132060mN N37° 19' 03" W113° 02' 26"
End of Subway	12S 318086mE 4131288mN N37° 18' 38" W113° 03' 10"
End Red Falls	12S 317868mE 4131101mN N37° 18' 31" W113° 03' 19"
Dino Print	12S 316529mE 4130113mN N37° 17' 58" W113° 04' 12"
Exit	12S 315186mE 4128995mN N37° 17' 21" W113° 05' 06"
Exit Trailhead	12S 314214mE 4128530mN N37° 17' 05" W113° 05' 45"

A permit is required for this canyon. For permit information see this page (<https://www.nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/canyoneeringpermits.htm>) .

Hype

Intro

The Subway, also known as the Left Fork of Great West Canyon, is likely the second most sought after place to visit in Zion National Park after the Narrows. It often makes "Top Natural Wonders Of the World" lists, and on any given visit you are likely to run into international visitors. Why the attraction? The Subway offers stunning scenery and colors. The curved walls, crystal clear stream, and vibrant colors will leave an impression on most everyone that visits.

The popularity of the Subway has, unfortunately, led to more oversight and management of it than other areas of the park. No matter how you visit it, you must have a permit and visitation is limited. See the NPS site for current permit information. Getting a permit is difficult in the prime summer season. If you are a Zion Express account holder, I have had the best luck with the last minute lottery.

How to Visit The Subway

There are two ways to do the Subway:

Bottom Up

Visiting from the bottom up is about 9 miles round trip and sees the bottom end of the Subway before a waterfall blocks upstream progress. This is suitable for all hikers, though is a moderately strenuous day. It does not visit the icon spot with the log angling down into the Subway, but is an amazing hike and recommended if you do not have any technical canyoneering experience.

Top Down

Visiting the Subway from the top down sees much more of the canyon, but at a price. It requires a car shuttle (or hitchhike), and the route itself is technical, involving several short rappels. **You must have technical experience to do the Subway from the top down safely.** There have been many accidents, fatalities, and near misses by inexperienced hikers getting in over their heads in the top-down route. It is very easy for those with any technical canyoneering experience, but without technical experience, it can become dangerous very quickly. Wetsuits recommended in all but the very hottest conditions.

If you have technical experience, opt for the top-down route. It is by far the best way to see the Subway.

This description is for the top-down route.

Tags: canyon, wetsuit needed, family friendly, beginner, access: paved

Trailhead

From the Zion Visitor center, head west on UT-9 for about 12 miles until you reach the town of Virgin. The Kolob Reservoir Road goes off on the right as you enter town. Follow the Kolob Reservoir for 8.2 miles to the Left Fork Trailhead on the right hand side of the road. **This is the exit trailhead, leave a car here.**

To reach the trailhead, continue on the Kolob road another 4.7 miles (12.9 total from Virgin) to the Wildcat Trailhead on the right. It is right on a curve, and has a pit toilet. Be sure not to park on any vegetation, as I have seen cars ticketed for this.

Route

Follow the Wildcat trail about 15-20 minutes to its junction with Northgate Peaks. Go right, on the Northgate Peaks trail for several minutes until the signed junction with the Subway trail going off to the left.

Follow the Subway trail, and cairns, along the slickrock on the right for 5 minutes or so until it drops off slickrock and onto dirt. The trail is now easy to follow as it makes its way down to and crosses Russell Gulch. After crossing Russell Gulch, it climbs slickrock to a small pass, then descends the other side. Social trails here can be confusing. Stay on the most used trail to a point with Left Fork ahead of you and Russell Gulch on the right. Here the social trails coalesce, and a single trail descends steeply into Russell Gulch. At the bottom, you may have a pool to cross, and then it is 2 minutes down to Left Fork.

Head down Left Fork, soon coming to a boulder pile and your first obstacle. Rappel this on the right, or highly skilled can downclimb it though it is a bit wide at the bottom.

The canyon becomes more of a slot, and you will likely encounter your first swims. The first of these can be avoided on the right, but not for long. When the canyon turns left, and you reach a 5 m (17 ft.) drop, you are at the Subway. Rappel the drop, and find the iconic Subway log at the next bend.

Below the log, it is an easy 5 minutes to the final obstacle, a waterfall into a slot. Carefully traverse over the head of the waterfall on the left side, and walk the slickrock ledge a short distance to an anchor that allows for a 15 m (50 ft.) rappel below the slot section.

Once down, the technical difficulties are over, and you will likely see many hikers who have hiked up from the bottom. Hiking up the water filled slot to the waterfall is worthwhile, and makes for great pictures.

As you leave the Subway, the canyon opens quickly with fantastic red sandstone cascades. Criss-cross the canyon on social trails trying to find the easiest path. From the end of the red falls, it is about 30-45 minutes to a large boulder on the right with dino prints. A good landmark.

The exit can be hard to find, especially if you are not paying attention, or it is running late. Keep an eye out on the right. Two side canyons come in about an hour or 90 minutes from the last red cascades. The exit is just past the prominent side canyon, about 5 minutes and usually marked with cairns. Find it, and climb it steeply to the mesa top, and then a few minutes across the mesa to the exit trailhead.

