

Easter on Deva Temple

When I felt the sharp pain that a rock makes on a bare kneecap, it occurred to me that we were only twenty minutes in to our day long trek to Deva Temple and I was already sucking wind and bleeding. The ascent off the Clear Creek Trail begins about 200 yards from a wash that drains into Clear Creek. My friend and guide, Shayne Hall, had made the ascent to Deva twice before. However, he had started at a higher and much closer base camp.



We had started at the South Kaibab Trailhead at 7200', went down to the Colorado River at 2400', then back up to 3600' at Sumner Wash for our first campsite. Brian and John, our other hiking companions had suffered injuries and general exhaustion at the beginning of the six day backpacking trip, two days and sixteen miles ago. Brian had injured his right hip, not from his previous climb of Mt. Rainier or our last Grand Canyon backpack six months earlier, but from a slip on the front porch at his Florida home. By the end of day two and six additional miles along the Tonto platform his hip sounded and felt like a bad transmission. John, his 27 year old son, was feeling the effects of the long distance with a heavy load and the difference in altitude from his sea-level training in Florida.



At 53, I was the oldest member of our foursome and having the distinct advantage of living in the southwest (Las Vegas), was able to train at similar altitudes and terrain at Red Rock Conservation Area and Zion National Park. Though sore and a little tired I was still "up" for the temple adventure.

We had decided to forgo our original campsite at the 4300' level which was two miles closer to Deva Temple and instead make base camp at Clear Creek at 3400'. The campsite was an oasis of beautiful cottonwood trees supplying shade, with the perennially flowing Clear Creek as a water source and general mood enhancer. It would



be the perfect place for Brian and John to recoup and recharge for a day. Shayne, of course, was in unbelievable shape and ready for anything.

The previous day had been overcast, cool and windy. From our campsite we had a breathtaking view of Brahma Temple (7500') the temple just south of Deva (7353'). The grey sky and cold wind gave me a real sense of foreboding. I later learned that it had been snowing up there that very day.

That night, curled up in my bag I felt that the next days

hike was going to be unlike any I'd ever done. I woke to see Brahma surrounded in sunlight with only a few visible clouds. Wow, it was clear Easter Sunday morning.



We started out just before 8:30am and after 30 minutes of vertical transit through slippery Shinumo Quartzite we were contouring through steep hills of black brush, prickly pear, hedgehog cactus, and yucca. Shayne would occasionally find a bighorn sheep trail which sped up our movement toward the temple. As suddenly as they would appear, the game trails would vanish. Then it was back to bushwhacking. I looked down at my legs to see them

crosshatched with more red cuts and scratches, this time from the unforgiving black brush.

We could now see Deva Temple to the northwest. Rising up 7353', the white Coconino sandstone temple stood out against the brilliant blue sky. It was still about 5.5 miles and 3600 vertical feet away, but at least the the finish line was in sight.

We dropped into the wash, which spreads southeast from the temple. My trekking poles propelled me, through the sand and gravel, up the wash and around large boulders.



We reached the originally planned campsite after about an hour and a half. It was nicer than I had imagined. Surrounded by Utah juniper and pinion pine, the site offered a few slick rock tent sites in the wash. Shayne had been a little concerned that the small spring there would be dry. We had each taken two liters of water from base camp and also a sport drink for electrolyte supplementation. I was most of the way through one liter.

Fortunately, there were two small pools in the slick rock with a slow drip coming out of the sandstone wall. One pool was filled with dozens of

tadpoles. Shayne immediately started pumping from the “uninhabited” pool. This would allow us to top off each water container and leave a cache of another few liters for the return trip.

We knew that it was not enough to simply rest for five minutes and drink water; given the heavy energy requirements that were to come, we needed more fuel. I pulled out an energy bar and my homemade trail mix (roasted soybeans, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, Craisins, and a sprinkle of M&M’s). Shayne did the same. After our energy and hydration recharge, we headed up the wash. As the altitude increased so did the number of pour-offs we had to scale or, in some cases, go around.

After an hour we reached a narrow and very steep ravine north of Brahma which would be our staircase to the Supai formation. Harvey Butchart described the area briefly in his book *Grand Canyon Treks, 12,000 miles Through The Grand Canyon*. The Redwall isn’t very red at all in the ravine. The red in Grand Canyon Redwall Limestone





actually comes from the above layered Supai Formation. The Redwall portion where we were is in a steep drainage area which has kept it from becoming red is instead a grey-black. The place was also full of purple flowering Redbud trees. We went from boulder hopping in the wash to boulder climbing up the Redwall. I became acutely aware that any fall now would really put one or both of us out of action—maybe permanently. I had to put aside my focus on the beauty of the place so as to not do something stupid and *really* ruin the day.

At one point we came upon what



appeared to be an impassable blockage of huge boulders. This place was also described by Harvey Butchart. He mentioned having to crawl through a hidden hole and noted that there could possibly be another way around. Well if there was, we didn't find it. The maneuver through the rock maze reminded me of scuba diving in the tight caves and underground rivers of northern Florida years before. At least in this case, there was no fear of a regulator being damaged and subsequently drowning. Still, there was a little claustrophobia going on inside my head. Now we needed to pass Shayne's large pack up through the obstacle course since the obstructions prevented him from climbing with it. Once through the hole it was onward and upward. At one point we encountered a tree trunk growing right up the side of a 20 foot vertical rock, and we climbed it! This was great. All the things I used to do as a little boy, I was doing again.

Once atop the Redwall we began contouring north through the Supai level towards Deva. Now the temple was clearly visible. The bigger it got, the more imposing it looked. Deva was named by surveyor Clarence Dutton in the late 1800s. In Hindu mythology Shiva was the destroyer of worlds and Deva was his wife. Wouldn't want to make her angry. The excitement and anticipation of summiting the temple drove us on. The transit through the Supai layers was slow, uneven, and hazardous, and it had become the norm. As before, game trails would appear then disappear. We eventually found a break in the upper level of the Supai formation, which after considerable scrambling brought us up to the saddle between Brahma and Deva. Now we could see for hundreds of miles to the west and south.



During our final refueling and hydration break, Shayne pointed out the actual path to the summit. It would take us up the loose and very steep Coconino sandstone before reaching the limestone top.

I could feel a big difference in the altitude. We had started the hike at 3400' and were now at about 7000'. My steps felt labored, and, in spite of the loads of calories I was burning, I felt a definite chill. The wind was picking up. Zigzagging through the shale proved to be the most challenging climb. The looseness of the surface combined with the steepness made for very unstable conditions. It was, step up: sink, slide down, catch yourself, then another step, repeated again and again. Numerous rock and brush blockages required us to find alternative routes. Progress seemed to slow to a crawl, and I really began to feel the energy drain.

The sight of blue sky over the approaching ridge gave me new energy. We were almost there! Once on the ridge we were in the midst of short, wind-stunted piñon pines and junipers. A brief, comparatively level hike brought us to a high point on the temple. There, about a quarter of a mile away, was the true "peak" of Deva temple. We made our way northwest and around huge room sized chunks of Toroweap limestone.



Scaling these monsters was a little different than most of the day's sandstone scrambling. The limestone had protruding "teeth" about an inch long, which, while easy to step on, wearing boots, was nasty to grab onto with bare hands and to brush up against with bare skin. As we hopped across the jagged rocks, Shayne cautioned me to really



“watch out” as a fall on this limestone would be TOTALLY unforgiving.

Soon a stunning view of the North Rim and Bright Angel Canyon appeared—we were perched at a shear drop-off and we had made it to Deva! Shayne retrieved an old rusty coffee can from under a pile of rocks, it served as the receptacle for the register. The years of temperature extremes had deteriorated the plastic lid and some of the papers had been ruined from the moisture. He

meticulously started to open and read the entries. The oldest was from B. Green in the



early 1960s. Green’s note gave credit to Harvey Butchart, the first to summit it in 1959.

Naturally, one has to assume that there were many Anasazi and Fremont people here years before any of us. Still there were less than 50 names listed since 1959. A far cry from the millions of people who have only seen the canyon at its most popular rims.

We both composed a short, but rather spiritual message in the small spiral notebook that served as the register. Knowing it would be

Easter when we planned the hike, my wife had sent along some chocolate eggs to celebrate the feat. We eagerly ate them and the chicken wraps we had packed that morning along with more trail mix and an energy bar. In spite of the chill in the air, my legs were burning from the direct sun in the cloudless sky.

We had spent only 30 minutes on top, but it was now 3:15. It had taken nearly six hours to reach the summit.

Sundown would be at 7:00. We felt the pressure to get down before dark. My legs and arms were covered with gashes and scrapes, all of which had



been inflicted in the daylight. A return in poor light could result in some major body damage

With trekking poles extended for the traverse down we stepped and slid our way along the shale. Once back on the saddle we decided to take the more direct route down the drainage area rather than trying to find the break in the Supai. While appearing more direct, we quickly discovered that this route was slow due to the

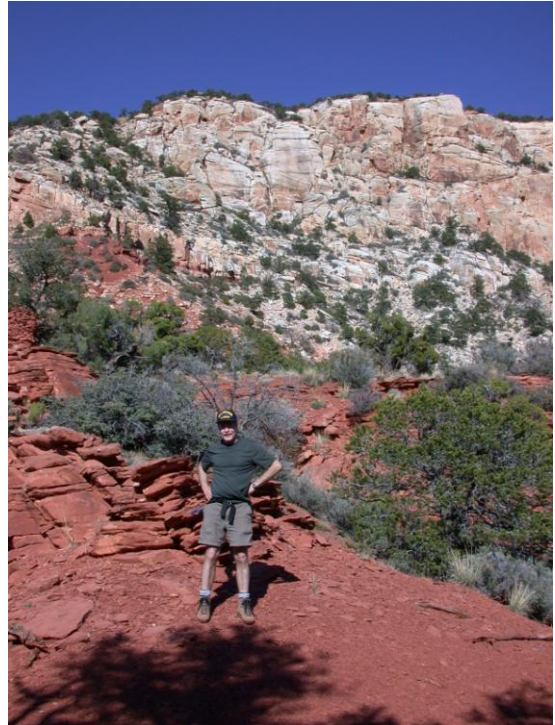


numerous pour-offs. We passed a standing rock which we figured would not be standing for too many more years before the forces of nature toppled it over.

Eventually, we reached the bottom of the Supai levels and contoured through a forest of juniper and pinion trees and subsequently coming to the “elevator” down the Redwall Ravine. The shadows were very dark in there and we did our best to keep up the rate of descent without getting crazy. By the time we

reached the wash below, we were both feeling the effects of the entire day’s activity. We were burning out as rapidly as the sunlight.

We put the poles in Shayne’s big pack and started down the wash. I was in the lead this time. The effect of gravity made the walking seem relatively easy, so I picked up the pace. We began a boulder hopping jog. It didn’t take long before we were flying down the wash. I was in what John Annerino (*Hiking the Grand Canyon*) describes as a state of *disassociation*. That is, placing your mind in a sort of “neutral gear” and just watching the scenery go by. Eventually, I’d have to break the mental state to go into *concentration* mode- when the pour offs were too high to permit jumping down. The first 15 or 20 minutes felt good. Then it occurred to me that the spring was still a substantial distance down the wash. Had the wash grown longer since we climbed it earlier in the day? Once again, I was reminded of how fatigued I was getting.



After a couple of miles we made it to the spring and our water cache. The shadows were getting long.



Howland's Butte to the east was reflecting the red and yellow glow of the setting sun. We still had two miles and over 1000' of descent to go. It would entail going up about 500' through a minefield of black brush, prickly pear, yucca, and rocks. Shayne recommended that since the initial ascent that day had been so extreme, we would simply go a little further to the south- over the black brush hills- and drop down onto the Clear Creek Trail which would lead us right into the Clear Creek campsites. Even if it were dark by

then, it would seem easy to be on an actual trail.



We topped off with water, consumed more energy bars and trail mix, then moved on down the wash, this time using our poles at a slower pace. Our knees were no longer well oiled shock absorbers—every step felt hard and as I moved, I shifted more of my weight onto the poles.

The ascent out of the wash began. It was very steep and I started breathing hard while struggling to maintain footing on the steep terrain. We zigzagged to the top of the hill. Near the top of the first of the three hills, we

began the “in and out” contouring and the inevitable “down and up” hiking. By now, I couldn't even feel the thrashing the black brush was handing out. As long as it wasn't cactus or yucca, I didn't care.

We were burning out by the time we reached the third hill. The sun had set about 10 minutes earlier. The cliché of “give 110%” kept running through my mind. Yep—at this point I really did have to dig down and find whatever “Kei” I had left. To lose the hard focus of will and concentration would not only prolong the return, but could prove to be very dangerous. Time to suck it up.

In the dark, grey light Shayne led us down the slope. He was about 20 feet ahead of me and shouted “Here's the trail!” Sure enough, we were there, and we became like two goofy, giddy little boys who now knew they were going to make it back home.

With trekking poles extended and a renewed charge of “psychic energy”, we headed down the steep trail. Far below we could see a tent light that Brian and John had set up. While it was only a couple of AA batteries bright, it seemed like a lighthouse; guiding us to the safe harbor of our camp site.

The walk down the trail seemed easy except for the fact that the natural light was becoming so minimal. I could see the sides of the narrow trail while the poles acted as a blind man’s cane. We had headlamps, but wanted to hold off on using them since they would blow our night vision. We had been hiking in the receding light for essentially an hour and our eyes were well accommodated. The trail made a 90 degree turn to the west and the light coming from the western sky seemed to outline the sides of the trail even better. We knew that while the trail was smooth and not loaded with rocks, it had a very steep drop-off to the right. Keeping up a moderate pace and feeling ahead with our poles, we finally made the final turn into the wash where we had started that morning.

The white and buff colored rocks appeared almost luminescent compared to the red dirt of the trail. We knew that we did not need our lights just yet. Only when we almost walked through a tent (it had not been there when we left that morning) and came upon Clear Creek did we turn on our headlamps.

The view of the creek and the tree branches was surreal – almost like watching a TV documentary with lights and a great camera.

Voices greeted us from the camp. We suddenly found ourselves in the middle of the “kitchen” with Brian and John congratulating us. The hike had taken 10 hours and 50 minutes. Shayne and I shook hands and gave each other a big bear hug. What a trip! Ever the professional, Shayne immediately went into his automatic guide mode and started preparing dinner. The other two told us they were a little concerned when we weren’t back by dark. They said that if we hadn’t made it back by 9:00 (it was 7:30) they would have eaten without us!

Brian graciously gave me his seat made from two rocks over which he had placed his sleeping pad. It felt better than any sofa or recliner chair I had ever known.

After rewarding ourselves with dinner and shots of tequila (and a bunch of ibuprofen), we got into our sleeping bags. My mind continued to race. I was dog tired, but mentally I could not come down from the experience. I would be just about to drop off to sleep, then I’d see a boulder coming up and I’d shoot my foot out into the sleeping bag. Bang! I was awake again. By now, the multiple scratches and abrasions over my arms and legs were really starting to burn from the sweat and sunscreen. It was not a restful sleep, but I truly felt that with Shayne’s help, I had done something few non-technical hikers had done. For me, it was the mother of all day-hikes. I gave a short thanks to the Almighty for keeping us safe and allowing us to be a part of such an awesome place. Then I went out.

