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Canyoneering: The San Rafael Swell



Synopsis

The first Canyoneering guide! dozens of hikes into the scenic splendor of the San Rafael, for adventurers at every level.

Book Information

Paperback: 260 pages

Publisher: University of Utah Press (October 1, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0874803721

ISBN-13: 978-0874803723

Product Dimensions: 9 x 6 x 0.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #408,323 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Books > Travel > United States > Utah > General #647 in Books > Travel > United States > West > Mountain #1999 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Nature Travel > Adventure

Customer Reviews

Steve Allen's commitment to exploring every nook and cranny in southern Utah's vast network of maze-like canyons has granted him legendary status. His guide to the San Rafael Swell is the first volume in a three-part series that will captivate both novice hikers and elite rock climbers alike.

Unlike many guides, Allen takes time to discuss the Swell's rich history, which undoubtedly lends itself to the reader's greater appreciation for the land. But this guide is not a misty-eyed overview.

Allen knows that canyoneering leads hikers into confusing territory, so his landmark descriptions are presented in meticulous detail. He covers 63 separate adventures and manages to cover them with a skillful writer's grace and a mad scientist's penchant for detail. --Ben Tiffany

We've been exploring the Swell for over ten years now and have found Allen's book absolutely indispensable. This is the backcountry, people, you don't go without GPS, topo maps and some basic BC navigation experience. We prepare by correlating USGS 7.5' topo data to Google Earth and generating GPS waypoints. It works amazingly well if you're careful. Stick to obvious Jeep tracks; trying to pick Navajo knobs atop the reefs can be tricky. We've found Allen's descriptions very useful, even with the inevitable interpretation that occurs. Even the desert BC looks a little different twenty years on. By comparison, my feeling is that Kelsey is a mad man. We refer to his

book when planning and delight in the harrowing accounts of rapping into 'keepers.' I was more agro when I was younger and might have tried some of that "back in the day," but Allen is our go-to guy in the field.

The San Rafael Swell is a huge geological blister located in east central Utah. It is crossed by several creeks and has numerous beautiful canyons, cliffs, mesas, slot canyons, and grottoes. It is also marked by spectacular cliffs of white Navajo sandstone, particularly on the east and southeast borders. There are a few big arches in the Swell and a host of gargoyle rocks. It's a place that, were it anywhere else, would be a National Park or Monument. However, in the scenic wonderland that is southeast Utah, it's just another unexplored place for the most part. Up to this book, the bulk of the Swell's publicity has come from occasional uranium strikes. Author Allen has turned out a masterpiece. The book extensively covers all the things previously discussed, and a lot more, too. Especially interesting is the history of the region. The maps and hikes/tours are clearly described, although I would have preferred measuring in terms of distance rather than time. Quite obvious is Allen's enthusiasm for the place, an enthusiasm brought out in the text. The pictures are good, but I would have preferred some of them in color, given the fantastic breadth of colorful formations in this region. I used the book last May in a brief Jeep tour of the Swell, and found it to be very accurate. I recommend the book highly to anyone who wants to see/explore this magnificent region.

Certainly not perfect, but this guide to the San Rafael Swell in central Utah is invaluable! This is my go-to book for exploring some amazing terrain in the Swell. You definitely need a GPS and TOPO for wherever you go, plus common sense for being miles from nowhere in the middle of the desert. Allen has enthusiasm for such excursions and great respect for preserving wilderness for others to experience. He lived out of his van with his dog for two years while exploring the territory and writing this book which conjures some serious Edward Abbey-ness. I still love to ponder the next adventure that I haven't yet been on in the Swell because of this book--Thanks Steve!

Keep in mind that this book describes the San Rafael Swell. This is a remote, undeveloped part of the world. If you use a guidebook, such as Steve's, that doesn't include all the GPS points and topo maps, then maybe you'll realize that you are going to need more than a guide book to do this stuff safely. And that, my friends, is the genius of Steve's book. It will get you started, but you need to invest some time with maps etc before the trip to do it safely. Route descriptions for this part of the world should be in units of time rather than units of length. Not all 5 mile roads in the San Rafael are

created equal. We've hiked 5 or 6 routes in Steve's book. With proper pre-trip planning, we've always been safe and never seriously lost (we've just experienced temporary navigational inconveniences, so far!) Mike.

This book offers some good ideas for some different adventures in the San Rafael Swell but is somewhat confusing and deceiving. In some of his hike descriptions, Steve uses time instead of distance to detail his routes e.g. hike 19 minutes southeast to the wash, then turn east. This can be misleading because everybody hikes at different paces. If you hike especially fast or slow you may make a turn at the wrong landmark. He also described a route as turning at the E.T. looking rock. - Huh? We missed our landmark and had to phone home. His maps (though meant to be supplements for topo maps) look deceptively one-dimensional, which give a false sense of easy, flat walking. If you're experienced in the backcountry, it's a good list of routes. I would, however, recommend Kelsey's San Rafael book for better maps, landmark descriptions, and distances though you do have to adjust his hike times as he hikes much faster than most. Add time and a half as a general rule.

More maps would be nice. I would have to agree about the using the minutes (ie 70 minutes) for beta. On the other hand one should always take the maps anyway. Opposite of Kelsey, difficulties seem to be over exaggerated, rather than underexaggerated. It would be nice if all authors used the same terminology for difficult and easy, but this will likely never happen. Steve seems to skip over some fantastic stuff, in favor of some more mundane stuff on some hikes, but all you have to do is do some side trips. To get the most out of this (or any) book, leave the paint by numbers route description on occasion and do some exploring on your own. I would still highly recommend the book. It's a great source of info.

Steve's book gives plenty of information to find these hikes with lots of detail about the highlights and routes. Being an experienced mountaineer but a novice canyoneer, I did find selecting hikes a little difficult without a rating system. I would recommend using the Falcon Guide to the same area in conjunction and as a cross reference to avoid getting in over your head. If you can only buy one, get this one, as the 2nd half of the book contains a rich overview of the history and geology of the area which will highly enhance your visit.

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