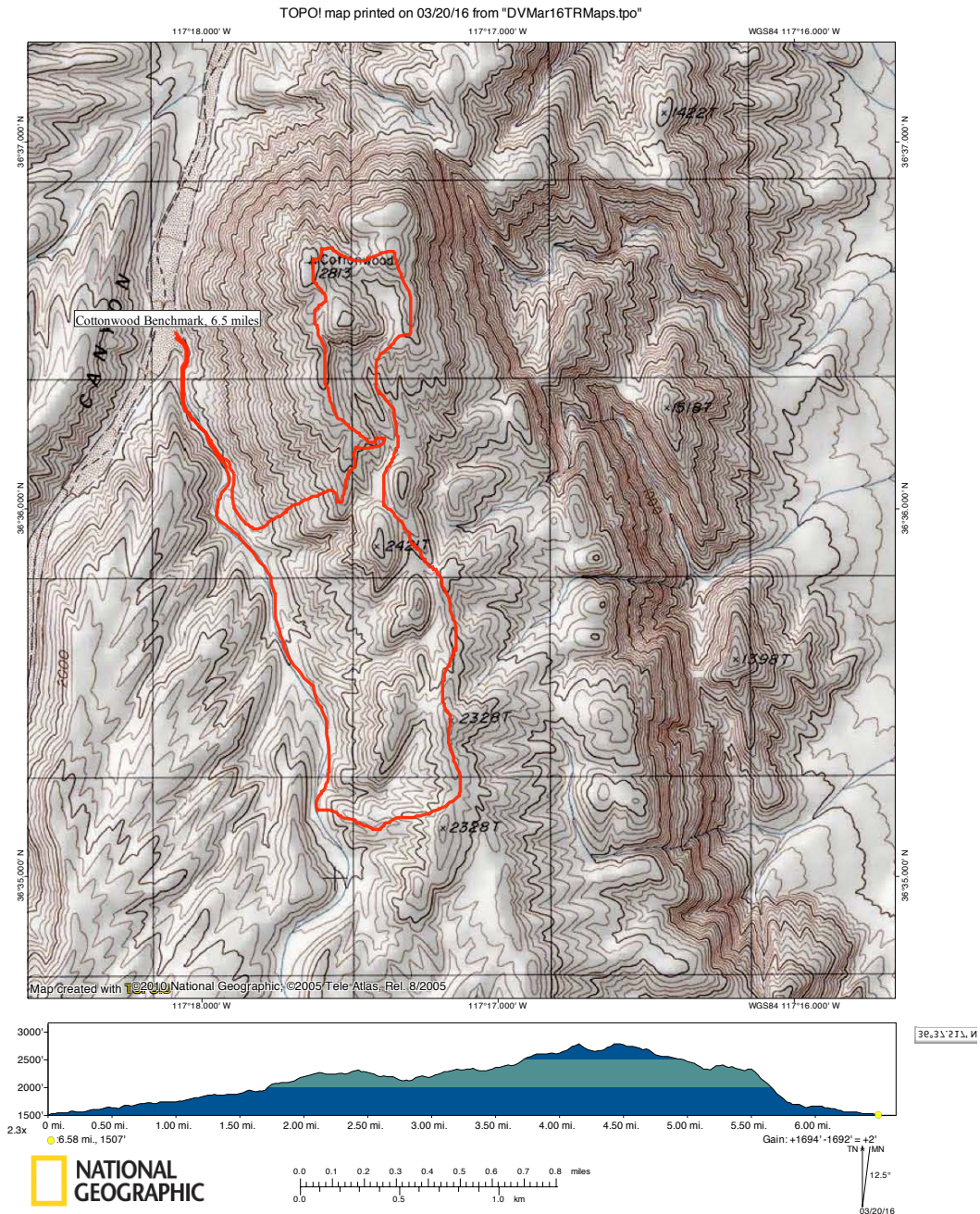


COTTONWOOD BENCHMARK (LONG ROUTE)

On our previous drives to Marble Canyon and to Cottonwood Canyon, we had noticed this prominent high point on the ridge above the Ten Canyons region, and after our hike to "Cottonwood Arch" in December 2015 we decided that the Cottonwood Benchmark would be an excellent choice for one of our March 2016 trip hikes. I haven't found any reports by hikers who have accessed the summit of the benchmark from the south side (like we did), although I'm sure a route similar to the one we did has likely been accomplished by many hikers. The only info I could find suggested ascending the crack on the north side of the benchmark, which, although short, looked quite steep and difficult. So, I mapped out a route which looked like it would be just easy walking to the top; and that turned out to be the case. However, on our way back, since it was getting quite hot, we decided to take a shorter route, as we had a better view of the area from the top of the benchmark. I do not recommend the "shorter" route we took on our return trip, because it crosses some steep and slippery talus with minor climbing necessary. My recommendation is to follow the "longer" route, which we took on the way out, except cross over to the western ridge which we took on the way back. Lastly, the view from the eastern side of the benchmark is not to be missed; one can look down into the uppermost reaches of Canyons 2 and 3 from there, and it is a spectacular view out into the valley as well.

TOPO map of the route:



Panorama from the Cottonwood Canyon Road, with Cottonwood Benchmark the prominent high point in the center of this photo:



This peak caught my attention once we exited the first narrows of Cottonwood Canyon:



Up ahead we are getting our first view of Cottonwood Benchmark, off to the left:



I think some hikers/climbers ascend to the top of Cottonwood Benchmark via the notch seen in the center of this photo:



Looking back out towards the mouth of Cottonwood Canyon from where we parked for this hike:



This view shows where the side canyon (left) which we would follow takes off from the main canyon (right):



Caltha-Leaf Phacelia in the Cottonwood Canyon wash:



There were lots of Brown-Eyed Evening Primrose in this side canyon:



Desert Dandelion:



The early morning lighting made for excellent photographs at the start of the hike:



The Pebble Pincushion always seems difficult to photograph, especially because (like the Gravel Ghost) its stem is often difficult to see:



This turned out to be the route which we would take back from the benchmark:



The best way to show just how many Brown-Eyed Evening Primrose flowers there were in this side canyon seemed to be to photograph them down at their level:



This is probably actually the *smallest* Gravel Ghost I've seen:



There were so many Brown-Eyed Evening Primrose flowers through here that we constantly had to be mindful not to step on any, and, even so, our shoes were covered with pollen by the time we left the side canyon and gained the ridge:



The Bigelow Monkeyflowers were astonishingly tall this year. It is interesting to notice the differing shades of pink that these flowers have, seemingly in different areas of the park:



Looking back down towards the main Cottonwood Canyon wash:



The Brown-Eyed Evening Primrose flowers were literally covering the wash through here:



This is probably the easiest route to the top of Cottonwood Benchmark; we followed the ridge seen to the right in this photo:



Looking back at Cottonwood Canyon from this ridge, with the top of the benchmark barely visible in the far back to the right in this photo:



As we hiked up to the ridge, we were surprised at just how many small Notch-Leaf Phacelia flowers were growing on the talus slopes:



The canyon route would probably be much more strenuous than the ridge route, and wouldn't be any less elevation gain:



I don't recall having seen this flower prior to this trip, and I am not sure what kind of flower it is:



This is another plant which I am currently unable to identify, but there was a lot of it growing in this area:



Panorama from this ridge, looking towards the direction we would subsequently be hiking. Cottonwood Canyon is to the far left, and the side canyon we had been following continues to the right:



Looking towards the Cottonwood Canyon Second Narrows (left of center):



View over towards the summit of Cottonwood Benchmark from a short distance further up the ridge (it's the highest point seen in the far back):



Looking over towards the top of Pothole Canyon; following the side canyon which we had been hiking in earlier would be a great way to access the top of that canyon, as well as the upper reaches of Canyons 8 and 9 (since the Lemoigne Canyon Road is currently too rough for most stock vehicles):



There were surprisingly many of big boulders along this ridge:



Looking over towards Tucki Mountain (right of center), with the upper reaches of Canyons 4, 5, and 6 in the foreground:



Looking towards Cottonwood Canyon; I'm not sure if the prominent high point (left of center) is one of the named benchmarks in this area:



Finally we have a good view of the Cottonwood Benchmark and the remainder of our route; it looks further away than it seems like it should be, but unfortunately to avoid unfriendly talus this route must be quite long:



Panorama with Cottonwood Canyon (Second Narrows) to the far left, Cottonwood Benchmark in the center, and the upper reaches of Canyon 3 to the right of center:



Another panorama from this same spot, looking the other direction; Tucki Mountain is on the left, and Cottonwood Canyon is to the right. The "side canyon of the side canyon" which we had circled around by getting on this ridge is seen just right of center:



A lone Golden Evening Primrose on the ridge here:



From here, we stayed on the ridge and continued to the next high point:



I think this is a bighorn trail; it was incredibly well-defined through here:



Some remains of an unlucky bighorn were stacked on this rock:



At this point, we dropped off the ridge and onto a saddle between two washes draining from behind the benchmark. Here is where navigation starts to get tricky, and one must use care not to get going in the wrong direction; head straight for the wash seen in the center of this photo, then follow it as it curves around to the right and behind the small hill:



This is the upper-most reaches of Canyon 3; hiking down this way will get you further from the benchmark:



Looking down into Canyon 3; notice the white mud-mound features to the left in this photo, which are quite prominent in the current Google Earth imagery:



The wash we were following curved around, and we were able to get another glimpse of the top of the benchmark, which still seemed quite some distance away:



This is where we ended up descending from the ridge on our way back down:



We continued towards the benchmark; this natural bowl-shaped valley was an interesting formation that I hadn't expected to see from my Google Earth research:

