

ESCALANTE RIVER CANYON, CHRISS & DEER CREEK LAKES DIXIE NATIONAL FOREST, AND HOODOOS ABOVE ESCALANTE RIVER CANYON, GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT

We had originally planned to check out the Escalante River Canyon down to Phipps Arch on this day; however, this did not work out, so instead we decided to do a hike in Dixie National Forest, which turned out to be much more pleasant.

We began following the trail down the Escalante River Canyon from where Utah Highway 12 crosses the Escalante River, but we were constantly being annoyed by flying bugs, including mosquitoes, and were pushing through much overgrowth on the trail, including what appeared to be large poison ivy plants. Therefore, we decided that, as we were not enjoying the hike at all, we should turn around. Note that hiking the private road down the other side of the river is not an option, as you will be stopped and turned around by a local.

The hike to Chriss and Deer Creek Lakes was very nice as the weather there was much cooler than in Escalante, and there were no mosquitoes or flies (this cannot be guaranteed in the future!). The parking for this hike is between mile markers 96 and 97 at a signed trailhead. It is about 1.5 miles to Chriss Lake, 0.5 mile further to the junction with the Great Western Trail, 1.25 miles beyond that to the junction with the Deer Creek Lake Trail, and a final 0.25 mile to the lake.

TOPO map of Chriss and Deer Creek Lakes:



This is the start of the route down the Escalante River Canyon:



A nice alcove quite near the beginning of the hike:



A short ladder to access a ledge; this is where the trail started getting seriously overgrown, and we were concerned about the plants nearby which looked like they could be poison ivy or some similar unfriendly plant:



A close-up photo of a very small one of these plants; I'm very familiar with poison oak, but there isn't much poison ivy near home so I'm not entirely certain that this is it. However, we decided to play it safe and let the "leaves of three" be:



Looking down-canyon from the ledge above the overgrowth:



We continued a little ways further, but as it was getting more and more overgrown, we decided to turn around. We attempted to walk down the road on the other side of the river, but we were immediately turned around by a local who insisted that we would be "much happier" walking down the trail. There is a (very expensive) vacation rental house down that road, which seems to be the only way an outsider would be allowed down there. The up-stream route up the Escalante River Canyon immediately has a river crossing:



Therefore, we decided to check out the trail to Chriss Lake:



This is an exceptionally nice hike! It starts out crossing a meadow-like area:



There are a few trees and a nice view towards Escalante, the Kaiparowits Plateau, and Powell Point along the first portion of this hike:



The trail soon enters a more forested area and begins to turn towards the nearby mountains:



The trail crosses a second meadow and we get more views towards the Kaiparowits Plateau and Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument:



After passing through another forested area, we enter one last meadow (which has a few fallen trees crossing the trail):



Once leaving the meadow, the trail turns more sharply towards the mountains and begins to get steep; this third meadow marks the half-way point in distance, but not in elevation:



Looking back towards Escalante yet again:



Looking ahead on the trail, as it begins to get more heavily forested and a bit steeper than I was expecting; I definitely noticed that we were at a higher elevation as we were climbing:



Still another view towards Escalante, from a clearing mid-way up the steepest stretch:



Finally, the trail levels out and we approach the lake through a small meadow with some very nice flowers:



Chriss Lake:



We walked over to the other side of the lake for lunch. There were absolutely no mosquitoes or similar bugs, so it was very pleasant to sit and look at the lake while eating.



Looking up-stream towards an interesting-looking cliff. As we had been enjoying the hike so far very much, we decided to continue on to Deer Creek Lake:



One last panorama of Chriss Lake:



We returned to where we had left the main trail and continued along the route between the Chriss Lake trail and the Great Western Trail. This connecting route appears to not be very highly used, as the trail was difficult to follow around the lake, and this large cairn was helpful in not getting off the trace of path (though as the lake was in easy view at this point, it would have been very difficult to get totally lost!):



The trail continues through a nice grove of aspen trees:



We cross a nice tributary stream of Chriss Lake, which has a number of fish in it (so many, in fact, that it appears that someone could spend an afternoon sitting by the stream with a net and catch quite a number of fish!); we also see a lot of morning cloak butterflies on this hike, especially in this area:



Continuing along the trail through the aspen forest:



We reach another meadow just before the junction with the Great Western Trail:



Looking down towards where Chriss Lake is, though it cannot be seen in this photo; there is a secondary trail along this creek which also goes down to the lake, but as I'd assume it would be less major than the one we took, we decided not to take it:



Panorama of the flowers in this nice meadow:



Two photos of the signs at the junction with the Great Western Trail:



There were lots of small signs nailed to trees along the Great Western Trail; I'm guessing that these signs were to prevent people from losing the trail when there is lots of snow on it:



The Great Western Trail was easier to find than the previous route, but it still was not very worn in:



Looking back down towards the Grand Staircase–Escalante, which we surprisingly can still see from here:



An easy creek crossing; as we were doing this hike early in the hiking season for this area, it was not at all dry yet, which made for very nice walking:



Panorama as we reach an open area and the trail begins to level out:



We catch sight of the cliff we had spotted from Chriss Lake and are pleased to find that it has indeed gotten closer:



We reach a small unnamed lake in this meadow:



As we approach the lake, we are astonished at the volume of noise produced by the frogs at this lake:



After photographing the small lake, we continue our journey along the trail:



There are some downed trees across the trail which must be crossed but do not prove to be at all difficult to navigate through:



The trail disappears through this area. To stay on the Great Western Trail, head for the close set of trees to the right. To take a shortcut to Deer Creek Lake, head directly for the cliffs seen to the left. Be sure to take note of the log standing upright which can be seen right of center in the photo, as this landmark must be aimed for on the return hike so as to not miss the trail:



As we were not familiar with the route, we ended up following the Great Western Trail to the junction with the Deer Creek Lake trail (we used the shortcut on our return hike):



Approaching Deer Creek Lake, which is a very nice lake situated not quite as close below the cliffs as we had hoped (being used to alpine lakes in the Canadian Rockies, we were anticipating it to be slightly different):



The trail ends at the western finger of the lake; more of the lake extends to the east than can be seen, but, as we had already done a longer hike than planned, we decided to not explore it further:



Looking up towards a potential route to Green Lake; this looks like an interesting lake to check out from the map, so we will very likely be making a return visit to this area:



View back towards Deer Creek Lake from here:



From here, we turned around for the hike back to the trailhead, since we had one more spot we wanted to check out before it got dark. This is the shortcut route back to the Great Western Trail:



On our hike out, while trying to keep track of the trail, we had missed Gresham Spring:



This is the spring; there was quite a bit of water and marshy area below the spring here, but above it was surprisingly dry:



One final photo on our hike back, this one on the route from the Great Western Trail back to Chriss Lake, with interesting bent-over small aspen trees:



With the good evening lighting, we returned to the hoodoos overlook which we had checked out last year (located on road #105 off of UT 12—note that this road has a severe dropoff which comes up rather fast and can be difficult to spot unless you recognize the parking area off to the right before it, and therefore must be driven in a high-clearance vehicle):



Looking down towards the Escalante River Canyon from southeast of the hoodoos:



Approaching the hoodoos:



Panorama from near the hoodoos looking towards the Escalante River Canyon:

