

TWO NORTHERN SIDE CANYONS OF MOONLIGHT CANYON

For the first major hike of our March 2015 trip, we decided to check out some more of the side canyons of Moonlight Canyon. As we had previously been exploring the southern side canyons, this time we decided to check out some of the northern side canyons (which aren't quite as narrow or as tall-walled as the southern side canyons, but they still have the same sort of formations). We also saw a lot of nice wildflowers in the Moonlight Canyon wash, more than we had seen in our trips during April.

Map of the area we checked out (the yellow pins correspond to the southern side canyons, with SC2 the side canyon in which Moonlight Bridge is located; note that the side canyons of Moonlight are labeled differently depending on who you ask, so there may be some discrepancies between reports). We hiked up the northern side canyon seen to the left in the image, which appeared to have the longest narrow section, then attained the ridge. We followed the ridge to a high point above the side canyon just east of this first side canyon we explored, then descended the ridge to the right of this second side canyon. We then checked out this second side canyon until we reached an impasse (essentially at the end of the narrow section of this side canyon, as we could see much of the upper canyon from the ridge), before heading back down Moonlight Canyon:



There were a lot of nice blooming plants that we saw on this hike:



Barrel cacti tend to be very photogenic in the spring:



These yellow flowering bushes were everywhere:



These pink flowers are actually less than an inch long;



I tried to get photos of the small flowers that were everywhere here, though they didn't show up well in most of these photos:



This photo worked out well with all the purple and white flowers:



Approaching the entrance to the first side canyon which we explored:



The canyon started out somewhat wide with relatively short walls:



Then, it appeared to get narrower up ahead:



This is where a conglomerate mud slab seems to have slid down and formed a (very small) sort of tunnel here:



The walls began getting taller and the canyon narrower:



These alcoves are typical of the side canyons of Moonlight Canyon:



This was the tallest and narrowest section of the canyon; it was more photogenic looking down-canyon:



Up ahead the walls became less tall and more "hoodoo" shaped



We turned a corner and were surprised to see this interesting formation on the left side of the canyon:



What appears to have happened here is that where the side canyon joins the main canyon a rock slab slid off the wall and formed a tunnel:



There were a few of these orange flowering plants in this part of the canyon:



The two sides of the side canyon connect only where a rock has fallen off of one and gotten stuck:



Looking back down at the main side canyon from the other side of this formation:



This side of the side canyon was narrow for a short distance:



Then, it ended at this dryfall; from the Google Earth map it appears that the canyon daylights beyond this:



Upon returning to the main (side) canyon, we passed through this interesting area with more hoodoo like formations:



Notice the large rock hoodoo near the center of this photo:



Turning the corner, we spotted another hoodoo on the canyon wall, this one quite large:



The canyon ceases to be narrow at this point, though it remains interesting:



Looking back down-canyon, with the big hoodoo to the left; I'd estimate that rock to be at least 6 feet tall:



The canyon passes through one last narrow-ish section:



Then, from here, the canyon appears to open up:



Thus we attained the ridge to the left of the canyon wash, and began to hike up towards the high point seen left of center in the nearer ridge of the photo:



The views from here were very nice:



We surprised a group of seven bighorn just below us:



The views of the upper valley were surprisingly good from this part of the ridge:



And the mountains around Moonlight Canyon were colorful in the not-so-bright lighting caused by all the clouds:



Zooming in on the part of the southern side canyon where Moonlight Bridge is located:



Looking back down at the part of this northern side canyon which we had missed by attaining the ridge:



There were quite a number of these little purple flowers that we saw as we hiked up the ridge:



The colors on this mountainside were surprisingly vivid; the side canyon seen to the right is the "Moonlight 3rd Side Canyon" which I reported on in December 2013:



We were starting to get a view into the other side canyon we planned to check out here:



And up ahead we also were getting increasingly good views further up Moonlight Canyon itself:



The 3rd and 4th Moonlight Southern side canyons certainly look like good places to explore from here:



Another view up Moonlight Canyon; there were blooming cacti everywhere:



Panorama of the Moonlight Canyon wash:



This is the furthest distance we could see up Moonlight Canyon from the ridge:



Looking down-canyon at the cliffs above the side canyon just west of Moonlight Bridge Side Canyon; we then followed the ridge seen just below center in the photo:



Looking across at the side canyon where Moonlight Bridge is located:



From here, we descended into this second northern side canyon we had planned to explore; we were surprised at how much greenery was in this canyon:



The canyon was narrower through here than we had expected:



However, it was not particularly long, and it soon ended at this dryfall (the canyon appeared to not have any more narrows beyond this point):



We continued down-canyon and encountered this impasse just before the side canyon reached the main canyon



Looking down into the very short narrow section below this dryfall:



We bypassed this impasse on the steep scree to the left (note that the rock is very loose and crumbly here!); interesting plant we spotted in the wash:



These are the short narrows at the entrance to this side canyon:



Panorama from the entrance to this side canyon, with Moonlight Canyon heading up to the left and the Moonlight Bridge Side Canyon straight ahead:



Heading down-canyon, we seemed to be constantly walking through these fields of wildflowers:



Nice blooming cactus near where we parked for this hike:

