

Zion Narrows demandin

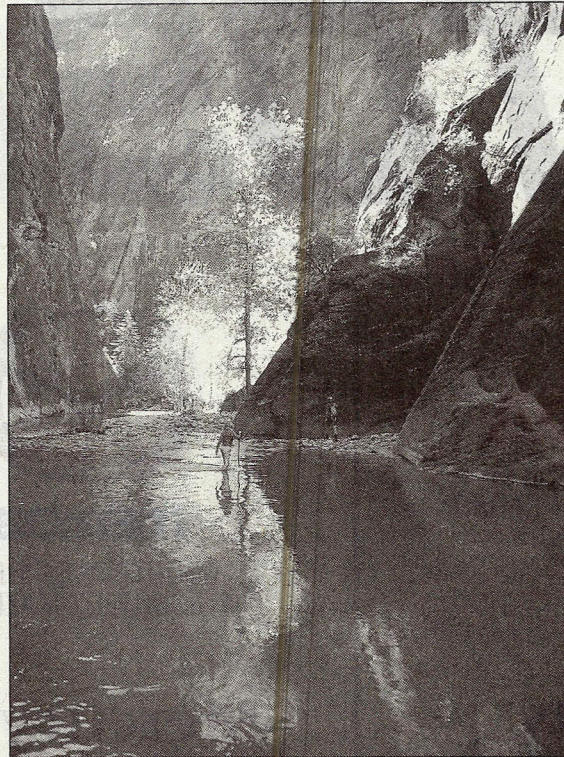
The Zion Narrows, located in Zion National Park in Utah, is one of the most famous hikes on Earth, and for good reason. Imagine hiking up a riverbed through a canyon where red Navajo sandstone cliffs tower more than 1,500 feet above you, yet these walls stand only 10 or 15 feet to your left and right. Furthermore, along the way, you will encounter lush hanging gardens, intimate alcoves and spring-fed cascades falling from the canyon walls and into the river.

The North Fork of the Virgin River serves as your trail. Over millions of years, the river has carved a stairway through heaven for those willing and able to hike it. Often, it becomes a life-changing experience, inspiring hikers to re-evaluate whether they're investing their short time on Earth in the things that truly matter.

Depending on what type of adventure you are looking for, the Narrows can be done in a variety of ways. For most people, a day trip upstream is satisfying enough, and it's a good choice if you've never before hiked a canyon with your feet underwater.

To do this day hike, take the shuttle up Zion Canyon's Scenic Drive and get off at the Temple of Sinawava. (Starting Oct. 26, until spring, private vehicles are allowed.) Hike the one-mile, paved Riverside Walk, then just drop into the river and head upstream.

This upriver route makes it practical to turn around and come back whenever you feel satisfied or tired. One good destination is the river's confluence with Orderville Canyon, less than



The North Fork of the Virgin River serves as the trail in the world-famous Zion Narrows in Zion National Park, Utah.

DEBORAH WALL/SPECIAL TO VIEW



Deborah Wall
OUTDOORS

Those up for the challenge will be rewarded with a feast for the eyes: deep pools, ferns, hanging gardens and cascading waterfalls. And this next leg of the hike includes the narrowest, most romantic part of the canyon.

Hiking upstream past Big Springs requires a permit.

The definitive Zion Narrows experience is a through-hike, which also requires a permit and can

TO ZION NATIONAL PARK

From Las Vegas, take Interstate 15 north about 125 miles to Utah Route 9 (Exit 16, or the Hurricane/Zion National Park Exit). Drive east 19 miles to the town of Springdale and the main entrance to Zion National Park.

be done either as a long day hike or an overnight hike. The latter requires reserving one of the designated campsites. It's a 16-mile trip, point to point, so you'll have to arrange private transportation to the Chamberlain's Ranch trailhead.

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shape will find the journey demanding. Through-hikes usually take about 10 to 12 hours, depending on your group and rest stops. Carry a headlamp in case you need to finish your trip after dark.

Whether you're taking the short day trip upstream or daring the longer through-hike, it is a must to wear hiking boots with good ankle supports, and take a sturdy walking stick for a third leg on the river crossings.

Depending on your height and weight, a 1¼- to 1½-inch-in-diameter heavy duty wooden dowel about 5½ feet in length will do the trick, found at most hardware stores or home centers.

Always outfit yourself in synthetic fabrics, as well. Never wear cotton on any outdoor adventure, for it loses all insulating value when wet.

Line your backpack with a heavy garbage bag to waterproof it for the inevitable slip and fall into the chilly waters. This time of year, expect water temperatures in the 50s.

With water so cold, strong currents, slippery rocks, and deep pools, this is obviously no hike for small children.

But even the experienced should not underestimate it. It is a lovely excursion, well worth calculated risks, but those risks are real.

Flash flooding is the biggest concern, and many people have died in this canyon as there are no

escape routes during much of the hike. It can be sunny and clear in Zion even while storms miles away flood the canyon in seconds. So it's imperative to check in at the Back Country Desk, the day of your trip or no more than one day ahead of it, about weather upstream.

The desk can not only forecast weather, but also estimate flash flood potential and water flow.

Measured in cubic feet per second (CFS), the flow is the most important indicator of what your trip will be like. A CFS of 70 or lower usually makes a trip into the Narrows a pleasant one.

Permits for the 16-mile through-hike and for camping are available either by advance reservation at the park Web site, or on a walk-in basis the day before your planned hike. But the number issued is limited, and they go fast this time of year.

Do this hike soon, as the water only gets colder and daylight hours shorter. By late fall or winter, you will need a driesuit and special equipment to do it safely. May, June, September and October are usually the best times. For complete information on hiking the Zion Narrows contact the park, visit www.nps.gov/zion.

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