

RULES TO RUN THE GRAND CANYON Rim to Rim to Rim

(South Rim to North Rim and return to the South Rim)



RULE # 1: SLOW DOWN

“Slow down and good luck on your adventure”, are the words the Arizona State Trooper left me with. I can’t believe my luck, he’s letting me off with a warning! When he asked me where I was going in such a rush, I told him my plans of running the canyon, so was it a touch of admiration or respect for a fellow man that got me off the hook? Or perhaps simply pity for a man who’s planning on running 50miles amongst the rams and rattle snakes on crazy Grand Canyon terrain....he must have been thinking the guy is already missing a few marbles, a ticket would just be rude.

So before I was interrupted with the well deserved State Police lecture, I was doing 100 m/h in a 70 m/h zone and daydreaming that I was back on the German Autobahn. Wicked. Being part German and part extreme junkie, I wasn’t surprised when I saw the flashing lights in my rearview mirror as bright as a Christmas tree.

So back to RULE #1, if you’re planning on running long distance in the Grand Canyon, leave your ‘pedal to the metal’ attitude behind and SLOW DOWN. It’s not the time to chase PRs, it’s time to chase the adventure.

Not only am I a dreamer, I’m a strong believer of turning your dreams into reality. That’s why I find myself on the US HWY 40, driving to the Grand Canyon Southern Rim after a full day of meetings and conventions in Vegas. I left behind my business associates eager to hit the blackjack tables and to take in the famous Vegas sights, I’m craving something else, my minds’ set on experiencing a different rush.

It's the 4th of November 2008, election day in the USA and at 10PM I check into a Motel close to the Grand Canyon Park entrance. The weather is wet and the temperature is currently 3 Degree Celsius. The weather forecast predicts light snow and -2 to -4 degrees on the South Rim. Good that I always travel with running gear and clothing for all terrain and weather conditions.

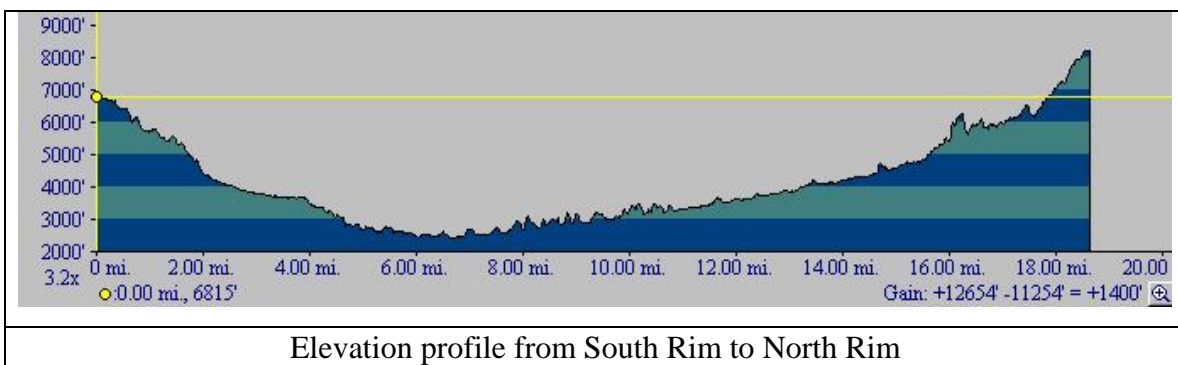
The Grand Canyon is one of our world wonders, and with good reason. When you are running into the Canyon, you experience that awesome yet increasingly scarce childish awestruck sensation. I feel like a little boy again sinking my teeth into my first spoonful of Häagen-Dazs ice cream. Am I dreaming? Could something so amazing be real? However, respect for the challenge and the accompanying elements get my nerves going now, a little anxious but full of adrenalin I need to begin my solo and unsupported decent into this awesome and breathtaking creation.

And here we come to RULE # 2: PLANNING AND PREPARATION.

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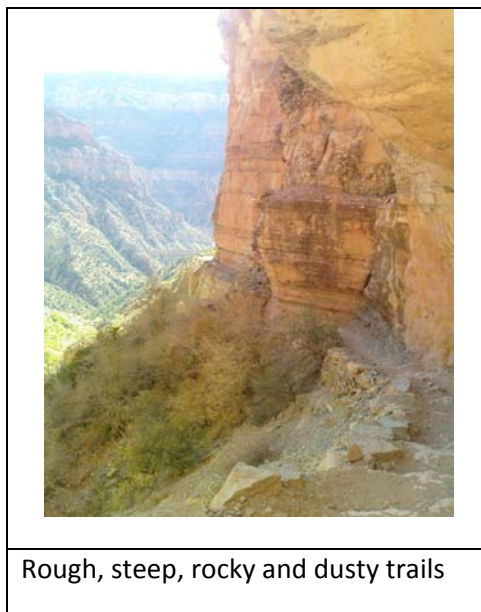
Running the Grand Canyon requires some preparation and planning. This doesn't mean charging your iPod and making sure "Eye of the Tiger" makes it into the shuffle, nor does it mean bringing your stop watch and scotch taping your splits onto your wrist. The primary element of this RULE is developing a strong running foundation. Long term preparation requires you to build your experience with trail running and you will need to build up your endurance. And short term preparation requires you to make sure you organize other critical aspects such as setting markers for yourself with regards to time and distance, bringing appropriate clothing depending on the varying temperatures, and being well stocked with regards to hydration as well as nutrition.

Running Foundation and Running experience on trails: I ran the Grand Canyon twice in the past 18 months (I love it so much) and I have a good understanding of what lies ahead of me, 47 miles of rough, rocky, steep and dusty trails in one of the most beautiful and bizarre places on earth. The trail has a net ascent of 12654 feet and total descent of 11254 feet. Pounding the pavement in your local neighborhood where the only time you needed to use fancy footwork was to dodge the pooh on the sidewalk someone failed to pick up doesn't constitute as appropriate training.



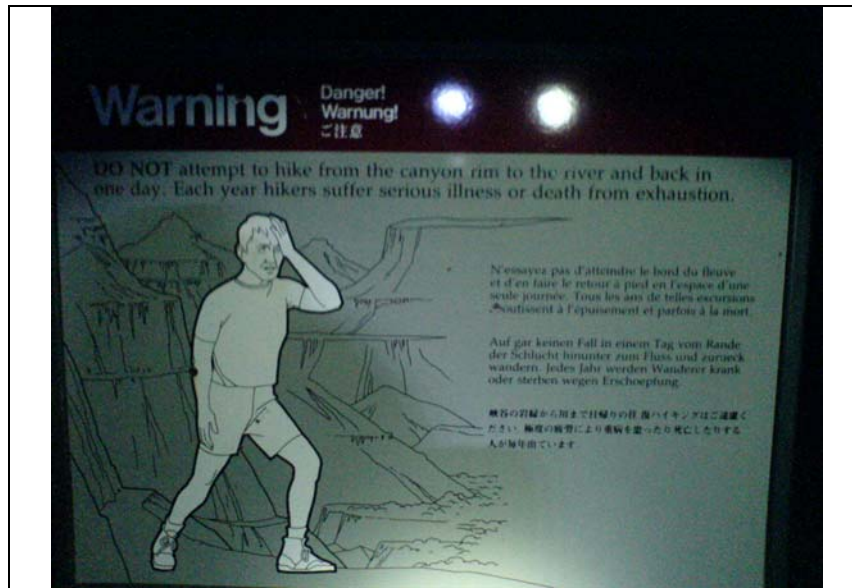
Since this run is all about up and down hill trails, it's advantageous if you trained on hilly and off the beaten path trails if you have them in your region in order to strengthen the muscles in your ankles and feet and develop an overall solid, comfortable and confident running style. If not, get in your car on the weekend and take a drive, get out of the city, look for nature parks, hills where you take your kids sledding in the winter, ski hills, etc.

If you're currently a marathoner with some off road experience and you are contemplating running the canyon challenge, you can do it. A time of 12-15 hours is attainable with some modifications to your training plan. Roughly 3 weeks and prior to running the canyon make sure you get in a couple of extra long runs in addition to your traditional training plan, approximately the distance of a marathon. The run on the Grand Canyon trail will ask you to remain focused and alert 100% of the time, so enjoy the spectacular view but watch your step!

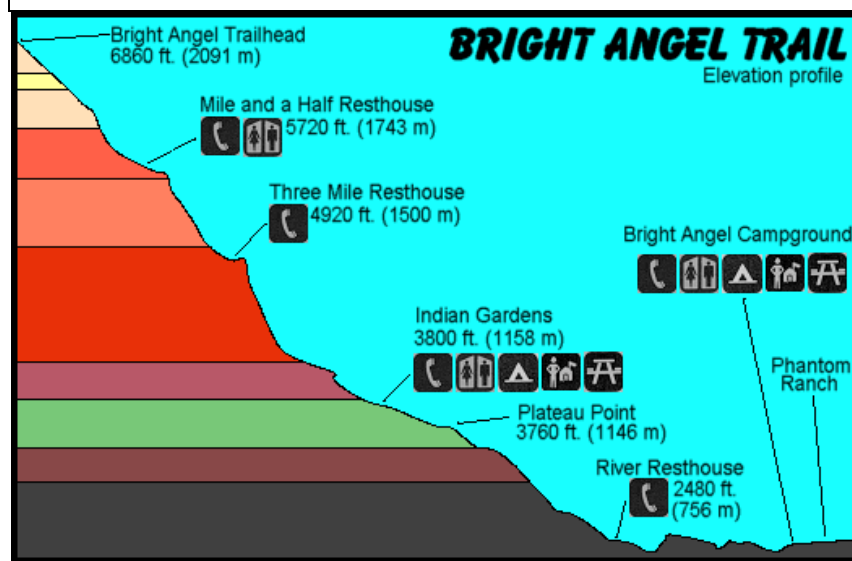


I ran in the canyon also at nights (this is my preferred running time). I love the peace and serenity during this time, and I also try to plan my long night runs during the full moon period, but I only recommend this to runners with a lot of trail experience and also a lot of night running expertise.

Targeting Speed and Distance goals: when entering the Bright Angel trail you will pass a warning sign (see below) warning day hikers not to attempt a rim to river and back trip on the same day. This warning sign should and will make you aware that the planned trip is not taken lightly. Therefore, I always plan my route and try to reach target points within a specific time, this will allow me to monitor my progress and also to re-arrange the whole trip and if necessary a backup plan when getting tired or having an accident. You should always know how far you are from the nearest campsite and how long it will approximately take you to get there.



Warning sign for day hikers



Clothing and Gear: In the summer months I recommend you to wear a hat or cap and lots of sun protection. And get an early start to cover a large distance before the temperature in the canyon rises above 35 degrees Celsius. In the winter time, make sure you have a wind breaker handy when coming up to the RIM, usually the wind blows hard and snow is possible as well! So be prepared! For your feet, a good pair of trail runners with lots of toe room, perhaps a size higher than your regular shoe size. With all the climbing and descent, your toes tend to hit the front of your shoes if they're too tight, which might result in very ugly toenails... your summer sandals might not make it out from the back of the closet. Bring some Vaseline with you as well, for those 'sensitive' areas that are susceptible to chafing.

Hydration and Nutrition: The Grand Canyon is open all year long and can be run at any time. However the preferred time by runners to do this adventure is the month of April or the month of October. Both months guarantee for mild running weather and temperatures and assure that all the water fountains along the trail are open. Between mid October to mid March some of the fountains on the high elevated trails are closed due to freezing problems. The water fountains are a major factor in your planning and strategy to get all the hydration needed when needed the most. I developed a habit in the past years of running that I take advantage of each open water fountain and refill my water bottle or camelback at any time when I find an open waterline. There is no guarantee that the next water fountain is working! Also testing all the water fountains on your way from the south rim to the north rim, will assure you when and where you can refill your water containers on the way back.

When planning my own trip, I bring enough nutrition for the 8 – 12 hours I expect to be out there, I like to keep it simple, just GU Gel and some Granola bars, but this only works if I had a good meal 10-12 hours before the run and a small snack or breakfast immediately before the run. You will burn easily 5000 calories on this trip, feel free to fuel up on the foods you like but foods that won't irritate your stomach. Oh, do ibuprofen & salt tablets constitute as nutrition?...perhaps not, but they both tend to make it into my camelback when I'm preparing for a long run.

It is now 11:14 PM and Obama Barack became the first President of the United States! He is just finishing his speech in Chicago and accepted the job while I prepare my gear for next days' challenge. I fill up my INOV backpack with a 2 litre water bladder and my handheld water bottle with GU & H2O. Before I finally go to bed I prepare the coffee machine for the morning.

RULE # 3: ENJOY: "Life is short, don't waste a moment"

It is nearly 5 AM and the nearly full moon is throwing my shadow onto the BRIGHT ANGLE TRAIL, my plan is to run without any big interruptions down to Phantom Ranch. During my 9.6 mile descent into the Canyon, to assure my return water supply plan I check the water fountains at mile 1.6, miles 3 and in Indian Garden a beautiful campground just about 4.6 miles from the south rim. Just before reaching the Colorado River I spot a strong looking Ram, it is just standing on an overhang about 15 meters away from me. The Ram is watching me slowly continuing on my way, however I do not lose eye contact and actually I don't know what to do if it would charge after me. My first thought is take a picture, but I quickly dismiss the idea thinking it must hurt a lot to feel the rams huge horns being pushed into my stomach.

After a running time of 1hour 52 minutes I reach the Silver Bridge and Phantom Range comes into sight. Once on the side of the Colorado River I follow the signs to the Northern Kalib Trail which will lead me all the way up to the North Rim.

Hikers and Campers on the trail are usually very friendly and during my past runs I always peaked their interest. I guess there aren't too many people actually running by them. Usually I was always asked 'where are you coming from and where are you running to?', except today. This day I got the typical

“where are you coming from?” my answer was always the same, from the south rim, but before I can explain my complete plan for today’s run, I get bombarded with a second question “do you know who won the election?”. Then I get it, there are more important things in the world going on than ‘little boy Markus’ having a fun run in the Grand Canyon. For the record all hikers and campers I talked to were elated to hear of Obama’s win. And I enjoyed delivering the good news to make outdoor people like me happy!

It is sunny and approx. 18 Degree Celsius I passed Cotton Wood Campground at mile 16,5 a while ago and moving with a power walk towards Roaring Springs Junction at 18.6 miles! After reaching the junction with a running time of 3 hours 50 minutes I start the ascent up the North Rim, the remaining 4.6 miles are more a fast walk and I will reach the cold and windy Rim at 10:12 so a total running time of approx. 5 hours 10 minutes. After making the historical picture with self timer I immediately start my return. Again I run all the way down to Phantom Ranch.

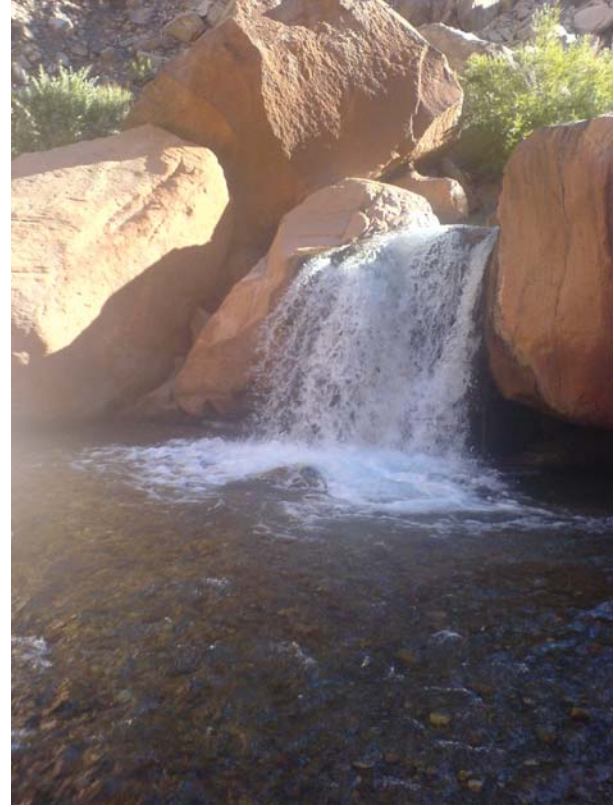


On the North Rim

The run is a total enjoyment; this is the advantage of not racing against others or the clock, you’re setting your own speed and time. At one point I run into a herd of deer blocking my way without making an effort to move aside I have to squeeze between the animals to make my way. Besides the amazing wildlife the Grand Canyon also has lots of beautiful waterfalls good for a quick cool down and beautiful vegetation to offer.



Mules track on the Northern Kalib Trails



Waterfall on the Northern Kalib Trail, where I took my morning shower



Cactus Plants on the Northern Kalib Trail



Wild deer close to Phantom Ranch



After crossing the Silver Bridge and the Colorado River I'm running back up to the South Rim

I reach the South Rim after a total running and enjoyment time of 10 hour and 45 minutes. I feel good but hungry! I decide for American Fast-food and good to know that civilization on the South Rim is only a 10 Minute drive away. I do not recommend the American Fast Food or Fast Food in general, but I do recommend to all the runners, hikers and people in general to get OUT there, go OUT and ENJOY LIFE!

The Canyon awaits you.