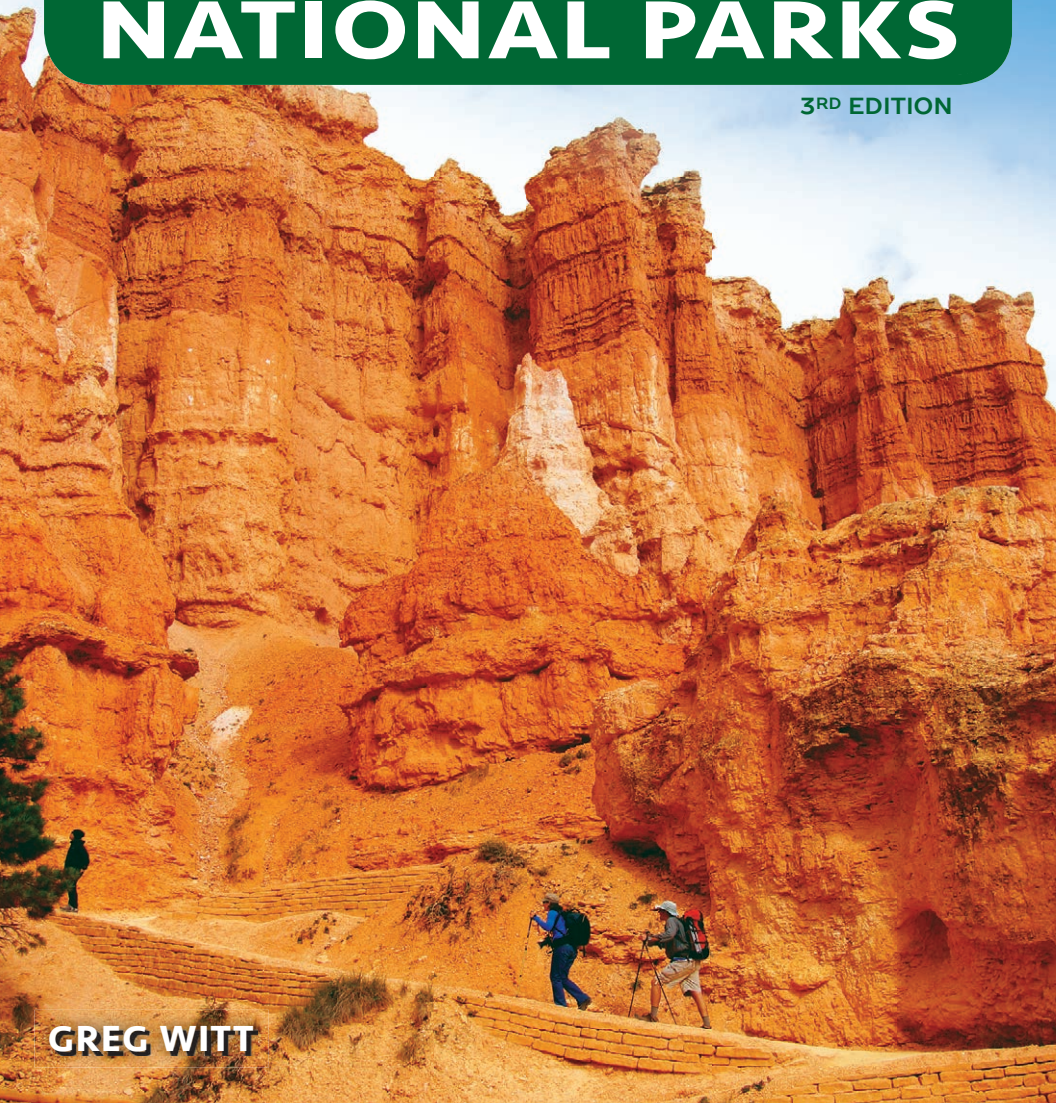


50 BEST SHORT HIKES

UTAH's

NATIONAL PARKS

3RD EDITION



GREG WITT

WILDERNESS PRESS



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The Very Best Short Hikes

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR NATIONAL PARK VISIT and discover the hikes that offer exactly what you're looking for. Here are my personal recommendations for the best of the best.

◆ *Very Best in Each National Park*

9. **Devils Garden** (*Arches*) More than a dozen arches in one hike, including Landscape Arch, the longest in the world
15. **Queens Garden and Navajo Loop** (*Bryce Canyon*) Venture below the rim into the heart of Bryce Canyon's hoodoos.
28. **Elephant Hill to Chesler Park** (*Canyonlands*) A slickrock trail with something for everyone—slots, washes, views, and varied terrain
39. **Sulphur Creek** (*Capitol Reef*) The creek is the trail as it flows through narrows and over waterfalls and ends up at the visitor center.
46. **Angels Landing** (*Zion*) Enter Refrigerator Canyon and ascend Walter's Wiggles before making the chain-assisted climb to the top of this spectacular canyon tower.

◆ *Very Best Views*

1. **Park Avenue** Walk down the Main Street of Arches National Park, flanked by immense fins and formations on both sides.
23. **Crater View Trail and Upheaval Dome Overlook** Gaze down into Upheaval Dome, with expansive views over the Canyonlands basin and beyond.
24. **Grand View Point Trail** An aptly named cliffside route overlooking the Canyonlands basin
31. **Panorama Point and Goosenecks** Three short walks to viewpoints that give you the lay of the land and a great introduction to Capitol Reef
40. **Rim Overlook** An easy walk from Sunset Point to Sunrise Point, two of Bryce's most popular viewpoints

◆ *Very Best Wildlife Viewing*

45. **Emerald Pools Trail** Birds nest in the canyon's deep recesses, while wild turkeys and deer are frequently seen in the open areas of Zion Canyon.
49. **Taylor Creek** Songbirds, deer, and small mammals enjoy this shaded and wooded canyon as much as you will.

◆ *Very Best Archaeology*

21. **Aztec Butte Trail** Beautifully preserved ancestral Puebloan granaries

Staying Safe

EVERY ROUTE IN THIS BOOK is safe in the sense that it is a designated public trail within a national park. Most are considered front-country trails as opposed to remote backcountry trails, and as such the trails are well maintained, regularly patrolled and hiked by park rangers, and heavily used by visitors. Each year millions of people find fun, rewarding, healthy, and life-transforming experiences while hiking in national parks.

However, the inherent risks and dangers of hiking in a national park or any outdoor setting are real. Rocks fall, rattlesnakes bite, flash floods roar down canyons, and the desert sun can toast you like a bagel. No ranger, guidebook, or trailhead sign can possibly protect you from every hazard. Nothing can take the place of personal responsibility, individual preparation, sound judgment, and constant awareness when hiking in the outdoors. With all that in mind, let's review some of the most common hazards you'll experience while hiking in Utah's national parks, along with the precautions and actions you should take in preparation for these hikes.

Even though most of these hikes are short, well known, well marked, and heavily used, you should be as mindful of precautions for these hikes as you would for any trail.

When visiting a national park, make the visitor center your first stop. Here you'll receive updated weather and trail notifications. Experienced rangers who know the trails can assist you in selecting the routes best suited to your experience and abilities.

The greatest risk factor for hikers on many of the trails in this book is the **extremely hot and dry summer weather**, with summer temperatures regularly exceeding 100°F. In the heat, be sure to wear a wide-brimmed hat and long sleeves. Carry water, wear sunglasses, apply sunscreen and lip balm with SPF liberally, and, when possible, plan your outings to avoid hiking in the heat of the midday sun. It's best to avoid some of these unshaded hikes anytime the sun is high in the sky during the warmer months of the year. Walking will not be enjoyable at those times anyway.

Heat exhaustion, or hyperthermia, occurs when the body loses more fluid than it takes in. That can happen very quickly in the desert's high temperatures. Signs of heat exhaustion include nausea; vomiting; fatigue; headaches; a pale appearance; stomach cramps; and cool, clammy skin. If you or a member of your

Reducing Your Impact in the Desert

CONSIDERING THE SIGNIFICANCE of national parks to our nation's heritage, it's particularly important that you familiarize yourself with the Leave No Trace principles as you plan your visit to Utah's national parks. Visit Int.org for details. Follow the philosophy of "pack it in; pack it out." Here are a few additional pointers:

- Follow park regulations. Do not collect rocks, plants, or artifacts.
- Check the weather forecast, and plan your hike accordingly. Be prepared for emergencies.
- Deposit solid human waste in a hole 4–6 inches deep, at least 200 feet away from water, camps, and trails.
- Do not approach or feed wildlife.
- Yield to others on the trail. Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering horses.

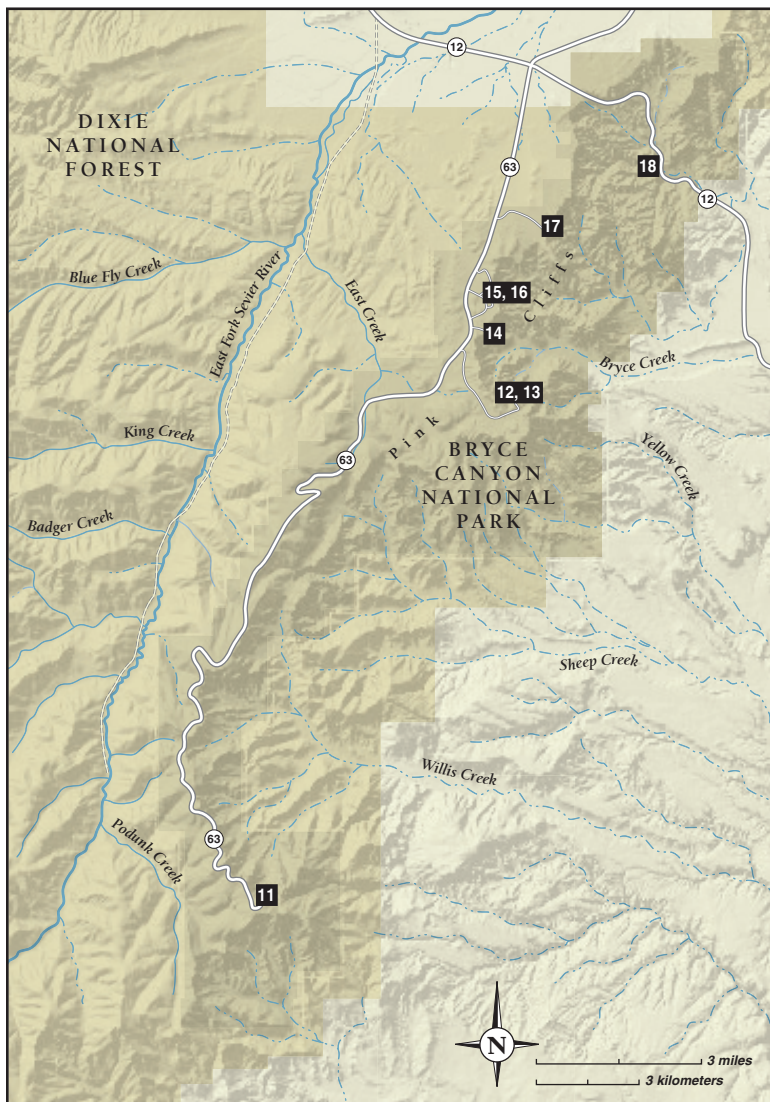
Additionally, in many parts of Utah's national parks, you'll encounter biological soil crusts (see page 18), which are an important part of the desert ecosystem. They prevent soil erosion, absorb and hold water, and provide nutrients to plants. But one footstep can destroy hundreds of years of growth. Please help protect these fragile crusts by learning to recognize them (you'll be instructed in the park's visitor information and on interpretive signage) and by walking on designated trails, bare rock, or streambeds.

Exciting experiences and vistas await, so now it's time to lace up your boots and hit the trail.

OPPOSITE: *Water Canyon* (see Hike 18, page 82)

LouieLea/Shutterstock

Bryce Canyon National Park



BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK

BRYCE CANYON is Utah's smallest national park—a glistening jewel cast in hues of yellow, pink, orange, and red. But its name is a misnomer because it isn't a canyon. Canyons are carved by rivers, while Bryce Canyon is actually a series of eroding cliffs on the eastern rim of the Paunsaugunt Plateau. The cliffs have formed brightly colored rock amphitheaters decorated with bizarrely shaped ridges, fins, and hoodoos. This otherworldly landscape, replete with windows, arches, and natural bridges, fuels the imagination and makes for irresistibly fun hiking.

Bryce is Utah's highest-elevation national park, and as in Utah's other national parks, you can read Earth's history in layers of stone. Geologically, Bryce can rightly be considered the uppermost rim of the Grand Canyon—a relatively young Cenozoic layer, softer and more quickly erodible than the formations found in other national parks in the Colorado Plateau. Because it's high and dry, you'll find an intriguing variety of alpine trees and shrubs in Bryce that are not found in the lower elevations of the Colorado Plateau.

Southern Paiutes and other American Indians lived in the area. But because of its higher elevation and less hospitable climate for growing crops, the immediate area that is now part of Bryce Canyon National Park was not as heavily populated as other parts of the Southwest were. Not until military men passed through the area in 1866 did it become known to the rest of America. In 1872 geologist G. K. Gilbert explored the area, and after first seeing the hoodoos, he wrote: "We caught a glimpse of a perfect wilderness of red pinnacles." Bryce Canyon became a national monument in 1923 and was designated as a national park in 1928.

◆ *Just One Day?*

BRYCE'S SMALL SIZE and linear layout mean it can be easily visited in one day. Even if all you do is stop at the viewpoints on the rim, you can see a high percentage of the park. But the greatest hikes in Bryce lie below the rim and require you to lace up your boots and hit the trail.

Begin with a stop at the visitor center, and proceed by car or shuttle to Rainbow Point, on the park's southernmost rim, for a short walk on the Bristlecone Loop. Because all the viewpoints are on the east side of the road, stopping at them is most easily done on your northward return, thereby avoiding left turns. When you arrive at either Sunset or Sunrise Point, hike the 3-mile Queens Garden and Navajo Loop, which is not just the finest hike in the park but is also arguably the finest short hike in America.

A HELLUVA PLACE TO LOSE A COW

That's how Ebenezer Bryce, a ship carpenter from Scotland, described the labyrinthine landscape of Bryce Canyon. After joining the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the age of 17, he immigrated to Utah and helped settle the area in 1875. He is well known for his many contributions to the area. Such projects include building a road to the canyon to access timber more easily and helping construct a 7-mile-long irrigation canal. He was also known for building a Mormon chapel in nearby Pine Valley that is still used today. The people began calling the area "Bryce's Canyon," and the name stuck long after he moved away.

11

BRISTLECONE LOOP

TRAILHEAD LOCATION Rainbow Point parking area

TRAIL USE Walking, hiking

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION 1.0-mile loop

ELEVATION RANGE 9,121' at trailhead to 9,145' along trail

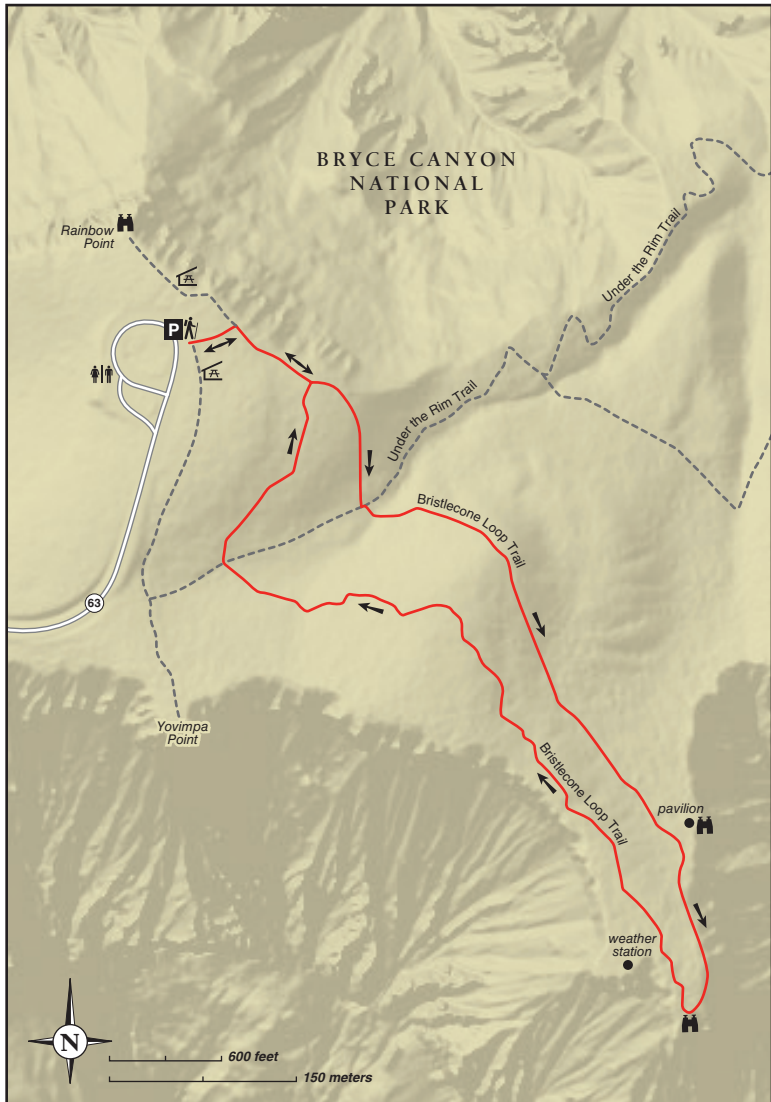
FACILITIES Restrooms and water at trailhead

HIGHLIGHTS A loop through a dense fir forest entirely above the canyon rim

◆ *Description*

RAINBOW POINT sits at the highest elevation within Bryce Canyon National Park. It's a harsh alpine environment—a windswept perch where only the strong

Bristlecone Loop



survive. At the windiest point of the trail, where few other species endure, a bristlecone pine tree has lived for more than 1,600 years. This bristlecone's trunk has been dead for many years, but a surviving branch has become the main tree in a textbook example of how species adapt to even the most severe environments.

In this coldest extension of the park, most of the trees are white fir and Douglas-fir, in contrast to the ponderosa pines found on the lower plateaus. Here trees seek mutual support as they grow in dense stands and deep shade, so that their shadows prolong moisture-giving snowbanks and steal sunlight from competing species.

The Bristlecone Loop is a great starting hike in Bryce Canyon. Because the layout of Bryce Canyon consists of amphitheaters and viewpoints, all of which are on the east side of UT 63, one recommended strategy for visiting the park is to start your day by driving to Rainbow Point, at the southernmost and highest elevation in the park. Then pick off the viewpoints on your way out. That way you traverse the entire park and never have to make a left turn—pretty smart.

The Bristlecone Loop is also unique within Bryce Canyon because it's the only hike in the park where trees, not geology, are the focus and theme. This short loop has more shade than most of the other trails in Bryce and, at this high elevation, predictably cooler temperatures, so come prepared with an extra layer of warmth for this beautiful stroll through an alpine forest.

◆ *Route*

START BY HEADING WEST to the interpretive sign at the parking area, where the trail takes off to the south through a conifer forest cover. In 100 yards you reach a signed junction marking the start of the Bristlecone Loop, which continues straight ahead and moves in a clockwise circuit. This junction is also the starting point for the Under the Rim Trail, an unforgettable 23-mile route set below the Pink Cliffs. It's a spectacular hike—one you'll definitely want to save for a return visit as a two-day backpacking trip.

The trail surface is wide, well graded, well defined, and edged the entire way. It would be wheelchair accessible were it not for the occasional fallen tree lying across the trail. Along the way, the sparse ground cover consists of manzanita and stunted Oregon grape.

At 0.5 mile you arrive at a viewpoint pavilion with interpretive signs. At this elevation, the highest in the park, the view almost seems aerial as you gaze down to the hoodoos and amphitheaters below—very different from the rim views in other parts of the park. Looking 30 miles to the east, you can see the Aquarius Plateau and the Kaiparowits Plateau. The Paunsaugunt Plateau, where you now stand, was once connected to the Aquarius Plateau. But about

BRISTLECONE PINES



mhgstan/Shutterstock

A young bristlecone pine

As the longest-living tree in the world, the bristlecone pine has outlived many generations of human visitors. The bristlecone pines in Bryce Canyon are up to 1,800 years old. Some bristlecones in Utah are known to be close to 5,000 years old! The twisted look of the tree results from the way it grows: as its roots become exposed, the parts of the tree that received nutrients from those roots will die as well. The bristlecone can also increase its chance of survival during droughts by shutting down metabolic activity in some of its branches. The remaining sections of the plant will continue to grow. While other pine trees shed their needles every few years, bristlecone needles can stay intact for more than 40 years.

16 million years ago, when the Rocky Mountains began their upward thrust, a north–south fault fractured the vast tableland into seven separate sections.

Moving on from the pavilion, the trail bends to the right to reach a second viewpoint on the southwest side of the promontory, with great scenery to the south and into Zion National Park, though none of Zion's iconic monuments are visible from this distance or angle. This windy bluff is a favorite nesting area for peregrine falcons, which live in cliffside grottoes. These falcons revel in high winds and, in dramatic dives, reach speeds up to 200 miles per hour.

As the trail bends back to the north on its return, you pass a weather observation station perched on a cliff to the left. Continuing as the trail gently winds through the forest, the loop trail technically ends at the junction with the Yovimpa Spur Trail at 0.8 mile, but your return to the parking area brings the total distance to 1.0 mile. Taking the Yovimpa Spur Trail to the left adds almost nothing to your time or distance and gives you an additional overlook, this time to the west. It's

wheelchair accessible and highly recommended. As you return to the parking area, be sure to make the short walk over to Rainbow Point. You've already had some great views on this trail, and this namesake viewpoint adds to the splendor.

◆ *To the Trailhead*

GPS COORDINATES 37.474317, -112.240283

From US 89 south of Panguitch, turn onto UT 12 and drive east for 14.0 miles. Turn right on UT 63 to enter Bryce Canyon National Park. From the visitor center, drive 17.0 miles south on UT 63 to the trailhead sign on the south side of the Rainbow Point parking area.

12 HAT SHOP

TRAILHEAD LOCATION Bryce Point Trailhead

TRAIL USE Walking, hiking

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION 4.0-mile out-and-back

ELEVATION RANGE 8,323' at Bryce Point Trailhead to 7,300' at the Hat Shop

FACILITIES None

HIGHLIGHTS Typical Bryce hoodoos with a twist (they're capped with dolomite limestone)

◆ *Description*

THE HAT SHOP is rarely visited by the thousands of park visitors who tend to stay close to the comfort of the rim, so it's not uncommon to spend 2 hours on this trail and, once you descend about 100 feet below the rim, not see another soul. This hike puts you on the final leg of the Under the Rim Trail—one of the greatest long trails in the country, a 23-mile route from Rainbow Point to Bryce Point.

The route traverses a piñon forest below the Pink Cliffs before dropping through hoodoos and into a side canyon. Once at the Hat Shop, you'll see a textbook example of how hoodoos form: Softer layers of sandstone lie beneath angular capstones of dolomite limestone. In a process known as differential erosion, the sandstone erodes at a faster rate than the harder limestone, thereby creating the distinctive and improbably balanced "hats." Each hat acts as an umbrella for the hoodoo below and provides it with some protection from further and faster erosion.

Hat Shop



◆ Route

FROM THE NORTH SIDE of the parking area, descend the long, wide trail steps to the right, in the direction of the Hat Shop and Peekaboo Loop. At 0.1 mile you arrive at a signed trail junction with a connector trail marked TO PEEKABOO

*The Hat Shop*

mhgstan/Shutterstock

LOOP, with Peekaboo Loop descending to the left and the Hat Shop Trail (the final leg of the longer Under the Rim Trail) continuing straight ahead. Continue straight. The trail undulates across the rim, dotted with manzanitas and sparse but varied conifers, including Douglas-firs, piñon pines, and ponderosa pines.

After this 0.5-mile stretch above the rim, the trail enters the Bryce Canyon Wilderness Area and begins its descent into the Pink Cliffs on steep switchbacks. Initially the trail is on the whitish layer of the Pink Cliffs, but it quickly enters the red section. Shortly you're surrounded by Pink Cliff hoodoos and immersed in a very different ecosystem from the one you just experienced above the rim.

As you continue your descent, you arrive at a promontory about 1.5 miles from the trailhead. If you know what you're looking for, you'll get a glimpse of the Hat Shop in the distance to the south. But the more sweeping and compelling views are to the east, where the Aquarius Plateau on the left and Kaiparowits Plateau on the right stretch across the horizon, 40 miles or more in the distance.

Passing the promontory, the trail curves to the right and stays fairly level as it contours its way along a side canyon, initially moving northwest in the opposite direction of the Hat Shop before making a bend to the left for your final approach.

There is no sign marking the Hat Shop, so you'll need to pay attention to the hoodoos on the right side of the trail. Exactly 2.0 miles from the trailhead, the path makes a quick rise onto a promontory where, on your right, you'll see hoodoos topped with precariously perched dolomite stones—the Hat Shop! You're in full exposed sunlight, and it may take some hunting to find a nearby tree large enough to offer sufficient shade for a picnic. From the Hat Shop, you can continue down the Under the Rim Trail and do some exploring in this piñon–juniper woodland before returning to the trailhead the way you came.

◆ *To the Trailhead*

GPS COORDINATES 37.604081, -112.156680

From US 89 south of Panguitch, turn onto UT 12 and drive east for 14.0 miles. Turn right on UT 63 to enter Bryce Canyon National Park. From the entrance and visitor center, drive south on UT 63 for 1.6 miles to Bryce Point Road, on your left. Turn left onto Bryce Point Road, and continue for 1.3 miles to a fork with Paria View on the right and Bryce Point on the left. Bear left and continue for 0.6 mile to the large parking area and viewpoint.

STONE PEOPLE

The word *hoodoo* may seem like an unscientific, unofficial, or colloquial name for the distinctive spires found in Bryce and other parts of the Colorado Plateau, but it is indeed a technical term used by geologists. The difference between a hoodoo and a spire or pinnacle is that hoodoos have a variable thickness, sometimes described as a totem pole–shaped body, whereas a spire has a smoother, more tapered profile. This variable thickness occurs when a harder rock layer sits on top of a softer, more easily eroded layer.

According to ancient legend, hoodoos were believed to be people whom the god Coyote turned to stone for misbehaving. In the Paiute language, hoodoos were called legend people. If you use your imagination, you can almost see their faces.

13 PEEKABOO LOOP

TRAILHEAD LOCATION Bryce Point Trailhead

TRAIL USE Walking, hiking, horseback riding on one portion of the trail

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION 4.9-mile balloon

ELEVATION RANGE 8,300' at Bryce Point Trailhead to 7,450' at loop's farthest extension, near the signed junction

FACILITIES Solar-composting toilet on Peekaboo Loop

HIGHLIGHTS A superb loop hike below the rim through the southern half of the Bryce Amphitheater

◆ *Description*

IF **QUEENS GARDEN** is the best hike in Bryce Canyon National Park, then Peekaboo Loop must be a very close second. Think of it as a companion hike to Queens Garden and Navajo Loop (Hike 15)—a longer, equally varied, and scenic hike south of Queens Garden. Peekaboo Loop plunges below the rim and winds through the hoodoos in the southern half of the Bryce Amphitheater in much the same way that the Queens Garden and Navajo Loop explores the northern half of the amphitheater. Each hike is comprehensive in its approach and captures the most spectacular and noteworthy formations within its respective area.

The trail to Peekaboo Loop descends below the rim from Bryce Point via a short connector. Once you're in the heart of the hoodoos, you'll be treated to some of Bryce Canyon's most iconic formations, including the Three Wise Men, the Cathedral, and the Organ. You'll also have eastward views to the Aquarius Plateau and the Kaiparowits Plateau.

On Peekaboo Loop you'll also pass the Wall of Windows, which may cause you to wonder, "What's the difference between a window and an arch?" In Utah's national parks, a hole in a fin can be designated as an arch or a window. While there's no consensus, some geologists suggest that an arch occurs at or near the base of a rock wall, like the doors of a house, whereas a window is found above ground level. Though the naming of the openings in Arches National Park does not always follow this distinction, the Wall of Windows is a perfect example of a window, according to the above definition.

Because a portion of the loop is shared with horses, park officials recommend hiking it clockwise to avoid horses approaching hikers from behind. The signage on the loop also supports that direction. Fortunately, equestrian usage is light, so the trail is not too fouled, and the trail surface still favors hikers.

Peekaboo Loop



◆ Route

YOUR ROUTE BELOW THE RIM starts with a quick descent along a steep but nicely groomed trail to a junction sign at 0.1 mile. Here you turn left onto the connector trail marked **TO PEEKABOO LOOP**. The trail to the right leads to the Hat Shop (Hike 12), which you can save for another day.

The connector makes a quick descent into hoodoos along several sweeping switchbacks. Descending through scattered bristlecone and limber pines, you'll pass through a short man-made arch or small tunnel 0.5 mile from the trailhead. Here the views open up to the area where you'll be hiking. Continuing your descent, you'll arrive at the beginning of the loop within 1.0 mile of the trailhead.

Your first stop comes quickly as you arrive at the horse corral. A picnic area and solar composting toilet are tucked in a shady spot to the left of the trail, making this a fine spot for a quick rest and snack.

Once you hit the loop, you encounter lots of undulation as you bob and weave your way under, around, and through the maze of hoodoos. At 0.3 mile from the start of the loop, you arrive at a viewpoint and sign directing your attention to the Wall of Windows, on the fin to the north.

At 1.1 miles on the loop, the trail completes its ascent and crests through a narrow passageway in the rock to move from the Bryce Amphitheater into the smaller amphitheater below Inspiration Point, with equally impressive views of

A hiker enjoying the delightful Peekaboo Loop



HEY, WHO'S BAKING COOKIES?



Ponderosa pine

Wildnerdpix/Shutterstock

While hiking through the canyons of southern Utah, you may get a whiff of freshly baked cookies, vanilla, or even cinnamon. Don't worry—you aren't losing your mind. That delicious smell is coming from a tree called the ponderosa pine. Widely distributed throughout the West, these trees can live up to 600 years and grow to an average height of 100–150 feet. When ponderosa pines are young, they have black bark. Once they reach the age of 100–120 years (young for a ponderosa), the black bark peels off, exposing the yellow, sweet-smelling bark that may remind you of a bakery. Go ahead; sniff the bark and enjoy.

the hoodoos—views, proximity, and perspective that drive-by tourists on the rim will never see. Consider yourself lucky.

At 1.9 miles on the loop, you'll come to the northerly extension of Peekaboo Loop at one of the lowest elevations on the trail. You'll now begin your ascent on the return side—the east side of the loop. After the initial steep ascent, the trail does some more winding, rising, and falling through especially scenic stretches of the Bryce Amphitheater to complete the loop in a total distance of just under 3.0 miles.

As you arrive at the same junction where you started the loop, turn left onto the connector trail for your ascent to the rim.

◆ *To the Trailhead*

GPS COORDINATES 37.604367, -112.156967

From US 89 south of Panguitch, turn onto UT 12 and drive east for 14.0 miles. Turn right on UT 63 to enter Bryce Canyon National Park. From the entrance and visitor center, drive south on UT 63 for 1.6 miles to Bryce Point Road, on

your left. Turn left onto Bryce Point Road and continue for 1.3 miles to a fork with Paria View on the right and Bryce Point on the left. Bear left and continue for 0.6 mile to the large trailhead parking area and viewpoint.

14 RIM TRAIL

TRAILHEAD LOCATION Sunset Point Trailhead

TRAIL USE Walking, hiking, pets, wheelchair accessible

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION 1.0-mile out-and-back or 0.5-mile point-to-point

ELEVATION RANGE 7,992' at Sunset Point Trailhead to 8,013' at Sunrise Point

FACILITIES Restrooms, water, general store, and lodge near trailhead

HIGHLIGHTS A connecting trail linking visitor services with the most popular viewpoints

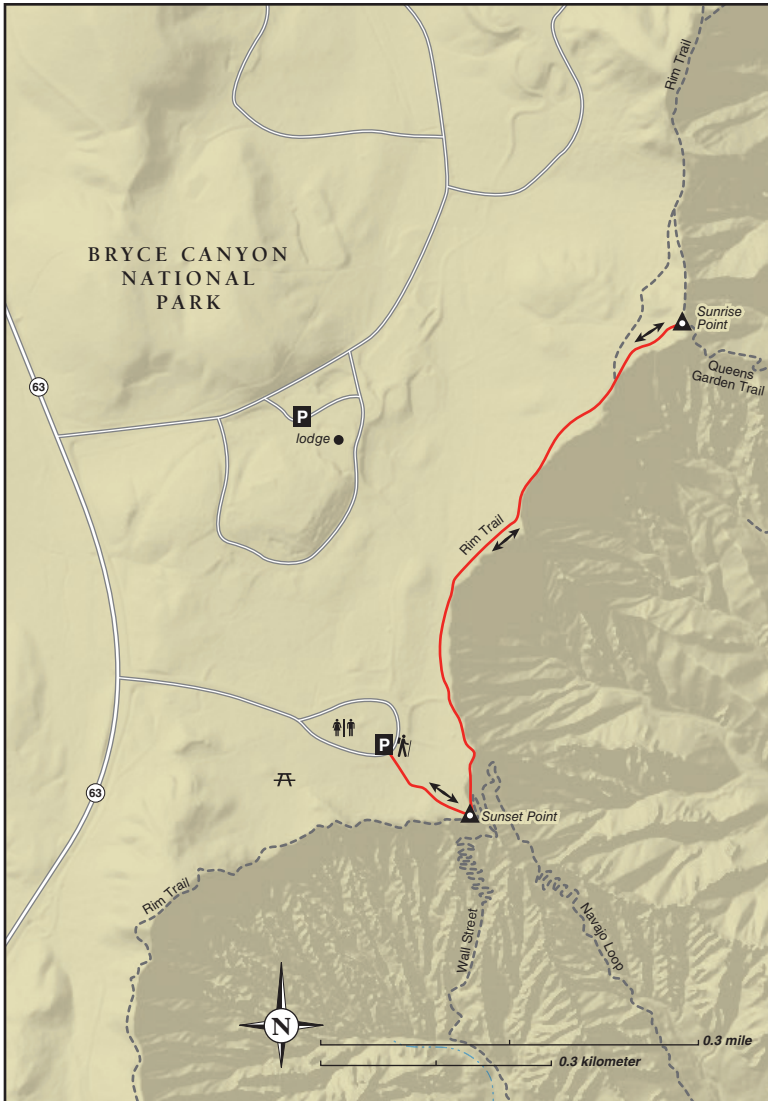
◆ *Description*

FOR MANY PARK VISITORS, a stroll along the Rim Trail, a night at the Bryce Canyon Lodge, and the view from the Sunrise Point and Sunset Point observation decks are the starting points for a Bryce Canyon vacation. Sadly, for some that's about the extent of their visit. The area between Sunrise Point and Sunset Point is the traditional heart of the park, the location of the historic Bryce Canyon Lodge, the campgrounds, and the ranger office. It's a fine baseline, but use it as a gateway to the rest of the park's wonders.

The most popular overlook in the park is Sunset Point, visited by 83% of park visitors, followed by Sunrise Point, visited by 76% of park visitors. It's an area near where Stephen Mather, a former director of the National Park Service, arrived when he first visited Bryce Canyon in 1919. A friend drove Mather to the rim and told him to keep his eyes closed until they arrived at the edge of it. When Mather opened his eyes, he gasped in wonder and promised to make Bryce Canyon a national park. In June 1923, President Warren G. Harding signed the bill to make Bryce Canyon a national monument; it was one of the last things he did in the White House. Departing on a trip through the western United States, Harding visited Zion but not Bryce Canyon. A few weeks later, he died of a heart attack. Bryce became a national park in 1928.

The historic Bryce Canyon Lodge was designed by Yale-educated Gilbert Stanley Underwood, who also designed Zion Lodge, The Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon Lodge on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon—all classic examples of early National Park Service rustic design. Built

Rim Trail



between 1924 and 1925 from locally quarried stone, including four monumental sandstone pillars reminiscent of the surrounding hoodoos, the lodge blends beautifully into the natural landscape of the Bryce Canyon rim. Of the national-park lodges designed by Underwood, Bryce Canyon Lodge is the only completely original structure still standing.

◆ *Route*

THE RIM TRAIL is the route along the rim of Bryce Canyon from Fairyland Point (to the north) to Bryce Point (to the south). And while you can walk the entire 5.5-mile trail, you can cover more territory most efficiently by driving or taking the Bryce Canyon Shuttle to the various points and overlooks along the way while doing most of your hiking on the more interesting below-the-rim trail through the Bryce Amphitheater and Fairyland. For that reason, what's included here is just the short paved section of the Rim Trail between Sunset Point and Sunrise Point.

It's a level, wide, and well-traveled route accessible to all—including wheel-chair users and pets—and it's suitable for children, inexperienced hikers, and casual walkers.

The Sunset Point overlook gives you a view into the biggest natural amphitheater in the park. From Sunset Point walk along the paved path to Sunrise Point, a distance of only 0.5 mile. Here you can ascend the viewing platform and enjoy an equally splendid view of the Bryce Amphitheater from a more northerly perspective.

You can return to Sunset Point or board the Bryce Canyon Shuttle for your continued visit in the park.

View from Sunset Point

lakkana savaksuriyawong/Shutterstock



◆ *To the Trailhead*

GPS COORDINATES 37.623471, -112.167244

From US 89 south of Panguitch, turn onto UT 12 and drive east for 14.0 miles. Turn right on UT 63 to enter Bryce Canyon National Park. From the entrance station, drive 1.1 miles south on UT 63 to the Sunset Point turnoff, on the left. Then drive 0.2 mile to the Sunset Point parking area.

WHERE DO THOSE COLORS COME FROM?

While admiring the canyon, you'll observe rocks in a rainbow of colors. The reason for this multicolored spectacle is the minerals in the rock. Hues of red, brown, black, or pink indicate that the rock contains the iron ore hematite. The yellow color comes from limonite, also an iron ore, and the lavender hues originate from the manganese ore pyrolusite. These minerals are mainly transported into the rock by groundwater. Dust-ingesting bacteria that live on the surface may also expel the minerals onto the rock.

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QUEENS GARDEN AND NAVAJO LOOP

TRAILHEAD LOCATION Sunrise Point, Bryce Canyon shuttle stop
(*Note:* This hike can also be started from the Sunset Point parking area and shuttle stop.)

TRAIL USE Walking, hiking

DISTANCE & CONFIGURATION 3.0-mile loop with various spurs and overlooks

ELEVATION RANGE 8,015' at Sunrise Point to 7,400' in the wash near Queens Garden

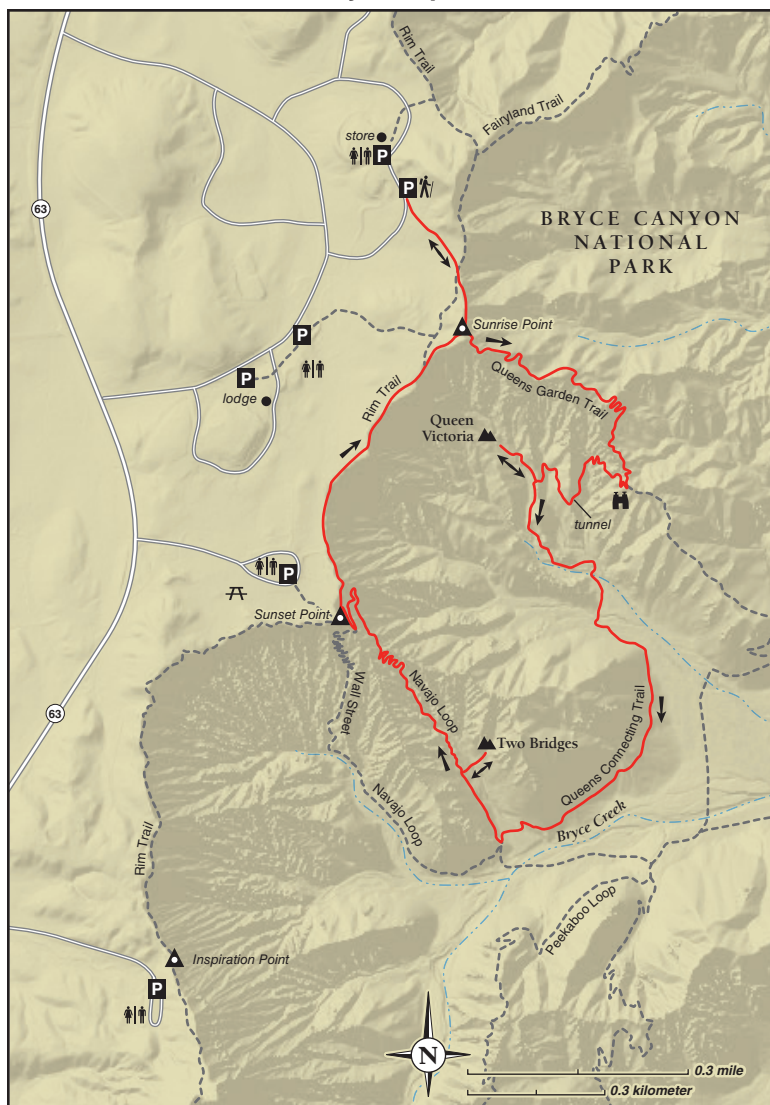
FACILITIES Restrooms, water, general store, and lodge near trailhead

HIGHLIGHTS An exquisitely sculpted trail that goes into the heart of the hoodoos

◆ *Description*

IT WOULD BE EASY to visit Bryce Canyon, drive the length of the park, stop at all the scenic turnoffs, and never stray more than 50 feet from your car, as thousands of visitors do each year. That would be a crying shame, though. To really experience Bryce, you need to dip below the rim and immerse yourself in the hoodoos. You need to experience the Bryce Amphitheater from inside it—not from a parking lot a mile away. Once you've descended below the rim, you're able to discover and explore the hoodoos, castles, and balanced rocks up close and from many angles.

Queens Garden and Navajo Loop



Queens Garden and Navajo Loop is the signature hike in Bryce Canyon National Park. At the visitor center, rangers will regularly tell you that it's the best hike in the park. You may even see one of the interpretive signs in the visitor center touting it as the best 3-mile hike in America. Once again, there's no

conceit in this claim; it would be difficult to find a better 3-mile hike anywhere in the world. Don't miss it.

Once you've committed to hiking to Queens Garden, you need to consider when to hike it. To beat the crowds, to avoid the scorching heat of the summer sun, and for the best photo conditions, hike the trail earlier in the day.

No hoodoo lasts forever. The formations and crumbly cliffs of Bryce Canyon are subject to rockfall, and nowhere is rockfall more prevalent than in the heart of the Bryce Amphitheater. Climbing on hoodoos is tempting, but those hand- and footholds are rated for chipmunks—nothing heavier. Rock climbing and scrambling on the gravelly slopes is illegal and dangerous, so stay on the trail and be aware of areas of potential rockfall.

◆ *Route*

FROM THE PARKING AREA, stay on the paved trail for 0.1 mile before arriving at the rim and a sign pointing you in the direction of Queens Garden. Continue on this wide path for another 100 yards to reach Sunrise Point, where you'll begin your descent below the rim.

Hiker on Queen's Garden Loop



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