



Grand Canyon from Moran Point with Red Canyon and the Colorado River below.

Photo Paul Fretheim

CLICK IN THE IMAGE TO OPEN A 360° PANO OF THIS LOCATION

Topo Map: Tuba City; Coordinates: 36° 52' N - 111° 35' W

Moran Point and the New Hance Trail

by Paul Fretheim

Moran Point provides one of the most spectacular views of the Grand Canyon. Moran Point is named after Thomas Moran, well known American artist of the 19th and early 20th century. Moran is known for his marvelous landscapes, such as his famous painting of the Grand Canyon, "Chasm of the Colorado," which was commissioned by Congress in 1873 for \$10,000 and hung for many years in the Capitol Building in Washington D.C.

Thomas Moran accompanied John Wesley Powell to the Grand Canyon and Mukuntoweap (Zion) as one of his illustrators and many of his original woodcuts grace the reproduction of Powell's 1875 account of his Colorado River expedition of 1869 found on this CD.



THOMAS MORAN 1837-1926

An Arizona Sunset Near the Grand Canyon, 1898

Oil on canvas, 20 X 30" (50.80 x 76.20 cm.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

T MORAN
↓



THOMAS MORAN 1837-1926

Chasm of the Colorado, 1873-1874

Department of the Interior Museum, Washington, D.C.

Captain John Hance

In the latter part of the 19th century, one of the first white settlers and proponents of tourism at the Grand Canyon, Captain John Hance, built a tourist camp near Moran Point. He also built and maintained a trail from his camp down Red Canyon from the rim to the river. The trail ended at the mouth of Red Canyon at the large rapids which came to bear his name, the Hance Rapids. There was an earlier trail, one canyon to the west, known as the Hance Trail. This trail was destroyed by floods in the 1890s, so John Hance built a new trail down Red Canyon for guiding his guests down to the



Thomas Moran with his sketchpad
and his two daughters at the rim of
the Canyon.
GRCA #13959



Captain John Hance leading three pack burros down a Grand Canyon trail. No part of today's New Hance Trail is maintained like the trail pictured here.

Photo by Kolb Bros. 1910. GRCA #26786

river and also to reach his asbestos claims on the north side of the river.

The New Hance Trail is sometimes also referred to as the Red Canyon Trail, which is probably a better name, as it avoids confusion with the Old Hance Trail which descended Mineral Canyon on the other side of Coronado Butte from Red Canyon.

New Hance Is a Difficult Trail

In his 1993 book, *Hiking the Grand Canyon*, John Annerino ranked the rim to river trails of the South Rim in order of their degree of difficulty. The eight trails and their rankings from easiest to most difficult according to Annerino are as follows:

1. Bright Angel Trail
2. South Kaibab Trail
3. Hermit Trail
4. Grandview (Horseshoe Mesa Loop) Trail
5. South Bass Trail
6. Tanner Trail
7. Boucher Trail
8. New Hance Trail

Annerino, John. *Hiking the Grand Canyon*. Sierra Club Books: San Francisco, California. 1993. p 136.

The characteristics of the New Hance Trail that make it more difficult than the other trails are basically twofold in nature:

First, the trail is not maintained, and in addition, is not well worn. It is well marked by rock cairns, but in some places marking is obscure enough to challenge the route finding abilities of even the most experienced hiker.

Secondly, the route crosses long stretches of loose rock. The trail is not well worn in many of these areas and the footing is treacherous.

The Trail Down Red Canyon

The New Hance Trailhead is not marked, but is fairly easy to find. It is located about a kilometer west of the Moran Point parking lot. To find the trailhead, start at the Moran Point parking lot and head west on Route 64. You will notice that the road goes through a



On the way up, I lost the trail for a few minutes after crossing the saddle beneath Coronado Butte. The brush just above here is quite heavy and the trail is obscure. Be sure to cache some water at the saddle on the way down for the return trip.

Photo Paul Fretheim

CLICK IN THE IMAGE TO OPEN A 360° PANO OF THIS LOCATION

couple of small dips, and then descends into a larger valley. This is the head of the Red Canyon drainage as it approaches the rim. You will see a post for a "No Parking" sign on the right as you head west. (As of this writing, spring 2001, the sign was missing from the post.) This is the spot where the trail leaves the road. You may want to stop for a moment and drop off your packs, but you cannot park here. Continue westward up the hill and watch for a small, unmarked road leading off to the left on the curve at the top of the grade. This is where you park.

From the trailhead the trail passes for a couple of hundred meters through pinyon and juniper forest to the rim. After reaching the rim, the trail drops off sharply and descends the Kaibab, Toroweap, and Coconino formations in an abrupt series of "steps" that are the



The route through the Supai group is probably the most rugged part of the hike.

Photo Paul Fretheim

CLICK IN THE IMAGE TO OPEN A 360° PANO OF THIS LOCATION.

outcrops of the various rock layers. This is an introduction to the nature of the trail, but the trail becomes even more difficult to follow not far below after the trail crosses the saddle at the foot of Coronado Butte and begins the long traverse of the Supai.

Be sure to cache some water at the Coronado Butte saddle for the hike out. I left 2 liters of water here and it was just enough so I could drink at will as I climbed out over the Coconino, Toroweap and Kaibab sections on the return hike to the rim.

The Most Rugged Part of the Hike

The most difficult section of the trail is the part that passes through the Supai formation. The trail crosses several secondary drainages along the Supai, and they are filled with loose talus. The trail winds in and out of these drainages, losing and gaining elevation in each one. The trail is hard to locate through this section, and



The Redwall descent on the New Hance Trail is surprisingly tame.

Photo Paul Fretheim

CLICK IN THE IMAGE TO OPEN A 360° PANO OF THIS LOCATION.

the footing is bad. Here and there the trail goes through thick brush in the pinyon-juniper forest and you have to bushwhack your way.

The Redwall Descent

Below the Supai is the Redwall. The Redwall is one of the most prominent features of the Grand Canyon. It is composed of 300 meter high sheer cliffs, and is one of the most formidable obstacles to travel from the river to the rim. In most places the Redwall is insurmountable, and on my first hike down the New Hance Trail I was very concerned about what the Redwall descent would be like as I picked my way along the difficult stretch through the Supai.

The Redwall turns out not to be a problem on this trail. The New Hance passes through the Redwall in a location where it has eroded back a good distance and the consequent break in the sheer lime-



The fruit of the Strawberry Hedgehog cactus tastes a bit like strawberries and was a popular treat for the Native people of this desert region.

Desert Paintbrush and Strawberry Hedgehog Cactus were just two of the many species of wildflowers in bloom on the Tonto Platform in early May.

Photos Paul Fretheim



stone cliffs provides an easy passage down to the Tonto platform below.

Once you are below the Redwall the trail is pretty easy to follow and the footing improves. At the foot of the Redwall you come out onto the open blackbush chaparral of the Tonto Platform. A few junipers grow here too, but the Tonto is desert and the plants of the Great Basin Desert Community dominate. I made my hike on the New Hance in the first week of May and the wildflowers of the Tonto platform were in full bloom.

The trail crosses a drainage as it descends into the red sandstone of the Grand Canyon Supergroup into Red Canyon below the Tonto. The Great Basin Desert plants give way to the heat loving plants of the Mojave Desert Community as you descend. The trail here is of a pretty even gradient and is well worn and easy to follow. Another kilometer or so of easy hiking brings you to the floor of Red Canyon. The trail runs along the wash at the floor of the canyon all the rest of the way to the river. In May there was running water at bottom of



My favorite camping spot is at the edge of the Tonto Platform under the lone juniper that grows there. The stars were unbelievable from there all night long.

Photo Paul Fretheim

CLICK IN IMAGE TO OPEN A 360° PANO OF THIS LOCATION.

Red Canyon just where the trail reaches the bottom of the wash that was suitable for filtering for drinking water .

I Finally See Some Other Hikers

I was getting pretty tired by the time I reached the bottom of Red Canyon. I had not seen another person all day since leaving highway 64. I was delighted to see a couple of people, a young man and woman, playing at the foot of a small waterfall along the trail just ahead as I rounded the last bend in the red sandstone before reaching the floor of the canyon. At first I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw them.

Their camp proved to be just ahead. The young blonde woman was most friendly and invited me to come join them at their camp and have some mint tea. They were part of a group of twelve REI



I laid out my bedroll near this candy striped boulder in the bottom of the wash. This would not be a good place to camp during the monsoon season.

Photo Paul Fretheim

[CLICK IN THE IMAGE TO OPEN A 360° PANO OF THIS LOCATION.](#)

(Recreational Equipment, Incorporated) employees from Minneapolis, MN out on a two week long expedition. They had hiked down the South Bass trail and were going to exit the Canyon the next morning via the New Hance Trail. A few members of the group who were really strong hikers had hiked out at the Hermit Trail and then hiked back down the Bright Angel Trail to resupply the group with food and other necessities.

I really enjoyed their company after a long day of solo hiking in some pretty remote territory.

As night began to fall and the depths of the Canyon began to slip into twilight I bid farewell to my new friends and made my way a bit further down Red Canyon and rolled out my bedroll. I slept soundly under the stars that night and made my way the rest of the



The red rock of the Grand Canyon Supergroup and the turquoise waters of Hance Rapids make for a delightful scene.

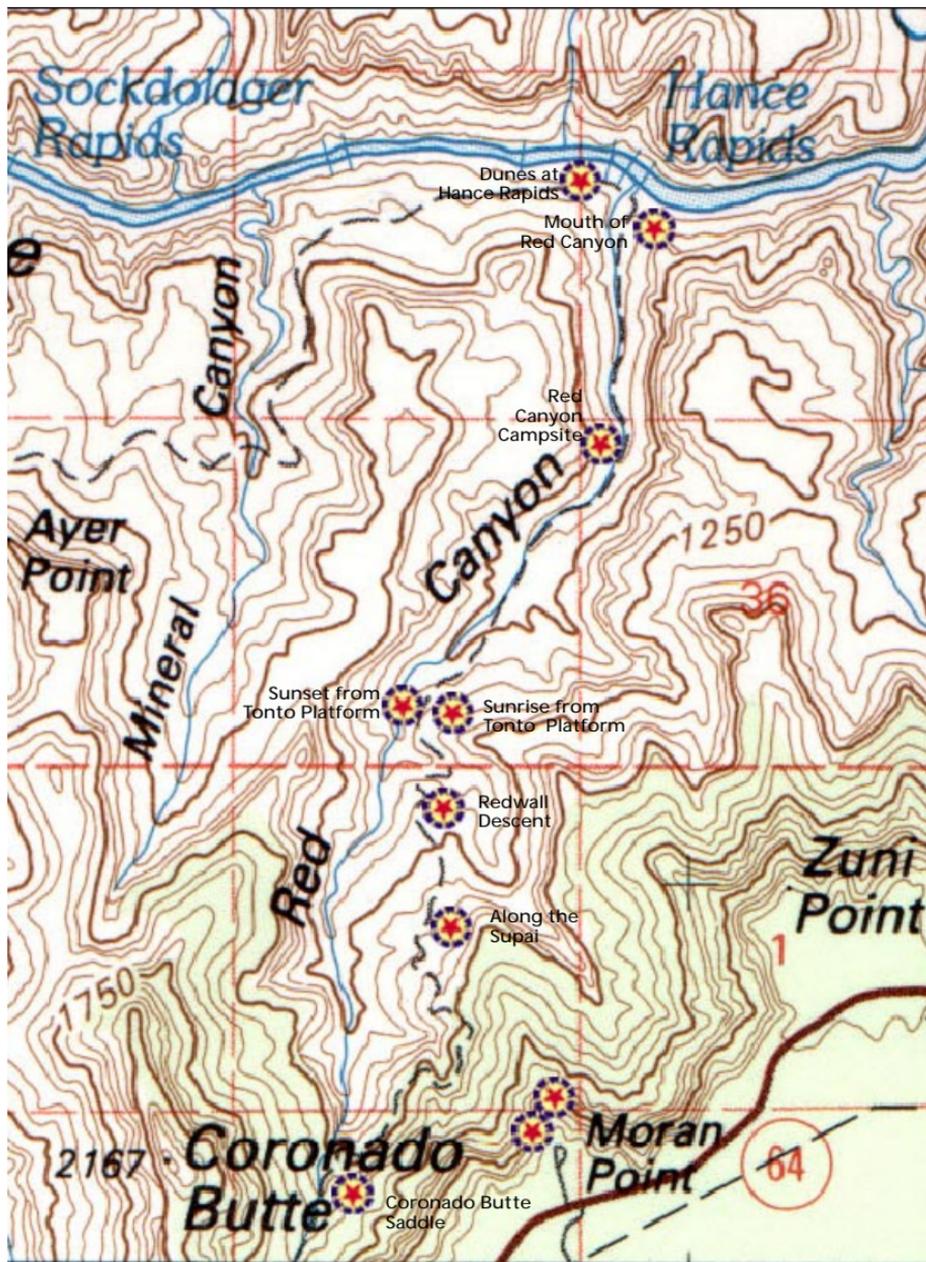
Photo Paul Fretheim

CLICK IN IMAGE TO OPEN A 360° PANO OF THIS LOCATION.

way to the river in the morning. There is a stretch of trail that goes up on the bank above the wash through some dense tamarisk growth just before you reach the river that is tough bushwhacking here and there, but it was mostly an easy walk from my campsite to the river.

Hance Rapids

As you round the last bend in the bright red sandstone of Red Canyon suddenly the turquoise waters of the Colorado River come into view. The scene at the Hance Rapids is one of the most beautiful anywhere in the Canyon. The rock is at its most red here and the water in the river is often turquoise now that the silt is left behind at Glen Canyon Dam. The whitewater and its roar adds yet another facet to this uniquely beautiful spot.



The New Hance Trail down Red Canyon from Moran Point to the Colorado River.
 CLICK ON A STAR TO BRING UP A 360° PANO OF THAT LOCATION.

The rapids continue for perhaps 500 meters downstream, and then the river drops into the First Granite Gorge of the Inner Canyon. White sand dunes line the river to the west along the rapids and make a comfortable spot to lay out your bedroll. I spent the day taking pictures and watching for rafters coming down the river. There was just one group of small rafts that came through that day in early May. In midsummer there would be a constant parade of river runners.

The temperatures were very pleasant in early May. At the river the daytime high was only about 30° C. (85° F.). In the summer months you might find temperatures in the high 40's C. or maybe even 50° C. (120° F.). down at the river.

That evening I hiked back up to the Tonto Platform so I could hike out the next morning before it got hot. The stars were unbelievable again that night, as were the sunset and sunrise views of Vishnu Temple, Wotan's Throne and the Walhalla Plateau across the Canyon. At sunset I could see the light of the bright sky to the north shining through Window Rock at Cape Royal.

Hiking Out Was Easier

The hike out was easier than the hike in. I knew the way, and I wasn't worried about getting stuck at the Redwall. I had an easier time with my footing on the loose talus in the Supai when going up too.

I ran out of water just before I got to my cache at the Coronado Butte saddle so I was really glad to pick up the 2 liters of water I had left there for my return hike. Another hour of hiking brought me back to the rim.

The New Hance Trail down Red Canyon is not a good hike for inexperienced hikers, but it is one of the most beautiful hikes in all the Grand Canyon.

See also: [The Hance Rapids from Kolb p 286](#)