

**Marble Canyon Region of Arizona**  
**Cathedral Wash Hikes – March 13 & 14 2020**  
**Evan Rose**

For this hike I used the guidebook “Hiking and Exploring the Paria River” by Michael R. Kelsey (6<sup>th</sup> edition), starting on page 236. On the afternoon of March 13 I hiked Lower Cathedral Wash, after hiking Spencer Trail in the morning. On March 14 I hiked Upper Cathedral Wash, but not the full extent in Kelsey’s guidebook.

**Lower Cathedral Wash**

Drive to the parking area about two miles north of US89A, located on the road to Lee’s Ferry. Park here, walk north to the end of the parking lot, and enter the Wash. Start walking downstream.

I started hiking in mid-afternoon. The weather was cool. It had rained recently, so there was some water in the wash, but it was easy to avoid. There is some route finding, following cairns to avoid dry falls and minor cliffs. It is fairly easy for anyone who has done some canyoneering. I encountered over a dozen people, some with dogs, most with cameras. Near the mouth of the wash, I met a couple (Steve and Rachel from Florida) who were spending two months in the West. They asked to tag along with me, because they found the wash challenging. We hiked back together, and I showed them a couple of canyoneering tricks – holding a partner’s foot on a foothold to assure grip, grasping each other by the wrists (instead of holding hands) when performing an assist. We had a pleasant return hike to the parking area and contacted each other by messaging later in the week.



Cathedral Wash is the large drainage running west to east and ending at the Colorado River. The Lower Wash is to the east of the road between Marble Canyon Lodge and Lee’s Ferry. (Google Maps)

Lower Cathedral Wash provides a pleasant half-day hike with good views and some minor challenges that make the hike interesting.



Entering Lower Cathedral Wash



The view changes from brown rocks to white rocks as the wash deepens.



The wash starts to “slot up.” Cairns lead the hiker around the dry falls and cliffs.



Here is a slot canyon section of Lower Cathedral Wash with some water from recent rains.



Lower Cathedral Wash joins the Colorado River. Looking upstream toward Lee's Ferry.



Evan Rose poses in Lower Cathedral Wash.

## Upper Cathedral Wash

Drive to the parking area about two miles north of US89A, located on the road to Lee's Ferry. Park here, walk north to the end of the parking lot, and enter the Wash. Start walking upstream.

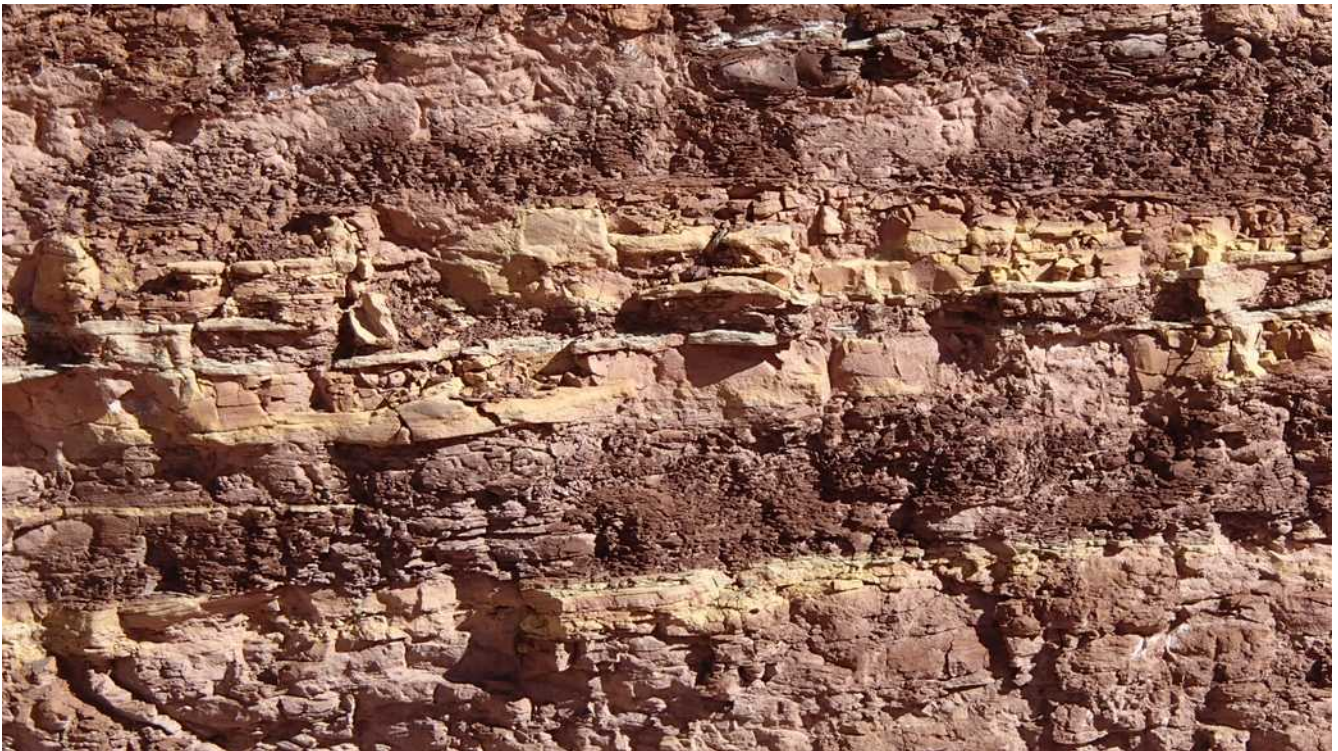
I started hiking around 11 AM. I took photos of Kelsey's pages 236 & 237, which shows a map and a photo of the upper route, and the guidebook provides detailed directions. Much of this hike is in the drainage, but then one needs to climb out and hike a sandy hogsback, climb some steep terrain, and find one's way around a cliff band. If followed to its conclusion, this route tops out at the Sand Hills with a hike extension to Powell Monument. I turned back before the top in the region of the cliff band.



The hike begins in Upper Cathedral Wash just north of the parking lot. My objective is the gap to the left of the tower in the center of this photo. There was wet sand and mud in the wash, mostly avoidable.



Another view of the objective from a point deeper in the Wash.



Rock layers with varied colors and textures line the walls of the Wash.



This side canyon required exploring.



After climbing some boulders and strolling up canyon, I came to a dry fall and returned to Cathedral Wash.



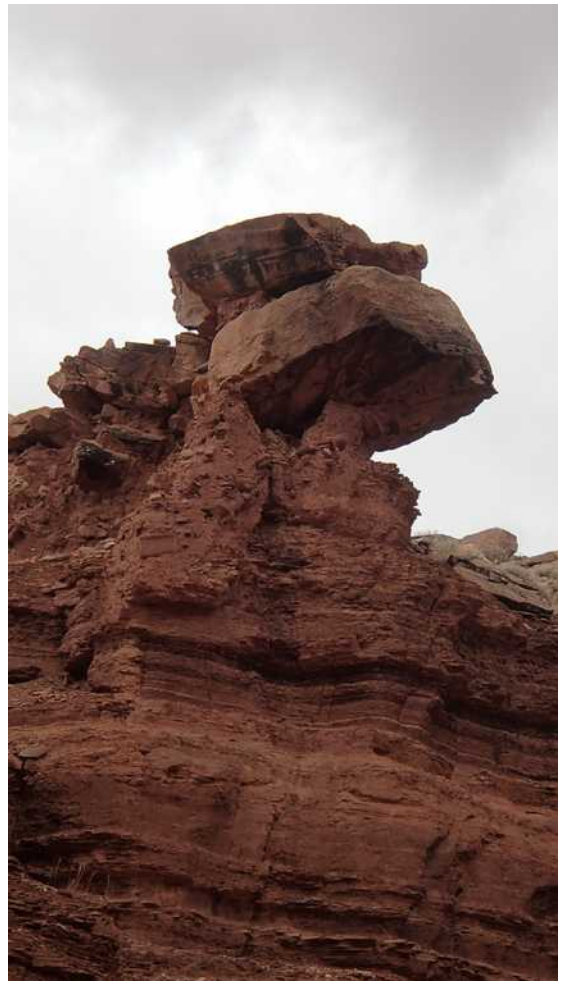


Here is the dry fall at the end of this fun little side canyon.





Rain threatened, but did not arrive. At this point, I'm looking for Kelsey's "toadstool with a capstone" that marks the climb out. Some candidates follow.





End of the line. Where is that toadstool?



A couple of cairns mark the trail up and out, passing by the elusive toadstool.



A steep hike up loose soil and rocks leads to a grand view of the toadstool from above.





Now it's time to walk the sandy hogback with traces of an old road and follow it to the tower.



The view down into Cathedral Wash upstream of the dry fall and toadstool. The Wash is no longer the route to the tower. Intriguing, though.



Views from the sandy hogsback, looking generally north.



Looking northeast toward the Colorado River.



Marble Canyon from the sandy hogback. I think the side canyon is Badger Canyon.



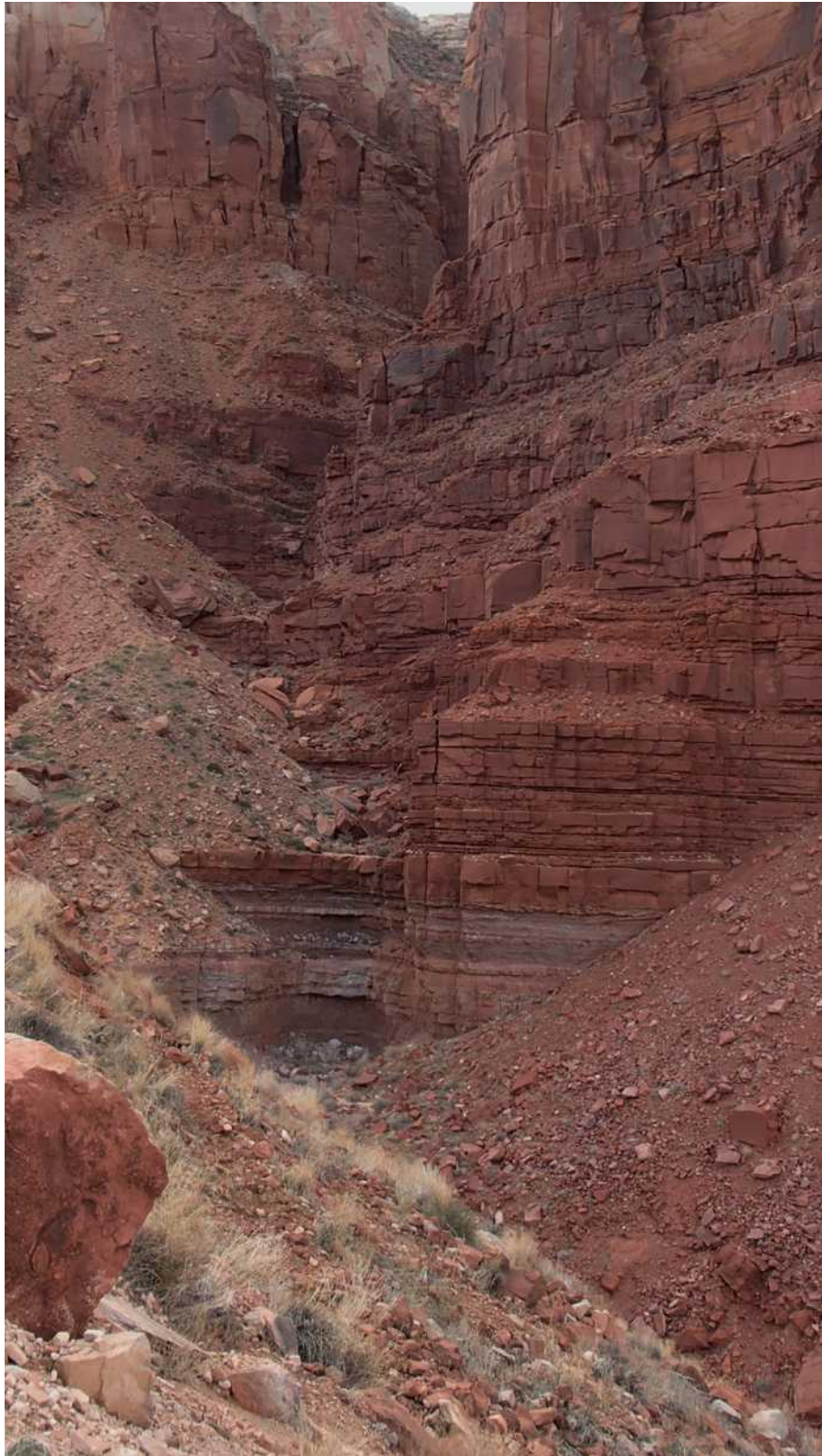
Black and red rocks looking south from the sandy hogback.



Lighter highlights on the dark gray rock.



This isolated boulder consists of a block of cross bedded sandstone. I was intrigued how it had broken off, landed in my path, retaining a significant geological feature. It did not, however, fit into my daypack. Pity.

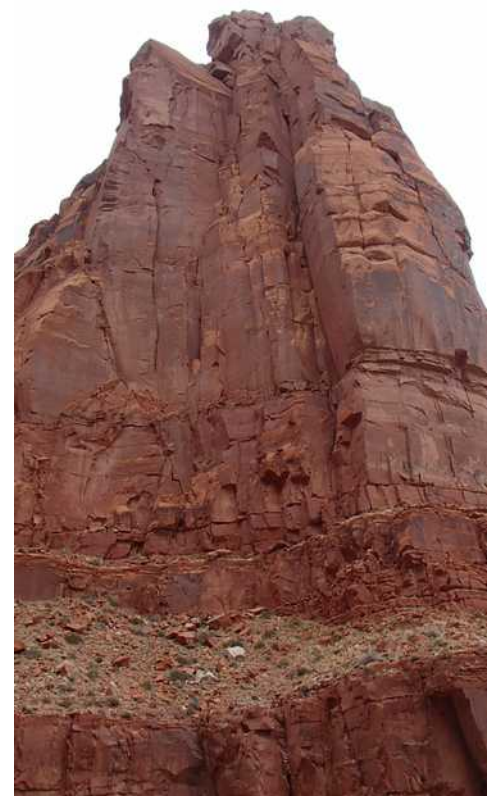


To get to this point required considerable scrambling on all fours along a steep and crumbling ridge. I'm examining the watercourse to the left of the tower and trying to decide whether I want to climb up that steep ridge to the left and then cross to the right along one of the cliff bands. I decided not to do that, but to return and explore some of Upper Cathedral Wash above the dry fall.





Here is a montage of photos from close to the tower. These were taken as I considered continuing up the route along the left side of the tower.





A view of the Colorado River.



Time to explore Upper Cathedral Wash and walk down the canyon, in favor of hiking the route already taken along the sandy hogsback.

Below: Dropping into the canyon and looking back out. Then admiring some banded deposits.





Banded and colorful deposits in soft browns and reddish hues.



Wet sand and mud in the canyon. Downstream of this area I encountered a place where a rockfall had impounded the flow of the stream. What appeared to be relatively solid mud and sand turned out to be a deep reservoir of sticky mud. It swallowed my boots and lower legs. I quickly got out and left the area. I retraced my path and climbed out of the canyon at the first opportunity. That route out was a steep climb on crumbling soil. Standard for this area, but requiring some concentration. Stabbing my fingers into the soft soil offered better purchase.



Views from the climb out of Upper Cathedral Canyon.  
The same rock formation is shown from different viewpoints as my climb out progressed  
in the upper two photos and the one that follows below.



Out of the canyon and walking back to the toadstool.  
Did I mention that this hike features steep and crumbling terrain?

Upper Cathedral Wash was a great adventure, offering wonderful views and a chance to explore. Continuing beyond my farthest point might have worked out, but I was deterred by the steepness of the route, lack of a trail and worries about retracing the route through the cliff bands. Perhaps I will explore this route on a future visit to Vermilion Cliffs. I would start earlier in the day, omit the side trip, and try to find more beta for this route.