The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America
RICK'S ROADS
Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What

BLOG POST: 2025.09.15
The Virgin River Narrows, Zion National Park, Utah



The Narrows is amazing. It would be a jaw-dropping hiking trail if it was dry, with the 300-foot-high, sheer cliffs towering up on both sides – in some places less than 100 feet apart. But add the fascinating experience of walking for miles through a moving river, and it becomes amazing.

I'd hiked this canyon twice before, so I knew enough to bring my trusty hiking staff (The Luckless Log, which I've had for about 40 years). Being a tri-ped rather than a bi-ped is definitely the way to go. The footing is ridiculously unstable. This is a rocky river bed. Dirt that would have stabilized the smooth, rounded stones washed away a long time ago, leaving precarious footholds at almost every step.

Now, clambering around on rounded rocks is no big deal, but these are under moving water, in some cases a few feet under. Your leg gets tugged by the current, you can't see where the rocks are, and once your foot does find a promising landing spot and you start to put your weight on it, it starts to roll. Whooaaa, pull that leg back and try again, Ben.



It is slowwww going, but it's also fun if you keep the right mindset. There are a lot of other people out here and you sometimes see somebody take the plunge when they miss a step. I admit that I got mostly wet from one near-tumble.

The hike starts on the riverbank. Many people – especially little kids and elderlies – hang out in the first couple of hundred feet. There is a rock-and-dirt bank there, and the water is shallow.

But once you get just a few minutes up the canyon, the river widens out to the tall walls, and your only option is to walk right on into the river. And it doesn't mess around. One of the deepest sections of the whole hike is right there. I went almost chest-deep for about 50 yards. The footing was good there though, so the only real concern was how cold that 55˚ water felt on my Florida-accustomed skin. It was, um, refreshing, especially at … well, figure it out. (See photo, next page.)

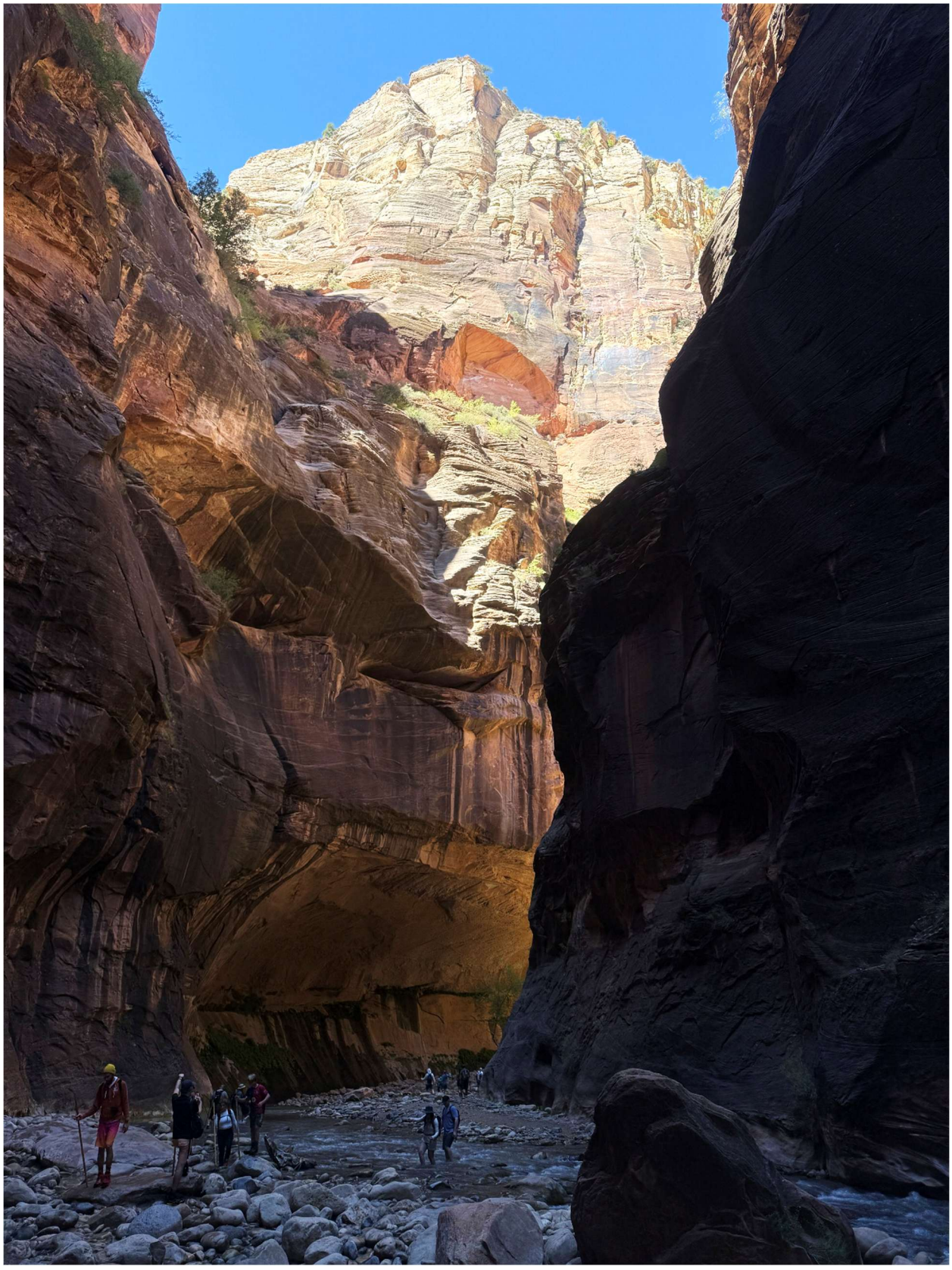
Now, the river does command your attention, but when you take a short pause and lift your eyes from where you are stepping, The Narrows is just one wow after another.

















There are areas during the hike where some solid land is an option. They are not lengthy, but they do often rest areas where you can stop and look for a while, have a snack, or just relax your mind from the focus of the precarious walk.



With so many people hiking the river today, it was tough to get unpopulated photos. The people do give scale to the landscape though, showing just how enormous these rock walls are. But a couple or a few would be fine. Not twenty.

There was one woman who particularly bedeviled me. While most of the hikers seemed to be in earth tones, blues, or dark hues, this woman was wearing a neon pink shirt. You could not not see her, from any distance or any angle. Her bright spot of color stole the scene.

I tried slowing down, I tried speeding up, I could not seem to lose her. Finally, at decisive fork, where the Narrows got especially narrow, I had a good photo lined up. And she came strolling into it. I gave up and decided to use her as the focal point. It came out quite well.



Being a deep and steep canyon, The Narrows has a lot of shady areas, even at midday. Between those and the cold water, this hike is a pleasant experience on a south Utah summer afternoon.

This is not a place to be, though, when there is rain anywhere in the region. There is a lot of high ground ‘round these parts, and rain water falls aggressively from it. The Virgin River catches a lot of it, and sends it roaring through these narrow spaces. You’d get smashed up real good if you got caught out here when the flash flood hit.



That aforementioned fork signaled the turnaround point for me. I sat on a large rock, drank my last bottle of water, scarfed down a protein bar. I had hiked about two hours, and being an out-and-back hike, I was looking at most of two more hours on the way back. There’d be fewer photo stops, partly because of familiarity and partly because the river flows westward here and the sun angles would not be as flattering.

I stopped and asked a couple of guys to take my picture next to a boulder. If you look closely, you can see the pink-shirted woman. She’s in shadow, but she’s still doing her best to be a scene-stealer.





Once back on the dry trail to the shuttle stop, the views did not disappoint. Zion is so beautiful.

It was tough to leave, but it was a gorgeous ride out the east gate and down to Kanab for dinner at my favorite restaurant, The Rocking V.

