

Name: Amanda Wolff

Age: 15

School: Homeschool

## **Hidden Canyon Hike**

By Amanda Wolff

We were on the side of the canyon trudging upward, walking back and forth along the switchbacks. The silence was broken only by thudding of feet hitting the ground and the occasional distant birdcall. Suddenly, we heard a faint rustling noise in an upcoming tree and all froze. What could this be? Quietly creeping forward, I cautiously made my way to the swaying tree and parted some branches. RatTicTicTic! The sound exploded into the silence like an avalanche. I jumped back startled, only to find the others in my party laughing! In the tree, there was a fat squirrel scolding me for disturbing his snack. The tense monotony of the past 20 minutes dissipated as we took a break and observed the squirrel's antics, scampering up and down the scrub tree it had been snacking in.

I was in Zion National Park with my Mom, Dad, 2 younger brothers, and older sister in mid-September. We decided to tackle the Hidden Canyon Trail early that morning to be some of the first people in the park and be well up the trail before the sun shone full force into the canyon, elevating the temperature over 100 degrees F. This drama was just one of the happenings along the course of our hike. Our family has a habit of unknowingly going on strenuous trails, and this 2.5-mile trail was no exception.

The lines of switchbacks looked pretty harmless and didn't look like much trouble as our ascent started. Steadily climbing, there wasn't much to see as we followed the manicured trail, but going along, the trail became more rugged. The smooth dirt path gave way to pitted rock with scrub trees and grasses sprouting out of crevices in the boulders. There weren't many hikers out, and we were largely alone with the deer and nature of the canyon. Frequently, we

would pause for a breather and drink water we had packed; it was important to stay hydrated in the dry, hot climate. At a fork in the trail, there was a wall with little stacks of sandstone rocks hikers had built as miniature monuments of making it there. Dad had fun making my brothers believe the stones had just happened to fall there in perfect little stacks (we did tell them that hikers had built these, and added a few stacks of our own before continuing on).

After the fork, the incline started to become steeper as we traveled along the rocks, a few safe feet from the edge of a drop-off. The scenery changed as we hiked higher, and at just the right moment, the sun peeked above the canyon side and filled the valley with radiant light. The scene was breathtaking as the light glinted off the rocks and trail we had hiked far below. As the sun rose, we paused for more water and took some pictures to try to capture the feeling of being on top the world. As we came to a landing at the edge of the canyon wall, with big rocks serving as a crude railing, we noticed most people would shoot a few pictures and turn back. However, a few adventurous souls would continue along. We would soon find out why only the most fit and adventurous people would continue from that spot, because we kept going. Within the next 10 minutes, the trail took a drastic change!

Where there once was a wide, smooth trail, there were now chains hooked into the mountainside for hikers to grip to avoid slipping off the narrow trail to the bottom of the canyon far below. At this point, Mom was ready to turn back, but we convinced her to keep going a little further. We proceeded along, single-file, hands grasping at the chains as our feet slid on the loose sand on the windswept rocks.

Making it to the end of the chains to a safe side of the path, we speculated that there shouldn't be any more dangerous parts like what we had just passed and continued merrily on our way. Again, we were wrong. After going about two hundred feet around a turn, we were confronted

with another portion of trail where we had to hang on for dear life and scramble along the rocks. This was the worst spot in the trail, and after reaching the other side; we stopped for a breather where Mom decided she had had enough.

We decided that Dad would proceed with the kids while Mom would stay there with our backpacks. After scrambling up a small rock wall, over some boulders, and across a log, a blast of cool air welcomed us to a hidden upper canyon that was revealed out of nowhere. As we marveled about the surprise of the canyon hidden at such elevation, the gritty sandstone turned into soft white sand that lined the floor, and a refreshing breeze played against our faces. It was shady in the canyon with large pine trees that had knotted, twisted roots and trunks scattered along the trail which created picturesque shadows along the walls. As we were drawn further down the trail, birds chirped the perfect background music. We were sorry Mom wasn't there to experience the peacefulness and carefree atmosphere. As we went along, we had to climb over and through a series of side trails and under entangled trees, with our feet swishing through the snow-white sand. After a while of savoring all the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings, we headed back, lest Mom worry about us.

It seemed the return trip was easier, and in little time we had returned to Mom. Going back through the trail of chains and rocks we had once trod, we successfully made it back to civilization. The whole experience was inspiring and caused us all to marvel at God's awesome and wonderful creation, tucked away for discovery by those who persevere for hidden secrets that lie ahead.