

# Snow Canyon

## A Day In The Park



A Photo Essay By  
Jim Witkowski



On The Road With Jim Presents

# Snow Canyon

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*Visit Jim's Website [www.jimwitkowski.com](http://www.jimwitkowski.com) to see more portfolios. To read the stories behind Jim's pictures, visit *On the Road With Jim* at [www.jimwitkowski.com/blog/](http://www.jimwitkowski.com/blog/)*

# The Long Shot

Utah's Snow Canyon State Park is like the CliffsNotes for understanding the Escalante Grand Staircase National Monument. Sure there's stuff missing, but once you've gone through it, you have a general idea of how it works. The park is located in the southwest corner of Utah, north of St. George. The 7,400-acres were gifted by Washington County and small ranch purchases in 1959.

My first impression of Snow Canyon was, "Gee, this is small." The north-south road

is approximately 11 miles between entrances, but the park floor climbs a thousand feet in that distance. 12 hiking trails are scattered along its length. Packed into that relatively small area is a miniature version of the Escalante Grand Staircase. At the bottom is the reddish-orange sandstone layer common to Kanab, and above it is the white Navajo Sandstone seen in Zion National Park. Black lava flows are intermingled with the colorful sandstone. Finally, the 10,369-foot Signal Peak is in the north.



Stacked Dunes



Yellow Cottonwood



White Rocks

# Jenny's Canyon

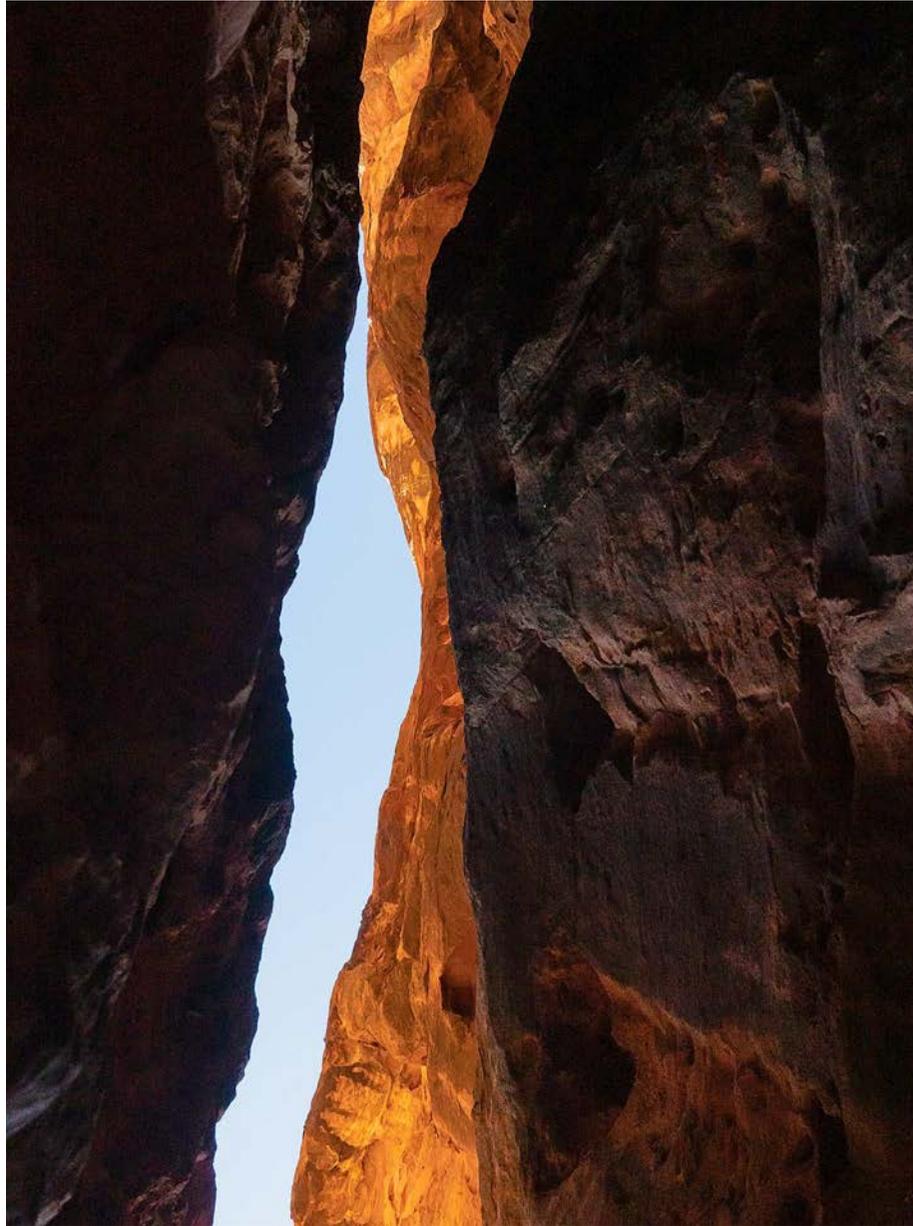
The Jenny's Canyon Trail is the most accessible and rewarding walk in Snow Canyon State Park. The hike is only a half-mile round trip with an elevation change of a couple of steps. The path is smooth and sandy except for the rock steps up onto the sandstone platform.

At the trail's end, you'll find a slot canyon that ends in a shallow cave. Unlike the more famous Antelope Canyon near Page, Arizona, where the water cut a deep course into the sandstone, here the petri-

fied dunes left a gap between layers when they formed during the Jurassic era. You get a sense of walking through a maze as you make your way through a narrow corridor toward the cave. The sandstone walls soar hundreds of feet over your head, and only a thin ribbon of blue sky separates them.

Inside the cave, millennia of erosion have created a natural window. They have left several examples of honeycomb weathering on the walls for you to examine.

Jenny's Canyon Sky





Arch and Honeycomb Weathering

Honeycomb Weathering



# Sand

In a canyon with a sandstone floor surrounded by sandstone mountains, you'd suspect that wind and weather erosion would result in the release of free grains of sand. If the area was unbounded, the winds could carry the sand grains to the four corners of the world; however, the mountain faces stall the air in a place like Snow Canyon. The free grains fall out of the air. You can see this in a couple of stops along the park's west side.

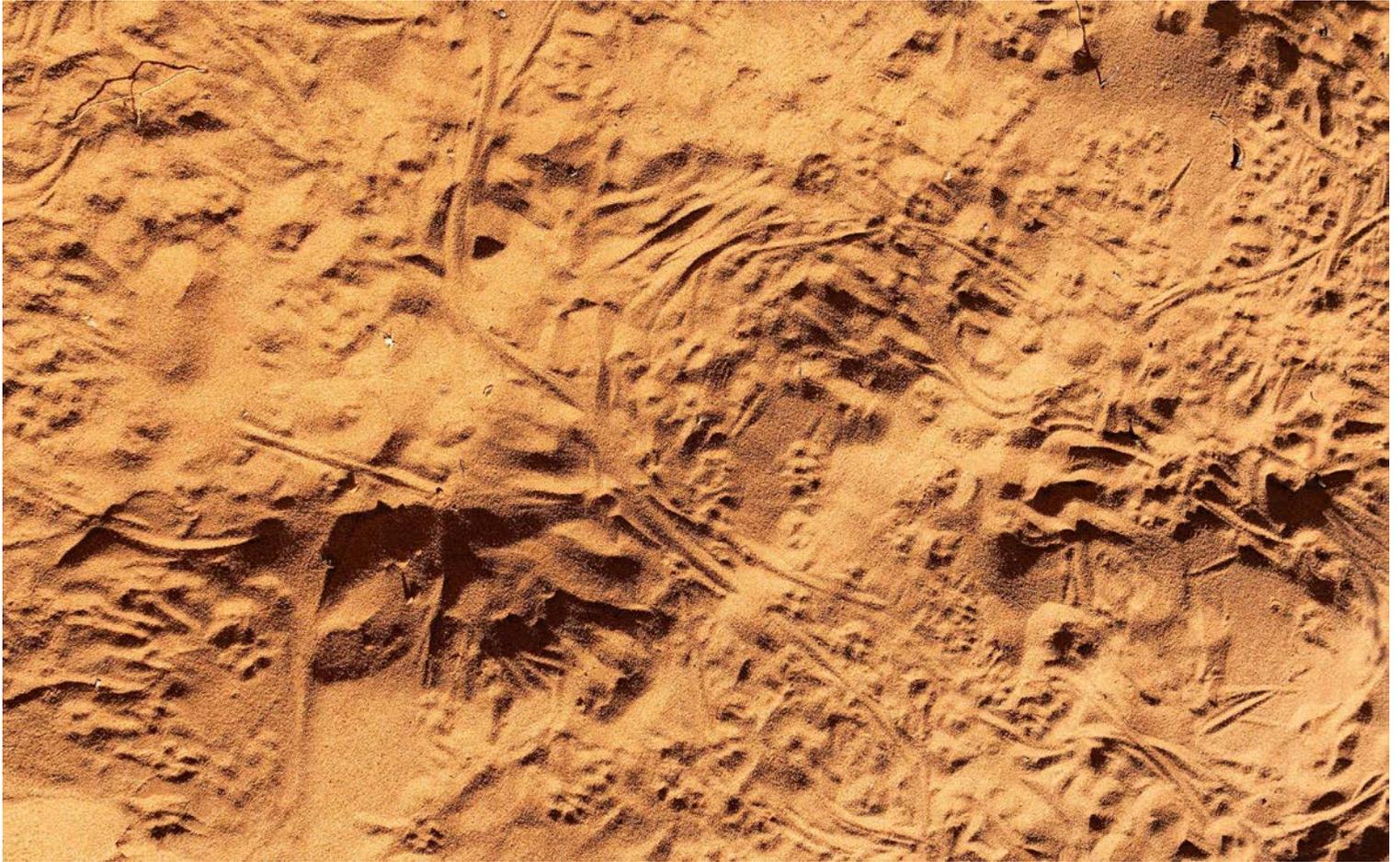
Photographers love dunes for the play of light in their

peaks and valleys. However, that's not what we have here. Because the dune trails are short, they're popular with visitors, and there's a lot of traffic on the sand.

Among the thousands of human footprints are other tracks; of bugs, lizards, birds, mice, and larger mammals. There are so many animal tracks in the sand that you'd be concerned to see them if they were in your backyard sandbox. In Snow Canyon, the rangers created a bingo card so you can record which tracks you've spotted.



A Thousand Human Footprints



Critter Tracks



Space Alien Statue

# Petrified Dunes

Near Snow Canyon's south entrance, you can see walls of the Kayenta Formation—a sedimentary layer formed during the early Jurassic era.

These are the park's oldest rocks. The remaining formation are Navajo Sandstone from a later Jurassic era. They were part of a tremendous Sahara-like sand desert blown in from across the north and northwest. The great wall of dunes lay diagonal across Utah from its northeast to the southwest. In subsequent eras, they were covered and hardened. Erosion has peeled

the top layers back, and some of the dunes are again exposed in Boulder, Zion, and Snow Canyon.

The sandstone's color indicates its age—the deeper red being older and transitioning to white. Since forming, pressures from expansion and contraction have fractured the dunes into nearly uniform blocks. As you walk the Petrified Dunes Trail, you see spots where weathering continues in 'cup-holders,' where water collects and freezes, further fracturing the rock.



Pinion And Petrified Dunes



Dune Block Fractures



Freeze Fractures

# Lava

Towards the park's north side, you'll see the jagged black basalt from recent lava flows (27,000 years ago). The basalt covers the east side ridges. Before the eruption, the cliff tops were the canyon floor, but the hardened magma forced the water west, which carved a new canyon.

There are two trails in this area that take you to exciting formations. The first is the Lava Tube Trail, and the other is the Cinder Cone Trail. The latter trailhead is on the east side of State Route 18 and has

a moderate elevation rise, so I didn't hike it on this trip. This trail winds to the rim of the lava cone, where you can peer into the extinct caldera.

Instead, I opted for the more accessible Lava Tube Trail. I find basalt a difficult subject to photograph. It's like taking a picture of a black cat in a coal mine. To get any detail, you need to overexpose, washing out the deep blacks. Fortunately, there's enough green lichen growing on the rocks to prevent the shadows from completely blocking up.



Lava Tube



Grass Tuft In Lava



Lava and Red Mountains

# Photographer's Thoughts

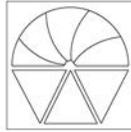
I made these photographs when my wife and I visited Snow Canyon State Park outside of Saint George, Utah, in the fall of 2021. I've been fascinated with the Colorado Plateau for as long as I can remember, so when a fellow photographer suggested that I visit Snow Canyon, I put it on my list. I'm glad that I did because the little State Park may not have all of the components of the Grand Staircase, but once you visit, you'll get the gist of how it all works.

There are countless beautiful places to see in America. Our

national park system is the envy of the world—our nation's crown jewels. However, tourists don't overrun some of the lesser-known parks and monuments. Because they're harder to get to, most people ignore them. If your goal is to get back in touch with nature, this is where you should be.

My book series is a sampler of what's waiting for you to discover. I didn't design the books to be a reference or a comprehensive guide, but a taste of what you'd see if you visit. It's an invitation for you to see your nation's best.

# Snow Canyon



On the Road With Jim

Snow Canyon is the first in a series of books to showcase beautiful places, whether they're a park, monument, road, or town. I intend to advertise them—so to speak—and generate inspiration for artists to come and create in these spaces. The series won't be extensive encyclopedias of facts, but instead, a light sampler that shows what I found in the short time I spent photographing there. I want to think of them as a challenge that says to artists of other genera's, "If this is what I came up with in a day or two, just imagine what you'll be able to create." W



Jim Witkowski

It seems as if Jim has spent his entire adult life looking through a camera back, from a cumbersome view camera to a smart phone. The subjects that he's most fond of are nature and history. That fact becomes obvious when you peruse his Website ([www.jimwitkowski.com](http://www.jimwitkowski.com)). His style of shooting is to tell a story, and because his images work well together, they're best seen in a grouping.

Over the years, Jim has developed an interesting writing style. As part of a 2016 Alaska road trip, he began writing a blog, so friends and family could share in the adventure. His followers were encouraging, and so Jim has continued to make weekly contributions. On the Road with Jim has over 388 posts to date and has morphed from a travel-blog into a photographer's journal. In it, Jim tells his viewers the back-story of the week's new photo.

Snow Canyon is the first book in a series to showcase places of natural beauty that are stepchildren to our national parks. Rather than publish an exhaustive reference catalog, his intent is to produce a sampler—a quick overview so that readers can see, and be motivated to visit. He's taunting artists by saying, "If these photos are what I got in a day or two, think of what you can produce if you spent some time here."



# Snow Canyon

A couple of years ago, I published a magazine about Utah State Route 12 and I was eager for people to know about it. I showed it to a friend and fellow photographer one evening. As he flipped through it, he asked, “Have you been to Snow Canyon?” I hadn’t, so I began researching the state park, and this fall, my wife and I finally committed to a visit. This book is a collection of my images and thoughts of that visit.