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9 Tips to Survive a Flash Flood

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Jun 10, 2011 jadler Comments

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Just like the food bins at the supermarket, slot canyons entice you to reach in and taste when no one's around. Narrow slivers of space sandwiched between twisted stone walls make for an adventure of skill, guts and athleticism and it's all fun and games until a black cloud creeps overhead.

Slot canyons, like those you find in the southwest and throughout southern Utah, are formed by surges of water over thousands of years that grind away the limestone or sandstone surfaces. If water can do that to rock, imagine what it could do to poor fleshy you if you were caught off guard.

When those storm clouds rumble and threaten to drench the ground, it's a stellar idea to be far away from any slot. Heavy rain over a short period of time in arid areas equals deadly flashflooding. Imagine a torrent of water, sediment, sticks, logs and debris charging down the narrow opening. That kind of power can lift and drag a car for miles.

Flashfloods are like avalanches. The best way to survive one is to not get caught in one. In fact, the National Weather Service's motto is Turn Around, Don't Drown. But don't let the threat of flashfloods deter you from exploring these wonders of nature. Here are 10 tips for avoiding them.

1. Do your research so you are aware of the risks with any particular slot. Ask around for beta on escape routes and weather patterns. Check the forecast.
2. Let others know where you're going. Aron Rahlston left his arm back in Blue John Canyon because of that brain fart.
3. Once there, pay close attention to your surroundings. Are there ledges you can climb to escape the water? Are there exit points along the way? Trees to anchor to?
4. Is there vegetation on the canyon rim to help absorb the rain? If not, water running down the walls will join the stuff rush down the middle and make the situation even more fatal.
5. How much has it rained? If it's been as dry as a clay pot, your surroundings won't absorb the incoming water. Just like a clay pot.
6. Go early to avoid afternoon (2-3 p.m.) rains.
7. Looks for signs of flooding: thunder, rain, red, black or muddy water. Are there watermarks from past floods? Maybe you can climb above those.
8. Communicate with your group. Talk to them about options if a flashflood appears.
9. If you think it's time to quit, it may be best to backtrack through familiar territory versus the



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unknown. There may be an Indiana Jones-sized boulder blocking your way.

Where to go:

Utah has most of the best and longest slots in the country. Check out [Zion National Park](#), [Bryce Canyon National Park](#), and [Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument](#). Northern Arizona has [Antelope Canyon](#) and [Secret Canyon](#) among many others.

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