

Dartmouth '68 Does the Grand Canyon  
(Not vice versa)  
A Phantom Training Plan

Hiking the Grand Canyon is a strenuous personal challenge for most of us, not unlike running a marathon. The South Kaibab trail, which we will hike down, is 7.3 miles long dropping 4780 feet. The Bright Angel trail, which we will hike up the next day, is 10.3 miles long rising 4380 feet. According to the National Park Service the hike up takes 7 to 8 hours on average although there are stories of 10 to 12 hours. Even if you are a runner, biker or otherwise in good condition, this trip will require activity-specific preparation. If you can't work 2 to 4 hours a week for hike training into your schedule, please reconsider whether hiking the Grand is in your future.

The training plan for this hike is similar to preparing for other types of endurance athletic events. For example, training schedules for first-time marathon runners (people who just want to finish, not post a fast time) typically last 16 to 20 weeks and consist of gradually increasing distances at a comfortable pace, reaching a peak of not quite marathon distance, and tapering off before the event. Our plan is similar.

Unfortunately we will be doing our preps during the winter. If this seems daunting, consider the following: we will be doing our hike 2 days after the 2017 Boston marathon, and those runners will be training over the winter too. In the 2015 Boston marathon, 7279 runners who live in New England or New York successfully completed the race after training through one of the coldest, snowiest winters on record.

While stairmaster, Cybex, stationary bike, etc. are useful, 30 minutes on a machine won't prepare you for walking all day or extended walking downhill. Honestly, the best thing you can do is walk in your hiking boots and that is the foundation of this training plan. The most important things are to start early, stay with it and build slowly to avoid overuse injuries. Think gradual progression.

This is a cautious training program focused on avoiding injury. The biggest dangers are [shin splints](#) and assorted foot and knee ailments, which is why we build gradually to toughen up. Time is allowed to take an occasional week off, in case some body part acts up, you get sick, or simply for recovery and mental rejuvenation. Keep up with your cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and other favorite winter activities.

This plan is for someone who is moderately active, i.e., regularly engages in at least a modest level of exercise, whether through sports or fitness workouts. If you are a couch potato you will need to start earlier and build gradually. Depending on your other activities, general level of conditioning, and hiking experience you may be able to start later or build to a higher level. Conversely, even if you only make it to a more modest peak level you will still be fine for the Grand as long as you train consistently. Customize as works for you.



Two plans are provided, differing in how rigorously you want to train. They are the same for the first two months.

- a) Plan A is for animals who intend to crush the canyon mercilessly. You know who you are.
- b) Plan B is for mere mortals who simply want to revel in the grandeur of the canyon and make it back alive. The weekly time commitment is about the same as we should all be spending on fitness anyway, it's just activity-specific.

If you are an experienced hiker who has done similar distances with significant vertical, you already know what to do to get yourself ready.

The better your preparation, the more likely you are to enjoy the hike. You will feel you have time to stop to photograph that special view and be able to catch up without stress or feeling like you're holding up the group. And you'll feel that you can bring that extra lens for your camera or pint of tequila to share with your pals at the end of the day.

So if in doubt, go big and back off as necessary. Besides, anyone can have a bad day so give yourself margin.

### Stretching

This is a big deal for avoiding injury, especially for those of us with 70-year-old body parts.

Stretch everything from ankle to hip. If you don't have a regular stretching routine, Google "stretching for hiking" and you will find lots of suggestions. Gerry Bell suggests the SmartFlexx Stretching Device (\$19.99 at FootSmart.com), used backwards for shin stretching as well as normally for Achilles and plantar fascia. Stretch after walking as well as before.

Include some stretches you can do once you are warmed up after walking for 5 or 10 minutes. During our canyon hike, our very own Wearer of the Green, Jim Lawrie, will lead us in stretching at appropriate times.

Consider discussing your hike plans with a physical therapist to get on a stretching and strengthening program. This will pay you back for the rest of your life.

When	What	What Else
Until December	Keep up with your usual sports and fitness activities. Do some hiking if possible, especially in the Fall, but don't attempt anything more difficult than your usual hikes.	<p>This is the time to discuss your plans with your doctor if you have any concerns.</p> <p>Consider investing in custom orthotics to go in your hiking boots. If you haven't used them before, it can take a while for your feet to get used to them.</p> <p>Figure out your travel plans.</p>

When	What	What Else
December – January  <u>Develop a conditioning base</u>	<p>This is when the walking gets serious, so borrow a dog and hit the bricks on December 1. Walk twice a week, starting at 30 minutes each time, always wearing your hiking boots. Focus on time, not distance, it's easier to manage that way.</p> <p>As that starts feeling pretty good and your routine is starting to take hold, increase your time in small increments to 45 to 60 minutes. Build cautiously. If by January you are feeling good and want to go 3 times a week, more power to you.</p> <p>Find your happy pace, not too fast, not too slow. Each walk should be an enjoyable activity that you look forward to, leaves you just a little tired and makes you feel good about yourself. Find different routes. Drive to someplace you like to walk. State parks are great.</p> <p>Availability of snow-free routes is likely to be a consideration. If you are stuck with a stretch of bad weather, safety first. Do 30 to 45 minutes on a treadmill, starting flat and then increasing the incline.</p> <p>If you use a personal listening device, only put a bud in one ear to maintain awareness of what's going on around you (especially important if you are walking on the side of a road).</p> <p>By January be using a long hill for one of the walks, 45 to 60 minutes. Drive someplace if necessary to find one. Walking downhill is as important as up.</p> <p>Take a week off sometime in January, unless you have become addicted to walking and just can't stop yourself.</p>	<p>Do calf stretches (knee bent and knee straight) before you go, to help avoid plantar fasciitis.</p> <p>Keep a training log. Seeing your progression is encouraging.</p> <p>Carry a cell phone and identification. Tell someone where you are going. A nice way to do this is a free smartphone app called Glympse, which allows someone of your choosing to see your location on a map on their phone continuously in real time. I use it every time I go for a run or bike ride.</p> <p>If you are planning to get new hiking boots, early January is the latest to start wearing them.</p> <p>Also get your hiking socks dialed in.</p> <p>Substitute a winter hike occasionally if you are comfortable with that and can find a partner.</p> <p>Consider wearing Yaktrax if you will be walking on packed snow or icy patches.</p>

How steep should your hill be? Here is the profile of the Bright Angel trail, from River to Rim:

Leg	Distance	Elevation Gain	Average Grade
Bright Angel Campground (river level) to River Resthouse	1.5 mi	0	0%
River Resthouse to Indian Garden	3.2 mi	1320 ft	7.80%
Indian Garden to Three-Mile Resthouse	1.7 mi	948 ft	10.6%
Three-Mile Resthouse to Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse	1.5 mi	981 ft	12.4%
Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse to Rim	1.6 mi	1131 ft	13.4%

These grades are approximately the same as a green circle ski trail.

When	What		What Else
February – Mid-March  <u>Build volume</u>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Plan A</u></p> <p>Start lengthening one of the walks by 15 minutes each week until it is 2 hours long. This is long enough that you will need to carry water, and you can get accustomed to hydrating on the move. Back off if you notice any problems with feet, legs, knees or back, and stick with what you can do comfortably.</p> <p>The other walk should be a hill day of 45 to 60 minutes. One hill day and one long day is a good combination.</p> <p>In March start wearing your pack with about 15 to 20 pounds in it for your hill walk.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Plan B</u></p> <p>Keep going with walks of about an hour.</p> <p>Do a third walk most weeks.</p> <p>Do at least one hill day of 45 to 60 minutes every week.</p> <p>In March start wearing your pack with about 15 to 20 pounds in it for your hill walk.</p>	<p>Plan the clothing you will wear on the hike and fill in any gaps in your wardrobe. Wear it during your training walks.</p> <p>Decide what to carry in your pack and what to send in the mule duffel.</p> <p>Find an electrolyte replacement beverage that you can tolerate, and get used to drinking it. You will need this (in addition to plain water) for the hike up, so it should be a powder that you can mix in the morning. I like fruit punch Gatorade. Some people prefer goo packs or Shot Bloks (with water), some flavors of which contain caffeine.</p> <p>Take a week off in late February or early March.</p>
Mid-March to Early April  <u>Peaking</u>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Plan A</u></p> <p>Starting in mid-March extend the long walk to 2¼, then 2½ hours. Stay at 2½ until early April, which should be no more than a couple of weeks.</p> <p>Keep up with the shorter hilly walk.</p> <p>About 10 days to 2 weeks before the Grand Canyon hike do one walk of 3 hours that includes some hill work. This is your peak.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Plan B</u></p> <p>Starting in mid-March lengthen one of the walks by 15 minutes each week until you have done a 2 hour walk that includes some hill work about 10 days before the Grand Canyon hike. This is your peak.</p> <p>Carry water on the long days, and get accustomed to hydrating on the move.</p>	<p>If the snow is clearing you may be able to use a hiking trail.</p> <p>Your peak walk should take you at least 6 miles, i.e., about 60% of our longest day. Longer is better. Then on our hike out of the canyon, with rest stops thrown in, you will be able to say "I got this far, I know I can finish this, and I will die before I don't." (Thanks to Gerry for those optimistic words.)</p> <p>Actually, if you can't make it we will simply shoot you and throw your sorry ass over the back of a passing mule to get you to the top. In the morning we will bury you in a shallow unmarked grave and make up some words to sing "Dartmouth's Not In Town Any More".</p>
Mid-April  <u>Taper</u>	<p>After your peak walk drop back to two 1-hour walks a week, with at least one of them being a hill day.</p>		<p>Whew! You are ready!</p>