

## At the End of My Rope

AT THE END OF MY ROPE Photos/Story By Mojo

"How did I get here?" This is the question I'm asking myself while dangling 100 feet above the ground, descending into the dark canyon below. Trusting a climbing rope is something all too unfamiliar and scary. This is all new to me. I am somewhat fearful of heights, to put it mildly. As I lower myself slowly into the darkness of the slot canyon, I hear echoes of my short, nervous gasps of breath mixed with the encouraging cheers from my friends.

"You're almost there," yells Red, my co-worker, from the canyon bottom. I look down and realize I am NOT almost there. Trying to calm myself, I decide that for my health and sanity it's best to concentrate on the task of rappelling and not think about the distance remaining to the canyon floor. Finally... I reach the bottom and with my feet planted firmly on the ground, I give a huge sigh of relief. I made it! I look up to see the intimidating yet impressive walls that surround me. Knees quivering and still feeling uneasy about the experience, I unhook myself from the safety rope and hoarsely shout "off belay" up to our guide, Matt Moore, who operates Desert Highlights out of Moab. Matt quickly pulls the belay rope up to the top for the next victim, Steve, who has had a lot more rappelling experience than I.

Looking up, I see Steve come over the edge. Boy, is he making it look easy. But, then again, Steve is a fireman in Park City, and needs to know rappelling technique for search and rescue. He reaches the ground in no time. "That was incredible!" he says, as he looks back upward to the top of the magnificent slot. The deepness of Lomatium Canyon surrounds us. Massive, vibrant walls each reflecting unique characteristics. Janet, Steve's wife, is the next to descend into the cool canyon bottom. Janet is a personal trainer at a fitness center in Park City. Athletic, strong and graceful, she lowers herself with ease while taking in the encompassing beauty of Lomatium. Next is Red's wife, Mother Karen, the famous skiwear designer. She's descending so slowly that I guess that she's savoring the thrill of the rappel. When she finally reaches the floor, I ask her, "Were you scared?" "Nah," she replies with a shrug. Then she pulls me aside and whispers, "I was terrified! Thought I'd never see my grandkids again!" I feel slightly better about my own state of mind. Tough and gutsy lady, that Grandmother Karen. There's still one more rappel, just around the corner. Somewhat tense, I'm hoping that the next drop is not quite as daunting as the last. As we approach the final rappel, I am immensely relieved that I can see the bottom and it's probably only half the distance of the last. This time, I have more confidence and lower myself with ease. I'm now a seasoned canyoneer! As the six of us hike out of Lomatium Canyon and back into the Fiery Furnace area of Arches National Park, I feel a sense of accomplishment and look forward to another canyoneering adventure. It was definitely a challenge and I'm ready for more. Thank you, Matt, for a great trip. Arches National Park, in southeastern Utah, spans 114 square miles and was designated a National Park by President Nixon in 1971. The area was once populated by the Fremont and Anasazi people and is now a hot spot for the outdoor enthusiast. Before exploring the vast splendor of this great natural wonder please visit the Ranger Station to learn about how we can all help to keep the park alive and thriving for future generations of hikers and canyoneers. Much of the area within the park is covered with cryptobiotic soil, a living crust that plays a key role in the ecosystem in which it occurs.

"Crypto" sustains the plant and animal life of the desert. The careless visitor who steps off the trail and onto unmarked territory can damage this precious soil beyond repair. Please stay on the marked trails, slickrock or in washes to help keep the local residents of Arches alive and healthy for future generations to enjoy. Arches National Park offers short and informative ranger walks into the Fiery Furnace area on a daily basis. If you wish to explore the area on your own, you must obtain a permit from the ranger station. The number of permits per day is limited so plan ahead. However, a word of caution. The Fiery Furnace is a maze of canyons, walls, chimneys and chutes. To the uninitiated, it is quite easy to get disoriented and lost. I would highly suggest going with a knowledgeable and experienced guide if you really want to explore this fascinating place. There are no marked trails and the Fiery Furnace is filled with cryptobiotic soil that can be damaged if stepped on. The guides know the best routes for keeping the sensitive soil untouched. It's up to all of us to be friendly to our environment and preserve it for the future. For more information on this trip contact [www.deserthighlights.com](http://www.deserthighlights.com) or visit [www.nps.gov/](http://www.nps.gov/)

Although containing some of the most remote backcountry terrain in the state, the entrance to Arches National Park is but a short two miles from downtown Moab, Utah. Moab, a hotbed of recreational activity, offers all the facilities and amenities for outdoor enthusiasts. An internationally renowned destination for mountain biking, river running, hiking, climbing, canyoneering and backcountry adventures, Moab's creature comforts; lodging, restaurants, pubs and guide services are some of the best in the state. Prior to our canyoneering adventure with Desert Highlights, we stayed two nights at the beautiful Solano Vallejo Condominiums on the Moab Golf Course. On previous visits, we have often selected to dine at either Eddie McStiffs (try the Sky Island Scottish Ale) or the Moab Brewery with its Dead Horse Ale (you can't beat a Dead Horse), two outstanding Moab landmarks. This trip, we opted for something new and different. The first evening, we dined at the award winning Center Café, which offers an incredible wine list. The second evening we treated ourselves to the small, delightful Desert Bistro. Both restaurants are excellent, and off the beaten path. Our choice for lunch was the Mondo Café. Really, really good sandwiches. There are also many fine lodging accommodations; motels, B&B's, and adventure lodges in the area. Dozens of guide services, outfitters and tour operators for all types of outdoor adventures are located in Moab. Contact Moab Area Travel Council, 435-259-1370 or [www.discovermoab.com](http://www.discovermoab.com), the pages of the Outdoor Utah Recreation Guide, or [www.outdoorutah.com](http://www.outdoorutah.com)