

Living the dream

Deep in the red rock

Rick Green of Escalante, Utah, has guided thousands of hikers through the state's gorgeous slot canyons. As a search-and-rescue commander, he saves people too. So what's it really like down there?

How'd you get here? I took my first hike in the canyons about 20 years ago and started organizing trips for friends. I was on my way to being a physical therapist and just made a detour to do something I loved more.

Best thing about your job? Watching people change after a day or weekend canyoneering. They start out nervous and tentative, and 48 hours later they are daring and confident. Or the opposite happens, and they get humble. Either way, they are totally changed by the canyons. I never get tired of seeing that.

Dangers? Nature has the ultimate say. Down here, you're always looking for exits in case of emergency—like a flash flood. Also, people overestimate their abilities and underestimate the time it's going to take them to get places. That, and losing track of where they left the car.

Best rescue? Every rescue feels amazing. I remember one couple who went hiking in the desert and just got lost. I mean, they were in flip-flops. They were barely alive when we found them, totally dehydrated

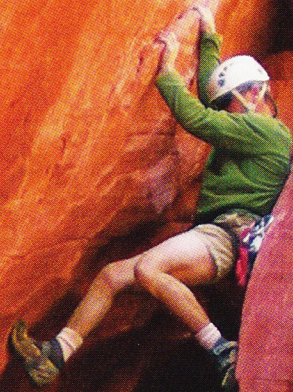
and lethargic after 36 hours. They'd said their good-byes to each other. When we found them and revived them, the woman, a teacher, talked about how much she appreciated having a window in her classroom. How she'd thought about things like that as she was dying. It's the little things in life, you know?

Strangest thing you've seen? I've saved lots of animals that have fallen into the canyons. Bobcat kittens, snakes, even a skunk. They come to the lip of a canyon and, whoops, fall in. Sometimes you have to wrestle them a bit to save them.

Wear out hiking boots much? I go through about four pairs during the eight-month canyoneering season, and my clothes get pretty shredded too. The sandstone is rough on the wardrobe.

How accurate was 127 Hours with James Franco? Pretty true. Except for the scene where they let go of the walls of Blue John Canyon to drop into a hidden blue lagoon. There's no lagoon down there.

—INTERVIEW BY KATIE TAMONY



INFO Rick Green (shown climbing above) leads Utah canyoneering adventures. From \$145/day; excursions ofescalante.com