

## Storm Mountain – Big Cottonwood Canyon, Utah

*A visit to Wasatch Canyon recreation site provides ideal picnic experience*

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Years ago, in order to have a picnic in Big Cottonwood Canyon, all you had to do was drive along the canyon road until you found a site. Most of the time a site was located with little problem. Today it's not quite as easy because of the large number of people using the canyon. Canyon use has continued to increase, placing greater demands on developed recreational sites. In the old days it was free, but this has changed too.



Storm Mountain located in Big Cottonwood Canyon, Utah, is just minutes away from the populated Wasatch Front.

The developed areas are now fee areas administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Even though I'm familiar with the area, there was some confusion on my part about how to reserve the site. The U.S. Forest Service web page shows the large group sites and a process for reserving them; however, it is not clear how to reserve a smaller picnic site. A phone call to the listed number lead me to believe that I had reserved a site. But upon reaching the entrance station, I learned that the site was not reserved, but was on a first come, first served basis. Fortunately there was a site available that cost \$5.00 per car.

It's been a number of years since I visited this popular picnic area in Big Cottonwood Canyon. So I was interested in how this recreation facility was being managed within one of Salt Lake City's prime watersheds.

The picnic site was well maintained and clean; same for the restroom facilities. Located next to the creek, the site provided a great setting for a family picnic. There were no mosquitoes and the temperature was just right. A few feet away rock climbers were challenging the almost vertical rock outcropping – definitely not for beginners. The climbers appeared to be well equipped and careful in the climb of about 150 feet.



Climbers tackle verticle walls of rock outcropping.

The stream was a strong attraction to the kids, and they had to be constantly reminded that wading is prohibited. This is a drinking water supply, and keeping the water clean is important. A posted sign

nearby noted that getting into the water is not permitted. Also dogs are not allowed in the watershed except under special permit. Signs are posted all along the canyon and within the recreation site. Citations are issued and fines imposed for violation of watershed ordinances. Last year 360 citations were issued in Big Cottonwood Canyon for watershed violations.

The parking lot for the site soon filled up. In one of the larger areas, a wedding reception was being held. People carrying presents came in and out of one of the group sites. In contrast wedding guests dressed for the occasion and backpackers alike could be seen walking through the area.

The spillway for the Utah Power hydropower diversion works is located a short distance away. Kids were sitting on the sidewall enjoying the overflow of creek water that is in excess of the amount needed to generate electrical power. Water taken into Utah Power's penstock to generate electricity is later piped to the Big Cottonwood Water Treatment plant located at the mouth of the canyon. The water treatment plant provides about 22 percent of the drinking water supply to 400,000 people.

It was a delightful day and everyone enjoyed this beautiful canyon and the picnic. The Wasatch Canyons along eastern Salt Lake County provide recreation, solace and invaluable drinking water supply. At your next visit to one of these canyon watersheds, please remember to obey the regulations that protect your drinking water supply from pollution. Multiple use of this resource is possible if everyone cooperates and follows the rules.

Additional regulation information can be obtained at:

[www.fs.fed.us/wcnf/slrd/water.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/wcnf/slrd/water.html)



Big Cottonwood Creek as it flows over Utah Power's overflow structure located in the Storm Mountain Picnic Area.