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Little-known Butterfield Canyon is awash in color

By Kathryn Jones
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The autumn leaves two-plus miles up Butterfield Canyon have reached the color bursting point.

Sure, visitors to the little-known canyon in the Oquirrh Mountains might see Boy Scouts snaring bugs or skateboarders and cyclists pushing and pedaling.

But it is the colorful leaves that leave them breathless. The claret reds, alpenglow golds, apricot oranges and summer-squash yellows frame the road and arch overhead. The tableau is fit for the artist's palette - and suitable for framing.

That might surprise many.



There is plenty of wildlife to be spotted and few people, compared to some better-known canyons. (Kathryn Jones/Close-Up Correspondent)

Butterfield Canyon doesn't usually spring to mind when talk turns to fall foliage.

But for a few short weeks from late September to early October, some autumn-leaf lovers find the canyon off Bacchus Highway and 12600 South the ideal spot to sate their appetite.

The canyon has morphed dramatically from its earlier incarnation as a haunt for high-schoolers and four-wheel-drive trucks. Oh, the students and pickups are still there. But Kennecott Copper, owner of the property, has cleaned up the place. The paved roads are narrow, the views spectacular and the stops at the canyon's mouth perfect for gazing up at the autumn splendor.

Lora Harwood of West Valley City enjoyed her foray up the canyon in 2004.

"We drove up the canyon with my brother and our parents," she recalls. "It was not very developed there; we could find no tables, so we had a picnic along the side of the road near a creek."

Undeveloped as it was, the canyon was equally unspolled. Harwood said the children on that jaunt

enjoyed the leaves and frolicking in the water.

Everyone had a "very fun time with grandma," says Harwood, who captured the event on camera.

Ascending to the summit, leaf enthusiasts can scan the entire Salt Lake Valley, stop at Butterfield Creek or travel to Tooele or further up the mountain to the north.

Conifers and aspens climb to astounding heights. So do the deer (try 9,180 feet) and visitors can while away their time looking for them and for other wildlife. Squirrels, butterflies and mountain lions also inhabit the canyon.

If leaf-watching falls flat for some, there's more-serious fun afoot.

"My husband loves the bike trails," says South Jordan resident Monique Flake.

At Butterfield Pass, about seven miles from the trail head, the pavement turns to dirt and ATV riders can traverse the single tracks down the mountain, turn left for a more leisurely drive for a few miles or find their way to the bottom of the canyon road, where they can climb up the steep trail to the pass.

"We've been all the way to the top of the canyon," Flake says. "It's so beautiful. You can see Kennecott, and my kids love that."

Flake and her family have made fall trips to Butterfield Canyon a tradition.

"We have recently been thinking about this year's trip," Flake says. "It's just a quick little jump from South Jordan."

The canyon is not only pretty, she adds, but a hidden jewel for people looking for an "escape from the city."



Butterfield Canyon, above, off Bacchus Highway and 12600 South, is a great place for viewing fall leaves. (Kathryn Jones/Close-Up Correspondent)



Butterfield Canyon in the Oquirrh Mountains is a good place to see fall leaves in an unspoiled setting and is not far from Salt Lake Valley cities. (Kathryn Jones/Close-Up Correspondent)