

# Flip Flop (South Fork Tuolumne River)

**Rating:** 3-C2 II \*\*\*

**Time:** 5-7 hours

**Season:** Low: July-Sept Norm: Aug-Sept High: Aug-Sept

**Number of Raps:** 1 plus 3 jumps

**Longest Rap:** ~105ft

**Gear:** 1x 200ft rope, 10 feet of pull cord, 40ft webbing, 1 rapide, wetsuit, neoprene gloves, technical canyoneering gear

**Rubber:** At least 2mm/3mm. 4mm or 5mm may be more comfortable under most conditions

**Hazards:** The canyon requires some moderately high jumps. Raps in waterfalls, natural anchors.

**Vehicle:** High Clearance 2WD

**Car Shuttle:** About 13mi

**Approach:** 3/4mi

**Exit:** ~1.5mi

**Good Eats:** Food in the immediate area is scarce. There is a café at the intersection of Hwy 120 and Ferretti Rd. but it has never been open when we were there. There are a couple of general stores to buy beer and basic supplies in the area along Hwy. 120.

**Camping:** The South Fork Campground at the bottom of Lumsden Rd. is decent and free (though a bit hot in the summer) it also has the advantage of being the lower trailhead for the canyon.

## Introduction:

Flip Flop is a canyon that seems like it is gonna deliver the goods in a big way. It starts out with a bang and puts you deep in the rock. There are two unfortunate things about Flip Flop however. First, It is downstream from an overcrowded swimhole. Though few of the folks that frequent this hole ever make it down to the start of Flip Flop, much of their party trash does. On our descent of the canyon we collected enough flip-flops to start a collection. The second is the canyon is not that sustained. It gets going with a bang and the initial technical section is a lot of fun. But, all too soon the gradient backs off and it's a long river scramble down to the bottom.

So, why would anyone want to do Flip Flop? Well, the initial technical section IS lots of fun. There are some cool mining ruins to look at in there too. Most importantly, it's a great canyon for beginners or folks looking for a moderate half-day affair. There are enough problems and challenges to get a good feel for class C canyoneering but it never gets too wild. For a reasonably fast team, you could descend flip flop in the morning and be back at your camp for lunch. Have an afternoon nap then pick up your car spot and spend the rest of the day with a few beers. Not TOO bad.

All the water in Flip Flop flows naturally down the canyon and will ebb and flow with the course of the snow melt. In the spring and early summer the flow in Flip Flop will be far too high for a canyoneering descent. Sometime between mid-July and early August in most years the flow will subside to a point where canyoneering is possible and fun. Parties must carefully assess the flow level on the approach and be sure that it is within their abilities to descent the canyon safely. Entering Flip Flop at high flow would be very dangerous and is not recommended.

## Driving Directions:

From the town of Groveland on Hwy. 120 near Yosemite National Park travel east on Hwy 120 for approximately 10 miles. Turn Left on Ferretti Road. After about a mile veer right on Lumsden Road. This is a steep, narrow, rocky single lane dirt road that descends 5 miles to the Tuolumne River at the take out for the famous Cherry Creek run. The road require high clearance 2WD. Continue on Lumsden Road over the bridge over the South Fork of the Tuolumne River. Immediately after the bridge over the South Fork, turn right into the South Fork Campground. This is the lower trailhead and a good place to camp.

To reach the upper trailhead, retrace your path to hwy. 120. Travel east approximately 6 miles. Immediately before the large bridge over the South Fork Tuolumne River turn right onto the Rainbow Pool access road. This one way road wraps around the Rainbow Pool (an overused and usually over run swimhole) and then continues back under the hwy. 120 bridge. After about 0.5 miles look for a gated road descending towards the South Fork on the left and a pullout on the right. Park in the pullout. This is the upper trailhead.

## Approach:

The hike begins on the gated road on the left. Pass through the locked gate and hike downhill on the dirt road. The going is steep at first. As you descend you will start to notice a number of beautiful falls and swimholes at the bottom of the canyon on your left. These are all sweet places to spend the day in their own right. Interestingly, they are seldom visited even though they are immediately downstream from the Rainbow Pool. After a while the road becomes paved, which seems odd, and you cross a well built bridge. Keep following the road to its end at a concrete veranda of sorts. This is about 0.75 miles from the gate. From here you should see the entrance to Flip Flop as gash in the watercourse that the whole



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Tuolumne flows through. Use stairs to climb down off the veranda and suit up on the rocks below.

**Canyon:**

The canyon starts off with a bang. As you approach the gash in the watercourse you'll notice a ledge heading out on the right (LDC) just above the falls. Follow this ledge out. Send one person down on meat to check the depth, then everyone else jumps.

Jump 1: 20 feet out ledges on the RIGHT (LDC). It is also possible to rig a rappel from a tiny arch on the wall above.

Continue down canyon. Soon you will encounter a long and potentially VERY SLIPPERY downclimb on the LEFT (LDC). Be careful here, a slip at the wrong moment would not be good.

Jump 2: 15 feet from ledges on the RIGHT (LDC).

After more hiking and scrambling downstream you'll come to another larger falls that flow into a pool that extends around a bend to the left (LDC). Scramble up the rocks beside the pool on the LEFT (LDC).

Jump 3: 25 feet from near the top of the rocks on the LEFT (LDC). Be careful to jump out on this jump to avoid rocks protruding out at the base of the jump.

It is also possible to bypass this jump by continuing to scramble up the rocks and then downclimbing to the pool below.

A short distance later you will arrive to the largest falls on the route.

Rap 1: 105 feet from a slung boulder in the MIDDLE of the watercourse. This is a single drop in the falls that ends in a large deep pool. Set the rope length or be prepared for a floating disconnect. This anchor will probably need to be rebuilt at least once each season.

**Exit:**

After the big 105ft rappel the gradient in the canyon backs way off and the hike becomes a river scramble. Make your way through the boulder fields. Wade or swim occasionally. The going is fairly fast but you do have a good distance to cover. Eventually, after about 1.5 miles of scrambling and hiking you'll see a small cement gauging station on the right (LDC). Exit the watercourse here and change on the riverbank. Follow a short use trail up into the back end of the South Fork campground and your car. Be careful of the abundant poison oak!

**Non-Technical:**

Non-technical hikers can enjoy the very nice swimholes just above Flip Flop. Follow the approach road down. When you see falls and pools in the canyon bottom scramble down to any that suit your fancy. There are enough pools here to spend the whole day exploring. Perhaps amazingly (or perhaps not) these pools are seldom visited even though they are in close proximity to the overused, yucky, Rainbow Pool.



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