

Hiker Rescued From Quicksand in Arches National Park: 'Thought It Was a Legend'

An experienced, 33-year-old hiker said he nearly lost his life, and credited local rescuers with saving him from a dangerous predicament.

Written by [Andrew McLemore](#) Dec 09, 2025 12:55 p.m. ET



(Photo/Grand County SAR)

While getting stuck in muck is rare — it does occasionally happen. An experienced hiker found that out the hard way in Arches National Park on Sunday, when a normal day on the trail turned into a scary ordeal.

Austin Dirks, 33, was walking through the upper end of the park's Courthouse Wash area just before sunrise when his left leg broke through what he assumed was solid ground. He was able to remove his leg, only to step more firmly onto the right leg, which felt like he "had stepped into concrete," according to an interview with local news station [Fox 13](#).

Once he realized he couldn't escape on his own, Dirks used a Garmin GPS device to call for help. Grand County Search and Rescue arrived on scene and spent several hours trying to free him. They used ladders, boards, and shovels to create a safe path to Dirks, and eventually pulled him out of the dangerous predicament.

It's a good thing, too, because the primary danger to Dirks wasn't slipping all the way into the muck — that doesn't really happen with quicksand. But if he'd been stuck there overnight, he would face the risk of hypothermia from the cold.

"Before this trip, I honestly thought quicksand was more of a folklore or a legend," Dirks told Fox 13 in the below interview.

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Quicksand: Not Like the Movies

In posts on Facebook and Reddit, Dirks explained what happened to him in detail. He described himself as a "fit" and experienced backpacker who had completed the Arizona Trail, Colorado Trail, and half of the Continental Divide Trail.

"I've been bogged down in mud and sand countless times, but never like what happened today," he wrote in a lengthy [Reddit post](#).

Dirks described how the "quicksand" wasn't really like sand at all. It's more like a sticky mud that kept his leg trapped, no matter how much Dirks tried to escape.

"After thirty minutes of digging and flailing, I had made no progress at all. My fingers were numb," he wrote. "The water kept moving around my leg, cold as ice. I was exhausted and I made the decision I hoped I would never have to make. I called for help."

The primary danger was not sinking in further, but being unable to escape the weather, which was in the 20s when he became stuck, Dirks wrote on [Facebook](#). He also repeatedly thanked the rescuers, who he credits with saving his life.

"The National Park Service, Grand County Search and Rescue, EMS and the Garmin dispatchers did everything right," Dirks wrote on Reddit. "Without them I would have been stuck there until nightfall. My family wouldn't have called it in until I was overdue at 6 p.m. I would not have been found by chance. I owe them more than thanks."

Quicksand: It Does Happen

Although incredibly rare, quicksand does pose a danger to hikers. In Dec. 2024, a lone hiker became [stuck in the mud](#) under a West Virginia bridge, and it took a "vertical rescue team" to safely retrieve him. At other times, "quicksand" is used to make "[mud races](#)" more challenging.

Though actual quicksand is extremely rare, it is sometimes possible to escape without help. Certain methods of body movement can help trapped hikers squirm out of the sticky mud, according to the [BBC](#).

GearJunkie reached out to Dirks and Grand County SAR, but did not hear back as of this writing.