



A curious ensemble of wonderful features.

—John Wesley Powell, 1869, summing up this astonishing land

Soaring cliffs. Solitary buttes. Ancient dunes. Hanging gardens. Whitewater rapids; miles of calm. Powell saw this and more in 1869 and 1871 as he explored the Colorado River. He named this canyon “Glen,” for lush green growth along the river and in side canyons.

Today, most of the river and its glens are deep beneath a lake that Powell never saw. Lake Powell began forming almost 100 years after his explorations, when the gates of Glen Canyon Dam closed. But even today you can get an idea of the glens that inspired Powell. Below the dam, the banks of the Colorado River are thick with willows and cottonwoods, and side canyons are rich with plants and animals.

Glen Canyon reminds us that much of life is hidden until we slow down and look closely—as a lizard darts across sand or as a raven casts a shadow on a red cliff. You can hear the red-spotted toad after a rain, peer at the tiny flowers of low-growing desert plants. Slow your boat alongside a cliff and imagine the ancient wind howling as it blows sand.

Ancestral Puebloans built dwellings high on canyon walls. Their descendants and other Tribal peoples continue to live nearby. European explorers followed Native trails and named some features. Latter-day Saints (Mormons) also have history here—Halls Crossing and Lees Ferry are among the places named for their ancestors.

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area was set aside in 1972 as Lake Powell rose behind the dam. Today over one million people come here each year—most to enjoy the lake and its stunning beauty, some to explore the human history, others to find adventure and solitude in the wilderness far from the lakeshore.

Lake Powell
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Chuckwalla
© GENE HANSON

The Beginning

You'll likely be breathless if you hike to the headwaters of the Colorado River. At 10,184 feet, atop La Poudre Pass, the river begins as a tiny stream flowing out of a meadow and through Rocky Mountain National Park.

The River That Is Lake Powell

The Colorado River and its tributaries feed much of the water needs for seven states—Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Warm spring days start the waters flowing. From the Rocky Mountains in the northeast and the Wind River Range in the north, melting snow tumbles downhill in a mighty seasonal rush of water through seven states. This is the Colorado River watershed (map), and Glen Canyon is in the middle of it.

When the Colorado River system was still wild with no dams, that mighty seasonal rush of water could flood the land from Wyoming to Mexico. For millennia, such floods enriched the land and helped create habitats where specialized plants and animals thrived. But as more people moved into the area, they wanted to tame the river system so they could use the water without floods.

The 1922 Colorado River Compact authorized the first big dam—Boulder Dam (now Hoover Dam), which formed Lake Mead. The 1956 Colorado River Storage Project allowed more dams, including Glen Canyon. By 1984, seven major dams and dozens of other projects tamed the Colorado River system and put its water to work. If you eat salads, chances are the greens were grown with Colorado River water pumped to the fields, using electricity generated by one of the dams.

After the river was tamed, its specialized plants and animals struggled to survive. Scientists are testing ways to help them, including unleashing a periodic “flood” from Glen Canyon Dam. They also think the river could begin to restore itself as drought and climate change lower Lake Powell. You might see this happening in the farther reaches of the park.

Forming the Canyon

Long before the present Colorado River system formed, water came and went across this region. It laid down thick layers of sand and sediment, which wind then rearranged. Over time, sandstone was created. Forces inside Earth pushed up a huge dome known as the Colorado Plateau (dotted line on map). The Colorado River and its tributaries began carving sandstone into towers and mesas and slicing it into canyons. River action has also exposed fossils—tiny insects and ground-shaking dinosaurs—in parts of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.



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Left to right—black-tailed jackrabbit, globemallow, western grebe
JACKRABBIT—© PAULIA K. MASLAR; GLOBEMALLOW—NPS / JACOB W. FRANK; WESTERN GREBE—© MICK THOMPSON

Places to Explore

Wahweap

“Wahweap” refers to salt or alkali and a creek or stream. —Glendora Homer, Kaibab Paiute
Stop here for information about recreation opportunities in this park and other nearby public lands like Rainbow Bridge and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments. You can also enjoy ranger programs and short walks to scenic areas. Be sure to visit Glen Canyon Dam; tours begin at Carl Hayden Visitor Center.

Lees Ferry

I came here near freezing to death, and now I am almost cooked alive. —Emma Lee
In the 1800s, Mormons followed ancient trails down Paria Canyon to this crossing of the Colorado River. John Lee and his wives, including Emma, settled here. They ran a ferry business and Lonely Dell Ranch. Trails follow the Colorado and Paria rivers past artifacts from their lives and others’.

The End

The Colorado River should flow 1,450 miles, ending at the Gulf of California. But it waters over four million acres of farmland and provides drinking water to about 30 million people. Often the water is used up before reaching the gulf.

Escalante

I camped . . . under a towering orange yellow cliff, like a wall against the sky. —Everett Ruess
Young Ruess wrote these words from the edge of Escalante Canyon in 1934; after that, he vanished. You can see some of the Escalante wilderness by boat, or you can hike its hidden glens, alcoves, and slot canyons. Make your plans at Escalante Interagency Visitor Center in Escalante, Utah.

Rainbow Bridge

For . . . all living creatures. . . We put those offerings for them too. —Rod Duwala, Hopi
This spectacular natural bridge—one of the world’s largest—is a short hike from Lake Powell. Approach with respect. It is a spiritual place for many Tribes. They held its secrets until 1909, when emigrants saw it and told the world about its beauty. Rainbow Bridge became a national monument the following year.

Bullfrog, Halls Crossing

The place looked as though it had been abandoned to the wind in recent time. —Dick Sprang
Defiance House was hidden far from the Colorado River when Sprang found it in 1952. Now this ancestral Puebloan site is a boat ride and short walk away. You can find other adventures “uplake” at the Bullfrog and Halls Crossing visitor areas. A ferry connects the two areas (fee and other information on the park website).

Ride a River into the Park

It’s the thrill of seeing cliff walls too sheer and stupendous to describe. —Norm Nevills
Nevills ran boating trips down the San Juan River in the 1930s and 40s. Today such river trips start outside the park. From the north, you can also ride the Colorado River into Glen Canyon. Hite is the ending point for these trips. What will you find when you float your way into the remote corners of the park?



Enjoying Glen Canyon

Enjoy your time here, but be careful. The desert and lake can be dangerous. Read the basic information here, but be sure to get details from a park ranger, the NPS App, bulletin boards, the park website, or a visitor center.

Weather Download a weather app with a real-time lightning indicator. • Heed storm warnings. Expect sudden winds, high waves, and lightning any time of year. • Get off the water or seek shelter in a cove. • In winter, expect below-freezing temperatures and snow.

Flash Floods Distant storms can cause floods here. • Never drive across a flooded road. • Turn around, don't drown. • Never camp in low-lying areas like wash bottoms.

Heat and Dehydration Drink water and eat salty snacks. • Wear sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses.

Swimming Swim at your own risk; there are no lifeguarded beaches. • Swimming in marinas and jumping or diving from cliffs are prohibited.

Boating Boating under the influence of alcohol is illegal. • Riding on the bow is illegal. • Watch for submerged rocks and debris. • Follow all rules for boat-based activities like skiing, wakeboarding, diving. • Watch for large wakes that can swamp small boats. • Follow all guidelines to prevent spreading invasive quagga mussels. • Know the danger zones for carbon monoxide (CO) and symptoms of CO poisoning.

Personal Watercraft (PWC) Follow all regulations for these vessels. • Wear life jackets at all times.

Life Jackets (PFDs) Approved life jackets must be available and easy to reach for each person. • Children 12 and under must wear a life jacket.

Human and Pet Waste Use the floating rest-rooms on the lake. • When camping within ¼ mile of the lake or its tributaries, you must use a device for containing solid human or pet waste. Using plastic bags in such devices is prohibited. • Disable the over-board discharge function on a boat.

Pets They must be leashed at all times. • Dogs are not allowed in the Escalante backcountry. • Dispose of solid pet waste properly (see above).

Driving and Bicycling All wheeled vehicles, including e-bikes, must stay on designated roads.

Hiking The park has few maintained trails. • Check your plans with park rangers. • Carry appropriate maps and supplies.

Camping Campgrounds and primitive camping are available throughout the park.

Lodging Various types of lodging are available in the park and nearby communities.

Firearms State and federal regulations are on the park website.

Trash Dispose of all trash and recyclables at the marinas and other visitor areas.

Natural and Cultural Features Federal law protects all natural and cultural features including rocks, plants, fossils, animals, artifacts, and archeological sites. • Writing and drawing on rocks and carving into rocks or other surfaces is vandalism. • Report suspicious behavior to a ranger or call the anonymous Archeological Crime Reporting Hotline: 800-227-7286.

Time Zone Glen Canyon National Recreation Area is on mountain standard time all year, whether you are in Utah or Arizona. But exceptions exist. Ask at a visitor center or check the park website.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

More Information Glen Canyon National Recreation Area
PO Box 1507
Page, AZ 86040-1507
928-608-6200
www.nps.gov/glca
www.nps.gov/rabr
Use the NPS App to guide your visit.

Emergencies call 911

Glen Canyon is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more, visit www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation. Join the park community. www.nationalparks.org



Personal flotation devices, or life jackets, save lives every year. Keep yourself, your family, and your friends safe—follow the life jacket regulations posted in marinas and on the park website.

US COAST GUARD

