
Stop 20. Lake Powell

Arrival datetime:	Friday, May 3, 4:00PM Mountain Daylight Time
Sites visited:	Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Rainbow Bridge National Monument
Accommodations:	Wahweap Marina
States traveled:	Utah, Arizona

On the way out of Moab, we were reduced to 7 mph by a convoy of off-road vehicles moving from the highway to a rocky dirt path on the right. Recalling our drive up Lathrop and Shafer Canyons, we thought them insane. Further along, we saw a sign for Gooseneck State Park. Mike, our driver from the Canyonlands, had urged us to stop at Gooseneck Overlook, saying that the views of the windy river were unparalleled. However, as soon as we pulled off the highway, a sign recommended 10 mph, warning of switchbacks and narrow curves ahead, so we skipped it.

Driving through Monument Valley was special enough for one day. The rock formations were not larger than those we'd seen in the parks, but their size in contrast with their isolation made them striking figures. Their tiers, spires, and turrets were probably similar to some we'd seen in the canyon, but the view of them against a backdrop of flat sand and empty sky was more commanding. We also saw quite a few williwaws, sand that seems to be traveling in swirling breezes. We later found out the locals call them "dust devils" or "whirlwinds."

Even after we left Monument Valley, stark shapes appeared at random intervals all the way to Lake Powell. We stopped at the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area Visitors Center. It was right next to the Glen Canyon Dam. The rich aqua blue of the lake contrasted starkly with the moss green and light brown crumbling buttes that surrounded it. A layer of white at the foot of the buttes around the lake showed how low the water level had become. We had once thoroughly enjoyed a tour of Hoover Dam and asked if they had something similar here. We were disappointed to learn that tours of the dam had been suspended on September 11 due to security concerns, and never reestablished.

Wahweap Marina was in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. We checked in and Michael went to get the oil changed while Jennifer showered and hung out on our terrace, which overlooked Lake Powell. Michael circled the town of Page for a while before he found the oil change place, but Jennifer was not concerned. The sun was melting beautifully and there was almost no activity on the lake. All she could hear was birds singing. We had dinner overlooking the lake and the multihued



View of Lake Powell from Wahweap Marina.

calm continued, just a scattering of dark, silent houseboats moored against light brown and rust sculptures on white pedestals resting on blue water.

The next day, we took a boat tour to Rainbow Bridge National Monument. It was especially nice for Michael to be on the water. It was May, so had we been at home, Michael would be working to get our sailboat ready for the season. As it is, he had spent one day on it in March and would not see it again until August.

We sat on the top deck of a tour boat, in position to hear the speakers. We learned that the white trim on the water line of the buttes and mesas was residue from

calcium oxide and dried plankton, and it washes off. We also learned the difference between a butte and a mesa. A butte is taller than it is long at the top. A mesa is the opposite, shorter than it is long at the top. Neither should be confused with a plateau, which is flat at the top and stretches for miles. As we approached Rainbow Bridge, we learned the difference between a natural bridge and a natural arch. An arch is formed from composites of different types of rock, where weaker varieties are in the middle and erode first. A bridge is formed by water and sediment of harder rock crashing against a single homogeneous rock.



Rainbow Bridge National Monument.

We heard the story of the Spanish Priests whose persistent efforts to establish a trade route to California for whom Padres Crossing is named. They were crossing the Colorado River, which at this juncture due to the Glen Canyon Dam is now Padre Bay, most famous for a notch between two buttes that looks like and is named for a gunsite. Unfortunately, some steps they built to facilitate mule traffic are now under water. We heard the story of the Utah state surveyor and sidekick university professor adventurer who explored the area in search of the Rainbow Bridge, with the result that it was made a National Monument. For their efforts, they had some geological structures

named after them. Of course, they had Indian guides who knew exactly where the Rainbow Bridge was the whole time. They got some mesas named after them, too.

The bridge itself was absolutely awesome. A sign on the dock said it was 309 feet over the water, and 278 wide at the top. The National Park brochure said it was 290 feet up and 275 wide at the top. The truth was that the water level must change too much for anyone to get a real accurate measure. The pictures we saw of it all had running water beneath it, but when we were there, the creek bed was dry. It was extremely tall and almost as wide. The base of the left side fanned

out like the beginning of a rainbow. It became progressively more narrow as it grew higher, ending in a curves bookend-like butte on the other side. The window opening had almost exactly the same smooth rainbow-shaped curve as the left edge of the structure, and rather than ending, continued the curve in a slightly sharper degree on the other side. It was just 30-40 feet shorter than the bridge itself. Tall rusty cliffs stood behind it, but they reflected the sun and did not block our view of the sky. To the left of it, the

smoky blue and gray outline of Navajo Mountain softened the scene. Tall grasses lined out path up to it. It beckoned, as if it was the entrance to Valhalla.

All of the natural formations surrounding Lake Powell were striking. The colors were all beautiful. We had heard that pollution was becoming a major problem for recreational boating, but we noticed none of it. We even had lunch overlooking the water before taking off.

Miles traveled: 303
Departure datetime: Saturday, May 4, 1:15 PM
Departure weather: 84° Sunny