

# Rainbow Bridge

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Rainbow Bridge National Monument  
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area



## A Century of Preservation

Rainbow Bridge National Monument was established May 30, 1910 by President William Howard Taft as a scientific example of “eccentric stream erosion”.

The 1906 Antiquities Act, signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt, provided himself and future presidents the “power of the pen”, the authority to set aside sites of cultural or natural significance as national monuments.

In 1906, the southwestern United States was still a frontier and the existence of Rainbow Bridge was yet unknown to the outside world.



### The Discovery Party

It was in 1909, that Anglos discovered Rainbow Bridge, the same year that Commodore Perry reached the North Pole. A dozen men from two different groups - one faction from University of Utah led by Professor Byron Cummings and another with the federal surveyor William Douglass – decided to join forces. Departing from the Oljato Trading Post in Utah, they persevered through 4 ½ days in the vast, carved, canyon wilderness of southern Utah/northern Arizona. The expedition was guided

by two Paiutes, Jim Mike and Nasja Begay, and also included John Wetherill, who operated the trading post at Oljato. It was Wetherill who was first to arrive under the bridge, on his horse, about noon on August 14, 1909.

But discovery - actually proving the bridge’s existence - was not the only goal of the 1909 expedition group. They also wanted to survey the bridge and have it set aside as a national monument.

### A Natural Wonder



One-hundred years later, we reap the rewards of their efforts. Eight and a half months after the discovery and survey, President Taft proclaimed Rainbow Bridge a National Monument. Today’s visitor may boat to within a mile of the bridge via Lake Powell, a much easier trip than that of the discovery party. Despite its increased accessibility, it still sits in one of the most remote locales in the lower 48 states. The visitor who takes a moment to soak in their surroundings can still feel that they have found the middle of nowhere.

**A Park Ranger welcomes visitors to the Rainbow Bridge docks**

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## Back in Time

In 1910, Taft preserved more than the physically impressive bridge (290 feet tall x 275 feet wide), he also preserved an earlier human connection to the bridge that likely dates back thousands of years. The Douglass/Cummings Party found a 3x5 foot oval fire pit made of rocks near the base of the bridge. Recently, charred wood fragments were carbon dated to about AD 540. Standing before the bridge, it's easy to ponder when that first indigenous visitor arrived at the bridge, and what his/her thoughts were.



Remains of ancient rock hearth found near the base of Rainbow Bridge

Preservation of an ancient paleo environment was assured with that stroke of a pen in 1910 as well. One approaches the bridge on a sandstone surface that was deposited in the early Jurassic Age, roughly 200 million years ago when dinosaurs roamed the area. The bridge itself is sculpted from the hardened sediments of an enormous, harsh desert that was near sea level and much closer to the equator - the Sahara Desert of the Jurassic Age.

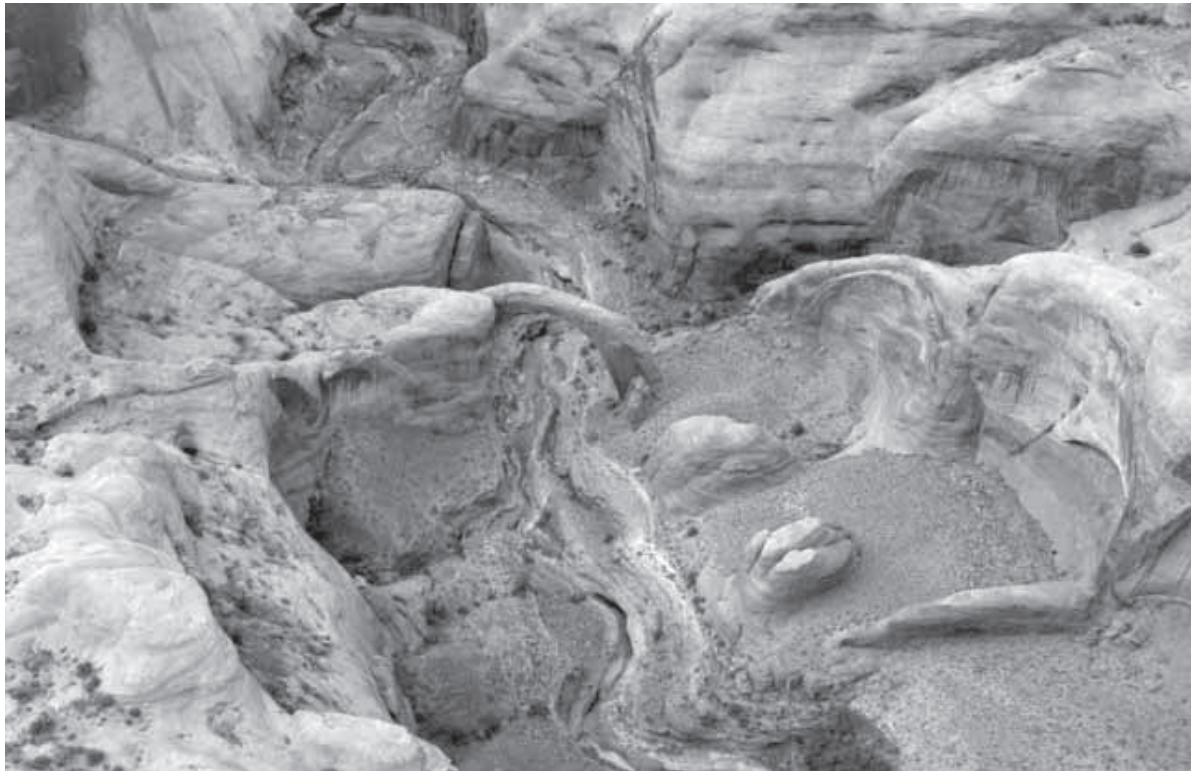


Fossilized footprint of a Dilophosaurus, found at the viewing area

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## Rainbow Bridge - Spanning Cultures in a Sacred Landscape

Rainbow Bridge appears much as it did the moment of its discovery by the earliest human visitor. Today's visitor to Rainbow Bridge National Monument benefits from the wisdom, now 100 years in duration, to protect precious sites such as Rainbow Bridge, for many centuries to come.



Rainbow Bridge from the sky