

# Coulee Dam

Official Map and Guide

Coulee Dam  
National Recreation Area  
Washington

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## A Gift of Change

In a region renowned for towering trees, soaring mountains, deep gorges, and expansive wilderness, Coulee Dam National Recreation Area can rightfully claim a place among the Pacific Northwest's outstanding resources. Its dominant feature, Lake Roosevelt, is the area's largest lake. On its waters you will find conditions ideal for motorboating, waterskiing, sailing, and fishing. And along shore, the lake paints a backdrop to surrounding sagebrush hills and forested mountains where you can camp, picnic, hike, hunt, and sightsee.

The creation of this sprawling recreation area began with 24 million tons of concrete and steel: Grand Coulee Dam. A Goliath of a dam, it was built to turn the power of the Columbia River into electricity and to store water sufficient to turn vast deserts into productive farmlands. In 1946, five years after the dam was completed, the reservoir called Lake Roosevelt and its shores were designated Coulee Dam National Recreation Area.

The National Park Service manages the recreational aspects of this man-made resource and acts as caretaker of the area's past, preserving reminders of the days when native Americans fished the free-flowing Columbia River and fur trappers, farmers, missionaries, and soldiers first worked and settled this region. Here in Coulee Dam, the new and the old coexist side by side.

Information on the area's history, wildlife, geology, and what to see and do is available at visitor centers at Fort Spokane and Kettle Falls, and at park headquarters in the town of Coulee Dam. The visitor centers are open daily May through October. The rest of the year they are open intermittently. Headquarters is open weekdays year-round. Schedules of special events, including evening programs, hikes, and water activities, are posted. For more information write: Superintendent, Coulee Dam National Recreation Area, Box 37, Coulee Dam, WA 99116; or call (509) 633-0881.

### Where Fair Weather Prevails

A dry, sunny climate—perfect for sailing and other outdoor activities—predominates at Coulee Dam in the warmer months. As you go further north, it becomes cooler and wetter. In summer temperatures range from 24° to 38°C

(75° to 100°F) during the day, and from 10° to 16°C (50° to 60°F) at night. It is predictably cooler, but still pleasant, in spring and fall.



### Activities Afloat

Coulee Dam National Recreation Area stretches 243 kilometers (151 miles) along the length of Lake Roosevelt and embraces the lower reaches of many rivers and streams, including the Spokane and Kettle Rivers. Most of the water comes from glacial ice, lakes, and snow high in the Canadian Rockies. Currents run slowly in the lake, swifter in the rivers and streams. Lake water temperatures rise slowly from June, when they range from 16°-21°C (60°-70°F), to August, when temperatures reach 22°-26°C (70°-80°F). Temperatures vary only slightly from north to south, but the Spokane River arm tends to be 2°-4°C (5°-8°F) warmer than the rest of the lake. Lake level also varies according to season. The lake is highest from late June through most of the winter. In late winter and early spring the water level is lowered as much as 30 meters (100 feet) to accommodate spring runoff.

**Boating** A variety of large and small craft, from yachts to canoes, tour the recreation area. Sixteen free public boat ramps give access to the water. From April through June only a few of these ramps can be used because of the annual drawdown of Lake Roosevelt early in the year. From late June through October boats can be launched at all ramps. Boat docks, gasoline, water, sewage dump stations, and other services are available at developed areas. Each of Coulee Dam's campgrounds can be reached by boat. See *Recreation Area Services* for a list of available services and their locations.

Navigational charts are useful travel guides that can help steer you safely around the area. NOAA charts 18551 and 18553, which cover all recreation area waters, are sold at visitor centers. Boating safety also depends on following federal and state regulations pertaining to boat operation. Don't endanger yourself by riding on the edge of a boat or boating without a lifejacket. Don't endanger others by speeding. Use extra caution when approaching another boat, a waterskier, or swimmers. Watch for floating logs, debris, shallows, and submerged obstacles. Know the "rules of the road" and the common boating "traffic signs." (See *Boating Safety Guide*.)

**Waterskiing** The confluences of Lake Roosevelt and its main tributaries—the Spokane, Kettle, Colville, and Sanpoil Rivers—are ideal for waterskiing. Other broad, open areas are also good skiing spots. U.S. Coast Guard regulations require a waterskier to be accompanied by two persons; one to operate the boat and another to observe the skier.

**Swimming** Six beaches are lifeguarded from early July to Labor Day. See *Recreation Area Services* for locations. Natural sand and gravel beaches occur all along the lakeshore, but it is recommended that you stay in guarded areas. You swim at your own risk outside these areas. Wherever you swim, always beware of approaching boats.

**Fishing** More than 30 species of game fish are sought here. A state fishing license is required. Area marinas and hardware and sporting goods stores carry licenses and copies of fishing regulations. See *A Fishing Primer* for more information.

**Observing Wildlife** Man has changed Coulee Dam country in many ways, but wild animals are reminders that much of the region still lies covered by natural conifer forests, scrublands, and grasslands. Bald eagles, black bears, elk, and bobcats—symbols of America's wilderness—inhabit the area. Deer are commonly seen along shorelines. Many birds, including osprey, hawks, and smaller birds, are year-round residents. In spring and fall migrating Canada geese, ducks, and swans visit.

**Interpreting the Landscape** Violent events thousands and millions of years ago created the landscape of Coulee Dam and most of eastern Washington. The dark layered rock walls you see as you travel along the lake were built from lava that gushed out of enormous cracks in the earth. Lakeshore sand and gravel terraces are evidence of a more recent event—the Ice Age. Prevailing geologic theory suggests that during glaciation, spectacular catastrophic floods raged through this area, carving the canyon of the Grand Coulee and other deep channels.

### Boating Safety Guide

**Channel Buoys** When traveling upstream or entering port keep well right of port buoys and well left of starboard buoys.

Use extra caution from November to April when these buoys are removed.

**Danger** Rocks and other underwater hazards are dangerous at all lake levels, but most dangerous when the lake is low.

**Boats Keep Out** Boats are prohibited from swim beaches and the waters near Grand Coulee Dam. Log booms enclose restricted areas.

**Speed Limit** Boats must reduce their speed when entering "wake free" areas such as harbors and docks.

**Right-of-Way** Yield right-of-way to boats in your danger zone (on your right). Slow down and let them pass.

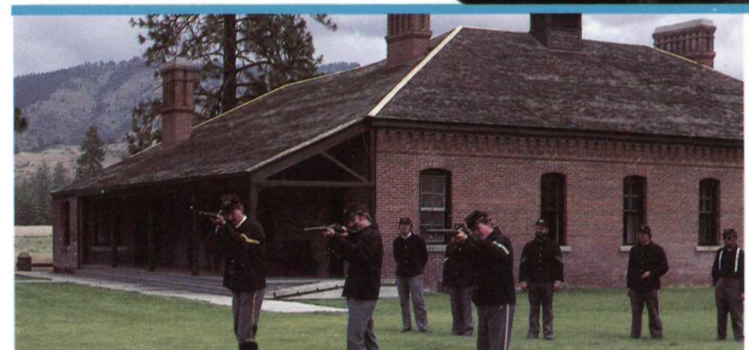
Port buoy (odd numbered)



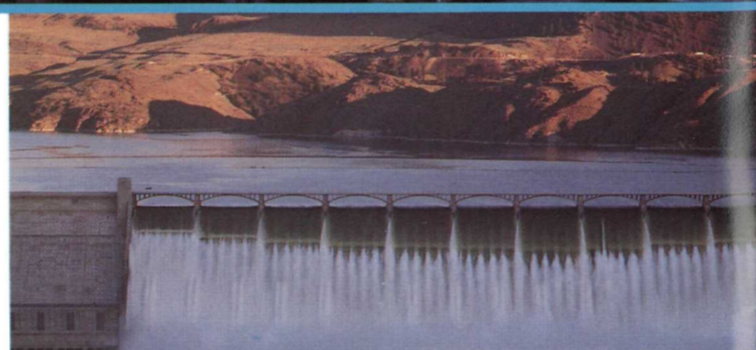
Starboard buoy (even numbered)



Danger zone



Living history demonstrations at Fort Spokane recall the late 1800s when soldiers were stationed



Heralded in a 20th century ballad as the "biggest thing built by the hand of man," Grand Coulee Dam is almost 1.6 kilometers (1 mile) long and twice as high as Niagara Falls.



Just outside Coulee Dam opportunities for hiking and other outdoor activities exist.



Scenic highways reveal passing glimpses of the waterways, mountains, forests, and desert lands throughout Coulee Dam country.

### Activities Ashore

**Camping and Picnicking** Thirty-two campgrounds ring Lake Roosevelt, offering a wide variety of places to stay. All are open on a first-come, first-served basis. A few open in May and close in late October; the rest are open through the summer. In the southern part of Coulee Dam campgrounds are located on open lakeshore terraces. To the north they lie amid high-country pine-fir forests. Separate picnic areas are provided near many campgrounds. See *Recreation Area Services* for more information.

**Hunting** Portions of the recreation area are open seasonally for hunting. Game includes whitetail and mule deer, black bear, pheasant, quail, chukar, and migrant birds such as mourning dove, duck, and Canada goose. State licenses are required.

**Fort Spokane** Eastern Washington was a little-explored frontier when Fort Spokane was established as a U.S. Army post for a

small peacekeeping force of infantry and cavalry troops. From their strategic location at the confluence of the Columbia and Spokane Rivers, soldiers kept a close eye on Indian reservations to the north and settlers to the south. Throughout the fort's history, from 1880 to 1898, when the last troops left, no hostilities broke out. Soldiers spent on-duty hours drilling and training and off-duty hours playing baseball, socializing, and enjoying "the great beauty of the natural scenery and the healthfulness and salubrity of the climate." On a walking tour through the fort grounds you can see four of the original buildings. Several trail-side exhibits tell the story of the fort. An 1892 brick guardhouse serves as the park's main visitor center.

**Kettle Falls** The Kettle Falls area once was a major gathering place for Indians who came to fish and trappers who came to trade. One link to this historic period that has been preserved is St. Paul's Mission. Built in 1846, this small Catholic chapel is one

of the oldest churches in Washington. Missionaries held worship services for the many bands of Indians that congregated at the falls. The best times to visit are spring through fall. A trail with historical exhibits is nearby.

**Grand Coulee Dam** Bigger than anything else man has ever built, Grand Coulee Dam is the world's greatest producer of hydroelectric energy. This powerhouse provides electricity for many hundreds of cities and towns in several states and supplies water to irrigate more than 200,000 hectares (500,000 acres) of cropland. The dam is open for free self-guided tours year-round except on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. More information is available at the Bureau of Reclamation's Visitor Arrival Center, located near the dam.

**Scenic Highways** An alternative to seeing Coulee Dam country by boat is to see it from scenic roads. One popular drive

begins at Fort Spokane and continues north along the east shore of Lake Roosevelt through the Spokane Indian Reservation and the Huckleberry and Kettle River Mountains. Another route follows the Sanpoil River north from Keller Ferry to the old gold mining town of Republic, turns east and crosses Sherman Pass, the highest pass in the state, and ends at the lake's west shore near Kettle Falls. North of Kettle Falls roads follow the Kettle and Columbia Rivers into Canada.

**Nearby Recreation Areas** Additional opportunities for recreation exist in lands next to Coulee Dam. In Colville and Okanogan National Forests popular activities include hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, and horseback riding. From time to time hunting and fishing are permitted in the Colville and Spokane Indian Reservations. In addition to state laws, there may be special regulations governing hunting and fishing in the national forests and the Indian reservations; check with the individual agencies.

## A Fishing Primer

Fishing is a favorite pastime in Coulee Dam National Recreation Area, one that blends challenge with relaxation. The key to a successful day is knowing as much as you can about the fish you're after, using your best angling skills to hook one and bring it in, and, of course, good luck.

### A Diverse Population

More than 30 species of fish inhabit these waters. Some common ones you may encounter are: **Walleye** Coulee Dam's number one game fish. In recent years more than 90 percent of all fish caught have been this highly prized food fish. If you catch one you can be sure others are around, because walleye

travel in schools. Average weight—0.5-1.8 kilograms (1-4 pounds.) **Rainbow Trout** Second only to the walleye in popularity. This sport fish is an acrobatic fighter when hooked. Average weight—0.5-1.4 kg (1-3 lbs.) **White Sturgeon** North America's biggest freshwater fish. Landlocked behind Grand Coulee Dam, this fish can grow

to be 6 meters (20 feet) long and 816 kg (1800 lbs.) Gourmets covet this fish for its tender meat and roe. Average weight—45-135 kg (100-300 lbs.) **Yellow Perch** A tasty mild-flavored fish transplanted from the East. When hunger strikes, this fish generally will bite anything offered. Average weight—0.1-0.2 kg (0.3-0.5 lb.) **Lake Whitefish** An

abundant species in Lake Roosevelt not generally pursued by Coulee Dam fishermen. It is caught most often by those angling for trout or kokanee. Average weight—0.9-1.5 kg (2-3 lbs.) **Kokanee** The landlocked version of the anadromous sockeye salmon. Lake tributary streams provide important spawning grounds for this fish. Average

weight—0.5-1.4 kg (1-3 lbs.) Other fish found in Coulee Dam waters include cutthroat trout, bass, sunfish, carp, perch, pike, and bullhead. **When to Fish** Coulee Dam is open year-round, but some months and certain times of day are favored for fishing.

**Season** The most popular months are September, October, November, May, and June. If you fish in mid-summer, remember that fish often retreat to cooler streams and deeper lake waters to escape the heat. **Time of Day** Dawn or dusk is prime time. **Where to Fish** In a lake the size of Lake

Roosevelt there is a staggering choice of places to drop a line. You might consider concentrating your efforts in one of these spots: **The Confluences** Many game fish, including walleye, trout, and bass, congregate where Lake Roosevelt converges with its tributaries, particularly the Sanpoil River, Hawk Creek, Ninemile Creek, Wilmont Creek,



The waters of Coulee Dam country began attracting fishermen long before the invention of rod and reel. Early Indians congregated by the

hundreds at Kettle Falls each summer and fall to catch salmon. They captured the fish as they swam upstream toward their spawning grounds,

trapping them in large baskets suspended over the falls or spearing them.

Hunters Creek, Hall Creek, Barnaby Creek, Colville River, Sherman Creek, Kettle River, and Onion Creek. **High Cliffs** Many game fish prefer lake waters near shoreline cliffs. Trout and salmon are common along bluffs near Keller Ferry. **Spokane River** These warmer waters are a good place to look for walleye. **Kettle River** Whitefish

and bass frequent this watercourse. **Sanpoil River and Sherman Creek** Trout and bass await fly fishermen in these tributaries. **Angling Techniques** Most fishermen prefer to troll Coulee Dam's waters. Trolling is an excellent way to find fish in unfamiliar territory; it allows you to cover a

lot of ground in a short time. A long line—50 to 60 meters (150 to 200 feet)—will cover most depths. Both natural and artificial baits are used. Fish illustrations by Daniel Feaser

