

Rainbow Bridge National Monument, Utah



In the semidesert country of Southeastern Utah stands Rainbow Bridge, nestled among canyons carved by streams that wind their way from the northern side of Navajo Mountain toward the Colorado River.

It is in one of the most remote and (until recently) inaccessible regions in the United States. So rugged is the surrounding Rainbow Plateau that few of the Navajo and Paiute Indians who live nearby have ever seen the bridge.

Colorful, symmetrical Rainbow Bridge is greater in size than any other known natural bridge. With a 278-foot span, the bridge gracefully arches to a height of 309 feet—as high as the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Thicker at the top than a 3-story building (42 feet), it is wide enough (33 feet) to accommodate the average highway.

Discovery The first white man to view the arch was probably a wandering prospector. No publicity was forthcoming, however, until the return of the Douglass-Cummings party from Rainbow Bridge in 1909. Dr. Byron Cummings, then dean of Arts and Sciences, University of Utah, and W. B. Douglass, a Government surveyor, had set out with separate parties in search of the great stone arch rumored by the Indians to be in the vicinity of Navajo Mountain. Subsequently, the two parties met and joined forces.

Two Paiute Indians and John Wetherill, a trader and self-taught archeologist from Oljato, Utah, guided the Douglass-Cummings party. The guides led the explorers into canyon and sandstone country that proved to be extremely rough and treacherous.

The explorers crossed canyons and slick-rock surfaces where the horses slipped and skidded. Frequently they had to retrace their steps, their progress blocked by rimrock ledges that the horses could not cross. They struggled through canyons that were dry and boulder-choked and others that contained water and dense brush.

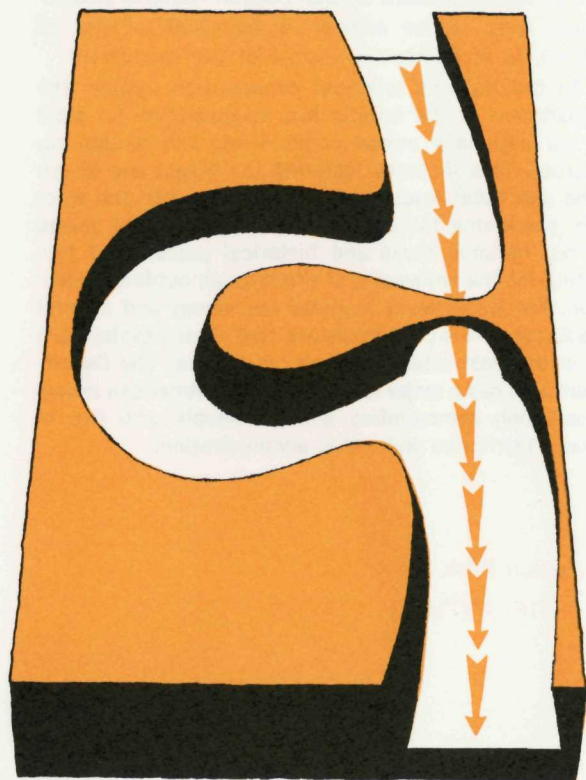
Across a scrub juniper flat and down into the last canyon they went. This was Nonnezoshi Biko, the Indian name for the canyon of the great stone arch, since named Rainbow Bridge Canyon.

Men and horses were exhausted, but they trudged onward. In the late afternoon of August 14, 1909, the party rounded a bend in the canyon and beheld the largest and most beautiful of all known stone arches, Rainbow Bridge.

How Was It Formed? Many millions of years ago sluggish streams flowed to the south and west across



THE CUTTING OF A NATURAL BRIDGE.



a broad floodplain. The streams deposited sand and mud in thin beds that later consolidated to form reddish-brown to purple strata—the Kayenta Formation, the upper part of which is now exposed beneath Rainbow Bridge.

Following this period, there was a gradual change to desert conditions. Winds from the west and northwest brought great quantities of sand, depositing it in large, sweeping dunes. This sand, now weakly cemented, has been named the Navajo Sandstone—the cliff-forming, pale orange to pale reddish-brown rock in which Rainbow Bridge and Rainbow Bridge Canyon have been formed.

For the next nearly 100 million years the region was alternately desert, floodplain, swamp, or partially covered by lakes or shallow marine waters. The Navajo Sandstone was buried under 5,000 feet or more of strata.

Then, some 60 million years or more ago, there began a slow, general uplift of the Colorado Plateau. In places, as at Navajo Mountain, the uplift was locally exaggerated as masses of molten rock, or magma, moved upward, doming the overlying rock.

The present landscape is the result of erosion by streams (some of which became the Colorado River and its tributaries) cutting into thousands of feet of ancient rock layers raised high above sea level. In the earlier stages, downcutting of the streams was slow, and their paths meandered widely. But as further uplift occurred and the tilting of the land became more pronounced, the streams acquired more force—speeding up the downcutting of their own meanders.

Rainbow Bridge was formed during the entrenching of Bridge Creek, which flows today from Navajo Mountain northwest to the Colorado River (Lake Powell). The canyon of Bridge Creek was carved through the Navajo sandstone into the top of the Kayenta formation. As it reached the lowest levels of the sandstone and the hard Kayenta rock, downcutting became more difficult. The stream began widening its path, undercutting the canyon walls, until it cut through the base of a thin spur, or neck, of one of the meander loops. Taking the more direct course, the stream widened the break; and a natural bridge of sandstone was thus formed.

The predominant color of the arch is salmon-pink, with dark streaks or stains caused by iron oxide or hematite. As rain falls on the upper part of the arch,

hematite in the sandstone is washed down the sides and deposited by evaporation—leaving streaks of variegated reds and browns. The coloring becomes brilliant in the afternoon sun, possibly the basis for the Indian legend that the arch is a rainbow changed to stone.

Lake Powell The wilderness seclusion of Rainbow Bridge has given way as Lake Powell fills the Glen Canyon of the Colorado River. Today, the reservoir's waters are easing toward the arch, and boaters can closely approach the area. Even at maximum capacity, however, the reservoir will be completely contained within the Bridge Creek channel and will pose no danger to Rainbow Bridge itself.

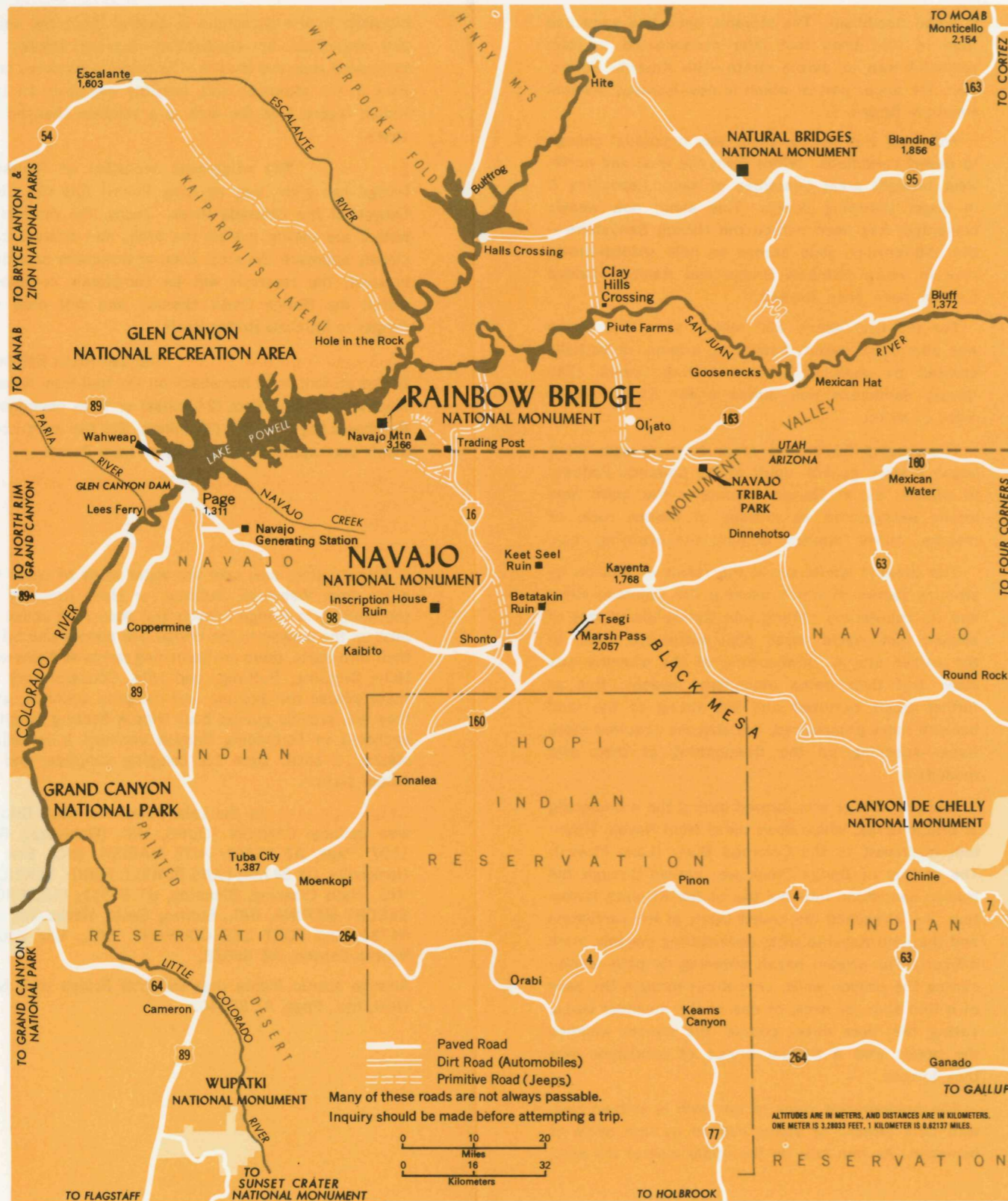
To Reach Rainbow Bridge You can reach Rainbow Bridge on foot or by horseback on the trail from Navajo Mountain Trading Post (24 miles) or from abandoned Rainbow Lodge on foot (13 miles). But the most commonly used approach is by boat on Lake Powell.

Before beginning a trail trip, be sure to ask a park ranger about the following: the condition of the trails, whether or not trading posts are open, and places at which water and supplies are available.

Many visitors now take the water route of some 50 miles from Wahweap, Bullfrog, or Halls Crossing to the landing in Bridge Canyon and then walk about ¼ mile up the canyon to the bridge. For people who bring their own boats, there are launching ramps at Wahweap, Halls Crossing, Bullfrog, and Hite. Concessioners at these places sell boating and camping supplies, and they will provide guided boat trips. A floating complex anchored in Forbidding Canyon contains a refueling station, a small store for camping supplies, and a ranger station.

Concessioners in the Lake Powell-Rainbow Bridge area include: CANYON TOURS, INC. (Wahweap), Box 1597, Page, AZ 86040; HITE MARINA, INC., Box 1, Hanksville, UT 84734; LAKE POWELL FERRY SERVICE, INC., Halls Crossing, Blanding, UT 84511; BULLFROG RESORT MARINA, INC., Bullfrog Basin, Hanksville, UT 84734; and FORT LEE COMPANY, INC., Box 2103, Marble Canyon, AZ 86036.

Arrange scenic flights over Rainbow Bridge with Sky West, Inc., Page, AZ 86040.



Facilities There is no designated campground or picnic area within the park boundary. You are reminded to pack out your tin cans and other refuse when leaving. Write your name in the register—but nowhere else.

The nearest town with hospital, bank, markets, churches, motels, and restaurants is Page, Ariz., on U.S. 89.

Regulations As all National Parks and Monuments, Rainbow Bridge National Monument is a sanctuary for wildlife. Hunting and the carrying of firearms are prohibited. Regulations also prohibit (1) destruction, cutting, or removal of plantlife, other natural features, or Indian artifacts; (2) defacing of sandstone with names, dates, or any other marks.

Your Safety Do not allow your visit to be spoiled by an accident. While every effort has been made to provide for your safety, there are still hazards which require your alertness and vigilance. Exercise common sense and caution while here.

Administration Rainbow Bridge National Monument, established on May 30, 1910, and containing 160 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The superintendent of Glen Canyon National Recreational Area, whose address is Box 1507, Page, AZ 86040, is in immediate charge of the monument.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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