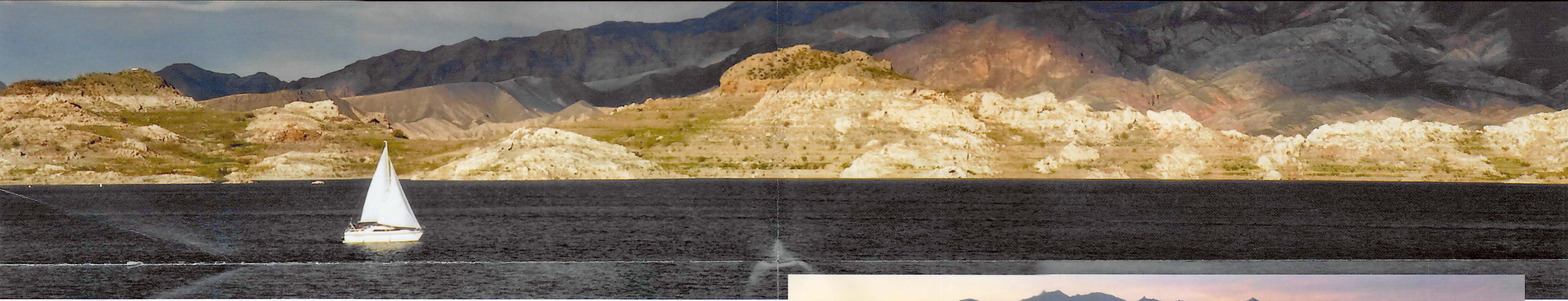


# Lake Mead

Lake Mead  
National Recreation Area  
Arizona/Nevada

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Blue Lakes, Desert, Rugged Mountains: Come Join in the Adventure

Lake Mead National Recreation Area is a startling contrast of desert and water, mountains and canyons, primitive backcountry and modern technology. Two powerful and uncompromising forces created this fantastic place. Nature, working slowly over millions of years, built the foundation. Humans, working feverishly over the last hundred years, remodeled and built a landscape better suited to modern needs and desires. This created two huge lakes in one of Earth's hottest, driest regions. Lake Mead and Lake Mohave emerged as the center of the nation's first national recreation area. People flocked to the desert

for boating, fishing, swimming, and waterskiing. Thousands of people now enjoy the cool, refreshing lakes. Attracted first by the water, people find unexpected rewards: the desert's quiet, stark beauty; imposing scenes of ancient, twisted mountains of the Basin and Range province; colorful vertical walls and high plateaus of the Grand Canyon; and unspoiled backcountry. Then there is Hoover Dam—a towering symbol of what human genius can achieve. The range of what you may experience here is as broad as the land and as deep as the lake.

Sailboat on Lake Mead  
© KAREN JOHNSON  
Inset South Cove  
© LARRY HENRIKSEN



## A Formidable Desert

Before Lake Mead's creation, the desert here was sparsely populated. People who did live here soon learned this brutally hot, dry, rugged land's hostile, unforgiving character. Many Native American groups, here for over 10,000 years, stayed to meet the challenge. Fur trappers, Mormon settlers, prospectors, and riverboat captains followed. Explorer John Wesley Powell penetrated uncharted territory of the Colorado River in 1869 and 1871.

In the 1900s, modern pioneers built a 726-foot-high dam on the Colorado River—higher than any dam built before, and still the Western Hemisphere's highest concrete dam. Hoover Dam changed this country's character forever. It created an abundance of water and power for the Southwest. It calmed the Colorado's floodwaters. This once forbidding landscape now yearly attracts millions of people.



Rock art here is sacred to Native Americans.

**The First People Here** Petroglyphs, remnants of an ancient city, and other traces of prehistoric peoples found in the Lake Mead area are clues to how Native Americans survived here ages ago. These

desert tribes hunted big-horn sheep and smaller animals and collected yucca seeds, mesquite beans, and other food plants. They also fished the Colorado and grew maize, squash, and beans in the river floodplain.

**Steamboats on the River** From the mid-1850s to the early 1900s steam-powered boats plied the Colorado River, supplying military outposts, mining towns, and other settlements. The typical

vessel in this "Arizona Fleet" was a sturdy flat-bottomed paddwheel-er that could navigate across shallow stretches and sandbars. Steamers went upstream at only five or six miles per hour. It was slow but easier than carrying

cargo and passengers across the desert by mule train. Difficult rapids, like those in Black Canyon, forced boats to use cables and winches for safe navigation. To get upstream, crews threaded cables through iron

ringbolts anchored in the canyon walls. A winch on deck reeled in the cables, pulling the vessel across the treacherous distance. On the return trip crews braked the boat's descent through the rapids by letting the cables out

slowly. Railroads arrived here in 1905, reducing steamboat use to local shuttles. Dam construction, begun in 1931, sealed the river, and the fleet sailed no more.



In 1858, Explorer became the first steamboat to navigate the river into Black Canyon.



Hoover Dam's 45-foot-thick crest and 660-foot-thick base hold back Lake Mead.

**Taming a Wild River** Completed in 1936, Hoover Dam turned the sometimes violent Colorado River into the still waters of Lake Mead. Over 5,000 men worked for five years to erect the massive structure

between Black Canyon's steep walls. The finished dam held enough concrete to pave a 16-foot-wide, eight-inch-thick road from New York City to San Francisco. Hoover Dam, managed by the Bureau of Reclamation,

offers tours daily except Thanksgiving and December 25. Davis Dam, downstream, was finished in 1953. Its rock-and-earth wall controls the flow of water from Lake Mohave.

**Living in the Desert** Animals and plants that live here have evolved traits to cope with this extreme environment. Most adaptations are to avoid heat, conserve water, and survive on a meager food supply.



Desert tortoise

protect it from freezing in fall and winter when the tortoise is dormant. This

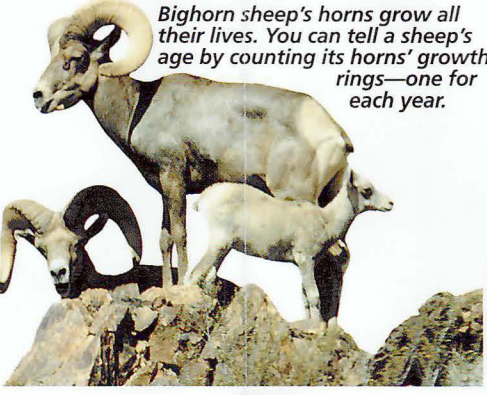
plant-eating tortoise's upper shell may be 9 to 15 inches long.

**Nature Is All Around Us** Mountains, canyons, and plains that surround the lakes and desert can seem as lifeless as the moon. A keen eye and sense of how animals survive in this wild place improve your chances of seeing some of the area's common and more extraordinary animals and plants.

Watch for bighorn sheep climbing down steep, rocky ridges along the

shores of Lake Mead or Lake Mohave for a mid-day drink.

Rams (males) develop deeply curled horns, and the ewes (females) have straighter horns. Lambs are born in May or June. Over 1,000 bighorn live in the recreation area—one of the few desert animals active in the extreme heat of day.



Bighorn sheep's horns grow all their lives. You can tell a sheep's age by counting its horns' growth rings—one for each year.

Lizards, squirrels, jackrabbits, and other animals usually come out of their shaded resting places only in the cool morning hours, late afternoon, evening, or at night.

Spectacular displays of desert plant life can also be elusive. Desert plants can bloom year-round, but many blossoms are so tiny you must lie on your stomach to see them. A winter rain can trigger a

spring burst of wildflowers that color the desert like a rainbow.

Along the lakes a rich mix of birds—out of place in the desert but fully at home on the water—abound. Resident and migratory ducks, cormorants, geese, egrets, herons, and pelicans fish in the waters, along with ospreys, golden eagles, and red-tailed hawks.



Left: The park's Joshua trees grow where few people see them. They play host to many desert animals.

Above: Its broad russet tail and shrill, rasping call identify a red-tailed hawk overhead.

## Having Fun at Your National Recreation Area



Experience the adventure of sailing a desert lake.



Mountain biking the River Mountains Loop Trail.



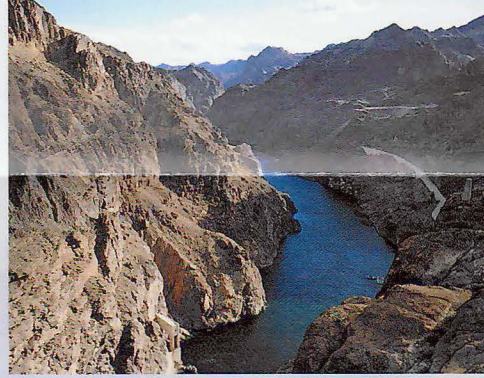
Children dabble in Lake Mead's refreshing water.

Striped and largemouth bass (right) and rainbow trout (below) flourish in the lakes. Sometimes anglers catch trout in Lake Mohave that weigh

about 10 pounds and striped bass in Lake Mead that weigh about 50 pounds.



FISH ILLUSTRATION: NPS / DAN FEASER



Black Canyon—the feel of the old Colorado River.

## What To See and Do

**Visitor Center** The Alan Bible Visitor Center, four miles from Boulder City, Nevada, on US 93, offers information, a film, exhibits, books, maps, nautical charts, and a native-plant garden. You can get information at park headquarters, at the intersection of Nevada Way and Wyoming Street in Boulder City, and at ranger stations. Visit [www.nps.gov/lake](http://www.nps.gov/lake) to plan your park trip.

**Marinas and Tours** Concessioner-run marinas offer boating services, rentals, and supplies year-round. Free public launch ramps and parking areas are at marinas; parking is limited to seven days per stay. Concessioners offer tours, including paddlewheel vessels and raft trips. Check the park website for details.

**Fishing** Lake Mead and Lake Mohave offer some of the nation's best sport fishing. Largemouth bass, rainbow trout, striped bass, black crappie, channel catfish, and bluegill are popular. Anglers prize Lake Mead's striped bass and Lake Mohave's rainbows. Check at a ranger station for "hot spots" for the catch you seek.

Arizona and Nevada share jurisdiction over both lakes. Fishing from shore requires a state fishing license. To fish from a boat you must have a license from one state and a special-use stamp from the other (available at most marinas). You must know the catch limits and legal methods of capture.

**Hiking** Short desert hikes take you places not seen from boat or car, like the colorful sandstone formations near Redstone Picnic Area along Northshore Road. Hiking in the recreation area usually requires cross-country travel; few maintained trails exist. Hiking is best from October through May. Explore with your own group or join a ranger-led hike. Longer hikes need careful planning—ask a ranger and use topographic maps. Let someone know where you will go and when you will return. If you get lost, rangers need to know where to start looking. Always carry enough water—at least one gallon per day per person. Long hikes are discouraged from June through September, when the desert heats up like a furnace.

**Camping** Backcountry camping is allowed along lake shores and at designated sites along unpaved backcountry roads. Length-of-stay limits apply in campgrounds and in the backcountry. Ask a ranger for details.

**Scenic Drives** Paved roads wind through mountains, desert basins, and canyons. From Lakeshore Drive and Northshore Road you see panoramic views of the blue lake set against the mountains' backdrop of browns, blacks, reds, and grays. Northshore Road leads through areas of brilliant red boulders and rock formations. The road to South Cove crosses one of the world's finest Joshua tree forests. Unpaved backcountry roads penetrate remote regions.

**Check on road conditions before you travel these routes.** Take water for your vehicle and tools for emergency repairs. Drive only on paved roads or unpaved roads signed with yellow arrows. Take drinking water.

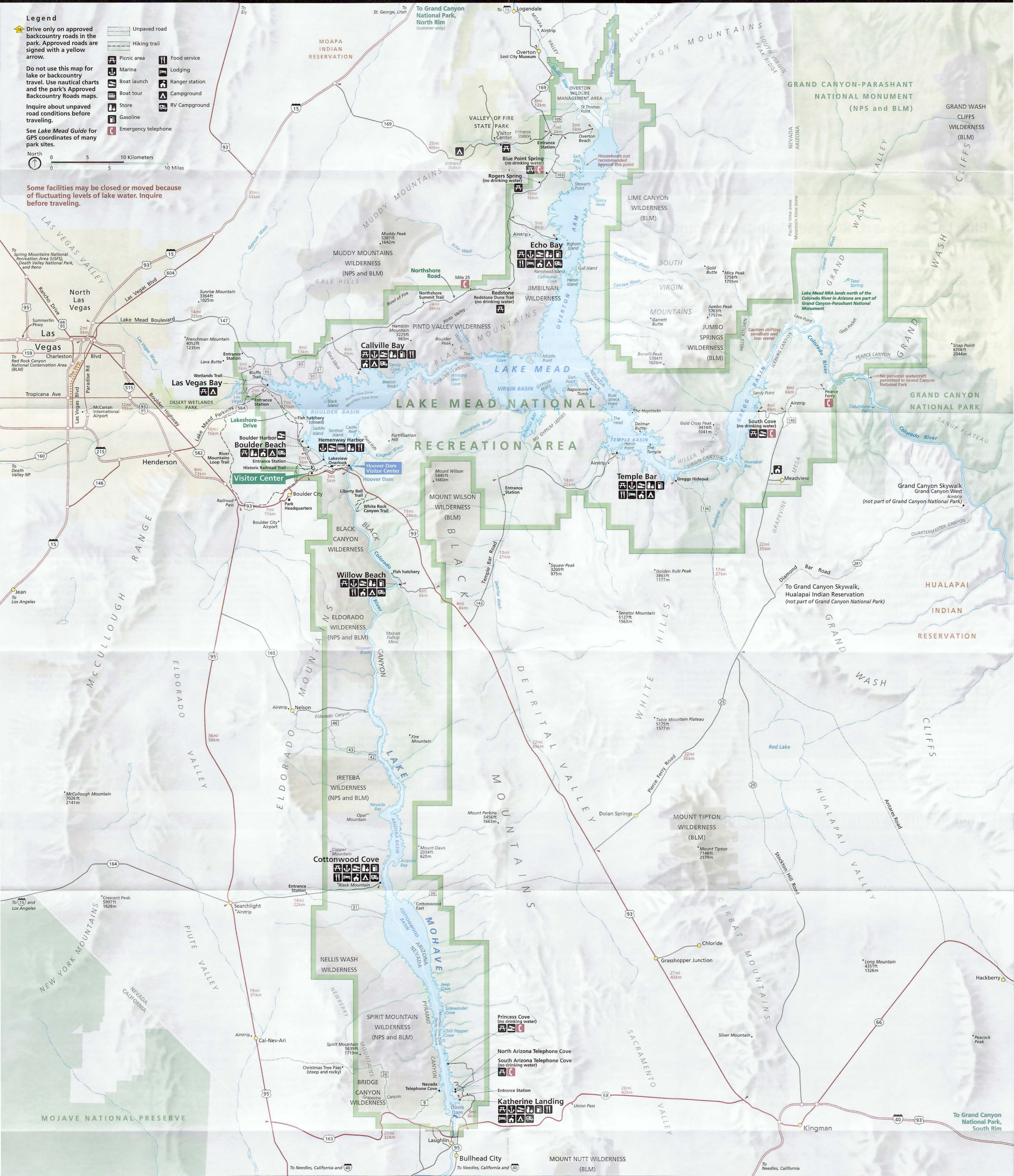
**Historic Sites** Scattered throughout the recreation area are structures that represent the Mormon migrations, logging and ranching, homesteading, hardrock mining and milling, Hoover Dam's construction, and Southwest water and power management. Sawmills, log buildings, ranches, irrigation ditches, railroad tunnels, and gauging stations call up the rich history you experience in the park. Many sites are on the National Register of Historic Places. Do not remove or damage any cultural artifacts; all are protected by federal law.

**Swimming** Both lakes are clean and ideal for swimming, snorkeling, and diving. The best seasons for swimming are spring, summer, and fall, when temperatures in Lake Mead and much of Lake Mohave average 78°F or cooler. Lake Mohave's colder northern reaches discourage most swimmers. Lake Mead National Recreation Area has no lifeguards. There are no designated swim beaches. Swim at your own risk. Never swim alone.

**Picnicking** Shaded picnic areas with tables, drinking water, fire grills, and restrooms are at Callville Bay, Las Vegas Bay, Boulder Beach, Temple Bar, Willow Beach, Cottonwood Cove, and Katherine Landing. There are picnic areas—without drinking water—at Princess Cove, South Arizona Telephone Cove, South Cove, and along Northshore Road at Redstone, Rogers Spring, and Blue Point Spring.



# Enjoying Your Visit to Lake Mead and Lake Mohave



**For any recreation activity find regulations at [www.nps.gov/lake](http://www.nps.gov/lake), the visitor center, or a ranger or entrance station. Know the hazards and learn how to protect yourself from danger.**

**In an emergency call 702-293-8932 or 800-680-5851.**

**Safety on the Lakes** Weather Check forecasts and look for the storm warning flags at marinas. If a storm breaks while you are out, seek shelter in a

cove and wait for it to pass. Winds spring up fast, creating waves as high as eight feet. Lightning is a hazard on open water.

**National Weather Service** Monitors marine radio channel 162.55. 702-736-3854.

**Water Safety** Always wear a life jacket for any recreation activity in the water. Never use pool toys in the lake; off-shore winds can blow you way out in the lake. Watch children. There are no life

guards at Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Swim at your own risk. Never swim alone. Follow all water safety rules for your water activity.

**Safety for Boaters** During the year lake water levels change. Approach the shore cautiously; watch for shallows and for submerged debris. • Never let a passenger ride on the bow. • Wear a life jacket. • It is illegal to operate a boat while drinking alcohol.

**Safety for Divers** All scuba divers must fly a diver's flag.

**Safety in the Desert** Flash Floods and Lightning Thunderstorms carry the double threat of flash floods and of lightning. Even distant downpours can make a flash flood roar into areas untouched by

rain. Never camp in a wash or a low-lying area or drive across a flooded road. Stay out of open areas where lightning may strike.

**Climate/Heat** Summer temperatures rise above 100°F daily causing conditions for heat stroke to occur. Avoid strenuous activities during the day. From October through May temperatures are less extreme. The winter highs average 50°F; nighttime lows seldom drop below 32°F. Drink water even if you are

not thirsty; your body can lose fluids quickly.

**Wildlife and Plant Advisory** Scorpions and rattlesnakes are poisonous but will leave you alone unless disturbed or cornered. • Wear sturdy boots, and do not put your hands or feet into a place you can't see. • A microscopic amoeba common to some hot springs can cause infection and sometimes death; do not dive or put your head in springs or streams.

• Oleander is a toxic plant common in developed areas; you or your pet should not eat plant parts or drink water from ditches. Do not use wood of the oleander for cooking.

**Mines and Tunnels** Avoid old mines and tunnels; shafts and rotten timbers are dangerous.

**Hunting** Hunting is allowed in season. Developed areas and many areas around the lakes are closed to shooting. For fire-

arms regulations, see our website.

**Driving** Off-road driving is prohibited. Get the free "Approved Backcountry Roads" maps at ranger stations or the visitor center, or from our website.

**Pets** Keep pets on a leash (six-foot maximum length). Pets are prohibited on designated beaches and in public eating places and public buildings. Never leave pets alone, especially in a vehicle. Temperatures inside

can climb to 160°F; a pet can die quickly.

**Time Changes** Nevada is in the Pacific Time Zone; Arizona is in the Mountain Time Zone. Except on the Navajo Reservation, Arizona does not observe daylight saving time.

**Protected Features** Do not damage or remove any plant, animal, Native American artifact, or natural or historical feature; all are protected by federal law.

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

**More Information** Lake Mead National Recreation Area 601 Nevada Way Boulder City, NV 89005 702-293-8990 [www.nps.gov/lake](http://www.nps.gov/lake)

Lake Mead is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System: Visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) to learn more about parks.

©GPO 2013—378-769/30014 Reprint 2012  
Printed on recycled paper.