

Rainbow Bridge

National Monument
Utah

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior





Rainbow Bridge, Gary Ladd photo

Rainbow Bridge, the world's largest natural bridge, is considered a sacred place by many Native Americans. To the Navajo, rainbows represent guardians of the universe. This natural wonder nestles among canyons carved by streams en route to the Colorado River from Navajo Mountain's north flank. Until the formation of Lake Powell, this was one of the most remote and inaccessible regions in the contiguous United States. Today the bridge is accessible by boat.

The first publicized sighting of the bridge was made by the Douglass-Cummings party in 1909. Two parties had set out, under government surveyor W.B. Douglass and under University of Utah dean Byron Cummings, to seek the great stone arch that Native Americans said lay near Navajo Mountain. The 2 parties eventually met and joined forces. They were guided by Ute Jim Mike and Paiute Nasja Begay, and by John Wetherill, trader and self-taught archeologist. The country proved rough and treacherous. Horses slipped and skidded on slickrock surfaces. Rimrock ledges, like terrible sandstone mazes, frequently blocked progress and turned the party back. They struggled through canyons, some dry and boulder-choked, some containing water and dense brush. Then, coming down what is now Bridge Canyon in the late afternoon of August 14, the party beheld this beautiful natural stone bridge.

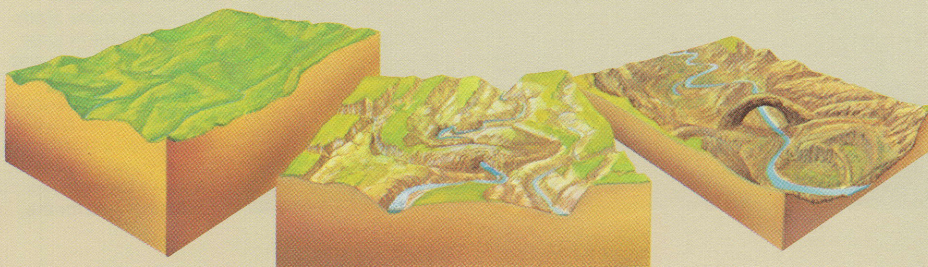
With a span of 275 feet (84 meters), Rainbow Bridge arches to a height of 290 feet (88 meters). The top is 42 feet (13 meters) thick and 33 feet (10 meters) wide. The dark, vertical streaks on the sandstone, called "desert varnish," are composed of iron oxide or manganese. Many believe these particles leach from the rocks; others believe that minerals are blown as dust particles and

settle on wetter areas of rock. Afternoon sunlight makes the colors especially brilliant.

The base of Rainbow Bridge is composed of Kayenta Sandstone, reddish-brown sands and muds laid down and consolidated hundreds of millions of years ago. Above its base the bridge is composed of Navajo Sand-

As Bridge Creek entrenched itself into the landscape, the scene was set for carving Rainbow Bridge. As the canyon cut through the Navajo Sandstone and then hit the hard Kayenta Formation rock, the cutting became more difficult. The stream widened its path and undercut the canyon walls. Finally it cut through the neck of a meander loop. The

How Rainbow Bridge was Formed



Water flowed off Navajo Mountain, forming Bridge Creek. On its way to the Colorado River, the rushing creek eroded the sandstone. As the water slowed, erosion continued at a slower pace. Stream meanders formed large loops, creating thin rock

walls as the water circled back on itself. Floods pounded the thin walls until the loosely cemented Navajo Sandstone gave way to the creek, forming a hole that began Rainbow Bridge. Illustration by Jaime Quintero

stone. This formation was created as wave upon wave of sand dunes were deposited to depths of 1,000 feet (305 meters). Over the next 100 million years, both these formations were buried more than 5,000 feet (1,524 meters) deep by other strata. The pressures and temperatures of this burial consolidated and hardened the rock of these formations.

Some 60 million years ago the landscape we know as the Colorado Plateau began a gradual uplift. Today's landscape results from the erosion caused by streams cutting into these massive layers of rock now lifted far above sea level. As the landscape lifted and tilted, these streams acquired more force and began to downcut their meanders.

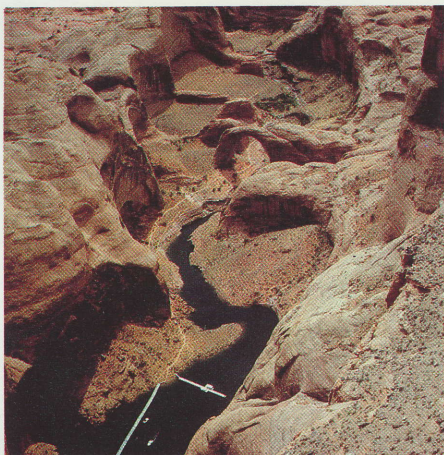
stream then altered its course, taking the more direct course through the break. Huge flakes of sandstone broke loose and fell, leaving a conchoidal or shell-like pattern like that found in the chipping of Native American arrowheads. Natural flaking, called exfoliation, contributes to the formation of alcoves and natural bridges throughout this region.

Rainbow Bridge



Rainbow Bridge by Water Most people travel by water to Rainbow Bridge, some 50 miles (93 kilometers) from Wahweap, Bullfrog, or Halls Crossing. From the courtesy dock landing in Bridge Canyon, Rainbow Bridge is about a ½ mile (1 kilometer) walk along a moderate trail. Tours of Rainbow Bridge, leaving from Wahweap and Bullfrog, are offered by the park concessioner. For those who want to use their own boat, launch ramps and marinas with boating and camping supplies exist at Wahweap, Halls Crossing, Bullfrog, Hite, and Dangling Rope. Dangling Rope is the closest marina, 10 miles (19 kilometers) northwest of Rainbow Bridge.

Concessioners: Wahweap Lodge and Marina, Box 1597, Page, AZ 86040; Hite Marina, Halls Crossing Resort and Marina, Bullfrog Resort and Marina—all can be reached at Lake Powell, UT 84533. Lake Powell Air Service, Box 1385, Page, AZ 86040.

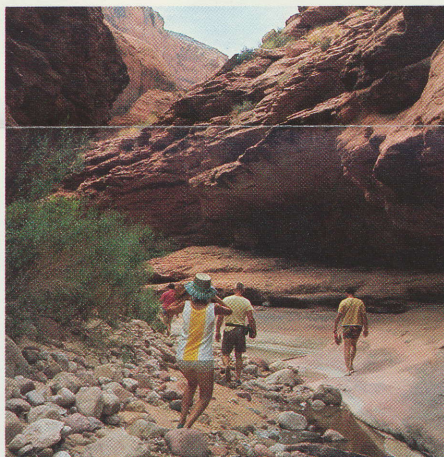


The bridge and courtesy dock

Hiking to Rainbow Bridge You can reach Rainbow Bridge via 2 foot trails: from Navajo

Mountain Trading Post, 14 miles (26 kilometers), and from abandoned Rainbow Lodge, 13 miles (24 kilometers). Required permits and detailed information on routes, water sources, and supplies may be obtained from the Navajo Nation (see below).

Trail Ethics Both hiking trails traverse Navajo Nation land. Please respect the land and the privacy of the people living there.



Hiking the Rainbow Trail

Remember that hogans are private property. Allow livestock to graze undisturbed. Leave gates as you find them. Use a backpacking stove. If you must build a fire, use previous fire sites and extinguish fires completely. Pack out all trash. Bury human wastes 8 inches (20 centimeters) below ground, and away from water sources.

Regulations While in the monument, the following actions are prohibited and are illegal: hunting, carrying firearms, removing plantlife or natural features, removing In-

dian artifacts, defacing sandstone with graffiti, camping, making wood fires, fishing, rock throwing, swimming, diving, and rock climbing.

Safety and Courtesy Carry at least 1 gallon (3.8 liters) of water per day per person in warm weather. Please respect the inspirational and sacred nature of this magnificent formation and enjoy Rainbow Bridge quietly.

Facilities There is no campground or picnic area. A vault toilet is available. The near-

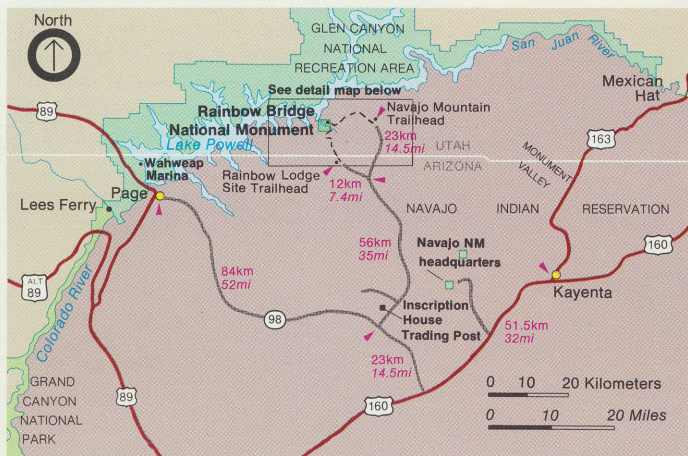


Boating on Lake Powell

est town with food, lodging, and facilities is Page, Ariz., on U.S. 89.

Administration The monument was established in 1910. For information write: Superintendent, Glen Canyon National Recreational Area, Box 1507, Page, AZ 86040; or call 602-645-8200.

Hiking to the Bridge



The Trailheads. The trailheads are near Navajo Mountain (see park map below). The Navajo Mountain Trading Post trailhead is unmarked; trail starts at the end of the road. The Rainbow Lodge-Rainbow Bridge trailhead lies at the west end of the old Rainbow Lodge ruins. Both trails lie on the Navajo Indian Reservation and terminate at Rainbow Bridge National Monument. The trails are not maintained and they cross rough canyon country. They are not recommended for the

beginning, casual, or careless hiker. In summer the trails are hot and dry; in winter elevations make them subject to severe cold and high winds. Portions of both trails are subject to flash floods. You can use the two trails roundtrip fashion. You can also make advance arrangements with a park concessioner for boat transportation back to Wahweap from Rainbow Bridge.

Hikers should carry the 15-minute quadrangle map "Navajo-Mountain,

Arizona-Utah." Know your timetable, stick to it, and leave your itinerary with someone who expects you back.

Trail bikes and motorized vehicles are illegal. Horse use on the Lodge-Bridge trail is **not** recommended. **Hikers must obtain a permit before hiking these trails.** Write: The Navajo Nation, Recreational Resources Department, Box 308, Window Rock, AZ 86515; call 602-871-6647, or 602-871-4941.

