

Rainbow Bridge

Rainbow Bridge National Monument
Utah

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



*The closer you get
the more humbleness
comes across you,
it's way older than I am,
than anyone is.*

—Charley Bullets, Kaibab Paiute

Rainbow Bridge is part of the culture and history of the Diné (Navajo), Hopi, Kaibab Paiute, San Juan Southern Paiute, Ute Mountain Ute, and Zuni. Their oral traditions tell of seeking food, water, and shelter in this canyon from time beyond memory to modern times. They also found hiding places here during conflicts with each other and, in the mid-1800s, with the US government.

Bridge Canyon has long been used by people, as far back as 10,000 years ago. Between 700 and 1300 CE (common era), they migrated through the canyon, made homes,

grew crops, and imbued the land with spirituality. "The spirits are guardians of those ancient places," says Abbott Deqaquaptewa (Hopi).

It was a long time before native people shared their oral traditions of Rainbow Bridge. The Diné began to tell their stories in the 1970s when Rainbow Bridge was at risk from the rising waters of Lake Powell. They wanted the world to understand that the bridge was more than a natural wonder and example of interesting geology—it was also spiritually important for Native Americans.

One story, shared by Nakai Ditloi, tells of a bridge formed by the god Danaize: "The Diné reached a canyon which they could not cross. Danaize told them he would create a rock rainbow which could be a bridge for the Diné. It was this way that the Diné were able to cross the Canyon of the Rainbow Bridge."

This canyon and its bridge remain profoundly important to many native people. Walk with respect, soak in the wonder, and prepare for your first glimpse of Rainbow Bridge.

The People's Bridge

*Native Americans speak of
Rainbow Bridge as a sacred place.*

Hopi

"It gives me something in my heart," said Floyd Lomajuyvaya when he visited in 2009. He was with Rod Duwala and Wilton Kooyahoema. Duwala explained, "We come to these migration points to deposit those things [that we've made at home] not just for the Hopi but for all people worldwide and all living creatures." Kooyahoema added, "Only the Hopi who come with offerings know where the shrines are."

Kaibab Paiute

"My first impression was the way the rock looked with Paiute Mountain in the distance," said Charley Bullets. He was referring to what other people call Navajo Mountain, which is sacred to many tribes. Glendora Homer said of her visit, "Before we ate, we made an offering so we went before the bridge, sang a song to the bridge and the Earth and I did the offering to the four directions for allowing us to be there. . . . It gave us chills."

Navajo

"It's not like a church," explained Willie Greyeyes. "We have certain sacred places that we reference to pray, to do offerings. . . . Those sacred and holy places are all over the Navajo Nation." Said Tim Begay, "I can see why people would go up there to see the arch; it's magnificent." He added, "That's where we go to ask for rain, to do other offerings . . . you can't put a value on a sacred place."

San Juan Southern Paiute

Jack and Mary Ann Owl live on the north side of Tucane or Paiute Mountain, their tribe's names for Navajo Mountain. Their name for the bridge is Barahoine. Mary Ann first learned about the bridge when she was nine; Jack recalls first seeing it when he was herding sheep. "At first it made me feel afraid but after a while of being there, I felt at peace."

Ute Mountain Ute

Lola Mike translates the Ute name for Rainbow Bridge as "bent rock." Her grandfather, Jim Mike (San Juan Southern Paiute), helped guide the 1909 expedition that "discovered" Rainbow Bridge. Aldean Ketchum says, "The most important thing is to understand the connection . . . it will remain there standing long after we are gone, to remind us that things created around us are there to share and to use to make us better people."

Zuni

The Zuni returned to Rainbow Bridge in 2014 after being gone for many years. Even so, they found their ancestors' shrine near the bridge. Octavius Se-owtewa explains its importance, "So, they left shrines so the ancestors, through the shrines, could talk to them and tell them which direction to go. . . . When we do come back at a certain point we still make that connection back to our ancestors when they were there."

Most of these quotations are from oral histories conducted by the National Park Service.

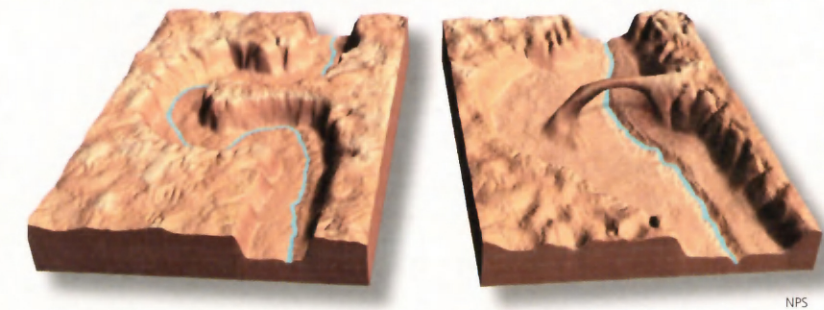


These represent items produced by each tribe.

BACKGROUND PHOTO—© CHRISTOPHER K. EATON; HOPI POT AND PIN, KAIBAB PAIUTE BASKET, NAVAJO RUG, SAN JUAN SOUTHERN PAIUTE BASKET, ZUNI BEAR FETISH AND POT—NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, UTE MOUNTAIN UTE POT—COURTESY OF THE BLM ANASAZI HERITAGE CENTER, NAVAJO RUG—NPS

Creating the Bridge

Finding the Bridge



“Eccentric stream erosion” is how President William Howard Taft described the geologic processes at work here. He designated Rainbow Bridge National Monument in 1910.

Over 30 million years ago, magma in Earth’s crust uplifted Navajo Mountain (*top of photo at right*). Melted snow and rain began flowing down its slopes, forming fast-moving creeks. Bridge Creek began to carve the canyon here, working back

and forth in wide curves that left behind narrow fins of Navajo sandstone (*above left*).

Under Navajo sandstone lies harder Kayenta sandstone that the creek could not erode as easily. Water began to wear away a spot at the base of each fin. After the creek broke through a fin, it began flowing straighter and faster (*above right*). Other bridges may have formed here, but only Rainbow Bridge remains.



Left: This aerial view shows the rugged country between Navajo Mountain (*top*) and Rainbow Bridge (*lower left corner*). Until the late 1960s, you had to hike six miles uphill from the Colorado River to reach Rainbow Bridge or hike 12 to 20 miles around Navajo Mountain and through many canyons. Today, you can walk a relatively easy trail from the dock. It is about one mile, depending on the level of Lake Powell.



UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Native Americans had long known of Rainbow Bridge and a few others may have seen it in the 1800s. But it remained hidden from the world until 1909. Explorers Byron Cummings and William Douglass mounted an expedition to find this almost mythical bridge. Nasja Begay (Paiute) and Jim

Mike (San Juan Southern Paiute) guided them. Mike heard about the bridge from his elders; Begay saw it when he was a boy.

Less than one year later—on May 30, 1910—President Taft designated Rainbow Bridge National Monument.

Left: The 1909 expedition included, in the front row, from right: Bryon Cumming’s son Malcol, William Douglass, Cummings, John Wetherill. Other crew are also shown.

Right, top: Cummings at Rainbow Bridge. The bridge rises 290 feet above the creek, reaches 275 feet across the canyon. At its apex, it is 33 feet wide and 42 feet thick.

Right: Members of the Cummings-Douglass expedition celebrate their success by eating watermelon.



NPS



NATIONAL ARCHIVES / NEIL M. JUDD

TOP: CANYON WALL—NPS / MELINDA SCHMITT

Your Walk to Rainbow Bridge

Along the creek diminutive waterfalls alternated with deep clear pools banked with ferns and overhung with willows and oaks.

—Weldon Heald

Today as you walk to Rainbow Bridge, you will experience a bit of what Bridge Canyon was like before Lake Powell was created. You will see grasses and other plants typical of streamside areas and pass a lush hanging garden (*map, right and photo, below*). As you approach the garden’s alcove, notice how the air cools—an effect of the seeping water. This small amount of water also provides enough moisture for plants like maiden-hair fern and Rydberg thistle, the large plant growing in the alcove.



NPS / MELINDA SCHMITT

Canyon wren
© THY BUN

Rainbow Bridge

Observation Area

Hanging Garden

Trail to Rainbow Bridge
Approximately 1 mile (1.6 km)
depending on lake level

Courtesy Boat Dock
location depends on lake level

Lake Powell

Rock squirrel
NPS / MARC NEIDIG



Bridges evening primrose and Great Basin collared lizard

PRIMROSE—© CLIFF HUTSON
LIZARD—© DEVIN BERGQUIST

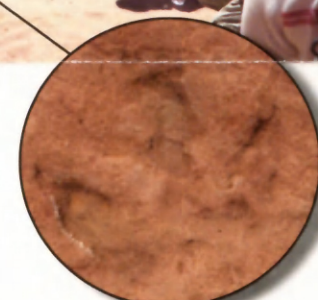


Above: As you get closer to Rainbow Bridge, you can begin to comprehend its immensity. A 25-story building could easily

fit inside its opening. *Right:* In the viewing area, a park ranger points out a dinosaur track (*right*). The size of a large hand, it

came from the hind foot of a theropod that walked through here over 200 million years ago.

ABOVE AND RIGHT—NPS / MELINDA SCHMITT



Listen for the song of the canyon wren (*above left*)—a series of whistles that sound like they are dropping down a cliff. Quick movement could be a lizard (*above*); more than six types live here. The agile rock squirrel (*left*) won’t sit still long. It scurries under rocks if surprised. Stop occasionally to look up; ravens often fly overhead, and you might see a peregrine falcon. Both species of birds nest in Bridge Canyon.

Bridge Creek carries enough water to allow plants to grow here. Alongside the trail, blooms of Bridges evening primrose (*above*) might brush your knees. Willows grow thickly along parts of the trail. And you may need to duck your head to pass through a patch of tamarisk. Its purplish plumes are beautiful, but this tall plant does not belong here and uses water needed by native plants.

You might be surprised how soon you see Rainbow Bridge in the distance, with Navajo Mountain rising behind. Rest in the shade of the wooden shelter before heading down to the viewing area, where you can see the bridge up close and talk to park rangers. Take the time to soak in the atmosphere. After all, you are in the presence of a natural wonder that has awed people for thousands of years.

Visiting Rainbow Bridge

By boat Rainbow Bridge National Monument is about 50 miles from Wahweap, Halls Crossing, and Bullfrog; about 15 miles from Dangling Rope. • A trail leads from the dock to the bridge; the length varies with lake level. • The trail is relatively easy, but not usually wheelchair-accessible; inquire before you come. • Boat rentals, tours, and current lake and trail conditions are on the website.

By foot Two extremely difficult trails enter the monument from the south. Permits are required; contact Navajo Nation, Parks and Recreation Department, Box 9000, Window Rock, AZ 86515; 928-871-6647; www.navajonation.org.

Remember Rainbow Bridge is sacred to Native American communities. We request your voluntary cooperation in not approaching beyond the viewing area and not walking under Rainbow Bridge.

SAFETY

Drink water often. • Wear sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses. • Wear sturdy shoes; the trail is rough and sandy. • Watch where you put your hands and feet. • Heed storm warnings; expect sudden winds and lightning. • Distant rain can cause flash floods in this canyon.

NOT ALLOWED IN THE PARK

Pets • Camping • Fires • Fishing • Rock climbing • Throwing rocks • Swimming, diving, and other watersports • Hunting • Drones

PROTECT THIS SPECIAL PLACE

Stay on trails. • Dispose of trash at the dock. • Federal law protects all natural and cultural features including rocks, plants, animals, artifacts, and archeological sites. • Writing, drawing, and carving on rocks or other surfaces is vandalism. • Report suspicious behavior to a park ranger or call the anonymous Archeological Crime Reporting Hotline: 800-227-7286.

FIREARMS

Regulations posted at www.nps.gov/glca.

ACCESSIBILITY

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

EMERGENCIES

From a boat Marine Band 16, call National Park Service
By phone 800-582-4351

MORE INFORMATION

Rainbow Bridge National Monument
PO Box 1507 / Page, AZ 86040
928-608-6200 / www.nps.gov/rabr

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