

Bursting with cliffs, canyons and geologic wonders, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (left) was the continental U.S.' last place to be mapped. Lake Powell (right) lures more than 3 million visitors annually to its pristine, 500-foot-deep waters.

FRITZ POELKING/THE IMAGE FINDERS



# COMING FULL CIRCLE

**For more than** a hundred years, we Americans have set aside vast swaths of our country, marking them as singularly unique representations of our natural heritage. Yet shamefully few of us visit them on a regular basis. And fewer still know that within 150 miles of small-town Page, Ariz., is the largest collection of national parks, national monuments and natural attractions in the country, known as the Grand Circle. Now is the time for explorers to head for the Southwest and see as many of these as they can.

**Page, Ariz., serves as home base for visiting a vast collection of natural wonders.**

BY GLENN KAUFMANN

## Along the Slickrock Sea

Page was founded in 1956 as a base for the workers tasked with constructing Glen Canyon Dam. The 710-foot edifice on the edge of town that provides power across the American West also marks the lower end of Lake Powell and the start of Glen Canyon, the last "tame" section of the Colorado River before it plunges headlong into the Grand Canyon.

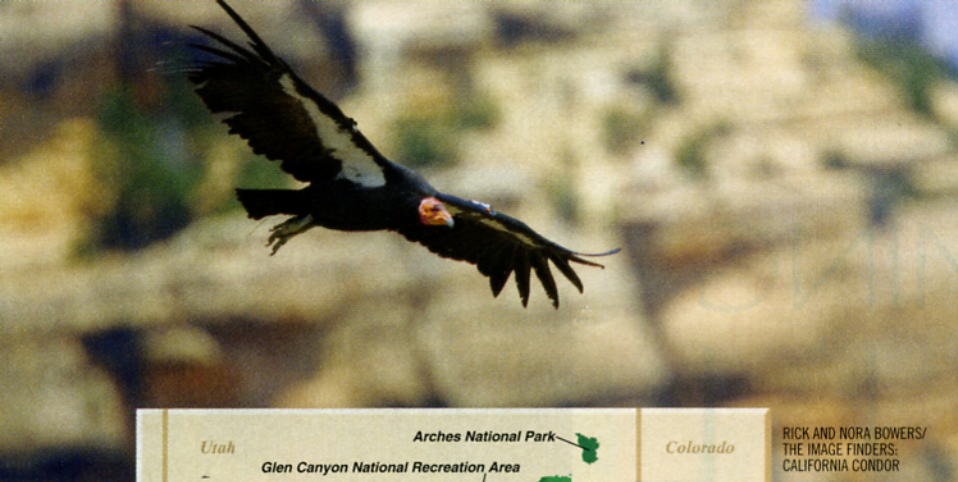
Lake Powell's 1,960 miles of shoreline and 186-mile length stretching across Arizona and Utah makes it the second-largest reservoir in the U.S. (behind Lake Mead) and one of the Southwest's premier outdoor attractions. Composed of slickrock coves, narrow (kayak-only) grottos and open basins with a backdrop of buttes, mesas and clear blue sky, Lake Powell is an outdoor paradise for anyone wanting to simultaneously spend time on the water and in the desert.

YVETTE CARDOZO/HOUSESTOCK



Visitors can take a four-wheel-drive tour from Page out to explore the Antelope Canyon on foot.





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Despite its moonscape terrain, Lake Powell's signature attraction is houseboating, whereas expeditions through Glen Canyon below the dam take the form of powered or leisurely paddled raft trips and jet-boat sprints, depending on the group's sense of adventure and definition of fun. On daytrips, visitors are advised to travel slowly and keep their eyes open for signs of the canyon's current residents (bighorn sheep) and for petroglyphs, signs of the canyon's original two-legged inhabitants.

While the Grand Canyon and Monument Valley (both within the Grand Circle) should be on every traveler's life list, there are destinations just a short drive from Page that receive far fewer visitors and feel more intimately connected with the earliest residents of the region.

■ Glenn Kaufmann is a freelance writer based in Bloomington, Ind.

## American Indian Memoirs

Long held sacred by some of the Southwestern American Indian peoples, Rainbow Bridge National Monument (the world's largest-known natural bridge) is one of Lake Powell's best-known natural attractions and 50 miles up lake from Page. Another popular rock formation is Antelope Canyon. Over the millennium, water has carved it into a thicket of Dr. Seuss-like pink-and-orange rocks and crawl spaces so remarkable that they are among the Southwest's most photographed landmarks.

Among the lesser-known and -visited sites is the Navajo National Monument, a relatively small site that contains big things. The monument preserves and protects three ancestral Pueblo cliff dwellings. While there are three short self-guided trails and a museum, visitors wishing to explore the archaeological sites more thor-

oughly are advised to call (928) 672-2700 in advance to book a ranger-guided tour.

Part of a landscape with great spiritual significance to the Navajo people, Canyon de Chelly National Monument is unique among National Park Service sites in that it is made up entirely of Navajo Tribal Trust lands that support a modern community of Navajo residents. Because it represents one of the

longest continually occupied communities in North America, Canyon de Chelly affords scientists and casual vacationers alike the chance to witness, explore and experience the distinctive architecture, artifacts, rock imagery and history of the Navajo people.

## Best-kept Secrets

Toward the end of Glen Canyon, after passing through iconic Horseshoe Bend, visitors will catch a glimpse of the majestic Vermilion Cliffs. This towering orange-and-pink range is where researchers and scientists have been reintroducing California condors since the world first took notice of their plight in the mid-1980s.

Roughly 40 miles northwest of Page, just north of the Utah border, 1.9 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is a veritable encyclopedia of Southwestern geology. The monument contains a huge variety of rock formations and paleontological sites spanning eons across three distinct areas. Within this monument, travelers will find towering multicolored sandstone buttes and mesas. The Escalante River winds beside and around the Escalante's canyons, which have become known for their variety of hiking trails.

Fairly bursting at the seams with natural splendor, Utah's contributions to the Grand Circle stretch as far north and east as Arches National Park and as far west as Zion National Park. Each of these destinations and many others lie within the 150-mile radius of the Grand Circle.

By itself, Page is a terrific getaway destination for anyone with a taste for water sports, hiking and the desert, but as the epicenter of some of the world's greatest natural attractions, it is the ideal base for excursions to National Park System treasures preserved for the American people and their children.

## Planning Your Trip

For a full listing of the NPS sites within the Grand Circle, see the sidebar of Kaufmann's article at *Home And Away Magazine.com*. For more information, contact [www.grandcircle.org](http://www.grandcircle.org) and Page-Lake Powell Tourism at (888) 261-7243 and [www.pagelakepowelltourism.com](http://www.pagelakepowelltourism.com). For trip-planning assistance, contact a local AAA Travel agent or [AAA.com/travel](http://AAA.com/travel).

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