Rainbow Bridge

The Effects of Glen Canyon Dam on the Sacred Navajo Land

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Why was Glen Canyon Dam built?

- The dam was built in 1956 to build a hydro-electric plant to increase electricity, and provide irrigation water to support a growing population in the arid southwest.
• However, when construction began in 1956 the land was still part of the Navajo Reservation
• January 29th, 1957 the Navajo Nation signed a Resolution with the US Government, exchanging the land (Glen Canyon Dam, Lake Powell, and Page, Arizona) for more grazing area in Utah.
What about Rainbow Bridge?

- Rainbow Bridge had been sacred to the Navajo, Hopi, and other tribes in the area for centuries.
- For centuries the Native Americans lived in the area. They had cultural stories about the area, and ancestors buried there.
The surrounding area had been home to these people when the US government was trying to send them to internment camps at Fort Sumner in 1864.
Why give up this sacred land?

- The Navajo did not just exchange this precious land with out consideration.
- The area they gained had been a disputed area where clashes with nearby ranchers had taken place.
- Also, Rainbow Bridge had been protected from any future flooding as a National Monument since 1910.
Rainbow Bridge, 1913
Why is it so sacred?

- Not only had the area been a safe haven in the 1860s, but it also was a part of the Navajo history.
- The Navajo believe that the bridge represents Rainbow Man and Rainbow Woman.
- Rainbow Man and Rainbow Woman bring clean, fresh Water to the Navajo people.
- Rainbow Bridge became the pilgrimage site for the reservation.
What about tourists?

- After World War II, the population of the Southwest began to skyrocket, as a result, they began to tour the area.
One prominent vacation spot was Rainbow Lodge, near what would become Glen Canyon Dam. From there the bridge was a few miles of difficult hiking.

Senator Barry Goldwater was a pert owner of the lodge and as such, became one of the main antagonists of tourism in the area.
Tourists on Rainbow Bridge, 1925
The Navajo were weary of tourist because they most likely would not respect the sanctity of the land. The tourists were thought to pass under the bridge (disrespecting Rainbow Man and Woman), and also, they were thought to be the cause of water pollution in the area.

People like Senator Goldwater and the Environmentalists agreed with this assessment.

On the other hand, in 1960, Senator Frank Moss petitioned the government to remove the National Park title (and with it the protection) to flood the area. He claimed it would enhance the monument not destroy it.
The monument is flooded

- Rainbow Bridge, 1983
Results - Tourism

- Rainbow Bridge has been flooded, and is slowly being eroded.
- The National Park Service requests that visitors refrain from passing under the bridge, and leaving trash or other pollutants in the area. However, many of these guidelines are broken daily.
Results – Navajo People

- The consequential flooding of the sacred area caused legal action amongst the Navajo Nation.
In 1980 the case of Badoni v Higginson crossed the US Supreme Court.

- The Court upheld the decision that the flooding of the site was perfectly legal, and did not legally impact the Navajo.
- The Navajo gave up all rights to the land when they exchanged it in 1957.
- The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 did not protect the sight because they had already give up their claim.
Rainbow Bridge: A Comparison

- 1913
- 1983
Citations


