



## WATCHING LAKE POWELL GO UP & DOWN.

I drove past Glen Canyon Dam last week, on my way to visit friends in Springdale. It hasn't changed much since my last visit, or my first for that matter; it's still the biggest chunk of concrete I've ever laid eyes upon and it still floods one of the most beautiful sections of the Colorado River—Glen Canyon.

Of course, I've never really seen Glen Canyon in its pristine state. When the dam's diversion gates closed in 1963, I was still a kid in Kentucky, oblivious to these kinds of devastating man-made disasters.

*Oh to be that innocent again!*

My introduction to Lake Powell and its consequences came to me via an aunt I barely knew. Bertha Gunterman was a frail but feisty retired editor for Random House, living in New York, when she got wind of my interest in the West. She began sending me clippings from magazines about The Dam and the effect it was having both downstream in the Grand Canyon and, of course, the utter destruction by drowning upstream.

Early on, it had become apparent that this dam was a bad idea. For example, water released from the bottom of Glen Canyon Dam is cold—very cold—and consequently, it killed most of the native aquatic life in the Grand Canyon. They've since stocked the river with trout, which is wonderful if you want to imagine you're fishing an alpine stream.

The dam had been built to “save” water for the Lower Basin states of the Colorado River Compact, but evaporation and bank storage was diverting millions of gallons of water away from the reservoir. That's what happens when you build a reservoir in...the DESERT! The politicians could just as easily have moved the measuring point to Hoover Dam, 300 miles downstream, but that would have made too much sense and saved too much money. So the Bureau of Reclamation built another dam.

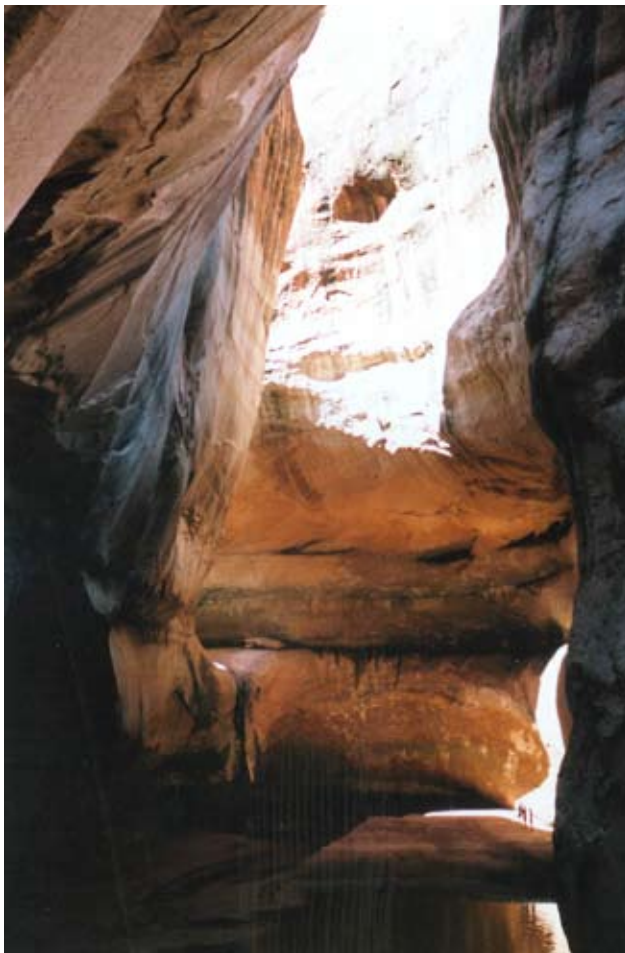
In my twenties, I became obsessed with The Dam and Glen Canyon. After my move to Utah, I made frequent trips to the reservoir and to Glen Canyon's above-water remnants. I discovered Ed Abbey and read *The Monkey Wrench Gang* about 200 times. I dreamed of “the precision earthquake” that Abbey's Seldom Seen prayed for. I drew a cartoon of The Dam with a gaping hole in its concrete facade and drove all the way to the remote Wolf Hole, Arizona to present

it to my favorite author. Of course, Abbey didn't live there as he'd claimed—he'd never even been there. Still my passion for Glen Canyon stayed red hot.

But one day, more than a decade ago, I was ranting about dam removal to an environmentalist pal of mine (an attorney of course) and I noticed a certain lack of enthusiasm on his part.

I said, “What's wrong with you? Don't you want to see Glen Canyon restored?”

He smiled sadly and replied, “It won't be the same.”



It was true that the Glen Canyon Story went beyond the physical resource—there was a romance to it that elicited visions of a Desert Xanadu. Tucked away in this remote, unknown corner of the Southwest was an entire canyon system, almost 200 miles in length. It was one of the best kept secrets in America. It truly

was, as Eliot Porter later said, “The Place No One Knew.” It was full of history, going all the way back to the Anasazi. The Glen was inhabited by just a handful of hermits and oddballs and explored by a strange mix of cowboys and prospectors and river runners. The legendary Bert Loper lived down there, in his old cabin that he called The Hermitage. Art Chaffin ran the ferry at Hite. The place was full of ghosts.

The men and women who had stumbled upon Glen Canyon in the 1940s and '50s, who really found religion of sorts here, were like an exclusive congregation. Their names, like Glen Canyon itself, are the stuff of legend. Glen Canyon will always be inextricably linked to the lucky few like Ken Sleight and Katie Lee and Harry Aleson and Moci Mac and Doc Marston. How much did this place mean to them? Watch Ken and Katie choke back tears a half century after the Glen's demise. The loss runs deep.

“All that's gone,” my friend said. “You can drain the reservoir but you can't bring back the way it *felt*. That's gone. All of it.”

He looked at me and said, “If they ever drain the lake, it'll be a ZOO down there.”

Still, when the drought in the early 2000s pulled Lake Powell's elevation down by 150 feet, I was anxious to see what the re-exposed parts of Glen Canyon would look like. Abbey had always insisted that Glen Canyon was not gone, that it was simply in “liquid storage,” waiting to be restored and rejuvenated.

In March 2005, the reservoir fell to a level that, if my friend Rich Ingebretsen's calculations were correct, meant that one of the canyon's most iconic natural features, Cathedral-in-the-Desert, was completely out of the water. Ingebretsen is the president and founder of the Glen Canyon Institute and is probably more dedicated than anyone to its restoration.

We'd seen the photos of this extraordinary side canyon, with its tapestried walls and hanging gardens and its fluted waterfall. What would it look like 42 years after it went under? Would it have retained its splendor after all these years? And would it *feel* the same? Ingebretsen and I wanted to find out.

To add some irony (or hypocrisy?) to our quest, we rented a speedboat to travel the 30 miles down lake from Bullfrog Marina---the very motorized contraption that we both claim to loathe. But we forgot about our contradictions when we found the Cathedral looking almost exactly as it had been portrayed in the old photos. Even small rocks on the ledges above the



Why are our days numbered  
and not, say, lettered?

— Woody Allen

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drop-off were just as they'd been in 1963. Later, we found inscriptions from the Hole-in-the-Rock Expedition, weathered but still readable after all these decades under water.

I'll be damned, I thought. Cactus Ed was right—it IS still here in "liquid storage."

Because we'd come down river in early March, we may have been the first visitors to see the re-emerging Cathedral. The ride back to Bullfrog was bitter cold and most people had the good sense to wait for warmer weather. And when the temperatures rose, the people arrived in droves. By May the narrow side channel was choked with tourists. Motorboats, house boats, canoes and kayaks—it was veritable gridlock down there. Scores of tourists rubbed elbows taking pictures and the silence we'd experienced in early Spring was gone, replaced by reverberating motors and the shouts and hollers of well-meaning admirers. It looked like Delicate Arch on Memorial Day weekend.

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I wondered what Glen Canyon would be like if the reservoir were drained and the canyon restored. A free-flowing Colorado River would stop most of the house boats, but the river in Glen Canyon was serene and almost rapid-free. Motor boats were already making trips up and down the river in the last few years before the Colorado stopped flowing. They would surely return.

But what about the non-motorized traffic? I thought of the hundreds of thousands of 21st century recreationists who would descend upon this "secret place," all of them looking to "re-create" the Glen Canyon that we'd read about. They'd be replacing the jet ski/Evinrude people—it's true, and for some that's an improvement—but it dawned on me: today's noisy waterborne tourists recreate *on top* of Glen Canyon. Yes, they race about the lake at full-throttle and drink beer and make noise and disturb the general welfare, but the Glen is safe and sound under 500 feet of H<sub>2</sub>O.

Drain the lake and the New Generation of Glen Canyon Recreationists might make me nostalgic for water skiers. Instead of floating and boating *over* Hidden Passage, they'd be *inside* it. The "place no one knew" would become "the place that got screwed." It would be loved to death by the very people who claimed they wanted to restore it. It's an idea so common these days that the notion is a cliché.

The Park Service would naturally feel the need to control this mass, this *mess* of "adventurers," and Glen Canyon Recreation Area would eventually become yet another heavily-regulated river---the waiting list for permits would stretch to years.

I thought about the way the spiritual and moral aspects of our last wild places have been pushed aside in favor of their recreational and commercial components. I wondered if the return of those magnificent thousand foot canyons would be seen for their grandeur or their climb-ability. Would these spires *inspire*? Or just challenge gonzo climbers to 'conquer' them? Would visitors to the Cathedral-in-the-Desert feel reverent? Or would they instead be inspired to exploit its beauty in some commercial way nobody has even fathomed yet?

On my return from Springdale via The Dam and Page, Arizona, I passed the overflowing parking lot for Antelope Canyon Scenic Tours. Twenty years ago, nobody had heard of this stunning slot canyon. Today its promoters are making the big bucks. It's a real "wilderness adventure." When I think about restoring Glen Canyon, I know that this is a harbinger of things to come.

And it occurred to me...maybe we don't deserve the return of Glen Canyon. Not yet. Would its restoration be anything but a cash cow for the "amenities economy?" Would it simply be the latest natural wonder to be exploited by thousands of entrepreneurs and trampled by millions of insensitive, thrill-seeking recreationists?

After decades of longing desperately to see Glen Canyon out of the water, I surprised even myself when I thought: maybe keeping it in "liquid storage" is the better alternative. Maybe it's even safer down there under all that water. Because today, I'm not sure we humans are worthy of something as holy as "The Place No One Knew."

#### BALANCED BUDGET? HOW ABOUT A BALANCED LIFE?

I was in Cortez, Colorado last week, doing some shopping and had just climbed out of my car in the grocery parking lot when I heard somebody shouting. Across the street was an auto dealership and standing on the curb was a salesman, waving to me for reasons I could easily imagine. I waved back.

"Hey," he hollered, "Aren't you ready to turn in that jalopy for a new set of wheels? We have some great deals."

A "jalopy?" I drive a 1999 Subaru Forester with 140,000 miles on the odometer. She's still got some life in her.

"Thanks," I replied, "But this car has got to last me a while longer. There's no way I can afford a new car these days."

He laughed. "Hey you don't have to pay CASH for it. We've got all kinds of financing for every kind of buyer...ANYBODY can afford a new car."

I shook my head. "There's no way I'm going in debt to buy a car. Isn't that why the country and the government are in such bad shape? Isn't it because everybody keeps spending money they don't have?"

"Yeah but..." he protested. But I cut him off.

"The truth is, hardly anybody can AFFORD a new car. That's not the point. What you want is for all of us keep SPENDING, whether we have the money or not."

By now, the car man was growing weary of my logic and good common sense. "Okay," he said. "I can see we're not going to put you in a new car today."

But isn't that the problem in a nutshell? Whether we're talking about government debt or consumer debt, spending beyond our means seems to be the only way to keep this shaky house of cards going. If we all want to keep living beyond our means, we all need to keep spending money we don't have. And we NEED to live beyond our means so that everybody else can do the same.

The government keeps interest rates low, hoping they can tempt us to keep borrowing. When they say there is "growing confidence in the economy," all they mean is, it looks like people are borrowing more money than they should again.

Look at the car salesman—he needs us to go into debt and borrow money to buy a car because he needs to have an income sufficient enough to let him borrow money so he can buy that new flat screen. The guy that sells the tv needs the income so that he can buy a bigger house. We're keeping the American Dream alive with smoke and mirrors.

It's no different with government. Everybody wants to cut the government's budget but nobody can decide how to do it or what to cut. And certainly nobody wants to see government spending slashed if it adversely affects benefits to them.

Conservatives dream of slashing discretionary spending to all those welfare bums and inefficient government bureaucrats. But whether they deserve their benefits and salaries, these millions of people take that money and SPEND it. They buy products and services that come from the private sector. Take away all those government paychecks and who really suffers for trimming government fat?

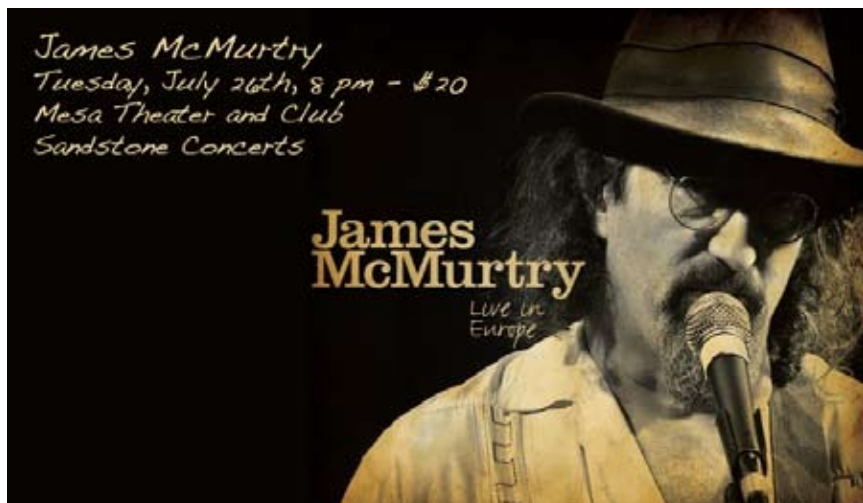
Liberals want to slash defense spending. But the fact is, more than 5 million Americans work in the civilian defense industry. What about *their* pay checks? Plans to close or curtail military bases always run hard against the reality that nearby communities often depend heavily on their business.

Is there a solution? Yes. Think about the things in Life that really make you happy and learn to live without the rest. If we all need less stuff, we won't need to borrow more money. And we won't have to earn as much to achieve the same result.

Spend less. Be happy. Don't worry....in that order. How's that for proposing something that can be so completely logical and so utterly unattainable, all at the same time?

At least I'm not suggesting a *rendez-vous* with an asteroid. I've become much kinder and gentler these days.

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