

## **With or Without Water, Desert Jewels Sparkle on Arizona-Utah Border**

**By Kate Linthicum**  
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For the first time in 40 years travelers at Lake Powell can access one of the lake's most scenic chambers, a buried treasure that has been uncovered by years of drought.

The pink, undulating sandstone walls of the canyon, called the Cathedral in the Desert, have been concealed under water and inaccessible since the government created Lake Powell by building Glen Canyon Dam in 1963. But the lake's water levels have dropped drastically after years of drought, once again exposing natural jewels like snaking canyons and waterfalls.

Since its creation, Lake Powell, 187 miles of water in the middle of the stark desert on the Arizona-Utah border, has been the center of a multimillion-dollar tourism industry. The drought is bad news for cities downstream that use the lake's water, but good news for locals who make their living off tourism.

According to Steve Ward, director of public relations for Lake Powell Resorts & Marinas, a company that offers chartered boat trips to the cathedral, the re-emergence of the striking formations has drawn new visitors. He and other boat rental companies that have noted the increase attribute the visitors to recent media coverage. Ward says he thinks shafts of sunlight sparkling onto the water from the top of the canyon are what make it picturesque.

Because the cathedral only recently reappeared, the area is poorly mapped and difficult to reach by land. Most visitors access it by boat, launching from Bullfrog Marina in southern Utah, 95 miles upriver from the bottom of the lake. It's a short trip to the heart of the Cathedral in the Desert, where the walls of the narrow canyon almost touch and the formations rise 200 feet in the air.

Visitors interested in seeing the Cathedral in the Desert should make plans soon, before it is covered with water again. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation predicts runoff from snowmelt will cause water levels to increase by up to 50 feet in the coming months. That means that by mid-July parts of the Cathedral in the Desert might again be cloaked in watery mystery and inaccessible to visitors.

Ward says that when water levels are high, the waterfall isn't able to be seen and becomes an underwater spring. Bullfrog Marina operators predict the

waterfall might be visible again later in the summer, if the drought drains the lake.

Ward urges people to visit Lake Powell whether the waterfall is visible. "There are a lot of beautiful places on the lake at any water level, places that rival Cathedral in the Desert," he says.

Peter Phelan, an Albuquerque resident who has kept a boat at Lake Powell for many years, says the lake is the closest thing New Mexicans have to an ocean. Several times a year family and friends join him on the six-hour drive to Page, Ariz., at the southernmost tip of the lake, where he stores his boat.

He says the lake is an ideal vacation spot for families, and that activities like hiking, boating and water-skiing bring generations together.

Phelan, who has never seen the Cathedral in the Desert but who plans to visit Lake Powell this month and again for the July Fourth holiday, can't wait to hit the water. "We've had some awful good times up there," he says. "It really is a kick."

### **If you go**

- The drive from Albuquerque to Lake Powell can take six to nine hours, depending on which part of the lake you visit.
- At Bullfrog Marina, several companies rent pleasure boats and houseboats. Renting a small boat to explore the Cathedral in the Desert costs around \$330 for a full day. Houseboats are more expensive. They can cost upward of \$1,500 for three days.
- Other lodging options include hotels, motels and campgrounds in the Lake Powell area. For information visit [powellguide.com](http://powellguide.com).