

# The Lost World Of Glen Canyon

I feel as though I'm traveling back through time as I round yet another bend in Davis Gulch, a tributary of the Escalante River in southern Utah. I'm descending deeper and deeper into a redrock labyrinth, which hasn't seen the light of day for more than 30 years. Each new twist in the canyon walls reveals a succession of plant communities quickly reclaiming the newly exposed ground.

Submerged beneath 60 feet of Lake Powell water just five years ago, the small clear stream at my feet now gurgles beneath a profusion of willows and eight-foot tall cottonwood trees swaying in the breeze. Before making this trip, I had visions of a muddy slog through silt-clogged, tamarisk-choked canyon bottoms. But now, my main impression is one of amazement

Dry years in the West have lowered the level of Lake Powell and revealed long-

submerged canyons

*Text And Photography By James Kay*







## JUMP

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filling. Seventy percent of the water in Lake Powell was gone.

My wife and I outfitted a pontoon boat with our gear and motored down the lake to the entrance of the Escalante and proceeded to the mouth of Clear Creek Canyon. With great anticipation of what lay ahead of us, we slowly moved up the canyon. As our boat rounded that last bend and entered the narrow chamber of the Cathedral, we couldn't quite believe our eyes. There at the back of the chamber, the waterfall stood high above the reclaimed floor of the canyon.

I had seen this image so many times before, but only in two-dimensional photographs. Now, here we were, as if gazing into the eyes of a long-dead friend. Retrieving my camera gear from the boat, I silently began to compose my first image in this sacred place. Later on, I located and stood on the same spot where Phillip Hyde captured his iconic image of Cathedral back in 1964 as the reservoir waters were already rising. This was the most profound experience of my professional life—to set up my own tripod and create my own images in that glowing, luminous chamber.

As I write this, the spring runoff from a snowpack 125% of normal is now flooding into Lake Powell. The water level is rising 18 inches every day and has already risen 30 feet since bottoming out in April. Many of the places we just explored are now re-submerged. Although I think last winter's high snowpack was a fluke, if this coming winter provides another above-average year, these canyons will continue to slip back beneath the dead waters of the reservoir.

Now that I've seen many of these canyons for myself, I can begin to understand how gut wrenching it must have been for people to have watched them slowly drown beneath the waves. For those of us fortunate enough to have gazed upon these resurrected wonders of Glen Canyon, and to now watch them slip beneath the surface again, perhaps we can find solace in the words of Edward Abbey who, while bemoaning their loss, commented that the canyons aren't really gone at all. They're simply in "liquid storage," just waiting.... **OP**