



A short list of the canyon's interpretive topics includes: Geology and climate, Botany, Human History, Birds and other Wildlife, Water and Resource Management Issues, etc.

Botany

Canyon plant communities are surprisingly diverse, varying from the high desert assemblages found in the upper canyon, through upper Sonoran, to lower Sonoran/Mojave Desert assemblages seen near the end of a trip. Life zones dependent on elevation and exposure reveal much of interest as one climbs in or out. Identification of "exotic" species illustrates how man has changed the canyon environment over the last 120 years or so.

Identifying uses of native plants by pre-historic inhabitants greatly enhances our understanding and appreciation of these people's lives.

Geology and climate in concert, are the two fundamental influences in creation of the Grand Canyon. The canyon reveals one of the most complete geologic records covering the entire second half of Earth's history. This illustrates the processes evident in the canyon's formation. At a minimum, discussion will include identification of major geologic formations, their rock types, their environments of deposition or mechanism of formation, and their significance in the story of Grand Canyon.

Human History in Grand Canyon

The Canyon was occupied by prehistoric peoples beginning with Paleo-Indian use (split-twig figurines, (4 K yr. to 3 K yr. B.P.), Basket Maker Periods "I", II, and III, Hisatsinom (Anasazi Pueblo) periods P-I through P-III, and the ancestral Pai groups of the western canyon.

When visiting archeological sites in Grand Canyon, your guides will be familiar with evidence indicating which group(s), the time(s) of occupation and abandonment, and plausible reasons for abandonment. Also of interest are diet, farming methods, physical stature, life expectancy, architectural styles, ceramic and lithic characteristics, etc. of these prehistoric groups.

Relationships of prehistoric groups to contemporary peoples of the region (Hopi, Zuni, Paiute, Hualapai, Havasupai, and Navajo) may be discussed with legends, myths, and religious beliefs of these modern groups tying these to the ancients of the canyon. The story of discovery by and influence of early European contact (Spanish explorers, missionaries to the pueblos, etc.) is also an interesting chapter.

The modern history of river running in Grand Canyon includes the initial exploration by Powell through the early expeditions (Stanton, Stone/Galloway, Holstrom, Nevills, etc.) to the advent of inflatable craft and modern boats. Characters such as Jacob Hamblin, Bert Loper, Capt. John T. Hance, W.W. Bass, etc made history into great stories!

Wildlife

Hérons and birds of prey (including osprey, red tail hawks, kestrels) may be sighted flying up and down river over the boats; ravens can be seen overhead, reflected against the canyon walls, or in camp trying to make mischief. The canyon wren's melodious song can be heard as you float through quiet stretches of calm water. Sharp eyes may spot beaver working along the shoreline or making trips across the river in narrow places.

Wild turkey and deer may be seen eating grasses along the shoreline as we float by. A group of bighorn sheep, whether they are jumping from rock to rock as they move downstream or sleeping in the shade, is among the most exciting of animal sightings. Signs of ringtail cats are often spotted in camp.

Multi-colored reptiles are commonly sighted in camp or on hikes.

Habitat and ecology information greatly enhances discussions and sightings (e.g. concentration of bald eagles at Nankoweap Creek due to spawning trout introduced into river below Glen Canyon dam; rebound in population of bighorn sheep after removal of exotic burros, etc).