

Please!  
Shake out those  
socks. Shake 'em out good!

Allow me to introduce  
myself. I'm Peter, an old  
grain of sand with a tale  
of destiny and a request for  
understanding. My fate rests in  
your hands. Let me explain.

Sand, as everyone surely knows, is the  
highest form of rockness. Rocks larger than a  
grain of sand -- boulders, cobbles, and pebbles  
-- are typically languorous and immature while  
smaller rocks dust and motes tend toward  
a diminishment of intellect. But sand grains,  
by virtue of their moderation, are noble,  
mobile, and passionate.

I was born hundreds of  
millions of years ago deep  
inside an ancient  
mountain in a vein of  
quartz. As is  
customary, the rains  
and snows of  
countless millennia  
washed my mountain  
birthplace away. But  
many quartz grains, myself  
included, survived. Although  
scattered by winds and water, we roam  
the continents until captured in nascent bedrock or  
weathered into hapless dust.

This is my second pilgrimage. In the first, I marched  
through a wilderness of dunes. The tour lasted more than  
5,000 years before seizure came at the edge of the sea.  
While locked in bedrock, I had a dream. In the haze of  
geologic slumber, I saw myself not lost in desiccated  
barrens or bounding across rocky plains but in a desert  
of heroic stone monuments, on whose edge broke  
the waves of a freshwater lake. But all lakes are

**A GRAIN OF SAND'S DREAM:  
LAKE POWELL**

**TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY:  
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*(Photo: A secluded beach on an inlet along Lake Powell's Padre Bay Provides a perfect spot to land for a crew of campers and their houseboat.)*

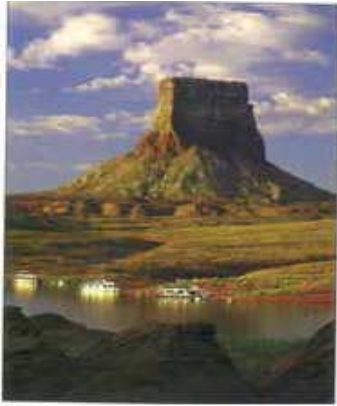


*(Photo: Lake Powell's Face Canyon bisects the maze of rugged canyons and buttes that make the lake's geology.)*

geologically fleeting, and desert lakes are phantoms. The vision faded, and I dreamed no more.

After a 150-million-year hiatus, my latest surface pilgrimage began in calamity. The ground quivered as the waves of an earthquake rolled by. When neighboring strata

suddenly fell away, I found myself on the face of a desert monolith. It stood as one of dozens of mesas, pinnacles, crags, and plateaus. What a thrill to return to the realm of light and life, sun and stars!



*(Photo: Tower Butte dwarfs a squadron of houseboats anchored in Labyrinth Canyon, the southernmost tributary of Padre Bay.)*

A great river rumbled between the stone monuments, and I knew that my fate rested in the lap of that river. Sooner or later, the river you call the Colorado would shuttle me away to the planet's ultimate destination, the sea. There I would be recycled into bedrock once more.

Scores of plants and animals inhabit this valley of rock monuments. They are enchanting. But the most marvelous of the lot are the humans. You are an invention as great as the miracle of life, itself. Never before had I come across a creature with a sense of humor -- you fellows are a kick compared to the cranky behemoths of late Jurassic time.

Our association began after my stint of nearly two millennia on the ramparts of Tower Butte. A thousand years ago, I watched your predecessors far below, as they lived, explored, and gathered food. Who could have guessed then how the strands of our fates would intertwine?

Of course, my days on the cliff were numbered. In the brittle air of a frigid winter night, there was a hellish crack! As part

of an enormous sheet of rock, I crashed to the plateau below. When the dust cleared, I lay half-buried in a heap of shattered rock.

A few seasons later, maddeningly frustrated with my stuffy quarters so close to the surface, one of your people rescued me. A man searched through the rubble, pulled me out as part of a small rock slab,



*(Photo: This Anasazi ruin along the Escalante River arm of Lake Powell is one of the restored ancient dwellings found in the recesses of the lake's side canyons. Rich in the prehistory of the Colorado Plateau, Lake Powell holds an abundance of early Indian ruins and petroglyphs.)*

and carried me away. In open country near a dwelling, I, by your definition, became useful: My slab was fashioned into a metate, a stone basin used by the Anasazi Indians for grinding corn.

The people used the metate and a hand-held mano for many years. Then, to be frank, there was a blunder. A little Anasazi stumbled while carrying the appliance, and it broke in two. At that moment, I regained my status as a free and independent sand grain.

A little more than 200 years ago, some fellows in tattered robes approached from the north. With some difficulty, the robed men and their animals forded the great river, then wearily plodded on. Fathers Escalante and Dominguez, I later learned, were headed home to New Mexico. It was 1776.

The persistence of gravity, the relentless persuasion of water, and the occasional

hounding of the winds carried me ever closer to a union with the river. The voracious brown torrent was in sight when, on a summer day, a group of men in wooden boats came drifting down. They were camped nearby when one of the men inadvertently transported me into a boat named the *Emma Dean* via the cuff of his shabby trousers.

The boat smelled of rancid bacon, and there was an alarming depth of water in the bilge. By all appearances, it seemed that I would soon be swirling toward the ocean.

Yet I rode the leaky boat for only a few hours before salvation visited again. A gust of wind carried me to the north shore while the men searched for fresh water. As I abandoned ship, I noted a logbook inscribed with the following: J.W. Powell. A hundred years in the future, that name would echo back.

Now the prevailing winds carried me farther away from rather than closer to the ravenous river. I was delivered north and east to an open valley sheltered by cliffs and plateaus. In this basin I would ramble for decades, sometimes chased north by the winds, sometimes ushered south through flooding canyons.

By the early 1960s, the winds had prodded me to the foot of a hillock of sand. On the fur of a mouse I rode to the top. Before me lay a staggering view across the distant glittering Colorado River with a backdrop of familiar stone monoliths.

Then came the incomprehensible. The remote sliver of water broadened, crept into side canyons, and engulfed the slickrock benches. It deepened and widened. For five centuries, I had successfully evaded a return to the sea. Now the river itself was in active pursuit.

As in my half-forgotten dream, the Colorado River transformed into a lake, Lake Powell, named for the unkempt guy in the leaky wooden boat. Finally, after years of

encroachment, the lake rose no more. I survived just out of reach as part of a lovely orange beach, a beach on the shores of Padre Bay, named for the men of 1776 in the tattered robes.

Soon all sorts of strange watercraft appeared: speedboats, sailboats, houseboats, tour boats, canoes, and more. One by one, either by accident or guile, I rode them all. I saw more territory in a single summer than I had seen in decades of wind-riding.



*(Photo: A sunrise's vivid colors silhouette Gunsight Butte and distant Navajo Mountain as morning dawns over Padre Bay.)*

The lake penetrated awesome sandstone chambers, lapped at sandstone escarpments, and caressed slickrock shorelines -- it made me proud of my ancestry. Using kayaks and paddleboats, the humans floated through twisting corridors to pause in the luminous shade of natural stone rotundas. Ricocheting sunlight turned incandescent as it poured into the hidden canyons.

I clung to boat hulls, was incorporated into sand castles, rode air mattresses, and fluttered on brilliant white spinnakers. There were slot canyons to explore, astonishing reflections to witness, and backpacker treks to attend. Once I rode the blue deck of an oar-powered dory. And a number of times, I traveled to Rainbow Bridge. These delightful ventures spanned

many summers.

The years were glorious until June of 1997. Then, in a moment of misjudgment, I lodged in a camera.

Unlike the beaches where sand is praised and admired, in this instrument I met with revulsion. I expressed my outrage by gouging a jagged scratch on the film contained therein. Then I was literally and figuratively blown away in contempt.



*(Photo: Reflected from the towering mesas and wind-sculpted sandstone promontories surrounding Lake Powell, the setting sun creates an ever-changing panorama of light and shadow.)*

Unhappily, the ejection took place on the crest of the huge Glen Canyon Dam that created Lake Powell. I drifted over a parapet, down the face of the dam, and into the swift water below, a captive of the Colorado River coursing toward the Grand Canyon.

Rumors of a Grand Canyon sand shortage had circulated for years. Surprisingly, they proved to be true. The river ran clear, and the *beaches* appeared malnourished. At least here I would be appreciated.

The rapids through the Grand Canyon were a thrill, and I found the surrounding rockwork impeccable. Obviously the Grand *Canyon* deserves its reputation as one of the treasures of the planet. Yet boat traffic on the Colorado moved downstream only, always toward ultima Thule. I soon felt homesick for old Padre Bay, and I dreaded the thunder of ocean surf.

Then, while floating past Elves Chasm,

well over a hundred miles from Glen Canyon Dam, I was abruptly jerked from the river. Along with a few dozen other grains swirling in the water, I found myself in a plastic container -- a water bottle -- held by a human, a backpacking human.

In the next few hours, while most of the water was consumed, the bottle was carried up, up, and out to the Rim. Several weeks



*(Photo: Swirling patterns of ancient sand dunes, frozen by time, rim the north shore of Padre Bay.)*

of darkness followed, our destiny teetering in the balance.

When the sunlight broke through again, we were unceremoniously dumped on a clump of blackbrush. I looked around.



*(Photo Rainbow Bridge arcs across Rainbow Bridge Canyon at the base of 10,388 foot-high Navajo Mountain. Boat docks in the canyon allow access to the bridge from Lake Powell.)*

There, just down the canyon, stood the backpacker, starting another walk, had taken me home.

So when you humans, shrewd as you are, visit Lake Powell, please remember the following:

You can see the world in a grain of sand.

Sandstones are superior to limestones.

And ...



*(Photo: Carved by the waters of Bridge Creek and eroded further by wind and weather, Rainbow Bridge is one of Lake Powell's most popular attractions and the best-known natural bridge in the world.)*

For Pete's sake, please shake out your socks.

I promise, in return, to steer clear of all cameras and peevish photographers.

*Gary Ladd makes his home in Page on the shore of Lake Powell. Like all those who live near the Colorado River, he often finds sand in his socks, canteens, cameras, ears, and house.*

