Lake Mead Adventure Parkway

**Overview:** The Lake Mead Adventure Parkway is one of the truly classic scenic desert drives in the American Southwest. It combines dramatic desert landscapes, world-class geologic sites, prehistoric and historic sites, the blue waters of Lake Mead, natural hot springs, and strikingly colorful sandstone formations. There are few places in the world that combine such a diversity of landscapes within such a short distance. The trip can be done in as little as four hours, but it is recommended to take six or seven hours in order to take in some of the outstanding hikes along the way and to relax and enjoy the stark beauty of the Mohave Desert.

Starting at the Lake Mead Visitor Center at the junction of U.S 93 and Lakeshore Road just south of Boulder City, the route follows the Lakeshore and Northshore Roads within the Lake Mead National Recreation Area managed by the National Park Service. The Visitor Center is accessed from the Strip by taking I-15S to I-215W to U.S. 93S through Boulder City.

The Lakeshore Road was totally redesigned and engineered several years ago to accentuate the scenic values of the route. There are frequent side roads that go to scenic overlook areas with picnic and restroom facilities. You will see some sweeping vistas of the Boulder Basin of Lake Mead with Fortification Hill and the Wilson Range in the background. Fortification Hill is an ancient volcano eruption leaving a caldera at the top. The sandstone formations on the lower slopes of Fortification Hill called the “Paint Pots” are very colorful, providing a stark contrast against the black volcanic rock of the upper slopes.

There are a number of scenic turn-outs along the Northshore Road that allows views into the Muddy Mountains and Pinto Valley Wilderness Areas and the Bitter Spring Valley, reminiscent of scenes from old western movies. Past the Redstone Scenic Area are several warm springs, Rogers and Bluepoint Springs, where warm water springs bubbles up out of the rock to form an oasis. For history buffs, there are two areas on the northern end of the Adventure Parkway of particular interest—the historic ruins of the town of St. Thomas and the Lost City Museum with its collection of artifacts from the ancient “Lost City” of the Anasazi, the most western extension of that culture.
POINTS OF INTEREST ALONG PARKWAY (south to north)

Lake Mead Visitor Center: The Alan Bible Visitor Center is Lake Mead National Recreation Area’s most complete Visitor Center with a natural desert garden, interpretive exhibits and programs, restrooms, information center and book store. Explore the attractive garden area and the newly designed exhibits at the Alan Bible Visitor Center. "Discovering the Desert" includes interactive, hands-on exhibits that invite visitors to discover the Mojave Desert. Explore the exhibits to see how plants and animals survive out here, how to read the stories in rocks and mountains, and how the landscape has changed over the ages. The Information Desk is a place for answers. Maps, hiking directions, scenic routes, ways to have fun at the lake, and more can be found here. Also enjoy the views of Lake Mead and surrounding area from the lake side of the facility. Almost everything you see in the distance and beyond is within Lake Mead National Recreation Area. The water you see is the Boulder Basin of Lake Mead and makes up about 5% of Lake Mead. Lake Mead consists of a series of large basins like this connected by narrow canyon. The Boulder Basin is connected to the next basin, the Virgin Basin, by the narrow and beautiful Boulder Canyon.

Historic Railroad Trail/River Mountain Loop Trail: Just down from the visitor center is the parking area and trailhead for the Historic Railroad Trail and the River Mountain Loop Trail. The Historic Railroad was a critical factor in the construction of Hoover Dam. In 1931, the U.S Government issued a construction contract to Six Companies, Inc., a consortium of six major western firms. Together with the government, they built almost 30 miles of railroad connecting Boulder City with all the facilities needed to build Hoover Dam (cement mixing plants, quarry pits, and gravel sorting plant). The tracks were dismantled in 1962 and the five tunnels and trail are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Historic Railroad Trail is about five miles long and ends up at Hoover Dam and has outstanding views of Lake Mead along its route. This parking lot is also the trailhead for the River Mountain Loop Trail. The River Mountains Loop Trail is 35 miles in length and surrounds the River Mountains connecting Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Hoover Dam, Henderson, Boulder City and the rest of the Las Vegas Valley. To better accommodate
outdoor enthusiasts, throughout the trail, you'll find segments 24 feet in width, including a twelve foot paved trail for hikers and road cyclists, a second trail for equestrian use and a third trail for mountain bikers.

**Hemenway Bay:** At Hemenway Harbor, you will also find two large marina complexes – Las Vegas Boat Harbor and Lake Mead Marina. Both marinas are operated by the Gripentog Family, who has been under concession contracts with the National Park Service for over 40 years. Together, the two marinas are the largest privately owner marina complex in the world, at 1500 slips. Each marina has a restaurant and retail store and gift shop. There are also boat rental operations for runabout boats, pontoon boats, personal watercraft, and water-toy rentals. There is also a public boat launch facility and dock at Hemenway Harbor.

**Boulder Beach:** The Boulder Beach area and access road is about a mile past the Lake Mead entrance station. This is a popular area for local people. There is a large campground and picnic area and the shore-line is used for a wide variety of water sports such as swimming, fishing, wind surfing, personal watercraft. Boulder Beach is home to a host each year to over 150 special events such as sailing regattas, boat races, waterski competitions, poker runs, triathlons, and others.

**Alfred Merritt Smith Water Treatment Plant:** On the lake side of the road past Boulder Beach, you can see part of the Alfred Merritt Smith Water Treatment Facility. This facility currently treats most of the drinking water for Las Vegas and the surrounding communities. The facility can treat...
up to 600 million gallons a day. The addition of ozone treatment in 2003 put the Treatment Plant on the cutting-edge of water technologies in the world.

About 88 percent of the drinking water for the Las Vegas area comes from Lake Mead. The rest is drawn through wells from an aquifer hundreds of feet beneath the Las Vegas Valley. Lake Mead is considered an excellent source of high-quality water. More than 97% of the water into Lake Mead comes from the Colorado River. The remaining 3% of the water comes from the Virgin and Muddy Rivers. Recent improvements to the facility increased the plant's reliability and capacity. The facility can treat up to 600 million gallons a day (mgd). The addition of ozone treatment in 2003 put the facility on the cutting-edge of water treatment technology. Ozonation is one of the best water treatment technologies in the world. (3)

Lake Mead Fish Hatchery

Just past the Treatment Plant on the right is the entry to the Lake Mead Fish Hatchery which is presently undergoing renovations so is closed to public use during the construction. Historically, this has been the largest supplier of trout stocking for Lake Mead, with over 57,000 trout stocked each year. The trout are stocked in the winter months when the water in Lake Mead is cooler. Lake Mead is also considered one of the most prolific striped bass lakes in the country and there are dozens of fishing tournaments during the year. The annual take of stripers is estimated to be close to one million fish. The liberal Lake Mead fishing limit is 20 fish per person, and can be a reality on any given day as these fish are aggressive almost all year. Pound for pound stripers are among the world’s strongest fighting fresh water fish and are catchable year round in Lakes Mead and Mojave. (4)
River Mountains/Tortoise Fence: To the west along lakeshore Drive, you can see some rugged baro-mountains. These are called the River Mountains. The River Mountains are home to a large population of Desert Bighorn Sheep. This population is world re-knowned as sheep from this area have been relocated to areas throughout the American Southwest to help re-built sheep population that are low in numbers or have been extirpated over time. Lake Mead National Recreation Area is home to one the largest number of Desert Bighorn Sheep found anywhere in North America.

Along this stretch of the Lakeshore Drive, you will see a short fence along both sides of the road. This fence was built to protect Desert tortoise from getting on the road and getting hit by cars. The fence actually extends below the ground as deep as it is tall. Although the area may look sparse, it is actually good Desert Tortoise habitat. The desert tortoise is a gentle reptile which spends much of its life in underground burrows. The burrows are excavated by the animals to escape the harsh summer and winter weather conditions of the desert.

33-Hole Overlook

The 33-hole overlook is one of a number of scenic side roads along Lakeshore Drive that take you to various overlook areas. Here you can enjoy panoramic views of Lake Mead and can access the shoreline for swimming, fishing and other water sports. Due to the recent drought conditions which have prevailed for over 11 years, the Lake Mead lake levels have dropped over 130 feet. The lighter-colored “bathtub ring” around the lake’s margin delineates its topography. Each of these viewpoints includes several pleasant shaded picnic sites with nearby trash receptacles and new restrooms. At some of the viewpoints, little trails explore nearly arroyos or miniature canyons leading to the water.
Las Vegas Bay Overlook: From this overlook, you can see Las Vegas Wash. The entire lowland area as far upstream as you can see was a part of the Las Vegas Bay arm of Lake Mead until the water levels dropped due to the last nine years of drought in the Colorado River Basin. There was a large marina operation here. The Las Vegas Bay Marina was moved about nine miles down the lake.

Just a mile upstream from this location is the Clark County Wetlands Park where the wetlands restoration work is centered. The Wetlands Park, administered by Clark County is a 2,900-acre, seven-by-one-mile strip of land along Las Vegas Wash. The Park borders both sides of Las Vegas Wash as it flows past Frenchman Mountain and the red sandstone of Rainbow Gardens on its way to Lake Mead. The Wetlands Park is the largest dedicated open space lands in the Las Vegas Valley and offers a wide variety of recreational and educational opportunities. The Wetlands Park offers habitat to most of Southern Nevada’s wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, and it presents a living laboratory for the study of desert plants communities. The area is a haven for migratory birds and spotting of osprey and bald and golden eagles are common. (1)

Las Vegas Wash/Lake Las Vegas/Lava Butte

The turnoff for the Northshore Road is just past the Las Vegas Bay overlook. About one mile on the Northshore Road is the Las Vegas Wash pull-out. The Las Vegas Wash is the primary channel through which the Las Vegas Valley’s excess water returns to Lake Mead. The water flowing through the wash comprises less than 2 percent of the water in Lake Mead and consists of urban runoff, shallow groundwater, stormwater and releases from the Valley’s three water treatment facilities. Presently, the wash carries over 150 million gallons of water per day. (3)

The Wash’s banks have suffered large-scale erosion over the past 20 years. However, there is an exciting effort underway to reestablish the wetlands. Wetlands are known to act as the “kidneys” of the environment, cleaning the water that runs through them, filtering out harmful residues from fertilizers, oils, and other contaminants that can be found on our roadways and in the surrounding desert. By allowing Mother Nature to filter the water received from the urban landscape, we also reap benefits in improved water quality, creation of habitat for various outdoor activities and wildlife uses, and increased aesthetic value. (3)

The lake and master planned community you see to the west is Lake Las Vegas. This is private land just outside the park boundary. You will also see a conical shaped mountain to the west just above Lake Las Vegas.
This is called Lava Butte and is an ancient volcano.

**Callville Bay**

Callville Bay is down a three-mile paved road off the Northshore Road. This scenic side trip brings you down to the shores of Lake Mead to a large recreation complex. Included in this complex is the Callville Bay Resort and Marina. Callville Bay has an interesting history. Seeing the viability of steamboat travel to transport supplies and immigrants, Mormon leader, Brigham Young recruited Bishop Anson Call to establish a colony and build a warehouse on the Colorado River. Call’s Landing (also referred to as Old Callville) became a permanent settlement with homes, warehouse and irrigation systems. Supplies intended for the newly established Mormon communities in the west traveled from New York and other eastern cities to Panama. From there goods were shipped to the west coast of Mexico, through the Gulf of California and up the Colorado River to Call’s Landing. This once-thriving community is known today as Callville. When construction for the Boulder Dam began, portions of the old warehouse still existed. Callville became submerged when Lake Mead was formed by the damming of the Colorado River. (9)

**Gale Hills**

The Gale Hills is a place where several multi-colored wash areas can be easily accessed and enjoyed. The geology is particularly stunning in this area. Although hundreds of miles inland, the geology of the Gale Hills area gives a telling glimpse into geologic time. About 300 million years ago, this area was sediment at the bottom of the sea. Today, this sea floor comprises the limestone peaks that jut nearly 6,000 feet into the sky. Scattered among these peaks are fossilized sand dunes that have eroded into galleries and canyons, intricately carved and painted in shades of red, brown, magenta, orange and yellow. (12)
The place to access both Gale Hill areas is the pullout and parking area at mile 14 on the Northshore Road. The route to get to the formations on the east side follows the wash below the parking area. It is only a 10 minute walk to the multi-colored sandstone formations that take on the appearance of a fairyland. Here are some very colorful landscapes: yellow, red, gray, green, pink, magenta, buff and tan-colored sandstones and mudstones as well as very interesting conglomerate rocks. It isn’t an extensive area but is quite intimate and beautiful.

To access to the Gale Hills on the west side of the Mile 14, follow the ridgeline which is gently sloping and reasonably easy to hike. Along the way are spectacular views of the deeply incised and multi-colored wash area below as well and the higher flat iron shaped ridges.

**Lovell Narrows**

At mile-post 16 is the turnoff to the historic Anniversary Mine and Lovell Wash Canyon. This is a wonderful side trip but you will need a high clearance vehicle to travel the two miles on the gravel road to the trailhead. If you do not have a high clearance vehicle you can park at mile 16 on the Northshore Road and hike to the narrows. It is a 4-mile round hike. Lovell Wash offers hikers both history and scenery. Hiking along a wash bottom you will pass the historic Anniversary Mine and end up in the spectacular Lovell Wash Narrows. This is a great slot canyon hike. Be sure to bring lots of water.
Bowl of Fire

At mile post 18 is a turnout for the “Bowl of Fire” scenic overlook. Here you can see into the beginning of the stunning “Bowl of Fire,” an area of fire red Aztec Sandstone formations that are great to hike and experience. The “Bowl of Fire” is part of the 48,019-acre Muddy Mountain Wilderness Area. The Muddy Mountain Wilderness Area is jointly administered by the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The area measures 18 miles long and 14 miles wide and includes the Muddy Mountains and all of the land above 3,000 feet. This is a spectacular area of outrageously tilted and folded geology and colorful sedimentary formations. The wilderness area has a number of slot canyons. The area has a significant desert bighorn sheep population. (10)

Northshore Summit Trail

At mile 20.5 is the parking area and trailhead for the Northshore Summit Trail. The half-mile round-trip trail climbs from the parking area to a nearby hilltop with a dramatic panoramic view of the Muddy Mountains Wilderness Area which includes the red rocks of Bowl of Fire. Bitter Springs Valley and the Virgin Basin are also within view. This truly is a land where the geology is laid bare.

Bitter Spring Valley

Just past the Northshore Summit Trail on the left is the Bitter Spring Valley, one of the classic western landscapes. It could easily be the backdrop to a western movie.
Redstone Scenic Area

At mile 27 is an area of spectacular red sandstone formations. A stroll on the half-mile trail is highly recommended. The red sandstone is actually ancient sand dunes that formed millions of years ago. The rocks here were formed in a climate hotter and drier than today’s climate. Strong winds piled up great dunes of sand over large areas which we call Aztec Sandstone. Varying shades of orange, red, purple, tan, and white in these rocks result from ground water leaching and oxidizing iron deposits in the sandstone layers. Erosion causes the holes in these sandstone formations. Although only four inches of rain falls here each year, water is slowly dissolving the cement that holds the sand grains together. Because the original cement was discontinuous and irregular, erosion has been more rapid in some areas than in others. This is why the rocks are honeycombed with holes and pockets. (12)

Pinto Valley Wilderness Area

At mile 28 in the distance to the east lies the Pinto Valley Wilderness Area. This 39,173-acre area is highly scenic and geologically complex, composed of volcanic, carbonate, sandstone, and classic sedimentary rocks all stirred together by major fault systems and cut by major drainages. The southern part is the volcanic Black Mountains, while the northern part is tilted carbonate ridges with sandstone outcrops. Desert Bighorn Sheep are prevalent in the area as well as raptures such as golden eagle, peregrine falcon, red-tailed and Cooper’s hawk and others. There are also a number of sensitive plant and animal species such as the bearpaw poppy, threecorner milkvetch, stick buckwheat, and the banded Gila monster and desert tortoise. (11)
Echo Bay

At mile 31 on the Northshore Road is the turnoff to Echo Bay. Echo Bay is an interesting four mile side trip if time allows. Echo Bay is near the old confluence of the Virgin and Colorado Rivers, where John Wesley Powell ended his 1869 journey. Armijo, Smith, Odgen, and others followed the Virgin River to the Colorado River, passing close to Echo Bay. Today, Echo Bay is located on the shores of the Overton Arm of Lake Mead. This is another very scenic part of Lake Mead. The National Park Service provides a campground, picnic area, boat launching ramp, courtesy dock, and area for swimming.

Rogers Spring

At mile 34 on the left is the turnoff to Rogers Springs. Rogers Springs is well worth a stop to view the warm water spring that bubbles up out of the rock to form a beautiful oasis. Rogers Spring attracts visitors to play in the warm water and enjoy the overgrown foliage. This is a great spot for a picnic lunch. Backcountry rooms are available.

Bluepoint Springs

A mile past Rogers Spring is the turnoff to Blue Point Springs. Blue Point Spring is a natural warm spring. Tall palm trees tower over the flowing spring. Visitors have an opportunity to view natural riparian habitat. This is an area where you can see the rare bearpaw poppy blooming in the spring. There are no services at the site.
**Overton Beach:** Overton Beach is an optional three mile side trip off the Northshore Road if time allows. Overton Beach is located on the shores of the Overton Arm of Lake Mead in a very scenic location. Overton Beach had a major marina until 2007 when it was moved down to Echo Bay because of the lowering water levels brought on by the extended drought in the Southwest. There are still picnicking and camping facilities as well as restrooms.

Located just south of Overton Beach, on the west side of the Virgin, was the famous mountain of salt. This necessity, also found in many caves in the area, was probably the reason for the site of the Lost City. The salt was mined by the Indians. The miners, using stone tools, would chip a circular groove into the salt, forming a knob which they would break off and carry away for their use and for trading. (15)

Lake Mead waters now cover this huge salt deposit, as well as most of the caves.

**St. Thomas:** About one mile past the Overton Beach turnoff is the intersection of two roads. The westbound paved road goes to Valley of Fire State Park and the eastbound gravel road goes to the historic town site of St. Thomas, three miles away. Both points of interest are worth exploring if time allows. St. Thomas is an interesting site for history buffs while Valley of Fire is a spectacular 42,000 acre natural landscape of red and multi-colored and shaped rock formations.

Today, remnants of the town of St. Thomas can now be seen thanks to the lowering water levels of Lake Mead, which is due to severe drought conditions. Once the town was flooded higher than 60 feet above the tallest structure, now visitors can roam the ghost remains of a true western town. St. Thomas has a fascinating history. The town had endured for about 140 years, spending half of that time as a small farming town and the other half under the waters of Lake Mead.

The community was first settled by Mormon pioneers in the 1860s that started farming the area using water from the Muddy River and the local springs. Cotton was one of the primary crops grown. There was competition for the water with the Paiute Indians who had occupied this area for centuries. The strife created from the competition for water and the growing of crops created considerable strife and made this a very difficult life for both the Indians and the Mormon settlers. of Historic Places. (14)
Overton Wildlife Management Area: Two miles past the St. Thomas road turnoff is the turnoff to the Overton Wildlife Management Area. If time allows, you may want to pull into the area as you can often see waterfowl and wild turkeys. The Overton Wildlife Management Area lies in the lower extremes of the Moapa and Virgin Rivers where they flow into the north end of the Overton Arm of Lake Mead. Following the construction of Hoover Dam and the inundation by Lake Mead, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created the Boulder Canyon National Wildlife Refuge in 1940, which later became the Overton Wildlife Management Area. There is no charge for use of the area. Roads throughout the area provide excellent viewing of wetland-dependent wildlife and upland wildlife. Waterfowl hunting is the most popular hunting activity on the area. Desert riparian habitat, associated with the floodplains of the Muddy and Virgin rivers, is extremely important to wildlife populations. The dense shrubbery of desert wash habitat provides food and shelter for small animals and many species of birds. Numerous wet meadows and ponds dot the landscape, providing food and water for birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The deep water of Lake Mead provides habitat for fish and diving ducks, while water near the shoreline provides feeding areas for puddle ducks and shorebirds.

Lost City Museum

Just before entering the town of Overton is the Lost City Museum on the left side of the road. Lost City is a series of Basketmaker and Pueblo ruins extending the 30-mile length of the Muddy River Valley. When early excavations began, the sites were called Pueblo Grande de Nevada. These residents, called the Virgin River Anasazi, lived off what they could grow and what the desert and the river had to offer. Mainly, the Anasazi farmed, growing corn, beans, squash, and cotton in the valleys. They also took advantage of seasonal wild foods such as mesquite.
beans, agave hearts, and pinyon nuts. This new way of making a living by staying put and raising crops emerged in the Lake Mead area around A.D.1. It marked a major shift from the economy of the Anasazi’s predecessors, who were not agriculturalists but hunters and gatherers, making camps and moving as food and water supplies dictated. The earliest settlers lived in the area until about 1150 A.D. Their long-lasting communities are proof of their endeavor and perseverance in a harsh and unforgiving desert. The sites and the artifacts that remain give us insight into the lives of these early residents. (15)

**Overton:** The town of Overton was settled in 1865 by Mormons to grow crops such as cotton and was one of a series of towns along the Mormon Road (Trail) to California.

**Moapa Valley Viewpoint**

From this vantage point you get a good birds-eye view of the Moapa Valley spreading out toward Lake Mead. The flat escarpment in the background is the Mormon Mesa, found to have the oldest surface anywhere on the planet. The Muddy River, a tributary of the Colorado River system, flows through the valley, eventually emptying into Lake Mead. In the late 1880s, Mormons settled into small agricultural communities in the fertile Moapa Valley and the farming lifestyle exits to this day. (14) Visitors to Moapa Valley will find friendly communities with small-town character. The Moapa Valley is the annual host of the Clark County Fair and Rodeo, which is held at the county fairgrounds in Logandale.
1. Wetlands website—http://www.clarkcountynv.gov/parks/Pages/cc-wetlands-park
2. National Park Service leaflet on the Historic Railroad Trail
3. Southern Nevada Water Authority: www.snwa.com/about/regional_treatment_amswtf.html
4. Nevada Department of Wildlife: http://www.ndow.org/Bodies_Of_Water/Lake_Mead/
5. Wetlands website—http://www.clarkcountynv.gov/parks/Pages/cc-wetlands-park
6. National Park Service leaflet on the Historic Railroad Trail
7. Southern Nevada Water Authority: www.snwa.com/about/regional_treatment_amswtf.html
8. www.nps.gov/lake/learn/historyculture/callvillebayhistory.htm
10. www.nps.gov/lake/learn/nature/pintovalleywild.htm
11. Information kiosk at Redstone
14. Lost City Museum Displays
15. www.nps.gov/lake/learn/nature/st-thomas-nevada.htm