

# New Hoover Dam Visitors Facility's OPEN

by Darrell McGarvey

The new visitor center and parking garage is now open at Hoover Dam after opening to the public on June 21st.

All the mess, the detours, the long waiting in lines of traffic and the congestion of busses, cars and motorhomes since 1986 is over!

The new facility will make it safer for tourists visiting the dam because there will not be any pedestrian crossing on the highway...all pedestrians will cross under the highway. The lines of tourists waiting to tour the dam will be indoors and away from any harm from any vehicles out of control on the sidewalk...always a fearful thought!

Tourists lining up inside for the dam tour means they will now be in a climatized area out of the heat, cold, wind and rain. Not only is that more pleasant but nearly eliminates the past problems of people succumbing to heat while waiting...elderly especially were susceptible to the intense heat, which sometimes went over 130°! My first visit to the dam in 1980 included evidence of that very temperature. One of the guides had a thermometer and placed it on a trash receptacle next to people in line...and it registered 130° (the receptacle was in the sun). He then placed it on the cement on top of the dam itself and I walked away when it reached 141°! I didn't want any fried eggs...I wanted something COLD to drink at the Snacketeria! Remember the old Snacketeria, where we had to sit outside, if you were lucky enough to find a seat?

There is a new traffic light at the dam, at the entrance to the parking garage. It will allow folks to turn left into the garage entrance and also let them out easily.

Fees went up for adults (over 16) to \$5 for the tour and \$2.50 for kids 10 to 16 and senior citizens with a Golden Age Passport. Children under 10 are admitted free as will organized school groups regardless of age. The admission fee includes parking in the new parking garage.

New tour hours are in effect. Guided tours begin at 8:30 a.m. every day and the last tour begins at 6:30 p.m. The visitor facilities will be closed on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The Bureau of Reclamation says the new facilities will accommodate more than one million people a year to take the guided tour; more than 700,000 tour the dam each year now. Like the old question about popcorn popping all at once, what would the center hold if all one million showed up at once? The Bureau hasn't estimated that number.

More than 30 million have toured the dam since 1936 and untold millions have visited without taking the tour. Hoover Dam is the most visited dam in the United States.

ALL facilities in the new center are designed to be fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Yet to come with anticipated completion by the end of 1996 is the interpretive program theater. When completed visitors will sit in one of three 145 seat sections with the theater rotating to give them three

consecutive audiovisual presentations. Total running time will be about 36 minutes. The first will show visitors the importance of water to all life. The second will contain the events leading to construction of Hoover Dam and the third will be a movie on the construction and operation of the dam, its many benefits, and the Bureau's management approach to the lower Colorado River.

From the theater, most people will take the 35-minute guided tour of the dam. Two 50-passenger, high-speed elevators, will carry visitors 530 feet down through the rock wall of Black Canyon for the tour and return them when their tour is complete.

An exhibit gallery will be constructed on the Plaza Level that will house static and interactive displays on the environment, habitation and development of the Southwest, the people who built the dam, and other topics. This, too, is scheduled to open sometime in 1996.

On the Overlook Level there will be an exhibit prepared by the Hoover Dam power contractors. From this level one can view the dam, its powerhouses, Lake Mead and the Colorado River, 770 feet below!

The new parking facility will include gift shops and food concessions later.

If you want more information, you may call the Bureau of Reclamation, External Affairs Office at 293-8420.