



John Gurzinski/Review-Journal

The third floor of the new Hoover Dam visitors center offers a sweeping view of the dam. The center opened June 21 and has attracted an average of 3,000

visitors a day. Officials say many of the opening-week problems have been fixed, although the parking garage elevators are still not working properly.

Hoover hopping with tourist traffic

7-15-95
 □ The \$123 million facility, criticized for cost overruns, is attracting big crowds of around 3,000 people a day.

By Shaun McKinnon
 Review-Journal

It cost \$91 million more than it was supposed to, provoked a congressional investigation and still can't get all its elevators running at once, but the new Hoover Dam visitors center is apparently a hit with the public.

The number of people taking the tour of the dam has increased from

2,000 a day — previously the maximum possible — to 3,000 a day since the \$123 million visitors center opened June 21, Bureau of Reclamation spokeswoman Colleen Dwyer said Friday.

"Everything seems to be shaping up really well," she said. "It's certainly doing the job it was made for."

The busiest day so far was July 3, when 4,150 people ponied up the \$5 to take a guided tour of the dam, watch a movie about its construction and wander through the air-conditioned museum and exhibit hall.

The visitors center sits on the

Nevada side of the dam, up against the dramatic walls of Black Canyon.

Dwyer said a most of the opening-week glitches, such as malfunctioning escalators and elevators, have been taken care of, although the elevators in the new five-level parking garage are still not operating the way they should.

"Someone is in to fix those," she said.

Guides take about 80 people into the dam every eight to nine minutes for the tour of the huge structure. The tour lasts about 35 minutes and includes a 70-second elevator ride down

to the dam's base.

Traffic along U.S. Highway 93 has benefited from the parking garage, which has room for 400 passenger cars, 30 buses and 20 motor homes. Shuttle buses still operate from remote parking lots, Dwyer said, because the garage fills up at peak visiting hours, usually between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

She suggests that people trying to avoid crowds should visit early in the morning or later in the afternoon. The visitors center is open 8:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. year-round.

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Dam

From 1B

Bonnie Forcheskie of the Boulder City Chamber of Commerce said her office has noticed an increase in the number of tourists to the area, but "(the visitors center) really hasn't been open long enough to develop word of mouth."

She said the chamber mentions the new center when people call or stop by for information: "They say, 'Oh, I've seen the dam,' but then we tell them the new visitors center is open and some decide they want to see it."

The dam "is a very popular summer attraction anyway," Forcheskie said, "but the new center may renew some interest with people."