Theodore Roosevelt Dam The site chosen for construction of the dam was called "The Crossing" by early Arizona pioneers. It was the place in the Salt River where Indians, farmers, and ranchers forded the river at a narrow gorge a short distance below the confluence of the Salt River and Tonto Creek, 76 miles northeast of the city of Phoenix.

1898 site of Roosevelt Dam

Originally proposed as the Tonto Basin Dam, the reservoir site and dam were renamed after President Theodore Roosevelt following his approval of the project.

Built between 1903 and 1911, the cyclopean-masonry gravity arch dam was the highest masonry arch dam

Theodore Roosevelt Dam before modification

in the world at the time and was among the last of the stone masonry dams built.

On March 18, 1911, former President Theodore Roosevelt dedicated the dam named in his honor. In 1963, it was designated a National Historic Landmark and, in 1970, the American Society of Civil Engineers designated the dam a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

Safety of Dams Modification In 1984, the Secretary of the Interior approved modification of Roosevelt Dam under Reclamation's Safety of Dams program.

The modification work was necessary because engineers determined that the probable maximum flood (the largest conceivable flood) was far greater than previously projected. A "probable maximum flood" would bring more water into the reservoir than the original dam was designed to safely release. In addition, the original dam did not meet the standards for a "maximum credible earthquake."

Theodore Roosevelt Dam, January 1993

As if to illustrate the need for safety modifications, three years prior to completion, record rainfall caused overtopping of the left side, resulting in $1 million in damage and setting the job back nearly six months.

On January 19, 1993, continued storms caused the reservoir to rise to elevation 2,139.1 feet, the highest in its history. The lake over-topped the left abutment early that day and continued to do so for nearly two days, discharging up to 700 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water. Spillway gates were opened February 12, and releases continued until March 8, 1993.

The modification, completed in April 1996, raised the crest elevation by 77 feet and increased flood storage