

Bear Canyon Lake

A beautiful, narrow and canyon-bound lake, Bear Canyon Lake is another in a series of lakes built by Arizona Game and Fish Department for angler recreation. Despite being several miles down a dirt road and having few amenities, it draws many visitors. The drive in is quite scenic, with several lookout points that offer spectacular vistas and views from the edge of the Mogollon Rim.

Location – Bear Canyon Lake is located nearly an hour's drive northeast of Payson. To access, travel west on Forest Road 300 (the Rim Road) from Highway 260 for about 12 miles. The road is paved to the Woods Canyon Lake turnoff, about three miles from Highway 260; thereafter, the road is improved gravel. Turn north on FR 89 and drive 2 miles, then turn right onto FR 89A and drive to one of two access points. The left or northern spur leads to a parking area with a restroom. From this spot, hike 0.2 miles down a steep trail to the lake. The shoreline is steep and narrow at this point. The right or southern spur leads to another parking lot with a restroom. A gentler hike, again about ¼-mile long, leads to the lakeshore. Here, the shoreline is a wider and flatter. Access is restricted in the winter when roads are closed due to snow, generally November to late April.



Description – Bear Canyon Lake consists of 60 surface acres with a maximum depth of 50 feet. It lies at 7,560 feet. Because of its depth, this lake has no water quality problems. The Department stocks it with catchable-sized rainbow trout about six times each year.

Amenities – There is free, dispersed camping at the junction of FR 89 and 89A. There are also several barrier-free toilets along FR 89A and at the two trailhead access points. There is no boat ramp. All boats must be carried in.

Fishing Techniques – Bear Canyon Lake is steep, as well as deep. There is little shallow water, except at the upper end of the lake. Fish using small spinners and lures. If fishing off the bottom, avoid casting out too far. Bait anglers should try fishing with a worm and bobber. Fly anglers using a float tube can find solitude at Bear Canyon Lake, especially on weekdays. However, fly-fishing from shore or wading is not recommended because the tree line comes right to the water's edge, and the water gets deep close to shore.

Special Notes – Statewide fishing regulations apply and a trout stamp is required. The daily bag limit is six trout; three for unlicensed anglers under the age of 14. Boat motors are restricted to electric motors only.