

Western Deserts



For Zuzu.

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Introduction

The American West has been portrayed many times in many media. I think it's been such an enduring motif because deserts, despite their supposed barrenness, have a scale and dimensionality that is endlessly interesting. This is especially in person, where you become intimately aware of their vastness. Here, I hope to convey the feeling of inspiration that I get when I visit American deserts through some photos and thoughts from my experiences.



Dry Falls, WA

Within the last 20,000 years, glacial damming of western Montana gave way to cataclysmic floods over Washington, Idaho, and Oregon. Water poured over the land with falls at this site over five times the width of Niagara.



The landscape is almost entirely shades of black and yellow. You can drive in at canyon-floor level from the south, and I remember being shocked the first time I visited the rim and realized the cliff-faced mountains were in fact the walls of a spectacular basin.







Canyonlands National Park, UT

Canyonlands affected me how I expected the Grand Canyon to affect me. Knowing nothing about the park, I was not ready for the vast and tortured landscape I found. The park has four sections and a lot of diverse geological history.



Joshua Tree National Park, CA

In addition to its eponymous plant, the park has backcountry hiking and climbable rock formations. These rocks are believed to have formed underground before being pushed up, uncovered, and eroded into smooth stacks.



Wupatki National Monument, AZ

After nearby Sunset Crater volcano erupted in the 11th century, indigenous peoples settled at Wupatki in the 12th century. The site includes a pueblo that had over 100 rooms, a ballcourt, and a natural blowhole.



When I visited, I was amazed by the structures and the lava beds, but a couple other features struck me most deeply. First, the sky was full of fluffy clouds. Second, Wupatki was so silent I could hear my blood. These qualities added to my awe imagining ancient inhabitants.

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