

THE GRAND CANYON AND THE AGE OF THE EARTH

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The Grand Canyon frequently is described as the most awe-inspiring and spectacular natural feature on the face of the Earth. Listed as one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, it became a national park in 1919, and in 1979 was named a World Heritage Site—a designation reserved only for those places that are considered to have universal value for all humankind. Because of its size and vivid coloration, the origin of this natural beauty has been the object of a great deal of speculation. Theories regarding the geological events that led to the present canyon are as abundant as visitors to the South Rim.

To the “man on the street,” one of the most impressive arguments for an ancient Earth is the testimony of sedimentary-rock layers (many of which are thousands of feet thick) strewn around the planet. Scientists (and park rangers) subject us to examples like the Grand Canyon, and present their spiel so effectively that—as we observe those beautiful layers of sedimentary rocks piled one on top of another—the only explanation seems to be that vast amounts of geologic time must have been involved. Each section of the rocks, we are told, represents a time long ago and an ancient world that long since has ceased to exist.

Consider the following statement from a book purchased in 1999 at one of the gift shops in Grand Canyon National Park.

The Grand Canyon presents an unrivaled view into the Earth’s geologic history. From the canyon’s Paleozoic-era rims to the bottom of the Precambrian-age inner gorge, nearly 2 billion years of time are represented in the exposed rocks, or about two-fifths of the Earth’s estimated age of 5 billion years (Hoffman, 1987, p. 11).

The author, John Hoffman, went on to describe how “about 4 million years were required for the Grand Canyon to be eroded to its awesome dimensions” (p. 12). While that book has truly beautiful pictures, the text inside is in dire need of revision. Why?

An article in the September 30, 2000 issue of *Science News* has shown that carving this beloved hole in the ground was not such a long-term project after all (Perkins, 2000). Prior to the 1930s, geologists proposed that the Grand Canyon was about “40 million years old” (Hoffman, p. 218). However, evidence now has come to light that indicates a **much younger** canyon. Research presented at a June 1999 conference devoted to the origin of the gorge suggests that substantial portions of the eastern Grand Canyon have been eroded only within the past million years (according to evolution-based dating methods). **And so, as quickly as ink dries on paper, geologists cut 39 million years off the age of the Grand Canyon, and dropped its age to 1/40 of their previous estimates.**

In justifying their new calculations for the young age, geologists offered a scenario in which portions of the present-day Colorado River above and below the canyon may not have been connected. They believe that the most likely explanation is that “the west flowing tributary of the ancestral lower Colorado River began to carve a small valley eastward into the edge of the Colorado Plateau. The upper portion of the river eventually merged with the ancestral upper Colorado River and its tributaries to form a single river system. The result would have been a strengthened torrent of water that could cut through rock at a faster clip than ever before” (Perkins, 158:219). Faster clip indeed! Thirty-nine million years is a tremendous amount of time to suddenly “just vanish”!

The *Science News* article listed other studies in which data show how fast rivers can slash through rock. It also listed the erosion rates of several neighboring canyons, and then noted: “Downstream in the Grand Canyon, where the Colorado carries much more water and sediment, rates of erosion are likely much higher” (158:219-220).

Today, we now know that canyons do not take even one million years to form. Consider the Burlingame Canyon. John Morris described its formation in the following manner:

Let me introduce you to Burlingame Canyon near Walla Walla, Washington. It measures 1500 feet long, up to 120 feet deep, and 120 feet wide, winding through a hillside. A small-scale analogy to Grand Canyon it was observed to form in less than six days. In 1904 the Gardena Farming District constructed a series of irrigation canals to provide water to this normally rather arid high desert area. In March, 1926, winds collected tumbleweeds at a concrete constriction along one of the canals situated on an elevated mesa, choking the flow of water, which at 80 cubic feet per second was unusually high due to spring rains. In order to clean out the obstruction, engineers diverted the flow into a diversion ditch leading to nearby Pine Creek. Prior to this time the ditch was rather small, at no location greater than 10-foot-deep and six-foot-wide, and often with no water in it at all. The abnormally high flow crowded into the ditch, and careened along until it cascaded down the mesa in an impressive waterfall. Suddenly, under this extreme pressure and velocity, the underlying stratum gave way and headward erosion began in earnest. What once was an insignificant ditch became a gully. The gully became a gulch. The gulch became a miniature Grand Canyon (2001).

The formation of this canyon occurred in only six days! This new information will force evolutionists to revamp their theories about the early history of the gorge. The Grand Canyon used to be one of the evolutionists’ favorite landmarks as they tried to establish an ancient age for the Earth. No more!—BH

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