

A Severe Earthquake Caused a Massive Landslide

It was a beautiful moonlit night, August 17, 1959, when one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded in the Rocky Mountains struck the Madison River Canyon.

The earthquake, which measured 7.5 on the Richter scale, triggered a massive landslide, which sent over 80 million tons of rock crashing down into the canyon, blocking the Madison River. The water backed up behind the slide, forming the new Earthquake Lake. High velocity winds and a gigantic wall of water swept through the area.

Earthquake at Hebgen Lake

In a matter of seconds, the earth's crust had dropped 19 feet. The land under Hebgen Lake tilted upward; cabins on the north shore were immersed in water, while portions of the south shore lay high and dry. Water sloshed back and forth, while huge waves crested over Hebgen Dam at the western end of the lake. Although the dam cracked, it miraculously held.

Three sections of Highway 287 fell into the lake. As a result of the night's disaster, hundreds of people vacationing in the area were trapped. A total of 28 lives were lost.

Earthquake Lake Geologic Area

This immense earthquake's impact shocked and chilled the world. Families gradually rebuilt their lives, structures and roads were reconstructed.

Today, this tranquil setting is misleading—geologic tensions are still active underneath. These 37,800 acres were federally designated in 1960 to interpret the 1959 Hebgen Lake Earthquake and provide public use and understanding of the strikingly awesome earthquake features and geology.

Earthquake Lake Visitor Center

Learn about earthquakes, plate tectonics, and survivor stories. View recent activity on the seismograph. Watch the film "A Force of Nature." See the landslide from the Vista Room. Visit the Yellowstone Forever Forest Store.

Take a short walk to the Memorial Boulder and upper overlook. Along the trails you will find interpretive exhibits with stories about the 1959 landslide and spectacular views of Quake Lake and the Madison River.

Open daily 10 am to 6 pm
Memorial Day weekend - Labor Day
After Labor Day - September 15 open 10 am to 5 pm
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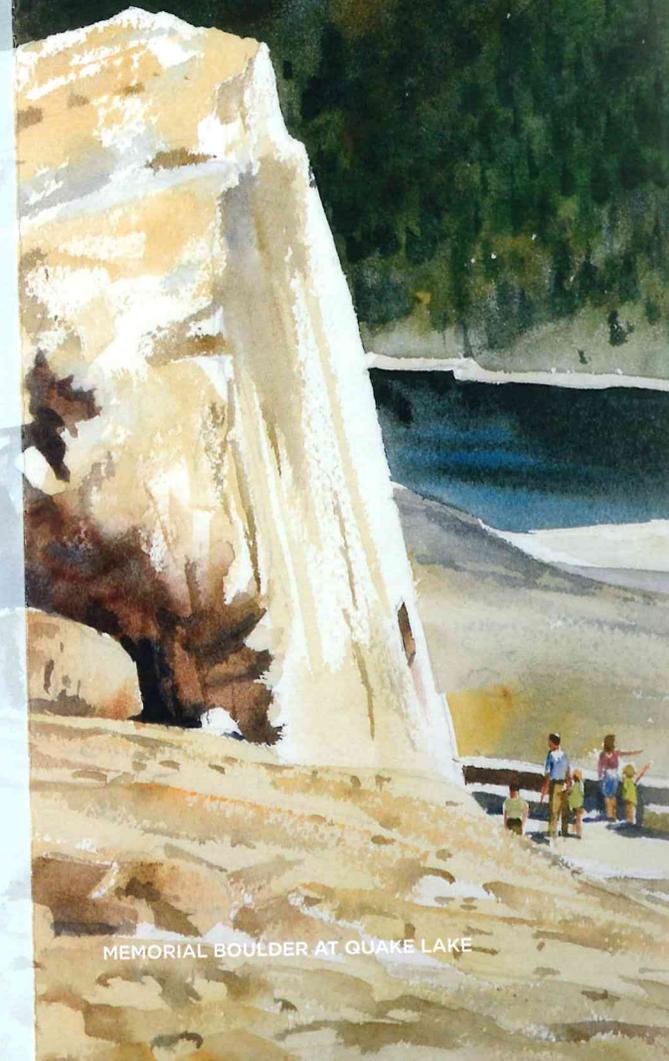
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Earthquake Lake Geologic Area

EXPLORE MONTANA'S DYNAMIC GEOLOGY

Custer Gallatin National Forest
near West Yellowstone, MT



MEMORIAL BOULDER AT QUAKE LAKE