After living in Arizona for many years, I only recently discovered the pleasure of kayaking and tubing. So far, I have been on the river below Saguaro Lake, on Saguaro Lake, and on Canyon Lake; the other two lakes created in the Salt River, Apache and Roosevelt Lakes, (hopefully) remain to be explored. The Rio Salado, or Salt River, was dammed between the early 1900s and 1930s to provide water and electricity to the Phoenix area, and later served recreational needs. The first dam to be constructed was Roosevelt so my description goes from the ‘younger’ to the ‘older’ lakes. Some of my information on the river comes from here.

The Salt River flows into the Gila River to the West of Phoenix and the Gila contributes to the Colorado, near Yuma, in the Southwest of Arizona. This river is supposed to end in the Gulf of California but rarely has enough water (see here).

The ecological impact of dams has been huge. Edward Abbey and others are famous for having suggested Monkey Wrenches to sabotage the plans for the dams in the West. There is always talk of restoring the natural flow in the river; see here. Apart from the ecological impact on bird populations, salinization, and silting, the politics behind dams is ugly. The 1972 Damming the West details the lobbying of the Bureau of Reclamation to keep new projects going even though there was no (agricultural) need for them. For instance, the Central Arizona Project, a system of aqueducts that takes Colorado River water east and up into central and southern Arizona, was pushed through by the Bureau and several senators from Arizona in 1968, after 20 years of politicking.

Saguaro Lake
I find Saguaro Lake the prettiest: so much change of scenery. The Four Peaks to the Northeast frequently appear around many a corner as do the Superstitions to the Southeast.
There is a lot of meandering on this Lake. On the map, the Dam is visible on the left. Below the dam, one can go tubing on the Salt River.

Tubing below the dam on the actual river is well-organized and wonderfully quiet mid-week and early morning. You rent a tube and a bus takes you to various points along the river and you float down the river to just above where it joins the Verde River.
There are moderate rapids in places (I lost yet another camera to being submerged) and changing scenery all the way. Wild horses roam the river banks and also the area around Saguaro Lake and many herons, vultures, crows, and cardinals appear.

Wild horses have been around since the river was rechanneled into a system of lakes; read the preservation pagers here or here but some agencies want them caught and sold to ranchers who will butcher them. There is a Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 that’s been used to protect them. As of April 2016, stories still appear how precarious their situation is, e.g. here. They eat eelgrass, cattail, all really tough food, and may help the river survive.

Canyon Lake
This lake is formed by the Mormon Flat Dam, pointed out by an arrow on the left. Tortilla Creek is pointed out by the arrow on the right but not actually shown on the map. The creek goes to the hamlet of Tortilla Flat, population 6, which started out as a camping ground for prospectors and later (in 1904) as a stagecoach stop to serve the Roosevelt dam community. It still has a post office and is a lovely but genuine tourist trap.
A heron

Tortilla Creek

Map of Canyon Lake

Satchin Cliff and the Four Peaks
The bridges along the Apache Trail are historic. The original wooden bridges were replaced in the 1920s and 30s by what you see below.

| Single lane bridge over First Water (or Willow) Creek from 1924 | Part of Boulder Creek Bridge, towards LaBarge Creek, upgraded in 1937 |

Apache Lake
Apache Lake is formed by Horse Mesa Dam, shown by the arrow on the left. It has an actual resort which I plan to check out some time. The famous route 88 travels on its right side; see here (first part) for more on that.

Roosevelt Lake
The fourth lake, Roosevelt Lake, is formed by a dam of the same name, finished earliest, i.e. in 1911. Notice how big the lake is compared to what flows below the dam, again marked by an arrow.
Out on the water in future

The Verde River, North of Phoenix, comes out in the Salt, as was mentioned. It has another set of lakes, Bartlett and Horseshoe. More to explore! Below where the Verde flows into the Salt, there is a final dam, the Granite Reef Diversion Dam, which transfers the water into the canal system in particular the Arizona Canal. I am not sure how the water of the Central Arizona Project mentioned above, interacts with this system. The river itself is mostly dry after the Granite Reef, except for Tempe Town Lake.