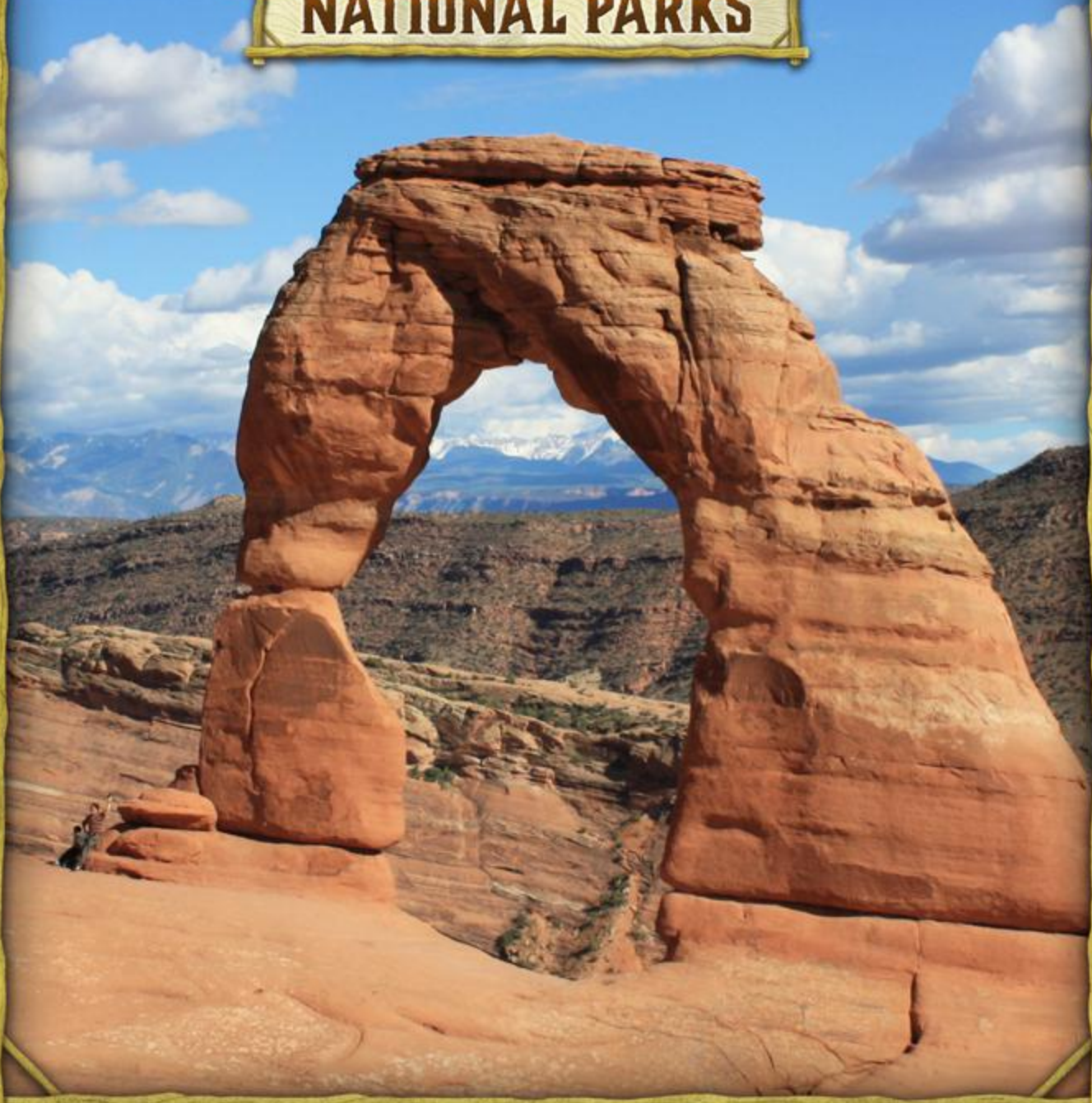


TREKKING[®]
THE
NATIONAL PARKS



PARK GUIDE BOOK

Exploring America's 59 Major National Parks

•• By John Binkele ••

Park Guide Book - Introduction

Welcome to the **3rd edition** of Bink Ink's **National Park Guide Book!** The Binkle family has long been advocates of our country's National Parks. From the very first experience I had camping along the Merced River in Yosemite in the '50's, to the recent visit of our 57th park - Voyageurs in Minnesota - our family has held a deep appreciation and respect for those who made and continue to make these visits possible.

In 2013, an idea developed to blend our passion for the parks with our son Charlie's artistic creativity and board game design ability. Thus became the genesis for the tabletop board game we created called **Trekking the National Parks™**.

An important component of the original game was the 32 page **Park Guide Book** - a collection of information about each of our country's 59 major National Parks. The intent of the Guide Book was to help **educate** players about the parks as they played the game and to **inspire** them to get out and visit these amazing natural cathedrals.

Following its first printing, we received an overwhelmingly positive response regarding the Park Guide Book, which prompted us to create this expanded and more comprehensive edition. Throughout the pages that follow, you will experience a tantalizing glimpse of each of our nation's 59 precious landmarks.

The Story of our Parks.

The National Parks as we know them today have evolved over the past 140+ years to become some of the world's most treasured landscapes. They provide visitors with extraordinary recreational resources. They are geological, biological and ecological classrooms. They are spiritual cathedrals that help us reconnect to the world of nature.

In every park we've visited, we encounter Americans and foreigners alike who are fascinated and thrilled that this nation had the foresight to protect and preserve these amazing environments.

However, along the time line from the birth of the first park in 1872 to the present day, our parks continue to experience many challenges. Logging companies, mining interests, real estate speculators, railroads, politicians and the privileged few have all clamored to stake their claim on these precious lands.



John Muir



Stephen Mather



Theodore Roosevelt

So in this "land of opportunity" how is it that these stunning environments we call our National Parks managed to escape privatization? How is it that we the citizens of the USA came to own a stake in over 84 million acres of public land covering over 400 park locations?

The story of our park system begins with the people who had the vision, the passion, and the dedication to contribute to the creation, protection and preservation of our country's "best idea." Famous people and many people unknown. Rich people, poor people and people in between. Politicians, businessmen, naturalists, scientists and soldiers. We owe this debt of gratitude to the many folks who generously contributed their time, energy and resources to help set aside these treasured lands for the world to experience.

Yet the future of our parks rests in the hands of our children. It will be up to the next several generations whether America continues to embrace these treasures as those in the past have done. One of the prime motivating factors behind the creation of our game and this Guide Book has been to help educate current and future generations about the incredible resources that have been set aside for all to enjoy. We hope you share our desire to encourage all Americans to become stewards for the continued protection and preservation of our country's National Parks.

About the New Park Guide Book

Whether playing the game or actually visiting the parks, the purpose of this Guide Book is help broaden your understanding about each of these landmarks and to enrich the player or visitor experience - whether trekking to a park on the game board or in the family car! While playing the game, pick up the Guide Book and read about the parks you are pursuing! When visiting the parks, use the Guide Book to help you explore these natural wonders.

Much of the information contained in this Guide Book comes from the first hand experiences we've had while trekking about each of the parks we've visited. We've also drawn on a number of other resources to help create this booklet. (See pg. 63 for additional information)

The Park Guide Book contains an alphabetical listing of each of our country's 59 major National Parks. The information on each page of the Guide Book will vary from park to park; however, the common threads in each section include the following:

The Park. To qualify as one of America's 59 National Parks, it must be considered a *unique natural, cultural or recreational resource*. The opening segment of each page will provide the reader with the key features, unique elements and qualifying factors contributing to its status as a National Park.

Getting there: Not all parks are accessible by automobile! Several of the parks are located on islands. Two of them lie above the Arctic Circle and have no roads leading into them!

When this section appears, it will help you understand where the park is located and how to get there.

When to go: For most of the parks, the summer months are typically “high season” attracting the largest crowds. This section will help you determine the best time of year for you to visit.

What to do: Every park contains a myriad of activities. This segment will highlight the activities offered once you reach your park destination. Much of this segment offers information regarding Day Hikes since our game and our treks about these fabulous landscapes included many of them!

As much as we like trekking about the parks, these incredible landscapes are perfect for downshifting from the hectic pace of city life. Slow down and savor their serenity.

Where to stay: Here you will find information regarding camping and lodging options once you arrive.

Wildlife: Protection and preservation of wildlife is an important matter at every park. This section highlights the animals you may encounter while visiting the park.

Trivia: This section is meant to offer interesting, yet lesser-known facts about the park.

Experience These! At the bottom of each page, you’ll find a checklist of things to do that we recommend you consider when visiting a park. Most of these come from activities we did while exploring the 57 parks we’ve visited. Check them off as you complete each activity and add your own experiences as well!

Note: The **Experience These!** Check List is designed for the average park visitor and includes only a few activities rated “strenuous.”

Many parks offer several **Visitor Centers**. We encourage you to stop by at least one during your stay and learn more about the park you’re at!

To all of our friends, family and supporters of the game and our country’s National Parks, we wish to thank you for contributing to this project and to the continued preservation of our park system. Your contribution to its success is heartfelt and appreciated. Thank you and happy trails!

John Binkele



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2017 Park Guide Book
created by Bink Ink LLC

ACADIA

Maine - Est. Feb 26, 1919



Acadia National Park is a diverse landscape featuring sandy coastal beaches, rugged granite shorelines, forested woodlands, wetlands, lakes, islands and the tallest mountain on the eastern seaboard! Those who contributed to the creation of this park include: **John D. Rockefeller, Jr.** who donated 45 miles of classic carriage roads that weave about Mt. Desert Island; **George B. Dorr**, known as the “father of Acadia” and **Charles W. Eliot**, who took his deceased son’s passion for this park and helped to preserve it for all to enjoy.

If you’d like to be one of the first people to see the sunrise on the continental US, get out of your jammies early and make your way to the top of Cadillac Mountain. If you do this in the high season, plan on getting to the summit by 4 am. Parking is very limited and there will be plenty of people joining you!

Acadia is spread out over three unconnected landmasses. The majority of the park is found on **Mt. Desert Island** located 28 miles SE of Bangor, ME. The granite mass that makes up the island was carved by massive glaciers separating it from the mainland. The **Isle au Haut** section of the park is accessible via passenger ferry from Stonington. **Schoodic Peninsula** is the only portion of the park located on the mainland.

PARK NOTES

When to visit: Acadia is open year round. The peak season is July and August. The fall colors attract large crowds in September and October. The full fall color explosion typically occurs around Columbus Day.

Things to do: A visit to Acadia offers outdoor enthusiasts a wide

variety of activity including: bicycling, bird watching, boating, climbing, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, fall color leaf peeping, photography, swimming, sightseeing and tide pooling.

Driving the 20 mile **Park Loop Road** will expose you to Frenchman’s Bay, Sand Beach, Thunder Hole, Otter Cliffs, Jordan Pond, the Bubble, Cadillac Mountain, several Carriage Road Bridges and other noteworthy sites.

Day hikes: Driving the loop is rewarding and we encourage you to get out of the car and trek about this park. Acadia offers 125 miles of hiking trails with a wide range of physical exertion from very easy (flat terrain) to the strenuous (steep grades). The trail along the coast between Sand Beach and Otter Point is breathtaking!

Where to stay: **Blackwoods** and **Seawall** Campgrounds are located on Mt. Desert Island. **Duck Harbor** campground (5 primitive sites) is located on Isle au Haut. Lodging is available on Mt. Desert Island in Bar Harbor or on the mainland.

Trivia: The first national park east of the Mississippi River, Acadia was originally named Lafayette National Park when founded in 1919. The name was changed in 1929.



Experience These!

- Take in the sunrise atop Cadillac Mountain
- Drive the Park Loop Road
- Hike Sand Beach to Otter Point
- Experience Fall Leaf Peeping
- Get soaked at Thunder Hole

AMERICAN SAMOA

American Samoa - Est. October 31, 1988

The National Park of American Samoa is situated on three separate islands. The main section is located on the Island of Tutuila, adjacent to Pago Pago and the main airport. The other two sections of the park, the islands of Ta'u and Ofu, are located on the remote Manu'a island group 60 miles east of Tutuila.

Almost all of the landmass on these rugged volcanic islands is covered by mixed-species rainforest where no single tree or plant species dominates. This is the only rainforest of its kind in a US National Park. Four thousand acres of this park are found underwater where sensitive coral reefs are now protected.

People: The first people to occupy the Samoan Islands are said to have arrived over 3,000 years ago making the Samoan culture Polynesia's oldest. The Samoan Way or *fa'asamoa* (fah-ah-SAH-mo-ah) has been passed down through the ages and visitors are asked to observe and respect the customs of these people.

The natives dress conservatively. Many wear a skirt-like garment called a lavalava. So should you! Bikinis and Speedos are NOT the garments of choice at this park!



Getting there:

The National Park of American Samoa isn't the most remote park to access (see Kobuk Valley and Gates of the Arctic in Alaska); however it lies 2,300 miles southwest of the Hawaiian Islands. The infrequent and lengthy flights into Pago Pago are limited so plan well in advance. Ta'u is accessible via



small aircraft. The incredibly beautiful coral reef and beaches on Ofu can be reached via local fisherman's boat.

When to visit: American Samoa is south of the equator so perhaps the best time to visit is between June and September when the heat and rain are at their most benevolent.

What to do: This is a very remote and relatively new park without the usual facilities found at mainland parks. However, your stay can take you trekking about secluded villages, tropical rainforests, white sand beaches and snorkeling on turquoise waters above colorful coral reefs.

Trails to hike: Whether you're looking for a walk along the beach or a trek up a challenging slope, the National Park of American Samoa offers a wide variety of trails for people of all abilities! The park's Day Hikes brochure provides detailed information about trekking American Samoa!

Where to stay: There are no campgrounds at this park; however, you'll find hotels on the main island of Tutuila. The unique Homestay Option provides an opportunity for visitors to live with the locals in their homes.

Trivia: The term *samoa* means "sacred earth." This expresses how the natives view their natural environment.

Experience These!

- For starters...just get there!
- Chat with the Rangers at the Visitor Center
- Hike the park trails on Tutuila
- Snorkel or dive the pristine waters
- Get to the outer islands (Ta'u and Ofu)

PARK NOTES

ARCHES

Utah - Est. November 12, 1971



Arches is located just outside the city of Moab in the eastern reaches of Utah. This weather-worn park contains over 2000 natural stone arches, hundreds of soaring spires, many massive fins and a bunch of balancing boulders, all which have been carved by natural elements over the past 200 million years.

Delicate Arch, the 65 foot sandstone icon (pictured above) is one of the park system's most widely recognized landmarks. Also known as "Chaps" due to its resemblance to a bowlegged cowboy, Delicate Arch began as a "fin" and over the years eroded to its present state.

Landscape Arch (pictured in title block) is the other impressive landmark and yet I can't help but think they got the names backward. Landscape Arch certainly appears much more "delicate" as it stretches its thin ribbon of rock across a 306 foot span!

When to visit: Open year round, Arches is most pleasant in the spring and fall when temperatures are moderate. Summers can be very hot. The best hiking is during the spring and fall.

PARK NOTES

What to do: Arches contains many nicely groomed trails for hikers of all abilities. Most are rated easy or moderate. The 1.6 mile round trip hike out to Landscape Arch is rated easy. The 3 mile round trip out to Delicate Arch is a bit more challenging; however, these are two hikes you should not miss!

The Fiery Furnace trail is rated strenuous. Sign up for a ranger-led hike and explore the labyrinth of narrow canyons while climbing over expansive slabs of sandstone. Hiking the Furnace on your own requires a permit.

Scenic drive: If time is limited, take the Arches Scenic Drive, which takes you through the heart of the park. Two spurs off the main road will take you to Delicate Arch Viewpoint or The Windows Section of the park. However, to truly appreciate this park, you'll need to get out of the car and walk about.

Where to stay: The City of Moab is just minutes from the park entrance and offers several hotel and motel options. The Devils Garden Campground has 50 individual campsites and two group sites handling up to 55 campers.

Trivia: Although most of the arches look "rock solid" and indestructible, eventually erosion will win out and gravity will take its toll as it did with Wall Arch on August 5, 2008.



Experience These!

- Take the Arches Scenic Drive
- Hike to Delicate Arch
- Trek out to Landscape Arch and the Dark Angel
- Take pictures during sunrise and sunset when the warm light is ideal for stunning photos
- Fun reading:** Edward Abby's book called *Desert Solitaire*.

BADLANDS

South Dakota - Est. November 10, 1978

Fantastic Fossil Fields! Imagine being a young girl wandering the rich fossil beds found in the Badlands and discovering the fossilized remains of a well-preserved Saber Tooth Cat! That's exactly what happened in 2010 when 7 year old Kylie discovered this treasured artifact. Badlands contains the world's largest assemblage of fossilized mammals including the likes of rhinos and wild horses.

Besides the intrigue of the fossil exhibits, the Badlands is comprised of extremely rugged and unique geological landforms that will have you gasping in disbelief. The jagged peaks of The Wall and rounded hillocks near Dillon Pass explode with a wide range of banded colors. It's a wonder how early pioneers were able to traverse such rugged and harsh terrain.

Prairielands. Badlands, located 75 miles east of Rapid City, SD protects one of the largest expanses of mixed grass prairie in the US. These prairielands are home to a wide variety of animals including bison, bighorn sheep, badgers and bobcats, prairie dogs and the reintroduced black-footed ferret.

When to visit: Badlands is open year round. Summer temperatures often top 100°. Winters can be unforgivably cold. Spring and fall offer the best time of year to visit.

What to do: If you do only **one thing** when visiting the Badlands,



Experience These!

- Take the Badlands Loop Scenic Drive
- Hike the Notch Trail
- Visit the Saber Site and Fossil Lab
- Gaze at the star-filled skies
- View the "Sea of Grass"



take the 31 mile Badlands Loop Drive found in the North Unit. Here you will view colorful pinnacles, jagged mountains and bizarre-looking mounds resembling the likeness of large scoops of Neapolitan ice cream.

A summertime experience worth noting is the park's Night Sky Events featuring a dazzling display of sparkling gems that fill the sky. This event is held Monday thru Friday evenings at the Cedar Pass Campground Amphitheater.

Hikes: Be sure to take advantage of the easy hiking terrain. The longest hike in the North Unit is the 10 mile round trip Castle Trail, which starts at the Door and Window Trail parking area and travels five miles one way to the Fossil Exhibit Trail. This relatively level hike passes along unique "badlands" formations.

Where to stay: Cedar Pass Lodge, located within the park's north unit, offers "eco-friendly" cabins. The Badlands Inn is located just outside the park and features 20 rooms with unobstructed views of the Badlands.

Cedar Pass Campground is adjacent to the Lodge with 96 level campsites facilitating both tent and RV campers. The primitive Sage Creek Campground located in the North Unit is accessed via a dirt road.

Trivia: In an effort to avoid the negative-sounding name of Badlands, the original congressional bill proposing this park used the name Teton National Park!

PARK NOTES

BIG BEND

Texas - Est. June 12, 1944



Big Bend National Park is found at southernmost tip of Highway 385 in a lonely stretch of Texas. A weather-beaten desert makes up the majority of this park. Early visitors to this region found it so desolate; they named it *El Despoblado* – the uninhabited land!

“Big Bend” refers to the U-shape the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River takes on as it “bends” around the western spur of Texas. For 118 miles, the river separates Big Bend NP from our Mexican neighbor. This is a land of high contrasts. Stretching from the sun-scorched terrain of a desolate desert floor to its cool wooded mountain peaks this park is like no other!

Big Bend is famous for its geological characteristics and the diversity of its plant and wildlife. This park has more types of plants, birds, bats, butterflies and cactus than any other national park in America! The park’s fossil finds have included the skull of a *Chasmosaurus* – the largest known skull of a land animal - and the bones of a pterosaur – the second largest known flying creature with a wing span of 36 feet!

PARK NOTES

When to visit: The park is open year round. During the summer months, temperatures at the lower elevations can exceed 110°!

Typically, the Chisos Mountain region will be 20° cooler than the lowlands. Winters are mild and the deciduous trees provide a splash of fall color during autumn.

What to do: Floating the Rio Grande provides an incredible view of the park’s steep canyons and a feel for the abundant wildlife that thrive in and along its shoreline. Sliding off the raft into the cool waters will offer a reprieve from the extreme summer heat!

The **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** will expose you to the geologic splendor of the park and give you a glimpse of how early settlers of this region lived.

Hiking: Big Bend offers day hikers or backpackers over 150 miles of trails located in the desert, about the rugged mountains and along the Rio Grande River. To escape the blazing heat of the desert floor during summer, hike the cooler Chisos Mountains.

Where to stay: *The Chisos Mountain Inn* is a 72 room hotel with hot showers, comfy beds and a “green certified” dining facility! For those who prefer camping under the stars, Big Bend offers three options:

The 60 campsites located in the *Chisos Basin Campground* are the park’s most sought after due to the higher elevation, cooler temperatures and proximity to many of the park’s more desirable hiking trails. The 100 site *Rio Brand Village Campground* is a favorite of those traveling in RV’s. The 31 site *Cottonwood Campground* is located in the southwestern stretches of the park.

Trivia: Black bears have returned to Big Bend! The Chisos Mtn. natives disappeared from the park in the mid-1940s. Wildlife biologists estimate the current Big Bend black bear population to be between 15 to 20 bears.



Experience These!

- Take the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive
- Hike to the top of Emory Peak
- Picnic at Cottonwood Campground
- Hike the Santa Elena Canyon Trail
- Float the Rio Grande

BISCAYNE

Florida - Est. June 28, 1980

Biscayne National Park is mostly an underwater wilderness filled with a wide variety of sea life. Below the surface, colorful coral reefs, exotic fish, manatees and turtles will dazzle you! Unlike land-based parks, 95% of the park is underwater! Most of the park that does contain terra firma is found approximately 6-10 miles off the mainland in Biscayne Bay. Elliott Key, the park's largest island, is considered to be the first in a long chain of the Florida Keys. These islands are what remain of ancient coral reefs, which formed when ocean waters were much higher than they are today.

This park was created to protect one of the world's most extensive coral reefs along with the longest stretch of mangrove forest on the east coast. The park also protects endangered species such as the Florida manatee, the Loggerhead and Green Sea turtles, the American crocodile and the Schaus swallowtail butterfly.

Within sight of downtown Miami, getting to the Visitor Center of Biscayne is easy. Getting into the main sections of this park requires a seagoing vessel!

When to visit: Florida's dry season and the best time to visit is from mid-December through mid April. Summer months are wrought with mosquitoes and thunderstorms; however, this time of year is ideal for snorkeling and diving.

What to do: This aquatic wonderland is meant for snorkeling, diving, boating, canoeing and kayaking. The park has only two hiking trails – both on Elliott Key. Visitors must take to the water to get a true sense of the park's charm.



Experience These!

- Stop by the Dante Fascell Visitor Center
- Rent a canoe or take a guided Boat Tour
- Visit Elliott and Boca Chita Keys
- Snorkel the park's shallow reefs
- Observe a manatee



For divers, Biscayne's **Maritime Heritage Underwater Trail** features the sunken remains of six of the park's many shipwrecks. Access to this trail is by boat only. The wrecks have been mapped and mooring buoys have been installed. The newest addition to the trail is Fowey Rocks Lighthouse where snorkeling is sensational around its base.

Where to stay: Lodging is available in nearby Homestead and Florida City as the park does not have any lodging within its borders. Camping inside the park requires boat transportation to either the Boca Chita Key or the Elliott Key.

Wildlife: A fascinating critter found floating about Biscayne Bay is the manatee. "Sea Cows" grow up to 12 feet long and weigh as much as 3,500 pounds. These harmless beasts have lungs as long as a basketball player. To submerge their massive bodies down into the water, they pass enormous amounts of gas! Eyes like a puppy, they are known to occasionally roll over and allow you to rub their bellies!

PARK NOTES

BLACK CANYON

Colorado - Est. October 21, 1999



Black Canyon is a “sleeper” park and must be experienced to be understood. To fully appreciate why Black Canyon has become a National Park, get to the rim and gaze down into the depths of this gorge. Located in western Colorado, the more developed South Rim is 15 miles northeast of the town of Montrose, CO.

Two million years in the making, the Gunnison River has carved its way through the gneiss and schist of Black Canyon exposing steep cliffs of well over 2000 feet from rim to river below. This canyon is deep, dark and mysterious with beautifully marbled canyon walls. The river drops dramatically through the canyon at an average of 95 feet per mile compared to the Colorado River, which falls on average a mild 7½ feet per mile.

At its narrowest, Black Canyon is only 40 feet wide. At its deepest point, from rim to river, the canyon walls measure 2700'. Because it is narrow and steep, sunlight has a difficult time penetrating into the depths of the canyon...thus the name “Black Canyon.”

When to visit: Like many parks, summer is the most popular time to visit; however the daytime temps can get a bit toasty. At an elevation 8000', evening temperatures get chilly and winter brings cold temperatures and snow that close the North Rim road.

PARK NOTES

What to do: The park offers hikers many well-groomed trails. Those along the South Rim are mostly rated easy to moderate. South Rim Trails worth hiking include the Rim Rock Trail, Uplands Trail and the Oak Flat Loop Trail.

Our favorite hike was the Warner Point Nature Trail. This easy hike features a Walking Guide Book, which provides an informative listing of 14 “markers” - points of interest along the path. The trail was built to “compel you to take note of our connection to the natural world.”

Hiking to the bottom of the canyon from the rim is arduous! There are no marked trails down into the inner canyon and poison ivy is prevalent. A free permit is required.

Where to stay: There are no lodging facilities inside this park; however, the park has two campgrounds to choose from. The South Rim Campground features 88 campsites situated in an oak-brush forest. The 13 campsites in the North Rim Campground are all shaded within a Pinyon-Juniper forest.

Wildlife: Black Canyon is home to the fastest bird in the world, the Peregrine Falcon. This bird reaches speeds of over 200 mph in an aerial dive. Other critters found here include Black Bear, Yellow Bellied Marmot, Elk, Big Horn Sheep Mule Deer and Eagle.

Trivia: The Painted Wall is the highest cliff in Colorado. (see picture above left) From the Gunnison River below to top of the rim Painted Wall measures 2250 feet - 1000 feet taller than the Empire State Building.



Experience These!

- Hike the Warner Point Nature Trail
- Gaze at the majestically marbled Painted Wall
- Trek about the Rim Trails
- Picnic at the end of East Portal Road

BRYCE CANYON

Utah - Est. February 25, 1928

Bryce Canyon is a wide-open amphitheater populated by thousands of “hoodoos,” pinnacles, fins and buttes. The park’s hoodoos, the brightly colored rock spires carved by the elements over millions of years, will mesmerize you with their invitingly warm yellow, red, pink and orange hues.

One of Utah’s “Mighty Five” National Parks, Bryce is located in the southern section of the state about two hours northeast of St. George, UT.

When to visit: Summer draws large crowds. Wildflowers are abundant in the spring and early summer. Winters cloak the hoodoos with a frosty coat of snow.

What to do: Bryce Canyon is open year round and whether you embark upon a snowshoe hike in the winter, full moon hike in the fall or a hike down into Bryce Amphitheater, you will be treated to a landscape full of staggering natural beauty.

If you’ve only got a half-day to visit this park, be sure to take the 17 mile Scenic Drive out to Rainbow Point and experience the uniqueness of the canyon below.

Far from city lights, Bryce has become known as one of the world’s best sites for stargazing where it’s possible to view thousands of stars with the naked eye.



Experience These!

- Take the Scenic Drive out to Rainbow Point
- Hike the Queens Garden/Navajo Loop Trail
- Marvel at the Hoodoos
- Trek about the Rim Trail
- Experience Bryce Amphitheater



Trails to hike: For day hikers, there is an abundance of opportunity to explore Bryce, whether along the rim or down into the canyon itself. Trails into the canyon range in difficulty from easy to moderate to strenuous.

Rated “easy to moderate,” the 1.8 mile round trip Queens Garden Trail is the least difficult path down into the depths of this colorful canyon. Strenuous hikes are those with steep grades and include the 8 mile Fairyland Loop and the 5 mile Peek-a-Boo Loop.

Our favorite hike was the 2.9 mile Queens Garden/Navajo Loop Trail. Some folks claim this to be the world’s best 3 mile hike!

Where to stay: Bryce has two campgrounds, both located in a Ponderosa Pine forest with plenty of shade and sunshine. The **Sunset Campground** is closest to the best hiking trails and offers 100 campsites. The **North Campground** is near the Bryce Canyon Visitor Center and offers 99 campsites.

The **Lodge at Bryce Canyon** is an architectural treasure and is listed as one of the 16 Great Lodges of the National Parks. The rustic western cabins are charming! Nearby **Ruby Inn** is also a good lodging option.

Trivia: Legend has it the Hoodoos were once animal-like creatures that turned themselves into people. But once transformed, they turned evil. As punishment, Coyote changed them forevermore into stone!

PARK NOTES



CANYONLANDS

Utah - Est. September 12, 1964



Canyonlands is a diverse landscape divided into four distinctively different “districts” by two mighty rivers - the Colorado and Green Rivers.

The northern district, *Island-in-the-Sky*, is located 32 miles southwest of Moab, UT. This district is the easiest to access and offers expansive views deep into the canyon. Take the short half mile walk out to Mesa Arch. Along the way, you’ll be exposed to “living dirt” - biological soil crust that stabilizes the earth.

The *Needles District* is found in the southeastern section of the park and features a host of colorfully jumbled landforms. Hiking opportunities abound in this District and include: Roadside Ruin, Pothole Point, Cave Spring and Slickrock Foot Trail. For a much more adventurous trek, don’t miss our favorite hike - the 11 mile Chesler Park Loop beginning at Elephant Hill.

On the road to the *Needles District*, you will pass by Newspaper Rock - one of the world’s largest and best preserved collections of petroglyphs. Stop by the Rock and spend a few moments catching up on the ancient news.

PARK NOTES

The *Maze District* remains as one of the most remote locations within the continental US. There are no paved roads into the Maze and those who venture to explore this section of the park must be fully prepared for a very primitive experience!

The *River District* is comprised of the Green and Colorado Rivers, both of which have carved through the

sandstone helping to form two deep canyons. Above the Confluence, where the rivers join together, the waters are calm. Below, the combined waters of the Green and Colorado begin a 14 mile stretch of white water called Cataract Canyon - as treacherous a stretch as any found on earth!

When to visit: Canyonlands is open year-round. The best time of to visit this rugged park is in the spring and fall when the daytime temps are below 80° and the nighttime temps won’t freeze you! Summers will be teeming with people and quite warm.

What to do: If you’ve only got a single day to visit Canyonlands - visit the Island in the Sky District. Drive out to Grand View Point Overlook and take in the expansive views of Canyonlands.

If you have more time, camp out in the Needles District where there is plenty of hiking, biking, backpacking and stargazing. Any of the several short hikes in this District will delight.

Where to stay: The city of Moab, UT is a short distance from the Island in the Sky District and offers several lodging options.

There are two campgrounds inside Canyonlands: The Willow Flat Campground, located in the Island District has 12 campsites, but no water. The Squaw Flat Campground in the Needles District has 26 sites, flush toilets and water year-round!



Experience These!

- Drive to the Grandview Point Overlook
- Visit Mesa Arch and experience “living dirt” at the Island-in-the-Sky District
- Hike the trails in the Needles District (Slickrock Foot Trail, Cave Spring, Roadside Ruin, Pothole Point)
- Visit the petroglyphs at Newspaper Rock

CAPITOL REEF

Utah - Est. December 18, 1971

Capitol Reef, the middle segment of Utah's "Mighty Five," is perhaps its most underrated park. We found Cap Reef to be delightful for its abundance of hiking opportunities, its lovely campground and for the pie! You see, pie is strength and if you like pie, visit this park!

The Gifford Farmhouse is located adjacent to the Fruita Campground and sits amongst a fruit and nut orchard. Dewey Gifford sold his homestead to the National Park Service in 1969. The kitchen of the Gifford residence was converted into a Natural History Association sales outlet, which sells locally baked fruit pies. For a modest fee, you can sink your teeth into the tastiest of pies, which will give you strength to explore this lovely park!

If you prefer to eat fruit right off the tree, you are welcome to stroll about the orchards and pick a peach, a pear, a cherry or an apple and eat the ripe fruit as you mosey about the grounds!

Although the pie at Cap Reef is delicious, most recognize this park for its Waterpocket Fold. The Fold is a 100 mile long wrinkle in the earth's crust that was formed over 50 million years ago.

The rock on the west side of the fold was lifted more than 7000 feet higher than those on the east exposing a variety of colorful geologic layers. Access to the Fold is gained in the southern section of the park via dirt road.



Experience These!

- Take the Scenic Drive
- Pick fruit from the trees
- Buy a fruit pie!
- Discover the "wrinkle"
- Hike the Fremont River Trail



The soaring white Navajo sandstone domes (pictured above) are what contributed to the naming of this park. These domes resemble **capitol** building domes. The **reef** portion of the park's name comes from the rocky cliffs created by the Waterpocket Fold (pictured lower left). Rocky cliffs, like a coral reef are barriers to travel. Hence the name Capitol Reef.

When to visit: Capitol Reef is open year-round. The summer months are warm. Spring and fall are ideal for hiking. The elevation at the Fruita Visitor Center is 5500' so winters are cold.

What to do: Capitol Reef offers a wide variety of outdoor activity including camping, hiking, biking, backpacking, backcountry horseback riding and more. Like Canyonlands, Capital Reef also has a nice display of ancient Indian petroglyphs that are easy to access.

Trails to hike: In the Fruita area, you'll find fifteen day hiking trails with varying degrees of difficulty. Capitol Gorge, Goose-necks, Grand Wash, Fremont River and Sunset are all rated "easy."

Where to stay: There are no restaurants or lodges within the park boundaries. The Fruita Campground hosts 71 campsites with picnic tables and fire pits. Restrooms feature running water and flush toilets but no showers.

Trivia: "Waterpockets" are basins that form in many of the sandstone layers as they are eroded by water. These basins are common throughout the fold, thus giving it the name "Waterpocket Fold".

PARK NOTES

CARLSBAD CAVERNS

New Mexico - Est. May 14, 1930



Carlsbad Caverns, located in southeastern New Mexico is most famous for the over 119 known caverns that lie beneath the earth's surface. However, the most significant critter at this park is the Mexican Free-tailed Bat. Situated two hundred feet below the Natural Entrance (pictured above), the **Bat Cave** serves as the summer home for hundreds of thousands of these migratory flying mammals.

At nightfall, the bats put on a spectacular show. By the thousands, they form a spiraling whirlwind funnel as they exit the Cave. The "bat cloud" then heads southeast to feed on insects in the Pecos and Black River valleys returning home shortly before dawn.

Cave tours: The "Main Event" at the Caverns is touring the underground world formed thousands of years ago when sulfuric acid dissolved the limestone found throughout the caves.

Two ways to enter the Caverns. The pathway beginning at the Natural Entrance follows a mile and a quarter paved trail that descends 750 feet into the Cavern through the Main Corridor.

PARK NOTES

From there, take the 1½-hour self-guided tour through the Big Room – the largest cave chamber in America measuring 4000 feet in length by 225 feet high. The Big Room should be experienced by all who come to Carlsbad Caverns.

For quick access to the Big Room, there is an elevator that descends 800 feet down from the Visitor Center.

Another way to explore the park is to purchase a Ranger Guided Tour, which leads you into areas inaccessible without a guide. Reservations recommended during peak season.

The **King's Palace Tour** is an hour and a half Ranger led tour down a paved trail to the deepest portion of the Caverns. As you descend down 830 feet below the desert floor, you will pass through four highly decorated chambers.

A lesser-known tour that's well worth the modest fee is known as the **Left Hand Tunnel Tour**. This two-hour trek is limited to 15 participants and takes you into an undeveloped section of the Caverns. You will navigate a dirt path using a candle lit lantern. At one point, your guide will ask to extinguish all candles and you will experience the eerie sensation of total darkness!

When to visit: Open year round, Carlsbad Caverns does close for major holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years Day. Summers draw large crowds and hot temperatures. Inside the caverns, the temperature is a constant 56° year round.

Where to stay: There are no lodges or hotels inside the park. The Town of Carlsbad has a number of lodging options. Backcountry camping within the park is allowed and requires a permit issued at the Visitor Center.



Experience These!

- Hike from the Natural Entrance to the Big Room and take the self-guided tour
- Watch the Bat Flight Program
- Try out the Left Hand Tunnel Tour
- Gaze at the stars at night
- Learn about the effects of White Nose Syndrome

CHANNEL ISLANDS

California - Est. March 5, 1980

Channel Islands National Park is situated a short distance off the coast of heavily populated Southern California, yet this park is one of the **least visited**. Why? Mainly because you cannot drive there! Access to the five Islands that comprise this park is either by boat or small aircraft.

Limited access means small crowds, which will provide you with a relaxed feeling of solitude. Visiting any one of the 5 islands that make up this park will help you escape the hustle-bustle and bumper-to-bumper traffic of Southern California city life!

Anacapa is the closest island to the mainland sitting 12 miles off the coast. San Miguel Island, the furthest, is located 70 miles west of Oxnard. Due to the discovery of unexploded military ordinance on San Miguel, those wishing to visit this island will need to sign a liability waiver.

Getting there: Island Packers is the official park concessionaire offering daily transportation to the Islands via boat from either Ventura or Oxnard. Private boaters have access to the islands and Channel Islands Aviation will fly you to the islands if desired.

When to visit: The park is open year-round and although Channel Islands has a "Mediterranean climate," there are some



Experience These!

- Visit Santa Cruz Island and hike from Prisoners Harbor to Pelican Bay.
- Check out the Visitor Center in Ventura, CA
- Explore Anacapa
- Enjoy the aquatic and land based wildlife



things to consider when planning a visit. High winds are common in spring. Dense fog in the late spring and early summer can dampen the mood. Summer is ideal for sailing, snorkeling and diving. Fall is an excellent time to visit as warmer temperatures and mild winds prevail.

What to do: Once you've reached the Islands, there is plenty to do. Hiking opportunities are available on all five islands. Other popular activities include kayaking, camping, boating, snorkeling and diving, fishing, tide pooling, whale watching and picnicking.

Our favorite hike was the 4 mile trek from Prisoners Harbor to Pelican Bay over Nature Conservancy property.

Where to stay: There are no lodges on any of the islands. All 5 islands have accommodations for camping. Reservations are required for all camping facilities.

Wildlife: Seals and Sea Lions are frequently spotted sunning themselves along the shoreline. During winter, the pacific gray whale migrates southbound through the Santa Barbara channel. Large pods of dolphins frequent the area.

The island scrub jay is a prime pursuit for bird watchers when exploring Santa Cruz Island. For those who enjoy watching a platoon of brown pelicans flying in formation, you will be pleased to know that this once nearly extinct bird now flourishes and nests on Anacapa Island.

Trivia: In 1959, human remains dating back to 13,000 BC were found on Santa Rosa Island.

PARK NOTES

CONGAREE

South Carolina - Est. November 10, 2003



Congaree National Park, located just south of Columbia, SC is the home of **Championship Trees!** Like Redwood National Park in California, Congaree achieved park status to preserve and protect the region's giant bottomland hardwood forests from the logger man's axe. In the 1880's, the lumber industry began harvesting the expansive hardwood forests found throughout the southeast.

In less than 50 years, most of these forests had been decimated by the lumber industry and only a few tracts of hardwood trees remained. Francis Beidler, whose lumber company owned bottomland forests in South Carolina, decided to spare the trees in Congaree when the lumber market slowed down in the early 1900's.

Recognizing that the forests on Beidler's land represented one of the few remaining ecosystems of its kind, conservationist Harry Hampton began lobbying for its protection and in 1976, Congaree was deemed a National Monument.

The trees of Congaree are so impressive, they've claimed 25 State and National Championships! Two of the most significant "champions" are the Bald Cypress and the Loblolly Pine. The park's largest Bald Cypress has a base circumference of 27 feet and is surrounded with "tree knees" (see picture at right) measuring up to 7 feet tall!

Loblolly's are known to reach heights of almost 170 feet and are the second most common species of tree in the US after the red maple.

PARK NOTES

When to visit: Spring is the best time to visit this park. Summer is hot and humid. Fall is also a good time to visit when humidity has subsided and the fall colors begin to pop. During the winter months, flooding is common!

What to do: The biodiversity of this park is best explored on foot or by canoe or kayak. The park offers a limited number of guided canoe tours each year. Congaree observes a BYOK policy - Bring your own Kayak! Canoes and kayaks can be rented in nearby Columbia.

Hiking: If you'd prefer to trek about the grounds rather than paddling, there are 25 miles of hiking trails leading you into the peaceful serenity of the Congaree forest. The **Boardwalk Sims Trail** is a 2.4 mile loop trail that takes you through the award winning woodlands!

Where to stay: There are no lodges within the park boundaries. The park does offer two campgrounds. **Longleaf Campground** located adjacent to the park entrance hosts 10 individual and 4 group camping sites. **Bluff Campground** is located on the Bluff Trail approximately one mile from the Longleaf Campground. There is no vehicle access to this campground. Visitors who wish to use Bluff Campground must carry their equipment to the site. Bluff has 6 individual campsites.

Trivia: Originally called Congaree Swamp National Monument, the "Swamp" connotation was lifted when the area achieved National Park status in 2003.



Experience These!

- Take the Boardwalk Sims Trail
- Explore the more remote sections of the park along the Kingsnake Trail.
- Kayak or canoe the waterways
- Admire the "Trees Knees"

CRATER LAKE

Oregon - Est. May 22, 1902

Crater Lake, located in southwestern Oregon, is the country's deepest lake. The lake was formed seventy-seven hundred years ago when the volcanic Mt. Mazama collapsed upon itself creating a 1943 foot deep cauldron. Over the next seven thousand years, 500 inches of annual snow and rainfall filled the void.

There are no rivers or streams feeding Crater Lake which means very little sediment is deposited into its crystal clear waters. With little sediment to discolor it, Crater Lake reflects an astonishingly intense blue hue.

The day we hiked the Sun Notch Trail to view **Phantom Ship** (pictured at right), the water was so still, I couldn't tell if the Phantom Ship was sailing in the sky or floating on the surface of the lake. The azure blue water defied reality.

When to visit: Crater Lake is open all year. The mountain roads leading up to the park and many of those inside are subject to closure due to adverse weather conditions. During the winter months, it is wise to check conditions before heading up the mountain. The park's south entrance is open year round. The north entrance closes each winter and reopens only when road conditions are favorable. The summer season is short with wildflowers peaking in late July and early August.

What to do: If you do only one thing at Crater Lake, take the 33 mile **Rim Drive** around the lake. There are more than 30 pullouts and overlooks along the route treating you to many invigorating views of this magnificent body of water.



Experience These!

- Drive the scenic Rim Drive Loop
- Take the Sun Notch Trail to view the Phantom Ship
- Trek down Cleetwood Cove Trail to Crater Lake
- Visit the Pinnacles
- Hike up Watchman Peak and view Wizard Island



At the north end of the lake, take the **Cleetwood Cove Trail** down to the lake and dip your toes into the refreshing, yet briskly frigid waters. Cleetwood Cove provides the only access to the lake shore.

Hiking Crater. Take the short **Sun Notch Trail** to view the Phantom Ship. Trek up **Watchman Peak** and get a glimpse of the stunning and unobstructed view of Wizard Island and the lake. Visit the **Pinnacles** – the eerily colorful volcanic spires that formed during the same eruption that created the lake.

Hike up the 2½ miles **Mt. Scott Trail** to the historic fire lookout tower and experience the view from the highest peak in the park. The **Garfield Peak Trail** begins at Crater Lake Lodge and climbs a little over 1000 feet in 1.7 miles. Both of these hikes are well worth the perspiration!

Where to stay: Crater Lake features two campgrounds - the **Mazama Campground** has 200 forested sites with running water, flush toilets, bear lockers, picnic tables and fire rings. **Lost Creek Campground** hosts 16 tent-only campsites.

Perched upon the cliffs at the southern rim of the lake, **Crater Lake Lodge** offers visitors 71 rustic rooms. Another one of the classic 16 Great Lodges of the National Parks, the Lodge features amazing views of the lake.

Trivia: The Pinnacles are “fossil fumaroles” formed when volcanic gases rose up through a layer of volcanic ash, cementing the ash into solid rock.

PARK NOTES

CUYAHOGA VALLEY

Ohio - Est. October 11, 2000



Cuyahoga Valley National Park is situated between Akron and Cleveland and provides visitors and local city dwellers a respite from the daily dust cloud of activity that consumes many urbanites. The park beckons you to get out of town. Albeit, the park is nestled in between many towns! Unlike the more remotely located western parks, Cuyahoga Valley is situated amongst a densely populated region.

Its formation is a story about local people and politicians coming together to preserve, protect and restore a culturally vibrant, less polluted landscape where wildlife can flourish and mankind can re-create their connection with nature.

One of the key attractions of this park is the **Towpath Trail**, which follows the Cuyahoga River for 19.5 miles. This historic trail is wide, flat and hard-packed and follows the Ohio & Erie Canal route used years ago to transport people and goods from Cleveland to Portsmouth. The trail is ideally suited for people using wheelchairs, bicycles and strollers.

When to visit: The park is open year round with weather typical of four distinct seasons. Summers can be hot and humid. Winter conditions change rapidly. The park receives about 60 inches of snow annually. Spring brings out the blooming wildflowers, new foliage on the trees as well as a plethora of visitors. Fall is mild and brings splashes of color to the area.

PARK NOTES

What to do: Popular activities include walking, jogging or biking the Towpath Trail or hiking about the park's 125 mile trail system. Bird watching, canoeing and kayaking are also popular activities.

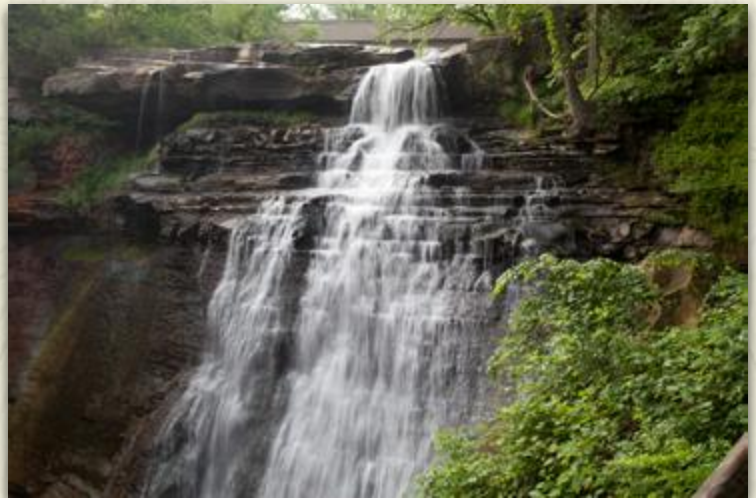
Take a nostalgic vintage train ride on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railway! Or visit the **Beaver Marsh**, a former junkyard cleaned up by a community effort.

Don't miss **Brandywine Falls** - Ohio's 2nd tallest waterfall which cascades over a staircase-like series of sandstone shelves. The short trail leading down to **Blue Hen Falls** is well worth the hike. The trail along the towering sandstone **Ritchie Ledges** leads you through an otherworldly microenvironment resembling a journey to the center of the earth! At the far end of the loop trail the **Ledges Overlook** is a nice spot for observing the sun setting over the woodlands in the valley below.

Where to stay: The park features 5 primitive campsites located along the Towpath Trail. There are no overnight sites for RV's.

Lodging near the park is plentiful. Three very quaint Bed and Breakfast facilities include the Inn at Brandywine Falls where we stayed during our visit. Other local B&B's include the Silver Fern Bed & Breakfast and the Stanford House.

Trivia: An uncommon yet popular activity at Cuyahoga is the art of **Questing**. Unlike geocaching, questing does not require a GPS unit. Once you locate a Quest Box, you collect its unique stamp, sign the logbook and put it back for others to discover.



Experience These!

- Walk, run or bike the Towpath Trail
- Visit Brandywine Falls
- Explore the Ritchie Ledges
- Walk through the Everett Street Covered Bridge
- Learn about Questing

DEATH VALLEY

California - Est. October 31, 1994

"There are hills, rounded, blunt, burned, squeezed up out of chaos, chrome and vermilion painted, aspiring to the snowline," wrote Mary Hunter Austin. Austin began writing about Death Valley back in 1888. Her book, *Land of Little Rain* is an influential work of environmental writing.

Death Valley National Park. Like bugs to flame, the extreme heat of Death Valley draws thousands of curious visitors each summer to experience this desert inferno. Summer temperatures frequently exceed 120° F. The highest recorded temperature was a toasty 134° F in July of 1913. One hundred years later, Death Valley recorded temperatures of 129° F or higher for five consecutive days. Those visiting loved it!

To the west, Mt. Whitney in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range stands tall at 14,491 feet. Badwater Basin in Death Valley is a lowly 282 feet below sea level. Within 100 miles of each other, these two landmarks are the highest and lowest points in the US respectively.

The mountains to the west serve as a "rain shadow" helping to keep the valley hot and dry by forcing the moisture out of the eastward-moving clouds before they reach the desert floor. To the east, the Amargosa Mountain Range traps the hot air from escaping the valley floor.

When to visit: If you want to experience why they call this park "death valley," go there in the summer! For a more tolerable experience, visit the park from November through April.

What to do: The 200 square miles of desolate salt flats of Badwater



Experience These!

- Walk about Badwater Basin
- Hike the sand dunes
- Take in the view at Zabriskie Point
- Explore Scotty's Castle
- Get spellbound by Dante's View



Basin was once the bottom of a vast lake. Badwater Basin is now covered with a surreal "saltscape." A devastating amount of rainwater flooded Badwater Basin in October 2015. Hopefully, once the newly formed "lake" dries up, it will again leave the crusty salt patterns as seen above.

Located in the park's northern reaches, **Scotty's Castle** is worth the visit. A tour of this desert mansion will take you back to the life and times of the Roaring 20's. Please check with park officials as Scotty's Castle was heavily damaged during the rainstorm of October 2015.

Hiking: There are very few constructed trails within the park. Most hiking is done free form – meaning you make your own path across the desert floor, up canyons or along ridges.

Hiking season is between October and April. Hiking during the summer heat can be deadly! The highest mountain in Death Valley National Park is 11,049 foot Telescope Peak. The vertical drop from the peak to the Badwater Basin is twice the depth of Grand Canyon!

Don't miss Zabriskie Point at sunrise. In the early morning light, the hills of Zabriskie Point resemble large scoops of Neapolitan ice cream. The steeply eroded hills are bone dry and completely devoid of vegetation. Another popular vista is **Dante's View** considered by many to be the most breathtaking view in the park.

Where to stay: There are 9 campgrounds within the park offering over 750 individual campsites. Campground elevations range from -196 feet below sea level to 8200'. Four are open year round while 5 are seasonal.

Trivia: Covering 3.4 million acres in California and part of Nevada, Death Valley is the largest National Park in the continental US. This park is referred to by its Native American name as the "land of little rain."

PARK NOTES

DENALI

Alaska - Est. February 26, 1917



The local Athabaskan's refer to this majestic mountain as "The High One." Denali stands as the tallest mountain in the United States at 20,320 feet above sea level.

The mountain is often blanketed by a thick coat of clouds that obscure the mountain for months at a time. Hence, getting a glimpse of The High One can be about a one in six proposition! We've been fortunate to see the mountain during all three visits!

There is a single 92 mile road that enters the interior section of this massive park. The first 15 miles are paved. After that, the Denali Park Road turns to gravel. Beyond Mile 15 the road is restricted to hikers, bikers, park busses and a limited number of passes.

The two Bus options to choose from are Shuttle Busses and Tour Busses. The Shuttle Bus system allow you to disembark and re-load anywhere along the road.

Three Tour Bus options range from 4, 8 or 12 hours in length and offer passengers a narrative of Denali as the bus travels through the park. The 8 & 12 hour Tours provide the best opportunity to view wildlife.

PARK NOTES

When to visit: Summer is the primary season to visit Denali. Winters can bring on severe weather and limit access into the park. However, crowds will be minimal during a winter visit! For us, September proved to be an excellent month to visit this amazing park!

What to do: The vastness of Denali lets you experience the wilds of Alaska. You can hike the groomed trails by the Visitor Center or take a guided "Dicso Hike" (Discovery Hike) off trail through the tundra with a Park Ranger.

Book a Tour Bus or jump on a Shuttle Bus and ride it out to Eielson Visitor Center. This is an excellent way to view the park's abundant wildlife. See if you can spot Denali's "Big Five" - Moose, Grizzly, Caribou, Dall Sheep and the ever elusive Wolf! Upon reaching the Visitor Center, hike up the Eielson Alpine Trail to the top of Thorofare Ridge. Here you will be treated to generous views of the Alaskan Range and The High One (if it's visible!)

If the mountain is "out," meaning it's not covered with clouds, a flightseeing tour around Denali is an exhilarating way to get up close to this majestic mountain!

Where to stay: There are 6 established campgrounds within the park and six million acres of wilderness for those who prefer the backpacking experience! For lodging inside the park, you'll need to travel to the end of the park road at Kantishna at mile 92 or stay in one of the many hotels located just outside the park.

Trivia: Denali is home to both black bears and grizzly (brown) bears. Black bears inhabit the forested areas of the park, while grizzly bears mainly live on the open tundra. Almost all bears seen by visitors along the Park Road are grizzlies.



Experience These!

- Ride the Bus to Eielson Visitor Center
- Hike Mt. Healy Overlook Trail and the Savage River Loop
- Experience a Discovery Hike
- Take a flightseeing tour around the mountain
- Enjoy the wildlife and spot the "Big Five" (Moose, Grizzly, Caribou, Dall Sheep and Wolf)

DRY TORTUGAS

Florida - Est. October 26, 1992

Dry Tortugas National Park is comprised of 100 square miles of mostly open water. Within its watery boundaries, there are 7 small islands known as keys. Fort Jefferson, located on Garden Key, is the best-known icon of the park. Commissioned by the Federal government to protect important shipping lanes, the Fort was under construction between 1846 and 1875. The Civil War interrupted its construction and the 16 million brick building was never completed.

Notice the two different colored bricks on the Fort in the picture to the right. The lighter colored bricks used to construct the bottom two thirds of the Fort came from the Confederate states. When the Civil War broke out, southern brick merchants felt it foolish to supply the Union with bricks to build a fort designed to blockade Southern shipping lanes! The reddish bricks on the upper third of the Fort came from the Union states!

Dry Tortugas is located 70 miles west of Key West, FL. Access to this park is either by boat or seaplane. There are no services on the island, so visitors must plan to bring everything they need with them. The NPS has contracted with concessionaires to provide transportation to and from Fort Jefferson.

When to visit: The winter season (Nov. thru April) is influenced by cold fronts that create strong winds and large swells. Summer (May thru Oct.) coinciding with Hurricane Season. Benefits of a winter visit – cooler weather, lighter crowds. Benefits of a summer visit – ideal weather and excellent visibility for snorkeling.



Experience These!

- Getting there is the first order of business!
- Explore Fort Jefferson
- Snorkel the pristine waters of the park
- Kayak around the Fort or out to the lighthouse (strenuous)
- This park is a paradise for bird watching



What to do: Most visitors come to tour Fort Jefferson; however, camping, snorkeling and diving about the coral reefs, world class bird watching, kayaking and canoeing are among the many other activities available to visitors of Dry Tortugas.

Where to stay: There are no lodges or hotels at Dry Tortugas. There is a 10 site primitive campground on Garden Key. Those campsites are let on a first-come, first-served basis. There is an overflow area in case a regular campsite is unavailable.

Transportation for those wishing to camp at Dry Tortugas is limited to the Yankee Freedom Ferry. Bring a tent, as tents are required camping gear on Dry Tortugas! Since there are no facilities on the island, you will also need to bring food and beverage!

Trivia: Dry Tortugas gets its name from two separate sources. The “tortugas” or turtles part of the name comes from Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon who, in 1513, found these islands teeming with hawksbill, leatherback and loggerhead turtles. He named the islands *las tortugas*.

The 7 landmasses within the park boundaries receive an average annual rainfall of about 40 inches. Most of the rainfall comes during the hot summer months. Collecting and storing fresh water has always been a challenge. Because they lacked fresh water, early nautical charts indicated these keys to be “dry,” thus the name Dry Tortugas evolved.

PARK NOTES

EVERGLADES

Florida - Est. May 30, 1934



Everglades National Park, the third largest park in the contiguous US, covers 1.5 million acres of the southern tip of Florida. Not a “swamp” as many believe, the Everglades is a 50 mile wide river that slowly flows from Lake Okeechobee down to Florida Bay at the southern tip of the state.

The first national park established to protect an ecological system, Everglades was formed to preserve the sawgrass prairie, the mangrove forest, the abundant wildlife, including rare and endangered species like the manatee, American crocodile, the Florida panther and much more.

Yet many things have changed since the Everglades became a park thus challenging its long term preservation. Primarily, a rapidly growing population of human beings living and vacationing in southern Florida has put a serious strain on the demand for water. Water for agriculture, water for human consumption, water for industrial usage and water for the survival of the fragile Everglades ecosystem. Water management has become the critical issue facing this unique landscape.

When to visit: The Everglades has two seasons – wet and dry. The **wet season** (May thru Nov) is typically hot, humid and attracts a plethora of pesky insects. During this season, crowds will be small.

PARK NOTES

The **dry season** (Dec thru April) is considered “high season” for the Everglades. It is the best time to observe the diverse collection of wildlife this park was established to protect. Bothersome insects like mosquitoes and biting flies prefer the wet season.

What to do: Wildlife viewing is excellent at this park. Be prepared to see alligators, crocodiles, manatees, turtles and a wide variety of migratory birds. Take the 38 mile drive from the Coe Visitor Center down to Flamingo. Along the way, stop off at Royal Palm and hike the Anhinga and Gumbo Limbo trails.

Hike the Long Pine Trail at Long Pine Key Campground. Venture out to the Pa-Hay-Okee Overlook. Explore the Mahogany Hammock and learn about the “River of Grass” and the wide variety of plants and animals that make Everglades home.

Once you reach Flamingo, opt to rent a canoe or kayak and paddle about the park on one of the many wilderness waterways. If you prefer others to do the paddling, take a Backcountry or Florida Bay Boat Tour. Stop by the Eco Pond. It will most likely be teeming with water fowl. At the north end of the park, take the 15 mile Tram Tour or rent a bike and tour Shark Valley at your own pace.

Where to stay: There are no lodging facilities within the park; however, you’ll find two drive-in campgrounds in the southern section: Long Pine Key and Flamingo Campgrounds. There are numerous wilderness campsites throughout the park.

Trivia: The Everglades is the only place on earth where alligators and crocodiles coexist.



Experience These!

- Stop by one of the park’s four Visitor Centers
- Journey down to Flamingo
- Walk the Anhinga and Gumbo Limbo Trails
- Observe the wildlife throughout the park
- Visit Shark Valley and/or the Gulf Coast section

GATES OF THE ARCTIC

Alaska - Est. December 2, 1980

Gates of the Arctic is an 8.4 million acre wilderness experience located above the Arctic Circle. The name of this park comes from wilderness advocate Robert Marshall, who traveled to Alaska frequently between 1929 and 1939. Marshall called two peaks, Frigid Crags and Boreal Mountain, the “gates” through Alaska’s central Brooks Mountain Range that opened up the door to the far north section of the Arctic.

If you’re looking for adventure above the Arctic Circle, this park will provide you with all you can handle. Mostly untouched by humans, Gates contains no roads, no trails and no established campgrounds! The opportunities to explore are endless.

However, the terrain is challenging and visitors who plan to visit for an extended period are encouraged to be highly proficient in outdoor survival skills! Cell phones don’t work here and there are no visitor facilities inside the park.

Getting to Gates is the first challenge! It is possible to hike into the interior of the park from Wiseman located on the Dalton

Highway or from the Anaktuvuk Pass. However, to get to the Pass, you will need to fly into the small Nunamiut village first.

Most visitors choose to Air Taxi into the park. During the summer months, Air Taxis depart from Fairbanks and Bettles frequently. We took a regularly scheduled flight on Wright Air from Fairbanks to the tiny town of Bettles located just outside



Experience These!

- The primary challenge is getting there!
- Stop by the Visitor Center in Bettles
- Take a Flightseeing Tour
- Float a river



the park boundaries. From Bettles, we chartered a floatplane that took us to both Kobuk Valley and Gates.

When to visit: Gates is open all year. The summer months are when the park is accessible for the average traveler. As to be expected, winter months are frigid. We visited Gates in mid August and found it to be cool and rainy; however, the mosquitoes and gnats weren’t nearly as pesky as we were told they would be.

What to do: Gates is a genuine wilderness with no established trails. Hiking about the dense vegetation, boggy grounds and frequent stream and river crossings will make for slow progress. Six miles a day is considered a good day’s hike! If you don’t have a good set of wilderness survival skills, consider hiring a guide to help you explore the backcountry or float you down one of the many rivers that meander through the park.

For a more leisurely experience, hire a bush pilot to take you on a flightseeing tour of the park. Your air taxi will be equipped to land either on water or on natural gravel “runways.”

Where to stay: There are no lodges inside Gates; however, there is lodging in Bettles (we stayed at the very pleasant Bettles Lodge) and in Coldfoot and Wiseman. The Bettles Lodge, located just south of the park border makes for a pleasant “base camp” for those visiting Gates and/or Kobuk.

There are no established campgrounds in the park. Find a spot that suits your fancy and pitch the tent! Bring everything you need, since there are no supply stores anywhere to be found.

PARK NOTES

GLACIER

Montana - Est. May 10, 1910



Glacier National Park is the crown jewel of the Rockies! Located in the northern reaches of Montana, the park will dazzle you with an incredible array of mountains, mammals, meadows and an occasional glacier. Warmer global temperatures have led to the considerable shrinkage of this park's namesake.

In 1850, this region had 150 glaciers. Today, only 25 remain. It is estimated that by 2030, all glaciers in the park will have vanished! Nevertheless, Glacier is a veritable playground for the outdoor enthusiast! A hiker's paradise with over 700 miles of trails!

When to go: Glacier is open year round, although heavy winter snowpack will close the upper sections of the very scenic Going-to-the-Sun Road until late June or early July. Summer attracts large crowds to this strikingly beautiful landscape. September is an excellent time to visit Glacier.

Where to stay: Six of the sixteen *Great Lodges of the National Parks* are located in and around Glacier-Waterton. Other lodging is available just outside the park boundaries in St. Mary, East Glacier Park, Columbia Falls and Kalispell.

Glacier has 13 developed campgrounds with over 1000 campsites. Most of the campgrounds are on a first-come, first-served basis.

PARK NOTES

What to do: If you visit Glacier, you must drive the 50 mile *Going-to-the-Sun Road* either in your own vehicle or via the popular Red Bus Tour.

The apex of this most unforgettable drive is *Logan Pass* where the Continental Divide splits the park into

the western and eastern sections. Explore this area and hike out to the *Hidden Lake Overlook*. Pull over to take a look at Jackson Glacier...one of the few remaining glaciers visible from the road.

Stop at *Wild Goose Island Overlook* before heading into the town of St. Mary. Along the way, take in *Sunrift Gorge* and *St. Mary Falls* before enjoying a tasty slice of pie at the *Park Café* in the town of St. Mary! The cafe's motto: "Pie is strength!"

Hiking: If you take but a single hike when visiting this magnificent mountain wonderland, take the Avalanche Creek Trail to Avalanche Lake! It's a beauty and remains as one of our most memorable hikes! With over 700 miles of hiking trails, there are plenty of opportunities to immerse yourself into one of Mother Nature's most remarkable landscapes.

Wildlife: Glacier is home to a wide variety of wildlife. There are 71 species of mammals including majestic species such as the grizzly bear, gray wolf, elk, moose, lynx, wolverine, cougar, mountain goat and bighorn sheep.

At Logan Pass, you will most likely spot Mountain Goats roaming the high country and Big Horn prancing about the meadows. Glacier has one of the largest remaining populations of brown bear (grizzly) in the lower 48 states.



Experience These!

- Drive the Going-to-the-Sun Road
- Hike Avalanche Creek Trail
- Trek the Hidden Lake Nature Trail
- Experience St. Mary Falls
- Circumnavigate Swiftcurrent Lake

GLACIER BAY

Alaska - Est. December 2, 1980

Two hundred years ago, Glacier Bay was one huge ice field - a glacier 4000 feet thick and 20 miles wide. Over the past couple of centuries the receding ice pack has left behind a most glorious bay!

Glacier Bay features 3.3 million acres of massive glaciers, jagged mountains, craggy coastlines, temperate rainforest, sheltered fjords and an abundance of wildlife.

Seven of the park's glaciers are "tidewater glaciers" - glaciers that flow down from the mountains and into the Bay. Where the glaciers meet the sea, they often put on a spectacular show called "calving." Calving is when a large block of ice (some up to 200 feet tall) breaks loose from the glacier and comes crashing down into the water. The "calves" from the Johns Hopkins Glacier can create such a violent disturbance that boats must keep their distance.

Accessing this park means arriving by boat, cruise ship or by taking a small airplane from Juneau, AK into the tiny Gustavus airfield which sits at the mouth of the Bay.

When to go: The park is open year round. Visitor services are limited during the winter months. The main visitor season is from mid-May through early September with the peak being in July. Summer temperatures range from 50° to 60° and rain is common during this season.



Experience These!

- Take the Glacier Bay Boat Tour
- Kayak about Bartlett Bay
- Hike to Bartlett Lake
- Take a Ranger Guided Tour
- Discover a porcupine and other animals



Where to stay: Bartlett Cove Campground is the only campground at Glacier Bay. It is a "walk-in campground"...meaning you must carry all your camp gear to the campsites. The other option is to book a room at the Glacier Bay Lodge (which we recommend), situated right on Bartlett Cove. Other lodging opportunities exist at local B&B's in the tiny town of Gustavus.

What to do: A "must do" activity at Glacier Bay is to take the all-day Glacier Bay Boat Tour! The Tour departs from the pier at the Lodge and makes a seven-hour, 130 mile loop around the Bay giving you a spectacular look at what remains of the ice age.

You will see a wild coastline with spectacular tidewater glaciers spilling over into the waters of the frigid ocean. You may hear the explosive sound of a glacier calving. You will learn about the Little Ice Age and how it has affected this region.

You will witness an abundance of marine and terrestrial wildlife, perhaps hearing whales whistling or sea lions barking.

Back at the Lodge, rent a kayak and explore the Bay on your own terms. A curious harbor seal will most likely join you.

Hiking: Good treks include the day hike to Bartlett Lake, the 3.4 mile round trip Bartlett River Trail and the Beach & Forest Loop Trails.

Wildlife: During our visit, we came across our first wild porcupine sighting, had a black bear encounter, saw humpback whales, moose, mountain goats, a colony of sea lions, harbor seals, three "rafts" of otters and dozens of colorful puffins.

PARK NOTES

GRAND CANYON

Arizona - Est. February 26, 1919



Grand Canyon National Park cannot fully be understood by simply gazing over its rim. To grasp the true meaning of this “grand” canyon you must hike down into the depths of it and experience what its namesake means! If you’re not up to hiking down into the canyon, at least visit the Desert View Watchtower to get a feel for just how “grand” this park truly is!

Most of the 5+ million people who journey to northern Arizona to visit the Grand Canyon each year travel to the park’s South Rim. If you seek to avoid crowds, venture to the more remote North Rim where you’ll be treated to evergreen forests, crisp clean air, far fewer people, incredible views of the canyon and an opportunity to venture down the North Kaibab Trail.

As the Condor flies, the north and south rim are only 10 miles apart. However, to drive from one rim to the other, you are looking at a 215 mile, five-hour drive!

When to go: The park is open year round. Summer attracts very large crowds...especially to the more easily accessed South Rim. North Rim facilities close each winter and reopen mid-May.

What to do: The park offers a wide variety of activities for those who wish to experience the great outdoors. Mule trips and rafting expeditions are popular pursuits. The South Rim Visitor Center and the park’s museums will help you learn more about the Grand Canyon.

The Grand Canyon offers many outstanding hiking opportunities along the rim or down into the canyon itself. However, before proceeding into the depths of the canyon, do

heed the warning signs posted on the Rim: **“Hiking down is optional. Hiking back up is mandatory!”** Hiking into the depths of the Canyon is an arduous event and should not be taken lightly! There are NO easy hikes into the Canyon and back up to the rim!

Where to stay: Three campgrounds on the South Rim - Mather Campground, Trailer Village and Desert View Campground - feature over 350 campsites. The North Rim Campground hosts 76 standard campsites and 12 tent-only sites.

There are numerous lodging opportunities within the Grand Canyon including the El Tovar on the South Rim and The Grand Canyon Lodge located on the North Rim. Both of these facilities are noted as two of the *Great Lodges of the National Parks*.

Wildlife: One of the rarest birds in the world and the largest bird in North America, the California Condor is making a comeback along the rim of the Grand Canyon. With a 9 foot wingspan, it is common to see one of the 73 “local” Condors soaring above the steep canyon walls.

Trivia: Water to support all facilities on the South Rim comes from the 16 mile Trans-Canyon Pipeline, which originates at Roaring Springs on the North Rim. The pipeline follows the North Kaibab Trail down the canyon, crosses the Colorado River under the steel bridge and up the Bright Angel Trail to the South Rim.



Experience These!

- Walk along the Rim Trail
- Trek down into the canyon...cautiously!
- Visit the North Rim
- Hike the Widforss Trail (No. Rim)
- Climb the Watchtower at Desert View Point

PARK NOTES

GRAND TETON

Wyoming - Est. February 26, 1929

Grand Teton National Park is comprised of four key elements. Set in the northwestern corner of Wyoming, the majestic peaks of the **Teton Range** remain the centerpiece of this park.

Along the eastern edge of the mountains, you'll discover a string of gorgeous glacially formed **lakes**. These lakes and the Teton Range were the original components of the park when it was established in 1929.

Adjacent to the mountains and lakes, Jackson Hole **valley** is home to significant populations of elk, bison, pronghorn, deer, moose and 300 other species of mammals and birds. The last component of the park is the **Snake River**, which meanders 40 miles through the valley floor.

The creation of Grand Teton National Park was perhaps the country's most controversial. The park was formed in 1929; however, when word got out that a secretly formed Land Company was buying up property to donate to the park service, a fire storm of opposition erupted from sheep, cattle and dude ranchers.

After decades of controversy and conflict, and the slow realization that tourism would become a major benefit to the local economy, the establishment of the "new" and expanded Grand Teton National Park finally occurred.



Experience These!

- Don't miss the Teton Park Scenic Drive
- Explore the Jenny Lake area
- Visit Mormon Row and the Gros Ventre River
- Float down the Snake River
- Hike one of the park's many trails



When to visit: Most visitors come to the Tetons during the summer months; yet, we believe anytime is a good time to visit these magnificent mountains.

What to do. The Tetons offers a plethora of opportunities for sightseeing and outdoor engagement including biking, boating, climbing, fishing, scenic drives, wildlife viewing and more!

Hiking opportunities abound at Grand Teton varying from easy day hikes to strenuous and technical climbs to the peaks of the Teton Range. Recommended reading: *Teton Trails - A Guide to the Trails of Grand Teton National Park*.

Where to stay: There are over 1000 campsites located in six different campgrounds ranging from "tent only" sites at Jenny Lake Campground to full RV hookup sites at Headwaters Campground.

Lodging ranges from rustic to luxury depending upon your budget and tastes. There are plenty of lodging options within the park and just outside the park in nearby Jackson, WY.

Wildlife: The Park Visitor Center is located in a small town called Moose. There's a reason for that. The area was blessed with many of these massive mammals when we visited the park.

We spotted the Momma and her calf (pictured) munching grasses just off the Gros Ventre Road.

Other critters we encountered were a herd of bison bumping heads, plenty of pronghorn prancing and a couple of elk seeking out the sweet grasses of the valley floor.

PARK NOTES

GREAT BASIN

Nevada - Est. October 27, 1986



Great Basin National Park sits very near the Nevada/Utah border 300 miles north of Las Vegas, NV and approximately 250 miles west of Salt Lake City. The tiny town of Baker is the closest community offering groceries and gas.

A few characteristics of this park that stand out include the Bristlecone Pines, Wheeler's Peak, Lehman Caves and gazing at the stars after dark!

The **Bristlecone Pines** in this region are some of the world's oldest living things with beginnings dating back to 2600 BC! Access the pines via the 2.8 mile Bristlecone Trail located at the termination of **Wheeler's Peak Scenic Drive**. Continue on the trail for another nine-tenths of a mile and you'll come across the only glacier in the state of Nevada.

Lehman Caves is decorated with stalactites, stalagmites, helictites, popcorn and over 300 rare "shield" formations. All Lehman Caves tours are guided by a Park Ranger. The Grand Palace Tour is 90 minutes long, limited to 20 visitors per tour and travels a distance of six-tenths of a mile. On this Tour, you will be treated to the famous "Parachute Shield" formation (pictured at right).

PARK NOTES

Dark Skies. One of the strikingly noticeable differences between Great Basin and other parks is what happens after sunset. Here, the night skies are not hindered by artificial light pollution typical of urban areas. Gazing up at the heavens in Great Basin gives you the feeling you could reach out and touch the stars! Great Basin is rated as one of the world's top star gazing sites.

When to visit: The Park is open year round with the peak season during the summer months. There is an 8,000 foot elevation difference between the valley floor and Wheeler's Peak. Winter visitation to the high country can be hindered by snowfall!

What to do: Great Basin features over 60 miles of developed hiking trails. The Bristlecone and Glacier Trail is a 4.6 mile round trip trek taking you through the grove of ancient trees and on up to Nevada's only glacier. The Wheeler Peak Summit Trail is an 8.6 mile trek with a 2900' elevation change. (Strenuous!)

Take in one of the **Lehman Caves Tours** and experience the fascination of this underground world. The **Lodge Room Tour** travels a little less than a half-mile and is good tour for young children. The **Grand Palace Tour** takes in more of the cave formations including the famous Parachute Shield formation. Both tours are limited to 20 people. Reservations recommended.

Where to stay: Great Basin has five developed campgrounds complete with tent pads, vault toilets, picnic tables and campfire grills. Campsites are on a first come, first served basis and there are no RV hookups. A limited number of lodging opportunities can be found in nearby Baker, NV.

Trivia: Nevada is the **country's most mountainous state** with over 300 individual mountain ranges and 42 named summits over 11,000'!



Experience These!

- Don't miss the Wheeler's Peak Scenic Drive
- Gaze at the stars
- Take a Lehman Cave Tour
- Trek up to the Bristlecone Pines
- Experience Nevada's only glacier

GREAT SAND DUNES

Colorado - Est. September 13, 2004

Great Sand Dunes is located 37 miles northeast of the town of Alamosa in Colorado. Nestled between the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the northeast and the San Juan Mountains to the west, the park is an unlikely candidate for being the location of the tallest sand dunes in North America!

For thousands of years, competing winds from these two mountain ranges have blown sand particles from ancient lakes back and forth where they eventually settled to create what is now Great Sand Dunes National Park.

When to visit: The park is open year round. At an elevation of around 8000', the weather can change quickly. We visited in late May and it snowed! Most visitors come in the summer when the average daytime temperature reaches 75-80° F. Evening temps will drop into the 40's. During the summer months, the sand on the dunes can reach temperatures of up to 150° F!

What to do: Popular activities include sandboarding, sand sledding, sand surfing or sand skiing. Sandboards and sand sleds are specifically designed for surfing the dunes. Snow boards, snow sleds, cardboard boxes, round saucers and such will dig into the dunes and abruptly launch you head first into the sand. Not a pleasant experience!

Hiking the dunes is another popular activity. There are five



Experience These!

- Trek to the top of High Dune, Star Dune or both!
- Hike up to Mosca Pass
- Slide down the sandy slopes
- Splash about Medano Creek (if there's water in it!)
- Observe the star-filled Dark Skies at night



dunes over 700 feet tall. The closest major dune is the 699 foot High Dune, which is located about a mile west of the parking lot. Climbing up to High Dune will test your meddle!

The round trip jaunt to High Dune will take you a good two hours. Hiking uphill in sand is all about two steps up, one step sliding back down!

If trekking on sand isn't your pleasure, this park has several excellent forested and alpine trails heading up into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The Mosca Pass Trail follows a small creek, which winds through an aspen and evergreen forest. The 3½ mile trail (one way) terminates at Mosca Pass - elev. 9739'.

Star gazing. This park offers visitors an excellent opportunity to gaze at the stars. Away from the obtrusive light pollution of the city and at an elevation of 8200', the Milky Way will twinkle brightly before your eyes.

Where to stay: The Piñon Flats Campground offers 88 campsites, 44 on a first come, first served basis. Reservations can be made for the other 44 sites. No RV hookups at Piñon Flats.

There are no lodges within the park; however, there are several lodges, hotels and motels located in nearby Alamosa, CO.

Trivia: Great Sand Dunes National Park is one of the *quietest* parks in the country due to its arid climate, the topography of its high mountain meadows and a location that's far from flight paths and freeways! Aaah, the sweet sound of silence!

PARK NOTES

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

No. Carolina/Tennessee - Est. June 15, 1934



Great Smoky Mountain, the nation's busiest park, straddles the border between Tennessee and North Carolina. The 10-million+ people who visit this park annually are treated to the beauty and grandeur of the southern Appalachian Mountains.

The park features over 90 historic structures including classic log cabins, barns, houses, churches, schools, grist mills and outbuildings. Visit Cades Cove, Chataloochee, Oconaluftee and the Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail to see these relics.

When to visit: Great Smoky is open all year. Access to some areas of the park may be closed in the winter due to snow and ice. The **Fall Color Explosion** is very popular and attracts large crowds. Heat, haze and humidity are common during summer! Spring weather ranges from sunny skies to snow flurries.

What to do: One of the main attractions of Great Smoky is "**Leaf Peeping**." The fall color display begins in October as the deciduous trees prepare for their annual shedding of leaves. Just prior to dropping their foliage, the leaves of the sugar maple, scarlet oak, sweet gum, red maple and the hickories explode into vivid displays of red, orange, purple and yellow!

Take the Newfound Gap road up to **Clingman's Dome** – the highest point in the park – to experience a great view of the Fall colors.

PARK NOTES

Motor Trails worth taking include the 11 mile **Cades Cove Loop Road**, which offers a historic glimpse at what a settler's life was like back in the 1800's. The **Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail**, just outside of Gatlinburg, TN winds through the back woods of the park and provides many scenic stops along the 5 mile one-way loop.

Hiking: If you've grown weary of driving the park, get out of the car and hike! Great Smoky offers 150 official hiking trails covering a distance of over 800 miles within the park including 70 miles of the Appalachian Trail.

Off-the-Beaten Path. To escape the hoards who flock to the main sections of the park, visit Cosby or Greenbrier for great spring-time wildflower viewing.

Where to stay: Great Smoky offers a variety of camping options. The park has 10 front country campgrounds with over 900 campsites for more traditional RV and tent campers.

There are plenty of lodging opportunities in nearby Gatlinburg, TN, which appears to be the **Pancake Capital of the World!** We counted at least 15 pancake houses within a 3 mile stretch!

Wildlife: Approximately 1,500 black bears live in the park. This equals a population density of approximately two bears per square mile. Bears are found throughout the park, but are easiest to spot in open areas such as Cades Cove and Cataloochee Valley.

Trivia: There is **no entrance fee** into Great Smoky because when the state of Tennessee transferred ownership of the Newfound Gap Road to the federal government, it stipulated that "no toll or license fee shall ever be imposed..." to travel the road!



Experience These!

- Soak up a Smoky Mountain sunrise/sunset
- Drive Cades Cove Loop & Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail
- Trek a piece of the Appalachian Trail
- Experience the Fall Color Explosion
- Have pancakes in Gatlinburg

GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS

Texas - Est. October 15, 1966

Guadalupe Mountains National Park is relatively unknown by people living outside the state of Texas. Even many Texans are unfamiliar with this remote park, which is located 110 miles east of El Paso adjacent to the Texas/New Mexico border.

Once underwater, the Guadalupe Mountains were part of a 400 mile horseshoe-shaped marine reef growing beneath the surface of an ancient inland sea. Over time, the sea evaporated and a major mountain-building uplift exposed a section of the ancient Capitan Reef.

The uplifting created the highest point in the state of Texas with the summit of Guadalupe Peak measuring in at 8,749 feet above sea level. Pictured at right is the "Top of Texas."

When to visit: Guadalupe is open all year. Weather can vary greatly as the elevation within the park ranges from 3000' at the Visitor Center to almost 9000' at the summit. The spring and summer seasons offer warm and mild temperatures. Fall and winter can be cold and windy.

What to do: Guadalupe Mountains National Park offers 80 miles of superb hiking trails, including the **Guadalupe Peak Trail**. The steepest portion of this "strenuous" 8½ mile round trip hike is in the first mile and a half! After that, the trail loops northward through a pine and fir forest offering a bit of shade. You'll pass by



Experience These!

- Trek to the Top of Texas
- Hike McKittrick Canyon Trail out to the Grotto
- Explore Devil's Hall
- Visit the Frijole Ranch History Museum
- See the ruins of the Butterfield Stagecoach Station

El Capitan (pictured lower left) and after a vertical climb of 3000 feet; you will arrive at the summit of Guadalupe Peak - 8,749 feet above sea level.

McKittrick Canyon Trail.

Visit McKittrick Canyon in the fall and be treated to a burst of sensational fall color. The McKittrick Canyon Trail is a moderate hike with a small amount of elevation change. Much of it follows McKittrick Creek. You'll first come across Pratt Cabin at about mile 2.4 and then the Grotto at mile 3.4. For an all day hike, continue up to the Notch for a fantastic view of South McKittrick Canyon.



Devil's Hall Trail. This easy 4.2 mile round trip hike takes you up the streambed of Pine Spring Canyon and the Hiker's Staircase to a narrow canyon called Devil's Hall.

Smith Springs Trail is a 2.3 mile loop beginning at Frijole Ranch. The trail climbs 402 feet up to the Springs offering dramatic views of the mountains and desert landscape.

Where to stay: There are no lodges or hotels in Guadalupe. The park does have two campgrounds. The Pine Springs Campground is located at the southeastern section of the park and sits at an elevation of 5822'. This campground hosts 20 level tent sites and 19 paved RV sites

The Dog Canyon Campground is located in the remote northern reaches of the park. This small campground will accommodate 9 tent sites and 4 RV sites. At an elevation of 6288', Dog Canyon is cooler during the hot summer months.

The nearest lodging would be found in Carlsbad, NM about 70 miles northeast of the Park Visitor Center.

Trivia: Guadalupe Mountain provides an excellent habitat for butterflies. More than 90 species have been reported fluttering about within the park.

PARK NOTES

HALEAKALA

Hawaii - Est. August 1, 1916



Haleakala, the volcano that formed the eastern portion of Maui, offers visitors two highly contrasting landscapes. At the park's summit (approx. 10,000'), Haleakala is a stark volcanic caldera with sparse vegetation.

In contrast to the summit, the Kīpahulu area of the park is a lush rainforest occupying a position on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, which is much milder and wetter. Kīpahulu gets an average of 187 inches of rain each year.

The Hawaiian Islands are the most remote major island group on earth. These volcanic lands were never connected to any landmass, thus the native plant and animal life are exotic. Thriving above 6,900 feet, the rare and beautiful Haleakala Silversword (pictured at right) is a delightful sight as you ascend the very steep 38 mile drive from the coast to the summit.

Hawaii's state bird, the Nēnē (pronounced nay-nay), can be seen waddling around near the Park Headquarters. Listed as endangered, the Nēnē is a medium-sized goose measuring about 25" from beak to tail feathers and is believed to have evolved from the Canadian goose, which arrived on the islands 500,000 years ago.

PARK NOTES

Haleakala has two points of entry. From Kahului (near the Airport), the summit can be reached in about an hour and a half via route 37 to 377/378. The coastal area of Kīpahulu is at least a three-hour drive from Kahului via the "curvaceous" Hana Highway. The Kīpahulu Visitor Center is located 10.7 miles from Hana.

When to visit: Haleakala is open all year unless severe weather restricts entry. Temperatures on the coast range between 70°-80°F. Thermometer readings at the summit in the early morning can be quite chilly and frequently dip below freezing. A jacket in Hawaii? If you want to experience the sunrise atop Haleakala, a jacket or heavy sweater is highly recommended!

What to do: Sunrises and sunsets are a big draw at the summit of Haleakala. To catch a view of the sunrise, leave your hotel or condo very early to make the 1½ - 2 hour drive to the summit.

For adrenalin junkies, take the 23 mile bike tour that descents down Haleakala on narrow, winding roads. For those who prefer traveling on foot, the "moonscape" crater at the summit offers over 30 miles of hiking trails. Be aware that hiking the 10,000 foot summit means the air is a lot thinner than down by the coast. Altitude sickness is common at higher elevations.

Where to stay: Maui has a wide range of lodging opportunities from the very modest to ultra-luxury.

As for camping, Haleakala features two drive-up campgrounds. The Kīpahulu campground is located near sea level on the wet side of the island. Access to it is via the Hana Highway. This site will accommodate up to 100 people. The Hosmer Grove campground is located at an elevation of 7000 feet along the road to the summit of Haleakala and will handle up to 50 people.

The Park Service maintains three Wilderness Cabins that can be reserved for up to 10 people. Accessing the cabins means hiking a minimum of 3.7 miles. The cabins are rustic and have no electricity.

Trivia: Haleakala has more endangered species than any other site in the National Park System.



Experience These!

- Take the scenic drive to the Summit
- Hike down into the cauldron
- Drive the Hana Highway to the Kīpahulu section of the park
- Ride a bike down Haleakala
- Experience the sunrise atop the volcano

HAWAII VOLCANOES

Hawaii - Est. August 1, 1916



Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is all about the two active, fire-breathing volcanoes – Kīlauea and Mauna Loa! Both are reminders of the strength of Mother Nature and how helpless mankind is in relationship to these powerful forces.

Located on the Big Island of Hawaii, the park is 30 miles southwest of Hilo and 96 miles from Kailua Kona via route 11.

When to visit: The park is open year round. Some sections of the park are closed during hazardous volcanic conditions and during Nēnē breeding season.

What to do: Take the **Crater Rim Driving Tour** beginning at the Kīlauea Visitor Center. Stop at the Jagger Museum and continue on to the Pu'u Pua'i Overlook and if you're feeling adventurous, hike to Keanakako'i Crater. A word of caution. Volcanic fumes can be hazardous to your health. I inhaled some of the sulfuric air and paid the price!

For a close look at where the lava eventually ends up, take the **Chain of Craters Road** down to the road's end. Along the way, don't miss the Thurston Lava Tube. Stop off and make the short hike out to the Pu'u Loa Petroglyphs. Once you reach the ocean, take in the view of the rugged coastline and the Hōlei Sea Arch.

Experience These!

- Drive the Crater Rim Tour
- Visit Jagger Museum
- Follow the Chain of Craters Road down to the sea
- Hike the Kīlauea Iki Trail
- Experience the Pu'u Loa Petroglyphs

With over 150 miles of hiking trails within the park, there are plenty of opportunities to explore this volcanic paradise from strenuous backcountry trails for the hearty to plenty of day hikes for those who wish to get a sampling of what it's like to walk on a volcano.

A day hike you should do is the popular 4 mile loop **Kīlauea Iki Trail** that starts in a rainforest before descending 400 feet down to the craggy crater floor. Once at the bottom of the caldera, you will trek across what was once a molten lava lake. Steam still rises out of the cracks.

The buckled crust along the trail is the result of the continuous cooling and subsiding of the crater floor that was formed when the Kīlauea Iki Crater erupted in 1959.

Other worthwhile day hikes include the Crater Rim Trail, the Devastation Trail and Halema'uma'u Trail.

Where to stay: Hawaii Volcanoes NP presents two camping opportunities within the park boundaries. **Nāmakanipaio Campground** is located 31.5 miles south of Hilo on Highway 11 at 4,000' elevation. It is a large, open grassy area with tall eucalyptus and ohī'a trees. The Hawaii Volcano Lodge Company manages this facility and offers 16 tent sites and 10 four person camper cabins.

Kulanaokuaiki Campground is located about 5 miles down the Hilina Pali Road at 2,700' elevation. There is NO WATER at this location. This new campground has 8 campsites.

There are plenty of lodging options on the Big Island including the **Volcano House** located a short walk from the Kīlauea Visitor Center. The **Kīlauea Lodge** located just outside the park boundaries was one of the most romantic escapes we've ever experienced.

Trivia: The Kīlauea volcano has been spilling lava almost continuously since 1983 thus adding 500 acres of new land to the island. It has also covered over 8 miles of highway up to 115 feet deep!



PARK NOTES

HOT SPRINGS

Arkansas - Est. March 4, 1921



Hot Springs National Park, located 60 miles southwest of Little Rock, AK, is the original home of “The American Spa.” Early visitors to Hot Springs included the likes of Al Capone, Lucky Luciano, Babe Ruth, Bat Masterson, Jack Dempsey and Joe Louis. All of these fellows enjoyed a good, hot soak!

As the name indicates, the area's hot springs are the primary reason this park exists. The geothermal conditions that lie a mile below the surface heat up the mountain spring waters that seeped into the earth from falling rain. The town grew up around the area where these hot mineral waters surfaced.

When the water resurfaces, its average temperature is 143° F. Plenty hot for a therapeutic bath! In 1832, Congress and president Andrew Jackson created the “Hot Springs Reservation” – the original forerunner of our National Park System. Theoretically, this would make Hot Springs the country's oldest park, predating Yellowstone as the country's first National Park by 40 years!

A stroll along Central Avenue's **Bathhouse Row** will present six nicely restored bathhouses. Quapaw and Buckstaff are “active” offering relaxing soaks like those who visited the area years ago.

Early bathhouses were basically shacks placed over the hot springs. In 1878, a fire swept through the town and wiped out many of the early structures.

PARK NOTES

The current bathhouses were all constructed between 1912 and 1923 and many of them have been updated and refurbished since then.

When to visit: The park is open all year; however, the Bathhouses do close for maintenance.

What to do: The featured activity at this park is to soak in the waters of the area's natural hot springs at one of the active Spas along Bath House Row. The mineral rich waters are sure to revive your spirits!

If soaking isn't your thing at America's smallest major National Park, the surrounding Zig Zag Mountains offer 26 miles of hiking trails through thickly forested stands of hickory, oak, pine, dogwood and redbud.

Where to stay: Hot Springs National Park is located in the middle of an urban city. There is no park managed lodging; however, there are plenty of local facilities to choose from.

The Gulpha Gorge Campground, located off Hwy 7s, offers 44 campsites. Sites are available on a first come, first served basis. Each campsite has a picnic table, grill and water nearby.

Trivia: Water currently emerging from the hot springs in Hot Springs National Park fell as rain when the pyramids of Egypt were built—4400 years ago!

Nearby attraction. About a half hour drive south of Hot Springs and nestled in the Ouachita Mountains you will find **Garvan Woodland Gardens** - a 210- acre horticultural botanical garden worth visiting. The Gardens were a gift to the University of Arkansas from philanthropist Verna Cook Garvan. (Garvan Gardens Bridge pictured below)



Experience These!

- Get soaked on Bathhouse Row
- Stroll down Central Avenue
- Trek about Hot Springs Mountain
- Fill your water bottle with mineral water
- Gaze at the landscape from atop Hot Springs Mtn. Tower

ISLE ROYALE

Michigan - Est. March 3, 1931

Islle Royale National Park is located in the northwest corner of Lake Superior. Although it is legally a part of Michigan, the island is closer to Minnesota and the Canadian border!

This park is a true wilderness island with no vehicular traffic. Total visitation to Isle Royale in a year is equal to one day's visitation at Yellowstone! It is the least visited park on the continental United States partially due to the fact that to reach this island, you must arrive by either boat or seaplane.

Once on the island, there is plenty to do! First order of business....relax! Here you will find exceptional separation from the hectic, frantic, fast-paced, hustle-bustle of city life! Hide your cell phone...or better yet, leave it on the mainland! It probably won't work anyway!

Getting there: There are four ferries and one seaplane that service Isle Royale departing from Houghton, MI, Copper Harbor, MI and Grand Portage, MN. Fares vary from carrier to carrier and reservations are strongly advised.

When to visit: Isle Royale is open from April 15th thru October 31st. Extreme winter weather conditions close the park in the late fall through early spring.

What to do: Once on the island, there is plenty to keep you busy. Water sports such as canoeing, kayaking and boating are popular activities. Canoeists and kayakers should be wary of the weather



Experience These!

- Tour the Visitor Center on the Mainland
- Get to the island!
- Hike a trail
- Take a Ranger Guided Tour
- Shoot a moose (with your camera)



as Lake Superior is noted for its very cold temperatures, thick fog and sudden squalls. A variety of shipwrecks make scuba diving the cold waters of Lake Superior a fascinating experience.

If hiking is your thing, there are miles of hiking trails available from either the Rock Harbor or Windigo sections of the park. Hikes range from the short 1.2 mile Windigo Nature Trail Loop to hiking from one end of the island to the other! The distance between the Feldtmann Lake campsite and Rock Harbor is 49 miles.

Where to stay: Isle Royale has 36 campgrounds located across the island. Campsites are accessible by foot or watercraft only as there are no roads on the island. Typically, campers backpack from one campground to another, traveling between six to eight miles per day.

If backcountry camping doesn't appeal to you, the Rock Harbor Lodge offers 60 Lodge rooms and 20 Duplex Cottages. It is the only lodging facility on the island.

Wildlife: As for wildlife, Isle Royale has a rather large population of moose (estimated to be about 1000) and is home to a dwindling population of local wolves.

The relationship between moose (prey) and the wolf population (predator) on Isle Royale is the longest continuous study of a predator-prey system spanning more than 5 decades beginning in 1958.

Trivia: Isle Royale is the largest island on the largest fresh water lake in the world - Lake Superior!

PARK NOTES

JOSHUA TREE

California - Est. October 31, 1994



Joshua Tree National Park is an 800,000 acre desert landscape located in southern California approximately 37 miles east of Palm Springs. Climatically, it's actually two desert parks in one. The eastern section of the park is considered "low desert" (below 3000 ft.) and is dominated by creosote bush. The western section or "high desert" (above 3000 ft.) is where you'll find the park's namesake - the Joshua Tree.

According to John C. Fremont, an early explorer of the west, the Joshua Tree is "...the most repulsive tree in the vegetation kingdom." The fact is, the Joshua Tree isn't really a tree at all, but an oversized yucca. It resembles something you might find in a Dr. Seuss book.

If the Joshua Yucca affects you as much as it did Fremont, perhaps you will find joy scrambling about the fascinating granite boulders that take on a variety of unusual shapes. **Skull Rock** (pictured above) is one of the more intriguing features located near the Jumbo Rock Campground. Massive rock formations make this park very popular for rock climbers of all abilities.

If unusual plant material captivates your imagination, be sure to visit the **Cholla Cactus Garden**. From a distance, these desert plants appear to be cuddly teddy bears. Upon closer examination, the spiny monsters will literally jump at you and attach themselves to your leg! Observe them...but keep your distance!

PARK NOTES

The spindly Ocotillo and desert wildflowers add color to this southern California landscape during the spring bloom.

When to visit: A visit to Joshua Tree National Park in the summer can be

as inviting as vacationing in a pizza oven. Summer temperatures will be hot; however, there will be plenty of campsites available! Winters carry freezing nighttime temperatures. The best time to visit Joshua Tree is in the fall or spring.

What to do: Joshua Tree offers a wide variety of things to do including camping, rock climbing and bouldering, mountain biking, horseback riding, backpacking, wildflower viewing, geology motor tours and more. As for hiking, the park offers an extensive network of trails of varying length from short nature walks to long, strenuous treks about Dr. Seuss's strange trees!

Where to stay: There are no lodges inside Joshua Tree; however, there are 9 campgrounds with over 500 developed camp sites. Most sites are available on a first come, first served basis. Water is scarce at Joshua Tree so it is recommended you bring your own. A few of the campgrounds do have running water; however, here are no RV hookups at this park.

Trivia: Joshua "trees" do not have growth rings like an oak or pine. They are estimated to grow at a rate of ½" to 3" per year. Based on height, researchers think an average lifespan for a Joshua Tree is about 150 years, but some of the larger trees may be much older than that.



Experience These!

- Scramble about the Jumbo Rocks
- Trek one of the many Nature Trails
- Take the 18 mile Geology Motor Tour
- Experience the Keys Ranch Walking Tour
- Visit the Cholla Cactus Garden

KATMAI

Alaska - Est. December 2, 1980

Katmai National Park was “born” on June 6, 1912, when Novarupta, an active volcano began erupting sending a gigantic plume of smoke and ash into the atmosphere. The eruption was ten times more violent than Mt. St. Helens in 1980 and buried the surrounding area in up to 700 feet of volcanic matter.

Shortly after the volcano settled, people began exploring the area and found an otherworldly terrain aptly named the “**Valley of 10,000 Smokes.**” Although viewing bears has become the park’s most popular activity, Katmai was made a National Park to preserve and protect the volcanic landscape surrounding Novarupta. Today, accessing the Valley can be achieved by taking a 23 mile bus tour from Brooks Camp. It is well worth the journey, as you will have the opportunity to explore a landscape created by the largest volcanic eruption of the 20th century!

Getting there: Brooks Camp is Katmai’s most popular tourist destination. Getting there is an adventure in itself. You’ll take a smallish aircraft from Anchorage into King Salmon. From there, you’ll load your gear onto a float plane, which will take off from the Naknek River and land on a lake near Brooks Camp.

Upon landing, you will be immediately shuffled into the Brooks Camp Ranger Station to become thoroughly educated on bear safety. You WILL encounter bears!



Experience These!

- Get there!
- Visit the Valley of 10,000 Smokes
- Fish for Salmon alongside the bears
- Shoot a Grizzly (with your camera)
- Hike to Brooks Falls



Once your bear orientation is complete, you are free to explore. Your senses will tingle with caution and delight with your very first bear encounter!

When to visit: The park is open all year. Most people visit Katmai between June and October when transportation to this remote location is available.

What to do: Visitors come to Katmai to either fish the world-class waters of the park or to observe the large population of brown bears (Grizzlies).

At Brooks Camp, there are three wildlife viewing platforms where you can observe the savage beauty of these majestic creatures as they swim about feasting on the Sockeye Salmon of Brooks River. To reach the platforms, you must cross a floating footbridge spanning the Brooks River. Occasionally, bears “camp” out near the entrance to the footbridge causing what the local Rangers call a “bear jam.” All footbridge traffic ceases until the bears relocate!

If you opt to fish the waters of Katmai, you will be competing with the local bear population for the catch. The noise of that splashing fish you hooked will sound a lot like food to a bear!

Where to stay: There are two Park Service sanctioned Lodges inside the park – Brooks Lodge and the Grosvenor Lodge.

Trivia: It is estimated that 2200 grizzlies inhabit Katmai, meaning there are more bears than people living on the Alaska Peninsula!

PARK NOTES

KENAI FJORDS

Alaska - Est. December 2, 1980



Kenai Fjords, the smallest of Alaska's 8 National Parks, is a landscape dominated by glaciers. Over 50% of the park is covered with ice. There are at least 38 active glaciers still sculpting the earth thus creating the valleys and fjords along the coast. This land was once entirely covered with one huge icefield.

Located 126 miles south of Anchorage, Kenai is one of the easiest Alaskan parks to access. Nearby Seward serves as the springboard for exploring this immense park, half of which is blanketed by the Harding Icefields.

When to visit: Reaching Seward can be achieved year-round by driving the scenic Seward Highway. Accessing the park during the winter months will be challenging. During the summer, Alaska Railroad's Coastal Classic makes daily trips to Seward. Buses and small aircraft also provide access to Seward.

What to do: Covering an area of over 700 square miles, the Harding Icefield is America's largest ice mass. The Icefield measures up to one mile thick and features over three-dozen glaciers that have carved their way through the mountains leaving behind stunningly beautiful fjords (pronounced fee yords).

The easiest ice mass to access within Kenai is Exit Glacier. Located a short 11 mile drive northwest of Seward, Exit Glacier got its name because it served as the "exit" for the first recorded crossing of the Harding Icefield.

Driving up to the Visitor Center at Exit Glacier, there are signs posted along the roadway indicating where the "Toe of the Glacier" once

touched at various points in time. Seeing the rapid pace of Exit's retreat serves as a visual reminder of the effect our changing climate has on the icefields around the world.

The only maintained **hiking trails** at Kenai are located at the Exit Glacier area. Once at the Visitor Center, venture out to the Edge of the Glacier Trail for a close up look at Exit Glacier. If you desire a more robust hike, trek the 8.2 mile Harding Icefield Trail and take in the panoramic view of Exit Glacier and its hauntingly ice-blue hue, its deep crevasses and moraines and the pure enormity of its mass! Backcountry exploration of this wilderness without trails is recommended for the experienced only!

Kayaking with a qualified guide is another way to experience the marine aspects of the park. Yet do understand that the waters around the Kenai's fjords are **not** for beginners.

Departing from Seward during the summer months, **boat tours** are a popular way to visit this park. Another way to get a sense of the vastness of the Harding Icefield and its coastal fjords is to take a **flightseeing tour**.

Where to stay: Kenai has but a single 12 site walk-in campground located by Exit Glacier. The sites are available on a first come, first service basis and there is no fee for camping.

There are several lodging options in Seward. If you want to get deeper into this park, the Kenai Fjords Glacier Lodge is an option.

Located in a native-owned wildlife sanctuary surrounded by the park, the Lodge is accessible only by boat during the summer.

Trivia: Snowfall on the Harding Icefield can exceed 100 feet each year. After 4 to 10 years of compression, snow turns into glacial ice.



Experience These!

- Visit the Exit Glacier Nature Center
- Trek to the toe of Exit Glacier
- Hike the Harding Icefield Trail
- Take a Boat Tour
- Enjoy a Ranger led walk, talk or hike

PARK NOTES

KINGS CANYON

California - Est. March 4, 1940

Kings Canyon is noted for having two distinctively different features – very **big trees** and a very **deep canyon!** The size of the giant sequoias in Kings Canyon National Park is something that cannot fully be appreciated without standing beside one! Photographs of these giants do not do them justice!

Sequoias grow only on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. They grow up to 300 feet tall. It is estimated they live to be 1800 to 3000 years old. These mighty trees produce a pinecone the size of an egg and a seed that resembles an oat flake.

For the tree to reproduce, it takes the intense heat of a forest fire to release the seed from the pinecone! Subsequently, forest fires are an important part of the forest ecosystem. To maintain the health of the park's natural character and to prevent catastrophic fires, the Park Service uses "prescribed burns" to help clear underbrush and help the sequoia seeds reach fertile soil.

The main attraction at Kings Canyon is the 3,000 year old **General Grant Tree**. The General is the third largest tree in the world. It is the only living thing officially designated by Congress as a national memorial dedicated to the men and women who have given their lives serving our country.

Deep Canyon! The south fork of the Kings River and the effects of past glacial activity combined to carve an 8200 foot deep canyon from which the park earned its name. Kings Canyon is one of the deepest canyons in America.



John Muir claimed Kings Canyon rivaled Yosemite for beauty and stature. Quite a strong statement from the man who had such a solid bond with Yosemite!

When to visit: Kings Canyon is open year round. Winter conditions will close some of the roads.

Experience These!

- Drive the Kings Canyon Scenic Byway to road's end
- Take the General Grant Tree Trail and stand in awe of the General Grant Tree
- Picnic along the Kings River
- Consider the lightly traveled, mile and a half North Grove Loop Trail



What to do: Besides being astounded by the sheer magnitude of the giant trees, there is plenty to do in Kings Canyon. The park has numerous **day hiking** trails that provide staggering natural beauty and lasting memories of the world's largest living things! Take the 1/3 mile General Grant Tree Trail and experience these magnificent beauties.

The **scenic drive** out to the end of Hwy 180 (Kings Canyon Scenic Byway) will give you a view of the very deep canyon as it follows the Kings River. Stop along the river and enjoy a picnic lunch.

During the winter months, cross-country skiing and snowshoe walks are popular activities.

Where to stay: Between Kings Canyon and neighboring Sequoia, there are 14 established campgrounds with over 1200 developed campsites.

As for lodging within the park boundaries, the John Muir, Grant Grove and Cedar Grove Lodges are located in Kings Canyon. The 102 room Wuksachi Lodge is located at nearby Sequoia National Park.

Trivia: Walter Fry spent five days with five men chopping down a single sequoia tree. After counting the rings on the fallen tree, he discovered he and his crew had just chopped down a 3266 year old giant.

This discovery shocked Fry into changing careers. In 1912, he became the Park Superintendent for Kings Canyon.

PARK NOTES

KOBUK VALLEY

Alaska - Est. December 2, 1980



Kobuk Valley National Park. As bizarre as this may seem, Kobuk Valley is the site of the Great Kobuk, Little Kobuk and the Hunt River **Sand Dunes!** Twenty-five square miles of southern Kobuk Valley hosts a series of lofty dunes that were created when ancient glaciers ground the local rocks into small sand particles. The dunes are a fascinating sight nestled in the middle of the Alaskan wilderness where daytime temperatures in the summer have been known to reach 100°F!

Another fascinating feature wandering the Kobuk landscape is the herd of almost 500,000 caribou that make their annual migration through the park each year. In the spring, the caribou travel north as they pass across the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes. The herd can be seen heading southbound in late August and September.

Getting there: Getting to Kobuk takes a bit of effort as there are no roads leading into this park. Commercial airlines fly from Anchorage to Kotzebue and from Fairbanks to Bettles. From Kotzebue or Bettles, a bush pilot will fly you into the depths of this fascinating land! (see picture on right)

The other option is to take a boat up the Kobuk River to gain access to the park. Once there, you'll be rewarded with a genuine "Alaskan Wilderness" experience above the Arctic Circle.

PARK NOTES

When to go: The park is open year round and the sun never sets from June 3rd to July 9th. The weather in the summer months is usually in the mid 60's. Winter temps average -6° and can dip as low as -50°F!

Where to stay: Within Kobuk, there are no established lodging facilities or developed campsites. Camping in the backcountry is the only means of lodging.

What to do: Once inside the park boundaries, there are no trails – just 1.7 million acres of remote backcountry where you can hike, backpack, camp, float rivers, fish, view the wildlife and photograph this amazing wilderness.

Hiking: Since trails do not exist within Kobuk, when your bush pilot drops you off you will be experiencing "Wild Alaska" in its truest sense. There are no restaurants or grocery stores in this park. Even the Park Ranger Station and Visitors Center are located outside the park boundaries in Kotzebue.

Our journey into the depths of Kobuk Valley National Park began by taking off in a vintage 6-passenger DeHavilland Beaver float-plane (below) from a pond in Bettles, AK. As we departed, the weather was mostly nasty - cloudy with rainy conditions. Two hours later, we were circling around the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes before landing on a narrow stretch of the Kobuk River. The sandy river bank was dotted with fresh bear tracks so we did not stray too far from our Air Taxi!

Trivia: Arctic sand dunes and vast herds of caribou aren't the only things that make Kobuk Valley National Park unique. The **Kobuk locoweed** is a small, flowering herb in the pea family that is only found in Kobuk Valley National Park.



Experience These!

- Getting to Bettles or Kotzebue is the first challenge!
- Exploring inside the park is the next test!
- Take an Air Taxi to the Sand Dunes
- Visit the Northwest Arctic Heritage Center in Kotzebue

LAKE CLARK

Alaska - Est. December 2, 1980

Like many of Alaska's National Parks, Lake Clark is predominantly an untouched wilderness. Within the park, you will find two active volcanoes, glaciers carving new valleys, rivers teeming with salmon, impressive waterfalls, lovely lakes, a plethora of wildlife and Dick Proenneke's historic cabin.

There are no roads leading into Lake Clark; however, visiting Lake Clark is definitely easier than accessing either Kobuk Valley or Gates! Entering this vast wilderness is done either by air taxi or by sea across the Cook Inlet. Two gravel runways in Port Alsworth provide access for visitors arriving by air.

When to go: The park is open all year. Summers offer visitors the best opportunity for decent weather. Lake Clark will begin to freeze in November and typically begins to thaw out in April.

What to do: Wildlife viewing is very popular at this park as the brown bear (grizzly) population is plentiful. The grizzlies tend to congregate along the Cook Inlet coastline in the Chinitna Bay, Crescent Lake and Silver Salmon Creek areas.

The only maintained hiking trails inside Lake Clark are found at Port Alsworth. The **Tanalian Trail** system offers day hikers an exceptional opportunity to get into the backcountry and enjoy the solitude.



Experience These!

- The first order of business....get there!
- Visit Proenneke's Cabin
- Hike the Tanalian Falls Trail
- Observe the wildlife along the Cook Inlet
- Meet the Rangers at the Port Alsworth Visitor Center



The trailhead, located adjacent to the airstrips of Port Alsworth, offers hikers two choices: Take either the Beaver Pond Loop or the Falls and Lake Trail to the junction where you decide to continue north up the Tanalian Mountain Trail to the 3900' summit or to trek the Lake Trail past the Tanalian Falls to Kontrashibuna Lake.

Rustic Cabin Tour. Having read about Dick Proenneke's Cabin, one of Alaska's foremost wilderness icons, we felt compelled to pay this landmark a visit. There are two ways to reach Dick's Cabin - hike 30 miles across the rugged and trail-less mountain terrain from Port Alsworth or take a floatplane to Twin Lakes.

We opted for the latter. Weather was an issue and it took us three attempts to finally touch down on Twin Lakes where the cabin is located. High winds cancelled our first attempt. Foggy conditions affected the next. After touring the Cabin, take the short hike up to Teetering Rock and experience the breathtaking view of Twin Lakes and the surrounding mountains.

Where to stay: Lake Clark offers a wide variety of lodging options from rustic cabins to all-inclusive lodges offering guided tours into the wilderness. Many of these lodges are found in Port Alsworth. We were delighted with our visit to The Farm owned and operated by the Alsworth family.

All camping in Lake Clark is primitive. There are no facilities, trails or designated campsites. However, there will be rivers to cross, bogs to avoid and nasty weather to contend with! Happy trekking!

PARK NOTES

LASSEN VOLCANIC

California - Est. August 9, 1916



Lassen is volcanic! Two years after the Alaskan volcano Novarupta erupted in Katmai National Park, Lassen Peak began three years of volcanic outbursts. The largest eruption took place on May 22, 1915 and launched a mushroom-shaped cloud of ash 30,000 feet into the atmosphere.

Lassen Peak has remained “quiet” since 1921; however, it is still considered an active volcano. Located at the southern end of the Cascade Mountain Range in Northern California, Lassen is one of many other famous volcanic peaks which include Mt. Rainier, Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Shasta and Mt. Hood.

Lassen features several impressive hydrologic characteristics including steaming fumaroles (vents from which volcanic gas escapes), bubbling pools and gurgling mud pots. The largest hydrothermal area in the park is known as **Bumpass Hell** – a 16-acre area of “hellish” terrain.

The area got its name when in the 1860’s, K.V. Bumpass, a local guide, stepped through the thin crust of a steaming hot mud pot, thus badly burning his leg. After the incident, Bumpass wisecracked about his “decent into hell!”

PARK NOTES

When to go: The park is open all year. Winter weather frequently shuts down roads inside the park. When we visited the park on July 12, 2010, we learned the summit of the Main Park Road didn’t open until July 8th!

What to do: The 30 mile **Lassen Volcanic National Park Highway** provides visitors an excellent introduction to the key features of the

park. This auto-tour will expose you to Sulphur Works, Bumpass Hell Overlook, Lassen Peak Viewpoint and more.

Hiking: Lassen features over 150 miles of hiking trails for trekkers of all abilities. One of the most popular hikes is trekking to the top of the world’s largest plug dome volcano via the 2.5 mile **Lassen Peak Trail**.

For another worthwhile and less strenuous hike, take in the awesome reflective view of the Lassen Peak and Chaos Crags while trekking about the 1.8 mile **Manzanita Lake Loop Trail**.

Lassen receives over 30 feet of snow each winter making it an ideal place for family snow play, snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. The roads are plowed in the winter to the southwest parking area and the Loomis Museum in the north.

Where to stay: Drakesbad Guest Ranch in Warner Valley is the only lodging within the park. Availability is limited and reservations are recommended. Most visitors choose to camp in one of Lassen’s 400 campsites found in eight campgrounds, which range from primitive to fully developed.

Trivia: The Main Park Road was built just 10 years after Lassen Peak erupted. At its summit (8512’), the thoroughfare is the highest road in the Cascade Mountains and has been known to accumulate up to 40 feet of snow near Lake Helen.



Experience These!

- Drive the Lassen Volcanic National Park Highway
- Trek to the summit of Lassen Peak
- Hike down to Bumpass Hell
- Stroll around Manzanita Lake
- Stimulate your senses at Sulphur Works

MAMMOTH CAVE

Kentucky - Est. July 1, 1941

Mammoth Cave, located 35 miles northeast of Bowling Green, Kentucky, is the world's longest known cave system containing over 400 miles of "grand and gloomy chambers."

Scientific evidence shows that Native Americans first ventured into Mammoth Cave over 2000 years ago. More recently, the "discovery" of Mammoth Cave is credited to John Houchins who, somewhere between 1798 and 1802, wounded a bear that either led him to the entrance of the cave, or chased him inside it!

Mammoth Cave is one of the oldest tourist attractions in North America with tours of the cave system having been offered since 1816. Today, the National Park Service offers a wide variety of Ranger-led Cave Tours. Although reservations for the tours are not required, they are highly recommended!

Popular tours include the **Frozen Niagara** – a short stroll and easy introductory visit to Mammoth Cave. Four miles in length, the **Grand Avenue Tour** is rated "strenuous" and guides you to the classic landmarks of the Cave. "Strenuous" in cave language means you will need to climb and descend stairs without getting severely winded. As long as you have no heart or respiratory issues, "strenuous" cave tours should pose no problem.

The 3 mile **Violet City Lantern Tour** is done by candlelight. This tour allows you to experience the Cave just as the early explorers did.



Experience These!

- Take a Cave Tour...or two (make reservations!)
- Hike the park's many trails
- Bike trails abound - bring your bike
- Explore the Nolin and Green Rivers
- Outside the park, visit Diamond Caverns and the Grand Victorian Inn (Park City)



If you desire to get down and dirty, the **Wild Cave Tour** will have you crawling on hands and knees as you squeeze through tight quarters, exploring this fascinating underground world.

Since we failed to make advanced reservations, the popular Grand Avenue Tour was sold out. Instead, we opted for the **Domes and Dripstones Tour**, which includes a small section of Grand Avenue and all of the Frozen Niagara Tour.

When to go: The park is open year round and cave tours are given every day except December 25th. Summer months are the busiest and cave tour reservations are highly recommended.

What to do: Most who come to explore Mammoth Cave seek to hike the underground world of the cave system; however, above grade, there are 84 miles of trails woven into the tapestry of the rolling Kentucky landscape. Mountain biking and horseback riding are other popular activities at Mammoth Cave.

Where to stay: Mammoth Cave features three developed campgrounds with over 100 available campsites and a dozen primitive sites in the backcountry.

Mammoth Cave Hotel is located adjacent to the Natural Entrance offering a variety of lodging options.

Trivia: Stalactites in Mammoth Cave grow downward – they hang "tight" to the ceiling. Stalagmites grow upward - some day they "might" reach the ceiling.

PARK NOTES

MESA VERDE

Colorado - Est. June 20, 1906



A little over 800 years ago, the Native Americans who occupied the four corners region of the southwest began constructing the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde.

The Ancestral Puebloans lived in the cliff dwellings for less than 100 years and by 1300, the Ancient Ones had all but abandoned their cliffside abodes. Speculation abounds regarding why these people packed up and left. Drought and depleted resources are thought to be contributing factors.

Nevertheless, when visiting Mesa Verde, you will be treated to a number of well-preserved cliff dwellings rich with history. In 1900, Virginia McClurg and Lucy Peabody formed the **Colorado Cliff Dwellings Association** with its sole purpose to preserve and protect the area from treasure hunters. In 1901 the first of at least 5 bills was introduced to Congress to create Colorado Cliff Dwellings National Park. All of these bills failed.

Finally, in 1906, Mesa Verde became the country's first National Park to be set aside to "preserve the works of man" when president Theodore Roosevelt signed the bill.

PARK NOTES

Those who visit this park will be astounded at the quality and sophistication of construction that was put into the creation of the over 600 cliff dwellings given the tools and technology of the era.

When to go. Like most parks, Mesa Verde is always open. The summer months draw the largest crowds.

What to do. The main event at Mesa Verde is to experience the

incredible "works of man" that cling to the cliffs. Take the **Cliff Palace, Balcony House or Long House Tour** and imagine what it was like to construct these dwellings so handsomely crafted out of sandstone, mortar and wooden beams.

Spruce Tree House is the best preserved of all the cliff dwellings and does not require a tour guide to visit. However, due to a rock fall in August of 2015, these dwellings are closed to the public indefinitely. Spruce Tree House is still viewable from overlooks near the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum.

If you've got a day or two, take a hike about the park. Hiking in Mesa Verde is allowed only on designated trails.

The 3 mile round trip **Petroglyph Loop Trail** beginning at the Chapin Mesa Trailhead leads you to Pictograph Point - the largest group of petroglyphs in Mesa Verde.

Where to stay. Inside the park, the Far View Lodge located at mile marker 15 offers a panoramic view of three "four corners" states - Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. The Lodge is open seasonally. The Morefield Campground offers 267 developed campsites. Several of the park's best hikes originate from this campground.

Trivia: The subterranean kiva's found in the park remain at 50 degrees Fahrenheit all year round. So for the Ancestral Puebloans, the kiva stayed cool in the summer, and only a small fire was needed to keep it warm in the winter.



Experience These!

- Stop by the new Visitor and Research Center
- Drive the Mesa Top and Cliff Palace Loop Roads
- Take a Guided Tour of the cliff dwellings
- Hike the Petroglyph Loop Trail
- Trek about another trail

MOUNT RAINIER

Washington - Est. March 2, 1899

Mount Rainier, located 80 miles southeast of Tacoma, WA, hasn't erupted for the past 150 years. Yet the mountain is still considered an "active volcano." Towering 14,410 feet above nearby Seattle, Rainier is considered one of the world's most dangerous volcanoes and is noted to be the most prominent peak of the Cascade Mountain range.

Open year round, Rainier offers abundant opportunities to play in the great outdoors. The summer months of July and August are generally sunny and mild while heavy winter snowfall lasts from November thru April.

The twenty-six major glaciers located on Mt. Rainier make it the most glaciated peak in North America. Paradise, one of the park's five developed areas, is famous for its breathtaking views and glorious wildflower meadows. At 5,400', Paradise receives an average of 54 feet of snow annually.

When to go: If you choose to visit Rainier in the summer, be sure arrive early as parking can be nearly impossible to find on a sunny day! Parking lots fill up quickly!

With over 600 inches of snowfall during winter, the only open road to the park is the section between the Nisqually Entrance and Paradise.



Experience These!

- Take in the splendor of the wildflower bloom
- Visit the Longmire Museum
- Hike the Skyline Trail
- Ponder the view from Panorama Point
- Shoot a Marmot (with your camera)



What to do: Rainier offers a plethora of outdoor opportunities! The subalpine meadows during the summer months will treat you to a dazzling display of wildflowers. Biking, fishing, boating and climbing will keep even the heartiest busy.

Hiking Rainier. For the super-hearty with plenty of time, the Wonderland Trail is 93 miles long and completely encircles Rainier. For the rest of us, Rainier has over 260 miles of maintained trails to trek about on a daily basis. A great day hike in the Paradise region is the **Skyline Trail**. The 5.5 mile loop trail climbs 1700 feet up to Panorama Point.

Where to stay: Mt. Rainier features three developed campgrounds with over 500 campsites for both RVs and tent campers.

Rainier also hosts two lodges within park boundaries. Paradise Inn is one of the classic Great Lodges of the National Parks. Built in 1916, this historic Lodge has 121 guest rooms and is open mid-May thru early October.

The National Park Inn, located in the Longmire Historic District, is open year round operating with 25 guest rooms.

Wildlife: Along the trails in the Paradise section of the park, you will most likely happen upon numerous **Hoary Marmots** – furry little creatures who are not afraid to pose for pictures! They are also known to whistle as you approach them.

Trivia: At the summit of Mt. Rainier, there exists an otherworldly grotto of ice caves formed from heat rising from the volcanic cauldron below.

PARK NOTES

NORTH CASCADES

Washington - Est. October 2, 1968



North Cascades National Park is one of the country's unique "wilderness" parks. The park is comprised of the Ross Lake National Recreation Area, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area and the almost entirely wilderness expanses of North Cascades National Park.

The Ross Lake National Recreation Area and the North Cascades Highway (SR20) divide the Park into two separate units – north and south. To the south, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area is accessible only by foot, boat or float plane. There are no roads leading into this segment of the park. Passenger ferry service on the 50 mile Lake Chelan is available departing from Chelan, WA.

At the far end of Lake Chelan, the community of Stehekin offers visitors an escape from the stresses of the modern day world.

The name "Stehekin" comes from a Native American word meaning "the way through." This tiny town serves as the gateway into Lake Chelan National Recreation Area and to the rest of the North Cascades National Park Complex, Stephen Mather Wilderness, and adjacent National Forest Wilderness Areas.

North Cascades hosts some of America's most beautiful mountain scenery – tall jagged peaks, glacially carved valleys and magnificent waterfalls. North Cascades gets its name from the many waterfalls, rivers and streams that flow from the park's 300 glaciers.

PARK NOTES

The park is accessed via the North Cascades Highway (SR20). This road is considered by many to be the most scenic mountain drive in all of Washington.

When to go: Winter visitation can be challenging as the area receives significant amounts of snowfall. The North Cascades Highway will typically close from mid-November to April. Summer months provide the best conditions for visiting this park.

What to do: If you're looking for a premier backpacking experience, you've come to the right park! There are over 400 miles of trails situated throughout the park including a portion of the 2663 mile long Pacific Crest Trail. You'll find 127 glacially fed alpine lakes dotting this backcountry landscape.

Climbing the mountain peaks, day hiking the park's many trails, floating rivers, fishing, kayaking and canoeing, horseback riding and biking will fill your days at this very modestly visited park.

Where to stay: North Cascades has five campgrounds accessible by car, three by boat and with over 400 miles of backcountry trails, there are numerous opportunities for wilderness camping.

For those who prefer a bed to a sleeping bag, there are seven lodges dotted throughout the park to accommodate a good night's rest!

Trivia: North Cascades is home to over 300 glaciers, more than any other park in the lower 48 states.



Experience These!

- Drive the North Cascades Highway to the Washington Pass Overlook
- Stop at the Diablo Lake Overview and gasp at the incredible view (pictured above left)
- Hike a section of the Pacific Crest Trail at Rainy Pass
- Take the ferry from Chelan to Stehekin Landing

OLYMPIC

Washington - Est. June 29, 1938

At *Olympic National Park* you'll need more than a day to experience the three distinctively different ecosystems Mother Nature has packaged into this remarkable landscape.

At the pinnacle of Olympics' three primary biomes, you'll find the *glacier-capped peaks* of Mt. Olympus and the surrounding mountains, which make up the majority of the park's wilderness.

The second ecosystem is found within the temperate *Hoh and Quinault Rain Forests*. These areas of the park are comprised of a lush landscape of trees, mosses and ferns, which are recipients of over 12 feet of annual rainfall.

The park's third ecosystem includes a 73 mile stretch of *wild coastline*. Here you will experience sandy beaches, giant "sea stacks" (islands just offshore) and the sun bleached driftwood logs that have accumulated along the shoreline.

Opening up the Elwha River. One of the most ambitious projects ever completed within the confines of a National Park was the removal of two dams that were built in the early 1900's along the Elwha River within Olympic National Park. The demolition of the Elwha and Clines Canyon Dams began in 2011 and the project has been successful in restoring salmon to the river while revealing sacred Indian sites that were once covered by water.



Experience These!

- Spend a day in the Rainforest
- Observe the Sea Stacks while strolling the beaches
- Trek a trail on Hurricane Ridge
- Hike up to Marymere Falls
- Get soaked at Sol Duc Hot Springs



When to visit: Open year round, Olympic is mostly visited between the months of June through September when the weather is most desirable. During the winter months, some of the park's roads and facilities are closed due to weather.

What to do: Exploring the park's three different ecosystems is a "must do" to fully appreciate the diversity of Olympic. Spend some time atop the park's mountains, noodle along the sandy beaches and be sure to explore the rainforests.

For the day hiker, Olympic offers an abundance of trails that will have you trekking through the temperate rainforests, strolling along the coastal beaches or hiking up into the highlands. One of our favorites was the Marymere Falls/Barnes Creek Trail, which climbs up to Aurora Ridge. (This one is a bit steep with a 4200' elevation gain!)

Also, there numerous kayaking and canoeing options in Olympic along with tide pooling, fishing wildlife viewing.

Where to stay: Campsites abound in the mountains, along the coast or amongst the mosses and ferns in the park's famous Hoh Rainforest.

We opted to stay at the Lake Crescent Lodge. The accommodations were adequate; however, the dining experience was beyond a doubt the best we've ever had in all of the parks we've visited!

Trivia: Olympic was almost named Elk National Park because it protects the world's largest herd of Roosevelt Elk.

PARK NOTES

PETRIFIED FOREST

Arizona - Est. December 9, 1962



Petrified Forest National Park is divided into two sections. The Painted Desert – a landscape consisting of colorful layers of intriguing landforms, lies north of Interstate 40. South of I-40 is where you'll find the treasure trove of petrified trees.

Once a land filled with tall conifers, floods felled the trees 225 million years ago and buried them in a mix of silt, mud and volcanic ash. Sediment cut off oxygen, which slowed the decay of the trees.

The sediment seeped into the logs replacing the original wood tissue with silica deposits. Over time, the silica crystallized into quartz, thus petrifying the trees!

Among the most fascinating aspects of Petrified are the park's petroglyphs - rock drawings created by Native Americans who chiseled through the dark patina known as desert varnish that covers the surface of sandstone. Beneath the varnish, the rock is much lighter in color, so the "rock art" usually stands out clearly once the surface layer has been removed.

The meaning of the "rock art" is speculative; however, much of the work seems to be inspired by nature. Many petroglyphs depict solar calendars while others resemble human and animal figures, geometric shapes and unidentifiable rock doodles!

PARK NOTES

When to visit: The park is open year round. Summer is the busiest (and warmest), winter the slowest. With spring come the wildflowers as well as the wind. Fall is an excellent time to visit.

What to do: Start your visit at the Painted Desert Visitor Center on the north side of I-40 (Exit 311). Take the short scenic drive through the Painted Desert section stopping at the viewpoints for panoramic sights of this colorful desertscape.

The best way to experience the petrified forest is to hike amongst the ancient trees. Several maintained trails and some suggested routes have been established to allow you to get to know the park more intimately. One of the largest collections of petrified wood can be found in the Jasper Forest.

Other things to experience include the archeological site **Puerco Pueblo**. Visit **Newspaper Rock** and enjoy the 650 petroglyphs etched into the boulders. Trek the **Blue Mesa Trail** and experience hiking in a "badlands" environment. The **Giant Logs Trail** takes you to the largest petrified log in the park – "Old Faithful!"

Where to stay: There are no lodges or developed campgrounds in the park; however, backcountry camping is allowed. Hotels can be found in town of Holbrook 26 miles west of the park.

Challenge: Perhaps the major challenge faced by this park is theft of the petrified wood, which is easily accessible to all park visitors. If you visit this unique park, please DO NOT remove the petrified wood! However, do enjoy this unique experience!

Trivia: Petrified wood is almost solid quartz. It's so hard, it can only be cut with a diamond tipped saw!



Experience These!

- Visit the Rainbow Forest Museum
- Investigate Puerco Pueblo
- Discover Newspaper Rock and read the petroglyphs
- Hike the Blue Mesa Trail
- Marvel at the petrified trees

PINNACLES

California - Est. January 10, 2013

Pinnacles, America's newest major National Park, gets its name from the unusual rock formations that were once part of an ancient volcano that has over time eroded into a series of spires, cliffs and jagged ridges. Originally designated as a National Monument in 1908 by Theodore Roosevelt, Pinnacles became the country's 59th major National Park in 2013.

Condor country. Pinnacles has been a part of the California Condor Recovery program since 2003. Currently, the park is carefully monitoring 25 of these free flying birds that were once on the verge of extinction.

These rare birds with a wingspan of up to 10 feet make their homes in the rocky cliffs, spires and pinnacles here at Pinnacles! To get a close look at these creatures, you'll either need high-powered binoculars or you'll need to take a hike up into the mountains.

As carrion feeders go, the condor feeds on the carcasses of dead animals; hence they are nature's genuine recycler! But be advised...from a distance, the ever-present Turkey Vulture looks identical to the Condor.

Getting there: There are two entrances to Pinnacles; however, there are no roads through the park connecting the eastern entrance to the western entrance! The east entrance to Pinnacles is located in northern California about 30 miles south of Hollister. The west entrance is accessed via Hwy 101 and SR 146 38 miles southeast of Salinas, CA.



Experience These!

- Explore the Talus Caves (Balconies and/or Bear Gulch)
- Hike the rocky spires of Pinnacles
- Marvel at the grace of a Condor in flight
- Enjoy the splendor that embodies our National Parks



When to go. With a Mediterranean climate, Pinnacles has hot, dry summers and mild winters. The park and the east Pinnacles Visitor Center is open year-round. The western Visitor Center is open seasonally.

What to do: Pinnacles has more than 30 miles of groomed hiking trails ranging from easy terrain through flat grasslands to uphill climbs that are so steep, you'll need to utilize handholds and a fence to navigate the trail.

Talus Caves. While trekking about this park, you may come across two talus caves - Bear Gulch and Balconies. These "caves" were formed when steep and narrow canyons were filled with massive boulders that fell from cliffs above. The boulders now serve as the cave's roof.

Whereas Balconies Cave, located on the west side of the park is typically accessible year round, the lower portion of Bear Gulch Cave, located on the east side of Pinnacles, closes to protect a colony of Townsend's big-eared bats. Bear Gulch is typically closed from mid-May to mid-July while the bats are raising their young.

Where to stay: There are no lodges within the park's boundaries; however, camping is available in the Pinnacles Campground located in the eastern section of the park. Lodging can be found in nearby Hollister.

Trivia: According to scientific knowledge, Pinnacles' 400 different bee species represent the highest bee diversity per unit area of any place on earth.

PARK NOTES

REDWOOD

California - Est. October 2, 1968



Redwood National Park. The Coastal Redwoods in this park stake claim to be the *world's tallest living things!* Reaching heights up to 370 feet, these giants are found only along a narrow strip of coastline in southern Oregon and northern California.

The lifespan of the Coastal Redwood averages 500 to 700 years, although some are known to live over 2000 years. Their 12 inch thick bark protects them from diseases and insect infestation. The tree's main marauder – mankind!

Between 1880 and the early 1900's, thousands of acres of old-growth redwoods were cut to the ground. Alarmed citizens formed the *Save the Redwood League* in 1918 to protect the remaining groves from complete decimation. Of the over 2 million acres of coastal redwoods that once graced the coastline, only 5% of these majestic trees remain!

When to go: The influence of the ocean provides fairly constant weather along the coastal sections of the park. Expect mild temperatures throughout the year (40° - mid 60's° F).

What to do: By all means, trek through the trees on over 170 miles of groomed trails found within this fantastic park and begin to grasp the scale of these living treasures.

PARK NOTES

Take a hike through **Fern Canyon**, a spectacular shaded canyon with 50 foot walls draped with 7 different kinds of ferns.

Walk along the **seashore** or hike the park's most popular trail - the 1.3 mile **Lady Bird Johnson Grove Nature Trail**, which passes by

Hyperion – the largest of the park's redwoods rising 380 feet above the forest floor.

If time is limited, take one of the many scenic drives though the forests of Redwood. The **Howland Hill Road** scenic drive is a 10 mile, one-way tour from Crescent City to US-199. Mostly unpaved, this road leads you through the towering trees found in the Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park.

Travel through the heart of the old growth redwood forest found in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park on the **Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway**.

To observe **Roosevelt Elk** (pictured below), take the **Davison Road** scenic drive. Once endangered, these majestic creatures can be spotted grazing throughout the park.

Where to stay: Redwood hosts four developed campgrounds with over 300 campsites. All have flush toilets and showers! For backpacking enthusiasts, Redwood offers over 200 miles of back-country trails with 36 tent sites.

There is no lodging available within the park boundaries; however, nearby Crescent City has plenty of options.

Trivia: These tallest of living things begin sprouting from a seed the size of a tomato seed, which comes from a pinecone the size of an olive!



Experience These!

- Hug a Redwood and give thanks to the *Save the Redwoods League* for helping protect this forest
- Visit the Lady Bird Johnson Grove and examine Hyperion
- Tour the many Scenic Drives
- Stroll Gold Bluffs Beach and Fern Canyon

ROCKY MOUNTAIN

Colorado - Est. January 26, 1915

Rocky Mountain High. The 2,700 mile Rocky Mountain chain, stretching from Mexico to Alaska, is the world's longest mountain barrier. In the southern section of this mountain range you'll find the magnificent Rocky Mountain National Park!

For an area to be classified as *Alpine Country*, its elevation must exceed 11,400 feet above sea level. Trees do not grow at this elevation. Breathing can be challenging at this height as well! One third of Rocky Mountain National Park is "alpine" - over 78 peaks exceed the 12,000 foot mark!

Rocky hosts many of Colorado's 53 "fourteeners" - mountain peaks exceeding 14,000 feet in elevation. Long's Peak, the park's highest, measures in at 14,249 feet.

The **Trail Ridge Road** - America's highest highway - roughly follows a 10,000 year-old hunting trail and crests at 12,183 feet. At the summit of this road, the air is thin and crisp and the view is splendid. A trip to the summit is worth the drive!

When to go: Rocky is open all year. Summer and fall are the busiest. If traveling during these months, be sure to arrive early and if you plan on camping, make reservations! Winter access is subject to weather conditions. Trail Ridge Road closes in winter.



Experience These!

- Wildlife viewing is the number one rated activity at Rocky. Go spot a moose, a marmot, a bighorn or a bear.
- Drive the Trail Ridge & Old Falls River Roads
- Hike the Bear Lake Trails
- Experience Alberta Falls



What to do: Rocky hosts two outstanding scenic drives. The 48 mile **Trail Ridge Road** is considered the "highway to the sky" and will expose you to dramatic views of the Rockies. Plan on at least a half-day to experience this memorable roadway.

The **Old Fall River Road** is an 11 mile, one-way "motor nature trail" with a posted speed limit of 15 mph! Primarily gravel, the Old Fall River Road will lead you from Horseshoe Park through the park's wilderness areas to Fall River Pass.

Hiking Rocky. Once you've taken the scenic drives, go take a hike on any of the over 350 miles of trails that weave a tapestry of tranquility for those who venture beyond the parking lot.

Many of these trails are located in the wilderness sections of the park; however, the trails originating at **Bear Lake** are easy to access and lead to beautiful lakes and stunning views. Our favorite hike in this area was a trek around the Bear Lake Loop. From there we ventured up to Dream Lake and Emerald Lake. Continuing on, we hiked up to Lake Haiyaha (elev. 10,220) before heading down to Alberta Falls.

Where to stay: Overnight lodging is available in nearby Estes Park and Grand Lake. There are no lodges available inside the park.

Rocky Mountain has 5 established campgrounds. Four of the campgrounds are open for vehicle and tent camping. One is restricted to tent only. Reservations are strongly recommended.

Trivia: Weather in the Rockies is extreme! It may snow in July!

PARK NOTES

SAGUARO

Arizona - Est. October 14, 1994



The *saguaro cactus* is the symbolic icon of the American southwest. Its life begins as a shiny black seed the size of a pinhead! Out of the 40 million pinheads a saguaro produces in its lifetime, very few will survive the harsh desert environment.

The survivors grow very slowly. On its first birthday, the tiny saguaro measures only $\frac{1}{4}$ inch tall! On its fifteenth birthday, it may have reached the 12 inch mark!

After 75 years the cactus could sprout its first arm, which starts out as a small prickly ball. From there, most of the "arms" reach for the sky resembling human-like characters in an old western stagecoach robbery!

At the 100 year mark, the saguaro is capable of reaching 25 feet. Those surviving 150+ years have been known to grow as tall as 50 feet towering well above other desert plants.

In the spring, the saguaro cactus sprouts a gorgeous white flower that opens up after sunset. Eventually, the flowers turn into a red fig-like fruit that Native Americans made into jams, syrup and cactus wine.

PARK NOTES

Getting there: Saguaro is divided into two Units: Saguaro West and Saguaro East. Both are accessed off Interstate 10 about a half hour drive from downtown Tucson, AZ.

When to visit: The park is open every day except for Christmas.

The best time of year to experience Saguaro is during the fall, winter and spring months.

Where to stay: There are no campgrounds or overnight lodging facilities available in either district. Lodging is available in nearby Tucson. There are 21 backcountry campsites located in 6 designated wilderness campgrounds within the Rincon District.

What to do: During January thru April, guided Ranger Programs give visitors a look at the many stories of the Sonoran Desert. Among the most popular are the guided walks that take you amongst the giant saguaros.

Saguaro offers 165 miles of maintained hiking trails in its two districts ranging from easy walks along interpretive trails to day-long wilderness treks.

Driving Tours: The scenic 5 mile Bajada Loop Drive in the West District passes through a dense saguaro forest along a graded dirt road. The 8 mile Cactus Forest Drive located in the East District winds through another saguaro forest providing a glimpse at life in the Sonoran Desert.

Although Saguaro is believed to be primarily a desert park, Mica Mountain located in the eastern district tops out at an elevation of 8,666 ft. Here you will find a dense forest of Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and Aspen.

Trivia: There are over 1.6 million saguaros estimated to be thriving in the park!



Experience These!

- Take the two driving tours - Bajada Loop Drive in the West Unit and the Cactus Forest Drive in the East Unit
- Experience the wildflower bloom in the spring
- Learn about homesteading along the Freeman Homestead Trail (East Unit)
- Hike the Valley View Overlook Trail (West Unit)

SEQUOIA

California - Est. September 25, 1890

Sequoia giganteum! Somewhere between 2,300 and 2,700 years ago, the *sequoia giganteum* known as The General Sherman Tree planted its roots in what is now Sequoia National Park.

The General isn't the world's tallest tree (275 feet). It isn't the widest (the circumference at its base measures over 100 feet) or oldest tree; however, by sheer volume, it is by far the earth's most massive living organism!

But the General wasn't always the world's biggest. The Crannell Creek Giant Coastal Redwood near Trinidad, CA had that distinction of being up to 25% larger than the General...up until the 1940's when it was cut down!

Saving Big Trees. We are fortunate to have had a small group of dedicated and persistent people who fought for the protection of these treasures in the face of adversity! Had it not been for the likes of folks like John Muir and virtual unknowns George W. Stewart and Frank Walker, the fate of these unique trees may have fallen into the hands of those wishing to cash in on these precious resources.

When to go. The park is open year round. Winter conditions can limit access to some areas of the park. Summers are crowded and advanced reservations for campgrounds are recommended.



Experience These!

- Walk amongst the Giants and ponder their enormity!
- Visit the Giant Forest Museum
- Climb the stairs to the top of Moro Rock
- Take a peek inside Tharp's Log
- Explore Crystal Cave



What to do. The best way to experience Sequoia is to walk about the trees. The **Walk amongst the Giants** is a "must do." Forty miles of maintained trails wander through the sequoia grove.

The most popular walk is the Congress Trail, an easy two-mile loop that begins and ends at the General Sherman Tree. Along the path, you'll be treated to the President Tree, the House and Senate Groups and the McKinley Tree.

For an ambitious hike, take the 5.1 mile Trail of the Sequoias & Circle Meadow Loop beginning at the General Sherman Tree. Along the path you'll find Tharp's Log - the rustic lodge Hale Tharp constructed out of a hollowed giant sequoia tree.

Climb up the 797 foot staircase to the summit of Moro Rock, a granite dome that will treat you to a fantastic view of the Great Western Divide and the western half of the park.

Where to stay. There are 7 established campgrounds in Sequoia with over 470 developed campsites. Dorst Creek in the northern section of the park hosts 211 sites. Lodgepole Campground near the Visitor Center features 203 campsites.

The 102- room Wuksachi Lodge is located in the Giant Forest area of Sequoia National Park. The lodge offers a full-service restaurant, cocktail lounge and a retail and ski shop.

Trivia: Sequoia trees are highly resistant to disease, insects and fire. However, they have a shallow root system, which contributes to their main cause of death - toppling over!

PARK NOTES

SHENANDOAH

Virginia - Est. May 22, 1926



For over a hundred years, settlers lived on the lands that now make up **Shenandoah National Park**. To create this park, the state of Virginia would need to acquire over 1000 tracts of private land and donate them to the nation. This was no easy task and was rife with controversy.

During the Great Depression, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps were established in or adjacent to Shenandoah. A good portion of the park's famous Skyline Drive was constructed between 1933 and 1942 when thousands of young CCC men lent a hand in developing this park.

When to go: Shenandoah is always open. Portions of Skyline Drive will close due to inclement weather and at night during deer hunting season. The busiest time of year is during the fall when people flock to the park to experience "Leaf Peeping Season." This is when the leaves of the deciduous trees turn color. Should you choose to experience the park during the Fall Color Explosion - go early and go midweek! During leaf peeping season, traffic will be denser than fog on the Maine coast!

What to do: Shenandoah offers a wide range of activities for visitors. Leaf Peeping is perhaps the most popular activity.

PARK NOTES

The scenic 105 mile **Skyline Drive** is a "must do" and includes 75 overlooks providing vistas of Shenandoah Valley and the rolling hills of the Piedmont. If the traffic drives you crazy, park the car, strap on your daypack and go for a hike! You will never forget experiencing the spectacular views as you trek about any of Shenandoah's over 500 miles of hiking trails.

Hike up the craggy peaks of **Old Rag Mountain** - the park's most popular trail...and its most difficult! Or for a real adventure, hike the 101 miles of the famous **Appalachian Trail** that passes through Shenandoah.

For the day hiker, take a trek to the top of **Stony Man Mountain** and admire the view of the Shenandoah Valley below. Hike down to **Dark Hollow Falls**. The scenery and the short hike back up will take your breath away! You might encounter a black bear sighting as we did! This park has a dense population of these furry critters.

Where to stay: Shenandoah has four developed campgrounds with over 600 campsites accommodating RVs as well as tents. Many of the sites can be reserved in advance; however, several at each campground are available on a first-come, first served basis.

Inside the park, Shenandoah offers three lodging facilities: Big Meadow Lodge, Skyline Lodge, and the Lewis Mountain Cabins south of Big Meadow.

Trivia: Shenandoah has created a formula for determining a hike's difficulty rating: **Elevation gain x 2 x distance (in miles)**. The product's **square root** is the trail rating. **Easy** hikes have a rating of 50 or less. **Moderate** hikes: 50-100. **Strenuous:** 150+ (Example: A 5 mile hike with a 900' elevation gain: $900 \times 2 \times 5 = 9000$ $\sqrt{9000} =$ A trail rating of approximately **95**...A **Moderate+** hike!)



Experience These!

- Drive the entire length of Skyline Drive
- Hike a section of the Appalachian Trail
- Trek down to Dark Hollow Falls
- Experience Fall Leaf Peeping Season
- Enjoy the flora and fauna

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

North Dakota - Est. November 10, 1978

"There can be nothing in the world more beautiful than the Yosemite groves of giant redwoods and sequoias, the canyons of the Colorado, the canyons of Yellowstone, the three Tetons; and our people should see to it that they are preserved for their children and their children's children forever, with their majestic beauty all unmarred."

Theodore Roosevelt

President **Theodore Roosevelt** (Teddy) is considered by many to be one of conservation's greatest advocates! As president, Teddy was responsible for creating the US Forest Service, establishing 51 bird sanctuaries, 4 National Game Preserves, 150 National Forests, 5 National Parks and enabling the Antiquities Act which led to the establishment of 18 National Monuments – five of which became National Parks. The passage above describes Teddy's love for our parks and his wish to see them protected.

During his presidency, Roosevelt signed legislation preserving over 230,000,000 acres of public land. Ninety-five years after he first set foot in North Dakota, Roosevelt was honored with a National Park bearing his name.

Getting there: Located in the "badlands" of western North Dakota off I-94, this park is comprised of three units –the South Unit, North Unit and the Elkhorn Ranch Unit.

When to go: The park is open year round. Winter conditions (snow and ice) can close access to all units of the park.



Experience These!

- Take the Scenic Drives in both the North and South Units
- Enjoy the abundant prairieland wildlife
- Visit Roosevelt's Maltese Cross Cabin
- Trek about the trails of the park
- Honor Teddy's request to help preserve the parks



What to do: The 36 mile Scenic Loop Drive in the South Unit will expose you to a plethora of items of visual interest! The 14 mile Scenic Drive in the North Unit runs from the park Entrance Station to the Oxbow Overlook.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park is teeming with prairieland wildlife! A large population of **wild horses** can be found grazing on the upland plateaus.

The **American Bison** (buffalo), the largest and perhaps the most ferocious mammal in North America, was once on the brink of extinction. The "Tatanka" (the Indian name for Bison) were saved by a few foresighted people including Teddy Roosevelt! Today 200-400 bison roam the park's South Unit while between 100-300 occupy the North Unit.

You'll also observe a well established population of elk, several prairie dog "towns" and a herd of Longhorn Steers. Be on the alert for rattlesnakes! I darn near stepped on one shooting pictures of a Momma Bison and her calves!

There are plenty of day hikes located within both the North and South Units including the 96 mile Maah Daah Hey Trail, which connects the North Unit to the South.

Where to stay: There are no lodges in this park; however, camping is available in both the North and South Units.

Trivia: Oddly, Theodore's North Unit operates on Central Time, while the South Unit is set up on Mountain Time!

PARK NOTES

VIRGIN ISLANDS

US Virgin Islands - Est. August 2, 1956



During World War One, the United States purchased the islands of St. John, St. Croix, St. Thomas and over 50 other islands in the Caribbean from Denmark for \$25 million to keep them out of the hands of Germany.

In 1956, conservationist Lawrence Rockefeller donated more than 5000 acres on the island of St. John to the US to become the country's 29th National Park. Six years later, 5,650 underwater acres were added to the park's domain.

The park covers over half of the island of St. John and about 95% of Hassel Island, which is located on the western edge of St. Thomas's harbor. The park includes over 100 historic sites that collectively represent some of the most undisturbed and comprehensive Caribbean landscapes and artifacts.

Getting there: There is no airport on the island of St. John so to get to this park, you will fly to **Thomas Cyril E. King Airport** (STT) on the island of St. Thomas. From there, either rent a car or hire a taxi to take you to the Ferry Depot at the east end of the island. From the Ferry Depot, hop a vehicle or passenger ferry to get to the National Park!

PARK NOTES

When to go: The park is open year round. Summer months bring on more rain and lighter winds and can experience tropical storms and hurricanes. During the winter months you are much more likely to experience stronger winds and less rainfall.

What to do: Most visitors head to the beaches when visiting this park. Trunk Bay (left) is considered one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. The park has incredible opportunities for snorkeling and diving and features an underwater snorkeling trail just off the shore of Trunk Bay. The underwater trail includes plaques providing information on the fishes and coral reefs.

Hiking in Paradise: Hiking is one of the more popular activities on the island. There are 20 established hiking trails available offering hikes both short and long. Reef Bay Trail is considered one of the more difficult trails; however, you'll be treated to fantastic views and island petroglyphs as well!

Where to stay: The Cinnamon Bay Campground offers bare tent campsites available or you can rent a tent complete with cots, bedding, cooking and eating equipment!

As for lodging within the park, the Campground offers a number of 15' x 15' cottages with awe-inspiring views of the beach. In addition, the Caneel Bay Resort with 166 rooms and four restaurants offers visitors an upscale, yet pricey lodging experience.

Trivia: Although the Virgin Islands are a territory of the United States, it is the only place under US jurisdiction where driving a car on the island requires you to drive on the left side of the road!



Experience These!

- Snorkel the self-guided underwater trail at Trunk Bay
- Take a bus tour of the island
- Hike the Cinnamon Bay Trail
- Explore the Petroglyph Trail
- Trek down to Reef Bay Sugar Mill Ruins

VOYAGEURS

Minnesota - Est. January 8, 1971

Voyageurs National Park. The French word “voyageur” means traveler. To be a voyageur in this land of old rock, pristine pine and clear, dark waters meant to travel the interconnected waterways as a fur trader by boat. The demand for beaver pelts brought a wave of entrepreneurial “voyageurs” to this region in the late 1600’s.

Located in the northern section of the Minnesota, the majority of activities at Voyageurs center on the four largest lakes: Rainy Lake, Kabetogama Lake, Namakan Lake and Sand Point Lake. The park is accessible by car; however, to truly experience this remarkable landscape, one must park the car and hop on a boat!

When to go: Like most all National Parks, Voyageurs is open all year. Two of the three Visitors Centers do close down for the winter. Rainy Lake Visitor Center remains open all year.

What to do: Fishing, boating, camping and hiking are all popular activities at Voyageurs. Guided boat and canoe tours are offered in the summer months and reservations are recommended. These tours typically begin at the three Visitor Centers.

This water-based park includes 26 interior lakes, 900 islands and 655 miles of shoreline. The fishing for walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, muskellunge and crappie is superb!



Experience These!

- Take a guided Boat Tour into the park
- Participate in the park’s Hike for Health program
- Paddle back in history aboard the 26 foot North Canoe
- Join park staff on a Garden Walk
- Take a boat ride to Kettle Falls



Hike to Health. One way to become happier, healthier, concentrate better and stay active is to go take a hike! With that being said, Voyageurs NP instituted the Hike to Health program encouraging people of all ages to get outside and explore the grandeur of this park along its groomed trails accessible by automobile. Many of those trails are near the Ash River and Rainy Lake areas.

The park offers visitors a *Hike to Health Trail Passport*. The idea behind this passport is to get you outdoors hiking the park’s many trails. Once on the trail, your task is to find the Hike to Health raised trail marker. Using a pencil or other writing device, rub the marker on the designated page of the passport.

Fill your passport with notes and observations of each hike. Once you complete a series of hikes, you’ll be officially recognized by the Park Service for your healthy efforts!

For those boating about the park, there are also a number of trails that can be accessed only by water!

Where to stay: Tent camping in Voyageurs requires a boat as all campsites are accessible only by water. There are 270 sites with excellent amenities to choose from.

House boating is another way to experience Voyageurs. Hotel and lodge accommodations can be found in nearby International Falls, MN where the Park Headquarters is located and other nearby towns.

Trivia: During the winter months, the lakes of Voyageurs will freeze up to two feet thick!

PARK NOTES

WIND CAVE

South Dakota - Est. January 9, 1903



Beneath the prairie grasses of the Black Hills plains in South Dakota lies the world's 6th longest cave formations. Wind Cave gets its name from the sound of the whistling winds heard entering and exiting the cave's natural entrance - the ear-shaped opening pictured above.

Winds measuring up to 70 mile per hour as they rush in and out of the caves are caused by changes in barometric pressure within the caverns.

In 1903, Theodore Roosevelt established Wind Cave as the first National Park to protect a cave environment. Later, the lands above the cave system were added to the park expanding its stretch to include grazing lands for bison, elk and pronghorn.

Unlike Carlsbad Caverns or Mammoth Cave where damp conditions help create stalactites and stalagmites, the caverns at Wind Cave are relatively dry. Consequently, there are no stalactite or stalagmite formations found within these caves.

Getting there: Wind Cave is located in the southwestern section of South Dakota approximately 50 miles south of Rapid City, SD and 11 miles north of Hot Springs, SD. The NPS recommends you

DO NOT use your GPS to locate this park. We tried and got lost!

PARK NOTES

When to visit: The park is open all year. The area receives around 18" of rainfall annually. Summers are typically dry and hot. Spring is when most of the rain falls. Fall is perhaps the ideal time to visit this park as the days are warm and dry, the evenings pleasantly cool, crowds are small.

What to do: Cave Tours are the park's most popular activity. There are several tours daily each charging a nominal entry fee. The temperature inside the Cave remains at 54°F year round. The **Natural Entrance Tour** is rated moderately strenuous. It descends 300 stairs down into the cave structure and features the famous **boxwork** formation.

Boxwork, the honeycomb formation pictured above, is made of thin blades of calcium that project from the cave's ceiling and sidewalls. It's origin remains one of the cave's biggest mysteries. Another noteworthy cave feature is the small, knobby growths of calcite growing on the cave walls called **Cave Popcorn**.

Hiking. After touring the underground world of Wind Cave, take a hike on one of the park's 30 miles of hiking trails.

Where to stay: There are no lodging facilities in Wind Cave; however, the nearby towns of Hot Springs and Custer can accommodate those seeking a place to stay.

Elk Mountain Campground is the only camping facility at Wind Cave. Located on the edge of the prairie, it's open year round and campsites are available on a first-come first-served basis.

Wildlife: Wind Cave first became a National Game Preserve in 1912. With that, bison, elk, and pronghorn were reintroduced into the park. You'll most likely encounter the park's two dominant critters - the Prairie Dog and the mighty Bison.



Experience These!

- Experience one of the many Cave Tours
- Enjoy the bison roaming about the prairie
- Listen to prairie dogs barking
- Trek about a park trail
- Visit nearby Mt. Rushmore and Crazy Horse Memorials

WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS

Alaska - Est. December 2, 1980

Wrangell - St. Elias. Almost six times the size of Yellowstone, Wrangell is the country's most spacious park. A visit to Wrangell offers a wilderness experience on a grand scale. The park is bigger than Yellowstone, Yosemite and Switzerland combined!

The park's name comes from the two massive mountain ranges that form its backbone - Wrangell and St. Elias Mountain Ranges. Mt. St. Elias at 18,008' is America's second highest peak trailing only Denali. Nine of America's 16 highest peaks are located within this park.

Mt. Wrangell (14,163') is one of the largest active volcanoes in all of North America. The Malaspina Glacier located at the southern portion of the park is larger than the entire state of Rhode Island!

Getting there. Situated 246 miles east of Anchorage, AK, Wrangell is one of the three Alaskan National Parks accessible by automobile. However, the two roads that access the interior of the park (McCarthy Road and Nabesna Road) are unpaved and rough.

When to visit. The park never closes. The main season for visiting Wrangell is between early June and mid-September.

What to do. Wrangell has limited developed resources and caters primarily to wilderness-oriented activities. You are on your own to climb mountains, float rivers, ski upon glaciers or fly above it. Experience in outdoor survival techniques is recommended should you choose to explore the wilds of Wrangell.



Experience These!

- The first order of business - get to Wrangell!
- Get acquainted with the park at the Visitor Center located near Copper Center
- Take a Flightseeing Tour
- Visit McCarthy and Kennecott Mines



A good way to experience this park is to take a flightseeing tour from a licensed air taxi operator. You'll soar over many of the 150 massive glaciers and jagged mountain peaks while taking in the expanse of the Alaskan wilderness!

Hiking Wrangell. Most of Wrangell's hikes begin on maintained trails and many of the more accessible trails are located outside the park boundaries. Many of those within the park become routes across glaciated backcountry.

A popular activity at this park is to visit the hippy-dippy town of McCarthy while visiting the famous Kennecott Mines - once the world's richest copper mine. The road into McCarthy follows the previous route of the CRNW Railroad. It is a bumpy dirt road that rides like an old fashioned washboard.

The Kennecott Mines were acquired by the National Park Service in 1998 and these historic buildings are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (see picture at right)

Where to stay. The only campground inside the park is the Kennecott Campground located at mile post 27.8 on the Nabesna Road. There are several campgrounds found outside the park.

A wide range of lodging facilities can be found outside the park boundaries. The few lodges found inside Wrangell are accessible only by small aircraft.

Trivia. Approximately 25% (5000 square miles) of Wrangell-St. Elias is covered by glacial ice representing close to 60% of all glacial ice found in Alaska!

PARK NOTES

YELLOWSTONE

Wyoming/Montana/Idaho - Est. March 1, 1872



Yellowstone - the country's first National Park! The inscription on the Roosevelt Arch, which serves as the gateway to the northwestern entrance of Yellowstone states: **"For the Benefit and Enjoyment of the People."** Yellowstone became the world's first National Park in 1872 specifically to benefit and be enjoyed by people from all parts of the world.

Those who lobbied for Yellowstone to become the world's first park were fascinated by the over 10,000 hydrothermal features including 300 geysers, boiling hot springs, bubbling mud pots, fumaroles, the stunningly beautiful Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone with its thundering waterfalls, and the abundant wildlife that roam the park.

When to visit: Yellowstone never closes. Winter weather does shut down many of roads within the park. Summer is the busiest season in the park that attracts 5 million visitors annually.

What to do: Boating, biking, camping, hiking, bicycling, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, fishing, horseback riding and wildlife viewing are but a few of the many activities available.

PARK NOTES

The 142 mile **Grand Loop Road** is an excellent way to experience Yellowstone. The road forms a figure 8 and touches upon many of the key features of the park.

At the north end of the loop, walk along the **Mammoth Hot Springs Terrace** - a wooden boardwalk featuring constantly changing, ever steaming hydrothermal limestone terraces.

Heading east and then south on the Grand Loop Road, you'll be treated to the **Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone** and the **Upper and Lower Yellowstone Falls** (pictured left). Further along the route, the **Norris Geyser Basin** sits at the intersection of three major faults and is the hottest, oldest and most dynamic of Yellowstone's thermal regions.

Old Faithful, the world-renowned iconic feature of Yellowstone is located at the southern section of the Grand Loop Road. Old Faithful erupts on average every 88 minutes. Although it is the world's most famous geyser, it is not the world's tallest. That title goes to Steamboat Geyser found in the Norris Geyser Basin. Steamboat is known to throw water over 300 feet in the air!

Hiking. With over 900 miles of hiking trails crisscrossing throughout this park, there are plenty of opportunities to get out and stretch your legs!

Where to stay: Yellowstone features 9 lodges with over 2000 rooms including the Old Faithful Inn - one of the 16 Great Lodges of the National Parks. In addition, there are 12 front country campgrounds with over 1,700 campsites available.

Trivia: Trekking about the trails of Yellowstone is walking on top of a dormant volcano! The Yellowstone Caldera was formed by a massive volcanic eruption 640,000 years ago. When the caldera will blow again is under constant study!



Experience These!

- Drive the Grand Loop Road
- Experience the park's hydrothermal features
- View the wildlife (best in early morning and dusk)
- Hike the park's trails
- Explore the Terraces at Mammoth Hot Springs

YOSEMITE

California - Est. October 1, 1890

"I have seen persons of emotional temperament stand with tearful eyes, spellbound and dumb with awe, as they got their first view of the Valley from Inspiration Point, overwhelmed in the sudden presence of the unspeakable, stupendous grandeur." – **Galen Clark, guardian of the Yosemite Grant**

Yosemite! Those of you who have visited any number of our country's National Parks will most likely have a favorite. For me...it's Yosemite! Perhaps because it was the first park I was introduced to when I was a youngster. Then again, as Galen Clark suggests, this park, and its staggering natural beauty is the consummate Outdoor Cathedral! Yosemite is the spiritual home of John Muir, the conservationist who pined for places such as Yosemite to be preserved for the people for all time.

Carved by glaciers thousands of years ago, nature left behind a valley of almost incomprehensible beauty. As Mr. Clark summed up, looking out across the valley from Inspiration Point or Glacier Point will literally take your breath away. My favorite rock – Half Dome – is the park's iconic granite ambassador. Then there's the staggering steep face of El Capitan, which stands as guardian to those who enter the valley floor.

The sight of the many waterfalls that shower down from the mountaintops above will bring misty tears of joy to your eyes. Especially should you choose to hike up the Mist Trail to Vernal and Nevada Falls.

When to go: Yosemite is always open. When to go will be determined by what you are looking for in your Yosemite experience. Each season has its advantages. Our most tranquil experience was our visit in December.

What to do: There is plenty to do in this magnificent open-air theater! Here are a few of my favorite Yosemite memories: **Half Dome** – If you



Experience These!

- Take in the breathtaking view from Inspiration Point
- Gaze at the valley from Glacier Point
- Trek Tuolumne Meadows
- Hike the Mist Trail to Half Dome
- Visit the Big Trees of Mariposa Grove



are fortunate to get a permit to climb to the top of Half Dome, you will experience one of life's most exhilarating hikes! The final 400 feet are so steep, steel cables have been installed to assist your climb to the top!

Mist Trail – As you hike to Half Dome, be sure to take the Mist Trail. It follows the Merced River and treats you to a "misty" view of Vernal Falls.

From **Glacier Point** your view of Yosemite Valley 3200 feet below will be superlative. Gazing the skyline, the profile of Half Dome is picture perfect. Cloud's Rest and Yosemite Falls majestically fill the frame. From this vantage point, you can retrace your steps past Vernal and Nevada Falls and relive your hike up the Mist Trail.

On a hot summer day, there is nothing more refreshing than to lazily **float the Merced River**.

Take in **Inspiration Point** before sunrise and observe the silhouettes of El Cap and Half Dome. (pictured left)

One of the best ways to escape the crowds and experience Yosemite is to **take a hike!** There are hundreds of miles of hiking trails ranging from very easy hikes along the valley floor to very strenuous hikes up the granite walls of this fabulous park.

The **Valley Loop Trail** takes you through meadows, forests and along the Merced River with excellent views of El Cap and many of the park's waterfalls.

Where to stay: Lodging in Yosemite ranges from simple tent cabins to the luxurious hotels. In addition, there are 13 campgrounds located inside the park offering over 1400 available campsites.

Trivia: In 1864, to protect Yosemite Valley from over settlement, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Act of Congress transferring the Yosemite Valley to the state of California.

PARK NOTES

ZION

Utah - Est. November 19, 1919



Zion was originally named Mukuntuweap by explorer John Wesley Powell. In 1909, president William Taft announced the formation of **Mukuntuweap National Monument**, shocking local residents and Mormons who had referred to this iconic canyon as Zion.

In 1918, acting National Park Service Director, **Horace Albright**, boldly took action and changed the name of what would become the first of Utah's five National Parks to Zion National Monument. A year later, Congress created Zion National Park.

In 1956, **Kolob Canyon** (located northwest of Zion Canyon) was added to the park's domain. Kolob Canyon is a quiet reprieve from the hustle-bustle of its southeastern sister - Zion Canyon, the park's main corridor.

When to visit: The park is always open. Most of the park visitors come during the busy summer months. Spring and fall are considered the ideal time to visit Zion.

What to do: Zion offers visitors plenty to do including hiking, backpacking, biking, bird watching, camping, canyoneering, climbing, horseback riding, river trips and much more.

PARK NOTES

Hiking is our primary activity when visiting any of the country's parks. On our first visit to Zion, we took a trek via the La Verne Creek Trail out to **Kolob Arch** - the world's second largest freestanding natural arch. This 14 mile trek exposes you to the beauty and grandeur of a forested red rock canyon.

For an even more exhilarating experience, hike out to **Angel's Landing!**

To reach the point where "Angel's land," you first hike up Walter's Wiggles - a series of 21 switchbacks on a very steep incline. After "wiggling" your way up the paved portion of the trail, you'll come to Scout Lookout. This is the turnaround point for those who wish NOT to brave the last half-mile out to the Landing.

The final section of this adrenaline-charged hike is noted for it's extremely sharp cliff drop-offs. One particular segment of Angel's Landing features a thirty-foot long, two-foot wide footpath with a thousand foot drop-off on either side of the razor-thin ridge line! However, there is a chain you can grasp as you tread across it!

If steep drop-offs aren't appealing, slosh along the Virgin River through a cool 16 mile long slot canyon called **The Narrows**. As the name suggests, this is the narrowest section of Zion Canyon and hiking it means wading upstream in the Virgin River. The trail is virtually the river!

Where to stay: The Zion Park Lodge features delightful "deluxe cabins" restored to their original historic ambiance.

Zion offers three campgrounds - The South and Watchman Campgrounds are located in Zion Canyon and host a total of 303 campsites. Lava Point Campground offers 6 primitive sites.

Trivia: Zion is one of the few National Parks that allow pets on trails. The pet-friendly Pa'rus Trail runs 2 miles along the Virgin River.



Experience These!

- Visit Kolob Canyon and brave the hike to Kolob Arch
- Experience Walter's Wiggles and Angel's Landing
- Take your pet for a walk on the Pa'rus Trail
- Ride the Shuttlebus along the Zion Canyon Scenic Drive
- Enjoy a Zion sunrise/sunset from the Canyon Overlook Trail



Acknowledgements

Park Photography by
John Binkele and Andrew Thomas

John Binkele is the co-creator of the *Trekking the National Parks™* board game and the author of this Park Guide Book. The travels he and his wife Terry have made over the past several years to most all of America's 59 major National Parks provided the inspiration for the Guide Book and the impetus for the creation of their tabletop board game.

Andrew Thomas is an award winning landscape photographer from Ballarat, Australia who, along with his partner Debbie, has visited all 59 of our country's National Parks. Andrew's book *"The National Parks of the United States - A Photographic Journey"* was released to coincide with the Centennial of the National Park Service. Visit www.andrewthomasphotographer.com and check out Andrew's photographic journey to the National Parks of the United States.

Health Wealth is Everlasting

"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out going to the mountains is going home." **John Muir**

"Health is the first wealth," claimed the speaker at a conference I attended years ago. A simple sentence that has since meant so much to me. "What good am I without a healthy mind and body?" I pondered. No amount of money can ever replace good health. So, how does one achieve "Health Wealth?"

For me and my wife, we've adhered to the following Rx:

- **Drug:** Trekking the trails of the National Parks.
- **Dose:** Trails of any length!
- **Directions:** Start with a good breakfast. Load day pack with water and snacks. Lace up boots. Apply sunscreen, sunglasses and smile on face. Grab trekking poles and hike for the health of it!
- **Refills:** Unlimited!

Frederick Law Olmsted, the famous Landscape Architect who designed Central Park in New York once said "It is a scientific fact that occasional contemplation of natural scenes of an impressive character is favorable to the health and vigor of men and especially to the health and vigor of their intellect."

When Olmsted made this claim back in the 1860's, it was based more on intuition than scientific study. There wasn't much evidence to prove his point back then. Today, however, there is! Science and the medical profession has shown that exposure to nature can have significant healing powers. Spending time outdoors can help cure a number of health related issues – sleeplessness, obesity, depression, high blood pressure, stress, asthma and ADHD to name a few.

The benefits gained from trekking about our country's treasured parks are many. First of all, you'll gain Health Wealth. Additionally, you'll be exposed to many of earth's remarkable pieces of organic art. Finally, you will experience an incredible array of landscapes, wildlife and activities foreign to those who confine their being to the city and their digital devices.

We encourage you get outside and go "Find your Parks." Trek about these natural cathedrals for the health of it. Happy Trails!

John Binkele

The Binkele family would like to thank the following people and organizations who generously supported the development of the original Park Guide Book and the award winning game *Trekking the National Parks™*:

524 Kickstarter Backers - 2014

50 Origins Backers - 2014

59 Park Pledgers - 2014

13 Park Patrons - 2014

(For a complete listing of all supporters, please visit our website: www.binkink.com)

We would also like to acknowledge the over 4000 friends and families who have purchased a copy our game - *Trekking the National Parks™* as well as the 2015 Mensa Mind Games Judging Team for their vote of confidence!

Additional Resources:

- National Park Service websites
- National Park Service Information Brochures obtained while visiting the parks

For information about *Trekking the National Parks™* Board Game, please visit our website at: www.binkink.com.





*Whether you collect Park Pins or panoramic pictures,
trekking about our country's National Parks will
provide treasured experiences and a wealth of
memories that will reward you for a lifetime!*



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