



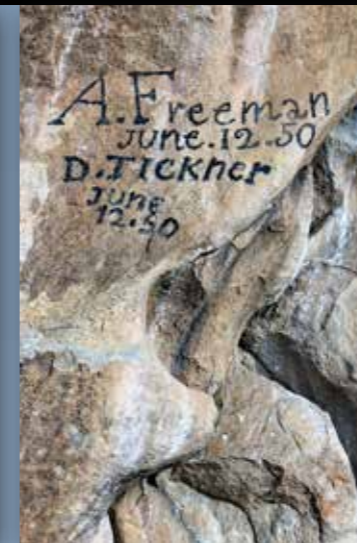
Sculpted granite rocks invite exploration.  
© DAVE BOWER



Hikers explore Elephant Rock.  
NPS



Autumn aspen leaves provide striking color in the heart of the "City."  
© ANTONIO PLASENCIA



Emigrants left record of their passing in axle grease.  
NPS



Window Arch illustrates the creative weathering of granite.  
© DAVE BOWER

## Trails and Travelers

Between 1843 and 1882 a mass migration of people headed west. They first sought land, but in 1848 the discovery of gold in California enticed thousands to hit the trail seeking their fortune. Travelers packed tools, food, books, clothes, furniture, and family heirlooms—everything needed to build a new life in a land of promise. The first emigrants followed the landmarks described by fur trappers and early explorers. Others soon followed wagon ruts and published descriptions. They braved weather, hunger, thirst, disease, accidents, and attacks. Many buried loved ones along the way. The obstacles were enormous, but so was the desire for a better life.

Over 200,000 emigrants followed the California Trail through *City of Rocks*, a name coined by James F. Wilkins, emigrant and artist, in August 1849. Weary by the time they arrived, many found delight and inspiration at this geologic marvel. In 1857 Helen Carpenter wrote . . .

*women ad children waded off to enjoy the sights of the city. We were . . . spellbound with the beauty and strangeness of it all. . . . Here they rested, grazed stock, and left their names and messages on the rocks. Many were forced to lighten loads, leaving behind precious items before embarking on the most dangerous part of their trek—Granite Pass, Forty Mile Desert, and the Sierra Nevada.*

Wagon routes were rarely used after completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Regional supply and stagecoach routes connected communities with depots. The City of Rocks stage station provided refreshment and lodging. Homesteaders moved here in the 1870s to graze cattle and dryland farm. This same ranching lifestyle continues today.

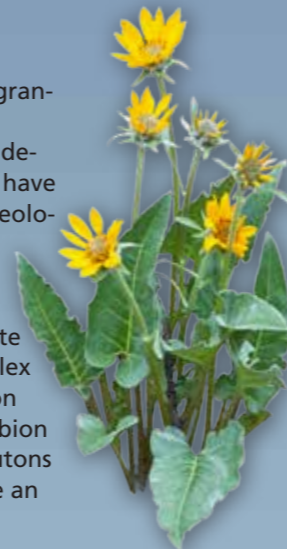
As part of the largest overland emigrant route in American history, the Reserve preserves the most intact and authentic setting of the California Trail. City of Rocks is a landmark and refuge that inspires all who visit.

## Nature's Sculptures

Emigrant journals describe this sculpted granite city as displaying steeples, cathedrals, pyramids, windows, and bathtubs. Some described the rocks and processes that may have formed them. Even today, the complex geology attracts professors and students alike.

City of Rocks is located in the Basin and Range physiographic province. The granite pluton of the ancient Green Creek Complex and the significantly younger Almo Pluton are best exposed here in the southern Albion Mountains. While only the tips of the plutons are visible, these ancient granites are like an open window into the earth's crust.

Once exposed, granite is subjected to weathering by wind, freezing and thawing water, salt, and other naturally corrosive chemicals. These forces work to create pinnacles, pan-holes, honeycombs, windows, and arches. Self-discovery of these unusual granite sculptures awaits the modern-day explorer along nearly every trail.



Arrowleaf balsamroot is one of the more common and showy flowers of the sagebrush steppe.  
© MARY SANSEVERINO

## Ecological Crossroads

The 14,407-acre Reserve exhibits what some scientists call a biogeographic crossroads, where many plants and animals are on the edge of their habitat range. Some plants and animals of the Great Basin, rarely occur farther north of here, like pinyon pine, pinyon jay, and ringtail. Colorado columbine, common in the Rocky Mountains, occur no farther west. Longhorn plectritis, slim larkspur, and western columbine occur here, but rarely east. These overlapping ecological areas provide scientists and students an opportunity to observe the ebb and flow of living communities, which can be early warning signs or predictors of ecological change.

Over 750 species of plants and animals have been documented within the Reserve. A few species of special interest include cliff chipmunk, Virginia warbler, Simpson's hedgehog cactus, and pinyon pine.



Rough-legged hawk  
NPS



Circle Creek Basin at sunrise.  
© DWIGHT PARISH

Cliff chipmunk  
© TONY GODFREY

Slim larkspur  
© AARON ARTHUR

Green-tailed towhee  
© LARRY SELMAN

Longhorn plectritis  
© PAUL SLICHTER

Great basin sagebrush  
NPS

Western columbine  
NPS

Juniper titmouse  
© ALISON SHEEHY

Gray flycatcher  
© LARRY SELMAN

Pinyon jay  
© STEPHEN PARSONS