

# Parks for America

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Perpetuating a Heritage

On June 30, 1864, it happened. The U.S. Congress passed an act granting the Yosemite Valley to the State of California "upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort and recreation." Such a grant of land was without precedent, unknown in the affairs of governments the world over. Scenic and hunting preserves had been the prerogative of European royalty, but nowhere had land ever been set aside for all the people.

Once the deed was done, it must have seemed a good idea, for eight years later on March 1, 1872, the first truly national park, Yellowstone, was set aside "as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." At once tourists began making the trek to Yellowstone. By 1890, three more national parks had been created and Yosemite was among them.

With the creation of more parks in the early years of this century and the passage of the Antiquities Act in 1906, which provided the machinery for establishing national monuments, increasing numbers of areas were being set aside but with no central idea for management.

Most were administered by the Department of the Interior, but the national parks were patrolled by troops of the U.S. Army. Management of the national monuments was split between the Departments of Agriculture and Interior. Some sites of military interest were run by the Department of War. Many people concerned about the preservation and care of these areas called for the establishment of a bureau to manage them collectively. Eventually, after being introduced over a period of a dozen years, a bill was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson on August 25, 1916. The new National Park Service in the Department of the Interior, thus created, was given the twin charge of managing the parks for use now and of preserving them for the appreciation of generations to come. Stephen Mather, the first director, realized that the parks would have no future unless the public soon became aware of their potential benefits. Friends had to be found in the Congress and in the public. With the aid of acquaintances in journalism and on the boards of some railroads Mather set about the task. He succeeded grandly and in so doing established a level of expectations that has become the standard for judging NPS performance in the years since.

The Federal Reorganization of 1933 had important consequences for the Park Service. Heretofore, the areas administered by the NPS had been overwhelmingly those of natural wonders. The reorganization, however, brought the monuments and military sites administered by the Departments of Agriculture and War to the Park Service. Now there was a predominance of history-related sites. The system was becoming more rounded and was on its way to reflecting the Nation's rich historical and natural heritage. Over the years this goal has become the touchstone against which the establishment of new areas is measured. Parkways, seashores, lakeshores, riverways, preserves, and a center for the performing arts have now joined the more traditional kinds of parks.

Today the National Park System contains almost 300 areas. They range in size from Glacier Bay National Monument in Alaska, the largest, to Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial in Pennsylvania, one of the smallest. And the system continues to grow. Through recent legislation, Congress has authorized the National Park Service to study and report on 12 sites a year for possible designation and in-

clusion within the National Park System. So what had begun quietly without fanfare and panoply, in the midst of the Civil War, has developed into the world's best and largest collection of parks. People from all over the country and from all over the world are now coming to the parks in record numbers. And more and more people are learning about the variety of parks and all the different things that they offer. It is a changing, growing system, reflective of the country's needs and priorities, and of those of the individual citizen.

Still, the heritage bequeathed Americans by those who set aside Yosemite and Yellowstone has endured. And it has never been more eloquently expressed than in the legislative act establishing the National Park Service:

"To conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

## To Help You in the National Parks



When you go to a national park you normally come upon several different kinds of Park Service employees. The familiar dark green and gray uniform and broad-brimmed hat easily identify the rangers and the interpreters. They

can answer questions and help you orient yourself. The rangers provide protection and law enforcement and perform rescue operations. Interpreters specialize in the history of the park, whether it be human or natural

history, so use their expertise when you can. An important aspect of the interpreters' work is Living History demonstrations. They range from military exercises to re-creations of a trapper's ways or of farm life 150 years ago.

Besides the rangers and interpreters, other important park employees include maintenance men and women. They keep the parks clean, the machinery and vehicles in repair, roads cleared of snow, and perform myriad

other tasks. And over the years they come to know every aspect of their park. They, too, can help you get around the park and enjoy your visit.

Another group deserving attention are the

Volunteer in Parks

Volunteers in Parks (VIPs). Men and women, of all ages, these people give their time to lead nature walks, conduct tours of historic structures, dress in period clothing, and perform work long forgotten. Their efforts are

an integral part of NPS public services.

Besides NPS employees, other people work in the parks. These are the concessioners. They are private business-people who have obtained the right to

provide a service, such as lodging, food, or outfitting, in the parks. Some of these businesses have been in the parks for many years and have become an established part of the total park picture.

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## Parks for a Changing America

A changing, growing America is reflected in its National Park System. Parks have always been places to depressurize and rejuvenate when the turmoil of everyday life mounts, and the National Park Service continues to encourage people to seek fulfillment of legitimate human needs in our parks. One human need in modern life is the search for one's heritage. The Park Service now interprets cultural and ethnic history at many parks, and research in and around many park areas increases our appreciation of the diversity and richness of America. Many changes in America are rooted in our increasingly urban way of life. The Park System has responded by reaching into the hearts of

the cities. Parks in central Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C., had existed for some years, but in the early 1970s Congress authorized national recreation areas in New York, San Francisco, and the Cleveland-Akron area. The National Park Service has addressed people's need to participate in such far-reaching decisions by drawing nearby residents into the planning process. Today, no area can be designated a park before extensive public hearings are held, for the National Park Service promotes vigorously the idea that Americans have a right to choose new national parks for coming generations. It's a great way to perpetuate a heritage.

## Common Sense Safety

When using national parks, some cautions are in order. Remember, wild, natural areas contain hazards that may be unknown in urban areas. Most accidents can be prevented simply by using common sense. Don't approach wild animals, even if they appear tame. They're not. And always swim or hike with a partner, letting park personnel know where you plan to go and when you plan to return. That way they will know where and when to miss you if you get into difficulty. Park regulations are designed to protect the natural beauty of the park and provide for your safety, comfort, and convenience. Park rangers are available to help and advise you.

# To Use and Enjoy

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## The Variety Will Surprise You

Picture yourself in a national park this week, this month, next year. Nothing could be easier, really, for there are nearly 300 areas in our National Park System. There are one or more in nearly every one of these United States.

Or pick an interest and match it to a park. Their variety will surprise you. Canoeing, hiking, climbing, skiing, swimming, clamming, crabbing, bird and wildlife watching, shell collecting, fishing, photography, scenery gazing—the parks have the best of these. And far more as well. Revolutionary and Civil War history, homes of former Presidents and other important historical figures, prehistoric ruins, aquatic gardens, early industrial technology, Thomas Edison's laboratory, ships and shipyards, coastal fortifications. The list goes on. Mountains, seashores, lakeshores, forests, deserts, plains, and wild rivers call to you. So do historic towns and cities, farms and factories, and islands of the natural scene in the midst of suburbia. Our parks inhabit the life of America, not only in the past, but also in the present and the future. Or simply pick a park and try it on for size, from vast and sweeping primeval forests to small historic city plots. Whether your interests lie

with those of the poet, artist, scientist, inventor, soldier, public servant, or outdoors enthusiast, our National Park System speaks your language. It is the language of the human experience of our continent and its outlying islands. It is the language of those who built a nation and those who have resisted building, of those who mined and smelted its ores and those who meditated on the meanings of its mountains. It often breaks into song, the song of the poet, the songwriter, the steam locomotive, and perhaps our wildest bird, the loon.

Some would say that the song of the wild birds and indeed music itself rise above the language of nations and become an international language. The National Park Service also takes language differences into account, providing foreign language folders for overseas and cross-border visitors of many nationalities and tongues. There is room in our parks for all who can and will come, the handicapped, children and the aged, and men and women representing the creeds and colors of our globe. Our finest parklands express the finest features of our continent, some of the finest on earth, and we hold them in common. What will you find in the parks? Many things. If you are lucky, and

many are, you will rediscover the center of yourself, the love of friends and family, a sense of belonging to humanity and fitting into the natural scheme of things. Or you may find that something seemingly small and insignificant becomes etched in your memory here . . . the coloration of a rainbow trout, the veining of a leaf, the smell of pines in a warm wind, the sound of waves lapping at the shore, the laughter of children making the most of every living moment.

By all means, come intent on enjoying yourself. Relax, release, let go. Try to tune in to the natural world naturally and you may experience such *living* moments yourself, regardless of your years. The first step is very simple: get out of your car and off by yourself. It need not be far away from others at all, but just claim a tree as your own and sit beneath it a few minutes, or on a likely rock or inviting spot of beach.

Now tune in to the present moment, letting past and future concerns just fall away. It's simple, really. Begin by asking yourself these two questions. The answers are obvious, but only if you ask the questions. "Where am I?" *Here*. "What time is it?" *Now*.

A great secret national parks hold is this secret of you in the here and now, the living present. And they truly *hold* this secret, they hold it for all who will look for it, just as the parks themselves are held for all who will come.

Another great thing about national parks is that you often find in them things that you did not set out to look for. You may know this peculiar kind of good fortune as serendipity. This is nothing more than "the gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for." And it is a gift, although a gift freely given by our parks to several generations now. Perhaps it's just that parks bring out the best in us, including both our best sight and insight. A big part of serendipity is really just our own freshness and openness to life's possibilities.

So by all means, picture yourself in a national park soon. You must provide the self-portrait, but we will color in the backdrop and the other details. The welcome is there.

## Action-packed Rapids—Quiet Woodland Glens



So you want to see a national park but can't get away this summer? Great! Come in spring and fall, or even winter. The only thing you'll miss is the crowds. Parks reach from Maine to the Virgin Islands and from Alaska to Ha-

wai. There are parks for all seasons. Check park hours in advance. Most are open every day of the year except December 25 and January 1. But at some parks winter weather restricts activ-

ities. Getting in touch before a visit makes good sense, anyway. You'll want to know about transportation services and other facilities.

National parks offer ideal wildlife-watching

opportunities. In fact, many parks protect the last homelands of endangered plant and animal species.

Do you like to fish? Many parks offer superb fresh- or saltwater angling. Hunting is not

allowed in most national parks.

A lifestyle close to nature and off the beaten path . . . the pioneer spirit lives on in parks. Canoeing and hiking or rafting wild rapids evoke their true nature.

Interpretive programs have been a special feature of parks from earliest days. Natural areas offer nature walks and campfire talks. Living History demonstrations suggest bygone eras and the old ways of doing things.

Summer in the Parks provides good, simple fun in urban areas. What is most important is that our parks be used and that they meet human needs. Park programs now reflect a growing interest in cultural or ethnic identities.

## Planning a Trip to the National Parks

Planning your visit to one or more parks can be half the fun, especially for families with children. The best place to start? Write or call us. We can send information you need to get your vacation travel under way. Write to the National Park Service, Washington, DC 20240. Or telephone 202-343-4747. When you arrive at the park you will want to begin your visit at the visitor center, a feature of most park areas. Here you may see films and exhibits, and ask questions. You can often purchase books offered for sale by cooperating associations. Park publications also may be purchased through the U.S. Government Printing Office.



## Entrance Fees and Golden Passports

What does it cost to use the national parks? Very little . . . but usually something. Entrance fees of about \$2 to \$3 per vehicle are often charged. Expect camping fees too, if you are a camper. Very few NPS campgrounds can be reserved. Most operate on a first-come, first-served basis. Backpackers may need permits to use certain trails or backcountry areas. These free permits are issued by rangers at the park. Golden Eagle Passports cost only \$10 for one calendar year and will save you entrance fees if you plan frequent visits to one or more parks. Those over 62 will want to claim their free, lifetime Golden Age Passport.