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THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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CAMPFIRE, TUOLUMNE  
CAMPGROUND, Yosemite  
National Park, California.

IAN SHIVE/TANDEM

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Is there room for mountain bikes in America's favorite places?

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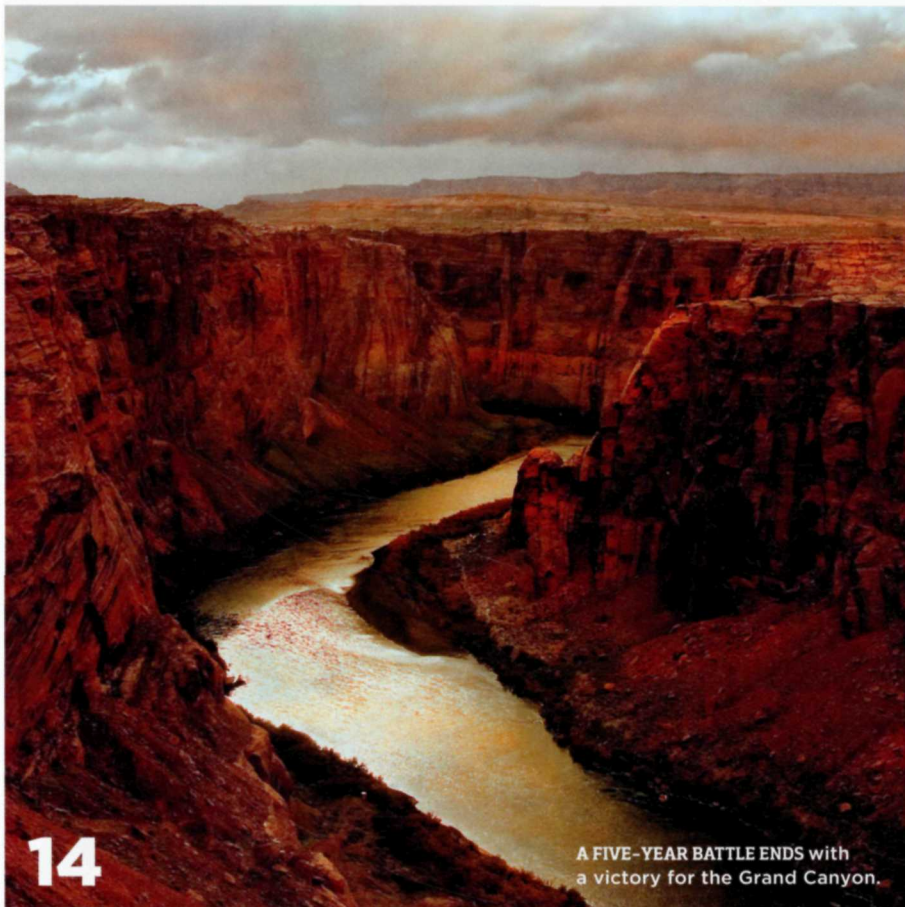
Conservation allies in Nevada's Great Basin join ranchers, business owners, and American Indians to stave off a water pipeline that would slake Las Vegas's thirst.

By Kevin Grange

COVER IMAGE:  
AN AIRSTREAM  
TRAILER,  
parked just beyond  
the border of  
Yosemite National  
Park, California.

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### ON THE WEB

For park news, insights into NPCA's work, and lighter fare like videos and photos, check out NPCA's new blog at [www.parkadvocate.org](http://www.parkadvocate.org). Then head to Yosemite with the Amazing Grace 50+ Club, a Los Angeles-based church group whose members are looking to change the face of visitors in our national parks. Watch the video at [www.npca.org/magazine](http://www.npca.org/magazine).



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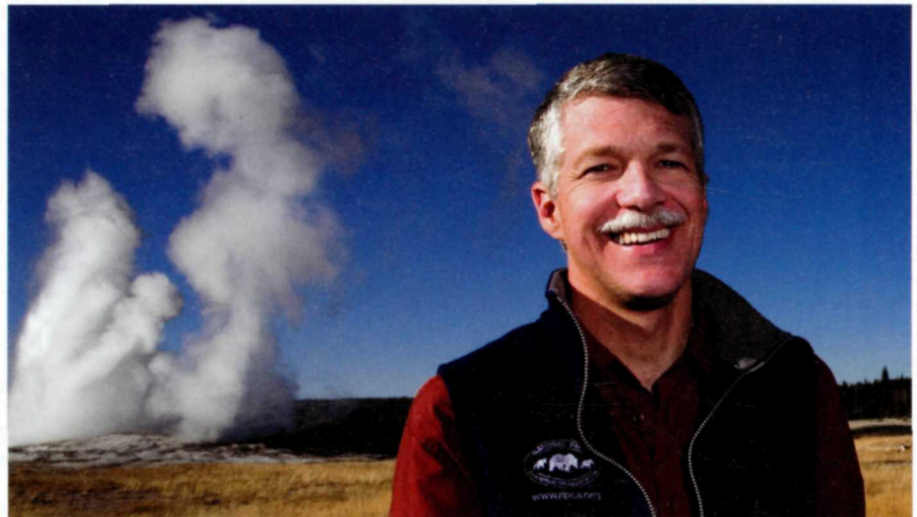
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# A View from the Summit

“Don’t wait on us to give you permission” to act. Those were the closing words of National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis at America’s Summit on National Parks, convened this past January by NPCA, the National Park Foundation, and the National Park Hospitality Association in cooperation with the Park Service. The Summit was not just another meeting of enthusiastic park advocates. This historic meeting attracted industry and political leaders from all over the country, including former Alaska Governor Tony Knowles, REI’s Chief Executive Officer Sally Jewell, former governor of New Mexico Bill Richardson, and Mark Barron—the mayor of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, gateway to the Grand Tetons.

More than 350 people participated in the invitation-only event to talk about the opportunity presented by the Park Service’s 100th anniversary in 2016. Discussions focused on ways to support and build on the Park Service’s 5-year plan released last August.

Speakers underscored the importance of parks as classrooms; the need to be more relevant to more people, particularly those who live in urban areas; and the need to recognize the diversity of the nation through our national and historic landmarks. Some provocative points from the three days: Use America’s best idea to help with America’s worst subject—history. Partner with the video-game industry to embrace technology and to attract new visitors. Stress the economic value of national parks to build political support. Sell the national parks experience to the American people and build a public-awareness campaign to attract new audiences. And include national parks in the nation’s health-care debate, since they can play a valuable role in improving physical and mental health.

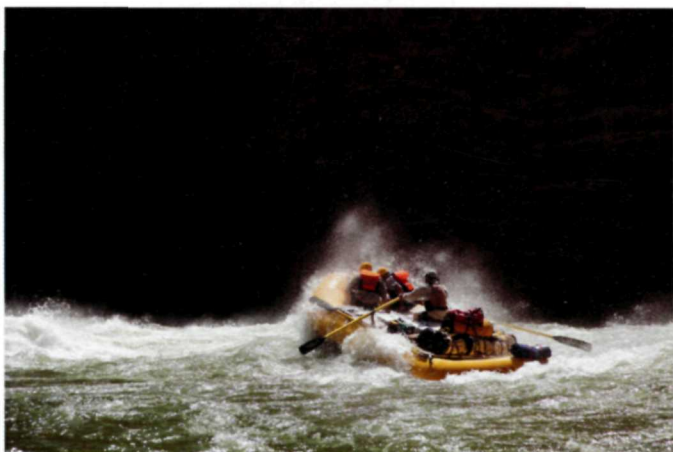
If you’d like to highlights from the conference, and help NPCA prepare our parks for their second century, visit [www.2016parksummit.org](http://www.2016parksummit.org). I believe the Summit and the action plan that follows will help us seize the opportunity of a lifetime, because, as President Lincoln once said, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Thomas C. Kiernan



## Editor's Note

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**A SINGLE PADDLE STROKE** in Grand Canyon whitewater may not feel very significant, but there's power in the collective.

# Strength in Numbers

As I interviewed people for several articles in this issue, two moments struck me. The first came courtesy of Doug McLeod, a Texas attorney who was discussing the possibility of a national recreation area near Galveston. "I consider myself a voracious capitalist," he told me. "I don't want to stop all development along the coast, but this is a great idea and one that will bring plenty of visitors." The other was a moment with Roger Clark, program manager for the Grand Canyon Trust in Flagstaff, Arizona, who was the first to tell a leader of the Havasupai tribe that a five-year battle had successfully prevented uranium mining in her home—the Grand Canyon. "There was silence on the phone," he said. "I could tell she was pausing to cry."

I can't remember another issue of our magazine that featured so many diverse groups coming together. In Texas, voracious capitalists are joining conservation advocates. In Arizona, Native Americans are joining local entrepreneurs, artists, river guides, and Washington lobbyists. Throughout the West, a small company called EcoFlight is giving reporters, politicians, faith-based leaders, and Young Republicans a bird's-eye view of some crucial environmental issues, and finding converts in some surprising places. In Nevada, ranchers, church groups, and senior volunteer groups are coming together to protect the waters of Great Basin National Park. Of course, conservation advocates are still lining up against opposing interests, as our article on Point Reyes illustrates. But it's important to stop once in a while and recognize the bright spots, the power of collaboration, and the impact of turning many voices into one.

Scott Kirkwood  
NPMAG@NPCA.ORG

# NationalParks

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### WHO WE ARE

Established in 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association is America's only private, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated solely to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the U.S. National Park System.

### WHAT WE DO

NPCA protects and enhances America's national parks for present and future generations by identifying problems and generating support to resolve them.

### EDITORIAL MISSION

National Parks magazine fosters an appreciation of the natural and historic treasures found in the parks, educates readers about the need to preserve those resources, and illustrates how member contributions drive our organization's park-protection efforts. The magazine uses the power of imagery and language to forge a lasting bond between NPCA and its members, while inspiring new readers to join the cause. *National Parks* magazine is among a member's chief benefits. Of the \$25 membership dues, \$6 covers a one-year subscription to the magazine.

### MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Members can help defend America's natural and cultural heritage. Activists alert Congress and the administration to park threats; comment on park planning and adjacent land-use decisions; assist NPCA in developing partnerships; and educate the public and the media. Please sign up to receive Park Lines, our monthly e-mail newsletter. Go to [www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org) to sign up.

### HOW TO DONATE

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If you have any questions about your membership, call Member Services at 800.628.7275. On a selective basis, NPCA makes its membership list available to organizations that our members find of interest. If you would like your name to be removed from this list, please call us at the number listed above.

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# Alaska

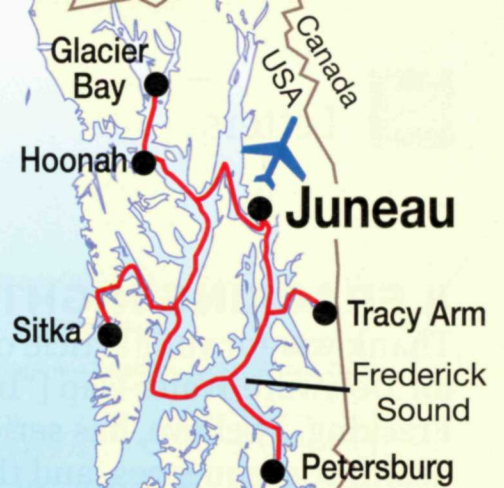
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## A FRACKING NIGHTMARE

Thank you for your article on fracking prevention for Delaware Water Gap [“In Harm’s Way,” Winter]. Fracking, I believe, has serious environmental and health consequences, and the public needs a better understanding of its harms. I understand the need for the fuel, but our air, land, water, and people’s lives are being compromised because of this extraction. The natural gas companies are moving at such a rapid pace that the implications of their work aren’t truly realized by the local populace until they are gone. I hope you continue to cover fracking in future issues.

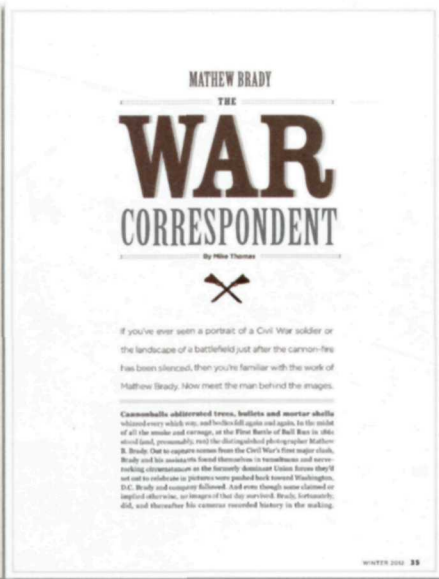
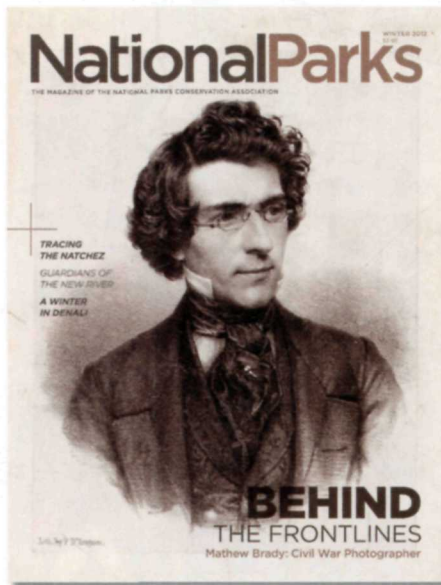
**GWEN TOMASKO**  
*Aurora, OH*

wrote a poem about the idea that while some people can paint with oil and pen and ink, she who had no talents in the visual arts “painted with words.” While Lias’ gift is “painting with music,” he also did a great job painting with words. His article took us up the mountain with him, and allowed us to participate in the challenge to create music that would speak to the experience.

When I was in high school, I had the incredible experience of spending a summer at Interlochen Music Camp in Michigan. I was enrolled in band, beginning piano, composition, and other art classes during the day and went to concerts, plays, and dance recitals at night. Often in the evenings, guys from the boys’ camp would come over to the girls’ camp and serenade us in the pine forest, in the dark, after lights were out. The memory of the French horns and trombones sending their magnificent sounds through the quiet still gives me chills—the same kinds of chills invoked by your article.

How appropriate that Lias reminds us of the connection between artists and the park—especially when both parks and art are in such desperate need of funding.

**ALICE NEILSON**  
*Ventura, CA*



## FIRE AND WATER

“Flowing Again” [Winter], points out the painful choices involved in generating electricity these days. While hydroelectric power has got to be cleaner than coal-fired power plants, the difference in wattage is significant. Both are destructive to land and wildlife. One wonders how many megawatts would be saved if everyone in the U.S. left their personal computers and televisions off one day

each week, and read a book or went for a walk instead.

**P.E. CROWDER**  
*Honeydew, CA*

## HITTING THE HIGH NOTES

The Fall issue of *National Parks* magazine had a number of interesting articles, but I felt most compelled to write about “The Movement” by Stephen Lias.

When I was in high school, my sister

Steven Lias’ essay in *National Parks* magazine was incredible. I connected with it in many, many ways. First, I was a camper at Cheley Colorado Camps in Estes Park, Colorado, in the summer of 1964. Longs Peak looms over the main camp like a guardian. I was 11 years old, and I climbed Longs that summer via the old cable route; had we known how dangerous it was, we never would have done it. Then, in 1976, I began working as a counselor at Cheley,



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Include your name, city, and state. Published letters may be edited for length and clarity.

and in the summer of 1980, I took 30 boys to the summit. It was a magical experience for them, and to this day I still hear (via Facebook) from the kids who climbed it with me and who now take their sons and daughters up the trail, through the Boulderfield and the Keyhole.

Ever since then, Longs has been in my consciousness. I am a playwright by passion, and my very first produced play, "The Hunter," was written about boys on a backpacking expedition beneath the mountain. I have pictures of the peak in my office and on my computer screen.

I am not a musician by any stretch—I can strum my six-string along with campfire songs—but I too sense the music in the mountains. For me, I hear Dvorak's New World symphony, especially the second movement. I also hear Dan Fogelberg's song "Nether Lands," which was recorded down the road from Longs.

Thank you for the beautiful music, thank you for bringing me back to a place I love, and thank you for sharing it in a way that has brought tears to my eyes—tears of joy for great memories, good friends, a beautiful and stark wilderness, and a connection that cannot be expressed in words.

**PHILIP WILLIAMS**  
*Palmetto Bay, FL*

### A MEMORABLE RIDE

Two friends and I bicycled the Natchez Trace ["Sketching the Natchez Trace," Winter] in October 1998, north to south, using maps and suggestions from the Park Service and camping most of the way, with occasional stops at nearby motels, mainly for showers. We stayed in a church in Waynesboro, Tennessee, courtesy of the local folks who didn't want us camping

in a driving rainstorm and near-freezing temps. A ranger from Tishomingo State Park brought us hot pizza one night. All along the Trace, people were inquisitive, generous, and unfailingly kind. From Grinders Fort in Tennessee to the antebellum mansions near Natchez, Mississippi, history unfolded with every mile. With no commercial traffic and slow-moving cars, it was the perfect autumn ride for three cyclists watching the leaves changing from green to red and gold. Thanks for renewing those wonderful memories.

**MARGARET FINK**  
*Austin, TX*

### THANK YOU & YOU'RE WELCOME

I love the new look of the magazine and of the website. Great job keeping it fresh and interesting. Keep up the good work!

**TAMI CHRISTOPHER**  
*Meridan, CT*

Each time a new issue of the magazine arrives, it takes priority over any other reading material in my home—and it gets read cover to cover! It is a beautiful visual treat, and so readable and informative. My late husband and I have had

the joy of visiting some of the parks and we had so many wonderful memories of our times there. Thank you for all of your efforts to keep the parks and their surroundings intact and available to future generations.

**JANN SPALDING**  
*Dade City, FL*

### PICTURE THIS


Mike Thomas' article "Mathew Brady, The War Correspondent" [Winter] put me in mind of the excellent, insightful program developed by National Park Ranger Mike Gorman at the Tredegar Iron Works at Richmond National Battlefield Park in Virginia. He used Brady photographs from the National Archives to illustrate many fascinating points about the Civil War battle that took place here.

**MADISON BROWN**  
*Staunton, VA*

### CORRECTION:

The map that appears on page 10 of the Winter issue ["Flowing Again"] incorrectly labeled Olympic National Park's Lake Mills as Lake Sutherland.

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## Echoes

**In this larger war on bears and wolves, Alaska's Board of Game has created a number of hunting methods to [reduce] the population of predators... to 'grow' more moose and caribou, in direct conflict with how the Park Service is supposed to manage its land.**

*Jim Stratton, senior director of NPCA's Alaska field office, quoted by the LA Times in response to the state's failure to exempt Alaska's national preserves from objectionable hunting methods like baiting, snaring, and shooting of sows and their cubs.*

**If you think of the [national parks] budget as a tire, right now the tire has a slow leak. If we get a 9% cut, it's a blow-out. Either way, you have a flat tire.**

*Craig Obey, NPCA's senior vice president for Government Affairs, quoted by the LA Times, in response to the possibility that the Park Service budget could be cut by as much as \$231 million. If Congress fails to reduce the federal deficit by \$1.2 trillion by January 2013, across-the-board cuts will occur, which means fewer park rangers, reduced hours at visitor centers, and even park closures.*

**The Buffalo Soldiers played a central role in protecting our national parks. They were... among our national parks' first guardians.**

*Alan Spears, legislative representative with NPCA, quoted by the Missoulian on a proposal to expand the story of the segregated black army regiments that built roads, fought fires, and prevented poaching in Glacier, Yellowstone, and Yosemite.*





# FAR OUT

National parks are among the most photographed places on the planet, but you probably haven't seen them from this perspective, thousands of miles above the Earth. Try to identify some of the spots pictured in satellite images from NASA and GeoEye. Answers appear at the bottom of this page.

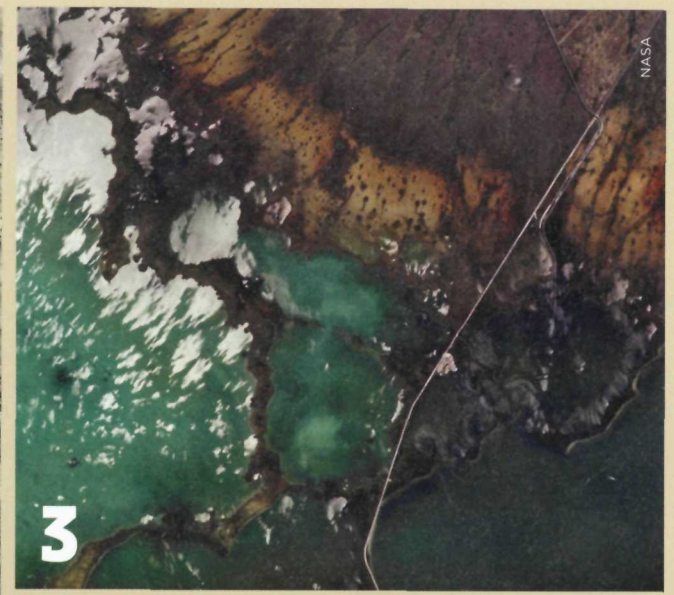
**ANSWERS:** 1. Hawaii's Volcanoes National Park; 2. Rainbow Bridge National Monument, Utah; 3. Everglades National Park, Florida; 4. Crater Lake National Park, Oregon; 5. Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona; 6. Kenai Fjords National Park, Alaska.



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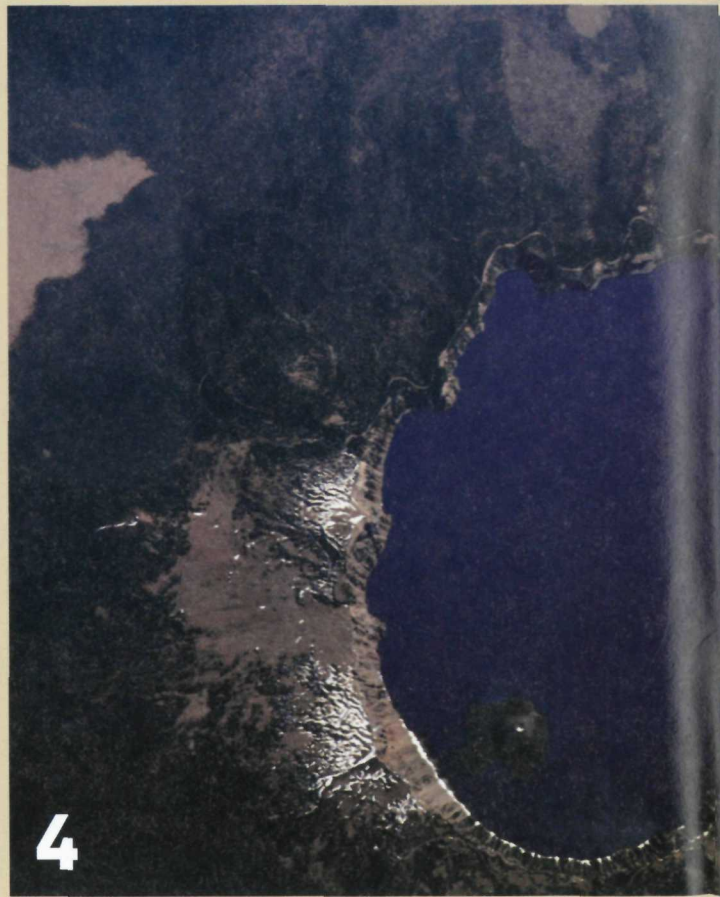
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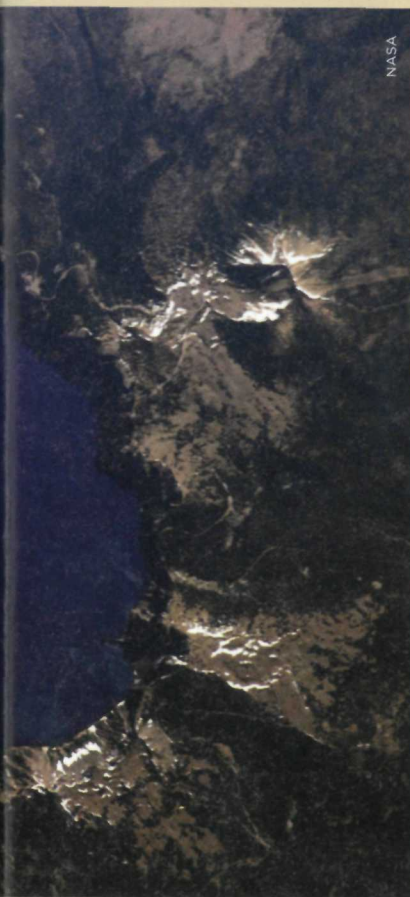
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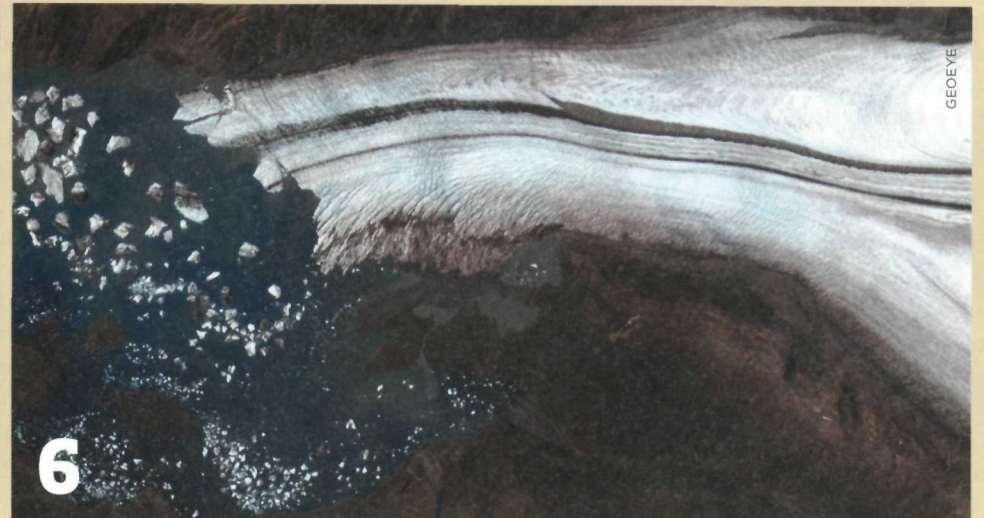
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4



**A tip of the cap** to Wired Science editor Betsy Mason who gathered dozens of these images from various sources. For even more, visit Wired at <http://bit.ly/y5ssf>.



6



## A Raw Deal

Marine wilderness is at stake in the ecological heart of Point Reyes National Seashore.

**Forty years ago**, there was no question in people's minds that Drakes Estero, a vibrant estuary known as the "ecological heart" of Point Reyes National Seashore, deserved wilderness protection. It was, after all, one of the last remaining, relatively intact marine sanctuaries on California's highly developed shoreline. So in 1976, Congress passed the Point Reyes Wilderness Act, preserving ecologically significant areas—including the estero—as wilderness, and protecting the historic ranches and dairy farms. But there was a catch: Four years earlier, an existing oyster company had sold their land to the Park Service but retained limited rights to continue operating in Drakes Estero, so the federal government had to delay full wilderness protection until the company's

lease expired. In 2012, Drakes Estero would finally gain the protection it deserved.

Or so went the plan.

In 2005, owners of the original oyster company sold their operation to the Drakes Bay Oyster Company, which began pushing for an extension of the lease. Four years later, the new owners successfully convinced Congress to pass legislation requiring Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to consider allowing commercial activities to continue in Drakes Estero (see box).

This puts Point Reyes at a crossroads. The estero is a sensitive wildlife refuge where hikers and kayakers can observe harbor seals, tens of thousands of birds, and the diverse marine life that finds shelter in the water's rich eelgrass beds. The Park Service is required to provide maximum protections to



## The Popular Vote

**The 2009** legislation that forced Interior to revisit commercial enterprise in Point Reyes prompted an environmental review of the marine area, as well as public engagement. Of the more than **50,000 comments** generated by that process, **90 percent** favored restoring the area's original plan for a wilderness designation. The Park Service is reviewing that feedback now, and is expected to make a final decision in June.



the wildlife, but those protections aren't possible now because wildlife habitat is being used for company operations. Additionally, oyster company motorboats make more than 3,000 trips through the area every year, creating both visible and audible disruptions.

"For more than 30 years, the public has waited for nature—not business plans and motorized uses—to be the estero's heart-beat," says Neal Desai, associate director in NPCA's Pacific regional office. "Oysters can be grown commercially elsewhere, but Drakes Estero is our only shot at a protected marine wilderness on the West Coast."

Sylvia Earle, former chief scientist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and a National Geographic Explorer in Residence, has been advocating for wilderness at Drakes Estero for years. "It's not that I'm opposed to free enterprise, but this oyster company is taking 'free' to an unusual extreme," she says. "The ocean is precious to all of us, and a small vested interest should not be allowed to disproportionately benefit from something that has such enormous, enduring benefits for all people. We should stick to the plan to restore Drakes Estero, as close as possible, to its full range of natural benefits."

"It isn't just about a beautiful landscape, or even about protecting habitat for marine mammals, birds, and creatures that live under the sea," Earle says. "With Drakes Estero, we have an opportunity to maintain the integrity of a system that can serve as an anchor to the changes that are sweeping the rest of the world. We can lose it or we can save it. It's our choice."

— AMY LEINBACH MARQUIS

# FOR SOME, STAR COUNT WILL ALWAYS BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THREAD COUNT.

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**NPCA WORKED CLOSELY** with the Grand Canyon Trust and the Center for Biological Diversity to earn a hard-fought victory for the Colorado River.

## The End of a Radioactive Proposal

Department of Interior Prohibits Uranium Mines Near Grand Canyon

After a five-year battle that included more twists and turns than the 1,450 miles of the Colorado River itself, park advocates have secured a 20-year moratorium on uranium mining on public lands adjacent to the Grand Canyon, removing a threat to the very waters that carved the canyon itself.

Back in 2006, uranium prices started to rise in response to increased demand from operators of nuclear reactors. As a result, thousands of new mining claims were filed within watersheds that drain directly into Grand Canyon National Park and the Colorado River. In 2007, a Canadian mine in Blanding, Utah, began to increase its production and started processing more uranium for nuclear reactors in South Korea and France. The U.S. Forest Service also started allowing mining companies to conduct exploratory drilling in the region without requiring an environmental assessment—a dangerous precedent.

For the next five years, NPCA and several other conservation groups worked to block any new uranium claims, to prevent the sort of contamination of land and water



“Going toe-to-toe with the mining industry was no small task.”

that had occurred at Church Rock, New Mexico, and the Grand Canyon’s Orphan Mine decades earlier.

Finally, in January, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar ordered a 20-year moratorium on thousands of new mining claims that could harm waters draining directly into Grand Canyon and the Colorado River

“Going toe-to-toe with the mining industry was no small task,” says Taylor McKinnon, public lands campaigns director for the Center for Biological Diversity. “The industry has huge financial and lobbying might buoyed by an endless supply of lawyers, and we don’t. The resulting volume of work has been staggering—four lawsuits, 40 to 50 press releases, thousands of news stories, hundreds of conference calls, trips to Washington, dozens of action alerts, hundreds of thousands of public comments,

congressional hearings, book-length comments on bottomless government documents... The good news is that with enough passion, persistence, and luck, victories sometimes come to those on the right side.”

“This really was a collaborative effort among many allies, most notably the Grand Canyon Trust and the Center for Biological Diversity, which took on real leadership roles beginning with some crucial court actions,” says David Nimkin, senior director of NPCA’s Southwest regional office. Nimkin himself testified before two congressional committees at hearings in the park, and NPCA’s Center for Park Resources produced a critical report that brought media attention to the issue. NPCA’s activist network also weighed in during the public outreach process, submitting 85,000 comments



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in support of the moratorium. When members of Congress tried to add riders to legislation that would have undercut the process at the last minute, NPCA's government affairs staff and media team drew attention to the moves and put a stop to them.

Roger Clark, program manager for the Grand Canyon Trust, rallied local support. The former Grand Canyon river guide went before city councils and county governments asking for resolutions supporting the 20-year withdrawal and worked with the Havasupai tribe, which has been fighting uranium mining for decades. The Grand Canyon Trust hired independent economic consultants, who revealed flaws in a Bureau of Land Management analysis

“Every generation of Americans faces moments when we must choose between the pressures of the now and the protection of the timeless.”

—Interior Secretary Ken Salazar

“When I was able to call Supai Village and talk to one of the Havasupai leaders and tell her that we had just gotten word of Secretary Salazar's decision, there was silence on the phone—I could tell she was pausing to cry,” says Clark. “It was remarkable to work with people whose sole source of drinking water and whole reason for being was threatened by uranium mining.”

and the scale of degradation and industrialization that it would have brought to the park is just inconceivable. It's inherent in the concept of a national park that this kind of activity simply shouldn't be permitted.”

“Some people may not grasp the degree to which Grand Canyon defines our regional culture,” says McKinnon. “It's central to the creation stories, histories, and identities of regional native cultures. It also sustains our communities—be they boatmen, restaurateurs, painters, photographers, authors, or scientists—so many people's lives are tied to the canyon in one way or another. The withdrawal goes a long way toward protecting all of that—not just the iconic landscape and its biodiversity, which is critical, but also a vibrant and diverse regional culture whose well-being is inextricably linked to the canyon's health.”

Mining interests are expected to appeal the decision, and conservation groups will need to continue their engagement, but for now the politics and legal wrangling have played out in favor of the canyon's health.

“Every generation of Americans faces moments when we must choose between the pressures of the now and the protection of the timeless,” Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said as he announced the decision in January. “Today, we know that we can no longer afford to turn our backs on... iconic landscapes like the Grand Canyon. [This] is the right thing to do.”

— SCOTT KIRKWOOD



**A VICTORY FOR THE GRAND CANYON** is an obvious success for park visitors and American Indians who live in the Canyon, but it's also important to members of the local communities like boatmen, restaurant owners, artists, writers, and scientists.

that had overstated the potential economic impact of the mine, which pales in comparison with tourism revenues.

And it all added up to a very sweet victory.

“I'm terribly excited about the announcement,” says Nimkin. “Uranium mining posed one of the more profound threats to the Grand Canyon—one of America's most enduring landscapes—



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A COASTAL VIEW OF MATAGORDA, one of four counties that would contain sites within the proposed recreation area.



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The Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area would extend along coastal marshes and estuaries along the Gulf Coast.

## A Rising Star

Could the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area become the country's next park unit?

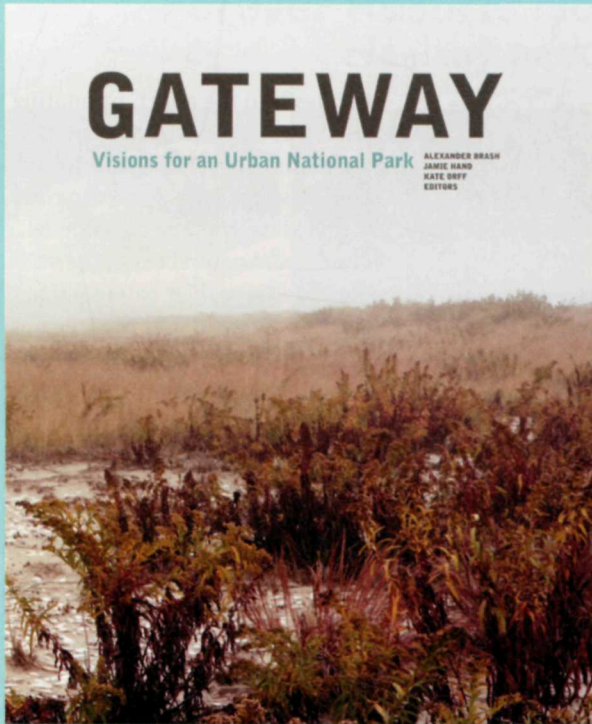
**The numbers are staggering:** At 2:10 a.m. on September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike struck Galveston, Texas, with sustained winds of 110 miles per hour and gusts up to 125 miles per hour. Radar images showed a storm nearly as big as the entire state, with an eye 46 miles wide. In spite of the heavy winds, most of the damage came from surge tide: Waves crashed over Galveston's 17-foot seawall, flooding the region and filling the county courthouse with six feet of water. More than 3 million people lost power. Conservative estimates peg the damage at more than \$20 billion.

And it could have been worse. Swaths of undeveloped land along the coast served as a natural buffer against the storm surge, prevent-

ing even more severe flooding. Now NPCA and several local organizations are crafting a proposal that would add another layer of protection to many of those natural areas and bring the National Park Service to the region with its associated economic boost. And it wouldn't take one square inch of property away from private landowners in a state with a well-known reputation for independence.

The proposed park unit, dubbed the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area, would extend along the coastal marshes and estuaries within the four counties of Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston, and Matagorda, along the Gulf Coast. National recreation areas, like Golden Gate in San Francisco and Gateway in New York, preserve significant historic resources and impor-





# GATEWAY

Visions for an Urban National Park  
ALEXANDER BRASH  
JAMIE HAND  
KATE ORFF  
EDITORS

## BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE SEA

Spreading across the coastline of Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and New Jersey, the Gateway National Recreation Area includes wildlife estuaries, bird-nesting areas, salt marshes, historic military forts, beaches, and NYC's first municipal airport, to name just a few of its exceptional features. Due to neglect and misuse, this extraordinary natural and national resource is at risk. *Gateway* presents the collaborative efforts of the Van Alen Institute, the NPCA, and Columbia University GSAPP to investigate and document the diverse ecology of the park and re-envision a more sustainable future for it.

### GATEWAY: Visions for an Urban National Park

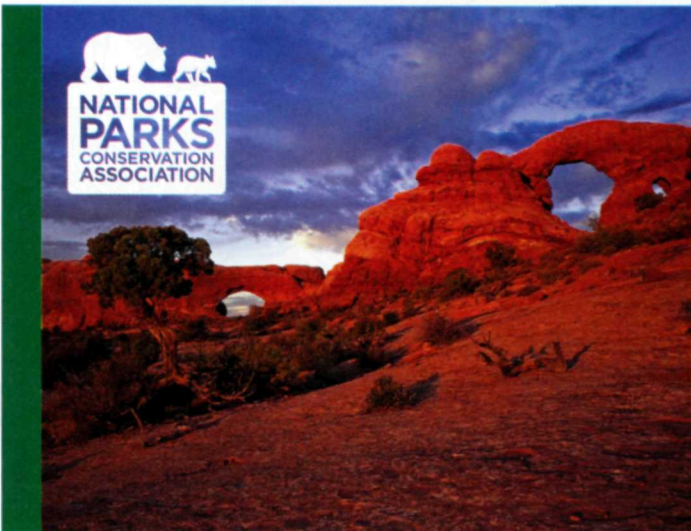
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## At seven park units similar to the proposed Texas site, visitation grew an average of 565 percent.

tant natural areas while providing outdoor recreation for thousands of people. If the vision becomes a reality, the view from Google Maps won't look all that different than it does today: Various swaths of land would still be operated by the state, the feds, and private entities. Land owners would simply come together to set guidelines for further development on their own property and brand the region as a vacation destination with the added muscle of the Park Service arrowhead. At seven park units similar to the proposed Texas site, visitation grew an average of 565 percent in the first ten years of operation. (For more, see box, below.)

"These 130 miles of coastland just have so much potential," says Suzanne Dixon, director of NPCA's Texas regional office. "People from all around the world already come to the area to go birding at High Island. The area has excellent kayaking in the coastal marshes, two national wildlife refuges, oyster reefs, great fishing, Civil War-era shipwrecks—all the natural, cultural, architectural, and historical attractions that make it ideal for a national recreation area. Many people just don't know

that it's here; a Park Service designation would change that."

So far, locals have offered tremendous support for the idea. One of those locals is Doug McLeod, a former state legislator and the chairman of the board for Galveston attraction Moody Gardens. McLeod grew up on Galveston Island and spent summers fishing at nearby Lake Como, an area now dominated by condominiums.

"I can't think of a better way to provide flood control to the region while producing so many recreational opportunities, all on a voluntary basis and at a much lower cost than building massive concrete dikes up and down the coast," says McLeod. "Know that I consider myself a voracious capitalist—I don't want to stop all development along the coast—but this is a great idea and one that will bring plenty of visitors."

Former Secretary of State James Baker, a native Texan, has said the recreation area would be a boon to the entire Houston-Galveston region; Baker and local business leader John Nau III have formed a steering committee to advance the effort. Local nonprofit Houston Wilderness is also putting its

energies into the effort, promoting the vision throughout the region.

So what's next? Congress would need to ask the Park Service to conduct a detailed study of the recreational, cultural, and natural resources in the area, determine their national significance, and suggest how the area might be established and managed. Much of that research has already been conducted by the Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disaster Center at Rice University, a fact that could expedite the process. Ultimately, a Texas congressional delegation would need to introduce a bill designating the recreation area, and Congress would need to approve the measure. The process could take a few years, but it's off to a great start.

"It's been incredible to hear from so many people in the region who want to make Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area a reality," says Dixon. "Although one of its primary aims is to protect the upper Gulf Coast from storm surge, people seem to recognize the incredible resources that deserve protection in this region—along with the economic benefits that could result from increased visitation. Grassroots efforts like we're seeing now will help ensure these worthy sites are protected for future generations."

— SCOTT KIRKWOOD



## Anticipated Economic Impact of the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area

### Year One

500,000 annual visitors  
\$46 million in local revenues  
1,200 local jobs

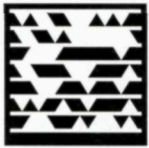
### Year Ten

1,500,000 annual visitors  
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## Friends in High Places

EcoFlight offers an aerial view of the national parks and the threats looming within and beyond their boundaries.

For nearly thirty years, Bruce Gordon has been squeezing as many people as he can fit into his tiny Cessna and flying them over the American West. His mission: To give his passengers a better understanding of the large-scale environmental issues that plague our landscapes, from beetle outbreaks, to road construction, to oil and gas development—issues that can be nearly impossible to grasp from the ground.

In 2002, Gordon put an official name on those excursions when he founded EcoFlight, a nonprofit organization that's proven especially valuable for the preservation of our national parks. He's flown passengers over the California Desert to illustrate the risks posed by massive solar developments, and the importance of the proposed California Desert Protection Act, which would create two new park units.

Gordon has flown clients over the Greater Yellowstone Area, where climate change is favoring beetle outbreaks, and entire mountains of whitebark pine are dying as a result. The view from the air

JANE PARGITER AND BRUCE GORDON of EcoFlight.



© JEFF BERTING

### Fledgling Environmentalists

In the 1980s, EcoFlight's Jane Pargiter taught at the college level in South Africa, a place where students were actively engaged in politics and social issues. So when she moved to the United States 23 years ago, she was shocked to learn that young Americans could be so apathetic. "Many of the teenagers I met were born with a golden spoon in their mouths," she says. "Everything was handed to them on a platter, and they just weren't interested in voting or being active in pursuing change."

That's when Pargiter vowed to grow the student-focused program at EcoFlight, where she could engage high school and college students in local environmental issues. The Kestrel Program runs a few times a year and brings together hundreds of students from the region's schools, where they can take part in live, round-table discussions led by guest speakers from both sides of the aisle; afterwards, pilot Bruce Gordon takes a handful of these students up in the air. EcoFlight also features a Flight Across America Student Program, where students from Colorado universities fly over a threatened ecosystem. Last year, four students toured the Four Corners, where they witnessed an aerial view of sprawling oil and gas development outside the national parks. Watch a short video of their expedition at [vimeo.com/20346790](https://vimeo.com/20346790).

was so alarming that it spurred the U.S. Forest Service to pursue the first-ever baseline climate change study using the dying trees as their subjects. (The same study helped put the Yellowstone grizzly bear, which feast on whitebark pine seeds, back on the endangered species list).

EcoFlight has also hosted tours over the Four Corners, where oil and gas development threaten the region's parks; Glacier, Montana, where glaciers are melting at shocking rates; Rocky Mountain, Colorado, where pine beetles are killing trees by the masses; and the Grand Tetons in Wyoming, where flights helped the Park Service envision a bike trail to cut down on traffic.

"These issues exist in vast areas that can be really hard to access on the ground," Gordon says. "You really get the big picture up in the air."

EcoFlight passengers are as diverse as the parks themselves—conservationists, reporters, politicians, tribal members, faith-based leaders, Young Republicans, ranchers, hunters. "We try to put diverse members of the community on each flight," Gordon says, "and by that I mean people who are not traditional conservationists or even aligned with the environ-

mental movement. That's how we make sure we're not just preaching to the choir."

Because here's the thing: Something magical happens when you squeeze people into a tiny space and take them 10,000 feet up in the air. "It's very intimate," says Jane Pargiter, EcoFlight's vice president. "Everyone is close together—they're touching elbows, touching knees. And you might have people with very different opinions sitting next to each other, but because they're all a little nervous and a little excited, and they're in this space together, it's a great place to find out what else they have in common."

The transformations can be amazing. Gordon recalls loggers who were horrified at the vast amount of forest they had cut down, and conservative ranchers who paid little mind to oil and gas development until they saw it from the air, creeping perilously close to their land. Pargiter recalls private land owners in Colorado who opposed a nearby wilderness designation, until they saw the proposed area from the air and realized it would actually protect their property. Once they hit the ground, passengers like these have gone on to become some of the most outspoken

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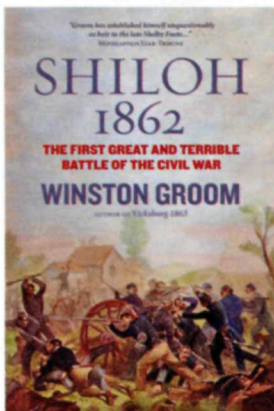
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environmental advocates.

"I think the American public and the politicians take the natural parks for granted," Pargiter says. "It's something they grew up with—they figure the parks are there, and they're going to be there forever. I don't think enough people understand how special these places are, and that they might not be here tomorrow if they're not taken care of today."

— AMY LEINBACH MARQUIS



#### EYE OPENER

**Winston Groom** is best known for creating the title character in his 1986 novel, *Forrest Gump*, but the author is also an accomplished historian whose credits include nonfiction books on the Civil War and Vietnam. Groom once again turns his attention to the Civil War in **SHILOH, 1862: THE FIRST GREAT AND TERRIBLE BATTLE OF THE CIVIL WAR**. During two days of fighting near the shores of the Tennessee River, both the Union and Confederate armies quickly realized the destructive power of the improved weaponry in their hands; Shiloh's 23,000 casualties were the first indication that a long war lay ahead. Filled with first-person accounts from everyone from nine-year-old Elsie Duncan, whose home became a safe house for soldiers, to Confederate General Sidney Johnston, *Shiloh, 1862* is an engaging account of the bloodiest battle fought on American soil up to that point. National Geographic Books, \$30, 448 pp.



**A DRAWING OF THE KINGSLEY MANSION** from 1878

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## Secrets of the Tombs

Archaeologists at the Kingsley Plantation in Florida shed light on the slaves who lived, worked and died there 200 years ago.

**W**ITH ITS ELEGANT BAY WINDOWS AND BREEZY verandah, the gleaming white Kingsley Plantation House is Florida's oldest and best-preserved planter's residence, but a recent discovery "out back," in the woods surrounding the 25 remaining slave cabins has upstaged the splendid manor house.

In May 2010, University of Florida archaeologist Dr. James Davidson and his students excavated the buried remains of six plantation slaves, including a middle-aged man, an elderly woman, and three school-aged children. Historians had long suspected that a burial ground existed somewhere on the site, thanks to references in plantation documents

from the early 1800s, when Zephaniah Kingsley and his family occupied the house and 40 to 50 slaves resided in 32 neighboring cabins (25 of which remain). Davidson's dig confirmed the cemetery's existence and sheds light on enslaved people whose lives have been shrouded in mystery.

"We can't know who the individuals are in the burial plots we discovered," says Barbara Goodman, superintendent of Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, which includes the Kingsley Plantation. But the discovery brings slaves' voices to a historical record that largely excluded them. "Visitors could see the slave cabins and imagine family life in these small quarters," she adds, "but to know that those inhabitants are buried beneath our feet makes that history more real."

Previous digs added valuable insights to that missing history. In 1968, Dr. Charles Fairbanks of the University of Florida conducted formal excavations at two Kingsley slave cabins. His work was the first archaeological inquiry focused on enslaved people in the United States and provided initial glimpses into their daily lives: Ceramics and metal tools yielded clues about slaves' dietary patterns and helped researchers determine when the cabins were used.

More clues surfaced between 2000 and 2010, when National Park Service archaeologist John C. Whitehurst uncovered a variety of household and personal items: smoking pipes; bone, shell, and metal buttons; ceramics; gunflints; and tabby processing materials used to build Kingsley's slave cabins. Those objects hint that slaves at Kingsley kept fire-arms—and not just muskets for hunting, but pistols, too. After the Patriots Rebel-



lion of 1812–14, when Seminole Indians burned Kingsley's Laurel Grove Plantation, Kingsley probably armed his slaves to defend his property in case of attack (see box).

Kingsley slaves were also pagans who likely practiced traditional african Culture: Blue beads were concealed within the cabins, likely to ward off evil, and a chicken burial at the entrance to one cabin points to



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**A FORMER SLAVE** at the Kingsley Plantation.

### MYSTERY SOLVED

For years, researchers have puzzled over the semi-circular design of the slave cabin complex. Why not build the cabins in straight rows? Pistols unearthed from the slave quarters offer one idea: In the event of an attack, the semi-circle allows residents to mount a more effective defense by forcing assailants to enter a ring of firepower.

While artifacts and objects can enlighten us about how people lived, their remains tell us who they were.

African fertility rituals. “Zephaniah was known to have prohibited Christian religious leaders from preaching to his people,” explains Whitehurst. In fact, Zephaniah married one of his slaves, Anta Majigeen Ndiaye, in an African ceremony. The couple had three children, and Anta (or “Anna,” as Kingsley called her) eventually became a slave-owner herself.

But, says Whitehurst, “While artifacts and objects can enlighten us about how people lived, their remains tell us who they were.” Studies have already confirmed the age and gender of the buried people; further DNA analysis could indicate what part of Africa they came from, and perhaps even tribal affiliation. “We could determine things like the types of diseases they were exposed to, nutrients absorbed or lacking, and what they were eating,” says Whitehurst.

These six burials are just the first prong of what might someday be a much broader investigation into the cemetery's full boundaries. Already, the Park Service has used radar technology to measure variations in soil density, and the readings suggest that other bodies may have been laid to rest near the current excavation site. But for now, the park is focusing on engaging the public in conversations about respecting and valuing those who lived and died here.

The discovery has made a tremendous impact on those who can trace

their lineage back to the Kingsley family. “Now we need to do more to give voice to those who no longer have a voice,” says Dr. Johnetta Cole, director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, whose great-grandfather married the great-granddaughter of Anna and Zephaniah Kingsley. “I can't help but wonder if, under the earth, in that particular place, are the remains of human beings—people—to whom I am related.”

Before the Park Service announced the findings publicly, it disclosed the news to descendants of the Kingsley family, who met for a private meeting and paid homage to their ancestors with a ceremony at the excavation site. “These descendants had so many thoughts and emotions about their heritage already,” explains Goodman. “Now, that history becomes tangible, becomes more than just stories.”

“I remember many years ago hearing [author] Julius Lester say that you will never understand America well until you understand slavery,” Cole adds. “This discovery is just another piece of that puzzle as I try to understand, in a full way, the country that I was born in and the country that I love.” **NP**

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**FOR SIX MONTHS EVERY YEAR,** the Park Service closes off a historic fort to visitors to help protect the bald eagles nesting above it.

position opposite Fort Stedman—where Robert E. Lee launched his last major offensive before surrender in 1865. Every year, the National Park Service shuts down the area to visitors for the six months of the eagles' residency, letting the birds nest in peace and allowing visitors to view the fort from afar.

Though Petersburg National Battlefield was established to protect the remains of a nine-and-a-half-month siege in 1864 and 1865, its 2,700 acres of woods and meadows also offer critical wildlife habitat. Much like other battlefields, Petersburg's green spaces attract a wide array of creatures, including opossums, skunks, snakes, deer, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, and even the occasional bear; as many as 50 percent of park visitors come expressly to walk, horseback ride, or bicycle the bucolic trails. That presents a challenging task for park management.

"We're trying to balance protecting the eagles while providing the historic tours of the site that the visitors are coming to see," says Dave Shockley, chief of resource management for Petersburg National Battlefield. "We want both the natural and historical values to be represented well."

The eagles haven't made it easy, however. They have nested near railroad tracks, a recreational trail, a residential neighborhood, and the fort—and the traffic doesn't really seem to bother them. Nonetheless, Petersburg shuts down the recreational trail and Colquitt's Salient between mid-December and mid-July, when the eagles are nesting, in order to approximate the National Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) recommended 750-foot buffer zone around the nest.

## Nesting Instincts

What happens when species protection trumps historical interpretation at Petersburg National Battlefield?

**E**VERY DECEMBER FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS, a couple of amorous bald eagles have arrived in Petersburg National Battlefield in Virginia. They find the same 65-foot-tall pine tree, gather sticks to build and repair their nest, lay eggs, and guard them jealously. A few months later, as many as three wobbly eaglets appear on the edge of the nest, flapping their wings and summoning the nerve to fly. Consumed by their own dramas, the eagle family seems blissfully unperturbed by its human observers.

But every year humans do arrive, and inevitably, a few are dismayed. That's because the eagles sit right on top of Colquitt's Salient, a Confederate

Although some visitors are disappointed, precautions like these have contributed to one of the greatest species recovery stories of all time. Because of habitat loss, effects from the pesticide DDT, and illegal shooting, there were only 487 nesting pairs of bald eagles in the continental United States in 1963. The public took notice—bald eagles are not only our nation’s symbol but also charismatic birds in their own right. They mate for life, their wings can span as wide as eight feet, and they can build nests ten feet across. The Fish and Wildlife Service added the species to the endangered list in 1967, initiating a long but successful recovery period that led to its removal from the list in 2007. Now FWS estimates that there are more than 10,000 pairs of nesting bald eagles in the continental United States.

Within six miles of Petersburg National Battlefield, the James River hosts one of the species’ most phenomenal success stories. Eagles vanished from the James River in the mid-1970s. Then the population started to rebound, rising each year, sometimes by as much as 10 percent, according to the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary and Virginia Commonwealth University. Last spring, the center recorded an

## The James River hosts one of the bald eagle’s most phenomenal success stories.

unprecedented 174 pairs of nesting eagles on the James River, a number that is nearing capacity—and pushing eagles to find nesting sites like the one at nearby Fort Stedman.

Still, threats to the eagles remain. Just outside Petersburg National Battlefield, the communities of Richmond, Hopewell, Petersburg, and Williamsburg will likely expand in the coming years, closing critical open space and creating a long corridor of human development. As development spreads, public lands of all sorts will become more important as eagle habitat.

“We have these public lands—there are quite a few on the James—and those are going to play a more critical role,” says Bryan D. Watts, director for the Center for Conservation Biology. The public lands include those managed by the Park Service, FWS, and the military.

In fact, many other Park Service sites also harbor nesting eagles in Virginia. Last year, during the Center for Conservation Biology’s spring survey, staff from FWS and the College of William and Mary found eight nests in Colonial National

Historical Park, one at Malvern Hill in Richmond National Battlefield, and three at George Washington Birthplace National Monument.

“One of the hopes is that these properties that have historic significance can play a dual role,” says Watts. “We can protect them for their cultural importance but at the same time provide habitat for some of these species we’re concerned about.”

Last year marked the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War, and 2015 will mark the 150th anniversary of Fort Stedman’s role in the end of it. Now that the resident eagles have produced two or three healthy eaglets every year—and don’t seem bothered by humans—Shockley hopes to allow more visitors to approach the fort while the eagles are nesting. Despite the careful management the eagles require, it seems fitting that they chose this spot. Who better but the national symbols to preside over such a storied site in American history? **NP**

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**KATE SIBER** is a freelance writer based in Durango, Colorado. She also contributes to *Outside*, *The Boston Globe*, and *National Geographic Traveler*, among other publications.



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### BIRDING THE BATTLEFIELD

Thanks to NPCA’s “Birding the Battlefield” program, birders participating in the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count have been tallying anything with feathers at Civil War parks across the country. As many as 141 bird species were recorded, from waterfowl to woodpeckers, proving that battlefields aren’t just hallowed historic grounds but important conservation areas, too. Learn more at [www.npsa.org/birdingthebattlefield](http://www.npsa.org/birdingthebattlefield).

# Hidden Yosemite

Explore the high country to complete the Yosemite experience.

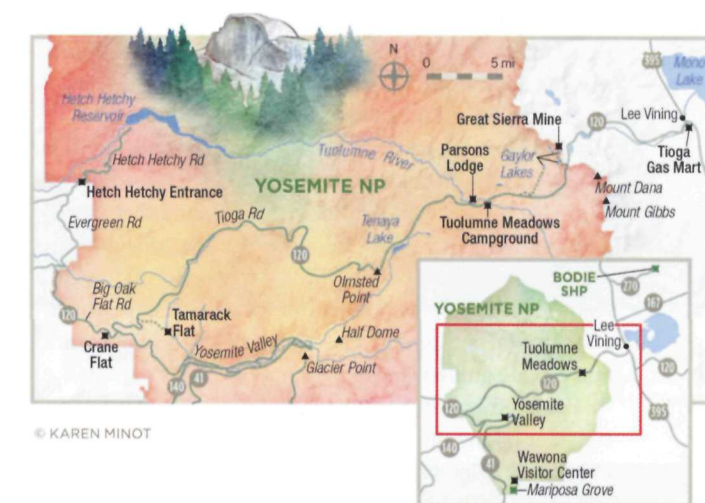
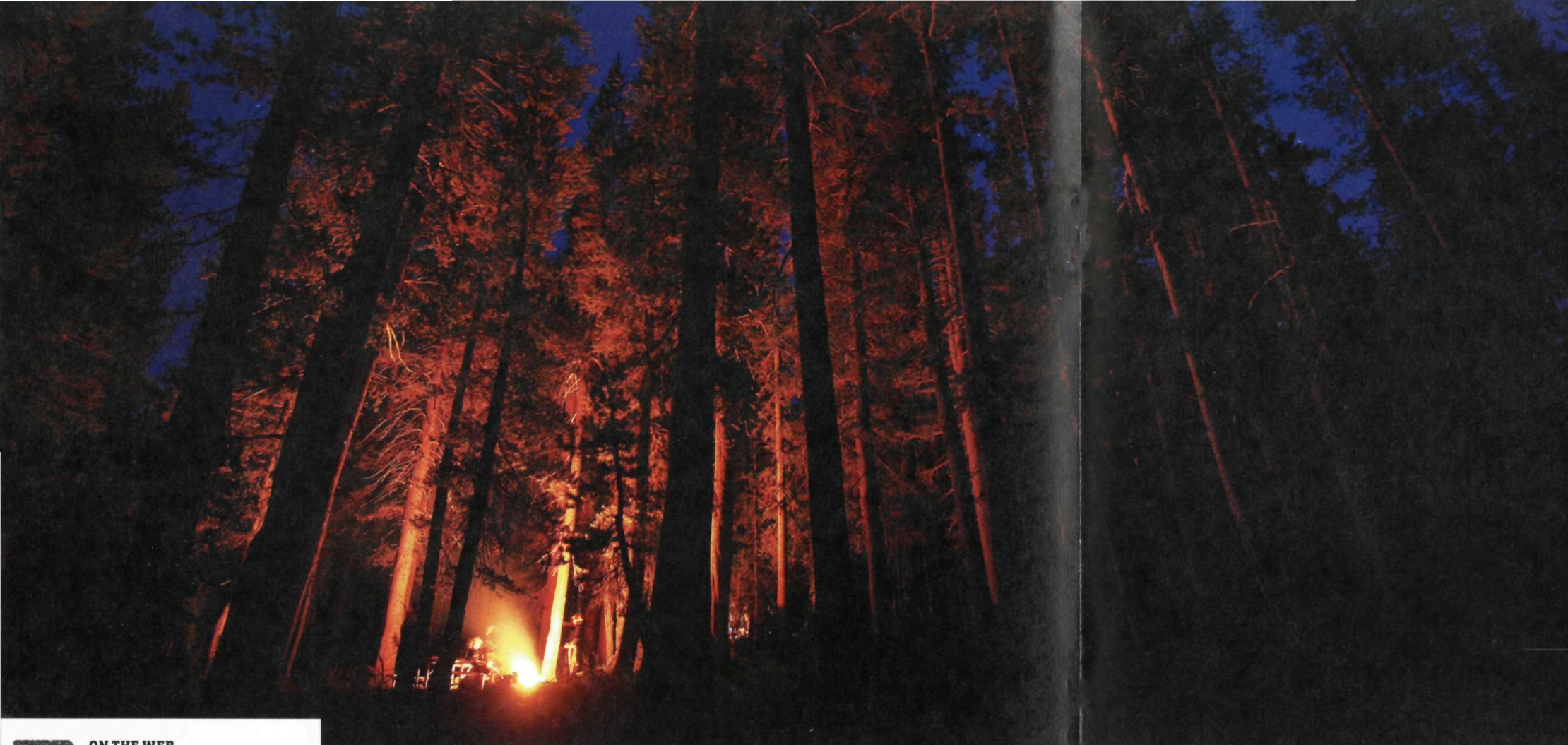
If you've visited Yosemite National Park without ever venturing beyond its famous valley, then you've sold it short. That's like traveling to the Louvre Museum in Paris, looking at the Mona Lisa, and immediately leaving without glancing at the other 34,999 works of art. No Venus de Milo, and nothing by Rembrandt or Michelangelo. Your experience would be so limited you could hardly say you'd been there at all. There's so much more to Yosemite that, frankly, you owe yourself another trip.

I owed myself a trip, period. I love camping, but I'm not hardcore; I just like sitting in a lovely outdoor setting and devouring the marshmallows I'm supposed to be roasting. But, I was ashamed of myself for being a fiercely loyal Californian without a solid knowledge of dear Yosemite, so I bribed two pals who'd never been and we began to plan.

Photos By Ian Shive

By Kallie Markle

STORM CLOUDS CAST DRAMATIC LIGHT  
on Tuolumne Meadows.



© KAREN MINOT

**YOSEMITE'S HIGH COUNTRY OFFERS** a welcome escape from the bustling crowds of the valley, whether it's a secluded campfire at Tuolumne Campground or a quiet hike around Tenaya Lake (opposite, bottom).

**ON THE WEB**  
Watch a short, inspiring film that follows African-Americans on their journey from Los Angeles to Yosemite at [www.npca.org/magazine](http://www.npca.org/magazine).



**W**e lacked the fitness, equipment, and general chutzpah for the more alternative Yosemite offerings and thus made a simple goal of “not the valley.” We headed straight to the high country in late July, coming from the east over Tioga Pass, through snow-speckled mountains and past mirrored lakes and galloping waterfalls before we even reached the park’s borders. We were scenery-saturated and we’d yet to see what Yosemite officially had to offer.

Take Tuolumne Meadows, for instance. This is the meadowy panorama where Maria von Trapp wishes she could have spun around. All eight-plus miles are as storybook and idyllic as anything one’s dreams of paradise could craft. Yosemite’s signature peaks and domes surround the meadows, but instead of craning our necks to scope their sheer height, we could simply look out in any direction and commit it all to everlasting memory.

The Tuolumne River winds its way through the meadow, and on a day ending in “y” you might see grazing mule deer, industrious pika, sunbathing marmots, and winking wildflowers. Summer thunderheads offered fantasy sunsets, and the scene was so halcyon we wondered what heaven has to offer that Tuolumne doesn’t already have in spades.

We (metaphorically) drank in the carbonated water bubbling from the ground at Soda Springs en route to Parsons Memorial Lodge, where we were treated to a visiting storyteller and illustrator. Other visitors might find conservationists, musicians, and writers on hand for an engaging dose of culture in the midst of highly concentrated nature. The historic stone building, with its intimate fireplace, is a cozy welcome once the sun dips behind the mountains and is an amble from the river’s picturesque wooden footbridge. To prove the high country is not just for high-intensity activities, Tuolumne Meadows beckons guests to snooze on its riverbank, picnic on a comfy boulder, or set up an easel and see if they can tear their eyes from the horizon long enough to put paint on the brush. It is both a reprieve for mountain adventurers and a casual adventure for the leisurely set.

We planted ourselves in the Tuolumne Meadows Campground, a 304-site conglomeration of reservations and walk-ins, retirees in RVs, and hikers who slipped in at sundown and vanished before first light. Volunteer Bill gave us the bear talk, and we pledged to keep all temptations hidden away in the locker; we were safely bear-bare, despite our fish dinner. The campground offers evening campfire

programs for fans of singing and storytelling and, on clear nights, star programs for fans of celestial twinkles. Making no attempt to match the food courts, galleries, and shopping of Yosemite Valley, the Tuolumne area boasts a store for when you run out of firewood, a grill for when you tire of trail mix, and a post office for sending your boss a Half Dome postcard announcing that your final paycheck should be directed to “Yosemite Park, Tuolumne Campsite #119.” There’s also a 24-hour gas station and the Yosemite Mountaineering School, which offers rental equipment, classes for all levels of climbers, and private guided climbs.

For a loftier perspective on the surrounding country, consider taking the trail to the uppermost Gaylor Lakes—a moderate, four-mile round-trip hike over 860 feet of elevation change. The forest stones offer natural stairs, so the terrain is easily navigable even where it’s steep. Be sure to turn around periodically for sweeping views of the valley below you, like meadows nestled among the peaks and Mt. Dana and Mt. Gibbs stretching up to shake off any clinging clouds. At the top of the pass we caught our breath, glimpsing the lake below but unsure that anything could possibly compare to what we’d already seen. Descending the hill planted us right at the edge of Middle Gaylor Lake, a dish of mercury ringed by granite crests and fed by a snowmelt stream;



**EVEN IF YOU'RE HEADED TO THE HIGH COUNTRY**, you may want to spend a couple days in the valley, which offers fine dining in the historic Ahwahnee Hotel (bottom left), a wide range of camping opportunities, and stunning views of El Capitan, Bridalveil Falls, and Half Dome (top left).

**SIDE  
TRIP**

There aren't many gas stations you would consider for catering your special occasion, but here's one for the short list: Tioga Gas Mart and its gem, the Whoa Nellie Deli. This must-stop shop is east of Yosemite National Park in Lee Vining, perched high above Mono Lake along U.S. Route 395 and Highway 120. Sure, you can fuel up your vehicle before the last stretch, but it's just as useful for an empty belly. A Yosemite-prone friend suggested I stop in for their excellent fish tacos, which I assumed was just a niche thing, but I soon discovered the full menu. The tacos aren't the niche: the unexpected marriage of gas mart and high-caliber fare is. Take a seat inside or on the lovely lawn to enjoy the views, and if it's a summer evening, plan to stick around for the concert series. Grab a beer or glass of wine to go with your Wild Buffalo meatloaf, legendary lobster taquitos, or herb-crusted pork tenderloin. Of course, the “legendary” part carries fishing and camping essentials for those headed to Mono Lake or Yosemite, as well as gourmet groceries and souvenir merchandise. It's rare to find an establishment with a fan base equal parts local and

far-flung, but the Tioga Gas Mart, with the Whoa Nellie Deli tucked inside, has earned its fame for being altogether unique, necessary, and excellent.

For more of the untraditional, take U.S. Route 395 about 23 miles north of Lee Vining to Bodie State Historic Park. This ghost town, abandoned after the mining gave out, is preserved in a state of arrested decay. It is so thoroughly trapped in time that the park doesn't offer modern amenities like food or gasoline, and the only flush toilet facilities are in the parking lot. The interiors of the buildings remain untouched—dust accumulates on stocked market shelves, church pews, and the saloon bar top. There's a three-mile unpaved road to get to Bodie, so it's best to leave your new Corvette at home. High-elevation weather can block access in the winter, but if you can get there your visit will provide a historical perspective hard to find in the shiny, speedy sphere of the here and now. Bring \$7 for park admittance for yourself and \$5 for children ages 6 to 16; pack snacks and water, and warn any faint-hearted companions that there's a reason it's called a ghost town.



*“Tuolumne Meadows beckons guests to snooze on its riverbank, picnic on a comfy boulder, or set up an easel and see if they can tear their eyes from the horizon long enough to put paint on the brush.”*

a panorama of Yosemite’s western ranges peeked out from the vanishing shoreline. Putting aside the trail and following the stream to Upper Gaylor Lake took us out of time completely; there was no sense of Sunday, or of July. There was only a place empty of footprints and silent but for the occasional sound of snowpack settling under the sun. We munched our crumbled Pop Tarts before embarking on the last stretch of our Gaylor journey: rimming the lake and climbing the last hundred yards to the historic Great Sierra Mine. The ruins of its stone cabins dot the slope, a far cry from the silver riches the mine promised but never delivered.

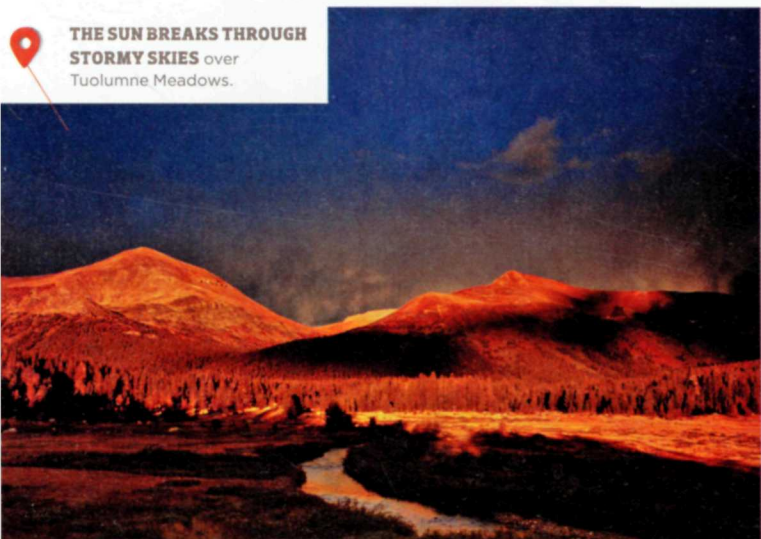
If the Tuolumne Meadows trail is too mild for you but you’re disinclined to attempt anything involving the words “upper” or “climb,” consider splashing around in Tenaya Lake or taking the path around it. A popular stretch of the Sunrise Lakes trail is a flat, comfortable two miles that briefly requires crossing a shallow slice of Tenaya Creek, but it’s a cinch if you don’t drop your socks in the water. Feeling valiant after our Gaylor success, we promptly abandoned the trail and followed

the creek instead, roaming over logs and boulders as we marveled at the rolling hills of granite underfoot. The high country is ideal for exploring glacier movement; it’s easy to envision the centuries of change and the forces at work over time. Tenaya Creek alternately lazes and races over the rocks, forming pools and falls and keeping the scenery from repeating itself. Kayakers and other water-tumbling enthusiasts can revel in the natural slides it forms as it works its way down to the valley, but casual paddlers should stick to the less vigorous lake.

The creek is easy to follow, but there’s just as much exploring to do around it as there is on its banks—keep it in your sight or sound and you’ll not need that trail of breadcrumbs to get back to the lake. The dry land allows for carefree scrambling and bouldering, which generously made us feel cleverer and more sure-footed than we really were. Walking along the huge, rounded expanses of granite feels like trespassing on the backs of slumbering behemoths, but they’re just the bare, sun-baked bones of the Earth, too busy holding California in place to be bothered by enraptured campers. Reunited with the trail, we found a tree that had been hugged by an enthusiastic bear and had lived to love another day; it was a darkly comic reminder that we were hardly the only ones roaming the Yosemite hills. We capped off the afternoon by driving west to Olmsted Point, a lookout offering views of Half Dome that turn positively enthralling under gathering thunderheads and coloring skies.

The high country is imperative for waterfall junkies, and July and August can be just as rewarding as the prime snowmelt season in late spring. Even if you go in a dry spell there are stunning, alternating vistas. Those willing to invest in a 16-mile hike or, for a (literal) change of pace, an all-day horseback ride will reap the payoff of three falls—Tuolumne, California, and LeConte—and the grand prize of Waterwheel. Waterwheel Falls is nature’s way of saying, “Look what I can do!” The exuberant falls carve deep rivets in

**THE SUN BREAKS THROUGH STORMY SKIES** over Tuolumne Meadows.



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**A MAN FLY-FISHES** on Tuolumne River—one of the many activities available in the high country, including hiking, wildlife watching, and backcountry camping.

## TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Whether you're wearing your life's possessions on your back or storing two of everything in the neatly lined cupboards of your RV, there are a few musts for all visitors to Yosemite's high country. If you intend to bypass the valley and arrive via the Tioga Pass entrance, you can fly into the Mammoth Yosemite Airport (weather permitting) or the Reno-Tahoe Airport, three- and four-hour drives from the park. Research opening and closing dates in advance, because unlike the ever-available valley, the high country is subject to snow. If you don't want to travel with your own roof, book a stay in one of the canvas tents at the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge or in a cabin at White Wolf Lodge. Committed hikers can head for the six remote High Sierra Camps, with their tent cabins and dormitory-style beds. Those carrying (or driving) their accommodations prefer the sites at Tuolumne Meadows Campground. Summer trips should include your choice of mosquito repellent: all the DEET products you can pack, or alternatives like Picaridin or lemon eucalyptus. Wear loose, light-colored long sleeves and pants, and if you really can't stand the suckers, bring a mosquito net enclosure for your picnic table. Visiting when water is abundant makes for spectacular waterfalls, but the price is

a particularly happy population of mosquitoes; preparation will make it a nonissue for you, or at least an expected issue. Warm-weather visitors shouldn't discount the altitude and its nighttime temps, especially when tent camping. Plan for warm sleeping layers and a toasty, polypro sleeping bag. Because the high country is so much closer to Yosemite's mountains, you'll be glad you packed your binoculars and zoom lens; they'll close the last little bit of distance and afford some choice wildlife watching that those with mere eyeballs won't be able to claim. The Tuolumne Meadows store accepts credit and debit payments, but only with the relic of a sliding carbon copy machine. Having cash on hand will save everyone time and buy you some good karma. Pack a journal or a voice recorder to keep track of what you did and saw and how you felt about it, because after just a week back at home, you'll start to think your memory is exaggerating. Artists should bring the tools of their medium, readers and history buffs should tote John Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra*, and everyone should prepare an appropriate playlist for when they drive through Tioga Pass to greet or bid farewell to the worthy icon known as Yosemite National Park.

the granite, creating a dish that sends the plunging water leaping out with so much gumption that it doubles back for another trip. This display of hydro-acrobatics strikes a balance between the heady beauty of nature and the relish of its eccentricity.

When we were finished barely scratching the surface of the Tuolumne Meadows and Tenaya Lake areas, we made our way west to camp in Tamarack Flat. This "first come, first served" campground is accessible only by foot or by rough, unpaved road and claims no flushing toilets or water faucets. Sites have picnic tables, fire pits, and access to Tamarack Creek, so if you're looking for a slightly rougher camping experience without forgoing all the niceties, this is your place. The vehicle-juggler of an entrance road discourages RVs, so the 52 sites are strictly for the tent types who don't mind boiling creek water for their morning coffee. The campground is spacious and affords plenty of exploring among surrounding pines and boulders. Had we known the dastardly road we'd braved to get there was historic Old Big Oak Flat Road, we might've been more gracious. Ambitious hikers can take the old road, closed to vehicles beyond the campground, all the way from Tamarack Flat to the valley floor, check the Mona Lisa off their list, and head back to the high country for the rest of the Yosemite experience.

I had fulfilled one duty to California and could scarcely forgive myself for waiting so long. I've travelled and seen some of the wonders of the world—I've even been to the Louvre—but Yosemite had been in my backyard all along and opened itself simply and unfolded magnificently. It created both a resolution and a craving and became a relationship more than a destination. **NP**

**KALLIE MARKLE** is a freelance writer based out of Redding, California. She likes writing about nature because it's simultaneously easy and impossible.

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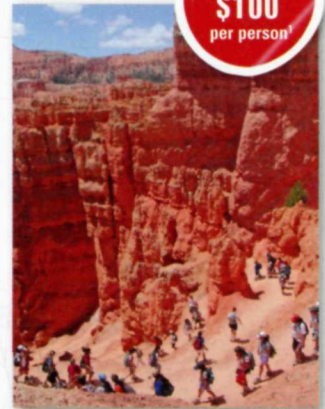
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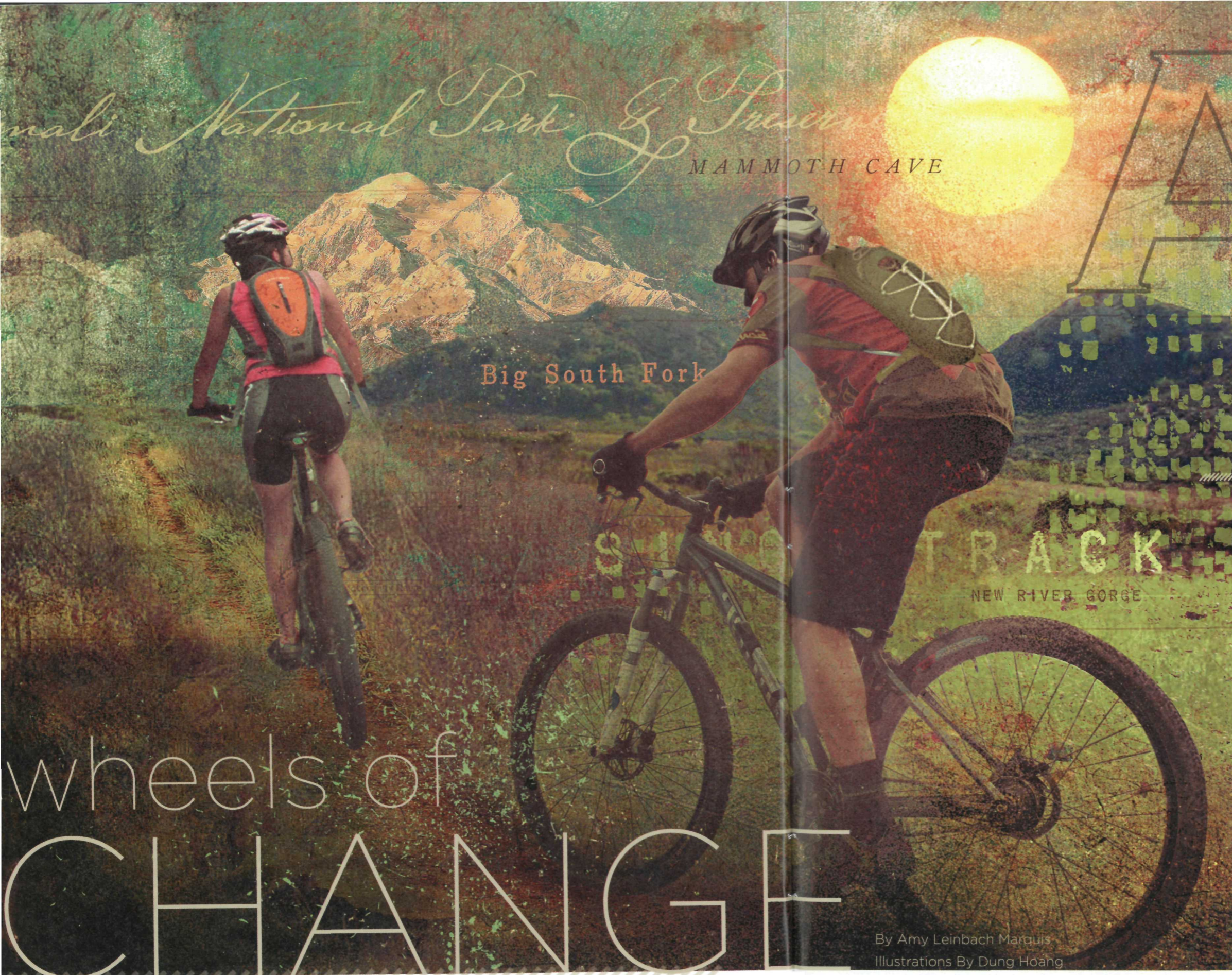


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GROWING NUMBER OF AMERICANS ARE HOPPING ON MOUNTAIN BIKES AS A WAY TO CONNECT WITH THE NATURAL WORLD. BUT DO KNOBBY TIRES BELONG ON NATIONAL PARK TRAILS?

In 1861, Major General Nelson A. Miles, a commanding officer in the U.S. Army, was cheering on cyclists from the sidelines of a six-day race in New York City when it hit him: Why not arm America's military with bikes, too? "Unlike a horse," he wrote, "a bicycle did not need to be fed and watered and rested, and would be less likely to collapse."

Five years later, Miles set out to test his idea on a small group of "Buffalo Soldiers"—African-American men tasked with keeping the peace on the frontier and, in some cases, serving as America's very first national park rangers in places like Yosemite and Sequoia. But Miles' group had a new mission: to ride custom-made bikes into Montana's wilderness. Off road. For an insane number of miles.

On August 15, 1896, the 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps set out on a self-propelled, round-trip journey from Missoula, Montana, to Yellowstone National Park—800 miles, to be exact. Packed bikes weighed as much as 76 pounds, and the soldiers' rations, which ranged from seven cans of beans to five pounds of prunes, added another 120 pounds collectively. At times, the trails got so muddy and the terrain so steep that soldiers had to push their bikes along railroad tracks instead. Changing a flat meant re-cementing loosened tires

By Amy Leinbach Marquis  
Illustrations By Dung Hoang

# wheels of CHANGE



IN AUGUST 1896, GENERAL NELSON A. MILES, pictured at the top of this illustration, led Buffalo Soldiers on an 800-mile mountain-biking expedition to Yellowstone National Park.

When the Park Service is deciding whether or not to unleash a pack of bikers onto a trail, it has a long list of consequences to consider.

onto wooden rims—a cumbersome process compared with the five-minute fix we’re accustomed to today. Despite the setbacks, however, Miles hailed the trip as a success and quickly enlisted his team for a longer, tougher challenge: a 1,900-mile trip across the Rocky Mountains to St. Louis, Missouri.

The Buffalo Soldiers’ expeditions are some of the first documented cases of mountain biking in history. And they happened in our national parks, where, ironically, the same activity has turned into one of the most controversial forms of trail use today. As the sport continues to grow in popularity—especially among America’s youth (research shows that mountain biking is the gateway sport to getting more kids outside)—the National Park Service and other land-management agencies are coming face to face with a complex set of questions: Do mountain bikes belong in our national parks, which boast the highest standards of conservation? If so, under what circumstances? And if land managers decide to introduce that use, how will they ensure it doesn’t destroy the resources and visitor experiences that have long defined those landscapes?

#### A GROWING TREND

Despite national attention during the Buffalo Soldiers’ expeditions, mountain biking didn’t catch on with the public until the late 1970s, after a young Californian named Gary Fisher got kicked out of bicycle racing for having long hair. Eager to shed the road scene, he turned to casual races down Marin County’s fire roads on old “beater-bikes” pulled

from dumpsters and supplemented with rugged parts. At one point, Fisher decided he wanted to be able to ride up the hills, too. So, borrowing parts from discarded motorcycles, he began building bikes with wider handlebars, adding front shocks to traditionally rigid forks, and fitting wheels with fat, knobby tires that handled better in the dirt. In 1979, Fisher and his partners started a company called “Mountain Bikes,” and by 1980, they were selling more high-end bikes than any other company in the world. Thirty years later, the sport is still evolving. High-end bike frames weigh about as much as a beagle. Front and rear shocks soften rides over rocky terrain. Special shoes attach to special pedals, giving cyclists an advantage on steep climbs.

So perhaps it’s no surprise that, 150 years after the Buffalo Soldiers took their first pedal strokes, today’s mountain bikers might set a longing gaze on our national parks and think, “I want to bike there, too.”

#### A MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE

Unless a special regulation has been put in place, current Park Service rules prohibit bicycling anywhere except on paved roads, in parking areas, and “along other designated routes”—a category that varies from park to park. It might sound exclusive, but there are actually 40 national park units that allow mountain biking on trails and dirt roads. Think seaside carriage roads in Maine’s Acadia National Park, Pacific-hugging trails in California’s Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and twisty, wooded

trails in Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area in Kentucky and Tennessee. Unfortunately, in some cases, the Park Service approved these trails without using a special regulation or soliciting public input. And that has stirred the debate.

Still, many positive projects have resulted from a growing relationship between the Park Service and the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA)—a nonprofit group that advocates for landscape conservation, trail access, and above all else, good trail etiquette. “IMBA has shown through hard work and cooperative attitudes that they share our passion for protecting and enjoying our nation’s parks,” said Park Service Director Jon Jarvis in a press release. “Bicycling helps draw new visitors—especially younger people—and gives them fun, memorable experiences in the national parks.”

If that sounds like a system-wide stamp of approval, think again. When the Park Service is deciding whether or not to unleash a pack of bikers onto a trail, it has a long list of consequences to consider first—the most obvious being potential harm to natural resources. But the research isn’t as straightforward as you might expect.

Mountain biking can take a toll on the land—a dozen or so studies conducted in the ’90s made that crystal clear. But those same studies also concluded that mountain biking does no more damage to trails than other forms of recreation: One study showed that hikers and cyclists trample vegetation at equal rates; another showed that hikers can

have a greater impact on the behavior of wildlife—namely, bighorn sheep and eagles—but bikers are more likely to suddenly encounter bears (read more at <http://bit.ly/t3Vjro>).

So perhaps bicycles don't threaten trails any more than activities we consider "low impact." But when you add bikers to the mix, more people are using the trails, period. And increased traffic causes increased wear and tear.

Is this just another example of people loving the parks to death? Bryan Faehner, NPCA's associate director for park uses, doesn't necessarily think so. "The challenges facing the national parks are daunting, in terms of the millions and millions of Americans using them," he says. "But you can meet many people's interests at national parks through thoughtful management. So to a large extent, it's not about too many people—it's about managing those people and their expectations. This is why it's so important for the Park Service to ask for input from the public before allowing

divide. Although most trail users are after the same basic experience—a genuine connection with the outdoors—the ways that people choose to seek that experience can cause conflicts. When a mountain biker comes around a turn and spooks a horse or surprises a hiker, tempers can flare. Sit in on a city council meeting in the Bay Area when the community is discussing open space, and there's a good chance you'll find red-faced neighbors yelling at each other over who should be banned from the trails.

Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky found a way to break that mold. It started several years ago, when Gov. Ernie Fletcher launched a campaign to boost the state's adventure tourism. At the time, mountain-biking groups were small and fractured and, in many areas, found themselves at odds with the hiking and equine communities. "There was a lot of tension and distrust," says Mike Dulin, a landscape architect, mountain biker, and former resident of Louisville, Kentucky. "We don't have a lot of public open space,

Mountain Biking Association, and in late 2004, he connected with the director of the Kentucky Horse Council and the local affiliate from the Sierra Club who heads up a state-wide hiking club. "We realized we had something in common," he says. "Despite very limited resources and very limited land, we seemed to be able to talk sensibly about sharing trails."

They knew they had to sell that message to their user groups, so they formed a group called the Kentucky Trails Coalition and hosted a summit in February 2005. About 50 people showed up, including state and federal land managers. "Those who had traditionally been at odds stayed at odds, but a lot of the newer people understood that there's power in cooperation," Dulin says. "Soon, everybody started to buy in."

In late 2005, the coalition helped some of the locals work through a planning process for Mammoth Cave's trails, which ultimately led to a plan to refresh an existing trail in the park and build another from scratch with multiple users in mind. Under the plan, equestrians would be granted access to a trail they had used in previous years, and mountain bikers and hikers would share a new, sustainably built trail in another area of the park. Park Service staff at Mammoth Cave took action to finalize the new trail corridor, complete associated environmental and archaeological studies, and secure funding to help offset some trail construction costs. Although everything moved relatively quickly, the final hurdle—the passage of a special regulation authorizing the use of mountain bikes on the new trail—has yet to be cleared. Exactly when mountain bikers will get to ride in Mammoth Cave again is still something of a mystery, but Dulin doesn't hesitate to call the process a success.

"This project at Mammoth Cave brought out the very spirit of the National Park Service," Dulin says. "People were

*Although most trail users are after the same basic experience—a genuine connection with the outdoors—the ways that people choose to seek that experience can cause conflicts.*

new recreational uses that might be controversial or even inappropriate, like mountain biking on trails."

#### A CULTURAL DIVIDE

But it's not just about managing traffic. It's also about bridging a deep cultural

so what little land there is can get pretty crowded pretty quickly. In some parts of the state, it had almost come to blows between mountain bikers and horseback riders at some of the public meetings."

Around the same time, Dulin assumed the role of president of the Kentucky



so passionate about this parcel of land, and some of them have a lot of history here. But they were able to get past the traditional hot-button issues and find common ground. It's not like we're all best buddies who are going out drinking every Tuesday, and we're not even sharing the trails—the equestrians have their section, and mountain bikers have theirs. But the process of getting to this point was one of respect and appreciation and understanding. It's a turning point in the way people behave and use their federal land, and that's something to celebrate as we approach the parks' centennial."

#### ADDING NEW IDEAS TO AMERICA'S BEST IDEA

Cooperation among trail users is an important hurdle, but it doesn't

necessarily mean shared-use trails are appropriate in every park. There's a significant difference, for example, between allowing mountain bikes in a place like Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area in the Southeast, which was established with recreation in mind, and a more remote park like Glacier in Montana, where much of the landscape remains untouched by humans. Bikes aren't allowed in designated wilderness, and for good reason. Although wilderness areas and national parks aren't synonymous, many parks play an important role in preserving large areas where "the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man," as defined by the Wilderness Act. And most mountain bikers are just fine with that idea.

"We aren't interested in inserting ourselves into parks where the conditions aren't right," says IMBA president Mike Van Abel. "Certainly, there are parks that are already overcrowded, or the trails are too rugged, or the terrain is otherwise unsuitable for cycling. But when park staff see an opportunity to include on-trail mountain biking, we're eager to help them create a new success story."

Sometimes, however, what park staff view as a good opportunity raises concerns in the conservation world. Consider what's happening right now in Big Bend National Park, Texas: For several years, IMBA has been advocating for the construction of a 10-mile, multiuse trail in an undeveloped part of the park. Opponents are citing everything from resource damage to rangers who are too

busy to manage yet another popular trail in the park. NPCA is raising a red flag, too, given talks of designating part of that land as a wilderness area in the future.

“We’re not against mountain biking in the parks,” says Suzanne Dixon, director of NPCA’s Texas regional office. “We just want to be sure the parks are asking all the right questions and making decisions based on the big picture.”

National Parks Traveler blogger Kurt Repanshek argues another point: “Questions are being raised over whether Big Bend officials are... bending over to placate a special interest group that already has more than 300 miles of mountain biking opportunities in the park,” he writes. In other words, why do we have to give them this trail, when they can just ride down those dirt roads instead?

### THE ALMIGHTY SINGLE-TRACK

No one seems to take issue with mountain bikes—or any type of nonmotorized bicycle for that matter—on asphalt or dirt roads open to vehicles. In fact, in many parks, cycling is encouraged as a way to stay fit, cut emissions, and relieve vehicle congestion.

But most mountain bikers are trying to get off the road. It’s noisy. It’s dangerous. And the terrain simply isn’t challenging enough. Instead, the type of trail they covet is called “single-track”—an off-road path that’s wide enough for just one bicycle at a time. It’s the kind of trail that leads to views without buildings, roads, and vehicles—views unmarred by humans. It offers a special kind of rhythm, engages a different part of the brain. It forces you to be present with whatever’s happening in that moment, because when you’re truly focused on the trail, unnecessary thoughts simply fade away.

Although some mountain bikers may be reckless, speedy, and inconsiderate

(every group has its bad apples), the majority don’t actually look that different from other trail users: They’re parents with kids, conservationists who work with nonprofits, and volunteers who dedicate entire weekends to restoring trails. And in most cases, the experience they seek isn’t so different from that of a hiker or equestrian. So as tempting as it might be to shoo mountain bikers onto flat, dusty roads, it also risks alienating a group of people that the Park Service might want in its corner: a group that understands what it takes to design safe, sustainable trails; a group that’s really started to prove itself as a valuable conservation partner.

### A DESIGN CHALLENGE

This summer, trail construction and design professionals from IMBA’s Trail Solutions team partnered with more than 1,000 Boy Scouts and Park Service staff at West Virginia’s New River Gorge National River to build 20 miles of new shared-use trail. IMBA also worked closely with the Park Service to ensure that the trails were built in a way that wouldn’t hinder the park’s ability to protect several globally rare plant communities and animal habitats, including local species of wood rats and bats.

Their secret? Good trail design. Which promotes not only healthy landscapes but happy trail users, too.

“To minimize user conflict, you have to design sustainable trails, and sustainable trails are just as much about education as design,” says Morgan Lommele of the Subaru/IMBA Trail Care Crew. That’s why she and other IMBA staff and volunteers often host educational meetings and visit trailheads to alert users about whom to expect on the trails, encourage them to communicate and be friendly, and dole out tips on how mountain bikers can help horses feel at ease.

Behind the scenes, there’s another layer of thought that goes into trail

## CAN’T-MISS MOUNTAIN BIKE RIDES IN NATIONAL PARKS

More than 40 national parks offer mountain biking on trails and dirt roads. Just about all of them are worthwhile, but here are five that no cyclist should miss. For more information, visit [www.imba.com](http://www.imba.com).

**Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area** in Tennessee offers mountain biking on more than 30 miles of trails.

**Canyonlands National Park** in Utah challenges riders with 100 miles of rugged dirt road, known as the White Rim Road.

**New River Gorge National River** in West Virginia features two trails totaling approximately 15 miles, and 20 miles of new trails constructed in 2011.

**Redwood National and State Parks** in California boast 50 miles of single-track trails.

**Whiskeytown National Recreation Area**, also in California, has more than 60 miles of single-track trails for mountain biking.



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design—like “sight lines,” or the ability to see what’s ahead in plenty of time to react. Most people assume that wide, open trails are safer for multiple users, and in some cases, they can be, but here’s a surprising twist: Land managers claim that most accidents occur on wider trails, simply because people can go faster. “On single-track, you have the perception of speed—you think you’re going fast—but you’re not going as fast, because there are a lot of obstacles around you on the trail,” says Lommele.

Basic regulations can help limit conflicts, too. In Tsali Recreation Area in North Carolina, the U.S. Forest Service alternates the days that horses and bikers can use the trails. “Users police each other,” Lommele says. “If you’re mountain biking out there when you’re not supposed to be, you’ll hear the riot act from other mountain bikers, because they want to be seen as a community that respects the law.” A popular trail west of downtown Boulder, Colorado, prohibits mountain biking on Wednesdays and Saturdays, giving hikers a break in traffic. In the city of Golden, just 30 minutes south, trail users are required to travel in the same direction, a practice that helps minimize conflicts around blind turns and on steep, technical terrain.

“Building trails isn’t just about digging in the dirt,” Lommele says. “It’s about knowing who’s going to use the trail, how they’re going to use it, and what their expectations are, and acknowledging that it takes a lot of work to design trails with good sight lines and gradual turns that help prevent surprises. It takes more time on the front end, but it will alleviate more conflicts once users are actually on the ground.”

Fortunately, IMBA has a lot of help. Across the country, its members log more than a million volunteer hours every year. And an increasing amount of that labor has been directed to restoring and creating trails within the national parks.

## A LONG ROAD AHEAD

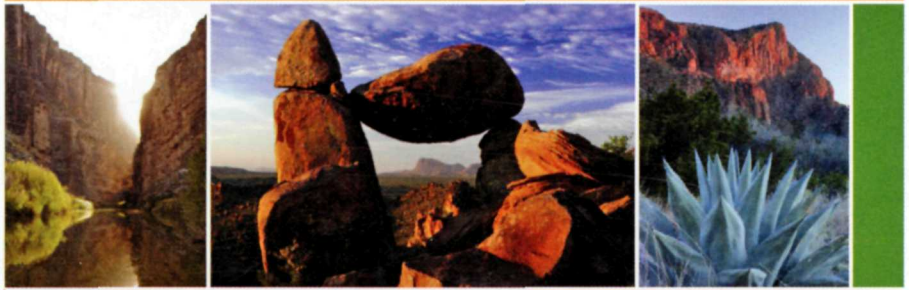
“As the Park System expands and evolves and our society gets more diverse, mountain biking is going to be the first of other more intense and frankly debatable uses coming down the pike, like ‘mountain boarding,’ or skateboarding on trails,” says Sean Smith, policy director for NPCA’s Northwest regional office. “So it’s good that the Park Service is figuring this out now. The more conversations we have, the more we can educate other groups on how the process works, and the more they can engage in thoughtful comments and thoughtful participation. Because that’s ultimately what the Park Service wants—to craft rules that protect the resources but allow for the most use possible.”

As different debates about mountain biking take shape in parks across the country, a few things are becoming clear: No matter what their mode of self-propelled transportation, most trail users are seeking the same trail experiences. Respect and collaboration are key. And every American deserves a voice in the conversation.

“Not everybody is going to get 100 percent of what they want all the time,” says Mike Dulin. “But we are a trail-loving population—whether we’re on foot, horseback, or bicycles. These parcels are incredibly valuable to the American landscape, and to fight over them is to do the American landscape a disservice. No matter who we are, we’re all after a great trail experience in a beautiful place, but if we’re fighting all the way to the front door of the supervisor, we’re not going to get a damn thing. It’s a breathe-deep kind of lesson. Stop, think about what you have to say, take a deep breath, and strip it down. What are we really after?”

A good question to ponder, next time we hit the trails. **NP**

**AMY LEINBACH MARQUIS** is associate editor of *National Parks* magazine, a Kentucky-raised equestrian, and a hiker and mountain biker in Boulder, Colorado.



## ADVENTURES AFOOT IN BIG BEND

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# SACRED WATER

How an unlikely alliance of conservationists, ranchers, business owners, and American Indians is fighting to save the Great Basin.



**I**T WAS ONE OF THOSE PHONE CALLS  
THAT COULD CHANGE EVERYTHING.

The kind where you remember where you were and what you were doing when you heard that first, life-altering ring. For Dean Baker, that call came in 2006 and found him in the same spot he'd been since 1959—his 12,000-acre ranch in rural Nevada.

“So you're really not going to sell?” a voice asked. It was a representative from the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA). During the past few months, SNWA had been buying up ranches for top-dollar prices in the Spring and Snake Valleys—two valleys that border

Great Basin National Park to the east and to the west. The plan: Buy out the ranchers, snatch up their water rights, then build a massive, 306-mile pipeline to ship billions of gallons of groundwater to parched Las Vegas.

The Robison Ranch in Spring Valley had just sold for \$22 million. Dean Baker and his three sons owned twice as much land and three times the water rights, which meant, by all accounts, they'd just won the lottery. But to the Bakers, some things in life are more important than money.

“We've been telling you for three years,” Dean replied. “We're not selling.”



**DEAN BAKER, A RANCHER IN EASTERN NEVADA,** has repeatedly refused to sell his land to the Southern Nevada Water Authority, which has proposed building a 300-mile pipeline to drain water from the Great Basin south to Las Vegas.

© SAM MORRIS/LAS VEGAS SUN

When the SNWA rep said he assumed the Bakers were just holding out for a higher price, Baker pondered his decision once again. Selling would grant his family the easy life and more money than they could ever hope to spend. Staying meant years of more hard work, and opposing the pipeline would be the toughest fight of their lives. Then again, staying also meant years of honoring what Dean loves most: watching things grow—his crops, his cattle, his family. “We’re not selling,” Baker said resolutely.

**MORE THAN 43 MILLION** years ago, a series of volcanic eruptions caused

the earth’s mantle to stretch, creating the Great Basin—a group of mountain ranges separated by flat, expansive valleys. Bookended by the Sierras to the west and the Wasatch Range to the east, the Great Basin covers most of Nevada, half of Utah, and dips its topographic toe into California, Idaho, Oregon, and Wyoming. The mountains are impressive but the Basin’s true miracle rests with its water. The precipitation that falls in the Great Basin has “no communication with the sea,” in the words of John C. Fremont, who named the area in 1843. Instead, all of the smaller basins in the 200,000-square-mile area that

constitutes the Great Basin drain internally. The rain and snow that fall here evaporate, pool into lakes, or sink deep into the gravel subsurface, where they recharge aquifers left over from the ice ages. Underground, the water slowly migrates toward the Great Salt Lake and along the way occasionally—almost miraculously—bubbles up through the dry desert as a spring. With more than 300 ranges and 42 peaks topping 11,000 feet, Nevada is the heart of the Great Basin. It is also at the heart of SNWA’s plan to get more water.

In 1989 Las Vegas water officials were concerned that nearly 90 percent of the city’s water supply came from

**SUBURBAN SPRAWL IN LAS VEGAS** is pushing more and more people into landscapes that lack the natural resources necessary for such large populations—hence the need to draw water from remote sources like Great Basin.



© TODD BIGELOW/AURORA PHOTOS

the dwindling Colorado River, so they proposed a massive underground pipeline that would transport water to Las Vegas Valley from 30 basins spread across four Nevada counties (see map on page 52). The proposal never gained much traction until Vegas' population boomed in the late 1990s and SNWA ramped up its campaign to build the massive pipeline to move up to 155,000 acre-feet of groundwater—enough to fill a good-sized lake. To succeed, SNWA would need two key permits: one from the state engineer granting the water rights, and another from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) granting permission to build the pipeline through federal land. But those permits hinge on one of SNWA's most difficult tasks: silencing the conservationists, ranchers, business owners, and American Indians who had joined together to stop the project. It is a

**"Our prayers begin and end with water,"** says Madeline Greymountain, a tribal council member. **"Water is for healing and cleansing body and soul."**

diverse group with deep roots, and one whose resilience matches the bristlecone pine, a conifer found in Great Basin National Park that can live upwards of 5,000 years. Even local ranchers who had initially opposed the creation of the national park in 1986 passionately joined the protest. Although the Great Basin kangaroo rat doesn't need much water to survive, the locals do, and they are fighting for it.

**ON A COOL MORNING** this past October, a passenger bus chartered by dozens of American Indians—ages

seven months to 75 years—sped down Highway 50 toward Carson City, Nevada's capital. To these travelers, who consider their people stewards of Great Basin for more than 12,000 years, water is more precious than gold. The goal of the bus trip, dubbed the "Groundwater Express," was to protest SNWA's idea to strip precious groundwater from the ancestral hunting, fishing, and farming lands surrounding the Basin's five federally recognized tribes.

"This is a direct threat to our survival," said Ed Naranjo, council member



GARY PEREA/WELL/NOUN/AIN, IGHIT STOCKS, CONNECTION, AURORA



© KAREN MINOT

and administrator for the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute. “Our culture, spirituality, and livelihood are based on diverse natural resources in Great Basin, the most vital of which is water.”

“Our prayers begin and end with water,” added Madeline Greymountain, a tribal council member. “Water is for healing and cleansing body and soul. People live through water as water lives through us.”

At a lunchtime rally at the Nevada capitol the following day, the Goshutes, Ely Shoshone Tribe, and Paiute Tribe of Utah sang water songs and chanted prayers as if their lives depended on it. Which, of course, they do.

**ONE MONTH LATER,** I traveled to Baker, Nevada—12 miles from Great Basin National Park and ground zero for the groundwater protest—to see if I could find some water. As a full moon rose above the Snake Range, I arrived at the Border Inn, a truck stop/convenience store/motel-restaurant/casino that straddles the Nevada-Utah border in the scenic Snake Valley. The inn’s tiny bar was crowded with ranchers, hunters, two Ely Shoshone Indians, and in the adjoining office, another group of locals huddled around a desktop computer, watching a live feed of Dean Baker testifying before the state engineer about the ill-conceived water

grab. “I hope these applications are not approved at this time,” Baker said. “A new approach must be used that protects existing rights and the environment and does not allow the large potential impacts created by this large, long-length, inter-basin transfer that will be impossible to shut down.” While the West may have been forged by rugged individualism, it was clear to Baker and those watching at the Border Inn that only cooperation can save it.

“The protest has certainly had a unifying effect across the county,” said Gary Perea, a White Pine County commissioner and co-owner of the Border Inn. “It has taken people of different



BLAKE GORDON

**GREAT BASIN NATIONAL PARK** features vast mountain landscapes (opposite), exceptional night skies, and the bizarre Gothic Palace inside Lehman Cave (above). Without water, plants would perish, cave species would suffer, and the dry, dusty earth would obscure star-lit skies.

interests and perspectives and really brought them together.”

“By uniting, we are much stronger than if we went at it alone,” added Susan Lynn, administrator of the Great Basin Water Network, a nonprofit that represents more than 100 groups and individuals working to oppose the pipeline. “We coordinate the protests, but others participate by providing technical expertise, research, and urging their members or partners to comment publicly when necessary. Sometimes, it’s a church hosting discussion groups or a school whose students write letters or draw pictures. Sometimes it’s seniors who address mail or a public relations firm that helps us design and

print educational brochures, or service organizations using their phone trees to educate others. There are so many ways for people to do a small piece.”

Given the amount of construction necessary to build the pipeline, Perea and his mother and business partner, Denys Koyle, could certainly make a lot of money selling gas, food, and lodging to construction crews in the short term. But they are far more interested in protecting the valley and its strong pioneering spirit. “You need a certain mindset towards life out here,” said Koyle. “We want people to know there’s value in rural areas and in the people who chose to live there.”

As Dean Baker finished his testimony, the mood at the Border Inn lifted, and a sense of pride seemed to fill the room.

**WITH MORE THAN** 77,000 mountainous acres, five distinct habitats, 71 kinds of mammals, 18 types of reptiles, and 800 different plant species, the Great Basin contains a stunning diversity of flora and fauna. But I was there to find out about the water—specifically the park’s four stream systems, nine miles of stream habitat, 18 wetland areas, and 25 perennial springs that could be affected by the pipeline. So the next



morning, I made the short drive to Great Basin National Park to tour the Lehman Caves, an exquisite collection of limestone stalactites, stalagmites, and draperies dripping down from the ceiling like candlewax. “The caves are a result of water,” park guide Peter Super informed me and two tourists, “specifically acidic water, which carved the limestone rock you see.”

## While the West may have been forged by rugged individualism, it's clear that only cooperation can save it.

Park Superintendent Andy Ferguson is quick to point out that pumping groundwater from Snake Valley—an area that averages less than 10 inches of precipitation a year—isn't a good idea and could affect the park's vast network of caves. Many caves are located close to one another and their entrances look quite similar, which suggests they were formed by a single drainage network. Deep-seated hydrothermal waters influenced the features of other caves, and since no sunlight penetrates far beyond the cave's entrance, every resident from millipede, cricket, and spider to the western big-eared bat relies on the nutrients and organisms that water brings into the cave.

Ferguson also refers to the possibility of Snake and Spring Valleys turning into dust bowls should the water table drop and deep-rooted plants such as greasewood lose

touch with moisture and die. The mountainous national park, which rises thousands of feet above the valley floors, would surely suffer. Along with harming plants, animals, and reducing visibility—including clouding up some of the darkest stargazing sky in the country—the dust would also collect on the snow, causing it to melt faster, thus exacerbating the water loss.

Then there's the impact on the community. “Towns like Baker and [nearby] Garrison are important gateway towns that have really supported the Park Service,” Ferguson stated. “And when people visit the park, they need somewhere to eat, sleep, and get gas.”

In other words, if you dry up the gateway towns, you dry up tourism.

In the cave, Ranger Super suddenly flicked off his flashlight and everything went black. “Can you hear any water?” he asked our group. At first there was only darkness and silence. Then a single, solitary drop of water fell, echoing in the distance.

Super flicked on the light. “That's good luck,” he said. “We've just been given a cave kiss.”

**THE NEXT MORNING**—my last in the Great Basin—I realized that with the exception of the isolated drop in Lehman Caves, I had yet to find water.

Tom Baker, Dean's son, pulled up in his truck and I hopped in. Tom had generously offered to give me a tour of the 12,000-acre family ranch, home to 2,000 head of cattle and crops of alfalfa, barley, corn, and grass seed. As we bounced down dirt roads, he told me of their constant struggle to find water, of drought years when pumps were “sucking air” and of wells dug a thousand feet into the earth that came up dry. “We are caretakers of the land, and we manage it for production,” he stated. “There's no production if the land isn't good and there's no wildlife. We aren't managing the land for today; we're managing it for the future.”

The truck came to a stop beside a wood cabin from the mid-1800s. I'd all but given up my search for water until we ascended a small hill, where the vegetation suddenly turned green and two mallards shot into the sky. Then I heard the exquisite sound of water and spotted a spring winding through the reeds like a string of liquid diamonds in the desert rough.

My host crouched down and pointed to a small spot, bubbling in the sand underwater: the source. I hunkered low and looked. The sight of water rising up from the stark desert had an unexpectedly strong impact on me. Maybe the spring was whispering something about grace. Or perhaps it was just testifying to the unconquerable spirit of people who call the Great Basin home.

“It's always amazing to me where it appears,” Tom Baker said, standing. “A guy never tires of watching water.”

*Read about the next steps for Great Basin on page 56*

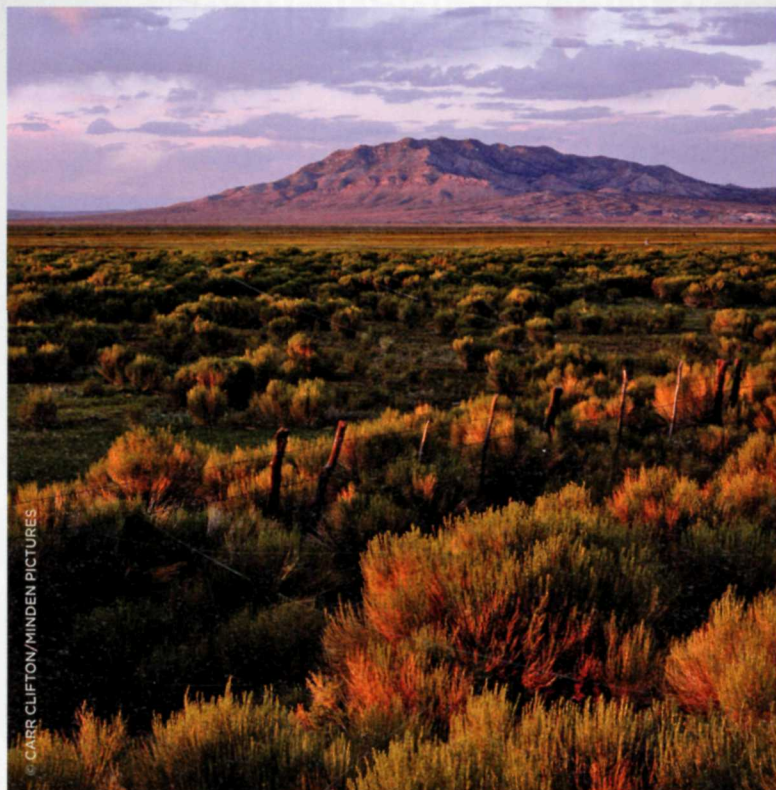
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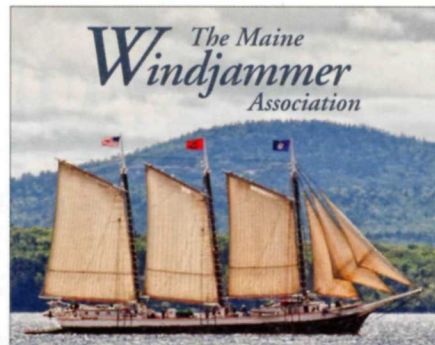
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## What's Next?

The Southern Nevada Water Authority maintains it is only seeking water that is “unused” in the aquifers and that not having a reliable long-term water supply could cause a 10 percent drop in the metropolitan Las Vegas economy—the equivalent of losing 80,000 jobs. The National Parks Conservation Association, Great Basin Water Network, and new allies such as the Mormon Church argue that a pipeline will cause irreparable harm to the environment and that taking a \$15-billion bet on poorly studied aquifers is a risky gamble, even for Vegas. Nevada’s state engineer is expected to make a decision on Spring Valley by March, and the hearings for Snake Valley have yet to be scheduled. Although the future of water resources surrounding Great Basin National Park hangs in a delicate balance—much like the Great Basin itself—one thing is certain: This unlikely coalition of conservationists, rural ranchers, small business owners, and American Indians won’t stop fighting.

“It has been a tumultuous journey,” declared Madeline Grey-mountain, “but we are warriors, and we will keep moving forward. I promise.” **NP**

**KEVIN GRANGE** is a freelance writer in California. His first travel memoir, *Beneath Blossom Rain*, was published in April.



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**CARL SANDBURG, JUST SHY OF 85 YEARS**, smokes a cigar in his office in North Carolina in 1963.

## An American Poet

Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site memorializes the poet whose work defined mid-century America.

**I**T'S EASY TO OVERLOOK the small flat rock surrounded by woods at Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site—264 acres of hills, ponds, woods, and pastures about 30 miles south of Asheville, North Carolina. But this is perhaps the most magical spot on the entire farm, once known as Connemara. It is the rock where the late poet, historian, biographer, and musicologist Carl Sandburg spent innumerable days writing in a chair in blissful solitude. In the serenity of a warm afternoon, it's not hard to imagine the ghost of the esteemed man sitting right here, lost in thought.

"It is necessary now and then for a man to go away by himself and experience loneliness; to sit on a rock in the forest and to ask of himself, 'Who am I, and where have I been, and where am I going,'" Sandburg once wrote

in a letter to a friend. His words ring true as ever today, and his last home offers not only a window into the poet's unusual life but also a vivid time capsule of mid-century America.

"There's no other place in the country to see how he lived when he wrote," says Sarah Perschall, chief of visitor services at the historic site. "When you walk into the house, you are walking into how the Sandburgs lived, down to the trash in the trash can and toothpaste containers in the vanity in the bathroom. It's as if they just stepped out."

Sandburg's story is a classic American tale of hard work and ambition. The son of Swedish immigrants, he was born in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1878 and dreamed of traveling the world. Instead, he read nearly every book in the local library and left school after eighth grade to help support his family. But one June afternoon in 1897, at the age of 19, Sandburg boarded a train and his life changed forever.

He traveled the country as a train-hopping hobo; worked as a shoeshine boy for former Civil War soldiers, a newspaper delivery boy, milk slinger, fireman, railroad worker, farm hand, house painter, and soldier in the Spanish-American War; and went to college, then left without a degree. These experiences no doubt informed Sandburg's deep understanding of the lives of common Americans—and later helped him become a voice for them.

Sandburg eventually became a journalist and covered World War I and World War II, but his interests couldn't be reined in to one medium of expression. Over the course of his career, he wrote seminal biographies of Abraham Lincoln, diverse collections of poetry, a children's fairytale

book called *More Rootabagas*, and *American Songbag*, a catalog of classic American folk songs collected from his travels. He won two Pulitzer Prizes, one for history in 1940 and another for poetry in 1951. President Lyndon B. Johnson awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964. In 1965, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People honored him for his reporting on the 1919 Chicago race riots and his lifelong devotion to social justice.

Beyond his awards, Sandburg was beloved for pioneering the use of free verse in poetry and expressing the joys and struggles of everyday people in a style accessible to a wide range of Americans. Now his work also presents a snapshot of early 20th-century life.

Many of the events happening at the turn of the 20th century—the industrial revolution, the depression, labor rights—mirror some of the issues Americans are dealing with today, Perschall says. As a result, Sandburg's messages are still relevant. "He's also a great person to look at to understand our past," she adds. He's painted this great picture of history for us."

While Sandburg lived at Connemara, he compiled *Complete Poems*, abridged his biographies of Abraham Lincoln into one volume, penned two autobiographies, and wrote *Honey*

Sandburg's home offers not only a window into the poet's unusual life, but also a vivid time capsule of mid-century America.

and *Salt*, a collection of poetry. As a loving and gregarious father, he spent time with family and friends, taking walks, sharing jokes, strumming the guitar, and singing songs. He also continually collected books that would help him understand human experience, and now some 12,000 remain.

"He was an American icon, a significant figure in our national life," says Penelope Niven, author of *Carl Sandburg: A Biography*. "He explored the human condition, from birth to death. He wrote about the American Dream, and... the importance of being part of a global community." As a testament to his influence, when Sandburg died in 1967 at the age of 89, some 6,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial for a tribute led by President Johnson.

After Sandburg's wife, Lilian Steichen Sandburg, died in 1977, Connemara was turned into Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site, the first national park unit devoted to a poet. Today, visitors can roam the grounds, explore the family's 9,000-square-foot home, and see some of the 300,000

letters, telegrams, maps, recordings, and photos left by the Sandburgs, including historic Civil War maps and a Mathew Brady photo of Abraham Lincoln. Sandburg's writing studio, complete with his typewriter and notes tacked up on the wall, hasn't changed in decades. The descendants of Mrs. Sandburg's herd of goats, now tended by more than 30 volunteers and the local 4-H club, still graze in the pastures.

"Carl Sandburg helped the American people discover their national identity through songs, poems, and prose," says Niven. "It's good to know something about his work as a poet, a biographer, a creator of children's stories, and a collector of folk music, because many of his themes and subjects are still timely and universal, and therefore relevant today." And there is perhaps no better place than the peacefulness of Connemara to reflect upon his life and legacy. **NP**

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**KATE SIBER** lives in Durango, Colorado, and is a contributor to *Outside* magazine. Her work has also appeared in the *New York Times* and *National Geographic Traveler*.



NPS

#### **A TALENTED TEAM:**

When Sandburg married Lilian Steichen, he gained Edward Steichen, the famed photographer, as a brother-in-law. The two collaborated several times, most notably on a 1955 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *The Family of Man*, in which Sandburg's prologue expressed their shared belief in the oneness of humanity.

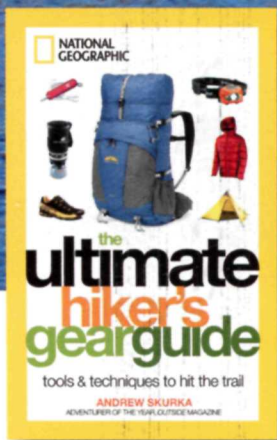


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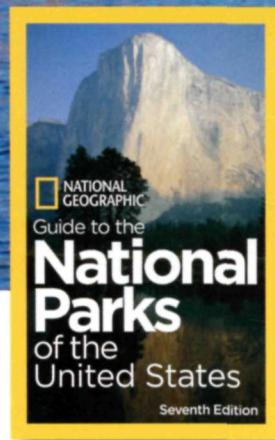
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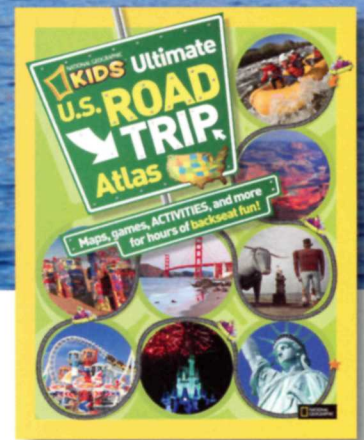
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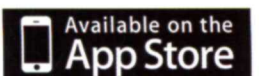


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