



# City of Rocks National Reserve

## Cassia County, Idaho

Managed and Protected Cooperatively  
by Idaho Dept. of Parks and Recreation  
and the National Park Service

### WELCOME . . .

Established in 1988, City of Rocks National Reserve encompasses approx. 14,300 acres of land renowned for its scenic, geologic, and historical significance.

For more than 100 years this area has been known for its scenic values and as a milestone on the immigrant trails west. More recently it has gained national renown for the outstanding rock climbing it provides.

In order to protect the fragile environment and to help make your visit more enjoyable, some changes are being made in the Reserve. New restroom facilities at Bath Rock and a potable water hand pump at the summit of Emery Canyon were installed in 1989. A visitor center in Almo is under construction and will be completed by Summer 1990.

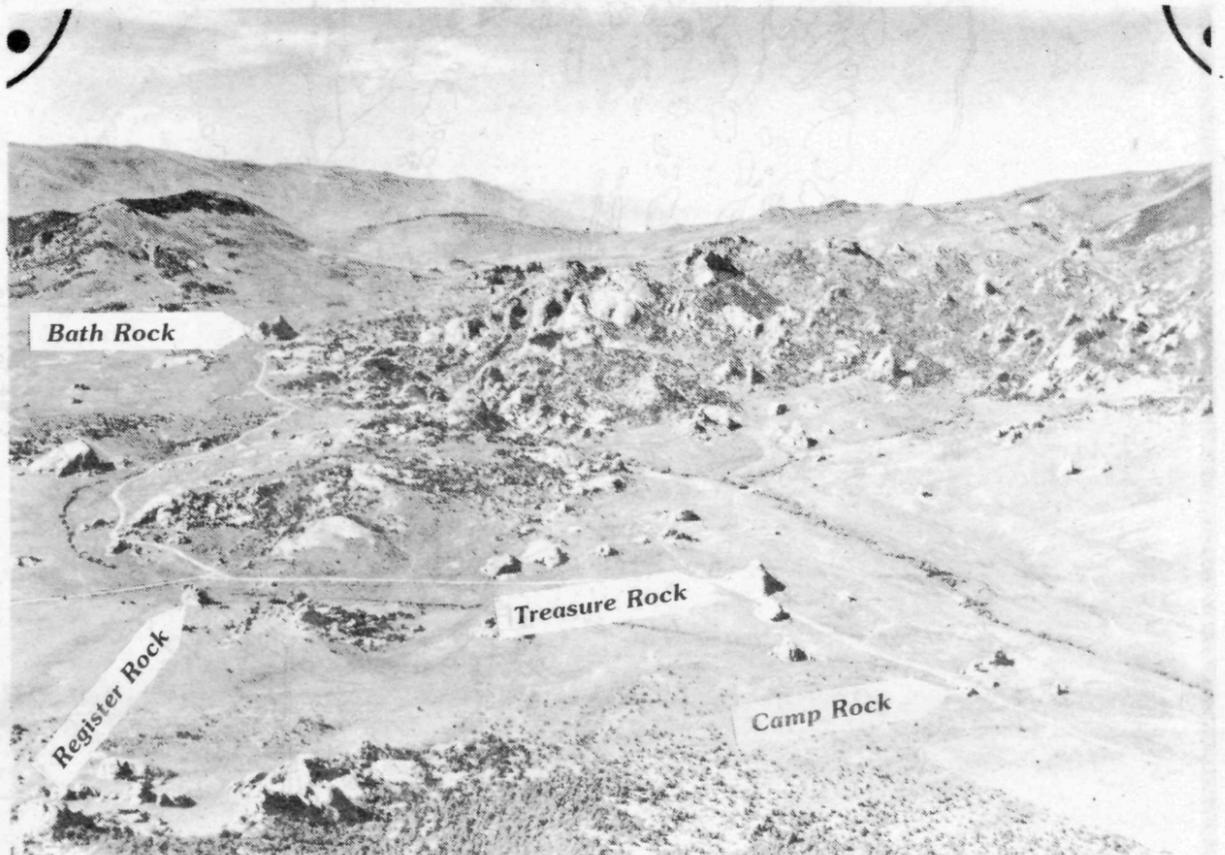
About half of the 14,300 acre Reserve is privately owned and your cooperation in respecting the rights of the private landowners is needed to help preserve this area.

Enjoy your visit. Reserve personnel will be happy to answer questions or call the headquarters at 208-824-5519 in Almo.

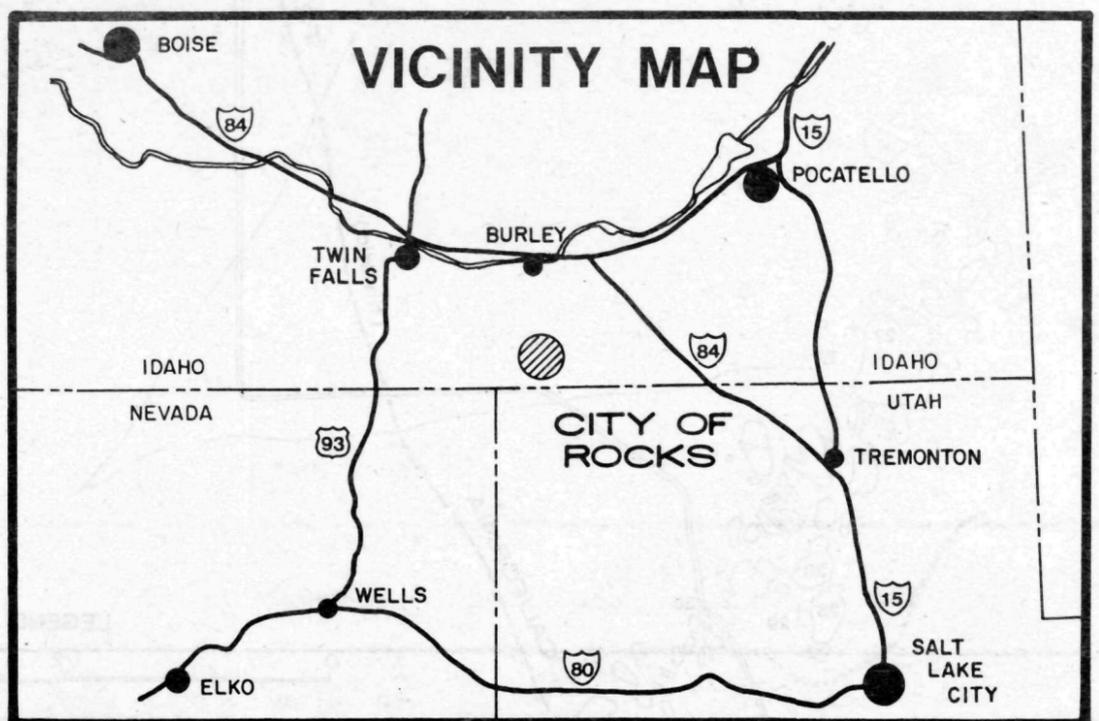
Lying just four miles west of Almo and fifteen miles southeast of Oakley in south central Idaho, the City of Rocks is named for its skyline of rock pinnacles, many 60-70 stories high, resembling a city.

The City of Rocks is famous for a number of reasons. It is of historic interest as a key milestone on the Oregon/California Immigrant Trail. It was in the 1850's that the area acquired its name. Diaries of the period commonly mention it.

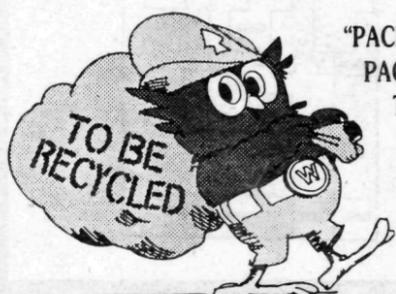
Camping is popular here because of the unusual scenery. Rock climbing opportunities draw people from all over the western United States. The area is at the northern extension of the singleleaf pinyon pine tree and it contains some of the oldest rocks in the United States. The area is designated as a National Historic Landmark and listed on the National Registry of Natural Landmarks.



Silent City of Rocks - view looking to the northwest



**NOTE:** Limited garbage collection is available.

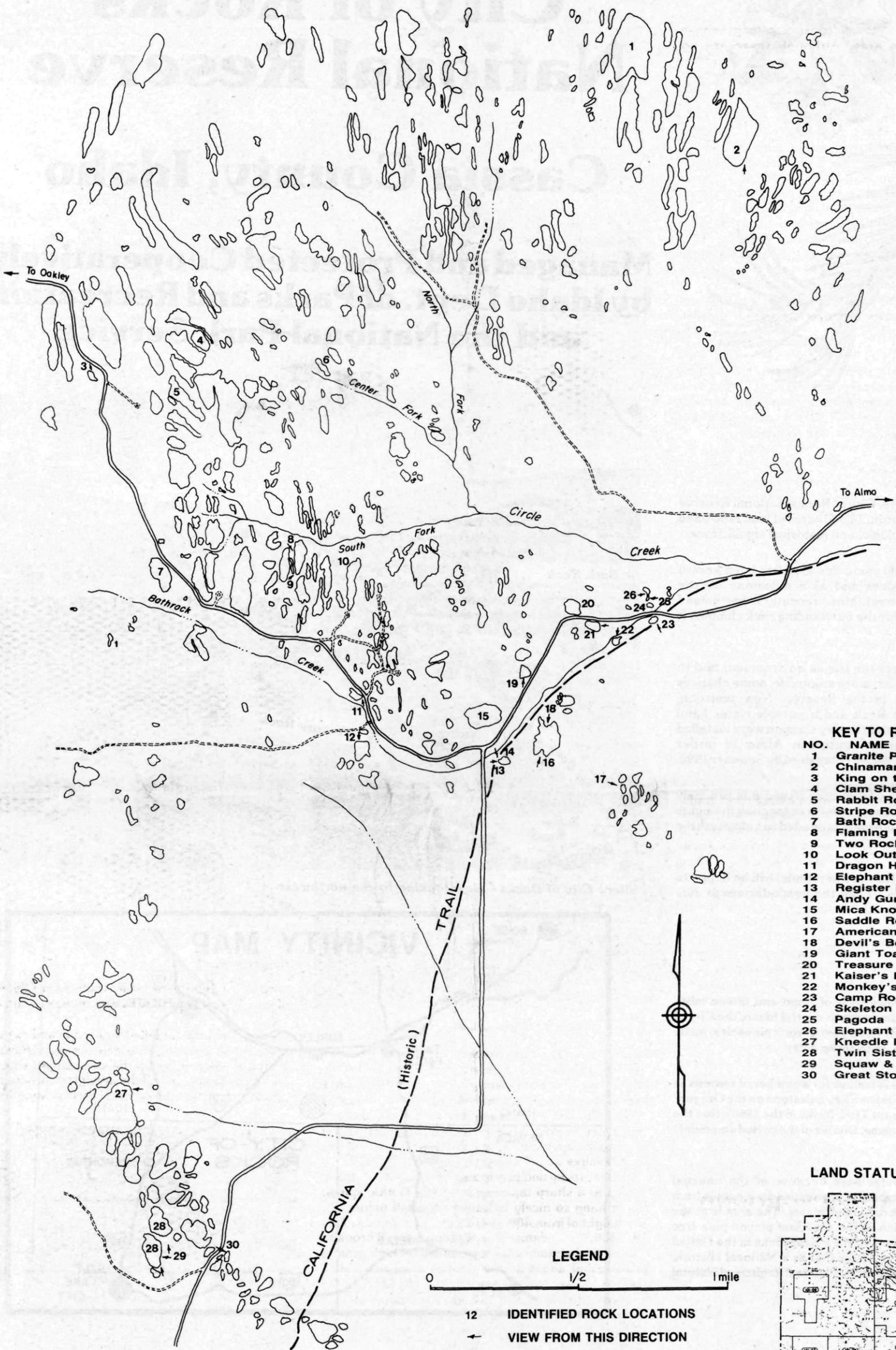


"PACK IT IN ...  
PACK IT OUT ..."  
Thanks ...

### FACILITIES

Because the Reserve is so new, facilities are limited. A picnic area and toilets are available below the Twin Sisters. A new vault toilet is available at Bath Rock and a hand pump with potable water is located at the head of Emery Canyon. The Reserve headquarters and information center is located in Almo, just 4 miles east of the Reserve.

The nearest developed camping sites with tables, toilets, and water are managed by the Forest Service at Howell Canyon in the northern part of the Albion Range and Clear Creek in the Raft River Range. Both are approximately 30 minutes away.



- KEY TO ROCKS**
- | NO. | NAME               |
|-----|--------------------|
| 1   | Granite Peak       |
| 2   | Chinaman's Head    |
| 3   | King on the Throne |
| 4   | Clam Shell         |
| 5   | Rabbit Rock        |
| 6   | Stripe Rock        |
| 7   | Bath Rock          |
| 8   | Flaming Rock       |
| 9   | Two Rock Turtles   |
| 10  | Look Out Rock      |
| 11  | Dragon Head        |
| 12  | Elephant Rock      |
| 13  | Register Rock      |
| 14  | Andy Gump          |
| 15  | Mica Knoll Hill    |
| 16  | Saddle Rock        |
| 17  | American Eagle     |
| 18  | Devil's Bedstead   |
| 19  | Giant Toadstool    |
| 20  | Treasure Rock      |
| 21  | Kaiser's Helmet    |
| 22  | Monkey's Head      |
| 23  | Camp Rock          |
| 24  | Skeleton Head      |
| 25  | Pagoda             |
| 26  | Elephant Head      |
| 27  | Kneedle Rock       |
| 28  | Twin Sisters       |
| 29  | Squaw & Papoose    |
| 30  | Great Stone Bird   |

**LAND STATUS**

Only slightly more than half of the area referred to as City of Rocks National Reserve is in public ownership. Management responsibilities on public lands are shared by the National Park Service and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. Road maintenance is carried out by the Oakley Highway and Cassia County Road Districts. Private land is owned by approximately 26 different owners.

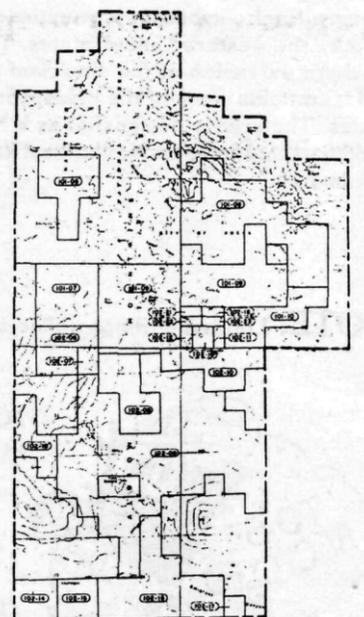
**LEGEND**

0 1/2 1 mile

12 IDENTIFIED ROCK LOCATIONS  
 ← VIEW FROM THIS DIRECTION  
 □ PRIVATE LAND  
 ▨ PUBLIC LAND

Owner/Manager	Approximate Acreage
Private	6,600
Reserve	7,640
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,300</b>

**LAND STATUS**



## ACTIVITIES

**Camping** - The City of Rocks has long been a popular camping area. Although there are no developed sites, there are numerous dispersed sites available. Camping is permitted only in those areas previously used where the vegetation has already been lost.

**Rock Climbing** - There are unlimited opportunities for rock climbing throughout the area. Many spots can be found for children as well as the technical climber. There are, however, places where climbing is inappropriate. If the rocks have old names on them written by the early pioneers, it is requested that you not climb on these rocks. Most of these are at the lower elevations in the City along the old road. It is also asked that climbing gear be removed from the rocks when your climb is complete. There are enough climbing sites on public lands so there is little need to trespass on private property. For additional information on rock climbing, refer to the section on rock climbing on page 6

**Touring** - Most of the interesting features of the area can be seen by automobile. For scenery, the best time to view the areas is late afternoon when the angle of the sun enhances the rock formations. The cooler temperatures also improve the experience.

**Programs** - Interpretive walks and campfire talks are available for groups or special events by stopping by the visitor center or by calling Reserve headquarters at 208-824-5519.

The map on page 2 shows a number of named rocks. It is fun to try and see the shapes implied in their names. Camp Rock provides easy access to some of the old writing of the pioneers. A drive south crosses the Oregon/California Trail twice. These crossings have been marked with yellow railroad ties by the California Trail Association. If you stop at the crossing near Spark Creek, the faint linear change in vegetation color reveals the old wagon road on both sides of the road. Farther south is the Twin Sisters. From the pass at Twin Sisters, you can see Granite Pass in the distant southwest.

**Hiking** - Although there are no developed trails, public lands do provide lots of opportunity for hiking. The vegetation is sparse, and no problems are encountered climbing down among the rocks for a considerable distance. Children and adults alike will find it fun to hike among the rocks and down the canyons looking for caves, strange formations, or just noticing how the vegetation changes with site conditions. Many of the views are outstanding.

**Sky Watching** - For a number of years, the City of Rocks has been a favorite of amateur astronomers because of the black skies. The light pollution in this area is one of the lowest in the continental United States. If you see groups setting up telescopes, be sure to ask them for a look. They can actually show you far-off galaxies, among other things, and are eager to interest people in their hobby.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After 1842, California Trail immigrants came by the City of Rocks and after 1846, immigrants bound for Oregon. In 1840, a group left Independence, Missouri, for California. At Soda Springs the group split up, one going to California, the other Oregon. John Bidwell led the California group of 33 by going down the Bear River then to their destination by the Humboldt River route. They had severe difficulty passing Salt Lake, so in 1842 Joseph B. Chiles scouted for a more practical route. They wanted a more direct Humboldt connection to the Snake River and Fort Hall and found Granite Pass just southwest of the City of Rocks. Granite Pass came into immediate use in 1843 when Chiles and Joseph R. Walker brought a group to California. (Walker had led a band of Captain B. L. E. Bonneville's fur hunters to California a decade earlier.)

At the time, Granite Pass was in Mexico, although less than a mile from Oregon Territory, which was claimed by Great Britain and the United States. After 1850, the area became part of the Utah Territory, but wound up in Idaho in the 1872 Idaho-Utah boundary survey.



*Twin Sisters*

City of Rocks, being on the road to Granite Pass, then California, became a landmark. In 1846 Jesse Applegate's route to Oregon also passed that way. During the California gold rush traffic routed through Fort Hall, or over the Hudspeth Cutoff, came close enough for people to write their names on the rocks. The Salt Lake traffic came into the area just south of the Twin Sisters, passing by the old Stage Station.



*Old trail divide entering City of Rocks*

Diaries of immigrants dwelled on this area. Describing their reaction to the Valley: Bigler, September 15, 1848, "... was 2 towering rocks near each other which Mr. A. Pratt named Twin Sisters ... ." Lewis, August 7, 1849, "... a great many curious peaks of rocks may be seen while passing through this valley bearing the appearance, at a distance, of being a city its tall spires ... ." Sawyers, June 22, 1850, "... very high, rocky and precipitous mountains ... many run up to a sharp tapering point like Gothic spires. Some hang so nicely balanced on small points ... to a height of from 400 to 600 feet ... ." Ingalls, July 10, 1850, "... camped at night on a small brook in a basin in the mountains surrounded by high granite peaks stand about in the greatest confusion called steeple rocks ... ." Shepherd, July 10, 1852, "... a most wild and romantic scenery presents to the eye, rocks upon rocks, naked and piled high in the most fantastic shapes ... It is called Castle City or Steeple Rocks ... ." Salton, July 26, 1852, "... Came to Pyramid Circle and Steeple Rock ... The rocks all around the circle ... The circle is about 5 miles across one way and 3 the other ... ." Carpenter, August 18, 1856, "... we were so spellbound with the beauty and strangeness of it all, that no thought of Indians entered our heads ... ." Lord, August 17, 1849, "... numerous artificial hydrants forming irregular pointed cones. Nearby they display all manner of fantastic shapes. Some of them are several hundred feet high and split from pinnacle to base by numerous perpendicular cracks or fissures. Some are domelike and the cracks run at different angles breaking up the large masses into huge blocks many of which hang tottering on their lofty pointed beds ... I have not time to write the hundredth part of the marvels of the valley of rocks ... ."



*Register Rock*

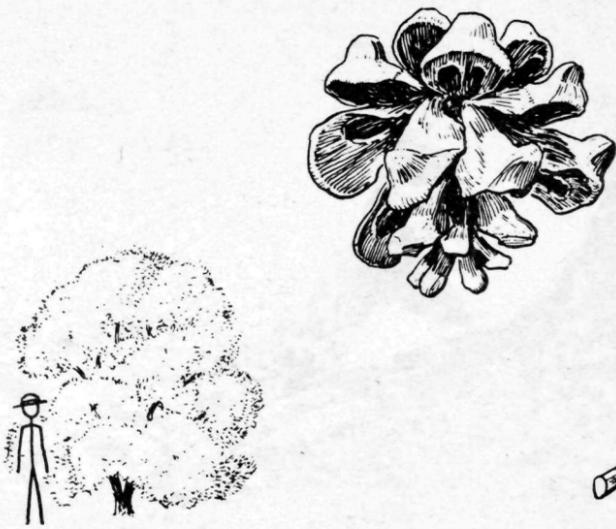
Portions of the trail are still visible as are the names of immigrants applied with axle grease on the rocks.

Viewing the little modified landscape and examining portions of the trail, one can almost visualize the wagon trains coming up the steep slopes with oxen, horses, or mules. Did all the immigrants whose names appear on these stones reach their destinations?



*Axle grease name on Register Rock*

With the opening of the Idaho mines in the 1860's, a demand for supplies was created. Freight from Utah passed through Immigrant Canyon (Salt Lake Cutoff) then turned north to the Snake River near Oakley. Stage routes were established from the southern railroads—one being John Halley's stage line from Kelton, Utah, to Boise City, a stage station being at the junction of the California Trail and the Salt Lake Cutoff. The remains of this station are still to be seen.



Singleleaf Pinyon Pine



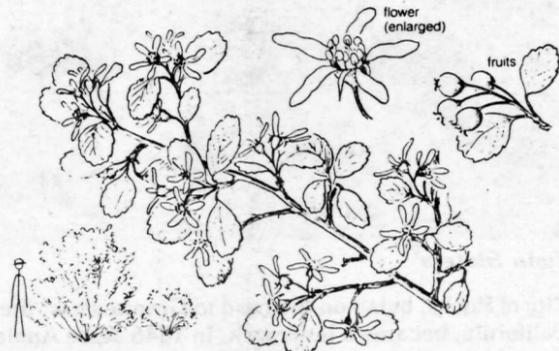
leaves, natural size

In the higher areas, you can see nearly pure stands of curlleaf mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*). Its wood is exceedingly heavy, hard, and dense, and occasionally is used for cabinet work (it takes a high polish) and for roller skate wheels. Deer and elk use it as a browse plant and thickets provide good cover.

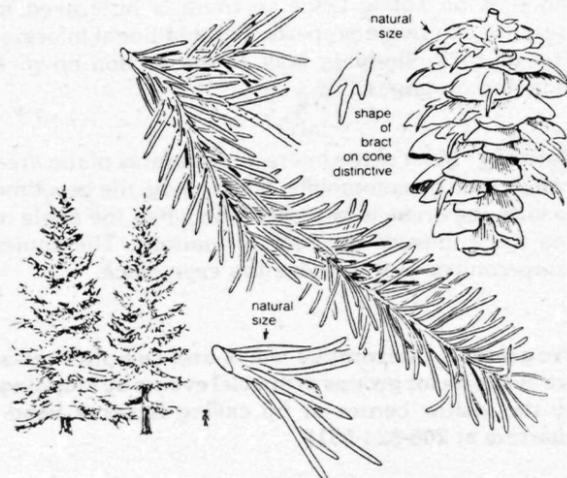
Many bets were won by the old-timers of the area with the use of the mahogany that grows in the City of Rocks area. When a person unacquainted with this hard, dense wood appeared on the scene, some old-timers would bet him that he could show him a piece of wood that would not float. The old-timer would secure a piece of dead and very dry mahogany—throw it into a body of water and it would sink due to the heavy, dense nature of this wood.

**VEGETATION**

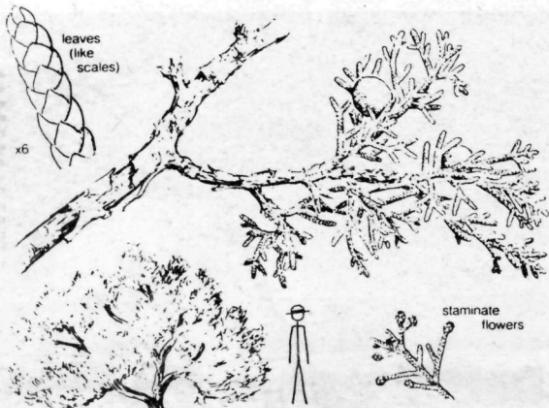
Although the City of Rocks is dominated by juniper, pinyon pine, and sagebrush, the topographic relief, canyons, and different moisture situations have created an interesting mosaic. The pinyon pine/juniper forests which are the most common in the area occur from southern California to their northern extension in southern Idaho. In fact, singleleaf pinyon (*Pinus monophylla*) reaches its northern and almost eastern extent here in the City of Rocks. It is interesting to note that single-leaf pinyon only grows where the summer rains from the Gulf of Mexico occur. This type usually grows next to sagebrush in higher or rockier areas where there is just a little more moisture.



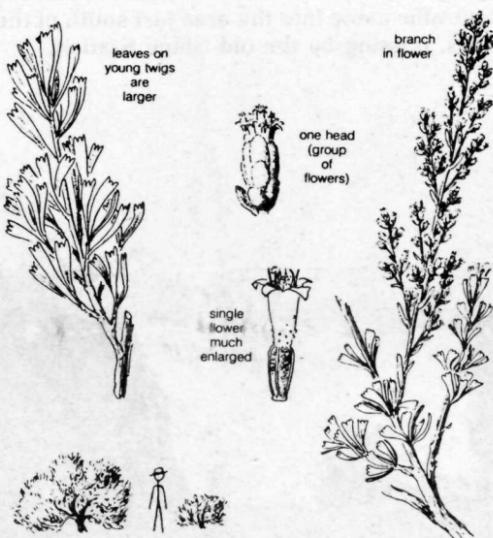
Utah Serviceberry



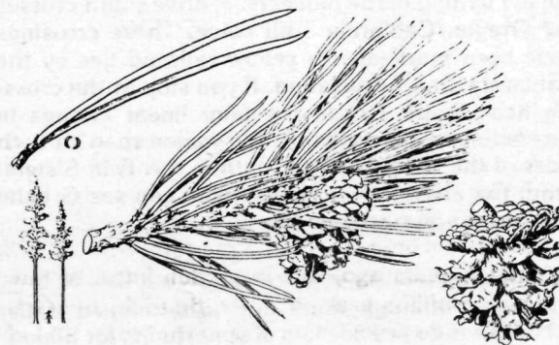
Douglas-fir



Utah Juniper



Big Sagebrush



Lodgepole Pine

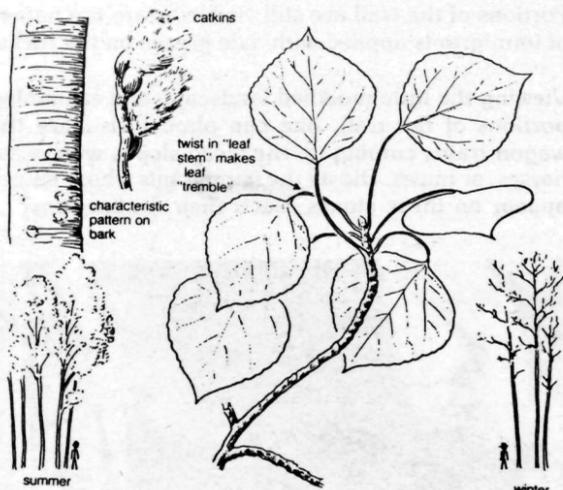
Utah juniper is the more dominant form of juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) while Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*) is scattered throughout the area on the wetter sites. The nuts of the pinyon were once a staple of the Indian diet, and the nuts are still a favorite of people in the area.

The very high elevations are covered by patches of lodgepole pine, limber pine, Douglas-fir, true firs, and grassy meadows.

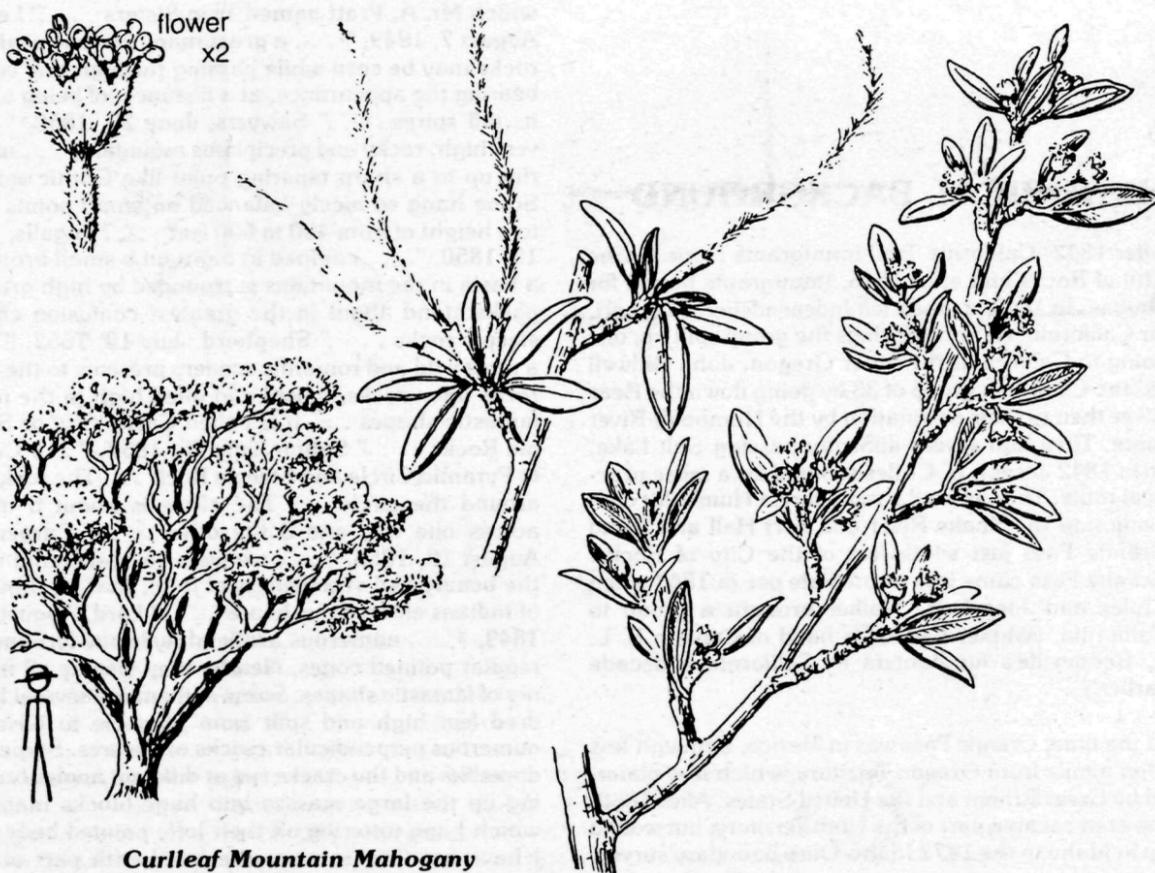
A Research Natural Area has been proposed for the area because parts of the City have uniquely undisturbed vegetative communities.

Take notice of the vegetation patterns as you visit different parts of the area. Correlating the vegetation to the sites where you find them provides an interesting insight to the world around you.

Of course, the dominant vegetation in the City of Rocks is sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), whose flower is the Nevada State flower. Its wood smoke is so pungent that the Indians used to steep themselves in it to neutralize skunk smell. In the spring, the cactus blooms with some of the prettiest flowers anywhere.



Quaking Aspen



Curlleaf Mountain Mahogany

Quaking aspen occurs in the canyons with streams. Associated with it are narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*), thinleaf alder (*Alnus tenuifolia*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier utahensis*), and the Rocky Mountain juniper. Of course, the aspen, a favorite food for beaver, turns the canyons to beautiful yellow in the fall. Alder bark is very rich in tannin, and is very puckery if chewed. In Mexico, the bark is used in tanning, giving skins a red color. The dye is also useful in basketwork. Serviceberry was a favorite of the Indians and many trappers who ground the dried fruit with venison or buffalo meat to make pemmican, or jerky.

Note: The information and drawings for this section on vegetation are courtesy of: Southwest Parks and Monuments, "Shrubs And Trees Of The Southwest Uplands", written by Francis H. Elmore and drawings by Jeanne R. Janish.



*Rabbit Rock (left)*

## GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The formations you see are composed of granitic rock (light colored, coarse grained rock with dark specks—salt and pepper) formed deep within the earth's surface. Most of the granite is part of a "small" batholith (large mass of formerly molten rock below the earth's surface) of the Almo Pluton formation which covers approximately forty square miles. Thirty million years ago, this formation intruded much older (2.5 billion year old) granitic rock, the Green Creek Complex, which is some of the oldest that can be found in the continental United States. Both of these granites can be seen at Twin Sisters, each spire being a different granite. The southern pinnacle is the older of the two.

The shaping of the granite is a result of the weathering process. The top of the rock is dissolved by rain-water and redeposited to form a more resistant crust-like cap. This cap has taken a darker color than the underlying material. The sides of the spires, where water seeps into the cracks, undergoes frost wedging which chips off pieces of rock, an action known as exfoliation. These two processes give the rocks their present shape. The Silent City of Rocks looks much the same as it did to the pioneers, though the exfoliation process is continuing to change the rock and has had time to chip off many of the pioneers' inscriptions.



*Nature's Sculpture*

## ROCK CLIMBERS, PLEASE NOTE

Please avoid climbing where raptor, birds of prey, nests exist, especially in the spring. Bolts should never be placed on existing routes and slings and other gear should be removed after use. Avoid climbing on any route with historic "inscriptions."



*Axle grease name on Register Rock*

## WILDLIFE

Although there is a great deal of variation in habitat in the City, it is not reflected in the wildlife found there. This is because small pockets of vegetation caused by the geologic formations are too small to meet the needs of specific species. Interesting wildlife, however, is common.



*Mule Deer*

The City of Rocks lies within an east-west migration route for mule deer, with some wintering taking place in the area. Other common mammals include badger, porcupine, coyote, bull snake, ground squirrel, and sand lizards. Some of the more common bird species one might observe are: marsh hawks, red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, kestrel, morning dove, common night hawk, gray fly catcher, western meadowlark, vesper sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, savannah sparrow, Brewer's blackbird, pinyon and gray jays.



*Kestrel*

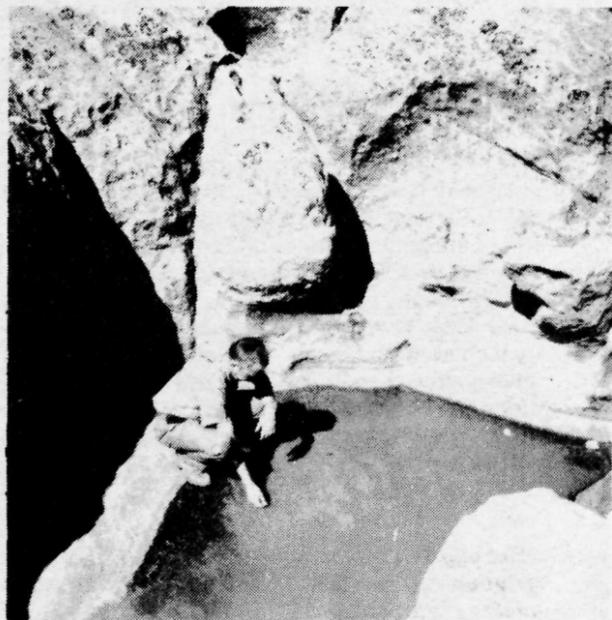
## FUTURE FOR THE SILENT CITY OF ROCKS

Recently, the National Park Service prepared a study on management options. Local public opinion supports some form of action. Use is increasing. The area represents an asset to Idaho, and the City deserves more care than it has been getting. Environmental problems and the threat of subdividing this area make some solution necessary.

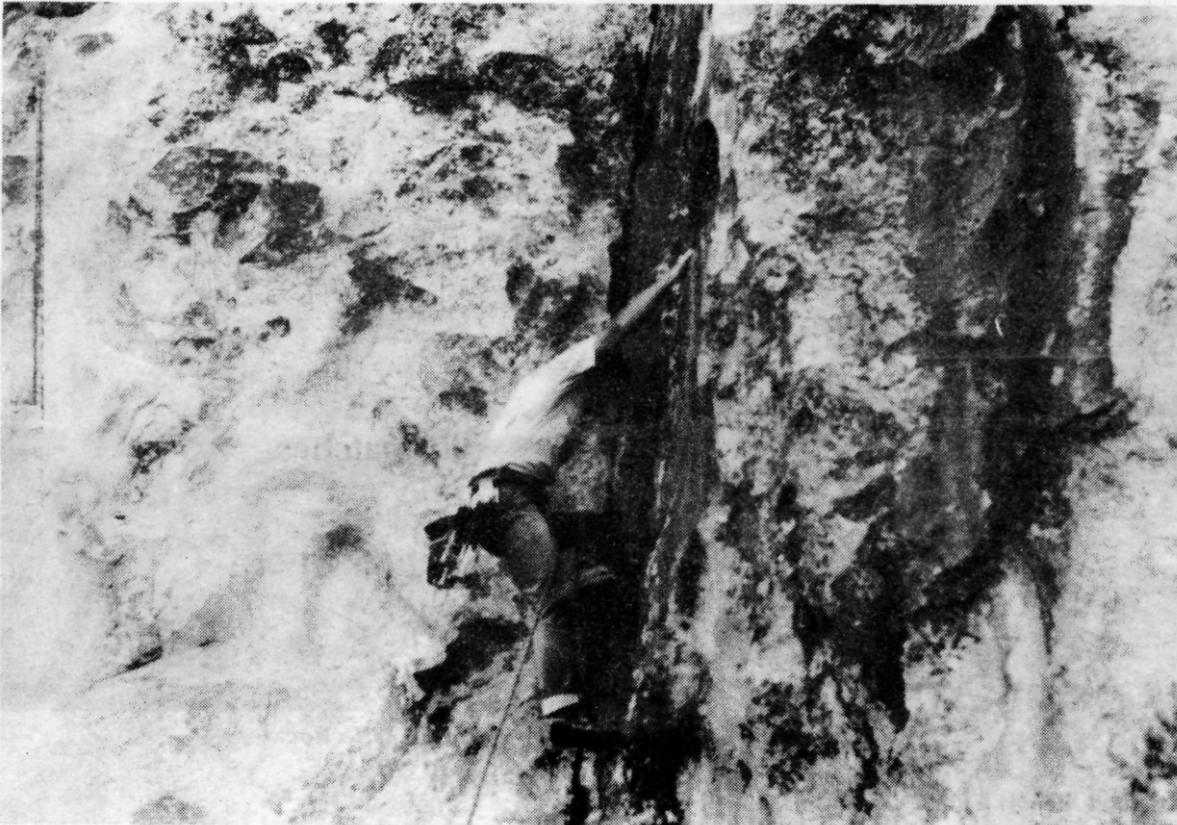


*View toward Castle Rock*

With suggestions gathered from local citizens, a planning team with representatives from the National Park Service, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Oakley, Almo, as well as the elected Cassia County Commissioners are currently working on the development plan to ensure a bright future for the newly created Reserve.



*"Bathtub" on Bath Rock*



## ROCK CLIMBING

The City of Rocks has become one of Idaho's finest sites for technical rock climbing. Climbs rival nearby areas such as the Sawtooth Mountains, Teton Canyons or Salt Lake City's Wasatch Granites.

Approximately 300 routes have been described to date. One hundred to 300-foot spires provide most of the climbing opportunities, although there are spires of 5-600 feet providing an all day adventure. For the adventurous, named climbing routes include Bloody Fingers, Lost Pioneers and No Cash Refunds.

The formations are composed of a rock (granite) noted for having superb, solid, rough friction properties with lots of pockets and edges for hand and foot holds. Most of the described routes follow crack systems, but climbers are attempting extremely difficult overhangs and thin blank faces needing dynamic gymnastic move abilities.

Rock climbers have the City of Rocks divided into five areas. These are the Upper City near Emery Canyon Saddle, the Parking Lot Rock, Center City, Inner City and the Twin Sisters areas.

The Upper City has probably the highest number of climbs in the City and is easily approached. The rocks are on the west side of the road from "King of the Throne" north to the saddle. The Upper and Lower Breadloaves is considered to have easy to moderate climbs. There are a number of good camping sites at the Emery Saddle, however, the winds that come up the canyon should be considered when setting up your tent.

The Parking Lot Rock has a number of climbing opportunities. There is a small road just below Emery Canyon Saddle going to the east providing access, picnic and campsites. Erosion is a problem in this area. Ground disturbance should be kept to a minimum. This includes using the road when it is muddy, trenching tent sites, and so forth.

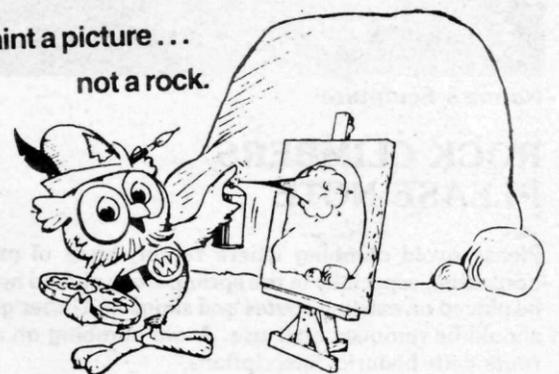
The area referred to as City Center and Inner City have the most camping sites with some of these sites having easy access for family exploring of the rocks and the South Fork Canyon.

Bathtub Rock is easily climbed from the back. Elephant Rock is the most popular formation in the City. Only the north half of the rock is on public land. It is requested that climbers restrict themselves to the public side. The rocks to the east along the road are on private lands. Please do not trespass on these lands.

The Inner City provides the most remote climbing and exploring. The best approach is from Parking Lot Rock, scrambling through the notch north of Rabbit Rock, then dropping down to the base of Clamshell. The 150-foot Lost Arrow spire is one of the most sought after summits.

The Twin Sisters are located on a small piece of land bordered on both sides by private land. Although adjacent rocks to the northwest and southeast look inviting, we request you respect the rights of the private land owner and refrain from trespassing. The Twin Sisters are the largest formations and offer challenging climbs.

Paint a picture ...  
not a rock.



**YOUR HOSTS . . .**

Should you desire additional information, or wish to share your comments about the management of this area, please do not hesitate to contact any one of the agencies listed below. We sincerely hope that your visit to the City of Rocks National Reserve will be a safe and enjoyable one.

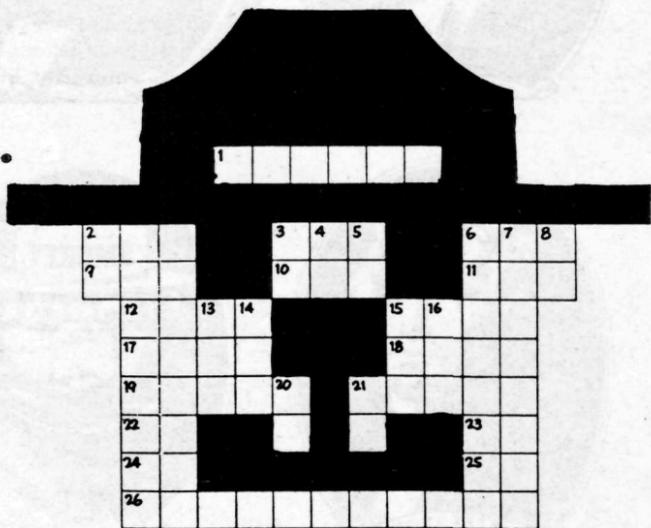
**IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION**  
**Ned R. Jackson**  
 Reserve Manager  
 Almo, Idaho 83312  
 Telephone: 208-824-5519



**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**  
**David A. Pugh**  
 Superintendent  
 963 Blue Lakes Blvd., Suite 1  
 Twin Falls, Idaho 83301



**FOR KIDS ONLY**  
**(BIG KIDS INCLUDED)**



**#1 Across: Who says  
 don't play with matches?**

**ACROSS**

- 2. Tom, Bob, Wild or Alley
- 3. What's left after a forest fire (singular); also the name of a tree
- 6. The science of people's relationship to their environment (first 3 letters)
- 9. The bear \_\_\_\_ the berries.
- 10. A female deer
- 11. If you drive one to the forest, you can sleep in it
- 12. It's what forest rangers call a dead tree that's still standing; it's also what any tree can do to your mother's stockings.
- 15. Bambi was a baby \_\_\_\_
- 17. The Scotch \_\_\_\_ is a very common kind of Christmas tree.
- 18. The middle of a tree or an apple
- 19. A relative of the seal that sometimes lives in rivers
- 21. A kind of plastic we use to make raincoats and car tops
- 22. The first 2 letters of what a bird says
- 23. The second and fourth letters in where Smokey lives
- 24. When Smokey smells smoke, he says \_\_\_\_ oh

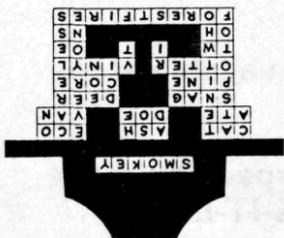
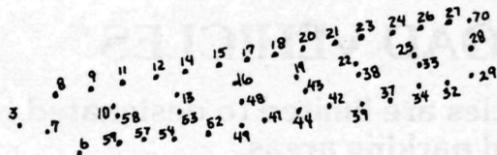
- 25. 2 letters on a compass besides E and W
- 26. Smokey says. Only you can prevent \_\_\_\_ (2 words)

**DOWN**

- 2. Abbreviation for the state where you find giant redwood trees
- 3. 2 letters besides B.C. that can follow a date
- 4. Sew, sow, or \_\_\_\_
- 5. If it's a girl, we say she. If it's a boy, we say \_\_\_\_
- 6. Who should be careful with fire in the forest?
- 7. Forest fires start because people are \_\_\_\_
- 8. Money doesn't grow \_\_\_\_ trees
- 13. He can ruin your picnic in the forest.
- 14. \_\_\_\_ whiz
- 15. If her name is Dorothy Catherine Irvine, her initials are \_\_\_\_
- 16. A very long time (Rhyming hint: A tree says, "I want a hill to be on, where I can live an \_\_\_\_")
- 20. Abbreviation for our smallest state
- 21. Abbreviation for the state between New Hampshire and New York

*(Solution displayed below)*

**Smokey's friends  
 don't play with:**



*(Connect the dots in order beginning with 1)*



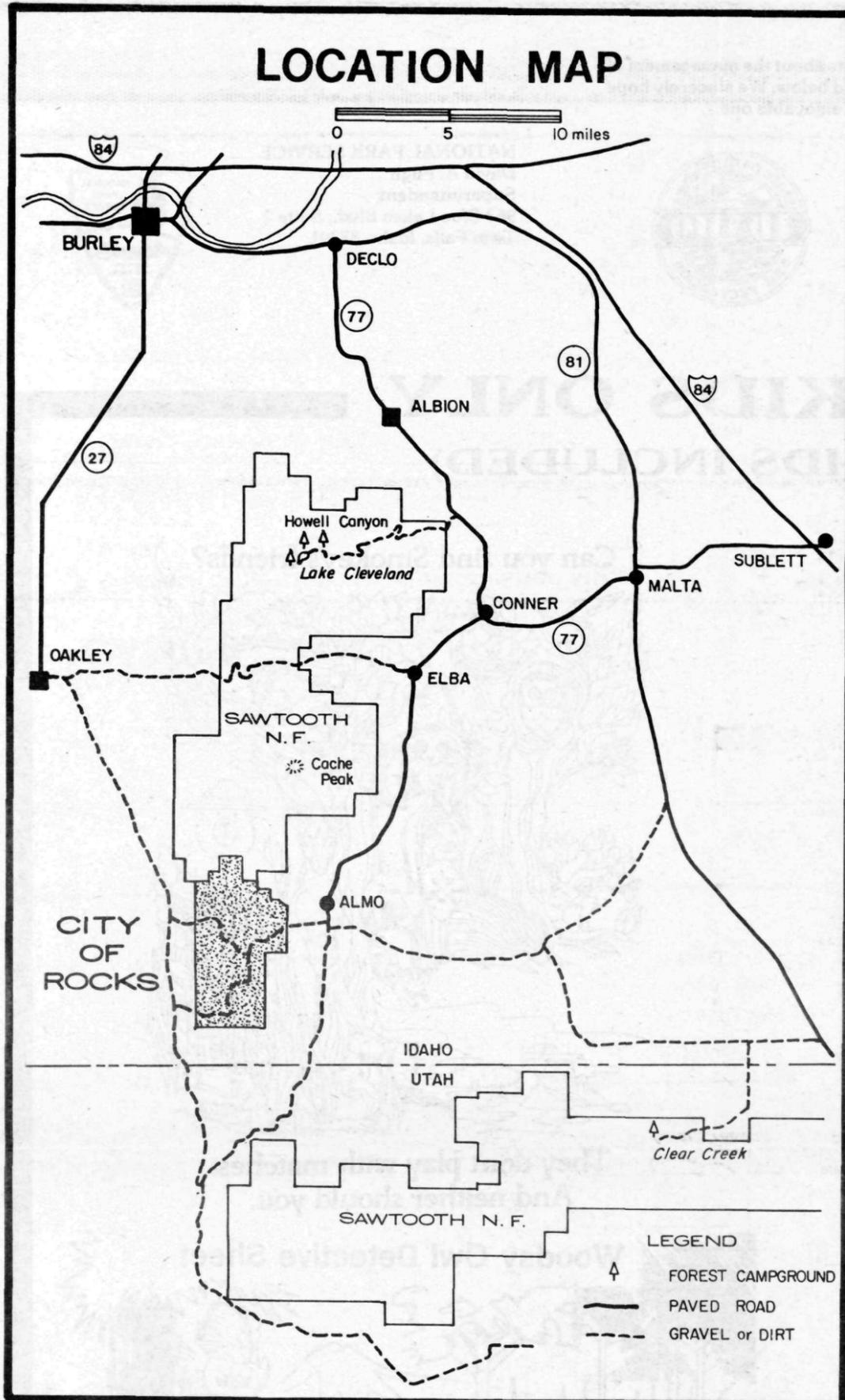
Can you find Smokey's friends?

**They don't play with matches.  
 And neither should you.**



**Woodsy Owl Detective Sheet**

How many kinds of air, water, sight, and noise pollution can you find? Circle each one and talk about them with your friends and family. Thanks.  
 P.S. "Give A Hoot, Don't Pollute!"



These guys want you  
to stop wasting  
your tax dollars.



Wildfires in our country are a terrible waste. A waste of natural resources. A waste of natural beauty. A waste of money.

Yet every single year, over one billion in tax dollars goes up in smoke. That's what it costs to protect our nation's resources and fight wildfires.

So, think of these famous faces next time you're in the great outdoors. And remember, only you can prevent forest fires.

## Use Regulations

### CAMPING

- Camping is permitted in established sites only.
- Camping is limited to a maximum of 15 days.
- Camps must not be left unattended longer than one day.
- Fires are permitted in designated areas only.

### ROCK CLIMBING

- Climbing is prohibited on rocks with historic writings.
- Noticable hardware must be removed.

### FIREARMS

- Firearms must not be discharged in the reserve.

### OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

- All vehicles are limited to designated roadways and parking areas.

### WASTE REMOVAL

- Limited garbage removal is available at the various restroom facilities.
- To help maintain this area especially in the backcountry, practice PACK-IT-IN, PACK-IT-OUT.