

ROCK CREEK PARK

WASHINGTON, D. C.



ROCK CREEK PARK

"Rock Creek has an abundance of all the elements that make up not only pleasing, but wild and rugged scenery. There is, perhaps, not another city in the Union that has on its very threshold so much natural beauty and grandeur, such as men seek for in remote forests and mountains."

Naturalist John Burroughs' description was written over 100 years ago; it applies equally today. The scenery Burroughs described has been preserved in Rock Creek Park, one of the largest "natural" metropolitan parks in the country. This forested area along Rock Creek in northwest Washington, D.C., is about 4 miles long and up to 1 mile wide, and contains 1,835 acres. It offers recreation and inspiration to residents and to visitors from all over the world.

ROCK CREEK PARK IS ESTABLISHED

In the last half of the 19th century, the growth of Washington began to threaten Rock Creek Valley, long a haven of natural beauty to city residents. Early attempts to establish a park in the valley failed. But in the autumn of 1888 Charles Glover invited three friends to join him on a horseback outing. They rode over thickly wooded slopes to a hillside overlooking the picturesque valley. There, at Glover's request, the four pledged themselves to work for a National Park. The pledge was honored. As a result of the efforts of these men and others, on September 27, 1890, President Harrison signed into law a bill establishing Rock Creek Park, and providing \$1,200,000 to purchase land for a "public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States."

To commemorate this action Rock Creek Park Day is observed, with special programs, each year on the weekend nearest the anniversary of the establishment of the park.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

- **The Rock Creek Nature Center** will help you gain greater understanding and appreciation of the park's natural features. A modern building, in an attractive woodland setting, has an exhibit hall, a 184-seat auditorium, and a planetarium seating 95 persons. Although the exhibits and programs at the nature

center are designed primarily for children, adults also find them instructive and stimulating. In the surrounding woodland are self-guiding nature trails and other interpretive helps.

- **Nature walks and bikes** are conducted by park naturalists, starting at the Rock Creek Trail Center on Beach Drive, and at other locations in the park. Information as to the purpose and starting point of each walk is included in the "Outdoor Program"—a free booklet published annually.

- **Park roads and trails.** "To Rock Creek Park there is nothing comparable in any capital city of Europe—you * * * have * * * an inexhaustible variety of footpaths * * *. There are leafy glades where a man can go * * * and listen for hours to the birds singing and forget there is such a place as Washington and such a thing as politics within 8 miles of him * * *."

Through these words of James Bryce, former ambassador from Great Britain, comes perhaps the greatest inspiration for using the trails of Rock Creek Park.

For hikers, there are about 15 miles of trail with 7 foot-

bridges across Rock Creek. Hikers may also use bridle trails.

The 14 miles of wide, graveled bridle trails traverse a varied park landscape. A bridle-trail map is available. Riders also use the jumps at the equitation field on Glover Road.

- **Rock Creek Stables.** Open all year, this modern facility offers rental horses and riding instructions. It is on Glover Road near Military Road. Nearby are Meadowbrook Stables and Pegasus Stable, north of the park, and Rock Creek Valley (Edgewater) Stables, just south of the National Zoological Park.

- **Brightwood Recreation Area** has facilities for tennis, football, baseball, softball, volleyball, horseshoes, and archery. Clay-surfaced tennis courts are usually open from late April through September, hard-surfaced courts through a longer season. Reservations should be made for use of these facilities.

Other tennis courts, all clay-surfaced, are on Park Road.

- **Carter Barron Amphitheatre.** Summer-evening programs at this unique outdoor theater in an attractive woodland setting include musicals and operettas direct from Broadway, sym-

Rock Creek Nature Center (planetarium on left).



phony concerts, folk music, and ballets with internationally famous artists. Ample parking is available.

- **Picnicking.** There are about 70 picnic groves, with tables, benches, and usually a fireplace. Bring your own fuel. Small shelters are provided at Groves 3, 6, and 24. From March through October, reserve picnic sites in advance.

- **Rock Creek Golf Course.** This 18-hole public course is open all year. The clubhouse includes a lounge, locker rooms, pro shop, and refreshment bar. There is a greens fee.

- **A dog-training area** is located on Glover Road near Military Road. A use permit is required.

- **Pierce Mill.** Early settlers built seven or more gristmills and one sawmill on the creek, using water to power the heavy machinery. Local farmers brought their corn, wheat, buckwheat, and rye to the gristmills to be ground into flour or meal.

The only mill remaining is Pierce Mill, built about 1820 by Isaac Pierce and his son Abner, and operated commercially until about 1900. The Federal Government restored the mill in 1936; it is now open to the public on a limited schedule.

- **Fort de Russy,** of the 68 forts defending Washington during the Civil War, was one of the few actively to engage the enemy.

On July 11, 1864, the Confederates, under Gen. Jubal A. Early, attacked Fort Stevens, about 1 mile northeast of Fort de Russy. During the fighting on July 11 and 12, troops at Fort de Russy assisted in the successful repulse of General Early.

- **Miller Cabin** was built by "The Poet of the Sierras" in a woodland on Meridian Hill east of Rock Creek in the 1800's. Although Joaquin Miller lived in the cabin only a short time, he did write some of his better known poems there. When the expanding city threatened the cabin, the California State Association decided to move the structure. It was transported to Rock Creek Park in 1912 and presented to the people of the United States on June 2 of that year.

- **Jusserand Memorial.** French Ambassador Jean Jules Jusserand often went to Rock Creek Park with his close friend, Theodore Roosevelt, to play tennis or take rigorous hikes. Jusserand served in this country from 1902 until 1924, winning the friendship of many Americans and the respect of leaders of the academic world. The memorial, a bench of pink granite from Massachusetts, dedicated in 1936, is the only memorial erected on Federal property to a foreign diplomatic representative.

GEOLOGY

The jumbled mass of rocks and ledges along Rock Creek represents the granites, gneisses, and schists of an ancient mountain range whose jagged, barren crags were devoid of any significant forms of life.

As time passed, the rock cliffs slowly decayed and were carried away by wind and water until only the roots of the ancient



A Matthew Brady photograph of Fort de Russy.

mountains remained. The broad, eroded surface that developed extended from what we now call the Blue Ridge Mountains eastward to the Atlantic. Crustal movements caused this relatively flat surface to tilt, and the eastward part of it was submerged under the Atlantic. A new cycle of erosion now set in, and the clay, sand, and gravel carried from the higher western region were deposited on the submerged surface. These sediments built up to form what we now call the Coastal Plain, extending from Washington to the Atlantic. The surface west of Washington, created by the removal of the material that formed the Coastal Plain, is called the Piedmont.

The boundary between Piedmont and Coastal Plain follows roughly the eastern side of Rock Creek Park, but both Piedmont rocks and Coastal Plain deposits are within the park.

Exposed along the streams are gneisses and schists that developed under the great heat and pressure of mountain building. Molten rock was forced up through cracks into the gneisses and schists; then it slowly cooled, forming granite. Interesting minerals associated with these Piedmont rocks include milky quartz and tiny crystals of garnet, pyrite, and tourmaline.

Sand, gravel, and clay of the Coastal Plain cover the highest hills of the park. Coastal Plain sediments crop out in the vicinity of the Rock Creek Nature Center, at Fort de Russy, and along the high banks above Blagden Avenue and Piney Branch.

PLANTLIFE

The Valley Floor

In Rock Creek Valley the forest was destroyed during the Civil War, when most of the trees were cut for military purposes. But nature has a way of healing scars caused by man or fire. As time passed, new trees grew to replace those lost. Once more a mature forest grows in the valley.

When you explore this beautiful forest notice the difference between the plants of the valley floor and those on the ridges. Plants needing much moisture live on the flood plain of Rock Creek. Sycamore, yellow-poplar, red maple, red ash, and river birch are the largest trees here. Smaller trees include American hornbeam and pawpaw. Shrubs such as hazel, alder, spicebush, and pinxterbloom azalea form an understory.

Wildflowers are most abundant on the flood plain, especially

in the northern section of the park. The blooming period starts in late winter with skunk cabbage, which grows in the wettest soil. Bloodroot, fawnlily, toothwort, and springbeauty bloom in March or early April. In late April golden groundsel and Virginia bluebells appear. The flood plain in spring is a green carpet splashed with color from patches of flowers.

The Upland Forest

On the drier ridges pignut and mockernut hickory, white ash, black cherry, black locust, yellow-poplar, beech, and several species of oak make up the forest canopy. The understory includes dogwood, mountain-laurel, pinxterbloom azalea, and sassafras. A few sucker sprouts and occasional graying stumps or logs are the only remnants of the American chestnut, formerly abundant and very useful to man and wildlife, but destroyed in the early 1900's by disease. Groves of Virginia pine probably represent former pastures reclaimed when the park was created.

Wildflowers are not abundant on the ridges, but several

kinds blossom during the early spring. Trailing arbutus, bloodroot, and hepatica bloom in late March or early April.

WILDLIFE

In earlier days Eastern bison, black bear, deer, American elk (wapiti), and timber wolves roamed the valley of Rock Creek and nearby ridges. These large mammals are no longer here, but Rock Creek Park is still rich in wildlife, having probably the greatest variety of any area in or around Washington.

Mammals, except for the abundant gray squirrels, are not conspicuous in the park—because they are active mainly at night. They include the raccoon, fox, opossum, flying squirrel, mice, weasel, and muskrat. Look in wet sand along the streams for footprints of such night prowlers as raccoons and muskrats.

Birds, abundant everywhere in the park, add their color and song to the forest scene. In spring and autumn the population swells as migrating birds rest briefly from their long journeys. In winter only hardy species such as the Carolina

Picnicking in Rock Creek Park.



chickadee, white-throated sparrow, cardinal, crow, blue jay, woodpeckers, mallard, and nuthatch remain. With the coming of warm weather, summer residents return and there is a flurry of activity as nests are built and families reared. A few common summer birds are the veery, woodthrush, towhee, redstart, and cardinal. The pileated woodpecker is a year-round resident; but this shy bird prefers the more secluded parts of the park woodland.

Water life. In the streams of Rock Creek Park, because of pollution, there is little life apparent. A few species of fish (including eels) swim in Rock Creek; crayfish and dusky salamanders are secretive dwellers of the tributary streams.

INDIANS OF LONG AGO

Before white men settled this area, Algonquin Indians lived in villages along the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. They fished in Rock Creek; hunted for bison, deer, bear, wild turkey, and smaller animals in the forests; and grew crops.

In the southern section of the park, along the shaded banks of Piney Branch, the Indians dug out rounded quartzite stones for making weapons and tools. The stones were tested for quality; only a few were usable, and large refuse piles eventually grew from the castaway material. With hammerstones, the Indians broke the select rocks into leaflike blades, or "spalls," of varying sizes. These rough spalls were then taken to villages, where craftsmen fashioned them into arrowheads, drills, fleshing tools, and knife blades.

The Indian villages were usually on the banks of major streams, but some of the Indians presumably pitched lodges at the quarry sites, and there established some kind of community.

The forests and passing time have nearly obliterated visual evidence of the quarries, but you may still find, along the slopes, many cobblestones chipped to varying degrees. These are the unusable stones tested and thrown aside by the Indians.

ADMINISTRATION

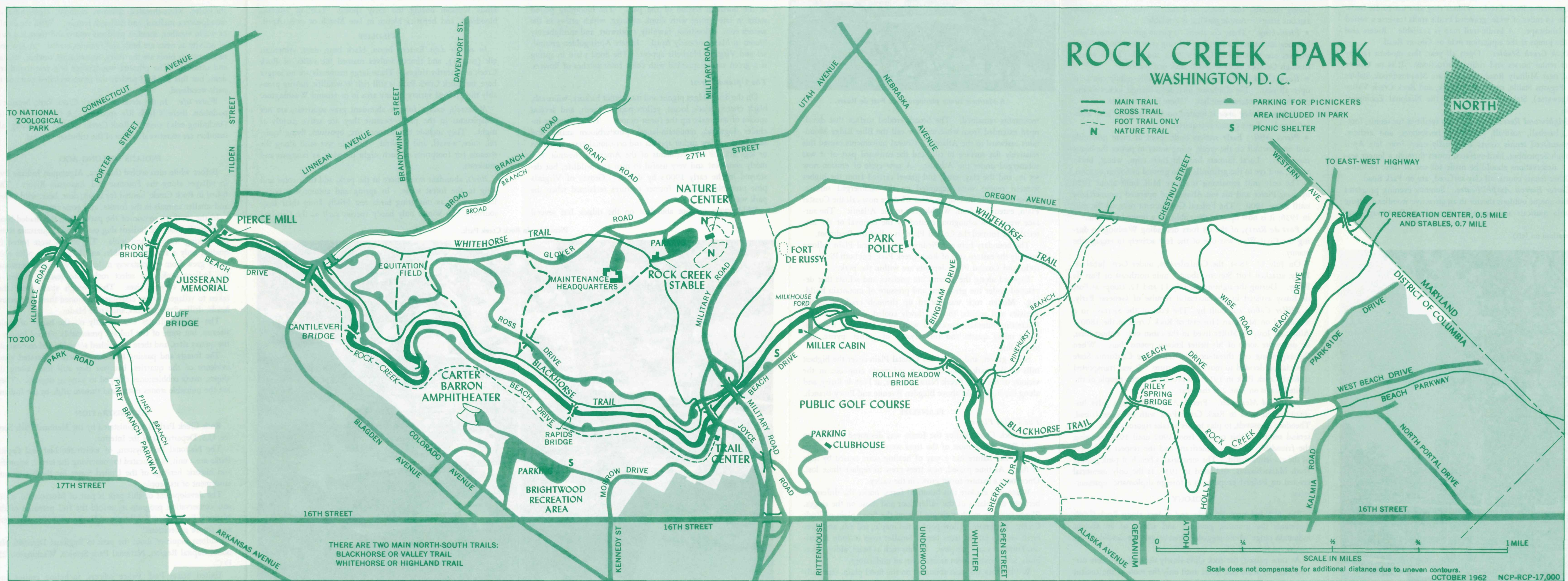
Rock Creek Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which the National Capital Parks are a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of its people.

The development of this park is part of MISSION 66, a 10-year conservation program to unfold the full potential of the National Park System for the use and enjoyment of both present and future generations.

Address inquiries about the park to Regional Director, National Capital Region, National Park Service, Washington 25, D.C.

United States Park Police officers, including cruiser and



horse-mounted patrols, protect and assist visitors and enforce regulations. You can help by observing these rules:

Animals, wildflowers, and trees. The park is a sanctuary for all living things. It is unlawful to destroy, injure, or remove trees, shrubs, flowers, birds or other animals, rocks, or other objects in the park. *No collecting is permitted.*

Fires are permitted only in designated picnic areas.
Pets are allowed in the park only under physical restraint.
Refuse—all paper, lunch remains, or other trash—should be deposited in the receptacles provided. Keep the park clean.
Wading, swimming, and fishing are not permitted in Rock Creek or its tributaries in the park, because of pollution.

HOW TO GET FURTHER INFORMATION
Permits: picnic, dog training, recreation facilities—D.C. Recreation Department, 3149 16th Street NW.; telephone ADams 4-2050.

Information: bridle-trail map; nature-center folder and schedule; Pierce Mill folder; "Outdoor Program"; Carter Barron Amphitheater—write to Regional Director, National Capital Region, National Park Service, Washington 25, D.C.; or telephone REpublic 7-1820, extension 2403.

Tennis courts: telephone FEderal 7-8080.
Golf course: telephone RAndolph 3-9832.
Stables: Rock Creek, EMerson 2-0117; Edgewater, ADams 4-9664.

For information on Rock Creek Park in Maryland, call or write Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 8787 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, Md., telephone JUaniper 9-1480.

AMERICA'S NATURAL RESOURCES
 Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved for the future, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.

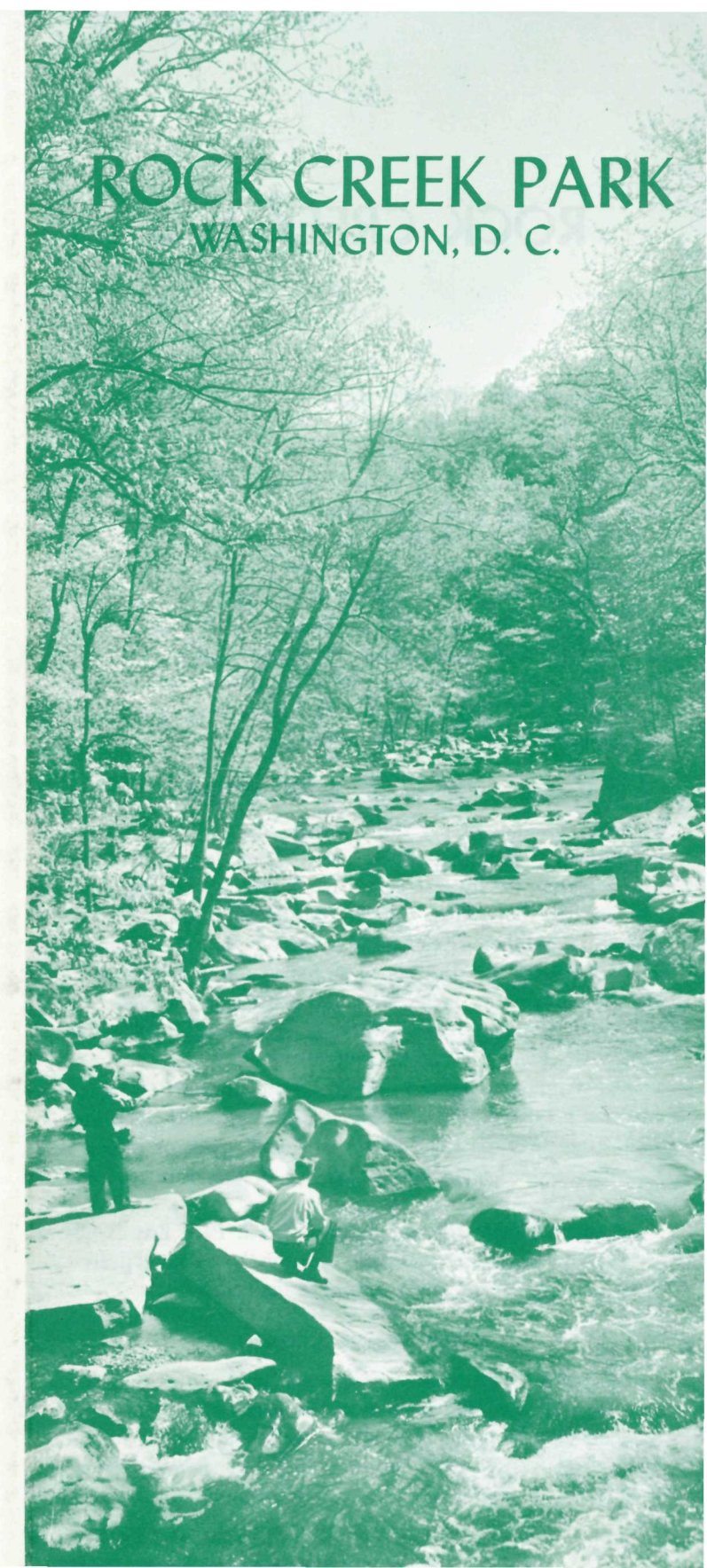


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