

# ROCK CREEK PARK



**R**ock 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-Author John Burroughs  
(1837-1921)

## WHAT TO SEE AND DO

\**Rock Creek Park Visitors Information Center.* Located south of Military Road on Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park.

\**The Rock Creek Nature Center* will help you gain greater understanding and appreciation of the park's natural features. There is an exhibit hall, a 184-seat auditorium, and a planetarium seating 95. Although the exhibits and programs at the Nature Center are designed for young people, adults also find them challenging. In the surrounding woodland are self-guiding nature trails and other interpretive helps.

\**Pierce Mill*, an early gristmill, was built about 1820 by Isaac Pierce and his son Abner, and operated commercially until about 1900. It was restored in 1936, and is now open to the public.

\**Nature walks and hikes* are conducted by park naturalists, starting at the Rock Creek Nature Center on Glover Road, and at other locations in the park. Information on each walk is included in the Rock Creek Nature Center seasonal schedule, and in the "Outdoor Program," a free booklet published annually by the National Park Service.

For hikers, there are about 15 miles of trail, with 7 foot-bridges across Rock Creek. Hikers may also use bridle trails.

\**Horseback Riding* may be enjoyed by the public on 14 miles of wide, graveled bridle trails traversing a varied park landscape. Riders also use the jumps at the Equitation Field on Glover Road.

Rock Creek Stables, open all year, offer rental horses and riding instructions. They are near the Nature Center on Glover Road.

Rock Creek Valley (Edgewater) Stables are just south of the National Zoological Park; and there are other stables north of the District line in Maryland.

\**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.

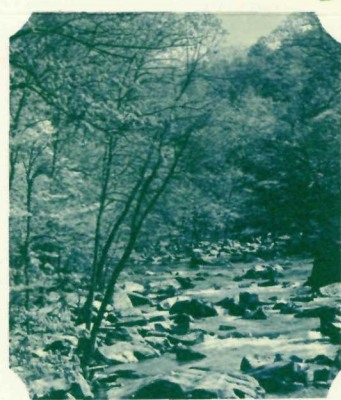
Other tennis courts, all clay-surfaced, are on Park Road.

\**Carter Barron Amphitheatre.* Summer-evening programs at this outdoor theater in woodland setting include musicals and operettas direct from Broadway, symphony 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 several groves. From March through October, reserve picnic sites in advance.

\**Rock Creek Golf Course.* This 18-hole 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.



**NATURAL HISTORY**—The jumbled mass of rocks and ledges along Rock Creek represent an ancient mountain range devoid of any significant forms of life. ■ As time passed, the rocks slowly decayed and were carried away by wind and water until only the roots of the ancient 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 eastern part of it was submerged. A new cycle of erosion 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, D.C., 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. ■ In Rock Creek Valley the forest was destroyed during the Civil War, when most of the trees were cut, 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. ■ 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 1920'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. ■ 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 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 raccoons and muskrats. ■ Birds add their color and song to the forest scene. In spring and autumn the population swells as migrants rest briefly from their long journeys. In winter only hardy species such as the Carolina 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, wood thrush, 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. ■ 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 AND SETTLERS**—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 forest; and raised 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 forests and passing time have nearly obliterated visual evidence of the quarries.

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.

**ADMINISTRATION**—Established September 27, 1890, under President Harrison, Rock Creek Park is a woodland area of 1,754 acres, about 4 miles long and 1 mile wide, in northwest Washington, D. C. The 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 the people.

U. S. Park Police protect and assist visitors and enforce regulations. You can help by observing these rules:

*Animals, wildflowers, and trees.* 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 to keep the park clean.

*Wading, swimming, and fishing* are not permitted in Rock Creek or its tributaries in the park.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**—*Permits:* Picnic, dog training, recreation facilities—D. C. Recreation Department, 3149 16th St., NW., Washington, D. C. 22210; telephone ADams 4-2050.

*Information:* Rock Creek Nature Center folder and schedule; Pierce Mill folder; "OUTDOOR PROGRAM," Carter Barron Amphitheatre—write to Superintendent, North National Capital Parks, c/o Rock Creek Nature Center, Washington, D. C. 20015 or telephone 381-7283.

*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 the State of Maryland, call or write Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 8787 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, Md., telephone JUniper 9-1480.

**THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**—The Nation's principal natural resources agency bears a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.



U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

