



The Respite

The official newspaper
of Rock Creek Park

Winter 2007



Winter in Rock Creek Park

WINTER IS NOT FOR EVERYONE. MANY PEOPLE TRAVEL TO warmer climates seeking milder temperatures and more sunshine during the winter months. For the rest of us, winter provides an opportunity to appreciate nature in all of her seasonal splendor. In Washington D.C., specifically Rock Creek Park, winter is a chance to see the landscape around us without the camouflage of foliage. Nature reveals Rock Creek Park's best kept secrets in the winter.

When it snows, animal tracks are seen on freshly fallen precipitation. To the exploring spirit, these tracks reveal the path to dens and nests that uncover the homes of park residents who are often seen during other seasons.

The land in winter is exposed - not a full exposure but a tantalizing glint revealing our history and heritage. The Rock Creek Valley shows off the land that once served as host to local farms, mills, homesteads, Native American quarries, and a Civil War battle. The trained eye can read the land much like our ancestors and see its past use and the need for future preservation.

On a cold windy day, a walk in the forest provides the opportunity to listen to the leaves rustle and trees squeak and moan, almost singing as they sway back and forth trying to keep time with nature's winter symphony. Occasionally animals chime in on the chorus. The shrill call of a hawk, the mew of the deer, the chattering of squirrels all can be heard in the refrain of the forest on just the right winter's day.

Icy-sleeting days create the prospect of a demonstration of the artistry of nature. Icicles left after a winter storm refract the light and distort the colors of the sun. This play of light and color can be seen on the side of historic buildings, as well as on majestic trees, causing the imagination to recall brush strokes of artists on display at the National Gallery of Art.

A favorite outdoor phenomenon of winter is the quiet and solitude one experiences, the absence of the hum of civilization. This offers visitors a chance to think unobstructed by the sounds of the nation's capital: automobiles, air planes, and other machinery that is the life blood of commerce and industry.

Most visitors experience winter in Rock Creek Park in some form of weather dependent activity: cross country skiing, sledding, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, or jogging. These activities are all good for your health and mental well-being.



Deer at Rock Creek Park near the Nature Center



View looking west toward Beech Drive from Pulpit Rock at Rock Creek Park

At the end of the day when you are snuggled on your couch sipping hot chocolate, the visions and sounds of your encounters in Rock Creek Park will lull you into a peace of mind not experienced by people in warmer climates during this time of year. These individuals miss out on a special opportunity located deep in the heart of the nation's capital, a chance to make a solitary personal connection to nature in winter on an emotional and intellectual level.

Welcome from the Superintendent

Rock Creek Park is a unique urban oasis in our nation's capital. It offers visitors the opportunity to relax and reflect. It is a respite from the everyday. Whether you spent your childhood wandering through these woods or this is your first visit to the park, you will find something that brings a smile to your face and peace to your heart.

Hiking and biking on the park trails are one of the more popular recreational activities. Some of these trails were originally designed for horseback riding and many of them also offer scenic views of the forest and the creek. Rock Creek Park also has much to offer if you are interested in history. Wander through the civil war sites at Fort DeRussey and Fort Stevens (the only Washington fort that saw battle during the civil war), or visit one of the oldest standing structures in the District of Columbia, the Old Stone House in Georgetown.

Rock Creek Park is part of the National Park Service and, like all national parks, our mission is to preserve our natural and cultural resources not just for today but for generations to follow. You can help us protect these areas by enjoying your experiences in the park, by taking only pictures and leaving only footprints. Enjoy the respite of Rock Creek Park.

Sincerely,

Adrienne A. Coleman
Superintendent

2. Touring African-American History

The echoes of the African-American history and individual stories of determination, adversity, and success resound throughout Rock Creek Park. Read about several examples of African-American contributions to the cultural history of Rock Creek Park.

3. The Places of Rock Creek Park: Meridian Hill

Located in northwest Washington, D.C., Meridian Hill Park is both rich in history and inspiring for its landscape architecture.

3. Teachers Gather In Rock Creek Park

Rock Creek Park and Bridging the Watershed are working to restore the ancient breeding grounds of migrating fish such as the herring and shad. Learn how teachers are participating in this project and educating the students about the "Herring Highway."

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Rock Creek Park

Rock Creek Park was founded in 1890 as one of the first federal parks. When the park was established, it bordered the edge of the growing city and was a favorite area for rural retreat. In the establishing legislation, Rock Creek Park would “provide for the preservation from injury or spoliation of all timber, animals, or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition, as nearly as possible.”

Staff

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may

Touring African-American History

WHETHER TRAVELING ALONG THE ROADWAYS or hiking along the trails, the echoes of African-American history and the individual stories of determination, adversity, and success resound throughout Rock Creek Park. From the time of slavery, through the Civil War, to the Civil Rights Movement, these stories are an integral part of the historic fabric of the park.

Considered as part of the southern portion of the United States, Washington, D.C., was a slave-owning community. The enslaved Africans in Washington primarily were used for both hard labor and domesticated chores. One enslaved African, known as Tabitha, purchased her and her infant child’s freedom from Mary Smith Brumley in the 1820s for the sum of \$201. For other slaves it would take an act of the Federal government and a Civil War to gain their freedom.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Washington, D.C., hastily created over 150 earthwork fortifications and batteries to defend the city. Both free blacks and slaves were used in the forts construction to make the federal city impregnable from attack. Elizabeth Thomas, (a free black woman who owned the land where Fort Stevens was built) was promised to have her land returned to her and to be financially compensated for her loss at the end of the war. Sadly, Ms. Thomas’ land was never returned to her. After many decades, her family was financially compensated for the use of her land.

In 1862, with the passage of the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, all enslaved Africans in Washington, D.C., and Georgetown were freed. Slave owners, such as the Peirce family who owned large tracts of land in Rock Creek Valley, were financially compensated for the loss of their “property.”

Freedman villages sprouted throughout Washington. With close inspection, one can still see the foundations of the community that was once located at Fort Reno. Around the same time at Fort Stevens, a young runaway slave known only as “Billy” found safety and refuge inside the fort. Billy served as a servant to several of the soldiers of Fort Stevens and even considered enlisting into Washington, D.C.’s black regiments. Unfortunately, it is not known if Billy ever enlisted to fight the war to end slavery.

At the end of the Civil War, small communities grew and flourished around Rock Creek. The community of Herring Hill, which dates back to the Colonial days, grew, prospered, and became a self-sufficient, self-sustaining neighborhood. Looking out from Herring Hill onto the Rock Creek Parkway, one can imagine the scores of families utilizing the creek.

With the creation of Rock Creek Park in 1890, city residents and visitors of all nationalities flocked to the park to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life. During the early 1900s, Hattie Sewell, an excellent cook and entrepreneur, was granted a lease to use old Peirce Mill as a teahouse. Stripped of its water wheel and inner mechanisms, visitors would sit in the mill and feast on the delicious sandwiches and refreshing drinks that Ms. Sewell offered. However, due to racial prejudice of park neighbors against Ms. Sewell’s African heritage, her lease was not renewed.

As the nation advanced into the mid-twentieth century, racial equality and desegregation issues became prominent social banners. Following in the footsteps of Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial, other individuals and groups



Photo of Elizabeth Thomas, also known as Aunt Betty, a free black woman who owned the land where Fort Stevens was built.

used public lands for rallies, sit-ins, and protests. Meridian Hill Park was one of the places used to bring solidarity and a guiding light through the storm of racial inequality. Over forty years later, many locals in the neighborhood of Meridian Hill Park still regard the park as “Malcolm X Park” in acknowledgement of the slain civil rights leader.

These are just several examples of African-American contributions to the cultural history of Rock Creek Park. The stories of African-Americans and their experiences in Rock Creek Park are boundless, thought-provoking, and inspiring.

Visitor Information

Hours of Operation

Nature Center & Planetarium

The Nature Center is open Wednesday - Sunday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The Planetarium is open only during show times. Show time for the planetarium is Wednesday at 4:00 p.m. , Saturday at 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. and Sunday at 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Peirce Mill

Peirce Mill is currently closed due to renovations and repairs. Peirce Barn, next to the Mill, is serving as a Visitor Contact Station and Bookstore. The Peirce Barn is open Saturday and Sunday from Noon to 4:00 p.m.

Old Stone House

The Old Stone House is located at 3051 M Street in Georgetown. Eastern National Bookstore, located in the front room of the Old Stone House, is open every day 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. The Old Stone House is open to the public for tours Wednesday to Sunday from Noon to 5:00 p.m. For groups larger than 10, please call for reservations.

Entrance Fees

General Admission to Rock Creek Park is FREE!

Park Regulations

Camping is prohibited within all park areas. All park areas are closed to the viewing of wildlife with an artificial light. All park areas are closed to swimming, wading, and bathing. Removing or damaging natural or cultural resources is prohibited. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited from all park areas. Fires permitted only in grills or fireplaces; visitors may bring own grill and fuel in designated picnic areas only. Parking allowed only in designated parking areas. Washing vehicles within Rock Creek Park is prohibited. Dogs must be on leash within park areas.

Special Events to Celebrate African-American History Month

Night Sky to Freedom

4:00 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays

Planetarium

In honor of African-American History Month, learn how enslaved people on the Underground Railroad used the night sky as a compass to reach freedom. Ages 7 and older.

Black Georgetown Walks

Please contact Nature Center for times.

Old Stone House

Explore the stories of sacrifice, adversity, and success on this ranger-led tour of historic Herring Hill, a Georgetown neighborhood that holds reminders of the vibrant African-American community that thrived in the 19th century. Ages 8 and older.

Visit our exhibit, “African-American Connections to an American Treasure” in the Nature Center auditorium.



Donise Stevens portraying Elizabeth Thomas, the free African-American landowner whose land became Fort Stevens.

The Places of Rock Creek: Meridian Hill

Meridian Hill Park is located in north-west Washington, D.C., and is bordered by 16th, Euclid, 15th, and W Streets. This 12-acre Renaissance and Italian garden-inspired site was designated a National Historic Landmark in the Designed Landscape category in 1994, as “an outstanding accomplishment of early 20th-century Neoclassicist park design in the United States.”

Construction of the park began in 1914, but was not finished until 1936. In 1933 the grounds were given to the National Park Service. However, the park’s history predates its construction. In 1819, John Porter erected a mansion on the grounds and called it “Meridian Hill” because it was on the exact longitude of

the original District of Columbia milestone marker. It was to this mansion that John Quincy Adams moved when he left the White House in 1829. During the years of the Civil War, Union troops encamped on the park grounds.

Today while visiting the park, you can see a variety of statues and a beautiful European-style landscape. The large cascading fountain is one of the largest fountains in North America. You can also view the memorial to President James Buchanan and the statues of Dante, considered one of the greatest historical fiction writers, Joan of Arc, and Serenity.



Statue of Joan of Arc at Meridian Hill Park.



Teachers from the “Rock Creek: A Herring Highway” workshop sample the creek.

Teachers Gather In Rock Creek Park

On Saturday September 16th, metropolitan area high school science teachers participated in the very first “Rock Creek: A Herring Highway” teacher workshop. This workshop debuted the new module especially created for Rock Creek Park in the high school education program, Bridging the Watershed. Migratory river herring are not unique to Rock Creek. Many creeks within the Chesapeake Bay watershed host herring runs during the spring. What makes the Rock Creek story different and intriguing is the fact that barriers to fish passage have been removed, thanks to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project. This work was done to restore the herring’s ancient breeding ground from the District of Columbia to Montgomery County, Maryland, the 33-mile length of Rock Creek.

Beginning this October, you might have seen high school students and educators along Rock Creek during scheduled field-studies. The students collected data to see if the creek is hospitable to herring on that particular day and to find indications of what fish are in the creek. The BIG question is, Will herring swim upstream this spring to spawn and will they use the Denil fishway built to allow them to pass the Peirce Mill dam? Only time will tell. So, we’ll keep our eyes on the creek and await the coming of spring.

Contact Information & Phone Numbers

Facility	Address	Phone
Nature Center	5200 Glover Road, NW	202-895-6070
Pierce Mill	Beach Drive and Tilden Street	202-282-6012
Old Stone House	3051 M Street, NW	202-426-6851
Carter Barron Amphitheatre	16th Street and Colorado Ave.	202-426-0486
Thompson Boat Center	2900 Virginia Ave, NW	202-333-9543 202-333-4861
Rock Creek Horse Center	5100 Glover Road, NW	202-362-0117
Tennis Center	3149 16th Street, NW	202-673-7646 202-673-7647
U.S. Park Police	1800 Beach Drive	202-426-6710

Public Programs

Young Planetarium

4:00 p.m. Wednesdays
Planetarium

This introduction to the night sky for the youngest of astronomers is a shortened version of our Night Sky Planetarium Program. Ages 2 to 10.

Winter Night Sky

1:00 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays
Planetarium

Visit the only planetarium in the National Park system and explore the wonders of the night sky. View the brightest stars, planets, and constellations and learn their stories. Ages 4 to 12.

Exploring the Universe

4:00 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays
(except February)
Planetarium

Join us for a series of planetarium programs exploring the universe. Topics for these programs include the sun, moon, stars, planets, and other space phenomena. Ages 7 and older.

Night Sky to Freedom

4:00 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays
(February only)
Planetarium

In honor of African-American History Month, learn how enslaved people on the Underground Railroad used the night sky as a compass to reach freedom. Ages 7 and older.

Creature Feature

4:00 p.m. Fridays
Nature Center

Get acquainted with the Nature Center’s live animals and assist a park ranger in their feeding. Please note: Houdina, a red corn snake, is fed a live mouse every two weeks. All ages.

Bicycle Rides

Please Contact Nature Center for location and times.

Join a park ranger for a bike ride through Rock Creek Park and learn about the different bike trails in Rock Creek and Washington, D.C. Bring your own bike, helmet, and water. Ages 8 and up.

Nature Walks

Please Contact Nature Center for location and times.

Experience the diverse natural and geological features of Rock Creek Park on this ranger-led hike. Distances and ability level vary for each hike. Ages 7 and older.

Historical Hikes

Please Contact Nature Center for location and times.

Learn the cultural and historical story of Rock Creek Park while strolling along walkways and footpaths. Distances and ability level varies for each hike. All ages.

Peirce Mill Updates

Please Contact Nature Center for times.

Peirce Barn

Discover what’s happening at Peirce Mill, Rock Creek’s last remaining mill. All ages.

Children’s Programs

Please Contact Nature Center for location and times.

Children of all ages can join a park ranger to learn about the natural and cultural resources of Rock Creek Park. Programs are designed to be interactive, so children can play as they learn. Program topics vary. All ages.

Black Georgetown Walks

Please contact Nature Center for times.

Old Stone House

Explore the stories of sacrifice, adversity, and success on this ranger-led tour of historic Herring Hill, a Georgetown neighborhood that holds reminders of the vibrant African-American community that thrived in the 19th century. Ages 8 and older.

Park Clean-ups

Please Contact Nature Center for location and times.

Assist park rangers in keeping Rock Creek beautiful by picking up trash. All ages.

Please contact the Nature Center at 505-895-6070 or visit the Rock Creek Park website at www.nps.gov/rocr for a complete list of activities and programs available.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Rock Creek Park
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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

Join Us in Sharing Your “Memorable Trees of Rock Creek Park”



One of the many beautiful and inspiring trees found along Rock Creek.

Rock Creek Park invites you to partake in the quest of celebrating the beauty of the park’s natural elements—specifically, trees through the expression of art. So grab your camera, or paint brushes, pencils, and canvas and head out into the park! Use your artistic talent to capture the beauty and essence of Rock Creek Park trees that are meaningful to you. We’re not just looking for the largest tree(s), but also those trees that are noteworthy for their beauty, age, history, community significance, or for any other reason that is relevant to the artist.

Send us your framed photographs, paintings, or drawings of the tree(s) along with an essay of 300 words or less telling why the selected tree(s) have significant meaning for you. Your framed submission should be no larger than 18” x 24”.

Your choice of trees can be from Rock Creek Park proper or any of the other areas in Washington, D.C., administered by Rock Creek Park, including Palisades Park, Glover Archbold Park, Whitehaven Park, Battery Kemble Park, Fort Reno Park, Soapstone Valley Park, Little Forest Park, Fort Stevens Park, Battleground National Cemetery, Meridian Hill Park, Old Stone House, Francis Scott Key Memorial, Dumbarton Oaks, Park, Montrose Park, Normanstone Parkway, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Klingle Valley Park, Melvin Hazen Park, Bryce Park, Fort Bayard Park, Fort Slocum Park, or Fort Totten Park.

This exhibit is open to visitors of all ages. Entries must be hand delivered to the Rock Creek Park Nature Center and Planetarium by close of business March 16, 2008.

Visitors whose images are chosen from the entries will be invited to attend the opening exhibit and reception the evening of April 6, 2008.

All visitors whose images are chosen will receive a copy of *Remarkable Trees of the World* by Thomas Pakenham.

All submitted images and essays can be picked up by participants at the Rock Creek Park Nature Center and Planetarium after July 5, 2008.

For more information, visit our website: www.nps.gov/rocr or call (202) 895-6070.