

Administration

Rocky Mountain National Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 1080, Estes Park, CO 80517, is in immediate charge.

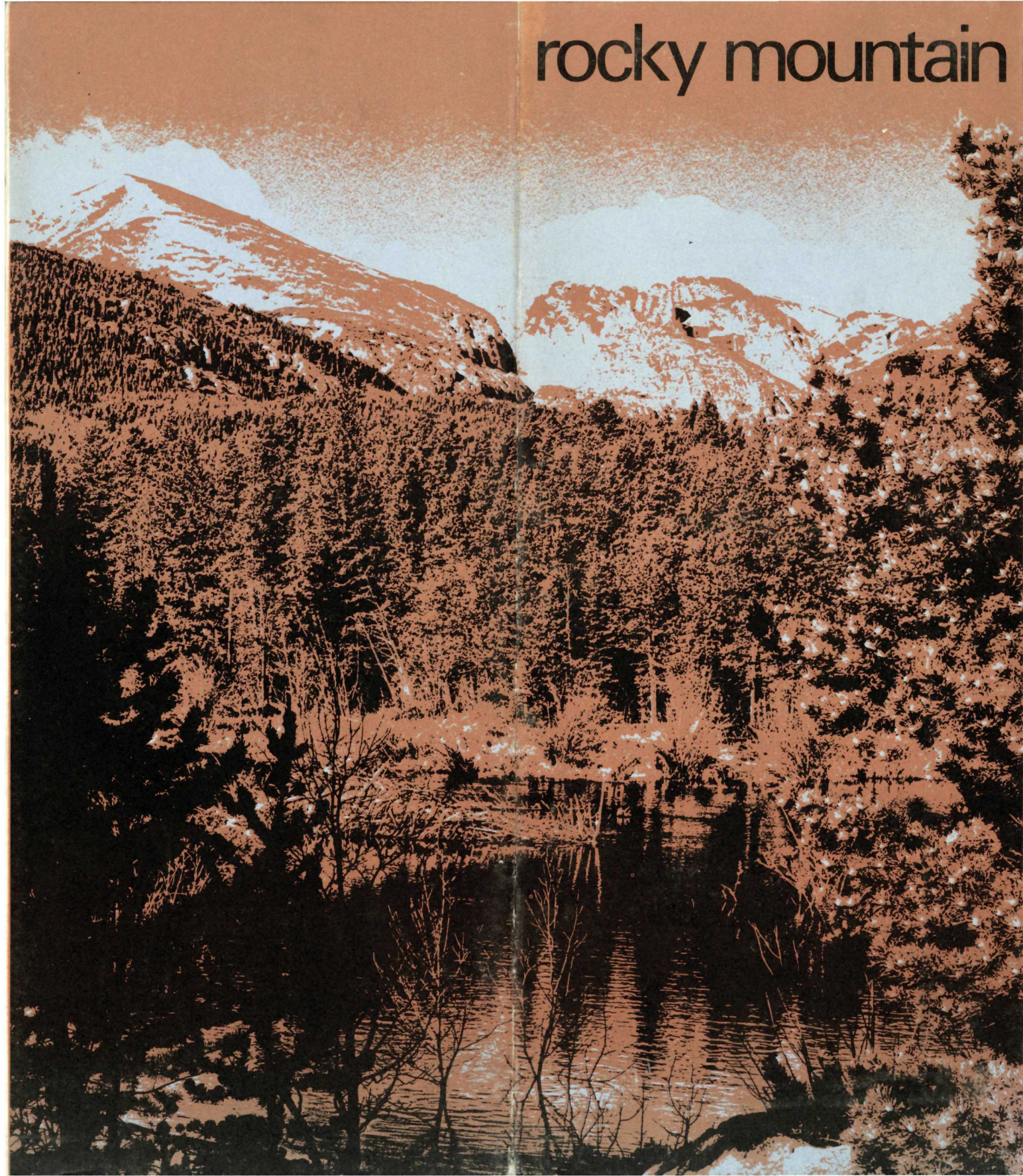
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.



☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1969—346-125/239

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, D.C. 20402 - Price 15 cents

rocky mountain national park colorado



The abrupt and snowy Front Range frowning down on valley parks; a high, rolling plateau carpeted with dwarf tundra plants—these are the hallmarks of Rocky Mountain National Park. Bighorn of the cliffs and columbine in the glades—these are some of its special denizens.

Look at the magnificence that is yours to explore!

In the northeast corner lies a spur from the Continental Divide—the Mummy Range—a tumbled majestic mountain mass which includes some of the park's loftiest peaks and one of the finest glaciers.

To the south of Longs Peak, the country grows wilder. The range is a succession of noble snow-covered summits.

The west side, gentler in its slopes and less majestic in its mountain massings, is a lovely region diversified by innumerable streams and lakes. Where the Continental Divide, following the crest of the Never Summer Mountains, bends around the Colorado River headwaters, another scene of rugged beauty has been carved.

Like the oceans, the Rockies change from moment to moment and day to day. At sunrise and sunset the vast bare granite masses are rosy. During fair, sunny days, they turn all shades of luminous grays, mauves, and blues. On stormy days they are dark and forbidding.

A thunderstorm—dark, ominous—might be born before your eyes on the square granite head of Longs Peak. Out of the blue sky a slight mist seems to gather. In a few moments it becomes a tiny cloud. In 5 minutes the mountaintop is hidden. Then, apparently out of nothing, the cloud swells and sweeps over the sky. Sometimes, 15 minutes after the first tiny fleck of mist appears, it is raining in the valley and snowing on the mountains. One-half hour later it has cleared.

From the summits of the mountains, look down on these brief-lived oceans of clouds! Perhaps in no other place will you witness Nature producing, like a great artist, such incomparable effects with so few materials.

Rocky Mountain's Geological Story

These mountains may appear eternal, but in the vast dimensions of geologic time they are but phases in a never-ending process of uplift and destruction.

Hundreds of millions of years ago a great sea covered the area the park now occupies. Near the close of the Precambrian era, about 1½ billion years ago when only the simplest forms of life existed, the sea receded and the first mountains began to rise where it had been. The uplift took place very slowly—so slowly that probably the only indication was occasional earthquakes as rock masses cracked under the irresistible pressure of the folding.

Uplift and intrusion were followed by another long period of weathering and erosion of the solid rock. Deep mountain canyons were widened into valleys, and the mountains were slowly worn away until their summits were reduced to a rolling plain. These early mountains are the source of schists and granites that form the principal rocks of the park.

The growth of the Rocky Mountains began at the end of the Mesozoic era (the Age of Reptiles), more than 60 million years ago. This growth likewise took place very slowly, but was of magnificent proportions.

No sooner had the first Rockies begun to rise than weathering and erosion started the wearing-down process. The result was the formation of a high, rolling plain. You can see evidence of this on the mountains themselves. Above timberline, Trail Ridge Road traverses a rolling upland in marked contrast to the rugged canyons cut into it from the east since the mountains have been uplifted.

Then, about a million years ago, the climate grew colder and the ice age began. Giant snowdrifts at the heads of stream-cut canyons compacted into ice, forming glaciers of tremendous size. The record left by these glaciers is clearly legible. Almost any view affords displays of glacial forms: U-shaped valleys, cirques, lakes, and moraines (ridges, heaps, or scattered masses of unsorted rock debris deposited by the ice).

Five small glaciers continue to exist in the park today as a result of strong winter winds from the west which drift the dry powdery snow into accumulation areas at the heads of the canyons on the east slope. These small drift glaciers are quite different from the large alpine glaciers of the North Cascades and Olympic Mountains in the State of Washington, where snowfall is heavy; but they do move at the rate of about 3 feet a year and develop crevasses late in summer.

Andrews Glacier can be reached by a fairly strenuous hike of about 4 miles; Andrews Tarn at the foot of the glacier is milky in appearance because of the pulverized rock carried into it by melt water.

The other glaciers cannot be reached by trail, but take a 5-mile hike from Bear Lake to Flattop Mountain for

a view of Tyndall, which is between Hallett Peak and Flattop at about 12,300 feet.

The Park's Plantlife

As you travel from the valleys to the high peaks, you will notice changes in plantlife, which are due largely to increasing coolness, wetness, and exposure.

At lower elevations, where the climate is relatively warm and dry, open stands of ponderosa pine and juniper grow on the slopes facing the sun, while on cooler north slopes Douglas-fir is mixed with them. The lovely blue spruce graces streamsides, and dense stands of lodgepole pine grow in some places. Here and there appear groves of aspen, which turn a golden yellow in autumn. Delighting the eye at ground level, such wildflowers as American pasqueflower, Rocky Mountain iris, spreading thermopsis, plains erysimum (known locally as "western wallflower"), and penstemon dot meadows and glades.

Above 9,000 feet or so, forests of Englemann spruce, subalpine fir, and limber pine take over. Openings in these cool, dark forests produce wildflower gardens of rare beauty and luxuriance. Here the blue Colorado columbine—the State flower—seems to reach its best development. At the upper edges of this zone, where cold winds constantly blow, the trees are twisted and grotesque, often flat and ground-hugging.

Then the trees disappear and you are in alpine tundra—open expanses of dwarf vegetation like that in arctic regions. Here plants grow close to the ground to survive the desiccating winds, flower, then produce seeds quickly during the brief summers. Grasses, mosses, lichens, and many bright-blossoming plants create patterns of endless variety and surprise. Trail Ridge Road takes you through 11 miles of this Lilliputian plant world above timberline.

And Its Wildlife

As you explore this magnificent setting of valleys and high mountain peaks, forests, and tundra, occasional glimpses of wildlife will add moments of excitement.

Many small mammals seem always to be around, but larger animals like elk and deer are usually seen only just after dawn or in late evening. Most of the elk summer near timberline, feeding at night in the open willow basins above timberline or in the forest glades. During the crisp Colorado autumn, listen for the trumpeted challenge of the big bull elk as he gathers his harem. If you startle a mule deer as you hike the trails, it will bound off characteristically touching all four feet at once.

The bighorn—symbol of Rocky Mountain National Park—venture out into Horseshoe Park near Sheep Lake where there is a mineral lick. These sheep, even the lambs, make remarkable descents down seemingly impossible

slopes. Early in the morning you might see a dozen or more of these animals making their way down Specimen Mountain. Landing on some nearby ledge to break their fall, they immediately plunge downward again to another ledge, and so on until they reach good footing in the valley below. With seemingly equal ease, they also ascend slopes surprisingly steep.

Above timberline in the tundra area, the yellow-bellied marmot, similar to the woodchuck in appearance, suns himself on the rocks. Another common, inconspicuous animal of the tundra is the small, rabbitlike pika.

The wild, eerie, yipping song of the coyote is familiar on autumn and winter evenings at Moraine Park and Horseshoe Park. Shy and elusive by nature, the coyote has become accustomed to unmolested existence in the park, and may sometimes be seen in the meadows hunting for ground squirrels. It doesn't permit close approach, and is most adept at disappearing, even in scanty cover.

Beaver, which are abundant in almost every stream, are easy to observe. All you need to do is spend a little time in the evening around their ponds and lodges. They begin working about sunset and continue long after darkness. As they cut willow or aspen, repair dams, and otherwise go about their business, they probably won't pay any attention to you!

Looking for some of the park's more uncommon species? You might be one of the lucky persons to see a pine marten or a weasel. These animals prey on squirrels, rabbits, and other rodents. Notice the pine, spruce, and fir trees where porcupines have eaten the bark; you may not see "porky" himself because of his nocturnal habits.

The most common species of birds in Rocky Mountain are the robin, mountain bluebird, and, at middle elevations, the chickadee and junco. The hermit thrush and solitaire, generally classed among the finest songbirds in the world, are fairly common forest birds; only slightly inferior in musical performance are the Cassin's finch, ruby-crowned kinglet, western meadow-lark, and rock and canyon wrens. The graceful violet-green swallow is unsurpassed in beauty of form and color, and the Steller's jay, magpie, and Clark's nutcracker are conspicuous for their handsome appearance and vigorous flight. Those with curious and unusual habits include the broadtailed hummingbird, water ouzel, and nuthatch. On the high peaks live ptarmigan, pipit, and rosy finch.

You may see many or all of these wilderness creatures; much will depend upon your ability to move quietly and without haste. One final reassuring word—there are no poisonous snakes in the park.

To protect wildlife and other park values, certain rules are necessary. It is unlawful to feed or molest any animal. Hunting is not allowed, and guns must be sealed or cased. Don't destroy or disturb any natural feature or public property.



Man and the Rockies

Whether any of these plants and animals were in the park between 10,000 and 15,000 years ago is probably unknown, but archeological evidence indicates that man may have been living in or crossing over the high mountains at that time. Occupation of the area by Indians probably began about 7,000 to 8,000 years ago and continued intermittently until about 100 years ago.

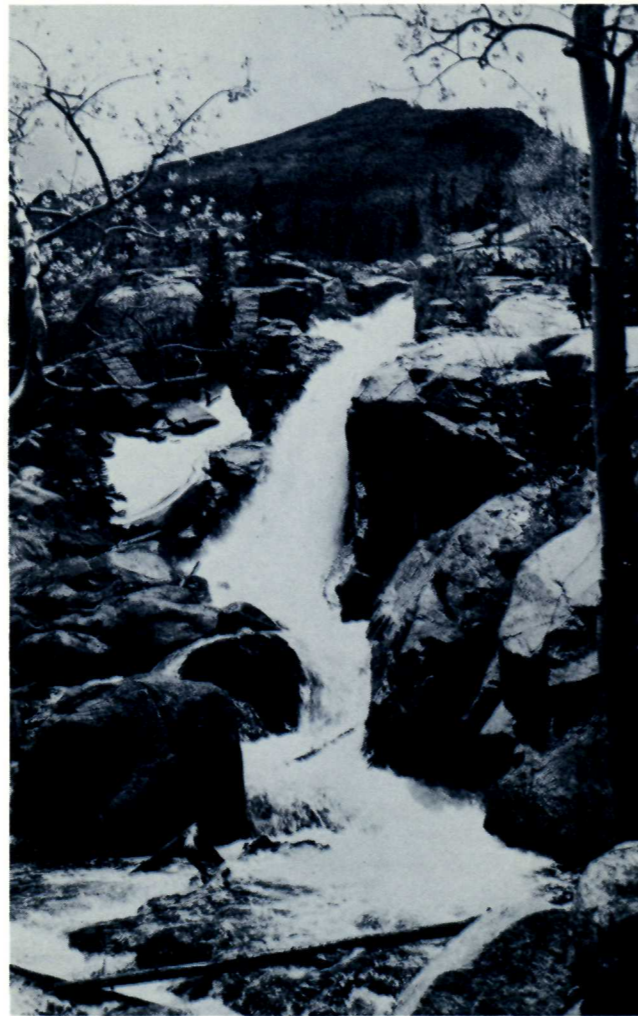
Trail Ridge, now crossed by the famous Trail Ridge Road, was the route the Utes and Arapahos used for thousands of years to cross the mountains. The trail is still distinctly visible even though it hasn't been used in the last few years. It appears as a well-worn rut across the tundra paralleling the road.

At least 40 intermittently used Indian campsites have been located in or near the park. Forest Canyon Pass, just south of Fall River Pass at the head of Forest Canyon, was a favored site. There were sites at Milner Pass, on Flattop Mountain, near Marys Lake, and in virtually all the meadows at lower elevations.

After the United States acquired the region through the Louisiana Purchase, explorers, trappers (the famous "mountain men"), and adventurers passed near the park.

On October 15, 1859, Joel Estes and his son, Milton, topped Park Hill and became the first known white men to see the "park," or open, forest-rimmed valley, which now bears the Estes name. The next year Estes settled his family in the grassy meadows here. By 1867, the Estes family claim was acquired by Griff Evans, who later transferred his rights to a British nobleman, the Earl of Dunraven. He kept out many enterprises that would have seriously marred the matchless landscape, and he also did much to bring the region to public attention.

In the early 1900's, when the automobile began to prove practical as a means of travel, many people urged consideration of a plan to have the area set aside as a national park. But the major force behind the idea was one man—Enos Mills, naturalist and writer.



To Enjoy the Park

... drive its roads

From the east, *Trail Ridge Road* takes a winding course as it leaves Estes Park, climbing to the crest of the Front Range and then descending to Grand Lake. Take 3 or 4 hours for this 50-mile scenic drive, stopping at the overlooks to absorb far-spreading views of Rocky Mountain's peaks and valleys.

You might start your trip up Trail Ridge from the *Moraine Park Visitor Center* where exhibits provide an excellent introduction. Stop at *Many Parks Curve* for a look at the whole eastern and central part of the park, and at *Rainbow Curve* to see the Mummy Range to the north. *Rock Cut* has superlative views of glacier-carved peaks, and from the lower end of the parking area, take the ½-hour round-trip trail to the *Toll Memorial*.

You are on the "roof of the world" when you reach *Fall River Pass* (11,796 feet). A stop here, for a visit to the Alpine Visitor Center and perhaps for lunch or a snack, is a must. The exhibits in the visitor center are devoted to the ecology of alpine tundra. From here, the 4,000-foot descent to Grand Lake at the west entrance begins. On the downward journey, you cross the Continental Divide, North America's backbone, at *Milner Pass* (10,759 feet).

A section of the original road crossing over the mountains, *Fall River Road*, is now open only from Horseshoe Park Junction to Chasm Falls. But the drive is unforgettable—along it are many superb views like the aspen groves and meadows of upper Horseshoe Park and the enchanting cascades of Chasm Falls.

Take *Bear Lake Road* if you have the time—an extra hour or so will do it. This is one of the few paved roads in the Rockies that leads to the heart of a high mountain basin.

Don't forget—Rocky Mountain's roads are not high-speed highways, but are instead designed for the utmost enjoyment of the scenery. *Speed limits and traffic laws are enforced. Please obey signs.* Report all accidents to the nearest park ranger station.

... take its trails and climb its mountain

Regardless of how long you stay, plan to take at least one hike into the wilderness. The 300 miles of trails in Rocky Mountain range from leisurely strolls to trips that tax even the well-conditioned hiker.

For a short, easy hike, try the ½-mile walk around Bear Lake. If you take your time, the walk takes about 45 minutes. As you proceed, pause frequently to look at the scenery, to listen to the birds, to take pictures, and to ponder the wonders of geology and natural history.

But if you are the more energetic hiker, a climb into the mountains' embrace so that you can know them in



the intimacy of their bare summits and their flowered, glaciated gorges is to turn a new, unforgettable page in human experience. One of the most popular climbs of America's higher peaks, and a wonderful initiation to high-mountain climbing, is to the summit of Longs Peak (8 miles from Longs Peak Campground). The toughest approach of all is up the "Diamond," and the park superintendent must give his approval before you do such serious technical rock climbing.

For a true intimacy with nature, go backpacking. Or go on horseback (a guide is usually required when saddle horses are rented for trips within the park). Most of the park trails like Flattop, a good day's ride across the Continental Divide from Estes Park to Grand Lake, can be covered on horseback.

For safety's sake. Many accidents have occurred when inexperienced hikers have attempted rock climbing or cross-country routes without realizing the hazards involved.

You must register at the chief park ranger's office or at the nearest park ranger station if you are planning to

- Make an ascent involving the use of technical climbing equipment (ropes, carabiners, pitons).
- Hike or climb on those parts of Longs Peak and Mount Meeker above 11,000 feet.
- Make ski or snowshoe trips away from main roads.

You would do well to take a few lessons before doing any strenuous exploring. Descriptions of climbing routes and information on mountaineering guide service are available at park headquarters and ranger stations.

Accidents in the mountains, even minor ones, may have serious or fatal consequences. Severe storms come quickly, even in summer, with attendant exposure to low temperatures, rain, snow, sleet, and lightning. All hikers and climbers should observe the following precautions: *Never climb alone. Register before and after the climb. Avoid steep snowfields. Don't over-extend your physical ability.*

Start early. Avoid open high ridges and peaks during lightning. Turn back in adverse weather. Move cautiously on steep or rocky areas. Children should be warned not to run downhill.

... utilize its interpretive program

Through its interpretive program, the National Park Service seeks to explain the evolution of this landscape as well as the natural history of its flora and fauna.

There is no better way to understand the park than to accompany ranger-naturalists on one or more of the many hikes. They will help you to identify some of the 240 or so birds of the park and will try to bring you within sight of some of the other park wildlife. Evening campfire programs, often illustrated with slides or films, are presented at the main campgrounds.

... fish in its streams

The mountain setting of park streams and lakes like Glacier Creek makes fishing a doubly attractive recreation. So check your gear and tackle box and start fishing for brook, rainbow, and cutthroat trout (the only native trout). They spawn in the cold streams and lakes of the park where the young grow to maturity. Your success will be topped only by the tales you tell when you get back home.

But remember, you must have a Colorado license and you should review fishing regulations at park headquarters or at the nearest park ranger station before you fish!

... see it in winter

Winter means snow in the Rockies, and snow means skiing that can't be beat for thrills and excitement.

Activities center at Hidden Valley, 7 miles from the Fall River Entrance and 6 miles from the Beaver Meadows Entrance. Access roads to Hidden Valley from the east are kept open, and provide the winter traveler a panorama of the high mountains, particularly majestic in their winter mantle of white. Illustrated programs about the park's natural history in winter are presented on weekends at Hidden Valley Lodge.

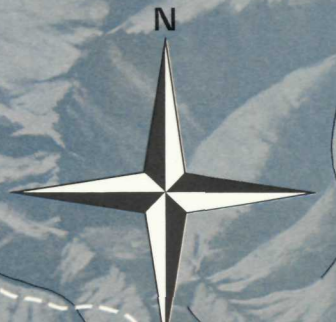
... stay in its campgrounds

This is camping country. You can come with your own tent. Drive in with your camper. Or tow your housetrailer. You'll find the perfect site, adjacent to the park's hustle and bustle like Moraine Park or isolated like Wild Basin.

So that others can have full enjoyment of living out of doors in Rocky Mountain, a few rules are necessary. Respect your campground—pour water on your campfire to make sure it is out, and leave your area clean for others to enjoy. Campsites, where your stay must be limited to 14 days a year, are not reserved. And they may all be full by mid-morning during July and August.

—Burton V. Coale

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK



LEGEND

- Park Boundary
- Paved Road
- Light-Duty Road
- Dirt Road
- Trail
- Scenic Overlook
- Campground
- Ranger Station
- Fire Lookout
- Cabin
- Historic Site
- Picnic Area
- Launching Ramp

SCALE IN MILES

