

Bryce Canyon

Bryce Canyon National Park
Utah
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



Silent City Area, Below Sunset Point. Photo: Mitsuho Agishi

It is tempting to tell you what you will see here, but that is impossible. Day will break or night will fall; the light will shift and it will all be different. A thunderstorm will rearrange sediments, pushing them one step seaward. Or you will find yourself standing in a slightly different place and even that is enough to change your outlook. And *your* outlook counts. Mormon settler Ebenezer Bryce lived here five years and tried to make a go of the land. He gave his name to the place and his description of it survives him: "A hell of a place to lose a cow!" Paiute Indians didn't find easy living here either. Their name for Bryce Canyon was simply a description which translates: "Red rocks standing like men in a bowl-shaped canyon." It would be hard to gauge the Paiutes' attitude toward this place from such a straightforward description if we knew nothing else about them. But we know that they attached spiritual values to Bryce Canyon, just as many people today who witness this landscape experience religious feelings or a sense of the supernatural. Without a preconceived notion to guide you, what would *you* call this place?

The many shapes and forms in stone have conjured up all sorts of images: walls and windows, minarets, gables, pagodas and pedestals, temples, and even "platoons of Turkish soldiers in pantaloons." Photos usually emphasize this other-worldly magnificence of Bryce Canyon, and rightly so. The intricacy of form and brilliancy of color astound you, as though in this particular spot the force of creation went temporarily unrestrained. But don't be put off or held back by the awesome beauty and grandeur. That's a danger here—there is a temptation to stay near your car. But this is not an alien land, this is the very stuff of earth and an insight into geology. Take a short walk into the canyon and open yourself to experience the unforgettable.

What has powerfully shaped the landscape here is what has also rendered it less than usable for most human purposes: water. What you see is the product of erosion, and in Bryce Canyon erosion is caused by water—as rain, snow, and ice. It is not caused by wind, a common misconception about how Bryce Canyon was formed. Practically all of southwest Utah is in fact a result of the eternal cycle of uplift and erosion. Right now the land is on top of the struggle; this region began rising about 13 million years ago until parts of it were more than 3 kilometers (2 miles) above sea level. Yet the red

rocks you look at here were deposited by vast lakes once covering this area. In earlier times dinosaurs tramped its swamps, foraging tons of plant foods, and left their own story in fossil bones. The topography in this region rises to the north, creating the staircase effect diagrammed below. Descending southward from Bryce Canyon along the staircase, the exposed geological formations become progressively older.

In badlands topography, erosion acts so fast that a thick layer of soil never forms. The slopes are steep, so that even plants have little chance. Exotic creations of nature abound, and as you wander such areas you may imagine yourself in another world. Regain your perspective by visiting Bryce Canyon's second world, its forests. As elevation rises from the park boundary out to Yovimpa and Rainbow Points, the forests change from a dwarf forest of Utah juniper and pinyon pine on the lower slopes to ponderosa pine forests on the plateau surface. Higher up toward Rainbow Point begins a spruce, aspen, and fir forest. Elevation and precipitation determine forest cover, and although you gain more than 300 meters (1,000 feet) elevation from the park entrance to Rainbow Point, you will hardly notice it, except for this forest change. Watch for it. Watch too, everywhere, for flowers: sego lilies, penstemons, asters, clematis, evening primrose, skyrocket gilia, Indian paintbrush, and wild iris. Spring and early summer offer the best display of flowers.

Something you do not see here is the passage of time because it is so vast, and, in a sense, gentle here. But some people *feel* geological time and its vastness here in Bryce Canyon better than anywhere else.

And color! From sunrise to sunset, the changing scene passes before you in vivid color. The reds and yellows are caused by iron oxides in the rocks; the purples and lavenders by manganese. Dazzling light plays upon the rock to immerse you in an immense and vivid light show.

One last secret: Bryce Canyon isn't a canyon at all, it's an amphitheater hollowed out of the Pink Cliffs. Time and raindrops, time and snow, time and ice. . . .

Bryce's Diverse Wildlife

The forests and meadows of Bryce Canyon support a remarkable diversity of animal life. At the bottom of the food chain is a huge rodent population that feeds directly on seeds, nuts, and other vegetable material. Chipmunks, ground squirrels, marmots, pine squirrels, and prairie dogs are active during the day and are replaced at dusk by their nocturnal counterparts—mice, woodrats, voles, and gophers. These small mammals, together with jackrabbits and cottontails, are preyed upon by small populations of night hunters, including badger, skunk, bobcat, weasel, ring-tailed cat, gray fox, and coyote.

Mule deer are the largest mammals at Bryce Canyon; they can usually be seen on summer mornings and evenings in meadows along park roads. By browsing on shrubs and young trees along the margin of the forest they help maintain the meadow environment. But unchecked numbers of deer can quickly outstrip available vegetation. Cougar, also called puma and mountain lion, are perhaps the most secretive animals at Bryce Canyon—and with good reason. Man has critically reduced the cougar

population with gun, trap, and poison. These big cats continue to be hunted on public lands surrounding the park. The rugged slickrock country below the Pink Cliffs is one of the last refuge areas for these graceful animals in western North America. Mule deer and cougar have a mutually beneficial prey-predator relationship. A single cougar may kill up to 50 deer each year, taking the young, old, and sick members of the herd, preserving a balanced, healthy deer population.

During the summer porcupines feed on leaves, berries, nuts, bark, and wildflowers. When winters are particularly snowy, these animals may be forced to depend upon young ponderosa pine and other trees for food. Since their quills can be deadly to most carnivores, porcupine have few natural enemies.

More than 164 species of birds visit Bryce Canyon annually, with the greatest variety between May and October. Predacious, omnivorous, and herbivorous species are supported by a broad food base of insects, berries, nuts,

and rodents. Swifts and swallows can be seen darting for insects along cliff faces; woodpeckers and nuthatches concentrate their efforts in tall trees; meadowlarks, bluebirds, and robins are most active in meadow areas.

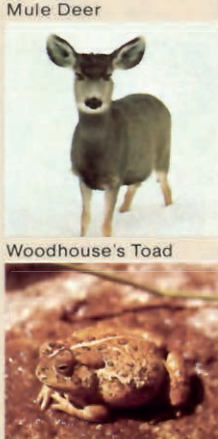
By October most species begin to prepare for winter. Mule deer, cougar, and coyote migrate to lower elevations. Most bird species migrate to warmer climates; jays, nuthatches, ravens, hawks, and owls are notable exceptions. Blue grouse are permanent residents also, subsisting on spruce and fir needles during long winters. Marmots and ground squirrels hibernate until spring.

Man has greatly reduced, and in some cases eliminated, large mammal species that originally existed at Bryce Canyon. The grizzly bear and timber wolf are gone; elk, cougar, bighorn sheep, and black bear are rare. Unfortunately, the park is not large enough to afford adequate protection for these animals, which will slowly disappear in the face of human population pressure.

Coyote



Mule Deer



Woodhouse's Toad



Mountain Lion



Steller's Jay



Ground Squirrel



The Grand Staircase

Bryce Canyon is not a canyon at all, but a spectacular amphitheater carved by erosion in the 50 to 60 million year old rocks of the **Pink Cliffs**. These cliffs are the uppermost step in the Grand Staircase, diagrammed below, that rises to the north between Grand Canyon and Bryce Canyon National Parks. The Staircase is a series of cliffs, all retreating to the north as the superimposed rock layers of southern Utah are eroded. Some layers formed at the bottom of ancient seas, others on the coastal plains adjacent to the shifting margins of the sea. The

layers were uplifted and are now being eroded by the action of water. The capstone of the Grand Staircase is the **Pink Cliffs** (elevation 2,800 meters—9,100 feet), ancient lake deposits once more than 600 meters (2,000 feet) thick but now reduced in thickness by erosion to 250 to 400 meters (800 to 1,300 feet). Look south from Yovimpa Point, in the southern part of Bryce Canyon National Park and you will see the Grand Staircase stretching backward in time. You will be standing on the uppermost of five major steps formed by the

eroding cliff faces of tilted sedimentary rock layers, each distinctive in character and color. Now, for a panoramic view of the Pink Cliffs themselves, go to Rainbow Point in the park. Their color is due to the presence of iron particles in the rock that oxidize and impart the resulting pigment to the whole formation.

The **Grey Cliffs** are of such soft stone that their cliff faces are less perpendicular than those of adjacent formations. They were deposited about 120 to 135 million years ago. The rocks of the Grey Cliffs can be seen at

the base of Bryce Canyon and are visible along the road between Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks.

Zion Canyon is incised into the rock of the **White Cliffs**. Here, the formations range in age from 135 to 165 million years and total more than 670 meters (2,200 feet) in depth. These are the tallest cliffs among the steps of the Grand Staircase. The **White Cliffs** are really tan in color, but appear white in sunlight. Their elevation above sea level ranges from more than 1,500 to more than 2,100 meters (5,000 to 7,000 feet). See these

spectacular cliffs along the road to Grand Canyon.

The **Vermilion Cliffs** are a brilliant dark red. These vertical cliffs are 165 to 200 million years old and more than 300 meters (1,000 feet) thick. Look for these red rocks at the base of the canyon walls as you walk through Zion and as you drive along the road to the Grand Canyon.

The rocks of the **Chocolate, or Belted, Cliffs** are older than those of the Vermilion Cliffs. They formed about 200 to 225 million years ago. They average 550

meters (1,800 feet) in thickness. The **Chocolate Cliffs** are reddish-brown but have belts of other colors running through them. Look for these near the south entrance to Zion National Park.

The southern edge of the **Kaibab Plateau** is the north rim of the Grand Canyon, and this top edge of the Grand Canyon is the bottom of the Grand Staircase. The **Kaibab Limestone** is more than 225 million years old, but this formation is one of the youngest you will see when you visit the Grand Canyon.



General Information

The park visitor center should be your first stop. It has information, exhibits, a slide program, first aid, and restrooms. The park staff is on hand to help you and to answer your questions. Publications are also sold here.

Pleasant days and cool nights prevail April through October. Thunderstorms are common in summer. Winter, with many bright and crisp days, lasts from November to March. The main viewpoints of the park are kept open in winter, when snow transforms the scenery.

Fifty-six kilometers (35 miles) of paved road go to a number of viewpoints in the park. The park's famous badland pinnacles, spires, and monuments can be seen best from Fairlyland View, Sunrise, Sunset, Inspiration and Bryce Points, and Paria View. Overlooks along the road south of Paria View offer panoramic views of Paria Valley to the east. Yovimpa Point provides a panoramic view of the plateau and canyon country to the south. No trailers are allowed beyond Sunset Ground; day visitors must park their trailers in the visitor center lot.

You can explore the park by hiking or on horseback. Be sure to wear sturdy shoes and carry drinking water; you will need a free permit for an overnight trip, allowed only on the Under-the-Rim Trail south of Bryce Point. Morning and afternoon horseback trips, led by a concession wrangler, begin at the corral near the lodge. Hikers are expected to move aside for horses on the trails.

The park staff offers a variety of interpretive programs in summer and fall, including human and natural history talks, campfire programs, rim talks, guided nature walks, and special interest walks. Ask at the visitor center for current information. Winter activities include cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and overnight camping; registration is required. No snowmobiling is allowed in the park.

Accommodations and Services

Camping: Tent and trailer camping is available on a first-come, first-served basis at North and Sunset Campgrounds. Campsites have picnic tables, fireplaces, and nearby water and restrooms. No hookups are provided, but a sanitary dump station is available just south of North Campground in the summer. Some campsites are available year-round. Camping is limited to 14 days in any calendar year. A fee is charged. Arrive early to be sure of getting a campsite. Buy or bring your own firewood; no wood gathering is allowed.

Lodging: Cabins are available from May to mid-October at Bryce Canyon Lodge, which has a dining room and gift shop. For reservations write:

TW Recreational Services, Inc., P.O. Box 400, Cedar City, Utah 84720; or call 801-586-7686. Lodging is available year-round near the park entrance.

Handicap Access: Most park buildings, restrooms, and viewpoints are accessible to persons in wheelchairs, as is the paved, fairly level trail between Sunrise and Sunset Points. In the summer, two campsites are held in North Campground until 6 p.m. each day for handicapped campers.

General Store: Film, souvenirs, and groceries are sold at a store near the Sunrise Point parking area. Showers and a coin-operated laundry are available in the store building.

Mail and Public Telephones: A post office is open all year at Ruby's Inn and at Bryce Canyon Lodge from mid-May to October 1. The summer address is General Delivery, Bryce Canyon, UT 84717. All visitor mail addressed to park headquarters will be returned to General Delivery. Several locations have public telephones.

Medical Services: First aid is available at the visitor center. A hospital is located in Panguitch, Utah, 42 kilometers (26 miles) from the park.

Church Services: Protestant services are held in the park each summer Sunday and in Panguitch all year. Roman Catholic and Mormon services are held regularly at the lodge and outside the park.

Lost and Found: Report lost items and turn in items that you find to the visitor center.

The Trails

The best way to see the natural beauty of Bryce is to hike along the trails that run through the principal parts of the park. But if you have only a limited amount of time you can see spectacular views of the diverse colors and formations by driving to Fairlyland View, Sunset Point, Inspiration Point, Bryce Point, and Paria View. The trip takes about one hour.

Along the trails of Bryce Amphitheater you will see a great variety of unusual eroded rock formations, some named for features or persons they were thought to resemble. Most of the colors come from the oxidation of minerals, especially iron. Exhibits at the visitor center, and the diagram above, will help explain the geologic history of the area.

When you hike, remember that the hardest part of your trip will be the *return*—it is all uphill. Wear sturdy walking shoes, and carry water with you. A permit is required for overnight

trips, allowed only on the Under-the-Rim Trail south of Bryce Point.

Guard your health while you are hiking, and remember that your heart and lungs may not be used to vigorous exercise at such high altitudes. Do not take shortcuts, as this would only endanger you and others. Do not take pets on the trails, and remember to stand aside for horse traffic. Ask a park employee for information on any point on which you are in doubt, keep your own and other's safety in mind, and enjoy your visit to one of the most beautiful scenic parks in the world.

Regulations and Safety Tips

Ask a park employee if you are in doubt; help them, yourself, and others by observing these rules:

The speed limit is 55 kph (35 miles per hour) unless otherwise posted. Drive carefully after dark to avoid hitting mule deer.

Don't feed the wildlife; it is unlawful, and they can transmit diseases to humans. Do not bring firearms, and do not attempt to hunt or trap. Keep pets under physical control at all times; they are not allowed on trails or in public buildings.

Don't throw rocks from trails or from the rim. Guard against sunburn and overexertion; the high elevation is dangerous if you have respiratory ailments or heart disease. Stay in your car during thunderstorms, and avoid isolated or open areas. Wheeled vehicles, including bicycles, are not allowed off paved roads.

Camp only in campgrounds, build fires only in grills, and picnic only in designated picnic areas. Be certain your campfire is out, and do not throw cigarettes from your car or from horseback. No fires are allowed in the backcountry.

Do not disturb vegetation, deface rocks, or disturb the setting in any way; leave things as you find them.

Keep a close watch on children at all times. There are many steep drop-offs and a fall could be fatal.

Access and Information

The park can be reached from the west by automobile, using U.S. 89 from Bryce Junction, 11 kilometers (7 miles) south of Panguitch. Turn east at this junction and follow Utah 12 and 63 for 27 kilometers (17 miles) to the park entrance. For information write: Superintendent, Bryce Canyon National Park, Bryce Canyon, UT 84717, or call 801-834-5322 between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (Mountain Time).

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Bryce Amphitheater

You can begin a hike into the amphitheater from any of the trailheads listed below.

Fairyland Point
Here you can start the Fairyland Loop Trail, which covers 13 kilometers (8 miles) round trip, takes 4 to 5 hours, and climbs 98 meters (320 feet). The trail is strenuous; you should carry water. Here you can also begin the Rim Trail, which goes 8.8 kilometers (5.5 miles) to Bryce Point; the section of this trail between Sunset Point and the North Campground is nearly level.

Sunrise Point
From Sunrise Point you may tour the Queen's Garden, or visit Tower Bridge. The round trip to the Queen's Garden covers 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles), takes 1½ hours, and climbs 98 meters (320 feet); it is the least strenuous trail below the rim. The hike to Tower Bridge begins 460 meters (1,500 feet) north of Sunrise Point, covers a round trip distance of 5 kilometers (3 miles), takes 3 hours, and ascends 229 meters (750 feet); it is fairly strenuous.

Sunset Point
From Sunset Point you can take the Navajo Loop Trail, which covers 2.4 kilometers (1.5 miles) round trip, takes 1½ hours, and ascends 159 meters (521 feet). It is fairly strenuous. You may also take a combination of the Navajo and Queen's Garden Trails, which covers 4.8 kilometers (3 miles), takes 2 to 3 hours, and ascends 159 meters (521 feet). This is a moderately strenuous walk; carry water.

Bryce Point
This is a starting point for the Peekaboo Loop Trail and the Under-the-Rim Trail. The Peekaboo Loop Trail covers 9 kilometers (5.5 miles), takes 3 to 4 hours to complete, and climbs 255 meters (837 feet). It is strenuous; carry water. A round trip hike to the Hat Shop along the Under-the-Rim Trail covers 6 kilometers (3.8 miles), takes 4 hours, and ascends 280 meters (920 feet). The hike is strenuous; carry water. The Under-the-Rim Trail continues southward to Rainbow and Yovimpa Points (see above map).

