

Rocky Mountain

National Park
Colorado

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

The snow-mantled peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park rise above verdant alpine valleys and glistening lakes. One third of the park is above tree line, and here tundra predominates—a major reason why these peaks and valleys have been set aside as a national park. This area was first traversed by French furtraders. In 1859 Joel Estes and his son, Milton, rode into the valley that bears their name. Few others settled in this rugged country, and

about 1909 Enos Mills, a naturalist, writer, and conservationist, began to campaign for preservation of this pristine area. Mills' campaign succeeded, and the area then became Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915. A feature of the park is the marked differences found with the changing elevation. At lower levels, open stands of ponderosa pine and juniper grow on the slopes facing the sun; on cooler north slopes are Douglas-fir. Gracing the

streamsides are blue spruces intermixed with dense stands of lodgepole pines. Here and there appear groves of aspen. Wildflowers dot meadows and glades. Above 2,700 meters (9,000 feet) forests of Englemann spruce and subalpine fir take over. Openings in these cool, dark forests produce wildflower gardens of rare beauty and luxuriance, where the blue Colorado columbine reigns. At the upper edges of this zone, the trees are twisted,

grotesque, and hug the ground. Then the trees disappear and you are in alpine tundra—a harsh, fragile world. Here, more than one-quarter of the plants you will see can also be found in the Arctic. From the valleys to its mountain-tops, Rocky Mountain National Park encompasses many worlds. We invite you to explore them.

Wildlife and Tundra



As you explore you will occasionally come upon wildlife that add moments of excitement to your time in the park.

Many small mammals seem always to be around, but larger animals such as wapiti (elk) and deer generally are



seen only at dawn or in late evening. Bighorn—the living symbol of Rocky Mountain National Park—venture out into

Horseshoe Park near Sheep Lakes where there is a natural mineral lick. Please observe them from the parking lot. You



may also see a gray jay, perched on a blue spruce. Above treeline in the tundra area, the yellow-belly marmot suns itself



on the rocks. The wild, eerie, ripping song of the coyote is familiar on fall and winter evenings at Moraine Park and Horseshoe Park. Beaver, which are common in many streams, are often easy to find. All you need to do is spend a little time around their ponds and lodges in the evening. They usually begin working around sunset and continue long after dark. The alpine tundra, which is home to some of these small animals, is a flower-

rich meadowland that grows above treeline. The tundra is a harsh world where the growing season is very short—sometimes less than 10 weeks. Five-year-old plants are sometimes smaller than the end of your finger. The tundra is a fragile world where recovery from severe damage may take several hundred years.

Getting to Know Rocky Mountain National Park



The Visitor Centers

Become acquainted with the park through its guided walks, campfire talks, and other services. These programs begin in early June and extend into September. Pick up a schedule at one of the visitor centers. Stop at park headquarters or the Kawuneeche Visitor Center, both of which are open all year, and see the exhibits at Alpine Visitor Center, open June through September, and at the Moraine Park Museum, open May to October. The staff at the visitor centers can help you plan your time in the park. Wayside exhibits and self-guiding trails also will help you enjoy your stay in the park.

About 3 million people come to Rocky Mountain National Park each year. Most arrive in the summer, so consider making your trip in September or October when the weather is pleasant, the aspens are golden, and the crowds are gone. It is a beautiful time of year.

Driving

Trail Ridge Road is one of the great alpine highways in the United States. It crosses the park from east to west and then drops into the Kawuneeche Valley, where the North Fork of the Colorado River flows. Its winding course takes you 3,713 meters (12,183 feet) above sea level and into a world akin to Earth's arctic regions. The road is usually open from Memorial Day to mid-October depending on snowfall. If you are pulling a trailer you will notice reduced power at this high elevation. Take three or four hours for this 80-kilometer (50-mile) scenic drive, stopping at the overlooks to absorb far-spreading views of Rocky Mountain's peaks and valleys. As you travel along Trail Ridge itself, above tree line, you are on the "roof of the Rockies" with superlative vistas of glacier-carved peaks on every side. For a closer look at the alpine world walk to Forest Canyon Overlook or take the half-hour round-trip Tundra Trail. Remember, the alpine tundra ecosystem is extremely fragile; stay on the paths. Also, stop at Fall River Pass, 3,595 meters (11,796 feet) to visit the Alpine Visitor Center, where exhibits explain the life of the alpine tundra.

Old Fall River Road, the original road crossing the mountains, runs from Horseshoe Park west to Fall River Pass. West of Endovalley Picnic Area, it is one-way uphill. The gravel road switchbacks up a narrow mountain valley, giving you an idea of what it was like to travel across the mountains in the early days of the automobile. Because of sharp switchbacks, trailers and motorized vans are prohibited. A guide booklet, available at the visitor centers, tells what you can expect to see as you make the drive. This road is closed in winter due to weather conditions.

Take Bear Lake Road if you have an extra hour or an extra day. This is one of the few paved roads in the Rockies that leads to the heart of a high mountain basin. The area is heavily used and is often congested. You can expect that parking lots here and at Glacier Gorge Junction will be full between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on summer days.



Don't forget: park roads are not high-speed highways; instead, they have been designed for maximum enjoyment of the scenery. Speed limits and traffic laws are enforced. Please obey signs. Report all accidents to the nearest park ranger station. There are no service stations within the park, so check your gasoline and other needs. Cars tuned for lower elevations often overheat and may vapor lock. If your car acts as if it isn't getting gas, pull off the road at the nearest pullout, stop your engine, and allow it to cool. If snow or cold water is available, put it on your fuel pump and the line leading to the carburetor. Let your car cool for 15 minutes before trying to start it again.

Horseback Riding

Horses with guides can be hired at two locations inside the park on the east side, or from a number of liveries outside the east and west park boundaries during the summer season. Horses or any other trail stock, are not permitted to travel crosscountry. A number of trails are closed to stock use altogether. Please ask a park ranger which trails are open or closed to stock use.



Camping

Five park campgrounds—Moraine Park, Glacier Basin, Aspenglen, Longs Peak, and Timber Creek—provide an enjoyable way to become acquainted with Rocky Mountain. Camping is limited to three days at Longs Peak and seven days at the other sites. In summer you will find that campgrounds usually fill to capacity early each day. Organized group campsites at Glacier Basin campground can be reserved. Longs Peak is restricted to tent camping. There are no electrical, water, or sewer connections in any of the campgrounds. Sewer dump stations are at Moraine Park, Glacier Basin, and Timber Creek campgrounds. Public telephones are located at Moraine Park, Glacier Basin, and Aspenglen. A full range of services is available outside the park at Estes Park on the east and at Grand Lake on the west.

Wood fires are permitted in the fire grates at campgrounds and picnic areas. A written permit is required for all fires outside those areas. Wood gathering is prohibited except when authorized at backcountry campsites. Firewood bundles are sold at campgrounds and at a number of locations outside the park. Pets are permitted in campgrounds provided that they are on a leash less than 2 meters (6 feet) in length. There are private kennels in Estes Park.



Fishing

In the mountain streams and lakes of Rocky Mountain National Park are four species of trout: German brown, rainbow, brook, and cutthroat. These cold waters may not produce large fish, but you will enjoy the superb mountain scenery as you fish.

Remember, you must have a valid Colorado fishing license. Use of live bait is prohibited except under certain special conditions. Review the special fishing regulations at park headquarters or at the nearest park ranger station before you fish. Fishing is not permitted in Bear Lake at any time. Other lakes and streams on the east side of the park are also closed to protect the greenback cutthroat trout that is being reintroduced to its native habitat. Check with a ranger for details.



Climbing

For the climber Rocky Mountain National Park offers a variety of challenging ascents throughout the year. A park concessioner operates a technical climbing school and guide service that provides climbing and mountaineering instruction. For more information, contact park headquarters.

It is important to be familiar with the park's climbing regulations before you begin. These regulations have been established to provide as safe and satisfactory a situation for climbers as possible. Study them and check with a park ranger if you have questions. Permits are not required for any hike.

Technical climbs do not require registration either at the trailhead or in advance. It is your responsibility, however, to make sure that someone reports your absence if you happen to be overdue.

Registration is still required for overnight bivouacs. See the Backcountry entry on the reverse side for detailed information on registering. If you have any

questions about registering, do not hesitate to ask a park ranger.

For those who are not technical climbers but would like the experience of reaching a mountain top, Longs Peak is the answer. In July and August and most of September, the route through the Keyhole can be negotiated without technical climbing equipment. The North and East faces are for technical climbing only.

Even though technical equipment is not needed, the lengthy climb up Longs Peak is demanding. The elevation gain is 1,433 meters (4,700 feet), and the 26-kilometer (16-mile) round trip can take 12 hours. Be sure you are acclimated to high elevations before you try this rigorous trip.

To avoid afternoon lightning storms around the summit, start before 6 a.m. and be in good physical condition.



Even in summer the weather can suddenly turn cold, so carry wool sweaters, spare socks, mittens, rain gear, and lunch. For information about Longs Peak, call the ranger station, 303-586-4975.

Winter Activities

Winter means snow in the Rockies and snow means skiing—crosscountry skiing in the lower valleys, winter mountaineering in the high country, and downhill skiing at Hidden Valley, 11 kilometers (7 miles) from the Fall River Entrance and almost 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the Beaver Meadows Entrance. Access roads from the east are kept open and provide the winter traveler with a panorama of the high mountains.

Three campgrounds are open all year—Longs Peak, Timber Creek, and either Moraine Park or Aspenglen. Longs Peak and Timber Creek campgrounds are not plowed once the snows begin so you have to carry supplies to your campsite. None of the campgrounds has water in winter.

If you are going into the backcountry overnight, you



will need a backcountry permit, available free at park headquarters, or the Kawuneeche Visitor Center. Some areas are closed to overnight camping, and the danger of avalanches frequently exists, so plan your trip carefully, checking with park rangers for the latest information on the areas in which you plan to travel.

Never travel alone. Take extra supplies in case you are forced to bivouac overnight. Winter in the Rockies can mean sudden storms and subzero temperatures at any time.

Hypothermia, or loss of body heat through exposure, is a danger that can be encountered any time of the year. If anyone exhibits shivering, slurred speech, incoherence, stumbling, or drowsiness, get the person out of the wet, cold, and wind, and into shelter and dry, woolen clothing. The quickest way to warm the victim is to place the person in a dry sleeping bag with another person.

General Information

Rocky Mountain National Park is in north central Colorado. From the east it can be reached by automobile on U.S. 34, U.S. 36, and Colo. 7, and from the west by U.S. 40. The nearest major rail, air, and bus terminals are at Denver, 105 kilometers (65 miles) from Estes Park and at Cheyenne, 146 kilometers (91 miles) to the northeast. The Estes Park Bus Company makes connections with transcontinental airlines, railroads, and buses at Denver. You can get further information by writing to Estes Park Bus Company, Estes Park, CO 80517, or by calling 303-586-8108.

ACCOMMODATIONS There are no motels or hotels in the park. For information about facilities adjacent to the park, write to the Chamber of Commerce in either Estes Park, CO 80517, or Grand Lake, CO 80447.

HANDICAMP This backcountry camping area is specifically designed for the disabled. It will accommodate ten campers and a maximum of five wheelchair users. Call 303-586-2371 for further details.

FOREST FIRE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM Be careful with fire. Rocky Mountain National Park was estab-

lished in part to preserve the beautiful mixed forest of aspen, pine, spruce, and fir that characterize the area. Fires caused by careless people present a major threat to this vegetation. Lightning-caused forest fires, however, are a natural and necessary part of forest life, fostering natural cycles of burning and regrowth.

REGULATIONS Dogs, cats, and other pets must be under physical control at all times. They are not allowed on trails or in areas not accessible by automobile.

Camping is permitted only in designated areas.

Vehicles must remain on roads or in parking areas. Parking any vehicle or leaving property unattended for longer than 24 hours without prior permission is prohibited.

Hitchhiking or soliciting transportation is prohibited.

All wildlife is protected from hunting or harassment. Please do not feed or attempt to touch any wild creature. Feeding rodents and birds increases the

population to abnormal, unhealthy levels and tends to make them other than the wild animals they are. Let them remain wild. You can enhance your chances of viewing wildlife by not trying to stalk them; it only frightens them and ruins the opportunity for others.

Do not pick wildflowers or damage plants. Regulations prohibit the destruction, injury, disturbance, or removal of public property or natural features, including plants, animals, and rocks.

When fishing use artificial lures or flies only; however, children 12 years of age and under may fish with bait in all waters in the park open to fishing.

HAZARDS Many serious accidents have occurred on snow and ice fields in the summer. Stay back from the edge of steep snow slopes or cornices and avoid sliding on snow and ice unless you are experienced and properly equipped.

Remember, mountain climbing is a technical sport requiring extensive training, skill, conditioning, and proper equipment. Do not attempt rock climbs or

"scrambling" up steep slopes that are beyond your ability and experience. Registration with a park ranger is not required for technical climbs.

Waterfalls can be deceptively dangerous. And, although they appear small, streams are especially hazardous in spring when the water is high and turbulent.

Beware of thunderstorms. Get off ridges or peaks and avoid exposed lone objects such as a large rock, tree, or telephone line. If riding horseback, get off and away from your horse.

The only bears in this park are black bears; there are no grizzlies. Color phases range from black to cinnamon. Bears can be particularly dangerous if provoked while feeding or when a sow has young cubs present, but they are unpredictable anytime. Never feed bears! Store food in closed cars or tie objects above ground between two trees if in the backcountry. Do not keep food in tents.

Drivers should be on the alert for animals crossing roads, especially at dawn and twilight.

Trail Ridge Road reaches elevations dangerous to persons with heart conditions and other physical impairments. Even healthy persons are normally winded by the slightest exertion at these elevations.

When leaving your car unattended, please be certain it is locked and that all valuables are out of sight. Do not leave valuables at your tent.

If an accident should occur, notify a ranger as soon as possible.

Giardiasis is a debilitating intestinal disorder, caused by drinking contaminated water, that you will want to avoid. Do not assume that stream and lake waters are safe to drink. Carry your own water or boil it before using. Boiling is the only reliable means of sterilizing.

OVERUSE Because more and more people are coming to the park, wear and tear is becoming more evident. Signs usually indicate areas where particular care and attention are warranted. You can help protect the park by staying on the trails, especially on the tundra, by not shortcutting trail switchbacks, and by following marked routes over lingering snowfields

that cover some trails early in the summer. Tundra is especially fragile. Plants may need several hundred years to recover from repeated trampling and resultant soil erosion. Plant communities are especially subject to damage when soil is wet, so pay particular attention at these times.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES It is illegal either to drink or have opened alcoholic beverages in a vehicle on park roads or in parking areas.

EMERGENCIES For emergencies or assistance in the park, call either park headquarters at 586-2371 or the Kawuneeche Visitor Center at 627-3471.

NATIONAL FORESTS For information about the national forests near the park, contact: Arapaho National Forest (Granby) 303-887-3331 or Roosevelt National Forest (Estes Park) 303-586-3440.

ADMINISTRATION Rocky Mountain National Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. For more information write to: Superintendent, Estes Park, CO 80517.

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Hiking

Rocky Mountain is a park for hikers. More than 571 kilometers (355 miles) of trails provide access to the remote sections of the park so you can get away from the crowds and savor the streams, meadows, and mountains. For detailed information on elevations, lakes, and hiking trails, purchase a U.S. Geological Survey topographic map or other guides at any visitor center. Because of the great numbers of people in the park during the summer, some trails are heavily used. If you wish to avoid this congestion, ask a ranger to suggest lightly used trails.

INTERPRETIVE TRAILS If you prefer on-your-own learning experiences, the park has a number of self-guiding trails. Folders describing features along the

trails can be picked up at the trailheads or visitor centers. Distances are for round trips.

BEAR LAKE NATURE TRAIL This stroll around an alpine lake tells the story of glaciation and subalpine life. Distance: 0.8 kilometer (0.5 mile). Elevation: 2,888 meters (9,475 feet).

NEVER SUMMER RANCH The landscape and cabins tell the story of homesteading and dude ranch life in the central Rockies during the early 20th century. Distance: 1.6 kilometers (1 mile). Elevation: 2,743 meters (9,000 feet).

LONGS PEAK TRAIL The main hiking trail to the park's highest peak leads through subalpine forests, tundra, and glacial landscapes; technical equipment

sometimes required. Distance: 26 kilometers (16 miles). Elevation: 2,912 to 4,345 meters (9,554 to 14,255 feet).

LULU CITY Traces of log cabins are all that remain of a once-booming mining town. Distance: 11.6 kilometers (7.2 miles). Elevation: 2,835 meters (9,300 feet).

MORaine PARK NATURE TRAIL This easy stroll helps you identify local plants and animals. Distance: 0.4 kilometer (0.25 mile). Elevation: 2,438 meters (8,000 feet).

SPRAGUE LAKE NATURE TRAIL This trail is ideal for wheelchair visitors. It is a level walk. Distance: 0.8 kilometer (0.5 mile). Elevation: 2,655 meters (8,710 feet).

TUNDRA WORLD Short trails lead from both the



Forest Canyon and Rock Cut overlooks. Elevation: 3,535 and 3,752 meters (11,600 and 12,310 feet).

WILD BASIN This is a wild corner of the park with scenic glaciated valleys, streams, and waterfalls. Distances: up to 26 kilometers (16 miles). Elevation: 2,582 to 3,353 meters (8,470 to 11,000 feet).

BACKCOUNTRY Step into the wilderness, get away from the crowd, and come into the backcountry. Because the wilderness is fragile, special care must be taken. Please follow these **REGULATIONS**:

- A permit is required for all overnight stays in the backcountry. The free permits may be obtained in advance or upon arrival at park headquarters, the West Unit Office, and at most ranger stations.
- Backcountry

camping is limited to seven nights between June and September and 15 more nights during the remainder of the year. Backcountry camping is allowed in designated campsites only, unless authorized by permit.

- Camp no closer than 30 meters (100 feet) to a source of water and do not dump soapy water or food scraps into a stream or lake.
- Dispose of human waste away from water sources. Dig a shallow hole for use and refill with soil and sod.
- Wood fires are permitted only in metal fire rings. Use only dead and down wood. Where there are no fire rings, you must use a lightweight portable stove.
- No pets are permitted in the backcountry.

