

# Rocky Mountain

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 valleys, twisting rivers, and glis-tening lakes. One-third of the park is above tree line, where tundra predominates—a major reason why the area has been set aside as a national park. In 1859 Joel Estes and his son Milton rode into a large valley 20 miles north of Lyons, Colorado. A year later Estes and his fam-ily returned and settled in the valley that bears his name.

In about 1909 Enos Mills—naturalist, writer, and conser-vationist—and others began efforts to preserve what is now Rocky Mountain National Park. The campaign suc-ceeded, and in 1915 the area became the nation's tenth national park. From the montane ecosystem in the park's lower levels to the high alpine tundra ecosystem, there are marked differences in wildlife and vegetation. In montane areas east of the Continental Divide, on warm

south-facing slopes, grow ponderosa pine and juniper. West of the divide, lodgepole pine dominates the lower levels. Higher up, in the subalpine ecosystem, the dom-inant tree species are Douglas and subalpine fir and Englemann spruce. Throughout the park below the tun-dra are groves of aspen. Openings in the forest produce summer wildflower gardens of rare beauty, where the Colorado blue columbine reigns. Meadows and glades

are dotted with wildflowers in season. At the edge of the tundra the trees are wind-sculpted and seem to crawl along the ground, finally reaching the point where there are no more trees. Life is fragile in this harsh, wind-swept world. Many of the park's tundra plants are those that can survive in Arctic regions. From its valleys to its mountaintops, Rocky Mountain National Park encom-passes many worlds. Come explore them.

## Wildlife and Tundra



As you explore you will occasionally come upon wildlife that add moments of excitement to your visit. Many small mammals al-

ways seem to be around. Larger animals such as wapiti (elk) and deer are generally seen at dawn or dusk. Bighorns, the living



symbol of Rocky Mountain National Park, venture out during daylight hours. Sheep Lakes, a natural mineral lick in Horseshoe

Park, is a good area to look for sheep. Please observe them from the parking lot or where park-ing is permitted along a



roadside. Gray jays may perch on blue spruce. The eerie, yipping song of the coyote is heard in Moraine and Horseshoe parks.



Beaver have altered the landscape in many areas. Look carefully for ponds and old and new lodges as you walk through the park. Beavers begin working around sunset and continue through the night. Above tree line in the alpine tundra, the yellow-bellied marmot suns itself on the rocks. The flower-rich tundra is also home to other small animals. The tundra's growing season is very short—sometimes less than 10

weeks. Plants five years old are sometimes smaller than the end of your finger; damaged plants can take up to several hundred years to recover in this fragile world.

## Getting to Know Rocky Mountain National Park



### Visitor Centers

To help plan your visit, stop first at a visitor center. The Beaver Meadows and the Kawuneeche visitor centers are open year-round. The Fall River Visitor Center, also open year-round, is part of a public-private complex of visitor services and features wildlife exhibits. At Fall River Pass on Trail Ridge Road is the Alpine Visitor Center, open during summer months only. The Moraine Park Museum and the Lily Lake Visitor Center are open from the late spring into the fall. More than three million people visit Rocky Mountain National Park each year—most of them in the summer. September and October offer golden aspen, the elk rut, and excellent hik-ing conditions—and fewer people.

### Driving

**Trail Ridge Road** (U.S. 34), which has been designated an "All-American Road," is one of the great alpine highways in the United States. It connects the Estes Park valley on the east and the Kawuneeche Valley on the west. The road's winding course takes you 12,183 feet above sea level and into a world akin to Earth's arctic regions. The road is usually open from Memorial Day weekend to mid-October, weather-permitting. You may notice that your vehicle has reduced power at higher elevations. Three or four hours are needed to fully enjoy the scenic drive, stops at overlooks, and a visit to the Alpine Visitor Center. Good view stops along the road include Rainbow Curve, Forest Canyon overlook, Rock Cut, Gore

Range overlook, the Alpine Visitor Center at Fall River Pass, the Continental Divide at Milner Pass, Lake Irene, and Farview Curve overlook. Above tree line on Trail Ridge Road you are on the "roof of the Rockies" with superlative vistas of glacier-carved peaks on every side.

**Old Fall River Road**, which was the original road across the mountains, gives you an idea of what it was like to travel across the mountains in the early days of the auto-mobile. This gravel road is one-way going uphill; it begins at the Endovalley picnic area in Horseshoe Park and switchbacks up a narrow mountain valley to end at the Alpine Visitor Center on Trail Ridge Road. Because of sharp switchbacks, pulled trail-ers are not allowed and maximum vehicle length is 25 feet. A guide booklet, available for a fee at the visitor centers, tells what to look for along the way.

The **Bear Lake Road** follows a 10-mile route from the Beaver Meadows Entrance Station to Bear Lake nestled in a high mountain basin. Along the way you pass through Moraine and Hollowell parks, past Sprague Lake and Glacier Gorge Junction. Parking at Bear Lake and Glacier Gorge Junction is very limited; in summer months both lots are often full between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. To avoid parking problems, it is highly recom-mended that you take the Bear Lake Road shuttle bus.

**Caution:** Park roads are scenic byways, not high-speed highways. Report all accidents to the nearest visitor center or ranger sta-tion. There are no gasoline stations in the park. Vehicles tuned for lower elevations may overheat or vapor lock. If your vehicle acts as if it is not getting enough fuel, stop at the nearest pullout and turn off the en-gine, allowing it to cool for at least 15 min-utes. Putting snow or cold water on the fuel pump and the fuel line may also help.

### Horseback Riding

Horses with guides can be hired at two locations inside the park on the east side from May through September, or from a number of liverys outside the park's east



and west boundaries. Horses and other trail stock must use designated trails only. There are 260 miles of trails open to private and commercial stock users; inquire at the visitor centers.

### Camping

**Longs Peak, Moraine Park, and Timber Creek** campgrounds are open year-round; there is no water available at campgrounds from mid-September to mid-May. **Moraine Park** campground is first-come, first-served from Labor Day to mid-May; it then becomes a reservation campground. **Timber Creek** campground is first-come, first-served year-round, though its roads are not plowed in winter. **Aspenglen** campground is open mid-May through late September and is first-come, first-served. **Glacier Basin** campground, which has group camping, is open June to Labor Day and is a reserva-tion campground.



For camping reservations, call 1-800-365-2267. Camping is limited to 7 days during the summer, except for Longs Peak camp-ground, which has a 3-day limit. No showers or recreational vehicle hookups are avail-able. Dump stations are located at Moraine Park, Glacier Basin, and Timber Creek. There are telephones at all campgrounds except Longs Peak. Open fires are permit-ted only in fire grates. Wood gathering is prohibited; firewood is sold at campgrounds. Pets must be on leashes 6 feet or shorter. Quiet hours in campgrounds are between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. Backcountry, cross-country, and bivouac camps are available in the park. Permits are always required. For permits and other information contact the backcountry office at 970-586-1242.



### Fishing

In the mountain streams and lakes of the park are four species of trout: German brown, rainbow, brook, and cutthroat. The fish do not grow large in the park's cold waters. Greenback cutthroat trout are being returned to some park waters. On the west side, Colorado River cutthroat trout are being returned; in those areas fishing is restricted. Fishing is also restric-ted in some other areas on both the west and east sides of the park, including Bear Lake.

### Climbing

The park offers climbers a variety of chal-lenging ascents throughout the year. The Colorado Mountain School, a park conces-sioner, operates a climbing school and guide service; call 970-586-5758. Technical climbs do not require registration either at the trailhead or in advance, but permits are always required for overnight bivouacs. Be sure to leave details about your climb-ing trip with someone who can report your absence if you are overdue. For more de-tails, see "Backpacking" on the opposite side of this brochure. Minimum impact climbing techniques are essential to the preservation of the park and its resources. Motorized drills are prohibited in order to avoid damaging rock, disturbing raptor habitat, and producing noise. Climbers are urged to leave no trace behind by using brown-colored chalk and neutral-colored webbing, traveling on established trails, and packing out what you pack in.

Never attempt high-elevation travel with-out adequate knowledge, experience, and equipment. Longs Peak, the highest of the park's 113 named peaks, can usually be negotiated during late summer without technical equipment. The north and east faces are for technical climbing only. The climb via the Keyhole route is demanding; it is 16 miles round-trip with an elevation gain of 4,700 feet and can take up to 12 hours. Start your ascent between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. in order to make the summit by noon and to avoid afternoon lightning storms.



**Caution:** To climb or hike Longs Peak, be sure you are acclimated to high elevations and in good physical condition. As with any mountain climb or hike, be prepared for sudden changes in the weather.

### Winter Activities

Winter means snow in the Rockies, and cross-country skiing and showshoeing in the park. Most park roads are maintained during winter months, and many trails are marked for winter activities. **Caution:** Travel on park trails in winter requires awareness of avalanche dangers. Adequate clothing and equipment are also required. Check on conditions at a visitor center or with a ranger. Never travel alone. Inform someone of your travel plans. Be prepared for chang-ing weather conditions and the possibility of having to bivouac overnight; assistance can be hours or days away. Bring extra supplies. Hypothermia, the loss of body heat through exposure, is a danger at any time of the year. Symptoms include shiver-ing, slurred speech, incoherence, stum-bling, and drowsiness. If you observe any of these symptoms, get the victim to a shelter and into dry clothes. The quickest treatment for hypothermia is to warm the victim inside a sleeping bag with another person.

## General Information

**LOCATION** Rocky Mountain National Park is in north-central Colorado. U.S. 34, U.S. 36, and Colo. 7 reach the east side of the park. From U.S. 40 take U.S. 34 to the west side. There are major rail, air, and bus terminals in Denver. Shuttle service from Denver to Estes Park is available. For more information, call the park at 970-586-1206.

**INTERNATIONAL BIOSPHERE RESERVE** The park, which lies within the Rocky Mountain Bio-geographic Province, has been recognized by the United Nations "Man and Biosphere" program as an International Biosphere Reserve. This network of protected samples of the world's major ecosys-tems is devoted to conservation of nature and genetic material and to scientific research. It provides a standard against which the effects of human impact on the environment can be measured.

**ACCOMMODATIONS** Hotels, motels, cabins, and bed-and-breakfast lodgings are available in and around the towns of Grand Lake and Estes Park. No such accommodations can be found within the park. For information call the Estes Park Chamber Resort Association, 1-800-443-7837; or the Grand Lake Chamber of Commerce, 1-800-531-1019.

**ACCESSIBILITY** Many park facilities are acces-sible for disabled visitors. A detailed description of these facilities is available at all visitor centers. Sprague Lake Camp, located at Sprague Lake, is specially designed for persons with disabilities and will accommodate 12 campers with up to 6 wheelchairs. Reservations are required; call 970-586-1242 for information.

**FOREST FIRE MANAGEMENT** Rocky Mountain National Park was created in part to preserve the beautiful mixed forest of aspen, pine, spruce, and fir that characterizes the area. Lightning-caused forest fires are a natural and necessary part of forest life cycle. Fires caused by careless people, however, present a major threat.

**PARK REGULATIONS** Pets are allowed only in established campgrounds, picnic areas, and parking areas, and along roadsides. Pets must be under physical control with leashes no longer than 6 feet and cannot be left unattended. • Camping is allowed only in designated areas. You must always have a permit for backcountry camping. • Vehicles must remain on roads or in parking areas. Stopping or parking on roads is prohibited; park only in designated areas. Over-night parking requires a permit. • Seatbelt and

child restraint laws apply. Buckle up! • Leaving property unattended for longer than 24 hours without prior permission is prohibited. • All wild-life is protected from hunting and harassment. • **Do not feed or try to touch any wild creature.** Feeding rodents and birds increases the population to abnormal, unhealthy levels, and the animals lose their fear of humans. Let them re-main wild! You can improve your chances of view-ing wildlife by not stalking them; it only frightens them and ruins the viewing for others. • **Do not** pick wildflowers or damage plants; berry-picking for immediate consumption is allowed. Federal law prohibits the destruction, injury, disturbance, or removal of public property, cultural resources, or natural features—including plants, animals, rocks, and archeological artifacts. Violation may result in fines and/or imprisonment. • When fish-ing use artificial lures or flies only; children 12 years of age and under may use bait in open fish-ing areas, but not in catch-release areas. • Bicy-cles are allowed only on designated roads, never on trails or in the backcountry. • **It is illegal to have opened alcoholic beverages in a vehicle while on park roads.** All DUI (driving under the influence) laws apply in the park.

**HAZARDS** Serious accidents can occur on snow and ice fields in summer. Stay back from the edge of steep snow slopes or cornices and avoid sliding on snow and ice outside of designated snow play areas. Mountain climbing is a technical sport re-quiring extensive training, skill, and conditioning, as well as proper equipment. Do not attempt rock climbs or "scrambling" up steep slopes beyond your ability and experience. Registration with the park is not required for day-long technical climbs.

Waterfalls can be deceptively dangerous. Streams, even small ones, are especially hazardous in spring when the water is high and turbulent.

Beware of thunderstorms. Lightning can kill or injure. During storms, get off ridges or peaks; avoid large rocks, trees, and telephone lines; and if on horseback, dismount and stay clear of the horse.

There are no grizzly bears in the park, but there are black bears, whose colors range from black to cinnamon. Bears can be very dangerous if dis-turbed while feeding or when a sow is with cubs —and bears can be unpredictable at any time. Never feed bears! Store food in closed cars or tie food containers high above ground between two trees. Do not keep food in tents.

Mountain lions—generally calm, quiet, and elu-sive—inhabit the park. For your safety: Do not jog alone. Keep children with a group. If you en-counter a lion, stop and stay calm. Back away slowly, but do not run. Pick up small children so they won't run. If the lion does not retreat, dem-onstrate that you are not prey, but a danger: try to appear large, throw stones or sticks, fight back if attacked by a lion.

Be alert for animals crossing roads, especially at dawn, dusk or when roads are wet.

Trail Ridge Road reaches elevations dangerous to persons with heart conditions and other physi-cal impairments. Even healthy persons are nor-mally winded by the slightest exertion at high ele-vations.

Lock your car when unattended and keep all valu-ables out of sight. Do not leave valuables at your tent. If a theft should occur, notify a ranger.

Giardiasis, a debilitating intestinal disorder, can result from drinking untreated water. Carry your own water or treat stream and lake water before using by filtering, adding purifying chemicals, or boiling.

**OVERUSE** Help protect the park by staying on the trails. Do not take shortcuts; follow marked routes through switchbacks and over summer-lingering snowfields. Tundra is especially fragile. Its plants may need several hundred years to recover from trampling. Walking on tundra can cause soil erosion. When soil is wet, plants are especially vulnerable to damage.

**CHILDREN** Cases involving lost and missing children are increasing in national parks. Report missing children to park staff immediately. Adults should supervise children at all times.

**NATIONAL FORESTS** Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests abut the park. For information call: west side (Granby) 970-887-4100; east side (Fort Collins) 970-498-2770.

**ADMINISTRATION** Rocky Mountain National Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. For more information write to: Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park, CO 80517; call 970-586-1206; visit [www.nps.gov/romo](http://www.nps.gov/romo) on the Internet.

**EMERGENCIES** Dial 911 or call the park staff at 970-586-1399.

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# Exploring Rocky Mountain

## Hiking

With more than 360 miles of trails, Rocky Mountain National Park is a place for hikers. Hiking guides, maps, and advice are available at visitor centers and at Rocky Mountain Nature Association Book Corners in the park. The park offers self-guiding trails; trail guides are found at the trailheads. Note: Distances below are for round-trips.

**Bear Lake Nature Trail** takes you on a short stroll around a subalpine lake and tells the story of glaciation and subalpine life. Distance: 0.5 miles; elevation: 9,475 feet.

**Lulu City-Colorado River Trail** follows the Colorado River to the remains of a once-booming mining town. Distance 7.2 miles; elevation 9,300 feet.

**Never Summer Ranch's** cabins and surrounding landscape tell the story of early 20th-century homesteading and dude ranch life. Distance 1 mile; elevation 9,000 feet.

**Moraine Park Nature Trail** is an easy walk around the Moraine Park Museum through a typical montane ponderosa pine forest.

Local plants and trees are identified. Distance 0.5 mile; elevation 8,140 feet.

**Sprague Lake Nature Trail**, a level, wheelchair-accessible around a lake and through a wetlands, is ideal for visitors with disabilities. Distance 0.5 mile; elevation 8,710 feet.

**Tundra World Trails on Trail Ridge Road: Tundra Communities Trail**—distance 0.5 miles; elevation 12,210 feet. **Forest Canyon Overlook**—distance 0.12 mile; elevation 11,716 feet.



## Backpacking

Step into the wilderness, get away from the crowds, and come into the backcountry. Remember that the wilderness is fragile and special care must be taken.

**Please follow these regulations:** • A permit is required for all overnight stays in the backcountry. Day-of-trip permits may be obtained in person. Reservations for a backcountry site may be made in advance. For information write to the backcountry office at the park's address or call 970-586-1242. • Backcountry camping is limited to 7 nights between June and September; during the rest of the year you are allowed 14 additional nights. • Backcountry camping is allowed in designated campsites only, unless authorized elsewhere by permit. • Camp no closer than 200 feet to a source of water; do not dump soapy water or food scraps into a stream or lake. • Dispose of human waste away from water sources. Dig a hole for use and refill with soil and sod or pack waste out. • Wood fires are permitted only in metal fire rings. Use only dead, down wood. If there are no fire rings, use a lightweight portable stove. • Pets are not permitted on trails or in the backcountry.

