

National Parks of the U.S.



FIND OUT: Which park covers the most acres, the park that has the most visitors each year, and much more details in this fascinating look at these 63 national treasures.



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We know you will enjoy learning about the 63 National Parks of the United States. Check mark the ones you have visited and circle the ones you want to see.

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National Parks of the U.S.



The United States has 63 protected areas known as national parks that are operated by the National Park Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior. National parks must be established by an act of the United States Congress. A bill creating the first national park, Yellowstone, was signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1872, followed by Mackinac National Park in 1875 (decommissioned in 1895), and then Rock Creek Park (later merged into National Capital Parks), Sequoia and Yosemite in 1890.

The Organic Act of 1916 created the National Park Service "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

National parks are designated for their natural beauty, unique geological features, diverse



ecosystems, and recreational opportunities.

Fourteen national parks are designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS), and 21 national parks are named UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (BR), with eight national parks in both programs. Eight national parks (including six in Alaska) are paired with a national preserve, areas with different levels of protection that are administered together but considered separate units.

Thirty states have national parks, as do the territories of American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands. California has the most with nine, followed by Alaska with eight, Utah with five, and Colorado with four.

The largest national park is Wrangell–St. Elias in Alaska: at over 8 million acres, it is larger than each of the nine smallest states. The smallest park is Gateway Arch National Park, Missouri, at 192.83 acres.

The total area protected by national parks is approximately 52.2 million acres, for an average of

829 thousand acres.

The national parks set a visitation record in 2017, with more than 84 million visitors and set a further record in 2018 with a 0.1% increase. The most-visited national park is Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee, with over 11.3 million visitors in 2017, followed by Arizona's Grand Canyon National Park, with over 6.2 million. In contrast, only 11,177 people visited the remote Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve in Alaska in the same year.

Many current national parks had been previously protected as national monuments by the president under the Antiquities Act before being redesignated by Congress or as other designations created by Congress; the most recent entirely new park is National Park of American Samoa. A few former national parks are no longer designated as such, or have been disbanded. Other units of the National Park Service (423 altogether) while broadly referred to as national parks within the National Park System do not hold the formal designation in their title.

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Acadia



Photo by Firoz Ansari of Bass Harbor Head Light Station.
Reference number 87002273.

Location: Maine

Date Established as park: February 26, 1919

Area: 49,076.63 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 3,437,286

Description:

Acadia National Park is an American national park located along the mid-section of the Maine coast, southwest of Bar Harbor. The park preserves the natural beauty of the rocky headlands, including the highest mountains along the Atlantic coast.

The park contains the tallest mountain on the Atlantic Coast of the United States (Cadillac Mountain), exposed granite domes, glacial erratics, U-shaped valleys, and cobble beaches. Its mountains, lakes, streams, wetlands, forests, meadows, and coastlines contribute to a diversity of plants and animals. Weaved into this landscape is a historic carriage road system financed by John D. Rockefeller Jr.

Acadia has a rich human history, dating back more than 10,000 years ago with the Wabanaki people. The 17th century brought fur traders and other European explorers, while the 19th century saw an influx of summer visitors, then wealthy families. Many conservation-minded citizens, among them George B. Dorr (the "Father of Acadia National Park"), worked to establish this first national park east of the Mississippi River and the only one in the Northeastern United States. Acadia was initially designated Sieur de Monts National Monument by proclamation of President Woodrow Wilson in 1916, then renamed and redesignated Lafayette National Park in 1919. The park was renamed Acadia National Park in 1929.

Recreational activities from spring through autumn include car and bus touring along the park's paved loop road; hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding on carriage roads (motor vehicles are prohibited); rock climbing; kayaking and canoeing on lakes and ponds; swimming at Sand Beach and Echo Lake; sea kayaking and guided boat tours on the ocean; and various ranger-led programs. Winter activities include cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and ice fishing.

American Samoa



Photo by Tavita Togia of Pola Islands just off the coast of Tutuila Island, American Samoa.

Location: American Samoa

Date Established as park: October 31, 1988

Area: 8,256.67 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 60,006

Description:

The National Park of American Samoa is a national park in the United States territory of American Samoa, distributed across three islands: Tutuila, Ofu, and Ta'ū. The park preserves and protects coral reefs, tropical rainforests, fruit bats, and the Samoan culture. Popular activities include hiking and snorkeling. Of the park's 13,500 acres, 9,000 acres is land and 4,500 acres is coral reefs and ocean. The park is the only American National Park Service system unit south of the equator.

The area is home to flying foxes, brown boobies, sea turtles, and 900 species of fish.

The volcanic islands of Samoa that dominate the acreage of the national park are composed of shield volcanoes which developed from a hot spot on the Pacific Plate, emerging sequentially from west to east. Tutuila, the largest and oldest island, probably dates from the Pliocene Epoch, approximately 1.24 to 1.4 million years ago, while the smaller islands are most likely Holocene in age.

The islands are not made up of individual volcanoes, but are rather composed of overlapping and superimposed shield volcanoes built by basalt lava flows. Much of the lava that erupted has since broken into angular fragments known as breccia. The volcanoes emerged from the intrusion of basaltic dikes from a rift zone on the ocean floor during the Pliocene Epoch, and were heavily eroded during the Pliocene and early Pleistocene Epochs, leaving behind trachyte plugs and exposed outcrops of volcanic tuff throughout the park.

Ta'ū island, the youngest of the islands included within the national park, is all that remains from the collapse of a shield volcano during Holocene time. This collapse produced sea cliffs over 3,000 feet high on the north side of the island, some of the highest such escarpments in the world.

Arches



Photo of Delicate Arch in Arches National Park

Location: Utah

Date Established as park: November 12, 1971

Area: 76,678.98 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,659,702

Description:

Arches National Park is a national park in eastern Utah. The park is adjacent to the Colorado River, 4 miles. More than 2,000 natural sandstone arches are located in the park, including the well-known Delicate Arch, as well as a variety of unique geological resources and formations. The park contains the highest density of natural arches in the world.

The park consists of 76,679 acres of high desert located on the Colorado Plateau. The highest elevation in the park is 5,653 feet at Elephant Butte, and the lowest elevation is 4,085 feet at the visitor center. The park receives an average of less than 10 inches (250 mm) of rain annually.

Administered by the National Park Service, the area was originally named a national monument on April 12, 1929, and was redesignated as a national park on November 12, 1971.

Among the notable features of the park are:

- Balanced Rock – a large balancing rock, the size of three school buses
- Courthouse Towers – a collection of tall stone columns
- Dark Angel – a free-standing 150-foot-tall sandstone pillar at the end of the Devils Garden Trail
- Delicate Arch – a lone-standing arch which has become a symbol of Utah and the most recognized arch in the park
- Devils Garden – many arches and columns scattered along a ridge
- Double Arch – two arches that share a common end
- Fiery Furnace – an area of maze-like narrow passages and tall rock columns (see biblical reference, Book of Daniel, chapter 3)
- Landscape Arch – a very thin and long arch in the Devils Garden with a span of 290 feet (the longest arch in the park)
- Wall Arch – located along the popular Devils Garden Trail; collapsed sometime on August 4/5, 2008



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Badlands



Photo by Dennis Warden

Location: South Dakota
Date Established as park: November 10, 1978
Area: 242,755.94 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 970,998

Description:

Badlands National Park is an American national park located in southwestern South Dakota. The park protects 242,756 acres of sharply eroded buttes and pinnacles, along with the largest undisturbed mixed grass prairie in the United States. The National Park Service manages the park, with the South Unit being co-managed with the Oglala Lakota tribe.

The Badlands Wilderness protects 64,144 acres of the park as a designated wilderness area, and is one site where the black-footed ferret, one of the most endangered mammals in the world, was reintroduced to the wild. The South Unit, or Stronghold District, includes sites of 1890s Ghost Dances, a former United States Air Force bomb and gunnery range, [8] and Red Shirt Table, the park's highest point at 3,340 feet.

Authorized as Badlands National Monument on March 4, 1929, it was not established until January 25, 1939. Badlands was redesignated a national park on November 10, 1978. Under the Mission 66 plan, the Ben Reifel Visitor Center was constructed for the monument in 1957–58. The park also administers the nearby Minuteman Missile National Historic Site. The movies *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and *Thunderheart* (1992) were partially filmed in Badlands National Park.

For 11,000 years, Native Americans have used this area for their hunting grounds. Long before the Lakota were the little-studied paleo-Indians, followed by the Arikara people. Their descendants live today in North Dakota as a part of the Three Affiliated Tribes.

Animals that inhabit the park include: badger, bighorn sheep, bison, black-billed magpie, black-footed ferret, black-tailed prairie dog, bobcat, coyote, elk, mule deer, pronghorn, prairie rattlesnake, porcupine, swift fox, and white-tailed deer.

Big Bend



Photo by National Park Service Digital Image Archives of Santa Elena Canyon in Big Bend National Park.

Location: Texas
Date Established as park: June 12, 1944
Area: 242,755.9 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 970,998
UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Big Bend National Park is an American national park located in West Texas, bordering Mexico. The park has national significance as the largest protected area of Chihuahuan Desert topography and ecology in the United States, and was named after a large bend in the Rio Grande/Río Bravo. The park protects more than 1,200 species of plants, more than 450 species of birds, 56 species of reptiles, and 75 species of mammals. Additional park activities include scenic drives, programs led by Big Bend park rangers, and stargazing.

The area has a rich cultural history, from archeological sites dating back nearly 10,000 years to more recent pioneers, ranchers, and miners. The Chisos Mountains are located in the park, and are the only mountain range in the United States to be fully contained within the boundary of a national park. Geological features in the park include sea fossils and dinosaur bones, as well as volcanic dikes.

For more than 1,000 miles, the Rio Grande/Río Bravo forms the boundary between Mexico and the United States, and Big Bend National Park administers approximately 118 miles (190 km) along that boundary.

Because the Rio Grande serves as an international boundary, the park faces unusual constraints while administering and enforcing park rules, regulations, and policies. In accordance with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the park's territory extends only to the center of the deepest river channel as the river flowed in 1848. The rest of the channel and the land south of it lies within Mexican territory. The park is bordered by the protected areas of Cañón de Santa Elena and Maderas del Carmen in Mexico.

Biscayne



Photo by National Park Service

Location: Florida
Date Established as park: June 28, 1980
Area: 801,163.21 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 463,832

Description:

Biscayne National Park is an American national park in southern Florida, south of Miami. The park preserves Biscayne Bay and its offshore barrier reefs. Ninety-five percent of the park is water, and the shore of the bay is the location of an extensive mangrove forest. The park includes Elliott Key, the park's largest island and northernmost of the true Florida Keys, formed from fossilized coral reef. The islands farther north in the park are transitional islands of coral and sand. The offshore portion of the park includes the northernmost region of the Florida Reef, one of the largest coral reefs in the world.

Biscayne National Park protects four distinct ecosystems: the shoreline mangrove swamp, the shallow waters of Biscayne Bay, the coral limestone keys and the offshore Florida Reef. The shoreline swamps of the mainland and island margins provide a nursery for larval and juvenile fish, molluscs and crustaceans. The bay waters harbor immature and adult fish, seagrass beds, sponges, soft corals, and manatees. The keys are covered with tropical vegetation including endangered cacti and palms, and their beaches provide nesting grounds for endangered sea turtles. Offshore reefs and waters harbor more than 200 species of fish, pelagic birds, whales and hard corals. Sixteen endangered species including Schaus' swallowtail butterflies, smalltooth sawfish, manatees, and green and hawksbill sea turtles may be observed in the park.

Reefs claimed ships from Spanish times through the 20th century, with more than 40 documented wrecks within the park's boundaries.

In the early 20th century the islands became secluded destinations for wealthy Miamians who built getaway homes and social clubs.

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Black Canyon of the Gunnison



Photo by Lorax of Black canyon gunnison Colorado

Location: Colorado

Date Established as park: October 21, 1999

Area: 30,779.83 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 432,818

Description:

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park is an American national park located in western Colorado. There are two primary entrances to the park: the south rim entrance, located 15 miles east of Montrose, and the north rim entrance, which is located 11 miles south of Crawford and is closed in the winter.

The park contains 12 miles of the 48-mile-long Black Canyon of the Gunnison River. The Gunnison River drops an average of 34 feet per mile through the entire canyon, making it the 5th steepest mountain descent in North America. The greatest descent of the Gunnison River occurs within the park at Chasm View dropping 240 feet per mile. The Black Canyon is so named because its steepness makes it difficult for sunlight to penetrate into its depths. As a result, the canyon is often shrouded in shadow, causing the rocky walls to appear black.

Precambrian gneiss and schist that make up the majority of the steep walls of the Black Canyon formed 1.7 billion years ago during a metamorphic period brought on by the collision of ancient volcanic island arcs with the southern end of what is present-day Wyoming. The modern Gunnison River set its course 15 million years ago as the run-off from the nearby La Sal and West Elk Mountains and the Sawatch Range began carving through the relatively soft volcanic deposits.

The Ute Indians referred to the river as “much rocks, big water,” and are known to have avoided the canyon out of superstition.

The first official account of the Black Canyon was provided by Captain John Williams Gunnison in 1853, who was leading an expedition to survey a route from Saint Louis and San Francisco.

Following his death at the hands of Ute Indians later that year, the river that Captain Gunnison had called the Grand was renamed in his honor.

Bryce Canyon



By I, Jonathan Zander of the Bryce Canyon Hoodoos Amphitheater

Location: Utah

Date Established as park: February 25, 1928

Area: 35,835.08 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 2,594,904

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site

Description:

Bryce Canyon National Park is an American national park located in southwestern Utah. The major feature of the park is Bryce Canyon, which despite its name, is not a canyon, but a collection of giant natural amphitheaters along the eastern side of the Paunsaugunt Plateau. Bryce is distinctive due to geological structures called hoodoos, formed by frost weathering and stream erosion of the river and lake bed sedimentary rocks.

The Bryce Canyon area was settled by Mormon pioneers in the 1850s and was named after Ebenezer Bryce, who homesteaded in the area in 1874. The area around Bryce Canyon was originally designated as a national monument by President Warren G. Harding in 1923 and was redesignated as a national park by Congress in 1928. The park covers 35,835 acres.

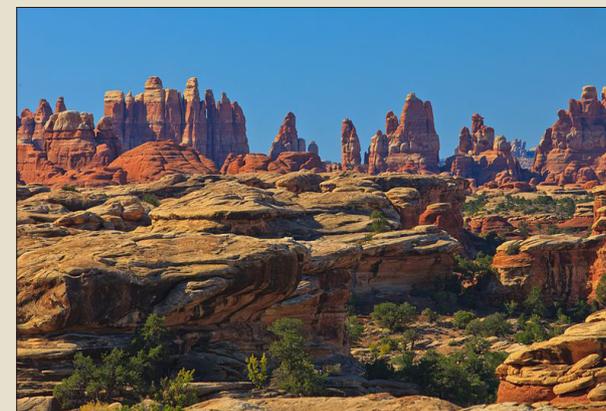
In 2018, Bryce Canyon received 2,679,478 recreational visitors, which was an increase of 107,794 visitors from the prior year.

Little is known about early human habitation in the Bryce Canyon area. Archaeological surveys of Bryce Canyon National Park and the Paunsaugunt Plateau show that people have been in the area for at least 10,000 years.

Area Paiute Indians developed a mythology surrounding the hoodoos (pinnacles) in Bryce Canyon. They believed that hoodoos were the Legend People whom the trickster Coyote turned to stone.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the first European Americans explored the remote and hard-to-reach area.

Canyonlands



The Needles area of Canyonlands National Park.

Location: Utah

Date Established as park: September 12, 1964

Area: 337,597.83 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 733,996

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Canyonlands National Park is an American national park located in southeastern Utah near the town of Moab. The park preserves a colorful landscape eroded into numerous canyons, mesas, and buttes by the Colorado River, the Green River, and their respective tributaries. Legislation creating the park was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson.

The park is divided into four districts: the Island in the Sky, the Needles, the Maze, and the combined rivers—the Green and Colorado—which carved two large canyons into the Colorado Plateau. While these areas share a primitive desert atmosphere, each retains its own character. Author Edward Abbey, a frequent visitor, described the Canyonlands as “the most weird, wonderful, magical place on earth—there is nothing else like it anywhere.”

Canyonlands is a popular recreational destination. Since 2007, more than 400,000 people have visited the park each year with a record of 776,218 visitors in 2016, representing a 22 percent increase from the prior year.

The geography of the park is well suited to a number of different recreational uses. Hikers, mountain bikers, backpackers, and four-wheelers all enjoy traveling the rugged, remote trails within the Park. The White Rim Road traverses the White Rim Sandstone level of the park between the rivers and the Island in the Sky.

As of 2016, the Island in the Sky district, with its proximity to the Moab, Utah area, attracts 76.7 percent of total park visitors. The Needles district is the second most visited, drawing 20.7 percent of visitors. The remote Maze district accounts for only about 1.5 percent of visitors, while river rafters and other river users account for the remaining 1.1 percent of total park visitation.

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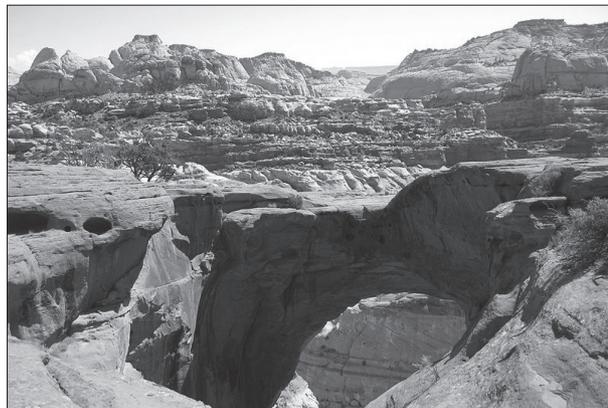
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Capitol Reef



Cassidy Arch in Capitol Reef National Park.

Location: Utah

Date Established as park: December 18, 1971

Area: 241,904.50 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,226,519

Description:

Capitol Reef National Park is an American national park in south-central Utah. The park is approximately 60 miles long on its north-south axis and just 6 miles wide on average. The park was established to preserve 241,904 acres of desert landscape and is open all year, with May through September being the highest visitation months.

Partially in Wayne County, Utah, the area was originally named "Wayne Wonderland" in the 1920s by local boosters Ephraim P. Pectol and Joseph S. Hickman.

Capitol Reef National Park was designated a national monument by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to protect the area's colorful canyons, ridges, buttes, and monoliths; however, it was not until 1950 that the area officially opened to the public. Road access was improved in 1962 with the construction of State Route 24 through the Fremont River Canyon.

Capitol Reef encompasses the Waterpocket Fold, a warp in the earth's crust that is 65 million years old. It is the largest exposed monocline in North America. In this fold, newer and older layers of earth folded over each other in an S-shape.

The park is filled with brilliantly colored sandstone cliffs, gleaming white domes, and contrasting layers of stone and earth.

The area was named for a line of white domes and cliffs of Navajo Sandstone, each of which looks somewhat like the United States Capitol building, that run from the Fremont River to Pleasant Creek on the Waterpocket Fold.

Fremont-culture Native Americans lived near the perennial Fremont River in the northern part of the Capitol Reef Waterpocket Fold around the year 1000. In the 13th century, all of the Native American cultures in this area underwent sudden change and the Fremont settlements and fields were abandoned.

Carlsbad Caverns

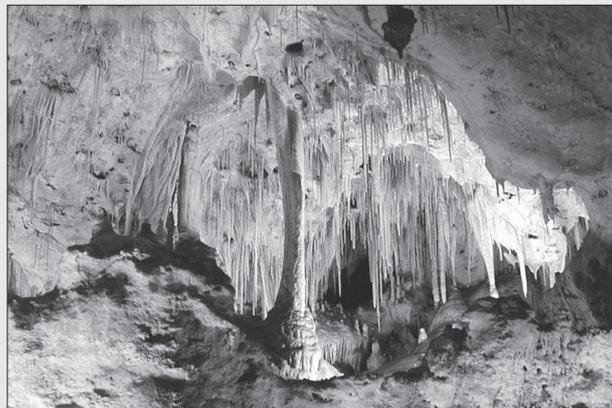


Photo by Eric Guinther of Carlsbad Caverns interior formations.

Location: New Mexico

Date Established as park: May 14, 1930

Area: 46,766.45 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 440,691

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Carlsbad Caverns National Park is an American national park in the Guadalupe Mountains of southeastern New Mexico. The primary attraction of the park is the show cave, Carlsbad Cavern. Visitors to the cave can hike in on their own via the natural entrance or take an elevator from the visitor center.

The park entrance is located on US Highway 62/180, approximately 18 miles southwest of Carlsbad, New Mexico. Carlsbad Caverns National Park participates in the Junior Ranger Program. The park has two entries on the National Register of Historic Places: The Caverns Historic District and the Rattlesnake Springs Historic District. Approximately two-thirds of the park has been set aside as a wilderness area, helping to ensure no future changes will be made to the habitat.

Carlsbad Cavern includes a large limestone chamber, named simply the Big Room, which is almost 4,000 feet long, 625 feet wide, and 255 feet high at its highest point. The Big Room is the largest chamber in North America and the 31st largest in the world.

In 1898, a teenager named Jim White explored the cavern with a homemade wire ladder. He named many of the rooms, including the Big Room, New Mexico Room, Kings Palace, Queens Chamber, Papoose Room, and Green Lake Room. He also named many of the cave's more prominent formations, such as the Totem Pole, Witch's Finger, Giant Dome, Bottomless Pit, Fairyland, Iceberg Rock, Temple of the Sun, and Rock of Ages.

The town of Carlsbad, which lends its name to the cavern and national park, is in turn named after the Czech town formerly known by the German name Karlsbad (English spelling Carlsbad) and now known by the Czech name Karlovy Vary, both of which mean "Charles' Bath[s]."

Channel Islands



Photo by Davyd of Scorpion Anchorage and Scorpion Ranch, view from the Eastern side, Santa Cruz Island, California.

Location: California

Date Established as park: March 5, 1980

Area: 249,561.00 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 409,630

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Channel Islands National Park consists of five of the eight Channel Islands off the Pacific coast of the state of California. Although the islands are close to the shore of the densely populated state, they have been relatively undeveloped. The park covers 249,561 acres, of which 79,019 acres are federal land. The Nature Conservancy owns and manages 76 percent of Santa Cruz Island, the largest of the eight.

The islands are home to significant natural and cultural resources, resulting in several designations. Anacapa and Santa Barbara islands were made a national monument in 1938.

Radiocarbon dating of a fire area near Arlington Canyon on the northwest coast of Santa Rosa Island shows human habitation from at least 37,000 years Before Present (BP), while a burned mammoth bone was dated at 30,000 years BP. Similar fire areas in the same vicinity were dated at 27,000 years BP and 17,000 years BP, also believed to have been made by man. Additionally, a burned dwarf mammoth in a shell midden was dated to 12,500 years BP. A fire pit in a midden-humus layer was dated at 11,900 years BP, while above this layer was a stone chopper with a butchered and burned mammoth dated 11,800 years BP. Several more fire areas were dated at 11,000 years BP, while human bones, Arlington Springs Man, are dated to 10,000 years BP. A circular fishhook was dated at 4,800 years BP. Huge shell mounds appear at 2,000 years BP, while a camp fire in Skull Gulch was dated at 330 years BP.

Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo first observed the islands in 1542. The three northern channel islands were inhabited by an estimated two to three thousand Chumash, with eleven villages on Santa Cruz, eight on Santa Rosa, and two on San Miguel.

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National Parks of the U.S.



Congaree



Bald cypress trees and a creek at Congaree National Park in Hopkins, S.C.

Location: South Carolina

Date Established as park: November 10, 2003

Area: 26,476.47 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 159,445

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Congaree National Park is a 26,276-acre American national park in central South Carolina, only 18 miles south-west of the state capital, Columbia. The park received its official designation in 2003 as the culmination of a grassroots campaign that began in 1969. The park preserves the largest tract of old growth bottomland hardwood forest left in the United States. The lush trees growing in its floodplain forest are some of the tallest in the eastern United States, forming one of the highest temperate deciduous forest canopies remaining in the world. The Congaree River flows through the park. About 15,000 acres are designated as a wilderness area.

Resource extraction on the Congaree River centered on cypress logging from 1898, when the Santee River Cypress Logging Company began to operate in the area of what is now the park. Owned by Francis Beidler and Benjamin F. Ferguson of Chicago, the company operated until 1914.

The park preserves a significant part of the Middle Atlantic coastal forests ecoregion. Although it is frequently referred to as a swamp, it is largely bottomland subject to periodic inundation by floodwaters.

It has been designated an old growth forest. The park also has one of the largest concentrations of champion trees in the world, with the tallest known examples of 15 species. Champion trees include a 167-foot 361-point loblolly pine, a 157-foot 384-point sweetgum, a 154-foot 465-point cherrybark oak, a 135-foot 354-point American elm, a 133-foot 356-point swamp chestnut oak, a 131-foot 371-point overcup oak, and a 127-foot 219-point common persimmon.

Large animals possibly seen in the park include bobcats, deer, feral pigs, feral dogs, coyotes, armadillos, turkeys, and otters.

Crater Lake



Photo by Zainubrazvi Crater Lake is a caldera lake in the state of Oregon, famous for its deep blue color and water clarity.

Location: Oregon

Date Established as park: May 22, 1902

Area: 183,224.05 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 704,512

Description:

Crater Lake National Park is an American national park located in southern Oregon. Established in 1902, Crater Lake is the fifth-oldest national park in the U.S. and the only national park in Oregon. The park encompasses the caldera of Crater Lake, a remnant of Mount Mazama, a destroyed volcano, and the surrounding hills and forests.

The lake is 1,949 feet deep at its deepest point, which makes it the deepest lake in the U.S., the second-deepest in North America and the ninth-deepest in the world. Crater Lake is often referred to as the seventh-deepest lake in the world, but this former listing excludes the approximately 3,000-foot depth of subglacial Lake Vostok in Antarctica, which resides under nearly 13,000 feet of ice, and the recent report of a 2,740-foot maximum depth for Lake O'Higgins/San Martin, located on the border of Chile and Argentina. However, when comparing its average depth of 1,148 feet to the average depth of other deep lakes, Crater Lake becomes the deepest in the Western Hemisphere and the third-deepest in the world. The impressive average depth of this volcanic lake is due to the nearly symmetrical 4,000-foot-deep caldera formed 7,700 years ago during the violent climactic eruptions and subsequent collapse of Mount Mazama and the relatively moist climate that is typical of the crest of the Cascade Range.

The caldera rim ranges in elevation from 7,000 to 8,000 feet. The U.S. Geological Survey benchmarked elevation of the lake surface is 6,178 feet. The national park encompasses 183,224 acres. Crater Lake has no streams flowing into or out of it. All water that enters the lake is eventually lost from evaporation or subsurface seepage. The lake's water commonly has a striking blue hue, and the lake is refilled entirely from direct precipitation in the form of snow and rain.

Cuyagoga Valley



Brandywine Falls in Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Ohio.

Location: Ohio

Date Established as park: October 11, 2000

Area: 32,571.88 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 2,237,997

Description:

Cuyahoga Valley National Park is an American national park that preserves and reclaims the rural landscape along the Cuyahoga River between Akron and Cleveland in Northeast Ohio.

Within its boundaries of the 32,572-acre park are areas independently managed as county parks or as public or private businesses. Cuyahoga Valley was originally designated as a National Recreation Area in 1974, then redesignated as a national park 26 years later in 2000, and remains the only national park that originated as a national recreation area.

Cuyahoga Valley is the only national park in the state of Ohio and one of three in the Great Lakes Basin, with Isle Royale National Park in Lake Superior and Indiana Dunes National Park bordering Lake Michigan. Cuyahoga Valley also differs from the other national parks in America in that it is adjacent to two large urban areas and it includes a dense road network, small towns, four reservations of the Cleveland Metroparks, eleven parks of the Summit Metro Parks, and public and private attractions.

No Native American tribes currently have federal recognition in Ohio; however, the former inhabitants of the Cuyahoga Valley were Native Americans. The Wyandot, Iroquois, Ottawa, Objibwe, Munsee, Potawatomi, Miami, Catawba, and Shawnee all lived in or traversed this area, but the Lenapé Nation, also known as the Lenape'wàk or Delaware Nation, are considered "the Grandfathers" of many Native Nations of the upper Ohio River Valley. They had a democratic and egalitarian sociopolitical structure where leaders (sachem) consulted elders who advocated for the expectations of the people before decisions were made. The Lenapé were actively involved in long-distance trade networks and were highly skilled at creating goods and art such as pottery, stone weaponry, clothing, and baskets.



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Death Valley



Photo by Brocken Inaglor of Mesquite Dunes in Death Valley National Park

Location: California, Nevada

Date Established as park: October 31, 1994

Area: 3,408,406.73 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,740,945

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Death Valley National Park is an American national park that straddles the California–Nevada border, east of the Sierra Nevada. The park boundaries include Death Valley, the northern section of Panamint Valley, the southern section of Eureka Valley, and most of Saline Valley. The park occupies an interface zone between the arid Great Basin and Mojave deserts, protecting the northwest corner of the Mojave Desert and its diverse environment of salt-flats, sand dunes, badlands, valleys, canyons, and mountains.

Death Valley is the largest national park in the contiguous U.S., and the hottest, driest and lowest of all the national parks in the U.S. The second-lowest point in the Western Hemisphere is in Badwater Basin, which is 282 feet below sea level. More than 93 percent of the park is a designated wilderness area. The park is home to many species of plants and animals that have adapted to this harsh desert environment including creosote bush, Joshua tree, bighorn sheep, coyote, and the Death Valley pupfish, a survivor from much wetter times.

A series of Native American groups inhabited the area from as early as 7000 BC, most recently the Timbisha around 1000 AD who migrated between winter camps in the valleys and summer grounds in the mountains.

A group of European Americans, trapped in the valley in 1849 while looking for a shortcut to the gold fields of California, gave the valley its name, even though only one of their group died there. Several short-lived boom towns sprang up during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to mine gold and silver.

The only long-term profitable ore to be mined was borax, which was transported out of the valley with twenty-mule teams.

Denali



Denali National Park and Preserve.

Location: Alaska

Date Established as park: February 26, 1917

Area: 4,740,911.16 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 601,152

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Denali National Park and Preserve, formerly known as Mount McKinley National Park, is an American national park and preserve located in Interior Alaska, centered on Denali, the highest mountain in North America. The park and contiguous preserve encompass 6,045,153 acres which is larger than the state of New Hampshire. On December 2, 1980, 2,146,580-acre Denali Wilderness was established within the park. Denali's landscape is a mix of forest at the lowest elevations, including deciduous taiga, with tundra at middle elevations, and glaciers, snow, and bare rock at the highest elevations. The longest glacier is the Kahiltna Glacier. Wintertime activities include dog sledding, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling. The park received 594,660 recreational visitors in 2018.

Human habitation in the Denali Region extends to more than 11,000 years before the present, with documented sites just outside park boundaries dated to more than 8,000 years before present.

The oldest site within park boundaries is the Teklanika River site, dated to about 7130 BC. More than 84 archaeological sites have been documented within the park. The sites are typically characterized as hunting camps rather than settlements, and provide little cultural context.

The presence of Athabaskan peoples in the region is dated to 1,500 - 1,000 years before present on linguistic and archaeological evidence, while researchers have proposed that Athabaskans may have inhabited the area for thousands of years before then. The word Denali means "the high one" in the native Athabaskan language and refers to the mountain itself.

The principal groups in the park area in the last 500 years include the Koyukon, Tanana and Dena'ina people.

Dry Tortugas



Fort Jefferson at the Dry Tortugas. Visible on the right is a breach of the sea wall caused by the direct strike of Hurricane Charley.

Location: Florida

Date Established as park: October 26, 1992

Area: 64,701.22 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 79,200

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Dry Tortugas National Park is a national park in the United States about 68 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico. The park preserves Fort Jefferson and the seven Dry Tortugas islands, the westernmost and most isolated of the Florida Keys. The archipelago's coral reefs are the least disturbed of the Florida Keys reefs.

The park is noted for abundant sea life, tropical bird breeding grounds, colorful coral reefs, and legends of shipwrecks and sunken treasures.

The park's centerpiece is Fort Jefferson, a massive but unfinished coastal fortress. Fort Jefferson is the largest brick masonry structure in the Western Hemisphere, and is composed of more than 16 million bricks. Among United States forts it is exceeded in size only by Fort Monroe, Virginia, and Fort Adams, Rhode Island.

Dry Tortugas is unique in its combination of a largely undisturbed tropical ecosystem with significant historic artifacts.

The park is accessible only by seaplane or boat and has averaged about 63,000 visitors annually in the period from 2008 to 2017.

Activities include snorkeling, picnicking, birdwatching, camping, scuba diving, saltwater fishing and kayaking. Overnight camping is limited to eight primitive campsites at the Garden Key campground — located just south of Fort Jefferson.

The first European to see the Dry Tortugas was Juan Ponce de León, who caught 160 sea turtles there and subsequently referred to the islands as the "Tortugas" (turtles). They are called Dry owing to the absence of surface fresh water on the island.

The archipelago includes a high concentration of historically significant shipwrecks dating from the 17th century to the present.

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Everglades



A great egret in a cypress grove at Everglades National Park.

Location: Florida

Date Established as park: May 30, 1934

Area: 1,508,938.57 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,118,300

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Everglades National Park is an American national park that protects the southern twenty percent of the original Everglades in Florida. The park is the largest tropical wilderness in the U.S., and the largest wilderness of any kind east of the Mississippi River.

Everglades is the third-largest national park in the contiguous U.S. after Death Valley and Yellowstone. An average of one million people visit the park each year.

UNESCO declared the Everglades & Dry Tortugas Biosphere Reserve in 1976, and listed the park as a World Heritage Site in 1979, while the Ramsar Convention included the park on its list of Wetlands of International Importance in 1987. Everglades is one of only three locations in the world to appear on all three lists.

Most national parks preserve unique geographic features; Everglades National Park was the first created to protect a fragile ecosystem.

The Everglades are a network of wetlands and forests fed by a river flowing 0.25 miles per day out of Lake Okeechobee, southwest into Florida Bay. The park contains the largest mangrove ecosystem in the Western Hemisphere.

Thirty-six threatened or protected species inhabit the park, including the Florida panther, the American crocodile, and the West Indian manatee, along with 350 species of birds, 300 species of fresh and saltwater fish, 40 species of mammals, and 50 species of reptiles.

The majority of South Florida's fresh water, which is stored in the Biscayne Aquifer, is recharged in the park.

Humans have lived for thousands of years in or around the Everglades.

Gates of the Arctic



Gates of the Arctic in Summer.

Location: Alaska

Date Established as park: October 1, 1890

Area: 7,523,897.45 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 10,518

Description:

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve is an American national park that protects portions of the Brooks Range in northern Alaska.

The park is the northernmost national park in the U.S., situated entirely north of the Arctic Circle. The park is the second largest in the U.S., slightly larger in area than Belgium.

Gates of the Arctic was initially designated as a national monument before being redesignated as a national park and preserve upon passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980. A large part of the park has additional protection as the Gates of the Arctic Wilderness.

The wilderness area adjoins the Noatak Wilderness. They form the largest contiguous wilderness in the United States together.

There are no roads in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. Owing to its remoteness and lack of supportive infrastructure, the park is the least visited national park in the U.S., and one of the least visited areas in the entire U.S. National Park System, which also includes national monuments, recreation areas, preserves, and historic sites. In 2016, the park received just 10,047 visitors.

Camping is permitted throughout the park, but may be restricted by easements when crossing Native Corporation lands within the park.

The park also features six Wild and Scenic Rivers:

- Alatna River 83 miles (134 km)
- John River 52 miles (84 km)
- Kobuk River 110 miles (177 km)
- the North Fork of the Koyukuk River 102 miles (164 km)
- part of the Noatak River
- Tinayguk River 44 miles (71 km)

Gateway Arch



Photo by Daniel Schwen: St. Louis on the Mississippi river by night

Location: Missouri

Date Established as park: February 22, 2018

Area: 192.83 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 2,055,309

Description:

Gateway Arch National Park is an American national park located in St. Louis, Missouri, near the starting point of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

The memorial was established to commemorate:

- the Louisiana Purchase, and the subsequent westward movement of American explorers and pioneers;
- the first civil government west of the Mississippi River; and
- the debate over slavery raised by the Dred Scott case.

The national park consists of the Gateway Arch, a steel catenary arch that has become the definitive icon of St. Louis; a 91-acre park along the Mississippi River on the site of the earliest buildings of the city; the Old Courthouse, a former state and federal courthouse where the Dred Scott case originated; and the 140,000 sq. ft. museum at the Gateway Arch.

The Gateway Arch and its immediate surroundings were initially designated as a national memorial, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, by executive order on December 21, 1935, and redesignated as a national park in 2018.

The Gateway Arch, known as the "Gateway to the West", is the tallest structure in Missouri. It was designed by Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen and structural engineer Hannskarl Bandel in 1947 and built between 1963 and October 1965. It stands 630 feet tall and 630 feet wide at its base. The legs are 54 feet wide at the base, narrowing to 17 feet at the arch.

There is a unique tram system to carry passengers to the observation room at the top of the arch.

The original platted area of St. Louis was the site of the Battle of St. Louis, the only battle west of the Mississippi River in the American Revolutionary War, the first capital for Upper Louisiana for the U.S., and the Three Flags Day ceremony in 1804.

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Glacier



Photo by Dennis Warden of St. Mary Lake on the Sun Point Trail in Glacier National Park

Location: Montana

Date Established as park: May 11, 1910

Area: 1,013,125.99 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 3,049,839

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Glacier National Park is located in northwestern Montana, on the Canada–United States border. The park includes parts of two mountain ranges (sub-ranges of the Rocky Mountains), over 130 named lakes, more than 1,000 different species of plants, and hundreds of species of animals. This vast pristine ecosystem is the centerpiece of what has been referred to as the “Crown of the Continent Ecosystem,” a region of protected land encompassing 16,000 square miles (41,000 km²).[4]

Soon after the establishment of the park, a number of hotels and chalets were constructed by the Great Northern Railway. These historic hotels and chalets are listed as National Historic Landmarks. By 1932 work was completed on the Going-to-the-Sun Road, later designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

Of the estimated 150 glaciers which existed in the park in the mid-19th century during the late Little Ice Age, only 25 active glaciers remained by 2010. Scientists studying the glaciers in the park have estimated that all the active glaciers may disappear by 2030 if current climate patterns persist.

Glacier National Park borders Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada—the two parks are known as the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park and were designated as the world’s first International Peace Park in 1932.

The park is also home to Triple Divide Peak, which forms the boundary between the watersheds of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans.

Glacier Bay



Photo by Brian W. Schaller of Johns Hopkins Glacier

Location: Alaska

Date Established as park: December 2, 1980

Area: 3,223,383.43 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 672,087

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve is an American national park located in Southeast Alaska west of Juneau.

The national preserve encompasses 58,406 acres of public land to the immediate northwest of the park, protecting a portion of the Alsek River with its fish and wildlife habitats, while allowing sport hunting.

The west side of the bay consists of a 26,000 feet thick sequence of Paleozoic sedimentary rocks, mainly massive limestones and argillite. The oldest rocks in this sequence are the Late Silurian Willoughby limestone and the youngest being the Middle Devonian Black Cap limestone.

Glacial advances occurred 7,000, 5,000 and 500 years ago, with the last extending to the entrance of the bay, where it left a huge semicircular terminal moraine. The consequent surface glacial deposits include gravels as outwash and moraines. Glacial gravels extend up to 2000 feet up the mountain slopes.

No roads lead to the park and it is most easily reached by air travel. During some summers there are ferries to the small community of Gustavus or directly to the marina at Bartlett Cove.

Despite the lack of roads, the park received an average of about 470,000 recreational visitors annually from 2007 to 2016, with 520,171 visitors in 2016. Most of the visitors arrive via cruise ships.

Other travelers come on white-water rafting trips, putting in on the Tatshenshini River at Dalton Post in the Yukon Territory and taking out at the Dry Bay Ranger Station in the Glacier Bay National Preserve.

Trips generally take six days and pass through Kluane National Park and Reserve in the Yukon and Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park in British Columbia

Grand Canyon



Photo by I, Luca Galuzzi

Location: Arizona

Date Established as park: February 26, 1919

Area: 1,201,647.03 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 5,974,411

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site

Description:

Grand Canyon National Park, located in northwestern Arizona, is the 15th site in the United States to have been named as a national park. The park’s central feature is the Grand Canyon, a gorge of the Colorado River, which is often considered one of the Wonders of the World.

The park, which covers 1,217,262 acres of unincorporated area in Coconino and Mohave counties, received more than six million recreational visitors in 2017, the second highest count of all American national parks after Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The Grand Canyon became well known to Americans in the 1880s after railroads were built and pioneers developed infrastructure and early tourism.

The Grand Canyon, including its extensive system of tributary canyons, is valued for its combination of size, depth, and exposed layers of colorful rocks dating back to Precambrian times.

The canyon itself was created by the incision of the Colorado River and its tributaries after the Colorado Plateau was uplifted, causing the Colorado River system to develop along its present path.

Grand Canyon Village is the primary visitor services area in the park. It is a full-service community, including lodging, fuel, food, souvenirs, a hospital, churches, and access to trails and guided walks and talks.

Private canyon flyovers are provided by helicopters and small airplanes out of Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Grand Canyon National Park Airport. Due to a crash in the 1990s, scenic flights are no longer allowed to fly within 1,500 feet of the rim within the Grand Canyon National Park. Flights within the canyon are still available outside of park boundaries.

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National Parks of the U.S.



Grand Teton



Photo by Daniel Mayer

Location: Wyoming
Date Established as park: February 26, 1919
Area: 310,044.36 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 3,405,614
UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Grand Teton National Park is an American national park in northwestern Wyoming. At approximately 310,000 acres, the park includes the major peaks of the 40-mile-long Teton Range as well as most of the northern sections of the valley known as Jackson Hole.

Grand Teton National Park is only 10 miles south of Yellowstone National Park, to which it is connected by the National Park Service-managed John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway.

Along with surrounding national forests, these three protected areas constitute the almost 18,000,000-acre Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, one of the world's largest intact mid-latitude temperate ecosystems.

The human history of the Grand Teton region dates back at least 11,000 years, when the first nomadic hunter-gatherer Paleo-Indians began migrating into the region during warmer months pursuing food and supplies.

In the early 19th century, the first white explorers encountered the eastern Shoshone natives.

Between 1810 and 1840, the region attracted fur trading companies that vied for control of the lucrative beaver pelt trade.

U.S. Government expeditions to the region commenced in the mid-19th century as an offshoot of exploration in Yellowstone, with the first permanent white settlers in Jackson Hole arriving in the 1880s.

Grand Teton National Park is named for Grand Teton, the tallest mountain in the Teton Range. The naming of the mountains is attributed to early 19th-century French-speaking trappers—les trois tétons (the three teats) was later anglicized and shortened to Tetons.

Grand Teton rises to 13,775 feet.

Grand Basin



Photo by James R Bouldin: The Pinus longaeva grove in which the Prometheus tree grew.

Location: Nevada
Date Established as park: October 27, 1986
Area: 77,180.00 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 131,802

Description:

Great Basin National Park is an American national park located in White Pine County in east-central Nevada, near the Utah border, established in 1986.

The park is most commonly entered by way of Nevada State Route 488, which is connected to U.S. Routes 6 and 50 by Nevada State Route 487 via the small town of Baker, the closest settlement.

The park derives its name from the Great Basin, the dry and mountainous region between the Sierra Nevada and the Wasatch Mountains. Topographically, this area is known as the Basin and Range Province. The park is located about 290 miles north of Las Vegas and protects 77,180 acres.

The park is notable for its groves of ancient bristlecone pines, the oldest known nonclonal organisms, and for the Lehman Caves at the base of 13,063-foot Wheeler Peak, as well as Wheeler Peak Glacier.

The Highland Ridge Wilderness lies adjacent to Great Basin National Park. These two protected areas provide contiguous wildlife habitat and protection to 227.8 square miles of eastern Nevada's basin lands.

Eleven species of conifer trees and over 800 species of plants are found in Great Basin National Park and the neighboring valleys.

Sixty-one species of mammals, 18 species of reptiles, 238 species of birds, two species of amphibians, and eight species of fish are in Great Basin National Park and the neighboring valleys.

The Bonneville cutthroat trout is the only fish native to Great Basin National Park.

Only two species of amphibians have been positively identified in the southern Snake Range and adjacent portions of Snake and Spring Valleys: the western spadefoot toad (*Spea hammondi*) and the leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*).

Great Sand Dunes



Photo of the Colorado dunes

Location: Colorado
Date Established as park: September 13, 2004
Area: 107,341.87 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 527,546

Description:

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is an American national park that conserves an area of large sand dunes up to 750 feet tall on the eastern edge of the San Luis Valley, and an adjacent national preserve in the Sangre de Cristo Range, in south-central Colorado.

The park contains the tallest sand dunes in North America.

The dunes cover an area of about 30 sq. mi. and are estimated to contain over 1.2 cubic miles of sand.

Sediments from the surrounding mountains filled the valley over geologic time periods. After lakes within the valley receded, exposed sand was blown by the predominant southwest winds toward the Sangre de Cristos, eventually forming the dunefield over an estimated tens of thousands of years.

The four primary components of the Great Sand Dunes system are the mountain watershed, the dunefield, the sand sheet, and the sabkha. Ecosystems within the mountain watershed include alpine tundra, subalpine forests, montane woodlands, and riparian zones.

Evidence of human habitation in the San Luis Valley dates back about 11,000 years. The first historic peoples to inhabit the area were the Southern Ute Tribe; Apaches and Navajo also have cultural connections in the area.

Visitors must walk across the wide and shallow Medano Creek to reach the dunes in spring and summer. The creek typically has a peak flow from late May to early June. From July to April, it is usually no more than a few inches deep, if there is any water at all.

Hiking is permitted throughout the dunes with the warning that the sand surface temperature may reach 150 °F in summer.

Sandboarding and sandsledding are popular activities, both done on specially designed equipment that can be rented just outside the park entrance or in Alamosa.

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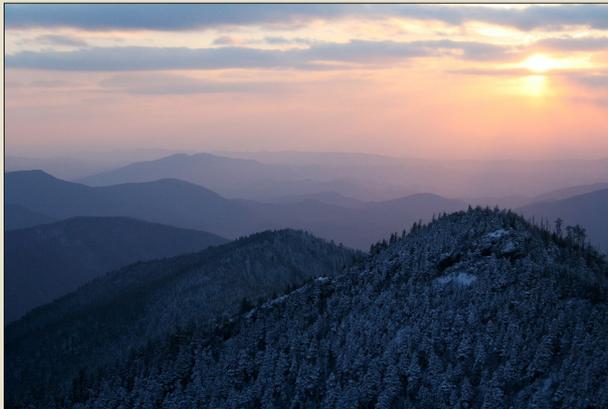
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National Parks of the U.S.



Great Smoky Mts.



The photo was taken at the Cliff Tops on Mount Le Conte, in the Great Smoky Mountains of Sevier County, Tennessee.

Location: North Carolina, Tennessee

Date Established as park: June 15, 1934

Area: 522,426.88 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 12,547,743

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Great Smoky Mountains National Park straddles the ridgeline of the Great Smoky Mountains, part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which are a division of the larger Appalachian Mountain chain. The park contains some of the highest mountains in eastern North America, including Clingmans Dome, Mount Guyot, and Mount Le Conte. The Appalachian Trail passes through the center of the park on its route from Georgia to Maine. With 12.5 million visitors in 2019, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the most visited national park in the United States.

The park encompasses 522,419 acres, making it one of the largest protected areas in the eastern United States. The park is internationally recognized for its mountains, waterfalls, biodiversity, and spruce-fir forests. In addition, the park also preserves multiple historical structures that were part of communities occupied by early settlers of the area.

There are 850 miles (1,370 km) of trails and unpaved roads in the park for hiking, including 70 miles of the Appalachian Trail.

The park was chartered by the United States Congress in 1934 and officially dedicated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940. The Great Smoky Mountains was the first national park whose land and other costs were paid for in part with federal funds; previous parks were funded wholly with state money or private funds.

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park anchors a large tourism industry based in Sevier County, Tennessee adjacent to the park. Major attractions include Dollywood, the second most visited tourist attraction in Tennessee, Ober Gatlinburg, and Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies. Tourism to the park contributes an estimated \$2.5 billion annually into the local economy

Guadalupe Mts.



Photo by Leaflet of Guadalupe Mountains at sunset, photo taken from Salt Flat

Location: Texas

Date Established as park: October 15, 1966

Area: 86,367.10 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 188,833

Description:

Guadalupe Mountains National Park is an American national park in the Guadalupe Mountains, east of El Paso, Texas. The mountain range includes Guadalupe Peak, the highest point in Texas at 8,749 feet, and El Capitan used as a landmark by travelers on the route later followed by the Butterfield Overland Mail stagecoach line. The ruins of a stagecoach station stand near the Pine Springs visitor center. The restored Frijole Ranch contains a small museum of local history and is the trailhead for Smith Spring.

The Guadalupe Peak Trail winds through pinyon pine and Douglas-fir forests as it ascends over 3,000 feet to the summit of Guadalupe Peak, with views of El Capitan and the Chihuahuan Desert.

The Guadalupe Mountains give their name to the Guadalupian series in the Permian period.

The International Commission on Stratigraphy estimates the mountain range's age at 272–260 Mya.

The mountains have had a tumultuous history for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence shows that people have lived there lived over 10,000 years in and among the many caves and alcoves.

Three major ecosystems are contained within the park. The Chihuahuan Desert exhibits salt flats, creosote bushes, and honey mesquite on the western side of the park, with low elevations on the eastern side covered with grassland, pinyon pine, and junipers. The canyon interiors, including McKittrick, Bear, and Pine Springs Canyon, exhibit bigtooth maple, velvet ash, chinkapin oak, and other deciduous trees that are fed by springs recharged by mountain streams. Finally, alpine areas more than 7,000 ft above sea level contain forests of ponderosa pine, Arizona pine, southwestern white pine, Rocky Mountain Douglas-fir, alligator juniper, and small stands of quaking aspen.

Haleakala



Photo by Matttrain of the Haleakala Crater, Maui, Hawaii.

Location: Hawaii

Date Established as park: July 1, 1961

Area: 33,264.62 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 994,394

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Haleakalā National Park is an American national park located on the island of Maui in the state of Hawaii, named after Haleakalā.

Haleakalā was originally part of Hawaii National Park along with the volcanoes of Mauna Loa and Kilauea on the island of Hawai'i, created in 1916. Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park was made into a separate national park in 1961.

The name Haleakalā is Hawaiian for "house of the sun." According to a local legend, the demigod Maui imprisoned the sun here in order to lengthen the day. The Hawaiian National Park Language Correction Act of 2000 was proposed to observe the Hawaiian spelling, but it did not become law.

The park features the dormant Haleakalā (East Maui) Volcano, which last erupted sometime between 1480 and 1600 AD.

The park is divided into two distinct sections: the summit area and the coastal Kipahulu area.

An extremely winding but well maintained road leads up the mountain. The summit area includes Haleakalā Crater, the summit of the volcano, and the area surrounding the summit. This part of the park is accessed by Hawaii State Road 378. There is a visitor center, with parking and restrooms, near the summit. At the summit itself is another parking lot and a simple observatory without facilities.

The main feature of this part of the park is Haleakalā Crater which, despite its name, is geologically an erosional valley. It is 6.99 miles across, 2.0 miles wide, and 2,600 ft deep. The interior of the crater is dotted by numerous volcanic features, including large cinder cones.

Visitors frequently come to the summit of the volcano to watch the sunrise and/or sunset.



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Hawaii Volcanoes



Photo by G.E. Ulrich, USGS of Pu'u 'O'o, a Volcanic cone on Kilauea, Hawaii

Location: Hawaii

Date Established as park: August 1, 1916

Area: 325,605.28 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,368,376

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is an American national park located in the U.S. state of Hawaii on the island of Hawaii. The park encompasses two active volcanoes: Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes, and Mauna Loa, the world's most massive shield volcano. The park provides scientists with insight into the development of the Hawaiian Islands and access for studies of volcanism. For visitors, the park offers dramatic volcanic landscapes, glimpses of rare flora and fauna, and a view into the traditional Hawaiian culture connected to these landscapes.

On May 11, 2018, the park was closed to the public in the Kilauea volcano summit area, including the visitor center and park headquarters, due to explosions and toxic ash clouds from Halema'umaui, as well as earthquakes and road damage.

Portions of the park, including the visitor center, reopened to the public on September 22, 2018.

As of 2020, most of the park is open; however, some road segments and trails as well as the Jaggar Museum of the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory remain closed to visitors.

Eruptive activity, ground collapses and explosions in the park ceased in early August of 2018, and the lull in eruptive activity at Kilauea continued until an eruption on December 20, 2020, at the Halema'uma'u crater.

The purpose of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park is to protect, study, and provide access to Kilauea and Mauna Loa, two of the world's most active volcanoes, and perpetuate endemic Hawaiian ecosystems and the traditional Hawaiian culture connected to these landscapes.

Hot Springs



Aerial photo of Hots Springs National Park

Location: Arkansas

Date Established as park: March 4, 1921

Area: 5,554.15 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,467,153

Description:

Hot Springs National Park is an American national park in central Garland County, Arkansas, adjacent to the city of Hot Springs, the county seat. Hot Springs Reservation was initially created by an act of the United States Congress on April 20, 1832 to be preserved for future recreation. Established before the concept of a national park existed, it was the first time that land had been set aside by the federal government to preserve its use as an area for recreation. The hot spring water has been popularly believed for centuries to possess medicinal properties, and was a subject of legend among several Native American tribes. Following federal protection in 1832, the city developed into a successful spa town.

The hot springs flow from the western slope of Hot Springs Mountain, part of the Ouachita Mountain range. In the park, the hot springs have not been preserved in their unaltered state as natural surface phenomena. They have been managed to conserve the production of uncontaminated hot water for public use. The mountains within the park are also managed within this conservation philosophy to preserve the hydrological system that feeds the springs.

Following 8,000 years of use by indigenous peoples, European Americans discovered and appropriated the springs. They have used the hot spring water in therapeutic baths for more than 200 years to treat rheumatism and other ailments. While this was a federal reservation, the area developed into a well-known resort nicknamed The American Spa; it attracted not only the wealthy but indigent health seekers from around the world.

The park includes portions of downtown Hot Springs, making it one of the most accessible national parks. There are numerous hiking trails and camping areas. Bathing in spring water is available in approved facilities at extra cost.

Indiana Dunes



Photo by J. Crocker of West Beach, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

Location: Indiana

Date Established as park: February 15, 2019

Area: 15,349.08 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 2,134,285

Description:

Indiana Dunes National Park is a United States National Park located in Northwestern Indiana. The park runs for about 20 miles along the southern shore of Lake Michigan; it contains approximately 15,000 acres. Located in the park are sand dune, wetland, prairie, river, and forest ecosystems.

There is little evidence of permanent Native American communities forming during the earlier years; rather, the evidence suggests that seasonal hunting camps were the norm. The earliest evidence for permanent camps was the occupation of the Ohio valley by the Hopewell culture. Five groups of mounds have been documented in the dunes area.

The park includes habitats for several rare plants and animals. The park has more than 1,400 species of vascular plants. At least two plant species are on the Federal list of Threatened and Endangered Species: Mead's milkweed (*Asclepias meadii*) and Pitcher's thistle (*Cirsium pitcheri*).

Several others are on the list of state T&E species. Populations of each plant group are estimated to be around 100–120 individual plants. The species included are:

- White baneberry (*Actaea pachypoda*)
- Virginia snake root (*Aristolochia serpentaria*)
- Shooting star (*Dodecatheon meadia*)
- American columbo (*Frasera caroliniensis*)
- Pink corydalis (*Corydalis sempervirens*)

Among the federally threatened and endangered wildlife are:

- Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*)
- Eastern massasauga rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*)
- Rufa Red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*)
- Piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*)

In addition, the park has habitat suitable for the bald eagle.

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Isle Royale



Photo by Bob Walker of Seaplane taking off from Windigo, Isle Royale National Park

Location: Michigan
Date Established as park: April 3, 1940
Area: 571,790.30 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 26,410
UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Isle Royale National Park is an American national park consisting of Isle Royale and hundreds of adjacent islands, as well as the surrounding waters of Lake Superior, in the state of Michigan. The park's northern boundary lies adjacent to the Canadian Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area along the international border.

Isle Royale, the largest island in Lake Superior, is over 45 miles in length and 9 miles wide at its widest point. The park is made up of Isle Royale itself and approximately 400 smaller islands, along with any submerged lands within 4.5 miles of the surrounding islands.

Large quantities of copper artifacts found in Indian mounds and settlements, some dating back to 3000 B.C., were most likely mined on Isle Royale and the nearby Keweenaw Peninsula. The island has hundreds of pits from these indigenous peoples, with most in the McCargoe Cove area. Carbon-14 testing of a charred log found at one of these pits yielded an age of 1,500 B.C.

The Jesuit missionary Dablon published an account in 1669-70 of "an island called Menong, celebrated for its copper." Menong, or Minong, was the native term for the island, and is the basis for Minong Ridge.

Prospecting began in earnest when the Chippewas relinquished their claims to the island in 1843, starting with many of the original native pits. This activity had ended by 1855, when no economic deposits were found.

According to the A. W. Kuchler U.S. Potential natural vegetation Types, Isle Royale National Park has a Great Lakes Spruce/Fir potential vegetation type and a Northern Conifer Forest potential vegetation form.

Joshua Tree

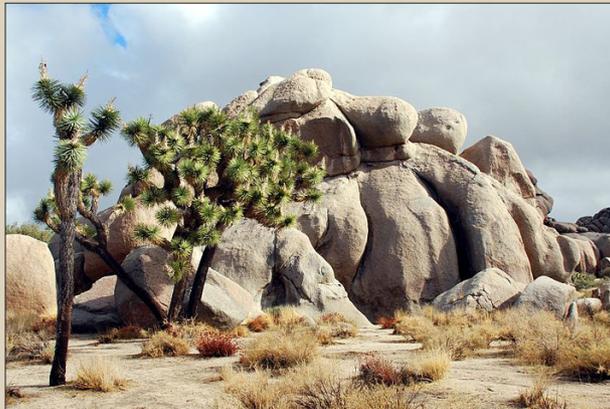


Photo by Jarek Tuszyński of Granite rock formation and Joshua Trees near Real Hidden Valley area

Location: California
Date Established as park: October 31, 1994
Area: 795,155.85 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 2,988,547
UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Joshua Tree National Park is an American national park in southeastern California, east of Los Angeles and San Bernardino, near Palm Springs. It is named for the Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) native to the Mojave Desert.

Straddling San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, the park includes parts of two deserts, each an ecosystem whose characteristics are determined primarily by elevation: the higher Mojave Desert and the lower Colorado Desert. The Little San Bernardino Mountains traverse the southwest edge of the park.

Nine established campgrounds exist in the park, two of which (Black Rock Campground and Cottonwood Campground) provide water and flush toilets. A fee is charged per night for each camping spot. Reservations are accepted at Black Rock Campground, Cottonwood Campground, Indian Cove Campground, and Jumbo Rocks Campground for October through May, while the other campgrounds are first-come, first-served. Backcountry camping, for those who wish to backpack, is permitted with a few regulations.

Nature walks inside the park include: Hidden Valley, Indian Cove, Cholla Cactus Garden;

Longer trails include: Boy Scout Hiking and Equestrian Trail, Contact Mine, Fortynine Palms Oasis, Lost Horse Mine, Lost Palms Oasis, Ryan Mountain and Warren Peak.

Due to graffiti on at least 17 sites on trails, officials have closed them to the public. The closed sites include Native American sites, at the Southern California park's Rattlesnake Canyon and Barker Dam. They blame the increase in vandalism on the increased use of social media.

Katmai



Brown bears at Brooks Falls Katmai National Park
Photographed by Brocken Inaglory

Location: Alaska
Date Established as park: December 2, 1980
Area: 3,674,529.33 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 84,167

Description:

Katmai National Park and Preserve is an American national park and preserve in southern Alaska, notable for the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes and for its brown bears.

Most of the national park is a designated wilderness area where all hunting is banned.

The park is named after Mount Katmai, its centerpiece stratovolcano. The park is located on the Alaska Peninsula, across from Kodiak Island, with headquarters in nearby King Salmon, about 290 miles southwest of Anchorage. The area was first designated a national monument in 1918 to protect the area around the major 1912 volcanic eruption of Novarupta, which formed the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, a 40-square-mile, 100-to-700-foot-deep pyroclastic flow. The park includes as many as 18 individual volcanoes, seven of which have been active since 1900.

Initially designated because of its volcanic history, the monument was left undeveloped and largely unvisited until the 1950s. The monument and surrounding lands became appreciated for their wide variety of wildlife, including an abundance of sockeye salmon and the brown bears that feed upon them. After a series of boundary expansions, the present national park and preserve were established in 1980 under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

The park's chief features are its coast, the Aleutian Range with a chain of fifteen volcanic mountains across the coastal southeastern part of the park, and a series of large lakes in the flatter western part of the park.

The park includes McNeil River State Game Sanctuary and Refuge on Kamishak Bay.



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Kenai Fjords



Photo by Reywas92 of Exit Glacier, Kenai Fjords National Park in July 2009

Location: Alaska

Date Established as park: December 2, 1980

Area: 669,650.05 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 356,601

Description:

Kenai Fjords National Park is an American national park that maintains the Harding Icefield, its outflowing glaciers, and coastal fjords and islands on the Kenai Peninsula in south-central Alaska, west of the town of Seward.

The park contains the Harding Icefield, one of the largest ice fields in the United States, and is named for the numerous fjords carved by glaciers moving down the mountains from the ice field. The field is the source of at least 38 glaciers, the largest of which is Bear Glacier. The fjords are glacial valleys that have been submerged below sea level by a combination of rising sea levels and land subsidence. Exit Glacier is a popular destination at the end of the park's only road. The remainder of the park is accessible by boat, airplane, and hiking.

The park protects the icefield, a narrow fringe of forested land between the mountains and the sea, and the deeply indented coastline. The park is inhabited by a variety of terrestrial and marine mammals, including brown and black bears, moose, sea otters, harbor seals, humpback and killer whales.

At the time of the park's establishment, there were few permanent inhabitants. Archeological surveys have altered the early view that the area was subject to only transient occupation as evidence has accumulated of long-term use.

Seward is a departure point and destination for large cruise ships from Celebrity Cruises, Holland America Line, Royal Caribbean International and others. Various companies offer tours, many guided by National Park Rangers. The tours provide views of land and marine wildlife, particularly Steller sea lions, puffins, Dall's porpoises, American black bear, snowshoe hares, Mountain goats, and humpback and orca whales, as well as natural sights such as the fjords and tidewater glaciers.

Kings Canyon



Photo by Crd637 of Kings Canyon as seen from the Mist Falls trail

Location: California

Date Established as park: March 4, 1940

Area: 461,901.20 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 632,110

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Kings Canyon National Park is an American national park in the southern Sierra Nevada, in Fresno and Tulare Counties, California. Originally established in 1890 as General Grant National Park, the park was greatly expanded and renamed to Kings Canyon National Park.

The park's namesake, Kings Canyon, is a rugged glacier-carved valley more than a mile deep. Other natural features include multiple 14,000-foot peaks, high mountain meadows, swift-flowing rivers, and some of the world's largest stands of giant sequoia trees. Kings Canyon is north of and contiguous with Sequoia National Park.

The majority of the park, drained by the Middle and South Forks of the Kings River and many smaller streams, is designated wilderness. Tourist facilities are concentrated in two areas: Grant Grove, home to General Grant (the second largest tree in the world, measured by trunk volume) and Cedar Grove, located in the heart of Kings Canyon. Overnight hiking is required to access most of the park's backcountry, or high country, which for much of the year is covered in deep snow. The combined Pacific Crest Trail/John Muir Trail, a backpacking route, traverses the entire length of the park from north to south.

People have inhabited what is now Kings Canyon National Park for about 6,000–7,000 years.

Grant Grove, the only vehicular entrance to the park, is 60 miles east of Fresno via Highway 180. In addition to Highway 180 from the west, Highway 198, the Generals Highway, provides access from Sequoia National Park in the south. The roads converge in Grant Grove Village, from where Highway 180 continues another 35 miles northeast to Cedar Grove.

Kobuk Valley



Agie river in Kobuk Valley National Park

Location: Alaska

Date Established as park: December 2, 1980

Area: 1,750,716.16 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 15,766

Description:

Kobuk Valley National Park is an American national park in the Arctic region of northwestern Alaska, located about 25 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

The park was designated to preserve the 100 ft high Great Kobuk Sand Dunes and the surrounding area which includes caribou migration routes.

Park visitors must bring all their own gear for backcountry camping, hiking, backpacking, boating, and dog sledding. No designated trails or roads exist in the park, which is slightly larger than the state of Delaware. Kobuk Valley is one of eight national parks in Alaska, the state with the second most national parks, surpassed only by California which has nine.

Since no roads lead into the park, visitors arrive via chartered air taxi from Nome, Bettles, or Kotzebue. Flights are available year-round, but are weather dependent.

The park is one of the least-visited American national parks, along with others inaccessible by road, including the neighboring Gates of the Arctic, Isle Royale in the middle of Lake Superior, the Dry Tortugas at the end of the Florida Keys, as well as Katmai and Lake Clark in southern Alaska.

The park consists of the broad wetlands valley of the Kobuk River which runs along the southern edge of the western Brooks Range, which is known as the Baird Mountains. The boundary of the park runs along the height-of-land of the Baird Mountains in the north and the shorter Waring Mountains in the south that form a ring, defining and enclosing the Kobuk Valley.

The park's headquarters are at the Northwest Arctic Heritage Center in Kotzebue, about 100 miles west of the park on the Bering Sea coast.

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Lake Clark



Lake Clark National Park

Location: Alaska

Date Established as park: December 2, 1980

Area: 2,619,816.49 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 17,157

Description:

Lake Clark National Park and Preserve is an American national park in southwest Alaska, about 100 miles southwest of Anchorage.

The park includes many streams and lakes vital to the Bristol Bay salmon fishery, including its namesake Lake Clark.

A wide variety of recreational activities may be pursued in the park and preserve year-round. The park protects rain Daniel Mayer forests along the coastline of Cook Inlet, alpine tundra, glaciers, glacial lakes, major salmon-bearing rivers, and two volcanoes, Mount Redoubt and Mount Iliamna.

Mount Redoubt is active, erupting in 1989 and 2009. The wide variety of ecosystems in the park mean that virtually all major Alaskan animals, terrestrial and marine, may be seen in and around the park. Salmon, particularly sockeye salmon, play a major role in the ecosystem and the local economy.

The Kvichak River is the world's most productive watershed for sockeye salmon. Large populations of brown bears are attracted to feed on the spawning salmon in Kijik River and Silver Salmon Creek.

Bear watching is a common activity in the park.

The park which can only be reached by boat or small aircraft, typically floatplanes. The major settled area in the park and preserve is Port Alsworth on Lake Clark. Five other settlements are near the park, populated mainly by Dena'ina natives.

The park has four main physiographic regions. The upthrust granite Chigmit Mountains connect the Alaska Range to the Aleutian Range. Superimposed on these mountains and little to the east of the main range are the two stratovolcanoes, Redoubt and Iliamna. Glaciers have altered the mountains, carving cirques and U-shaped valleys into the range.

Lake Clark, the largest, is the sixth largest lake in Alaska, 860 feet deep and 42 miles long.

Lassen Volcanic



Photo by Daniel Mayer of Lassen Peak

Location: California

Date Established as park: August 9, 1916

Area: 106,589.02 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 517,039

Description:

Lassen Volcanic National Park is an American national park in northeastern California. The dominant feature of the park is Lassen Peak, the largest plug dome volcano in the world and the southernmost volcano in the Cascade Range.

Lassen Volcanic National Park is one of the few areas in the world where all four types of volcano can be found—plug dome, shield, cinder cone, and stratovolcano.

The source of heat for the volcanism in the Lassen area is subduction of the Gorda Plate diving below the North American Plate off the Northern California coast. The area surrounding Lassen Peak is still active with boiling mud pots, fumaroles, and hot springs.

Native Americans have inhabited the area since long before white settlers first saw Lassen. The natives knew that the peak was full of fire and water and thought it would one day blow itself apart.

Inconsistent newspaper accounts reported by witnesses from 1850 to 1851 described seeing "fire thrown to a terrible height" and "burning lava running down the sides" in the area of Cinder Cone.

As late as 1859, a witness reported seeing fire in the sky from a distance, attributing it to an eruption.

Early geologists and volcanologists who studied the Cinder Cone concluded the last eruption occurred between 1675 and 1700.

After the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) began reassessing the potential risk of other active volcanic areas in the Cascade Range. Further study of Cinder Cone estimated the last eruption occurred between 1630 and 1670. Recent tree-ring analysis has placed the date at 1666.

Lassen National Park saw 536,068 visitors during 2016.

Mammoth Cave



Photo by Navin75 of Mammoth Cave

Location: Kentucky

Date Established as park: July 1, 1941

Area: 54,011.91 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 551,590

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Mammoth Cave National Park is an American national park in west-central Kentucky, encompassing portions of Mammoth Cave, the longest cave system known in the world.

Since the 1972 unification of Mammoth Cave with the even-longer system under Flint Ridge to the north, the official name of the system has been the Mammoth-Flint Ridge Cave System.

The park is located primarily in Edmonson County, with small areas extending eastward into Hart and Barren counties.

The Green River runs through the park, with a tributary called the Nolin River feeding into the Green just inside the park.

Mammoth Cave is the world's longest known cave system with more than 400 miles of surveyed passageways, which is nearly twice as long as the second-longest cave system, Mexico's Sac Actun underwater cave.

Mammoth Cave developed in thick Mississippian-aged limestone strata capped by a layer of sandstone, which has made the system remarkably stable. It is known to include more than 400 miles of passageway; new discoveries and connections add several miles to this figure each year. Mammoth Cave National Park was established to preserve the cave system.

The upper sandstone member is known as the Big Clifty Sandstone.

The National Park Service offers several cave tours to visitors. Some notable features of the cave, such as Grand Avenue, Frozen Niagara, and Fat Man's Misery, can be seen on lighted tours ranging from one to six hours in length. Two tours, lit only by visitor-carried paraffin lamps, are popular alternatives to the electric-lit routes. Several "wild" tours venture away from the developed parts of the cave into muddy crawls and dusty tunnels.



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Mesa Verde

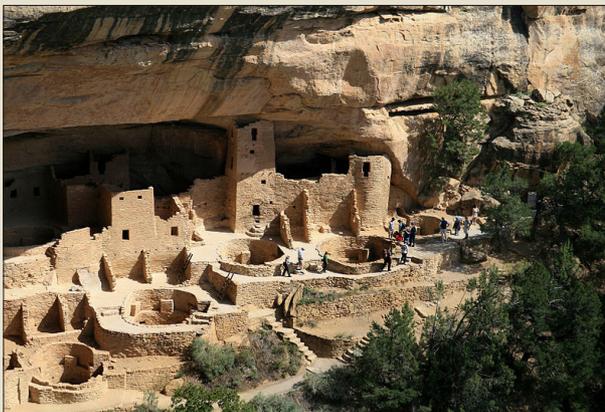


Photo by Andreas F. Borchert of Cliff Palace

Location: Colorado

Date Established as park: June 29, 1906

Area: 52,485.17 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 556,203

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site

Description:

Mesa Verde National Park is an American national park and UNESCO World Heritage Site located in Montezuma County, Colorado. The park protects some of the best-preserved Ancestral Puebloan archaeological sites in the United States.

Mesa Verde (Spanish for “green table”) is best known for structures such as Cliff Palace, thought to be the largest cliff dwelling in North America.

Starting c. 7500 BC Mesa Verde was seasonally inhabited by a group of nomadic Paleo-Indians known as the Foothills Mountain Complex. The variety of projectile points found in the region indicates they were influenced by surrounding areas, including the Great Basin, the San Juan Basin, and the Rio Grande Valley. Later, Archaic people established semi-permanent rock shelters in and around the mesa. By 1000 BC, the Basketmaker culture emerged from the local Archaic population, and by 750 AD the Ancestral Puebloans had developed from the Basketmaker culture.

The Mesa Verdeans survived using a combination of hunting, gathering, and subsistence farming of crops such as corn, beans, and squash. They built the mesa’s first pueblos sometime after 650, and by the end of the 12th century, they began to construct the massive cliff dwellings for which the park is best known. By 1285, following a period of social and environmental instability driven by a series of severe and prolonged droughts, they abandoned the area and moved south to locations in Arizona and New Mexico, including Rio Chama, Pajarito Plateau, and Santa Fe.

The first occupants of the Mesa Verde region, which spans from southeastern Utah to northwestern New Mexico, were nomadic Paleo-Indians who arrived in the area c. 9500 BC.

Mount Rainier



Aerial Photo by Stan Shebs of Mount Rainier from the west

Location: Washington

Date Established as park: March 2, 1899

Area: 236,381.64 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,501,621

Description:

Mount Rainier National Park is an American national park located in southeast Pierce County and northeast Lewis County in Washington state. It was the fifth national park in the U.S. to be established, preserving all of Mount Rainier, a 14,411-foot stratovolcano.

The mountain rises abruptly from the surrounding land with elevations in the park ranging from 1,600 feet to over 14,000 feet. The highest point in the Cascade Range, Mount Rainier is surrounded by valleys, waterfalls, subalpine meadows, and 91,000 acres of old-growth forest. More than 25 glaciers descend the flanks of the volcano, which is often shrouded in clouds that dump enormous amounts of rain and snow.

Mount Rainier is circled by the Wonderland Trail and is covered by glaciers and snowfields totaling about 35 square miles. Carbon Glacier is the largest glacier by volume in the contiguous United States, while Emmons Glacier is the largest glacier by area. Mount Rainier is a popular peak for mountaineering with some 10,000 attempts per year with approximately 50 percent making it to the summit.

The earliest evidence of human activity in the area which is now Mount Rainier National Park, a projectile point dated to circa 4,000–5,800 BP (before present) found along Bench Lake Trail (the first section of Snow Lake Trail).

A more substantial archeological find was a rock shelter near Fryingpan Creek, east of Goat Island Mountain. Hunting artifacts were found in the shelter. The shelter would not have been used all year round. Cultural affinities suggest the site was used by Columbia Plateau Tribes from 1000 to 300 BP.

New River Gorge



Photo by JaGa of The New River Gorge Bridge in Fayetteville, West Virginia

Location: West Virginia

Date Established as park: December 27, 2020

Area: 7,021 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: —

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

The New River Gorge, formerly a national river, was upgraded to a national park and preserve as part of the COVID-19 stimulus package signed by president Donald Trump on December 27.

Established in 1978 as a national river, the NPS-protected area stretches for 53 miles. The park is rich in cultural and natural history and offers an abundance of scenic and recreational opportunities.

New River Gorge is also home to some of the country’s best whitewater rafting, mainly from the Cunard put-in to the Fayette Station take-out., owering sandstone cliffs that reach up to 1,000 feet in some areas

New River Gorge is also one of the most popular climbing areas on the east coast with over 1,400 established rock climbs. The cliffs at “The New” are located just below the rim of the gorge and are made up of a very hard Nuttall sandstone. The rock is very featured, and an abundance of crack and face routes, with occasional large roofs. Almost all climbs are one pitch long and range from 30 to 120 feet in height. The majority of the routes in the gorge are for advanced climbers in 5.10-5.12 range of the Yosemite Decimal System with about an equal number of traditional and sport climbs.

Fishing is one of the most popular activities on the New River. The diversity of fish in its waters makes the New River an excellent warm water fishery.

There are over 50 miles of hiking trails in the park ranging from easy walks to more challenging hikes. Several trails following old railroad grades are open to bikes. There are four primitive camping areas within the park, all located along the river.

There are two year-round visitor centers located at Sandstone and Canyon Rim.

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North Cascades



Photo by Daniel Hershman of Pelton Peak, Yawning Glacier and Magic Mountain (left to right).

Location: Washington

Date Established as park: October 2, 1968

Area: 504,780.94 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 38,208

Description:

North Cascades National Park is an American national park in the state of Washington. It is the largest of the three National Park Service units that comprise the North Cascades National Park Complex. North Cascades National Park consists of a northern and southern section, bisected by the Skagit River that flows through Ross Lake National Recreation Area. Lake Chelan National Recreation Area lies on the southern border of the south unit of the park. North Cascades National Park features the rugged mountain peaks of the North Cascades Range, the most expansive glacial system in the contiguous United States, the headwaters of numerous waterways, and vast forests with the highest degree of flora biodiversity of any American national park.

Heavy snows and a high risk of avalanches due to the steep terrain, especially on the western slopes, severely limit visitation in the winter.

With approximately 312 glaciers, North Cascades National Park has the most glaciers of any US park outside Alaska, and a third of all the glaciers in the lower 48 states.

Hikers and backpackers often visit Cascade Pass in the southwestern section of the southern unit of the park, which was used as a travel route by Native Americans.

Unlike most US national parks, there are no places within North Cascades National Park where one can drive to a campground. Camping inside the park requires hiking in by trail, horseback or boat, and camping is regulated by a permit system to ensure the wilderness is not over-exploited.

High quality climbing routes on the numerous cliffs, ice and other challenges make the park a favorite destination for many mountaineering enthusiasts. Only unobtrusive clean climbing is allowed.

Olympic Olympic



Photo of Maples in Olympic National Park's Hoh Rain Forest.

Location: Washington

Date Established as park: June 29, 1938

Area: 922,649.41 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 3,245,806

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Olympic National Park is located in the State of Washington, on the Olympic Peninsula. The park has four regions: the Pacific coastline, alpine areas, the west-side temperate rainforest, and the forests of the drier east side. Within the park there are three distinct ecosystems, including subalpine forest and wildflower meadow, temperate forest, and the rugged Pacific coast.

President Theodore Roosevelt originally designated the park as Mount Olympus National Monument on March 2, 1909. The monument was re-designated a national park by Congress and President Franklin Roosevelt on June 29, 1938. In 1988, Congress designated 95 percent of the park as the Olympic Wilderness.

The coastal portion of the park is a rugged, sandy beach along with a strip of adjacent forest. It is 60 miles long but just a few miles wide, with native communities at the mouths of two rivers.

Within the center of Olympic National Park rise the Olympic Mountains whose sides and ridgelines are topped with massive, ancient glaciers.

The western side of the park is mantled by temperate rainforests, including the Hoh Rainforest and Quinault Rainforest, which receive annual precipitation of about 150 inches, making this perhaps the wettest area in the continental United States.

There are several roads in the park, but none penetrate far into the interior. The park features a network of hiking trails, although the size and remoteness means that it will usually take more than a weekend to get to the high country in the interior.

Views of the Olympic National Park can be seen from the Hurricane Ridge viewpoint.

During winter, the viewpoint known as Hurricane Ridge offers numerous winter sports activities.

Petrified Forest



Photo by Kumar Appaiah - Flickr: Petrified Forest National Park, Eastern Arizona, of petrified log.

Location: Arizona

Date Established as park: December 9, 1962

Area: 221,390.21 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 643,588

Description:

Petrified Forest National Park is an American national park in Navajo and Apache counties in northeastern Arizona. Named for its large deposits of petrified wood, the park covers about 346 square miles, encompassing semi-desert shrub steppe as well as highly eroded and colorful badlands. The site, the northern part of which extends into the Painted Desert, was declared a national monument in 1906 and a national park in 1962. T

Averaging about 5,400 feet in elevation, the park has a dry windy climate with temperatures that vary from summer highs of about 100 °F to winter lows well below freezing. More than 400 species of plants, dominated by grasses such as bunchgrass, blue grama, and sacaton, are found in the park. About one third of the park is designated wilderness—50,260 acres.

The Petrified Forest is known for its fossils, especially fallen trees that lived in the Late Triassic Epoch, about 225 million years ago. The sediments containing the fossil logs are part of the widespread and colorful Chinle Formation, from which the Painted Desert gets its name. Beginning about 60 million years ago, the Colorado Plateau, of which the park is part, was pushed upward by tectonic forces and exposed to increased erosion. All of the park's rock layers above the Chinle, except geologically recent ones found in parts of the park, have been removed by wind and water. In addition to petrified logs, fossils found in the park have included Late Triassic ferns, cycads, ginkgoes, and many other plants as well as fauna including giant reptiles called phytosaurs, large amphibians, and early dinosaurs.

The park is open every day except Christmas on a schedule that varies slightly with the seasons. No campgrounds or overnight lodging are available in the park, although nearby communities offer accommodations. Sightseeing is available by private automobile, motorcycle, commercial tour, bicycle, and hiking.



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Pinnacles



Photo by Samartur of Rugged cliffs at Pinnacles National Park with San Benito Valley in the far horizon.

Location: California

Date Established as park: January 10, 2013

Area: 26,685.73 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 177,224

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Pinnacles National Park is an American national park protecting a mountainous area located east of the Salinas Valley in Central California, 80 miles southeast of San Jose. The park's namesakes are the eroded leftovers of the western half of an extinct volcano that has moved 200 miles from its original location on the San Andreas Fault, embedded in a portion of the California Pacific Coast Ranges.

The national park is divided by the rock formations into East and West Divisions, connected only by foot trails. The east side has shade and water, the west has high walls. The rock formations provide for spectacular pinnacles that attract rock climbers. The park features unusual talus caves that house at least 13 species of bats. Pinnacles is most often visited in spring or fall because of the intense heat during the summer. Park lands are prime habitat for prairie falcons, and are a release site for California condors that have been hatched in captivity.

Pinnacles was originally established as a national monument in 1908 by President Theodore Roosevelt, and was redesignated as a national park by Congressional legislation in 2012 that was then signed into law by President Barack Obama on January 10, 2013.

Several trails have been developed for day hikers, some of which are strenuous. The San Andreas Fault is visible from some vantages along the trails. The park includes a well-known hiking portion known among enthusiasts simply as "The Pig Fence".

The caves at Pinnacles are talus caves, formed when steep, narrow canyons were filled with boulders, leaving passages between the larger rocks.

Camping facilities are available on the east side in the Pinnacles Campground.

The park is popular with advanced rock climbers due to the many difficult and challenging climbs.

Redwood



Photo by Michael Schweppe of Coast Redwood forest and understory plants

Location: California

Date Established as park: October 2, 1968

Area: 138,999.37 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 504,722

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site

Description:

The Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP) are a complex of several state and national parks located in the United States, along the coast of northern California. The combined RNSP feature old-growth temperate rainforests. Located within Del Norte and Humboldt Counties, the four parks, together, protect 45% of all remaining coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) old-growth forests, totaling at least 38,982 acres. These trees are the tallest, among the oldest, and one of the most massive tree species on Earth. In addition to the redwood forests, the parks preserve other indigenous flora, fauna, grassland prairie, cultural resources, portions of rivers and other streams, and 37 miles of pristine coastline.

In 1850, old-growth redwood forest covered more than 2,000,000 acres (8,100 km²) of the California coast. The northern portion of that area, originally inhabited by Native Americans, attracted many lumbermen and others turned gold miners when a minor gold rush brought them to the region. Failing in efforts to strike it rich in gold, these men turned toward harvesting the giant trees for booming development in San Francisco and other places on the West Coast.

There are no hotels or motels within the parks boundaries. However, nearby towns such as Klamath, Requa, and Orick provide small hotels and inns.

While the state parks have front country campsites that can be driven to, the federal sections of the park do not, and hiking is the only way to reach back country campsites. Almost 200 miles of hiking trails exist in the parks. Horseback riding and mountain biking are popular but are only allowed on certain trails. Kayaking is popular along the seacoast and in the various rivers and streams.

Rocky Mountain



Photo by Daniel Mayer of Bear Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park

Location: Colorado

Date Established as park: January 26, 1915

Area: 265,807.25 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 4,670,053

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Rocky Mountain National Park is an American national park located approximately 76 miles northwest of Denver International Airport. The park is situated between the towns of Estes Park to the east and Grand Lake to the west. The eastern and western slopes of the Continental Divide run directly through the center of the park with the headwaters of the Colorado River located in the park's northwestern region. The main features of the park include mountains, alpine lakes and a wide variety of wildlife within various climates and environments.

The park has a total of five visitor centers and regions, with park headquarters located at the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center—a National Historic Landmark designed by the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture at Taliesin West.

Region 1 is known for moose and big meadows and is located on the west, or Grand Lake, side of the Continental Divide.

Region 2 is the alpine region of the park with accessible tundra trails at high elevations—an area known for its spectacular vistas.

Region 3, known for wilderness escape, is in the northern part of the park and is accessed from the Estes Park area.

Region 4 is the heart of the park with easy road and trail access, great views, and lake hikes including the most popular trails.

Region 5, known for waterfalls and backcountry, is south of Estes Park and contains Longs Peak—the park's iconic fourteenner—and the Wild Basin area.

The park contains a network of trails that range from easy, paved paths suitable for all visitors including those with disabilities, to strenuous mountain trails for experienced, conditioned hikers as well as off-trail routes for backcountry hikes. Trails lead to more than 100 designated wilderness camping sites.

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Saguaro



Photo by Luke Jones from Yucca Valley of Saguaro National Park

Location: Arizona

Date Established as park: October 14, 1994

Area: 92,867.42 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,020,226

Description:

Saguaro National Park is an American national park in Pima County, southeastern Arizona. The park consists of two separate areas—the Tucson Mountain District (TMD) about 10 miles west of the city of Tucson and the Rincon Mountain District (RMD) about 10 miles east of the city—that preserve Sonoran Desert landscapes, fauna, and flora, including the giant saguaro cactus.

The volcanic rocks on the surface of the Tucson Mountain District differ greatly from the surface rocks of the Rincon Mountain District; over the past 30 million years, crustal stretching displaced rocks from beneath the Tucson Mountains of the Tucson Mountain District to form the Rincon Mountains of the Rincon Mountain District. Uplifted, domed, and eroded, the Rincon Mountains are significantly higher and wetter than the Tucson Mountains. The Rincons, as one of the Madrean Sky Islands between the southern Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Madre Oriental in Mexico, support high biodiversity and are home to many plants and animals that do not live in the Tucson Mountain District.

Earlier residents of and visitors to the lands in and around the park before its creation included the Hohokam, Sobaipuri, Tohono O'odham, Apaches, Spanish explorers, missionaries, miners, homesteaders, and ranchers.

Popular activities in the park include hiking on its 165 miles of trails and sightseeing along paved roads near its two visitor centers. Both districts allow bicycling and horseback riding on selected roads and trails. The Rincon Mountain District offers limited wilderness camping, but there is no overnight camping in the Tucson Mountain District.

Sequoia



Photo by Dennis Warden of Abby Warden next to a Sequoia tree

Location: California

Date Established as park: September 25, 1890

Area: 404,062.63 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,246,053

UNESCO Designation: Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Sequoia National Park is an American national park in the southern Sierra Nevada east of Visalia, California. The park was established on September 25, 1890 to protect 404,064 acres of forested mountainous terrain. Encompassing a vertical relief of nearly 13,000 feet (4,000 m), the park contains the highest point in the contiguous United States, Mount Whitney, at 14,505 feet above sea level. The park is south of, and contiguous with, Kings Canyon National Park; both parks are administered by the National Park Service together as the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

The park is notable for its giant sequoia trees, including the General Sherman tree, the largest tree on Earth by volume. The General Sherman tree grows in the Giant Forest, which contains five of the ten largest trees in the world.

The park's giant sequoia forests are part of 202,430 acres of old-growth forests shared by Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. The parks preserve a landscape that still resembles the southern Sierra Nevada before Euro-American settlement.

In addition to hiking, camping, fishing, and backpacking, the following attractions are highlights with many park visitors:

- Sherman Tree Trail
- Tunnel Log is a fallen giant sequoia tree in Sequoia National Park. The tree, which measured 275 feet tall and 21 feet in diameter, fell across a park road in 1937 due to natural causes. The following year, a crew cut an 8-foot tall, 17-foot wide tunnel through it.
- Tokopah Falls The trail to Tokopah Falls
- Crescent Meadow is a small, sequoia-rimmed meadow in the Giant Forest region of Sequoia National Park.
- Moro Rock is a granite dome located in the center of the park, at the head of Moro Creek, between Giant Forest and Crescent Meadow.

Shenandoah



Photo by Shenandoah National Park in early fall at Dark Hollow Falls

Location: Virginia

Date Established as park: December 26, 1935

Area: 199,223.77 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 1,425,507

Description:

Shenandoah National Park is an American national park that encompasses part of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The park is long and narrow, with the Shenandoah River and its broad valley to the west, and the rolling hills of the Virginia Piedmont to the east. Skyline Drive is the main park road, generally traversing near the ridgeline of the mountains. Almost 40% of the land area — 79,579 acres — has been designated as wilderness and is protected as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The highest peak is Hawksbill Mountain at 4,051 feet.

The park is best known for Skyline Drive, a 105-mile road that runs the length of the park along the ridge of the mountains. 101 miles of the Appalachian Trail are also in the park. In total, there are over 500 miles of trails within the park. There is also horseback riding, camping, bicycling, and a number of waterfalls.

Shenandoah National Park offers 196,000 acres of backcountry and wilderness camping. While in the backcountry, campers must use a "Leave No Trace" policy that includes burying excrement and not building campfires.

Most of the campgrounds are open from April to October—November. There are five major campgrounds:

- Mathews Arm Campground
- Big Meadows Campground
- Lewis Mountain Campground
- Loft Mountain Campground
- Dundo Group Campground

There are three lodges/cabins:

- Skyland Resort
- Big Meadows
- Lewis Mountain Cabins

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Theodore Roosevelt



Photo by NPS/Mark Hoffman: Plateaus and tops of buttes provide expansive views of the buttes and river valley floor

Location: North Dakota
Date Established as park: November 10, 1978
Area: 70,446.89 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 691,658

Description:

Theodore Roosevelt National Park is an American national park comprising three geographically separated areas of badlands in western North Dakota. The park honors U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and is the only American national park named directly after a single person.

The park covers 70,446 acres of land in three sections: the North Unit, the South Unit, and the Elkhorn Ranch Unit. The park's larger South Unit lies alongside Interstate 94 near Medora, North Dakota. The smaller North Unit is situated about 80 mi north of the South Unit, and Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch is located between the North and South units. The Little Missouri River flows through all three units of the park. The Maah Daah Hey Trail connects all three units.

Roosevelt first came to the North Dakota badlands to hunt bison in September 1883. During that first short trip, he got his bison and fell in love with the rugged lifestyle and the "perfect freedom" of the West.

Both main units of the park have scenic drives, approximately 100 miles of foot and horse trails, wildlife viewing, and opportunities for back country hiking and camping.

Both main units of the park have scenic drives, approximately 100 miles of foot and horse trails, wildlife viewing, and opportunities for back country hiking and camping. There are three developed campgrounds: Juniper Campground in the North Unit, Cottonwood Campground in the South Unit, and the Roundup Group Horse Campground in the South Unit.

One of the most popular attractions is wildlife viewing. Among the local wildlife, bison may be more dangerous and visitors are advised to view them from a distance.

Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch is a separate, remote area of the park, 35 miles north of Medora, accessible by gravel roads.

Virgin Islands



Photo by Fred Hsu of Trunk Bay on St. John

Location: U.S. Virgin Islands
Date Established as park: August 2, 1956
Area: 15,052.53 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 133,398

Description:

The Virgin Islands National Park is an American national park preserving about 60% of the land area of Saint John in the United States Virgin Islands, as well as more than 5,500 acres of adjacent ocean, and nearly all of Hassel Island, just off the Charlotte Amalie, Saint Thomas harbor.

The park is well-known for scuba diving and snorkeling, and has miles of hiking trails through the tropical rainforest.

Cruz Bay is the gateway port to the park. Ferries operate hourly from Red Hook, St. Thomas, thrice daily from Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas and West End, Tortola, twice daily from Jost Van Dyke, and twice weekly from Virgin Gorda.

In 1956, Laurance Rockefeller's Jackson Hole Preserve donated its extensive lands on the island to the National Park Service, under the condition that the lands had to be protected from future development. The remaining portion, the Caneel Bay Resort, operates on a lease arrangement with the NPS, which owns the underlying land.

The beaches of Virgin Islands National Park are regularly named some of the best in the world.

Trunk Bay is a body of water and the adjacent beach on Saint John. Trunk Bay has an underwater trail for snorkeling along its coral reef.

Cinnamon Bay beach is a long, wide stretch of sand on the north shore of St. John. The beach is popular for sunbathing, snorkeling, and water sports.

Honeymoon Beach is on the north shore of St. John and can be accessed from Cruz Bay by hiking the 1 mile long Lind Point Trail or from Caneel Bay Resort.

Maho Bay is known for its soft sand and calm, shallow waters. The sand and seagrass sea floor make it a good place to see sea turtles and stingrays.

Salt Pond Bay is a protected bay and beach.

Voyageurs



Voyageurs National Park

Location: Minnesota
Date Established as park: April 8, 1975
Area: 218,222.35 acres
Recreation Visitors in 2019: 232,974

Description:

Voyageurs National Park is an American national park in northern Minnesota near the town of International Falls established in 1975. The park's name commemorates the voyageurs—French-Canadian fur traders who were the first European settlers to frequently travel through the area. The park is notable for its outstanding water resources and is popular with canoeists, kayakers, other boaters, and fishermen. The Kabetogama Peninsula, which lies entirely within the park and makes up most of its land area, is accessible only by boat. To the east of the park lies the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

The park has several boat ramps and visitor centers on its periphery, though the main body of the park is only accessible by boat or, in the winter, by snowmobile, ski, or snowshoe.

Campsites are maintained by the National Park Service and are accessible only by water. The 282 sites are classified as frontcountry or backcountry tent, houseboat, or day-use sites; all are designated by signs.

The major lakes in the park are home to Walleye, Northern pike, Muskellunge, Smallmouth bass, and Crappie. In the minor lakes that dot the park, Largemouth bass, Lake trout, Bluegill and other small sunfish and Yellow Perch are also found.

Visitors travel and explore the park's lakes and islands with canoes, kayaks and motorboats. The park's interior peninsula is only accessible by boat except when frozen lakes provide outer routes. The park has a system of canoes and boats available for rental at interior lakes.

The park has over 50 miles of hiking trails.

The Voyageurs Forest Overlook, Beaver Pond Overlook, and the Kettle Falls Dam area are all popular stargazing locations in the park. Additionally, the park is working on becoming a dark sky park with the International Dark-Sky Association.

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White Sands



Photo by davebluedevel - Flickr: White Sands, New Mexico

Location: New Mexico

Date Established as park: December 20, 2019

Area: 146,344.31 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 608,785

Description:

White Sands National Park is an American national park located is completely surrounded by the White Sands Missile Range. This gypsum dunefield is the largest of its kind on Earth, with a depth of about 30 feet, dunes as tall as 60 feet, and about 4.5 billion short tons of gypsum sand.

Approximately 12,000 years ago, the land within the Tularosa Basin featured large lakes, streams, grasslands, and Ice Age mammals. As the climate warmed, rain and snowmelt dissolved gypsum from the surrounding mountains and carried it into the basin. Further warming and drying caused the lakes to evaporate and form selenite crystals. Strong winds then broke up crystals and transported them eastward.

It is the most visited NPS site in New Mexico, with about 600,000 visitors each year. The park features a drive from the visitor center to the heart of the dunes, picnic areas, backcountry campground in the dunefield, marked hiking trails, and sledding on the dunes. Ranger-guided orientation and nature walks occur at various times and months throughout the year.

White Sands, during its period as a national monument, has been used as a filming location for scenes in several films.

Many visitors arrive during the warmer months from March through August, but sledders and photographers can be seen throughout the dunes year round. March and July are the two busiest months.

The Dunes Drive leads 8 miles into the dunes from the visitor center at the park entrance. Three picnic areas are available, as well as a backcountry campground with ten sites for overnight camping in the dunefield. Five marked trails totaling 9 miles allow visitors to explore the dunes on foot. Ranger-guided orientation and nature walks occur at various times and months throughout the year.

Wind Cave



By Dave Bunnell / Under Earth Images: Boxwork in the lower part of Wind Cave.

Location: South Dakota

Date Established as park: January 9, 1903

Area: 33,970.84 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 615,350

Description:

Wind Cave National Park is an American national park located 10 miles north of Hot Springs in western South Dakota. Established in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt, it was the seventh national park and the first cave to be designated a national park anywhere in the world. The cave is notable for its calcite formations known as boxwork, as well as its frostwork. Approximately 95 percent of the world's discovered boxwork formations are found in Wind Cave.

The cave is recognized as the densest cave system in the world, with the greatest passage volume per cubic mile. Wind Cave is one of the longest caves in the world with 149.01 miles of explored cave passageways, as of 2018. Above ground, the park includes the largest remaining natural mixed-grass prairie in the United States.

Several roads run through the park and there are 30 miles of hiking trails on the surface. More than 109,000 people toured the cave itself in 2015, the most since 1968 before cave tours were limited to 40 people each.

The Wind Cave visitor center features three exhibit rooms about the geology of the caves and early cave history, the park's wildlife and natural history, and the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the park.

Elk Mountain Campground, located in a ponderosa pine forest, is about 1.25 miles from the visitor center. The campground has 75 sites for tents and recreational vehicles, and is open year-round with campfire programs offered in the summer and limited services available in the winter.

Wrangelle-St. Elias



Photo by R. McGimsey, U.S. Geological Survey of Mount Jarvis is the youngest volcano in the eastern Wrangell Volcanic Field.

Location: Alaska

Date Established as park: December 2, 1980

Area: 8,323,146.48 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 12,547,743

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site

Description:

Wrangell—St. Elias National Park and Preserve is an American national park and preserve managed by the National Park Service in south central Alaska. The park and preserve form the largest area managed by the National Park Service with a total of 13,175,799 acres, an expanse that could encapsulate six Yellowstone National Parks. The park includes a large portion of the Saint Elias Mountains, which include most of the highest peaks in the United States and Canada, yet are within 10 miles of tidewater, one of the highest reliefs in the world. Wrangell—St. Elias borders on Canada's Kluane National Park and Reserve to the east and approaches another American national park to the south, Glacier Bay. The chief distinction between park and preserve lands is that sport hunting is prohibited in the park and permitted in the preserve. In addition, 9,078,675 acres of the park and preserve are designated as the largest single wilderness in the United States.

The park has long, extremely cold winters and a short summer season. Plate tectonics are responsible for the uplift of the mountain ranges that cross the park. The park's extreme high point is Mount Saint Elias at 18,008 feet, the second tallest mountain in both the United States and Canada. The park's glacial features include Malaspina Glacier, the largest piedmont glacier in North America, Hubbard Glacier, the longest tidewater glacier in Alaska, and Nabesna Glacier, the world's longest valley glacier. The Bagley Icefield covers much of the park's interior, which includes 60% of the permanently ice-covered terrain in Alaska. At the center of the park, the boomtown of Kennecott exploited one of the world's richest deposits of copper from 1903 to 1938. The abandoned mine buildings and mills comprise a National Historic Landmark district.

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Yellowstone



Photo by Brocken Inaglor of Grand Prismatic Spring and Midway Geyser Basin

Location: Wyoming, Montana, Idaho

Date Established as park: March 1, 1872

Area: 2,219,790.71 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 4,020,288

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserves

Description:

Yellowstone National Park is an American national park located in the western United States. It was established by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant on March 1, 1872. Yellowstone was the first national park in the U.S. and is also widely held to be the first national park in the world. The park is known for its wildlife and its many geothermal features, especially Old Faithful geyser, one of its most popular.

Although Native Americans have lived in the Yellowstone region for at least 11,000 years, aside from visits by mountain men during the early-to-mid-19th century, organized exploration did not begin until the late 1860s.

Yellowstone National Park spans an area of 3,468.4 sq mi comprising lakes, canyons, rivers, and mountain ranges. Yellowstone Lake is one of the largest high-elevation lakes in North America and is centered over the Yellowstone Caldera, the largest supervolcano on the continent. Half of the world's geysers and hydrothermal features are in Yellowstone, fueled by this ongoing volcanism. Lava flows and rocks from volcanic eruptions cover most of the land area of Yellowstone. The park is the centerpiece of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the largest remaining nearly-intact ecosystem in the Earth's northern temperate zone.

Grizzly bears, wolves, and free-ranging herds of bison and elk live in this park. The Yellowstone Park bison herd is the oldest and largest public bison herd in the United States. Yellowstone has numerous recreational opportunities, including hiking, camping, boating, fishing, and sightseeing. Paved roads provide close access to the major geothermal areas as well as some of the lakes and waterfalls. During the winter, visitors often access the park by way of guided tours that use either snow coaches or snowmobiles.

Yosemite

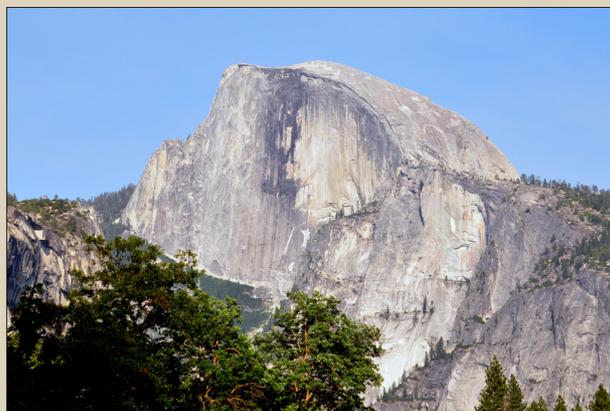


Photo by Dennis Warden: View of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park

Location: California

Date Established as park: October 1, 1890

Area: 761,747.50 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 4,422,861

UNESCO Designation: World Heritage Site

Description:

Yosemite National Park is in the western Sierra Nevada of Central California, bounded on the southeast by Sierra National Forest and on the northwest by Stanislaus National Forest. Yosemite is internationally recognized for its granite cliffs, waterfalls, clear streams, giant sequoia groves, lakes, mountains, meadows, glaciers, and biological diversity. Almost 95% of the park is designated wilderness.

The name Yosemite is from the Native American word "uzumate," which meant grizzly bear. The indigenous tribe that lived in the Valley were called Yosemite by caucasians and by other tribes because they were reportedly skilled at killing the bears.

The park has an elevation range from 2,127 to 13,114 feet. The geology of the Yosemite area is characterized by granitic rocks and remnants of older rock. About 10 million years ago, the Sierra Nevada was uplifted and then tilted to form its relatively gentle western slopes and the more dramatic eastern slopes. About one million years ago, snow and ice accumulated, forming glaciers at the higher alpine meadows that moved down the river valleys. Ice thickness in Yosemite Valley may have reached 4,000 feet during the early glacial episode. The downslope movement of the ice masses cut and sculpted the U-shaped valley that attracts so many visitors.

Yosemite was central to the development of the national park idea. Galen Clark and others lobbied to protect Yosemite Valley from development, ultimately leading to President Abraham Lincoln's signing the Yosemite Grant in 1864. John Muir led a successful movement to have Congress establish a larger national park by 1890, one which encompassed the valley and its surrounding mountains and forests, paving the way for the National Park System.

Zion



Photo by Tobias Alt of view from the Angels Landing trail looking northward to the Narrows

Location: Utah

Date Established as park: November 19, 1919

Area: 147,242.66 acres

Recreation Visitors in 2019: 4,488,268

Description:

Zion National Park is located in southwestern Utah. A prominent feature of the 229-square-mile park is Zion Canyon, which is 15 miles long and up to 2,640 ft deep. The canyon walls are reddish and tan-colored Navajo Sandstone eroded by the North Fork of the Virgin River. The lowest point in the park is 3,666 ft at Coalpits Wash and the highest peak is 8,726 ft at Horse Ranch Mountain. Located at the junction of the Colorado Plateau, Great Basin, and Mojave Desert regions, the park has a unique geography and a variety of life zones that allow for unusual plant and animal diversity. Numerous plant species as well as 289 species of birds, 75 mammals (including 19 species of bat), and 32 reptiles inhabit the park's four life zones: desert, riparian, woodland, and coniferous forest. Zion National Park includes mountains, canyons, buttes, mesas, monoliths, rivers, slot canyons, and natural arches.

In 1909, President William Howard Taft named the area Mukuntuweap National Monument in order to protect the canyon. In 1918, the acting director of the newly created National Park Service, Horace Albright, drafted a proposal to enlarge the existing monument and change the park's name to Zion National Monument, Zion being a term used by the Mormons. According to historian Hal Rothman: "The name change played to a prevalent bias of the time. Many believed that Spanish and Indian names would deter visitors who, if they could not pronounce the name of a place, might not bother to visit it."

Guided horseback riding trips, nature walks, and evening programs are available from late March to early November.

Seven trails with round-trip times of half an hour (Weeping Rock) to 4 hours (Angels Landing) are found in Zion Canyon.

Lodging in the park is available at Zion Lodge, located halfway through Zion Canyon.

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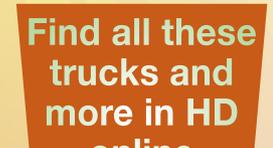
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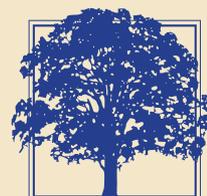
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