

rocky mountain national park colorado

Sheer, snow-mantled peaks of the Front Range frowning down on verdant valleys; a high, rolling plateau carpeted with dwarf tundra plants: these are the hallmarks of Rocky Mountain National Park. Sure-footed bighorns on craggy cliffs; beavers engineering new valley habitats; glistening, snow-fed lakes nestled in the high country; columbines that add a graceful note to half-hidden glades: these are the discoveries that await you in this wilderness park.

The Face Of The Land

Much of Rocky Mountain National Park is underlain by rocks that are more than 1,800 million years old. These ancient rocks are now chiefly gneiss and schist. While still deep within the earth, they were folded and changed by pressure and heat, and invaded from beneath by masses of molten rock which cooled into granite. For a period of time following this, nothing is known of the geologic history of the park. Then, between 530 million and 300 million years ago, the area was invaded by relatively shallow inland seas which alternately spread across and receded from the region. The ancestral Rockies had their beginning about 300 million years ago when this area was uplifted from the seas. Cycles of invasion by seas and renewed uplift of the land followed until the last sea withdrew, about 70 million years ago, never to return. Alternating periods of uplift, volcanic activity, and erosion came next. About 5 to 7 million years ago, forces within the earth initiated a final broad uplift of the Rocky Mountain region. In the park, the overall effect was to raise the mountains as much as 1,200 meters (about 4,000 feet) which brought the summits to their present altitudes above 3,600 meters (nearly 12,000 feet). Deep erosion followed. Shallow valleys eventually became winding V-shaped canyons 200 to 450 meters (about 600 to 1,500 feet) deep.

For the past 2 million years or so, in what is known as the Ice Age, the earth's climate has alternated between cold and warm periods, each lasting many thousand years.

Signs of several periods of glacial activity during the Ice Age are evident throughout the park. The quarrying action of glaciers has left sheer rock faces like those on Longs Peak. Broad, U-shaped valleys denote the passing of giant glaciers through the V-shaped stream-cut valleys. The glacier-deposited ridges, heaps, and scattered masses of unsorted rock debris known as moraines can be clearly seen in Moraine Park. Chains of lakes linked by streams, such as the Gorge Lakes (visible from Trail Ridge Road), now fill depressions that were scoured out by glaciers.

Several small glaciers persist in the park today. They are not remnants of the Ice Age glaciers, but remain from the last expansion of small glaciers, which began to develop in empty depressions (called cirques) about 3,800 years ago. Among the most southerly glaciers in the Rocky Mountains today, they are very sensitive to climatic changes. They are at a bare-subsistence level; but for the present they seem to be holding their own.

Plantlife To Match The Heights

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

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

Above 2,700 meters (9,000 feet) or so, forests of Englemann spruce, subalpine fir, and limber pine take over. Openings in these cool, dark forests produce wildflower gardens of rare beauty and luxuriance. Here the blue Colorado columbine—the State flower—seems to reach its best development. At the upper edges of this zone, where cold winds constantly blow, the trees are twisted and grotesque, often squat and ground-hugging.

Then the trees disappear and you are in alpine tundra—open expanses of dwarf vegetation like that in arctic regions. Here plants hug the ground closely, an adaptation to the desiccating winds, and produce seeds quickly, an adaptation to the brief summers. Grasses, mosses, lichens and many bright-blossoming plants create patterns of endless variety and surprise. Trail Ridge Road snakes for 18 kilometers (11 miles) through this Lilliputian plant world above treeline.

A Varied Wildlife

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

Many small mammals seem always to be around, but larger animals such as wapiti ("elk") and deer are generally seen only just after dawn or in late evening. If you startle a mule deer as you hike the trails, it will bound off characteristically touching all four feet at once.

Bighorn—the living symbol of Rocky Mountain National Park—venture out into Horseshoe Park near Sheep Lake where there is a mineral lick. Please observe them from the parking lot.

Above treeline in the tundra area, the yellowbelly marmot, similar to the woodchuck in appearance, suns itself on the rocks. Another common, but inconspicuous, animal of the tundra is the tiny, rabbitlike pika.

The wild, eerie, yipping song of the coyote is familiar on autumn and winter evenings at Moraine Park and Horseshoe Park.

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

For numbers of species and individuals seen, bird watching is the most rewarding of wildlife-observation activities in the park. Of the more than 150 kinds regularly encountered, the most common are the familiar robin, bluebird, chickadee, and junco. A good field guide, some understanding of the distribution and habits of birds, and good habits of observation on your part should lead to such exciting finds as the golden or bald eagles, white-tailed ptarmigan, Steller's jay, and dipper.

Certain rules have been established to assure your safety and that of the wild animals, and to protect park values. It is unlawful to feed or molest any animal. Hunting is not allowed; in fact, possession of any device designed to discharge missiles and capable of injuring or destroying animal life is prohibited. All natural features—plants, animals, even the rocks—are protected by law. There are no poisonous snakes in the park; and other animals are not apt to harm you if you do not approach them.

To Enjoy The Park

. . . utilize its interpretive programs

The National Park Service encourages you to become acquainted with the park through its guided walks, campfire programs, and other activities. These programs begin in early June and extend into September. Pick up a schedule at one of the information centers. Be sure to see the orientation film at headquarters (open all year), and the exhibits at Alpine Visitor Center (June-October) and Moraine Park Visitor Center (May-October). Roadside exhibits and selfguiding trails also help to interpret the park.

When you leave Rocky Mountain National Park we hope your experience here will go with you as a happy memory. You should also carry away an enhanced appreciation for nature, a sharpened awareness of the interdependence of animals (including man), plants, soils, air, and water, and an understanding that man is inescapably a part of this precariously balanced system.

. . . drive its roads

From the east, Trail Ridge Road takes a winding course as it leaves Estes Park, reaches 3,704 meters (12,183 feet), and then descends to Grand Lake. Take 3 or 4 hours for this 80-kilometer (50-mile) scenic drive, stopping at the overlooks to absorb far-spreading views of Rocky Mountain's peaks and valleys. As you travel along Trail Ridge itself, above tree line, you are on the "roof of the world" with superlative vistas of glacier-carved peaks on every side. For a closer look at the alpine world, walk to Forest Canyon Overlook or take the ½-hour round trip Tundra Trail. Stop at Fall River Pass (3,595 meters, or 11,796 feet) to visit the Alpine Visitor Center. The exhibits will help you understand some of the things you have seen and felt along Trail Ridge Road.

Fall River Road, a section of the original road crossing over the mountains, is open from Horseshoe Park Junction to Fall River Pass. West of Endovalley Picnic Area, the road is one-way, uphill. The gravel road switchbacks up a narrow mountain valley, offering an early-day motoring experience. Because of the sharp switchbacks, trailers and motorized vans are prohibited. A guide booklet explains the history and natural history of this old road.

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

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

. . . fish in its streams

In the mountain streams and lakes are four species of trout: German brown, brook, rainbow, and cutthroat. These cold waters may not produce large fish, but the superb mountain scenery will enhance your experience. Trout populations are maintained by natural reproduction without stocking.

Remember, you must have a Colorado license. Use of live bait is prohibited. You should review special fishing regulations at park headquarters or at the nearest park ranger station before you fish!

. . . go horseback riding

Horses with guides can be hired at two locations inside the park on the east side, or from a number of liveryies outside both the east and west park boundaries.

. . . see it in winter

Winter means snow in the Rockies; and snow means skiing—cross-country skiing in the lower valleys, winter mountaineering in the high country, and downhill skiing at Hidden Valley. Each type of activity has its special thrills; but you must be properly equipped.

The Hidden Valley Winter Use Area is 11 kilometers (7 miles) from the Fall River Entrance and almost 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the Beaver Meadows Entrance. Access roads to Hidden Valley from the east are kept open, and provide the traveler a panorama of the high mountains, majestic in their winter mantle of white.

. . . stay in its campgrounds

Five roadside campgrounds—Moraine Park, Glacier Basin, Aspenglen, Longs Peak, and Timber Creek—provide an enjoyable way to become acquainted with Rocky Mountain. Camping is limited to 3 days at Longs Peak and 7 days at the other sites. In summer, campgrounds usually have been filled to capacity early each day. Organized group campsites, at Aspenglen and Glacier Basin Campgrounds, can be reserved. Longs Peak is restricted to tent camping. There are no electrical, water, or sewer connections in any of the campgrounds. Sewer dump stations are at Moraine Park, Glacier Basin, and Timber Creek Campgrounds. One campground is kept open all year. A reservation system may be in use at some campgrounds at the time of your visit.

Wood fires are permitted in fire grates at campgrounds and picnic areas. A written permit is required for all fires outside those areas. Wood gathering is prohibited in campgrounds and along roadsides.

. . . take its trails and climb its mountains

Day use. More than 480 kilometers (300 miles) of trails provide access to remote sections of the park. Short trails lead to many scenic features. Easy strolls start from the Cub Lake and Fern Lake trail heads. The Bear Lake area is a good starting point for short hikes to other lakes. Visitors on day hikes or horseback trips are requested to sign the trail records provided near the trail heads.

Overnight trips. The backcountry of the park includes all of the park outside of developed and road-accessible areas; it can be reached only by trail or cross-country travel.

A Backcountry Use Permit is required for:

- All overnight trips into the backcountry, summer or winter.
- Technical climbs. All ascents involving the use of technical climbing equipment (ropes, carabiners, pitons, etc.).

This permit can be obtained from any ranger or at any information station during summer. In winter, and generally in late fall and early spring, it is necessary to go to park headquarters or the West District Office to obtain the permit. These permits are issued on a "first come" basis, and no earlier than 24 hours before departure time.

Trail distances. One-way trail distances from nearest approach roads (distances based on nearest half mile):

From Bear Lake to	Kilometers	Miles
Dream Lake	1.6	1
Emerald Lake	2.4	1.5
Lake Haiyaha	3.2	2
Flattop Mountain	7.2	4.5
Grand Lake (Jct. Trail & W. Portal Rd.) via N. Inlet	31.2	19.5
Grand Lake (Jct. Trail & W. Portal Rd.) via Big Meadows	29.6	18.5
Bierstadt Lake	3.2	2
Odessa Lake	6.4	4
Fern Lake	8	5

From Glacier Gorge Jct. to		
Loch Vale	4	2.5
Mills Lake	4	2.5

From Grand Lake to		
Shadow Mountain (East Shore Trail head)	8	5
Cascade Falls (Jct. N. Inlet Trail with W. Portal Rd.)	7.2	4.5
Lake Nokoni (Jct. N. Inlet Trail with W. Portal Rd.)	20	12.5
Lake Nanita (Jct. N. Inlet Trail with W. Portal Rd.)	20.8	13
Adams Falls (East Inlet Trail head)	1	0.5
Lone Pine Lake (East Inlet Trail head)	9	5.5
Lake Verna (East Inlet Trail head)	11	7

From Wild Basin to		
Calypto Cascades	3.2	2
Ouzel Falls	5	3
Bluebird Lake	10.4	6.5
Finch Lake	8	5
Pear Reservoir	11	7
Thunder Lake	11	7
Sandbeach Lake (from Copeland Lake)	6.4	4

From Horseshoe Park to		
Lawn Lake	9.6	6
Crystal Lake	12	7.5
Ypsilon Lake	7.2	4.5
Deer Mountain (from Deer Ridge)	5	3

From Fern Lake Trail Jct. (Moraine Park) to		
The Pool	3.2	2
Fern Lake	6.4	4
Odessa Lake	8	5
Club Lake (from Moraine Park Rd.)	4	2.5

From Longs Peak Campground to		
Eugenia Mine	3.2	2
Chasm Lake	7.2	4.5
Longs Peak	13	8
Twin Sisters (from Colo. 7)	5.6	3.5

From Estes Park to		
Gem Lake (from Devils Gulch Rd.)	3.2	2

From Phantom Valley Parking Area to		
Lulu City site	5	3
La Poudre Pass	11	7
Thunder Pass	9.6	6

Safety Precautions

Hiking and climbing precautions. Accidents in the mountains, even minor ones, may have serious or fatal consequences. Severe storms come quickly, even in summer, with attendant exposure to low temperatures, rain, snow, sleet, and lightning. All hikers and climbers should observe the following precautions:

Never climb alone. Register before and after the climb. Avoid steep snowfields. Don't over-extend your physical ability. Start early. Avoid open high ridges and peaks during lightning. Turn back in adverse weather. Move cautiously on steep or rocky areas. Children should be warned not to run downhill.

Pets are not allowed on trails or in areas not accessible to automobiles. In areas where they are permitted, they must be kept on a leash.

Vehicles are not allowed on trails or off the roads.

From Mountain Men To Naturalists

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

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

In the early 1900's, when the automobile began to prove practical as a means of travel, many people urged consideration of a plan to have the area set aside as a national park. The major force behind the idea was one man—Enos Mills, naturalist, writer, conservationist, and philosopher. His years of hard work were rewarded when he participated in the dedication ceremonies for Rocky Mountain National Park on September 4, 1915.



Enos A. Mills (left) served as chairman at the dedication of Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915. Mills, a nationally known writer, lecturer, and naturalist, devoted much of his life to the campaign for the park. With Mills were Rep. Edward T. Taylor (third from left) and Colorado Gov. George A. Carlson (right). Taylor, a skilled politician, shepherded the park bill past its final congressional hurdles.

How To Reach Rocky Mountain

The nearest major rail, air, and busline terminals are at Denver, 105 kilometers (65 miles) from Estes Park, and at Cheyenne, Wyo., 146 kilometers (91 miles) distant.

Gray Line Tours makes connections with transcontinental airlines, railroads, and buslines at Denver. You can obtain further information from this company at P.O. Box 1977, Denver, CO 80202, or by telephoning 303-825-8201.

Accommodations

There are no overnight accommodations under Government supervision in the park. A few privately owned accommodations are available.

For information about facilities adjacent to the park, write to the chamber of commerce at either Estes Park, CO 80517, or Grand Lake, CO 80447.

Forest Fire Management Program

BE CAREFUL WITH FIRE. Fires caused by man present a major threat to the park's vegetation. Lightning-caused forest fires, however, are a natural and necessary part of forest life. Areas subject to natural cycles of burning and regrowth contain mixed stands of both young and old trees. Rocky Mountain National Park was established in part to preserve the beautiful mixed forest of aspens, pines, spruce, and firs which characterize the area. Lightning-caused forest fires are thus being allowed to burn themselves out, providing they do not endanger human life and property.

We're Joining The Metric World

The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become acquainted with the metric system and to improve interpretation for park visitors from other nations.

Administration

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

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK



SAFETY IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS
SEE SAFETY MESSAGE ON OTHER SIDE

- Historic Site
- Scenic Overlook
- Paved Road
- Light-Duty Road
- Dirt Road
- Trail (Interpretive)
- Environmental Study Area
- Campground
- Ranger Station
- Launching Ramp
- Visitor Center
- Livery
- Picnic Area

0 1 2 3 MILES
0 1 2 3 4 5 KILOMETERS

3281 1000 FEET METERS

ALTITUDES ARE IN FEET, AND DISTANCES ARE IN MILES.
ONE FOOT IS 0.3048 METERS, 1 MILE IS 1.6093 KILOMETERS.

