Winter in Rock Creek Park

WINTER IS NOT FOR EVERYONE. MANY PEOPLE TRAVEL TO warmer climates seeking milder temperatures and more sunshine during the winter months. For the rest of us, winter provides an opportunity to appreciate nature in all of her seasonal splendor. In Washington D.C., specifically Rock Creek Park, winter is a chance to see the landscape around us without the camouflage of foliage. Nature reveals Rock Creek Park’s best kept secrets in the winter.

When it snows, animal tracks are seen on freshly fallen precipitation. To the exploring spirit, these tracks reveal the path to dens and nests that uncover the homes of park residents who are often seen during other seasons.

The land in winter is exposed - not a full exposure but a tantalizing glint revealing our history and heritage. The Rock Creek Valley shows off the land that once served as host to local farms, mills, homesteads, Native American quarries, and a Civil War battle. The trained eye can see the land much like our ancestors and see its past use and the need for future preservation.

On a cold windy day, a walk in the forest provides the opportunity to listen to the sounds of the nation’s capital: automobiles, airplanes, and other machinery that is the life blood of commerce and industry. This offers visitors a chance to think unobstructed by the sounds of the nation’s capital.

At the end of the day when you are snuggled on your couch sipping hot chocolate, the visions and sounds of your environment fill your意识 and consciousness.

Welcome from the Superintendent

Rock Creek Park is a unique urban oasis in our nation’s capital. It offers visitors the opportunity to relax and reflect. It is a respite from the everyday. Whether you spent your childhood wandering through these woods or this is your first visit to the park, you will find something that brings a smile to your face and peace to your heart.

Hiking and biking on the park trails are one of the more popular recreational activities. Some of these trails were originally designed for horseback riding and many of them also offer scenic views of the forest and the creek. Rock Creek Park also has much to offer if you are interested in history. Wander through the civil war sites at Fort DeRussey and Fort Stevens (the only Washington fort that saw battle during the civil war), or visit one of the oldest standing structure in the District of Columbia, the Old Stone House in Georgetown.

Rock Creek Park is part of the National Park Service and, like all national parks, our mission is to preserve our natural and cultural resources not just for today but for generations to follow. You can help us protect these areas by enjoying your experiences in the park, by taking only pictures and leaving only footprints. Enjoy the respite of Rock Creek Park.

Sincerely,
Adrienne A. Coleman
Superintendent

Visitor Information...2
Public Program...3
Contact Information...3
Memorable Trees of Rock Creek Park...4
Touring African-American History

WHETHER TRAVELING ALONG THE ROADWAYS or hiking along the trails, the echoes of African-American history and the individual stories of determination, adversity, and success resound throughout Rock Creek Park. From the time of slavery, through the Civil War, to the Civil Rights Movement, these stories are an integral part of the historic fabric of the park.

Considered as part of the southern portion of the United States, Washington, D.C., was a slave-owning community. The enslaved Africans in Washington primarily were used for both hard labor and domesticated chores. One enslaved African, known as Tabitha, purchased her and her infant child’s freedom from Mary Smith Brumley in the 1850s for the sum of $200. For other slaves it would take a act of the Federal government and a Civil War to gain their freedom.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Washington, D.C., hastily created over 150 earthwork fortifications and batteries to defend the city. Both free blacks and slaves were used in the forts construction to make the federal city impregnable. From attack. Elizabeth Thomas, a free black woman who owned the land where Fort Stevens was built, was promised to have her land returned to her and to be financially compensated for her loss at the end of the war. Sadly, Ms. Thomas’ land was never returned to her. After many decades, her family was financially compensated for the use of her land.

In 1862, with the passage of the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, all enslaved Africans in Washington, D.C., and Georgetown were freed. Slave owners, such as the Peirce family who owned large tracts of land in Rock Creek Valley, were financially compensated for the loss of their “property.” Freedman villages sprouted throughout Washington. With close inspection, one can still see the foundations of the community that was once located at Fort Reno. Around the same time, at Fort Stevens, a young runaway slave known only as “Billy” found safety and refuge inside the fort. Billy served as a servant to several of the soldiers of Fort Stevens and even considered enlisting into Washington, D.C.’s black regiments. Unfortunately, it is not known if Billy ever enlisted to fight the war to end slavery.

At the end of the Civil War, small communities grew and flourished around Rock Creek. The community of Herring Hill, which dates back to the Colonial days, grew, prospered, and became a self-sufficient, self-sustaining neighborhood. Looking out from Herring Hill onto the Rock Creek Parkway, one can imagine the scores of families utilizing the creek.

With the creation of Rock Creek Park in 1890, city residents and visitors of all nationalities flocked to the park to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life. During the early 1900s, Hattie Sewell, an excellent cook and entrepreneur, was granted a lease to use old Peirce Mill as a teahouse. Stripped of its water wheel and inner mechanisms, visitors would sit in the mill and feast on the delicious sandwiches and refreshing drinks that Ms. Sewell offered. However, due to racial prejudice of park neighbors against Ms. Sewell’s African heritage, her lease was not renewed.

As the nation advanced into the mid-twentieth century, racial equality and desegregation issues became prominent social banners. Following in the footsteps of Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial, other individuals and groups used public lands for rallies, sit-ins, and protests. Meridian Hill Park was one of the places used to bring solidarity and a guiding light through the storm of racial inequality. Over forty years later, many locals in the neighborhood of Meridian Hill Park still regard the park as “Malcolm X Park” in acknowledgement of the slain civil rights leader.

These are just several examples of African-American contributions to the cultural history of Rock Creek Park. The stories of African-Americans and their experiences in Rock Creek Park are boundless, thought-provoking, and inspiring.

Special Events to Celebrate African-American History Month

Night Sky to Freedom
4:00 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays
Park Headquarters
In honor of African-American History Month, learn how enslaved people on the Underground Railroad used the night sky as a compass to reach freedom. Ages 7 and older.

Black Georgetown Walks
Please contact Nature Center for times.
Old Stone House
Explore the stories of sacrifice, adversity, and success on this ranger-led tour of historic Herring Hill, a Georgetown neighborhood that holds reminders of the vibrant African-American community that thrived in the 19th century. Ages 8 and older.


Visitor Information

Hours of Operation
Nature Center & Planetarium
The Nature Center is open Wednesday - Sunday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
The Planetarium is open only during show times. Show time for the planetarium is Wednesday at 4:00 p.m., Saturday at 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. and Sunday at 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Peirce Mill
Peirce Mill is currently closed due to renovations and repairs. Peirce Barn, next to the Mill, is serving as a Visitor Contact Station and Bookstore. The Peirce Barn is open Saturday and Sunday from Noon to 4:00 p.m.

Old Stone House
The Old Stone House is located at 3051 M Street in Georgetown. Eastern National Bookstore, located in the front room of the Old Stone House, is open every day 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. The Old Stone House is open to the public for tours Wednesday to Sunday from Noon to 5:00 p.m. For groups larger than 10, please call for reservations.

Entrance Fees
General Admission to Rock Creek Park is FREE!

Park Regulations
Camping is prohibited within all park areas. All park areas are closed to the viewing of wildlife with an artificial light.
All park areas are closed to swimming, wading, and bathing.
Removing or damaging natural or cultural resources is prohibited. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited from all park areas. Fires permitted only in grills or fireplaces; visitors may bring own grill and fuel in designated picnic areas only.
Parking allowed only in designated parking areas.
Washing vehicles within Rock Creek Park is prohibited.
Dogs must be on leash within park areas.

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The Places of Rock Creek: Meridian Hill

Meridian Hill Park is located in northwest Washington, D.C., and is bordered by 16th, Euclid, 15th, and W Streets. This 12-acre Renaissance and Italian garden-inspired site was designated a National Historic Landmark in the Designed Landscape category in 1994, as “an outstanding accomplishment of early 20th-century Neoclassic park design in the United States.”

Construction of the park began in 1914, but was not finished until 1936. In 1913 the grounds were given to the National Park Service. However, the park’s history predates its construction. In 1809, John Porter erected a mansion on the grounds and called it “Meridian Hill” because it was on the exact longitude of the original District of Columbia milestone marker. It was to this mansion that John Quincy Adams moved when he left the White House in 1825. During the years of the Civil War, Union troops encamped on the park grounds.

Today while visiting the park, you can see a variety of statues and a beautiful European-style landscape. The large cascading fountain is one of the largest fountains in North America. You can also view the memorial to President James Buchanan and the statues of Dante, considered one of the greatest historical fiction writers, Joan of Arc, and Serenity.

Teachers Gather In Rock Creek Park

On Saturday September 16th, metropolitan area high school science teachers participated in the very first “Rock Creek: A Herring Highway” teacher workshop. This workshop debuted the new module especially created for Rock Creek Park in the high school education program, Bridging the Watershed. The River Herring Teacher Workshop was designed with teachers in mind, to assist park rangers in keeping Rock Creek healthy. The goal was to help the students learn how to fish and see a live fish. Teachers Gather In Rock Creek Park while learning about the natural and cultural resources of Rock Creek Park.

The Respite
Join Us in Sharing Your “Memorable Trees of Rock Creek Park”

Rock Creek Park invites you to partake in the quest of celebrating the beauty of the park’s natural elements—specifically, trees—through the expression of art. So grab your camera, or paint brushes, pencils, and canvas and head out into the park! Use your artistic talent to capture the beauty and essence of Rock Creek Park trees that are meaningful to you. We’re not just looking for the largest tree(s), but also those trees that are noteworthy for their beauty, age, history, community significance, or for any other reason that is relevant to the artist.

Send us your framed photographs, paintings, or drawings of the tree(s) along with an essay of 300 words or less telling why the selected tree(s) have significant meaning for you. Your framed submission should be no larger than 18” x 24”.

Your choice of trees can be from Rock Creek Park proper or any of the other areas in Washington, D.C., administered by Rock Creek Park, including Palisades Park, Glover Archbold Park, Whitehaven Park, Battery Kemble Park, Fort Reno Park, Soapstone Valley Park, Little Forest Park, Fort Stevens Park, Battle Ground National Cemetery, Meridian Hill Park, Old Stone House, Francis Scott Key Memorial, Dumbarton Oaks, Park, Montrose Park, Normanstone Parkway, Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Klingle Valley Park, Melvin Hazen Park, Bryce Park, Fort Bayard Park, Fort Slocum Park, or Fort Totten Park.

This exhibit is open to visitors of all ages. Entries must be hand delivered to the Rock Creek Park Nature Center and Planetarium by close of business March 16, 2008.

Visitors whose images are chosen from the entries will be invited to attend the opening exhibit and reception the evening of April 6, 2008.

All visitors whose images are chosen will receive a copy of Remarkable Trees of the World by Thomas Pakenham.

All submitted images and essays can be picked up by participants at the Rock Creek Park Nature Center and Planetarium after July 5, 2008.

For more information, visit our website: www.nps.gov/rocr or call (202) 895-6070.