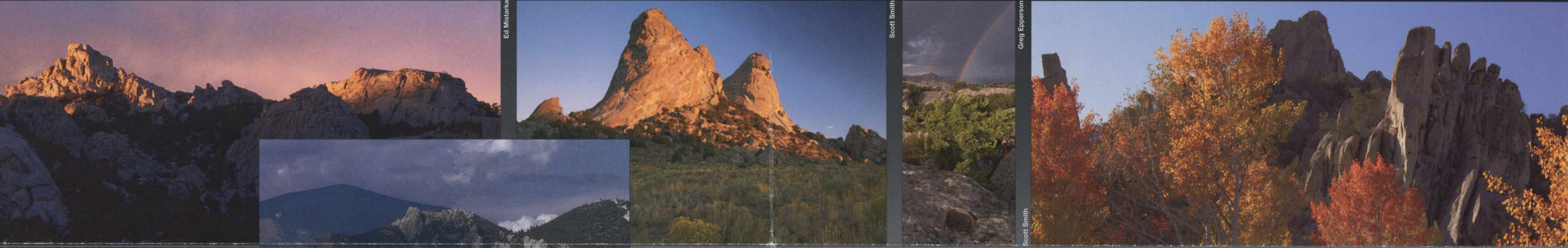


# City of Rocks

City of Rocks National Reserve  
Idaho

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation

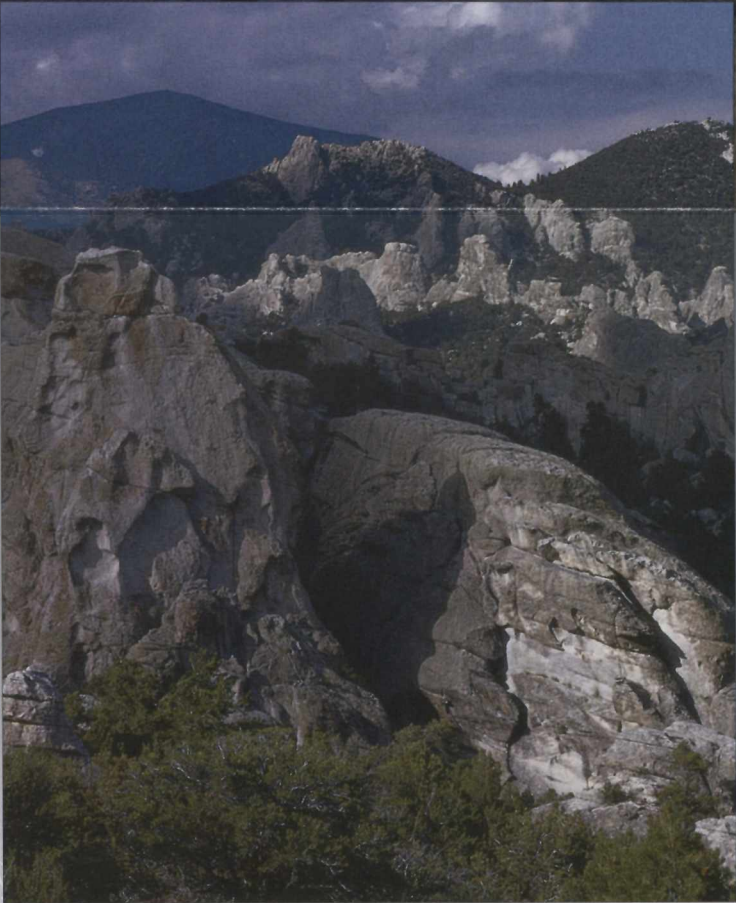
## Official Map and Guide



Dusk's shadows fashion a goblin city.

### Like a Dismantled City

"We encamped at the city of the rocks, a noted place from the granite rocks rising abruptly out of the ground," wrote James Wilkins in 1849. "They are in a romantic valley clustered together, which gives them the appearance of a city." Wilkins was among the first wagon travelers to fix the name City of Rocks to what looked like "a dismantled, rock-built city of the Stone Age." California Trail pioneers were leaving civilization as they knew it in the East for new lives in the



Twin sisters guard the City's south exit.

Towering granite shapes resemble a silent city, which is what James F. Wilkins named this area in 1849. A looming backdrop, Independence Mountain, rises to 10,339 feet of elevation.

Limber pines.

West. Some wrote their names in axle grease on rock faces, and their signatures can be seen today. No doubt thirsty on this northern edge of the Great Basin Desert, one emigrant saw the distant rocks in August like "water thrown up into the air from numerous artificial hydrants." Beginning in 1843, City of Rocks was a landmark for emigrants on the California Trail and Salt Lake Alternate Trail and later on freight routes and the Kelton, Utah, to Boise, Idaho, stage route. The area's historical and geologi-

Fall dyes aspen leaves yellow-golds and bright orange-reds.

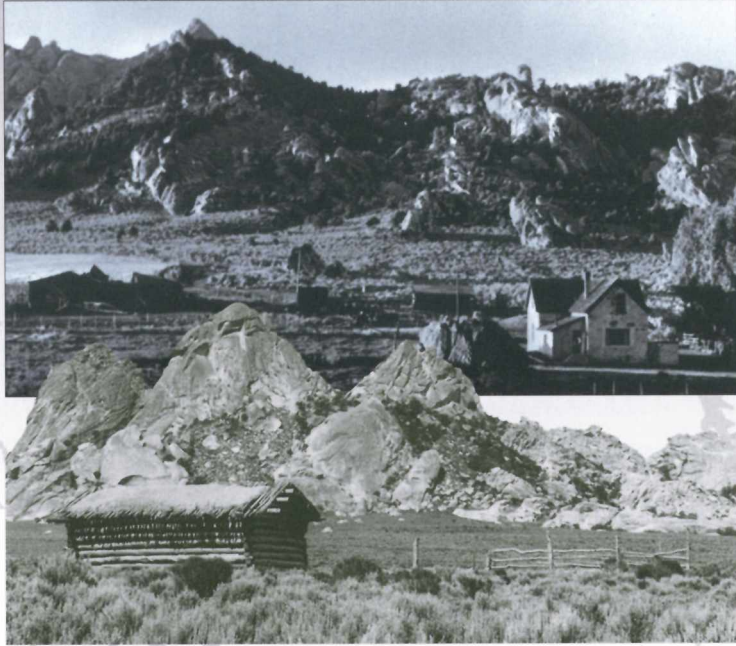
cal values, scenery, and opportunities for recreation led to its designation as City of Rocks National Reserve in 1988. This unit of the National Park System is managed cooperatively by the National Park Service and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, who invite you to enjoy the wonders of the City of Rocks.



Quartzite

## Nature and Culture Comingled

Shoshone-Bannock Indians hunted in the City of Rocks area and gathered nuts of the pinyon pine trees. The return of horses to the Americas in the 16th century and swelling European immigration disrupted the Shoshone-Bannock homelands and way of life. Indians grew to resent the intruders but could do little to stop them. Most emigrants on the California Trail saw no Indians, but some of their journals record smoke signals rising from high hills and the surrounding mountains. Peter Skene Ogden and his Snake River brigade of beaver trappers were the first non-Indians to note the City of Rocks, in 1826. Having few beaver, the area was ignored until growing summer streams of wagons flowed through starting in 1843.



William E. Tracey began building his Circle Creek Ranch house in 1896 (top photo). A 1967 fire gutted it. Samuel Mikesell homesteaded here in the early 1900s (lower photo). In the 1920s area wells went dry, and homesteads were abandoned. Early travelers wrote in axle grease on Signature Rock (background photo.)

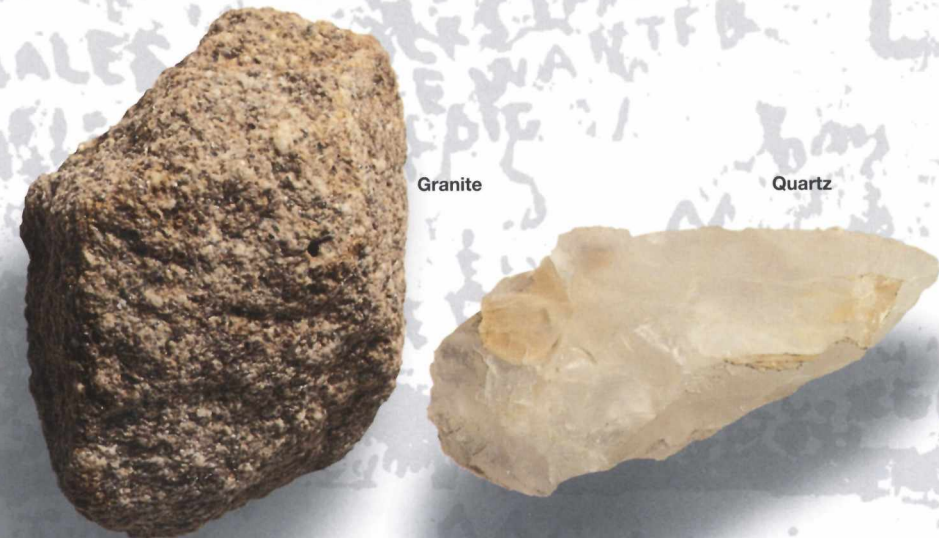
Early emigrant groups were guided by experienced mountain men such as Joseph B. Chiles and Joseph R. Walker. Later wagon parties followed the trails themselves, perhaps with the help of diary accounts of previous emigrants. City of Rocks marked both progress west for the emigrants and, for their loaded wagons, a mountain passage over nearby Granite Pass. By 1846, emigrants headed for Oregon's Willamette Valley also used this route as part of the Applegate Trail. In 1848, the Mormon Battalion opened the trail from Granite Pass via Emigrant Canyon to Salt Lake. In 1852, some 52,000 people passed through City of Rocks on the way to California goldfields. When the trails opened in the 1840s, Granite Pass

was in Mexico and less than a mile from Oregon Territory, which included the City of Rocks. After 1850 the area became part of Utah Territory, but the 1872 Idaho-Utah boundary survey placed City of Rocks in Idaho Territory. With completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the overland wagon routes began to pass into history. Wagons saw continued use instead on regional supply routes that spread out from the railroad lines. John Halley's stage route connected the railroad at Kelton, Utah, with Idaho's mining hub of Boise and supplied the early economic development of Idaho, which won statehood in 1890. The Kelton stage route passed through City of Rocks, with a stage station set up near the junction of

the old California Trail and the Salt Lake Alternate. Settlers began to homestead the City of Rocks area in the late 1800s. Dryland farming declined here during the drought years of the 1920s and 1930s, but ranching survived. Livestock grazing began with early wagon use of the area in the mid-1800s and continues today.

## Geology

More like mother and daughter than siblings, the Twin Sisters of City of Rocks are made up of different rocks. The difference helps explain how the City of Rocks landscape came to be. The darker sister is made of rock in a formation that geologists call the Green River Complex. It is 2.5 billion years old and is some of the oldest rock in the Lower 48 states. The lighter sister is made of rock in a far younger formation that geologists call the Almo Pluton. It is 25 million years old. Both formations began as molten matter



in the Earth's crust. Eventually the Almo Pluton was thrust up through the Green River Complex, while both formations still lay beneath the Earth's surface and other layers of rock. As time passed, the overlying rocks and the formations beneath them cracked. Along the cracks and fissures erosion took place more rapidly and exposed the rocks of the Almo Pluton and Green River Complex. The exposed rocks were then shaped by the forces of erosion. In weathering, the tops of rocks are dissolved by rainwater; and minerals,

such as iron oxide, are redeposited to form crust-like caps. These caps are more resistant to weathering than the underlying rock, and this causes the formation of spires and pinnacles. When the caps erode, the inner rock can be molded by erosion into the many caves, arches, bath tubs, and hollow boulders seen at City of Rocks. On the sides of spires water seeps into cracks and frost wedging occurs. When the water freezes it expands and can crack great slabs off the rock. This process already has

removed some of the layers of rock bearing 150-year-old signatures left by the pioneers. Today, many people see animals, faces, or buildings in the shapes of these rock formations. Only your imagination limits what you see in the City of Rocks.



Feldspar and mica (darker)

Background photo of signatures: Idaho Statesman collection, Boise State University Library.



On the Cairo Route.

Inner City boulders attract climbers to meadows of Rocky Mountain iris.

## Recreation in the Pioneers' Path

City of Rocks offers scenic walks near the historic California Trail and opportunities for wildlife watching, photography, world-class technical rock climbing, and picnicking and camping where children can frolic beneath the rock formations.

At City of Rocks the range of elevations in a compact area combines with other factors to create varied patterns of vegetation and wildlife habitat. At high elevations the forests are of lodgepole pine, limber pine, and Douglas fir. Middle elevation forests are of quaking aspen, mountain mahogany, and cottonwood. Sagebrush, pinyon pines, and juniper dominate lower elevations. The Reserve boasts Idaho's tallest pinyon pines, at more than 55 feet. The trees' nuts provide important proteins and fats for wildlife. Spring and summer displays of wildflowers can be spectacular. More than 450 plant species have been recorded in the Reserve.

Buffalo once roamed here but now elk and mule deer are the largest mammals. The deer are hunted by mountain lions, and coyotes scavenge deer carcasses. Other mammals include badgers, bobcats, porcupines, ground squirrels, and bats. The Reserve is part of Idaho's Minidoka Bird Refuge. Just a few of the birds here are eagles, falcons, vultures, hawks, hummingbirds, jays,

sparrows, doves, and Idaho's state bird, the mountain bluebird. The only poisonous snakes found in the Reserve are rattlesnakes, at lower elevations. Other reptiles include the sand lizard, watersnake, blowsnake, and rubber boa. All plants and animals are protected by law; do not disturb them.

### Rock Climbing

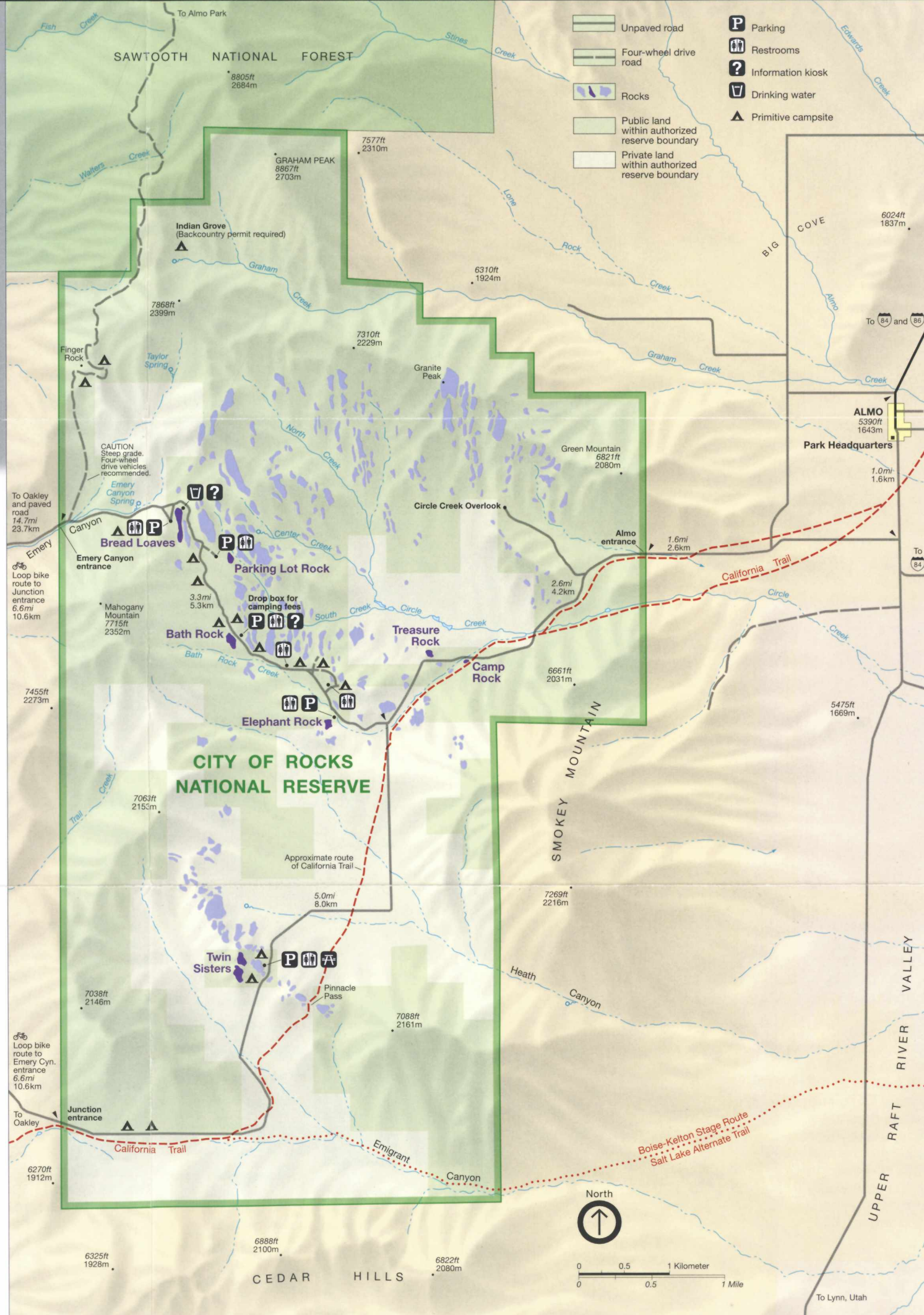
City of Rocks rivals Yosemite National Park as a western favorite for North American technical rock climbers. International climbers come to the Reserve to climb on Rabbit Rock, Morning Glory Spire, and Bread Loaves. The degree-of-difficulty scale for rock climbing here runs from least difficult at 5.0 to 5.10, most difficult. City of Rocks contains a great number and variety of 5.10 climbs. Do not climb unless you have training and experience. Serious accidents can occur when rock scrambling. All climbers should stop at Reserve headquarters for regulations and current conditions.

### Information

For more information contact: City of Rocks National Reserve, P.O. Box 169, Almo, ID 83312-0169; 208-824-5519; or visit us at [www.nps.gov/ciro](http://www.nps.gov/ciro) on the Internet. Reserve headquarters is located in a historic building in Almo; see map at right. Stop at headquarters for current information on weather, road conditions, camping, climbing, and any restrictions that may be in effect.

### Weather

City of Rocks National Reserve lies in southern Idaho on the northern edge of the Great Basin, but its streams flow into the Snake River Drainage. Outdoor recreation can be pleasant from April through October. Summers are generally dry: the 10 to 15 inches of annual precipitation fall mostly in winter and spring. Summer temperatures range wildly: the temperatures can approach freezing in July and August, but midday summer temperatures can hit 100° F. Those months also see afternoon thunder showers. Take precautions also for the very intense sunshine at high elevations.



On Heartbreaker Wall.

### Hiking and Camping

City of Rocks offers easy landscapes for hiking among the very rocks that stirred the imaginations of emigrants. Always carry water on longer hikes and watch the weather. Park elevations range from about 5,500 feet to 8,867 feet on top of Graham Peak. If you have physical limitations, check with your physician before exerting yourself. Hiking opportunities abound, but please stay on designated trails.

Camping is permitted only in designated primitive sites. Please use only a marked campsite and the established fire grill or grate. Cutting of trees and shrubs and the removal of vegetation are prohibited. Use a camp stove. Camping fees and regulations are enforced. There are no developed campground hookups. Backcountry use permits are required for all overnight use of the backcountry. They are available at Reserve headquarters in Almo.

### Services and Facilities

Meals, overnight lodging, gasoline, and groceries are available in nearby communities. Reserve facilities are primitive, but restrooms are located throughout. Potable water is available at the hand pump well at the summit of Emery Canyon Road, less than a mile above Bath Rock. This water is for drinking purposes; please help us keep the water source safe

for all. Any other water in the Reserve should be treated properly for drinking—by boiling, chemicals, or adequate filtration—before use. In case of an accident or emergency, contact the Reserve headquarters or dial 911. Food supplies, pay phones, and gasoline are available at Almo and Oakley.

### Drive Safely

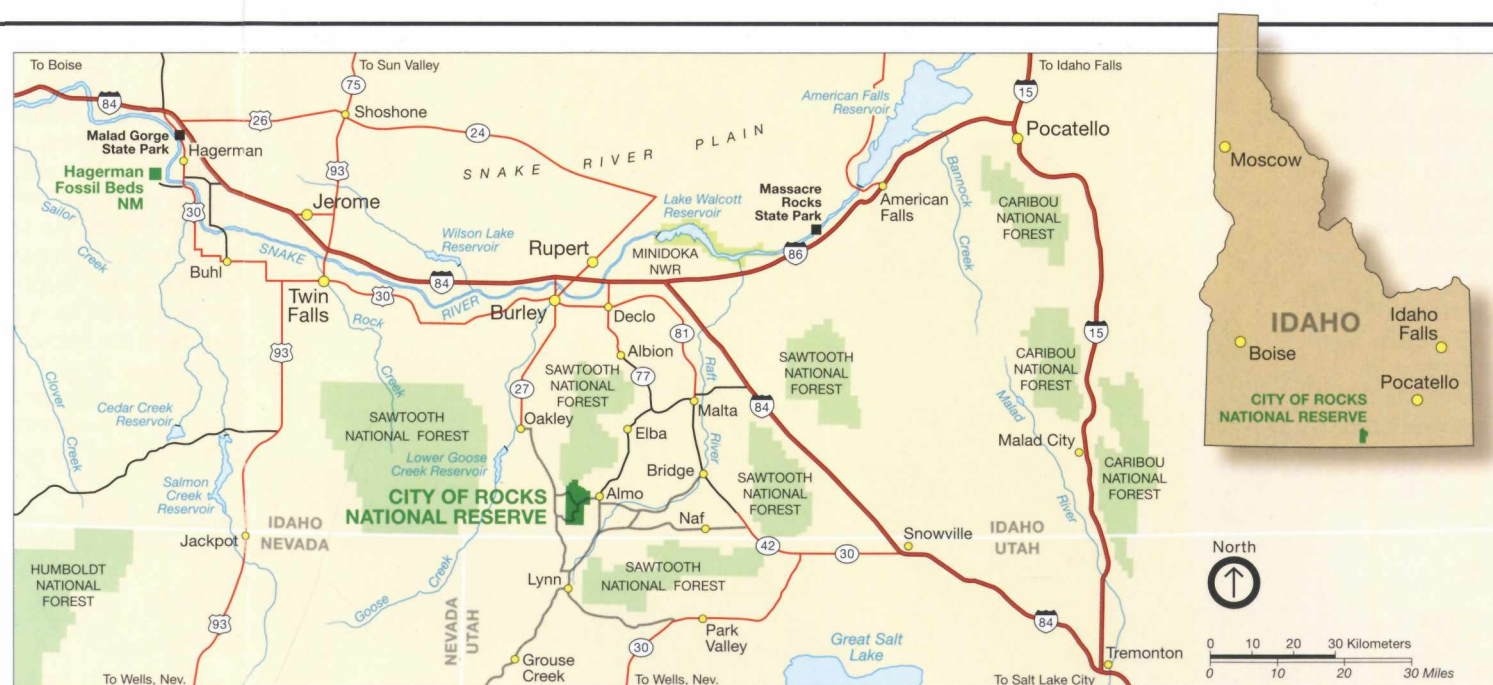
The Reserve speed limit is 35 m.p.h. except where posted

otherwise. Be wary of blind and sharp corners on the gravel roads. Drive defensively; you may come upon mountain bikers, hikers, or cattle drives using Reserve roads in spring and fall. Generally the person herding the cows will make a corridor through the herd and escort you through.

### Hunting

Much of the Reserve is private land and discharging or shooting

firearms in part of the Reserve is prohibited. Where hunting is allowed, seasons and bag limits are regulated by the Idaho Fish and Game Department. A hunting license and game tag must be with the hunter at all times. Before hunting, contact the Idaho Fish and Game Department for information on types of hunts, location maps, seasons, and current regulations.



### Getting Here

From Boise and the west take Interstate 84 to the Declo exit south to Idaho Route 77 to Albion, Elba, and Almo. From Pocatello and Idaho Falls, take Interstates 86 and 84 to the Declo exit south to Almo. From Salt Lake City take Interstate 84 to north of Snowville and then head west toward Malta, Elba, and Almo. There is a seasonal route through Oakley via Route 27.