Devils Postpile

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
California



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Outstanding Formation of Columnar Basalt



NPS

Left: As basalt lava erupts from volcanic vents and cools, it shrinks and then cracks. Sometimes vertical columns will form. These well-developed columns formed as homogenous lava cooled at a uniform rate.

Right: Column tops were polished by past glaciers, as this photo shows. The Devils Postpile columns have from three to seven sides.

Above: The 60-foot-high sheer wall was exposed during the last glaciation.



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Welcome to Devils Postpile

Devils Postpile National Monument rests along the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River on the Sierra Nevada's western slope (elevation 7,560 feet). The 798-acre monument established in 1911 preserves the columnar basalt formation, Devils Postpile, and 101-foot Rainbow Falls. To see these features a moderate ½-mile walk is necessary.

Originally part of Yosemite National Park, the monument lost its park protection in the early 1900s due to pressure from local mining interests. Soon they planned to dynamite the postpile to make a rock dam on the river. This threatened not only the postpile and falls but this vital watershed. Activists persuaded President Taft to give Devils Postpile and Rainbow Falls federal protection again. Congress included 747 acres of the monument in the Ansel Adams Wilderness in 1984. Other important features in the monument include the John Muir and Pacific Crest trails.

Beauty From Fire and Ice

First a Volcanic Event Basalt lava erupted two miles upstream from today's postpile fewer than 100,000 years ago. As the lava cooled it contracted and cracked, forming the columns of Devils Postpile. The symmetrical vertical and hexagonal columns formed because this particular eruption provided ideal conditions: the lava cooled slowly and its mineral composition was consistent.

Then a Glacial Event Some 20,000 to 12,000 years ago a glacier flowed down the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River and overrode the fractured mass of lava. The moving ice carved away one side of the postpile, exposing a sheer wall of columns 60 feet high. Erosion and earthquakes later felled many columns that now lie fragmented on the talus slope below the postpile.

Hiking atop Devils Postpile reveals a cross section of glacially polished columns that look like floor tiles *(above)*—with parallel grooves cut in them by rock-studded glacial ice.

Rainbow Falls

The Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River plunges 101 feet over a cliff of volcanic rock. When the sun is overhead on a clear day, rainbows sparkle in the mist rising from rocks below the falls.

Glaciers widened the canyon but did not create Rainbow Falls. The two layers of volcanic rock you see in the cliffs are similar but with an important difference. They are the same lava but cooled at different rates. On top is the harder, more erosion-resistant rock. Below is the softer, less erosion-resistant rock. Water cascading over the falls wears away the lower, softer rock faster, undercutting the stronger rock and creating an alcove beneath it. As the stronger rock loses support, it caves in and breaks apart—becoming boulders and rock debris at the bottom of the falls.



Rainbow Falls

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Exploring Devils Postpile

Getting Here From U.S. 395 go 10 miles west on Calif. 203 through Mammoth Lakes to Minaret Summit; go seven miles on the paved, narrow mountain road to the monument. It is usually open mid-June to mid-October; closed in winter. Contact the park for details.

Shuttle Bus From mid-June into September day-use visitors to Devils Postpile and Reds Meadow *must ride the shuttle bus (large map below)*. Buy tickets and board buses at Mammoth Mountain. For rates call 760-934-2289.

Ranger Station Park rangers give interpretive programs, answer questions, help plan your visit, and enforce regulations.

Accommodations/Services Mammoth Lakes, Lee Vining, Bishop, or Reds Meadow Resort offer lodging, groceries, horses, and services.

Camping A 21-site campground near the ranger station is open from mid-June to early October, weather permitting. Bear-proof food storage lockers are provided *(see bear warning)*. No reservations, no hookups, and no showers.





Belding ground squirrel



Shooting star

BOTH PHOTOS: ©DENNIS FLAHERTY

Hiking Trails See trail distances on map. You can hike west on the King Creek Trail or north or south on the John Muir and Pacific Crest trails. The 211-mile-long John Muir Trail links Yosemite and Sequoia/Kings Canyon national parks, with access at Rainbow Falls trailhead and the ranger station. The Pacific Crest Trail goes from Canada to Mexico. For wilderness permits contact Inyo National Forest: 760-873-2485. *Backpackers must use the shuttle—racks hold backpacks—or walk. (See bear warning.)*

Fishing/Hunting Fishing in the monument requires a California fishing license for persons age 16 or older. Hunting is prohibited.

Pets Pets must be leashed and under direct physical control at all times.

Bicycles Bicycles are permitted on roads but prohibited on all trails or cross-country.

Safety/Regulations • Stay on designated trails. • Stay back from cliff and gorge edges; falls can be fatal. • Do not remove or disturb plants, rocks, or animals; all are protected by federal law. • Snowmobiling is prohibited.

Bear Warning Bears live here. Federal law requires proper food storage. Ask for details.

More Information
Devils Postpile National Monument
P.O. Box 3999
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546
760-934-2289
www.nps.gov/depo

Devils Postpile National Monument is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

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One-way trail distances (in miles)

Ranger Station to:

Devils Postpile	0.4
Rainbow Falls	2.5
Minaret Falls	1.5
Reds Meadow Campground	1.2
Rainbow Falls—then to Shuttle Bus Stop at Rainbow Falls Trailhead	3.8

Rainbow Falls Trailhead to:

Rainbow Falls	1.3

Round-trip trail distances (in miles)

Ranger Station–Devils Postpile	0.8
Ranger Station–Rainbow Falls	5.0
Rainbow Falls Trailhead–Rainbow Falls	2.6

- Shuttle bus stop
- Ranger station
- Telephone
- Pack station
- Food service
- Campground
- Store
- Shuttle bus route/ Fee road
- Unpaved road
- John Muir and Pacific Crest trails
- Other hiking trails
- National Park Service property
- U.S. Forest Service property

Two federal agencies work as partners to manage public lands in this area. The National Park Service oversees the 798-acre Devils Postpile National Monument, while the U.S. Forest Service manages the lands surrounding the monument. Both agencies are also responsible for wilderness areas. Monuments, forests, and wilderness areas may have different rules that reflect their different goals. Check with a ranger to find out what activities are permitted in different areas.