



# Foundation Document Overview

## Bryce Canyon National Park

Utah

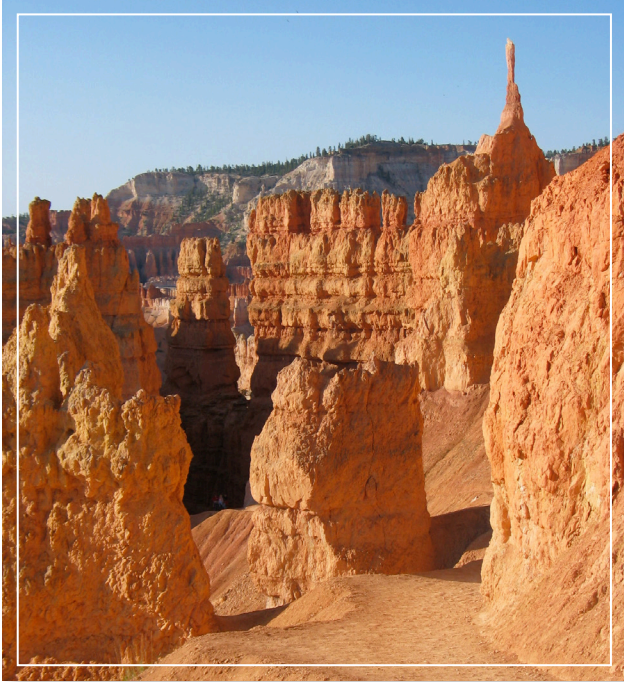


### Contact Information

For more information about the *Bryce Canyon National Park Foundation Document*, contact: [brca\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:brca_superintendent@nps.gov) or (435) 834-5322 or write to: Superintendent, Bryce Canyon National Park, Hwy 63, Bryce Canyon, UT 84764



## Purpose



*BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK protects and conserves resources integral to a landscape of unusual scenic beauty exemplified by highly colored and fantastically eroded geological features, including rock fins and spires, for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Bryce Canyon National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Bryce Canyon National Park showcases one of the largest and most colorful concentrations of erosional geologic features in the world, including hoodoos, fins, windows, fluted cliffs, bridges, arches, and grottoes. This unusual landscape within the Claron Formation is created by a unique combination of natural processes, location, rock properties, and climate.
- The location of the park at the summit of the Grand Staircase, surrounded by a system of nationally protected lands, and combined with the exceptional clarity of the air and natural quiet, provides a multisensory experience. The outstanding views often extend more than 100 miles and begin with the colorful and intricately carved Claron Formation and include panoramic vistas of cliffs, canyons, and forested landscapes.
- With a nearly pristine night sky, thousands of stars shine brightly at Bryce Canyon National Park. As one of the darkest publicly accessible places in North America, the Milky Way Galaxy can be viewed from horizon to horizon. The clear, clean air and a lack of artificial light in the park and the region are essential to this unparalleled nighttime experience. The darkness is also an important resource for nocturnal wildlife.
- Cultural resources encompassing thousands of years of human use and experience are found throughout Bryce Canyon National Park. These resources are important to the identity of indigenous people of the Colorado Plateau and the living descendants of 19th-century pioneers. In addition, many of the historical resources of the park are associated with the emergence of tourism in the early 20th century, and are linked to the regional development of other “Grand Circle” national parks.
- Bryce Canyon National Park is a scientist’s laboratory. Its geophysical setting, range in elevation through three climatic zones, and dynamic terrain provide for study of diverse biological and physical processes and resources important to the understanding and management of Colorado Plateau environments of the past, present, and future.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Geologic Features**
- **Dynamic Landscapes**
- **Natural Soundscapes**
- **Clean Air**
- **Near Pristine Night Sky**
- **Cultural Resources**



Bryce Canyon National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Recommended Wilderness**
- **Meadow Landscapes**
- **Paleontology**
- **Scientific Study**



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Earth History.** The brilliant red limestone formations at Bryce Canyon National Park form the top step of the Grand Staircase within the Colorado Plateau. This unique geologic feature descends from Bryce Canyon to the Grand Canyon, and spans more than 200 million years of geologic history, giving us the ability to view and contemplate geologic processes over eons of time.
- **Power of Erosion.** Water and the power of erosion through freeze-thaw cycles create the wondrous geologic formations found in the park, a testament to the power of nature to mold and alter the physical environment.
- **Vistas.** Bryce Canyon National Park is on the western edge of the Colorado Plateau and offers one of the world's most expansive vistas of untrammelled wild lands. Sparsely populated, this remote, undeveloped landscape provides an outstanding opportunity for visitors from around the world to experience wilderness values such as solitude, clean air, healthy ecosystems, unobscured night sky viewing, natural sounds and smells, and self-reflection.
- **Life Zones.** Bryce Canyon National Park provides important protected lands and habitats, ranging through several life zones, where scientific methods and research are being used to restore natural processes after decades of human influence.
- **Changing Relationships with the Land.** The area's rich cultural history documents changing connections with the land, illustrating an ongoing struggle to balance resource use and the ecological and societal consequences.
- **National Park Service Subtheme.** The first generation of NPS leaders and pioneer conservationists worked tirelessly to connect Americans with their national parks, both physically, through transportation and accommodations, and mentally, through emotional and intellectual connections to the resources. Bryce Canyon's historic districts and cultural resources open a physical window into this foundational era.



## Description

Bryce Canyon National Park is located in Garfield and Kane counties in south-central Utah. The park encompasses 35,835 acres, and ranges between 6,600 and 9,100 feet in elevation. Named for pioneer Ebenezer Bryce, the park was originally established as a national monument in 1923. Eventually the name was changed to Bryce Canyon National Park in 1928. In 1975, 16,303 acres of the park was recommended to be included as a unit of the national wilderness preservation system.

The park's most noted feature is the eroded landscape below the east rim of the Paunsaugunt Plateau. The erosional force of frost-wedging and the dissolving power of rainwater have worn the colorful limestone of the Claron Formation into slot canyons, windows, fins, and spires called "hoodoos." The formations, which range from shades of red to white, are a brilliant contrast to the lowlands east of the park and the timbered plateaus to the west.

The park transcends 2,500 feet of elevation and exists in three climatic zones characterized by spruce/fir forest, ponderosa pine forest, and pinyon pine/juniper woodlands. The diversity of forest and meadow habitats provides a high degree of plant and animal diversity. Bryce Canyon's highland plateau gets more rain than the surrounding lowlands and the relatively lush ecosystem, supports more than 100 species of birds, dozens of mammals, and more than 1,000 plant species.

Bryce Canyon National Park is not an island; important park resources and values transcend park boundaries and are dependent on environmental conditions both inside and outside the park. The vast, panoramic views from within the park to the outlying valleys and canyons add an outstanding quality to the aesthetic values of the park. Bryce Canyon is also one of the best places to experience a truly dark night sky. These resources depend on regional air quality, soundscapes, and lighting conditions. Park boundaries are irrelevant to migratory hummingbirds or nesting peregrine falcons; Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, and pronghorn cross through the plateau forests and meadows within and beyond the park; other animals have adapted to occupy the distinctive erosional features and adjacent habitats.

The park's cultural resources and values are also expressions of the region's diverse human history. For thousands of years, American Indian people passed through the Bryce Canyon area. More recent tribal groups such as the Southern Paiute, as well as the European American pioneers who settled nearby, drew sustenance from the area's resources. In the early 20th century, the scenic splendor of Bryce Canyon inspired park developers to integrate the built environment with the natural setting. In perpetuation of this enduring legacy, modern visitors and the descendants of those who came before continue to draw inspiration and make personal and cultural connections to the landscape.

