



# Foundation Document Overview

## Capitol Reef National Park

Utah

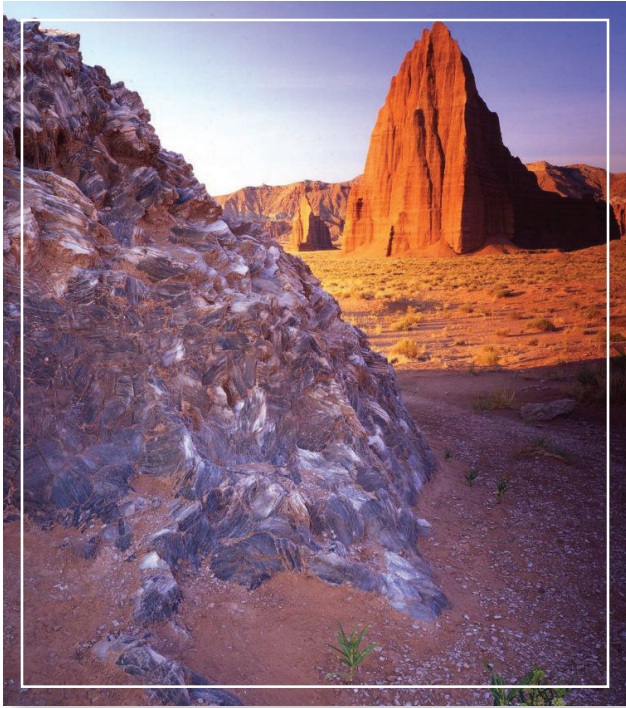


### Contact Information

For more information about the *Capitol Reef National Park Foundation Document*, contact: [care\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:care_superintendent@nps.gov) or 435-425-3791 or write to: Superintendent, Capitol Reef National Park, HC 70, Box 15, Torrey, UT 84775



## Purpose



*The purpose of CAPITOL REEF NATIONAL PARK is to preserve striking geologic landscapes within the Colorado Plateau, including the Waterpocket Fold, Cathedral Valley, and their associated ecosystems, as well as magnificent scenery, scientific value, wilderness character, and rich human history.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Capitol Reef 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.

- Capitol Reef National Park encompasses the Waterpocket Fold, the longest exposed monocline in North America, exhibiting a stunning array of geologic features resulting from the processes of deposition, uplift, deformation, and erosion.
- Capitol Reef National Park protects one of the most complete, continuous, and exposed records of Colorado Plateau geology and paleontology from the Mesozoic Era.
- The varied landscape created by the power of water and the environmental conditions of this high desert climate allow for a wide range of intact ecosystems and habitats supporting a diversity of plant and animal communities, including 27 locally endemic plant species and 8 federally threatened or endangered plants and animals.
- Capitol Reef National Park features some of the most exceptional night skies in the world, as well as clean air, spectacular scenery and views, and opportunities to experience sounds of the natural world without interference from human sources.
- The dramatic landscape and environment of Capitol Reef National Park have attracted humans for more than 10,000 years, including ancestors to several modern-day American Indian tribes. The historic district of Fruita preserves the rustic structures of early Mormon pioneers along with the largest ongoing cultivated orchard in the national park system.
- Capitol Reef National Park preserves a rugged and remote undeveloped wilderness landscape where opportunities for solitude and wilderness recreation are abundant. Dramatic views of striking rock cathedrals, colorful geologic strata and high forested slopes provide visitors with a sense of scale and isolation, free from the encumbrances of modern society. Human use and manipulation of the wilderness landscape is minimal and natural processes unfurl unhindered by human action.



## 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.

- **Geological and Paleontological Resources**
- **Water Resources**
- **Assemblage of Ecosystems**
- **Cultural Resources**
- **Air Quality, Night Skies, and Scenery**

Capitol Reef 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.

- **Wilderness**



## 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.

- The magnitude and variety of geologic features at Capitol Reef National Park reveal a long and perpetual story of dynamic geologic processes, which provide outstanding opportunities for research and education and provoke reactions of awe and wonder, and powerfully illustrate the inspirational qualities of “landscape.”
- The rich cultural legacy found in Capitol Reef National Park portrays a continuum of human activity spanning thousands of years and stimulates contemplation of the past and ongoing relationships between people and places.
- With its wide range of microhabitats, the Waterpocket Fold supports a high desert ecosystem with an extraordinarily diverse combination of plant and animal life, including a large assemblage of rare and endemic plant species, which fosters opportunities for education, scientific research, and a deeper connection to the natural world.



## Description

Capitol Reef National Park is located in south-central Utah within the Colorado Plateau. The spectacular geologic scenery and long cultural history of the area, along with ardent supporters, led President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1937 to designate Capitol Reef National Monument. Congress established Capitol Reef National Park in December 1971. The park encompasses approximately 242,000 acres of rugged bedrock heights dissected by deep canyons, mesas, and buttes, and sparsely vegetated badlands. These striking features are unified by the nearly 100-mile-long monocline (wrinkle in the earth's crust) called the Waterpocket Fold. The park's varied landscape is the result of 270 million years of geologic history and an abundance of colorful Mesozoic Era strata. The exposed geologic strata reflect the stories of changing ancient oceans, swamplands, riverine environments, desert climates, and volcanism.

The Waterpocket Fold is the classic definition of a monocline, a geologic fold with steeply inclined layers that create a warp, or step, in otherwise relatively horizontal layers of rock strata. The exposed Waterpocket Fold in Capitol Reef National Park is the largest monocline in North America and results from movement along faults deep in the Earth's crust. It was named for the many water-holding basins created in the exposed bedrock of the fold. The high rugged cliffs of the Waterpocket Fold appeared to early explorers and pioneers as a difficult barrier to cross, likened to a reef at sea, and this reef-like barrier helped give the park its name.

The southern section of the park, the Waterpocket District, provides superb opportunities to view and explore the Waterpocket Fold. Traveling the Burr Trail and Notom-Bullfrog Roads, visitors pass spectacular cliff faces, amphitheaters, strike valleys, narrow canyons, and other geologic wonders.

Visitors who venture to the northern sections of the park, the Cathedral District, are rewarded with spectacular vistas, and views of massive solitary sandstone monoliths standing in stark contrast over the vast desert landscape. The Temple of the Sun and Temple of the Moon monoliths are emblematic of the park.

The most visited areas of the park and most easily accessed, the Fruita Rural Historic District and nearby areas, were occupied both prehistorically and historically. Prehistoric peoples of the Archaic and Formative periods traveled through and lived in Capitol Reef, including the American Indians of the Formative period, the Fremont Culture. These relatives of Ancestral Puebloans migrated out of the area around AD 1300, leaving behind petroglyphs and pictographs on rocks and canyon walls to mark their passage. In the early 1600s to 1800s, Paiute Indians lived and thrived in the area. Early explorers, Mormon pioneers, and others came to the area in the late 1800s and named a number of geologic features throughout the park. The historic Mormon farming community of Fruita was occupied and actively farmed from the 1880s through the 1950s. Substantial remnants of the extensive pioneer orchards are still managed by the park, and many of the historic buildings remain.

The gateway town of Torrey, 11 miles west of Capitol Reef National Park visitor center on Utah Highway 24, offers lodging, restaurants, and other services, and easy access to the scenic wonders inside the park. Other neighboring communities near the park, including Teasdale, Bicknell, Lyman, and Loa west of the park and Hanksville east of the park, make great staging areas for exploration of Capitol Reef National Park and the surrounding area.

