



Foundation Document Overview

City of Rocks National Reserve

Idaho



Contact Information

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Description



City of Rocks National Reserve was designated as a unit of the national park system by the Arizona-Idaho Conservation Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-696) and is managed cooperatively by the National Park Service and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR). By 1988, the site was already well known and had been assigned multiple special designations due to its exceptional resources. A portion of City of Rocks had already been designated a state park in 1957, a national historic landmark had been established in 1964, and the Cassia Silent City of Rocks National Natural Landmark was declared in 1974.

The reserve is located in the Albion Mountains in south-central Idaho and is one of many publicly held lands in the region. The unit comprises an area of 14,407 acres. Of that total, approximately 10,000 acres are in federal ownership, 3,767 acres are privately owned, and 640 acres are owned by the State of Idaho. Private land within the reserve remains regulated by Cassia County zoning and subdivision ordinances. Though considered nontraditional uses in most national park system units, cattle grazing and hunting still occur in the reserve. The Northern Shoshone people have traditionally used the area for seasonal hunting and pine nut gathering and continue to do so today.

The reserve's geologic features are world-renowned, both for rock climbing and academic study. Vegetation communities include sagebrush steppe, pinyon-juniper woodlands, mountain mahogany woodlands, and higher-elevation forest communities of aspen, subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, and limber pine.

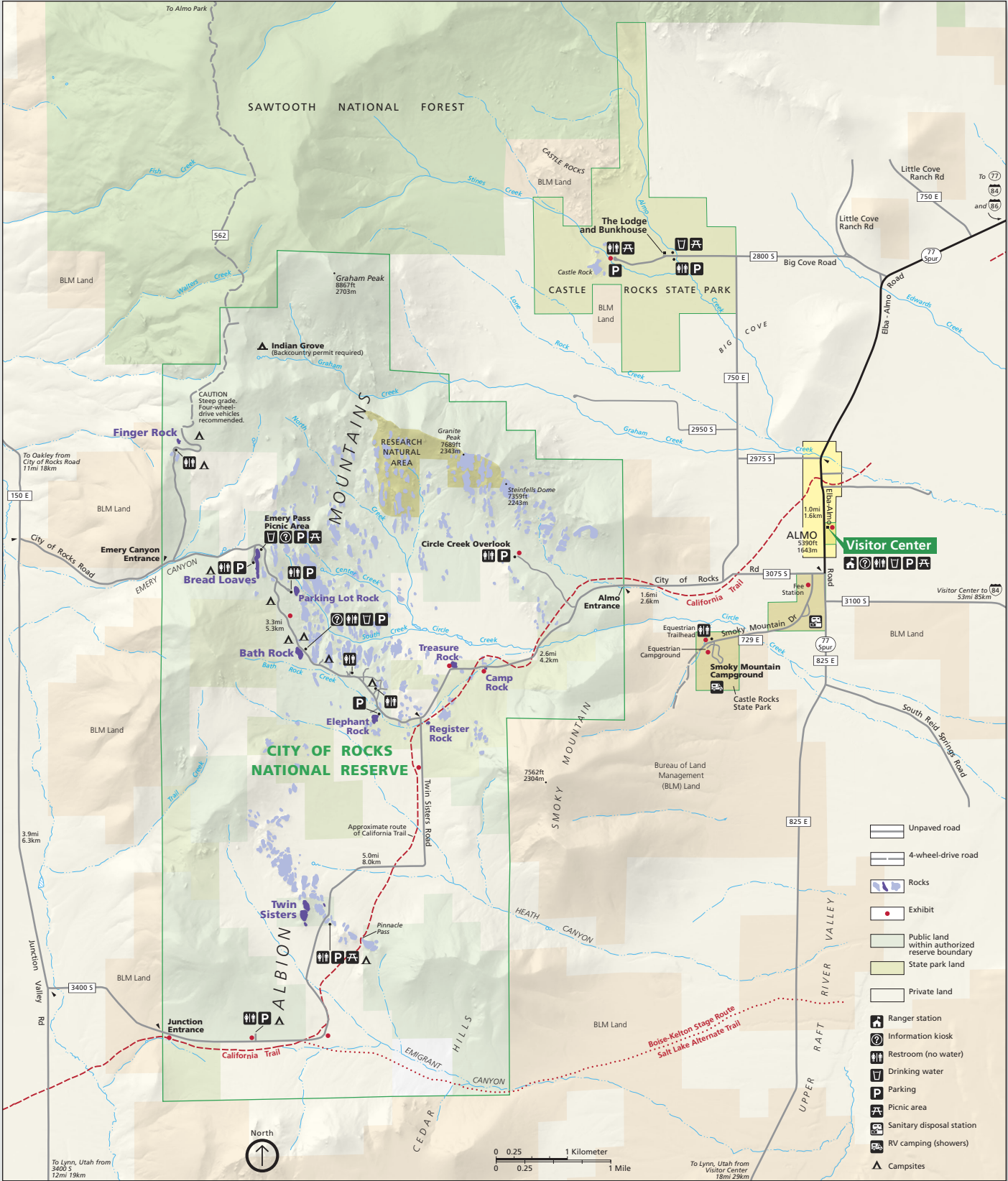


The reserve's pinyon-juniper woodland contains the state champion pinyon pine and is the largest forest of its kind in Idaho. There are at least 498 plant species, 174 birds, 5 amphibians, 14 reptiles, and 56 mammals documented or expected in the reserve. Idaho's only known population of cliff chipmunk is found in the reserve and on adjacent lands. Other fauna of note include mule deer, coyote, bobcat, mountain lion, moose, elk, and bighorn sheep.

The reserve also protects 6.9 miles of the California National Historic Trail, 1.8 miles of the Salt Lake Alternate Trail, and the surrounding cultural landscape, which includes remnant historic trail ruts, more than 350 emigrant signatures on 22 rocks, and portions of the Mormon Battalion Trail and the Kelton-Boise Stage Route.

Today, the reserve offers camping, climbing, hiking, backpacking, equestrian riding, mountain biking, sightseeing, and much more. About 110,000 visitors pass through the reserve annually, primarily between April 1 and October 30. Many come from the metropolitan areas of the Wasatch Front in Utah or the populated areas of southern Idaho (Boise, Twin Falls, Pocatello, and Idaho Falls). Nearly every state is represented in visitor registers and on camping receipts—with Utah, Wyoming, California, Colorado, and Oregon most frequently listed. Foreign countries (about 15 to 20) are also represented annually. Although the reserve is open year-round, some of the roads become impassable in winter.

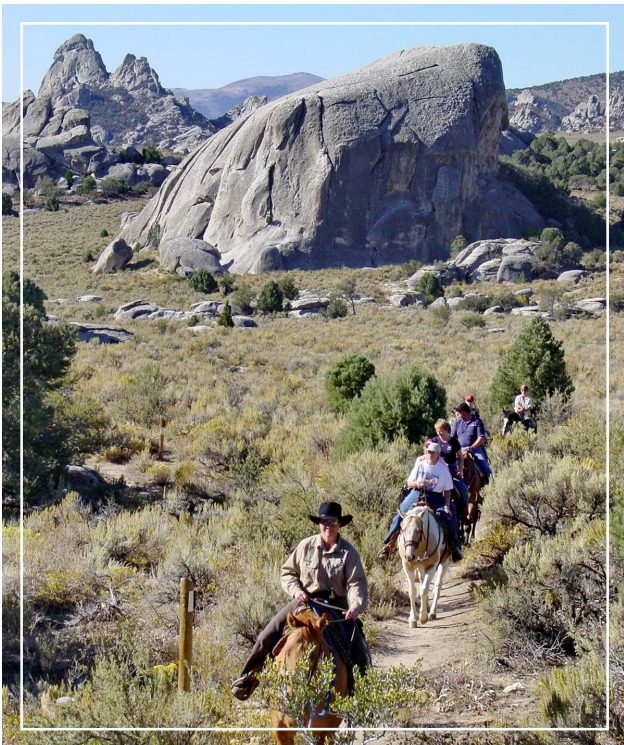
Reserve Map



Purpose



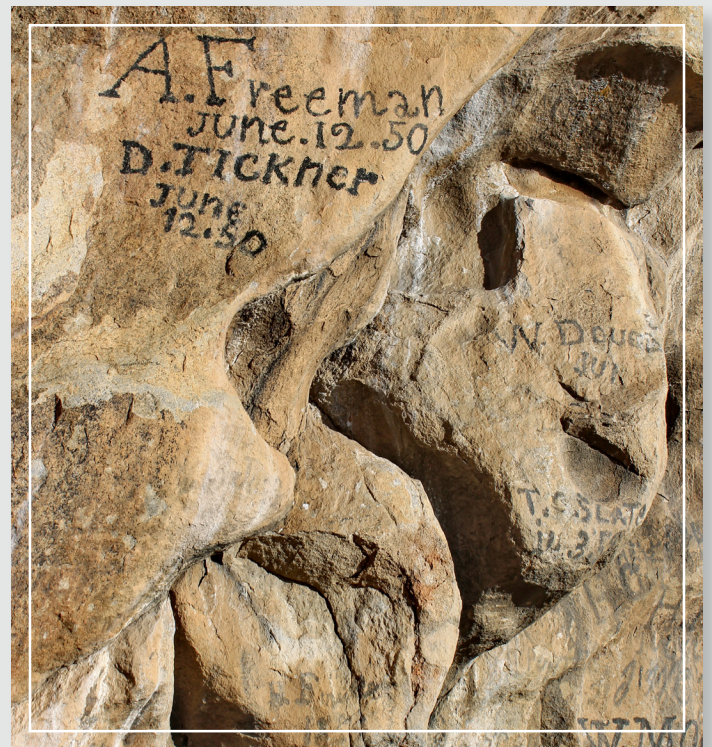
*CITY OF ROCKS NATIONAL RESERVE
was created to preserve and protect
through cooperative efforts the scenic
qualities and attributes of the California
Trail landscape, historic rural setting,
and granite features, while interpreting
its values and managing recreation.*



Significance

Significance statements express why City of Rocks National Reserve 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.

- **California Trail History.** City of Rocks National Reserve preserves the most intact and authentic setting of the California Trail, which utilized travel routes established by the Northern Shoshone people and became part of the largest overland emigration route in American history. Now designated a national historic landmark, this area served as a landmark and critical refuge that inspired numerous written accounts of the landscape.
- **Historic Landscapes.** City of Rocks National Reserve embraces and stewards the historic rural setting associated with eras after the California Trail emigration.



Significance

- **Inspirational Scenic Landscape.** The reserve is a dramatic geologic landscape with naturally sculptured spires and domes that are significant to the Northern Shoshone people and evoke emotional responses for many who encounter them, as recorded in emigrant diaries and by visitors today. The landscape has a timeless natural quality; it protects and preserves outstanding scenery set among granite monoliths framed by the Albion Range and surrounding mountains.
- **Cultural Values.** The attachment of the reserve's landscape, geology, and biota by the Northern Shoshone people has endured for thousands of years. Cultural values and practices of hunting small game and gathering pinyon nuts continue in accordance with tribal treaty rights.
- **Geologic Formations.** The reserve is home to a rare, nationally significant geologic landscape of densely spaced granite spires and domes enclosed within a mountain basin. The geologic structures and rock types found here led to the designation of its national natural landmark status and provide opportunities for scientists and visitors to observe and understand: (1) ancient and recent tectonic events that raised the mountainous interior of the western United States; and (2) surficial processes of weathering, erosion, and deposition that shape the current landscape and reveal otherwise buried structures and ancient rocks. These geologic formations provided landmarks and inspiration for the people who lived in and traveled through the "City of Rocks" throughout history.
- **Biogeographic Crossroads.** The reserve occurs at a rare biogeographic crossroads and protects a rich ecological diversity, providing exceptional opportunities for scientific study and shared learning.
- **Rock Climbing.** City of Rocks National Reserve includes one of the highest quality granite, face-climbing areas in the United States.



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.

- **Historic Landscape Features.** The reserve's rich post-contact history is evidenced by visible features and structures on the landscape. California Trail remnants and historic features such as wagon ruts, inscriptions, and encampments characterize the landscape of the California Trail corridor. Remnant structures and features of the historic City of Rocks stage station can be found along the historic Kelton-Boise stage route.
- **Ethnographic Landscape.** Evidence of thousands of years of use by different peoples is revealed in the cultural landscape of what is now City of Rocks National Reserve. A dynamic relationship continues between the Northern Shoshone people and the land that is now designated as the reserve. Even as traditional practices continue within the reserve, the legacy of the area's use and significance is conveyed through archeological objects and pictographs.



- **Historical Archives and Collections.** Archives of the reserve document the signatures, historic vegetation communities, and historical emigrant encampments. Among the most notable items from the California Trail period are diaries, art, and other written records documenting the experiences and thoughts of emigrants passing through City of Rocks. Archeological collections preserve the physical evidence of the area's occupants and visitors over time through curated artifacts.
- **Spectacular Views and Scenery.** The reserve offers unobstructed views of the natural landscape, which include towering rock pinnacles, vegetation patterns, and changing elevation. Clean air and clear daytime and night sky views provide pristine airsheds and clear night skies.

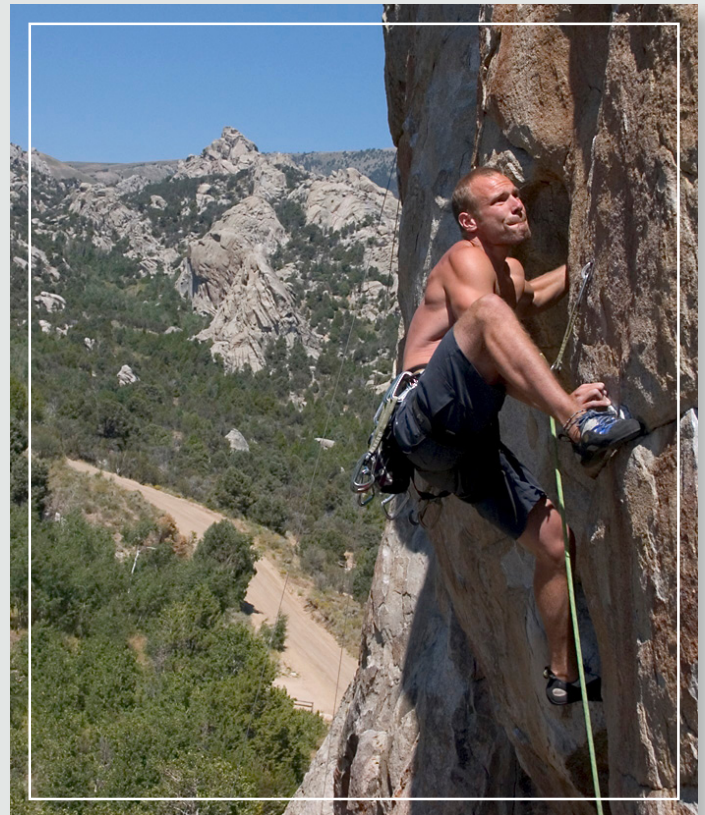
Fundamental Resources and Values



- **Native Flora.** Vegetation communities traditionally used and experienced by people for thousands of years are still present today in the reserve.
- **Geologic Resources.** The reserve preserves an uplifted and eroded landscape that reveals geologic structures, igneous intrusions, and a rare exposure of some of the oldest and deepest crustal metamorphic rocks in the western United States.
- **Hydrologic Resources.** Watering sources in the reserve, including springs and streams, supported the emigrants and continues to provide water to the flora and fauna inhabiting City of Rocks National Reserve.
- **Natural Soundscape.** Once known as the “silent city of rocks,” those who traveled through the area noted the natural quiet of their surroundings. Today, little noise intrusion leads to a dominance of natural sounds such as birds and wind as well as culturally appropriate sounds associated with ranching and indigenous culture. These characteristics of the soundscape evoke the “silent city” for modern-day visitors.



- **Biogeographic Crossroads.** The reserve contains a unique representation of plant and animal species converging at the extreme edges of their ranges, providing excellent opportunities for scientific research and nature viewing.
- **World-Class Climbing Area.** The combination of excellent quality granite, a preponderance of easy-to-moderate well-protected climbs, and a naturally quiet and austere western setting have helped make the reserve a world-renowned rock climbing destination.



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.

- City of Rocks was a major landmark for emigrants traveling along the California Trail, providing rest and inspiration for the many weary travelers heading for Granite Pass and ultimately for California or Oregon.
- Individuals and cultures have developed emotional, spiritual, and life-sustaining relationships with this timeless landscape, as evidenced by American Indian pictographs and traditions, pioneer journals, and expressions of modern-day visitors.
- The rural setting of City of Rocks National Reserve, characterized by sweeping views across a landscape of towering granite monoliths interspersed with remnant historic features and roaming cattle, evokes a feeling of the traditional western rural lifestyle that followed the California Trail period.
- One of only three places in the United States where such ancient rocks can be seen at the surface, the maze of spires and domes at City of Rocks National Reserve provide an open window into the crust of the earth. Visitors and scientists can view the results of a long history of tectonic events that raised the mountainous interior of the western United States and landforms that provide clues to the geologic processes that shaped the current landscape.
- The reserve sits at the crossroads of distinct geographic regions, including the Northern Basin and Range, Snake River Plain of the Upper Columbia Basin and Northern Rocky Mountains, that are each home to a wealth of species, making the City of Rocks a rare location where the diversity of plants and animals from each of those regions can be studied, and the subtleties of climate change can be observed.
- Visitors come from around the world to experience the challenge of climbing these granite monoliths in a quiet and scenic western setting.

