

Mountains in a Sea of Sagebrush

Welcome to Great Basin National Park, where you can experience desert heat and alpine cold in one day. The park rises from a sea of sagebrush to treeless rocky summits. Its name refers to the huge geographic area shown at right where waters have no outlet to the sea. Streams and rivers drain into shallow salt lakes, marshes, and mud flats, eventually evaporating in dry desert air. The Great Basin contains many smaller basins separated by mountain ranges running north to south. This undulating basin-and-range topography stretches across Nevada and into four other states.



Centered in Nevada, the Great Basin stretches from California's Sierra Nevada to Utah's Wasatch Mountains. The region features high valleys, many mountain ranges, and few rivers. Great Basin National Park protects the South Snake Range near Utah's border east of Ely, Nevada.

The repetitive landscape could seem monotonous, but looks can deceive. Life teems in the desert's sagebrush "sea." Mountain ranges are "islands" of cooler air and more water. Plants and animals have adapted to thrive in such isolated environments.

Congress set aside Great Basin National Park in 1986 to preserve one of these desert mountain islands—the South Snake Range. From desert and sagebrush at its base to Wheeler Peak's 13,063-foot summit, the park offers streams, lakes, abundant wildlife, varied forests, alpine plants, and limestone caverns.

Great Basin National Park also provides a rare opportunity in our world to view a truly dark night sky. This remote park still has clean air and hardly any light pollution. Its night sky offers brilliant views of planets, constellations, and the Milky Way. To protect and celebrate these panoramic views of the night sky, Great Basin National Park was designated an International Dark Sky Park in 2016.

Wheeler Peak
© JEFF GNASS

At Desert's Edge

The Snake Range rises from the desert as you approach. Both basin and range looked different during the most recent ice age. Glaciers hung in the mountains, carving peaks and high valleys. Lakes shimmered in the basins where sagebrush now grows. Waves from the largest of those lakes, massive Lake Bonneville, once lapped against a shore less than five miles (8 km) from the town of Baker.

A warming climate began melting glaciers and drying up the lakes about 10,000 years ago. As



Basin meets range: park peaks seen from the southeast
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the lakes dried, desert plants took root. The Snake Range became an island, its elevation a cool refuge to temperate-climate dwellers. Many of these organisms, unable to cross the desert basins, became isolated here. Over time some of them—like Holmgren's buckwheat shown above right—developed adaptations found nowhere else on Earth.

Great Basin rattlesnake
© GARY NAFIS



Into the Mountains



Stella Lake
NPS / GRBA

To experience how the landscape changes with elevation, take the Wheeler Peak Scenic Drive. Starting at 7,000 feet (2134 m), it climbs through pinyon-juniper woodlands and along Lehman Creek. Manzanita and shrubby mountain mahogany line the road on the way to higher stands of ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. Here the road enters the realm of ice-age glaciers that scraped U-shaped slopes and sharpened peaks. Their activity left behind piles of glacial till—boulders, sand, and gravel—forming mounds and ridges.

Aspens line the road as it climbs higher. After 12 miles (19 km) and an elevation change of 3,400 feet (1,036 m), the drive ends. Subalpine meadows, groves of aspen, and forests of limber pine and Engelmann spruce reward



Bonneville cutthroat trout
NPS / MARK PEPPER

the traveler. Here trailheads invite you to explore the high country. Options include a 0.4-mile (0.64-km) wheelchair-accessible trail that winds through the subalpine forest.

At Treeline

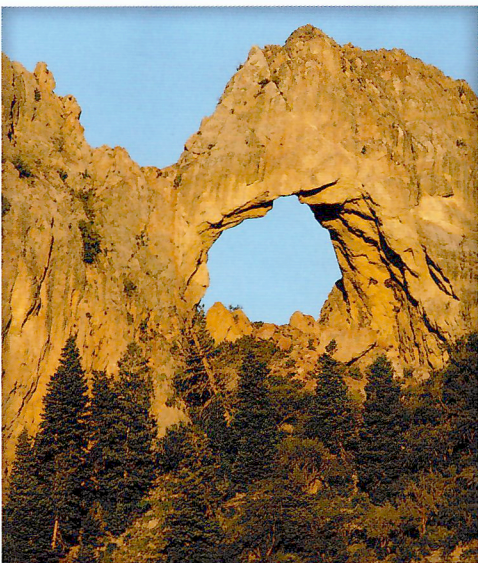
Trails take hikers beyond the road to explore more of the ice-sculpted landscape. A loop trail winds past Teresa and Stella lakes. Each is cupped in a glacier-carved bowl called a cirque.

Another trail leads to a grove of ancient trees. Bristlecone and limber pines live at elevations



Holmgren's buckwheat
NPS / GRETCHEN BAKER

higher than most trees can survive—between 9,500 and 11,000 feet (2896–3353 m). Both are hardy, but bristlecone pines are the masters of longevity, enduring thousands of years.



Lexington Arch
© TOM BEAN

Beyond that ancient grove, the trail continues to the last of the Great Basin glaciers. This ice-age remnant, now mostly covered in rock, persists as a reminder of the power of ice.

Even now as Earth's climate warms, snow can fall in any month in this high country. Freezing temperatures are common. Plants must cope with short growing seasons, shallow soils, thin air, and intense solar radiation. High winds tear at anything above the ground. Lichens cling to rocks. Plants anchor in cracks and crevices close to the ground. Trees grow in twisted forms molded by snows and the ever-present wind. Life in the high country is tenuous and fragile, and easily damaged by our missteps.

Help protect the fragile ecosystems of Great Basin National Park. Stay on trails or seek advice before attempting to hike across trailless areas.

People of the Great Basin

During the most recent ice age, people hunted the abundant streams and marshes of this region. As the climate warmed, they adapted to changing food sources by developing new tools and methods for hunting and gathering plants.

The Underground World



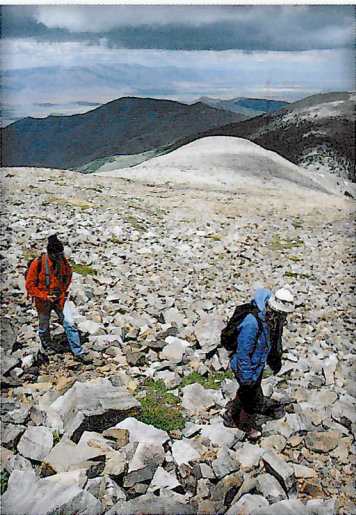
Touring Lehman Caves
© TOM BEAN

A beautifully decorated geologic wonder, Lehman Caves is a single cavern that weaves two miles (3.2 km) into the eastern base of the Snake Range. Native Americans knew of the cave long before local rancher and miner



Bristlecone pine
© TOM BEAN

About 1,800 years ago the native Fremont people learned to farm and began to live in villages. They made decorative pottery and painted images on rocks. Then long droughts destroyed crops, and the people returned to a life of hunting and gathering. Shoshone and



Climbing Wheeler Peak
© TOM BEAN

Paiute family bands continued this lifestyle until the mid-1800s. Then settlers, ranchers, and miners drove them from traditional food sources. Today some Native people continue to gather pine nuts and other foods and materials in this area.

Abraham Lehman began exploring it in 1885. Today, the cave provides a home for bats and endemic pseudoscorpions and millipedes.

Lehman Caves began developing about 515 million years ago when sediments settled at the bottom of a warm shallow sea. Violent shifting of rock layers about 20 to 30 million years ago pressed and heated the limestone, changing it to marble. Cave passages formed two to ten million years ago when warm, acidic water rose and dissolved the marble along cracks.

After the water table dropped, cave decoration began. Rain and melting snow percolated down into the cave. The water passed through organic material, becoming acidic and dissolving away bits of marble or calcite. When water reached the air-filled room, it re-deposited the calcite, drop by drop. Centuries of drips created

cave formations (speleothems). Stalactites, stalagmites, flowstone, and draperies decorate many caves. You can also see helictites—delicate branching formations that defy gravity—and cave popcorn along the trails. Rare speleothems like shields, welts, and turnip stalactites make a tour of Lehman Caves both an unusual and rewarding experience.

Parachute shield in the Grand Palace
© TOM BEAN



Great Basin

Things to See and Do

For a One-day Visit
Stop first at a visitor center to learn about the Great Basin or Lehman Caves. • Take a ranger-led cave tour (see below). • Travel up the scenic drive to the Wheeler Peak parking area and follow trails to subalpine lakes or the ancient bristlecone pine grove.

If You Have More Time
Start early and climb Wheeler Peak. • Hike the Baker Creek trails. • Drive through aspen groves along unpaved Snake Creek Road. • Hike to Lexington Arch or explore the rugged back roads. • Drive up Strawberry Creek to see plant communities recovering after a wildland fire.

Driving in the Park
Wheeler Peak Scenic Road is the only paved road in the park. Snow can close it at any time of year. The upper portion is closed to long vehicles and trailers. Ask a ranger about current road conditions.

Cave Tours
Available when the Lehman Caves Visitor Center is open. • For tour fees and reservations (recommended) go to www.recreation.gov or call 877-444-6777. • An adult must be with those under 16.

Camping
Four campgrounds open summer only. Lower Lehman Campground open year-round, but no water in winter. All have pit toilets, fire rings, tables, and tent pads. • Primitive sites along Snake Creek have tent sites, fire grates, and tables; some have pit toilets; none have water. • For details check the park website. You can reserve sites at www.recreation.gov.

Location and Services

To park entrance from:
Cedar City: 142 mi (229 km)
Delta: 106 mi (171 km)
Ely: 68 mi (109 km)
Las Vegas: 286 mi (460 km)
Reno: 385 mi (620 km)
Salt Lake City: 234 mi (377 km)

Visitor Centers
Lehman Caves Visitor Center is open year-round except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. • Great Basin Visitor Center is open in summer only. • Both have information, bookstores, and exhibits.

Services
A cafe and gift shop next to Lehman Caves Visitor Center are open in summer. • Baker has restaurants, hotels, gas, and basic food supplies.

Hiking
Check the park website or stop at a visitor center to find trails that suit your fitness level, time, and interest. • Be prepared for extreme weather, both hot and cold temperatures. • Bring your own water, at least one gallon (4 l) per person per day. • Seek advice from park rangers about hiking in the fragile subalpine and alpine ecosystems. • Plan ahead for longer hikes. Check with park rangers about conditions. Many trails are primitive and can be hard to follow. See other cautions at the lower right of this page.

Other Activities
Fishing is allowed with a Nevada state fishing license and follow all state regulations. • Horses are allowed on some trails; inquire at a visitor center or see the park website. • Mountain biking is allowed on designated roads but not on any national park trails.

Regulations
Pets are prohibited in caves and buildings, on trails except Lexington Arch Trail, and over 100 feet (30 m) from roads. They must be on a leash six feet (2 m) long or less. • Campfires are allowed only in campgrounds and picnic areas in designated grills. • Vehicles and drivers must be licensed. • ATVs must be street-legal and licensed. • Off-roading prohibited. • Do not feed wildlife. • Hunting prohibited. • Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park.

Firearms
For state and federal firearms regulations check the park website.

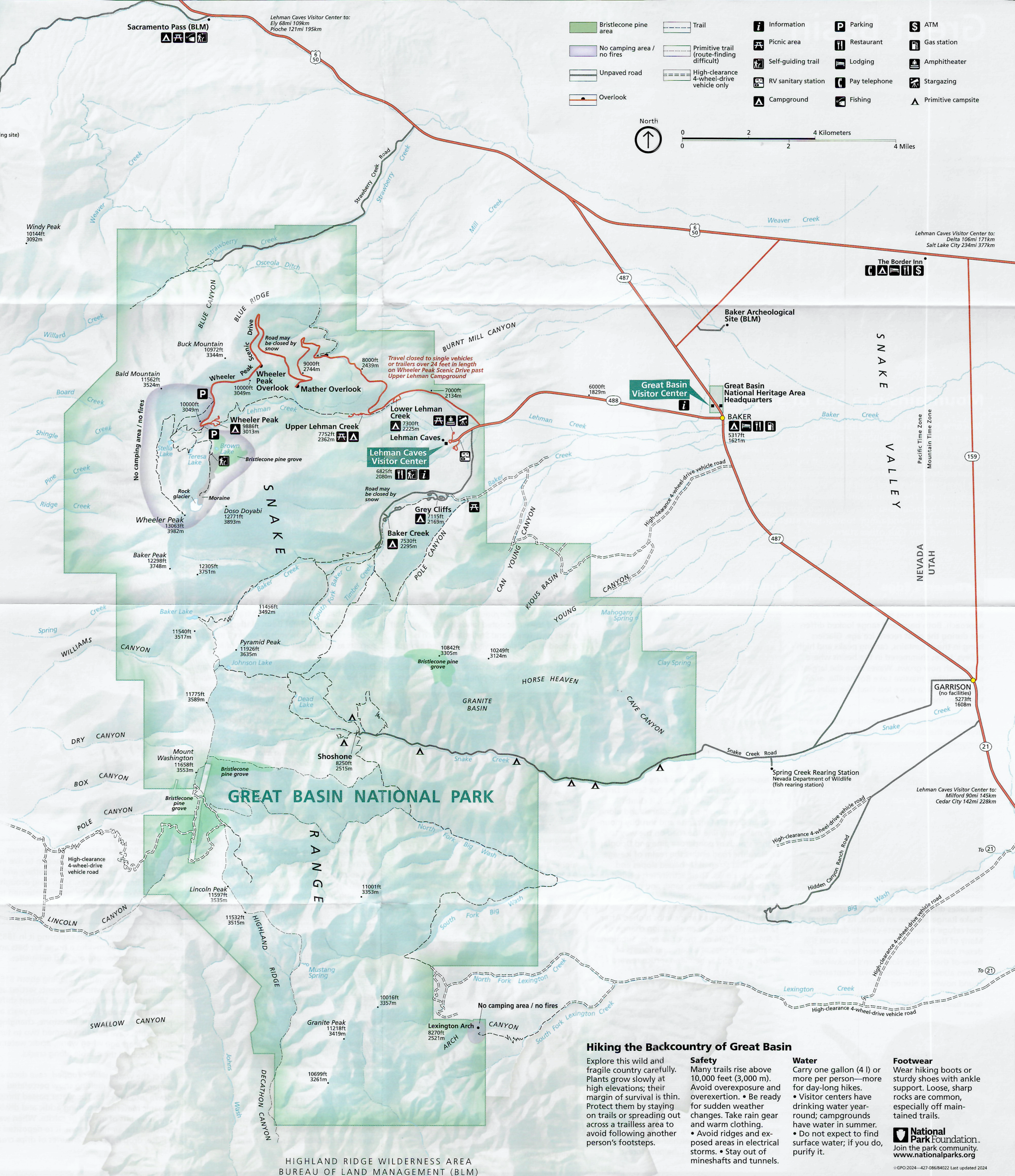
Accessibility
We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

More Information
Great Basin National Park
100 Great Basin NP
Baker, NV 89311-9700
775-234-7331
www.nps.gov/lgrba

Follow us on social media.

Emergencies call 911 from a landline or contact a park ranger or campground host. **Do not rely on cell phone service.**

Great Basin National Park is one of over 425 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.



Hiking the Backcountry of Great Basin

Explore this wild and fragile country carefully. Plants grow slowly at high elevations; their margin of survival is thin. Protect them by staying on trails or spreading out across a trailless area to avoid following another person's footsteps.

Safety
Many trails rise above 10,000 feet (3,000 m). Avoid overexposure and overexertion. • Be ready for sudden weather changes. Take rain gear and warm clothing. • Avoid ridges and exposed areas in electrical storms. • Stay out of mineshafts and tunnels.

Water
Carry one gallon (4 l) or more per person—more for day-long hikes. • Visitor centers have drinking water year-round; campgrounds have water in summer. • Do not expect to find surface water; if you do, purify it.

Footwear
Wear hiking boots or sturdy shoes with ankle support. Loose, sharp rocks are common, especially off maintained trails.

National Park Foundation.
Join the park community. www.nationalparks.org

HIGHLAND RIDGE WILDERNESS AREA
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)