

Sequoia and Kings Canyon

Sequoia National Park
Kings Canyon National Park
California

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



*A thousand upspringing spires and pinnacles pierce the sky in every direction,
the cliffs and mountain-ridges are everywhere ornamented with countless needle-like turrets.*

Clarence King, *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*, 1872

Despite the natural longevity of giant sequoias, early conservationists recognized they needed protection. In 1890 Congress established Sequoia National Park as a permanent refuge for sequoias. As awareness grew of the importance of the surrounding landscape and habitats, the park was expanded several times. In 1940 Kings Canyon National Park was established. Over 800,000 acres in both parks are designated wilderness.

The great diversity of life at these parks results mainly from their extreme elevation range—1,360 to 14,494 feet. As you explore, keep in mind that the parks face threats their early advocates could not have envisioned, mostly due to climate change: higher temperatures, changing precipitation, more severe wildfires, and invasive species. How will future generations experience these fragile mountain habitats?

MOUNTAINS—© RAYMOND RIOS

Alpine / Subalpine



Alpine landscapes offer rugged hikes and wilderness views like this of Arrow Peak.

In the subalpine habitat, over 9,000 feet, the air is cold and dry, and soil is scarce. Foxtail pines, whitebark pines, and western juniper can survive here. The alpine zone, which has no trees, begins at about 11,000 feet. Here, the glaciers' work is most evident: rocks of all sizes; crystal clear lakes in rocky, ice-carved cirques; the occasional low-growing shrub; and meadows that show off wildflowers like the sky pilot (above) in the briefest of summers.

Many peaks tower over 14,000 feet high. Mount

Whitney, at 14,494 feet, is the highest point in the contiguous United States. It is most easily seen from the Owens Valley east of the parks. Because park roads top out at 7,800 feet, you will not experience high country except on trails off-limits to motorized vehicles.

You can see mountain vistas from Moro Rock, Generals Highway, Panoramic Point near Grant Grove, pullouts before Kings Canyon Scenic Byway (CA 180) descends into the canyon, and Mineral King Valley.

Foothills

As you head toward the parks from the west, you roll through the foothills. Even in the extreme summer heat, a greater variety of plants and animals thrive in these relatively low elevations than in any other habitat in the parks.

The brushy chaparral that covers these low slopes is a marvel of adaptation. Hot, dry summers create an arid landscape. In winter and spring—the best seasons to visit the foothills—rain seems to magically



bring it back to life when wildflowers pop out against lush green.

Park entrance roads provide places to stop and explore up close. The Foothills Visitor Center has information and programs. If you have at least half a day, the road to Mineral King is an ideal place to experience the foothills' ups and downs.



Generals Highway climbs through the foothills past white blooms of chaparral yucca and distant granite formations like Castle Rocks. Above: California quail. Background: East Fork Kaweah River, Mineral King

NPS / ROCK CLARK, BIRD—© GARY LINCOLN, BACKGROUND—© BRENT PAUL



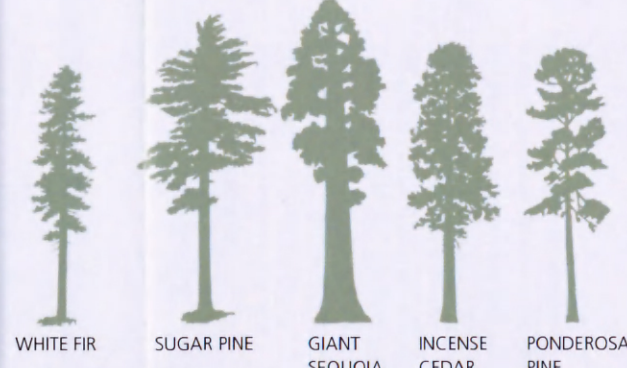
Montane Forest



© GARY CRABBE

Forests in these parks change constantly. The tallest giants may suddenly fall, creating space for new seedlings.

ILLUSTRATIONS—NPS / JANE HAMRA



Mixed-conifer montane forests on the Sierra Nevada's middle slopes are remarkably diverse. Look for ponderosa pine, sugar pine, white fir, black oak, Jeffrey pine, and incense cedar amid the scattered groves of giant sequoias.

The parks' 36 sequoia groves are the world's most dramatic examples of old-growth coniferous forest. They grace the Sierra Nevada's western slope in a 60-mile-long

belt between 5,000 and 7,000 feet. Some tree species live longer, have greater diameters, or grow taller like their cousins the coast redwoods, but no tree is larger than the giant sequoia (right). In total volume of wood, it is the largest living tree on Earth.

A mature sequoia's trunk remains thick for much of its height rather than narrowing to a

point like other conifers. Chemicals in the wood and bark repel most insects and fungi, and thick bark insulates them from most fire. Their shallow root system has no taproot. The main cause of sequoia deaths is toppling. Soil moisture, root damage, and strong winds can destabilize them to the tipping point.

The easiest places to meet the big trees are Giant Forest, Grant

Grove, and Redwood Mountain Grove. Giant Forest includes the eight largest sequoias, including the world's largest tree, the General Sherman (275 feet). Grant Grove is home to the second-largest tree, the General Grant. Redwood Mountain Grove, one of the largest sequoia groves, covers 3,100 acres. All three groves have loop trails.



NPS / JOHN DAWSON

Rivers and Canyons

Nearly all the parks' precipitation falls in winter and spring. Heavy snows blanket the Sierra Nevada range. The snowpack melts throughout spring and summer, saturating meadows and forests and releasing icy water into park rivers.

Park rivers flow year-round, creating a corridor for abundant wildlife. As water flows down to the foothills, it sustains plants and animals through hot, dry summers.

Three stretches of river in the parks are protected through the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This designation recognizes their free-flowing state and helps preserve them for our enjoyment and for the survival of wild species.

As tempting as it may be to jump in on a hot day—don't! These cold, fast-moving rivers are extremely dangerous. Drowning is the parks' leading cause of death.



© GARY CRABBE, FISH—© JOSEPH R. TOMELLER

In Cedar Grove, granite cliffs and tall peaks frame the Kings Canyon floor. Above: Little Kern golden trout, a threatened species

Caves



NPS / ALISON TAGGART, BARONE, BAT—© MICHAEL DURNHAM

Marble bedrock and calcite formations decorate the half-mile trail through Crystal Cave. Above: Townsend's big-eared bat

Delicate and dangerous, nearly all caves in these parks are closed to the public. Many have pits, steep drops, and other obstacles that create hazards for casual touring. The wild caves are habitats for animals that may exist nowhere else on Earth.

Crystal Cave is open for guided tours, which offer a journey into a "marble solution" cave. Here, over eons, acidic

water has dissolved the marble rock, leaving winding passageways through a gallery of fascinating formations.

Along the route, you can experience the total darkness and chilly temperatures of a classic cave environment. Rooms and passageways are relatively undisturbed.

Tickets must be purchased in advance and are not sold at the cave.



PARK ROADS—KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- GENERALS HIGHWAY IN WINTER** From early January to mid-March, Generals Highway closes for public travel between the parks. It may also close due to storms.
- NO GASOLINE IN THE PARKS** Gas is not available inside the parks. *Year-round:* Get gas before entering the parks. *Summer:* Gas is also available at Stony Creek.
- VEHICLE LENGTH LIMITS** Maximum recommended lengths:
• Between Foothills Visitor Center and Potwisha Campground: 24 feet.
• Between Potwisha Campground and Giant Forest Museum: 22 feet.
- NARROW, WINDING, AND STEEP** Save your brakes. Use low gears on downhills. Stay in your lane. Watch for wildlife. Use turnouts to let others pass. Speed limit is 15–25 mph.
- WEATHER** Temperatures drop as you climb uphill. Be prepared for changing weather and road conditions. Tire chains may be required, especially November–April.
- DON'T RELY ON GPS** Follow road signs and use your map. Cellular coverage is limited and varies by carrier.
- SHUTTLE BUSES** Free shuttles operate in Sequoia National Park in summer and on some winter holidays. A shuttle (fee) runs from Visalia to Giant Forest in summer. www.sequoiashuttle.com

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

GETTING TO THE PARKS
Take CA 180 into Kings Canyon or CA 198 into Sequoia. Drive between and within the parks on the scenic Generals Highway (*may be closed in winter*). No east-west roads cross the parks, and there is no road access from US 395 east of the parks.

Visalia offers a shuttle (fee) to Sequoia National Park in summer. Gasoline is not available in the parks.

CAMPING
Campground locations range from the relatively warm foot-hills to cool forest settings.

SOME CAMPGROUNDS ARE OPEN YEAR-ROUND. To reserve either standard campsites or group sites, call 877-444-6777 or go to www.recreation.gov.

LODGING
For reservations in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks year-round, call 806-307-3598 or go to www.visitsequoia.com.

ACCESSIBILITY
We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information check the park website or ask at visitor centers for an accessibility guide with details.

STAY SAFE; PROTECT THE PARKS
• Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the parks. • *Be bear aware!* Do not feed or try to approach bears or other wild animals.
• Pets must be leashed at all times. • Rattlesnakes are common. Always look before you step or reach. • For a list of regulations, including fire-arms, check the park website.

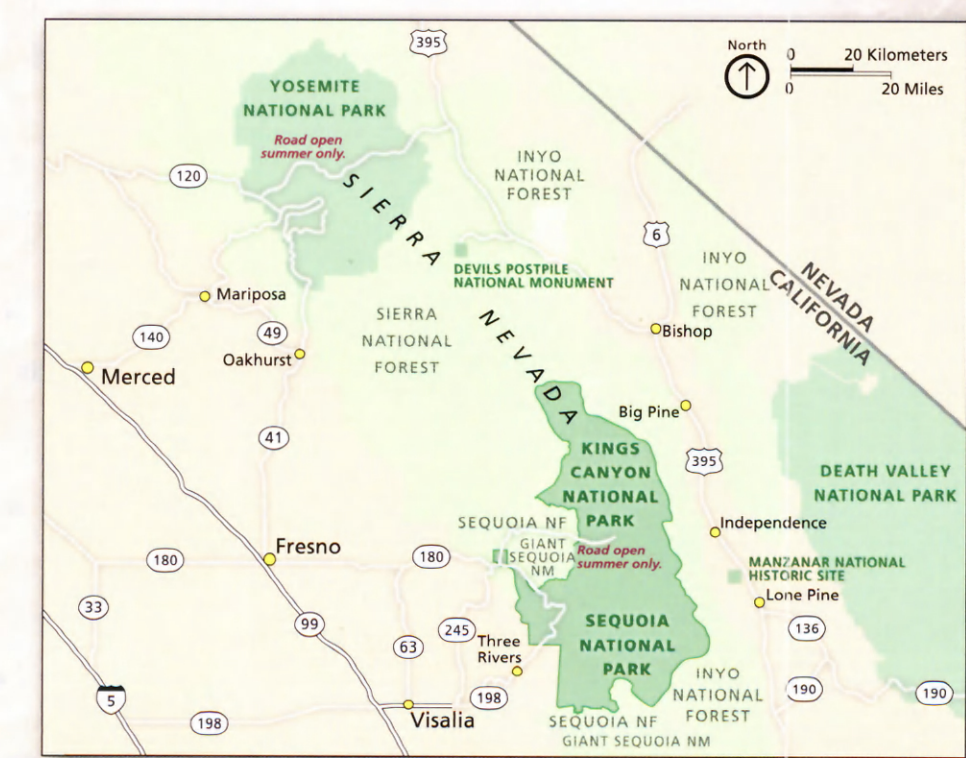
EMERGENCIES CALL 911

MORE INFORMATION
Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are two of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
47050 Generals Hwy.
Three Rivers, CA 93271
www.nps.gov/seqi

Follow us on social media. Use the official NPS App to guide your visit. Select "save this park" to use offline.

Sequoia Parks Conservancy
www.sequoiaparksconservancy.org



Things to See and Do

For information about services, facilities, activities, and special events listed by current season, pick up the park newspaper, the *Visitor Guide*, at entrance stations and visitor facilities.

STARTING OUT
Go to the Foothills, Lodgepole, Kings Canyon, and Cedar Grove visitor centers for trip-planning information, permits, exhibits, films, and sales items. The Giant Forest Museum has exhibits about sequoias and their habitat.

CRYSTAL CAVE
This underground wonderland is open in summer only. Buy tour tickets online at least two days in advance at www.sequoiaparkconservancy.org. Limited numbers of tickets may be available at Lodgepole and Foothills visitor centers. *Tickets are not available at the cave.*

SEQUOIA GROVES
Giant Forest offers the Big Trees Trail, a level, 0.6-mile paved loop through a stand of giant sequoias. The General Sherman Tree, the largest tree on Earth, is reached by a 0.5-mile trail or an alternate wheelchair-accessible trail with parking. Grant Grove has trails to the General Grant Tree and through the North Grove sequoia stand.

MORO ROCK
Climb a steep, 0.25-mile stairway 300 feet up this granite dome for one of the best mountain views in the parks (*top photo, other side*). Nearby are the Crescent Meadow loop trail, Tharp's Log (a cabin carved from a fallen sequoia), and the drive-through Tunnel Log.

MINERAL KING
A steep, winding road takes you from the foothills to 7,800 feet and to an expanse of subalpine forest and mountain vistas. The ranger station has detailed information about trails. The narrow, winding road is 25 miles one way; allow at least half a day for this visit. Open late May–late October.

INTO THE WILD
Over 95 percent of these parks is designated wilderness, not reachable by vehicle. Trails—both strenuous and gentler—lead you to high peaks, alpine lakes, subalpine forest, and some of the most rugged country in our national parks. Wilderness permits are required for overnight trips.

Driving Miles / Minutes

	VISALIA	FRESNO	LAKE KAWEAH	MINERAL KING RANGER STATION	FOOTHILLS VISITOR CENTER	GIANT FOREST MUSEUM	GENERAL SHERMAN TREE	LODGEPOLE VISITOR CENTER	GRANT GROVE VILLAGE	CEDAR GROVE VISITOR CENTER	ZUMWALT MEADOW
ZUMWALT MEADOW	89.2/150	87.3/140	88.9/185	106/300	79.3/170	63.8/125	62.2/120	59.6/110	33.4/60	4.8/10	
CEDAR GROVE VISITOR CENTER	85.3/140	81.8/130	84.5/175	101/290	74.9/160	59.4/115	57.9/110	55.2/100	29/50		4.8/10
GRANT GROVE VILLAGE	56.4/90	52.8/80	55.6/125	72.4/240	45.9/110	30.5/65	28.9/60	26.3/50		29/50	33.4/60
LODGEPOLE VISITOR CENTER	55.6/110	77.2/130	29.6/75	46.4/190	20/60	4.5/15	2.9/10		26.3/50	55.2/110	59.6/110
GENERAL SHERMAN TREE	55/110	79.9/140	29/75	45.8/190	19.5/60	3.9/15		2.9/10	28.9/60	57.9/110	62.2/120
GIANT FOREST MUSEUM	51.1/95	81.4/145	25.1/65	41.9/175	15.5/45		3.9/15	4.5/15	30.5/65	59.4/115	63.8/125
FOOTHILLS VISITOR CENTER	35.6/50	78/95	9.6/20	26.5/130		15.5/45	19.5/60	20/60	45.9/110	74.9/160	79.3/170
MINERAL KING RANGER STATION	56/160	105/205	30.1/130		26.5/130	41.9/175	45.8/190	46.4/190	72.4/240	101/290	106/300
LAKE KAWEAH	26/30	74.5/75		30.1/130	9.6/20	25.1/65	29/75	29.6/75	55.6/125	84.5/175	88.9/185
FRESNO	49/55		74.5/75		78/95	81.4/145	79.9/140	77.2/130	52.8/80	81.8/130	87.3/140
VISALIA		49/55	26/30	56/160	35.6/50	51.1/95	55/110	55.6/110	56.4/90	85.3/140	89.2/150