

SPECIAL TRAVEL ISSUE

High Country News

For people who care about the West

March 7, 2016 | \$5 | Vol. 48 No. 4 | www.hcn.org

The Parks You Don't Know

FROM A TRAIL ON THE BORDER TO A TINY ISLAND IN WASHINGTON,
THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM INSPIRES — AND SURPRISES

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Michelle Nijhuis

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ADVERTISING SALES
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Bob Wedemeyer

GRANTWRITER
Janet Reasoner

editor@hcn.org

circulation@hcn.org

development@hcn.org

advertising@hcn.org

syndication@hcn.org

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(ISSN/0191/5657) is published bi-weekly, 22 times a year, by High Country News, 119 Grand Ave., Paonia, CO 81428. Periodicals, postage paid at Paonia, CO, and other post offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to High Country News, Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428. All rights to publication of articles in this issue are reserved. See hcn.org for submission guidelines. Subscriptions to HCN are \$37 a year, \$47 for institutions: 800-905-1155 | hcn.org

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Contributors

Cally Carswell is a *High Country News* contributing editor who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and is currently working on a film project about dog-powered sports.

In the early 2000s, **Sarah Gilman** unwittingly traveled parts of the Oregon Trail on her way to and from college in southeastern Washington. She is a *High Country News* contributing editor in Portland, Oregon.

Heather Hansman is a Seattle-based freelance writer. She’s a former editor at both *Powder* and *Skiing* magazines and a contributor to *Smithsonian’s* “Innovations” department.

Krista Langlois is a freelance journalist and correspondent with *High Country News*. She writes from a tiny round cabin outside Durango, Colorado.

Glenn Nelson is the founder of The Trail Posse (trailposse.com), which documents and encourages diversity and inclusion in the outdoors. He tweets @trailposse.

Ana Maria Spagna lives and writes in Stehekin, Washington. Her most recent book is *Potluck: Community on the Edge of Wilderness*.

Jonathan Thompson is a *High Country News* senior editor, and writes from Durango, Colorado.

Brad Tyer is a former editor of the Missoula, Montana, *Independent*, and the author of *Opportunity, Montana: Big Copper, Bad Water, and the Burial of an American Landscape* (Beacon Press).

Leath Tonino’s writing appears in *Outside*, *Men’s Journal*, *Orion*, *The Sun* and other magazines. He edits poetry for the Afghan Women’s Writing Project.

Sarah Tory is a freelance journalist and correspondent for *High Country News*.

Joshua Zaffos is an *HCN* correspondent based in Fort Collins, Colorado. His work has also appeared in *Audubon*, *Yale Environment 360*, *Wired* and other publications.

Editor’s note

The parks less traveled

I’ll never forget the misty June morning I caught a glimpse of a gray wolf, loping like a ghost dog through the green of Yellowstone’s Lamar Valley. Or the March afternoon I squeezed through the claustrophobic Joint Trail in Canyonlands, emerging sweaty and exhilarated into a surreal landscape of red and white sandstone hoodoos. The West’s national parks naturally evoke indescribable feelings of awe. But there is more than beauty involved; many of these places are designed to preserve American history, and to provoke moments of reflection — even if those reflections are sometimes uncomfortable. Years ago, for example, I hiked to the Shrine of the Stone Lions at Bandelier National Monument, only to find that park staff had removed the offerings of turquoise, eagle feathers and antlers left by Native people, who hold the place sacred. Why? Because non-Native tourists had started adding their own offerings — including beef jerky and .38 caliber bullets.

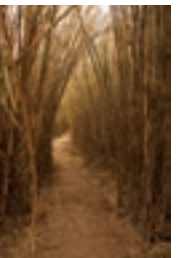
Last year, a record 307 million people sought out the more than 400 units of the national park system, ranging from the world-renowned “Y” parks, Yellowstone and Yosemite, to their more obscure but perhaps equally intriguing alphabetical cousins, Yucca House National Monument and Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area. This year — the parks’ centennial — is likely to see even more visitors.

And so this *HCN* special Travel Issue is devoted to the parks. But we’re not going to recommend hikes and lodges and road trips, or make suggestions about what you should pack. (Although you should know that, during National Park Week, April 16 through 24, you can visit any U.S. park for free.) You can find that kind of information in many other places.

Instead, we want to introduce you to some lesser-known Western gems. Contributing editor Sarah Gilman takes us to the Oregon Trail and considers the complexities involved in preserving this key Westward route — and the vexed question of how the story should be told, and who should tell it. On the U.S.-Mexico border, correspondent Sarah Tory explores another historic trail, the Anza, with its uncomfortable parallels between modern and historic immigration. Out in Nevada’s remote Great Basin National Park, Leath Tonino playfully blindfolds himself to discover how the landscape might stimulate other senses. And in New Mexico, contributing editor Cally Carswell visits Valles Caldera, which failed under semi-private management but is now reinventing itself as one of the park system’s newest units. Our writers also visit what we call “dark parks,” places that memorialize some of the West’s most painful historical chapters. We’ll also meet a few of the men and women (and even sled dogs) who keep things running behind the scenes.

We hope you enjoy the journey, and that it inspires you to seek out the hidden riches of this truly unique invention: our national parks.

—Jodi Peterson, senior editor



Cover

A tunnel through an arundo thicket on the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail on the outskirts of Nogales, Arizona. JORDAN GLENN

Parks confidential

In keeping with our theme of The Parks You Don't Know, we asked readers and staff about some of the little-known discoveries they've made within the national park system. Here is a sampling.



CHUCK HANEY

Cycling-to-the-Sun

Most of its 2 million annual visitors become acquainted with Glacier National Park by driving Going-to-the-Sun Road, the cliff-hugging main thoroughfare. But what many don't know is that in the spring, the road is only open to cyclists, pedestrians and other non-motorized traffic. Cyclists can inch their way around hairpin turns toward Logan Pass, before running into snow yet to be cleared. The refreshingly intimate and uncrowded glimpse of the park's main corridor is harder to replicate in the car-choked months from July to October. Just be sure to test your brakes before the ride back down.

—Bryce Gray,
HCN intern

A park 'in the raw'

New Mexico's Valles Caldera National Preserve recently entered the park system, ending an experiment in funding and managing federal lands outside the traditional agencies

BY CALLY CARSWELL

Tom Ribe leans into the steering wheel of his green pickup, its dashboard a mosaic of souvenir pins from public lands. Just past the Valles Caldera National Preserve sign, in New Mexico's Jemez Mountains, he brakes. The pine forests sandwiching Highway 4 have dropped away, replaced to the north by the Valle Grande, a stunningly expansive, treeless valley surrounded by gentle, forested domes.

The valley was created after the volcano, whose magma still boils a few miles underground, erupted and its crater collapsed inward from the rim. Cold air drains into the valley, forming an inverse treeline. The view — a sea of white in winter, a verdant grassland in summer — is singular in New Mexico.

But this January morning, Ribe focuses on something more pedestrian: the newest panel on the preserve's timber-frame sign, a brown National Park Service arrowhead. "I love seeing that Park Service logo," he remarks, turning right into the big valley.

The preserve was added to the national park system last fall, ending a 14-year experiment in semi-private public-land management, and prompting stakeholders to consider the lessons learned, both practical and philosophical. For many locals, these 89,000 acres remained mysterious and forbidden even after the federal government purchased them. Now, with the Park Service in charge, the public is assured open access to the valleys, streams and hot springs hidden behind the domes ringing the Valle Grande.

To Ribe and his wife, Monique Schoustra, longtime advocates for Park Service management, this seems a small miracle — especially since it required an act of Congress. Ribe, who often writes op-eds for this magazine, has strong opinions about public lands, but a calm and quiet demeanor. "I have this pessimism in me sometimes," he confesses. "I really didn't think it was going to happen."

In the parking lot, Ribe and Schoustra run into two friends. They yuck it up about being able to get in for "free" with their national parks passes and take off in any direction — which we soon do on snowshoes, into a cold wind that bites at our temples and skims powder from crusty snow. The slender grasses poking through it shiver.

The Valles Caldera became a private ranch in 1876. From Highway 4, passersby could admire the miles-wide sweep

of the Valle Grande, but not the treasures beyond it. Access to the view alone wasn't much, but it was enough to make New Mexicans feel they had a stake in the place.

In the late 1990s, recognizing public support for a purchase, New Mexico's senior senator, Republican Pete Domenici, overcame his opposition to more federally owned land and struck a deal with President Bill Clinton. Instead of being run by the Forest Service or National Park Service, the Valles Caldera would be managed by a presidentially appointed citizens' board. This "Trust" would continue to lease land for grazing, but also manage the preserve for ecological health, recreation, timber, hunting and fishing. And it had 15 years to make the whole thing financially self-sufficient. Domenici's support was key to securing money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In 2000, enjoying a rare budget surplus, the U.S. government purchased the property for \$97 million.

"Even in Congress, people believed the nation could afford to buy itself a wonderful gift," says author, conservationist and former chair of the Trust, William deBuys.

But the Trust had trouble living up to its many — sometimes conflicting — goals. Though it wasn't a typical public agency, it still had to comply with federal administrative and environmental regulations. Compliance was labor-intensive and frequently "bewildering" for trustees, recalls deBuys.

On top of that, while other public lands are included in a federal insurance pool, the Trust had to buy its own coverage. It was costly and put the Trust perpetually "one lawsuit away from having to close their doors," says University of New Mexico professor Melinda Harm Benson, who studies public lands.

To help cover costs, the preserve charged high fees. Grazing fees were around 10 times what they are on other federal lands. Hikers, bikers and skiers, who were restricted to a few trails, were charged \$10 per person, per day, per activity, when most national park units charged \$10 to \$20 per vehicle for seven days and most national forests and BLM lands could be visited for free. Elk-hunting tags often went to hunters who could afford up to 20 lottery tickets to increase their odds in the draws.

The public balked, and the Trust still lacked financial self-sufficiency. "It was

pricing everyday New Mexicans out of this public treasure," says Joel Gay of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation, a sportsmen's group that supported National Park Service management.

Despite the Trust's experimental charter, says Benson, people's expectations remained rooted in the egalitarian values that helped create public lands. "There was early on a general concern that the Valles Caldera might become a playground for the few," she says, which was evident in the debate around the lucrative hunting program.

In response to public concerns, in 2013 the Trust implemented a more equitable one hunter-one ticket lottery system. That impacted revenues, but the Trust viewed financial self-sufficiency as just one goal, not the primary one. Eventually, it even reinterpreted its mandate: It would aim only to recover the costs of programs like grazing and recreation, rather than to make the entire preserve self-sufficient. That, Benson says, highlights a key lesson of the experiment: "Making money isn't what public lands do best."

As we skirt one of the Valle Grande's volcanic domes, busting through wind-swept snow sculpted like desert sandstone, I ask Ribe and Schoustra: Why the Park Service? New Mexico has few public lands that aren't managed for multiple use, Ribe responds. Forest Service oversight, he says, would have come with the possibility of logging, off-road vehicles and a lot more cows — looser protections, in other words, heightening the risk of the place getting "trashed."

"I thought it would be really great to have a place that was not an archaeological site in the Park Service, where you could have a large piece of land and say, 'Here's an alternative way of relating to this place,'" says Ribe. He and others wanted it protected not for its practical utility, but for its wildlife and its aesthetic, even spiritual, qualities.

The Park Service is still developing its management plan, a process likely to take a few years, so the scope of changes remains uncertain. For instance, it's unclear how much of the preserve will be opened to overnight camping, which was previously restricted to one unimproved campground.

Daytime access has already increased substantially, though, and fees are consistent with other Park Service units.



Elk forage in Valles Caldera National Preserve, where between 2,500 and 3,000 elk live, above. Visitors cross-country ski around Cerro La Jara, a forested lava dome within the caldera of Valles Caldera National Preserve, below. LARRY LAMSA/CC FLICKR; NPS/ BRITTNEY VAN DER WERFF



Visitors can get in with a national parks pass or a \$20 weekly vehicle fee, and a new backcountry vehicle permit allows anyone to drive into the more remote northern valleys. “(It’s) created a release valve for that pent-up desire to explore,” says Jorge Silva-Bañuelos, the preserve’s new superintendent.

Grazing will continue to some extent, but only for research or historical interpretation. This is a significant change

from the Trust’s original charter, Silva-Bañuelos says, but stocking rates had already been reduced from historic levels. When the Trust took over, researchers used a model to determine appropriate cattle numbers to leave enough plant cover for elk, birds and erosion control. They found there was typically enough to support 750 cows for four months annually; the private owners had run as many as 9,000 head for six months. Cattle were

eventually kept out of riparian areas, and removed altogether during severe drought.

Remarkably, no lawsuits followed. In fact, the Trust, which supported a robust research and monitoring program run by ecologist Bob Parmenter, was never sued. That’s a testament, Benson says, to the success of transparent, science-based decision making, which is widely viewed as the Trust’s most important legacy. It’s an approach Silva-Bañuelos plans to continue.

As morning wanes, a storm approaches, whitewashing the sky. There are few sounds aside from the wind and our steps, and no one else in sight, until we crest a subtle rise and spot a lone skier.

Silva-Bañuelos told me earlier that he thinks of the Valles Caldera as “a national park in the raw.” There are no paved roads, and little has been done to the historic ranch buildings for decades. The visitor’s center is a doublewide with a woodstove. “It’s both a warning to the public,” he said — you won’t find much infrastructure here — and “an opportunity to see this national park at its origin.”

I ask Ribe and Schoustra if they worry that the new status might bring too many visitors. They don’t. In nearby Bandelier National Monument, they point out, the expansive backcountry is underused. It probably won’t be much different here.

Silva-Bañuelos agrees, saying most visitation will be concentrated in the Valle Grande, near the main entrance. That’s where the agency will likely develop interpretive sites covering forest ecology, climate change, volcanic geology, and the history of Native peoples in the region. But Silva-Bañuelos also hopes to develop additional trails for mountain bikers, hikers and horseback riders. His staff will complete a feasibility study for an 80-mile trail circling the caldera’s rim, the longtime dream of local trails advocate Dorothy Hoard, who died before New Mexico Sens. Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall convinced Congress to transfer the preserve.

To celebrate the transfer, Ribe and Schoustra went skiing just after the New Year. The snow was fresh, the weather mild, the preserve peaceful. They stopped in the visitors’ center, and another skier came in. “His cheeks were all flushed, he ran over and said, ‘That was exquisite!’ ” Schoustra says, flipping her poles in the air. “We just looked at each other and said, ‘That’s why.’ ” □

IF YOU GO

Valles Caldera National Preserve
Jemez Springs, New Mexico
575-829-4100
nps.gov/vall

Parks confidential

Lively Rain

About five years ago, I visited Death Valley National Park in February with a friend. Threatening dark clouds meant that we had popular Mosaic Canyon mostly to ourselves, especially after a cold shower began. As the rain



JEAN DAY

continued, we drove to Badwater Basin, where the usual low, salty pools had spread into a shallow ephemeral lake, reflecting distant Telescope Peak. Along Artists’ Drive, we hiked into a canyon; the soaked soils, slippery underfoot, revealed colors even more vivid than usual, shades of red, green, yellow and purple. Rain brought out the best in the park, even as it kept other tourists mostly indoors.

—Jodi Peterson, HCN
senior editor

Desert winter

It’s cold in January as 2016 gets underway, and we’re hiking bundled up on snowy trails in Arches National Park. As we explore the twisted red rock, losing and finding our way as we cross ice-hard streams, we see boot tracks, but not a soul. It’s just us, surrounded by the park’s bizarre beauty. It feels magical. So try visiting a park like Arches, which gets little snowfall, in the dead of winter. Enjoy the quiet punctuated only by the squawks of a raven, and avoid a long queue of generally impatient people, all waiting under a hot sun to pay their way into the park.

—Betsy Marston, HCN
Writers on the Range
editor

Listening to big empty

An acoustical journey into Great Basin National Park

BY LEATH TONINO

*Mormon tea is
whispery, delicate.
Mountain
mahogany is
coarse, gruff.
Prickly pears
have little to say,
though they do
nip at the ear
when I lean in too
close.*

I wake at dawn, and before my eyes even open, I'm drenched by the creek. Not the water but the song, the liquid harmony braiding and unbraiding 10 feet beyond the tent's thin wall. No need for the blindfold yet, I tell myself. Just stay warm in the sleeping bag, listening to this music.

Coffee calls to me, though, and soon I'm at the picnic table, firing up the stove, hearing the hiss of propane, the grinding flick of a lighter. For a while there's just my boots stomping heat into numb toes, the occasional dark-eyed junco clicking in the snowy underbrush. Then it's the percolator's oh-so-sweet gurgle and a first sip that pricks up my ears.

Getting here, to this day of uninterrupted focus, was a chore — six hours of tires whumping over old pavement, six hours of pop-country radio and ranting talk-show hosts. Great Basin National Park is located south of Route 50 in Nevada, the nation's so-called "Loneliest Road." Since 1934, the park has welcomed a total of 3.5 million visitors, which is about how many people flooded Zion National Park's sandstone canyons in 2015. Where better than the Big Empty to practice walking the land with ears in your feet?

Actually, the plan isn't to walk, that proving tricky once you're blindfolded, but to sit. To explore the uncharted micro-topography of snaps, grumbles, chirrs, buzzes and burbles. To stage a quiet revolt against the tyranny of eyesight, the dominant and mostly unquestioned belief in our culture that nature is a visual spectacle, nothing more.

Years ago in Grand Teton National Park, on what had to be the most postcard-perfect autumn weekend of all eternity, I tied a bandanna across my eyes — blacked out the vistas, deposed the tyrant. My friends were incredulous: Why conduct your little sensory deprivation experiment now, in the presence of these crazy toothy peaks? I told them that it wasn't deprivation I was after, but the opposite. Enrichment. A nuanced sense of the terrain. The hidden park inside the park.

At that exact moment, or so the story goes in my memory, a bull elk bugled nearby, sending harmonic overtones rushing through the forest. Countless aspen leaves rattled on their stems. The bones in my body whistled like so many flutes. For an instant that felt more like an hour, nobody made a peep.

See, I said.

Then I quickly corrected myself, cinching the blindfold tighter: *Hear*.

That nature is more than scenes and scenery, more than a movie to watch or some image to capture and upload, is hardly a new thought. George Catlin, the frontier painter who in 1882 proposed "a nation's park," included in his vision (excuse that sneaky ocular metaphor) a prairie refuge characterized by "desolate fields of silence." John Muir could supposedly identify every tree species in the Sierra Nevada simply by listening to its "wind-music."

Natural sounds don't just provide listeners with a sense of place — they *are* the place, no less so than dirt and grizzly bears. Wilderness fragmented by human din is not wild, and even keeps ecosystems from functioning as they should. Frogs need quiet to discuss potential dangers. Birds need to court. Quite simply, land conservation, to deserve the name, must include the conservation of soundscapes.

The National Park Service picked up on this in 1972, when the Noise Control Act was passed. The law requires the federal government to regulate, among other things, commercial helicopter and airplane tours over national parks. But it wasn't until 2000, with the creation of a natural sounds division, that the agency got serious about "protecting, maintaining, and restoring acoustical environments." Tasks range from baseline audio sampling at front- and backcountry sites to tracking threats such as growing crowds and industrial development beyond park boundaries. But public outreach, educating and inspiring the masses — that's arguably most important of all.

Intrusive anthropogenic noise, while a serious issue, is only half the problem. The other half is under-hearing — disregard. A failure on the part of hikers and picnickers and photographers to open themselves to potential opportunities. Can we climb El Capitan's immaculate granite with our ears? Can we appreciate a Yellowstone wolf's howl cutting across the face of the full moon without ever lifting our gaze? These questions should be asked and answered by experts and regular park-goers alike. They should be engaged with playfully, in the field.

As pioneering soundscape ecologist Bernie Krause puts it, writing of the Grand Canyon: "The pictures of the park really do only convey a fraction of the experience." If you're not hearing the



ancient stratigraphy crumbling grain by grain, you might as well be sitting on the tour bus, looking out the window.

After a strong cup of coffee and 20 minutes of close listening — the juncos, I realize without looking, have taken to the piñon pines, their voices mapping in my mind the precise location of perches — an annoying rumble rises in my gut. Nope, not hunger. The other morning rumble, the one that comes 12 hours after a dinner of baked beans and hotdogs, like a rockfall in the echoey alpine cirque of my belly.

Strolling to the bathroom, I work

WEB EXTRA Listen to sounds from your national parks and get some tips on how to enhance your soundscape experience at hcn.org.



A double exposure of a bristlecone pine in Great Basin National Park, Nevada, and its bark. Can you imagine the wind blowing through the branches, or the creaking of the slowly growing bark? DAVID MUENCH

or close to nothing. The approaching storm's invisible edge. My breath within the heave and sigh of some larger elemental breath. It's hard to describe the way our world knits itself into wholeness one whir and rustle at a time without getting all cheesy and metaphysical. But it's true, very real.

A Clark's nutcracker cuts by with a *whoosh* of wings, arresting me mid-step. The sky almost audibly re-gathers itself in the bird's wake. Then the moment's gone, dissolved, which is a good thing, as it'd be dangerous to delay any longer my rendezvous with the "comfort station."

Misnomer? You bet your frigid fanny. And you can throw in the icy seat as well! Never fear, I'm a pretty tough guy, and moreover, I'm beginning to get lost in aural reveries. I experiment with the concrete walls and the ping-ponging resonance, humming for a few minutes, chanting some bass notes. Boy, if only I could get a corvid in here, I think, then we'd really be jamming.

Back outside, the mountain slope above the campground is beginning to moan, a lenticular cloud forming around Wheeler Peak's summit. Channeling John Muir, I hike into the piñon-juniper woodlands — pausing, crouching, trying to distinguish between the thrum of sagebrush and the thrum of cliffrose. Personalities emerge. Mormon tea is whispery, delicate. Mountain mahogany is coarse, gruff. Prickly pears have little to say, though they do nip at the ear when I lean in too close. I'm reminded of other natural history pursuits — sorting seashells, identifying lichens with a hand lens — and how the ecological community starts to resemble just that: A community, a neighborhood of individuals.

The nondescript forest is suddenly described. A snag and a living tree speak the same language but different dialects. Even the growing wind comes across as a gang of many.

As far as I can tell, the sounds we absorb — a mountain lion's scream, a glacier's groan — become landmarks in our personal sonic geography. Capitol Reef National Park is for me the back-and-forth of raven calls inside slickrock alcoves. Rocky Mountain National Park is an electric crackle and the slam of thunder against an exposed ridgeline. Of a solo backpacking trip on the beaches of the Olympic Peninsula, the only color I remember is gray — foggy gray, relentless gray. But the push and pull of waves, that was strange, unforgettable. By day, the ocean laughed like a schoolyard of happy

children. By night, it bellowed like a tortured monster. And it never stopped. It was always speaking, even when it wasn't.

Hiking along, I ruminate. Maybe it's not so much what we hear as that we *try* to hear, that every once in a while we approach a landscape delicately, on tiptoes, alert to possibilities. Maybe it's this effort and intention that drops a pin flag into our life. Maybe park rangers should hand out complimentary blindfolds as a way of encouraging toddlers and grandparents and everybody between to take it easy, quit the chitchat. Maybe once our ears are tuned, once the practice has become ingrained, we can do away with the blindfolds and enjoy a synesthetic wonderland, our senses working in concert to perceive an infinitely layered world.

Maybe. But not today.

After a few slow miles, a souging draws me over to a particular piñon pine. I lie down in a crunchy patch of exposed duff on the leeward side of the trunk, boughs just inches above my forehead. Out comes a thick cotton bandanna, soft on the bridge of my nose. I cinch it tight.

Stories unfold beneath the pine, all without beginning, middle or end, all without plot or character. Branches clatter against branches. A million needles sift fast-moving air. I want to rip the bandanna away, find the source of a specific sound, but the fun is hanging in there, taking the ride, letting the tension build. Sometimes the wind is almost too intense, as if an 18-wheeler is about to smash me into oblivion. I brace for impact, tensing every muscle, only to relax seconds later into an unexpected lull.

Bernie Krause again: "When the sound of wind is hushed and subtle, it sometimes reminds me of the breath of living organisms; it becomes the crossover between animals and an alive-sounding earth."

This is my last thought before thinking stops altogether, before I disappear. Where do I go? Far, that's all I can say. I travel far, return, emerge from a state of consciousness that resembles dreaming yet involves no sleep. Pulling off the blindfold, I try to stand but only manage to stumble. I can barely see, barely walk, barely pick up the journal that falls from my pocket — and when I do, there are no notes to write. Words fail. There is only the day's eloquence pressing against me from all sides.

I'm out of it. By which I mean in it. Way deep.

And then I'm in my jacket's hood, the storm's first snowflakes scratching perfect tiny poems — haiku — against the nylon. □

IF YOU GO

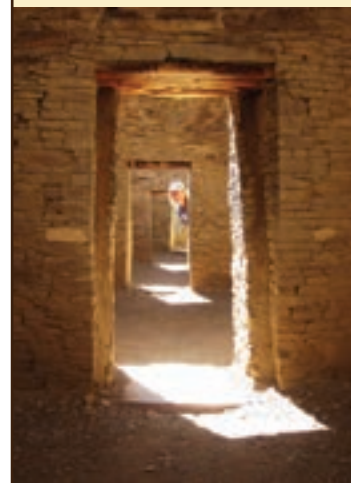
Great Basin National Park
Baker, Nevada
775-234-7331, nps.gov/grba

Parks confidential

Surprising places

I've bumped along the terrible road to Chaco Canyon, hoping there was something worth seeing at the end. Imagine my surprise at the wonders of this ancient city. I've floated the Kenai Fjords, surprised as huge sea glaciers calved before my eyes and a whale breached the ocean surface time and time again. And I've hiked to Delicate Arch, surprised I could still enjoy the view when it was too hot to breathe, or hike. The greatest surprise as I travel the West? That we have had the wisdom to set aside these lands to continually surprise generations to come. May it always be so.

—Rosann Fillmore, reader



Ruins in Chaco Canyon
KATHERINE DARROW

More wild, less people

North Cascades is one of the greatest Western national parks. And yet it's often overlooked. Why? Probably because it is mainly wilderness and backcountry. Yet it reminds me of Glacier National Park, only with more glaciers, mountain goats and a lot fewer people. Yes, there are grizzlies, but far too few of them to be a concern while hiking.

—Robert Watzek, reader

on parsing the various sounds within a single footstep: First the crush of loose surface snow, then the creak as the sole flexes and compacts the base, and last the tinkle of crystals thrown ahead by the push-off. It's November, a squall forecasted to arrive this morning, and the campground is vacant — not that I would expect anything less. On my first trip here, I climbed 13,064-foot Wheeler Peak, the park's centerpiece, and had the entire summit to myself, along with a sizeable chunk of the Basin and Range. And the whining of my nervous system, the pulse of blood in my temples.

Today, I'm hoping to hear nothing,

DARK PARKS

Why are we drawn to monuments that commemorate evil, darkness and death? What compels us to remember things we would rather forget? Every year, thousands of visitors journey to Nazi concentration camps. Here in the U.S., President John F. Kennedy's birthplace is a national historic site, but the museum on the sixth floor of the Dallas book depository, from which JFK's assassin fired the deadly bullet, is arguably more popular.

Perhaps we seek out these places to remind ourselves of the depths to which we can sink, and to give us the will to resist those darker impulses. Maybe it's a kind of collective therapy: By facing our demons, we can begin to purge them.

A handful of "dark" sites are scattered across the West, and the National Park Service is adding more to its roster of historic places. The park system now includes not just Mesa Verde National Park, but also the Japanese American internment camps and Sand Creek Massacre site; not just monuments to vanished civilizations, but also reminders of bloody savagery. The Manhattan Project sites in Hanford and Los Alamos somehow manage to be shrines to both human ingenuity and barbarity.

"Our job is to help tell the full story of America — the giant jigsaw puzzle that is the United States and the American experience," says John Sprinkle, acting chief historian for the National Park Service. That story is unavoidably complex. "You can't just have happy history."

The sinister chapters of our past, Sprinkle adds, offer lessons in survival, and maybe that's part of what motivates us to engage with them. "Folks in the past had it tough and faced adversity and came through and survived." In darkness, there can be hope.

Here, we visit three "dark parks."

JONATHAN THOMPSON



In 1942, Shigeho Kitamoto and her four children, left, were among more than 200 Bainbridge Island residents of Japanese descent forced from their homes and into internment camps. Corp. George Bushy, member of the military guard, assists with her young son. Below, a terra cotta frieze and origami birds are part of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial.

AP PHOTO, LEFT.
PAUL GORDON, BELOW.

Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial

When the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial was little more than a clearing in a forest on Puget Sound, among its first visitors was a cacophonous murder of crows. On March 30, 2002, about 750 people came to mark the 60th anniversary of the first forced removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast after the attack on Pearl Harbor. By shining a light on this dark piece of American history, the memorial was meant to discourage racially fueled hysteria.

Bainbridge Islanders of Japanese descent were taken primarily to the Minidoka camp in Idaho, now a National Park Service unit that includes the Bainbridge memorial. That day in 2002, their names would be read aloud as part of the dedication of a small granite marker.

The crows arrived swiftly and noisily when Clarence Moriwaki, one of the memorial's organizers, spoke the first names. The cawing was so uproarious that some people no longer could hear Moriwaki, despite the sound system. Moriwaki worried about the moment of silence scheduled to follow.

But as soon as he uttered the last name, the crows, which the region's Native peoples consider the spirits of their ancestors, flew off. A hush reclaimed the forest. "It was as if a switch went off," Moriwaki recalled.



Moriwaki recounted this tale on a chilly evening last December as we waited for a vigil to begin at the memorial. I am Japanese American but have no direct connection with the prison camps; my mother was in Japan during the war. Yet I still feel strongly attached to that history, such a central part of my racial heritage, and have visited the memorial several times.

The place holds a jarring grace, its beauty and serenity seeming incongruous with the history of hatred it records. The centerpiece is a 276-foot story wall, one foot for each Japanese American exiled

*The national park system does more than celebrate beauty.
It also commemorates the ugliest parts of our past.*



The prairie in southeastern Colorado where at least 150 Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians died in the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

from Bainbridge Island. It is made of old-growth red cedar, and bordered by wetlands and cherry trees. The names of the exiled are affixed to the wall. It doesn't scream the intended message: "*Nidoto Nai Yoni*" — let it not happen again. Not the way a bit of razor wire might.

I confessed my misgivings to Moriwaki, who reacted with unexpected delight. There already was too much ugliness and pain associated with the forced removals, he said. The organizers sought a site for healing, honor and hope as well as history. The Japanese "less-is-more" aesthetic was a testimony to the exiled, who had been burdened by shame. They approached this part of their past according to the Buddhist notion of "*Gaman*" — enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity. This place offered a release.

Below us in the candlelit night, people assembled at the base of the wall to protest recent anti-Muslim rhetoric from Donald Trump's presidential campaign. It struck a chord on Bainbridge Island: More Japanese Americans returned there after World War II than to any other place in the U.S. On Bainbridge, they were embraced by neighbors, who looked after their property and possessions, fought against the mass incarceration, and in some cases even made mortgage payments for the imprisoned. The memorial is as much a monument to those relationships as it is a warning against racial hatred. As Moriwaki put it, they "demonstrated the best of what America can be." GLENN NELSON

Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site

I stood on a bluff in southeastern Colorado, overlooking the lonesome prairie, 180 miles southeast of Denver. Bare cottonwoods lined the dry bed of Big Sandy Creek. Otherwise, there was nothing but grass, earth, rocks and sky. The only sounds that November day were the wind and the singing of LaForce "Lee" Lonely Bear, a Northern Cheyenne spiritual adviser.

This was the site of the notorious Sand Creek Massacre. At dawn on Nov. 29, 1864, a 675-man Colorado militia, led by Col. John Chivington, a Methodist minister, attacked a small, peaceful village of Cheyenne and Arapaho camped along the creek. Without provocation, the militia charged and killed at least 150 Indians, mostly women and children. According to militiamen and survivors, soldiers chased unarmed Indians down the creek bed, raped and bayoneted women, hacked off limbs and genitals. Cheyenne Chief White Antelope was scalped and mutilated as he pleaded for peace. The Cheyenne say that White Antelope repeated his final journey song as he lay dying: "All my relations, remember / Only the rocks on earth stay forever."

This horrific massacre — denounced as a "cowardly and cold-blooded slaughter" by an 1867 U.S. Army inquiry — escalated simmering conflicts between Plains tribes and settlers. The fighting climaxed with the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn and the annihilation of

Custer's troops by the Sioux and Cheyenne, but it didn't end until 1890, when every Plains tribe had been ushered onto a reservation.

While the massacre never entirely faded from memory, it was rarely mentioned in history books and only whispered about by tribes. Little Bighorn became a national park; Sand Creek became private ranchlands. Otto Braided Hair, a Northern Cheyenne, says he never learned about Sand Creek in school.

Braided Hair, Lone Bear and the others who brought me to the site in 2005 had been working to change that, partly by establishing Sand Creek as a national historic site managed by the National Park Service. Along with other Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, they envisioned it becoming a place of remembrance and healing for their own people and the nation. "So the history may live on," Lone Bear told me.

That November afternoon, the five Northern Cheyennes had journeyed there from Montana to repatriate the remains of an ancestor who died there. As Lone Bear's prayer carried across the plains, I realized I was experiencing a doubly rare moment. I was afield with Native Americans during a sacred rite at a sacred place, and also glimpsing a national park site-to-be. After Lone Bear concluded his song, I followed him and the others down a bluff and through the grove of wrinkled cottonwoods. Braided Hair told me that they wanted the park to be simple, with a few short trails and limited services; they didn't want visitors wandering around the

JOHN KRZESINSKI / CC VIA FLICKR



Yosemite Falls "moonbow"

Nixon, moose and moonbeams

There are lots of great, unexpected things in national parks. Death Valley: Getting out to the Racetrack, and a few years later, seeing the "mystery" of the stones solved. Redwoods: A burl that looked just like Richard Nixon. Grand Teton: A bull moose swimming the Snake, surrounded by pelicans. Yosemite: Learning about the "moonbow" at the base of Yosemite Falls during April and May full moons, and getting photos of it.

—Steve Snyder, reader

Awesome Arches

One of my favorite hikes is the one to Delicate Arch at Arches National Park, which often has a steady stream of tourists heading to the top. A lot of them look like maybe they don't get out hiking very much. At the end of the trail, you can't see the arch until you come around a rock wall and suddenly there is this huge, impossible rock formation sitting on the edge of a cliff with a magnificent vista all around it. When people come around the corner and see the arch, they get a look of absolute awe on their faces. It feels like a pilgrimage.

—Amy Brunvand, reader

IF YOU GO

Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site
Eads, Colorado
719-438-5916
nps.gov/sand

Minidoka National Historic Site
Bainbridge Island, Washington; between Twin Falls and Jerome, Idaho
208-933-4100
nps.gov/miin

Manhattan Project National Historic Park
Hanford, Washington; Los Alamos, New Mexico; Oak Ridge, Tennessee
303-969-2700
nps.gov/mapr

Construction of the B Reactor at the Hanford Site in Washington, circa 1944, below. The B Reactor was the first reactor built on the Hanford Site, and was also the first full-scale reactor in the world. Below right, a modern-day tour of the B Reactor.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

lowlands and creek where the massacre actually occurred. That, the tribes believe, is consecrated land.

In 2000, the project received congressional authorization and the Park Service began acquiring privately owned ranchlands encompassing the site. The Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site was officially designated in April 2007, two years after my visit. Since then, a modest number of tourists have trickled through. And every year in November, the Cheyenne and Arapaho organize a healing run from Sand Creek to Denver, to help commemorate the massacre, the tribes and their way of life.

“Part of the reason for establishing Sand Creek as a national historic site,” Superintendent Alexa Roberts told me, “is to use it as a vehicle to recognize and help prevent such incidents from ever occurring again.” As Lone Bear and his friends had hoped, the exhibits and services today remain minimal. The primary visitors center is in the nearby town of Eads, so that at the site, “the landscape can speak for itself,” Roberts said.

It’s still possible to stand on the bluff above the creek bed and gaze across the empty, rolling prairie, imagining scenes of 19th century tribal life, and then to picture the terrifying chaos that erupted on a frozen November morning. North of the site, there’s a speck of a town called Chivington, named after the colonel who led the attack. Now, the Sand Creek Massacre appears on maps, too. But only the rocks stay forever. JOSHUA ZAFFOS

Manhattan Project National Historic Park

Past the gates to the Hanford Site, eastern Washington’s plains seem to sprawl forever. In 1943, seeking a site to produce plutonium for the top-secret Manhattan Project, which would yield

the atomic bomb, the federal government settled on Hanford. It seemed ideal — essentially empty, an immense, remote expanse of channeled scablands inside a curve of the clear, cold Columbia River.

Hanford displaced three farming towns, whose ruins still stand, interspersed with the remains of the infrastructure needed for the world’s first full-scale nuclear reactors. The construction camp became the state’s fourth-biggest city; its 51,000 workers devoured 7,200 pies at Christmas. At its height, the 640-square-mile site was home to 544 buildings.

The B Reactor, the first to be operational, and the only one you can visit, is a blocky concrete layer cake of a building. Inside, a cavernous room holds the three-story tall reactor, its face a grid of 2,004 tubes where scientists enriched uranium into plutonium 239. One ton of uranium made a hockey puck-sized piece of plutonium.

By the late ’80s, plutonium production had ceased, and in 1989, the U.S. Department of Energy, which runs the site, demolished most of the buildings and cocooned the reactors. The nuclear waste cleanup continues, costing \$2 billion a year.

In 2009, former workers asked the Department of Energy to start giving tours of the B Reactor. “People can’t understand the impressiveness of this,” says Kevin Haggerty, the reactor’s facilities manager, noting the astonishing speed with which the power of fission was discovered and exploited. “It changed the way countries interacted with each other.”

So last fall, the DOE and the National Park Service teamed up to operate the site as part of the Manhattan Project National Historic Park, which includes parts of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, and Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, the two other sites where plutonium was processed into bombs. Tour guides talk about the pre-

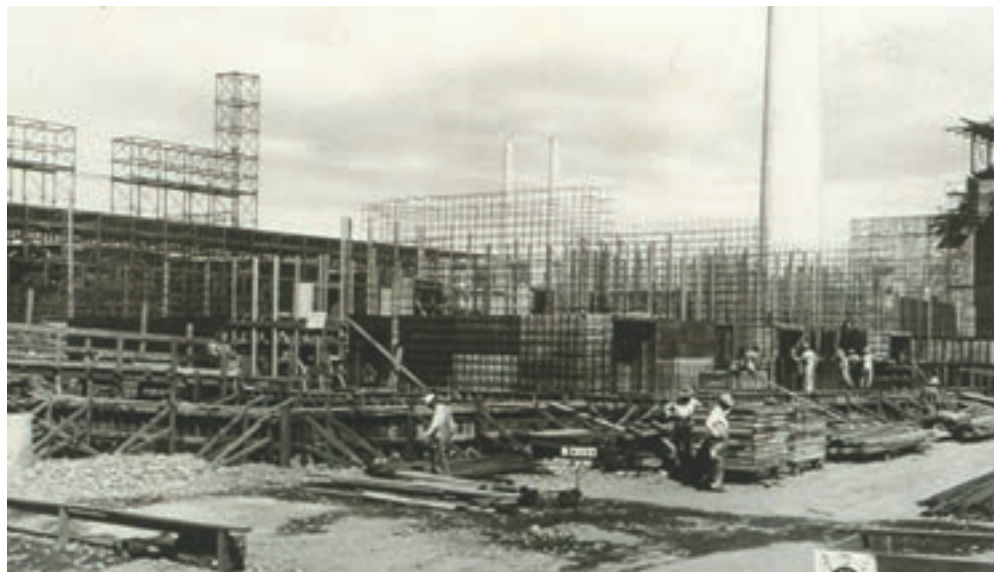
nuclear-era history of the communities, the engineering feats that were accomplished, and the complicated consequences of fission, for better and worse.

I went to Hanford to reconcile the two narratives I associated with the atomic age — innovation and annihilation. Nancy Bowers, a docent for the B Reactor, said they’ve avoided talking about the bomb’s impacts until now. Most of the visitors come for the pre-WWII history. Now, with the park’s new focus on nuclear history, that’s likely to change, and Bowers is uncertain what she’ll say.

On the wall inside the B Reactor, there’s a framed copy of the front page of the *Richland Villager* newspaper from Aug. 6, 1945, the day the U.S. bombed Hiroshima. “It’s atomic bombs,” the headline screamed. Most of Hanford’s workers didn’t know what they had been building until the news broke; no one knew that more than 200,000 people would die from the bomb’s fallout.

In the operating room behind the reactor, Bowers tells me that Enrico Fermi’s code name was Earnest Farmer. She describes how the operators had to sneak the plutonium down to Los Alamos, sending it a different way every time. Bowers says she tries to simply give people the history and let them form their own opinions. “I always talk to people about ‘presentism,’ and not evaluating things that happened 70 years ago by today’s standards,” she says. “You have to put yourself back in their shoes.”

Inside the reactor, it’s easy to imagine the hum of excitement Fermi and his team felt. But driving out of the eerily beautiful site, past the cleanup zones and the hulking shells of the reactors, the Manhattan Project’s fallout feels very present. Perhaps that’s part of the value of the park, and of coming to places like this to contemplate the past. It’s rarely clear-cut, even when looking back. HEATHER HANSMAN



Where you go — and where you don't

The National Park Service's known, and lesser-known, sites

Though the West's national parks endure, visitation to specific sites constantly varies, subject to the whims of gas prices, social media and even books and movies.

"Sites really tend to fluctuate with special events and what's going on in popular culture. That gives them a pretty good push for a year or two," says Pamela Ziesler, National Park Service statistics coordinator. When a documentary about John Muir came out in 2012, visitors flocked to the Muir Woods near Mill Valley, California. And after Cheryl Strayed's book *Wild* (and the 2014 movie based on it) became popular, so did the Pacific Crest Trail: In 2015, 3,000 people applied for a permit to complete the entire 2,650-mile path, compared to 300 people in 2012.

Ziesler says cheap gas and a growing population also draw tourists. Rocky Mountain National Park, on Colorado's Front Range, saw more than 4 million visits in 2015, nearly twice as many as a decade earlier, mainly because of the park's proximity to rapidly expanding Denver. (See graph at bottom.)

Still, many of the park system's more than 400 units exist under the radar of most travelers, meaning that there is still plenty of open space in parks, preserves, monuments, historic sites, national seashores and battlefields. One such lesser-known treasure is Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in Southeast Alaska. While Wrangell-St. Elias is the largest unit in the system — 13.2 million acres — it's so remote that fewer than 100,000 people find their way to it each year. PAIGE BLANKENBUEHLER

A SAMPLING OF TYPES OF NATIONAL PARK UNITS, AND THEIR MOST AND LEAST VISITED SITES IN 2015

National Park

Yellowstone, the first national park, was designated by Congress in 1872, "dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson created the National Park Service to preserve natural and cultural resources for future generations.

National Monument

While national parks protect large areas of exceptional natural beauty, national monuments preserve specific assets, like landmarks or structures with prehistoric or scientific interest. The first monument was Devils Tower in Wyoming in 1906.

National Historic Site

The Historic Sites Act of 1935 allowed the National Park Service to designate historic sites — locations with special features and a strong tie to the past.

National Seashore

There's only one national seashore in the West: Point Reyes, designated in 1962. Typically, states manage their coastal landscapes, but the Park Service took responsibility for Point Reyes because of its value as a wildlife sanctuary, home to more than 1,500 plant and animal species.

Big Hole, MT

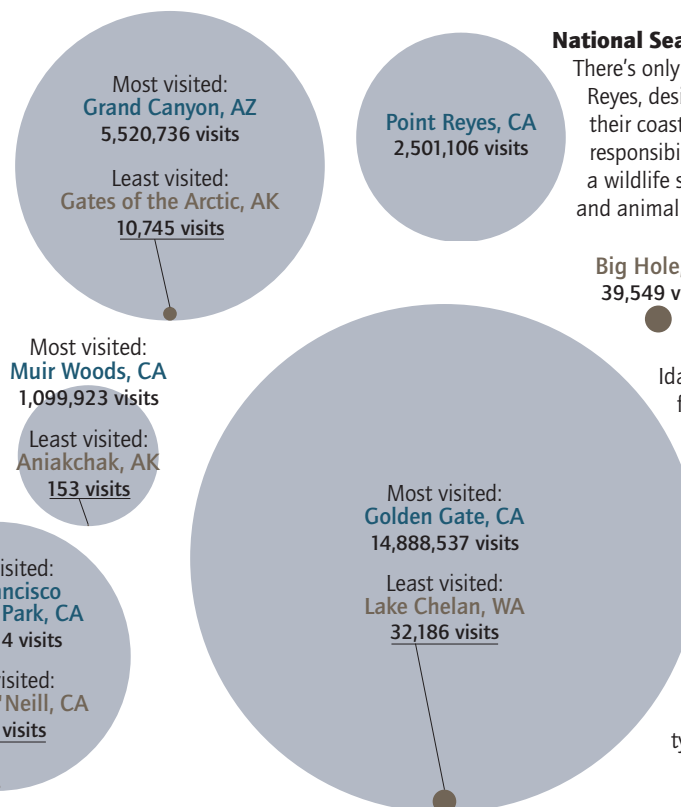
39,549 visits

National Battlefield

The National Park Service manages just a single battlefield in the West. Big Hole Battlefield in Idaho, where U.S. soldiers and the Nez Perce fought in 1877, became a national monument in 1910, and was added to the parks system in 1933.

National Recreation Area

The National Park Service began emphasizing certain units' outdoor recreation opportunities, officially differentiating them from parks and monuments in 1936. These areas often focus on water-based recreation and are typically located near major cities.



Parks confidential

Unimpressed by predators

I once traveled through Yellowstone National Park in the early spring, with my sister and her daughter. My niece was 7 or 8 at the time, and I bought her a little laminated field guide for the flora and fauna. The roads had just been cleared, and there was a ton of snow still on the ground. Bison walked past the cars with heavy breath in the cold, and, when we stopped at the side of the road, we saw some kind of canine pulling an elk carcass out of a frozen lake. My niece looked down at her identification sheet and said, in a matter-of-fact way: "I think that's a gray wolf." It was. The wolf is now her favorite animal.

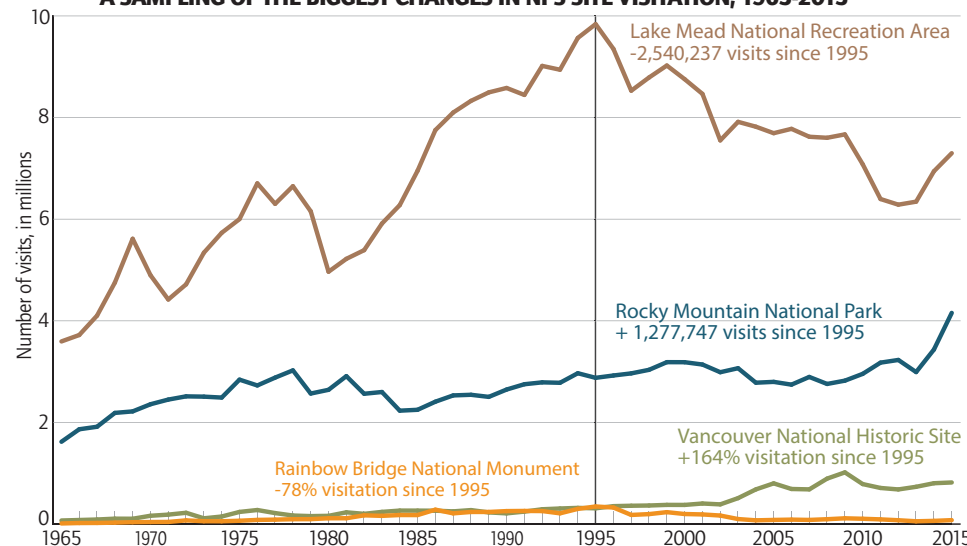
—Brian Calvert, HCN managing editor

Finding family

In my not-quite-teens years, I traveled with my father and sister from Colorado to Crater Lake National Park in Oregon. My parents were newly divorced and traveling with just one of them seemed awkward. Plus, since we already lived in the country's most alluring state, I wasn't sure why we needed to journey so far for yet more mountain beauty. But at the overlook of Crater Lake, I choked up and felt a surprising sense of belonging. Maybe it was knowing that my family was still my family, even if it wasn't the same, and maybe it was the understanding that the great outdoors is a place I'll always be able to find myself.

—Gretchen King, HCN community engagement

A SAMPLING OF THE BIGGEST CHANGES IN NPS SITE VISITATION, 1965-2015



SOURCE: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. *GRAPH USES SOME OF THE BIGGEST NUMERICAL AND PERCENT CHANGE INCREASES AND DECREASES IN THE WESTERN NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM.

Lake Mead Recreation Area: Low lake levels

Years of drought can be blamed for visitation decreases at one of the West's most popular recreation areas, Lake Mead. Last year, approximately 7 million visitors came to its shores, compared to nearly 10 million a decade earlier.

Vancouver National Historic Site: Increasing the appeal

Since 1995, visitation has more than doubled — partly because of a new trail system and highway overpass that allowed visitors to walk from the former fur-trading post and Army base to the Columbia River waterfront.

Rainbow Bridge National Monument: Drought detracts

The fate of one of the smallest park units is linked to nearby mega-attraction Lake Powell. Since most trek to the remote desert landmark en route to the popular reservoir, drought-related visitation declines kept many visitors from Rainbow Bridge, too.

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THE NATIONAL PARKS: AN AMERICAN LEGACY

Photographs by Ian Shive, introduction by
W. Clark Bunting
240 pages, hardcover: \$50
Earth Aware Editions, 2015

"When I think about large landscape conservation, I think about connectivity — of the land, yes, but also the air, the water, the wildlife, the migratory patterns and corridors — and how all these things know no park boundaries," writes National Parks Conservation Association president W. Clark Bunting in *The National Parks: An American Legacy*. This coffee-table book celebrates the Park Service's centennial with over 300 never-before-seen photos shot in vivid color by Ian Shive, accompanied by essays from conservation groups, including the Yellowstone Park Foundation and Friends of the Smokies. Shive, winner of the 2011 Ansel Adams Award for Conservation Photography, travels from New Mexico's White Sands National Monument to Montana's Glacier National Park, capturing intricate geologic and botanical details as well as vast landscapes populated by an astonishing variety of wildlife. His images illuminate our deep connection to the American landscape, together with its extraordinary history. **LYNDESEY GILPIN**

A view of mountains through fireweed wildflowers inside Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska.

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On the road between here and there

We love Paonia, Colorado, the small town where *High Country News* is based, but we couldn't function without our correspondents and editors, who are scattered all over the West. Our far-flung colleagues adventure through the region's most unusual and beautiful places, reporting and writing the stories you find in the magazine. A lot of great people spend some time at *HCN*, but we're especially thrilled when their journeys finally lead them back to us.

And so we're delighted to welcome back **Kate Schimel**, our assistant editor, who re-joins us at *HCN* headquarters after a long sojourn in the Pacific Northwest. Kate, who worked for us as an editorial intern and correspondent, is now back in Paonia, after a long, long, long drive from Seattle, across the sagebrush sea. It's nice to have you back home again, Kate!

We've had a lot happening in our little town, including TedXPaonia, an independently organized TED event in early February, which included some of our favorite writers and speakers. Several longtime *HCN* contributors put in an appearance, including award-winning author **Craig Childs** and **Christie Aschwanden**, lead science writer for 538.com. And **Rebecca Clarren**, a longtime writer and former *HCN* editor, stopped by to peek at her old desk and reminisce about her time as an intern in 1999. (Not all the par-

ticipants spoke, either: **Brooke Warren**, our associate designer, gave a wonderful modern dance performance.) A big thank-you to all the writers, editors and thinkers, near and far, who keep *HCN* chugging along.

Finally, a few clarifications. In our "Sagebrush Insurgency" issue ("The Rise of the Sagebrush Sheriffs," *HCN*, 2/2/16), we included a photo of Richard Mack, founder of the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association. Mack spoke at a pro- (not anti-) gun rally in Washington, D.C., in 2010. In our graph, "Common Cause," we listed Siskiyou County Sheriff Jon Lopey as supporting both the CSPOA and the Oath Keepers. Lopey says he has avoided contact with those groups since 2014. And in our story about anti-fracking measures, "Colorado activists set their sights on a ballot measure to limit drilling" (*HCN*, 2/22/16), Rep. Jared Polis did support two 2014 anti-fracking measures, including one that would have created an "environmental bill of rights," which were slated for the Colorado ballot and were widely supported by many activists. However, neither of those initiatives had backing from the Colorado Community Rights Network, and it was federal district court that overturned a community ordinance, not New Mexico, as we indicated. We regret the confusion.

—Paige Blankenbuehler
for the staff



Former *HCN* editor Rebecca Clarren, far left; contributor and author Craig Childs, third from left; former contributor and science writer Christie Aschwanden, fifth from left; *HCN* associate designer, Brooke Warren, sixth from left; and former contributor Alex Carr Johnson, third from right, participated in Paonia, Colorado's TEDx event in February.

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Tracing borderlands history on the ANZA TRAIL

I am lost before I've even started. It's December and I'm in Nogales, Arizona, determined to re-trace the footsteps of the first Spanish colonizing expedition across what is now the border between the United States and Mexico. Nearly 250 years ago, in 1775, a young Spanish commander led a group of mostly poor villagers — men, women and children — together with more than 1,000 horses and cattle from the Mexican state of Sinaloa northwards across a vast desert to the far reaches of the Empire in what was then called Alta California. Like Yosemite or Yellowstone, or the Oregon Trail, the expedition's route is part of the national park system. It should be easy to find. But the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail has no official starting point — at least not one

that's marked.

Instead, there is a giant steel fence equipped with motion sensors, and the ever-vigilant eyes of the U.S. Border Patrol.

Anza actually began his journey 600 miles south of here, in the town of Culiacán, Mexico. But the route managed by the National Park Service begins on this side of the border, and heads north, then west, a loosely connected corridor of dirt paths, protected areas and ruins that “connect history, culture, and outdoor recreation from Nogales, Arizona, to the San Francisco Bay Area.”

But here in downtown Nogales, with its stream of honking cars and people waiting to cross the wall that divides the city, I can find no remnants of the original route, nor any modern markers that com-

memorate it. The border, it seems, erases history.

At least that's how Teresa Leal, a petite 66-year-old anthropologist with a pixie haircut and a mischievous smile, sees it. She belongs to the Anza Society, established to help commemorate the expedition's history in both Mexico and the U.S. and works as the director of the Pimeria Alta Museum, a stone's throw from the Nogales portion of the border wall.

Leal's ancestors were Opatá, once the most numerous people in what is now the border region of northeastern Sonora and southern Arizona. Anza, she explains, did not actually blaze the trail that today bears his name, but rather followed in the footsteps of the area's indigenous people, whose ancient paths created the first



RAIL

FEATURE BY SARAH TORY

migration routes through the modern-day borderlands.

As a person whose history spans the border itself, Leal is bothered by the lack of commemoration. There are Anza Trail markers in Sonora and farther north in Santa Cruz County, but along the border, nothing. Long ago, she says, we stopped defining this place as interesting — as land worth preserving. Why? She gestures at the wall that rises just behind the museum: Because it is the border. “There is something unreal about it.”

One day, Leal hopes there will be two Anza Trail markers on the border, one facing north and the other south. For now, there are just the rust-colored bars of an 18-foot-tall barrier, the streets of Nogales, Mexico, visible through it — colorful houses perched on steep hillsides cracked

sidewalks and roaming dogs. Marimba music drifts through the wall as if it were paper.

ON OCT. 14, 1775, Anza’s expedition reached a small wetland a few miles north of the present-day border. Today, Las Lagunas, a privately owned nature preserve on the outskirts of Nogales, marks the unofficial beginning of Arizona’s portion of the Anza Trail. It belongs to John Anthony Sedgwick, who, with his son, Anthony, runs a nonprofit called the Santa Fe Ranch Foundation, which brings local school kids to Las Lagunas for outdoor education.

It’s an unlikely wilderness, just 2.8 acres, sitting next to some warehouses. Interstate 19 rumbles just beyond the hilltop overlooking the small ponds and

their thickets of 12-foot-tall arundo. The cane is invasive, admits Anthony Sedgwick, 38, who pulls up on his motorcycle, a Triumph Street he painted himself. But it’s partly what makes this place what it is. “Plus,” he says, “it’s a good barrier against the warehouses.”

Before the wetland was restored, there was a drive-in movie theater here. When that was abandoned, the space became a de facto dump for everything from cars to refrigerators to an entire trailer home. It took all summer to uncover the original ecosystem; the junk they removed filled up multiple 40-foot dumpsters.

Sedgwick hopes that by uncovering the wetlands he is helping uncover a forgotten history as well. “Up until a few years ago, I thought of the late 17th century as when the British landed at Plymouth Rock,” he admits. We tend to focus on dates like 1607, when the English settled at Jamestown, Virginia, or 1620, when the Pilgrims arrived. But there’s another, older history — the Spanish colonization of America, which began a century before that. It’s rarely taught in our schools, because, as Sedgwick puts it, “there’s this issue with Latin American studies not being ‘American’ enough.”

Sedgwick sighs. It’s the border again. At the far edge of the wetlands, he stops

Teresa Leal, above left, at the wetlands of Las Lagunas, where the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail begins on the outskirts of Nogales, Arizona. Top, Nogales, Mexico, as seen across the border wall. Above, one of the shrines along the trail.

JORDAN GLENN
“A” ILLUSTRATION BY
HOLLY MCCLELLAND



“There’s this issue with Latin American studies not being ‘American’ enough.”

— Anthony Sedgwick, who, with his father, John Anthony, brings school children to Las Lagunas for outdoor education

at a clearing where migrants used to camp. He’d find empty water jugs, discarded clothing, sleeping bags, and pizza boxes, mostly the Little Caesars Hot-N-Ready kind, because they only cost \$5, and people were hungry.

The campsite stays mostly empty now. Fewer people cross near Nogales, where the border is now heavily patrolled and mostly walled off. Instead, they are pushed deeper and deeper into the desert, where, every year, dozens die of thirst or exposure. Before 9/11, Nogales was a thriving border community. People crossed into Mexico to shop at the market, which was always pulsing with life. Slowly but surely, that stream of commerce withered. “Now, there are these ridiculous checkpoints,” says Sedgwick, referring to the Border Patrol station on I-19, 20 miles north of the actual border — an “affront to our Constitution,” Sedgwick calls them.

People believe that crime is everywhere, he adds — that Nogales is dangerous. The community is struggling. But Sedgwick consoles himself with the thought of Las Lagunas: an unlikely wetland in the middle of a desert where kids can run free.

FROM LAS LAGUNAS, Anza travelled almost due north along the Santa Cruz River. But the modern trail-follower should probably begin roughly 20 miles north of Nogales near the old Spanish mission of Tumacácori, nestled among cottonwoods and mesquite alongside the river, where Anza stopped for supplies. Here, the first section of real trail begins.

I happen to arrive during the annual Fiesta de Tumacácori, and stop for my own supplies in the form of an ice-cold horchata, served up by Lupita Ferree, a teacher with freckles sprinkled across her nose, who lives in the nearby town of Rio Rico. Ferree, 63, has been walking this stretch of the trail since the 1970s, before it was designated.

When Ferree and her family first moved to Arizona from Sonora, she and her siblings played in the river. Now, almost all of the Santa Cruz’s flow is treated wastewater from the Nogales Treatment Plant and Ferree won’t let her grandchildren play in the water. And yet, without the wastewater, the river would run dry most of the year. The riparian ecosystem would vanish. “We sort of have a conflicted relationship to it,” admits Marty Jakle, a retired biologist who leads a nature walk along the trail. But there are signs of improvement, he says; the endangered Gila topminnow was recently spotted for the first time in a decade.

Back at the festival, I ask Ferree about her relationship to the river. “For immigrants, you don’t associate the land necessarily with who you are but who you want to become,” she says. “And the longer you’re here, the more invested you become in the place.”

Yet here, where the concept of “place” is muddled by the border, making that investment can be challenging. A few

years ago, after a rough day, Ferree came upon the checkpoint installed along I-19 not far from the Tumacácori Mission in 2006. (That liminal place, the border, seems to be migrating northward.) A border patrolman peered into her car and asked for proof of citizenship. Ferree snapped back: “You look Canadian, can I see *your* papers?” The officer, clearly taken aback, waved her through without further questioning. Anza’s expedition would have passed within a mile of that checkpoint; back then, it was deep in Spanish territory.

Ferree brings her grandchildren to the river when they visit, because she wants them to feel that it is part of them, too. And she would bring her students here. Now she sees them sometimes walking on the Anza Trail with their families. “It’s so cool to see that,” she says. “To hear that they’re teaching them about the history.”

I DECIDE TO WALK the 4.5-mile stretch of trail between the villages of Tumacácori and Tubac. At 3:30 p.m., it is still brutally hot, and the trail grows increasingly unkempt as I head north. At one point it nearly disappears into the mud of a braided river channel, which I navigate with the help of some logs placed to make the crossing easier.

Beads of sweat are running down my legs, and blisters are forming on my feet because I stupidly forgot to wear socks. And though I’ve been walking for only a little over an hour, I’m thirsty and hungry. At this point, I remember that the expedition was less than halfway through its 1,200-mile trek. The thought is somewhat depressing.

Turning back was not an option for Anza and the settlers. In the late 18th century, Spain’s hold on Northern California was tenuous at best. Just five inadequately staffed missions and two presidios were all that stood between those remote Spanish holdings and potential takeover by Russian or English forces. So when Anza sought to recruit the settlers he needed from the hardscrabble towns of New Spain, he spoke eloquently of the abundant rainfall and pleasant climate far away in Alta California. There, he said, a better life would be possible.

I, on the other hand, cannot stop thinking about the half-eaten package of Twizzlers in my rental car sitting in the parking lot of the Tubac Presidio. I decide to turn back.

FROM TUBAC, the expedition continued north, to La Canoa, or the “Watering Trough.” Today, it is a 4,800-acre conservation area owned by Pima County, with fine views of the Santa Rita Mountains. There is no proper trail yet along this part of the route, so at dusk I get back on the Interstate and drive north, past a blur of gated communities filled with identical stucco homes, interspersed with endless parking lots. Here in the desert they seem even larger than usual — swaths of asphalt the size of football fields, surrounding giant



JORDAN GLENN

boxy shopping malls.

Just a few miles from here, the expedition suffered its first — and only — death throughout the entire eight-month journey. In his diary, Anza writes that on the first night out of Tubac, they stopped near the Santa Cruz River, where one of the women “felt the first pains of childbirth.” A few hours later, she gave birth to a baby boy. But the mother’s health faltered, and in the middle of the night, “other various troubles befell her,” writes Anza, and she died. At daybreak, the rain began and the expedition continued on, carrying the woman’s body through a downpour. They buried her two days later at the San Xavier del Bac Mission, on the outskirts of what is now Tucson.

Meanwhile, my own attempts to follow Anza across the desert are starting to unravel. Supposedly there is an interpretive sign on the highway marking Anza’s campsite at La Canoa, but I never find it. Instead, I drive on through the Green Valley, whose name must owe more to the abundant golf courses and large farms than to the land itself, which is mostly brown.

I leave Tucson on a side road marked by the occasional Anza Trail logo. The route grows more desolate as it merges with Interstate 10 and then I-8, on its way through Pinal and Maricopa Counties. Even from the inside of my car, the desert feels freakishly large, made more freakish still by the large number of things whose existence we’d rather not think about — prisons and industrial feed lots and massive solar plants. South of here, there is a bombing test zone in the strip of desert along the border called the Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range.



Lupita Ferree, left, looks out on the trash-strewn river that runs along the Juan Bautista de Anza Trail in Rio Rico, Arizona, where both the water level and its quality have declined since the 1970s, when her family came here from Sonora. Below, a cross marks the site near Las Lagunas where migrants used to camp after crossing the border.



SARAH TORY

Later, I pass another housing development, this one abandoned, its hollowed remains filling with sand.

NORTH OF TUCSON, I stop briefly at Pica-cho State Park, a rocky cactus-studded peak rising out of the desert. The expedition made its 21st camp near here. Upon leaving the next day, Anza laments the “lack of water, any of which is found only by rare accident.” Nevertheless, he continues, “no dissatisfaction whatever has been shown by the people who have made the march, and this is a thing to marvel at, especially in the women and children, and their patience under the hardships is an indication of the contentment with which they are accepting their lot.”

Just a few hours of driving across this desert has me wondering if it ever ends. On foot, it must have seemed impossible. Just past the town of Gila Bend, where the expedition rejoined the Gila River — now just a dry wash — I turn off the interstate towards the Bureau of Land Management’s Painted Rock Petroglyph site. Anza camped somewhere near here. Without the Cocomaricopa people, whose land this was, the expedition would never have survived.

At Painted Rock, there are several shaded picnic tables but no visitors. A caretaker lives in an RV, keeping watch over a large pile of rocks etched with squiggly prehistoric markings, souvenirs of a history written centuries before Anza came through. I continue on towards Yuma, along a network of old dirt roads, through more empty, cactus-studded desert. Somewhere near a place called Agua Caliente, where Anza spent his last night with the Cocomaricopa, the desert morphs

into endless rows of date palms. I drive around for hours here, completely disoriented, until a farmworker from Mexico named Ramón Rodríguez Avalos shows me how to get back to the interstate.

It’s dark when I pull into Yuma, a vibrant little town known for its date crop, on the banks of the Colorado River at the California border. In the morning, I run on the riverside trail, through wetlands that peter out into irrigation canals on the far side of town. The river moves lazily here and looks less than 100 feet wide. Crossing it, I think, wouldn’t be so hard. Anza’s diaries, however, describe a river 240 feet across and more than six feet deep in some places. None of the travelers knew how to swim. Twice, a man carrying a child fell into the water, but thanks to help from the Yuma Tribe, the entire expedition eventually made it across. From there, they continued across the desert, to a place beyond the distant line of bald, amber-colored peaks rising from the sand.

Anza’s colonists reached San Francisco Bay on March 28, 1776, and established the Presidio of San Francisco. No one, as far as we know, ever asked to see their papers.

“THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT REPEAT themselves,” Teresa Leal told me, before I left Nogales. She was talking about how, centuries before the Anza expedition, her Opata ancestors migrated between the high mountains and the river valleys, their journeys timed to survive the hot summers and cold winters in this land of extremes. They would travel from the Santa Cruz River all the way to the Gila River, along the same route Anza and his people later followed, looking for a place

to live. “Survival is at the bottom of this.” No matter how many walls we build, people will find a way to keep coming. That is the real story of the Anza Trail, Leal tells me.

It is her story, too. When Leal was 2 years old, her uncle, a laborer, was shot in the head in Sonora, murdered while he sat drinking coffee outside his house. He was killed by a big landowner who took issue with his involvement in the land-redistribution movement that rippled through Mexico in the 1940s and ’50s. When Leal’s mother, who had been away buying groceries at the market returned, she found the bullet still smoking inside the headboard where it lodged — in the same room where her daughter lay sleeping. “She couldn’t take it anymore, so she took me and ran to the border,” Leal says, speaking of the violence and fear that drove her mother north. Leal has spent her entire life near the border, watching, over the years, as the wall grew taller and more forbidding, trying to figure out exactly where she belongs.

“It’s a work in progress,” Hale Sargent, the Anza Trail’s interpretive specialist, told me before I started my trip. But for now, Leal can see something of herself in the trail’s piecemeal existence, and in its attempts — however feeble — to reassemble a broken history.

In early spring, Lupita Ferree likes to walk along the trail, when the cottonwoods are shedding their pods, floating to the ground like snow. She’ll sit on a log, listening to the birds and to all the mysterious little sounds. In those moments, on that fragment of trail, Ferree feels part of everything. “All that stuff out there in the world fades.” □

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A composite image featuring a mountain peak, a compass rose, and hikers. The compass rose is yellow with a black star in the center, and the letters N, S, E, and W are positioned around it. The hikers are silhouetted against a bright, hazy background.

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NPS unveiled

What makes our national parks run? Thousands of dedicated individuals in parks from Denali to Petrified Forest, some with little-known and sometimes quirky jobs you might not have considered. *High Country News* contributor Krista Langlois caught up with a few of them.

*"I get these **moments with wildlife** when there's no one else around."*

Name Rachel Cudmore

Age 32

Park Yellowstone

Title Commercial film permits coordinator and winter courier

Job description In the summer, Cudmore issues film permits for nature documentaries and yearns for the quiet winter months, when she sometimes finds herself alone in the park's 2.2-million-acre interior, watching wolves lope down a moonlit road. Since 2009, Cudmore has been a lifeline for the 100 or so employees and volunteers who overwinter in Yellowstone. Twice a week from December to March, she climbs into a truck or snowmobile and embarks alone on a 140-mile loop of closed-off, snow-packed roads to deliver mail and packages from the outside world. For rangers, caretakers and others who don't leave



Rachel Cudmore, the winter courier at Yellowstone, makes deliveries to employees who overwinter in the park's interior. BIANCA KLEIN

the park all winter, Cudmore's deliveries — and her company — may be their only connection to the outside world.

Necessary skills Troubleshooting broken snowmobile parts, baking cookies for Christmas and Valentine's Day

Job perk "So many times in Yellowstone when there's an animal spotted, you're not the only one there. I get to have these moments with wildlife when there's no one else around. It's like watching a *National Geographic* documentary."

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NPS unveiled ...

Her favorite dog? “That’s like asking which child is your favorite.”

Name Jen Raffaeli

Age 40

Park Denali

Title Kennel manager

Job Description When rangers need to haul trash out of or bring scientific research supplies into Denali’s 2 million acres of designated wilderness, they call Raffaeli. As manager of the only team of Canine Rangers (sled dogs) in the country, Raffaeli’s mushing helps keep the backcountry quiet, by doing work that would otherwise be done by snowmobiles or motorized vehicles. She also plays a role in preserving Alaskan history: As snow machines replace dogs in many villages, and smaller, faster breeds replace traditional Alaskan huskies in races like the Iditarod, Denali’s 27 sled-pulling huskies (and six puppies) are a living link to the state’s past. Denali’s kennel was founded in 1921 to control poaching in the newly designated park; today, Raffaeli and her team still mush some 3,000 miles a year.

Favorite season Winter

Favorite dog “That’s like asking which child is your favorite,” Raffaeli says, laughing. “There are dogs that are best for



Jen Raffaeli with a husky puppy in training as a canine ranger in Denali National Park.

COURTESY JEN RAFFAELI

breaking trail in deep snow, dogs that are best for bringing into the cabin to snuggle, dogs that are best for raising puppies.”

Biggest accomplishment In her five years managing the kennel, neither Raffaeli nor her staff have ever fallen through the ice. But with climate change bringing warmer winters and later freeze-up, Raffaeli has become extra-diligent. “It’s a constant wake-up call,” she says. “Just because a route has always been good, doesn’t mean it’s good now.”



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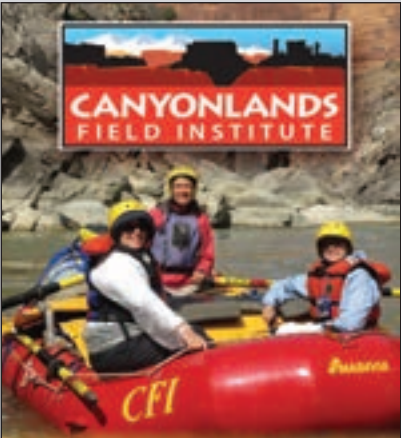
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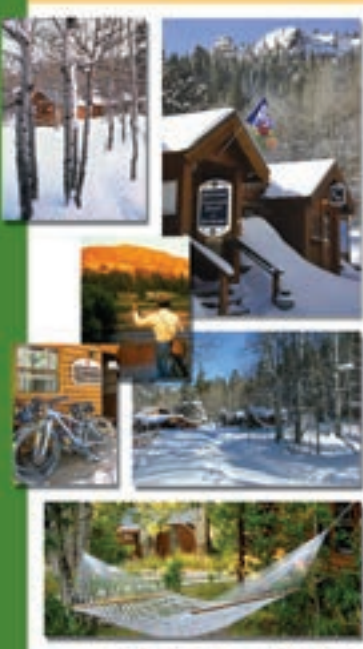
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NPS unveiled ...

Cave visitors leave behind *tiny pieces of themselves* — clothing fibers, skin cells, hair

Name Pat Jablonsky

Age 72

Park Carlsbad Caverns

Official title Lint camp coordinator (retired)

Unofficial title “The nagging lint lady”

Job description In 1986, a park ranger leaned over a retaining wall deep within the caverns and grabbed a handful of what Jablonsky thought resembled the lint from a clothes dryer. That’s basically what it was: For decades, visitors had left behind tiny pieces of themselves — clothing fibers, skin cells and hair — that coated Carlsbad’s famous formations, creating a barrier that trapped acidic cave moisture and helped corrode the formations. Over the next three decades, Jablonsky, a volunteer, organized annual camps to pick the lint from the caves. Between 1988 and 2014, when she retired, Jablonsky and 386 other volunteers spent 8,111 hours removing 495 pounds of human detritus. Jablonsky’s work and the research it spawned has helped cave managers in the United States, Australia and New Zealand develop rules to minimize human impact on delicate underground environments.



Pat Jablonsky uses a paintbrush to loosen the layer of lint that collects in a cave in Carlsbad Caverns National Park. COURTESY PAT JABLONSKY

Best way to put her out of work “If everyone caved nekkid!”

Other interests Paleontology. Jablonsky once helped excavate a ground sloth from a remote cave in Carlsbad, and has a fossil, *Pseudopalatus jablonskiae*, named after her. Her biggest passion, however, remains caving: Her husband took her caving on their second date, and while she’d always been fascinated by caves, “to finally get to go into one was like a disease. I was hooked.”



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NPS unveiled ...

Occasionally, she'll rescue an old saw from a crumbling cabin inside the park

Name Tara Vessella
Age 35
Park Rocky Mountain
Title Backcountry coordinator

Job description Rocky Mountain National Park has 250 backcountry campsites, and Vessella and her crew are in charge of maintaining all of them. Often, that means packing tools, food and gear dozens of miles into the wilderness to repair tent platforms, clean pit toilets, and fell dangerous “widowmaker” trees to keep campers safe. Although chainsaws are allowed when deemed necessary for human safety, Vessella is part of a small but passionate group that prefers to do things the old-fashioned way: with a crosscut saw, often one that’s older than she is. When she’s not slicing through beetle-killed wood, Vessella is sharpening her skills, sometimes with the help of Forest Service saw-sharpening legend Dolly Chapman. She also bargains with saw hunters — collectors and middlemen who travel the West searching for vintage crosscuts — and occasionally does some hunting of her own, rescuing old saws from crumbling cabins inside the park.



Tara Vessella, right, prefers an old-school crosscut saw for her work at Rocky Mountain National Park. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Favorite tool Llamas, used to pack tools and supplies into the backcountry, “because without them I don’t think a lot of the things we do would be possible.”

Unexpected downside In 2015, Rocky Mountain shattered its previous backcountry record by nearly 3,000 permits. That means there’s a whole lot of people in the backcountry, and many, Vessella says, are inexperienced and lack fully developed “Leave No Trace” ethics. Or to put it bluntly: “We pick up a lot of human waste.”

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NPS unveiled ...

Parker uncovered a **Revueltosaurus** skeleton and found it wasn't a dinosaur at all

Name Bill Parker
Age 48
Park Petrified Forest
Title Paleontologist

Job description Despite its abundance of fossils, visitors to Petrified Forest often struggle to picture what the park looked like in the late Triassic Period, 200 to 250 million years ago. That's where Parker comes in. As one of the park's three paleontologists, he digs up, preserves and documents fossils, then turns his research into information that helps the public imagine the arid Arizona landscape as an ancient jungle, replete with giant ferns, six-foot-long amphibians and freshwater sharks. Since he began working for the park in 2001, Parker and his team have discovered two to three new species of plants and animals every year, gradually providing a better glimpse into an environment that disappeared as the continent shifted northward.

Coolest discovery The world's first *Revueltosaurus* skeleton. Previously known only by its teeth, *Revueltosaurus* was thought to be the ancestor of later dinosaurs like *Stegosaurus* and *Triceratops*. But in 2004, Parker uncovered skeletons that revealed



the creatures weren't dinosaurs at all, but rather the ancestors of modern crocodiles, throwing a wrench into evolutionary theories that had persisted for decades. "It was very exciting," he says.

On seeing the world "It's kind of annoying, but I don't see scenery anymore. When I drive through Utah, I don't remember the exit numbers. I remember the geologic layers."

Bill Parker at the site of a phytosaur in Petrified Forest National Park.
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



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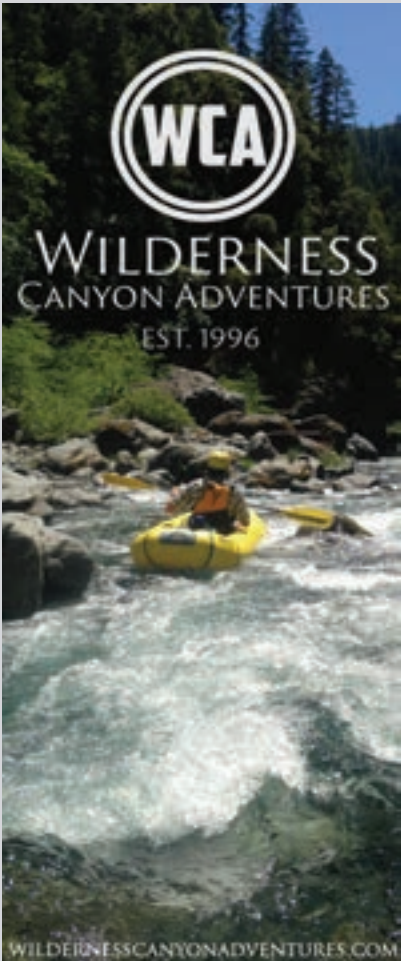
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*“We do a lot of **schlogging** up and down this mountain”*

Name Stefan Löfgren

Age 44

Park Mount Rainier

Title Mountaineering district ranger / chief climbing ranger

Job qualifications EMT certification, substantial mountaineering skills, experience around helicopters, avalanche training, technical rope rescue

Number of Rainier summits 105

Job description Löfgren is one of a dozen seasonal and full-time climbing rangers who staff Mount Rainier’s high camp, haul supplies up and down the mountain, and educate and register the 11,000 or so climbers who attempt to summit the 14,409-foot peak each year. But the elite climbing rangers are perhaps best known for their search-and-rescue work. Although calls rose by 40 percent last year, Löfgren says that the increase came largely from casual visitors, not mountaineers, who tend to be better-prepared. Still, in his 25 years at the park, Löfgren has responded to more climbing rescues than he cares to recall. He’d rather not discuss the “gory” ones; he prefers to recollect the time he helped find a group of five climbers in a white-out blizzard. They had been presumed dead, but survived with only

cold toes and dehydration as injuries.

On climbing mountains in his off time “I’m really not motivated.” Or as one of his colleagues puts it, “We do a lot of schlogging up and down this mountain for work, so if we can avoid schlogging on our personal time, we do.”

What he does instead Walks across countries and continents. Löfgren has traversed the United States and Europe by foot, and attempted Nepal and New Zealand. □

Stefan Löfgren evacuates an injured climber from Lane Peak in Mount Rainier National Park.
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ILLUSTRATION: SARAH GILMAN

Oregon's trail through time

FEATURE BY SARAH GILMAN
PHOTOS BY OTTO KITSINGER

*How do you protect a historic artifact from
the development it helped create?*

Ignore the cold that stiffens your fingers this blustery November day. Ignore the snow atop the distant mountains and the seed-flecked mud that weights your boots. Forget the Jeep Cherokee you came in. None of that was here, in eastern Oregon, in late summer when they crossed.

"You've gotta pretend," says Gail Carbiener, "that it's 100 degrees."

I close my eyes. Beneath my feet are the ruts of the Oregon Trail, left by thousands of covered wagons that settlers used to haul belongings from Missouri to the valleys beyond the Cascades, back during the 1840s, '50s and '60s. Even then, the route wasn't new: Fur trappers and missionaries used it, and so, for millennia, did Native peoples.

Today, it's the designated Oregon National Historic Trail, administered by the National Park Service and mostly visited by history enthusiasts like Carbiener and his wife, Muriel. This particular stretch,

northwest of Ontario, Oregon, was a brutally dry 25 miles between the algae-choked Malheur River and a final crossing of the Snake River called Farewell Bend. I conjure creaking leather, plodding livestock, and sunburnt families on foot. It's not easy: The ruts look more like an eroded ditch grown over with sagebrush. I can faintly hear traffic on Interstate 84, out of sight beyond a hill that fails to conceal a cellphone tower.

The visual intrusion makes 81-year-old Carbiener scowl beneath his John Deere ball cap, but otherwise, the white-grassed hills appear mostly unchanged since the 19th century. That's why the Carbieners so love this spot, called Birch Creek. Those early travelers "would talk about coming up to a ridge, and as far as the eye could see, they saw wagons," Gail Carbiener continues. "And so the dust here was unbelievable. The diaries would say that it was so thick, we can't see the oxen in front of the wagon."

To complete the scene, I glance at Muriel Carbiener. She performs living history at the High Desert Museum in Bend, where the couple lives, and today, she's in character. A bonnet covers her close-cropped hair and a floral-print dress hangs to her ankles, cinched with a slightly tattered apron. "And of course there's a corset," the diminutive 79-year-old laughs, to "keep the girls in. Do you want to walk 2,000 miles without any support?"

The Carbieners want me to stand in pioneers' boots, but they've brought me here to imagine something else: lattice towers up to 195 feet tall marching along a nearby ridgeline. Though the Park Service is charged with protecting the trail, it doesn't actually have control over the 2,250-mile long corridor, which crosses a patchwork of federal, state and private land. This spot belongs to the Bureau of Land Management, and it's contemplating routes for the Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line Project, or B2H — a 300-mile, 500-kilovolt powerline between Boardman, Oregon, and the Hemingway substation near Melba, Idaho. Idaho Power, the utility that proposed the project, says the B2H will enable electricity sharing between the Northwest and the Intermountain West, helping meet new demand as the population grows.

According to the BLM's 2014 draft environmental impact statement, the line could also cross the Oregon Trail a dozen times and be visible from up to 80 percent of it within the project area. Much of the trail corridor is already significantly altered, but about 18 percent in Oregon still has intact ruts

and relatively pristine views. That includes significant portions of this stretch, which the BLM's preferred route would parallel south of where we stand and cross just to the north, causing, as the agency acknowledges, "direct, long-term adverse impacts to the visual setting." Farther northwest, the line could sweep across the viewshed of other fairly pristine sections of trail and the BLM's National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center outside Baker City.

The Park Service has expressed serious concerns about those impacts. And the Oregon-California Trails Association, to which the Carbieners belong, is pushing for the line to be rerouted if not stopped altogether — putting the organization in the interesting position of defending a historic agent of development from a modern one. "We're a bunch of damn old folks that just like to go out and walk the ruts! And then all of a sudden, we're realizing that they're disappearing," says Gail Carbiener. "Our concern is that we can't afford to lose any more. Once it's gone, it's gone."

WHAT EXACTLY IS LOST when parts of the Oregon Trail succumb to development? The events are over, the people long dead, and the corridor itself is less a continuous trail than a series of car-accessible historic sites and segments. First and foremost, today's trail is a story. And the one most often told is of ordinary people enduring an incredibly difficult months-long journey in search of new beginnings. The rhetoric that helped inspire the first waves of the 300,000 to 500,000 settlers who headed west along the Overland Trails often highlighted their character in the face of privation and struggle, and glorified them as the vanguard of the new nation's aggressive expansion. The pioneers themselves later formed societies to celebrate a similar notion of their experience — one in which, Benjamin Franklin Owen



Gail Carbiener discusses a photograph that is marked to show where power lines might obstruct the view from Oregon Trail wagon ruts south of Birch Creek, according to one route proposed in the 2014 draft environmental impact statement.

"We're a bunch of damn old folks that just like to go out and walk the ruts! And then all of a sudden, we're realizing that they're disappearing."

—Gail Carbiener, history enthusiast and member of the Oregon-California Trails Association

wrote in 1853, men and women "had a fair test as to the stuff they were made of."

Their pride also hinged on the transformation of the region's land into thriving farms, ranches and settlements. Whether the settlers acknowledged it or not, that land was "empty" only because of the brutal displacement of Native people. But when the U.S. fell victim to widespread economic depression around the turn of the century, the romantic idea of the frontier gained even more traction. In the ensuing "cultural crisis," historian Peter Boag writes, "efforts intensified to remember Oregon's pioneer generation as representative of a cheerier and more heroic phase of the local past."

It's not surprising, then, that many early attempts to commemorate the Overland Trails were themselves development proposals, calling for paved roads along the wagon routes to encourage growth. Between 1906 and 1928, the most famous Oregon Trail campaigner, an elderly, ambitiously bearded former pioneer named Ezra Meeker, crossed the country several times, in part to promote a memorial highway. Twice, he retraced the Oregon Trail by covered wagon. He also went by car with covered-wagon carapace, by plane, and by train — his vehicles mirroring the transformation of the West, for better or worse.

It wasn't until Congress designated the trails under the 1968 National Trails System Act that preserving their remains became a formal federal priority. The Oregon and Mormon Pioneer trails were listed in 1978, and the California and Pony Express trails in 1992. "In many ways," historian Will Bagley wrote for the Park Service in 2007, the four trails' 11,000-mile web constitutes "America's longest and narrowest national park, stretching from the Missouri River to the Great Salt Lake and beyond the summits of the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades."

"What we're trying to define is a moment in time that has disappeared," explains Aaron Mahr, superintendent of the Park Service's National Trails Intermountain Region. Preserved ruts, a long view, an important mountain pass, a spire of rock repeatedly noted in old journals — all provide anchor points for contemporary travelers to connect historic events to the places where they occurred, illuminating the pioneer experience. "The landscape," agency archaeologist Lee Kreutzer says, "is part of the trail."

But preservation is complex. The Park Service relies on partnerships with the Forest Service and the BLM to protect trail corridors and help provide interpretation, as well as with



Muriel, in 1852 period garb, and Gail Carbiener, who have helped erect Oregon Trail signs and markers, walk on the Oregon Trail at Birch Creek.

state historical offices, tribes, and private landowners. Nonprofit volunteer organizations also provide labor and expertise. Among them is the Oregon-California Trails Association, or OCTA, which has about 1,400 members and draws half its budget from the Park Service. It was founded in 1982 after an Oregon farmer plowed up a mile of ruts to plant potatoes; the trails were vanishing even as preservation efforts ramped up.

And no wonder: “What made a good route of travel in 1840 makes a good route of travel in 2016,” says Kreutzer, who tracks projects on federal land that might affect the trail. Aside from being swallowed by farms and settlements, stretches of the Oregon Trail have long since disappeared under modern highways like I-84. Utility corridors parallel it. Natural gas fields and pipelines gnaw at the sage flats surrounding it and other trails. Overuse can even be a problem, with thousands of Mormon pilgrims hauling heavy handcarts across a Wyoming stretch of trail each summer. But wind farms and new powerlines like the B2H are the biggest worry, simply because they’re tall enough to bite into the vistas that support the vicarious emigrant experience.

Preserving historic trails is just one of many legal mandates that the Forest Service and BLM must balance, and neither of the agencies have any say on private land, home to an estimated 1,700 miles of the Oregon Trail, explains Kreutzer. “And the National Historic Preservation Act is just not that strong. All (the Park Service) can do is speak up and hope to be heard.”

“Sometimes that works straightaway, or you get some compromise,” says OCTA’s national preservation officer, Jere Krakow, who held Mahr’s superintendent position until 2007 and is now monitoring 29 projects in nine states. Still, “We try to preserve everything, knowing that we’re going to lose.”

THE LAND WEST OF ONTARIO, population 11,000, is remarkably flat. From the town’s assembly of chain motels and restaurants, tilled earth sweeps toward the hills in all directions, peppered

with houses, windrows, and, improbably, two fighter planes parked amid low prefab buildings. Gail Carbiener steers the Jeep through the tiny community of Vale, where stoic-looking settlers and a single Indian stare from a grocery-store mural. Technically, we’re back on the trail, buried under Glenn Street, but we’re bound for a stretch of pristine ruts farther south, beyond the B2H’s reach. “Tell her about how you were in the bathroom and the Donners were there!” Carbiener calls to his wife.

The Donner Party was a group of emigrants trapped by snow in California’s Sierra in 1846, who may have resorted to cannibalizing their dead to survive. “When I meet descendants of real people, I really get excited,” Muriel Carbiener elaborates. The couple was visiting Donner Memorial State Park when Muriel emerged from a restroom stall to find two Donner relatives: The family, it turned out, was there observing the ordeal’s sesquicentennial. She clasps her hands jubilantly. “It was just like, AAAHH!”

Muriel Kilgo intended to major in history at UC-Berkeley, but married Gail Carbiener instead. After the Carbieners’ children finished school, she returned to her studies, focusing on emigrant women’s lives, and earned her degree in 1990. When she dragged her skeptical husband, a retired banker, to an OCTA convention in 1994, he was hooked, too. One of his ancestors traveled the Mormon Pioneer Trail, and he likes to think he also would have come West; he’s always loved the mountains.

Since then, the Carbieners have collected 200 books and diaries on the emigrant trails and have explored them extensively. Gail Carbiener volunteers a few weeks each year for federal agencies, sleuthing historical sites with a cadre of other metal-detector-wielding old guys, under the supervision of an archaeologist. With OCTA, the couple erects directional and interpretive signs, and Gail Carbiener has even re-cast concrete trail markers in home-built molds.

After we park below a gap in the hills called Keeney Pass,

“What made a good route of travel in 1840 makes a good route of travel in 2016.”

—Lee Kreutzer,
National Park Service
archaeologist

Carbiener tenderly takes his wife's arm and they stroll along the wagon track through the sage. "You're camping in a cesspool and you're walking in one," Muriel Carbiener reminds me cheerfully. The trail would have been littered with livestock feces and carcasses, denuded of grass for miles around. To lighten the load, people often jettisoned belongings — a piano, libraries of books, thousands of pounds of bacon, even a diving bell — a wake stretching back to Missouri.

Many died from cholera or drowning. Others, according to historian John D. Unruh, died as a result of "careless handling of the fantastical arsenal of fire-arms" they dragged west. Some, perhaps, even succumbed to despair. A plaque at the grave of John D. Henderson, which we visit next, notes mournfully: "Died of Thirst, August 9, 1852, Unaware of the Nearness of the Malheur River ... Proved too Great a Struggle for the Weary Travelers." Those remembered hardships retain their power, especially for pioneer descendants. David Welch, former OCTA president and national preservation officer, describes his sense of connection to a little-changed landscape in Nevada, where his great-great-grandmother walked while nine months pregnant. Amateur historian Stafford Hazelett says perfect strangers reach out to him for help finding the exact places along the trails where their ancestors are buried.

Muriel Carbiener carries paper towels and water to clean signs and marked graves. Sometimes, she feels ghosts with her. "It seems like you take care of these like you might take care of a family member's grave," I observe.

"Gosh," she says, as if surprised.

"Maybe more than a family member's."

"It's personal," her husband adds. "It really is."

That might explain the vehemence with which he's fought the B2H. He's driven to Eugene to meet with environmental lawyers, Skyped with law students, and, with OCTA, has signed onto a lengthy comment

letter opposing the project alongside hardline environmental groups like Oregon Wild. Just before I met the Carbieners, the BLM dismissed Gail from a special committee reviewing the proposal: He had inadvertently shared privileged information in an anti-B2H letter to the editor.

It's uncertain how the powerline will affect Birch Creek and the pristine segment to the south, called Alkali Springs. The final environmental study won't be out until summer. And because powerlines traverse their own patchwork of public and private land, they're perhaps as hard to build as the trail is to protect. The alternative routes here have their own controversies: One would pass through more farmland, potentially disrupting irrigation and crop dusting, says BLM Vale District project coordinator Renée Straub, and both cross more habitat that is considered a priority for greater sage grouse.

Recent preliminary maps suggest the BLM may be leaning away from the route that most impacts the Oregon Trail here. But its preference for the section near the interpretive center appears little changed, and 35,000 to 40,000 people visit that site annually. Other alternatives for that spot, at least those that have been analyzed, are more problematic; the only one that would mostly bypass the trail would detour far from existing utility and transportation corridors, slicing through more intact forest and big game and sage grouse habitat. "It's not always feasible," says Straub, "to protect everything when we're trying to balance all these resources."



Wagon ruts on the Oregon Trail at Keeney Pass south of Vale, Oregon.

To lighten the load, people often jettisoned belongings — a piano, libraries of books, thousands of pounds of bacon, even a diving bell

Before I leave the Carbieners, we stop at McDonald's. Muriel elucidates the finer points of emigrant cuisine as she nibbles a burger: "Beans ... and beans ... and beans." The list underscores the relief they probably felt trading with tribes for salmon and vegetables. Early on, Native Americans often helped travelers with dangerous river crossings and route finding, especially in Oregon. Sometimes, Muriel Carbiener says, "the Indians wanted to charge people for crossing their land, and most whites refused to do that." She pauses. "We were mean and nasty."

That hints at a painful side of trail history that the Carbieners frankly acknowledge. Empowered by a sense of divine destiny, the emigrants squatted on tribe-owned lands, overgrazed grass tribes needed for their horses, depleted wild game, destroyed staple camas meadows, fouled drinking water, and inadvertently devastated Native American populations with novel diseases like measles — ultimately leading to bloody clashes as settlement swept the region. "This is our history," Muriel says circumspectly. "None of us would be here unless these people had done this."

"I think these stories are a part of us," OCTA's Krakow says later. They carry a lot of the nation's formative values, "and not all of those are good ones."

HITÍÍMÉCIX WÉETEŠNE — THEY ARE MARKING THE LAND. The Nez Perce phrase appears on a text panel at the Tamástslíkt Cultural Institute. About 160 miles northwest of Ontario on I-84, it's the only tribal interpretive center on the designated Oregon Trail route. The panel describes the treaty process that carved up the Columbia Plateau, forcing the Umatilla, Cayuse and Walla Walla to surrender their lands alongside other tribes in 1855. Beside it, there's a map of the tiny trapezoid that became the Umatilla Indian Reservation, where Tamástslíkt is located, contrasted against the vast expanse of ceded ancestral territory.

Much of the B2H's length, it turns out, falls inside that ceded land, where the Umatilla, Cayuse and Walla Walla — now the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation — still have treaty-protected hunting and fishing rights. While the tribes have no official position on the line, their formal comments fault the BLM for not adequately consulting them about the project's possible impacts on archaeological resources, as well as the continuing uses and cultural significance of the land. In fact, the tribes preferred the proposed routings that most irk Oregon Trail advocates because they're closer to existing development and appear less harmful to wildlife. "Our first priority is preservation of tribal cultural history and treaty rights,"



There are more than two dozen murals in Vale, Oregon. This one, called *Death on the Trail*, is on the side of a Les Schwab Tire building.

explains Chuck Sams, tribal government spokesman. But “we want to ensure that the line has negligible impacts on everyone’s historical background.”

“All of that is part of our past, too,” Bobbie Conner, Tamástslikt’s director since 1998, tells me later. “I believe the wagon ruts tell an important story. I understand what enlightenment it brings people to know the struggles of their ancestors.” She notes her own blended heritage: Umatilla, Cayuse and Nez Perce, with a last name from a Scotch-Irish ancestor. Still, she adds, “There is much that we wish to protect that’s much older. We’ve been here in this landscape for more than 10,000 years. And we don’t ever expect to leave.”

It’s this last message that Tamástslikt most conveys. In addition to showcasing tribes’ rich histories and covering the dark years of land division and forced assimilation that followed white settlement, it takes visitors up to the present, as the tribes restored water and salmon to local rivers emptied by irrigation and built a modern economy while still maintaining traditional culture. *Núun Wišítix*, reads a wall near the end of the exhibit: *We are*.

Such inclusive histories have been slow to catch on at other emigrant trail interpretive sites. Recognizing the problem, the Park Service began holding tribal listening sessions about five years ago to build relationships and find ways to integrate tribes’ perspectives. The agency has worked with Oglala Lakota College students to collect oral histories from elders on the Pine Ridge Reservation for use in a trail interpretive film, for example, and the BLM hopes to use Park Service funds for an exhibit exploring Native Americans’ experience of the Oregon Trail.

But no matter how close the agencies get to telling the Oregon Trail’s complete story, the scars of land theft and its legacy remain. No signs on I-84 identify the ancestral homelands of the Cayuse, Walla Walla and Umatilla. A casual traveler would have no idea they used these routes in a seasonal migration for food long before the pioneers, or that the tribes are still deeply invested in this landscape. The Oregon Trail, meanwhile, is marked with signs likely to catch the eyes of even incurious drivers, emblazoned with the symbol of this region’s conquest: A covered wagon. As University of Oregon emeritus professor

Matthew Dennis writes, “history and memory are not merely ways of recollecting the past but are also means of obscuring and forgetting it.”

THE SKY IS FADING TO PINK WHEN I EXIT the interstate one last time, then wind through alfalfa fields. Center-pivot sprinklers loom like giant mantises, and gray birds blink through my headlights. Beyond someone’s farmhouse and up a gravel road, I park at a picnic shelter and set out down an asphalt path buckled by tumbleweeds. It’s completely dark by the time I find the cement obelisk marking a stretch of wagon ruts at Echo Meadows. To the northwest, red lights atop the Columbia Gorge’s thicket of windmills pulse with cardiac regularity.

I follow the bright spark of reflective trail markers in the other direction, towards a black horizon crowned with stars. I think of the rest areas along 84, with their Oregon Trail kiosks — of the families adjusting baggage in their SUVs, the truck drivers hunched into cellphone conversations. I think of the people who honor pioneer ancestors, and those who make a hobby of following emigrants’ footsteps. Few among them could claim roots in this region more than a handful of generations deep. Perhaps the trail helps them feel that they belong, both to history and to the landscape itself.

As a recent transplant to Oregon, I pause to see if I, too, might experience something like Muriel Carbiener’s communion with ghosts. I hear rustles and squeaks in the head-high sage. But all I feel is the disquieting sense of drift that comes from being in constant motion—just one more emigrant shifting between the hubs of a society that is forever pressing outward, devouring new places. History aside, perhaps the best reason to preserve these last shreds of trail and the sweeping views around them is as reference points that help us remember how much the land has changed — and is still changing. □

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Whiteness reigns in a new film about national parks



OPINION BY
GLENN NELSON

Max Lowe and Rachel Pohl explore a cave behind a frozen waterfall in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Michigan. Professional snowboarder Ryan Hudson, who is black, was there with the team, but was only briefly shown onscreen.

COURTESY OF MACGILLIVRAY FREEMAN FILMS.
PHOTOGRAPHER: BARBARA MACGILLIVRAY
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The new film *National Parks Adventure* aims to inspire its viewers, as producer Shaun MacGillivray puts it, “to get off their couches and get outdoors.” Its destination of choice is our national parks, which are celebrating 100 years of management by the National Park Service in 2016. MacGillivray and his crew used every IMAX 3-D trick at their disposal, from jaw-dropping aerial footage of sun-plattered landscapes to in-your-face encounters with furry, squeaky creatures like prairie dogs.

As if the visual feast weren’t enough, the film also serves up actor-environmentalist Robert Redford as narrator, climber Conrad Anker as narrative focal point, and a soundtrack that features rocker Bruce Springsteen. But missing from the buffet, as usual, is the story of the parks’ future — the one filled with those diverse people who will not only enable the parks’ continued existence but, as the impending nonwhite majority in this country, provide the political, economic and spiritual wherewithal to ensure the future of the planet.

The film gets off to a promising start with its mention of Native Americans and their belief that this country’s “natural wonders belong to no one, they belong to us all.” But to go from that utterance to Springsteen’s version of the Woody Guthrie classic “This Land is Your Land” renders most everything

in between not only as antithetical, but also as a continuing indictment of the National Park Service’s overwhelming whiteness.

This land doesn’t appear to be made for you and me if a significant number of us are missing from the picture. And *National Parks Adventure*, which opened globally on Feb. 12, feeds this perception by illustrating the national parks experience as an almost exclusively white one.

The trick to solving the diversity issue, of course, is to actually begin diversifying. Otherwise, absent outside agitation, there’s little potential for recognizing that diversity indeed is an issue. The people affected aren’t at the table.

This is the challenge for the production company, MacGillivray Freeman, known for producing IMAX hits including *Everest*, *Dolphins* and *The Living Sea*. When asked about diversity in his film following a Seattle screening, Shaun MacGillivray, the president of the production house, hailed the film’s opening remarks about Native Americans. When asked if he’d considered actually showing Native Americans and other people of color onscreen, MacGillivray said, “If my crack research team had found a character with a more diverse story, we would have considered using one.”

Here’s one his team might have found: Ryan Hudson may not be Conrad

Anker, but he is a black professional snowboarder with a compelling backstory. Hudson grew up in and out of homeless shelters until, at 14, his life was changed when he was introduced to snowboarding by Outdoor Outreach, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering at-risk youth through outdoor activities. Hudson was part of an expedition, led by Anker, which attempted to climb Denali. That expedition was likely the reason that Hudson was with Anker, his stepson, Max Lowe, and friend Rachel Pohl at one of the film’s more spectacular stops in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

We know Hudson is there, because Pohl mentions his presence. If you watch carefully, without blinking, you’ll see him on the screen, ever so briefly. What a lost opportunity.

MacGillivray also said that the filmmakers wanted to portray John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt, the architects of the Park Service, “who just happened to be white.” The only semblance of diversity is shown in some of the user-generated content near the end of the 43-minute film. The National Park Service should have known better, yet it allowed a project to be executed with blatant racial ignorance.

The agency hasn’t delivered on its pre-centennial promises to ramp up diversity efforts. Its ranks remain 82 percent white, about the same as its visitation, in a country that is 38 percent nonwhite and growing fast. Even the National Park System Advisory Board found that “despite ongoing efforts to address diversity gaps, the Park Service is perceived by stakeholders as neither diverse nor inclusive.”

National Parks Adventure attempts to herald the national parks road trip as quintessentially American, but instead proves the conceit as quintessentially white American. When Springsteen belts out, “This land is your land,” a much too significant portion of this country is forced to disagree. In essence, MacGillivray’s work reflects too closely the history of the agency it celebrates. And as a film, it joins a cinematic legacy long dominated by sci-fi flicks that rarely consider the presence of people of color in anyone’s future. □

WEB EXTRA

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People hike in Fiery Furnace at Arches National Park in Utah, left. A wooden ladder leads to a cliff dwelling in Frijoles Canyon at Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico, right. NPS/ANDREW KUHN; NPS/SALLY KING

Writing the next chapter for our park system

The National Park Service's 2016 centennial got off to a rocky start.

On Jan. 2, militants occupied Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in a sustained attack on the very legality of public land — the philosophical and political foundation upon which the national parks and other reserves (including wildlife refuges) are built.

Then, in mid-January, came the galling announcement that one of the system's flagships, Yosemite, is changing the names of well-loved landmarks in response to a legal dispute with a concessions company that managed to trademark park imagery and institutions for its own marketing purposes.

Neither is the sort of publicity that the agency hoped to receive from this anniversary, which was supposed to reignite the enthusiasm of the American public in a yearlong campaign called "Find Your Park."

More in line with the message, surely, are two well-timed new books.

A Thinking Person's Guide to America's National Parks is an almost painfully earnest re-assessment of the national park system at the century mark. Its 23 chapters dissect the parks — why, and for whom, they exist. The book reflects the evolution of the agency's approach to conservation, recreation, inclusiveness, sustainability and other facets. Between Ulysses S. Grant's creation of Yellowstone National Park on March 1, 1872, and Barack Obama's designation, in February, of three new national monuments comprising 1.8 million acres of California desert, the National Park Service has expanded its horizons generally from the West to the East, from scenic to historic, from wilderness toward urban areas. "The national parks are the American experience expressed in place," writes former Director Denis Galvan in the foreword,

and as our understanding of the contours of that experience expands, the agency's mission grows with it. "Today we contemplate the effects of a changing climate against the benchmarks of these protected places," Galvan writes. "The story and contributions of enslaved people, once invisible, are now told."

The book's academic and in-agency contributors strike a measured balance between celebration and constructive criticism. The critiques mostly revolve around the agency's slowness to come to terms with America's history of oppression and diversity. These brief essays show an agency eager to attract young people and what we'll soon enough need to stop calling minorities — the demographic core of whatever future support the parks may enjoy.

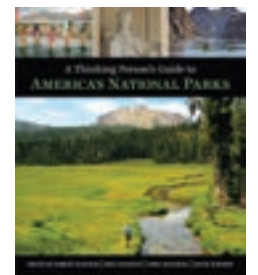
Population is increasing faster than park attendance, even as the system grows to meet its audience. The challenge is significant, and no book, however gorgeously illustrated (this one has 300 glossy color photos), is likely to be the magnet that draws new visitors into the parks.

But for anyone already invested, *A Thinking Person's Guide* makes an excellent armchair roadmap to the Park Service's more than 400 sites and its many priorities and pursuits, which range from community farming partnerships within the Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve on Whidbey Island, Washington, to the Kaibab Paiute Tribe's leadership in preserving dark skies at Arizona's Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument. You might think of the book as an illustrated catalog of the nation's grandest common holdings, and an eloquent (if indirect) defense of the principles and benefits of public land managed for public use.

The Wonder of It All, compiled by the nonprofit Yosemite Conservancy, takes a different approach, collecting 100 short anecdotes and testimonials to the parks' transformative powers. They're stories of first jobs, true love, encounters with bears and wolves and stars, and the sudden flare of a light in a child's eyes. *The Wonder of It All* demonstrates both the charms and flaws of anthologized amateur writing, but its stories exude a heartfelt passion that complements and sweetens the administrative efficiency of *A Thinking Person's Guide*. Bob McConnell's recollection of a night enjoying opera with veteran seasonal Yosemite ranger Carl Sharsmith, who died in 1994, offers an intimate portrait of one of the many indispensable volunteers who make the parks tick, while Rebecca Bailey learns that the less-than-flattering "green and gray" uniform is no deterrent to unsolicited male attention in "How to Talk to a 'Girl Ranger.'" ("Respectfully" will do just fine, thank you.) Anybody who's ever worn that iconic flat hat, or daydreamed of doing so, will likely enjoy these stories.

Both of these new books serve as invitations to the national parks — a reminder that it's not enough to support the idea of the parks; we need to visit them in person and get to know them. As timeless and unassailable as they may seem, the parks are the tip of America's public-lands iceberg, and if recent history shows anything, it's that they require our constant protection. Plenty of folks are fighting hard to find new ways to exploit our natural and scenic resources. For now, "We the People" have the stronger claim. We'd be remiss, and we'd be lessened, if we failed to exercise it.

BY BRAD TYER



A Thinking Person's Guide to America's National Parks
edited by Robert Manning, Rolf Diamant, Nora Mitchell and David Harmon
304 pages, softcover: \$24.95.
George Braziller, 2016.



The Wonder of It All: 100 Stories from the National Park Service
edited by the Yosemite Conservancy
306 pages, softcover: \$18.95.
Yosemite Conservancy, 2016.

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Unpeopled places

ESSAY BY ANA MARIA SPAGNA

A view of Sahale Mountain, Park Creek Ridge and Mount Buckner in North Cascades National Park, from the Stehekin River Valley.
DEBY DIXON/ NPS

In the late 1980s, I worked at a visitors' center in a trailer at the entrance to the Needles District of Canyonlands National Park, a still relatively unknown place then, a kind of secret. To get there, you had to drive 35 miles off the highway through slickrock and green sage, hazy mountains on the horizon and cottonwoods along the creeks, as startling a landscape as you'd find anywhere. Cars arrived at lazy intervals, and when people reached the desk, the conversation was often the same.

That was the most beautiful drive we've ever taken, they'd say. Now, how do we drive out?

The same way you came in, we'd say.

Sometimes they'd complain loudly. Sometimes they'd mask their disappointment. Rarely did they show enthusiasm. It was both exasperating and the stuff of comedy, but part of me could sympathize.

When I was a kid, my family took cross-country trips and stopped at national parks — Zion, Bryce, Mesa Verde, the Grand Canyon. Were we finding solace in wide-open spaces? Uh, no. Our parents were just showing us all they could — on the way from one place to another— through the windows of an un-air-conditioned station wagon. Once, we kids refused to get out of the car: No more rock formations, we chanted. I sounded ungrateful, yes, but I was also getting hooked.

I remember standing on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, thinking: Someday I'll go down there. The idea felt foreign but giddily within reach, like reading a book that opened a new world. When I finished college, I went straight to volunteer in a national park.

At the visitor center desk, the second set of questions was nearly as predictable as the first: Where can we camp with no one nearby? What hike does no one know about?

If we told people about the secret places, I wanted to say, they wouldn't be secret anymore. *Duh!* But I also knew that part of me wanted them to stay secret so they could be mine alone. So I sighed and pointed out some less-popular trails and campgrounds.

There are a thousand reasons why I was a lousy visitor center ranger. I don't like being indoors. I bristle at toeing a party line. I wear a uniform poorly — “unkempt,” read one of my evaluations. But the biggest reason was my uneasiness. The love of nature sometimes seems to hinge on greediness. People aspire

to “bag” peaks and “score” campsites. We elbow in, believing we're more deserving because we are locals, or because we've invested more time or money into our vacation, or because we are stronger and more willing to take risks, or because, well, we're wearing a uniform standing behind a desk.

I didn't want to win the competition. I wanted to avoid it. So I found another relatively unknown park, North Cascades, joined trail crew, and headed for the unpeopled places.

All my best memories are out there: watching peaks float above clouds from a meadow thick with flowers — paintbrush, lupine, columbine, lily — sleeping in old-growth to the patter of raindrops on duff, steeped in cedar and smoke, cross-country skiing past a boulder in a river from which a lone otter track slid into an ice-hemmed pool, and, on one off-season trip, sitting alone beside the Colorado gazing up at the distant forested North Rim.

Still, I'm uneasy.

For one thing, I now realize these supposedly unpeopled places were actually well-known and often cared for by indigenous people. Then there's the fact that working for the Park Service took me far away from people who were different from me. I've often said that I'm more scared of a subway than a cougar. Which is telling. What if, when I say I like to get away from people, subconsciously I mean certain types of people? There was a time I'd have denied it vehemently. Now, I am not so sure.

Still, I'm hooked.

Here's the truth. I long to be in unpeopled places, and when I find them, I'm often overcome with aching loneliness. I miss the people I love. I desperately want to share these places, even if it means re-entering the fray.

Not long ago, I visited Yosemite in early spring with my mom. Parking lots were under construction, requiring muddy too-long walks for her, and calendar views hid behind a stubborn veil of clouds. We drove in and out in a single day, but stopped at a lone roadside picnic table where new blades of grass showed between melting snow berms. No one else stopped while we ate our string cheese and apples and listened the charge of distant running water and smelled wet pine and asphalt. For a moment, the clouds cleared, and we had our own private peek-a-boo view of Yosemite Falls charging from sky to earth. I'm telling you: We totally scored. □

If we told people about the secret places they wouldn't be secret anymore.



HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY BETSY MARSTON

WYOMING

It must have been a terrifying few moments for the three snowboarders. The young men were traversing a cliff in rugged country near the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, when the going became increasingly icy. Losing control, they slid toward the edge of the cliff and then tumbled over, falling 200 feet into the snow below. Two were seriously injured, and rescue was difficult because they landed in a narrow area; they were flown out by helicopter, dangling in stretchers, reports the *Jackson Hole News&Guide*. One guy wore a helmet that probably prevented a more serious injury; it was found in the snow, “shattered in the fall.”

UTAH

The Salt Lake Tribune makes no bones about it: It occasionally lacks respect for the state Legislature. This February, the paper called politicians “seriously deluded” if they think Utah has a prayer of gaining control of the 31 million acres of federal land within the state’s borders. In fact, said a recent editorial, a bill from Republican Rep. Mike Noel “might just as well be titled the *Utah Public Lands Fairies and Unicorns Act*, for all the chances it has of actually setting the rules for any territory.” Noel argues that his bill outlines a plan for ranking priorities for managing those lands. “It’s not a drill rig on every piece of ground,” he insists. “I don’t see that happening.” The editorial board doesn’t see it happening either, because Noel’s bill is merely an “illusion.” Still, it concedes: “The dog that keeps chasing cars should probably be praised for making a plan for what to do with the first one he actually catches.”

IDAHO

Science is really as easy as pie: Just ask an Idaho state legislator. Worried about the impact of fossil fuels on the world’s climate? “Listen to Rush Limbaugh once in a while,” advised Republican Rep. Dell Raybould. “He’ll tell you that this is just a bunch of nonsense.” Raybould’s skepticism is particularly interesting because he is the chairman of the House Resources and Conserva-



OREGON Oregon Dunes National “Wreckreation” Area? RICHARD LEBLOND

tion Committee. Meanwhile, Idaho Republican Rep. Tom Loertscher has his own explanation for global climate change, reports the *Idaho Falls Post Register*. “We get climate change four times a year,” he said. “It’s called the four seasons. I think we’re pretty vain if we think we can control the climate.”

THE NATION

“Clueless” is just one of the harsh words a former press officer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service chose to characterize the Interior Department’s recent “share your love” campaign. No sentimentalist, David Klinger, who worked for the federal agency from 1977 to 2012, said that by asking online for couples’ videos of their marriage ceremonies and “bachelorette blowouts on federal lands,” the Interior Department demeans the “sacredness” of the nation’s parks and refuges, which are not “enlarged platforms for private partying.” Klinger allows that he might be old-fashioned, “but I regard Yosemite as the public’s Sistine Chapel of American conservation, not an inexpensive and tawdry wedding chapel.” Undaunted, the Interior Department shared some of the public-land-based love stories and videos it received at www.facebook.com/USInterior/videos/951270304926651/

CALIFORNIA

How do you sell 117 boxes of Girl Scout cookies in two hours? Just park yourself outside a medical marijuana dispensary, reports the *Los Angeles Times*. That’s what 12-year-old Danielle Lei and her mother did, near a pot outlet called Green Cross, in San Francisco. They got so busy that 45 minutes later, they had to call for more cookies. “I’m not saying go out in the streets and take marijuana,” said Lei’s mother. She added, though, “I can be a cool parent for a little bit.” Because all the money stays in local chapters, each one makes decisions on how to run a program, and Lei’s chapter said it had no problem with her location. Girl Scouts of Colorado, however, said that it disapproved of the “situation” in San Francisco, adding that Girl Scout cookies must not be sold in the Centennial State near pot shops, liquor stores or bars. Incidentally, Green Cross happens to sell a new variety of marijuana it calls “Girl Scout Cookie.”

IDAHO

Wolf hating might be considered a religion in Idaho, says one longtime resident, who prefers to remain anonymous owing to the extreme emotions the issue provokes. She looked into one charge against the animals — that wolves feast on too many elk — and talked to several outfitters. Most told her they weren’t convinced wolves were to blame for spotty hunter success. One had his own theory: “It’s not easy to haul yourself thousands of feet up into the mountains,” he told her. “Plus you need to be stealthy, not sucking wind. The primary reason that hunters fail to bag an elk has nothing to do with wolves. It’s because more hunters are out of shape. Or, to put it bluntly, fat.”

WEB EXTRA For more from Heard around the West, see hcn.org.

Tips and photos of Western oddities are appreciated and often shared in this column. Write betsym@hcn.org or tag photos [#heardaroundthewest](https://www.instagram.com/heardaroundthewest) on Instagram.



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“ I believe in intact ecosystems.
I believe hard science trumps
superstition and false facts.”

Andrew Gulliford, in his essay, “Wolves belong back home in Colorado,” from *Writers on the Range*, hcn.org/wotr