

America's Treasures: Our National Parks Script

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Welcome, everyone! Thanks for attending this chapter [Summit chapter] Educational Event.

For those of you who aren't currently members of Modern Woodmen of America, we're glad you're here. Educational programs are just one of the many ways Modern Woodmen gives back to the community. Please see me after this program if you'd like to learn more about our many other member benefits. I'd be glad to give you some information.

[Today's/Tonight's] topic is Our National Parks. There are 58 parks in the National Park System – in every state but Delaware. We'll cover 16 of them in this presentation.

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Yellowstone, the first national park, was created in 1872 by President Ulysses S. Grant. It covers nearly 2.2 million acres of the states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

Yellowstone has the largest collection of geysers in the world – 300! Geysers are springs that periodically send up jets of heated water and steam. Some geyser eruptions, like those of "Old Faithful," are predictable; others are not.

This is Steamboat, the world's tallest active geyser. Its eruptions are rare, but they can sometimes burst skyward more than 300 feet in the air.

A little trivia for you: Old Faithful was used by Civil War General Philip Sheridan and his men for ... laundry! That's right, the predictable bursts of steam and hot air were used to clean the men's clothes! Gen. Sheridan was quite a supporter and advocate of the park, and Mount Sheridan was named for him.

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Less than 50 miles south of I-90 in western South Dakota, you'll find Badlands National Park, which attracts a million visitors each year.

The Lakota Sioux Indians referred to this area as Mako Sica (mah-koh shee-chah) or "land bad." One of the land features you'll see in the Badlands are "tables," isolated, flat-topped hills with steep sides. Some of the tables found in the Badlands mark the sites of historic Ghost Dance ceremonies. Even today, Stronghold and Sheep Mountain Tables are favorite sites for young Lakota men to go to fast and pray, hoping to have a vision for their future.

The Badlands area is home to bighorn sheep, black-footed ferret, elk, mule deer, mountain lions, badgers, prairie dogs and American bison. By the way, did you know that bison and other wildlife pose a significant danger to humans? Bison stand six feet tall, weigh up to 2,000 pounds, and run at speeds up to 30 miles an hour. The National Park Service recommends you stay at least 25 yards away from bison and elk, and 100 yards away from wolves and bears. Be safe!

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Congaree National Park in South Carolina was created in 2003 and is named for the Indian tribe that once inhabited the area. The word *congaree* means "scraping bottom." The park is home to many animals, including wild boar, otter and flying squirrels.

Congaree contains the oldest, largest area of floodplain hardwood forest in the southeastern United States. The Congaree and Wateree Rivers flood the park nearly ten times a year. The river water carries nutrients and sediments, causing the park's ecosystem to thrive. The canopy of the bald cypress trees averages more than 100 feet high!

As you can imagine, the best way to tour Congaree is by canoe. Free ranger-guided canoe tours are offered year-round, though you must BYOC (bring your own canoe). Plan ahead because reservations are required and the tours fill up fast!

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Big Bend National Park is located in western Texas, less than 25 miles from the Mexican border. The Spaniards called this area “El Despoblado” (El Des-poe-BLAH-doe) or “the uninhabited land.” I’m sure you can see why!

At the turn of the 20th century, geologists began studying the Big Bend area. Countless fossils have been discovered since that time, including those of “ruling reptiles” from the Mesozoic (Meh-so-ZOH-ic) Era, 250 to 65 million years ago. These include:

- *Quetzlcoatlus* (qwet-zel-KWAHT-lus), a flying reptile, or pterosaur (TARE-uh-sore), with an amazing 39-foot wingspan.
- *Deinosuchus* (Die-no-SOO-kuss), a 50’ long “super croc” with 6-inch teeth.
- More than 90 species of dinosaurs, including the duck-billed *Hadrosaurus* and 100-foot long *Alamosaurus*.

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Do you like to “get away from it all” while on vacation? Then put Isle Royale National Park, off the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, on your list of dream destinations!

Accessible only by a half-hour seaplane trip or 1 ½ to 6 hour boat ride, Isle Royale boasts fewer than 20,000 visitors a year. The 45-mile-long island, described as a “primitive wilderness,” is located in Lake Superior, less than 20 miles from the Minnesota shoreline.

Visitors stay 3 ½ days on average and can view moose, wolves, beavers and other wildlife while hiking and camping at dozens of available sites. Amateur scuba divers will enjoy touring nearby wrecks of freighters and passenger steamers.

Less-adventurous types can cruise to the island, stay at the Rock Harbor Lodge (late May-early September), enjoy ranger-led programs and day hikes, and tour lighthouses and fisheries.

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Mount Rainier (Ray-NEER) National Park is located about 50 miles south of the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area.

Mount Rainier is the tallest volcano in the contiguous United States. Scientists say it will most likely be active in the future, though for now it's quiet. It's estimated the last eruption was about 150-200 years ago.

The Paradise area of the park is the snowiest place on earth (where snowfall is measured regularly). The most snow ever recorded there fell in the winter of 1971-72: 93 ½ feet! Mount Rainier is usually only snow-free from mid-July to late-September.

Cougars, also known as pumas or mountain lions, are found in the park and are the only North American animals that occasionally stalk humans. If you ever meet up with a cougar, don't run away! Stand still, try to appear larger than you are and make a lot of loud noise!

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Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 30 miles south of Cleveland, Ohio, was created in 1974 after a decade of cooperative efforts by local citizens and government leaders against land development and urban sprawl. The park is now a haven for wildlife.

Beaver Marsh, pictured here, was once a dumping ground and slated to become a parking lot. After the local Sierra Club cleaned the area, beavers returned to the state after more than a century's absence, and over time the wetland was restored. Beaver Marsh is one of the park's most popular areas.

The park's Towpath Trail follows the Ohio & Erie Canal which connected Lake Erie to the Ohio River. The canal, dug by hand by German and Irish immigrants between 1825 and 1832, provided the transportation route Ohio needed to trade with the eastern United States. The trail is open to walkers, joggers, bicyclists and horse riders.

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Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado contains nearly 5,000 archaeological sites, including 600 cliff dwellings.

Cliff Palace, seen here, is one of three dwellings that can only be accessed in a ranger-guided tour. About 100 people lived in Cliff Palace's 150 rooms. Its walls were once decorated in pink, brown, red, yellow and white.

The cliff dwellers lived in the area from about 550 A.D. until the late 1200s. By 1300 A.D., the cliff dwellings had been abandoned. Why did the people leave? A 25-year drought, combined with dwindling supplies of good farming soil, animals and wild plants needed for food, and wood for fuel caused the cliff dwellers to migrate south to New Mexico and Arizona. Their descendants include the modern-day Hopi and Zuni tribes.

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Four hours north of Missoula, Montana, you'll find Glacier National Park. In 1932, Glacier and Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta, Canada, combined to form Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, spotlighting the friendship that exists between our countries.

Glaciers are slow-moving masses of ice formed by snow accumulation. In the mid-1800s, Glacier Park had 150 glaciers. Today there are only 25, all shrinking in size. Some scientists say that by 2020, there may be no more glaciers in Glacier National Park due to global climate change.

Going-to-the-Sun Road spans the park through Logan Pass. It's an engineering marvel, a 50-mile, 2-hour trip that's only completely doable during the summer months. "Sun Road" is an exciting drive, featuring tight curves and mountain-hugging portions; riders on the passenger side can actually look over the edge of the road!

One of the many sights you'll see as you drive on Sun Road is Jackson Glacier, pictured here. Another is Triple Divide Peak, standing more than 8,000 ft. tall. From its summit, water flows to the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and Hudson Bay. Along the way, you're sure to see some of Glacier's snow-white mountain goats – the mountain goat is the official symbol of Glacier National Park!

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Mammoth Cave National Park is about 90 miles northeast of Nashville. Visitors have toured this “grand, gloomy and peculiar” place for nearly 200 years.

Mammoth Cave is the world’s longest cave system, with nearly 400 miles explored thus far. The very first people to visit 4,000 years ago were torch-carrying Native Americans in search of gypsum crystals. The cave was rediscovered by white pioneers in the late 1700s.

How did this amazing cave form? Millions of years ago, ancient sea waters covered the Midwest, laying down a 600-foot layer of soluble limestone. An ancient river topped the limestone with sandstone and shale. Over time, erosion removed this top layer. Then, 10 million years ago, rainwater began working its way through cracks and holes in the limestone. The water formed underground rivers which over time hollowed out the cave.

About half a million visitors tour Mammoth Cave each year. The seasons determine which of the 16 tours is available. Tours range from family-friendly quarter-mile jaunts to the 5-mile, 6 ½ hour “Wild Cave Tour”!

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Acadia National Park is located on Mount Desert Island, 50 miles southeast of Bangor, Maine. It was the first national park established east of the Mississippi River. Summer residents of the island bought up the land in the early 1900s and then donated it so it could be preserved.

Acadia is home to Cadillac Mountain, the highest point on the U.S. Atlantic coast. From Oct. 7 through March 6, the mountain is the first place in the United States you can view the sun rise each day. In fact, the four Native American tribes in this area are known as the Wabanaki (WAH-buh-NAH-kee) or “People of the Dawnland.”

Birdwatchers, note that Acadia Park is one of the best sites in the country to view birds! The park and its offshore islands are home to 338 bird species and are both important nesting grounds and wintering habitats for sea and shore birds.

Acadia is a very “green” park. The park’s 2 million annual visitors are encouraged to park their cars and ride fare-free, propane-powered Island Explorer buses.

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Yosemite (Yo-SEH-mi-tee) National Park is located about 200 miles east of San Francisco. The word *yosemite* is adapted from an Indian phrase that means, “They are killers!” referring to a violent tribe that once lived in the area! These three photos show unique sights found in Yosemite:

- For a 2-week period of time each February, if the right conditions exist – flowing water and a clear sky – Horsetail Fall will glow a brilliant orange and red for about 10 minutes at sunset.
- In the winter, visitors can view a “Snow Cone” at the base of Upper Yosemite Falls. The cone forms as falling water freezes at the bottom and can be hundreds of feet tall.
- Frazil (FRAY-zuhl) ice may be viewed in March and April in Yosemite. These small crystals of frozen mist mix with flowing water to create millions of gallons of slushy “Slurpee.” In certain areas, frazil ice may accumulate and stop flowing, forming stationary pieces. Visitors beware – though these slushy masses resemble snow, they have swift-moving, icy water beneath!

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Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona is the second most-visited park, with 4.4 million visitors annually. The canyon is more than one mile deep at its deepest, and 18 miles wide at its widest.

Fossils of mammoth, mastodon, camels, and 12-foot-tall giant ground sloths have been found in the park. Giant short-faced bears weighing 1500 pounds ran up to 40 mph as they roamed the Grand Canyon long ago.

Adventurous types can take a two-day, round-trip mule ride to the Colorado River at the canyon bottom. Sound like fun? Plan ahead – reservations must be made more than a year in advance!

Speaking of mules ... did you know that the town of Supai (SOO-pie), at the bottom of the canyon, is the only place that features mail delivery *by mule*? It's a 3-hour trip, one way, made every day!

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North America's highest peak is found in Alaska and stands more than 20,000 feet in elevation. Denali (Duh-NAH-lee), or "the high one," was named by the local Native American people. In 1896, its name was changed to Mount McKinley by gold prospector and explorer W.A. Dickey to recognize McKinley's support of the gold standard. In August 2015, President Barack Obama restored the mountain's original name.

On average, it takes about 2 weeks to scale Denali, and only about half of all climbers are successful in doing so.

Denali National Park and Preserve encompasses six million acres of wild land. A summertime visit to the park can feature night temperatures close to freezing and day temperatures in the mid-80s. During that season, visitors can view the young of caribou, moose and grizzly bears. And because summer features round-the-clock sunlight, the fun can be non-stop!

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Arches National Park in Utah contains more than 2,000 natural stone arches. The park is located in a high desert, which features hot summers, cold winters and very little rainfall.

How did these beautiful arches form?

Beneath the park is a 5,000-foot-thick bed of salt deposits, left from sea water that flowed through the area millions of years ago. This unstable salt shifted under the weight of the mile-thick rock layer above, causing cracks in the stone.

Over time, nearly all the rock layer wore away, creating narrow walls of sandstone called "fins." Carbonic acid in rain weakened the fins. Some fins collapsed, while the stronger and better balanced ones formed the arches we marvel at today.

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Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the most-visited in the National Park system, with more than 10 million visitors annually. The park covers more than a half-million acres in North Carolina and Tennessee. Water and hydrocarbons from tree leaves combine to form a haze or “smoke” that hangs over the mountains.

The park has many waterfalls, due to generous annual rainfall and wide variations in elevation. Pictured here is the tallest waterfall, Ramsey Cascades. The 8-mile roundtrip hike to the 80-foot waterfall follows rushing rivers and streams.

The park also contains 97 historic structures, including grist mills, churches, schools, barns, and the homes of early settlers, preserving Southern Appalachian mountain heritage.

Did you know Great Smoky Mountains Park is known as “The Salamander Capital of the World”? Thirty species of the amphibian can be seen at the park!

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Want to see “America’s Treasures” in person? Modern Woodmen makes it more affordable by offering a \$5.00 reimbursement of the fees associated with the America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands Lifetime Pass (\$80) or Annual Senior Pass (\$20). This lifetime pass is available to U.S. citizens or permanent residents age 62 or older. One per household.

You can apply for the pass at a federal recreation site or office, or purchase it by mail. For more information, or to apply for the pass online, visit the U.S. Geological Survey website, USGS.gov.

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Thanks again for joining us for this presentation of “America’s Treasures: Our National Parks”!

We look forward to seeing you at our next chapter [Summit chapter] event! (Offer the time and place.)