

National Geographic Secrets of the National Parks: The Experts' Guide to the Best Experiences Beyond the Tourist Trail (National Geographic Secrets of the National Parks)

By National Geographic

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Find the best National Geographic picks in 32 amazing national parks including Yellowstone's Lamar Valley, the Everglades' Nine Mile Pond Canoe Trail, and Yosemite's exquisite Snow Creek Trail. Discover that Lamar Valley is home to many of the park's wolf packs; why the Everglades is the domain of the pink flamingo; and that astounding views of Yosemite's Half Dome and Tenaya Canyon are accessible on an easy day hike. The majority of national park visitors often stick to the most celebrated trails and scenic overlooks, missing a whole world of stunning scenery in the process. Informed by park rangers, superintendents, and frequent park visitors, *National Geographic Secrets of the National Parks* provides all the inspiration and information you need to plan your visit beyond the well-trodden, touristy spots in these 32 great national parks. Stunning photographs, informative sidebars, and easy-to-use maps will help make your next national park adventure memorable.

FEATURED PARKS:

EAST: Acadia - Shenandoah - Great Smoky Mountains - Biscayne - Everglades

SOUTHWEST & ROCKIES: Big Bend - Petrified Forest - Grand Canyon -

Bryce Canyon - Zion - Capitol Reef - Mesa Verde - Canyonlands - Arches -

Rocky Mountain - Wind Cave - Badlands - Theodore Roosevelt - Yellowstone -

Grand Teton - Glacier

PACIFIC: Mount Ranier - Olympic - Crater Lake - Redwood - Yosemite -

Channel Islands - Sequoia & Kings Canyon - Death Valley - Joshua Tree -

Hawaii Volcanoes - Haleakala

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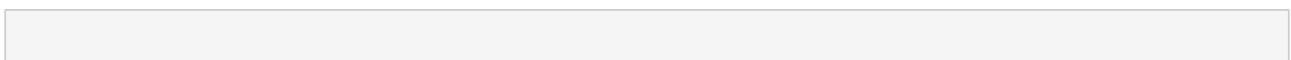
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National Geographic Secrets of the National Parks: The Experts' Guide to the Best Experiences Beyond the Tourist Trail (National Geographics Secrets of the National Parks) By National Geographic Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #13459 in Books
- Color: Paperback
- Brand: National Geographic
- Published on: 2013-04-02
- Released on: 2013-04-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.39" h x .55" w x 5.27" l, 1.03 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 272 pages



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Editorial Review

Review

"Get hints about the best places to see wildlife, the least crowded beaches, barely traveled trails. There is insider information for every park that will make a visit even more memorable." --*The Free Lance-Star* (Fredericksburg, VA)

"Adding authoritative heft to the text are insights from park superintendents, rangers, interpreters, and guidebook authors." --*National Parks Traveler*

"With vivid color photographs and details...this book is a handy pre-trip planner for travelers." --*Billings Gazette*

"[This Guide] offers a plethora of tips for both the hard-core backcountry expert and the day-tripping family group - and everyone in between." --*Deseret News*

"The writers uncovered walks, trails, destinations, and vistas off the beaten paths which, combined with maps and practical advice, make the book the perfect companion for any National Park adventure. --*Family Focus Blog*

"This guide goes beyond the tourist trails, with 350 tips from local experts, how to find the undiscovered scenic spot and the best places to see wildlife." -- *Cadiz Record* (Kentucky)

"National Geographic Secrets of the National Parks: The Experts' Guide to the Best Experiences Beyond the Tourist Trail...travels 32 of the nation's parks from an insider's viewpoint." --*NorwoodLibrary.org*

"There is insider information for every park that will make a visit even more memorable."--*Fredericksburg Free-Lance Star*

About the Author

National Geographic cartographers create award-winning maps using state-of-the-art software for cartography and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The results are clear, detailed maps that make map reading fun and informative.

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SHENANDOAH

As the closest national park to Washington, D.C., Shenandoah is an oasis straddling 300 square miles of Southern Appalachian ridgeline for metro residents and other visitors.

To the east is the Appalachian Piedmont, to the west lies the Shenandoah Valley, and in the corridor between are expansive mountain vistas, abundant black bears and deer, and secluded waterfalls and swimming holes.

Homesteaders first settled these mountains in the 1750s, and their descendants were displaced in the 1920s

and 1930s when the Commonwealth of Virginia acquired the land to create the park.

Some were allowed to stay in their homes (the last resident died in 1979), and some worked with contractors to help build Skyline Drive and other park facilities. Family cemeteries and ruins serve as enduring reminders of the farm families who once lived here.

North District: Skyline Drive from Front Royal to Byrd Visitor Center

The park's 105-mile long spine is Skyline Drive, a scenic roadway (speed limit 35 mph) built in part along trails blazed by Indians, fur traders, and pioneers.

Mileposts begin at zero at the northernmost point—Front Royal, Virginia (US 340)—and count up as you drive south. The drive and the park end at milepost 105, Rockfish Gap (I-64), where Skyline connects to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Viewing the park in three leisurely driving chunks—North, Central, and South—makes it more likely you'll take the time to explore the side trails off Skyline Drive and stop at the scenic overlooks.

While the 75 overlooks along the ridge-crest route (the high point is 3,680 feet) make the Appalachian mountain vistas accessible to all, appreciating the park requires approaching it as more than a drive-through destination, says Andy Nichols, director of programs for a local guide company. "Shenandoah has more than 500 miles of trails, most of which lead to stunning places, but few people ever get out from behind the wheel. There are some often overlooked trails that are true gems."

1. Fox Hollow Trail

The first stop for most people who enter the park via Front Royal is the Dickey Ridge Visitor Center, where clean restrooms and an information center are the main draws.

Few people venture across Skyline Drive from the center to the Fox Hollow trailhead. The 1.2-mile loop doesn't offer any of Shenandoah's sweeping panoramas, but it does provide a window into the history of the people who lived here before the park was created.

The trail is named for the Fox family, tenant farmers here from the early 1800s through 1936. Thomas Fox eventually bought this site from owner Marcus Buck and built a seven-room log house in this area. The forest has reclaimed their cornfields and pastures, but the family's cemetery and homesite remain.

2. Overall Run/Heiskell Hollow Loop

If you're physically up to a challenging circuit hike (about 12.5 miles, half that if you only go to the falls and back), this one delivers Shenandoah's best in microcosm.

"There are beautiful falls [including the park's tallest, 93-foot Overall Run Falls], great views, and swimming holes near the bottom," says Nichols. "In summer the swimming is amazing, and in winter the upper falls are magnificent." (Freezing temps can turn the cascades into icicles.)

From Skyline Drive, park at the Matthews Arm Campground amphitheater and follow Traces Trail to the Tuscarora–Overall Run Trail, connecting with Heiskell Hollow to complete the circuit.

3. Beahms Gap

With 101 miles of the Appalachian Trail (AT) paralleling much of Skyline Drive through the park, it's easy

to hike a short section. White blazes on trees mark the AT. Blue signifies park trails, and yellow, horse trails (hiking allowed).

The AT crossing near Beahms Gap is only a few hundred yards from the parking area and is a favorite birding spot of biologists Ann Simpson and her husband Rob, co-owners of a local photography business.

“More than 200 species of birds are found in the park,” says Ann. “In summer, look for scarlet tanagers, indigo buntings, and rose-breasted grosbeaks. In fall, sparrows, eastern towhees, and migrating warblers love the scrubby, insect-filled cover here.”

Central District: Thornton Gap to Swift Run Gap

To meet Shenandoah in the middle, enter the park through Thornton Gap or Swift Run Gap, and drive between the two. This is the highest section of the park, and it includes its highest peak, at Hawkskill (4,051 feet), and second highest point, 4,011-foot Stony Man.

4. Stony Man to Spitler Knoll Overlooks

With 75 Skyline Drive vista overlooks, it can be difficult to pick the perfect spot to pull off and watch the sun go down. “Most of the overlooks are oriented with a westward view into the Allegheny Mountains, so there are many that are nice for sunset pictures,” says Rob Simpson.

To snap the quintessential Shenandoah sunset vista, the Simpsons suggest staking out an unobstructed view at one of their favorite photo stops along this stretch of Skyline Drive: Stony Man, Timber Hollow, or Spitler Knoll.

5. Stony Man

The popular loop hike to the top and back is steep (about 340 feet upward) and rocky (it’s called Stony Man for a reason) in spots.

At only 1.6 miles, however, it’s a short way for some long views west over wave after wave of forested Appalachian Mountain ridges. Park at historic Skyland Resort early in the day to make the climb before the crowds arrive.

For a shorter option with similar views, hike the trail to Little Stony Man, a 0.9-mile round-trip.

6. Limberlost Trail

The easy Limberlost Trail (named for an early 1900s novel) is Shenandoah’s most accessible woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife trail.

The five-foot-wide crushed green- stone walkway loops through 1.3 miles of forest. Mountain laurels bloom in June and white-tailed deer are regularly spotted here throughout the year.

The gentle grades make it possible to push a stroller or wheelchair, but ruts can form and wooden bridge surfaces can get slick when wet. If you’re a wheelchair hiker, invite a friend to join you (always a good idea for any hiker on any trail).

7. Big Meadows

The Byrd Visitor Center is a popular rest stop since it sits roughly at the halfway point along Skyline Drive.

Take some time here to stretch your legs and walk across Skyline Drive to Big Meadows, the park's largest open vista, suggests Mary Craig, summer park teacher.

The meadowlands' low-bush blueberry, maleberry, and deerberry bushes; two nutrient-rich wetlands; and native grasses attract abundant wildlife and insects, including some species found nowhere else in Shenandoah.

"Early morning or just before sun- set are the best times to wander Big Meadows," says Craig. "It's a quieter period with fewer visitors and more opportunities to see white-tailed deer and black bears."

While any of the bigger mammals are fairly obvious, spotting the Jones Run Falls four-toed salamanders, eastern gray tree frogs, upland chorus frogs, and other critters that live here requires walking softly and listening closely. Adds Craig, "Unplug from your electronics and have your kids do the same. When you get engaged in the outdoors, you see and hear so much more."

8. Rapidan Camp

Before President Franklin Roosevelt established the USS Shangri-La retreat (renamed Camp David) as the presidential country residence, President Herbert Hoover built this fishing camp on the Rapidan River.

"The Hoovers enjoyed 'Camp Hoover' during the summer months to escape the heat of Washington and to entertain government officials and international guests," explains Ann Simpson. "On a pleasant 4-mile round-trip hike along Mill Prong Trail from the Milam Gap parking area, you can reach Rapidan Camp, explore the area, and enjoy the same inspiring mountain trout stream that soothed the souls of many famous national and world leaders."

To fish here, bring your gear and purchase a five-day nonresident fishing license at the Big Meadows Wayside or a local sporting goods store.

9. Lewis Mountain Campground

The campground is the park's smallest, making it a quiet, somewhat secret retreat. When visiting with children, this also is an ideal setting for an impromptu discussion about the civil rights movement, say Ann and Rob Simpson.

"The Lewis Mountain facilities opened in 1940 as a segregated campground," says Ann Simpson. "Later, that segregation ended and the campground was freely shared by everyone."

The site is close to the Appalachian Trail, so through-hikers often camp here to shower, wash clothes, and stock up on supplies.

Near the campground facilities, hike to the summit of Bearfence Mountain, suggests Rob Simpson. "The name comes from the palisade-like rocks resembling a fence that surround the summit. The hike is a fairly easy 1.2- mile circuit to a 360-degree vista."

South District: Rockfish Gap and North

"The southern edge of Shenandoah is much less populated, but there's still plenty to see and do," says Craig. Approach the park through the southernmost Rockfish Gap Entrance at US 64 for a different perspective.

Heading north up Skyline Drive from here, there's generally less traffic, and in early morning and early

evening, adds Craig, more chance you'll spot black bears, deer, or wild turkeys walking or feeding near the road.

10. Jones Run/Doyles River

In summer, pack a picnic and towel and spend a day cooling off in the swimming holes along this 6.6-mile loop trail, suggests hiking guide Andy Nichols. Park at Browns Gap (mile- post 83) lot, cross Skyline Drive, and follow the AT along the ridge for 1.4 miles to the Jones Run Trail. "This is a fun and rewarding hike on a hot day," says Nichols. "There's not quite as much solitude as some of my other 'secret' hikes, but it's great for water- falls and pools."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Grace McClellan:

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