



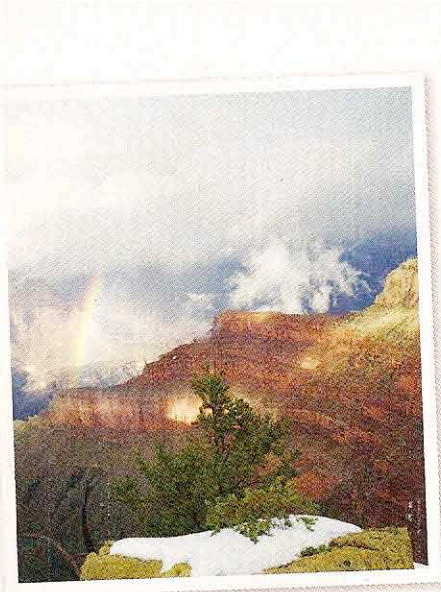
Cut from the same geology? Glacier National Park mirrors much of the landscape found at North Cascades National Park (inset).

TWIN PEAKS

Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Glacier and Yosemite draw most visitors, but travelers catch glimmers of what makes the popular parks shine at some of the lesser-visited ones. —By *Becky Lomax*

Who can forget Grand Canyon National Park's immense rift, Yellowstone's lofty spouting geysers, Glacier's rugged ice-carved peaks or Yosemite's looming granite walls? Even for travelers who haven't visited the parks, these images are seared into America's conscience. Ever since President Ulysses S. Grant declared Yellowstone America's first national park in 1872, the west's big four parks have captured the nation's imagination with their stunning scenery, wildlife and natural history.

But there's more to the West than these well-known giants. Smaller, less-traveled national parks hold similar features. Bryce Canyon National Park mirrors what's found at Grand Canyon. Yellowstone-like bubbling mud pots flank Lassen Peak. Glaciers drape the North Cascades. And granite monoliths worthy of Ansel Adams' lens (whose pictures made Yosemite famous) pack Kings Canyon. Simply put, the larger parks' smaller twins double adventurers' pleasure.



(This page, clockwise from far right) rowing on the Grand Canyon's Colorado River; sunlight amplifies Bryce Canyon's orange spires; mapping Bryce Canyon; inclement weather turns to glory over the Grand Canyon.

(Next page, clockwise from near left) cooler water temps allow red and yellow algae to encroach on the center of Yellowstone's Morning Glory Pool; mud pots boil in an Earth-bound Hades at Lassen's Bumpass Hell; Yellowstone's Great Fountain Geyser lets off some steam.



next stop: grand canyon

Since 1901, the Grand Canyon Railway has toted travelers to the Grand Canyon. The historic train departs daily from Williams, Arizona, and travels north to the park, then back. Along the way, passengers observe a variety of landscapes and even enjoy a re-enactment of an Old West train robbery. Contact AAA Travel Agency for more information.

CANYONLANDS

In the desert southwest, **Grand Canyon National Park** defines immense. Its namesake water-carved pink and rust rent gapes across 18 land miles and 277 river miles through Arizona's northwest corner. On the South Rim, sightseers stop at popular Mather Point for a dizzying look one mile down. Nearby, Grand Canyon Village buzzes with crowds, while deep in the rift, outdoor enthusiasts find solace. Whether hiking the canyon on a rarely used path or riding a mule down Bright Angel Trail to the Colorado River, explorers marvel as light plays off sandstone walls, changing tint from sunrise to sunset.

North on the Colorado Plateau in southern Utah, a much smaller chasm—but no less grand—drops 2,000 feet. Located in a national park of the same name, **Bryce Canyon** forms a maze. Here, wind, water and frost ravaged the landscape, leaving vibrant orange limestone spires crowded into horseshoe amphitheatres. Weather continues to shape the terrain as evidenced on the 1.3-mile

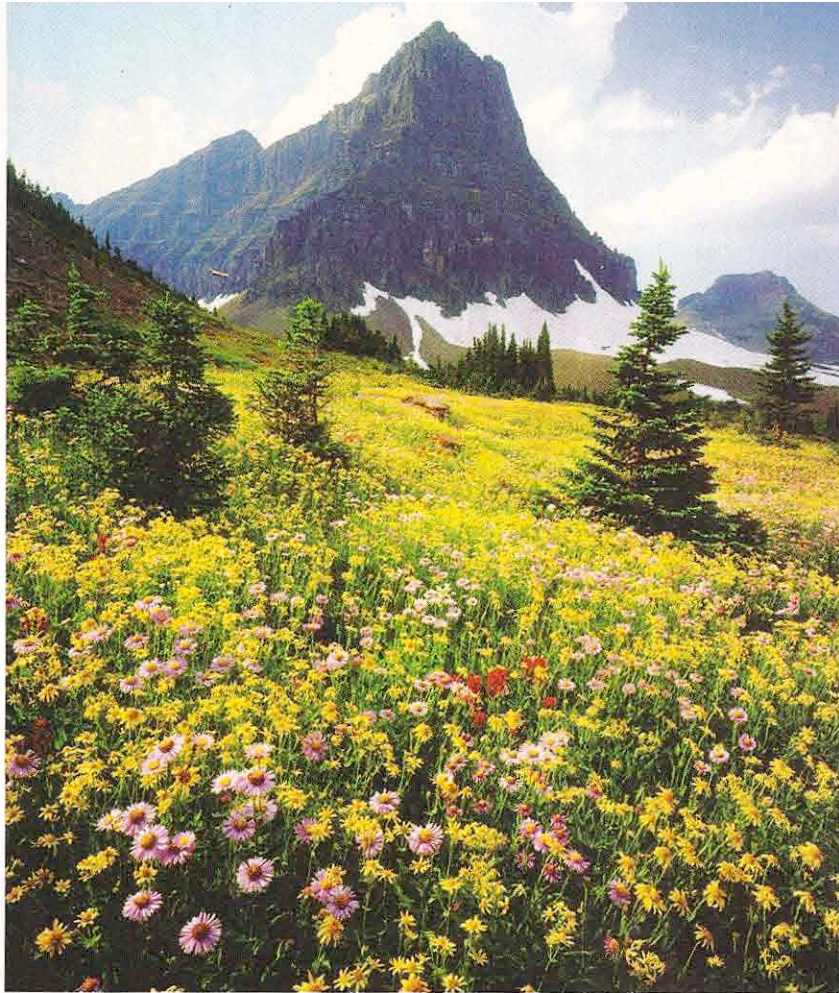
Navajo Loop Trail, where hikers who used to shimmy smoothly through narrow Wall Street slot canyon now clamber over 400–500 tons of rock that a 2006 frost wedged off.

Ambling along the eight-mile Fairyland Loop, vacationing hiker Michael Makieie pauses.

“With its otherworldly hoodoos, it’s like another planet,” he says. He runs his hand over unusual stone pillars, in awe of the power that sculpted them and the park’s notable natural masterpieces, China Wall and Tower Bridge.

Perhaps the most splendid show, however, happens at Sunrise Point, where Makieie watches light dance across Bryce Amphitheater’s brilliant ginger and persimmon hues. Unsurpassed air quality affords great views—and plenty of deep, refreshing breaths. Tonight, the show continues as Makieie stands at the rim of the rounded shell. Under clear skies, he stares across three states and 100 miles, admires the earth’s penumbra at sunset, and eventually gazes at twinkling stars too numerous to count.

PHOTOGRAPHY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) BY SYLVAIN GRANDADAM—GETTY IMAGES; JEFF FOOTT—GETTY IMAGES; JOHN ELK III—GETTY IMAGES; PETER HAIGH—GETTY IMAGES.



summer road report

Going to the Sun Road, the major Glacier Park artery that passes between the park's east and west entrances, is under repair. This summer, visitors should expect short delays (setting total travel time back about 30 minutes) on weekends and Monday-Thursday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Construction between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. will delay motorists about four hours. Public transportation will run July 3-Sept 1.

ICE CAPADES

In the northern Rockies of Montana, **Glacier National Park** cradles 1 million acres of deep U-shaped valleys, hanging cirques, arêtes and horns—the handiwork of huge, ancient ice flows. Today the park nurses only 27 small glaciers predicted to reach extinction within 25 years. Hikers often head to the most accessible—Grinnell Glacier. From the historic Many Glacier Hotel, they hop boats across two lakes and climb three miles through grizzly bear habitat to listen for ice cracking, a sign of the receding glacier.

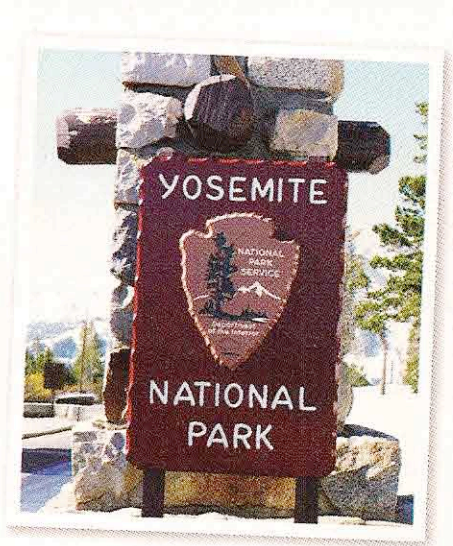
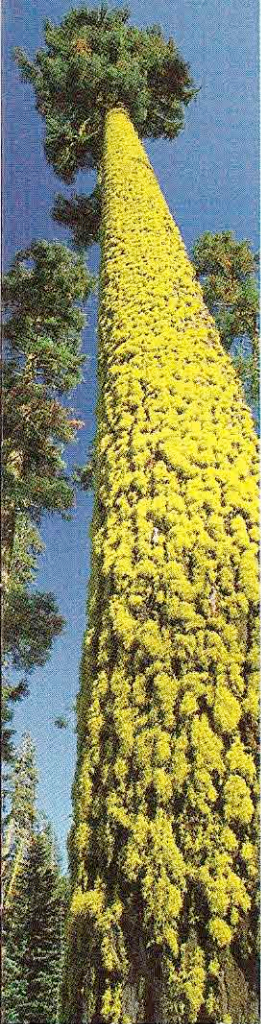
On the cliff-clinging, nail-biting Going-to-the-Sun Road, sightseers cross the Continental Divide in open-topped red jammer buses. Gasping in awe as these national historic landmarks crawl between jagged peaks plunging into fir-scented valleys, they often exclaim, “I can’t fit it all in my camera!”

Due west along the Canadian perimeter in Washington, ancient ice also chiseled the landscape now preserved in **North Cascades**

National Park. Aided by prolific Pacific winter snows, 300 glaciers adorn its craggy peaks, making it the nation’s most glaciated area outside of Alaska.

In some places, such as on ice-sculpted Lake Chelan, the landscape appears stolen from other countries. Steep mountainsides, the likes of Norway’s fjords, plummet into deep, clear, chilly waters—good for fishing and paddling.

“It’s *Sound of Music* scenery,” says Stacey Bengtson, who bicycled the North Cascades Scenic Highway a few years ago. The winding route bisects the remote wilderness. The smell of moist cedar duff rises from west side temperate rain forests; the eastern edge gives way to snap-dry ponderosa needles. In between, young, dynamic mountains rise, riddled with faults and upthrusts. Hikers amble past paintbrush meadows and bleating mountain goats to Easy Pass’ glacier-draped peak panorama, while cyclists and drivers target the highway’s apex, Washington Pass.



(Previous page, clockwise from far left) battling down for a boat ride in North Cascades; guided hikers traverse Grinnell Glacier in Glacier; summer wildflowers add color to Glacier.

(This page, clockwise from top right) King's Canyon; giant sequoias and lichen-covered ponderosa pines (left) dwarf hikers in Yosemite; "you are here."

BIG IMPRESSIONS

Due east of San Francisco in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, **Yosemite National Park** sprawls with mammoth rock slabs, huge waterfalls and giant trees. One word describes this park's scale—COLOSSAL. Massive, polished granite walls rise up to 5,000 feet off the glacier-carved valley. Daring rock climbers scale one of these sheer faces, El Capitan, while folks with binoculars scan every move from below. Hikers aim for Yosemite Falls—at 2,425 feet, one of the world's tallest; those not up for the climb gander at its grandeur from Sentinel Meadow. At Mariposa Grove, towering sequoias dwarf visitors. Even the upscale Ahwahnee Hotel, a national historic landmark completed in 1927, looks like a pebble in this titanic landscape.

Similarly, elements of **Kings Canyon National Park** in the southern Sierra Nevadas make visitors feel like Lilliputians. "The enormity of the (sequoia) trees hits home when you see how big the stumps are," says Marcy Yoshida, who

visited with her family. "You stand your family around them, and some are the size of a room."

The most notable lies in Grants Grove, where eyes strain to see the top of the General Grant Tree, which President Calvin Coolidge named the nation's Christmas tree in 1926.

Behemoth gray, granite outcroppings and plummeting waterfalls dominate the scenery. From Canyon View, photographers shoot the ice-scooped canyon. Drivers tour the snake-like Kings Canyon Highway, enjoying the broad valley and tight squeezes between cliff walls. And from Road's End, hikers walk a 4.5-mile sand and rock trail to Mist Falls. One of the park's largest waterfalls, it crashes over enormous stone slabs and down more than 50 feet with deafening noise.

No matter the size, the West's national parks leave an indelible impression. 🌲

Becky Lomax, author of *Moon Handbook Glacier National Park*, writes from Whitefish, Montana.



AAA Travel Agency offers tours

to many of the nation's national parks. Contact a AAA Travel Agent or visit AAA.com/Travel for more information. If you're road-tripping through America's parklands, visit AAA.com/BuildYourTrip for car rentals and hotel accommodations.