



Photo
portfolio

PARK LIFE

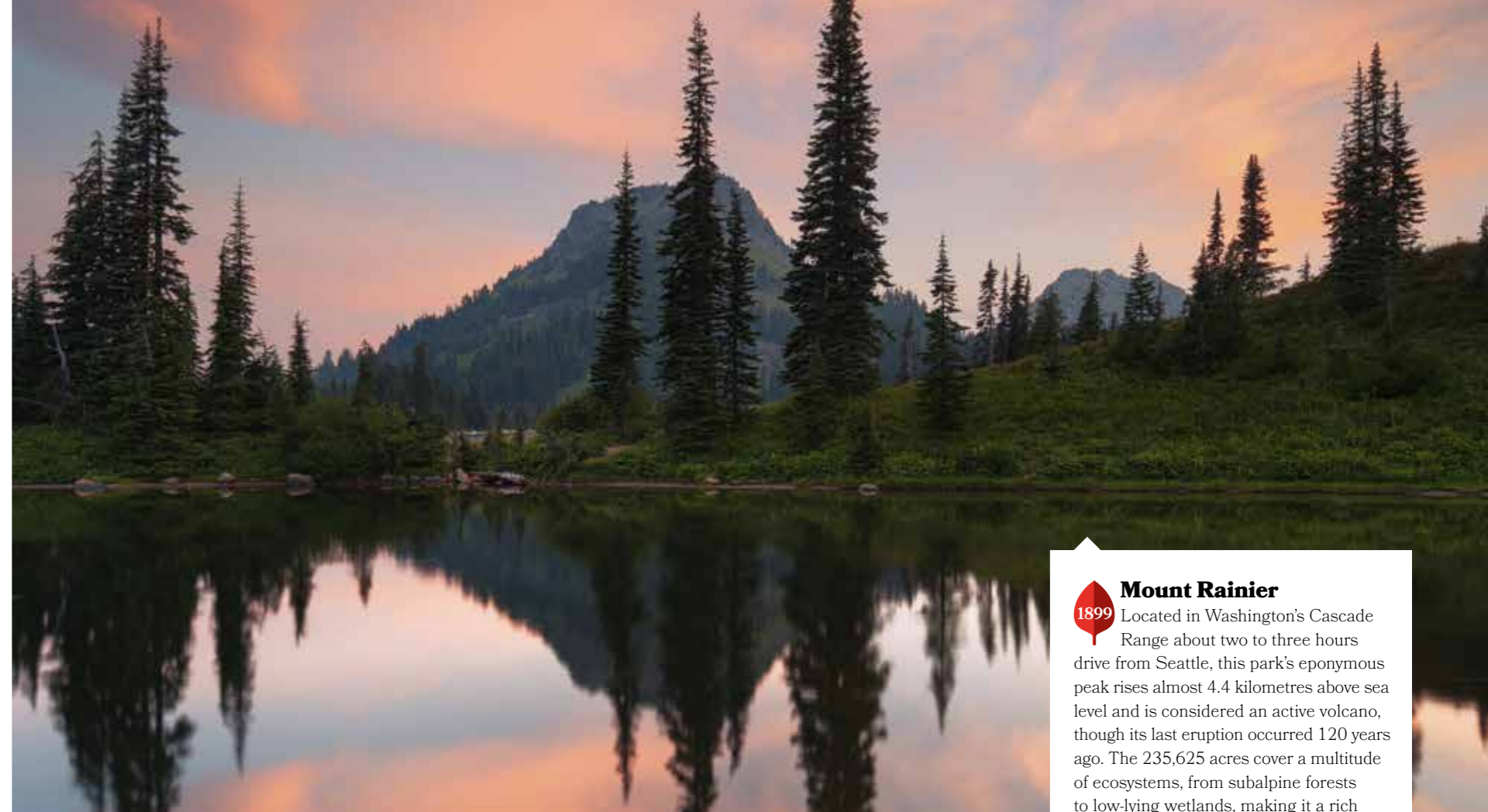
IN THE AGE OF HYPERCONNECTIVITY, FEW PLACES
ALLOW US TO TRULY DISCONNECT AND FIND SERENITY
LIKE THE UNITED STATES' NATIONAL PARKS

Words: Sarah Bruning

Yosemite

1890 Nearly 95 per cent of this 747,956-acre recreation area comprises pristine wilderness – land completely undeveloped and unspoiled by humans. In 1864, president Abraham Lincoln signed a grant to create the country's first official national park and ensure its myriad waterfalls, granite domes and U-shaped canyons would be protected. Much of this rugged topography results from the slow, steady movement of glaciers over the course of several millennia. Awe-inspiring vantage points allow visitors to take in stunning panoramas of the valley. In celebration of its 150th anniversary, we honour some of America's other breathtaking natural treasures. >

Photo © Phil Hawkins



1872 Yellowstone Since prehistoric times, herds of bison have roamed freely across America's first national park, which spans the continental divide and stretches across parts of Wyoming, Idaho and Montana. The vast 2,221,766-acre refuge is also home to some of the world's most prolific natural marvels; adventurers will observe upwards of 10,000 thermal features, including kaleidoscopic hot springs, bubbling clay mudpots and steam vents, plus more than 300 active geysers. The most famous? Old Faithful, which erupts approximately every 92 minutes.

1890 Sequoia and Kings Canyon The enormous namesake trees attract the most visitors, but other aspects of the terrain demand equal admiration. Within the prominent ranges of the Sierra Nevada mountain, explorers can take in 3,200 lakes and ponds and over 4,100 kilometres of rivers and streams. More than 1,200 kilometres of trails snake through a landscape that includes dry lowlands, dense oak woodlands and wildflower-covered foothills, which encompass more types of flora and fauna than any other area in this dynamic 865,964-acre expanse.



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1899 Mount Rainier Located in Washington's Cascade Range about two to three hours drive from Seattle, this park's eponymous peak rises almost 4.4 kilometres above sea level and is considered an active volcano, though its last eruption occurred 120 years ago. The 235,625 acres cover a multitude of ecosystems, from subalpine forests to low-lying wetlands, making it a rich environment for wildlife-spotting. It's home to 900 types of native plants, 126 birds, 54 mammals and 17 species of reptiles and amphibians – some of which are threatened or near-threatened. Glaciers form another prominent portion of the landscape.

1902 Crater Lake Wizard Island peeks out from the deepest lake in the USA, found in the now-dormant volcano Mount Mazama. Named for its resemblance to a sorcerer's headpiece, the 233-metre-high cinder cone emerged as the volcano's crater began to fill with rain and snowmelt after an eruption, until it reached a depth of 589 metres. Hikers can traverse almost 145 kilometres of trails lined with mountain hemlock, Shasta red fir and several species of pine, including whitebark, lodgepole and majestic ponderosa. Animal life is also diverse, with black bears, bobcats and marmots among the inhabitants. >

Park history >	1872	1890	1890	1899	1902	1903	1906	1910	1915	1916	1919
	Yellowstone	Sequoia	Yosemite	Mount Rainier	Crater Lake	Wind Cave	Mesa Verde	Glacier	Rocky Mountain	Lassen Volcanic	Grand Canyon



1910 Glacier Montana boasts no shortage of stunning vistas, but those contained within this 1,013,572-acre haven might be the most impressive. The dramatic scenery fluctuates between lush evergreen forests, alpine meadows, broad valleys and craggy mountaintops etched by the dense ice formations for which the park is named. Hundreds of crystalline lakes, ponds and rivers formed by snowmelt also abound. The largest body of water, Lake McDonald, draws a majority of horseback riders and hikers, but the less frequented Two Medicine Lake offers a rare slice of wild splendour to those who make the trek.

1903 Wind Cave One of the world's longest caverns lies beneath this 28,295-acre plain. Though its dry atmosphere prevents stalagmites and stalactites from forming, the labyrinth system is peppered with boxwork, a web-like calcite structure. Life above ground proves just as fascinating, with bison, mule deer, antelope and prairie dogs present in conspicuous numbers. A majority of the terrain is covered by short and tall grasses, but anyone who looks closely can also identify white sego lilies, purple coneflowers and golden sunflowers.



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1906 Mesa Verde Archaeologists prize the pithouses and cliffside dwellings carved into the sandstone and shale rocks of Colorado's Montezuma County. Built by the ancestral Puebloans between 550 and 1300 AD, the homes ranged from simple one-room abodes to complex multi-story villages. These well-shielded residences inspired president Theodore Roosevelt to declare the 52,074-acre area the first national park specifically dedicated to "preserv[ing] the works of man".



1915 Rocky Mountain It's no surprise that songs have praised the beauty of this untarnished sanctuary, which celebrates its centennial anniversary in 2015. Covering 265,873 acres of Colorado, it demonstrates some of the greatest ecological diversity contained within a single national park. More than 60 peaks break the three-kilometre mark, making them inhospitable to most plants and animals. Closer to sea level, fauna thrive in pine forests and lush meadows, where wildflowers in every hue also flourish. Elk, black bears and mule deer are the most abundant here, but watchful eyes could glimpse the more elusive moose and bighorn sheep too. >



1916 Lassen Volcanic
This northern California mountain hasn't rumbled since 1921, five years after it gained National Park status, but it has centuries of tumultuous activity to thank for its signature features: fuming vents, hot springs and the red-tinged Painted Dunes dotted with snow algae, pine trees and other soaring conifers. Geologists have discovered each of the four main types of volcanoes within Lassen's 106,372 acres: Prospect Peak typifies the shield style; Lassen Peak itself is a plug dome; Cinder Cone is named for its category; Mount Tehama represents the composite form.

1919 Grand Canyon
About 4.5 million annual visitors venture to its southern rim to peer into its 1.6-kilometre-deep abyss, where the Colorado River rushes through rocks that date back 1.8 billion years. A day-long hike down the Bright Angel or South Kaibab trails affords visitors ample opportunity to appreciate the rugged sandstone surfaces, but nearly 40,000 people every year opt to extend their journey overnight and rest for the challenging ascent. Still, even those who remain at the rim can soak up the sweeping desert plateaus, which become even more stunning as the sun goes down. 

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