

Celebrating the Centennial of our

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

BY DAWN MERRITT



Many people think of our national parks as big landscapes somewhere out West. Lovely, scenic places we can all be proud of and enjoy.

But our national park system is much more than a pretty face. From national monuments and urban getaways to the places where America was born, national parks protect our past and provide the historical context to help us find our best future. The National Park Service is entrusted with preserving these special places for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of all Americans.

As the National Park Service celebrates its 100th birthday this year, we want to celebrate what the park system means to America.

The Lincoln Memorial and Reflecting Pool is one of the most recognized — and most visited — sites on the National Mall in Washington, DC.

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

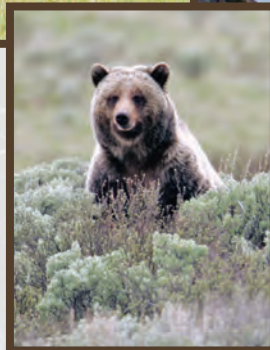
Old Faithful and the majority of the world's geysers are preserved here. They are the main reason the park was established in 1872 as America's first national park – and the world's!

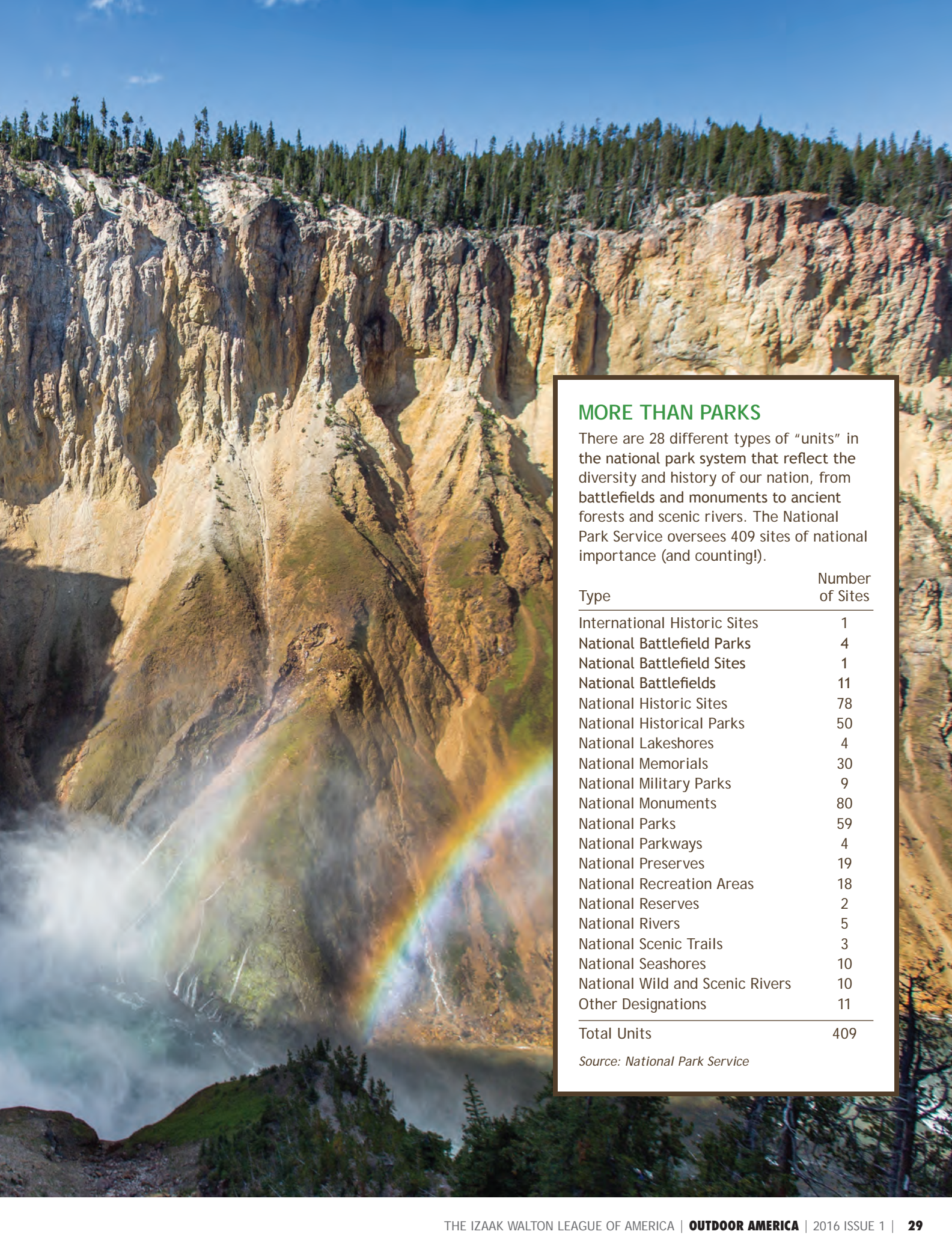


Steamboat Geyser is the world's tallest active geyser, shooting water more than 300 feet.



Yellowstone's abundant wildlife – from bison to grizzly bears – are as famous as its geysers.





MORE THAN PARKS

There are 28 different types of “units” in the national park system that reflect the diversity and history of our nation, from battlefields and monuments to ancient forests and scenic rivers. The National Park Service oversees 409 sites of national importance (and counting!).

Type	Number of Sites
International Historic Sites	1
National Battlefield Parks	4
National Battlefield Sites	1
National Battlefields	11
National Historic Sites	78
National Historical Parks	50
National Lakeshores	4
National Memorials	30
National Military Parks	9
National Monuments	80
National Parks	59
National Parkways	4
National Preserves	19
National Recreation Areas	18
National Reserves	2
National Rivers	5
National Scenic Trails	3
National Seashores	10
National Wild and Scenic Rivers	10
Other Designations	11
Total Units	409

Source: National Park Service

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

More than 3.8 million people visit Yosemite National Park each year for its spectacular waterfalls (Yosemite Falls is the largest waterfall in North America), incredible rock formations (which attract rock climbers from around the world), ancient groves of giant sequoias (estimated to be more than 3,000 years old), and more.



The U.S. Army managed our parks until the National Park Service was formed in 1916.

RYAN PARK, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK

Independence Hall (originally the Pennsylvania State House) is where the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution were debated and signed. This 55-acre urban park includes the Liberty Bell as well as the Benjamin Franklin

National Memorial, the site where George Washington and John Adams lived and worked while serving as U.S. Presidents, and other places that were integral to the founding of our nation.



WRIGHT BROTHERS NATIONAL MEMORIAL

On December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright accomplished what men had been dreaming of for centuries: flight (technically “the first sustained and controlled heavier-than-air, powered flight”). In North Carolina, you can take the same path as the Wright brothers’ plane and learn how they succeeded, from more than a thousand glider flights to perfect their plane controls to designing their own engine and airplane propellers.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (2)

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GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

Considered one of the seven natural wonders of the world, the Grand Canyon rises more than one mile above the Colorado River, displaying layers of geologic history. Those layers are more than pretty scenery – they hold marine fossils that are millions of years old. The oldest human artifacts found here are nearly 12,000 years old. Today, close to five million visitors each year enjoy hiking, biking, rafting, and more in this wonder of a national park.





W. TYSON JOYE, NPS; NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; BOB WICK, BLM

ROCK CREEK PARK

This urban oasis in the heart of Washington, DC – the oldest natural, urban park in the national park system – features a nature center, horse riding stables, tennis courts, golf course, picnic areas, playing fields, and an extensive network of trails for walking, jogging, and cycling.



BANK BRYAN, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; CAROL HIGHSMITH



BILL DOWLING/NPS (2)



GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

The Battle of Gettysburg was the bloodiest battle – and a turning point – in America’s Civil War. It was also the inspiration for President Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.” More than one million people visit this park each year to learn about the Civil War and the difficult decades following.

FLIGHT 93 NATIONAL MEMORIAL

One of four aircraft hijacked on September 11, 2001, Flight 93 did not reach terrorists’ intended target in Washington, DC, thanks to the heroism of the passengers and flight crew, who are honored here.



Park rangers provide interpretive programs at the southwestern Pennsylvania crash site.

BRENDA SCHWARTZ, NPS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

BISCAYNE NATIONAL PARK

Ninety-five percent of the 172,000-acre park is under water, giving Miami residents and visitors plenty of space to dive, snorkel, boat, and enjoy the world's third largest coral reef. Small islands in the park (accessible by boat) offer opportunities for camping and hiking.



The shallow waters of Jones Lagoon are home to red mangroves, upside-down jellyfish, and bird rookeries.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, MATT JOHNSON; KEY LIME PIE YUMYUM

CUYAHOGA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

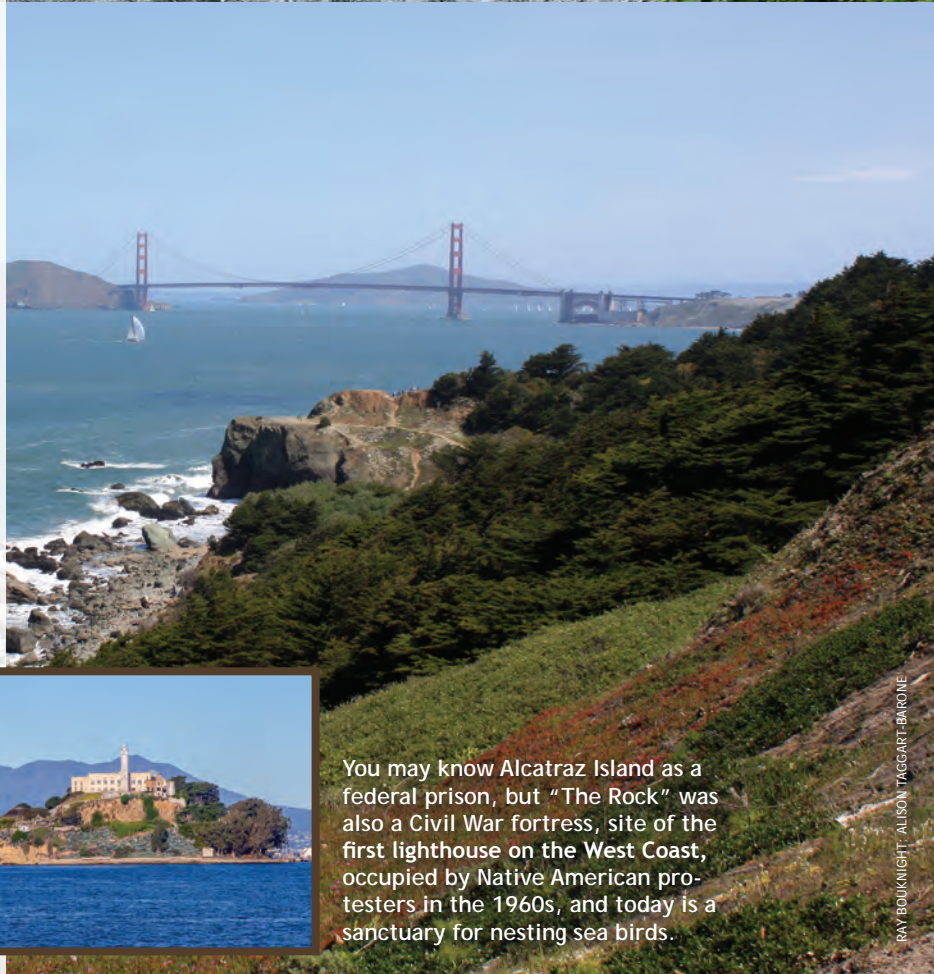
This valley had offered a nature escape for Ohio urbanites since the 1870s. Residents worried that urban sprawl would overwhelm the area and lobbied for a national park, which protects 33,000 acres on the Cuyahoga River between Cleveland and Akron and welcomes two million people each year for outdoor recreation and cultural attractions.



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GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

The largest urban national park in the country, Golden Gate National Recreation Area chronicles 200 years of California history, including Native American culture, the California Gold Rush, and the growth of urban San Francisco.



You may know Alcatraz Island as a federal prison, but "The Rock" was also a Civil War fortress, site of the first lighthouse on the West Coast, occupied by Native American protesters in the 1960s, and today is a sanctuary for nesting sea birds.

RAY BOUKNIGHT; ALISON TAGGART BARONE



INDIANA DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE

Two million people each year – many of them from Chicago and nearby towns in Indiana – enjoy the sandy shores of Lake Michigan and more than 15,000 acres of oak savannas, swamps, bogs, marshes, prairies, rivers, and forests that make up the Indiana Dunes. The League’s Porter County Chapter in Indiana was founded with the goal of creating and protecting this national lakeshore.

K. GEORGE, MAMUSZAK

Our national parks tell the story of America, from the earliest inhabitants to the struggles of our Founding Fathers and today’s heroes. For 100 years, the men and women of the National Park Service have been the custodians of these special places, preserving the cultural, historic, scenic, environmental, educational, and recreational values of our parks.

As we celebrate the National Park Service’s centennial birthday, we also celebrate America’s best idea.