

## A Rocky Mountain Majesty

The Rocky Mountains, an amazing and beautiful mountain range that rises above the greenest valleys and the clearest lakes in the country. The epitome of paradise west for campers or hikers, Rocky Mountain National Park sprawls across the mountain tops about 70 miles north of Denver, Colorado.



Much of the park is accessible for travelers that enjoy passive access to scenic views and prolific wildlife, but the snow-covered peaks and bleak hillsides remain as rugged and inaccessible as any area in the states.

For those hardy individuals that choose the back-country, hiking and biking trails run up and down the slopes, but these will not suit the squeamish. The trails require careful planning and experience in the back-country.

Ponderosa pine and juniper fill the sunny slopes, while Douglas fir blanket the northern face. Blue spruce decorates the steep stream banks, surrounded by dense stands of lodge pole pine, and graceful aspens.

Trail Ridge Road with its gravel base and extremely tight turns crosses a desolate stretch of alpine tundra that contains a distinct and varied collection of plants and animals that survive these harsh conditions. It's definitely worth the effort if your vehicle can manage the road. Elk and deer bask in the sunlight and graze the sparse vegetation, while the most magnificent cat in North America hides in the shadows awaiting its chance to eat. Moose, elk, deer, marmots, beaver, mountain lion and bighorn sheep find dinner and a home in the park. Wildflowers are abundant and the birds prolific. The diversity of ecosystems within the park presents wildlife and scenic viewing opportunities at every turn.

The trees twist and bend at the higher elevations then disappear completely, leaving the grasses and low brush of the sparse tundra ecosystem. One-third of the park's 266,960

acres are located above the tree-line, and twenty-five percent of the plant life found on these treeless peaks exists in the Arctic regions as well.



The raw beauty of this rugged terrain brought a few hardy pioneers during the 1800s, but the harshness of the land and unpredictability of the weather sent them packing in short order. A glimpse of the mining history remains, the area rich with remnants of a culture that scratched out a living and helped settle the inhospitable terrain.

Five campgrounds dot the park – Aspen Glen, Glacier Basin, Moraine Park, Longs Peak, and Timber Creek, with group camping at Glacier Basin. The park remains open all year, and cross-country skiing offers an alternate view of the snow-covered peaks that defies description. An incomparable visual feast for everyone who has a pair of eyes, Rocky Mountain National Park welcomes more than three million visitors a year.

