Rocky Mountain National Park

Backcountry Wilderness Camping Guide

Welcome to the backcountry wilderness of Rocky Mountain National Park. We hope you will use this guide to plan a safe, enjoyable and memorable trip. This guide includes information on how to plan for your trip, obtain a backcountry permit, use the trails, set up camp, hike in a cross-country area, and care for the backcountry.

In addition to reading this guide, please read the following free publications: Rocky Mountain National Park Newspaper, Fishing, Bear Lake Area Hiking, Longs Peak Keyhole Route, and Hiking in the Kawuneeche valley. These are available at park visitor centers. You may also call (970) 586-1206 for general park information or to request specific brochures. You may order any of the following publications by phoning the Rocky Mountain Nature Association at (970) 586-0121: *Trails Illustrated Topographic Map of Rocky Mountain National Park*; *Backpacking One Step at a Time*, Manning; *Hiking Rocky Mountain National Park*, Dannen.

There are many other excellent sources on backcountry hiking and camping. Take the time to learn the seven Leave No Trace ethics, how to backpack safely, and how to care for the environment. Always remember this is your park. Its 265,828 acres are a resource for not only you but many future generations. Because the backcountry regions of the park have greatly increased in popularity over the last few years, we need to enlist your support as "keepers of the royal lands", the historic charge given to park rangers.

We hope you enjoy your stay in one of America's premier backpacking destinations.

Planning your trip

The first step in planning your trip is to decide where you want to camp and for what length of time. We suggest you purchase a Rocky Mountain National Park topographical map to choose a destination and route. You can then use the map on the inside of this guide, to select backcountry campsites.

As you plan your trip, take into consideration the physical condition of the least experienced member of your party, and the distance and elevation gain from the trailhead to your destination.

Rocky Mountain National Park is a high elevation park. If you live at sea level, it will take you several days to become acclimated to this elevation. Most trails begin above 7,000 feet (2,000 meters) and climb abruptly higher. If you are not acclimated, you can get high altitude sickness. Rangers recommend that you spend at least one night at 7,000 or 8,000 feet (2,000 or 2,500 meters) prior to setting out. This will allow your body to begin to adjust to the elevation.

When you visit or call the park, discuss your plans with a ranger. Find out whether snow has melted from the trails and destination where you wish to hike. Check the weather forecast before starting on your trip. Be aware that mountain weather changes very quickly. Within just a few hours, bright sunny skies may give way to raging storms. High winds often occur in the high country. Wind chill accelerates the lowering of body temperature which can result in hypothermia.

Proper clothing is your first line of defense against cold. Plan to dress in layers so you can regulate your temperature by bundling up or peeling down. Be sure to pack rain and storm gear.

Remember, you assume complete responsibility for your own safety and that of your group while hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Backcountry waterfall

THE PERMIT

You must have a backcountry permit to camp overnight in the backcountry of Rocky Mountain National Park. You can pick one up at the Headquarters Backcountry Office (beside the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center on Highway 36 west of Estes Park, CO) or at the Kawuneeche Visitor Center (Highway 34, north of Grand Lake, CO).

To minimize impact on the park's resources, the number of permits issued is limited.

You may obtain day-of-trip permits in person year-round. You may make reservations by mail or in person anytime after March 1 for a permit for that calendar year. You may only make reservations by phone from March 1 to May 15 and anytime after October 1 for a permit for that calendar year.

Write: Rocky Mountain National Park
Backcountry Office
1000 W. Hwy 36
Estes Park, CO 80517
Call: (970) 586-1242
TTY: (970) 586-1319

For reservations, use the attached "Trip Planning Worksheet" (page 7) or a separate piece paper:
• Include your name, address, zip code and telephone number.
• List an itinerary with dates corresponding to campsites or cross-country areas where you plan to stay. If you plan to stay in a cross-country area, indicate the area(s) where you wish to camp.
• Specify the number of people that will be in your party. (Limit of seven per party for individual campsites and cross-country areas. Limit of eight to 12 per party for group campsites.)

There is a $20 administrative fee for permits during peak season periods (non-refundable and non-exchangeable). Fees are not to be sent when requesting reservations, but are payable (by exact cash or check or credit card) when the permit is issued.

During the winter and early spring, when the backcountry is not as frequently used, you may self-register at the Wild Basin Entrance, Longs Peak Ranger Station, Dunraven Trailhead, and Fall River and Beaver Meadows entrance stations. During the busy summer months, if you have a permit reservation, you must pick up the permit by 10 a.m. on the first day of your planned backcountry stay; otherwise, the permit will be canceled in its entirety, and given to other backpackers. If you know you will not be using your permit, please cancel your reservation as soon as possible.

June through September, campers may stay in the backcountry for a maximum of 7 nights. October through May, campers may stay in the backcountry a maximum of 14 nights with no more than a total of 21 nights per year.

How to use the permit

Your permit is a contract between you and the National Park Service stating that you agree to treat the backcountry with respect and that you will take care of the wilderness.

You will see backcountry regulations on the back of each permit. Read, understand, sign, and obey them.
Attach the permit in plain view on the outside of your backpack at all times when you are hiking to or from your campsite. When you reach camp, attach the permit to the outside of your tent. The permit indicates the number of people in your party, and specifies a campsite for each night you are in the backcountry. You must stick with your planned itinerary so that campsites do not become overcrowded and overused.

In addition to a permit, you will receive a dash tag, to be placed on the dashboard of your vehicle. Since overnight parking is only allowed with a backcountry permit, failure to properly display a dash tag may result in a citation and/or a towing fee.

Mount Ypsilon

PERMIT PARAMETERS

Designated sites

• Individual sites: For parties of one to seven people. Each party is assigned one campsite. Each camping area has one to six sites.
We recommend you travel in small parties as fewer people per site leave less impact on Rocky's fragile backcountry.
• Group sites: For parties of eight to 12 people. Groups must camp at special sites. Because of impact caused by group interaction in and between sites (site spread, social trails, etc.), groups over seven persons may not camp in neighboring individual sites but must use group sites or split up and camp at least one mile apart.
• No more than three consecutive nights in one camp area.

Cross-country areas

Cross-country areas are the least traveled and least accessible places in Rocky Mountain National Park. Stock are not permitted to travel in these areas. Those who travel here must be skilled with a map and compass and must be proficient in Leave No Trace camping and hiking ethics and techniques. Cross-country areas are remote areas characterized by rugged terrain, dense forests, icy streams and wet bogs. These areas are below treeline. Fires are not allowed. There are no developed campsites, no developed trails, and no pit toilets. The following regulations and guidelines, in addition to those listed above, apply to cross-country area campers.
• Have no more than seven people in your party.
• Plan more hiking time to get to your destination than if you were on a trail.
• Use a portable stove for cooking.
• Stay within the boundaries of the cross-country area.
• Camp at least 70 adult steps (200 feet/60 meters) away from any water source.
• Be out of sight and sound of any other party.
• Move your camp at least one mile (1.6 kilometers) each day.
• No more than two consecutive nights in one cross-country area.

Climbers and bivouac camps

If you plan to bivouac, you must obtain a bivy permit. You can make reservations as described for backcountry permits.

The following rules apply for bivouacs:

- You may have no more than four people in your party.
- All in the party must climb.
- You must bivy in the area specified on your permit.
- Bivys must be on rock or snow.
- Bivys must be set up at dusk and taken down by dawn.
- No tents or structures are permitted.
- Fires are not allowed.
- Helmets are advised for climbing.
- No more than three consecutive nights in one bivy area.

Sprague Lake Camp

This is a special wheelchair accessible backcountry campsite near Sprague Lake. It is half-a-mile (one kilometer) from the trailhead to the campsite.

The camp accommodates up to 12 campers including a maximum of five wheelchair users.

If you are hearing or sight impaired and have a certified assistance dog, your dog may accompany you to this or any other campsite or trail in Rocky Mountain National Park. To make reservations please read the section entitled THE PERMIT.

Packing with horses or llamas

There are special campsites and rules for overnight camping with stock. Some trails are closed to stock use. Call (970) 586-1206 or (970) 586-1242 for information about packing with stock. Ask for the Horse and Pack Animals brochure.

"When in the wilds, we must not carry our problems with us or the joy is lost."

-Sigurd Olson

Trail through aspen grove

THE BACKCOUNTRY TRIP

Setting out

Before you leave home, always tell someone your trip itinerary and when you are planning to return.

Allow plenty of time for your trip. Consider the distance you plan to travel, the elevation of the trailhead and your destination, the amount of weight you are carrying, your physical condition, current and forecasted weather, and the hours of daylight remaining.

Remember:

- Avoid taking excess foods to trailheads, as bears have been known to break into cars for food and scented items.
- At trailheads store food in food storage lockers where provided.
- Properly display your permit and vehicle dash tag.
- Read the trailhead bulletin board.
- Falling trees are an ever present hazard especially during windy or snowy conditions.
- Plan to be off summits early in the day to avoid thunder and lightning storms. Note: wind is hazardous in exposed areas.
- Streams, lakes and waterfalls can be dangerous and deadly at any time of year, especially during high runoff in May and June as well as after thunderstorms. Keep your distance from stream and river banks because powerful currents exist. Provide proper supervision for children. Use caution in winter when crossing rivers.
- Hunting & Recreational Use of Firearms are Prohibited. Possession of Firearms must Comply with Federal & State Laws.
- Pets and vehicles (including mountain bikes) are not permitted in the backcountry.
- Bring insect repellent to fend off mosquitoes. Check frequently for ticks.
- Hike on the trail and hike single-file. Resist the temptation to walk off the trail when it is muddy. Mud will flake off your boots much sooner than trampled plants will grow back.
- Never shortcut switchbacks.
- Pick up litter you find along the way.
- Horses and llamas have the right-of-way. Step off the trail on the downhill side and stand quietly until the stock passes.
- Never leave food unattended or unsecured from wildlife.
- Never feed wildlife as this can be hazardous.
- Do not disturb any flowers or plants.

Moss Campion

Please respect the fragile tundra

Alpine tundra vegetation is hardy. These plants survive extreme cold, strong winds, intense ultraviolet radiation, and very low humidity. Although these plants are tough, they cannot withstand repeated trampling. It takes 100 years for many alpine tundra plants to grow an inch.

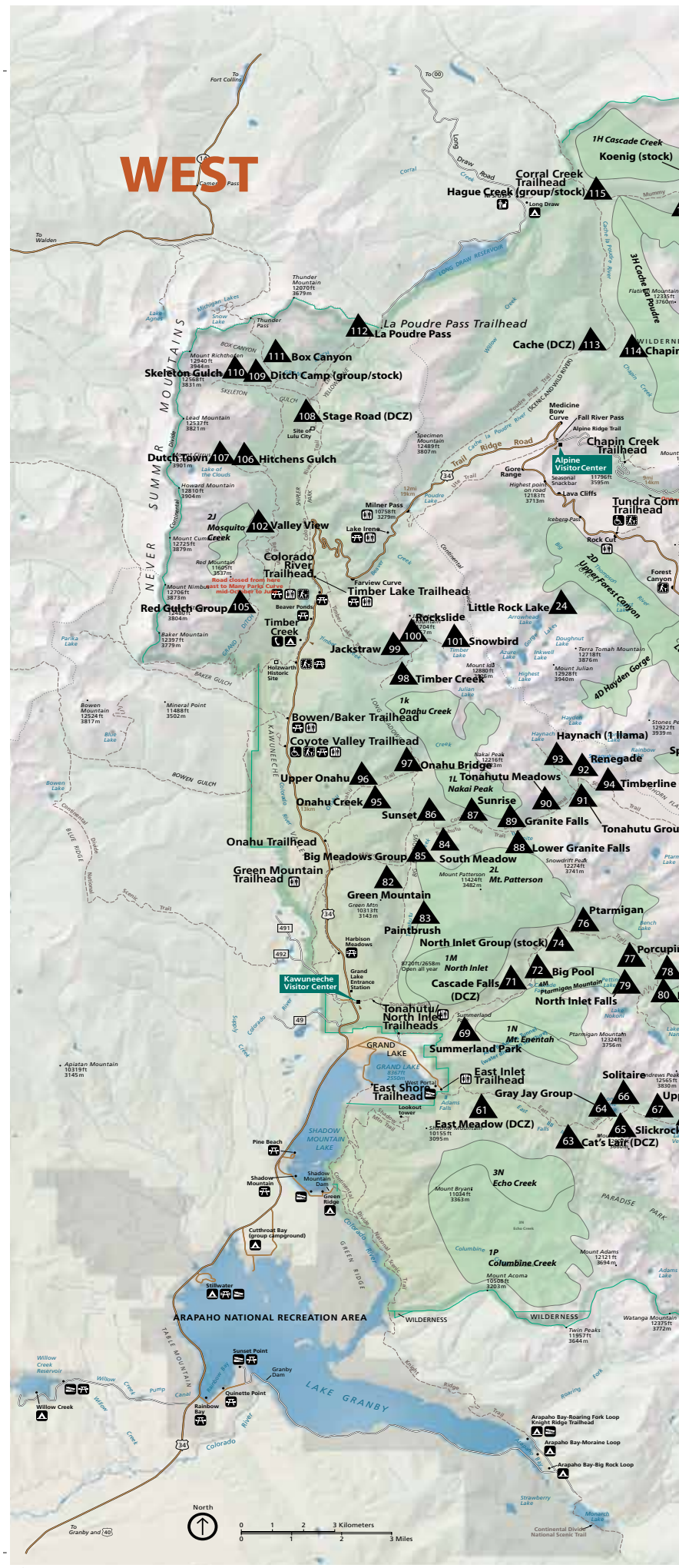
Where there are no maintained trails and in undeveloped places, you may walk across the alpine tundra, in contrast to below treeline, in the tundra you do not walk in single file. Spread out, so that your foot prints are not concentrated on a small area, and rock-hop rather than stepping on vegetation.

Rocky Mountain N

Backcountry Desi

West Side

Code	Campsite Name	Number of sites individual	/group	Distance in miles	Elevation in feet
East Inlet Area					
	East Inlet Trailhead				8,390
061	East Meadow DCZ	2		1.9	8,550
063	Cat's Lair DCZ	2		3.3	9,200
064	Gray Jay Group		1	4.9	9,650
065	Slickrock	1		6.0	10,000
066	Solitaire	1		6.2	10,120
067	Upper East Inlet	1		6.6	10,200
068	Lake Verna	1		6.9	10,280
North Inlet Area					
	North Inlet Trailhead				8,540
069	Summerland Park	1	1	1.5	8,610
071	Cascade Falls DCZ	2		3.1	8,840
072	Big Pool	2		5.0	9,160
073	Grouseberry (Closed)				
074	North Inlet Group (stock) (WF)		1	6.5	9,290
075	Foot Bridge (WF) (Closed)				
076	Ptarmigan	1		6.7	9,360
077	Porcupine (WF)	2		6.8	9,360
078	North Inlet Junction	2		7.5	9,600
079	North Inlet Falls	1		7.6	9,540
080	Pine Marten	2		7.8	9,560
081	July	3	1	9.7	10,760
Tonahutu Area					
	Tonahutu Trailhead				8,540
	Green Mountain Trailhead				8,800
082	Green Mountain	1		1.8	9,550
083	Paint Brush	1		2.3	9,400
084	South Meadow	1		2.0	9,450
085	Big Meadows Group		1	1.9	9,400
086	Sunset	1		3.0	9,550
087	Sunrise	1		3.5	9,600
088	Lower Granite Falls	2		5.1	9,760
089	Granite Falls	2		5.4	9,840
090	Tonahutu Meadows	2		6.2	10,050
091	Tonahutu Group (stock) (WF)		1	6.6	10,160
092	Renegade	1		7.3	10,500
093	Haynach (1 llama)	2		7.2	10,760
094	Timberline Group		1	7.4	10,570
095	Onahu Creek	1		2.4	9,480
096	Upper Onahu	1		2.8	9,600
097	Onahu Bridge	1		2.9	9,650
Timber Lake Area					
	Timber Lake Trailhead				9,010
098	Timber Creek	2		3.0	10,400
099	Jackstraw	2		4.0	10,760
100	Rockslide	1		4.5	10,960
101	Snowbird	2		4.6	11,010
Never Summer Area					
	Colorado River Trailhead				9,000
102	Valley View	1		3.2	10,260
105	Red Gulch Group		1	5.8	10,320
106	Hitchens Gulch	2		5.8	10,480
107	Dutch Town	1		6.0	10,760
108	Stage Road DCZ	1		4.2	9,530
109	Ditch Camp (group/stock)	1	1	4.6	10,160
110	Skeleton Gulch	1		6.2	10,600
111	Box Canyon	1		5.5	10,480
112	La Poudre Pass	1		6.7	10,200
Hague Creek Area					
	Corral Creek Trailhead				10,000
113	Cache DCZ	1		5.6	10,150
114	Chapin Creek Group		1	6.1	10,240
115	Hague Creek (group/stock)	1	1	1.6	9,720
116	Desolation (Closed)				
117	Flatiron (WF)	1		2.8	9,860
118	Mummy Pass Creek (WF)	2		4.6	10,640
119	Koenig (stock)	1		5.2	10,680
120	Mirror Lake	3		6.0	11,000



Cross-cou

West Side

Code	Name	Number parties
1H	Cascade Creek	2
2H	Hague Creek	5
3H	Cache La Poudre	3
2J	Mosquito Creek	1
1K	Onahu Creek	1
1L	Nakai Peak	1
2L	Mount Patterson	3
1M	North Inlet	4
2M	Ptarmigan Creek	1
3M	Upper North Inlet	2
4M	Ptarmigan Mountain	2
1N	Mount Enentah	1
3N	Echo Creek	2
1P	Columbine Creek	4

Note:

- A Dispersed Camping Zone (DCZ) is similar to a Cross-country Area, except that you may stay three consecutive nights, and you do not have to move each night.
- Mileages listed are from the nearest trailhead (not all trailheads are listed).
- All sites are stoves only unless designated (WF), where wood fires are permitted in grates provided at the site and no fire ban is in effect. Use dead and down wood only.
- The higher the elevation the later the site melts out from snow. For current conditions contact the Backcountry Office (970) 586-1242.

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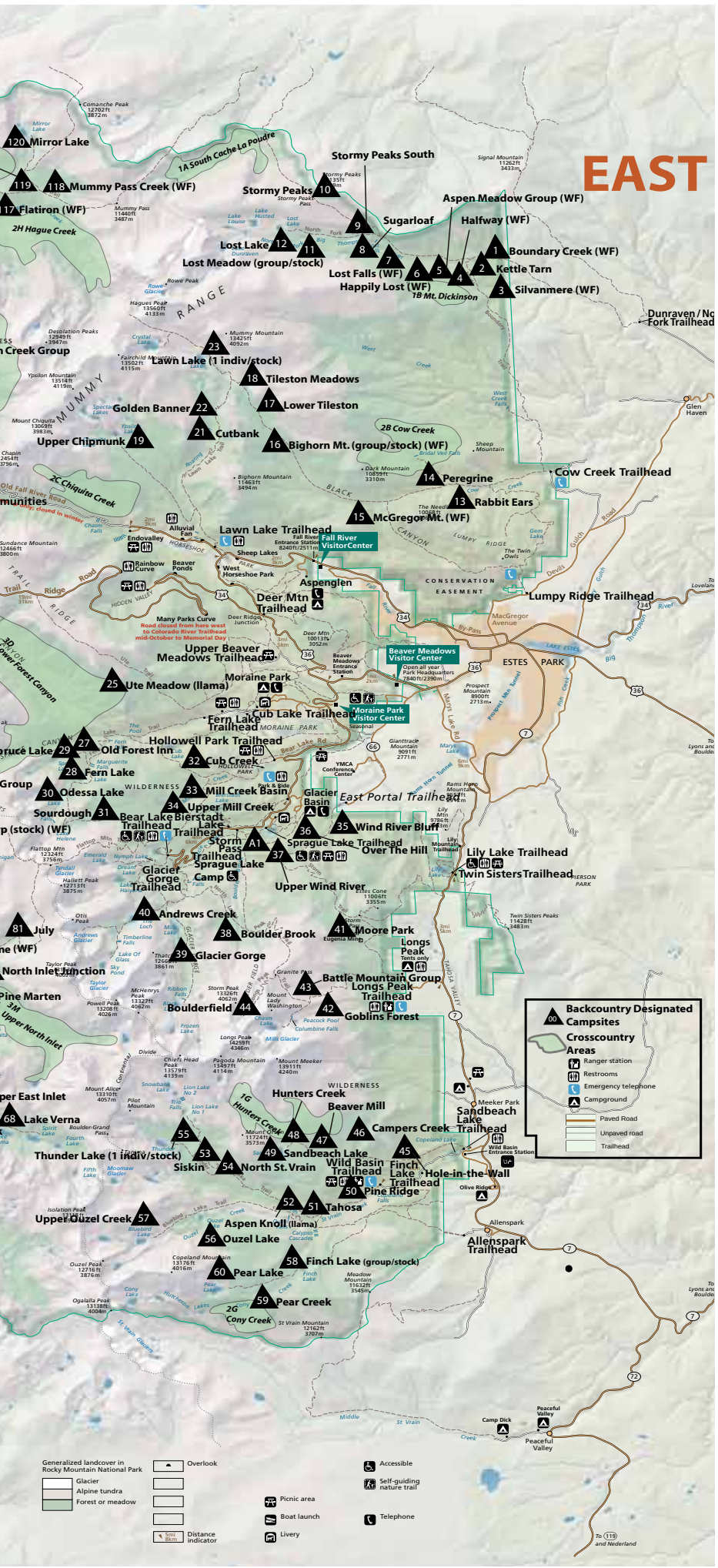

untry Areas

East Side

Code	Name	Number parties
1A	South Cache La Poudre	1
1B	Mount Dickinson	2
2B	Cow Creek	2
2C	Chiquita Creek	1
2D	Upper Forest Canyon	3
3D	Lower Forest Canyon	4
4D	Hayden Gorge	1
1G	Hunters Creek	1
2G	Cony Creek	1

East Side

Code	Campsite Name	Number of sites individual	Number of sites group	Distance in miles	Elevation in feet
	North Fork Area				
	Dunraven Trailhead				7,960
001	Boundary Creek (WF)	2		4.6	9,120
002	Kettle Tarn (Temp Closed)	2		4.9	9,200
003	Silvanmere (WF)	2		5.6	9,360
004	Halfway (WF)	2		5.6	9,340
005	Aspen Meadow Group (WF)		1	5.9	9,520
006	Happily Lost (WF)	1		6.2	9,560
007	Lost Falls (WF)	2		6.7	9,600
008	Sugarloaf	1		8.2	10,290
009	Stormy Peaks South	1		8.6	10,840
010	Stormy Peaks	2	1	11.0	11,160
011	Lost Meadow (group/stock)	1	1	8.4	10,420
012	Lost Lake	4		9.7	10,710
	Mummy Range Area				
	Lawn Lake Trailhead				8,540
	Lumpy Ridge/Cow Creek Trailheads				7,840
013	Rabbit Ears	1		1.4	8,100
014	Peregrine	1		2.0	8,480
015	McGregor Mt. (WF)	2		4.1	9,040
016	Bighorn Mt. (group/stock) (WF)		1	6.1	10,320
017	Lower Tileston	1		6.3	10,650
018	Tileston Meadows	2		6.0	10,800
019	Upper Chipmunk	2		4.2	10,640
021	Cutbank	1		2.4	9,620
022	Golden Banner	2		2.5	9,600
023	Lawn Lake (1 indiv/stock)	4		6.2	10,990
	Gorge Lakes Area				
	Milner Pass Trailhead				10,760
024	Little Rock Lake	1		6.0	10,280
	Bear Lake Area				
	Bear Lake Trailhead				9,475
	Glacier Gorge Trailhead				9,240
	Fern/Cub Lake Trailheads				8,150
025	Ute Meadow (llama)	1		2.7	9,800
026	Arch Rock (Closed)				
027	Old Forest Inn	2		1.7	8,400
028	Fern Lake	4	1	3.8	9,530
029	Spruce Lake	2		4.6	9,670
030	Odessa Lake	2		4.1	10,020
031	Sourdough	1		2.5	10,600
032	Cub Creek	1		2.2	8,600
033	Mill Creek Basin	1		1.8	9,000
034	Upper Mill Creek	1		1.7	9,200
035	Wind River Bluff	1		1.0	8,800
036	Over the Hill	1		1.3	8,870
037	Upper Wind River	1		1.6	8,940
038	Boulder Brook	2	1	3.9	10,200
039	Glacier Gorge	1		3.8	10,000
040	Andrews Creek	1		3.6	10,560
A1	Sprague Lake Camp (WF) ♿		1	0.5	8,730
	Longs Peak Area				
	Longs Peak Trailhead				9,404
041	Moore Park	2		1.7	9,760
042	Goblins Forest	6		1.2	10,120
043	Battle Mountain Group		1	2.8	11,000
044	Boulderfield (by tent)	9		6.0	12,760
	Wild Basin Area				
	Wild Basin/Finch Lake Trailheads				8,500
	Sandbeach Lake Trailhead				8,310
045	Hole-in-the-Wall	1		1.9	9,240
046	Campers Creek	1		2.3	9,600
047	Beaver Mill	1		3.0	9,640
048	Hunters Creek	1		3.3	9,760
049	Sandbeach Lake	4	1	4.2	10,280
050	Pine Ridge	2		1.4	8,880
051	Tahosa	1		1.7	9,040
052	Aspen Knoll (llama)	1		2.3	9,400
053	Siskin	1		3.7	9,600
054	North St. Vrain	2		3.5	9,560
055	Thunder Lake (1 indiv/stock)	4	1	6.8	10,570
056	Ouzel Lake	1		4.9	10,020
057	Upper Ouzel Creek	1		5.6	10,600
058	Finch Lake (group/stock)	2	1	4.6	9,910
059	Pear Creek	3		6.4	10,550
060	Pear Lake	1		6.6	10,580

At camp

When you arrive at your destination, you will see trail signs that show where to find campsites. Pitch your tent in designated areas. Never dig or trench around a tent.

There are no grizzly bears in Rocky Mountain National Park, but black bears do live here. Help park rangers keep bears and other animals (including mice, marmots, martens, porcupines, elk and deer) from becoming a problem, by carefully securing your food and garbage.

A carry-in/carry-out bear resistant food storage canister is required May - October for backcountry camping below treeline and the Boulderfield on Longs Peak. All food, scented items, and trash must be kept in the canister, and placed 70 adult steps away from campsite. Keep a clean camp!

Camp safely away from standing dead trees as near as is safely possible to the silver metal arrowhead that marks the site.

Bear and mountain lion encounters can be potentially dangerous and can occur anywhere in the park. Ask for park information regarding proper wildlife interaction procedures. Keep your group close together, protect small children by picking them up, and never run.

Preparing meals at camp

Cook meals with a portable stove. Do not plan to build a fire. Fires are comforting and aesthetically pleasing, but they cause considerable impact on the backcountry. Wood is better used as habitat for wild creatures than as fuel for campers whose lives do not depend upon forest resources.

Campfires have potential to get out of control if not well tended. For these reasons, fires are allowed in only a few designated campsites which have metal fire rings.

Never take food in the sleeping area. Separate where you cook and eat from where you sleep. Keep all scented items out of your tent including soap, deodorant, and toothpaste.

Seal uneaten food scraps and all garbage in airtight containers or storage bags and secure in bear canister. Carry all garbage out of the backcountry.

Drinking water

Always purify the drinking water you get in the backcountry by using one of the following methods:

- Filter water with a water filter system that eliminates giardia.
- Boil water for 1 minute and add an additional minute for each 1000 ft above sea level (example: 10,000 feet = 11 minutes).
- Use water purifying tablets or drops that eliminate giardia.

Wash water

Carry water at least 70 adult steps (200 feet/60 meters) from a lake or stream to wash yourself or your dishes. Use biodegradable soap. When disposing of wash water, first filter out all food scraps with a small screen. Pack the food scraps into an airtight container, secure in bear canister to be carried out later. Toss out the wash water by throwing it over a wide area.

- Never wash directly in a lake or stream.
- Do not scatter food scraps in the water or on the ground.
- Do not throw food into pit toilets.
- Pack out all food scraps, trash and uneaten food.

Backcountry sanitation

There are pit toilets at many backcountry campsites. When a pit toilet is not available, do the following:

- Urinate in rocky places that won't be damaged by animals who dig for salts and minerals found in urine.
- Dig a hole, 6 inches (15 centimeters) deep, for fecal waste using a small trowel or pack out waste and paper.
- Be sure that you defecate at least 70 adult steps (200 feet/ 60 meters) from camp, water or trails.
- Do not bury sanitary napkins, tampons, or paper wipes. Dispose of them in an airtight container and pack them out.
- Wash hands with biodegradable soap. Giardia and other diseases are frequently spread by unsanitary practices.

Fishing

To fish in Rocky Mountain National Park, you must have a Colorado state fishing license. You may purchase licenses at local sporting goods stores.

Check at Rocky Mountain National Park visitor centers for fishing regulations, which vary at different lakes and streams in the park.

Quiet backcountry campsite

Leaving the backcountry

If you end a trip early, notify the backcountry office to cancel the permit, so other backpackers may use your site.

Please report all unusual wildlife sightings, trail conditions, or incidents to a ranger.

Pack out all your garbage and that of others less considerate.

If you see any violations of rules and regulations, please report them to a ranger as soon as possible.

You can find showers and laundry facilities in Estes Park and in Grand Lake.

These lands were set aside for you by our foreparents. It is our most sincere hope that you have an inspiring, refreshing and renewing backcountry wilderness experience in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Leave No Trace

Join park rangers in protecting the natural conditions of the backcountry while hiking and camping.

Plan ahead and prepare

Travel and camp on durable surfaces

Dispose of waste properly

Leave what you find

Minimize campfire impacts

Respect wildlife

Be considerate of other visitors

Ask a park ranger how you can Leave No Trace on your backcountry visit or contact:
Leave No Trace Inc. P.O. Box 997 Boulder, CO 80306 or www.lnt.org.

Cut here

TRIP PLANNING WORKSHEET

Rocky Mountain National Park - Backcountry Office
1000 W. Hwy 36
Estes Park CO 80517
(970) 586-1242
This is NOT a Permit. Send no money with this request.

Last Name _____
First Name_____
Address_____
_____
City_____
State_____ Zip_____
Phone_____

In Party_____ # of Stock_____

Trailhead In_____
Trailhead Out_____

Vehicle License #_____
State_____

First Choice Date	Campsite(s)	Second Choice Date	Campsite(s)
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Please complete fully and mail to the address above.

"Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed; if we permit the last virgin forests to be turned into comic books; if we drive the few remaining wild species into zoos or extinction; if we pollute the last clear air and dirty the last clear streams and push our paved roads through the last of silences." -Wallace Stegner

It is the hope of the Park Rangers of Rocky Mountain National Park that you have the trip of a lifetime while you are here. Safety is the foundation of having the trip a lifetime. It is our desire that you leave with wonderful memories rather than a tragic story. Any planning that you can do to prevent an injury, accident or the separation of members of your party while in the wilderness is wise and will help make for a successful vacation.
Risks in the backcountry are remote risks.
Please take extra time to come out of the wilderness safely.