

Automobile Tour

The tour starts at the Visitor Center, located in Almo, Idaho. It is approximately 24 miles long and you should allow about 1.5 - 2.5 hours. Travel is on gravel roads that vary in condition from place to place and throughout the year. You can check on the latest road and weather conditions at the Visitor Center. We recommend that you set your trip odometer to zero at the start of the tour at the Visitor Center's parking lot.



Mile 0.0-Visitor's Center Parking Lot (Elevation 5,400 ft)

There are two wayside exhibits at the east edge of the Visitor Center parking lot. These waysides provide information about the emigrants traveling across the Almo Valley. California and Oregon bound emigrants shared the Oregon Trail until they reached the "parting of the ways" just after crossing the Raft River. The Oregon bound emigrants stayed along a more northerly route and the emigrants that chose California as their destination headed southwest along the Raft River. When the emigrants reached Cassia Creek and the north end of the Jim Sage Mountains they stayed on the west side of the mountains and headed through the Elba valley and then the Almo valley. The trail roughly follows the course of the State Route 77 Spur of the City of Rocks Scenic Byway.

In addition to the main stem of the California Trail, the route of the Salt Lake Alternate is visible in the distance. The route of the Salt Lake Alternate comes through the "narrows", a gap in the mountains to the east and meets up with the California Trail at the southern end of the Reserve. The dust clouds from the wagons on the California Trail were visible to emigrants on the Salt Lake Alternae and vice versa.

There are two replica wagons near the waysides on display each year from April - November, depending on weather conditions. Please do not climb on the wagons.

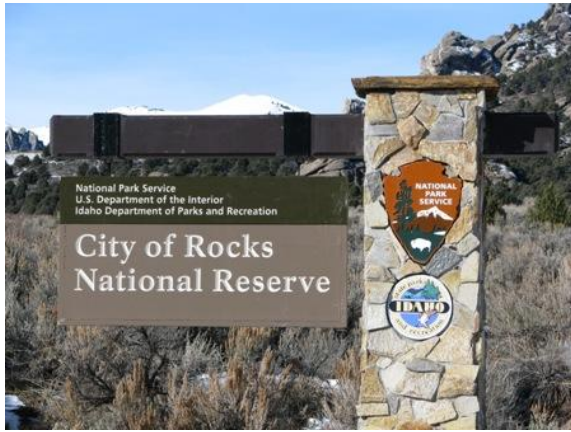
To continue the tour, turn left (south) from the Visitor Center parking lot.

Mile 0.4 - Intersection

The City of Rocks Scenic Byway continues to the right on City of Rocks Road.

There is a California Trail marker at the intersection - Marker C-7

"We enter a gorge of the hills which in a short time brings into a large amphitheatre surrounded with rock of every kind of fanciful character." - Joseph Middleton, Aug 26, 1849.



Mile 2.4 - Almo Entrance

The City of Rocks is part of the National Park System. Congress established the reserve in 1988 as one of the nation's four national reserves. By its establishment, Congress recognized the character of this place; its history, scenery, and natural wonders that had been forgotten. Congress mandated cooperative protection, preservation, and management of this special place.

The reserve is made up of land owned by the federal government, state government, and private individuals, and is made up of 14,407 acres. The reserve contains some 450 plant species, 115 bird species, 14 reptile species, and 55 mammal species. The largest pinyon pine forest in Idaho is located within the reserve.

Mile 2.6 Circle - Creek Overlook Road

This one lane road to the right winds through pinyon pines to a viewpoint which overlooks the raft River Valley. Several mountain ranges including the Bear River Range of the Wasatch Front (120 miles) are visible on a clear day. This parking area has a bathroom and serves as the trailhead for the Geological Interpretive Trail (1.2 miles round trip). A booklet explaining the features on the Geological Interpretive Trail is available at the Visitor Center. The Circle Creek basin was an overnight camp site for the emigrants on the California Trail.



Mile 3.1 - Circle Creek Ranch

In 1882, Iowa farmer George W. Lunsford withdrew 160 acres under the 1862 Homestead Act, receiving a patent to his land in 1888. Lunsford sold his land to William Tracy in 1901. This parcel, plus 160 adjacent acres, patented by Mary Ann Tracy, under the Desert Land Act, formed the nucleus of the Circle Creek Ranch.

The Tracy's spent years constructing a substantial stone house to replace their log dwelling. The stone used in the construction of the home is from a quarry located about one mile southwest of the home site. The home burned in 1957.

The California Trail crossed the road at this point.



Mile 3.4 - Circle Creek Basin

It was approximately at this point that the emigrants had their first glimpse of City of Rocks. The main part of the City is made up of a dome of granitic rock known as the Almo Pluton. This granitic rock is light in color and is represented by the rocks that you see in the valley ahead.

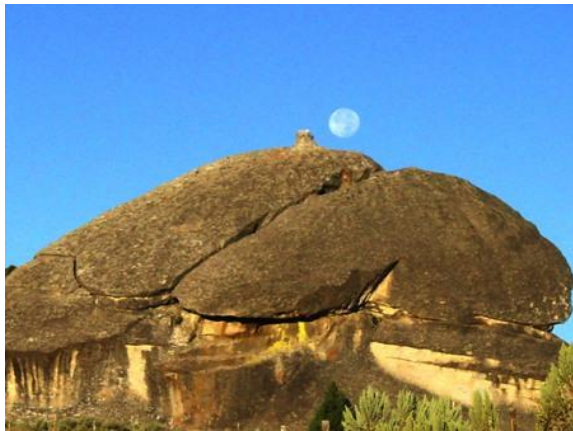
Approximately 28 million years ago, this younger granite intruded into the much older Green Creek Complex (2 - 3 billion years old). The Green Creek Complex makes up the brownish formations that you see. This older rock is of Precambrian origin, and contains some of the oldest exposed rock on the North American Continent.

In the high areas surrounding the City, you can also see the edges of the quartzite cap rock, known as Elba Quartzite, which was uplifted by the granitic intrusion.



Mile 3.7 - Camp Rock/Chicken Rock Complex

There is an informational sign and pull-out to the right. The California Trail crossed the road at this point. This was a favorite camping spot along the trail. The rock to the south side of the road is called Camp Rock, and the one to the north is called Chicken Rock. On the eastside of Camp Rock is a trail leading around the rock, where you may view where the emigrants wrote their names and dates using axle grease. A profile of a man's face with the words "wife wanted" nearby suggests a single man on the trail looking for a partner. Ida Fullenwider from Kansas passed through here with her parents and siblings when she was 16. You can read more about Ida on our website.



Mile 3.9 - Kaiser's Helmet

The rock formation directly ahead is called Kaiser's Helmet. Most of the rock formations, that you will see on your tour through the reserve, have been named, first by the emigrants passing through, and later by the local residents and rock climbers.

It is believed that this rock got it's name after World War I, when returning veterans may have noticed the similarity between the rock formation and a German Kaiser helmet.



Mile 4.0 - Treasure Rock

The formation to the right is called Treasure Rock. Tales of stage robberies complete with lost loot, buried beneath one of the City's rocky crags, have existed for over 120 years. Local lore states that the Kelton stage was robbed around 1878 on it's way to a U.S. military camp in Boise. One of the bandits was killed, and the second was captured days later, after reportedly burying the treasure at the base of what is now known as Treasure Rock.

On the east side of Treasure Rock is a California Trail Marker - Marker C-8.

"The gray granit rocks stand in pyramid monument & dome forms, here & there towering aloft the road winds along between them. Emigrants names are written ... on these curious structures" - August Ripley Burbank, Aug 4, 1849

Mile 4.4 - Durfee Rock

Curtis Durfee is a resident of Almo. His family was one of the first families to occupy the valley and there are many Durfee's in the valley today. Curtis wrote on the rock when he was a young boy (Circa 1960).



Mile 4.2 - Devil's Bedstead

Mile 4.3 - View of Twin Sisters

Mile 4.5 - Intersection

Proceed to the left, on Twin Sisters Road.



Mile 4.6 - Register Rock

This rock has emigrant signatures including; D. Tickner, A. Freeman, and H. Keck. Daniel Tickner traveled on horseback with his friend A. Freeman. They left Illinois in 1850 to travel to California at the behest of Daniel's in-laws to retrieve his brother-in-law, John, who had gone in search of gold. On March 27, 1850, Henry Keck and his brother Joseph, along with 22 other men, departed Iowa with the goal of reaching California. They traveled in six oxen teams, with seven cows and three horses in the company. Joseph kept a detailed journal of the trip, which has provided significant insight into their voyage west. Find more information about Daniel and the Keck brothers on our website.



Mile 4.9 - Twin Sisters and Pinnacle Pass (Wayside Exhibit)

Ahead are the Twin Sisters, and approximately one half mile to the left, is Pinnacle Pass. Pinnacle Pass and the California Trail narrowed to a single wagon track. Traveling to California, emigrants faced a gradual ascent to the pass, followed by a steeper descent on the other side.

Pinnacle Pass is on private property but can be reached by arranging a free ranger led hike to the pass. The hike is a fairly easy (1.25 mile round trip).

Mile 6.1 - California Trail - Pinnacle Pass - Marker - C-9

This is the location where the California Trail crosses the Twin Sisters Road. The emigrants used the gap, called Pinnacle Pass, to cross the east west ridge of granite in front of you. The quote on this marker talks about traveling through Pinnacle Pass. The Pass is on private property but can be reached by arranging a fee ranger led hike. This hike is fairly easy (1.25 mile round trip).

"A ride ... brought us to the outlet of this romantic vale, a very narrow pass - just wide enough for a wagon, and on either side very high, jagged, and thin walls of granite....called the 'Pinnacle Pass' " - J.G. Bruff, Aug 29, 1849



Mile 7.0 - Twin Sisters

The left peak, of the Twin Sisters, is made up of rock from the Green Creek Complex. The right peak is made up of rock from the Almo Pluton. These twin peaks, at 638 feet high, are the most prominent features in the reserve. The Twins were visible to emigrants traveling either on the California Trail or the Salt Lake Alternate Trail, and are mentioned in their journals.

Mile 8.1 - Twin Sisters (Wayside Exhibit)



Mile 8.1 - The Kelton Road and City of Rocks Stage Station

The Kelton Road was not a Pioneer Trail, but a freight route and stagecoach line, established to carry people and supplies before the Southern Idaho Railroad. The coaches traveled to City of Rocks, by way of the Salt Lake Alternate Trail, and on to Junction Valley. By 1883, the Kelton and Boise stage route was abandoned.

Mile 8.4 - California Trail - Trail Junction - Marker C-10 (Private Land)

"About one mile from the last of these granite spires we cam to the junction of the northern Salt Lake road to California." - John Steele, Aug. 8, 1850



Mile 9.4 - Granite Pass (Wayside Exhibit)

When the trails opened in the 1840's, Granite Pass was in Mexico and less than a mile from Oregon

Territory. After 1850, the Pass became part of Utah Territory, and in 1872 an Idaho-Utah boundary survey error placed Granite Pass in Idaho Territory.

A critical point on the trail, Granite Pass was a funnel through which emigrants moved from eastern prairies toward the Humboldt River Valley to the west.

Mile 10.7 - Intersection

This is the intersection of Junction Valley Road and Twin Sisters Road (3400 S). The development to the left is the American Stone quarry yard. Just to the right of the quarry, you can see the remains of the ghost town of Moulton. Dryland farmers settled Junction Valley in the early 1900's. By the 1920's the dryland farmers had failed, due to drought.

To continue the tour, proceed to the right (north), along Junction Valley road.

Mile 14.7 - Intersection

This is the intersection of Emery Canyon Road and Junction Valley Road. If you continue forward, the road leads down Birch Creek Canyon to the town of Oakley, and beyond to I-84. The mountain range to your left is called Middle Mountain.

To continue the tour, proceed to the right (east).



Mile 16.9 - Breadloaves

This is a group campsite.

Mile 17.0 - Emery Canyon Picnic Area (Elevation 6,830 ft)

Picnic in the shade of aspen trees. There is tasty drinking water available from the old Forest Service hand pump. This is also the parking area for backcountry camping. Backcountry camping is free but requires a permit that you can acquire from the Visitor Center.



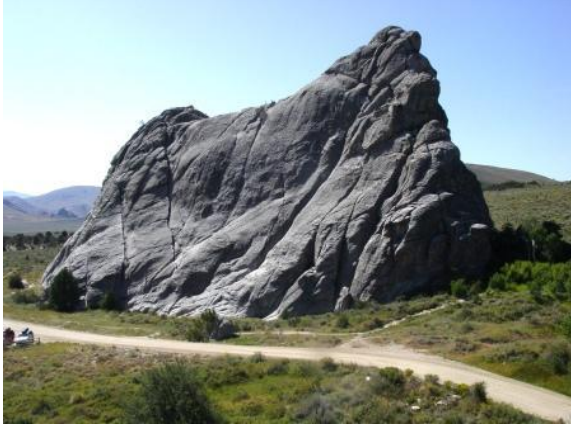
Mile 17.6 - Morning Glory Spire (Wayside Exhibit)

On your left, is Morning Glory Spire. This is one of the City's most desirable climbing feature. The spire is home to classics, such as "Crack of Doom" and "Power Tools". To the right of Morning Glory Spire, is The Anteater. The Reserve provides one of the highest quality granite-face climbing areas in the United States.



Mile 17.6 - 17.8 - Aspen Grove (both sides of the road)

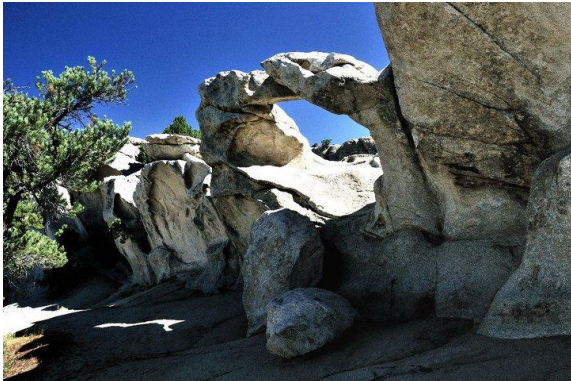
Aspens grow in a colony and all of the individuals in a grove are connected underground. These trees are spectacular in the fall when they turn an amazing shade of gold or orange. For more information about the aspen monitoring project at City of Rocks, see our website or inquire at the Visitor Center.



Mile 18.0 - Bath Rock

There is a large parking area to your right with restrooms. On top of Bath Rock, there is a large depression (panhole) that frequently fills with water. Panholes are formed by physical and chemical processes, enlarging a small indentation.

In the 1920's and 30's, when City of Rocks was being promoted, bathing beauty contests were held here.



Mile 18.2 - Window Arch

The road to the left leads to campsites 36-38. Park near campsite 37. Follow the ridge behind campsite 37 for approximately 300 feet. Look for the arch in the rocks on your right. This is a very popular spot for group photos.



Mile 19 - Elephant Rock

There is a turn out on the right side of the road here. Elephant Rock is one of the more easily accessible and popular climbing formations. Technical rock climbing, in the City of Rocks, started in the 1950's when Utah climbers first visited the city. By the 1970's, climbers from around the region started to visit the area. In the late 1980's, the City had achieved international attention for its world class climbing.

Mile 19.4 - Intersection

Turn left at the stop sign to return to the Visitor Center.

Mile 22 - Upper Raft River Valley

The valley before you is the Upper Raft River Valley. In the distance, the Salt Lake Alternate trail passes through The Narrows of the Raft River. Some forty-niners followed the Mormon Trail into Salt Lake and then returned to the California Trail, at City of Rocks, by way of the Salt Lake Alternate Trail. It would take a full day for them to cross the valley, stopping in the evening at the spring in Emigrant Canyon.

Mile 23.6 - Intersection

Turn left at the stop sign on Elba-Almo Road.



Mile 24.2 - Visitor Center

This concludes the automobile tour.