

# Grand Teton

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Teton National Park  
John D. Rockefeller, Jr.  
Memorial Parkway



## Welcome to the Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center

Approaching the Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center, the grand expanse of the Teton Range stretches before you. The center opened on August 11, 2007, funded through a remarkable partnership with \$8 million from Congress, \$1.5 million from the Grand Teton Association, and more than \$12 million from the Grand Teton National Park Foundation, including a \$2 million capital maintenance endowment. Exhibit and architectural design teams incorporated green building techniques, using recycled materials, energy efficient windows, hydronic heating, and replanted native vegetation saved during the construction phase, to add to the beauty and legacy of this center.

### The Grand Scheme

This amazing facility serves as a gateway for park exploration, and seeks to welcome, educate and inspire visitors. The interior space faces the mountains to spark a sense of awe, offers an invitation for personal discovery, and encourages development of personal connections to the unique natural and historic resources of Grand Teton National Park. Look for the symbolism designed into this building – the peaked silhouette of the roof reflects the jagged landscape, a symbolic Snake River winds through the building, and log archways stretching from floor to ceiling capture the valley’s cultural history. The innovative and interactive exhibits attempt to reach visitors on many different levels. From low-tech children’s exhibits to the high-tech “video river”, these displays stimulate our senses and seek to reach different age groups and interest levels.

### Themes: Place, People, and Preservation

The interwoven themes of place, people, and preservation encourage visitors to connect intellectually and emotionally with Grand Teton National Park. The “video river”, a series of video screens in the floor with an accompanying soundtrack, leads you from “Place” to “People” to “Preservation” following the symbolic river flowing through the valley. As you enter “Place,” the video river displays footage of animals and the landscape during the different seasons. The “People” footage traces American Indians, trappers, and visitors across this landscape. Finally, the “Preservation” footage shows the story of historic structures, wild places, and on-going processes that are important to the park’s future. Images of flowing water at the end of each video segment connect the three themes.

### Place – A Landscape that Lifts the Imagination



The formation of the Teton Range began billions of years ago and continues today. Rocks forming the central peaks are some of the oldest rocks in North America, and, more recently, movement on the Teton fault and carving of Ice Age glaciers sculpted this breath-taking landscape. Notice how the jagged “uplift” (exhibit display wall) reflects the Teton Range. Touch ancient rocks and watch a short animated video to bring alive the region’s geologic history and provide insight as you explore the park.

This geologic backdrop gives rise to diverse habitats. Search the beautiful diorama of wetlands, sagebrush flats, meadows, forests, and alpine communities for some of the plants, animals, environments, and signs of animals found in this life-like exhibit.

## People – A Legacy of Struggle, Conflict, and Compromise

The park's human story began more than 11,000 years ago as nomadic Indians spent summers in the valley. Life-sized sculptures depict an American Indian, a fur trapper, an explorer, a photographer, a settler, a mountain climber and a modern visitor, representing different chapters in the human story of the struggle to live in Jackson Hole and the controversy surrounding the valley's future. These figures remind us that the unique story of Grand Teton National Park is not only a story of wild communities but also one of human communities. Each sculpture contains an artifact representative of that period, such as the matate and mano for the American Indian. Look for these symbolic relics as you discovery the human history of this area.



## Preservation – We preserve these wild places so they will thrive for future generations



The creation of Grand Teton National Park took the determined efforts of many people. Without the likes of Struthers Burt, one of the valley's first dude ranchers, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a philanthropist and visionary, Mardy and Olaus Murie, pioneering wildlife conservationists, Congress may never have established Grand Teton National Park. In these exhibits, learn about the park's creation and the evolving ideas about how to manage this national wonder. Learn how natural predators, such as wolves and bears, help to balance the ecosystem, and learn why wildland fire, once thought to be a destructive force, is part of a healthy ecosystem. See how the park restores and preserves many historic structures so that you can get a sense of the hardship early settlers

experienced. The preservation story continues as the park strives to protect this unique place for now and the future.

## Mountaineering

The rugged Teton Range speaks to all of us, but the peaks have a special place in the hearts and souls of mountaineers who scale these imposing towers. Through an extraordinary collection of mountaineering equipment and a video narrated by Harrison Ford, imagine the drama and beauty of climbing these peaks. Through an interactive climbing wall, experience the thrill of placing climbing gear into a crack in the rock face and realize what a tenuous grip a mountaineer has on these crags. Mountaineers continue to redefine the limits these mountains impose.



## Orientation

A raised-relief map provides a birds-eye view of this landscape. The color scheme replicates natural communities, while the wedge of the Teton Range towers over Jackson Hole and slopes gently toward the Idaho plains. Look for the park's major landmarks such as the Grand Teton and Jenny Lake. Notice metal bars embedded in the floor, radiating like spokes from the entry toward the terrace. If you stand on these "Peak Identifiers" and look west, your gaze will fall upon one of the major peaks in the Teton Range. Inside, the bars are engraved with the peak name and elevation, but if you follow the bars out to the terrace, you can learn the origin of the peak's name and interesting facts about that mountain.

## Children's Layer

Unlike other centers that have a hands-off approach, the discovery center encourages visitors of all ages to look, listen, touch, and interact with the exhibits. A series of eight, "Who am I?" riddles spark curiosity, first to figure out the identity of the mystery animal, and second to locate that animal within the building. A series of touch panels invites visitors to feel animal fur and compare their hands to the size of animal footprints. Many of you will never catch a glimpse of these elusive animals, but having an opportunity to see their footprints and touch their fur will be an unforgettable experience.

## The Future

The Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center will captivate this and future generations of visitors who come to Grand Teton National Park. The themes of place, people, and preservation woven throughout the center will continue to welcome, educate, inspire, and allow visitors to develop personal connections to this place for years to come. Touch rocks, video rivers, climbing equipment, fur, footprints, and life-like displays stimulate the senses and invite exploration of Grand Teton National Park. Thank you for coming to experience this place and enjoy visiting Grand Teton National Park.