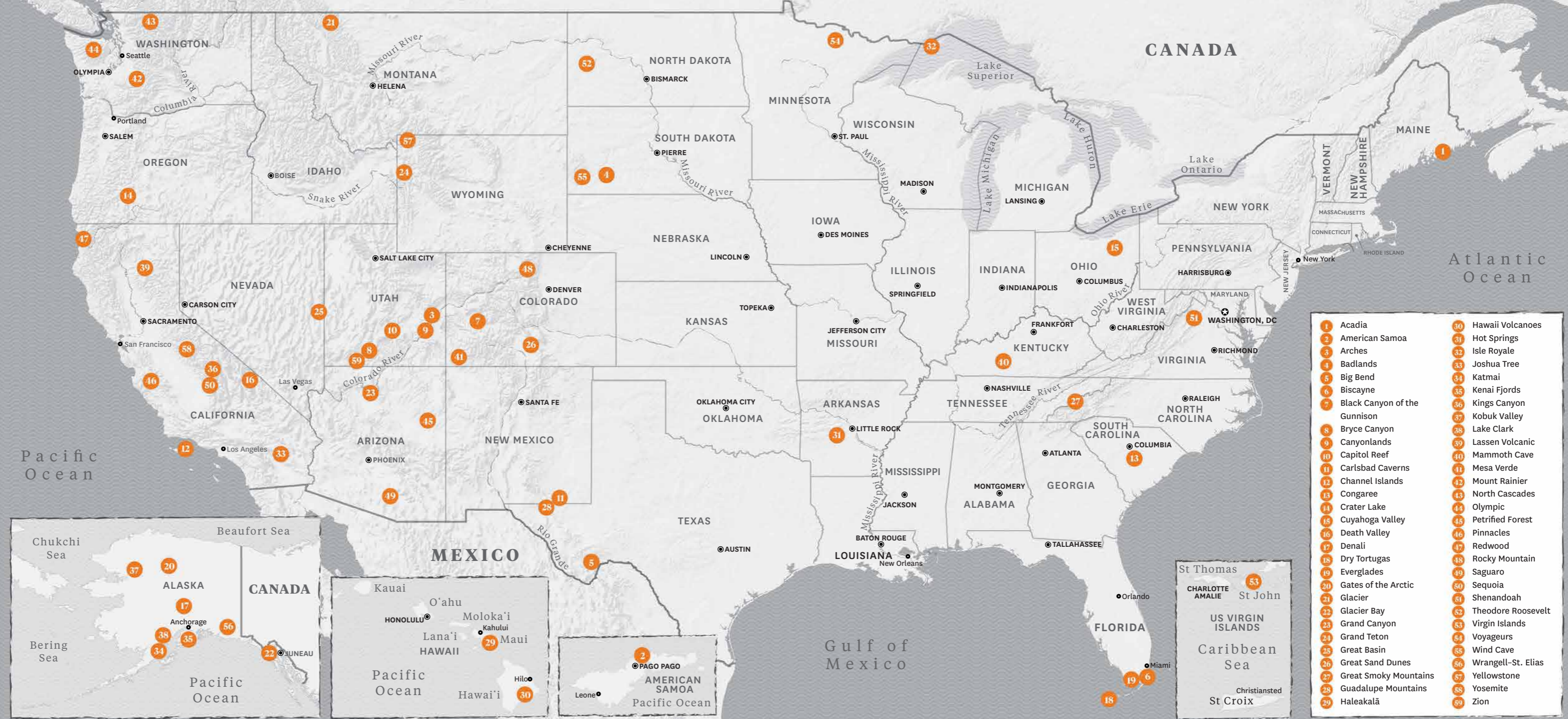


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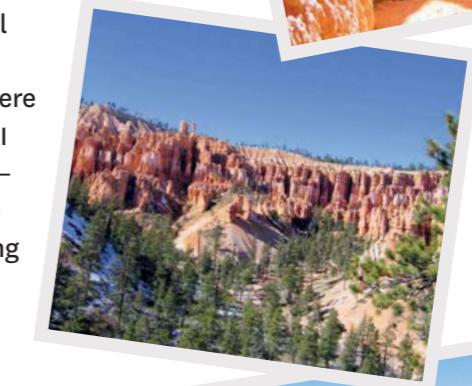


■ Grand Prismatic Geysers, Yellowstone National Park.  
■ Bryce Canyon National Park.

# Introduction

I got lucky the first time that I visited an American national park. I was in Utah and with a few days free before my flight out of the state, and a pair of hiking boots in my luggage, I headed for the closest national park, not knowing what I'd find. That park was Bryce Canyon (see p46). It was October and there had already been some flurries of snow. When I arrived at a viewpoint overlooking a vast bowl – that I later discovered was called ‘Silent City’ – snow remained in the sun’s shadow, highlighting every ridge and feature. But glowing red, yellow and orange under the blue sky were row upon row of Bryce Canyon’s extraordinary hoodoos, narrow spires of rock formed as fins created by water erode into columns. It was an epiphany.

America’s national parks are full of such marvels: the world’s largest trees in Sequoia; its most spectacular geothermal site in Yellowstone; the grandest canyon. It’s around these world-famous places that the story of the National Parks Service is woven. President Woodrow Wilson created the National Parks Service (NPS) on August 25, 1916, but the drive



to protect some of America’s most remarkable wild spaces, to be ‘used and preserved for the benefit of mankind’, began in the 1860s.

Perhaps the movement’s most eloquent advocate was Scottish-born writer John Muir. He had worked in the Yosemite Valley in the 1860s and later, in 1903, camped there under the stars with President Theodore Roosevelt, who created five national parks during his administration. ‘Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people,’ Muir wrote in *Our National Parks*, ‘are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity...’

This book is intended to be a practical introduction to each of America’s 59 national parks, distilled by Lonely Planet’s expert authors. We highlight the best activities and trails, explain how to get there and where to stay, show you the wildlife to watch out for, and suggest ideal itineraries. Whether you’re lucky enough to have a park on your doorstep or need to travel further, we hope that the following pages inspire you to explore what Stephen Mather, the first director of the NPS, described as America’s ‘national properties.’

# 21

MT

## Glacier National Park

*Everything in Glacier is larger than life, from the ancient snowy mountains and the deep navy lakes to the fearless mountain goats.*

Getty Images | Danita Delimont



Views of Glacier National Park. Previous page: fall kayaking on Bowman Lake



**D**riving along Glacier National Park's famed Going-to-the-Sun Rd feels rather ordinary at first. You drive through pine forest. You pass a lake. Then – whoa! – you turn a bend and you're 1000ft (305m) above the valley floor, surrounded prehistoric granite peaks straining towards the clouds. You turn your head to see a wall of waterfalls streaming down an ancient rock face. Turn again, and spot mountain goats leaping along flower-fringed crags so high they seem to touch the sun. This is Glacier National Park. Words like 'pretty' don't apply. Words like 'massive,' 'electrifying,' and 'fierce,' however, do.

Signed into existence by William Howard Taft in 1910, Glacier didn't become a major tourist destination until two years later, when the Great Northern Railway began building magnificent hotels and advertising the region as 'America's Switzerland.' WWII brought activity in the park to a screeching halt, and many of the chalets fell into disrepair. Today, nine of the original thirteen have been revived.

The 53-mile-long (85.3km) Going-to-the-Sun Rd was finished in 1932, ushering in the era of automobile travel. Traversing some of the park's most spectacular terrain via switchbacks and hairpin turns, it's considered by many to be one of the finest scenic drives in America. It's named for Going-to-the-Sun Mountain, which the local Blackfeet tribe considered a sacred spot. Today, it's closed for much of the year due to snow, sometimes not opening until as late as July.

In 1932, Glacier joined with Waterton Lakes National Park across the border in Alberta, Canada, to create the world's first International Peace Park, a symbol



of the friendship between the US and Canada. Today visitors can hike or take a boat ride across the US-Canada border. In fact, this is the only place you can cross

the border without clearing customs, but do bring your passport – hikers crossing the border by foot will get a unique mountain goat stamp.

## Toolbox

**When to go**  
As you might expect with a name like 'Glacier,' this park is freezing most of the year. Many facilities don't even open until July, and roads are often closed after the snows come in early fall. Hit the park in late August or early September for the best combination of warm weather and solitude.

**Getting there**  
Glacier is in northern Montana, on the Canadian border. Glacier Park International Airport is in Kalispell, about 30 miles (48.3km) west. A public bus plies the park's main areas, but it's hard to get here without your own car.

## Park in numbers

**1583**  
Area covered (sq miles)

**6646**  
Highest point on Going-to-the-Sun Rd: Logan's Pass (ft)

**1500**  
Number of mountain goats in the park

## Stay here...



### Many Glacier Hotel

Everything about this rickety Swiss-style chalet charms, from the valets in lederhosen to the vintage tiled bathrooms and the library full of bird-watching books. Built in 1915, the lodge is far enough from Going-to-the-Sun Rd to be quiet even in mid-July. Rooms are basic but comfy. In the evening, pull on a sweater for drinks overlooking Swiftcurrent Lake.



### Many Glacier Campground

First-come, first-served sites at Many Glacier Campground fill up fast, and no wonder – this is one of Glacier's loveliest campsites. Arrive early to snag a spot with good views.

## Do this!



### Scenic driving

Bisecting the park diagonally from southwest to northeast, the engineering marvel that is Going-to-the-Sun Rd gives drivers dizzy views across the range and to the valley floor far below. Drive your own car, ride the park shuttle, or – our favorite – join a tour in one of Glacier's vintage red buses, complete with a guide.



### Horseback riding

See Glacier from the back of a horse: Swan Mountain Outfitters has corrals throughout the park, where their cowboys and cowgirls will lead you on a half- or whole-day ride through the pine forests to mountain

Easy access to showers, laundry and a camp store means you won't be roughing it too much – and proximity to some of the park's finest hiking means you can roll right out of your sleeping bag and onto the trail.



### Lake McDonald Lodge

Built in 1913, this pretty chalet is perched on the shore of Lake McDonald. The lobby is an example of early-20th-century 'parkitecture,' with half-timbered walls and a stone fireplace. Stay in the main lodge or a cabin, save money with a hostel-style dorm or splurge on a suite. Like all the park's lodgings, it books up early.

lakes and streams. You'll learn neat facts about the park's flora and fauna (sometimes because your horse is busy trying to eat a poisonous bush!).



### Glacier-viewing

Glacier counts about 25 glaciers within its boundaries; back in 1850, there were 150. Many experts think the existing glaciers' days are numbered. So where's the best place to spot an endangered glacier? Some glaciers can be seen from Going-to-the-Sun Rd, including blue-gray Jackson Glacier. In the Many Glacier area, Grinnell Glacier is a bucket-list classic. Hike to the overlook to see it glimmering in the Montana sun.

## What to spot...

*Glacier teems with wildlife, especially when the summer thaws mean hibernating creatures come out to play. Chubby yellow-bellied marmots scurry across rocky pinnacles, majestic moose graze peacefully on the upper slopes of mountains, lumbering grizzlies forage for huckleberries in the lush meadows. The eastern side of the park is blown by dry chinook winds, making it drier and browner. The west side is wetter and more primeval, home to dark, dew-dripping cedar and hemlock forests.*



### MOUNTAIN GOATS

The park's official symbol, the fluffy, white mountain goat can be found scrambling up steep slopes – often they use the same hiking paths humans do.



**GLACIER LILY** In summer the avalanche slopes are carpeted in delicate yellow glacier lilies, which look like tiny six-pointed stars.



**CANADIAN LYNX** The silvery-brown lynx looks rather like a large housecat, but it takes work to spot them. Their numbers are threatened, and they are generally active at night.

Going-to-the-Sun Road is a popular alpine route for cyclists in Glacier National Park.



## Hike this...



### 01 The Highline

The park's most iconic hike cuts a narrow path along the famed Garden Wall (handholds included) before winding 7.5 miles (12km) into the mountains towards the rustic Granite Park Chalet.

### 02 Avalanche Lake

Popular with families, this steady 4-mile (6.4km) round-trip traverses dense forest to the banks of a pretty blue alpine lake.

### 03 Iceberg Lake

Hikers gasp when they hit the top of this 9-mile (14.5km) hike and the clear green water bobbing with small icebergs appears in front of them.



# Itineraries

Ready for some life-changing hikes? Try Iceberg Lake or Logan Pass for glacial views, stunning vistas and bonus wolf sightings.

- Stand-up paddle-boarding on Hidden Lake.
- Backcountry cooking in Glacier National Park.



## 01

### Two days

Wake early on your first day and inhale the piney air as you embark on the length of Going-to-the-Sun Rd. Heading southwest to northeast, stop first at Lake McDonald for a photo session and a peek at the timber lobby of iconic 1913 Lake McDonald Lodge. Ascend the hairpin turns of The Loop, where the road cuts across the continent-dividing Garden Wall. Keep your eyes open for the cascades at Bird Woman Falls and the Weeping Wall, then stop at Logan Pass Visitor Center to stretch

your legs and gaze down across the valley from 6646ft (2026m). Descend to the viewpoint of Jackson Glacier Overlook, then stop for more pics by the navy waters of St Mary Lake. Finish up with a bison burger and a thick slice of huckleberry pie at the Park Cafe in St Mary. On day two, hit the Many Glaciers area for a plunge into the park's wilder side. Fortify yourself with lunch at the Ptarmigan Dining Room in Many Glacier Hotel before embarking on the 9-mile (14.5km) hike to impressive Iceberg Lake.

## 02

### Four days

On day one, drive Going-to-the-Sun Rd as described in the two-day itinerary, but this time park at Logan Pass for the life-changing hike along the Highline Trail. You'll almost certainly spot a mountain goat or three along the trail; in spring and summer they sometimes have their fluffy white kids in tow. On day two finish Going-to-the-Sun Rd and stop at the mirror-smooth St Mary Lake for an afternoon of canoeing. On day three, head to Many Glacier and hike to either Iceberg Lake

or Grinnell Glacier; both trails are stunners, full of sweeping vistas and primeval snowcaps. Dine at Two Sisters Cafe near Babb, beloved for their goofy-bumper-sticker-lined walls and their huckleberry milkshakes. On day four explore the more remote precincts of the park at Two Medicine Valley, where you're just as likely to see a wolf as another person. Upper Two Medicine Lake is a good day hike, passing through dense, ferny forest to reveal achingly beautiful mountain views.

## 03

### One week

On day one get a feel for the park and its history with a day-long tour in one of the photogenic jammer buses; it'll give you the lay of the land for further adventures. One day two, hit the southwest portion of Going-to-the-Sun Rd, stopping for a warm-up hike at Avalanche Lake. Bring a picnic to eat on the sandy shores. On day three proceed to Logan Pass for the Highline Trail, again bringing lunch to eat at Granite Park Chalet while taking in the sweeping views of encircling mountains.

On day four paddle St Mary Lake, watching for osprey, hawks and peregrine falcons. On day five head to the Swan Mountain corral at Many Glacier for a day-long trail ride through the dense forest to one of the area's milky-blue glacial lakes. Head to the wild Two Medicine Valley on day six for a scenic boat tour across the ice-cold, glassy lake. On day seven, pack your passport and cross the border for a day trip of hiking and boating in Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada.

# 47

CA

## Redwood National & State Parks

*In foggy forests among  
emerald fern groves, some of  
the world's tallest trees have  
been shooting skyward for  
2000 years.*

500px | Philip Bindeman



Imagine how peaceful it is to walk among a forest of silent sentinels, these coast redwood trees over 60 times taller and hundreds of years older than you are. The stillness of the eternal watch they keep from high in the green canopy will slow your heartbeat, relax your pace and clear your mind. Despite its name, it's not just redwoods that this national park protects. It is also a safe haven for other threatened species, such as Chinook salmon that spawn in freshwater streams, Steller (northern) sea lions who haul out on coastal rocks, and California spotted owls, those great hunters who perch in the branches of mature conifers.

Tragically, only 4% of California's old-growth redwood forests have never been logged. Almost half of what remains lies inside this web of federal and state parks, extending from the edge of the Pacific Ocean to inland forests and prairies where elk graze, and along wild rivers where Native American tribes traditionally hunt and fish. In 1918, citizens united in the Save the Redwoods League to rescue these primeval forests from destruction by loggers. Their political activism was rewarded when Redwood National Park was established 50 years later, and again in the 1980s, when Unesco declared this region a World Heritage site and part of the California Coast Ranges Biosphere Reserve.

Redwood National Park and its three neighboring state parks – Prairie Creek Redwoods, Del Norte Coast Redwoods and Jedediah Smith Redwoods – together protect more than 200 sq miles (518 sq km) of land and almost 40 miles (64.4km) of rugged, undeveloped Pacific coastline. Bathed in a temperate rainforest climate,



the parks receive up to 140in (356cm) of rain every year. This cool moisture, along with rich forest-floor soil and the trees'

ability to sprout new buds in burls, allows coast redwoods to reach lofty heights and venerable old age.

## Toolbox

**When to go**  
The parks are open year-round. The sunniest weather arrives from May through October, when most visitor facilities are open. Winters can be cold and rainy.

**Getting there**  
San Francisco is the nearest major international airport. From there, it's more than a five-hour drive on Hwy 101 north to the national park's visitor center. Over the next 50 miles (80.5km), you'll pass three more state parks on the way north toward the Oregon border via Crescent City.

## Park in numbers

**217**  
Area covered (sq miles)

**379.1**  
Height of Hyperion (ft)

**45%**  
California's remaining old-growth redwoods protected here

## Stay here...

**Gold Bluffs Beach Campground**  
Just over two dozen sites wait at the end of a dirt road in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. Solitude, ocean views and nearby hiking trails feature in this coastal preserve, with soft sand only a short walk away. Reserve campsites in advance during summer.

**Jedediah Smith Campground**  
This northernmost state park has the best drive-up campground for families, who picnic and swim in the Smith River. Pitch your tent

in the shade of sweet-smelling spruce, juniper and fir trees – ah, bliss. Reservations are essential in the busy summer season.

**Historic Requa Inn**  
On the banks of the Klamath River, not far from the ocean, this 1914 hotel beckons with glowing night-lights and a chef-run dining room. Old-fashioned rooms are tech-free (no TVs or phones, sorry) and have antique furnishings such as claw-foot tubs. Rent the cottage for a romantic weekend spent by the wood-burning fireplace.

## Do this!

**Scenic driving**  
If you're impressed by the scenery along Hwy 101, just you wait until you motor down the paved Newton B Drury Scenic Parkway, bordered by awe-inspiring stands of tall trees – or take bumpy Davison Rd out to Gold Bluffs Beach and backcountry Howland Hill Rd to the Stout Grove of old-growth redwoods.

**Cycling**  
Most national and state parks don't allow mountain biking, but these parks do, along a few old logging roads and specially designated trails. Cycle among the ancient trees, out to coastal bluffs

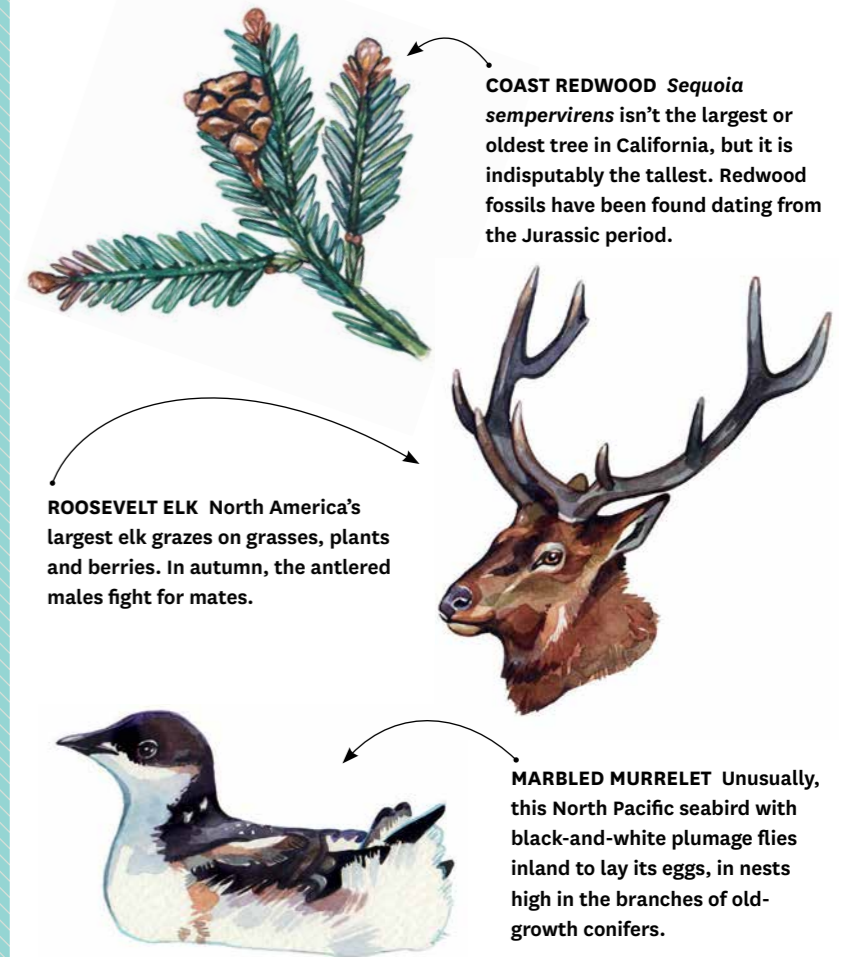
or around gentle prairies. A mixed terrain of easy, level loops and steep climbs keep things interesting.

**Kayaking**  
In summer, paddle a kayak down the placid Smith River, the largest free-flowing river in California. Rentals are available in Orick. For ranger-guided kayak tours, sign up in person in advance at the Hiouchi Information Center, off Hwy 199 in Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park.

**Jurassic giants:** the redwood trees flourished in the cool, moist air here during the age of the dinosaur, 160 million years ago.

## What to spot...

On the coast you'll find tidepools rich in marine life, such as the giant green anemone, and beaches where pinnipeds bark and bask. In misty forests, where the tallest trees grow, listen for owls hooting, then quietly watch Roosevelt elk graze in nearby prairies. As you hike along trails, be careful not to step on the yellow-colored banana slug, which wriggles along the rich, dirt-covered forest floor in search of its next meal.



**COAST REDWOOD** *Sequoia sempervirens* isn't the largest or oldest tree in California, but it is indisputably the tallest. Redwood fossils have been found dating from the Jurassic period.

**ROOSEVELT ELK** North America's largest elk grazes on grasses, plants and berries. In autumn, the antlered males fight for mates.

**MARBLED MURRELET** Unusually, this North Pacific seabird with black-and-white plumage flies inland to lay its eggs, in nests high in the branches of old-growth conifers.