

City of Rocks National Reserve and State Park

Introduction: Visitors today will see nearly the same scene - granite spires and monoliths reaching 60 stories tall as the California Trail emigrants saw. Geologists estimate the oldest granite to exceed 2.5 billion years. Established in 1988 as a national reserve, City of Rocks is expansive and encompasses 14,407 acres of land within its boundaries. This would make City of Rocks the largest state park in the Idaho State Park System. However, only about 10,441 acres are in the custody and control of the IDPR. The rest are privately owned in-holdings. The park is renowned for its scenic, geologic, and historic significance. The City of Rocks area was an important landmark on the California Trail. City of Rocks is one of the finest granite-face climbing sites anywhere. Climbers find the younger granite of the Almo Pluton to be some of the best rock they've ever ascended. About 700 routes have been developed to date. City of Rocks also has ample access to hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. The winter months provide excellent opportunities for snowshoeing and skiing.

Getting There: From east bound I-84, take the Highway 77 exit (exit 216) and turn south on Highway 77 enroute to Declo, ID (about 4 miles). Stay on Highway 77 straight through Declo enroute to Albion, ID (about 10 miles). Continue to follow Highway 77 through Albion enroute to Connor Junction (about 14 miles). At Connor Junction, turn right onto Elba-Almo Rd. Continue on Elba-Almo Rd. for about 20 miles to Almo, ID. To get to the Visitor Center, drive through the town of Almo and you will see the Visitor Center on your left. To get to the Almo entrance to City of Rocks National Reserve and State Park continue past the Visitor Center for about 2,000 feet and turn right on City of Rocks Rd. (3075 S) and continue on this gravel road for about 2 miles to the Almo entrance.

From west bound I-84, take the Sublett Rd. exit (exit 245) and turn west on Sublett Rd. Continue to follow the signs to Malta, ID (about 11 miles) on a few different roads. When you reach Highway 81, turn left and drive through Malta. Just south of Malta, turn right on Highway 77 and continue west for about 9 miles to Connor Junction. From Connor Junction, follow the directions provided above.

Major Features:

The Rocks: City of Rocks is located on the Basin and Range physiographic province. The granite pluton of the Green Creek Complex and the significantly younger Almo Pluton are best exposed here in the southern Albion Mountains. While only the tips of the plutons are visible, these ancient granites are like an open window into the earth's crust. While the rocks are certainly geologic and scenic wonders, they are also internationally renowned for rock climbing. The granite spires range from 30 to 600 feet high. Their textured rock is tailor-made for both sport and traditional climbing. City of Rocks offers a mixture of moderate and advanced climbs. About 700 routes have been developed. Some of the significant named rock formation to see are: lost arrow spire, box top, clam shell, bread loaves, window rock, king on the throne, parking lot rock, morning glory spire, anteatr, creekside towers, bath rock, elephant rock, widow arch, flaming rock, practice rock, lookout rock, and twin sisters.

The Landscape: The natural resources are diverse and scenic. Here can be seen the blending of eight ecosystem/plant communities. These include the sagebrush steppe, the pinyon-juniper woodlands, mixed scrub, montane woodlands, riparian, mountain mahogany scrub, high-elevation meadows and ridges and wetlands. The pinyon-juniper woodlands are the largest and northernmost such forest in the State of Idaho and it contains the state champion pinyon pine. The forests and shrub communities are interspersed among the rocks in scenic valleys, coves, and mountains.

The History: Within the park boundaries, 6.2 miles of the California Historic Trail is preserved along with 1.8 miles of the Salt Lake Alternate route as well as the surrounding cultural landscape. This landscape includes remnant trail ruts, 350+ emigrant signatures on 22 rocks, a portion of the Mormon Battalion Trail, , and the Kelton-Boise Stage Route. One emigrant artist, James F. Wilkins, named City of Rocks in 1849. Some of the specific historical sites to visit are: trail ruts, Tracy homestead, register rock, camp rock, pinnacle pass, Durfee homestead corral, Salt Lake alternate and Boise-Kelton Rd. Some of these sites are on private property, so visitors are advised to seek information about the sites at the Almo Visitor Center.

The Park: The park is quite popular. About 271,012 visitors come here each year. About 33,680 come to camp and 237,332 come for day use. For the most part, the park is somewhat “undeveloped.” There is no centralized campground and the individual campsites are scattered throughout the park. Each standard campsite generally has a table, a fire ring, and a place to park. Some have improved tent pads. There are no hook-up sites. Water is only available in two places, Bath Rock and Emery Pass.

The Circle Creek Overlook area has a gravel parking lot, a vault toilet, some interpretive panels and it serves as a trailhead with trails leading into the park and the Circle Creek Trail leading to the Smoky Mountain campground.

The Practice Rock/Elephant Rock area has 18 standard campsites and 1 vault toilet. A few of the campsites are walk-in sites. There is a gravel parking lot at Elephant Rock for the hiking trail around the rock and the Tea Kettle Trail that goes to the Bread Loaves area.

The Flaming Rock area has 10 standard campsites and 1 vault toilet. The trailhead for the Flaming Rock Trail is also located here.

The Window Arch area has 6 standard campsites. A short walk from the end of the road leads to the Window Arch formation which is a favorite for family picture taking.

The Bath Rock area has a large gravel parking lot and there is a camp host located here during the summer season. There is potable water available here. There are 10 standard campsites and several of these are walk-in tent sites. There are two vault toilets here. The Bath Rock trail is located right across the road. The Creekside Towers Trail also starts at the parking lot.

The Parking Lot Rock area is a day use area with 1 vault toilet, but no picnic tables. From the gravel parking lot here, the Window Rock Trail goes north and the Creekside Trail goes south to Bath Rock. There are also trails that go completely around Parking Lot Rock and Window Rock. On the main road near the entrance to the Parking Lot Rock road are scattered 8 standard campsites.

The Emery Pass area is a day use picnic area. There is a gravel parking lot, three tables and a drinking fountain here.

The Bread Loaves area has 3 standard campsites with a gravel parking lot and 1 vault

toilet. The 3 campsites are walk-in sites. There is also a group camp here. The Tea Kettle Trail starts here and heads south to Elephant Rock.

Getting to the Finger Rock area requires driving off the main City of Rocks Road and heading north from the Bread Loaves area on Forest Service Road 562. There are four standard campsites and a vault toilet located about 1 mile north of the Bread Loaves area .

The Twin Sisters area has four standard campsites. There is a group camp area across the road where the vault toilet can be found.

The Juniper area is an equestrian group camp with a gravel parking lot, corral, 1 vault toilet, and one picnic table.

Geology: City of Rocks is part of the geologic province known as the Basin and Range. Basin and Range topography results from crustal extension. As the crust stretches, faults develop to accommodate the extension. Along these roughly north-south-trending faults, mountains were uplifted and valleys down-dropped, producing the distinctive alternating pattern of linear mountain ranges and valleys of the Basin and Range province. As the rocky ranges rise, they are immediately subjected to weathering and erosion. The exposed bedrock is attacked by water, ice, wind and other erosional agents. Rock particles are stripped away and wash down the mountain sides, often covering young faults until they rupture.

Outcrops of the Green Creek Complex, in the Albion mountains, are the most westward exposure of Archean basement rocks in North America. Granite, granitic gneiss, schist, and amphibolite compose most of the rock types of the Green Creek Complex. The oldest rock, of the Green Creek Complex, is dark brown schist that is rich in biotite mica. Most of the Green Creek Complex consists of granite that intruded these schists around 2.5 billion years ago. Metamorphism and deformation have converted the granite into gneiss in some areas, mostly near contacts with the Almo pluton. The Green Creek Complex can easily be distinguished from the younger Almo pluton by its darker color caused by a greater concentration of iron-bearing minerals.

The Elba Quartzite was formed after the Green Creek Complex. This quartzite is one of the most distinctive geologic units of the Albion Mountains. It is very light colored, and extremely resistant to weathering because of its high quartz content. The Elba Quartzite originated as a quartz-rich sandstone derived from the prolonged weathering and erosion of Archean basement rocks. The quartz rich sands were probably deposited during the Proterozoic Eon between 15,000 and 600 million years ago.

The Almo Pluton is made of igneous rock formed by the slow cooling of magma that intruded into older rock. Granitic rock of the Almo pluton makes up most of the spires in the City of Rocks. The Almo pluton is cut in many areas by dikes of younger intrusive rocks. Pegmatite dikes in the Almo pluton commonly contain very large crystals. The Almo pluton has complex contact relationships with the surrounding country rock. The contact is best exposed on the eastern and southern margins of the pluton where the magma intruded Archean gneiss and granite of the Green Creek Complex. The most dramatic contact between these granitic rocks is in the saddle that separates the Twin Sisters.

One of the most obvious features of the Almo pluton are the cracks, known as joints, that cut across every outcrop. The orientation and spacing of the joints plays a critical role in controlling the size, shape, and distribution of spires in the City of Rocks. There are three processes that have created the joints at City of Rocks; contraction, extensional tectonics, and expansion related to the release of pressure as overlying rock is removed by weathering and

erosion.

Ecosystems and Plant Communities: Elevation within the park ranges from 5,720 feet at the Almo entrance to 8,867 at Graham Peak. This provides a great deal of diversity from one part of the park to another. The park contains eight ecosystems/plant communities, including the sagebrush steppe, the pinyon-juniper woodlands, mixed scrub, montane woodlands, riparian, mountain mahogany scrub, high-elevation meadows and ridges and wetlands.

Sagebrush Steppe: The sagebrush steppe covers the open basin floors and represents approximately 37% of the park. This community originally would have appeared as a mosaic of open stands of big sagebrush with an understory of native perennial grasses such as Idaho fescue. The sagebrush steppe vegetation in its natural condition is scarce in Southern Idaho. Continued human and livestock use have modified the community into now-monotypic stands of big sagebrush interspersed with plants of little or no forage value, such as tansy mustard, Russian thistle, cheatgrass, and halogeton which is toxic to livestock. Crested wheatgrass was introduced in the early 1950s range improvement programs and dominates the understory where the range has been improved for livestock.

Pinyon-Juniper Woodlands: Pinyon-juniper woodlands are located in rocky and rugged terrain. This plant community covers approximately 37% of the park. The singleleaf pinyon and Utah juniper that comprise the community can grow to 30 feet in height but are generally scrubby, fewer than 15 feet tall, and almost as wide. This forest type is the most visibly prominent on the slopes surrounding the basins. The pinyon-juniper woodlands have expanded in range, encroaching into previously open spaces. The park has one of the few old-growth pinyon forests remaining in Idaho and contains the largest pinyon in the state. Pinyon forests are also home to a number of Idaho's species of conservation concern, including cliff chipmunk, goshawk, pinyon jay, juniper titmouse, and Virginia's warbler.

Mixed Scrub: Mixed Scrub is confined to the higher slopes and representing approximately 9% of the park. This visually open community includes such plant species as big sagebrush, snowberry, Utah serviceberry, and antelope bitter brush, along with other shrubs, grasses, and herbs growing in openings between the shrubs.

Montane Woodlands: Montane woodlands are found in approximately 7% of the park and include groves of quaking aspen, stands of subalpine fir at Indian Grove, Douglas fir on the north slope of Granite Mountain, and lodgepole pine. They are often interspersed with high-elevation meadows located on the uppermost stony grassy slopes of the park. The quaking aspen community occurs in canyons or other areas containing perennial or intermittent streams. These groves can include narrowleaf cottonwood, mountain alder, and serviceberry, with chokecherry and mountain snowberry creating visual thickets below the slender tree trunks. Many herbaceous plants are also confined to these montane woodlands, such as Jacob's ladder, Colorado columbine, and heartleaf arnica.

Riparian: Riparian vegetation covers about 2.6% of the park. Riparian vegetation is limited to a small portion of the park adjacent to stream courses and springs. The most outstanding of these are the North Fork of Circle Creek and Graham Creek. Riparian zones are associated with water

and occur as important transitions between aquatic and terrestrial communities. These transitions have a greater quantity and diversity of plant species than adjoining land. They provide food, water, and cover for both wildlife and livestock. Overgrazing has altered many of the riparian areas in the park, causing accelerated soil erosion and elimination of typical riparian plant species. Typical species of this plant community include willow, smooth scouring rush, Rocky Mountain maple, mountain alder, red osier dogwood, and yellow monkeyflower.

Mountain Mahogany Scrub: Mountain mahogany scrub occurs on some higher mountain slopes of the park—including Mahogany Mountain, the north slope of Granite Mountain, and the south slope of Graham Peak where nearly pure stands of curlleaf mountain mahogany are present. They cover only 2.4% of the park and most often occur in less rocky areas, next to or surrounded by pinyon-juniper woodland. Other species associated with this community include mountain snowberry, arrowleaf balsamroot, Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and steershead.

High-Elevation Meadows and Ridges: Mountain meadows near upper ridges in the park contain a combination of grasses, herbs, sedges, and wildflowers. Easily mistaken as an alpine community, these meadows result from exposed and windswept ridges, where conditions are unprotected and harsh in winter. Locations of this type within the park include the ridges from Finger Rock to Graham Peak and Smoky Mountain peak. Plant species here grow low to the ground and often do not bloom or peak until late June through mid-July. One of the park species of concern, Simpson's hedgehog cactus (*Pediocactus simpsonii*), is common in these areas. Other plants in this community include low sagebrush, fleabane, pale paintbrush, and cushion phlox. Only 2% of the park contains the high-elevation meadow community. Simpson's hedgehog cactus is the keynote species. Simpson's hedgehog cactus grows at elevations of 4,600 feet up to 11,500 feet. Thus, many people call it mountain cactus and sometimes snowball cactus. It grows in rocky soil on exposed ridges and is found in mountains throughout the interior West. It is found in a vast range from Eastern Washington to west-central Nevada and northern Arizona; east to northern New Mexico, western Colorado, western South Dakota, and western Montana. This is a beautiful little cactus. It is almost perfectly round, up to 6 inches in diameter, and is rather densely covered with smooth relatively stiff spines. It has one or a few tiny, nearly spherical stems that have flowers near top. The stem is usually solitary, spherical to oval, spiny, with diagonal furrows in a pineapple-like pattern. It is only 2 to 8 inches in height. It blooms from early May to June. Flower color can be white, pink, magenta, yellow, or yellow green. Its cold hardiness makes Simpson's hedgehog cactus a favorite of cactus enthusiasts in northern climates.

Wetlands: There are a few small wetlands in the park, typically in riparian areas next to streams and springs. Because of the aridity of the region, these wetlands, although quite small, are important resources for many forms of life. There are a few ponds and marshy areas along Circle Creek. These wetlands are commonly dominated by willows including Booth willow and Geyer willow. Other common shrubs include Rocky Mountain maple, mountain alder, chokecherry, and elderberry. An abundance of cattails, sedges and rushes are also present.

Wildlife:

Mammals: The mammals present in the park include: mountain lion, moose, mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, coyote, bobcat, badger, porcupine, red fox, chipmunk, mountain cottontail,

blacktail jackrabbit, golden-mantled ground squirrel, pocket gopher, Great Basin pocket mouse, pinon mouse, bushy-tailed woodrat, yellow-bellied marmot, deer mouse, montane vole, and long-eared bat, little brown bat, western small-footed bat and the rarely seen ringtail cat. Idaho's only known population of the Cliff Chipmunk is in the park.

Mountain lion is the keynote animal. The City of Rocks area is part of a mountain lion corridor. A long-term mountain lion study was conducted in the area and several individual cats were tracked through the park at various times. The study noted that four adults and five kittens were known to use the park during the winter of 1989–90.

What many in the west know this animal as the mountain lion, it is officially known as the North American cougar (*Puma concolor cougar*). It is the cougar subspecies once commonly found in eastern North America and still prevalent in the western half of the continent. The cougar has the largest range of any wild land animal in the Americas. Its range spans from northern Yukon in Canada to the southern Andes. Its wide distribution stems from its adaptability to virtually every habitat type: it is found in all forest types, as well as in lowland and mountainous deserts. The cougar prefers regions with dense underbrush, but can live with little vegetation in open areas. Its preferred habitats include precipitous canyons, escarpments, rim rocks, and dense brush. With its vast range across the length of the Americas, it has dozens of names and various references in the mythology of the indigenous Americans and in contemporary culture. The cat has many local or regional names in the United States and Canada, of which cougar, puma, mountain lion, and panther are popular. "Mountain lion" was a term first used in writing in 1858 from the diary of George A. Jackson of Colorado.

Cougars are the largest of the small cats. They are placed in the subfamily Felinae, although their bulk characteristics are similar to those of the big cats in the subfamily Pantherinae. Cougars are slender and agile members of the cat family. They are the fourth-largest cat. The adults stand about 24 to 35 inches tall at the shoulders. Adult males are around 7.9 feet long from nose to tail tip, and females average 6.7 feet. Males typically weigh 15 to 220 lbs. Females typically weigh between 64 to 141 lbs. The head of the cat is round and the ears are erect. Its powerful forequarters, neck, and jaw serve to grasp and hold large prey. It has five retractable claws on its forepaws and four on its hind paws. The larger front feet and claws are adaptations to clutching prey.

Despite its size, it is not typically classified among the "big cats", as it cannot roar. Compared to "big cats", cougars are often silent with minimal communication through vocalizations outside of the mother-offspring relationship. Cougars sometimes voice low-pitched hisses, growls, and purrs, as well as chirps and whistles, many of which are comparable to those of domestic cats. They are well known for their screams.

Cougar coloring is plain but can vary greatly between individuals and even between siblings. The coat is typically tawny, but ranges to silvery-grey or reddish, with lighter patches on the underbody, including the jaws, chin, and throat. Infants are spotted and born with blue eyes and rings on their tails.

Cougars have large paws and proportionally the largest hind legs in the cat family. This physique allows it great leaping and short-sprint ability. The cougar's top running speed ranges between 40 and 50 mph. It is adept at climbing, which allows it to evade canine competitors. Though capable of sprinting, the cougar is typically an ambush predator. It stalks through brush and trees, across ledges, or other covered spots, before delivering a powerful leap onto the back of its prey and a suffocating neck bite. The cougar is capable of breaking the neck of some of its smaller prey with a strong bite and momentum bearing the animal to the ground.

The cougar is a successful generalist predator and will eat any animal it can catch, from insects to large ungulates. Like all cats, it is an obligate carnivore, meaning it needs to feed exclusively on meat to survive. Its most important prey species are various deer species, particularly in North America; mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk and even bull moose are taken. Other species such as the bighorn sheep, mountain goat, coyote, pronghorn, and domestic livestock such as cattle and sheep are also primary food bases in many areas. Other listed prey species of the cougar include mice, porcupines, beavers, raccoons, hares, and wild turkey.

Females reach sexual maturity between one-and-a-half to three years of age. They typically average one litter every two to three years throughout their reproductive lives, though the period can be as short as one year. Only females are involved in parenting. Female cougars are fiercely protective of their cubs, and have been seen to successfully fight off animals as large as Grizzly bears in their defense. Litter size is between one and six cubs; typically two. Caves and other alcoves that offer protection are used as litter dens. Born blind, cubs are completely dependent on their mother at first, and begin to be weaned at around three months of age. As they grow, they begin to go out on forays with their mother, first visiting kill sites, and after six months beginning to hunt small prey on their own.

Like almost all cats, the cougar is a solitary animal. Only mothers and kittens live in groups, with adults meeting only to mate. It is secretive and crepuscular, being most active around dawn and dusk. Home range sizes and overall cougar abundance depend on terrain, vegetation, and prey abundance.

Birds: Some of the more common birds present in the park include: pinyon jay, northern flicker, black-billed magpie, raven, mountain chickadee, dark-eyed junco, Cassin's finch, sage grouse, dusky grouse, Clark's nutcracker, nighthawk, rock pigeon, mourning dove, rock wren, house wren, mountain bluebird, western meadowlark, golden eagle, prairie falcon, red-tailed hawk, Cooper's hawk, northern harrier, American kestrel, turkey vulture, great-horned owl, red-winged blackbird, violet-green swallow, and cliff swallow.

Reptiles: The reptiles present in the park include: common sagebrush lizard, western skink, rubber boa, striped whipsnake, gopher snake, garter snake, and Great Basin rattlesnake.

Cultural History: An archeological survey was conducted at the Ranch Unit of the nearby Castle Rocks State Park in 2001. A variety of prehistoric sites were found including lithic/artifact scatters, artifact scatters with sub-surface features, rock shelters, and hunting blinds. A total of 28 archaeological sites were recorded. The prehistoric sites indicate that human use of the area has been ongoing for thousands of years. The few diagnostic artifacts recovered during surface surveys appear to be typical of others from the northern portion of the Great Basin culture area.

An artifact that was recovered at Castle Rocks in a 2009 survey is a Folsom pre-form which suggests that habitation of the area began in the early Holocene (10,000 to 11,000 years ago). The recovery of this fluted point preform suggests the potential availability of now-extinct megafauna in the vicinity. Other projectile points recovered during the 2009 survey indicate that the area was occupied during the middle Holocene period, (about 5,500 years ago). The majority of the points date between 3,000 and 100 years before present time. The recovery of these projectile points indicates that the area served as an important hunting locality for Shoshone and Bannock groups.

Situated in the northern reaches of the Great Basin physiographic region, the area comprising City of Rocks has a long history of use and occupation by the Shoshone and Bannock peoples. Documentation indicates that Pocatello, a prominent leader of the Northern Shoshone, and his followers used the area for hunting, gathering, grazing horses, and seasonal habitation. In the higher elevations they collected pine nuts, a traditional food, from the pinyon pine forests. The City of Rocks area is located at the junction of two physiographic regions, the Great Basin and the Columbia Plateau, at the northern margin of the Great Basin “culture area.” The Shoshone and Bannock people who occupied the upper Snake River Valley at the time of European-American contact displayed a blend of cultural traits typically associated with Plains, Great Basin, and Plateau cultures.

Because of excellent grazing resources, pinyon pine nuts, yellow-bellied marmots, game animals, and vegetable roots, the upper Raft River and the City of Rocks area served as a summer range for the Shoshone’s extensive horse herds.

Some oral histories of Almo residents in the 1970s, provided:

The Indians [from the Fort Hall Reservation] used to come every fall gathering pine nuts. They would gather the cones all day, then dig huge pits, fill them with wood and set it on fire. Then when the coals were right, they put the sticky cones in and covered them with dirt. By morning the cones would be popped open. The squaws picked the nuts out of the cones. They would sell them for .25 a pint. . . . every year, ‘til the last few years, they come and traded back and forth with people for hides and on the years that the pine nuts were good ... they come by car. Then they first come, they come in a buggy and team, wagon and team. And camp here, they’d have a camp right here, right above here for weeks at a time... They’d come here and buy deer hides... They trades us buckskin gloves for deer hides. See and then they make the gloves out of the deer hides.

History: Fur trappers and traders were known to have come through the area as early as 1826. Then there were great waves of emigrants starting in 1843 that were moving east to west along the Oregon and California Trails and signs of their presence can still be found today.

The first known party to travel across the continent to California was the Bidwell-Bartleson party. But after splitting from the Oregon Trail at Soda Springs, Idaho, they ended up traversing the north end of the Great Salt Lake. So this party did not pass through the City of Rocks area. Perhaps, one of the first parties to pass through the City of Rocks area enroute to California was the Martin Murphy party in 1844. The Murphy party were a group of Irish emigrants who had emigrated from County Wexford, Ireland and lived at Frampton Township, Quebec, Canada for about 25 years. They migrated to Missouri in 1841 seeking land that became available through the “Platte Purchase.” Those migrating to Missouri (and later to California) were: the Martin Murphy family, the James Miller family, Dennis Martin, and siblings John, Robert, Michael and Mary Sullivan. After hearing about the potential of settlement in California, this “Murphy Party” joined up with the “Stephens Party” in Independence, Missouri and set out on the track of the Oregon Trail. The “Murphy-Stephens” party arrived at Fort Hall on August 10, 1844. All they learned at Fort Hall about the route to California was that the Joseph Chiles and Joseph Walker parties had passed through enroute to California the previous year (1843), but the Chiles party took a route through Idaho to Fort Boise and then through Oregon to California. The Joseph Walker party had headed south along the Raft River and the tracks left by Walker would guide the Murphy party into Nevada. However, the Walker party would not succeed in crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains through the Donner Pass area via the Truckee River, rather

they ended up far south at the Owens Valley. The Murphy-Stephens party departed Fort Hall on August 17 and continued on the Oregon Trail to the Raft River. The Stephens party continued on to Oregon, while the Murphy party split off and traveled up the Raft River. It would take them eight days to pass through the Raft River/City of Rocks area until they arrived at the headwaters of the Humboldt River in Nevada. The Murphy party would be the first to cross the Sierra Nevada Mountains with covered wagons to California via the Donner Pass and the Truckee River route. When winter set in around Donner Lake, California, the Murphys built rudimentary cabins for shelter. The ill-fated Donner party would occupy these structures during their ordeal in 1846.

So emigration through City of Rocks on the California trail began in 1843 with the Joseph Walker party and continued in 1844 with the Murphy party. Mass migration on the California Trail through the City of Rocks would continue until well into 1882. The first emigrants sought land in California, but in 1848 the discovery of gold in California enticed thousands to hit the trail seeking their fortune. Travelers packed tools, food, books, clothes, furniture, and family heirlooms – everything needed to build a new life in a land of promise. Over 200,000 emigrants followed the California Trail through the City of Rocks.

Prior to 1849, emigrants going to California shared the road with Oregon travelers until they reached the Raft River. Here the trails parted. Those going to California turned south. In 1849, the California Trail intersected the newly opened Hudspeth's Cutoff at Cassia Creek and continued southwest. After leaving City of Rocks through Pinnacle Pass, the trail joined Samuel Hensley's Salt Lake Cutoff, which opened in 1848, and continued southwest through Granite Pass into Nevada and on to California. After 1849 most California bound emigrants used Hudspeth's Cutoff rather than the Raft River route.

In 1849, while traveling on the California Trail, artist James F. Wilkins reportedly named the City of Rocks. Many emigrant diaries contain references to the rock formations that looked like castles, spires, pyramids and silent sentinels.

Some emigrants documented their experiences along the California Trail in the City of Rocks in diaries. On July 19, 1849, Vincent Geiger and Wakeman Bryarly wrote:

The road lies between high & immense rocky mountains, with not a particle of herbage or vegetation upon them. But being white and smooth upon their surface. Just opposite to where we encamped was one which struck us as particular curious. It was a perfect face upon the highest cliff around . . . The road continued between these & around these rocky piles but the road itself was good. You can imagine among these massive piles, church domes, spires, pyramids, & in fact, with a little fancying you can see anything from the Capitol at Washington to a lowly thatched cottage. Four miles brought us to the coming in of the Mormon road. Half mile before striking it we passed through a narrow pass of rock, just wide enough for the wagons, & which evidently has been made by some adventurers before us.

On August 11, 1849, Bernard J. Reid wrote his impression of the rocks:

Another 2 miles enter a rocky dell some 4 miles long by a winding road running among the most grotesque rocks standing out singly in the valley, or grouped fantastically together. There were sphynxes and statues of every size, and haystacks and wigwams and castles, and towers, and pyramids and cones and projecting turrets and canopies, and leaning columns, and so on throughout a thousand varieties of fantastic shapes.

On June 22, 1850, Lorenzo Sawyer seemed to be describing the Twin Sisters when he wrote:

There were so many rocks both here and where we camped last night that might answer the description and

name, we had no little difficulty for a time in determining which was Steeple Rock. The last two rocks, however, as we passed out of the valley, seemed pre-eminently entitled to the appellation. They rise in a cone-like form from the bottom of the valley to a height of from 400 to 600 feet; they are round and quite regular in form tapering gradually to a point. Opposite these two rocks the Salt Lake road comes in through another valley some eight miles from where we first saw it.

On July 17, 1850, Margaret Frink gave another description of the rocks as follows:

During the forenoon we passed through a stone village composed of huge, isolated rocks of various and singular shapes, some resembling cottages, others steeples and domes. It is called the 'City of Rocks', but I think the name 'Pyramid City' more suitable. It is a sublime, strange, and wonderful scene-one of nature's most interesting works. The Salt Lake road, which turned off between Dry Sandy and Little Sandy, and which we passed on the twenty-sixth day of June, rejoins our road at this point.

Perhaps the first mention of the rocks as a source of wonder and recreation was written by Helen Carpenter in August 18, 1857:

Emerging from the pass we came into what is known as Pyramid Circle. There was perhaps an acre of partially level land with a good sized stream flowing through it. On this level, and the hills which encircle it, were the most beautiful and wonderful white rocks that we ever saw. This is known as the City rocks and certainly bears a striking resemblance to a city. To be sure it was a good deal out of the usual, for the large and small houses were curiously intermingled and set at all angles but it only made the place the more charming. There was everything one could imagine from a dog house to a church and courthouse. While the stock was being cared for the women and children wandered off to enjoy the sights of the city.

The area around City of Rocks was some of the last to be settled in Idaho, and only then by a few ranchers in the 1870s. The City of Rocks most consistent and economically successful usage has been as range land. Farmers and ranchers who had homesteaded the lands near Almo, could put the open range lands at City of Rocks to use for seasonal livestock grazing. Early agricultural endeavors and Homestead Act entries were intended primarily to obtain land ownership, provide a family's subsistence and the sustain their herds during the winter months.

During the 1870s, large numbers of sheep had been trailed east from California into the Raft River area. The sheepmen moved into the area and took up grazing on the open lands in the City of Rocks. This created conflict with the early cattlemen settlers over competition for forage on the open range. Using as their justification some early laws prohibiting certain sheep grazing that had been passed by the Idaho Territorial Legislature in 1874 and 1883, the cattlemen took action against the sheepmen. Acts of violence and murder ensued that could be described as a "range war."

The homesteading era in City of Rocks started in about 1885. For the next few decades, the U.S. General Land Office would grant land patents through various land entry laws to about 34 different individuals. This would pass government lands into private hands on about 8,634 acres within the 14,407 acres later included within the boundaries of the City of Rocks National Reserve. The first group were those that claimed land under requirements provided in the Homestead Act of 1862. To "prove up" a homestead claim under this law required the building of structures, the cultivation of crops, and occupation of the land for a five year period of time. Once "proved up," the claimant would received a patent to 160 acres. In this arid climate, the cultivation of crops requirement meant that the claimant had to have access to surface water rights in order to irrigate the crops. About 10 individuals settled on lands under "true"

homesteading conditions. Although two out of these ten made outright purchases of their land. George W. Lunsford probably started his claim in about 1885, because he received his patent to 160 acres on June 13, 1890. George B. Graham, Nathaniel Rice, and George Davis arrived shortly after Lunsford as they received their patents in 1891, 1894, and 1899, respectively. Lunsford's property was located in the Circle Creek Basin and would become the Circle Creek Ranch.

Lunsford sold his land to William Tracy in 1901. This parcel, plus 200 adjacent acres patented by Mary Ann Tracy as a Desert Land entry on May 29, 1907, formed the nucleus of the Circle Creek Ranch. The Tracys established their homesite farther east than Lunsford's original improvements, nearer the California Trail. They spent years constructing a substantial stone house (now in ruins) to replace a log dwelling.

John J. Bruesch, Clara Campbell, Thomas N. Fairchild, and Charles L. Freckleton received land patents for about 160 acres each in 1907, 1911, 1916, and 1917, respectively. They represent the remainder of those who took up land under the original homestead type requirements.

Realizing that the original homestead requirements of crop cultivation and the granting of only 160 acres had proved impracticable in the arid western states, Congress passed the Stock Raising Homestead Act on December 29, 1916. Under this act, crop cultivation was not specifically required and the claimant could patent up to about 320 acres. This opened up new possibilities for settlement on the lands at City of Rocks. Dryland farmers could now settle on the land and the practice of cattle grazing became the dominant agricultural use in the area. About 23 land patents would be granted under these conditions between 1916 and 1936. Because of relatively poor soils and semi-arid conditions, the majority of these farms were marginal enterprises at best. As the dryland farmers abandoned their claims in the 1920s due to drought, this land was used for summer and fall grazing. One of the historic remnants of this era is the Durfee homestead corral. Eugene L. Durfee has arrived around 1914 and received a patent for 293 acres on June 4, 1919.

At first the unpatented/unclaimed federal lands in the area were completely open to grazing without permit or fees. That all changed with the passing of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. After that, the Grazing Service (the predecessor agency to today's Bureau of Land Management) implemented a program of regulated grazing with the designation of grazing districts, allotments, and the establishment of permit requirements and fees. The act also gave preference to those who owned base property at or near the lands to be grazed. So regulated cattle grazing on the public lands in the area of City of Rocks is a long established practice.

Park History: Since the 1920s, City of Rocks has been proposed as a national monument. The Idaho Legislature declared Section 36 within City of Rocks as a state park under the jurisdiction of the Idaho Lands Board on February 27, 1957. In 1964, City of Rocks was designated a national historic landmark. On March 15, 1973, Section 36 was transferred to the IDPR from the Department of Lands. The IDPR acquired this core property in 1973 by purchase from the state endowment funds. City of Rocks was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1974. The National Park Service published a suitability/feasibility study for a proposed City of Rocks National Monument in July 1976. A study of management alternatives for City of Rocks was published in 1986. The City of Rocks National Reserve Act was enacted on November 18, 1988. The Act drew a 22-mile boundary around lands owned or managed by the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and private individuals. After approval of a comprehensive management

plan, the NPS officially transferred on-site management to the IDPR on May 2, 1996. In 1999, the IDPR entered into a Recreation and Public Purpose lease with the Bureau of Land Management for the development of a campground and visitor center outside the boundaries of the Reserve. This property has become the Smoky Mountain Unit of Castle Rocks State Park. Among the purposes intended for this property was additional camping space to serve visitors to City of Rocks. The campground also includes an equestrian trail head, restrooms, showers, and an RV dump station.

Recreation Activities:

Exploring: There is probably no Idaho State Park more suitable for exploring and auto touring than City of Rocks. There is a network of about 13 miles of gravel roads from which scenic vistas may be viewed. There are several parking lots, turnouts and short trails that provide great opportunities to see the sights. A stop at the Visitor Center is advised to assist in this activity.

Camping: The park has 63 standard campsites and 2 group camps. Each campsite is equipped with a table, fire ring, and a parking spot. There are vault toilets nearby. Water is available at the Bath Rock parking lot. A developed campground with 38 campsites with water and electrical hook-ups and improved restrooms is available nearby in the Smoky Mountain campground in Castle Rocks State Park. Backcountry backpacking/camping is available by permit at Indian Grove.

Picnicking: The only devoted picnic area is the Emery Pass day use area that has 3 individual picnic tables and a drinking fountain. The Parking Lot Rock area is designated as a day use area, but there are no picnic tables there, but there is a vault toilet. Visitors are welcomed to have tailgate picnics there. Further, picnicking is allowed at any of the campsites as long as they are not being used or reserved for camping.

Nature Study/Birding: Castle Rock State Park is classified as a natural park and as such, it provides a great deal of diversity for nature study. Short hikes will allow access to pretty streams, aspen groves, pinyon pine forests, and extensive view of the sagebrush steeps. The diversity of ecosystems/plant communities lead to an abundance of birds to see and identify. City of Rocks is on the Idaho Birding Trail.

Please Remember

- Campfires are only allowed in the provided fire rings.
- Dogs must be on a leash at all times and are not permitted in the buildings.
- Motor vehicles are to stay on established roadways unless directed otherwise.
- There are some special rules applicable to rock climbing and a few specific areas are closed to such use. Climbers are reminded to check with park personnel for further information.
- Camping is only allowed in the designated sites. All other areas of the park are day use only.
- All historic and archeological resources are protected by federal and state laws and regulations. Please do not disturb, deface, or remove these artifacts.
- While the discharge of firearms for licensed hunting within the park is generally allowed, target shooting is not.

Horseback Riding: Many of the trails in the park open for horseback riding. Obtain a trail map to determine which ones are open to such use. There is an equestrian group camp at the Juniper Area that has a vault toilet and a corral. There is also an equestrian staging area at the Smoky Mountain Unit of Castle Rocks State Park where horses can be unloaded and the City of Rocks trails can be accessed by the Circle Creek Trail.

Mountain Biking: Many of the trails in the park open for mountain biking. However, mountain bikers need to be aware of the trails that are closed to such use. Obtain a trail map to determine which ones are open to such use.

Rock Climbing: Generally the park is open to rock climbing and bouldering. Ice climbing is also available in the park in the winter months. For information on established routes, check with park personnel. Climbing is prohibited within the California Trail management subzone which includes the Twin Sisters formation. After some litigation over the closure, the decision was affirmed by the court on March 29, 2000.

Trails: City of Rocks is a great place for hiking. Over 22 miles of hiking trails lead to climbing areas, striking features and dramatic overlooks.

Hunting: When the City of Rocks Reserve Act was enacted in November 1990, it specifically permitted hunting in the Reserve in accordance with applicable federal and Idaho state laws. The law stated that there can be designated zones and periods in which hunting is prohibited for reasons of public safety, administration, floral and faunal protection and management, or public use and enjoyment. The park is generally open to hunting. All IDFG licensing, bag limits, and seasons apply. Check with park personnel in regards to areas that may be closed. Target shooting is not permitted in the park.

Winter Sports: Generally the trails and features in the park are open to nordic skiing, snowshoeing and ice climbing.

Visitor Center: There is a Visitor Center at the Administrative Unit of Castle Rocks State Park. The Visitor Center includes an improved restroom (flush toilets), a public counter, sales of books and souvenirs, an audio/visual area, a couple of exhibits, and park offices for both Castle Rocks State Park and City of Rocks National Reserve and State Park. There are also some replica covered wagons on display to help visitors visualize travel through the parks on the California Trail. The selection of books available include some specific to the City of Rocks and surrounding area. These are: *Birder's Guide*; *Geologic and Historic Sites*; *Geological Interpretive Trail*, and *California National Historic Trail*. Visitors are also invited to view some short audio visual presentations about Castle Rocks and City of Rocks. The Visitor Center also offers in-season interpretive presentations.

Resource Management Issues:

Invasive/Noxious Weeds: Vegetation in and around the park likely differs from pre-settlement conditions because of past grazing, farming, fire, and other disturbances. Often these influences result in the introduction and establishment of invasive plants or noxious weeds in disturbed

areas. The most common plants in this category include cheatgrass, Russian thistle (tumble weed), spotted knapweed, black henbane, Canada thistle, field bindweed, musk thistle, Scotch thistle, and white top.

Livestock Grazing: The Reserve differs from most traditional national park system units in terms of allowing certain traditional livestock grazing uses to continue, provided they are consistent with the obligation to protect natural and cultural resources. NPS management policies allow grazing where it is specifically authorized by federal law or is required to maintain a historic scene, and where it does not cause unacceptable impacts on park resources or values. Private grazing permits for six allotments on public lands are currently in effect on a large proportion of public lands in the Reserve. Permits for these allotments are currently reviewed on an annual basis. Grazing is not permitted in the Research Natural Area and cattle grazing is excluded from wetlands and riparian areas. Since 1989, the following grazing improvements have been accomplished in the Reserve.

- 14% reduction in public lands grazed in the Reserve
- 4% reduction in animal unit months
- Indian Grove wetlands fenced to exclude cattle
- Some springs fenced to exclude cattle
- Elimination of grazing in Lower Circle Creek
- Circle Creek Allotment permanently closed, fences removed to restore cultural landscape

Livestock grazing in a state park that is classified as a natural park seems to contrary to such purposes and could be consider a detriment to the park environment. However, IDPR policy provides that “. . . when it is determined that grazing would be advantageous, with no expected detriment to the park environment or enjoyment of the people, and in conformance with the master plan, grazing leases may be let . . .” Since, livestock grazing was part of the historic environment at City of Rocks and the General Management Plan calls for grazing use to be maintained and managed, then it is allowed at City of Rocks National Reserve and State Park.

Research Natural Area: A Research Natural Area was previously designated by the BLM in the Reserve that contains unique geologic formations and is the northern limit of the pinyon-juniper forest type in North America that exhibits high-quality native vegetation and old-growth tree stands. The Research Natural Area is part of a cougar migration corridor, and its geologic formations provide important habitat for species such as bats. The Research Natural Area will continue to be managed for its outstanding natural features, natural processes, natural diversity, and ecological values.

Suggestions for the Future: A Draft General Management Plan for the City of Rocks National Reserve and State Park was published in March 2015 in conjunction with the National Park Service planning process. The final plan has yet to be released, but the draft plan provides for a alternatives that has several recommendations for the future. Those recommendations that represent very favorable enhancements for the park are as follows:

- An equestrian staging area should be developed for day-use parking near the Bread Loaves intersection to supplement the equestrian camping provided at Smoky Mountain

Campground and the Juniper group campsite. This development would be located out of the California Trail viewshed in a concealed, flat area and would connect to the North Fork Trail for equestrian users. The development could include a loop road spur off City of Rocks Road with parking for three to five horse trailers. This location would be close to existing water and restrooms.

- IDPR should implement the rim development concept plan in which 9 campsites would be converted to picnicking or day use parking, 13 campsites would be closed and rehabilitated, and 22 new campsites would be added, resulting in improved resource protection and visitor safety with no net loss of the 64 campsites currently within the park.
- Consider developing a turnaround area adjacent to USFS-managed land at the north end of Logger Springs Road.
- Although the preferred alternative in the City of Rocks master plan recommends that the large visitor center envisioned in the Reserve's 1996 comprehensive management plan would not be built, consideration should be given to constructing a new visitor center type building on the same state-owned property next to the current ranch house being used for a visitor center office. Or if IDPR applies for and receives a patent to the land currently under RPP lease at the Smoky Mountain Unit of Castle Rocks State Park, then the new visitor center could be built on that property.