

Parks (Continued)

In Giant Forest, a favorite area for family vacations, the small fry (and the not-so-small) are fascinated by the "Big Trees" and the deer, bears, and smaller animals; by Moro Rock, with its 400 steps cut into solid granite and its magnificent view on all sides; by lovely Crystal Cave; and by the hollow sequoia log in which Hale Tharp, first white man in Giant Forest, lived.

Both parks have spectacular canyons and rugged mountains, and vast wilderness areas reached by hikes and pack trips.

Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park is well known because its popular Trail Ridge Road, one of the highest in the nation, is a national highway—U.S. 34. But Mesa Verde National Park, tucked away in the southwestern corner of Colorado, is only beginning to receive deserved recognition as a fascinating park. Good paved roads now lead to it from several directions, and people who visit "the Green Tableland" are drawn back to it year after year.

Here for a thousand years lived the people known as cliff dwellers. We know them by the workmanship that made their cliff houses so enduring. Elaborate structures, often several "stories" high, are nested firmly under overhanging cliffs. Handprints still show in the adobe mortar; shallow hand- and foot-holds cut into the canyon walls still remain; narrow trails lead to canyon floor or mesa top.

Three of the larger ruins are open to the public—Spruce Tree House, the best preserved; Cliff Palace, the largest; and Balcony House, high on the canyon wall. These

ruins and many more can also be viewed from vantage points on the highway along the mesa top. Mission 66 has some ambitious plans for Mesa Verde, including excavating Long House and other ruins on Wetherill Mesa and opening them to the public.

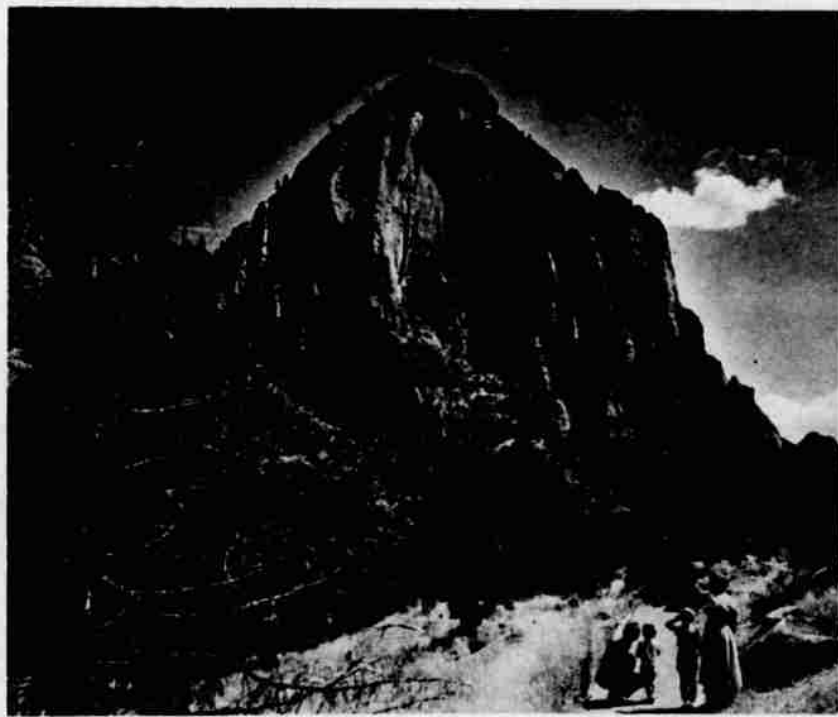
Wind Cave National Park, in South Dakota's Black Hills, preserves a cave whose walls and ceilings are covered by the rare, delicate boxwork of calcite, the veins crossing one another to resemble fragile lace. Crystallized cavities, flowstone, and frostwork ledges add to the beauty of the formations.

Above ground in the park is an attraction that is giving the cave competition—herds of hundreds of buffalo, here and in adjoining Custer State Park. Almost any day you can see them from the highway, frequently quite close to it. Antelope often appear, too, and an occasional deer or elk. Prairie dogs—actually ground squirrels that live in "towns" near the road—run from hole to hole or "scold" visitors for disturbing them.

The gigantic Mount Rushmore monument to four presidents, symbol of the Black Hills, is familiar in picture and story. But Mount Rushmore has much that is new, including a handsome dining lodge with a wide veranda and glass walls that face the memorial. This is a Mission 66 accomplishment, as is the new outdoor amphitheater. There, each evening, the memorial is lighted.

These are only a sampling of the attractions of our national parks. There are many others—and more and more people are beginning to explore them. In most of them you can experience the special enjoyment for which the park was created, and never be far from pavement. But you can usually multiply your enjoyment by leaving your car at a parking place and exploring the byways. So—happy hunting!

Awesome geological spectacles abound in Zion National Park, Utah.

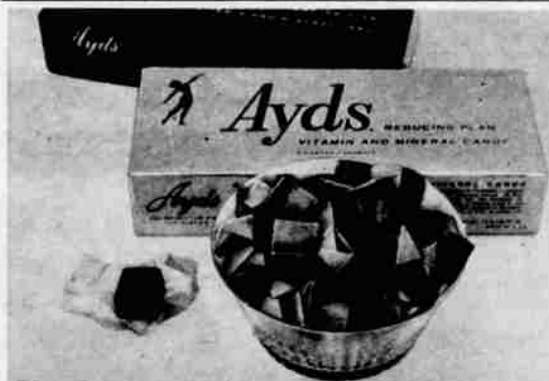


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