



ROCKY MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS

Set in the Southern Rockies, Rocky Mountain National Park could be called “the top of the world.” Here treeline and tundra—the miniaturized alpine world—are accessible to all along the park’s Trail Ridge Road, the highest continuous paved highway in the United States. It tops out at 12,183 feet above sea level not far from the Alpine Visitor Center.

At the Tundra Communities Trail east of the Alpine Visitor Center, you can walk in an alpine realm that hikers elsewhere might labor uphill thousands of feet to experience. Nearly one third of the park is above treeline—approximately 11,400 feet of elevation—the limit above which conditions are too harsh for trees to grow.

The park is home to 77 named peaks above 12,000 feet. Longs Peak, at 14,259 feet, is the northernmost “fourteener” in the 2,700-mile-long Rocky Mountain chain stretching from Mexico to Alaska. Great earth forces thrust the Rockies skyward 70 million years ago, but much of the exposed granite rock was formed more than 1.3 billion years ago!

Several major glacial episodes sculpted the scenery that inspired citizens to persuade Congress to make this a national park in 1915, one year before Congress created the National Park Service (NPS). For over 30 years, most of the park was managed as wilderness, and in 2009, 95 percent of Rocky Mountain National Park was officially designated as wilderness.

Ecosystems of the Rockies



BIGHORN SHEEP RAM

Alpine: Above 11,400 feet

Alpine tundra occurs above treeline where the climate is extremely harsh. Fierce drying winds, bitter cold, intense ultraviolet light, thin soil, and a brief growing season let only specialized plants and animals thrive.

Alpine plants are tiny, growing close to the ground. Many have waxy leaf surfaces to resist moisture loss, or dense, tiny hairs to trap warmth against stems and leaves. Plants just inches tall may grow taproots 6 feet long to get moisture and anchor them against the wind. Alpine winters are long—for nearly eight months, average temperatures do not rise above freezing.

Mammals and birds survive by migrating, hibernating, or staying put.

The White-tailed ptarmigan, a ground dwelling, grouse-like bird, is well-adapted for staying put. Its large, dense, feather-covered body retains heat well. Ptarmigan can even gain weight in winter by eating nutrient rich willow buds.

Yellow-bellied marmots, one of the largest members of the squirrel family, escape winter by piling on fat in summer, nearly doubling their size, then hibernating seven to eight months. They survive by greatly slowing their metabolism and heartbeat, and by lowering their body temperature to 40°F.

Most other birds and mammals migrate when shorter, cooler days arrive.

American pipits fly to Central America, while other tundra dwellers like elk and coyotes move down into lower valleys.

Subalpine: 9,000–11,400 feet

The subalpine ecosystem lies between 9,000 and 11,400 feet and is characterized by long, cold winters, short, cool summers, and high annual precipitation—30 inches or more. It is the highest, windiest, and snowiest forest.

Engelmann spruce and Subalpine fir dominate the landscape. But abundant moisture produces a rich understory of Broom huckleberry and Juniper shrubs, as well as many colorful wildflowers like Arnica, Fairy slipper, Twinflower, and Senecio.

Limber pines thrive in wind blown areas and often have a twisted growth habit. Winds can also stop growth on the windward side of spruce and fir trees, creating flag or banner trees. At treeline, low-growing trees called krummholz (German for “crooked wood”) grow more horizontally than vertically, and some may be hundreds of years old.

Pine martens, Long-tailed weasels, Chickarees (pine squirrels), and Snowshoe hares frequent the subalpine forests. Birds like the Hermit thrush, Ruby-crowned kinglet and Pine grosbeak are more often heard than seen in the dense cover.

Montane: below 9,000 feet

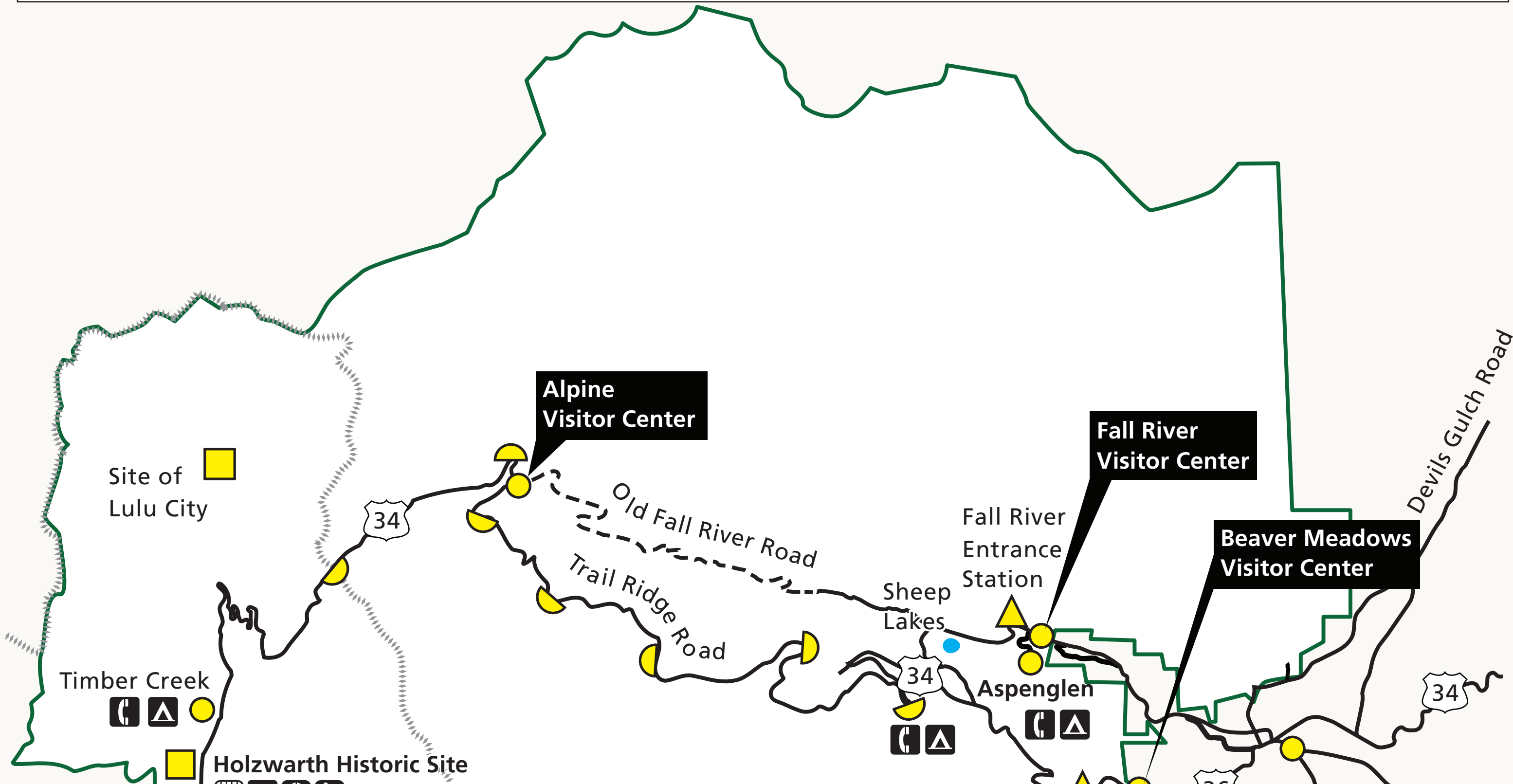
As you enter the park, you are entering the montane ecosystem—a land of pine forests and beautiful mountain meadows. Open stands of Ponderosa pine dominate the drier south-facing slopes of the montane. Mature trees can be 150 feet tall and 400 years old. As the ponderosa ages, its bark changes from gray-brown to cinnamon-red and often gives off a sweet fragrance when warmed by the sun.

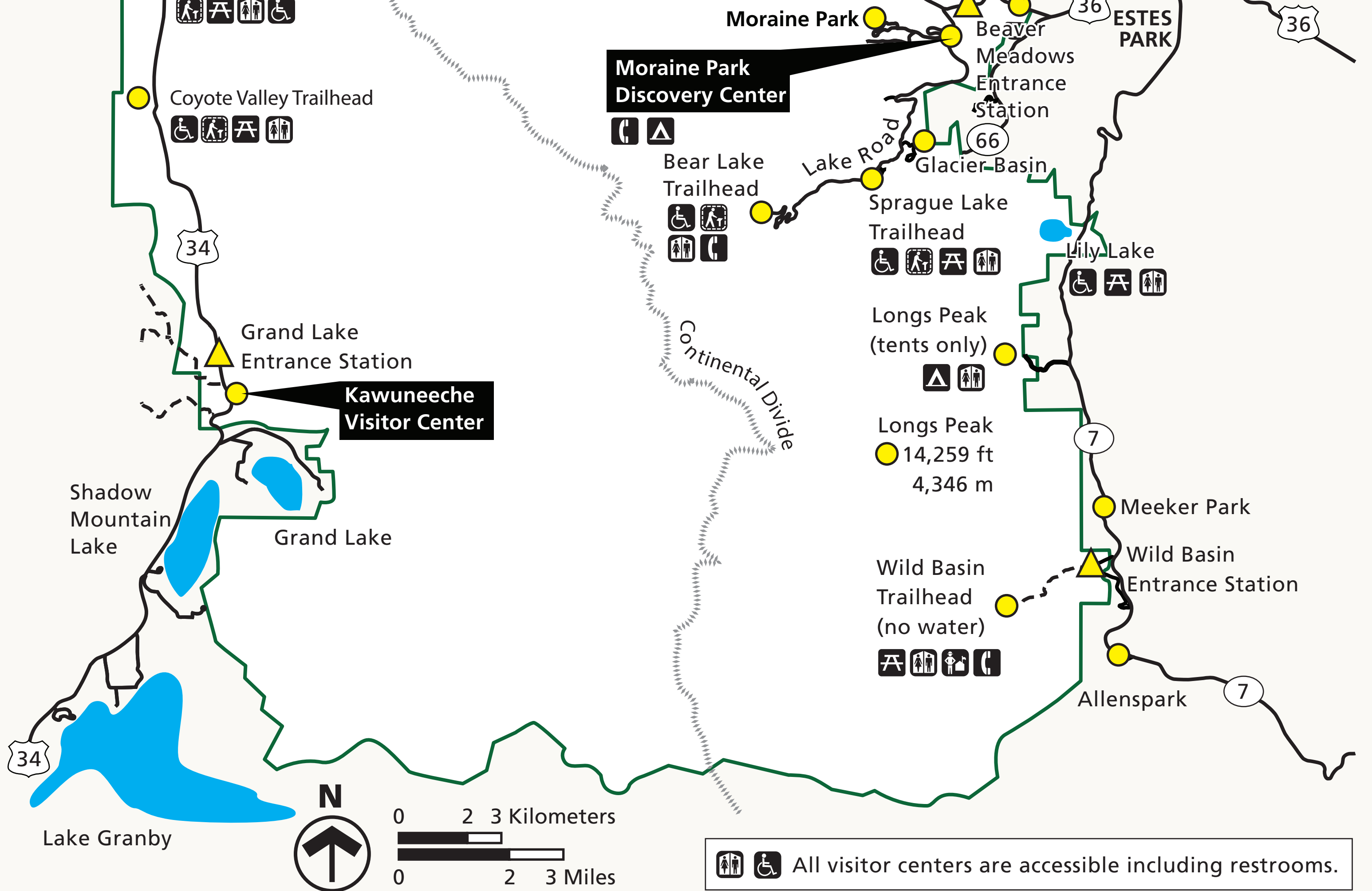
Many grasses, shrubs, and flowering plants thrive in the montane. Chokecherry and wax currant bushes provide food and shelter for many insects, birds, and other animals, including Mountain bluebirds, bears, tassel-eared Abert’s squirrels, coyotes, Red-tailed hawks, and deer and elk.

Rocky Mountain National Park

Map Legend

| | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|
|  Point of Interest |  Historical Site |  Park boundary |  Continental Divide |  Emergency Telephone |  Self-Guided Nature Trail |
|  Park Entrance |  Wayside |  Ranger Station |  Campground |  Wheelchair-Accessible |  River / Lake |
|  Unpaved Road |  Paved Road |  Picnic area |  Restrooms | | |







Mountain People

NEVER SUMMER MOUNTAIN
FROM KAWUNEECHE VALLEY

Mountain Ute and Arapaho

Following retreating glaciers 10,000 years ago, humans first began living intermittently in these mountains. By 6,000 years ago the Ute, or Mountain People, lived in bands scattered throughout Colorado and Utah. They followed game and traveled over set seasonal routes collecting plants. Other groups, including the Cheyenne and Arapaho, lived primarily on the plains, hunting buffalo, with occasional mountain excursions.

European Americans Arrive

Early 1800s European American fur trappers and traders sought beaver throughout the Rockies until pelt prices fell in the 1840s. The 1859 Colorado gold rush created the boom towns of

Denver, Boulder, and Golden. Mining didn't pay much here, but people discovered the areas beauty. Gold-seeker Joel Estes found the valley now named for him. In 1860, he built cabins for ranching, but scenery soon outpaced commodities in value and tourism grew.

Protectors

Tourism continued growing in Estes Park and Grand Lake as word of the surrounding mountains beauty spread. A forest preserve was created, but many conservationists feared the surrounding mountains would be exploited. Through the efforts of Enos Mills, F.O. Stanley, James Grafton Rogers, Joe Mills, and other Colorado citizens, Congress established Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915.



Roaming the Rockies

ELK GRAZING

Park Information

Check your free park newspaper, check at a park visitor center, or call the park Information Office, 970-586-1206 for more for important information about visitor centers, ranger-led programs, safety, wildlife, shuttle buses, and more. Nearby towns of Estes Park and Grand Lake offer accommodations and services.

Accessibility

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Pets

Pets are prohibited in all park areas not accessible by motor vehicles, including trails and meadows. Pets are allowed along established roads, in parking areas, and within established campgrounds and picnic areas. Pets may not be left in vehicles if it endangers the pet or becomes a public nuisance. Where allowed, pets must be kept on a six-foot leash. Service animals are welcome anywhere foot travel is permitted.

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting is prohibited in the park. Contact the park for regulations on the possession of weapons, including firearms. Fishing requires a Colorado fishing license. Abide by park regulations; details on our website, at visitor centers, or entrance stations.

Regulations

Camp only in designated campgrounds. All backcountry camping requires a permit. Leaving property unattended for over 24 hours without prior permission is prohibited. Vehicles, including bicycles, must stay on roads or in parking areas. Stopping or parking on roads is prohibited. Overnight parking requires a permit.

Safety

Altitude sickness is common among park visitors. Consult your doctor if you have a respiratory or heart condition. Natural hazards in the park include swift water, waterfalls, lightning, sudden weather changes, falling trees, hypothermia, and giardiasis from drinking untreated water.

Wilderness

Ninety-five percent of the park is protected under the 1964 Wilderness Act. Road corridors and adjacent visitor use areas are excluded.



TRAIL RIDGE ROAD

For More Information
Rocky Mountain National Park

1000 U.S. Highway 36
Estes Park, CO 80517-8397
970-586-1206
970-586-1319 TTY
www.nps.gov/romo

For information call 970-586-1206

For Trail Ridge Road status
call 970-586-1222.

Rocky Mountain National Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov