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Hiking the Hidden Parts of Rocky Mountain National Park

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Jun 15, 2011 Misty Faucheux Comments

Hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park is sometimes a test of endurance and sometimes just a test of patience. The endurance part comes from hiking steep trails and being prepared for the weather, which can change at any time.



The patience part is twofold. You need to take your time hiking the terrain so you don't get hurt. You also need patience in dealing with the traffic on the trails, especially the popular ones. Grandma, grandpa and grandkids often run around these trails, making a lot of noise and scaring away the animals.

You can, however, avoid the serious earaches and the increase of stress by heading to some of the lesser-known trails.

Regions of the Park: Northeast and Northwest

Rocky Mountain National Park is basically broken up into four areas: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest.

The Northeast trails include all the ones located off of eastern side of Highway 34, which is near the tourist town of Estes Park Colorado. You can mainly access the trails of the Northwest region by going on Rocky Mountain National Park's main thoroughfare and tourist attraction, Trail Ridge Road.



Southeast and Southwest

The Southeast trails are found off of Highway 7. This area is pretty popular throughout the year, being the closest to the famous Longs Peak. You may want to avoid this area at all costs if you hate traffic jams.

The Southwest trails are located by Grand Lake on the western side of the park. Grand Lake doesn't get all the traffic that the eastern side gets. This may be a better bet if you want a quieter experience. You access these trails off of

western side of Highway 34.

You can generally access the trails of the Northeast, Southwest and Southeast regions all year round since these are off major highways. The Northwest area is a little more difficult to get to during the winter. Trail Ridge Road becomes a mountain all in itself during the winter – a mountain of snow that is.

Avoiding the Crowds

Hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park really is the best way to see all of the flora, fauna and views. If you are in good physical condition, consider hiking one of the more difficult trails. For example, the North Fork and Boulder-Grand Pass trails are moderate to difficult trails. The views from the summit, however, are spectacular and well worth a few sore muscles.

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The North Fork trail takes you through the canyon area of the North Fork Big Thompson River, and it is located near the town of Drake. The Boulder-Grand Pass crosses near delicate tundra and the Lake of the Winds. This trail is located near Estes Park off Highway 7.



Hazards

Remember, Rocky Mountain National Park is extremely high with some trails topping out around 14,000 feet. You must acclimate yourself to the altitude before attempting any of these trails, or you run the risk of getting altitude sickness. If you feel sick, dizzy or nauseous, take a break, and drink plenty of water. If necessary, call for help.

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