Article by Jay Newman. Originally published in *Uncle John's Greatest Know on Earth Bathroom Reader*. Not for sale or reprint. Copyright © 2020 Portable Press.

APARKALYPSE NOW

In the 2010s, America's national parks and outdoor recreation areas saw a huge uptick in visitors—with far-reaching effects. Longtime BRI writer (and veteran nature photographer) Jay Newman wanted to know why this is happening and what we can do to help keep nature natural. Here's what he found.

THE ZOMBIES OF ZION

The Narrows, located in Utah's Zion National Park, is where the Virgin River cuts through Zion Canyon. The water is shallow (most of this trail is actually *in* the river), the river is only 20 or 30 feet wide, and the steep walls of the gorge are up to 1,000 feet high. It is considered one of the most incredible and unique hikes in the United States. Want to hike it? Be forewarned: On nearly any day of the year, you will be surrounded by literally hundreds of other hikers—all of you trudging through the murky, knee-deep water. It begins to feel less like a walk in the park and more like a horde of zombies... who stop often to take selfies. It's gotten so crowded there that you can no longer drive to the trailhead anymore; you have to leave your car outside the national park and take a shuttle bus crammed full of other soon-to-be zombies. If you go, plan on hiking at least two to three miles up the river before the horde starts to thin out.

LOVING NATURE TO DEATH

These same kinds of crowds have been taking over Yosemite, Yellowstone, and dozens more. In 2016, nearly 331 million people visited a national park—that's more than the entire U.S. population (323 million in 2016). This isn't what the federal government had in mind in 1916 when it founded the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) to set aside special places and "leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." They weren't prepared for this generation.

Making matters worse, this overuse and abuse is spilling over to the national forests and wilderness areas *around* the parks—not to mention the small towns and, until recently, little-known swimming holes, waterfalls, hot springs, secluded beaches, and even public flower farms. It's happening in wilderness areas all over the world, but the American West has been hit especially hard. For example, Horseshoe Bend, a scenic overlook of the Colorado River in Arizona's Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, saw the number of visitors increase from a few thousand per year in 2000 to 4,000 people *per day* in 2017. The facilities at these remote places weren't designed for this kind of onslaught, and the damage to the infrastructure and the environment has been swift and severe.

President Calvin Coolidge's favorite prank:
He'd press a buzzer to summon his bodyguards, then hide under his desk.

THE NOT-SO-GREAT RECESSION

How did this happen? If you asked most people that question, they'd probably blame social media influencers and the "selfie generation." While those do play a big part, it really began with the Great Recession, the worldwide economic downturn following the collapse of the U.S. real estate market in 2007. Unemployment rates rose to nearly 10 percent, and those who kept their jobs saw wages stagnate while the costs of rent, groceries, and fuel steadily rose. Airfares skyrocketed at the same time employers were cutting back. People were stressed out and needed a vacation...and no one could afford one.

The recession technically ended in June 2009, but for years afterward, wages remained flat and airfares weren't getting any cheaper. In 2020, for a family of four to fly to a California Disney vacation, including lodging and a rental car, it would cost around $5,000—nearly double pre-recession prices. But if Mom and Dad could convince the kids to spend a long weekend camping in a national park—or in lodgings nearby—that vacation would cost a fraction of what Mickey Mouse would have charged. So they went to Yellowstone.

How did they choose that particular park?

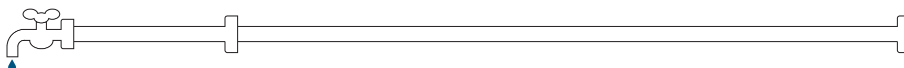
OUTSIDE INFLUENCERS

"Social media is the No. 1 driver," Maschelle Zia told the *Denver Post* in 2018. She manages the Horseshoe Bend overlook, which now draws in 1.5 million visitors a year. "People don't come here for solitude. They are looking for the iconic photo." In the social media era, an iconic photo is one that amasses thousands of likes and shares on such social media sites as Facebook, Pinterest, Tumblr, Twitter, and others. In Horseshoe Bend's case, that iconic photo is a pair of bare feet dangling high above the bendy blue river.

The main culprit: Instagram, a photo-sharing site launched in 2010 that gave rise to the role of the "influencer." If you're not familiar with influencers, the most popular ones are A-list celebrities, but there are countless other "micro influencers"—regular people turned Internet celebrities—who are paid as "brand ambassadors" by companies. They're also paid by hotels, restaurants, and resorts to post photos from their stay and "geotag" the locations.

MARCH OF THE TRIPODS

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it could lead to a million footsteps. Anyone with a smartphone—which is nearly everyone these days—can post photos from a hiking trail because more and more parks are getting Wi-Fi. What better way to make your coworkers jealous than by posting your own feet-dangling selfie at Horseshoe Bend?



In the UK, it's illegal to drive a car through a puddle intending to splash pedestrians.

But it's more than just smartphones and selfies. Interest in outdoor photography—both amateur and professional—has grown exponentially since the rise of digital cameras in the early 2000s. While always a presence at the parks, shutterbugs have all but taken over some of the most "gotta-have" spots. Mesa Arch at Utah's Canyonlands National Park is especially problematic because only about a dozen photographers can fit side by side to get a decent view of the site's quintessential sunrise image, in which the underside of the arch glows like molten lava. For that one moment at dawn, it looks like a scene from another world. The NPS describes it as "a perfect trail for beginners, families with small children or light hikers, and one of Canyonlands' most iconic vistas." That, wrote pro photographer Don Smith, leads to situations like this one that occurred at a workshop he conducted there in 2017. In addition to his group, "serious photographers arrived a couple hours prior to sunrise. To make matters worse, two buses of tourists descended upon the Arch 10 minutes prior to sunrise. As the sun began to crest, one man grabbed one of my Workshop participants by the arm and said 'MOVE,' as he edged in with his iPhone for a shot." Skirmishes like this are playing out at other spots:

- On most days at Utah's Delicate Arch, from before sunrise to past sunset, dozens of landscape photographers vie with tourists for position on the large sandstone slab.
- A strikingly photogenic (and fragile) Arizona sandstone formation called the Wave has no marked trails, so hikers must find their way across the desert. But due to overcrowding, only 20 hikers are allowed in each day, and they have to win a lottery to get there. In 2017, more than 160,000 people applied.
- Arizona's Upper Antelope Canyon isn't much wider than a hallway. After a 2011 photograph of a sunlit shaft of dust called "The Phantom" sold for a record $6.5 million, an onslaught of photographers—with tripods—overran the slot canyon, posing a huge problem for the tourists who had to tiptoe around them. The NPS began offering photographer-only tours...and then canceled them in 2020 due to "negative feedback from attendees." (Sample review: "I didn't pay 200 bucks just to get rushed through!") Result: No tripods are allowed in Upper Antelope Canyon...at all.

FANTASY VS. REALITY

Instagram has had another effect on outdoor photography. The social media app was originally known for its array of creative filters that could make any smartphone pic look like a party scene, or an old sepia photo, or a Monet painting, and so on. As landscape photography began to connect with the Instagram generation, a new kind of hyper-real nature photograph emerged, one that is equal parts photography and digital art.

For most of landscape photography's history—a field popularized by Ansel Adams at many of these same national parks in the mid-20th century—the challenge was to portray an accurate representation of a pristine scene in optimal conditions. Today's digital darkroom comes with filters that allow photographers to add elements such as a more dramatic sky or a larger moon. Whereas an Ansel Adams waterfall photograph would look pretty much like a waterfall, a 21st-century Instagram-ographer photo of that waterfall would have the same basic composition, but the falls may have become turquoise and luminous, bathed in an ethereal glow beneath the technicolor core of the Milky Way. Another big difference from Adams: today's Instagram-ographer isn't behind the camera; he's likely to be standing *in* the shot at the base of the waterfall ("to give it scale"), posed dramatically on a patch of moss, shining his flashlight beam at the starry sky.

In their attempts to outdo each other, these "outdoor influencers" (a term that showed up in 2016) have collectively created a new genre of clichéd photos. In addition to "Man Standing at Base of Waterfall," there's "Feet Sticking Out of Tent," "Pretty Girl Lying in Lavender," "Pretty Girl in Hat From Behind," "Rugged Man on Outcrop Over Gorge," and dozens more.

IN THE KNOW

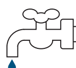
Deep Thoughts: America's **deepest lake** is Oregon's Crater Lake (1,943 feet). The **deepest gorge**, at 7,993 feet, is Hells Canyon, in Oregon and Idaho. New Mexico's Carlsbad Caverns is the nation's **deepest cave** (1,593 feet), and the **deepest spot** above ground is Badwater Basin in Death Valley National Park, which is 282 feet below sea level.

TAG! YOU'RE IT!

Aesthetics aside, these photographs are having a huge impact on nature, due to the thousands of outdoor influencers who post these kinds of photos every single day. Many of them have more than 100,000 followers, and nearly every post includes geotags to the locations. Commonly called tagging, the practice was originally used by serious adventurers to share secret locations with each other, but tagging locations on social media now lets everyone in on it. That waterfall photographer may post his photo to his Instagram page, his Facebook page, and then to one or more regional Facebook groups. Forty percent of Earth's population—more than three billion people—uses social media, which means that any one of these posts can potentially reach millions of people. And the photo of the "natural" world that they're seeing has all the crowds cropped out and the "fairytale filter" set to max.

THE SECRET IS OUT

Secret Beach boasts one of the most spectacular views of rock formations (called "sea stacks") on the Oregon Coast. But there's no trailhead there, nor is there a



proper trail—just a steep decline through the forest down to the beach. There's no parking lot, either—just a small, rutted clearing off of busy Highway 101. That's why it was known by locals as Secret Beach: You had to know someone who knew about it to get directions. Today, that small clearing is often crammed with the cars of people who clicked on detailed directions they found in articles from magazines and websites, including one from OregonLive.com titled "10 Low-tide Treasures on the Oregon Coast." As traditional print media wanes, these outlets rely on social media to keep them afloat. And they're not just trying to get you out into nature. They need you to click on their links...and an enticingly named place called "Secret Beach" is very clickworthy.

AD NAUSEUM

Tourism boards and parks departments have also been doing their best to get more people out to the wilderness. Ad campaigns utilize TV, magazines, guerrilla marketing, professional photography, and social media influencers. Colorado's award-winning "Come to Life" campaign, named the most effective in the country in 2018, "generated significant incremental travel," according to the Colorado Tourism Office, "driving more than 2.66 million influenced trips to Colorado with a total impact of $4.45 billion." The good news is that it brought jobs and revenue to the state—and an 81 percent increase in park revenue from 2014 to 2019—but it also brought larger crowds to wild places.

Even car commercials have played a part. Companies like Subaru, Toyota, and Jeep have cashed in on the stay-local traveling trend by marketing their mid-size, all-wheel-drive, fuel-efficient "adventure" models as an inexpensive way to reach incredible places. A young couple drives their Outback from one vista to another, where there's always a pretty sunset and there are never any other people.

What do you get when you put all of these factors together? Long lines just to drive into the busier parks (that you *can* drive into), limited parking when you're in there, and visitors from all walks of life walking over each other. There's more trash, more crime, more accidents, more selfie-takers, more tripods, more grumpy kids who are still mad they couldn't go to Disneyland, and more signs like this one at the top of the Angels Landing Trail in Zion: "Toilets have reached capacity—closed due to extreme use."

This crisis affects more than the experience—the creatures of the forest are none too pleased, not to mention the environment. Turn to page 344 for some more horror stories from the great outdoors.

...First legal Internet purchase: in 1984, a grandmother in the UK used a phone-based service on her TV to buy margarine, eggs, and cornflakes.

APARKALYPSE NOW, PART II

The esteemed philosopher Yogi Berra once said, "Nobody goes there anymore, it's too crowded." He was referring to a restaurant, but the same could be said about America's national parks and outdoor recreation areas. The busiest ones can look like something out of a Mad Max movie. And the collateral damage is spreading. *(Part I is on page 197.)*

GROUND ZEROES

Almost every outdoor tourist destination in the United States started seeing massive crowds in the 2010s, and some spots really got hit hard. "Over a period of four months," reported the *Guardian* in 2018, "[we] dispatched writers across the American West to examine how overcrowding is playing out at ground level. We found a brewing crisis: 2-mile-long 'bison jams' in Yellowstone, fistfights in parking lots at Glacier, a small Colorado town overrun by millions of visitors." It doesn't even need to be a national park or a famous landmark. It just needs to go viral.

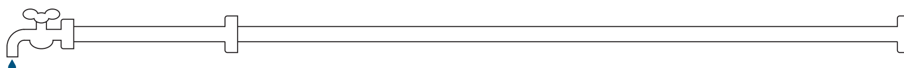
WHAT'S THAT SMELL?

In late 2009, the *Oregonian*'s online magazine published a seemingly innocent article that included "a list of the state's best natural hot springs, which have seen little or no development. All you need to enjoy them is plenty of water, a good map, clear roads, and careful directions." Then came links to the directions, then came the copycat articles, and the copycats of the copycat articles, and then shares of those copycat articles. Result: the hot springs were inundated by so many weekend warriors that some have had to build parking areas and charge entrance fees. Hit especially hard was Umpqua Hot Springs, a four-hour drive south of Portland in the Cascade mountains. In the past, you would have needed a map just to find the trailhead, and then a trail book to find the pools. Now you simply enter the location into your phone and follow the directions.

Umpqua Hot Springs got so overrun with visitors that in 2016, the area was closed to overnight camping. Reason: according to the *Oregonian*, campers were dumping their trash on the ground, removing trees, and "leaving behind incredible amounts of human waste." When the same thing happened at Conundrum Hot Springs in the Colorado Rockies after it became popular online in 2018, the U.S. Forest Service had to institute a paid permit system and a "human waste awareness campaign."

#POPPYNIGHTMARE

In March 2019, Southern California's poppy "superbloom" exploded on social media, enticing the hordes to hop in their cars and head to Lake Elsinore, about 90 minutes



Most consumed red wine, worldwide: cabernet sauvignon.

south of Los Angeles. Over the weekend of the peak bloom, the city of 66,000 was getting 50,000 visitors per day, causing traffic jams, car accidents, and mad dashes to find parking spots so that they could catch the shuttles to Walker Canyon, where the delicate orange flowers were blanketing the steep slopes. The Palm Springs *Desert Sun* dispatched this harrowing report from the scene:

> "Wildflower-seekers slid and fell down the side of Walker Canyon that was never meant to be hiked on, though some managed to do so anyways—even in very chic wedge heels. Families and Instagram-influencer wannabes alike attempted feats of free-climbing and scrambling as large boulders toppled down behind them as every step kicked more rocks loose, threatening to squish children or seniors who couldn't lunge out of the way fast enough."

Local officials used the city's Facebook page to issue pleas for people to turn around: "Our city is not made for Disneyland size crowds!" On Sunday, they finally had no choice but to initiate #PoppyShutdown (also using the hashtags #PoppyNightmare and #IsItOverYet). The shuttle service was canceled, and the canyon was closed to the public until the poppies faded and no one cared anymore.

But it didn't end there. In the middle of the *Desert Sun* story was this embedded ad: "Best Spring Destinations to See Flowers Bloom, from Arizona to Japan." Clickbait articles like that and the social media shares they generate have caused an invasion of public (and sometimes private) flower farms all over the world. In July 2019, the owners of a lavender farm near Milton, Ontario, took their complaints about selfie-seekers to CTV News: "We love it when they sit next to the lavender and carefully respect the lavender, but you'll find people lie in the lavender and crush it. Once it's crushed, we can't harvest it." He added that when he asks people to step out of the lavender, many refuse, saying, "Hey, I paid to come in here."

PARKS AND WRECK

More people brings more rule breakers—from selfie-seeking influencers (and wannabe influencers), to landscape and wildlife photographers focused on getting the perfect shot, to stereotypical "city folk" who don't see the harm in petting the wildlife. So it's not surprising that the 2010s saw an unprecedented number of people getting injured or even killed at national parks.

- From 2008 to 2017, Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming recorded "a 90-percent increase in vehicle accidents, a 60-percent bump in ambulance calls, and a 130-percent rise in searches and rescues." In 2016, a 13-year-old boy received serious burns after his father, who was carrying him off-trail, slipped and fell into a hot spring. A few days later, a 23-year-old man was killed in a hot spring after he left the boardwalk at Norris Geyser.

In Denmark, it's illegal to burn any country's flag…except Denmark's.

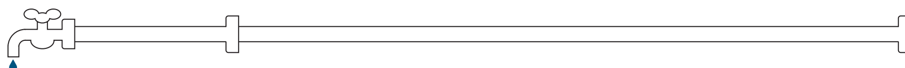
- At the Grand Canyon, over a period of three weeks in March 2019, there were four separate incidents of visitors who fell to their deaths. (At least two were attempting selfies.)
- In February 2019, a 56-year-old California woman ignored closure signs at Yosemite's Mist Trail, which was cordoned off due to icy conditions. She was struck by falling rocks and ice, and died. The previous summer on that same trail, a teenager visiting from Israel attempted to duplicate a popular "hanging from a rock" selfie. Despite warnings from other visitors not to, and heroic efforts to save him, he fell to his death. That wasn't long after a married couple—the wife was a popular Instagram travel blogger—fell to their deaths off another Yosemite cliff. All that was left was their camera on a tripod.

There's a selfie epidemic taking place in national parks. As Michael Ghiglieri, coauthor of *Off the Wall: Death in Yosemite,* told the *Los Angeles Daily News,* "In the old days people went out to have an experience. Now they go out to record that they had that experience."

IT ONLY TAKES ONE

Higher attendance has also led to more willful destruction of some of the NPS's most sensitive areas, where stepping off the trail or going off-road—even by just a few feet—can potentially cause damage. Doing donuts in a 4x4 can cause carnage:

- In July 2018, a visitor at Oregon's Crater Lake National Park took a joyride across the Pumice Desert—a large wildflower meadow on top of a thick layer of volcanic ash. According to news reports, the car left ruts a foot deep and destroyed a wide swath of plant life, including at least 15 native species. The man had to pay $60,000 in fines for the damage.
- At Racetrack Playa, where the boulders famously move across a flat desert lake bed in California's Death Valley National Park, there are numerous "No Motor Vehicles Allowed" signs. But that didn't stop an unknown person (or persons) from leaving 15 miles of tire tracks across the surface in 2016. That's not the only time someone has done this to Racetrack Playa. (Maybe they should change the name.) The high cost to build a barrier around the remote area—which can only be accessed via a 27-mile dirt road—means it will remain unprotected.
- In 2016, a crew of YouTube influencers from Vancouver, B.C.—members of a group called "High on Life"—drove their bright blue RV past closure signs and water-skied across Utah's Bonneville Salt Flats, causing extensive damage. The young men were also caught on video—taken by witnesses *and* themselves—stomping all over Yellowstone's delicate Grand Prismatic Spring, riding their bikes



off-trail at Death Valley, and illegally using a drone in Colorado's Mesa Verde National Park. Two of them spent a week in jail, and all had to pay hefty fines.

LEAVING THEIR MARK

Of course, not everyone who harms nature does it with malice. Take the two (now former) Boy Scout leaders in Utah's Goblin Valley State Park who posted a video of themselves toppling a hoodoo—a giant, 170-million-year-old rock formation. The men argued in court that they did it to "prevent the rock from hurting anyone," but later acknowledged that if they really thought it was a danger, they should have notified a ranger.

Fortunately, they didn't have millions of impressionable Instagram followers, like Vanessa Hudgens did when she carved a heart with "Austin + Vanessa" onto a rock in the Coconino National Forest outside Sedona, Arizona, on Valentine's Day 2016. In doing so, she broke federal law for defacing a natural feature and was fined $1,000 by the U.S. Forest Service. "I'm such an earth person, I love Mother Nature," the former Disney star said in her defense on the radio show *Sway in the Morning*. "Literally, I took a piece of rock and wrote on the rock, so it's the type of thing where it's chalk. If you rub it, it comes off, so I knew that, like, with the first rain it would go away." That might sound reasonable, but it isn't. Scratch-marks can take decades or more to disappear; in fact, some ancient petroglyphs were made the exact same way. And as Coconino National Forest Public Affairs Officer Brady Smith pointed out to *US Weekly*, "We have found that when one person carves something, it encourages others to carve." Especially when that person posts a selfie with the carving to her 10 million-plus Instagram followers. That can lead to stories like these:

- In 2014, a 21-year-old New York woman used permanent acrylics and markers to paint weird faces at iconic spots in seven national parks in the West. Then she posted selfies with the images onto her Facebook and Tumblr pages. (She got two years' probation.)
- In 2019, a young couple posted Instagram selfies of their freshly carved initials ("B+X") at Council Overhang, a 425-million-year-old rock formation and sacred Native American site in Illinois's Starved Rock State Park. At last report, they were still at large.

KEEP OFF THE BISON

Increased human presence has also wreaked havoc on the animals, especially at Yellowstone. Every visitor is warned at the entrance, in the visitors' guide, and on signs throughout the park *not* to approach the animals. But many do it anyway:

- "According to witnesses," said an NPS report, "a group of approximately

50 people were within 5–10 feet of the bison for at least 20 minutes before eventually causing the bison to charge the group." A disturbing 12-second video shows what happened next. Two adults run one way, leaving a 9-year-old Florida girl to fend for herself. Right after she turns to run, the charging, 1,000-pound bison head-butts her from behind, throwing her several feet through the air like a rag doll. (She survived.)

- In May 2016, two Yellowstone tourists, described in reports as a "father and son from another country," drove to a ranger station with a bison calf in their back seat and said they rescued it from a field because it looked too cold. The calf was later rejected by its herd and had to be euthanized. The dad got a ticket.

Similar reports from Yellowstone include a man who teased and then lunged at a bison, a woman who was injured after trying to take a selfie with a bison, and many more. "We're exceeding [our] capacity," said former Yellowstone superintendent Dan Wenk. "Our own species is having the greatest impact on the park."

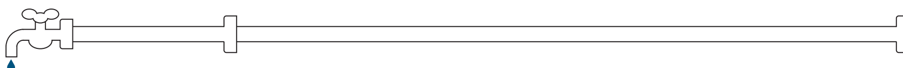
HERD MENTALITY

Another problem: people are trying to beat the crowds by going farther out into nature. In many remote areas, that's been bad news for nature. And it's been especially bad for the Vail elk herd, which inhabits a wilderness area in the Rocky Mountains near Vail, Colorado. In 2009, biologists flew above the herd and counted more than 1,000 elk roaming through the snowy terrain. Ten years later, biologists flew over the same herd and counted only 53. Instead of animal tracks, they saw ski tracks.

Until recently, many of these trails were considered "backcountry." Now, some of them see up to 500 hikers a day—and the elk must contend with hikers, bikers, backpackers, school field trips, photography workshops, and in many places Jeeps, all-terrain vehicles, and motorcycles. Thanks to improved mapping technology and more cell phone towers, people are making it farther into the wilderness than ever before, even in the winter, which brings a steady stream of snowmobiles and cross-country skiers.

Elk are so vulnerable because they are easily spooked—especially pregnant or nursing females. Whenever people enter their habitat, the skittish elk scatter and run away. When this happens every day and night (even "night hiking" is now a fad), the females can either become separated from their young—which are left vulnerable to predators and the elements—or the females become so stressed that they stop producing milk.

And the elks' decline isn't just happening in Colorado; similar elk populations are under siege at Point Reyes National Seashore, just north of San Francisco, and at several other remote areas once known for their solitude. Colorado Parks and



At least one tree planted by Johnny Appleseed in the 1840s still produces apples. It's in Savannah, Ohio.

Wildlife's district wildlife manager Devin Duval warns that if trail expansion into critical elk habitat continues, "it will be a biological desert."

LOUD NOISES!

"After visiting Monument Valley about 12 years ago, I was looking forward to showing it to my family," began a 1-star TripAdvisor review. "While the sites were still incredibly beautiful, the peaceful desert silence I remember from years ago is now marred by the sounds of tour buses and hundreds of tourists."

To find out exactly how loud it's gotten in protected areas, researchers at the NPS and Colorado State University made recordings at 492 sites across the country in 2017. Their findings, as reported by *Science* magazine: "Noise pollution from humans has doubled sound levels in more than half of all protected areas in the United States—from local nature reserves to national parks—and it has made some places 10 times louder." This does more than mar the human experience. It can negatively impact animals that rely on hearing to hunt, or to hide from hunters, or to find a mate.

WORST-CASE SCENARIOS

What's the worst that can happen? The damage suffered by California's Joshua Tree National Park during a partial government shutdown in January 2019 illustrates what could transpire if the NPS loses the ability to protect these sensitive areas. When staffers returned to a campground that had been closed for only *one week*, they discovered that hundreds of people had camped there anyway. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, they also discovered "24 miles of unauthorized trails carved into the desert landscape by off-road vehicles, along with some of the park's namesake trees toppled." Not just Joshua trees—dozens of juniper and acacias were chopped down and burned in more than 100 illegal firepits. Park officials said some of the more sensitive areas could take centuries to recover.

"Park and recreation funding has been slow to recover since the end of the recession," reported the National Recreation and Parks Association in 2018. The decade ended with a backlog of $11 billion for crucial maintenance to park trails and roads, while the NPS was facing even steeper budget cuts. Entrance fees were raised to $35 per vehicle, but it will take more than that to keep the parks maintained. One extreme example is the busy toilet at the top of Zion's Angels Landing trail: It costs $20,000 per year to empty by helicopter. Not all park toilets are that expensive, but there are thousands upon thousands of them filling up faster than ever before. And when the toilet lines get too long, nature becomes the toilet.

To find out how we can all enjoy the outdoors without soiling it for future generations, tread lightly over to page 382.

Pros and cons: Citizens of Monaco pay no taxes but are not allowed to step foot in the country's casinos (unless they work there).

APARKALYPSE NOW, PART III

If you read Part I about how America's national parks got so overcrowded (page 197) and the mayhem that ensued (page 344), then it might seem like our most treasured outdoor destinations have been ruined forever. That's far from the case.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

The U.S. Forest Service introduced Smokey Bear in 1944 as the mascot for its Wildfire Prevention Campaign. Woodsy Owl debuted in 1971 as the mascot for the children's Conservation Education Program. Maybe if the Forest Service's Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics (LNT), launched in Colorado in 1987, had a similar mascot, more people would know about the "Seven Principles of Leave No Trace." They are: "1) Plan ahead and prepare, 2) travel and camp on durable surfaces, 3) dispose of waste properly, 4) leave what you find, 5) minimize campfire impacts, 6) respect wildlife, and 7) be considerate of other visitors."

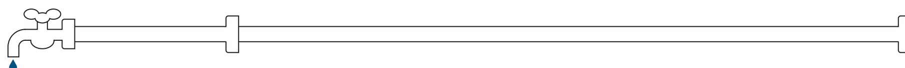
IN THE KNOW

The NPS's largest park is Alaska's Wrangell–St. Elias National Park and Preserve at 13.2 million acres (that's nearly two Rhode Islands). It also has the most elevation gain: 18,008 feet from sea level at the Gulf of Alaska to the summit of Mt. St. Elias, the second highest spot in the U.S.

LNT first published the list in 1999, but the seed for Leave No Trace was planted in the 1970s during the early days of the modern environmental movement. Back then, more Americans than ever before were going hiking and backpacking, but there was a prevailing "live off the land" mentality that made it seem like no big deal to pitch your tent wherever you liked and cut down trees for firewood. The Seven Principles were the culmination of decades of the LNT's research team drawing from "the latest insights from biologists, land managers, and other leaders in outdoor education."

THE DAY HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Because the original Seven Principles dealt mainly with the backcountry, LNT later issued a "front-country" version for day hikers and car campers. They are: "1) Know before you go, 2) stick to trails and camp overnight right, 3) trash your trash and pick up poop, 4) leave it as you find it, 5) be careful with fire, 6) keep wildlife wild, and 7) share our trails and manage your pet." You can read more about these on LNT's website. Some pointers:



Most popular pizza in Australia: Hawaiian pizza.

- **Don't Feed Wildlife:** Approaching and feeding an animal can alter its behavior, making it more likely to approach other people. As rangers often say, "A fed bear is a dead bear." Even throwing food scraps can cause harm. Although banana peels are technically biodegradable, they can take a long time to degrade. When eaten, scraps can alter an animal's organs so it can't digest its own food.
- **Don't Cut Switchbacks:** Trails that traverse steep slopes are zigzag-shaped for two reasons: to make the hike less strenuous, and—more importantly—to help maintain the integrity of the slope. But taking shortcuts, in addition to ruining the aesthetics, destroys vegetation and increases erosion.
- **Don't Pick Wildflowers:** The U.S. Forest Service strictly forbids removing any plant life from public lands. Why? "A critical chain of events is triggered for years to come once wildflowers are lost...Some pollinators depend on just one species of plant and die once their habitat has been destroyed." They add that it's not even worth it: "Wildflowers are fragile and many wilt and perish soon after being picked."
- **Tag Responsibly:** When it comes to sharing locations, LNT "encourages outdoor enthusiasts to stop and think about their actions and the potential consequences of posting pictures, GPS data, detailed maps, etc." It's also important for the more experienced enthusiasts, especially photographers, to set a good example by not going out of bounds just to get a better shot.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

And finally, we at the BRI wouldn't be doing our job if we didn't take this opportunity to tell you how to sh*t in the woods, Leave No Trace–style: Rule 1: Take it out with you in a bag. That's it.

However, if you are in the backcountry and you have no choice but to leave it out there, the experts recommend that you find a spot at least 200 feet from a water source, dig a hole eight inches deep, do your business, cover up your business, seal your toilet paper in a plastic bag, and at least take *that* out with you. And don't under any circumstances do this (as reported by LNT): "Zion's delicate desert ecosystem has been battered by tourists, some of whom wash diapers in the Virgin River."

Hopefully this all won't deter you from enjoying nature yourself. There are so many special places in the American West and elsewhere, with room enough for everyone to have fun—as long as you do some research before you head out and maintain a keen awareness of your surroundings while you're out there.