

Making Ripples

A Century to Celebrate: 100 Years of National Parks

by Amanda Bancroft

August 25th marked the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, which was created in 1916 by then-president Woodrow Wilson. But Yellowstone National Park, the nation's first, was established in 1872. We've enjoyed over a century of wild land and open, undeveloped spaces, and are about to leap into the second century of the National Park Service preserving these places. Autumn is a great time to visit our national parks to escape the pressures of everyday life, learn about history, engage in outdoor recreation, or explore nature.

People are going wild about the centennial! Free admission to all 412 national parks is offered during select days of 2016. Events have been going on around the country to celebrate culture, history, and conservation. College students raced solar-powered vehicles on a route through nine national parks this summer. The US Postal Service has released sixteen Forever stamps featuring photographs from the national parks. The film "National Parks Adventure," narrated by Robert Redford, was recently released for IMAX and giant screen theaters to take viewers on a virtual exploration of many national parks. Classical music was recently performed by the Eastman School of Music within seven national parks for "Music in the American Wild."

Arkansas isn't called the Natural State for nothing – we have an abundance of wild places here, as well as historical monuments, mountains, and springs. Our state offers the Buffalo National River (the nation's first national river!) and "America's Spa" in Hot Springs National Park. But if you're stuck at home for whatever reason, Google has us covered. "The Hidden Worlds of the National Parks" is a newly released Google Arts & Culture interactive online exhibit. You can virtually take a helicopter ride over volcanoes, go scuba diving, descend 750 feet into a cavern, climb 30 feet down into a glacier, or gaze at constellations - all within five lesser-known but amazing national parks. Viewers can access the virtual tours using Google's Arts & Culture app on Apple iOS and Android devices or by going to g.co/nationalparks.

Ready to plan your adventure? Visit FindYourPark.com and enjoy an interactive website full of features to explore, including a map of all the national parks and a search engine to find what you're looking for. All of these natural wonders and historical moments were preserved by average people like you who wanted future generations to see it someday. Even a medium-sized backyard is worth tending and protecting: the approaching Monarch butterfly migrants might see your backyard as a lifesaving campsite.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.