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Nevada State Parks

An Adventure Waiting to be Discovered

BY RODNEY OROSCO

At Nevada State Parks, you can experience the quiet of hiking a forest trail and the thrill of water skiing. You can comb the hot desert to learn about fossilized megafauna or go ice fishing in the dead of winter. Let that sink in.

“You can ice fish at the park,” confirms Nevada State Parks Administrator Eric Johnson, who has been spreading the word on the wonders of Nevada State Parks for 30 years. “People can really get the experience they seek.”

It may seem amazing that all this can be found in one state, but the 3.6 million people who visit Nevada State Parks each year have figured it out.

Whether an adventure involves remote camping far away from people or the comfort of a shower each morning, Johnson says Nevada State Parks can be the backdrop.

“We rely on comments from our visitors to help accommodate their needs,” he explains. That has led to adding more RV hook-ups, allowing leashed dogs at almost every park, and Wi-Fi access at some locations (for those who may want to look up that wildflower they just spotted).

Nevada’s unique geological history makes for some stunning adventures. On a walk through Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park, visitors will encounter a Mesozoic-era marine creature that once called Nevada home, back when it was covered by a warm-water ocean.

“The Ichthyosaurs you see at the Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park died at what was then the equator,” Johnson says. After 225 million years, the earth has moved a bit, Johnson points out.

If marveling at fossils is too “old school,” visitors to the park can walk through more recent history at the remains of an authentic Nevada ghost town.

If that is still not enough, parks visitors can take a guided wildflower walk at Spooner Lake, make adobe bricks at Fort Churchill, or work on their atlatl-throwing skills at Valley of Fire (that’s an ancient spear, for those unfamiliar with native weaponry).

Helping people experience a different kind of state park is what Nevada is all about.

“The Nevada State Parks hold on to that independent Western spirit,” Johnson says.

“THE PARKS HOLD ON TO THAT INDEPENDENT WESTERN SPIRIT.”

Eric Johnson
Nevada State Parks Administrator



GET OUT THERE!

Need incentive to go camping? Consider the following:

- Park entrance day-use fees range from **\$5 to \$10**
- Overnight camping fees are **\$15 to \$20** a night
- **No reservations** needed for camping
- **Campfires** are permitted in all State Parks, unless otherwise posted
- **Dogs** on leashes are allowed at most parks
- There is a “No Turn Away” policy for **bicyclists**, even when the park is full
- **RV hook-ups** are available at some parks for an additional fee
- You can stay in a **yurt**
- Campsites are accessible to those with **disabilities**
- There are parks that offer very **remote** camping
- You can go **ice fishing** (and regular fishing, too)
- You can take your **horse** to most parks

Exploring Nevada – One Park at a Time

Nevadan puts in the miles to visit 15 State Parks in one year

BY RODNEY OROSCO

Wrangle the dogs in the truck, attach the pop-up trailer, grab the binoculars and head out on the road for about an hour to get into it all — oh, and don't forget the passport. This describes just about any weekend for Sara Danta of Carson City, Nev.

The Carson City resident says she never leaves on an adventure without her special Nevada State Parks Passport — and her dogs Tucker and Dolly.

"The passport was a good way for me to bond with my new state," the former California resident said. Fifteen state parks and 12 months later, the retired paralegal is now one of Nevada State Parks' biggest fans.

"It is a big, wide, diverse state out there," she says. "People need to go discover this gorgeous land."

The Parks Passport program was designed to challenge and encourage Nevada residents and visitors to experience the diverse natural, cultural and recreational resources that span all of Nevada's State Parks. Passport-holders who visit 15 parks earn a free annual pass good for admission to all State Parks.

Danta not only found a whole new world through the program, she found a whole new friend.

The 62-year-old retiree met another passport enthusiast, Sharon Marie Wilcox. With their dogs in tow, the pair have been crisscrossing Nevada from one adventure to the next. Just some of their travels: The geology of Valley of Fire,

**"PEOPLE NEED TO
GO DISCOVER THIS
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Sara Danta
Nevada State Parks aficionado

scoping out fall colors at Beaver Dam, and birding around Lahontan ("The birds are just amazing here!" she exclaims).

Another thing she loves about Nevada State Parks? She can take her dogs camping with her. Her ridgeback mix, Tucker, and the dachshund mix, Dolly, are her constant camping companions — that was not always the case when she went camping in California.

"The dogs are wonderful to have out there with me," she says.

It is also wonderful to have the parks so well maintained. "The bathrooms are so clean and well kept up," she says, "and so many parks have showers."

Even if it is just driving through the Valley of Fire, or staying in a hotel and taking a day trip to a park, Danta says Nevada is waiting.

"People need to get out of their bubble and discover this amazing state," she says.



YOUR CAMPING PACKING LIST

- ☐ **VACUUM THERMOS:**
A cup of hot Joe can make any place feel like home
- ☐ **LANTERN:**
Find a good solar-powered one — batteries die at the worst time
- ☐ **METAL COOKSET:**
For al fresco cooking
- ☐ **CAMP CHAIR:**
They fold up nice and sitting in dirt is not romantic
- ☐ **GOOD SLEEPING BAG:**
Invest in a grown-up bag designed to handle the brrrr temps
- ☐ **SLEEPING MAT:**
For a good night's sleep
- ☐ **COMPASS:**
It's like an old-school map app
- ☐ **GOOD PORTABLE CAMP STOVE:**
Eating hot food is a no-brainer
- ☐ **FIRST-AID KIT:**
Because you just never know
- ☐ **TENT:**
Find a good one and practice putting it together
- ☐ **TRASH BAGS:**
For trash (or for emergency poncho use)
- ☐ **MATCHES, LIGHTER:**
We've evolved — fire, good
- ☐ **WOOD:**
Because campfires + starry skies = pure bliss
- ☐ **COOLER:**
To keep those perishables cool



Choose Your Own Adventure



Get in gear!



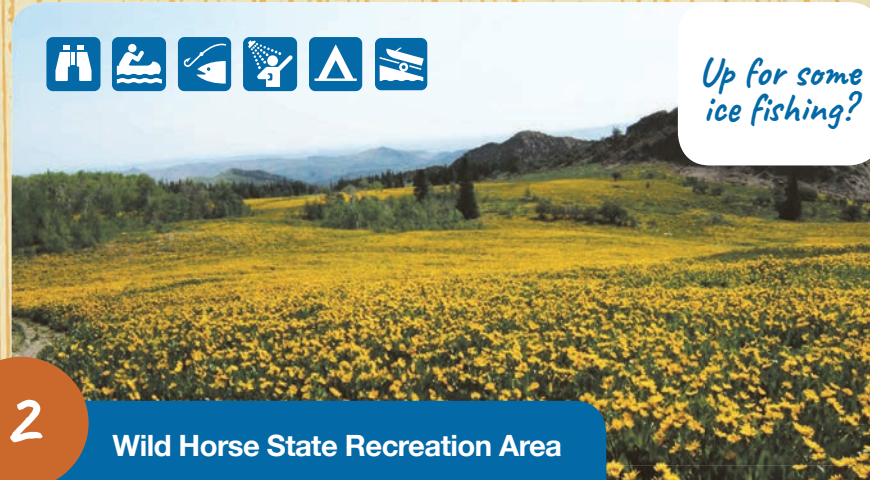
1

Beaver Dam State Park

This park offers a great spot for the **mountain bike enthusiast**. Every year, the bold participate in the annual Gravel Grinder bike ride. The terrain is rough (hence the name), so participants need to bring whatever they might need to fix tires and chains or perform other repairs. For those more inclined to keep both feet on the ground, the park offers a peaceful environment for **hiking, camping and fishing**. Accented by streams and waterfalls, fragrant pinyon, juniper and ponderosa forests, and dramatic outcrops of volcanic and sedimentary rocks, the park is a designated Watchable Wildlife Area — visitors are likely to see turkeys, jackrabbits and porcupines during their visit.



Up for some ice fishing?



2

Wild Horse State Recreation Area

This remote park is great for year-round adventures. Enjoy ice fishing or **ice skating in the winter**. Come spring, extraordinary **wildflowers** blanket the park, and summer offers **swimming, boating, camping and hiking**. The park is also a great base camp for off-highway vehicle riders and snowmobiling. Although hunting is not allowed in the park, the campground is a popular base camp for hunting in the surrounding area. Wildlife includes pronghorn, mule deer and elk, as well as a variety of waterfowl and upland game birds.



Ghost towns and fossils!



4

Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park

Only in Nevada: Explore the **fossils** of an ocean-swimming dinosaur, then walk the streets of an **abandoned mining town**. The park is home to an abundant concentration of Ichthyosaur fossils. The ancient marine reptile swam in a warm ocean that covered central Nevada 225 million years ago. The fossils are displayed at the park's Fossil House. A more recent fossil, the town of Berlin, was built in the 1890s and is a true Nevada ghost town. Many of Berlin's original buildings remain and some of its original residents are interred in the town's cemetery. Trails throughout the town site tell the story of Berlin and its mine.



Yes, we have bandit hideouts



5

Ward Charcoal Ovens State Historic Park

This park features six beehive-shaped **charcoal ovens** that were used from 1876 through 1879 to help process silver ore that was discovered in the area. Once mining ended, the ovens were used to shelter travelers and even had a reputation as a hideout for stagecoach bandits. The ovens remain today and are open for touring. Visitors can also enjoy **camping, picnicking, hiking and fishing** while surrounded by a diversity of wildlife within the park, including mule deer, grouse and elk. Make sure to explore nearby Cave Lake State Park.

Beat the crowds at one of these six ‘hidden’ parks



*A water
wonderland*

3

Spring Valley State Park

The 59-acre Eagle Valley Reservoir makes this park a great trip for **boating, swimming, camping and fishing**. The park also gives visitors the opportunity to tour **historic ranches** built in the late 1800s. Thanks to the reservoir, birders are likely to spy an array of waterfowl and shore birds, including mallards, herons, avocets and the trumpeter swan. Campers and hikers share the canyons and valleys with soaring eagles, hawks and songbirds.



*Where the
Old West
comes alive*

6

Mormon Station State Historic Park

Few parks are more idyllic for a **picnic**. Mormon Station’s lush lawns and mature trees make it a wonderful location to gather with friends and family. The site of Nevada’s first permanent, non-native settlement, Mormon Station was built in 1851 as a trading post along the Carson Route of the California Trail. Today, the park is home to a reconstructed version of the original trading post and a **museum** with original pioneer-era artifacts. Popular annual events include the **Candy Dance**.

KEY TO ADVENTURE



Fishing: Yes, there is excellent fishing — bring your license



Campsites: Pitch the tent and enjoy the solitude



Horseback riding: Bring your four-legged ride



Watersports: Bring the paddles and the life vest



Showers: Because you just need the “AHHHH” factor



Historic site: The past comes alive



Bike Trails: Pedal your way through the park



Boat Launch: Check signage for speed

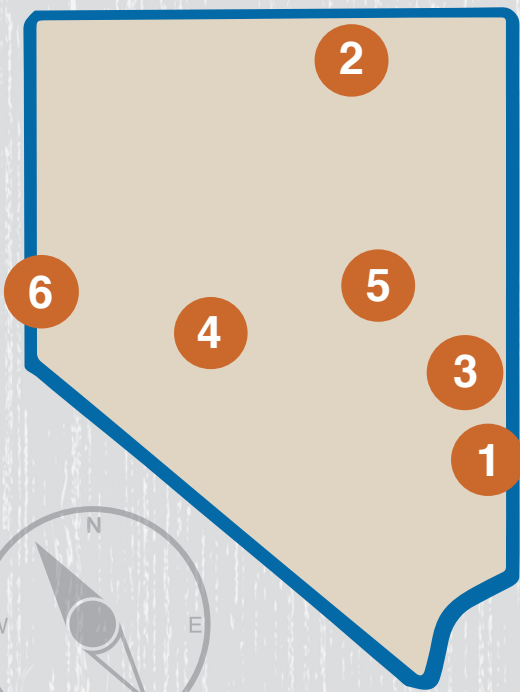


Bird Watching: Is that a Mountain Bluebird?



Picnic Area: For a little outdoor dining

Which State Park is near you?



Whether he's mountain biking or winning chili cook-offs, parks visitor has had many adventures

Always in Motion



Kevin Smith has participated in the annual Park-to-Park Pedal, which takes participants on a 100-mile bike ride through four Nevada State Parks.

COURTESY PHOTO

BY RODNEY OROSCO

Every year, Kevin Smith sees Nevada's State Parks at very different speeds.

Sometimes he is zipping along at 15-20 miles an hour. Other times he is trekking over a forest trail. Often he is ambling after his young grandchildren. And, there are times he is not moving at all, like when he sits down to enjoy the view — or a bowl of his award-winning chili.

Smith takes full advantage of the adventures offered at the five parks located near his Caliente home.

One of them is the annual Park-to-Park Pedal bike ride.

The event inspired Smith to start bike riding. He saw training for the ride as an opportunity to improve his health and start exercising more. He's been doing the ride for seven years now and has done several other rides in other states — but this is his favorite.

"I particularly enjoy the Park-to-Park ride because it is in my own area and I enjoy showing other people the area where I live," he says. "I hear many comments about how beautiful the area is and many say they want to come back and bring their families and friends."

The 100-mile, daylong ride traverses through four state parks: Kershaw-Ryan, Cathedral Gorge, Spring Valley and Echo Canyon. While there are 40- and 60-mile options, the 100-Mile Extreme is the most intense, with approximately 5,600 feet of climbing that takes cyclists past two Old West towns and up Pioche Hill.

"There is great satisfaction in making a goal and accomplishing it," Smith said of the challenging ride.

"Sometimes I go alone. Sometimes my adult kids come with me. One year my 10-year-old grandkids did about 14 miles with me then turned around."

When he'd rather wear his hiking boots than his helmet, Smith hits the trails for a chance to see the parks in more depth at a slower pace.

For the past several years, Smith and his wife have spent New Year's Day going on First Day Hikes, an annual ranger-guided walk through a park. The couple have taken part in First Day Hikes at Kershaw-Ryan, Cathedral Gorge and Echo Canyon State Parks. Waking up on day one of the new year is a transformative experience.

"It may be the same park," he says, "yet depending on the

**"IT MAY BE THE SAME PARK,
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Kevin Smith
Chief Operating Officer, Nevada Bank and Trust

time of year it is a different kind of beauty."

After a long day of hiking, there's nothing better than a campfire-cooked meal. In fact, Smith and his wife are camping cuisine aficionados and frequent entrants in the annual Cathedral Gorge State Park Dutch Oven Cook-off.

"We've cooked rolls, corn bread, chili," he explains, "and we win prizes about every time."

Smith points out that Nevada's landscape is alive with beauty — no matter what kind of adventure you embark upon.

"The State Parks are not big ugly deserts," he says. "You have green mountains, juniper trees and green pastures."

YOUR THREE-DAY ADVENTURE ITINERARY

Set up camp at Cathedral Gorge

The campground has 22 sites, each with a table, grill and shade, and RV hook-ups.

Once you get settled, explore the slot canyons and cathedral-like spires that are the result of geologic processes from tens of millions of years ago. A photographer's dream, the park offers stunning views of the scenic canyon.

DAY 1



Fishing and birding at Spring Valley

The next day, take a 20-minute drive to Spring Valley State Park, which offers fishermen an opportunity to catch rainbow, tiger and German brown trout. Day-trippers will share the scenery with eagles, hawks, mallards, herons, avocets and the occasional trumpeter swan. Visitors can also tour historic ranches built in the late 1800s.

DAY 2



Valley of Fire

Pull up stakes, pile into your wagon and head 2 1/2 hours south to drive through a geological marvel. World-renowned for its 40,000 acres of red, sandstone outcrops nestled in gray and tan limestone, Valley of Fire contains ancient, petrified trees and petroglyphs dating back more than 2,000 years. The visitor center provides exhibits on the geology, ecology, prehistory and history of the park and nearby region.

DAY 3



Meet the Ranger



“I LOVE MEETING NEW PEOPLE AND SHARING MY PASSION AND ENTHUSIASM ABOUT THE PARKS WITH OTHERS.”

Jennifer Dawson
Nevada State Parks Ranger

PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS

Q&A with Jennifer Dawson

Nevada State Parks Ranger Jennifer Dawson has been a ranger for 18 years and is currently stationed at Washoe Lake State Park. Here, she shares how to get the most out of your Nevada State Parks visit.

What advice would you give a newbie camper?

It's not as intimidating as you might think. You don't have to spend a lot of money on gear to get started, just get the basics. If you can, try out your gear before you come.

Should campers be afraid of being alone in the wilderness?

No, they shouldn't be afraid of being alone; however, campers should always be prepared for changing and diverse conditions. Although camping in the wilderness carries inherent risks, Nevada State Parks Rangers are available to help you in any way we can.

Why should people visit Nevada State Parks?

We have a park for every adventure, and we pride ourselves on providing a personal experience — our employees are accessible, from the administrator to the seasonal staff.

What wild animals might campers run into, and should they be worried?

Visitors have seen desert bighorn sheep, coyotes, deer, jackrabbits, bears, lizards and pelicans. We recommend people be respectful of wild animals and use common sense — maintain distance and enjoy the view.

What is the most common question you get from campers?

It varies from park to park, but the most common questions are: “What is there to do?” “What's the best trail?” and “Where are the bathrooms?”

Why do you enjoy being a ranger?

I love combining my two favorite interests: working outside and teaching kids about the parks. I love meeting new people and sharing my passion and enthusiasm about the parks with others. Every day is different, I love working in an ever-changing environment.

Is your job ever dull?

No, it is never dull. The job is challenging — Nevada State Parks Rangers wear a lot of different hats. What you think will be a somewhat ordinary day of talking to park visitors and cleaning bathrooms can very easily transition to searching for a missing hiker, providing first aid to a child who fell into stinging nettles, assisting the maintenance staff on a broken water line or providing traffic control during a fire. The night could end with me taking a group of Scouts on a scorpion hunt using black lights or helping a new-to-camping family set up their tent.

JENNIFER'S TOP 10 TIPS

- 1 Be respectful of other visitors.
- 2 Many Nevada State Parks offer fishing. Remember to bring your fishing license so you can catch dinner.
- 3 You bring the marshmallows, we'll provide the fire ring.
- 4 Temperatures in Nevada can range from -45 degrees to 125 degrees Fahrenheit, plan and pack accordingly.
- 5 Plan to visit often — you'll need multiple trips to see everything the parks have to offer.
- 6 Leave the electronics at home — enjoy the solitude.
- 7 Ask a ranger — get the inside scoop on the park's best features.
- 8 Leave the park better than you found it.
- 9 If you bring your dog, don't forget the leash.
- 10 Don't forget to pack your sense of adventure!

Adventure is Calling



To plan your Nevada State Parks adventure and to learn more about each park, visit parks.nv.gov

- Get **detailed descriptions and pictures** of each park
- Find park **tour** information and special events
- Request park **trail maps**
- Get up-to-date **weather** conditions
- Learn how you can **volunteer** to keep the parks a state treasure

CATHEDRAL GORGE STATE PARK

PASSPORT TO DISCOVERY

A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first stamp. Getting a stamp in your Nevada State Parks Passport is about discovering Nevada, crisscrossing the state and enjoying an adventure of remarkable beauty.

Your Nevada State Parks Passport serves as a travel aid as well as travelogue. It includes photos, a description of each park, a list of each park's amenities, travel journal pages and spaces for individual park validation stamps, which have

been designed to reflect the uniqueness of each state park.

Adventure travelers who collect stamps from 15 parks earn a free annual pass to enjoy all parks!

Pick up your passport during your next visit to any Nevada State Park, or request one by mail by calling (775) 684-2770.

