

Celebrating a Century: America's National Parks

My Trip to Glacier National Park

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June 7

The sign to the right of the car read, "Welcome to Glacier National Park!" I felt more than welcome. The mountains, the lakes... It was all so beautiful! My dad was in the driver's seat, taking in the view as we arrived at Glacier National Park in Montana from our home in Vancouver, Washington. We had decided to stay in a tent with a heap of blankets. We found a good spot to pitch up near the Sprague Creek Campground and wandered our way back up to the Ranger Station.

At the Station, we were presented with a bevy of information relating to the park – date of establishment (May 11, 1910), land area (over a million acres), official symbol (mountain goat), number of yearly visitors (usually around two million). Why was the park created, I wondered? Looking on the National Park Service website, I found this explanation: "By the late 1800s, influential leaders like George Bird Grinnell, pushed for the creation of a national park. In 1910, Grinnell and others saw their efforts rewarded when President Taft signed the bill establishing Glacier as the country's 10th national park." Grinnell was a strong supporter of conservationism and saw the park's founding as a monumental success.

June 8

Today, my dad and I went on a hike of Gunsight Pass. We got about halfway through the hike and noticed that the ecosystem around us had changed a lot. As we hiked east, we saw fewer and fewer trees. When we got back to the Ranger Station, we were astonished to learn that we had crossed the Continental Divide during our hike! The western part of Glacier

National Park, which drains to the Pacific, has a much wetter climate because it's lower in elevation. That explained the thinning tree line.

On our hike, we passed a group of tourists from Spain. It's crazy how Glacier attracts people from all over the world! I think the park is so popular because of how beautiful it is no matter where you come from. It's clear to me why George Bird Grinnell used the phrase "Crown of the Continent" to describe Glacier back in 1901 in an article he wrote for *Century Magazine* – which exists today as *Field and Stream* magazine.

June 9

We packed our fishing rods into the car and drove off to beautiful Avalanche Lake, which is nestled at the foot of Bearhat Mountain. We aren't good fishermen – the last time we were out fishing, we didn't catch any fish, even though the osprey caught two. But we have fun, and that's all that matters. Today we got lucky. We caught three cutthroat trout, but decided to release them due to their tiny size.

While at the lake, we saw loads of wildlife native to the park. We spotted four mountain goats, two bighorn sheep, and a doe with two fawns. I heard a rumbling sound in the distance toward the mountains, which turned out to be an avalanche off in the distance! I read in a travel brochure that in late spring those avalanches turn into huge waterfalls. I wish I could come back to see them!

Back at our tent, I cooked us a mean dinner of hotdogs. My dad's trusty camping stove from the 1960s is still holding up! (It's about as old as he is.) The only mistake we made was forgetting buns – we had to use slices of bread. The food was still great!

June 10

I woke up feeling colder than I ever had before. It was 38 degrees outside, which was colder than the typical low temperature for June. Plus, I had kicked off my blankets during the night. That was a mistake! When I got up, I pulled all my blankets and a heavy coat around me, but I was still so cold! I chugged some hot chocolate, not caring if it burned my tongue. I finally warmed up after thirty minutes of torture.

We decided that since it was our last day at the park, we should take the guided tour offered by the National Park Service. Our tour guide, Fred, grew up near the park and had worked at the park for twenty years. He took us on the "Western Alpine Tour" in a bus. We drove along the Going-to-the-Sun Road and saw beautiful glaciers and mountains.

Before we left, I made sure to stop by the Ranger Station to thank the rangers for taking the time to get other people interested in the park, and nature in general. You can't put a price

on what they do. My dad and I agreed that Glacier National Park was a national treasure! The scenic mountain ranges, the pristine lakes, and – of course – the glaciers combine to make Glacier a wonderful experience. I think it's very likely that one day, I'll be taking *my* kids to Glacier National Park too.

THE END

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