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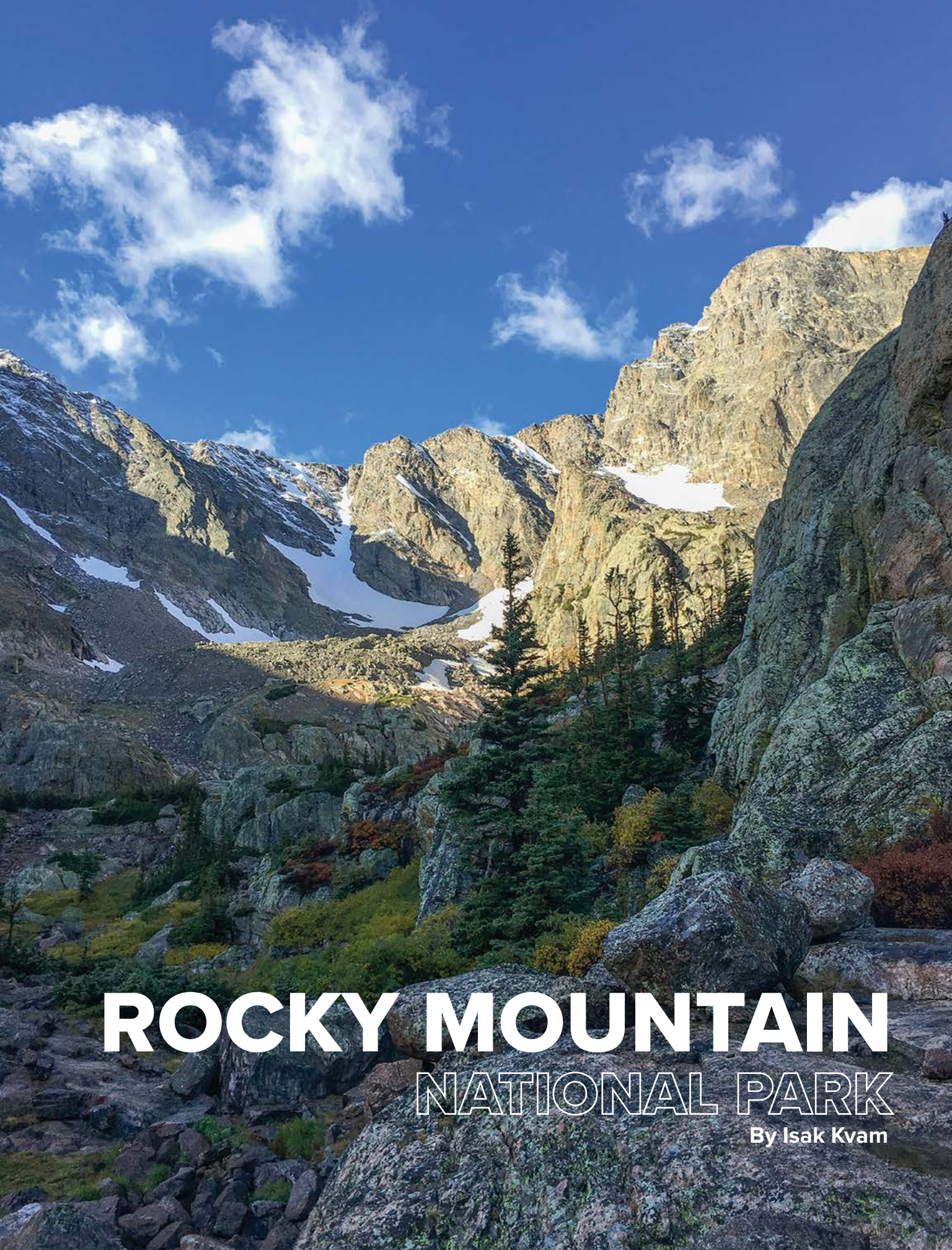
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ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK • RV TECH SCHOOL



ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

By Isak Kvam



Rocky Mountain National Park in north-central Colorado is iconic for a reason: it's chock-full of towering mountains, alpine lakes, roaming elk herds, and miles and miles of green forests. It offers some of the best day-hikes in the country, and with paved roads weaving into the mountains, a diverse set of landscapes and animals, too. My girlfriend Maria and I visited the park for a month last fall in our self-converted Ram Promaster, and in our first weekend we saw elk, marmots, pika, mule deer, and bighorn sheep. Outdoor enthusiasts could spend years exploring the nooks and crannies of this park, but there's plenty to experience in one weekend, too.

When you first arrive in Rocky Mountain National Park from Estes Park, stop at the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center to learn about the park. You can plan out what hikes and areas you'd like to visit and ask the park rangers questions. You'd be surprised how helpful they can be for planning the perfect hike and recommending underrated areas. Then, head to their small auditorium to watch the short movie about the park.

Next, drive up Trail Ridge Road to the Alpine Visitor's Center on your first day in the park. It's the highest-elevation NPS Visitor Center in the nation! Trail Ridge Road is the 'road to the sky' that offers sweeping views of the Rockies in all directions as you climb over 4,000 vertical feet on switchback roads. It is a higher-trafficked road in the park, but you can also take the Old Fall River Road from June to September if you've got a 4x4 vehicle. Our Promaster doesn't have 4x4, so we had a blast

driving on Trail Ridge Road in the fall beneath the yellow aspen trees. We climbed higher and higher until it felt like we were in the clouds, mountain peaks poking up in all directions and pikas squeaking in the distance.

As for hiking, any of the trails up Bear Lake Road are unforgettable. But be warned: the parking lots fill up very early! Maria and I hiked to Nymph Lake and Emerald Lake one morning, and the parking lot had filled up by 6:30 a.m. If you've been meaning to take a sunrise hike, this is the place to do it. The trail to Nymph Lake and Emerald Lake is one I'd recommend to nearly everyone: 3.1 miles with only 700 feet of elevation gain with views of beautiful lakes, forests and mountains. This is the ideal view of mountains you've always dreamed of.

On our second weekend, Maria and I got up early to park at the Glacier Gorge Trailhead off Bear Lake Road and hike my absolute favorite trail in the park: Sky Pond. This is an 8.1-mile, out-and-back difficult trail with beautiful views of alpine lakes, but there is a tricky scramble up a waterfall to get to the final section. We trudged along in a dense, wet fog for the first half of our hike, but the hard work was well worth it. When we climbed past the waterfall and arrived at Sky Pond, the fog finally lifted, and we were greeted with a stunning view of towering peaks surrounding us.

Maria and I love traveling through public lands on our nomadic journey, and Rocky Mountain National Park is one of our favorite spots we've visited so far. We've been

on a slow tour through the western national parks while we grow our business Seek More Wilderness, where we sell outdoor lifestyle apparel and donate 50% of profits to protecting public lands like Rocky Mountain National Park. By mixing work and play on our travels, we've had a blast not just exploring the national parks but advocating for them, too.

Another great area of the park is past the Fall River entrance station. After a long day working in the Estes Valley library – a great work spot in town – we decided to grab a pizza from Antonio's and drive up Horseshoe Park. We pulled off at a trailhead near Sheep Lakes and had a picnic in the meadow while we listened to the elk bugling fill the mountain valley. Afterward, we hiked the alluvial fan, which was formed after the Lawn Lake Dam collapsed in 1982. When the dam burst and water raged down the mountain, it carried debris and boulders as large as cars into the valley below. Today, you can hike to this alluvial fan of debris that was left behind from the flood. It's a short, simple hike from the parking lot with a great view of the mountain valley.

You can visit Rocky Mountain National Park year-round, but I'd recommend visiting in September if you like hiking. The mornings and nights are cool, the elk are in rut - their voices echo over the mountain valleys. In fall, the leaves are beginning to change color and the trails aren't muddy like earlier in the season. That's not to say you shouldn't visit during other seasons, though. Winter provides a great opportunity to snowshoe, enjoy the snow-covered mountains, and have more solitude





on the trail. And of course, you can't beat the blooming wildflowers of spring or long, sunny days of summer.

Estes Park has several RV campgrounds that are just minutes from the park entrance, including Spruce Lake RV Park and Manor RV Park. Once you're set up, head downtown. Estes Park has great restaurants, charming local shops, and some great breweries, too. We had to visit Antonio's Real New York Pizza, which promised delicious pizza, and we were not disappointed. (Pro-tip: grab it to-go and have a picnic in the park. Don't forget the tiramisu!) We paired it with some Estes Park beer, which was incredible. If you're looking for the perfect spot for a date night, head to SEASONED or The View. If you're a family, Antonio's is great, and so is The Egg of Estes and Mountain Home Cafe.

When you've finished with Rocky Mountain National Park, there are still plenty of other places to see in the area. Start with the Stanley Hotel, the old, historic hotel that's full of beautiful views and inspired Stephen King to write *The Shining*. After that, head to the Art Center, walk the riverwalk, catch a concert from Performance Park, or enjoy the views from the top of the Aerial Tram. Whether you're in town for days or months, you won't run out of things to do!

About the Author:

Isak is an entrepreneur and freelance outdoor writer. He travels full-time through western public lands with his girlfriend Maria in their self-converted van. They left their traditional life in Minnesota to live intentionally and grow their business Seek More Wilderness, which provides outdoor lifestyle apparel that defends the wild. When they're not advocating for public lands, you can find them downhill skiing, housesitting in mountain towns, or scoping out the local coffee shops. Follow them on Instagram [@IsakandMaria](https://www.instagram.com/IsakandMaria) and shop the brand [@SeekMoreWilderness](https://www.seekmorewilderness.com) at [SeekMoreWilderness.com](https://www.seekmorewilderness.com)

