OUR NATIONAL
MONUMENTS

OUR NATIONAL MONUMENTS

America's Hidden Gems

QT LUONG

Foreword by SALLY JEWELL

Marine National Monuments text and photographs by IAN SHIVE

With contributions from 27 citizen organizations protecting our public lands and waters at risk

TERRA GALLERIA PRESS
San Jose, California

CONTENTS

Foreword *by Sally Jewell* · 8

Introduction · 10

MAINE · 16
Katahdin Woods and Waters · 18

MONTANA · 28
Upper Missouri River Breaks · 30

WASHINGTON · 40
Hanford Reach · 42

IDAHO · 52
Craters of the Moon · 54

OREGON · 66
Cascade-Siskiyou · 68

CALIFORNIA· 80
Berryessa Snow Mountain · 82
Giant Sequoia · 90
Carrizo Plain · 102
San Gabriel Mountains · 112
Sand to Snow · 124
Mojave Trails · 134

NEVADA · 146
Basin and Range · 148
Gold Butte · 160

UTAH · 172
Bears Ears · 174
Grand Staircase–Escalante · 188

COLORADO · 202
Canyons of the Ancients · 204

ARIZONA · 210
Vermilion Cliffs · 212
Grand Canyon–Parashant · 224
Sonoran Desert · 234
Ironwood Forest · 242

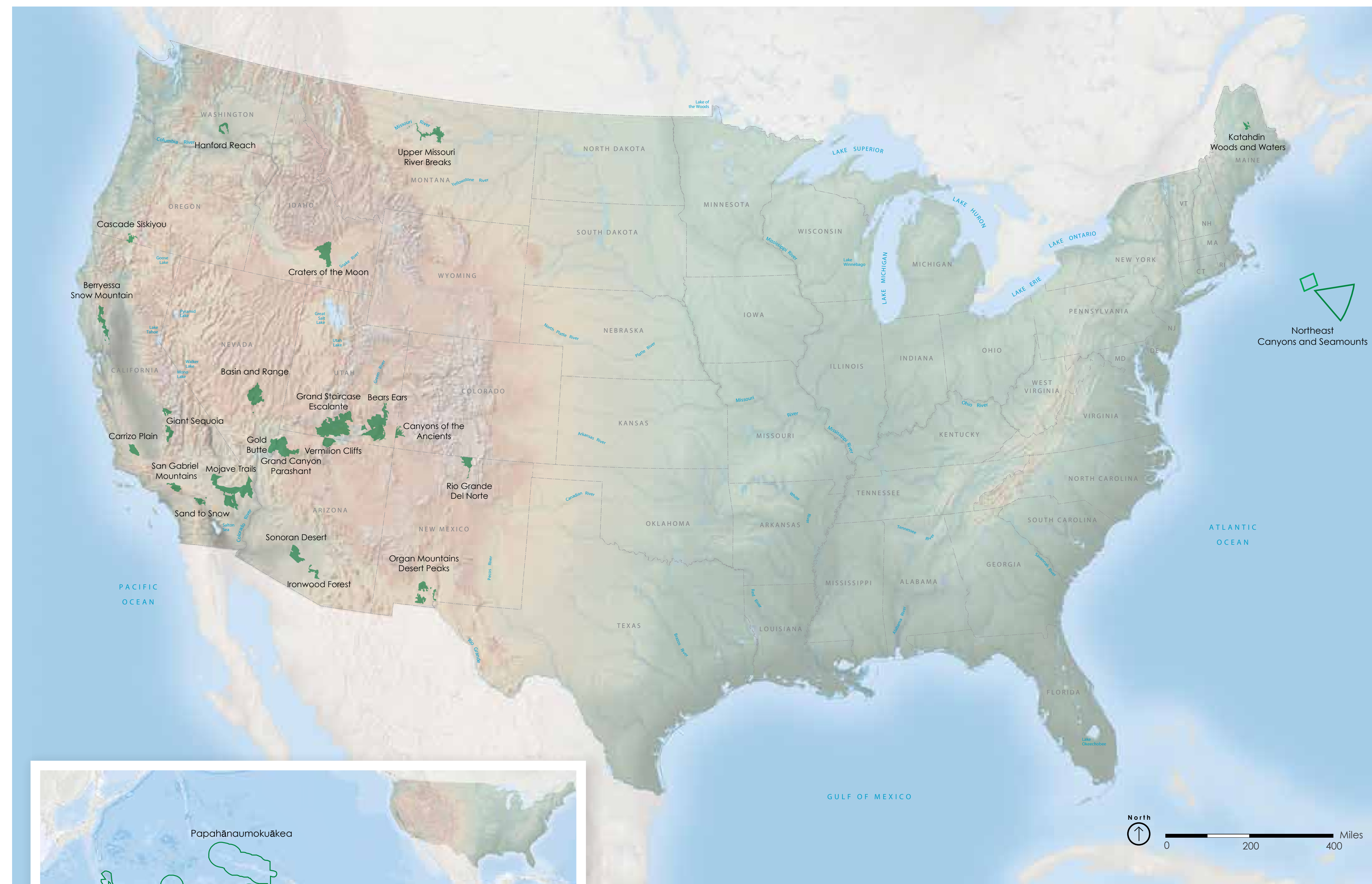
NEW MEXICO · 250
Rio Grande del Norte · 252
Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks · 262

MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENTS · 274
Papahānaumokuākea · 276
Pacific Remote Islands · 284
Rose Atoll · 290
Mariana Trench · 296
Northeast Canyons and Seamounts · 300

Afterword · 304

Acknowledgments · 306

Colophon · 308



Owners of this book can purchase an electronic, extended version of the travel notes with full maps at a reduced price: OurNationalMonuments.com/ebook

FOREWORD

SALLY JEWELL

As a childhood immigrant to the United States, my family developed a deep appreciation of nature through exploring the towering forests and dazzling waters of our new home in the Pacific Northwest. In the six-plus decades since, I have witnessed population growth and development alter these landscapes, making it clear that without sensible protections, everything is vulnerable. In serving as US Secretary of the Interior under President Barack Obama, I came to further understand the irreplaceable value and uniqueness of America's public lands and waters and the importance of listening to the collective knowledge of the original stewards of these natural gifts—indigenous communities whose ancestors lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years. With each passing year, modern science blends with traditional knowledge to evolve our understanding of what is needed to shape a sustainable future for all life on land and sea.

We now know that the unique biodiversity, habitat, and culture of the United States cannot be sustained through a patchwork of protected areas that lack the interconnectivity needed to sustain healthy plant and animal life, especially at this time of climate change. US presidents and members of Congress, dating back to President Abraham Lincoln, have heard from caring citizens across the nation about the importance of protecting natural, cultural, and historic places that have irreplaceable treasures under threat from a multitude of human activities. Our understanding of these threats has evolved by witnessing the long-term impacts of unnatural disturbance, from unsustainable extraction of resources to roads, development, and destructive recreational uses in areas we now recognize as important to preserve.

Each of the twenty-seven examples in this book is introduced by people on the ground, in the local communities, who have advocated tirelessly for the protection of these landscapes they know so well. Through his stunning photography of national monuments, coupled with the words of these contemporary advocates, QT Luong captivates us all, making a compelling case for protecting a rich diversity of public lands and waters by recent presidents. Subsequent studies reflect the wisdom of this approach, such as the discovery of over a dozen new dinosaur species in Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument in an area that was slated for mining. In expanded marine national monuments in the Pacific, apex predators are returning, restoring healthy ocean life previously at risk from unsustainable commercial fishing. The creation of Bears Ears National Monument was shaped by five American Indian tribes that urged protection of lands deeply important to sustaining their diverse cultures, deepening our understanding of the importance of habitat, native species, and the protection of cultural sites on lands threatened by looting, unsustainable recreational use, and development. Each national monument in this book illustrates the importance of the Antiquities Act of 1906, providing presidents with the power to immediately protect our nation's treasures that are under threat. Using this same Act to undermine protections makes no sense, despite efforts to the contrary initiated in mid-2017.

Humanity is awakening to the importance of intact lands, waters, and ecosystems to our health and well-being, and the stresses we have placed on them through our actions. Before settlement by newcomers, American public lands were shared common resources of indigenous communities who understood the importance of taking only what was needed. With the protections chronicled in this book, and others being studied and advocated for by a wide array of citizens, I am hopeful our grandchildren and the generations to follow will be thankful that these lands and waters were protected, and their curiosity nurtured by a deeper understanding of nature's capacity to provide all living beings with a sustainable future.

Utah, May 2021

INTRODUCTION

QT Luong

Our National Monuments

National Park, National Monument, Wilderness Study Area, Wild and Scenic—America's public lands and waters have a variety of designations that don't necessarily mean much to many, but these are some of the most beloved destinations for people here in the States and around the world. They serve as places of discovery, adventure, and worship. These landscapes are vital for understanding how people have lived and interacted with the land for millennia. They serve as refuge for people, plants, and animals. Preserving millions of years of the earth's history, they safeguard scientific discoveries both past and future. Since 1906, America's boldest efforts in conservation have been through the presidential declaration of national monuments.

In the early days of the twentieth century, as the western frontier was closing, preservation of archaeological sites in the Southwest gained national attention. While Congress was debating, looting of indigenous artifacts escalated. Recognizing the legislative process could be too slow to prevent permanent damage, Edgar Hewett and John Lacey created the Antiquities Act to enable a quicker executive response. Consistent with the Progressive Era's vision of common long-term ideals served by a competent and forceful government, the Antiquities Act used broad language in a modest-looking bill to entrust vast powers to the president, who can swiftly give federal protections to an area by proclaiming it a national monument:

> *The President of the United States is hereby authorized, in his discretion, to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments, and may reserve as part of thereof parcels of lands, the limits of which in all cases shall be confined to the smallest area compatible with proper care and management of the objects to be protected.*[i]

i. Antiquities Act of 1906, S.4698, 59th Cong. (1906).

What distinguishes a national monument from a national park? *National Park Portfolio* (1917), the National Park Service's first publication, acknowledges that "the name monument is clumsy and misleading."[ii] Indeed, small archaeological and historical sites alluded to by the term *antiquities* constitute the minority of today's approximately 130 national monuments. Many are large and diverse landscapes. The difference resides not in the lands themselves but rather in the way they are protected.

Congress designates national parks (and national monuments) through legislation that presidents have to sign. Presidents cannot designate a national park on their own, but thanks to the Antiquities Act, they can do so for a national monument. National parks, established for "the benefit and the enjoyment of the people"[iii] *and* for preservation receive yearly funding from Congress to maintain and develop infrastructure. National monuments are for conservation. Their proclamation generally lacks funding, resulting in a scarcity of facilities, information, and publicity needed to *put them on the map* for the general public.

In 1906, less than a month after the passage of the Antiquities Act, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed Devil's Tower as the first national monument in Wyoming. Congress had been debating over the Grand Canyon since 1882, but even as commercialism was running unchecked, by 1908, it had not yet acted to protect the quintessential American wonder. President Roosevelt did, by proclaiming Grand Canyon National Monument, an area over 800,000 acres.

Politicians in Arizona howled at the designation. The controversy went all the way to the Supreme Court—which fortunately found that the smallest area compatible with preservation can be quite large and at the discretion of the president. Arizona now officially calls itself the Grand Canyon State. The pattern repeated itself time and time again: controversy and local outrage over new national monuments, eventually turning into near-universal approval. History has always proved the proclamations wise, and local opposition has often reversed itself.

ii. Yard, R.S., *National Parks Portfolio*, Department of the Interior (1917).
iii. Act Establishing Yellowstone National Park, S.392, 42nd Cong. (1871).

Wyoming governor and US senator Cliff Hansen, who fiercely opposed the 1943 proclamation of Jackson Hole National Monument stated in 1962, "I'm glad I lost, because I now know I was wrong."[iv]

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter made the most substantial use of the Antiquities Act by proclaiming fifteen national monuments totaling 56 million acres in Alaska, the largest expansion of protected lands in history. Several dwarfed the Grand Canyon in size. In the twenty-first century, even larger marine areas received protections as national monuments.

Grand Canyon would, of course, become a national park. Jackson Hole National Monument would be the basis for a major extension of Grand Teton National Park. Six of the Alaskan national monuments from the 1978 proclamation, when redesignated national parks, would double the acreage of National Park Service lands. Proclaiming a place as a national monument in response to immediate threats and then later establishing it as a national park would repeat itself thirty times; almost half of our treasured national parks started as national monuments.

New Models for Conservation

The National Park Service (NPS) manages all the national parks and, until 1978, all the national monuments. Historically, the NPS could dedicate their lands only for preservation and compatible recreational uses because they were empty, or were emptied by relocating natives or settlers. Per the Antiquities Act, presidents can create national monuments only from existing federal lands—not from state or private lands, so they are not *land grabs*. Until 1978, after proclamation, management had been transferred to the NPS from another federal agency.

That agency was often the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The BLM administers more surface land than any other federal agency, one in every ten acres of land in the United States. Those lands were considered leftovers without clear guidelines for use. Not until the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 were BLM lands recognized to have a public value and actively managed with a multiuse framework. Reflecting the alignment of the BLM with rural land users, all traditional activities are authorized by default on BLM lands: logging, drilling, mining, cattle grazing, hunting, off-road driving. That policy contrasts sharply with the mandate of the NPS.

In the mid-1990s, President Bill Clinton and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt envisioned a new conservation role for the BLM that would later be formalized with the creation of the National Landscape Conservation System (now referred to as National Conservation Lands):[v]

> *It can become the greatest modern American land management agency, the one that sets the standard for protecting landscapes, applying evolving knowledge and social standards, and bringing people together to live in harmony with the land.*

In that new model of conservation, with protections provided by national monument status, the BLM would emphasize collaboration with local communities and support a range of traditional activities as long as they were compatible with the proclamation's conservation objectives. Two national monuments, in particular, exemplify innovative approaches to land management: Grand Staircase–Escalante and Bears Ears, both located in Southern Utah. In 1996, Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument marked the first time a new national monument—the largest national monument in the continental United States—was created under the BLM model of conservation. Subsequently, all the large national monuments would remain with the BLM and follow that promising conservation model.

Proclaimed by President Barack Obama in 2016, Bears Ears National Monument is one of the most recent BLM national monuments. It protects a cultural landscape populated millennia before there was a state of Utah. The Hopi, Navajo, Mountain Ute, Zuni, and Ute hold the land sacred because it is their ancestors' burial site and a continual source of physical and spiritual healing. They agreed to set generations-old differences apart to petition President Obama to establish Bears Ears as the first native-led national monument initiative. For the first time, its proclamation assigned shared management responsibilities between the tribes and the federal government, with guaranteed access for native traditional uses. As such, Bears Ears National Monument was a significant step in social and racial justice, righting and healing wrongs stemming from the American West's settlement, broken treaties, and abuse. The native and environmental communities held hopes for a new conservation model converging national park ideals with the indigenous respect and worship for the land.

iv. Conrad L. Wirth, *Parks, Politics and the People*, University of Oklahoma Press (1980).

v. D. Harmon, Francis P. McManamon, and Dwight T. Pitcaithle, "The Antiquities Act and How Theodore Roosevelt Shaped It," *The George Wright Forum* 3(3) (2014), 324–344.

Monuments at Risk

This conservation progress was all upended on April 26, 2017, when President Donald Trump signed an unprecedented executive order to review all the national monuments created since 1996, larger than 100,000 acres, and established using the presidential authority bestowed by the Antiquities Act. The review's objective was to determine if former presidents had abused their power and if the protections curtailed economic growth, eyeing removing protections toward industrial development. Conservationists worried not only about the land but also about the future of land preservation, as the promising ideas embodied by those national monuments also came under fire.

Targeting twenty-seven out of the thirty-five larger protected areas, the review included all five marine national monuments and twenty-two land-based ones. Almost all of them are located in the West, just like our first fifteen national parks, owing to the more arid climate and rugged topography that discouraged settlement but bestows abundant natural beauty. The exception is Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument located in Maine. But as writer Stephen Trimble quipped, "Maine is really part of the Western wilderness; it's just misplaced."[vi] Philanthropist Roxanne Quimby had *acquired* and *donated* those lands to the federal government *specifically* to establish the national monument.

Together, the twenty-seven national monuments at risk, the subject of this book, represent a broad cross section of natural environments, from deep canyons to high mountains, from cactus-covered plains to conifer forests, from deserts to lush river habitats. The twenty-two land national monuments, mostly managed by the BLM and some by the US Forest Service (USFS), cover a significant portion of the American landscape, totaling about 11 million acres. For comparison, the fifty-one national parks in the contiguous United States total about 19 million acres. The marine national monuments are another order of magnitude, totaling 218 million acres.

Besides their vastness and diversity, the monuments under review hold natural and historical treasures that rival those found in our beloved national parks. Vermilion Cliffs National Monument's Paria Canyon is more than twice as long and every bit as impressive as Zion National Park's Virgin River Narrows. The monument also houses unique rock formations like the Wave, which has become world-famous. California's densest population of cholla cactus thrives in Bigelow Cholla Garden Wilderness of Mojave Trails National Monument, rather than in the better known Cholla Cactus Garden of Joshua Tree National Park. Giant Sequoia National Monument protects more sequoia groves—almost half of the total number—than Sequoia and Kings National Parks. Portions of the Sonoran Desert included in Ironwood Forest National Monument and Sonoran Desert National Monument are as beautiful and representative as those in Saguaro National Park, if not more pristine. There is no national park where one can wander amid an array of petroglyphs as numerous as in Gold Butte National Monument or Basin and Range National Monument.

The debates of the past persist. Should local voices have priorities over the nation's interests in the public estate? Does an economy based on tourism and recreation work better than one based on resource extraction? Both sides of the argument have merits, but for a long time, the vast majority have approved of protecting our natural and cultural heritage. Visitation numbers also show that recreation has become the dominant use of public lands. People from all walks of life and all political persuasions can relate to nature and find common ground in our public lands. The public comment period of the summer of 2017 generated near unanimous 97 percent support for the national monuments under review.

Yet, on December 4, 2017, President Trump ordered immediate size reductions to two national monuments located in Utah. More were considered for future size reductions and removal of protections. Bears Ears would go from 1.3 million acres to nearly 230,000, retaining only 15 percent of its original size. Grand Staircase–Escalante would be reduced by roughly half, from almost 1.9 million acres to about 1 million. President Trump's actions were the most considerable reduction of protected lands in the country's history. Once an area gains federal protection, it can be easy to assume that the fight to *save* it has ended. However, land protection is an endless struggle, where the outcome is never guaranteed.

vi. Stephen Trimble, New England photographs (n.d.), stephentrimble.net.

America's Hidden Gems

I watched in helplessness as the administration eviscerated the protections of two of the largest and most beautiful national monuments to pave the way to extract oil, coal, and uranium. In January 2018, I resolved to take action the only way I knew, by hiking and photographing those twenty-two land-based endangered national monuments. Even though I had been photographing America's public lands for a quarter-century, many of those monuments were unknown to me. I spent months in repeated visits, immersing myself in those sacred lands and discovering remnants of cultures imprinted on the ancient landscape. The enriching experience increased my motivation to help protect those places by raising public awareness. To amplify the call for conservation, I have invited others who work closely with these national monuments to voice their perspective. More than ever, we need our public lands as wild places for our spirits. We conserve what we love, and we love what we understand. I hope to inspire you to learn about our public lands' hidden treasures and experience them yourself.

In contrast with the national parks, I was surprised to find the BLM and the US Forest Service's national monuments to be so wild, with even fewer facilities than I expected. The first director of the NPS, Stephen Mather, envisioned the national parks to incorporate spectacular scenery and drive mass tourism. It required an infrastructure of roads, visitor centers, lodges, developed campgrounds, and interpretive trails. By contrast, Secretary Babbitt intended for the BLM national monuments to protect scientifically significant areas, accommodating dispersed recreation as one of the multiple uses supported. In the spirit of community-based cooperation, the BLM encourages visitors to rely on the surrounding communities and provides only minimal visitor services within the monument. Even road-building is limited. Many national monuments do not have a single paved road. I needed to rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle several times to access some of them. Even then, I still ended up with five flat tires over three years, sometimes in incredibly remote areas. Edward Abbey would have smiled.

Despite a dozen visits to Death Valley National Park, I could never find the Mesquite Sand Dunes devoid of numerous footprints from other visitors. At Cadiz Dunes Wilderness in nearby Mojave Trails National Monument, I saw many animal tracks but no human footprints, aside from my own. The last time I attempted to drive to Cadillac Mountain in Acadia National Park, the road was closed by rangers due to congestion. During four days in Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, there were so few cars, less than a handful, that I frequently stopped in the middle of the road to photograph the exquisitely beautiful fall foliage. Photographers crowd famous natural arches in Arches National Park and Canyonlands National Park. Securing a spot at sunrise or sunset can require arriving well in advance. Each time I photographed three of the most famous natural arches in Grand Staircase–Escalante, I had the entire place to myself.

As the crown jewels of our public lands, the national parks are home to places of superlatives that overwhelm at first sight. Many of them have become icons of our natural and cultural heritage. The often starker and more subtle landscapes of national monuments invite exploration to get to know and love. Because the natural features are less prominent, it was easier to pay attention to the small details that make up the ecosystem. I found the absence of postcard views conducive to personal discovery.

Our national monuments are unique places with different rules of engagement. The heavy visitation of national parks led to the necessity of strict rules, fences around champion sequoia trees, and scenic overlooks. Although one is expected not to enter ancient ruins out of respect, there are no such fences on national monuments. They offer more flexibility to experience the great outdoors. You can hike with your dog and camp almost anywhere. Unlike in Grand Canyon National Park, you can drive to the Grand Canyon rim in Grand Canyon–Parashant National Monument and pitch your tent at the edge of the chasm. As the national parks become ever more popular, the BLM and USFS national monuments' vast open spaces offer us places of solitude and inspiration. The rugged experience gives us a sense of the western frontier, where personal responsibility, independence, and self-sufficiency are qualities that matter, where unlimited opportunities for exploration and adventure under a wide blue sky leave you endless room to be your own person. Tread lightly, conserve loudly.

San Jose, California, November 2, 2020