

## TRAVEL

# Fee hikes not affecting national park attendance

BY H. JOSEPH HERBERT  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

**SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK, Va. (AP)** — On a perfect August day, \$10 bought James Robertson, his wife and two grandchildren a breathtaking view across the Blue Ridge mountains.

The retired painting contractor from Victoria, Va., didn't mind that the fee was double the \$5 charged last year to enter the 105-mile Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park.

"I don't pay attention to that little \$10 thing," he said as his grandchildren, ages 6 and 8, scrambled up a jagged rock for a better vantage point.

Others, it seems, share his view. Despite the doubling of entry fees in many national parks, the number of visitors to the 374 federal parks, monuments and historic sites during the first half of the year is up nearly 5 percent over last year.

Tim Stone, fee program manager for the National Park Service, said more than 112 million people visited national parks this year through June, an increase of 5.3 million over the same period last year. The figures include visitors to more than 200 free sites, but some of the biggest jumps in attendance are at parks where fees have risen.

For example, the number of visitors at the Petrified Forest

National Park in Arizona is up 16 percent this year. A 13-percent increase was recorded at the Badlands National Park in South Dakota. The fees at both parks rose from \$2 last year to \$5 this year for individuals and from \$5 to \$10 for a car carrying two or more people.

In Washington state, the \$10 fee per car hasn't slowed the flow of visitors to Olympic National Park.

The sprawling park on the Olympic Peninsula has been visited by an estimated 2.1 million people through June, up 40 percent from 1.6 million during the same period last year. Exact figures aren't available because several traffic counters are broken, said Karin Mesarous, an official in the Park Service's Port Angeles office.

Mount Rainier National Park has seen attendance drop nearly 17 percent this year, with 363,819 visitors in 1997 versus 436,425 during the first half of last year.

But park spokeswoman Donna Rahter says the decline of visitors to the 14,410-foot volcano probably is affected more by unusually heavy snowfall and late road-openings than the new entrance fees.

Congress approved the higher fees, earmarking much of the money for park repairs and improvements.

Attendance is down at three of

the best-known and most expensive scenic parks in the West — Yosemite (13 percent), Yellowstone (6 percent) and the Grand Canyon (3 percent). But Park Service officials say the dropoff is due to a decrease in foreign visitors, not the fees, which jumped from \$10 to \$20 per carload.

Stone explained that travel agents and European tour operators, who make arrangements six months in advance, were reluctant to book customers at Yosemite because of last winter's floods. About 16 percent of the 276 million park visitors annually are foreigners, according to the Park Service.

Attendance was also hurt because flooding closed the park for more than two months at the

beginning of the year, although that happened when the number of visitors is traditionally low because of the weather.

Stone said he thinks the severe winter may have held down advance bookings at Yellowstone as well.

"Fees aren't going to affect visitation at destination parks," Stone said. "If you're going to a national park, a handful of dollars is not going to affect your visit."

Gary Machlis, a sociology professor at the University of Idaho who is examining public attitudes about park fees, says most people are willing to pay a little more if the fees are clearly explained and fair and if most of the money returns to the park where it is collected.

"The majority of visitors support the new fees as long as they meet these conditions," he said in an interview.

Visitors to Shenandoah, a scenic ribbon through the Blue Ridge Mountains about 70 miles from Washington, said the higher fees would not deter them.

"We can't complain. It's still a

bargain," said Stan Krev of Cleveland, who was visiting with his wife, Jan, and their four children.

Tom DeRose of Greenfield, Mass., who climbed with his wife, Carol, to the park's highest point, agreed.

"What can you buy for \$10 nowadays?" he asked.

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she completed the Switzerland Network education program to become an expert in Swiss travel.

## SEATTLE ARTS FEST

Labor Day weekend is the time for Seattle's giant Arts Festival, Bumbershoot, held at the Seattle Center. The festival features more than 25 indoor and outdoor stages, exhibit halls and performance sites, showcasing music, literary arts, dance, all visual arts, theater, comedy, film, kids performances and the trademark fest spectacles. Key commitment for the festival is to regional talent from the Northwest. Call 1-206-281-8111.

## FALL IN BOYNE COUNTRY

Cyclists can ride through the tunnel of trees along M-119 during the annual shoreline bike tour Saturday, Sept. 6, with starting point at the Birchwood Inn, Harbor Springs. A fee includes refreshments, a barbecue and pool party. Call 1-800-830-9865.

Another Boyne Country event is the Taste of Harbor Springs Sept. 20 at the city's waterfront. Taste of Harbor Springs showcases many area restaurants, microbreweries and wineries. Call 1-816-526-7999.

From mid-September through mid-October is peak fall color time in Boyne. Call 1-800-846-2828 for free information on fall color tours.

## BACKPACKING CLASSES

The School of Outdoor Leadership Adventure and Recreation will offer a backpacking class (5:45 to 8:45 p.m.) on five successive Wednesdays beginning on Sept. 3. An overnight trip to Pinckney Recreation Area is set for Sept. 20-21; a Picture Rocks trip will be held Oct. 3-5. Classes are in Farmington; call Carol McCrie at 1-810-229-6232.

## GRAND JAZZ FEST

The Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island will salute American workers and jazz lovers alike with a spectacular lineup of nationally renowned jazz greats during its 10th annual Labor Day Jazz Festival Friday, Aug. 29, through Monday, Sept. 1. Featured are the Phil Woods Quintet on Friday, Aug. 29; Boots Randolph and John Boutte and Juanita Brooks on Saturday, Aug. 30; and Pote Fountain on Sunday, Aug. 31. For reservations or more information, call 1-800-33-GRAND (1-800-334-7263).

## SWISS EXPERT

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