



OFFBEAT PURSUITS

Tandem parachute jumping in Utah

Parks offer plenty of ways to stay and play

By Lisa A. Beach

Federal and state governments own more than one-third of all the land in the United States — more than 785 million acres — according to the Natural Resources Council of Maine. Beyond typical outdoor activities like hiking and fishing, you might be surprised to learn what you can do in some of the amazing natural treasures sprinkled throughout the Southwest. Here are some suggestions:



TANDEM PARACHUTE JUMP
NEAR CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK

This southeast Utah desert destination beckons thrill-seekers to take a leap. With nearly 338,000 acres to explore, Canyonlands National Park stuns you with its assortment of arches, buttes, canyons, mesas and spires — much of it carved by the Colorado River.

For a truly immersive experience and bird's-eye view of the landscape, try a tandem parachute jump off some of the spectacular cliffs on the park's border through BASE Jump Moab. The company was co-founded by Andy Lewis, an avowed adrenaline junkie and one of the co-stars of the Discovery+ series *Pushing the Line*.

SYLVAN SLACKS



BIKEPACK
ORGAN PIPE CACTUS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Never heard of bikepacking? It combines the best of two outdoor adventures — trailbiking and backpacking — where you ride for miles and camp overnight.

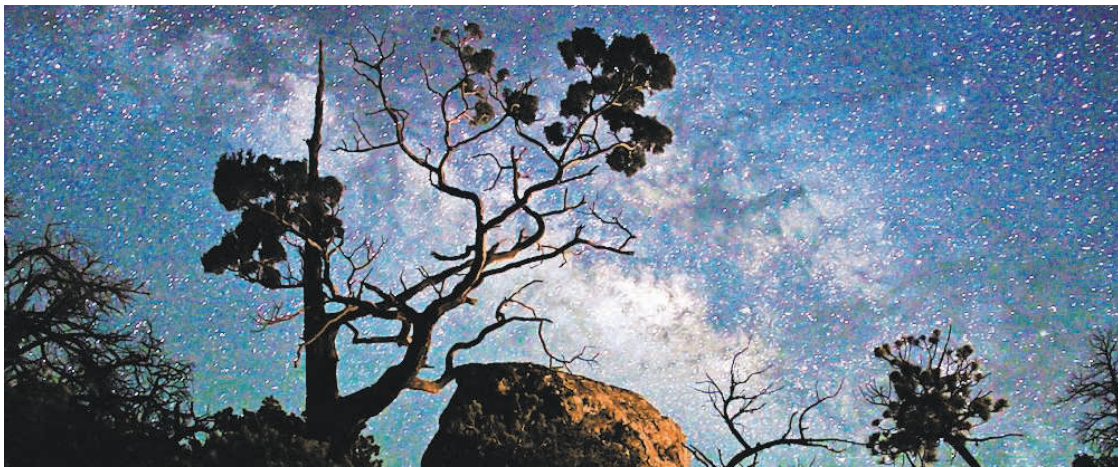
The beautiful Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in southern Arizona offers the ideal setting for a bikepacking adventure. With its rugged, wide paths (especially the popular 15 miles of Ajo Mountain Drive trails), you can tour this stunning desert landscape and see why it earned a UNESCO biosphere reserve designation. Dotted with Mexican poppies, lupine, owl clover and saguaro, this ecosystem is the only place in the country where organ pipe cacti grow in the wild.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

TAP THE APP

Created by park rangers with visitors in mind, a new National Park Service app gives the public up-to-date information about all 423 national parks.

Offering all the basic information of the parks' individual websites, it also contains current status reports, and an offline feature allows you to download resources ahead of time — particularly helpful when visiting more remote areas.



STARGAZE IN CHIRICAHUA NATIONAL MONUMENT

While most people typically visit public lands during the day, consider taking an evening stargazing trip to Chiricahua National Monument in southeast Arizona. Designated in April as the 104th International Dark Sky Park in the world, this 12,025-acre site offers some of the darkest night skies left in the American Southwest. Visitors will find particularly good stargazing opportunities at the trailheads for the Massai Point Nature Trail and the Echo Canyon Grottoes hike. Situated near the U.S.-Mexico border, Chiricahua draws in visitors eager to spot double stars, nebulae, planets, star clusters and other celestial wonders.

JACK SUMAN



BIRD-WATCH IN HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST

If you're a fan of feathered friends, head to Humboldt-Toiyabe in central Nevada for glimpses of Clark's nutcrackers, yellow warblers and other songbirds throughout the forest's aspen and pine groves.

With a total of 23 wilderness areas, Humboldt-Toiyabe is the largest U.S. Forest Service site in the lower 48 states, covering more than 6 million acres and home to dozens of bird species. Bring your binoculars to Dry Pond Loop, a 6.5-mile trail near Washoe Valley, or head to Galena Falls Trail, a 4.7-mile out-and-back hike — spectacular waterfall included.

JERRET RAFFETY/RAWLINS (WYO.) DAILY TIMES



WITNESS LIVING HISTORY AT WASHITA BATTLEFIELD

Step back in time as you walk the grounds of Washita Battlefield National Historic Site near Cheyenne, Okla. Here, in 1868, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer led the 7th U.S. Cavalry in a surprise dawn attack on a Cheyenne village.

Stop in the visitor center first to watch the short film *Destiny at Dawn: Loss & Victory on the Washita*. Costumed volunteers share stories and give demonstrations on military life 150 years ago.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



SANDBOARD
AT CORAL PINK
SAND DUNES STATE PARK

What is sandboarding? Think snowboarding down a mountain — but on sand instead of snow. As the coral-colored Navajo sandstone eroded, it left towering sand dunes estimated at 10,000 to 15,000 years old in this southern Utah park. With 1,200 acres of dunes to “ride,” you’ll find elevations of all levels, including smaller dunes closer to the lookout point that are ideal for beginners. For \$25, you can rent a sit-down sand sled or a stand-up sandboard from the visitor center.

UTAH DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION



EXPLORE PUEBLOAN RUINS
AT CHACO CULTURE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Curious visitors and amateur archaeologists alike regularly stream into this park in northwestern New Mexico for an up-close glimpse of ancient Puebloan, or Anasazi, culture. Added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987 for its cultural ancestry, the park preserves an extensive collection of ancestral sites and engineering marvels representing the people who lived here between 850 and 1250 A.D.

Take a self-guided tour along the 9-mile Canyon Loop Drive to view key sites, including Casa Rinconada, Chetro Ketl, Hungo Pavi, Pueblo Bonito, Pueblo del Arroyo and Una Vida. To visit the more remote Chacoan sites, follow any of the four backcountry hiking trails (ranging from 3 to 8 miles) and see ancient roads, petroglyphs, stairways and spectacular vistas of the mesa landscape. Don’t miss the Chaco Museum Collection, which houses more than a million artifacts that showcase the culture’s daily life, technology, trade and communication.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



TUBE
THE GUADALUPE RIVER

Grab your inner tube (or rent one from a local vendor) and head to Guadalupe River State Park for a splashing good time on the 4-mile stretch of river that runs through the park. Of course, you can also canoe, kayak and swim in this family-friendly park about 40 miles north of San Antonio. But a relaxing day of tubing gives you a chance to soak in the scenery, which includes bald cypress trees lining the riverbanks and sycamore and pecan trees in lower elevations.

As you drift, see if you can spot belted kingfisher, great blue herons, osprey, red-tailed hawks or sandhill cranes found throughout the park. Be prepared for four natural rapids as the river winds its way through the park, providing some on-the-water thrills in your journey. Check the park’s website or Facebook page for current conditions, as increased rainfall can make water activities unsafe.

MATT SLOCUM/ASSOCIATED PRESS