

Lifeless trees come to life in Petrified Forest

Arizona national park a mysterious land where time stands still

Few things have aged better than Petrified Forest National Park. Its history dates nearly 220 million years.

Located in northeast Arizona, the park features one of the world's largest and most colorful arrays of petrified wood. It's as stunning as it is unique. Fossils tell tales of prehistoric Earth and its inhabitants. Early dinosaurs and reptiles roamed the area.

The trees – nearly pure quartz – stoke curiosity, opening your eyes to a land few places on Earth can match. The rainbow-like coloring and intricate patterns are the results of the minerals and imperfections found in the wood.

Step back in time to a place before humans existed. The sights are profound. Eons of history lay before you in a variety of shapes and sizes. Artifacts bring to life the Triassic Period.

Interest in the area began to grow during the late-19th century, prompting the Arizona Territorial legislature to petition Congress to protect its resources. By 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt created Petrified Forest National Monument. It was elevated to national park status in 1962.

This geological playground encompasses 220,000 acres. The location receives fewer than 10 inches of rain annually, allowing a clear, blue sky to



ROCKIN' – The fiery red Painted Desert glistens at Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona. The park is populated with trees and rock formations more than 200 million years old. *Image: Jerry Ginsberg/Danita Delimont. Adobe Stock.*

mesh perfectly with the desert terrain.

There are many ways to explore the park. View it by vehicle and take advantage of stops at overlooks. Walk one of the many short trails or hike the backcountry along one of the Off the Beaten Path routes. Crystal Forest Trail and Giant Logs Loop provide up-close visuals meant to leave lasting impressions.

There are fossils, badlands, buttes and mesas, ancient petroglyphs, wild-life and wildflowers and vast vistas. The Painted Desert offers solitude, allowing you to collect your thoughts while exploring the mysterious surroundings.

Sightsee via bicycle or horse – you just have to bring your horse. Rangers, scientists, cultural demonstrators and

other field experts lead guided tours. Their knowledge enhances the experience.

There are plenty of sights to visit, including:

- Newspaper Rock that has more than 650 petroglyphs that are believed to have been created between 1499 B.C. and 1000 A.D.
- The Teepees, rock formations comprised of bands of crimson, gray, blue, purple and white rock.
- Agate Home, a reconstructed Puebloan domicile created primarily from petrified wood.
- Blue Mesa, a landform that is considered to be one of the best ways to see the beautiful blue, pink, gray and purple hills.
- Agate Bridge, a petrified log that rests over a washed-out hollow.

Myths abound. Perhaps none more popular than claims of bad luck to anyone who takes petrified wood past the park's boundaries. A curse awaited those eager to bring home souvenirs.

The legend became so deep that hundreds of people have returned chunks of wood with apology letters, according to the book "Bad Luck, Hot Rocks." Park officials named the stack of returned rocks the "conscience pile."

That shouldn't be surprising. Petrified wood is scarce. It doesn't need to be scary.

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