

A Mineral Tour of National Parks

This activity was developed on behalf of the National Parks Service for Earth Science Week 2026.

Introduction

Across the United States, National Parks preserve landscapes shaped by powerful Earth processes that concentrate and reveal a wide variety of minerals. In this activity, you will explore the rocks and minerals in five National Parks to uncover the range of Earth processes that have shaped the United States.

Materials

- Computer (or tablet/phone) with internet access
- Copy of “Rocks and Minerals in National Parks” table

Steps

1. Watch the video on NPS’ Rocks and Minerals (<https://bit.ly/NPS-rocks-minerals>) page to review the difference between rocks and minerals.
2. Use the Park’s Geology Webpages (<https://bit.ly/NPS-park-geology>) in addition to each park’s website to fill in the table with information on each National Park:
 - Capitol Reef National Park (<https://www.nps.gov/CARE>)
 - North Cascades National Park (<https://www.nps.gov/noca/>)
 - Mammoth Cave National Park (<https://www.nps.gov/macal/>)
 - Isle Royale National Park (<https://www.nps.gov/isro/>)
 - Guadalupe Mountains National Park (<https://www.nps.gov/GUMO>)
 - Whiskeytown National Recreation Area (<https://www.nps.gov/whis/>)
 - Blue Ridge Parkway (<https://www.nps.gov/blri/>)

Analysis

1. How are the minerals in each park similar and different? How do these similarities relate to their geologic history?
2. Choose another National Park that is located near one of the parks from this activity.
 - a. Based on its location, predict what types of rocks and minerals you would expect to find in this park. Explain your reasoning.
 - b. Research the rocks and minerals found in the park you chose. Then, compare these to the park from this activity: how are they similar or different, and why do you think that is?

National Park	Location	Key Rocks and Minerals	How the Rocks and Minerals Formed	Additional Notes/ Unique Features
Capitol Reef National Park				
North Cascades National Park				
Mammoth Cave National Park				
Isle Royale National Park				
Guadalupe Mountains National Park				
Whiskeytown National Recreation Area				
Blue Ridge Parkway				