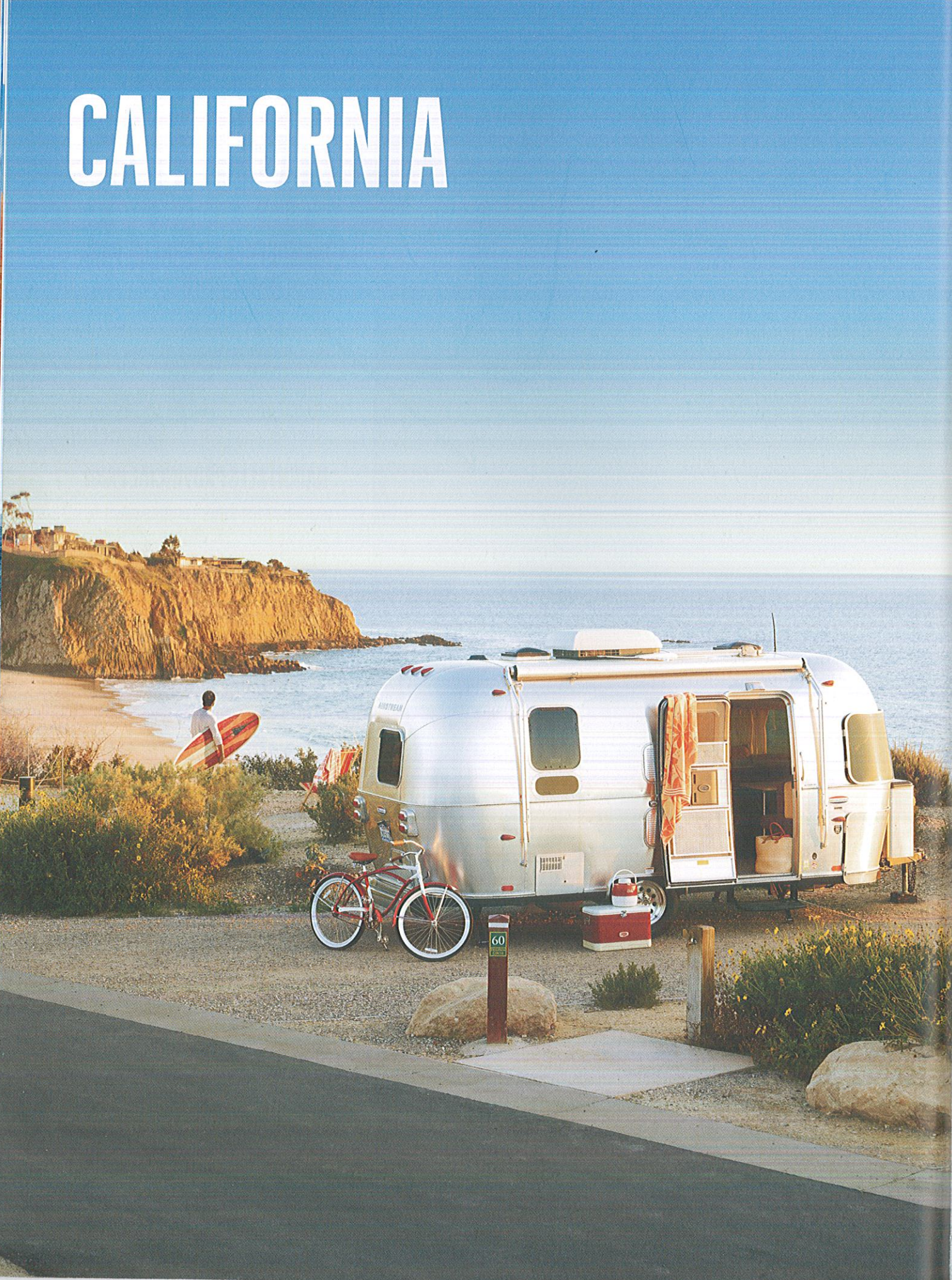


CALIFORNIA



50 Cal 6 hrs
← **CRYSTAL COVE STATE PARK**
Moro Campground

Look coastward for breathtaking Pacific views at this park off the Pacific Coast Highway between Corona Del Mar and Laguna Beach. Look inland for 17 miles of trails through canyons and rolling hills (hike 'em early, while it's cool). Sites 51-60 at Moro Campground sit just above 3.2 miles of pristine sands—and within walking distance of Bloody Marys garnished with shrimp and lobster claws at the Beachcomber Café. **INFO:** From \$50; 58 sites; flush toilets; crystalcovestatepark.com

North Cal
BIG LAGOON COUNTY PARK 7 hrs

Camp on a huge lagoon bordering the Pacific Ocean in this Humboldt County park. The brackish water is relatively warm, and rich with river otters, shorebirds, and steelhead trout. Launch your canoe right from your campsite. Insider tip: Rent a kayak from Kayak Zak's (from \$25/hour; kayakzak.com) and paddle up to the sand spit to search for agate. **INFO:** \$20; 25 sites; no reservations; RVs not recommended; flush toilets; co.humboldt.ca.us

Local
BUTANO STATE PARK
Ben Ries Campground Pescadero 1 hr, 20 min

The Bay Area's best quickie escape is a forest-fairy redwood grove that also happens to be 15 minutes from the beach. Insider tip: Soul-warming cream of artichoke soup and olallieberry pie are a short drive away at Pescadero's famous Duarte's Tavern (650/879-0464). Best for: Beating the heat. **INFO:** \$35; 38 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

Local
CASPER'S WILDERNESS PARK
Live Oak Campground 6 hrs, 20 min

Forest camping in Orange County? Yes. Set your tent under oaks and sycamores in the Santa Ana Mountains without forgoing life's little necessities—like flush toilets. (Water line upgrades scheduled for 2014 may cause intermittent interruptions.) Get oriented to the great outdoors at the Saturday night campfire talk or on the Sunday morning ranger walk. The 2.5-mile East Ridge Trail makes a great beginner's hike. **INFO:** \$20; 42 sites; flush toilets; ocparks.com



BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK Local
Sunset Trail Camp

Three spectacular waterfalls are the payoff for tackling the roller-coaster Berry Creek Falls Loop that wends its way through gargantuan old-growth trees in the Santa Cruz Mountains. You can't go wrong camping anywhere in this popular park, but consider one of the hike-in sites at Sunset Trail Camp if you want ample space and privacy. **INFO:** \$15 (plus \$8 reservation fee); 10 sites; pit toilets; no potable water; parks.ca.gov

FROM LEFT: THOMAS J. STORY, DAVID FENTON

7 hrs 30 min

← DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK Mesquite Spring Campground

Set in the Grapevine Canyon wash, this campground is a great base for exploring northern Death Valley. Tour the Spanish-Moorish mansion, Scotty's Castle (\$15), and walk the rim of Ubehebe Crater. Insider tip: With off-road tires, you can take a day trip to Eureka Dunes, California's tallest sand dunes. **INFO:** \$12 (plus \$20 park entry fee per vehicle); 40 sites; no reservations; RVs not recommended; flush toilets; nps.gov/deva

D.L. BLISS STATE PARK ^{Tahoe} 4h 40min

It isn't easy (or cheap) to claim a site along Lake Tahoe's glorious west shore. But here you can swim and sunbathe at Lester Beach, marvel at Balancing Rock, or simply ogle Tahoe's famously blue waters. Insider tip: Reserve ahead to nab beachside spots (\$45; sites 141-165). Great for families. **INFO:** From \$35; 150 sites; RVs not recommended; flush toilets; open mid-June-Labor Day; parks.ca.gov

DOHENY STATE BEACH ^{So Cal} 6:11

Swimming and surfing are prime at this mile-long protected beach in Orange County's Dana Point. Try to snag a beachfront site on the sand (\$60). Insider tip: Don't miss the spectacle of the small, silver fish called grunion laying their eggs in wet sand on the beach during full moons June through August. **INFO:** From \$35; 120 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

ELDORADO NATIONAL FOREST ^{Tahoe} 4:30 Wrights Lake Campground

This spot southwest of Lake Tahoe is pure Sierra Nevada fantasyland. It comes with relatively easy access to the ominously named, utterly gorgeous Desolation Wilderness (free permit required for day hiking), which means you're on the trail through pristine sub-alpine forests while others are still on the road. **INFO:** From \$20; 67 sites; vault toilets; usually open June-mid-Oct (opening may be delayed in 2014 due to storm damage); fs.usda.gov/eldorado

GORDON WILTSIE/GETTY IMAGES



Local **GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA** ↑ *1:30*
Kirby Cove Campground

A big-city surprise: Foghorns and gulls are your wake-up call at Kirby Cove Campground, across the bay from San Francisco. Just west of the Golden Gate Bridge, the four sites are tucked away from the wind in Monterey cypress and eucalyptus; spot 1 is the best. Once the day-users pack their picnic baskets up the steep, mile-long approach trail, the city views are all yours. With just a handful of sites, reservations are a must. **INFO:** \$25; 4 sites; vault toilets; no potable water; open Apr 1–Oct 31; nps.gov/goga



FROM LEFT: ROBERT HOLMES, DAVID FENTON, DAVID ZATZ

North Cal 4 hrs

HENDY WOODS STATE PARK

In summer, kids spend whole days ankle deep in the Navarro River, which flows placidly over fist-size stones through a redwood grove. If they can be dragged away from the large, looping campground here, the gardens and picnic areas at the Anderson Valley wineries are a short drive, the coast only a bit farther. If cooking for the gang seems a bit much, Libby's (closed Mon; 707/895-2646), just down the road in Philo, has excellent Mexican food. **INFO:** From \$40; 92 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

INYO NATIONAL FOREST *E Central (South of Yosemite) 6 hrs*

Minaret Falls Campground

Riverfront sites here overlook the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River; some have views of Minaret Falls. Insider tip: The short hike to the Devils Postpile lava formation at Devils Postpile National Monument is a must. **INFO:** \$20 (plus \$10 vehicle fee); 27 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; open mid-Jun–Sep; fs.usda.gov/inyo

← **EMERALD BAY STATE PARK** *Tahoe*
Boat-In Camp

Lake Tahoe's U-shaped Emerald Bay is one of the lake's most gorgeous (and popular) stops. But there are only 21 sites at peaceful Boat-In Camp, part of Emerald Bay State Park, where teeming speedboat traffic quiets at glassy dusk and dawn. Here bald-eagle sightings are common, and the stunning, shore-hugging Rubicon Trail is steps from your tent. The waterfront real estate—sites 1 or 21—is especially coveted, so you might have best luck with a midweek reservation or cancellation. **INFO:** \$35, including buoy; 21 sites; vault toilets; closed in winter; parks.ca.gov



JULIA PFEIFFER BURNS STATE PARK ↑ *Local 1:50*

Saddle Rock and South Garden Campsites

Have Big Sur to yourself. With a priceless perch over the Pacific and only two hike-in campsites, Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park is more private paradise than crowded campground—which is why the sites are usually booked six months out. From site 1, shaded under Monterey cypress, you can sip your morning joe to the bark of sea lions. **INFO:** \$30; 2 sites; vault toilets; no potable water; parks.ca.gov

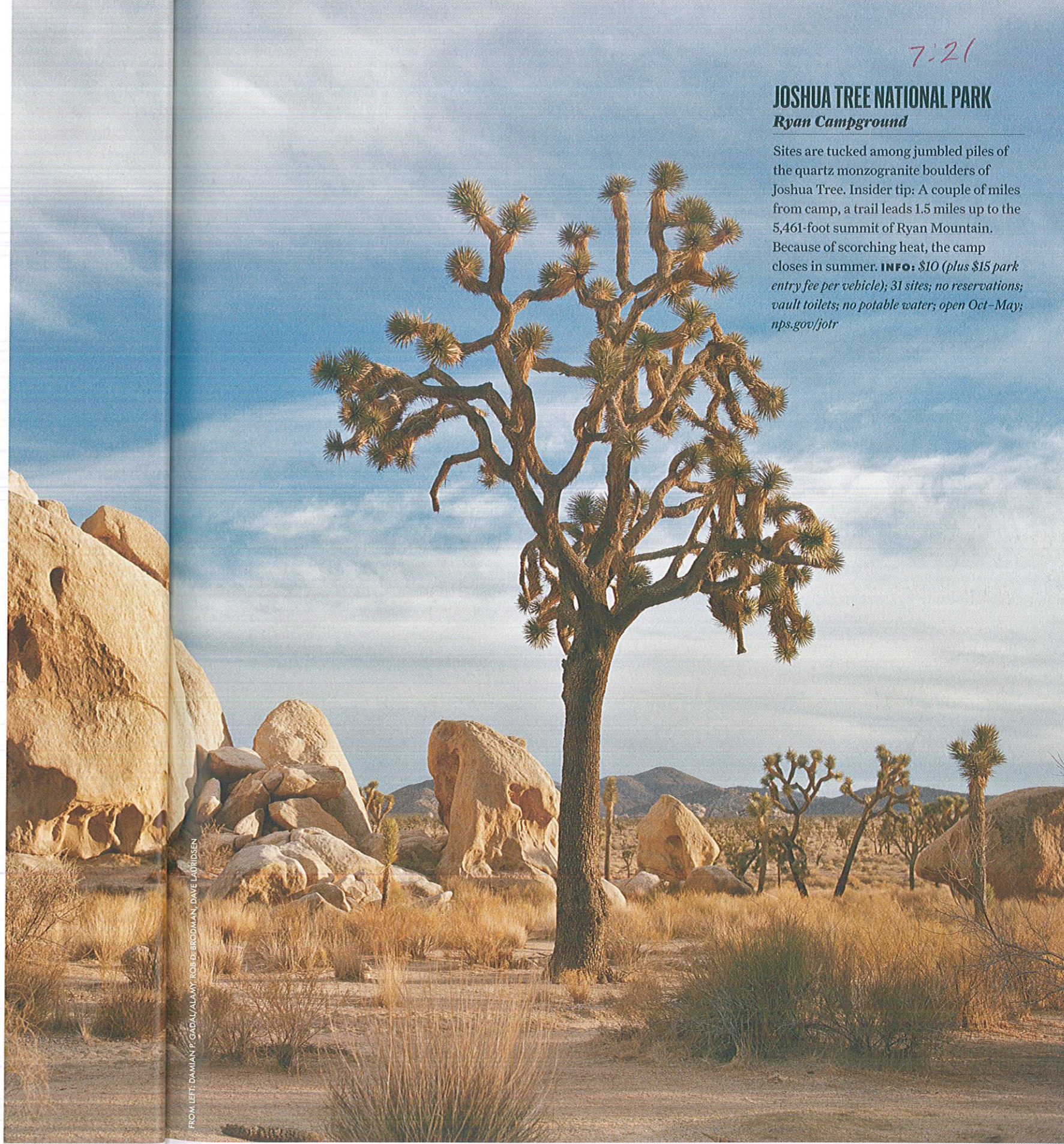
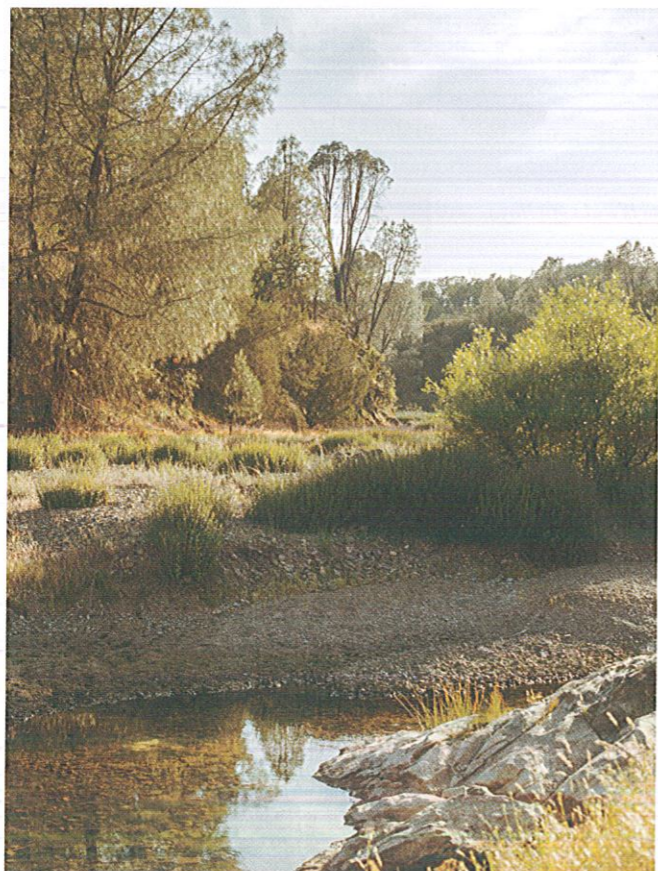


JALAMA BEACH COUNTY PARK

Windswept and wicked-waved, Jalama Beach lies on an isolated stretch of coast south of Lompoc. Beachcomb, fly kites, and fish, but steer clear of the surf. Insider tip: Sites 48-64 are closest to the water. Jalama Burgers at the beach store (jalamabeach.com) are legendary. **INFO:** From \$28; 109 sites; flush toilets; sbparks.org/reservations

HENRY W. COE STATE PARK ➔

A hiker's dream, with 87,000 acres of grassy hillsides and ridges dotted with gnarly oaks and wispy pines. Visit in spring for the best wildflowers and cooler weather. Insider tip: This is an open, sunny campground, so bring some shade with you. **INFO:** \$20; 19 sites; pit toilets; parks.cs.gov



7:21

JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK

Ryan Campground

Sites are tucked among jumbled piles of the quartz monzogranite boulders of Joshua Tree. Insider tip: A couple of miles from camp, a trail leads 1.5 miles up to the 5,461-foot summit of Ryan Mountain. Because of scorching heat, the camp closes in summer. **INFO:** \$10 (plus \$15 park entry fee per vehicle); 31 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; no potable water; open Oct-May; nps.gov/jotr

FROM LEFT: DAMIAN P. GADAL/ALAMY; ROB D. BRODMAN; DAVE LAURIDSEN



Not Cal
JEDEDIAH SMITH REDWOODS STATE PARK

Jedediah Smith Campground

6:47
Lush with ferns, lichens, and towering old-growth redwoods, this park lies 9 miles east of Crescent City, near the Oregon border. Its cool, shaded camp is set beside the emerald Smith River, the longest free-flowing river in California. Prepare to be dwarfed by the 300-foot-tall redwoods in Stout Grove. **INFO:** \$35; 86 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

Not Cal 5:40
KING RANGE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Mattole Campground

A million miles from everywhere, this small Humboldt County campground lies where a country road dead-ends at the Pacific. Summer weekends are crowded, but midweek you'll have the windswept beach and surrounding coastal dunes to yourself. Insider tip: This spot is remote—be sure to stock up on supplies and fill your gas tank before leaving U.S. 101. **INFO:** \$8; 14 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/arcata.html

w central 3:20

← **KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARK**
Sunset Campground

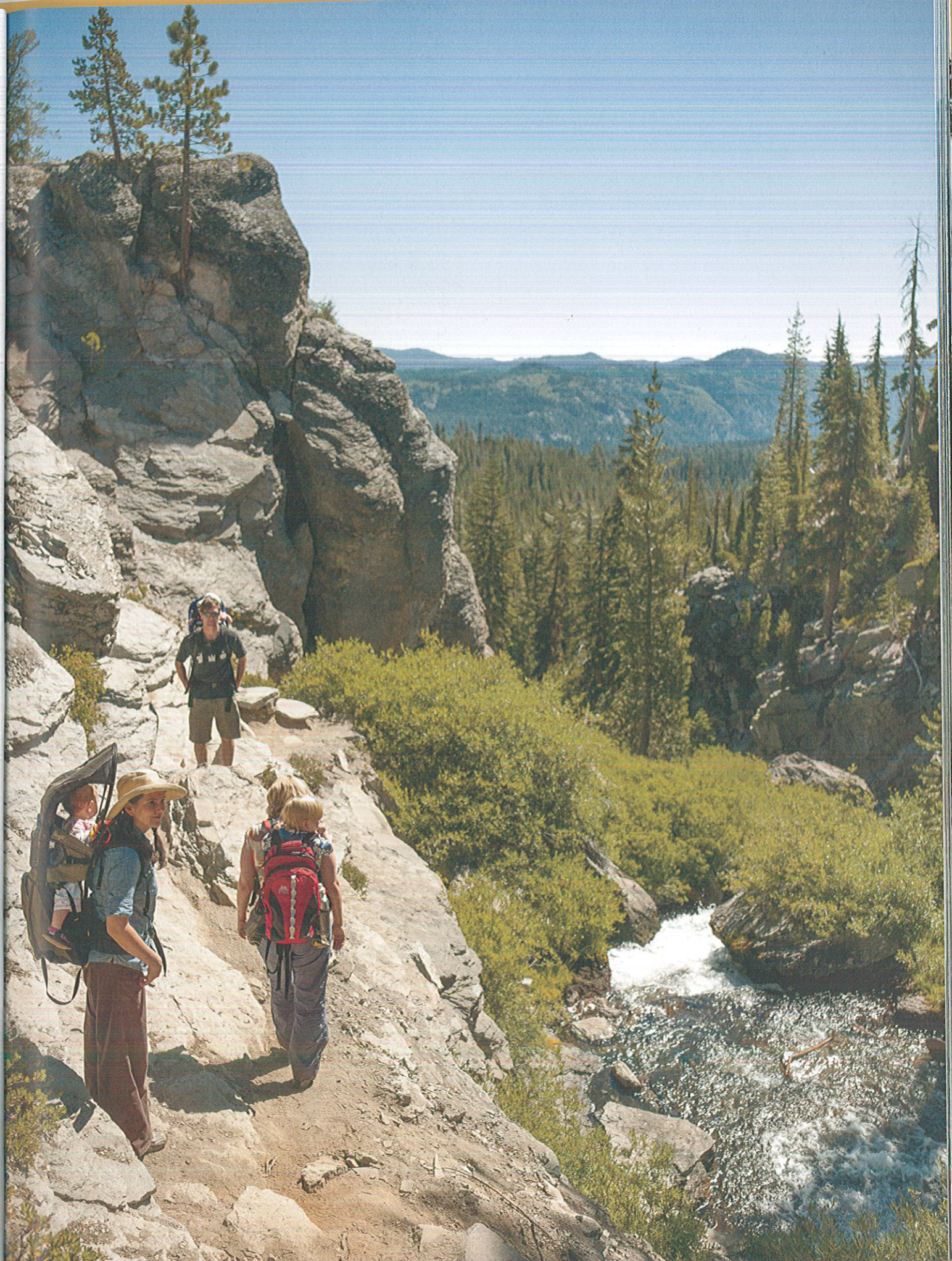
At a pleasantly cool elevation and less than a mile from the Grant Grove of giant sequoias, this camp is an ideal base for exploring both Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks. Forget something? The Grant Grove Village market and restaurant are a half-mile away. **INFO:** \$18 (plus \$20 park entry fee per vehicle); 157 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; open late May–early Sep; nps.gov/seki

LASSEN VOLCANIC NATIONAL PARK →
Not Cal 4:30
Summit Lake South Campground

Smack in the middle of the park, this campground lies at the southern edge of the tiny but picturesque Summit Lake. It's a great base for hiking. Insider tip: Reserve early to snag site D9 or D10; both have great views and lake access. Be warned: After mid-September, the water goes off at the campground. **INFO:** From \$16 (plus \$10 park entry fee per vehicle); 48 sites; pit toilets; open late Jun–late Sep; nps.gov/lavo

LEO CARRILLO STATE PARK *5:00*

At this Malibu gem, campsites sit under the sycamores on the east side of State 1 and on a gorgeous beach on the west side, with access to tidepools. This is a great campsite for first-time campers. Insider tip: Hike the Nicholas Flat Trail for coastal views. **INFO:** \$45; 130 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov



FROM LEFT: DAVID FENTON, THOMAS J. STORY



LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST

Kirk Creek Campground

Scattered across a grassy Big Sur bluff, the sites are open to the stars and the sea, offering extraordinary sunset views. Nearby trails make it a great starting point for hikes into Los Padres National Forest or down to a rocky beach. Just a short drive away is broad, sandy Sand Dollar Beach. **INFO:** \$25; 34 sites; vault toilets; no potable water; fs.usda.gov/lpnf

NEW BRIGHTON STATE BEACH

Set on a pine-shaded bluff above an endless white beach near Santa Cruz, New Brighton's 100+ sites get snapped up by those itching for a beach weekend—without the triple-digit nightly tab. The beach is the real draw, and the hot showers don't hurt, but another bonus is that if you forget your matches or just don't feel like cooking, you can easily grab takeout in town, a five-minute drive away. After all, this is vacation, right? **INFO:** From \$35; 111 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

← PINNACLES NATIONAL PARK

Pinnacles Campground

California's answer to the Grand Canyon, with enormous rock formations, craggy cliffs, and bat-filled caves, Pinnacles was upgraded recently from a national monument to a national park. Despite the wildness of the terrain, the park, south of Hollister, is within easy driving distance of the Bay Area; it's a terrific spot for first-time campers to pitch a tent.

INFO: From \$23 (plus \$5 park entry fee per vehicle); 135 sites; flush toilets; nps.gov/pinn

PRAIRIE CREEK REDWOODS STATE PARK *Gold Bluffs Beach Campground*

To step from a redwood forest onto the wide-to-the-sky spread of Gold Bluffs Beach is an unforgettable memory. Equally memorable are the Roosevelt elk grazing in the meadows, then making their regal, antlered way through the sand. The world's tallest trees, America's largest elk—the scale is all grand. Officially in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, the beach is cooperatively managed by California State Parks and the surrounding Redwood National Park. Don't miss: The oasis of Fern Canyon, back from the beach, where sinuous walls, blanketed by moist green, press in on a cobbled stream. **INFO:** \$35; 24 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov





PALOMAR MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

Doane Valley Campground

With dense conifer forests and grassy meadows at 4,700 feet, this campground is like a slice of the Sierra Nevada—in San Diego County. Kids can fish in Doane Pond, and the 200-inch Hale Telescope at Palomar Observatory (free; 760/742-2119) is a scenic drive up the road. **INFO:** \$30; 31 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

PISMO STATE BEACH

North Beach Campground

Sites sit among pine-covered dunes bordering the beach, with privacy and wind protection. Beach walking and birding are prime activities. Insider tip: Winter campers can observe thousands of monarch butterflies clustered in the neighboring eucalyptus grove. **INFO:** From \$35; 103 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

REFUGIO STATE BEACH

Northwest of Santa Barbara, campsites sit along a crescent-shaped cove fringed by palm trees, where you can fish, swim, and snorkel. Insider tip: During the summer, ask the park staff if they're offering free sea-kayaking lessons. **INFO:** From \$35; 65 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

RED ROCK CANYON STATE PARK

Ricardo Campground

At Red Rock Canyon, northeast of Mojave, colorful sandstone walls rise from the desert floor, and campsites are tucked against the White House Cliffs. Insider tip: The stargazing is so exceptional here that rangers post constellation charts detailing each evening's display. **INFO:** \$25; 50 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

RUSSIAN GULCH STATE PARK

On the rugged Northern California coast, this campground offers an up-close look at Mendocino's natural beauty. Marvel at Devil's Punch Bowl, where the ocean surges through a huge hole in the headlands. Insider tip: Hike to Russian Gulch Falls. Best for: Beating the heat. **INFO:** \$35; 26 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

SAN BERNARDINO NATIONAL FOREST

Boulder Basin Campground

At 7,300 feet in elevation, the forested campground is peppered with giant boulders. Sites at the top of the campsite loop feature expansive vistas of the national forest. Insider tip: Walk the quarter mile to the Black Mountain Fire Lookout for 360° views of Mt. San Gorgonio and the Banning Pass. It's a great spot for intimate, RV-free escapes. **INFO:** \$10; 34 sites; RVs not recommended; vault toilets; no potable water; open mid-May–late Oct; fs.usda.gov/sbnf

SHASTA-TRINITY NATIONAL FOREST

Mary Smith Campground

Thanks to clever placement, all the tent-only sites here has a view of sparkling Lewiston Lake and the rolling green peaks of the Trinity Alps. Add in excellent fishing and canoeing, and this spot northwest of Redding has all the ingredients for a perfect weekend. **INFO:** \$11; 17 sites; no RVs; flush and vault toilets; open late May–mid-Sep; fs.usda.gov/stnf

SANTA CATALINA ISLAND

Little Harbor Campground

Indulge your Robinson Crusoe fantasies here. Palm trees grace a sandy beach cove. Bright orange garibaldi swim in turquoise waters. On the coastal bluff, catch a glimpse of a grazing herd of bison, first imported here for a 1924 silent movie shoot. Grab your camera and hike as much or as little of the 37.2-mile Trans-Catalina Trail as you like; keep an eye out for some of the island's unique animals: Santa Catalina fox and Catalina California quail. Little Harbor Campground is

accessed via bus from the town of Avalon or Two Harbors (cars are not allowed on the island). Intrepid campers can backpack the 6³/₄-mile distance from Two Harbors. **INFO:** From \$21; 23 sites; no RVs; vault toilets; visitcatalina.com

FROM LEFT: J. P. GREENWOOD, CHRIS LESCHINSKY





SAMUEL P. TAYLOR STATE PARK

You've probably blown past this Marin County campground on the way to Tomales Bay. It's irresistibly close to San Francisco—and popular. Pitch a tent in the cool, shaded grove and spend the day splashing in the creek, pedaling along a smooth section of the Cross Marin Trail, or exploring hiking trails that swoop up for views of grassy hills. Insider tip: The 11 creekside sites are picturesque—but get road noise. The Orchard Hill Loop is quieter. **INFO:** \$35; 59 sites; flush toilets; parks.ca.gov

SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST
Lower Billy Creek Campground

On the forested shore of Huntington Lake, this spot is ideal for campers who want to sail, water-ski, fish, or swim. Most sites look out over the lake. For dazzling Sierra views, serious hikers should bag 10,310-foot Kaiser Peak (a difficult 14-mile round-trip). Head out early and be sure to reserve time to soak up the scene from the peak. **INFO:** From \$26; 13 sites; vault toilets; open late May–early Sep; fs.usda.gov/sierra

SHAVER LAKE ➤➤
Camp Edison

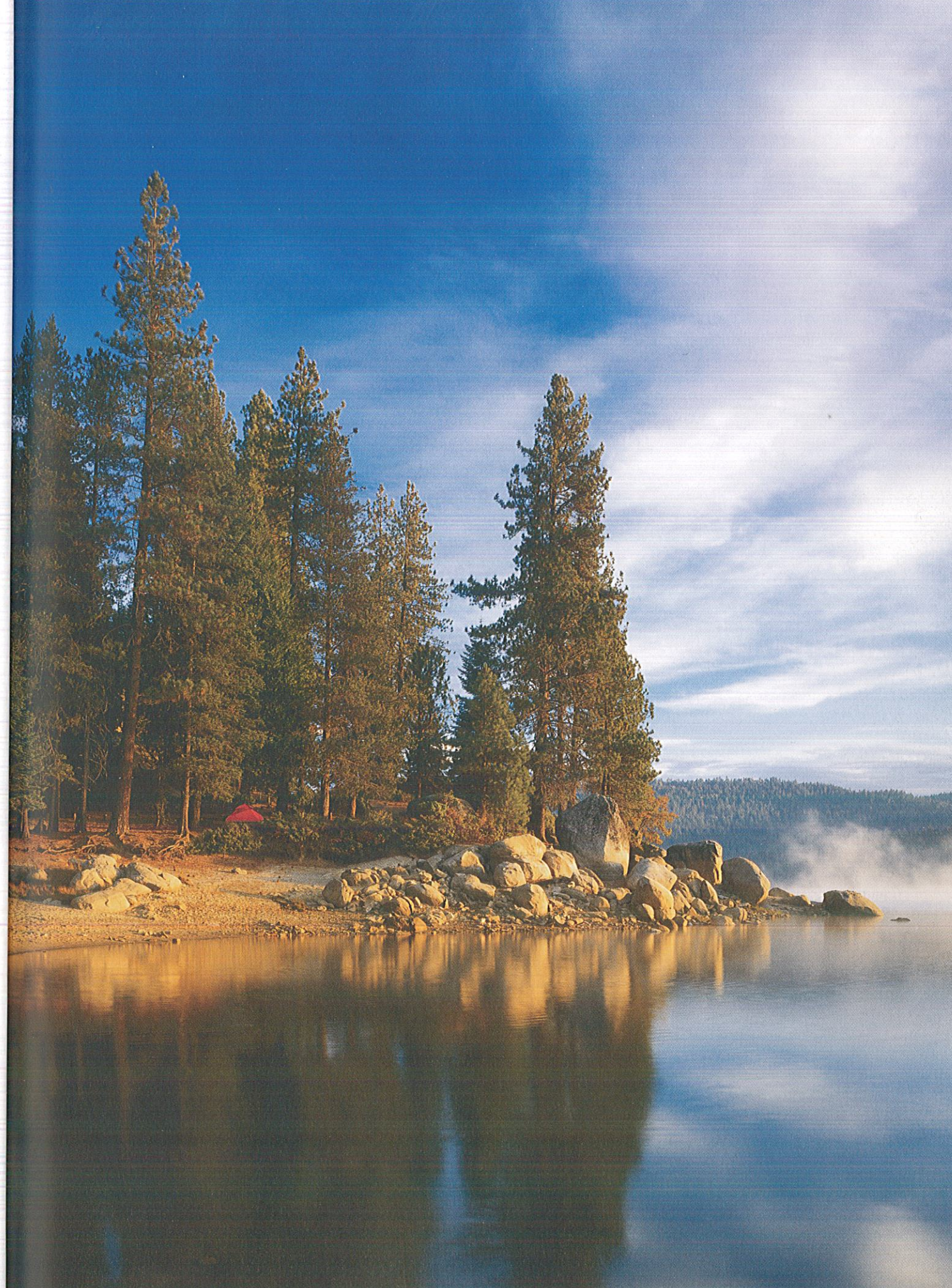
Rent a boat and join the flotilla cruising Shaver Lake's shimmering waters, or just kick back and listen to the wind in the pines. Shaver, 50 miles northeast of Fresno, is one of the Sierra lakes created as part of a Southern California Edison hydroelectric project, and Camp Edison's 252 campsites have electricity and cable TV. Some even have Internet. But power down: This camp has great lake access and mountain views. The lakefront spots are the most coveted, but conifers and granite boulders make even the "standard" sites private and comfortable. Campsites 119 and 121 have the best views but cost the most (\$65). **INFO:** From \$30; 252 tent and RV sites, flush toilets; 559/841-3134. Reservations by fax and mail only (details at sce.com/campedison)

STANISLAUS NATIONAL FOREST
Lake Alpine Campground

This family-friendly campground high in the Sierra makes an ideal home base for water enthusiasts, offering low-speed boating (with a free ramp), kayaking, and excellent fishing. Hikers and mountain bikers enjoy the 4-mile trail (paved part-way) that rings the lake. **INFO:** \$25; 25 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; open late May–late Sep; fs.usda.gov/stanislaus

STANISLAUS NATIONAL FOREST
Highland Lakes Campground

A drive-to campground with backpack-worthy scenery. You'll be drinking your morning coffee with one lake in front of you and another lake behind. Insider tip: Hit it in late June or early July to catch swaths of wildflowers framing high, craggy peaks. The campground opens and closes based on snowfall. **INFO:** \$8; 35 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; open mid-Jun–late Oct; fs.usda.gov/stanislaus

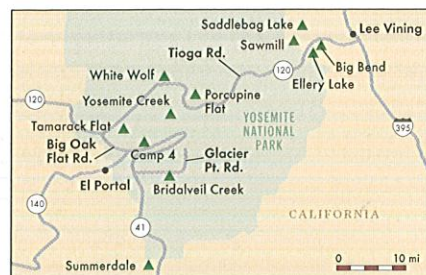


FROM LEFT: DAVID FENTON, MICHAEL VENERA



YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Plunging waterfalls, stark granite, alpine lakes, pristine meadows, giant sequoia trees, and meandering rivers lure 3.9 million visitors to Yosemite National Park each year. And since everyone comes for the scenery, why spend the night walled off from it? Get up close and personal with Yosemite's grandeur at one of 13 park campgrounds, each graced by the Sierra Nevada's starry skies and sweet mountain air. nps.gov/yose



CAMPGROUNDS

BEST SITE

White Wolf. Nestled in a lodgepole pine forest at 8,000 feet, the campground provides a taste of the Yosemite high country without the drudgery of backpacking. The camping gods are smiling on you if you score site 28 (our favorite), 22, or 23—the largest and most private options. White Wolf offers a few luxuries, including delicious meals at neighboring White Wolf Lodge (*breakfast, box lunches, and dinner daily, reservations required; 209/372-8416*). Trails to Lukens and Harden Lakes lead from the camp. **INFO:** \$14 (plus \$20 park entry fee per vehicle); 74 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; open mid-Jun–mid-Sep; 209/372-0200

Also great

Porcupine Flat. Situated 38 miles from Yosemite Valley, it's often the last to fill up on summer nights, and it's ideal for exploring the high country. **INFO:** \$10 (plus \$20 park entry fee per vehicle); 52 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; no running water; open mid-Jun–mid-Oct; 209/372-0200

Yosemite Creek. The campsite provides the most seclusion of any car campground in the park, but the price is a 4³/₄-mile drive off the highway via a narrow road. **INFO:** \$10; 75 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; no running water; open mid-Jun–early Sep; 209/372-0200

Outside the park

Big Bend. Set in a quaking aspen and Jeffrey pine forest alongside Lee Vining Creek, Big Bend is a perennial favorite of Yosemite veterans. It's just 9 miles from the park's eastern boundary. **INFO:** \$19; 18 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; open late Apr–Oct 31. *Inyo National Forest: fs.usda.gov/inyo or 760/873-2400*

Ellery Lake. The granite-backed lake surrounded by jagged peaks lies 3 miles west of Yosemite's eastern border at an elevation of 9,500 feet. The best sites are set off from the main camp by a short walk. **INFO:** \$19; 21 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; open mid-Jun–Sep; *Inyo National Forest (see above)*.

Saddlebag Lake. At 10,087 feet, the location's a major entrance point for the 20 Lakes Basin, a favorite hiking and angling area. And it's only 5 miles outside Yosemite's eastern boundary. Sites 16 and 18 have a lake view to die for. **INFO:** \$19; 20 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; open mid-Jun–mid-Oct; *Inyo National Forest (see above)*

Sawmill. Each campsite has a gorgeous view of the High Sierra—mountain peaks, a subalpine meadow bisected by a rushing stream, and scattered whitebark pines. If there's camping in heaven, this is what it

looks like. **INFO:** \$14; 12 sites; no reservations; no RVs; vault toilets; no running water; open mid-Jun–Sep; *Inyo National Forest (see above)*

Summerdale. Located 1¹/₂ miles from Yosemite's southern entrance, Summerdale is set at 5,000 feet in elevation on Big Creek. You can cool off in the creek's deep, clear swimming holes. **INFO:** From \$24; 29 sites; vault toilets; open early May–late Sep; *recreation.gov*

WHAT CAMP HOSTS SAY

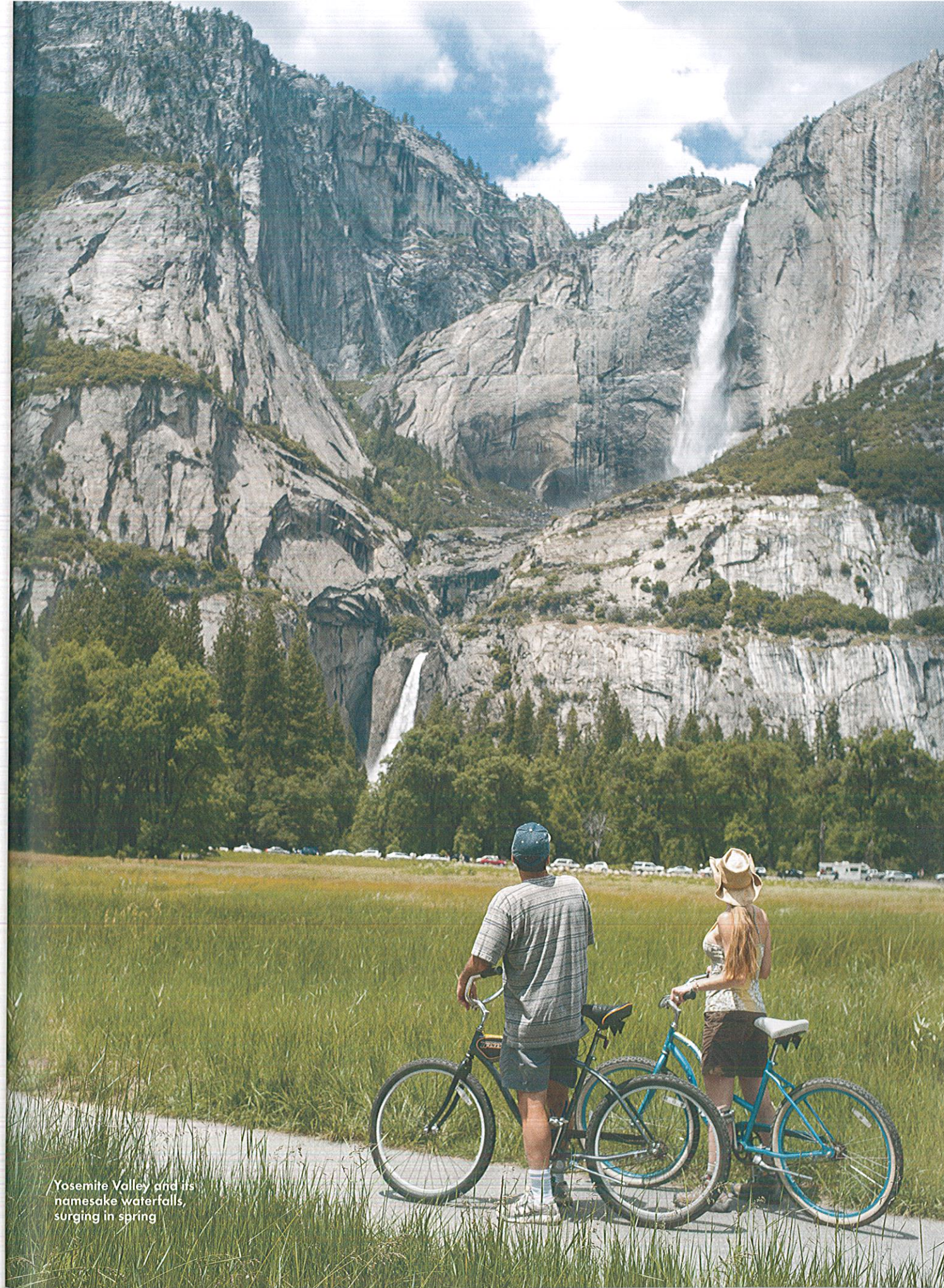
SHOW UP RIGHT AROUND CHECK-OUT (10 a.m. in Yosemite Valley; noon at all other park camps) to get your pick of available sites as campers vacate.

BE BEAR AWARE. Don't leave food or any other scented items (cosmetics, toiletries, toothpaste) in your car or tent—store them in your campsite's bear box.

STOCK UP. Outside the valley, be as self-sufficient as possible—it's a haul to the nearest store.

GET READY TO GO. Porcupine Flat, White Wolf, Yosemite Creek, and three additional park campgrounds—Bridalveil Creek (Jul–early Sep), Camp 4 (year-round), and Tamarack Flat (July–mid-Oct)—are first come, first served. Reservations are a must at all others (reserve up to five months in advance on the 15th of each month: recreation.gov or 877/444-6777).

INFO: Seven-day pass \$20 per vehicle. nps.gov/yose or 209/372-0200



Yosemite Valley and its namesake waterfalls, surging in spring

ANDREA M. GÓMEZ

NEVADA



THOMAS J. STORY

HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST

Hilltop Campground

At 8,437 feet, the aptly named campground overlooks the Mojave Desert and accesses the North Loop Trail, which takes you a rigorous 10.3 miles to the peak of Mt. Charleston. If you aren't up for Mt. Charleston, stop 3 miles in at a bristlecone pine known as Raintree, thought to be Nevada's oldest living thing. **INFO:** From \$21; 35 sites; flush toilets; open May–Oct; fs.usda.gov/htmf

LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Boulder Beach Campground

You'll find more than 100 palm-studded campsites just 1/2 mile from Lake Mead's shores in Boulder City. Go in October—the water's still warm and the days are still long enough to hike. Great for fishing and boating. **INFO:** \$10 (plus \$10 vehicle entry fee); 148 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; nps.gov/lame

← RED ROCK CANYON NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

Red Rock Canyon Campground

It's only 20 miles from Sin City, but you'd never know Las Vegas exists: The warm sandstone cliffs of Red Rock Canyon are a world unto themselves, with seriously beautiful desert day hikes, secret troves of rock art, and more climbing routes than you could scale in a lifetime. The campground, which is closed in summer, isn't adjacent to any formal hiking trails, but there are miles of old roads for wandering. Water is available, but limited to one gallon per person per day. **INFO:** \$15; 71 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; closed Jun–Aug; blm.gov/nv

VALLEY OF FIRE STATE PARK

Arch Rock Campground

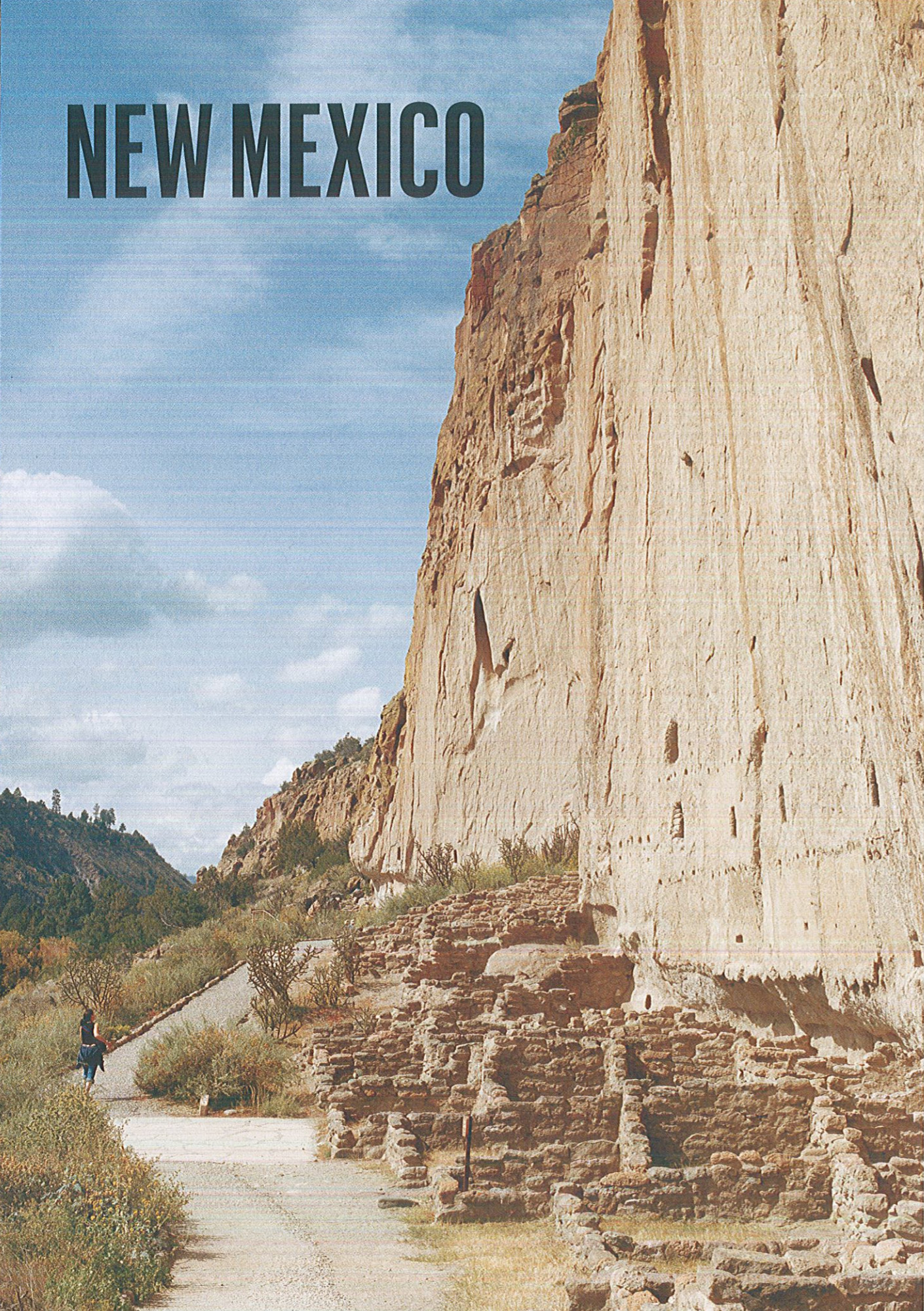
Talk about a Vegas showstopper: watching dawn or dusk paint this valley's sandstone formations vivid red is a spectacle as grand as anything on the Strip. All that and Ancestral Puebloan petroglyphs too. One of only two campgrounds in the aptly named Valley of Fire, Arch Rock has an upper loop where sandstone rocks create more privacy. Visit in spring or in fall; summer's daytime highs of 120° may make you long for casino air-conditioning. **INFO:** \$20; 29 sites; no reservations; flush and pit toilets; parks.nv.gov

WILSON RESERVOIR CAMPGROUND

About 90 miles north of the town of Elko lie the Bull Run Mountains, with the headwaters of one fork of the Owyhee to the east. This is DIY country—most of the land is BLM, and there are great car-camping spots along the shores of Wilson Reservoir. For just a few bucks a night, Wilson becomes your ideal base camp for scrambling up nearby Porter Peak, at 9,268 feet the highest in the range.

INFO: \$6; 15 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; no potable water; open all year when road is passable; blm.gov/nv

NEW MEXICO



← BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT

Juniper Family Campground

Set on a mesa amid junipers and pines, Juniper makes a great base for touring the monument's cliffs, mesas, and Ancestral Puebloan dwellings. Then hike the 2.5-mile Falls Trail past a waterfall.

INFO: \$12 per night (plus \$12 vehicle entry fee); 53 sites; flush toilets; nps.gov/band

CARSON NATIONAL FOREST

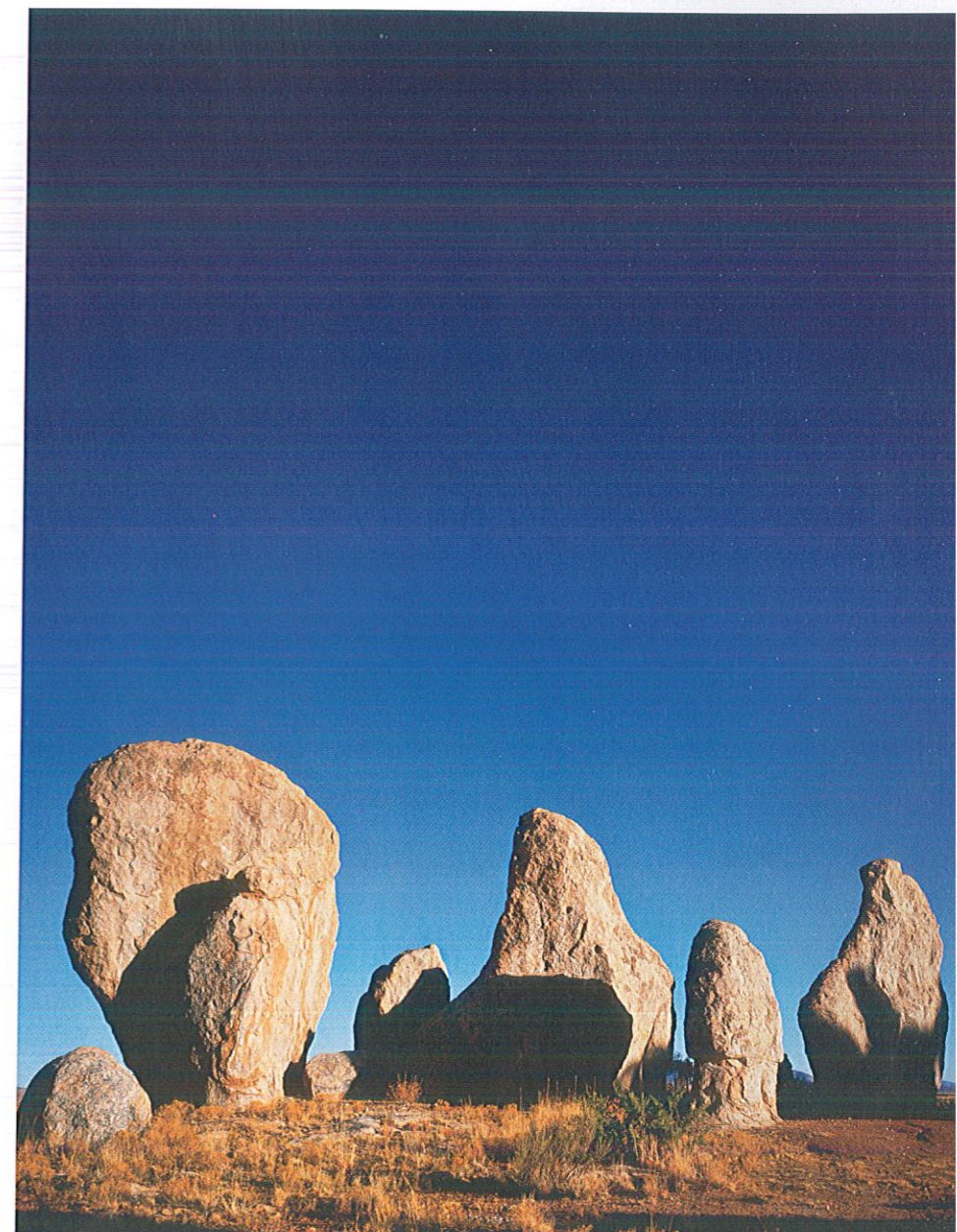
Twining Campground

Set in Taos Ski Valley at 9,400 feet, Twining gives you access to New Mexico's highest peak—13,161-foot Mt. Wheeler—and the easier 6-mile Long Canyon/Gold Hill loop. Invite friends and camp at the uppermost loop, the largest. **INFO:** Free; 4 sites; no reservations; no toilets; no water; open May–Sep; fs.usda.gov/carson

CIMARRON CANYON STATE PARK

Maverick Campground

This sun-dappled park has all the best of northern New Mexico: It's set in a wilderness area that offers 33,000 acres of crystalline creeks, abundant trout, shaded canyons, towering granite cliffs, and wildflowers galore. Take it all in from this creekside campground deep in the park, which comes with civilized touches like bathrooms and running water during the May–November high season. **INFO:** \$10; 45 sites; flush toilets; nmparks.com



CITY OF ROCKS STATE PARK ↑

At this southwest New Mexico hidden gem of a park, house-size volcanic ash boulders create a mini-city maze; ancient paths weave through the boulders. Insider tip: Campsites have little shade, so go in spring or fall. **INFO:** From \$10; 55 sites; vault toilets; nmparks.com

LINCOLN NATIONAL FOREST

Sleepy Grass Campground

The grass-and-pine meadow here feels totally secluded, but it's just 1 mile from Cloudcroft's shop- and restaurant-dotted Burro Avenue. At 8,800 feet, it's a great spot to beat summer heat. Hike or bike Trail 5661 for views across White Sands National Monument and out to Las Cruces. **INFO:** From \$15; 46 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; open mid-May–early Sep; fs.usda.gov/lincoln

FROM LEFT: DAVID FENTON, WILLARD CLAY/GETTY IMAGES



PECOS WILDERNESS

Jack's Creek Campground

This grassy expanse is your jumping-off point for exploring the quarter-million-acre forested mountains of the Pecos Wilderness. Down the road, the Cave Creek Trail leads through stands of aspens and wildflower-filled meadows before reaching its namesake. The rushing stream snakes in and out of natural caves, some of which can be explored if you've got a flashlight. **INFO:** \$10; 40 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; open mid-May–mid-Nov; exploreNM.com

MORPHY LAKE STATE PARK

Campers once needed a four-wheel-drive vehicle to reach the campground here, about 100 miles northeast of Santa Fe. A paved road now smooths the journey, but mornings here are still serene. Ponderosa pines surround the 15-acre lake, tucked into the eastern edge of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Most of the campsites sit waterside, allowing paddlers to launch right from camp. And sites on the lake's east side enjoy blown-open views of 10,000-foot peaks, which get spotlighted by the rising sun. **INFO:** From \$10; 26 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; no potable water; open Apr 1–Oct 14; nmparks.com

RIO CHAMA WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

Rio Chama Campground

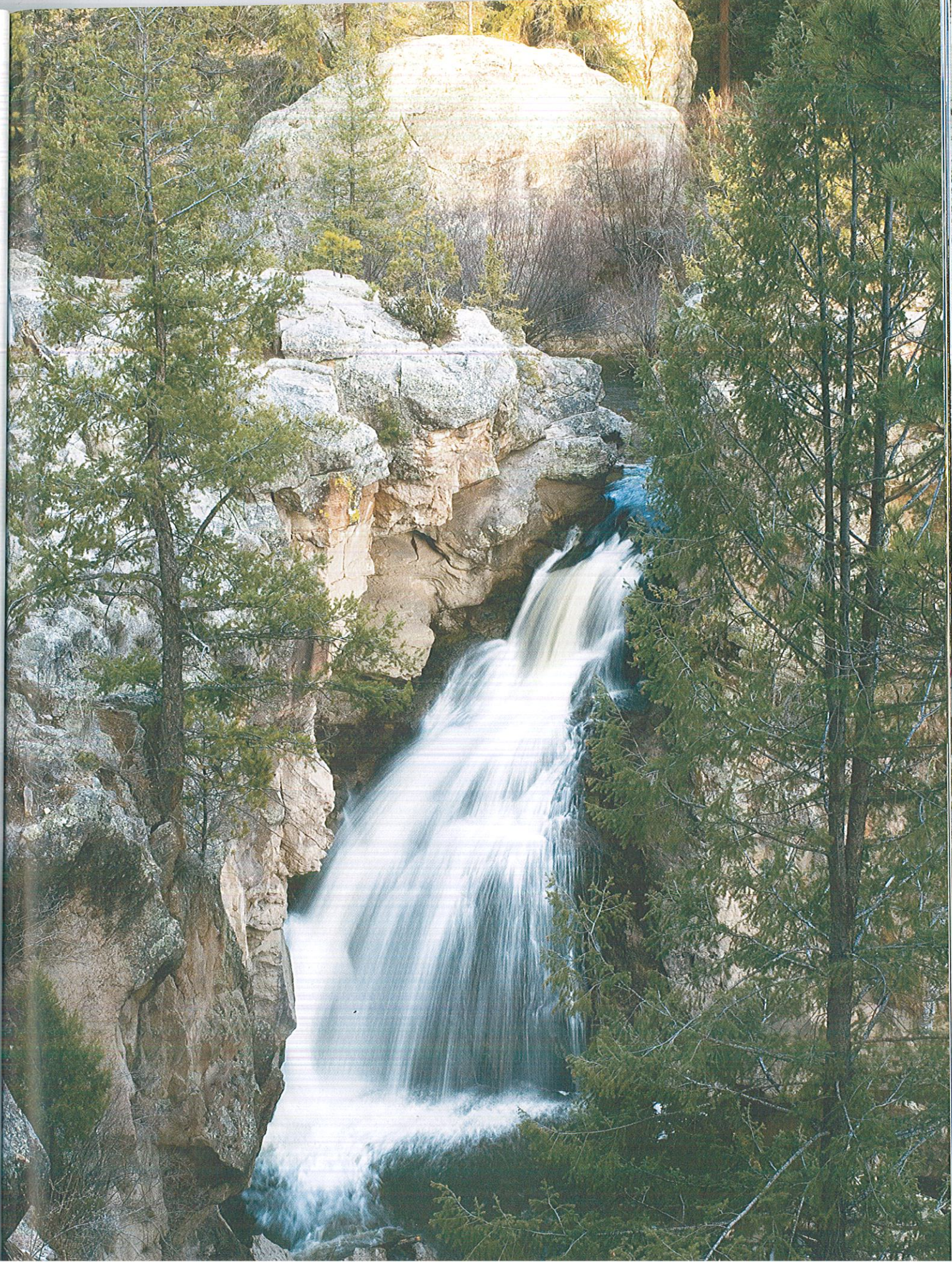
Tucked into a stand of juniper along the Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River, this campsite is in the heart of sandstone cliffs and Georgia O'Keeffe country. Wooded and open sites are available, many with water views. **INFO:** Free; 10 sites; RVs not recommended; no reservations; vault toilets; open Apr–Oct; fs.usda.gov/santafe

SANTA FE NATIONAL FOREST

Jemez Falls Campground

Nestled in a ponderosa forest at 8,000 feet and next to the Jemez River, Jemez Falls Campground is a fly-fishing dream. It's also just a stroll away from Jemez Falls, which even in dry years is a lovely sight. Feeling in need of a stiffer hike followed by a soothing soak? Follow the East Fork Trail to McCauley Warm Springs, a 5-mile round-trip. **INFO:** \$10; 52 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; no potable water; fs.usda.gov/santafe

FROM LEFT: JEN JUDGE, DOUGLAS MERRIAM



ARIZONA



FROM LEFT: RON & PATTY THOMAS/GETTY IMAGES; EDWARD MCCAIN



CHIRICAHUA NATIONAL MONUMENT

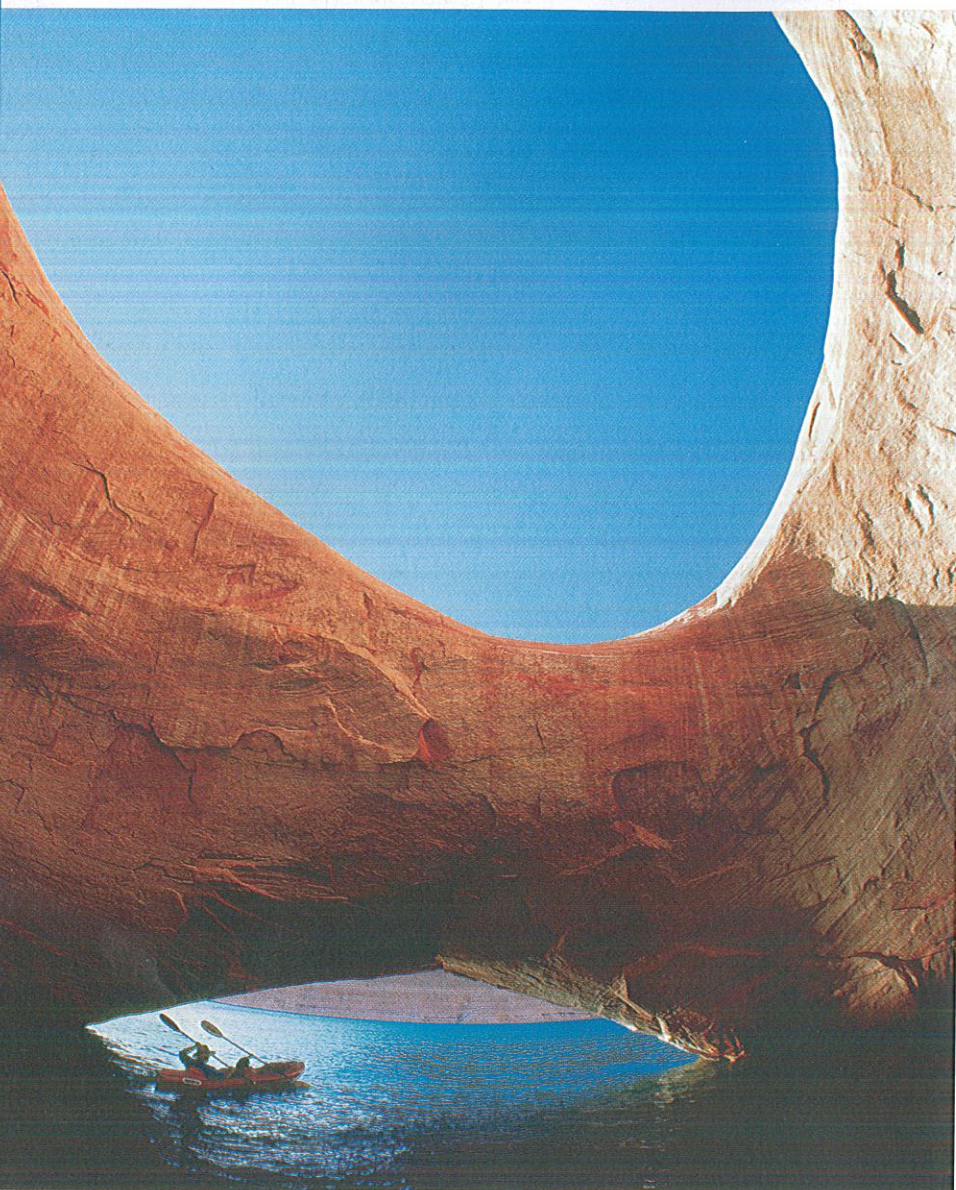
Bonita Canyon Campground

The pine and juniper-studded campground is near the visitor center of the national monument, southeast of the town of Willcox. Drive 6 miles up the road to access hiking trails that cut through a forest of volcanic-ash rock spires and hoodoos, the wind-carved remnants of a cataclysmic volcanic explosion 1,000 times the magnitude of the eruption of Mount St. Helens. Come in September, when you'll have the place to yourself. **INFO:** \$12 (plus \$5 entry fee per person); 24 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; nps.gov/chir

← CANYON DE CHELLY NATIONAL MONUMENT

Cottonwood Campground

Shaded by cottonwoods and surprisingly cool, the campground is near pueblo sites and the visitor center, where you can hire a private guide to tour the northwest Arizona park's backcountry (you can't access it without one). **INFO:** \$14 for up to 7 people; managed by Navajo Nation Parks & Recreation; 93 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; nps.gov/cach



COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST
Cave Springs Campground

Set in shaded Oak Creek Canyon near Sedona, the campground is surrounded by red sandstone walls and has its own creek. Great for first-timers. Hit the water holes at Slide Rock State Park (\$20 per vehicle; azstateparks.com), about 5 miles down the road. **INFO:** \$20; 85 sites; vault toilets; open Mar 15–Nov 2; recreation.gov

GLEN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA ↑
Wabweap Campground

What better payoff for taking the camping plunge than the finger canyons of Lake Powell? A waterfront site comes with basic creature comforts (hot showers, shaded picnic tables). After breakfast, the main event: Rent a boat or kayak at the marina to explore what looks for all the world like Zion National Park filled half-way with water. **INFO:** From \$26 (plus \$15 park entry fee); 251 sites; flush toilets; lakepowell.com

ORGAN PIPE CACTUS ➤➤➤
NATIONAL MONUMENT
Twin Peaks Campground

Blue skies arch over the astonishingly lush heart of the Sonoran Desert here in southwest Arizona, where columnar cactus dominate the rocky ridges of the nearby hills. If winter rains are generous, early spring wildflowers carpet the land with splashes of yellow, purple, and scarlet. **INFO:** \$12 per night (plus \$8 entry fee per vehicle); 208 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; nps.gov/orpi

PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST
Hilltop Campground

At 5,800 feet, this campground in Lynx Lake Recreation Area is only half a mile south of the 55-acre, trout-stocked Lynx Lake. Try to get a site with a lake view. Families love to pan for gold in Lynx Creek, just north of the recreation area. **INFO:** \$18; 38 sites; no reservations; vault toilets; open Apr–Oct; fs.usda.gov/prescott

TONTO NATIONAL FOREST
Crabtree Wash Recreation Site

Park your tent or trailer right on Apache Lake's granite gravel beach, 100 miles northeast from Phoenix. Dispersed camping (camping outside a designated campground) gives you a front-row view of saguaro-covered volcanic cliffs that catch dawn's first rays, and the shallow water is perfect for swimming or paddling. **INFO:** \$6; no reservations; RVs not recommended; vault toilet; no potable water; fs.usda.gov/recremain/tonto/recreation

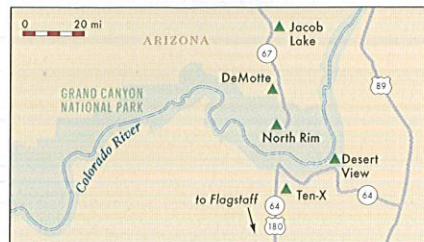
FROM LEFT: KERRICK JAMES, PURESTOCK/GETTY IMAGES





GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

The Grand Canyon's dizzying cliffs and vast scope can easily overwhelm—as can its more than 4.4 million annual visitors. One remedy for absorbing the park's beauty is to spend a night beneath the stars. If you're after views alone, the South Rim won't disappoint; its overlooks galore offer varied perspectives on the canyon. The higher, cooler North Rim—claiming only 10 percent of the visiting throngs—is more remote and bordered with wildflower meadows and thick stands of spruce. nps.gov/grca



CAMPGROUNDS

BEST SITE

North Rim. Facing the canyon, site 14 is lovely. Set at the far end of the campground, it's fringed with aspens and ponderosa pines and offers easy access to the Transept Trail. An added bonus: a perfect sunset view. **INFO:** \$18–\$25 (plus \$25 park entry fee per vehicle); 90 sites; flush toilets; open May 15–Oct 31 (reservation required May 15–Oct 15); recreation.gov

Also great

Desert View. Head 25 miles east of Grand Canyon Village for the most peaceful and scenic camping on the South Rim—not to mention the park's most beautiful sunrise spot. Professional photographers camp here to capture the unfolding layers of color and shadow at dawn. The best time to secure a spot is midmorning, when people are packing up camp. **INFO:** \$12; 50 sites; no reservations; flush toilets; open May–mid-Oct; 928/638-7888

Outside the park

DeMotte. Seven miles north of the North Rim entrance, this Kaibab National Forest Service campground is adjacent to a grassy meadow and offers easy access to the Rainbow Rim Trail and great mountain biking opportunities. At 8,760 feet, expect cool evenings. **INFO:** \$18; 38 sites (some reservable); vault toilets; open mid-May–mid-Oct; fs.usda.gov/kaibab or recreation.gov

Jacob Lake. Set in a ponderosa pine forest about 45 miles from the North Rim, the campground has hiking and biking access to Buck Ridge Viewpoint, where you can catch views of Bryce and Zion. Just across the street is Jacob Lake Inn (breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily; 928/643-7232); if you tire of camp cooking, head here for a gourmet burger and excellent baked goods. **INFO:** \$18; 51 sites; vault toilets; open mid-May–mid-Oct; fs.usda.gov/kaibab or recreation.gov

Ten-X. Located 2 miles south of Tusayan, the Forest Service campground is set in the woods and has barbecue grills and large sites covered with soft pine needles. It's just 4 miles to the south entrance of Grand Canyon National Park, with access to other hiking opportunities within a short driving distance. **INFO:** \$10; 70 sites; vault toilets; open May–late Sep; fs.usda.gov/kaibab or recreation.gov

WHAT CAMP HOSTS SAY

PLAN AHEAD WHEN HIKING. If you're going into the canyon, decide just how long you'd like to hike, then turn around once a third of that time has elapsed. Head out at dawn to avoid hiking in the heat of the day.

BRING WATER. It gets hot here in the summer. Plan on 2½ gallons of water per person for each day of your stay.

TAKE IN THE SUNSET. From North Rim Campground, hike along the Transept Trail at sunset and have a cocktail on the deck at the Grand Canyon Lodge.

GET READY TO GO. If you're planning to camp within the park, make the reservations one year in advance—or try for a first-come, first-served spot at North Rim (Oct 16–Oct 31 only) or Desert View Campgrounds.

INFO: Seven-day pass \$25 per vehicle. nps.gov/grca or 928/638-7888

The awesome scene near Grandview Point



THOMAS J. STORY