

# Ninety Three to Ninety Six

A wander through  
some of America's  
less famous  
National Parks



(Part 1 of the "Best Idea" trilogy)



This trilogy consists of 3 geographically-based volumes, as shown above. You are in volume 1. The name of each volume is explained within its pages while the name of the trilogy is taken from a quote by Wallace Stegner, who said:

***"National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst."***

Wallace Earle Stegner (1909 to 1993) was an American novelist, short story writer, environmentalist, and historian who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972.

The National Park Service manages 418 individual units in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and US territories. The table below shows most of the different naming designations, all of which are commonly referred to as "parks". Some parks such as Jean Lafitte consist of more than one location or unit.

16 National Battlefields, Battlefield Parks & Battlefield Sites
9 National Military Parks
52 National Historical Parks & 77 National Historic Sites
1 International Historic Site
4 National Lakeshores & 10 National Seashores
29 National Memorials & 88 National Monuments
60 National Parks
4 National Parkways
19 National Preserves & 2 National Reserves
18 National Recreation Areas
5 National Rivers
10 National Wild and Scenic Rivers and Riverways
3 National Scenic Trails

About 380 of the units keep records of visitor numbers, and we have used the official 2018 figures in deciding which sites count as "less famous".

23 Parks had more than 4 million visitors in 2018, and 45 had more than 2 million.

2 of the sites featured here had fewer than 100,000 visitors in the same period, and only 1 had more than a million visitors. This despite the fact that this is the most heavily-populated area of the United States.

Images in this book, if not our own, are © National Park Service.

We are sure you will know of, and may well have visited, the more famous US National Parks such as Yellowstone..



Death Valley,.....



..and the Grand Canyon.



You will know that there are many more National Parks in the USA, especially in the west of the country. Arizona and Utah in particular have some spectacular geomorphology with great canyons and red rocks, but there are plenty of interesting sites further east in the country as well. For example the National Parks Service looks after The National Mall in Washington D.C. and the Jefferson National Expansion Monument (Gateway Arch) in St. Louis.



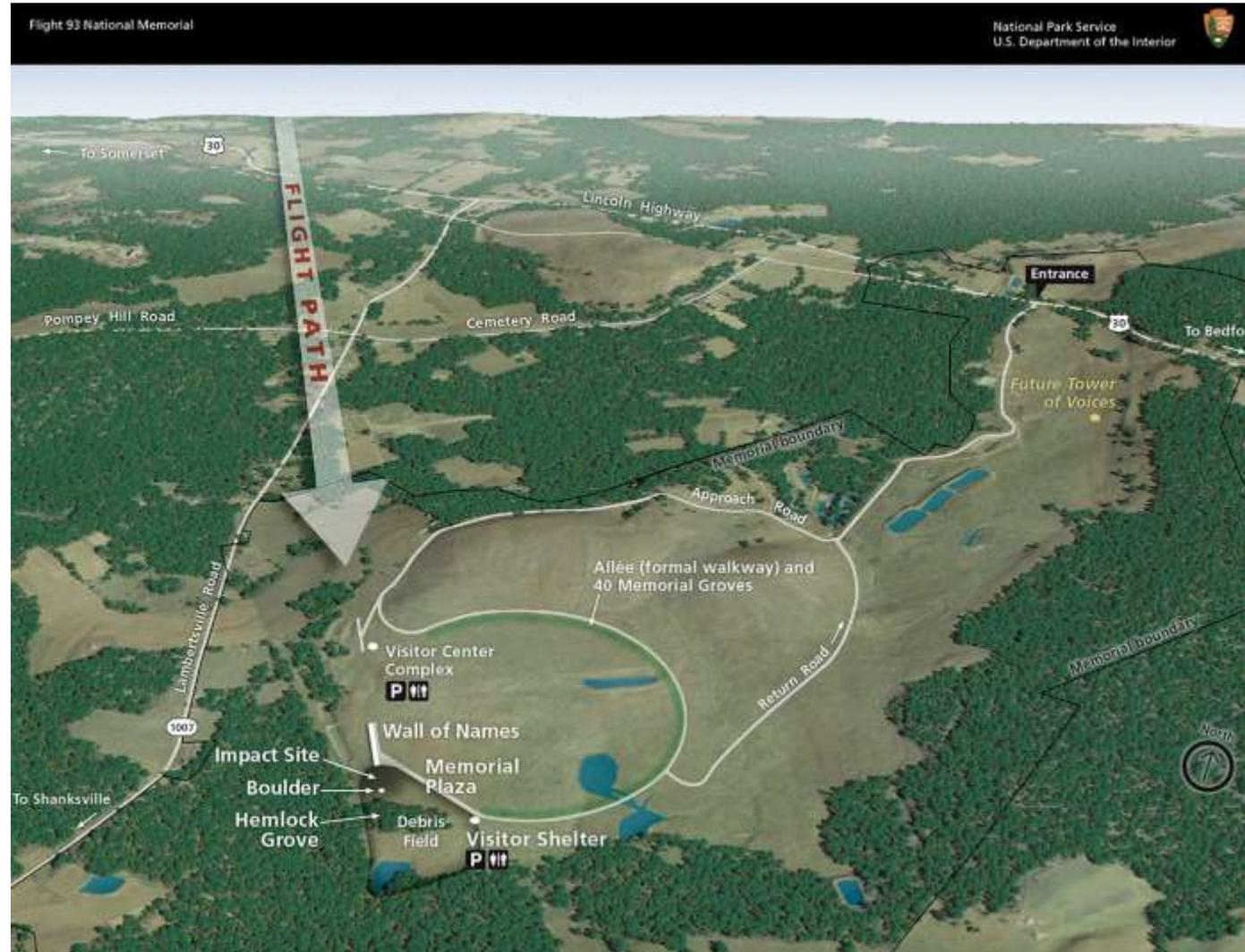
In this book we're going to have a look at some sites which are much less well-known but still very interesting.

We will start in Pennsylvania where we find the source of the first part of this book's title, **Flight 93 National Memorial**.

When we were younger a very common question was: "Where were you when JFK was shot?" We suspect the 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent will be "Where were you on 911 (nine-eleven)?"

On 11th September 2001, 2 aircraft piloted by Al-Qaeda extremists were crashed into the towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and a third plane was crashed into The Pentagon in Washington D.C. There is a very moving memorial at The Pentagon which we would urge you to visit if you are nearby, but as it is not a National Park it is outwith the scope of this book.

United Airlines Flight 93 from Newark, New Jersey to San Francisco was the fourth aircraft involved on the day and was hijacked over northern Ohio and turned southeast towards Washington D.C. It is believed that The Capitol was meant to be its target, but the passengers on the plane heard about the other attacks and attempted to regain control of the aircraft. During the struggle the plane crashed or was crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, about 130 miles short of its target. All 44 people on board were killed, including the four hijackers, but no one on the ground was injured. Vice President Dick Cheney is reported to have said, "I think an act of heroism just took place on that plane."



The Memorial includes a  
wildflower meadow.





The Wall of Names follows the flight path to the Ceremonial Gate and the crash site beyond.





*A common field one day. A field of honor forever.*



"IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SEPTEMBER MORNING  
WITH A BLUE SKY...JUST A NORMAL DAY."  
—BY MARY, TENNESSEE, EARLY 1900S

THIS IS THE WORK OF  
TERRORISTS.





The interior of the Visitor Centre contains a great deal of information about the aircraft, terrorism generally, and the FBI investigation into this attack.

There are also many sobering reminders of the event, including personal details of all the passengers and crew as well as some of the personal effects found at the crash site. Visitors can even listen to actual recordings of a few of the phone calls made by passengers and crew during the hijacking.





The final part of the Memorial is a “Tower of Voices” which was nearing completion at the time of writing.

The tower is conceived as a monumental, ninety-three feet tall musical instrument holding forty wind chimes, representing the forty passengers and crew members. It is intended to be a landmark feature near the memorial entrance, visible from US Route 30/Lincoln Highway. The Tower of Voices will provide a living memorial in sound to remember the forty through their ongoing voices.



**Mammoth Cave National Park** in Kentucky is our next destination.



The cave is not so named because of any connection with mammoths from the stone age: it is called that because it is far and away the world's longest cave. More than 400 miles of passages have been mapped, under a surface area of 53,000 acres, and cave mappers believe the cave system will eventually prove to be 560 miles long. For comparison, the second longest cave in the world, Optymistychna Cave in the Ukraine, is only 143 miles long.

Mammoth Cave was formed in Mississippian-age limestone rock. The cave is 379 feet deep, and contains at least 5 levels of passages. The levels were formed in response to changes in the Ohio River during the late Tertiary and Quaternary Periods.

Mammoth Cave is only one of many large caves in Kentucky: twelve other Kentucky caves are on the list of the world's longest caves.





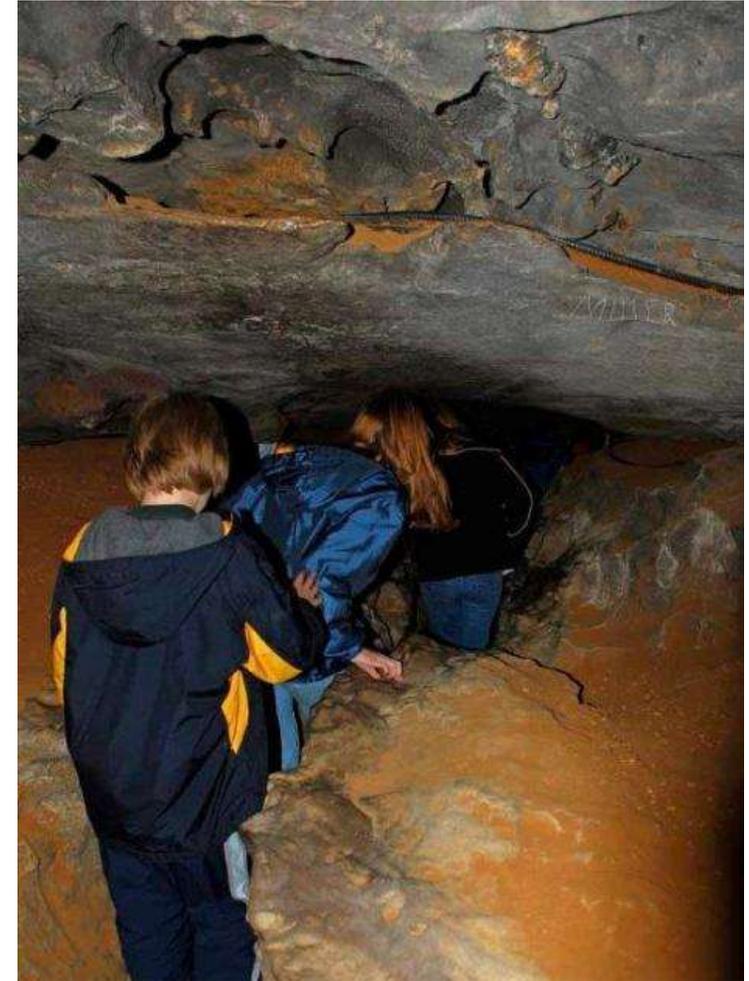
A ranger preparing a group in the morning mist before going underground. All tours of the cave are led by rangers and free exploration is not permitted.

The main entrance to the cave system.





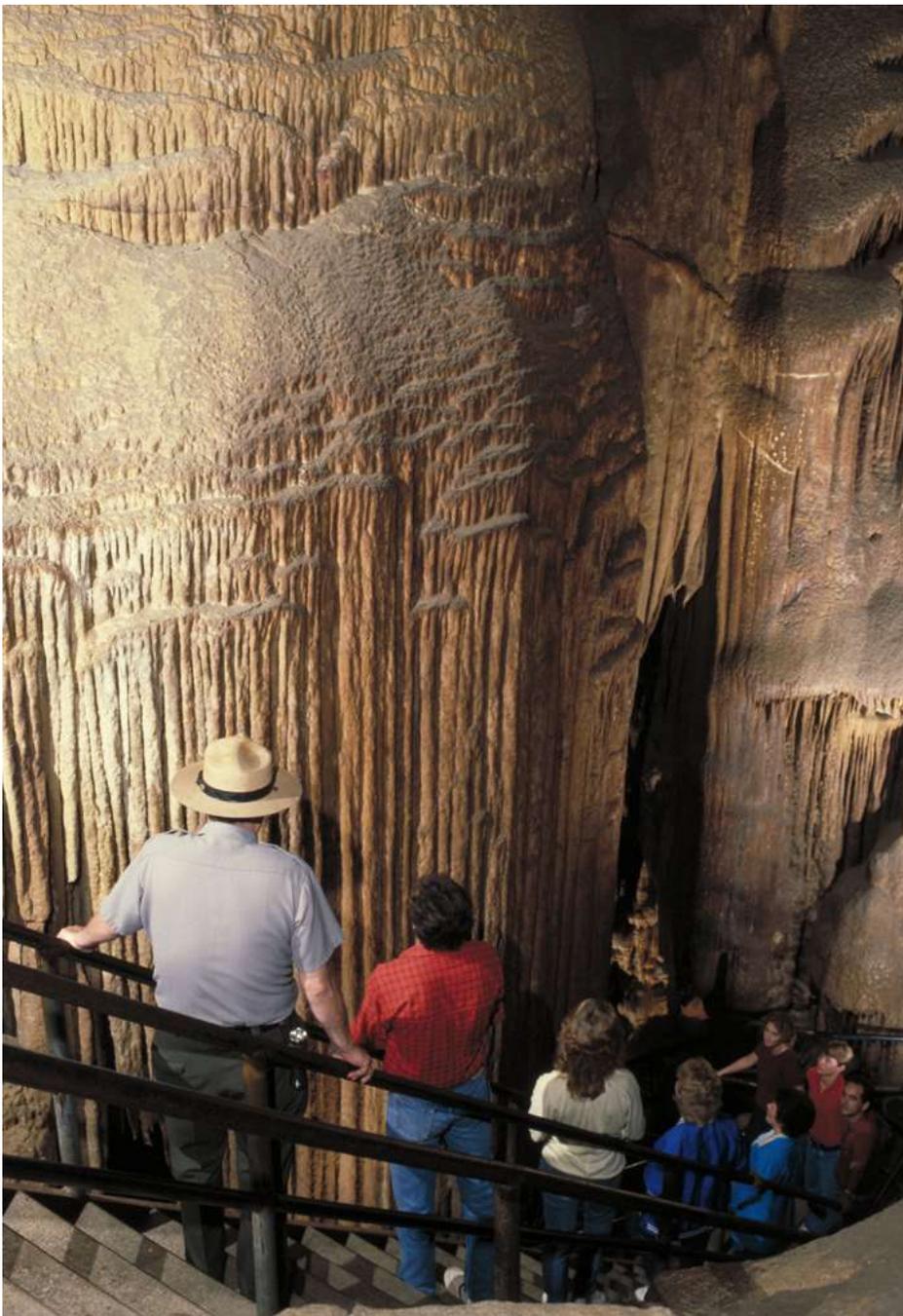
Some of the passages are quite large as you can see on the left, and others much less so. The “passage” below is called “Fat man’s misery”!



The bottom left picture is of a scale model of a very small part of the cave system, part of the extensive display in the Visitor Centre. It is fascinating to see the different routes taken by the river over the millennia as it carved its way down.

This entrance to the cave, access to some of the tours, is a 4-mile bus journey from the main entrance.





The picture on the left is of “Frozen Niagara”, an extensive set of stalactites, accessible from the second entrance.

If you ever visit Mammoth Cave and want to take one of the organised tours, it is well worth taking the time to read the description of the tour. Some tours only operate once a day so pre-booking is highly recommended, particularly in high season, and other tours involve some stairs.

The River Styx tour, which descends to the lowest level of the cave system, is described as:

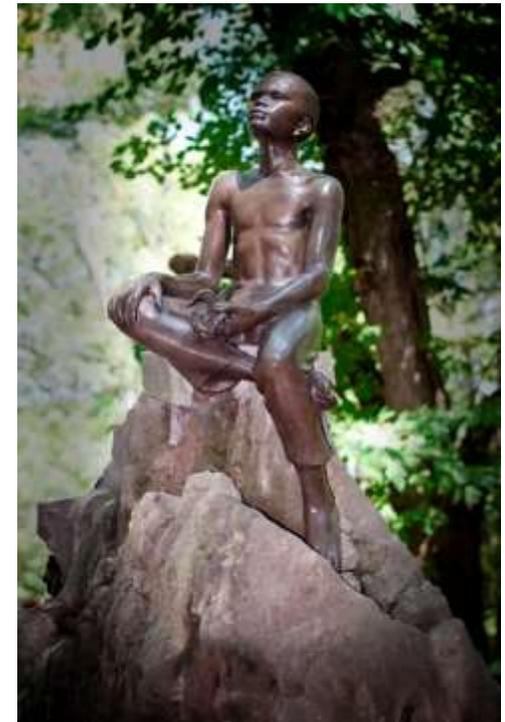
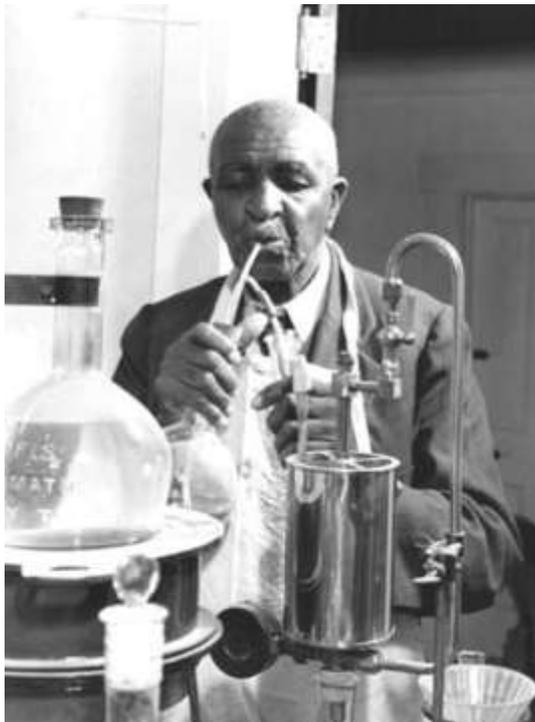
“Total Stairs: Approximately 475, including 155 at Mammoth Dome  
Difficulty: Moderate, Duration: 2½ hours,  
Distance: 2½ miles”

475 stairs over 2½ hours doesn’t sound too bad, does it? What the website neglects to mention is that the 155 stairs at Mammoth Dome are at the very end of the tour, are in a single continuous upward staircase, and feel like an awful lot more! The first 50-odd stairs are shown on the right.





Just outside the town of Joplin in Missouri, on the border with Kansas and Oklahoma, is a National Monument to a man called George Washington Carver. Before we went there we had never heard of him, and we suspect the same applies to many of you.



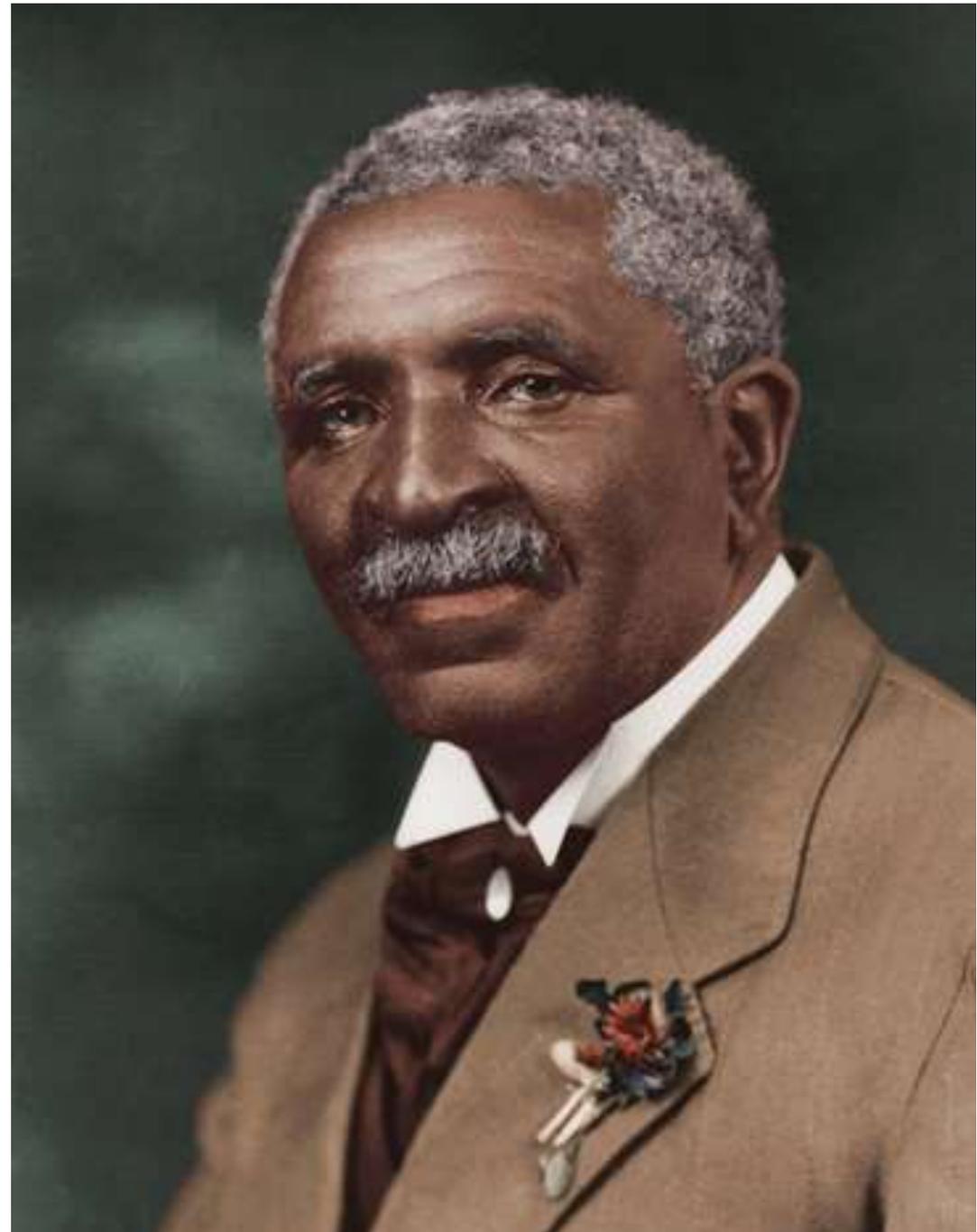
With fewer than 45,000 visitors in 2018 this site is 294<sup>th</sup> on the list, so quite clearly counts as “less famous”.

George Washington Carver was a scientist, botanist, educator, and inventor. He was born into slavery a year or so before slavery was abolished in Missouri in January 1865. In his childhood he spent all his spare time in the fields and woods near his home, drawing and studying the plants, crops and trees.

Black people were not allowed at the local public school in Diamond Grove so he had to go to a school for black children 10 miles away.

After finishing school, Carver applied to several colleges before being accepted at Highland University in Highland, Kansas. When he got there, however, they rejected him because of his race.

Instead he homesteaded a claim, where he maintained a small conservatory of plants and flowers and a geological collection. He manually ploughed 17 acres of the claim, planting rice, corn, Indian corn and garden produce, as well as various fruit trees, forest trees, and shrubbery. He also supported himself by doing odd jobs in town and working as a ranch hand.



His desire to educate himself was undiminished and he kept trying to find a college which would accept him. When he was eventually accepted at a college in 1891 (Iowa State Agricultural College), he was the first black student there. He obtained his degree with a thesis on "Plants as Modified by Man", and went on to obtain a Master of Science degree. Carver then taught as the first black faculty member at Iowa State.

Carver accepted the post of Head of the Agriculture Department of the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) and taught there for 47 years, developing the department into a strong research centre. He lived at the Institute where he had 2 rooms. His salary was above average when he started but not so by the time of his death: he always lived frugally and always declined offers of a pay rise, yet used \$60,000 of his own money to create the George Washington Carver Foundation to continue agricultural research. (About \$1 million by today's values.)

Carver's reputation is based on his research into and promotion of alternative crops to cotton, such as peanuts, soya beans and sweet potatoes, which also aided nutrition for farm families. He wanted poor farmers to practice crop rotation and grow alternative crops both as a source of their own food and as a source of other products to improve their quality of life.



He issued 44 practical bulletins for farmers, the most popular of which contained 105 food recipes using peanuts. He also developed and promoted about 100 products made from peanuts that were useful for the house and farm, including:

- cosmetics
- dyes
- paints
- plastics
- gasoline
- nitro-glycerine

His inventiveness with peanuts led to that becoming one of the six most produced crops in the U.S. by the 1940s.

George Washington Carver died on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1943 aged about 79. His monument is a garden on the site where he was born: a very fitting tribute to a man who taught himself the basics of botany while exploring these very woods.

On his grave is written, “He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honour in being helpful to the world”.





## Mission San Antonio de Valero (normally known as The Alamo)

This Spanish mission complex was the first of the San Antonio missions founded to convert the local American Indians to Christianity. The mission eventually became a community of Spanish, Mexican, and American Indian Catholics but was secularized at the end of the 18th century and fell into disuse. Thereafter it witnessed a very bloody period.

The Mexican Revolution began in 1810 and during that period the Spanish and the Mexicans fought for control of The Alamo. In 1835 Texas rebelled against rule from Mexico City and declared itself the independent Republic of Texas. The rebels took The Alamo in December of 1835. In January, they heard that Mexican General Santa Anna was marching north with a large army, but the Texan government could not get enough reinforcements to them.

The Mexican soldiers arrived on February 23, 1836. The siege lasted 13 days and Mexico lost 1544 of its 5000 men in the fighting. At the end, 187 Texan men garrisoned at The Alamo died defending it against Santa Anna's attack. The only survivors were a small number of non-combatants, mostly women and children. In 1845 the United States annexed the Republic of Texas, an act that helped spark the U.S.-Mexican War the following year.

Those killed in the Alamo included the famous Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie: the former was a Colonel in the Tennessee Militia and former Congressman in addition to being known as a backwoodsman, and the latter was a notorious knife fighter.





### **Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuña**

A bit of a mouthful isn't it? Not surprising that it is normally shortened to Concepción. Originally founded in 1716 in what is now eastern Texas, the mission was one of six authorized by the government to serve as a buffer against the threat of French incursion into Spanish territory from Louisiana. Developed by Franciscans and after a tenuous existence and several moves, the mission was transferred to its present site in 1731.

This handsome stone church took about 15 years to build, and was dedicated in 1755. It appears very much as it did over two centuries ago. Due to the fact that it was built directly on bedrock, it never lost its roof, or its integrity. It remains the least restored of the colonial structures within the Park.





In its heyday, colourful geometric designs covered its surface inside and out. The exterior patterns have long since faded or been worn away. However, there are several rooms in which to see remaining frescoes with all their detail and creativity.

Until preservation work in 1988 revealed a second eye, the fresco (top right) on the convent ceiling was known as the "Eye of God".



## Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo

Founded in 1720, the mission was named for Saint Joseph and the Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo, the governor of the Province of Coahuila and Texas at the time. It was built on the banks of the San Antonio River a few miles to the south of the earlier mission, Mission San Antonio de Valero (the Alamo).

Its founder was the famous Father Antonio Margil de Jesus, a very prominent Franciscan missionary in early Texas.







The imposing and quite extensive building is set in a large open area.







## Mission San Juan Capistrano

In 1716, Mission San José de los Nazonis was established to serve the Nazonis Indians. However, the mission was not successful, and whatever was transportable was moved here. On March 5, 1731, the mission was re-established on the east bank of the San Antonio River and renamed San Juan Capistrano.

Despite the new location, the mission still had to contend with adversity. Epidemics of smallpox, measles, and other European disease swept through the mission, causing much suffering and death among the native inhabitants. Early on, bands of raiding Apaches and later Comanche terrorized the community.

At times, when food was bountiful and danger was low outside the protective walls, some of the mission Indians left, returning to their hunting and gathering way of life.







## Mission San Francisco de la Espada



Spain founded Mission San Francisco de los Texas in 1690. Along with the other Missions in the area, it served as a buffer against French encroachment from Louisiana. Fevers, floods, fires, enemies, and limited supplies prompted several relocations of this early mission. On March 5, 1731, Mission San Francisco de la Espada was established along this bank of the San Antonio River.

Spanish Franciscan missionaries pursued a powerful vision for God and country. They trained the Coahuiltecan (kwa-weel-teken) people to be servants of God and loyal, productive citizens of New Spain. Over a 50-year period, they earnestly taught the principles of farming, ranching, architecture, blacksmithing, loom weaving, spinning, and masonry. Espada was the only San Antonio mission where bricks and tiles were made. The Catholic faith and Spanish language became the foundation of the new culture.

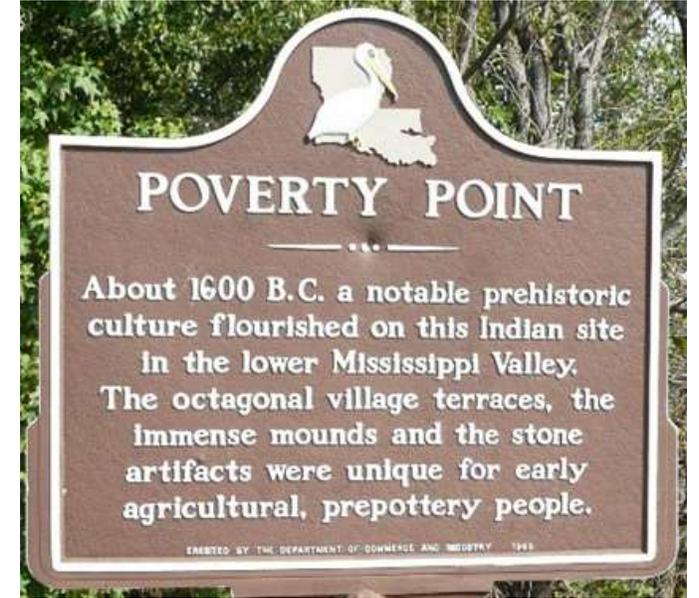
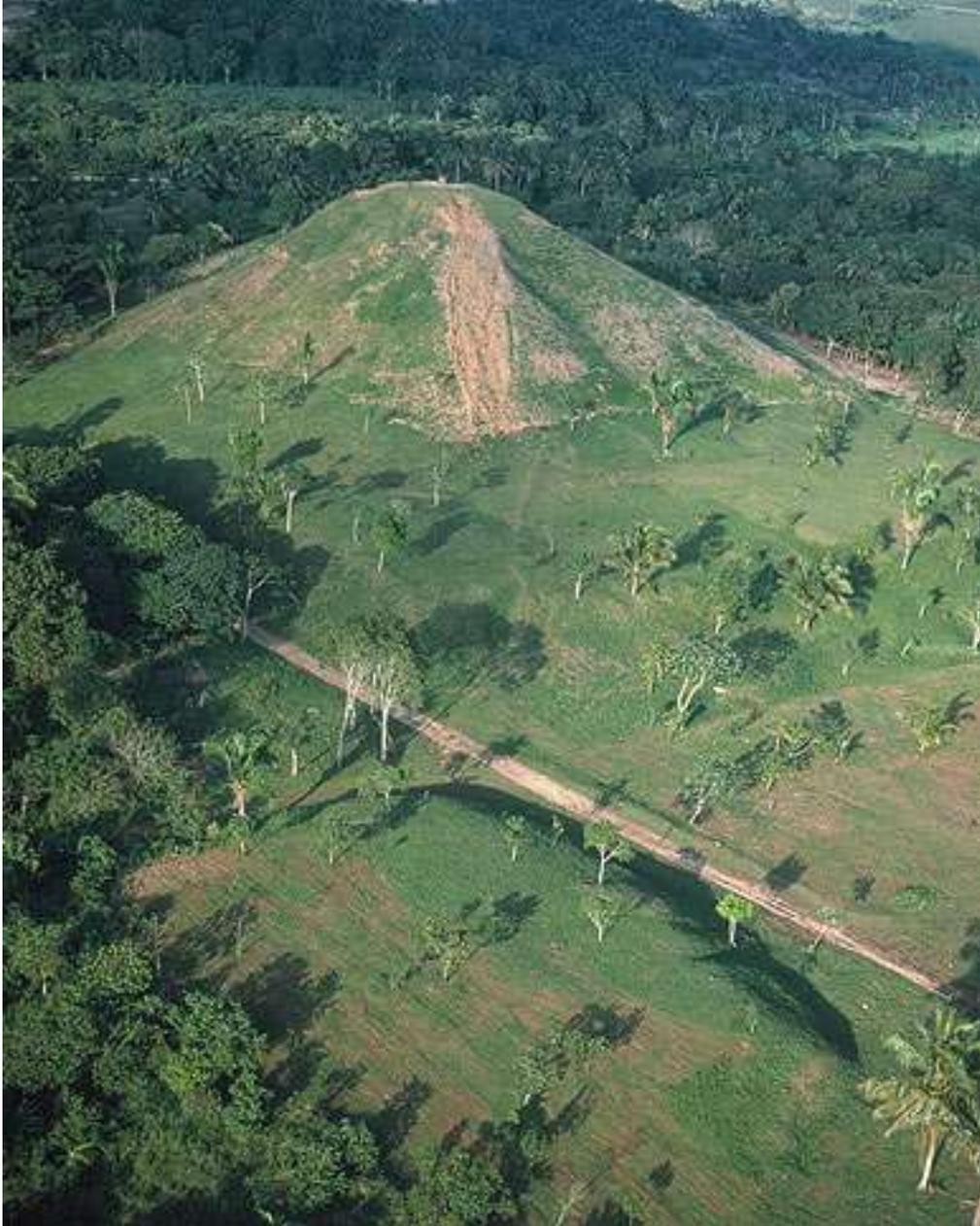
Many Coahuiltecan, staggered by strange intruders, famine, imported diseases, and enemy tribes, opted for the protection and steady food supply of Mission Espada. Here they mastered Spanish arts and trades - and embraced Christianity. By the mid-1700's, there was a dynamic community: the blacksmith's ringing anvil, bellowing livestock, pounding looms, the clatter of carpentry, and the scrape of the brick maker. Beyond the walls were peach orchards and vast fields of beans, corn, and melons, and within, the hum of chants and prayers.







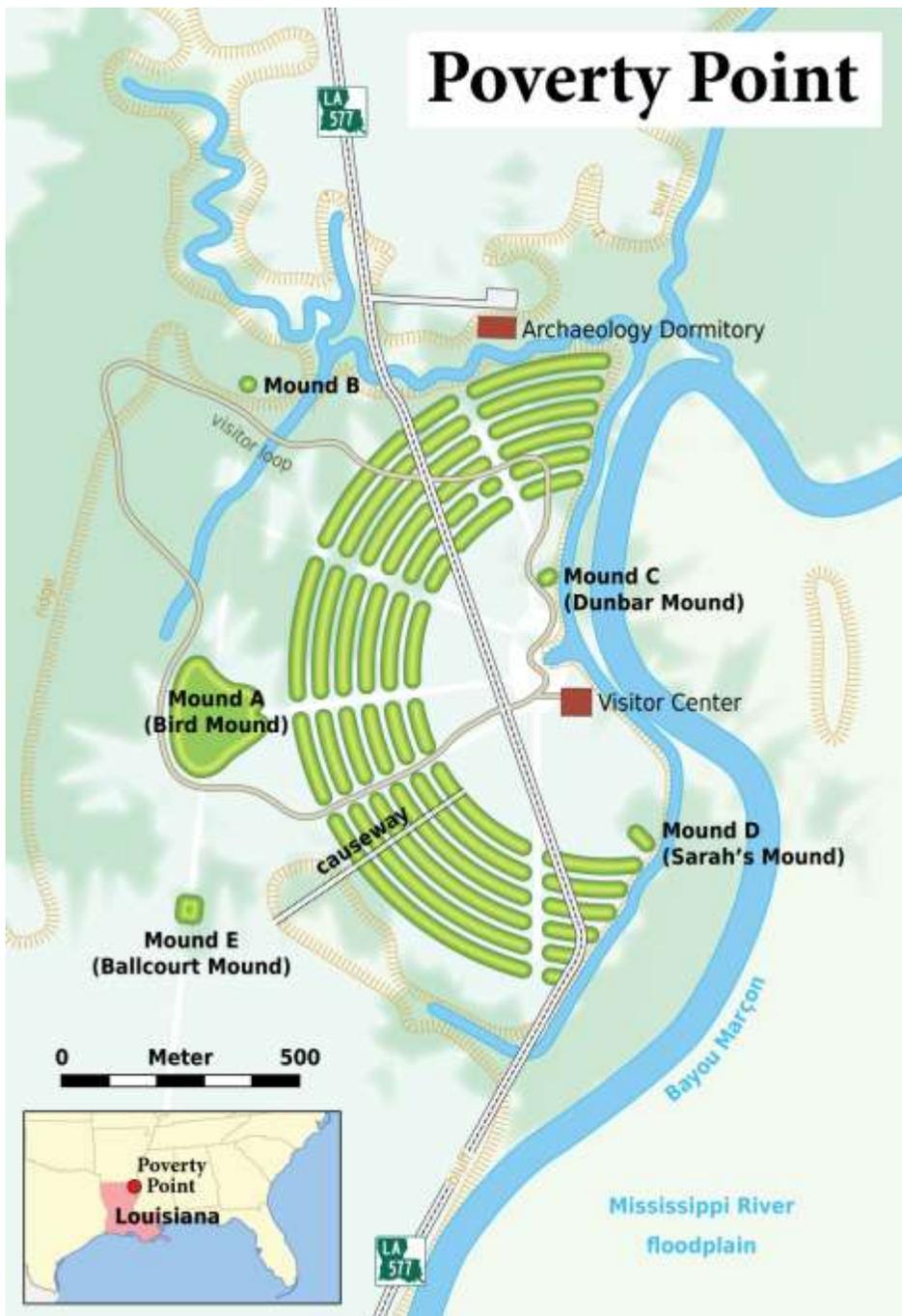
To Louisiana, now, to **Poverty Point National Monument** (and World Heritage Site)



This was a settlement in the northwest corner of Louisiana, not far from the borders with Arkansas and Mississippi.

At its peak 3,000 years ago it was part of an enormous trading network that stretched for hundreds of miles across the continent. It was - and is - also an engineering marvel, the product of five million hours of labour. Construction probably began as early as 1800 BC and continued until about 1200 BC.

Archaeological excavations have found that prior to the construction of the earthworks, prehistoric workers levelled the land around the site and filled in gullies and hollows to create the flat central plaza and surfaces on which to build the mounds and ridges. The main building material was loess, a type of soil which is easy to dig but erodes when exposed to water. For this reason, clay may have been used to cap the loess constructions to protect the surfaces from erosion. The earthworks were constructed by dumping basket loads of soil in piles and then filling in the gaps between them. The baskets, depending on the size of the bearer, could hold between 30 and 50 pounds of soil.



The plan on the left shows the layout of the site, which contains earthen ridges and mounds, built by American Indians between 1800 and 1200 BC during the Late Archaic period in North America. Archaeologists have proposed a variety of possible functions for the site including as a settlement, a trading centre, and/or a ceremonial religious complex.

What we can say is that a large, sophisticated society (about which we know very little) constructed the impressive complex. A hunter-gatherer society built Poverty Point, a massive network of artificially created ridges and mounds surrounding a plaza. Archaeologists, including those at the on-site archaeological laboratory at Poverty Point, continue to attempt to discover information about the society and the reason for the construction of the mound complex.

Objects like clay cooking balls, spear points, and fishing tools found at the site give some idea as to how the mound builders ate and lived. The quality, diversity, and quantity of jewellery and other objects found here suggest that it may have been a capital for an entire ancient culture. The size of the complex and the number of objects are not what make Poverty Point remarkable, though. It is already clear that those who moved the earth, basket by basket, were a mobile society of hunter-gatherers and therefore seem unlikely builders of such a complex system of mounds.



This is a ground level view of the main mound at the site. Completed about 1400 BC, 72 feet high and with a base of 710 feet by 660 feet, it consists of 390,000 tons of soil which would have been carried in baskets and deposited on the growing mound.



As mentioned previously the earthworks were constructed by dumping basket loads (30 to 50 pounds each) of soil in piles and then filling in the gaps between them. Someone has taken the time to work out that it would have needed more than 15 million basket loads!

We now go to **Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve** which consists of six sites across south Louisiana.

**Barataria Preserve in Marrero**

A 23,000-acre Louisiana wetland and a visitor centre with dioramas, exhibits, and hands-on displays.

**Chalmette Battlefield in Chalmette**

Talks and tours of the site of the War of 1812's Battle of New Orleans and a visitor centre with exhibits about the battle and how it shaped American history. Chalmette National Cemetery, established in May 1864, is next to the battlefield.

**French Quarter Visitor Center in New Orleans**

Here you can see the influences that shaped one of America's greatest cities.

**Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette**

Find out about the Acadian people who settled southeast Louisiana from the far north-east of the USA and became known as Cajun.

**Prairie Acadian Cultural Center in Eunice**

For the prairie Acadian story, music, dancing, craft demonstrations, and Saturday night entertainment.

**Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in Thibodaux**

For bayou boat tours, free jam sessions with local musicians, history walks, and the story of Louisiana's bayou country.



The **Barataria Preserve** is a wonderful place for spotting wildlife. Tree frogs, green anoles, and water snakes are often seen. The species that attracts the most attention is of course the American alligator. As with all National Parks, there are many fascinating exhibits in the visitor centre (or *center* as they like to call it) as well.



**Chalmette Battlefield** is the site of the last major battle of what is known as the war of 1812. The war was fought between Britain and America at a time when Britain was still heavily involved in the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. The war officially ended on Christmas Eve 1814 when the Treaty of Ghent was signed, but news of this did not reach America in time to prevent the Battle of New Orleans taking place on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1815. American troops led by Andrew Jackson defeated a numerically superior British army.



The site is only a couple of miles downstream from the centre of New Orleans, and is accessible by stern wheeler tours as well as by land.







Chalmette also features a miniature version of the Washington Monument in the National Mall in Washington D.C. (below)



The French Quarter Visitor Center is located in one of New Orleans' traditional buildings and offers exhibits and a film detailing the history and traditions of the city and indeed the whole Mississippi River delta area.



In 1966, Louisiana authorized the creation of a state park at the present site of the Barataria Preserve. The park was named after Lafitte because of his connections with the area. In 1978 Congress combined Chalmette National Historical Park (established in 1938) with the Louisiana state park and authorised a visitor centre in the French Quarter. The name **Jean Lafitte** was retained for the whole of the newly created Park since Lafitte was associated with the other sites: he roamed the streets of New Orleans' French Quarter, navigated the swamps of the Barataria Preserve, and helped the Americans win the Battle of New Orleans at Chalmette Battlefield. Later, the Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette, the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center in Eunice, and the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in Thibodaux were added to the park, and there are stories connecting Lafitte with those areas, too.

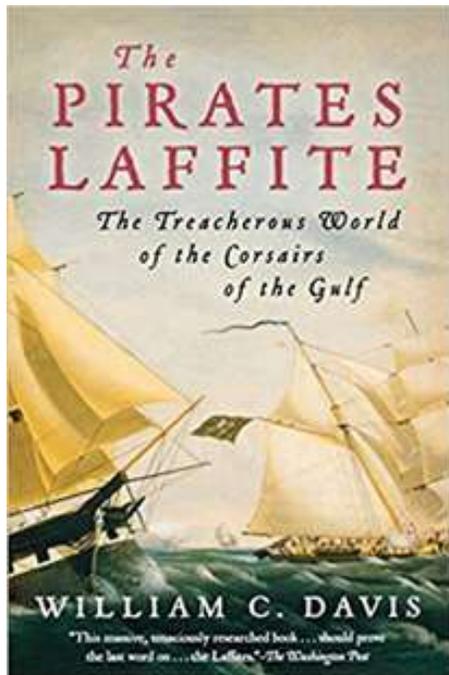


So who was Lafitte?

A lot of his history is something of a mystery: he is believed to have been born either in Basque-France or the French colony of Saint-Domingue (Haiti). By 1805, he operated a warehouse in New Orleans to help disperse the goods smuggled by his brother Pierre Lafitte: these “goods” would include slaves, kidnapped by the Lafittes from the Caribbean and sometimes from other places in the U.S. After the United States government passed the Embargo Act of 1807, the Lafittes moved their operations to an island in Barataria Bay, Louisiana. By 1810, their new port was very successful; the Lafittes had a profitable smuggling operation and also started to engage in piracy.

In 1813, the governor of Louisiana at the time put a price of \$500 on his head so Lafitte responded by putting an offer of \$15,000 on the head of the governor.

In 1814, he made a deal with the governor that he and his men would aid Louisiana in the Battle of New Orleans in exchange for freedom to continue their dealings uninterrupted. Lafitte became a hero and was even pardoned by the president of the United States.



The Lafittes later moved to Galveston Island, Texas, where they developed a pirate colony they called Campeche. Lafitte continued attacking Spanish merchant ships as a pirate around Central American ports until he died in 1823.

His close ties to most, if not all, sites in the Park clearly justify the Park bearing his name.

The penultimate site in this book is Everglades National Park.



Everglades National Park protects an unparalleled landscape that provides important habitat for numerous rare and endangered species like the manatee (a very shy creature as can be seen in the pictures on the right, the best we could capture in the limited time we had), American crocodile (not the alligator seen a moment ago), and the elusive Florida panther (which we didn't see).

An international treasure as well - a World Heritage Site, International Biosphere Reserve, a Wetland of International Importance, and a specially protected area under the Cartagena Treaty.

Unfortunately a lot of native wildlife is threatened by the invasive species of boa constrictor and Burmese python, probably originally dumped here by their former owners when they outgrew the house and now breeding freely with no natural predators.



The Everglades is often perceived as a swamp. Much of it is, in fact, a slough. This is a low-lying area of land that channels water through the Everglades. These marshy rivers are relatively deep and remain flooded almost year-round. Though they are the main avenue of waterflow, the current remains leisurely, moving about 100 feet (30 metres) per day.

Dotted with tree islands, the vast Everglades landscape channels life-giving waters from Lake Okeechobee southward. Everglades National Park contains two distinct sloughs. On the west is the larger Shark River Slough, also known as the "River of Grass."





**WARNING!**

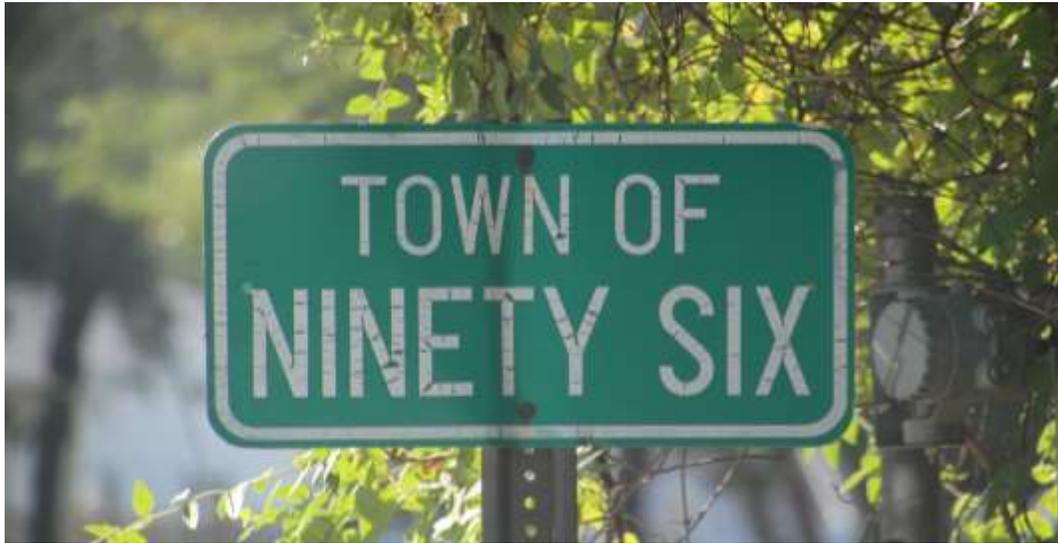


**Do not approach wildlife!** Never get closer than 15 feet (5 meters) to an alligator. If it hisses or opens its mouth in defense, back away even further.

Everglades National Park is a wilderness area. All animals are wild and should be viewed with caution. Feeding alligators is a violation of Federal and Florida state law. When people feed alligators, they lose their fear of humans and become dangerous.



Let's finish this tour in South Carolina, about 60 miles south of the beautiful town of Greenville, for the source of the second part of the title of this book. **Ninety Six National Historic Site** lies just on the edge of the strangely-named town of Ninety Six.



Incidentally, Ninety Six is not the only unusually named town in this part of South Carolina, as the photographs below will confirm.



In 1775, 10 years after the start of the American Revolution (which in our schooldays was known as the American War of Independence), there was a short, sharp battle for control of Ninety Six. This ended in an uneasy truce which lasted for 6 years with occasional flare-ups. In May 1781 the patriots laid siege to the loyalists who had concentrated in the town. The siege lasted from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May until the patriots launched an all-out assault on June 18<sup>th</sup>. The battle went backwards and forwards with the patriots capturing then losing control of the forts. The patriots withdrew, ending the siege, and the loyalists also withdrew and burned the town behind them. The war itself dragged on for another 2 years.



The Cherokee Path Trail, pictured on the left, is part of the site and is a 1.5-mile woodland trail that leads to remnants of the old Cherokee Path. The Cherokee Path ran from the Carolina Coast northwest through Ninety Six to the Cherokee town of Keowee. The path was once the direct route for traders and trappers, Native Americans, and settlers to trade goods between the backcountry and the Carolina Coast.

There are several romanticised legends about the origin of the name Ninety Six, but one of the most plausible conjectures is that the original town is 96 miles from Keowee. It is just conjecture, however, and the official explanation of the name's origin is a (not too helpful) "We don't know"!

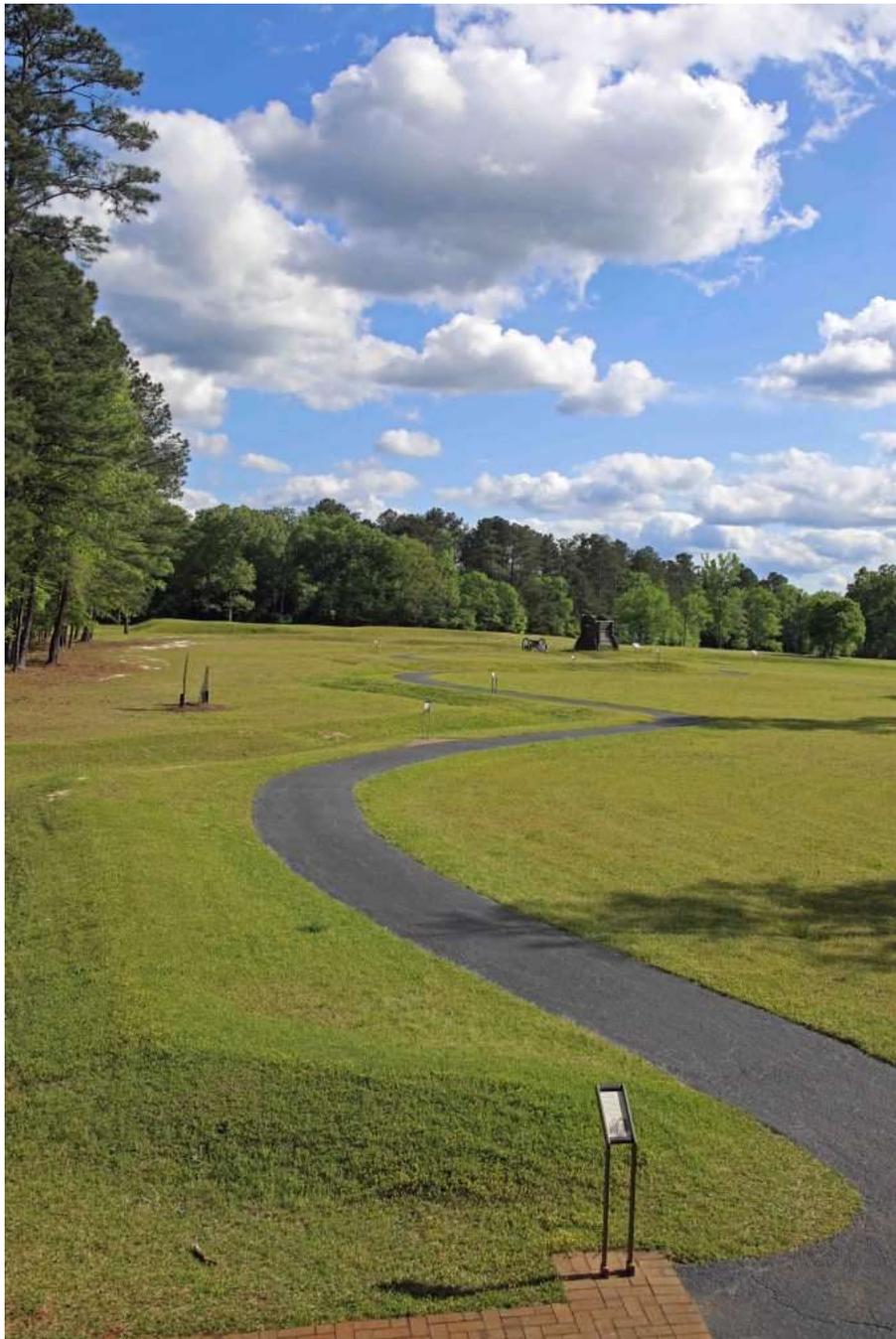


Reconstruction  
of the Stockade  
Fort.



The Logan  
Log House





The Siege Trenches, the original town site and the site of Star Fort complete the tour. All that remains of the Star Fort (named because of its shape) is the mound in the centre of the picture above. The wooden structure on the right of that picture was used by the riflemen of the besieging army to fire into the fort.

The site is relatively level with a surfaced mile-long track around the main features.

Be warned, however, that the Visitor Centre is closed on Mondays, as are the restrooms.



This map gives an idea of the locations of all the sites featured in this book, and the table below shows their rank in the 2018 list of most-visited National Parks.

67	San Antonio Missions NHP	1208104
108	Everglades NP	597124
115	Mammoth Cave NP	533206
116	Jean Lafitte NHP & PRES	529878
138	Flight 93 NMEM	381448
241	Ninety Six NHS	95550
294	George Washington Carver NM	44411

Poverty Point is not in the table: although a National Monument it is actually managed by the State of Louisiana.

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Grateful thanks go to Margaret (Maggie) Morrison for allowing me to use so many of her photographs and for her help proof-reading the book.

Thanks are also due to the US National Park Service for their work in maintaining these wonderful parks for all to enjoy as well as for the few photographs copied from their website at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) .