



THE PARKS ARE FOR... PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

## EASY ACCESS

When the Americans with Disabilities Act required better trail access for all, Yosemite saw an opportunity. **BY SCOTT YORKO**

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**VERY YOSEMITE VISITOR** should be able to feel the spray from 320-foot Lower Yosemite Fall on his or her face. If this is everyone's park, everyone deserves to touch the house-size granite boulders just off the paved trails and learn from the educational presentations provided by videos and interpretive rangers. But a key demographic of guests would not have this opportunity without Yosemite's 2005 effort to make this iconic cascade fully accessible to the disabled. Part of the existing trail reaches a 13.8-percent grade—too steep for many, especially in wheelchairs. Solution: The park built an alternate route to the base of the falls that climbs through the forest at no more than a 5-percent grade. Crossing braided streams on rock-lined boardwalks, the half-mile trail has several resting logs and an accessible bathroom. But it's not just accessible to those with mobility limitations. The trail serves the vision- and hearing-impaired with 3D tactile displays like the 3-foot bronze relief map of the watershed built to scale. Information packets come in Braille and films like *Spirit of Yosemite* have captions. You can even arrange for a sign language interpreter. While not all national parks are this welcoming, expect more accommodations soon with the NPS's five-year strategic plan to upgrade old facilities and ensure any new projects meet accessibility standards. The magic of the national parks is for everyone, no exceptions. ♦





THE PARKS ARE FOR... GEARHEADS

# RANGER CONFIDENTIAL

The NPS prohibits\* employees from recommending specific equipment, but few people know gear better than rangers, who actually buy their own stuff. We've granted them anonymity.



## The Veteran Ranger

In 25 years on the job, my favorite piece of gear is my **Coolibar Neck Gaiter**. It has these flaps that extend below the neckline to protect your chest when your collar is open. Great for hiking under the fierce summer sun [UPF 50+] and staying warm in harsh winter weather. \$20; 2.4 oz.; [coolibar.com](http://coolibar.com)



The one piece of gear I can't backpack without is my **Big Agnes Q-Core SL**. It's so light and compact, and the quilted pattern stays comfortable on rocky, uneven desert surfaces. I've been using it for three years without tearing it and I'd rather leave my food at home than that sleeping pad. \$160; 1 lb.; [bigagnes.com](http://bigagnes.com)



**Prana** makes these **Halle** hiking pants that don't come all the way up over your waist. They're stretchy, comfortable, and really flattering on everybody. Many backcountry rangers wear them since they come in olive green. My clothes are always a mess and these hide the dirt well. \$85; 12 oz.; [prana.com](http://prana.com)



\*Provision 5 C.F.R. § 2635.702 forbids all DOI employees, including NPS rangers, from endorsing specific products.

PHOTOS BY COURTESY

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## The Trail Maintenance and Rescue Ranger

The hiking we do in Olympic's Elwha River valley is all fairly steep. The **Black Diamond Distance Z Trekking Poles** make things so much easier on my knees and help me move a little bit quicker. Plus, they're superlight and fold up into three small sections that fit in your pack. I had the rubber tips that wore off, then I switched to carbide because I'm kind of cheap. \$100; 13 oz. per pair; [blackdiamondequipment.com](http://blackdiamondequipment.com)



I worked at Olympic hanging bear wires. I had to carry 15 to 20 pounds of wire, bolt cutters, nuts, and bolts. On one trip I could barely pick my feet up. Ever since then, I've been going as light as possible with the **Osprey Exos 58** pack. It cuts weight but the light mesh on the shoulder straps and hipbelt can still handle a load. \$220; 2 lbs. 6 oz.; [ospreypacks.com](http://ospreypacks.com)

My **Arc'teryx FL-365** harness is super lightweight for technical rescue. I've used it in Yellowstone to recover bodies from Silver Cord Cascade, a 1,000-foot waterfall and one of the only places you can climb in the park. \$145; 12.9 oz.; [arcteryx.com](http://arcteryx.com)



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## The Marine Ranger



I'm on a boat all day and the most important thing I use is a marine rescue radio/GPS called the **Nautilus LifeLine**. On land I can use it as a satellite messenger. In the water I can call other boats nearby when I come up from a dive and have a two-way conversation. I can send out emergency distress signals like an EPIRB and not only is it cheaper than the **DeLorme inReach Explorer**, but you don't need a monthly service plan. \$299; 9.9 oz.; [nautiluslifeline.com](http://nautiluslifeline.com)

Since I started in 2010, I've used the **Arc'teryx Altra 65**. When my first one got destroyed, I went and bought the same one. I like the pocket setup and durability. It's great for heavy loads. I went off **BACKPACKER** review and said, "That's gotta be a good choice." Turns out it was. \$449; 4 lbs. 15 oz.; [arcteryx.com](http://arcteryx.com)





## The Backcountry Ranger

I wear the nylon **Mountain Khakis Men's Granite Creek** pants almost everyday. It's their only pant that's not cotton-based and I'm on my fifth pair. I climb in them, too, and they don't get torn up easily. I abuse the crap out of these things. \$83; 6.3 oz.; [mountainkhakis.com](http://mountainkhakis.com)

Five years ago, I bought the **Mystery Ranch Glacier** (70 liters). It's pretty pricey and heavy, but they'll repair any damage under warranty. It's very durable for trail clearing, where we're using axes and crosscut saws and tossing logs around. It's been with me to Nepal and probably at least 5,000 miles. \$350; 5 lbs. 14 oz.; [mysteryranch.com](http://mysteryranch.com)

I'm on my 11th pair of **Garmont Dakota Lite GTX** boots with nubuck leather. They typically last about 1,100 miles, which I do in a little over one summer. Make sure to moisturize the leather or they'll crack and lose their waterproofing where the boot meets the sole. I use **Atsko Sno-Seal** with beeswax grease (\$7.69; 8 oz. jar; [atsko.com](http://atsko.com)) or **Huberd's Shoe Grease** with pine tar (\$7.50; 7.5 oz.; [huberds.com](http://huberds.com)) once every two to three months. The leather will outlast the rubber. \$350; 3 lbs. 6 oz. per pair; [garmontnorthamerica.com](http://garmontnorthamerica.com)

The **MSR Miniworks Ex Microfilter** works great in the desert or anywhere the water is silty. It's super easy to clean the ceramic filter. Just use any cloth to wipe the sediment right off and it's back to rocket speed. Just be sure to drain it; the ceramic filter can freeze in cold conditions and shatter. \$90; 1 lb.; [cascadedesigns.com/msr](http://cascadedesigns.com/msr)



## The Canyon Ranger

Lots of packs I'm using—like the **Hyperlite 3400 Southwest**—are made with Dyneema fabric, which is basically indestructible. I just did a 700-mile trip exclusively off-trail with class 5 scrambling and my pack only got two small holes. Every other lightweight pack I can think of would have been destroyed. \$350; 2 lbs. 2 oz.; [hyperlitemountaingear.com](http://hyperlitemountaingear.com)

