



Name: _____

Rocky Mountain National Park: The Roof of the World

Imagine standing on a mountain peak so high that you are actually looking down at the clouds! That is what it feels like to visit Rocky Mountain National Park. This spectacular park is located in the state of Colorado. It is home to some of the tallest mountains in North America, which are part of a giant chain called the Rocky Mountains. When you visit, you feel like you are standing on top of a giant skyscraper made of stone and ice.



View of Rocky Mountain National Park

The Highest Road in the Land

Because the mountains are so tall, the park has a special road that takes you all the way to the top of the peaks. It is called Trail Ridge Road. This road is famous because it is the highest continuous paved road in the United States. As you drive higher and higher, the air gets thinner and colder. You will notice that the trees start to change. Near the top, the wind blows so hard that the trees cannot grow tall. Instead, they become small and twisty, looking more like bushes than trees. These are called "Krummholz" trees, which is a word that means "twisted wood." Eventually, you reach a place where it is too cold and windy for any trees to grow at all.



Krummholz tree

The Great Water Divide

Running right through the middle of the park is an invisible line called the Continental Divide. You can think of this line like the peak of a gigantic house roof. When rain or snow falls on the east side of the divide, the water eventually flows into the Atlantic Ocean. But if a single raindrop falls just a few inches away on the west side, that water flows all the way to the Pacific Ocean! It is incredible to think that a snowflake's entire journey depends on exactly where it lands on the mountain.

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Survival in the Alpine Tundra

The very highest part of the park is a place called the alpine tundra. This area is a very harsh environment where the ground stays frozen for most of the year. In the tundra, you won't find any tall forests. Instead, the land is covered in soft moss, hardy grasses, and tiny wildflowers. These plants have to be very strong to survive the freezing winters and the powerful mountain winds. Even in the middle of summer, you might still see patches of white snow hiding in the shadows of the rocks.

Wildlife of the Rockies

Even though the mountains can be a tough place to live, many amazing animals call this park home. In the meadows, you might hear the loud "bugle" sound of a massive elk. This high-pitched whistle is how the elk talk to each other in the fall. If you look up at the steep, rocky cliffs, you might spot bighorn sheep. These animals are like expert tightrope walkers, using their special hooves to balance on tiny ledges without falling.

Deep in the rock piles of the tundra lives one of the park's smallest residents: the pika. Pikas look like tiny, fluffy hamsters with round ears. Since they do not hibernate in the winter, they spend their whole summer acting like little farmers. They gather "haystacks" of grass and flowers and lay them out on rocks to dry in the sun. Once the grass is dry, they store it in their rocky burrows so they have plenty of food to eat when the mountains are covered in deep snow.



Pika

A Land of History

People have thought this land was special for a very long time. Long before it was a National Park, the Ute and Arapaho people traveled through these mountains. They hunted for food and found peace in the beautiful valleys. Later, explorers and scientists came to study the unique rocks and plants. Today, millions of people visit to hike the trails and take photos. When we visit, we have to be careful to stay on the paths and protect the "tundra" plants, which are very fragile. By taking care of the park, we make sure the mountains stay beautiful for everyone in the future.

1. Based on the passage, how is the Continental Divide like the "peak of a gigantic house roof"?

- A. It is made of shingles that protect the mountain animals.
- B. It is a place where people go to build houses in the park.
- C. It is the highest point that determines which way water flows.
- D. It is a line that prevents rain from falling on the west side.

2. This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A What can the reader conclude about pikas based on the section "Wildlife of the Rockies"?

- A. Pikas are lazy animals that sleep through the cold winters.
- B. Pikas are excellent climbers that live on steep, rocky cliffs.
- C. Pikas are the largest animals living in the alpine tundra.
- D. Pikas are hard workers that plan ahead for the winter months.

Part B Which sentence from the passage best supports the answer to Part A?

- A. "If you look up at the steep, rocky cliffs, you might spot bighorn sheep."
- B. "They spend their whole summer acting like little farmers."
- C. "Pikas look like tiny, fluffy hamsters with round ears."
- D. "In the meadows, you might hear the loud 'bugle' sound of a massive elk."

3. Which TWO details from the passage show how the pika prepares for the winter?

- A. They look like tiny, fluffy hamsters with round ears.
- B. They gather "haystacks" of grass and flowers during the summer.
- C. They sleep in deep burrows and hibernate until the snow melts.
- D. They lay plants out on rocks so the sun can dry them.
- E. They use their special hooves to balance on tiny ledges.

4. In the section "Wildlife of the Rockies," the author describes bighorn sheep as "expert tightrope walkers." What does this phrase help the reader understand?

- A. Bighorn sheep are often found at the circus.
- B. Bighorn sheep are very good at balancing on narrow rocks.
- C. Bighorn sheep use ropes to climb up the mountain cliffs.
- D. Bighorn sheep like to walk in a straight line in the meadows.

5. According to the passage, why must the plants in the alpine tundra be "very strong"?

- A. They have to grow tall enough to reach the clouds.
- B. They are eaten by massive elk during the fall.
- C. They must survive freezing cold and powerful winds.
- D. They provide the wood used to build the famous Trail Ridge Road.

6. Based on the passage, what is the main difference between the "Krummholz" trees and the plants in the alpine tundra?

- A. The trees are very tall, but the tundra plants are small.
- B. The trees grow in the freezing wind, but the tundra plants need heat.
- C. The trees are twisted wood, while the tundra plants are mosses and grasses.
- D. The trees grow on the west side, but the tundra plants grow on the east side.

7. According to the text, what happens to a snowflake that falls on the WEST side of the Continental Divide?

- A. It stays frozen on the ground all year long.
- B. It flows toward the Atlantic Ocean.
- C. It flows toward the Pacific Ocean.
- D. It turns into a Krummholz tree.

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