

Parks designated world heritage sites

What do the Taj Mahal, the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, and the Egyptian Pyramids have in common with Glacier, Waterton Lakes, and Carlsbad Caverns National Parks? They are all world heritage sites. The world heritage site designation recognizes both natural and cultural sites that have been deemed to be of outstanding universal value to all citizens of the world. The honor was bestowed on the parks at a December meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Berlin, Germany.

The World Heritage Convention, an international treaty ratified by 147 nations, governs the designation and preservation of world heritage sites. To be inscribed a world heritage site, nominees must meet several criteria that define "outstanding universal value." For example, natural site nominees must exhibit major stages of earth's natural history or its ongoing geological, ecological, or biological processes, among other criteria. Conditions of integrity must also be met that include size and legal protection. To carry out the field evaluations, the committee contracts the independent organizations IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and ICOMOS (the International Committee on Monuments and Other Sites).

Nominated for world heritage site status in 1994, Carlsbad Caverns now joins Chaco Culture National Historical Park and Taos Pueblo as New Mexico world heritage sites. One of the deciding factors in the

Carlsbad addition to the list was Lechuguilla Cave and the many scientific discoveries made there since 1986. Also contributing to the designation were other park geological and biological features, park size, beauty, and the significance of its most famous cave, Carlsbad Cavern.

Glacier National Park was first nominated for the distinction in 1984; however, consideration was deferred until 1993 when Glacier and Waterton Lakes were nominated jointly. The Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park was recognized for its biological diversity and natural beauty. The two parks sustain exceptionally diverse and productive habitats, reflected by the natural populations of large mammals and carnivores, including wolves, grizzly bears, and mountain lions. Glacier plans to use the designation to amplify its role in achieving and maintaining an international ecological complex.

The three newly designated parks join the list of 360 world heritage sites occurring in 83 countries that includes the Great Wall of China; Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park; Kilimanjaro National Park, Tanzania; the Galapagos Islands; the Statue of Liberty; Grand Canyon, Hawaii Volcanoes, Mammoth Cave, Mesa Verde, Everglades, and Yellowstone National Parks; Independence Hall; and the old city of Jerusalem among others. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization oversees both the World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve Programs.