

City of Rocks Best Photography Locations

City of Rocks and Castle Rocks have an abundance of photographic opportunities; however, some areas are better than others, and the best locations for maximum photo opportunities are described below:

Best Sunset Locations:

- The City of Rocks Rim from Lookout Rock to Bath Rock. Subjects include the play of light on pinnacles and monoliths of the Inner City, Granite Mountain, and Steinfells Dome. Foreground subjects include water-filled panholes, limber pine and colorful lichen. Wildlife and flowers are also possible.
- The Backyard Boulders Trail in Castle Rocks State Park offers north-looking opportunities to photograph the play of light on the pinnacles of Castle Rocks. Views also include the colorful sunset on the mountain snows of Cache Peak. Foreground subjects include Tafoni weathering, panholes, vegetation, including wildflowers, and wildlife. The potential to photograph or stage climbers in the foreground is also possible.

Best Sunrise Locations:

- Circle Creek Overlook, especially from the pinnacles south of the parking area. Views include the colorful play of light on the sky/clouds and granite towers from Steinfells Dome to Granite Mountain. Foreground views include lichen-covered rock, wildflowers, pinyon pine and possibly people.
- Rock #7 north of the Cowboy Shelter in Castle Rocks State Park. This location allows for pinnacles and tree snags to be silhouetted in foreground of rising sun. Other foreground subjects include water-filled panholes and pinyon-juniper forest.
- Almo Valley around various old structures and ranch developments. Placing old log cabins, fences, corrals, farm implements, ponds (for reflections) old trees, etc. in the foreground of a rising sun offer exceptional creative opportunities. Permission could be secured from a few landowners who might be willing to allow workshop participants to enter upon the ranch landscapes.

Best Geological Area:

- City of Rocks' Land of the Lizard (Lizard Head) below the north slope of Smoky Mountain offers a myriad of windows, arches, pinnacles and granite features. It requires a ½-mile hike in from Hansen Hill or Register Rock.
- City of Rocks' Geological Interpretive Trail provides exceptional areas to photograph nearly every kind of weathering feature, especially fragile geology and windows.
- City of Rocks' Window Arch is a classic feature, but there are opportunities to photograph it artistically in ways others have not; and the ridge provides many other geological subjects.
- Castle Rock's best geological area is reached from the Comp Wall Trail, west to the Flintstone House, where many windows, arches and weathering are grouped closely.
- Castle Rock's Three-pool Boulders Area is exceptional for Tafoni weathering panholes and odd shapes which are interesting with angled light (morning and evening).

Best Climbing Areas:

- Photographing climbers is one of the more popular activities in City of Rocks. Close up shots are easily taken at Elephant Rock, Bath Rock, Parking Lot Rock and Bread Loaves. Some of the more picturesque images are taken on Flaming Rock, Morning Glory Spire, and Finger Rock.
- Castle Rocks is a great location for photos of bouldering, but also great shots are taken on the south side of Castle Rock on routes like Red Rib and Big Time. Hostess Gully also is a great area to find and photograph climbers.

Best Wildflower Areas:

- In spring, the pasture/meadows and Almo Creek Wetlands of Castle Rocks State Park offer variety, but as the season progresses, the uplands along the Castle Rocks Trail are excellent.
- In City of Rocks, wildflower photography is good along the Creekside Towers Trail, and then up Logger Springs Road along the windswept ridges by June and July.

Best Wildlife Areas:

- Fall and winter provide exceptional opportunities to photograph mule deer in fields around the Almo Valley. Deer frequently cross the road north of the Durfee Hot Springs, or can be seen feeding in the evenings beneath the orchard at the Castle Rock Lodge.
- Summer is the best time to photograph reptiles, rabbits, and chipmunks in most areas, but especially rock outcrops of City of Rocks' campsites 5-19.
- Late spring and early summer offer great opportunities to photograph birds, especially colorful songbirds, or large birds of prey. Almo Creek Wetland is the preferred area.

Best Water/Snow/Ice Areas:

- To photograph running, sparkling, falling water, visit the Almo Creek Area, just about anywhere north of the Lodge for two miles. The ungrazed riparian areas of the Almo Cree Wetland or Eagle Rock Grove are best, as well as section above the park in the Sawtooth National Forest.
- Johnson Creek on the southwest side of Castle Rocks also provides great close-ups of mountain streams and riparian subjects.
- In City of Rocks, visit Circle Creek above Stripe Rock (i.e. the North Fork Country).
- Creekside Towers Trail has a stream and falls that is flowing beneath the namesake towers.
- Snow drifts and the shadows they often cast are easy to reach and photograph in winter around City of Rocks campsites 5-19.
- In Castle Rocks, after heavy valley snows, good snow drifts are found in the Eagle Rock Grove area, especially along Almo Creek. A shelter cave nearby is also a great place for ice formations.
- Bath Rock, in City of Rocks, usually produces a lot of ice.

Other Areas and Opportunities:

Twin Sisters is a great feature to photograph with storm clouds or with a full moon. Emigrant signatures on Register Rock are exceptional. Storms and rainbow in Almo Valley with the Jim Sage Mountains as backdrop are excellent.