

NATIONAL & STATE PARKS

A number of collectors specialize in this fascinating category, as almost everyone can identify past experiences with various National Parks, since almost everyone has been to at least one. There are some 39 National Parks in the United States. Some are well-known...Yellowstone, Yosemite, etc.; some aren't...Kalea-kala (in Hawaii), Isle Royale (in Michigan), etc. Additionally, my *Checklist of American State Parks* lists 1,743 State Parks. So, we have approximately 1,800 parks as potential targets.

This is a tough category, however (and I refer to both National and State Parks as a single category for the purposes of this article only, as many collect them separately). One reason for this is that, for obvious reasons, park authorities have always tried to limit smoking within their parks. Then, there are those parks from which covers simply have never been issued. I've never seen or heard of any cover from Isle Royale, for instance. The biggest reason, though, is that the most common source for park covers is the various businesses within the parks (i.e., concession stands, lodges, gas stations, and so on), and many state parks are completely devoid of such enterprises. As a case in point, beautiful Folsom State Park (CA), some 15 miles down the road from where I now sit, has no commercial enterprises within the park boundaries.

This means, of course, that your hopes for finding covers from every park in America are dashed from the very outset, since it is an impossibility. Still, if that's your goal, there are a couple of ways to lessen the impact of reality. First, some states have issued sets of covers with each cover featuring a different state park (Kentucky, for example). Thus, that particular park may never have issued its own cover, but you may still find a cover to represent it in your collection. Second, along the same line, there are several store sets of National Parks (and, "Yes", there's even a cover for Isle Royale!). Finally, if you're not a purist, you can often find covers from business outside the park that mention the park...."Smith's Pharmacy, located in beautiful Modesto, CA, gateway to Yosemite National Park." Personally, if the cover doesn't come from inside the park, or at least from the overseeing agency, then I don't collect it. But that's *my* definition; it certainly doesn't have to be yours.

Well, on to the covers! What variety! What color! What nostalgia! No wonder this is such a popular category. Sizes: 10s, 12s, 20s, 30s, 40s, and boxes, and I'm sure there must be some souvenir sizes, as well, although I don't have any. I haven't seen any Midgets. Types: although there are a lot of color-photo covers to be seen here, there aren't many fancies (a few Foilites, a few Cameos, etc.). Type-wise, the emphasis is on colorful in this category. There are lots of sets, including 3 Kentucky State Parks sets (4, counting the variation set to Set #1) from the 1950s, a beautiful old set of 40-strikes from Yellowstone, a Regal Match Co. 5-cover set for Colonel Denning State Park (PA) from the 1950s, a 6 (?)-cover set by Ohio for Carlsbad Cavern National Park from the 1950s(?), a Diamond set of 5 for Arkansas State Parks (1980s), and so on.

Most of these covers are front-strikes, and, as you can imagine, recent issues are become rarer and rarer. Some of the covers, here, go back quite a way, as can be seen from the Diamond Quality and Lion Safety First shown on page 1. The older issues, of course, would generally be the harder ones to acquire.

Some of the National Parks have exceptionally large numbers and varieties of covers, compared to other parks. Yosemite and Yellowstone are two of the largest, but, at least judging from my own collection, the largest number of issues actually comes from Hot Springs National Park, AR. The reason for this is that, unlike most other National Parks, this one is heavily commercialized: hotels,

banks, resorts, restaurants, and some of these covers come from the town just outside the park. I have over 40 covers from this park, and there must be many more, so I always make it a point to check my Arkansas covers closely, but it's difficult to tell which are actually from *inside* the park.

But, let's not forget foreign, here. Other countries have their own parks. Canada has a good assortment of covers representing its park systems, including a beautiful Grant-Mann color-photo, 30-strike set, and a number of covers from Banff, Jasper, and Niagara Falls. A few other foreign samples: a box from Lake Toya National Park, Japan; a box from Fuji Hakone National Park, Japan; a Mobil Gas cover from Natal Parks, Natal; and a Jewel-sized cover from Tatton Park, Cheshire, England. The latter cover, from England, brings up two further issues to be noted. One has to be careful of the word "park." The word is not always meant to denote a National or State park, nor is it even always used to mean a "park" in the sense we're looking for. The Tatton Park cover, for instance, is more of what we would actually call an historic monument. Also, race tracks and the like are often named "parks." Moreover, Tatton Park is actually a *County* park...but since England has no states, I count it as a *State* park (hee hee!).

Numbers! What about numbers? What's a good-sized collection? Well, checking my data base on collection sizes, which is possible because many of you have so generously kept me up to date on the growth of your collections, the average size of Parks collections is approximately 240. The largest collection I know of was that of Ed Brassard, WA, who, in 1988, had 2,000+.