

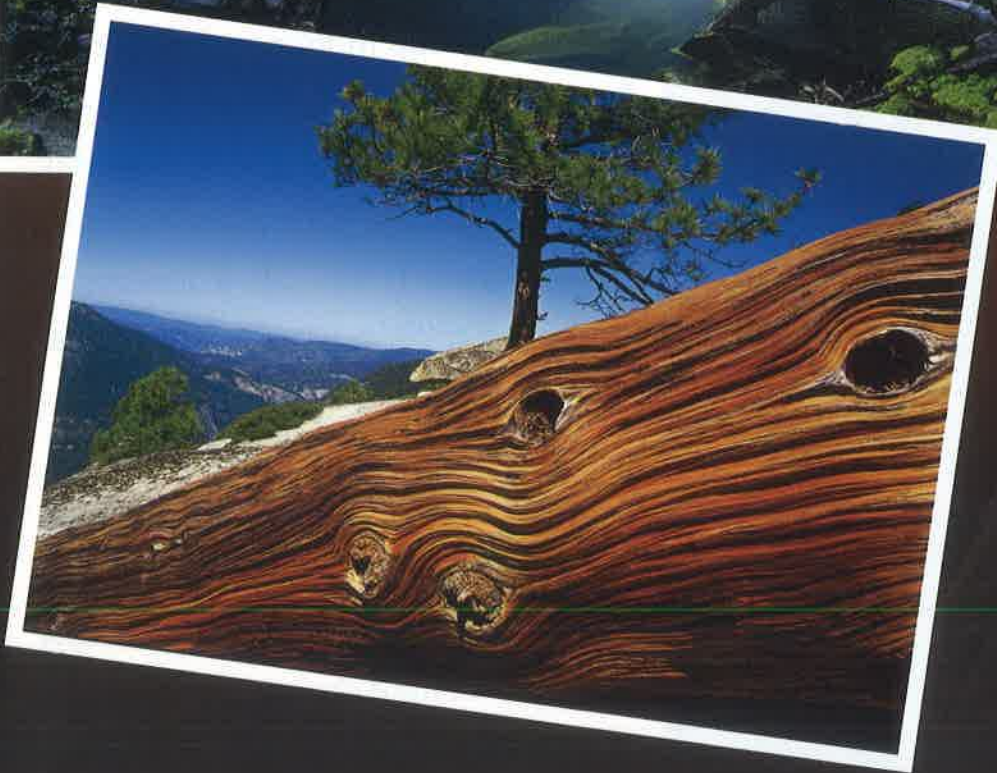
America the Beautiful

by Dana Jensen and Dolores Johnson
Photographs by Q.T. Luong

Q.T. Luong is a photographer. He paddles kayaks and climbs mountains. He hikes tough trails. What's his goal? To bring all 58 national parks into focus.



Reading Strategy: As you read about the national parks, think about places you have seen.





Cliff Climbing.
Luong worked hard to get this picture of a climber on El Capitan.

Sweat dripped down Q.T. Luong's face. He looked over the edge of the **cliff**. It was a terrifying 900 meters (3,000 feet) down to the ground.

Luong was in Yosemite **National Park**. He stood on top of a cliff called El Capitan. Luong is a photographer. He was there to take pictures of people climbing the steep cliff.

He checked the rope around his waist. He hugged his camera to his chest. Then he climbed over the edge. Soon he was dangling off the rock. He spotted the climbers below and started to take pictures. Was it scary? Yes. Was it worth it? It was for Luong.

California Treasure

Luong's parents are from Vietnam. But he grew up in France. In college, he learned to climb mountains. He took pictures on each climb. One day, he heard about a great place to climb in California. It was called Yosemite.

About a million years ago, **glaciers** moved through this land. They carved away earth and rocks. They left behind tall cliffs and deep valleys. Luong wanted to see this place. So he moved to California in 1993. His first visit to Yosemite changed his life.

Birth of the Parks

People have been amazed by places like Yosemite for ages. In the 1800s, explorers saw beautiful land in the West. It had **geysers** and hot springs. It had mountains and waterfalls.

The explorers wanted to protect this place. They didn't think any one person should own it. Everyone should enjoy its beauty. They asked the government to help. **Congress** made this land into the first national park. It was called Yellowstone.

Years later, a man named John Muir saw a wonderful place in California. It was named Yosemite. He thought that land should also be protected. Congress agreed. In 1890, it formed Yosemite National Park. Today, the U.S. has 58 national parks.

Gearing Up. *Luong carries heavy camera gear on his trips.*



Top Bunk. *Most climbers take several days to reach the top of El Capitan. At night, they sleep high up on the cliff.*



© WADYU CHANDRA/SHUTTERSTOCK



A Vertical World

Luong remembers his first trip to Yosemite. He camped in Yosemite Valley. It is the heart of the park. On one side is a huge cliff called Half Dome. Across the valley is El Capitan.

From the valley, you can watch Yosemite Falls. It is the tallest waterfall in North America. The crashing waters roar like thunder. The spray is bright with misty rainbows.

Yosemite has a lot of wildlife, too. Black bears live in the forests. Coyotes hunt in the foothills. Marmots crawl over the higher peaks.

Through the Lens

After Yosemite, Luong went to Alaska. There he climbed the tallest mountain in North America. Next he visited Death Valley. He took photographs at each new place. He used a special camera to show more details.

Luong wanted everyone to see these beautiful places. He decided to begin a big project. He would photograph all 58 national parks in the United States. It took ten years.

He traveled over 100,000 miles. He faced hungry bears. He crossed rushing rivers. Nothing could stop him. In 2002, he finished the project.

Protecting Parks

Luong's project was a big challenge. The national parks also have a challenge. They are in danger. People and pollution are hurting many parks.

Things near the parks can cause pollution. That harms the plants and animals. Cutting down trees can harm the land, too.

Another problem is too many people. Each year, millions of people go to the parks. Too many people means lots of trash and noise. Their cars cause more pollution.

Should people stop visiting the parks? No. These places belong to us. But people must be careful. They need to pick up their trash. They need to leave nature as they find it.

This Land Is Your Land

America's parks are national treasures. Luong's photos show us their beauty. Still, it is even better to see the parks for yourself.

Visit a national park when you can. Explore deep canyons. Hike tall mountains. Look at a field of bright flowers. Stand under thundering waterfalls. Watch deer leap over logs. And tell yourself: There is no place quite like this on Earth.



Rock Sculptures. *This is called Cathedral Rocks. Glaciers carved it millions of years ago.*



Falling Water. *Luong loves taking photos of Yosemite Falls. It is the tallest waterfall in North America.*

Wordwise

cliff: steep wall of rock, soil, or ice

Congress: part of U.S. government that makes laws

geyser: jet of hot water and steam

glacier: large body of ice moving across land

national park: land set aside by the government for public use



Wild Life. *You can see coyotes in Yosemite National Park.*

Coming in November

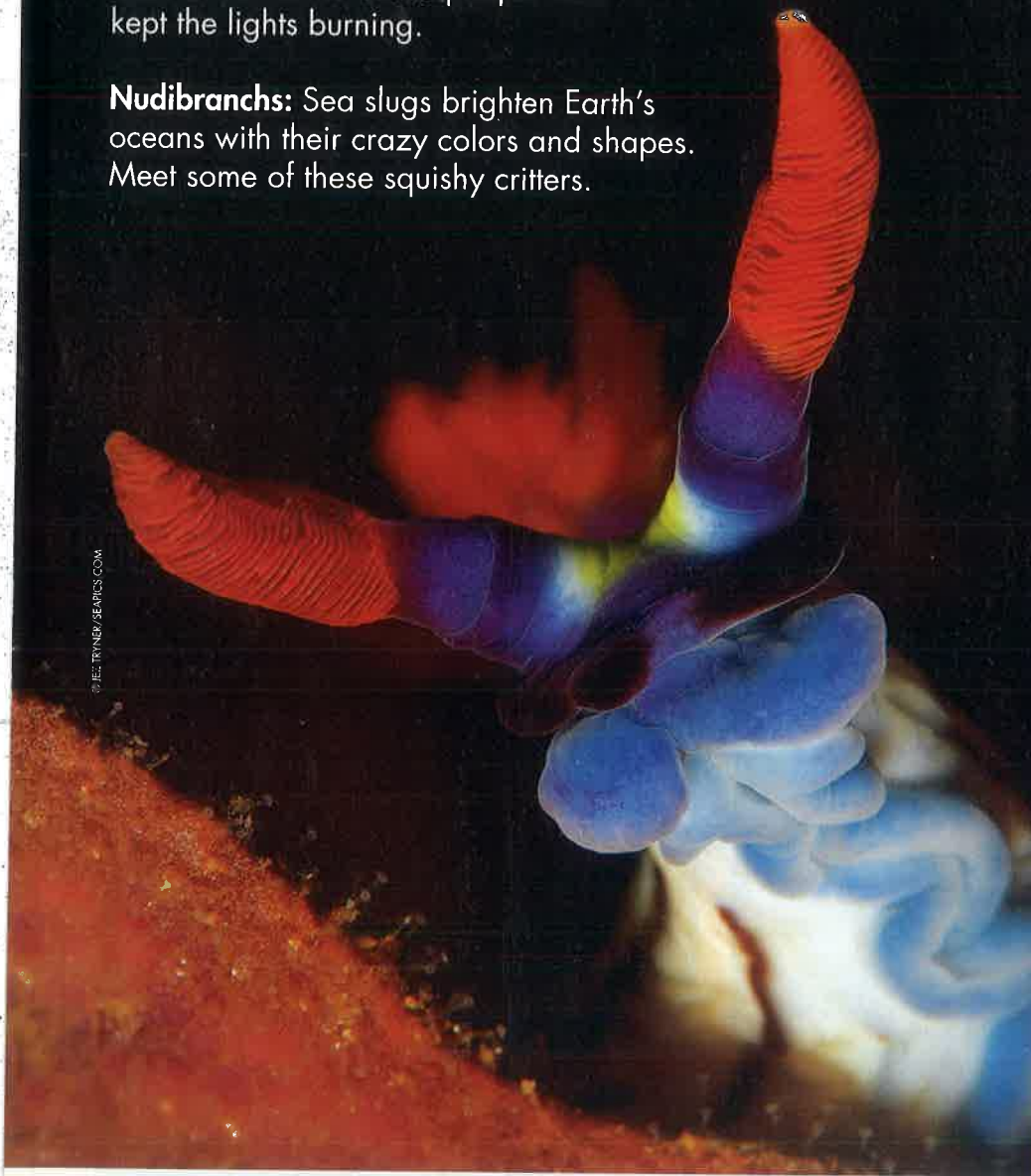
Avalanche! Join a scientist as he buries himself in tons of snow. Learn the cold facts about giant snow slides.

Trickster Plants: From tiny flowers to giant trees, plants are stuck in place. Discover their secrets to survival.

Lighthouse Lives: Lighthouses warn ships of danger. Meet some of the brave people who kept the lights burning.

Nudibranchs: Sea slugs brighten Earth's oceans with their crazy colors and shapes. Meet some of these squishy critters.

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Cover: This doppelganger tarantula crawls through rain forests in Costa Rica.

(Photo: © JAMES CARMICHAEL, JR./NHPPA/PHOTOSHOT)

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