

This Day in History... May 27, 2006

Wonders of America Sheet

On May 27, 2006, the USPS issued a colorful stamp sheet honoring 40 American natural and man-made superlatives. Called Wonders of America: Land of Superlatives, the pane celebrated record-setting places, plants, animals, and structures from across the country.

The 39¢ stamps were issued in Washington, DC, during the Washington 2006 World Philatelic Exhibition. The pane included 40 different designs and went on sale nationwide that same day. Unlike earlier large se-tenant sheets that highlighted all 50 states, this issue focused on the extremes and standouts of the American landscape. Still, the selections represented every region of the United States.

Artist Lonnie Busch illustrated the stamps. He had also created the artwork for the 2002 Greetings from America issue. Richard Sheaff served as designer, art director, and typographer. Each stamp used bold lettering to identify the superlative, such as “Deepest Lake,” “Tallest Trees,” or “Longest Cave.” Smaller lettering gave the name or location of the subject. The backs of the stamps included added facts and statistics.

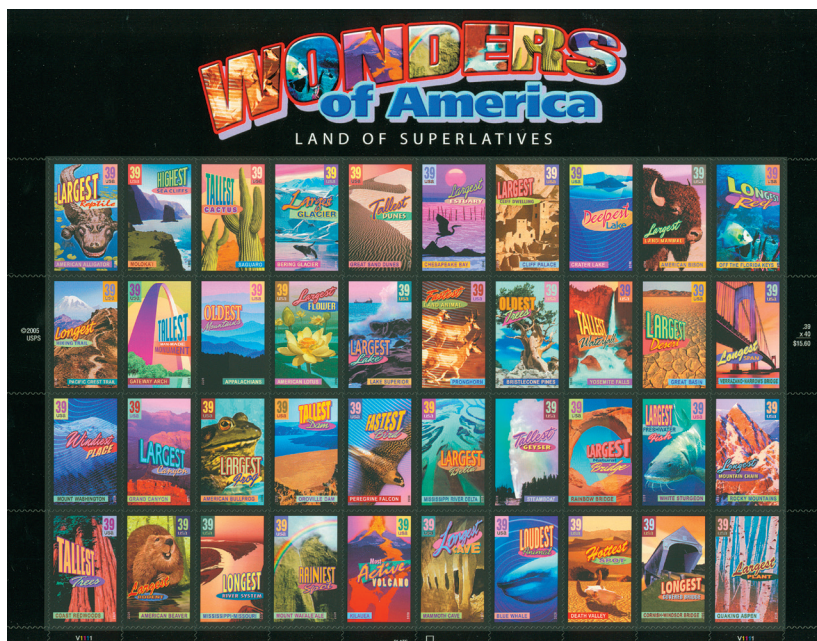
The subjects ranged from famous landmarks to lesser-known natural wonders. Crater Lake in Oregon represented the deepest lake in the United States. Yosemite Falls stood for North America’s highest waterfall. The Grand Canyon appeared as America’s largest canyon. The Gateway Arch in St. Louis was honored as the country’s tallest man-made monument. The pane also included the American bison, American alligator, peregrine falcon, blue whale, pronghorn, white sturgeon, and other wildlife.

Some selections highlighted living records. Coast redwoods were pictured as the world’s tallest trees. Great Basin bristlecone pines represented some of the oldest living trees. The saguaro cactus stood for America’s largest cactus. The American lotus was identified as the country’s largest flower. The quaking aspen clone known as Pando was included for its enormous shared root system. The USPS booklet described it as having more than 47,000 trunks and weighing about 13 million pounds.

Some of the superlatives have changed or need updated wording today. Mammoth Cave is still the world’s longest known cave system, but its mapped passages have grown from more than 360 miles to more than 426 miles. Kilauea remains one of the world’s most active volcanoes, though the long eruption that began in 1983 ended in 2018. Mount Washington’s 231-mile-per-hour wind gust is no longer the world record, but it remains the fastest wind recorded at a staffed weather station. Mount Wai‘ale‘ale is now better described as one of the world’s wettest places, rather than the single rainiest spot. The Pacific Crest Trail is no longer called the nation’s longest designated hiking trail, and the Cornish-Windsor Bridge lost its US “longest covered bridge” title after Ohio’s Smolen-Gulf Bridge opened in 2008. Lake Superior’s claim also carries a caveat: it is the world’s largest freshwater lake by surface area, not by volume.

Other records remain secure. Mammoth Cave, Steamboat Geyser, Crater Lake, the Gateway Arch, and the coast redwoods still hold the distinctions represented on the stamps. Steamboat Geyser in Yellowstone remains the world’s tallest active geyser, with major eruptions that can exceed 300 feet.

The USPS also produced a Meet the Wonders of America coloring and activity book for children. It included black-and-white versions of the stamp art, short lessons, and activities tied to the subjects. Like the stamp pane itself, the booklet turned record-setting geography, wildlife, engineering, and natural history into a colorful tour of the nation.



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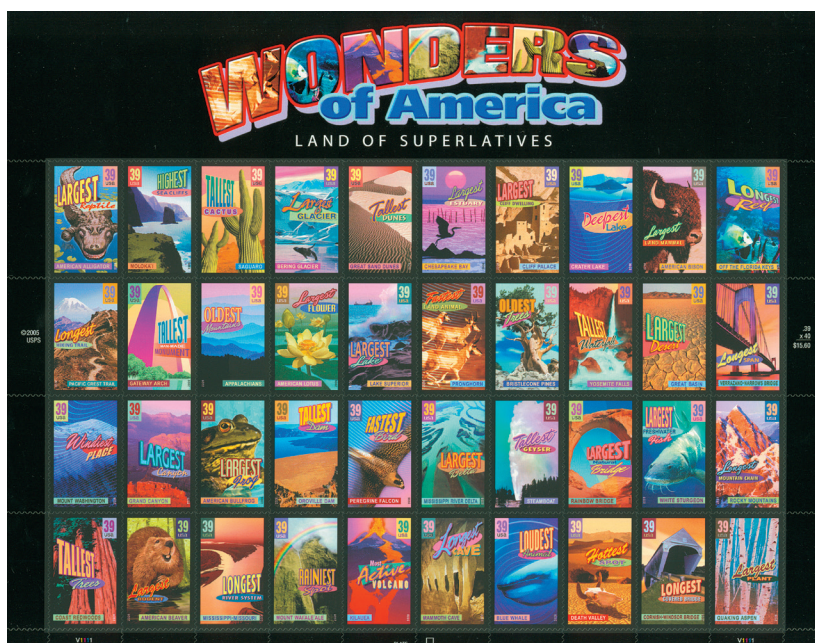
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