

The Site Guide

Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, Montana and Idaho

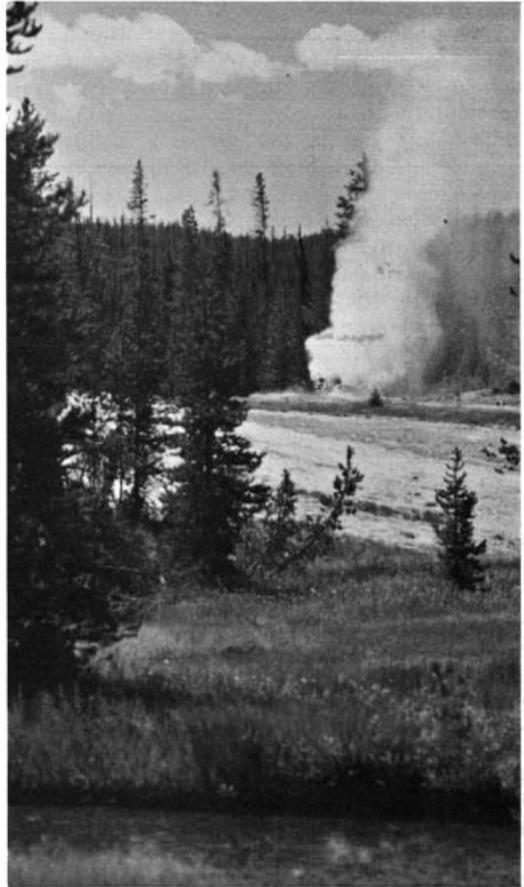
Location Northwest Wyoming, overlapping into Montana on the north and west and Idaho on the west and south.

Description Essentially an elevated plateau with an average elevation of about 8,000 ft. Roughly square in shape; more than 80% of the park's 3,471 sq.-mi. area is comprised of lodgepole pine forests which occur for the most part at elevations of 7,000 - 8,000 feet. At higher elevations, in stream valleys and in glacial kettles on the plateau, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir and whitebark pine occur. Timberline in the park is at approximately 10,000 ft. At lower elevations Douglas-fir and quaking aspen grow in scattered stands. Limber pine and Rocky Mountain juniper also occur in lower elevations, often along the edges of sagebrush-grassland communities. Nonforested territory in the park is generally comprised of wetland meadows, sagebrush-grassland, subalpine meadows, thermal areas or talus. Elevations in the park range from 5,000 ft. near Gardiner at the n. entrance to 11,358 ft. at Eagle Peak in the s.e. corner. Numerous ponds and lakes, including the 139 sq.-mi. Yellowstone Lake lie in the pockets of the mountain plateaus, and are drained by several rivers feeding on both sides of the Continental Divide into both the Pacific and Atlantic drainage systems. Yellowstone is surrounded by rugged mountain ranges with the Snowy and Beartooth ranges extending along the northern boundary, the Absarokas along the east. The picturesque Gallatin Range extends along the northwest boundary, while the lofty Teton Range lies to the south.

Access Yellowstone is serviced by airports at West Yellowstone near the west entrance; Bozeman, Mont., 80 mi. from the n. entrance; Cody, Wyo., 56 mi. from the e. entrance and Jackson, Wyo., 57 mi. from the s. entrance. By car: From east: Cody, via U. S. 14, 16, and 20. From south: Jackson, via U. S. 89, 287 through Teton National Park.

From west: Idaho Falls, Ida., via U. S. 20, 191 to Rexburg, Ashton, and West Yellowstone, 110 mi. From north: Livingston, Mont., via U. S. 89 to Gardiner, 56 mi. More than 500 mi. of roads and numerous trails provide access to all corners of the park in spring, summer and fall. During the winter only the n. and n.e. entrance roads are kept open. Concessionaire-operated snowmobile tours are available to some sectors of the park, originating at Mammoth.

Accommodations Full accommodations are offered from mid-June to Labor Day at all major stations within the park. (Limited accommodations are available in early and late seasons.) Advance reservations suggested. Campgrounds are available in and near the park. Arrive early during the peak of the summer season in order to secure a campsite.



Union Geyser, Shoshone Geyser Basin. One of more than 10,000 thermal features in Yellowstone National Park. Photo/National Park Service.

Motels, rental cottages, restaurants, food markets available at West Yellowstone, Gardiner, Silver Gate and Cooke City near the park entrances.

Birdwatching Owing to the general homogeneity of elevation and of plant communities an observer can expect to find many species of birds more or less equally distributed over a large part of the park. A checklist, free upon request, will assist you in ascertaining seasonal occurrence and relative abundance. Entering the w. entrance watch for paired Trumpeter Swans along the Madison River. Clark's Nutcrackers are almost always present at Gibbon Falls and W. Tanagers are common. Sandhill Cranes frequent the meadows of the Twin Lakes area between Norris and Mammoth. The lakes and wetland meadows of Swan Lake Flats (just beyond Indian Creek Campground) provide excellent habitat for Mallard, Gadwall, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Lesser Scaup, Com. Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbird. The patient observer will find Rock Wren in the unusual assemblage of travertine boulders referred to as the Hoodoos near Mammoth. Take the Upper Terrace Loop Road at Mammoth, stopping at the New Highland Terrace Parking Lot. Follow the trail along the flank of the hill where you should find Com. Raven, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Am. Robin, Townsend's Solitaire, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, W. Tanager, Cassin's Finch, Pine Siskin and Chipping Sparrow. In Mammoth village watch for Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in the birch trees opposite the post office. Listen and watch for Warbling and occasionally Red-eyed Vireos in the cottonwood trees which line the street on which the



The Yellowstone River near Hayden Valley. Photo/author.

museum is located. A morning or evening trip to Gardiner at the n. entrance via the old road (a one-way dirt road originating directly behind the Mammoth Motor Inn) can be rewarding. Mountain Bluebirds and Starlings nest in the scattered stands of Aspen along the road. This drive is one of the best locations in the park for raptors. Green-tailed Towhees are common. The road leading from the entrance to Mammoth Hot Springs follows the swift-moving Gardner River. Watch for Dipper and Belted Kingfisher along the river. In spring the willows along the river's edge will resound with the songs of Swainson's Thrush, Yellow Warbler, Com. Yellowthroat, Lazuli Bunting and Song Sparrow. In fall E. and W. Kingbirds congregate in the willows of the lower canyon. In late summer the ripening chokecherries in the Mammoth campground attract large flocks of Evening Grosbeaks. Magpies are also common in the campground and MacGillivray's Warblers breed on the brushy hillside above the amphitheater. A rewarding spring or summer side trip is the Blacktail Deer Plateau Drive (a one-way dirt road between Mammoth and Tower Junction). Large portions of the drive are through sagebrush, with scattered stands of Douglas-fir and quaking aspen. In these aspen groves, one may find Com. (Red-shafted) Flicker, Dusky Flycatcher, Tree Swallow, House Wren and Mountain Bluebird all nesting together in one small grove. Further along the plateau drive watch exposed dead limbs for W. Wood Pewee and Olive-sided Flycatcher. Harlequin Duck breeds on Hellroaring Creek above its ford with the Yellowstone River. To reach Hellroaring Creek requires a 10-mile hike (5 miles each way). Watch in the area just before crossing the suspension bridge over the Yellowstone River for Brewer's Sparrow and in the rocky canyon beyond the suspension bridge for Rock Wren, Red-tailed Hawk and Am. Kestrel are also common in this area. From Tower Junction take the northeast entrance road. Within a few miles glacial boulders are strewn about and small glacial ponds dot the valley floor. Watch for Great Blue Herons and showy Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the tules along the edges of these ponds. Numerous waterfowl including Trumpeter Swans, Ruddy Ducks and Coot breed in these ponds. In the upper portion of the valley watch for Golden Eagle and Swainson's Hawk. Hundreds of Cliff Swallows nest on Soda Butte, an extinct hot spring cone near the head of the valley. Returning to the

loop road system, search the tules along the edge of Rainey Lake near Tower Falls for breeding White-throated Swifts. In Tower Falls campground look for Steller's Jays and in spring, migrating Townsend's Warblers. At Canyon, take any of the Grand Canyon rim trails. From a safe vantage point watch for soaring Ospreys in the canyon. Along the rim of the canyon watch for the rare Northern Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, breeding Pine Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, and Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco. South of the canyon, watch in early spring for Harlequin Duck on the LeHardy rapids of the Yellowstone River. Watch along the river's edge for Lincoln's Sparrow. North of Yellowstone Lake the Yellowstone River flows placidly through the broad, rolling sagebrush-covered hills of Hayden Valley. Grizzly bear, moose, bison and coyote share this valley with breeding Canada Geese, Mallard, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, and Cinnamon Teal. The river also attracts American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup, Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Am. Coot and on occasion Ring-necked Duck and Bufflehead. Bald Eagles and Osprey patrol the river and

Com. Snipe, Great Blue Heron and Am. Bittern may be seen along the river margins. In spring, and in more pronounced fashion in fall, Hayden Valley is a mecca for migrating shorebirds. Solitary and Least Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs are most common, while Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers, Marbled Godwits and Mountain Plovers are rare. Along the east entrance road at the northern end of Yellowstone Lake take the Squaw Lake Trail. Red Crossbills are consistently seen here; watch also for Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warbler and White-crowned Sparrow. The lake area in general is also the best area for locating Bald Eagle, Osprey, White Pelican, California and Ring-billed Gull. Near Old Faithful watch for Ruffed Grouse along the trail to Lone Star Geyser. This and other trails on the plateau represent the best possibility for observing the Goshawk and the uncommon Great Gray Owl.

Rating Summer (June-August) ✓✓✓✓, Fall (Sept.-Nov.) ✓✓✓, Spring (March-May) ✓✓, Winter (Dec.-Feb.) ✓. — Richard Follett, 2531 Cactus Ave., Santa Rosa, Calif. 95405.



The Gallatin Mountains form a picturesque backdrop for this Swan Lake Flats scene. Photo/National Park Service.

