

**THE HISTORY OF YELLOWSTONE—
AND A LOOK AT THE SECOND HUNDRED YEARS**

**Governor Stan Hathaway
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As Yellowstone National Park now begins its second one hundred years, it is appropriate to reflect a moment on the early inhabitants and visitors to this northwest corner of Wyoming and also on the events that led to its being set aside as the world's first national park.

Little, really, has changed, in this 2.3 million acre area of mountains, forests, water, abundant wildlife and thermal fireworks from the time the first Indians inhabited the region. With less than 10 per cent of the park developed, in any way, Yellowstone remains a pristine wilderness.

Nearly 8,500 years ago and 3,500 years before the first of Egypt's pyramids was built, men hunched over campfires in the area that is now Yellowstone. At that time, the Rockies were just emerging from the last Ice Age and these early men were probably nomadic hunters stalking the now extinct mastodon or the giant bison.

These hunters were predecessors of the modern American Indian (or AmerInd), who is usually pictured as a skilled horseman bravely charging giant herds of bison or fighting the incursion of the "white-eyes." Such were the Crow Indians who roamed east and northeast of the park, and the Blackfoot Tribe which reigned to the north. Such, too, were the Bannocks, who established the Bannock Indian Trail through the northern part of the park on their annual treks to hunt buffalo on the Great Plains to the east. The ruts of the trail can still be seen in the meadows of Blacktail Deer Creek and near Tower Fall. The North-east Entrance Highway parallels the old trail for miles.

Not all the Indians developed a culture built around the horse and buffalo. The Tukidikas or "sheepeater" Shoshone, the only Indians who actually lived within Yellowstone Park, were still practically in the Stone Age when the park was founded in 1872. Actually, the Sheepeaters were a mixture of Shoshone "walkers" and Bannock mountain dwellers. They were not outcasts so much as people who could not compete in their own society because they lacked horses and guns. There was nothing left for them but to eke out an existence in the less desirable portions of the domain between the Shoshone and their neighbors. Thus, the Sheepeaters were found in the Wind River Mountains and in the rough country along the Continental Divide as well as in the mountains rimming the Yellowstone Plateau.

Beautiful as it was, the Yellowstone area was not prime living territory for a Stone Age Indian. Winters were extremely harsh, yet the Sheepeaters' only shelters were caves or wickiups of sticks, brush and grass. The growing season was short, but the Indians depended on berries, seeds and edible roots for part of their diet. The lower valleys and plains were much better

hunting areas. The Sheepeaters, unable to compete with the powerful tribes that controlled these areas, hunted the elusive mountain sheep in the park area--hence their name.

While the Sheepeaters were the only Indian residents of Yellowstone Park, it was the Nez Perce who probably created the biggest stir in the area. Yellowstone National Park was five years old when the Nez Perce became involved in war with the United States because of encroachment of miners and settlers. Yellowstone was crossed by the embattled tribesmen in the course of a masterful retreat, and in the process there were collisions with visitors, residents and scouts for the military, with the result that several lives were lost, and some property was damaged. And today's visitor thinks he has trouble with the bears?!?

Points of particular interest associated with the Nez Perce campaign in Yellowstone Park are the campsite of the Cowan Party of tourists near the Fountain Paintpot area; the place where George Cowan was shot and left for dead at the foot of Mary Mountain on Nez Perce Creek; the Nez Perce crossing of the Yellowstone River near the Mud Volcano and Captain W.F. Spurgin's "beaverslide" near Canyon where Army wagons were let down a precipitous slope with ropes which left burn marks on the trees which were used as snubbing posts.

The year after the Nez Perce were crushed, the park was again visited by hostile Indians, but this campaign was short lived, and a group of Bannocks were defeated near Heart Mountain on September 4, 1878. Fugitive groups were gathered up and placed on reservations and Yellowstone's Indian history had its final Chapter.

The white man became acquainted with the Yellowstone region largely because of the Louisiana Purchase. The purchase, for all practical purposes, opened the way for exploration of the Rocky Mountains. The Lewis and Clark Expedition missed the Yellowstone area by about 40 miles. However, one of its hunters, John Colter, is believed to have been the first white man to explore the Yellowstone area. In the Spring of 1807 as Colter descended the Missouri River, he met the keel boats of the trader Manuel Lisa, who was then ascending the river for the purpose of establishing a trading post on the Yellowstone at the mouth of the Big Horn River. Colter was induced to return to the mountains, and during the Winter of 1807-08 he made his epic journey through Pryor's Gap, past a thermal area near the present day Cody, across a jumble of mountains into Jackson Hole and probably across Teton Pass into Teton Valley, from where he returned by way of the Yellowstone Plateau.

Unfortunately, there is no written account of that solitary trek and presumptions as to the actual route followed must stand on the mute evidence presented on William Clark's "Map of the West," published in 1814. On it is shown "Colter's Route in 1807" which is as much as we are ever likely to know about the first visit of a white man to the Yellowstone region. Aubrey Haines, former Yellowstone Park historian, points out that except for the notation "Hot Spring Brimstone," shown near the point where Colter's route crossed the Yellowstone River, there would be no proof that he was in the area of the present day park. The entry fits only one point along the river--the place below Tower Fall where the Bannock Trail forded the Yellowstone.

While Colter was probably the first white man to enter the Yellowstone region, some knowledge of the area had been obtained earlier, according to Haines. A map sent by Meriwether Lewis to President Jefferson on April 7, 1805, just before the Lewis & Clark Expedition, showed the “River Yellow Rock” and one of the branches of that stream was labeled “Stinking Cabin River.” In that latter name was certainly an allusion to the phenomenon that became known as “Colter’s Hell.”

Trappers began to work the area, and American interest in the wealth of furs available in the Rocky Mountains developed rapidly after General William Ashley issued his call for “one hundred young men to ascend the Missouri River to its source” in 1822. Among those who enlisted were James Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick and Jediah Smith. Haines says it seems likely Smith led a party through the Yellowstone area in 1824, giving Bridger his first view of Yellowstone’s wonders.

“Old Gabe” became Yellowstone’s chief “tub thumper.” During his untiring travels, Bridger gained intimacy with Yellowstone. Dr. F.V. Hayden, the geologist for whom Hayden Valley was named, called Bridger the best mountain man the West ever produced and said he had learned of the marvels of Yellowstone from him in the early 1850s.

Like Colter, Bridger could get no one to believe his stories concerning the Yellowstone region, so, since no one would believe him, Bridger embellished his yarns, and they became tall tale classics.

Typical of his stories is one concerning a “glass mountain.” Bridger related: “Once’t I camp yonder in a purty meadow. Wantin’ meat I went lookin’ fer an elk. I seen a beaut a right smart spell yonder. Comin’ close, I let him have it. Bejabers, he didn’t make a move. I moved nigh onto him--took a dead bead. Same result. Says I, I’ll get so darn nigh the report o’ the gun’ll kill him. So I did. The blame critter didn’t look up. O’course, I thought he was deaf, dumb and blind. I was so bloomin’ mad I grab my blunderbuss by the shank and start runnin’ fer him intendin’ to smash him slam-bang on the haid. Well sirree, ye’d never believe it! What I actilly hit was the side of a glass mountain. Crawl’n to the top, what do I see but that same elk 25 miles yonder, feeding as peaceable as ye please.”

The “glass mountain” turned out to be Obsidian Cliff, a 130-foot escarpment near Mammoth Hot Springs made up to a considerable extent of black volcanic glass. Because it is black and not transparent, Jim would have had a difficult time seeing an elk through it, but his story was at least based on some element of truth.

This rawhide-tough mountain man also boasted the knowledge of a choice campground hidden among the inner labyrinth of Yellowstone’s canyons. The marvel of the place was its delayed action echoes.

“In fact,” Jim said, “it’s a natural alarm clock, which I winds up so: when campin’ there I beds myself down, and just afor I goes to sleep I raises my head from the saddle and hollers, ‘Time to

get up, you sunuvagun,' and sure as shootin' the echo comes a bouncin' back at the crack o' dawn!"

Yellowstone's northeast corner was the basis for still another Bridger yarn. Jim claimed the entire area was under the curse of an old Crow chieftain. All things became lifeless-plants, animals, rivers and even the light of the sun, moon and stars had a petrified cast. "Yes sirree, thar's miles of peetrified hills, covered with layers of peetrified trees and on 'em. trees air peetrified birds singing peetrified songs."

Bridger was no doubt referring to Specimen Ridge, a fantastic area near Tower Fall where some 40-50 million years ago great volcanos exploded in the area, and great globs of molten lava and volcanic ash fell on the living forests of Specimen Ridge. As hundreds of years passed the forest reestablished itself, the mountains erupted again, and the process was repeated--27 times in-fact.

And Jim also talked of a creek, probably Alum Creek in the Hayden Valley, that actually puckered distance itself. "We was ridin' east o' the river along side o' the creek. When the canyon narrowed, we guide our horses into the stream. 'Twasn't no time till the hosses feet shrunk to pin points, and by tarnation, we went 20 miles in a jiffy. Them thar waters was so strong as to pucker distance itself."

Although Bridger could get no one to believe his stories, his tales of "petrified trees," and "glass mountains" and streams that "puckered distance itself," and the stories and tales of other trappers and gold seekers from the Montana gold rush of the 1860s eventually aroused curiosity. In 1869 the first expedition for the sole purpose of exploring and reporting (the Folsom-Cooke-Peterson Party) spent two months in the upper Yellowstone region. What the trio saw was so amazing, they were afraid of being ridiculed and so made very few public statements. However, they told enough to inspire another Yellowstone expedition--the Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition of 1870--an expedition that merits a more in-depth look.

Of the several early parties who visited Yellowstone, by far the most important was the Washburn-Langford-Doane group. Made up of nine prominent Montana citizens, it was escorted by a small cavalry detail under the command of Lt. Gustavus C. Doane. General Henry D. Washburn, surveyor-general of Montana, headed the group, and Nathaniel P. Langford, whose later articles in Scribner's Monthly gave wide publicity to the discovery, became the first superintendent of the park.

On August 1, 1870, 20 civilians were enthusiastically enrolled in the Yellowstone exploration party, report Orrin & Lorrain Bonney in their *Battle Drums and Geysers*, the life and journals of Lt. Doane. Then, rumors of the warlike maneuvers of the Crows reached their ears and courage suddenly vanished. The majority found sudden emergencies calling them back to their businesses. A new roster was established, consisting of General Washburn and N.P. Langford, whom we've already met and, of course, the cavalry under the command of Lt. Doane. Other civilian members included Samuel T. Hauser, president of the First National Bank of Helena; Cornelius Hedges, an attorney who had come to Montana to pan gold and stayed to practice law; Truman C. Everts, at 54 the oldest member of the group and then Montana's assessor of Internal

Revenue. The search of more than a month for him created national publicity for the expedition, and his 12,300 word epic of his wanderings and sufferings, "Thirty Seven Days of Peril," is a story in itself; Walter C. Trumbull, the son of a U. S. Senator and Evert's assistant and also a newspaper reporter, and it was his accounts of the search for Everts that generated the widespread publicity; Benjamin Stickney, Jr., Helena storekeeper and pioneer who served as quartermaster of the group; Warren C. Gillette, a pioneer merchant in Bannock, Virginia City and then Helena, the best mountaineer of the group; and finally, Jacob Smith, the last to sign up and "unfitted to be a member," according to an entry in Langford's diary--which proved to be correct.

The party left Fort Ellis, Montana, on Monday, August 22, 1870. They entered the area which was to become Yellowstone National Park on Friday, August 26--the fifth day of the expedition.

Doane kept a daily journal, and the 25,000 word journal was his major contribution to the expedition. The Bonneys say, "With matter of fact directness, he dispels any doubt that the unbelievable wonders of the Yellowstone did exist . . . in the case of Yellowstone--1870 unembellished facts observed were precisely what was needed. We today, realizing the uniqueness and the immensity of the awe-inspiring phenomena which confronted Doane and knowing that he fell in love with Yellowstone for the rest of his life, can only marvel even more at the restraint in his writings which prevented emotion from clouding the factual and scientific clarity so necessary for the first genuine information and understanding of the region--a region previously so misunderstood and surrounded with terrible and sublime tales."

Obviously, I cannot go into great detail regarding the month long expedition, but the group did explore the area around Tower Fall, and gave the fall its name; Mt. Washburn, which the group named; the Grand Canyon area, Hayden Valley, Yellowstone Lake and the geyser basins. While they could give the basins only a cursory examination, a number of outstanding features such as Old Faithful, Castle, Giant, Bee Hive, Giantess and Grotto Geysers were observed and named.

The night of September 19, found the group camped at the junction of the Firehole and Gibbon Rivers. A discussion that night developed over the possibility of personal aggrandizement available in the Yellowstone "wonders."

N.P. Langford wrote in his diary on September 20, 1870: "Mr. Hedges then said he did not approve of any of these plans--that there ought to be no private ownership of any portion of that region, but that the whole of it ought to be set apart as a great National Park, and that each one of us ought to make an effort to have this accomplished. His suggestion met with an instantaneous and favorable response from all--except one--of the members of our party, and each hour since the matter was first broached, our enthusiasm has increased. It has been the main theme of our conversation today as we journeyed. I lay awake half of last night thinking about it--and if my wakefulness deprived my bedfellow (Hedges) of any sleep, he has only himself and his disturbing National Park proposition to answer for it."

Haines noted that the suggestion advanced by Hedges was not unique for there is historical reason to believe that the idea of reserving natural wonders for the public benefit had already gained some acceptance before 1870. In Anglo-Saxon England, for instance, the poorest lands

were held in common. And prior to 1870 a portion of Yosemite Valley had been made a state park in California (in fact, it was the Yosemite legislation that served as the model for the Yellowstone Park bill). But Hedges was a vigorous and successful proponent of the idea, and credit must be given him for championing the idea and stirring many others to successful action on its behalf.

Following the return of the Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition, members of the party moved fast to see the National Park idea through to fruition. Publicity generated by the group stirred the activity of Dr. Hayden, head of the U.S. Geological Survey of the Territories. At the time he was engaged in wheedling funds from Congress to support his organization's work during the coming field season, and he found it wise to capitalize upon the current interest by promoting an official survey of the wonder-filled area. Such a project was doubly dear to Hayden because he had so narrowly missed exploring the region in 1860, when he was the geologist with the Reynolds Expedition.

Dr. Hayden received the necessary finances and authority, and he had an expedition organized at Ogden, Utah by June 1, 1871. From there he moved north through Utah and Idaho to enter the Yellowstone region from the west.

A comprehensive survey of the area gathered data on its topography, geology, botany, zoology, paleontology and meteorology. This scientific work was supplemented by photographs taken by W.H. Jackson and paintings by Thomas Moran.

Jackson's photographs and Moran's drawings and paintings did much to convince skeptical Congressmen about the wonders and the worth of Yellowstone. A portfolio of Jackson's photographs appeared on the desks of all Senators and Representatives shortly before the vote on the Yellowstone Park bill.

A word here, if I might, about the techniques used and the problems encountered by Jackson.

The photographs were taken with a large view camera on a wet plate. Before taking the picture, Jackson had to crouch in a small tent darkroom, coat a plate of glass with a silver solution and rush the wet plate into the camera.

For his "speed" work, Jackson had rigged up a shutter, powered by a rubber band, which gave exposures of about one-tenth of a second. Normally the lens cap served as a shutter and exposures ran from 10 to 15 seconds. The plates were developed immediately after exposure. Most of Jackson's 300-lb. photo kit was carried on the back of his trusty mule, Hypo. I think you'll agree, Jackson's equipment and techniques were a far cry from today's era of Instamatics and Polaroids!

On December 18, 1871, the bill to create Yellowstone National Park was introduced simultaneously in both Houses of Congress. The speed with which it was enacted is staggering to any student of federal legislation. Langford, Everts and Hauser were in Washington pushing for

its passage. Hayden, just recently back from his expedition to the area, was doing likewise from his position at the Interior Department.

The bill was passed by the Senate on January 30, 1872, and went to the House where it was passed on February 27, 1872. President Grant wasted no time signing it, and the bill became law on March 1, 1872. Yellowstone was the world's first national park. From the time it was introduced until it was enacted into law, the bill took less than three months to clear Congress! The legislation provided that Yellowstone be "dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people."

What, then of the next 100 years? There's no bright, new bold look in the park today. Jim Bridger, John Colter, Lt. Doane, Dr. Hayden and the others would find very little changed outside of the minimum amount of roadways and facilitation. Tower Fall still tumbles 132 feet into Tower Creek just as it did when the Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition first measured and named it. The "Petrified trees" on Specimen Ridge are still where Bridger saw them as is Obsidian Cliff--the "glass mountain." Lower Falls still crashes 308 feet into the multi-hued Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone just as it did when the Sheepeaters roamed the nearby mountains--and they'll all be there 100 years from now.

The Yellowstone Act empowered the Secretary of the Interior to provide for the "preservation from injury or spoilage of timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities or wonders within the Park and to guard against the wanton destruction of fish and game and their capture or destruction for the purpose of merchandise or profit."

This obligation has been fulfilled by the Interior Department and its National Park Service in a most excellent manner through the first 100 years--and I am confident that the obligation will be met during the next 100 years. The wonders of Yellowstone must be preserved and remain unspoiled because they are part of the heritage of all Americans.

At the same time we must remember the specific intent of Congress that Yellowstone be "set apart as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." If we were to merely preserve, the Park and not permit people to enjoy it, we would be nullifying the intent of its establishment as well as denying millions of people a priceless experience.

In recent years, Yellowstone has been opened to snowmobiling and cross-country skiing in the winter time. In my opinion the Park displays its greatest majesty in the winter. I hope that all of you will have an opportunity to undertake a winter excursion and to enjoy a truly great experience.

In the first hundred years nearly fifty million people have visited Yellowstone. The numbers have increased dramatically as the following visitor years indicate: 1880-1,000; 1890-7,808; 1900-8,928; 1910-19,575; 1920-79,777; 1930-227,901; 1940-526,437; 1950-1,109,926; 1960-1,443,288; 1970-2,297,290.

The annual number of visitors is likely to increase just as dramatically during the next 100 years.

The challenge then for us is to develop the planning and management capabilities that will preserve the integrity and beauty of Yellowstone's wonders and still make it available for the benefit and enjoyment of people.

I am confident that we will meet this challenge because we must--so that Yellowstone can continue to be a great blessing to all mankind.