

# THE WONDERS OF YELLOWSTONE

*Yellowstone has the world's largest active volcano*





This is a shot of the Daisy Geyser erupting. (Wikimedia Commons/Broken Inaglor)

During my lifetime, I have been very fortunate to visit many of our country's national parks. I guess the one that is closest to my heart would be the Everglades, after spending so many years hunting and fishing in the area. Second for me would of course be our own Rocky Mountain National Park. If you live in Colorado and have not been there, take the time. It is well worth it.

My first visit was during my eighth summer, when my grandparents decided we would load up the truck with camping gear, and head to Yellowstone National Park, for a short vacation that included the Fourth of July holiday. I don't remember much from that trip about the wondrous beauty of the park, probably because at that age I had the attention span of a monkey chewing on a fly swatter, but a few things stand out in memory.

Never visit the parks during a big weekend like the Fourth. The camping areas looked, and sounded, like Woodstock. It was a virtual sea of humanity, all with a transistor radio blaring away. We tried to tent camp but there were so many people that it was



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

not enjoyable.

I did get to fish in several places. Standing on the bank, shoulder to shoulder with other hopeful anglers, while small children swam and threw rocks into the water. Needless to say, all I caught was a bad sunburn.

We did visit the geysers and was pretty impressed with that. There wasn't much wildlife around, probably because of all the people. The highlight of the trip was to stop in at the ranger station and watch the rangers climb the walls.

On a more serious note, we must appreciate the foresight of our leaders who sought to preserve a portion of our wild country for future generations to enjoy. In a world full of over consumption and depletion of our natural resources, it is nice to have something preserved in a natural state.

Much of the credit goes to President Teddy Roosevelt who created the United States Forest Service, established 150 national forests, 51 federal bird reserves, four national game preserves, five national parks and 18 national monuments. The beloved president was a dedicated hunter and loved the outdoors. But it did not all start with him.

Yellowstone National Park was the first, born on March 1, 1872. President Ulysses S. Grant, who was fresh out of the Civil War, signed the Yellowstone National Park Protection Act into law. This act protected more than 2 million acres of mountain wilderness, geysers, and wildlife, for future generations to enjoy.

What is most amazing to me and is a credit to the foresight of Grant, was the timing of this act. People were still using the Oregon Trail, although it was slowing down. There were no railroads near Yellowstone. It was not until 1882 that the Northern Pacific Railroad reached Livingston, Montana. From there, a spur was added in 1902 that went to the north entrance of the park.

Yellowstone's history actually goes back many

years. There is evidence that man was living there 11,000 years ago, along the shores of what is now called Yellowstone Lake. The first American to explore the area was John Colter of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Because of all the geothermal activity in the area, it was mockingly called "Colter's Hell."

It was the famous Washburn expedition that next explored the future park. In 1870, its members discovered Old Faithful, the famous geyser. Pretty fast action on the part of the government to preserve this area so quickly, especially considering that Wyoming did not become a state until 1890.

Yellowstone preserves more than 10,000 hydrothermal features, consisting of a collection of hot springs, mud pots, fumaroles, and geysers, with Old Faithful being the most famous. Half of all the hydrothermal features in the entire world are found in Yellowstone National Park.

Yellowstone has more geysers than anyplace on earth and Old Faithful is probably the most famous. It got its name back in 1870 because of the regularity of the time intervals

between its eruptions. Old Faithful's eruptions, about 17 a day, reach up to 184 feet in the air and last anywhere from a minute and a half to five minutes.

The geyser is not as regular as it once was. The time between eruptions has been lengthening over the past few decades. Perhaps the geyser is not so faithful anymore. I remember it was late when I was there by a few minutes.

There are 67 species of mammals that make Yellowstone their home. There are nearly 300 species of birds and 16 species of fish, although I could not catch one on my visit. The park is especially known for its bison herds. It is the only place in the U.S. where bison have lived continuously since prehistoric times.

One of the scarier things about Yellowstone is that the world's largest active volcano lies underneath the park. The first major eruption of the volcano occurred 2.1 million years ago and covered almost 6,000 square miles with ash, one of the largest eruptions of all time.

The super volcano is still active, a very comforting thought. The last lava flow was about 70,000 years

ago. In recent years, there have been more rumblings of activity from this volcano and some scientist believe another eruption is coming someday. Better make that trip to the park before any eruptions.

If you have never seen Yellowstone, plan a trip there. The area is crammed full of the Rocky Mountains at their finest. The mountains, geysers and wildlife will create memories that last a lifetime. Just don't make the mistake my grandparents made of going over the holiday weekend with a hyperactive 8-year-old with no attention span.

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