

Postcard of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. F. JAY HAYNES. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK HERITAGE AND RESEARCH CENTER

CHAPTER ONE

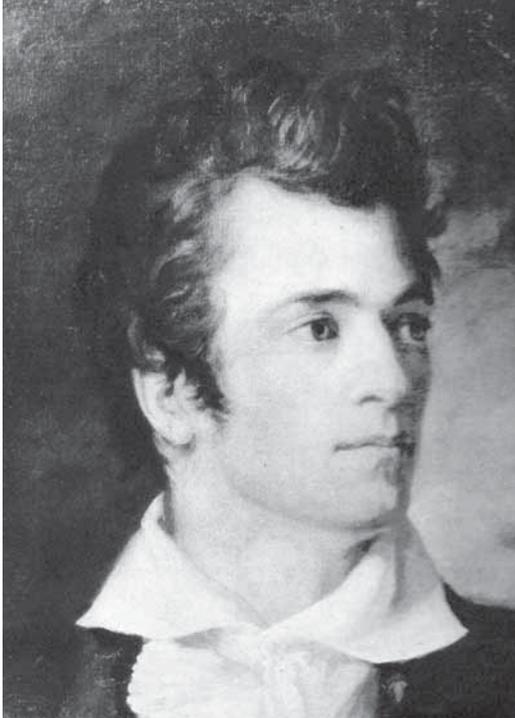
Some early visitors: John Colter, Baptiste Ducharme, Daniel T. Potts, Joseph Meek, Johnson Gardner, Osborne Russell, Warren Angus Ferris, Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, John C. Davis. The Folsom-Cook Expedition takes off. The Washburn Expedition follows. Truman Everts is lost. Calfee and Josey look around.

This is an account of the Northern Pacific Railroad and its influence on the early days of Yellowstone National Park. Many names will be familiar: early visitor John Colter, banker Jay Cooke, Northern Pacific President Frederick Billings, United States President Chester Alan Arthur, Colonel George Custer, writer Rudyard Kipling, the Earl of Dunraven, United States President Theodore Roosevelt, writer Mary Roberts Rinehart. Others will be less known: fur trapper Johnson Gardner, Chief Engineer W. Milnor Roberts, hotel man Rufus Hatch, W. W. Wylie and his tent camps, Joseph Keeney, Park visitors Emma and George Cowan.

Yellowstone National Park became important to the Northern Pacific Railroad as a destination for its passengers just as California's state park at Yosemite was an important destination for the Union Pacific Railroad's passengers. The Northern Pacific took advantage of the fact that the more affluent American families had changed their habits of vacationing and had begun to spend recreational time together as families. The railroad men could see that hotels in the Park would suit eastern families of some wealth, and dude ranches in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming would attract even more visitors to the Park area. The railroad men put up the money for many of these Park amenities to attract more passengers as they knew that financier Cornelius Vanderbilt was right when he told the *New York Herald* "You can't build a railroad from nowhere to nowhere."¹

No one knows for certain who was the first to come up with the notion that a land of geysers, mud pots, boiling springs,

¹ *New York Herald*, September 18, 1873.



*George Catlin traveled west in 1833. SELF-
PORTRAIT, 1824, THOMAS GILCREASE INSTITUTE OF
AMERICAN HISTORY AND ART*

and deep canyons should be reserved as a national park. The Yellowstone area was part of the Louisiana Purchase, acquired from Napoleon in 1803. Members of the Crow tribe called the Yellowstone River the Elk River. Canadian trader David Thompson and early French voyageurs called the river through the area of yellowish rock “Les Roches Jaune.”

As early as 1833, artist George Catlin, having traveled west the year before on the steamboat *Yellowstone*, proposed that much of the Rocky Mountain West, including the Yellowstone area, be reserved as parkland.

The purchase of land in the middle of New York City in 1856 that Frederick Law Olmsted supervised as Central Park may have helped to change somewhat American perspective on lands set aside for leisure. The designation of Yosemite as parkland under California jurisdiction in 1864 made sense to more and more Americans.

Olin D. Wheeler, known earlier for his volumes on Lewis and Clark, writer of many early tracts for the Northern Pacific, wondered why it took so long for the region to be “discovered.” He did not realize that

men had come through the area for quite some time. Some of those who came back from the wondrous lands were not believed; hence, many of those travelers kept quiet about what they saw to avoid unpleasant remarks about their sanity. Some observers maintained that the land was worthless for agricultural pursuits, too desolate for settlement, too rugged for the mining and the lumber interests, and too dangerous for the wandering tourist.

Indeed, the Yellowstone area seemed dangerous for some. Some white men, new to the area, saw Indian hunters as menacing. Shoshone, Flathead, Nez Percé, and other tribal groups traveled through the region on their way to hunt bison; each year, the hunters had to travel farther east to find game. The Crow visited the area, as did the Siksika and Piegan (Blackfeet) from the north, the Bannock (Shoshone) from the west, and the Tukurika, also a Shoshone group, who sometimes resided in the park area and were called derisively “Sheepeaters.”



Bison were common on the western plains until the 1880s.

For an area generally regarded as lonely, desolate, and unwelcoming, a good number of adventurers visited the Yellowstone area in the 1800s. Some trappers could neither read nor write, nor did they want others to know their source of beaver pelts. They came and went in silence. Others, however,



Another visitor to a hot pool in the Yellowstone area. BERNAL ALEXANDER PHOTO. GALLATIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

either told or wrote of their experiences, although they risked derisive laughter and ridicule when they did.

After John Colter left the Lewis and Clark Expedition that was making its way back to the States, he moved out on his own and came upon a series of boiling mud pots in 1807-1808, probably located on the eastern portion of the Yellowstone area. Colter was a shy, quiet, reserved man who told others what he had seen. Those to whom he

unwisely described his observations laughed and called the mud pots in jest “Colter’s Hell.”

French-Canadian Baptiste Ducharme came west with the Ashley Expedition in 1819. Later, as an independent trapper, Ducharme traveled about the area in 1824 and 1828, describing with some accuracy a number of falls and geysers.

In 1827, Daniel T. Potts, a trapper from Pennsylvania, visited the region and published a letter entitled “In the West,” in the *Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser* on September 27, 1827, outlining his unpleasant encounters with Blackfeet warriors. But he saw beauty as well:

On the south border of this lake are a number of hot and boiling springs, some of water and others of the most beautiful fine clay, resembling a mush pot, and throwing particles to the immense height of from 20 to 30 feet. The clay is of a white, and of a pink color...²

Potts signed his name at the edge of a hot spring basin north of West Thumb; shortly thereafter, he gave up trapping beaver, and returned to Pennsylvania.



Fur trappers tell stories around the campfire. AMERICAN WEST, VOLUME 8, NUMBER 6 (NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1976): 42

² Cramton, Louis C., *Early History of Yellowstone National Park and its Relation to National Park Policies*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932: 5-6

Nineteen-year-old trapper Joseph Meek was in the Yellowstone area in 1829 and in later years. For a time he was separated from his group and climbed a low mountain; at the top he could see miles and miles of volcanic activity, and marveled at its beauty. "...behold! the whole country beyond was smoking with vapor from boiling springs, and burning with gasses issuing from small craters, each of which was emitting a sharp, whistling sound."³

A fur trapper named Johnson Gardner spent time in the area in 1831-2 at the head of a valley that came to be called Gardner's Hole, one of the earliest place names in the Park region. The Gardner River is also named for the trapper as well as the town of Gardiner, north of Mammoth Hot Springs.⁴ Gardner could not read or write and signed with his "X" when he sold his furs to the American Fur Company. The trapper was regarded as an argumentative scoundrel, tough and dissolute.

Twenty-year-old trapper Osborne Russell, a farm boy from Maine, came through the area with friends a number of times between 1834 and 1843 and wrote in his most readable account,

*I almost wished I could spend the remainder of my days in a place like this where happiness and contentment seemed to reign in wild romantic splendor surrounded by majestic battlements which seemed to support the heavens and shut out all intruders.*⁵

Russell remembered that many elk were in the vicinity of Yellowstone Lake.

Jim Bridger, a delightful windbag to some, was in the area at the same time and most regarded his descriptions of geysers as more fine tall tales for which he was notable⁶

When Warren Angus Ferris came through the region in 1834, he was first assailed by unpleasant smells in the air. However, he

³ Frances Fuller Victor, *The River of the West: The Adventures of Joe Meek*, Hartford, Conn., R. W. Bliss, 1870. Republished in Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1983: 75

⁴ Mammoth Hot Springs was first called White Mountain Hot Springs.

⁵ Osborne Russell, *Journal of a Trapper*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1955: 27-28

⁶ Jim Bridger died in 1881 in Missouri.



Originally from Virginia, Jim Bridger had described the geysers but no one believed him.

MONTANA PICTURE GALLERY, STEVENSVILLE, MT: 1986

came close to one of the smelly pools and "ventured near enough to put my hand in the water of its basin, but withdrew it instantly, for the heat of the water in this immense cauldron was altogether too great for comfort."⁷ Ferris, a clerk with the American Fur Company, also published articles on the area in the *Western Literary Messenger*, Buffalo, New York, from July 13, 1842 to May 18, 1844, and may have been the first observer to call them "geysers."

Father Pierre-Jean De Smet walked through the park area in 1851, on his way to St. Mary's Mission in the Bitterroot Valley. He seldom talked about what he observed – he had seen gold deposits at Alder Gulch but didn't mention them to anyone – except to say that Jim Bridger did not exaggerate his descriptions of the park region.

When John C. Davis, a farmer living near Canmer, Kentucky, came through the future park in 1862, he thought he saw smoke from Indian campfires three miles away, but later realized he had seen his first geyser. Davis was with a small group led by

⁷ Warren Angus Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, Denver, The Old West Publishing Company, 1983: 328



Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet quietly hiked through the area. MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY RESEARCH CENTER.

Walter D. DeLacy, whose map of the region is regarded as the first. The following year, Davis traveled with another group, split off from a larger James Stuart party traveling farther east. He was not prepared for the magnitude of the area.

*We came into the park just above the lake, and immediately found ourselves at the midst of the wonders of the enchanted land. The boiling springs and geysers were all around us, and accustomed as we were to the marvels of the Western scenery, we hardly knew what to think of the phenomena.*⁸

The party was surrounded by unstable ground, but wisely followed the tracks of buffalo to firmer ground and safety. Davis, like some other visitors to the area, decided he was the first “white man” to view these splendors.

In the autumn of 1869, three stockmen, David E. Folsom, his ranch hand and friend

⁸ John C. Davis, “A Kentucky Granger Tells of the Earliest Visit to the National Park,” *Livingston Enterprise*, April 21, 1884

William Peterson,⁹ and Charles W. Cook, left Diamond City to visit the Yellowstone region. In addition to ranching, the men worked at the Boulder Ditch Company. Both Folsom and Cook were Quakers. Others were to accompany them, but found that “pressing engagements” would keep them from joining the three adventurers; moreover, some stayed home because no military escort was available. The men had five horses, two carrying supplies, which included fishing tackle and buffalo robes. They left on September 6.

The three took their time and enjoyed the sights that had made earlier people laugh at the stories of those who traveled years before. They were gone thirty-six days. Later Cook wrote, on seeing Great Fountain Geyser, “The setting sun shining into the spray and steam drifting toward the mountains, gave it an appearance of burnished gold, a wonderful sight. We could not contain our enthusiasm; with one accord we all took off our hats and yelled with all our might.”¹⁰ When the ranchers returned to Helena, they learned that a search party was forming to find them. The three men were wary of telling their neighbors what they had seen, as they did not want to be branded liars, as had the earlier visitors. When magazines *Harper’s* and *Scribner’s Monthly* were told of the expedition, editors of both journals decided the story was too unreliable to publish. But Cook did publish an article in *Western Monthly*, Chicago, July 1870, entitled “The Valley of the Upper Yellowstone.”¹¹

In August 1870, a party of nineteen men made the Yellowstone trip: Territorial Surveyor-General Henry Dana Washburn;¹² Nathaniel Pitt Langford of St. Paul, Minnesota; Truman C. Everts, former Assessor of Internal Revenue and, at fifty-four years, the oldest man on

⁹ Originally from Denmark, Peterson eventually became a prominent rancher in Idaho.

¹⁰ C. W. Cook, *Preliminary Statement*, J. B. Haynes Bulletin, December 1923. Copy at Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University at Bozeman

¹¹ Louis C. Cramton, *Early History of Yellowstone National Park and its Relation to National Park Policies*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932: 83-89. May have been written by David Folsom.

¹² Washburn died a few months later at the age of thirty-nine, January 26, 1871, from consumption.

In 1864, Montana became an official territory, with portions gleaned from several earlier territories. In 1868, Wyoming became a territory, carved from part of Idaho Territory. Montana became the forty-first state on November 8, 1889; Idaho became the forty-third state on July 3, 1890; Wyoming became the forty-fourth state on July 10, 1890.



C. W. Cook, William Peterson, and David E. Folsom did not wait for a military escort to visit the Yellowstone area. C. W. COOK, PROGRESSIVE MEN OF MONTANA, CHICAGO; A. W. BOWEN, c1900; WILLIAM PETERSON, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK HERITAGE AND RESEARCH CENTER; DAVID E. FOLSOM, NATHANIEL P. LANGFORD, THE DISCOVERY OF YELLOWSTONE PARK, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS, 1972

the expedition; Everts' assistant Walter Trumbull; hides merchant Jacob W. Smith; engineer and banker Samuel T. Hauser; fledgling Helena lawyer Cornelius Hedges; stationer Benjamin F. Stickney; freighter Warren C. Gillette; packers Charley Reynolds and Elwyn Bean; and black cooks Nute and Johnny.

As the group passed through Bozeman on the way to the Yellowstone, Nathaniel Langford thrilled local businessmen when he said he knew that the "residents were patiently awaiting the time when the cars of the Northern Pacific shall descend into their streets."¹³

At Fort Ellis, they picked up a six-man military escort on August 22 headed by Lieutenant Gustavus Cheyney Doane, including Sergeant William Baker, Privates Charles Moore, John Williamson, William Liepler, George W. McConnell, and a dog named Booby. From the beginning of the trip, a deep inflammation, or felon, had formed in Lieutenant Doane's thumb. At night, he paced back and forth near the sleeping men, poking at his thumb with a dull pocketknife. After nine days, the problem became more serious. On September 4, Langford volunteered his services as acting surgeon and sharpened



General Henry Dana Washburn may have been the first visitor to call the geyser "Old Faithful."
NATHANIEL P. LANGFORD, THE DISCOVERY OF YELLOWSTONE PARK, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS, 1972

¹³ Nathaniel P. Langford, "The Wonders of the Yellowstone," *Scribner's Monthly*, v. 2, n. 1 (May 1871): 3



Jack Baronett built the first bridge to cross the Yellowstone River. WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON PHOTO, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK HERITAGE AND RESEARCH CENTER

his penknife. The men stretched Doane out on an empty ammunition case. While Cornelius Hedges and packer Elwyn Bean held him down, Langford sliced open the offending thumb, infected matter spewing over all the medical assistants. Doane shrieked and then relaxed, saying, “That was elegant.”¹⁴ Following this “surgery,” Doane slept for thirty-six hours. The dog Booby also had his troubles. His paws got so sore from the terrain he could not keep up with the men, so someone fashioned four little leather moccasins for his feet.

As the party camped along the southeast arm of Yellowstone Lake, Truman Everts somehow managed to get himself truly lost, resulting in an ordeal of thirty-seven days. He wandered about, having lost all sense of direction; toward the end of his ordeal, Everts experienced hallucinations, broke his much-needed spectacles, and endured a snowstorm. Trackers George A. Pritchett and Jack Baronett, spurred on by a promise of a six-hundred-dollar reward, found the

greatly emaciated Everts on October 16 and gently nursed him with bear oil and stomach-soothing remedies until he was able to get to Bozeman by spring wagon. Alas, the two rescuers never received their reward.

Collins J. Baronett, also known as “Yellowstone Jack,” first visited the Park area in 1864 looking for gold. Shortly after the Everts rescue, he built the first bridge across the Yellowstone River north of its junction with the Lamar River in 1871. He charged a man or a mule a one-dollar toll to cross. He received twenty-five cents each for other animals that crossed the bridge. On the east side of the river on the flats, he built his lookout cabin.¹⁵

In the summer of 1871, two newcomers to the Montana area, house painter Henry Bird Calfee and boot maker Macon Josey decided to look over the region. They did not worry about the lack of a military escort but went into the area by themselves. In an attempt to save a frightened young deer that had fallen into a boiling pool,

¹⁴ Nathaniel P. Langford, *The Discovery of Yellowstone Park*, Bison Books, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972: 51

¹⁵ The bridge was torn down in 1911.

Josey fell in too, scalding the lower part of his body. Friend Calfee cut off his clothes, covered him with flour, fashioned a travois, and the two proceeded to continue their journey toward the Madison River. Despite Josey's discomfort with his burns, both men enjoyed the sights; after a time, the burned man was able to forgo the travois and rode a horse.

Toward the end of their trip, the two experienced another shock. Bandits hiding in brush near the Madison River began to shoot at them. Calfee and Josey raced quickly toward Bozeman and Sheriff John Guy, who found the shooters, killed three of them, brought two in for trial, with lots of stolen goods as evidence. Josey returned to the perhaps soothing and less dangerous manufacture of boots; Calfee moved back into the geyser area time and again, developing his skill as a photographer.¹⁶

¹⁶ Henry Bird Calfee, "Calfee's Adventures," *Great Falls Tribune*, c1895