

"Flying Squirret"

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## RESEARCH ARTICLES

# Creating Yellowstone: Montanans in the Early Park Years

Langdon Smith and William Wyckoff

In the summer of 1872, a Montana woman named Mrs. H.H. Stone and her family spent a month on horseback exploring the Yellowstone Plateau. With her family at her side, Mrs. Stone followed animal trails and riverbeds, snaked her way through downed timber, and faced the possibility of armed conflict with Native Americans—all to become the first woman to enter Yellowstone National Park. Her adventures make a good story, but also illustrate the pivotal role local residents played in shaping the early evolution of Yellowstone National Park and the larger national park idea (Figure 1). Indeed, the Yellowstone example suggests a larger pattern in many western American national parks. When parks were established, nearby residents exerted a tremendous influence on subsequent management policies and land uses within the park. Locals knew the parks better than the federally appointed administrators did, and they often had their own ideas about how the parks should evolve.<sup>2</sup>

This essay explores the relationship between national parks and their neighbors by reconstructing how locals from nearby Montana shaped the world's first national park, and how their vision of the park influenced its subsequent development in five key roles. First, as explorers, locals substantiated unbelievable tales of explosive geysers and mud volcanoes, and produced photographs and written accounts to publicize Yellowstone's wonders to the American public. Second, as tourists, they identified key attractions and recreational activities. Third, locals cut trails and built roads to establish a spatial pattern of human use that remains virtually unchanged today. Fourth, as entrepreneurs, locals guided the initial design and construction of the park's tourism infrastructure, a pattern that served as a template for future parks. Finally, Montanans fought to establish and more clearly define the extent of federal protection over park wildlife and resources.

Yellowstone's story is important for several reasons. As the world's first national park, Yellowstone set the stage for later parks, both in the United

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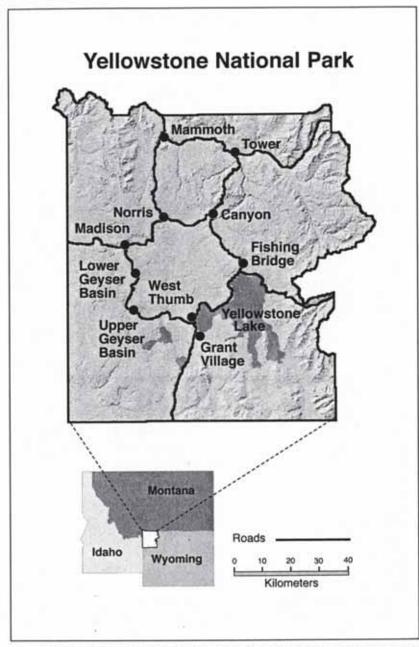


Figure 1. Yellowstone National Park was the world's first national park, established in 1879. It encompasses 3,479 square miles (8,987 square kilometers).

States and beyond. For example, enabling legislation for subsequent American national parks mirrored Yellowstone's arrangement for leasing land for tourism development—in some cases with wording taken verbatim from the 1872 Yellowstone Act. The clustered village-style development of Mammoth Hot Springs also became the norm for future parks, and Yellowstone's road system marked the first broad-scale approach to park planning. Other parks soon followed Yellowstone's example and in 1910 the Interior Department called for comprehensive plans for all national parks. The Yellowstone experience also illuminates park issues at the global level. Many national parks elsewhere in the Americas, Asia, and Africa are closely intertwined with the presence and needs of nearby residents, including those who live within park boundaries. Yellowstone's saga is a reminder that these close interrelationships are hardly new, that indeed they are rooted in the very formation of the national park idea itself.

Recent Yellowstone scholarship has provided a critical look at the driving forces behind the park's establishment and early development. Historians Chris Magoc, Paul Schullery, and Aubrey Haines have chronicled the tremendous influences of the Northern Pacific Railroad in first lobbying for establishment of the park, and then promoting its wonders.5 These efforts effectively debunk what has become known as the "campfire myth," an institutionalized legend suggesting members of the 1869 Folsom expedition were so enamored by Yellowstone's scenery that while sitting around the campfire one night they agreed to return home and work to make the region a national park. Richard West Sellars recently expounded on these themes, arguing that the collaboration between private business and the federal government in early Yellowstone fostered a new type of public land use in the West. Setting aside such a huge tract of land as Yellowstone for the public's recreation, Sellars argues, was a "resounding declaration" that tourism was to be important in the economy of the American West.6 These studies share the theme that the burgeoning tourist industry and American capitalism were firmly behind Yellowstone's establishment, despite the park's image today as a symbol of the birth of wildlands preservation.

This essay supports this broad interpretation of Yellowstone's founding, but it suggests more. The involvement of nearby local residents demonstrates that Yellowstone's development was not limited to powerful corporations and eastern elites, but was also a grassroots affair in the West. The fact that many locals shared the view of eastern developers that Yellowstone should become a tourist resort also demonstrates that there was at least some consensus about the role of a national park. But perhaps the most valuable contribution this essay can make is to demonstrate the significance of locals to park development and policy making during the pivotal early years when Yellowstone was ignored by the U.S. government. While several Yellowstone studies have referenced local involvement, none focus specifically on Montanans during this critical period. With little or no guidance from Congress or the Interior Department, and no funding for its first six years, Yellowstone's future could have

followed a path very different from the one we see today, including being opened to settlement or auctioned off to the highest bidder. While the federal government let the young park languish, Yellowstone's nearest neighbors enthusiastically filled the vacuum with their own attempts at "improving" and developing the park, attracting investors and marketing its many wonders. When the government did slowly begin taking an active role in developing Yellowstone as a tourist resort, federal officials followed the lead of locals and continued much of what they had begun.

### Ground Truthing the Rumors

By playing an important role in the initial exploration of Yellowstone, Montanans shaped early written and visual images of the park during a time when the American public had little access to the region. Through photographs and written accounts, locals helped convince a skeptical eastern audience that Yellowstone's spectacular geothermal features were more than just yarns spun by Jim Bridger and other mountain men. These first images were critical in forming national opinions and policies concerning Yellowstone's future as a national park. As Judith Meyer has noted, the reports and descriptions brought back from the first expeditions were often copied directly into early guidebooks and were rapidly disseminated to a broad audience, serving as a template for the "evolution of the public's perception of place" in Yellowstone.7 Similarly, the images brought back from expeditions by artist Thomas Moran and photographer William Henry Jackson transformed the region from a kind of "hell on Earth to a spectacular wonderland" that could stand as an important symbol of America's uniqueness.8 The images also provided a "mythology of unusual things to see," as John Sears has argued, which was required to excite people's desire to visit Yellowstone.9

The first organized party to explore Yellowstone was the Folsom Expedition of 1869, which got off to a rocky start when Indian conflict created a shortage of troops at Ft. Ellis near Bozeman. Upon learning there would be no military escort, all but three of the party refused to go. The remaining volunteers, locals from Helena, Montana, were David Folsom, Charles Cook, and William Peterson. Although packing extremely light by necessity and lacking modern surveying and mapping equipment, the amateur members of the Folsom Expedition were careful observers during their journey. They created a map of their route through the region and even measured the upper and lower falls of the Yellowstone River with a bale of twine and stick. Their estimate of the upper falls (115 feet) came remarkably close to the accepted measurement of 109 feet. 10

After they returned, word of the expedition got out. Folsom was invited to speak to a group of Helena residents about his expedition, but so many people arrived at the meeting that he was unwilling to tell the entire story. Folsom said "he did not wish to be regarded as a liar by those who were unac-

quainted with his reputation." Folsom's reasoning may have been sound, as his written report of the trip was not immediately believed. Folsom and Cook's account was rejected as unreliable by the New York Tribune, Scribner's, and Harper's Monthly. One magazine, the Western Monthly Magazine of Chicago, finally published their account in July of 1870.12

Although their story was not widely distributed or believed, the Folsom party was successful in creating the first relatively accurate map of Yellowstone, and sparking the interest of Henry D. Washburn, the newly appointed surveyor general of Montana Territory. Washburn led another expedition the following year, accompanied by Nathaniel Langford, former acting governor of the territory. Despite their credentials in Montana and a much better organized and equipped expedition, the explorers also initially fared poorly with the eastern press. Langford wrote about the expedition but was branded by one reviewer as the "champion liar of the Northwest." 13

The dramatic exploits of Truman Everts finally captured the imagination of the eastern press. Everts, a Montanan from Helena, became lost during the Washburn expedition. Separated from his horse as well, Everts wandered for weeks in the wilderness with only the clothes on his back, two knives, and a small opera glass. Surviving his 37-day walk out of Yellowstone by eating thistle roots and making fires using his opera glass and the sun, he was treed by a mountain lion, burned by hot springs, and scalded by forest fires. Finally discovered by rescuers, he weighed only 50 pounds and was hallucinating from exhaustion. Soon *Scribner's Monthly*, a popular and widely distributed magazine, devoted 17 pages to Everts' personal account, "Thirty-Seven Days of Peril," and Everts himself became a national folk hero, thus adding more to the public awareness of Yellowstone through his misadventures than the Washburn expedition's official report.

But more than just thrilling readers with his harrowing experience, Everts reassured the public that the wild and dangerous region would soon be tamed:

In the course of events the time is not far distant when the wonders of the Yellowstone will be made accessible to all lovers of sublimity, grandeur, and novelty in natural scenery, and its majestic waters become the abode of civilization and refinement.<sup>15</sup>

As Magoc notes in his study of Yellowstone, Everts' call for the domestication of Yellowstone signified the imminent approach of tourism. The public could look forward with Everts to the time when "the accountrements of tourist travel would allow them to view Yellowstone's spectacular features without trepidation; its sublimity known more than feared."

With perhaps less drama than the exploits of Everts, though with no less importance, Montana-based commercial photographers often participated in early exploration efforts between 1871 and 1883, adding important early Yellowstone images to both government and commercial publications. Although overshadowed by William Henry Jackson and Thomas Moran, local

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photographers including Thomas J. Hine, Joshua Crissman, and Henry Bird Calfee promoted and sustained early interest in the park, and influenced the way Americans, Europeans, and others viewed and perceived the region. Though much of their Yellowstone work was displayed and sold regionally, they also produced pictures in stereoscopic form (double-image cards that gave a three-dimensional effect when seen through a viewer) and were able to reach a national audience. By the 1870s, stereo viewing was a popular pastime, and millions of images, including views of Yellowstone that had been taken by locals, could be found in parlors across the nation.<sup>17</sup>

### Identifying Key Attractions

Nearby residents also played a pivotal role in defining the initial tourist experience within the park. What was one to do there? What activities were appropriate in such a place? Early Montana tourists provided answers to those questions and their interests and publicity shaped how future tourists from

within and beyond the region experienced the park.

Harry J. Norton, a Virginia City, Montana, tourist, published his Yellowstone adventures in the first locally written guidebook. Touring the park by horseback with a group of six others from Virginia City in 1872, Norton reported finding other Montana tourists from Bozeman at the Lower Geyser Basin. In Wonder-Land Illustrated: or, Horseback Rides Through the Yellowstone National Park, 18 Norton passed on information and practical advice ranging from proper clothing to recommended types of hunting dogs, and even detailed how his party had used a dormant geyser to brew tea, boil meat, and cook two quarts of navy beans.

Unlike Norton, many of the other early guidebook authors could not afford to actually travel to Yellowstone, so they borrowed material from the expedition accounts and local authors who had actually been there. Norton's guidebook was a favorite source for such armchair authors, including Union Pacific Railroad employee Robert Strahorn and Northern Pacific Railroad employee Henry Winser. Both authored or collaborated on Yellowstone guidebooks, which disseminated Norton's experiences to a much broader audience.<sup>19</sup>

Another way locals shaped the evolution of Yellowstone was simply by naming things and places they found. As Meyer has suggested, the specific words, metaphors, and meanings they attached to the park provided the seeds from which Yellowstone's sense of place grew.<sup>20</sup> It, after all, as Yi-FuTuan has noted, is through speech, literature, and artistic endeavors that people make localities visible and real—creating places where none existed.<sup>21</sup> Thus, for example, members of the Washburn expedition established Yellowstone's "hellish" reputation by naming sites such as Hell Broth Springs, Hell's Half Acre, and Devil's Den. Tourists seemed to respond well to the symbolism, which gave them a way to dare the gates of a "sinfully tempting and terrifying underworld" and live to joke about it.<sup>22</sup>

But the term coined by locals that was to have the broadest implications for Yellowstone was "Wonderland," a name Montanans preferred when describing the park. Inspired by Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, published in 1865, the phrase first appeared in relation to Yellowstone in the Helena Daily Herald in 1872. Suggesting an unpredictable place where events occur illogically and sometimes alarmingly, the term became a key slogan for the Northern Pacific, which began publishing its Wonderland series of guidebooks in 1883. Initially focused only on Yellowstone, the guidebooks soon became boosters of the entire Pacific Northwest region served by the railroad—on one page prospective customers saw images of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and on others saw attractive cities, prime agricultural lands ready for settlement, and vast natural resources waiting to be harnessed by modern technology. Thus Wonderland, the image locals portrayed of the park, was used to promote development of the entire Pacific Northwest.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond their reach through the print media, the wilderness adventures of local tourists in early Yellowstone also established a tradition of camping in the park (Figure 2). An excursion into Yellowstone during the park's first decade usually meant weeks on horseback, with the inherent risks of wilderness travel over mountainous terrain. Between Bozeman and the northern bound-



Figure 2. Tourists camping in the Upper Geyser Basin enjoy a "Dinner in the Park" in about 1880. Their provisions and tools were carefully displayed for the camera. Photograph by H.B. Calfee, Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.

ary of Yellowstone, the only white inhabitants were the Bottler brothers, who built a ranch in 1868 near Emigrant Gulch north of present-day Gardiner. Many early travel accounts detailed the inherent dangers—people were thrown from their horses, stranded and isolated from companions, or caught in vicious storms. <sup>26</sup> Locals often caught fish and hunted grouse and big game for their meals. "At the creek we saw three deer and two antelope. Charlie and Alex McAllister, with their guns, started after them but failed to kill anything," wrote Mrs. T.H. Vincent of her Yellowstone camping trip. <sup>27</sup> For some local visitors, hunting game in the park was a big part of their trip as reflected in their diaries or journals.

Though non-local visitors arriving by train after 1883 could follow the example of locals by renting all the provisions to rough it; they sometimes lacked the necessary experience. Campers stopped wherever was convenient after a day's travel, and were not always careful extinguishing campfires. After a particularly difficult season of fighting Yellowstone fires, acting superintendent Frazier Boutelle told the Interior Department of his plans to establish the park's first designated campgrounds. "Fires are generally traceable to camping parties," argued Boutelle. "I do not charge much willful carelessness to them, but many have had no previous experience in camping, and leave their camps believing they have taken all necessary precautions." As John Sears has noted, a trip to the park gave tourists the feeling of being in Buffalo Bill's Wild West, without actually being in much danger. Nevertheless, their actions were not always without consequence.

As with their other pioneering activities, local Montana visitors were also the first attracted to the park's geysers and hot springs, which became informal meeting places within the park. (Figure 3). Locals sometimes mentioned seeing other Montanans while in the geyser basins. "At present there is quite a camp here, composed principally of representatives from the Gallatin Valley, while Willow Creek, Madison, Jefferson, and Helena are also represented," a Bozeman letter writer described in 1872. "A goodly number of Eve's fair daughters are sprinkled among the sterner sex, and their presence is the cause of giving a high tone to the first large camp in the National Park." 30

The wild country surrounding Yellowstone's geyser basins was familiar to the locals, who had no shortage of wilderness, but the geysers were unique to those who could not afford to travel to Iceland or New Zealand. Locals would sometimes camp for weeks enjoying the bathing opportunities or waiting for stubborn geysers to erupt. "After breakfast we visited Old Faithful, which gave us lively entertainment," N.A. Switzer wrote in his diary. "We find the names of perhaps one hundred written on the krust [sic] and on pebbles. A great many of persons we knew." 31

The hot springs were gaining the reputation of being restorative to health and Montana locals were some of the first to try them out. In 1872, the Avant Courier reported that Mrs. W.H. Randall of Bozeman had been in "delicate health" for some time and it was hoped that the "remarkable curative powers



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Figure 3. Two women tourists take a closer look at Fishing Cone along Yellowstone Lake in the West Thumb Geyser Basin in 1895. Photograph by E.V. Steadman. Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.

of the springs will restore her health." The article concluded by poking fun at Mrs. Randall's guide, J.P. Waddell: "We confidently trust that the gray hair and bald spots on the cranium of our handsome young friend Waddell, whose piety is cropping out rather early, will be replenished by a full suit of natural auburn."<sup>32</sup>

By the mid 1880s, the medicinal values of the hot springs were receiving more national scientific attention. In July of 1885, *Popular Science Monthly* published an article by Edward Frankland, M.D., "setting forth the special advantages of the Yellowstone Park as the best winter resort on the American Continent, or in the world, for consumptives, dyspeptics, rheumatics and for the cutaneous complaints, diseases of the kidney and of the genital organs." The *Popular Science* article, reprinted in the *Livingston Enterprise*, recounted the successful healing of several Montana residents who visited Yellowstone's hot springs. Bathing in hot springs, drinking the mineral water, and breathing the vapors was credited with "permanently curing" miner's poisoning (exposure to arsenic), consumption, vertigo, insomnia, loss of appetite, and "general prostration."

Without the walkways and protective railings and fences of modern Yellowstone, geysers and hot springs were sometimes dangerous for the park's first tourists. Four Butte men thought they had lost one of their party to a geyser in 1882, only to have him flushed out and restored alive. 4 Walter Watson had volunteered to descend a short way into the mouth of the large geyser to obtain a few mementos, when the crust gave way, tossing him in. His three companions lowered a light into the geyser, but could see nothing of Watson.

Eventually giving up hope, the dejected party returned to their camp, thinking Watson dead. The next morning a group of newcomers walked into camp, with a shaken Watson in hand, who told the following story:

After what seemed to me ages, the shouts ceased and I realized that my friends had given me up for lost . . . I suppose it was nearly five o'clock when I heard what sounded like distant thunder. The noise grew more and more distinct and the water surrounding me began to be troubled. I then realized that I was in the crater of an active geyser. Suddenly I discovered that the water was rising. . . . The water continued to rise more rapidly, and I at last found myself at the point from which I had fallen ... When I recovered I was being cared for by the strangers, the men who conducted me to my comrades.35

Such misadventures led park officials to build the first plank walkways in the geyser basins. Indeed, after leading terrified visitors gingerly over a thin "silicon crust" to see the Dancing Dunes in Porcelain Basin, assistant park superintendent George L. Henderson promised a safer trip in the future. "The government will in due time construct plank pathways when individuals may

safely reach this and other objects of interest."36

But danger came not only in the form of geyser-basin collapse. The fear of armed conflict with Indians was considerable for Montanans during the 1870s. Warfare against Native Americans dominated much of the front-page stories in local newspapers, including the surprising loss by Custer at the battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. Many of the conflicts involved the surveying parties of the Northern Pacific and attempts to settle the fertile Yellowstone Valley north of the park between Livingston and Billings. However, with one notable exception described below, armed conflict within Yellowstone during its early years was virtually non-existent. Though several hundred Shoshone (Sheepeaters) Indians are thought to have lived within Yellowstone before Europeans arrived, by the time the park was being explored and developed, the region had become a neutral territory between several different groups.37

Locals feared warfare outside of the region would hurt tourism, so they tried to downplay the risks within the park. "The number of visitors to the [hot] springs this season has not been as large as was expected, which may be attributed to the Indian excitement," reported the Avant Courier in 1874.38 A year later, the same newspaper tried to discount the threat of Indian conflict after learning that several parties of tourists booked trips with local businesses

only to cancel after hearing about violence with Indians:

Now, we will say to all who propose visiting the park that there is no danger to be apprehended from the Indians while on the park road. We know parties who have resided on the Upper Yellowstone for years, and they state emphatically that no hostile Indians has [sic] ever been seen in that section.39

The prediction of safe passage may have been accurate at the time and good for the business of tourism, but it proved later to be highly inaccurate, as Yellowstone found itself under siege for two weeks during the summer of 1877. "TOURISTS KILLED. SEVEN IN ONE PARTY AND NINE IN AN-OTHER," screamed the exaggerated headlines in the Avant Courier on August 30. The headlines continued for several weeks as wounded or scared tourists, many already reported killed, reached settled areas and found help.

The warfare in Yellowstone was a small chapter of the Nez Perce War, which had begun two months earlier in Idaho. Seeking refuge with Crow Indians east of Yellowstone, a band of 600 Nez Perce traveled directly across the Yellowstone Plateau. Once within the park, they crossed the paths of two different groups of Montana tourists, including that of General Philip Sheridan, who was himself playing the role of tourist in the park immediately before the Nez Perce entered Yellowstone and had the mistaken idea that Indians would not enter the geyser basins because of superstitious fear. By the time the Nez Perce had left Yellowstone two weeks later, they killed two tourists and had captured and released several more.40

Although not significant in the story of European conquest in the West, the clash between Nez Perce and early Montana tourists did influence park policies. Philetus Norris, Yellowstone's second superintendent from 1877 to 1882, was obviously shaken by the Nez Perce experience. In his annual reports, Norris often mentioned the threat of Indian attack, and when he built his headquarters building in 1879, its fortress-like defense capabilities had not escaped him-Norris noted, "I selected as the site for our block-house headquarters, where it fully commands the entire mound, valley and terrace, within range of rifle or field artillery, and a fair view of the entire balance of the valley and its approaches." The two-story log building featured an octagonal gun turret, loopholed for rifles. 418 The following year, Norris drafted regulations prohibiting all Native Americans from entering the park. 42

Much of the behavior of early local tourists, such as breaking off mineral specimens, shooting wildlife, leaving campfires burning, and soaping geysers to make them erupt, would be judged harshly today. 43 Yet the idea of a national park and the corresponding behavior was up for grabs. It was literally being field tested during these early Yellowstone years. Some of these misadventures were perhaps necessary before park managers could establish what was acceptable and what was needed on their part. When tourists risked life and limb to cross thin geothermal crust, or were flushed out of geysers, it became obvious that walkways and railings were needed. Likewise, campfires sparking forest fires led to the establishment of

designated camping sites—a familiar policy in today's national parks.

#### Spatially Defining Yellowstone

As the first tourists, locals also played a formative role in designing the initial travel routes within Yellowstone. Without any government road building during the first five years, local tourists cut trails to the major points of interest—the Old Faithful area and geyser basins, Yellowstone Lake, the Grand Canyon and Falls of the Yellowstone River, and Mammoth Hot Springs. This route, which came to be called the "Grand Rounds" of Yellowstone, was estab-

lished within a very short period around 1874.44

Early tourists followed and improved some existing Indian trails through the park, which were strongly influenced by natural factors such as topography and drainage. However, Indians had a different travel agenda than tourists, so their patterns related to tourist travel patterns often only by coincidence of destinations.45 Once established, the tourist trail network became a template that has changed little through time. With the exception of a road segment over Dunraven Pass connecting Madison Junction to Mammoth, these first trails approximate all of today's figure-eight-shaped Grand Loop road used by millions of tourists.46

Local entrepreneurs were also responsible for the first wagon roads into Yellowstone. Business owners understood that before they could reap the profits of tourism, visitors had to be able to arrive comfortably and in greater numbers. With the U.S. Congress refusing to cooperate with funding, the burden of building safe wagon roads was initially left to private interests, so Montana business owners in Bozeman and Virginia City raised money to build the first roads to the park. By 1873, the Bozeman Toll Road from Bozeman to Mammoth Hot Springs was completed. Later that same year, Virginia City entrepreneurs raised and additional \$2,000 for road building, and Gilman Sawtell, who owned a hotel at Henry's Lake in Idaho, built a road from Virginia City to the Lower Geyser Basin via Henry's Lake and the Madison River. 47

When government funding for road building finally came in the late 1870s, construction crews followed the paths of the tourist trails, reinforcing the early patterns of human use within the park. And thus by omission, the road builders and the locals who defined the roads before them, determined which areas of the park would remain virtually wilderness. The vast areas surrounding the original road network remain mostly roadless today, and see only a small per-

centage of the human use within Yellowstone.

In 1878, Superintendent Norris was the first to receive government funding for road building, and he began a flurry of roadwork. In less than a month during the summer of 1878, and without adequate exploration of the route, Norris and his crew built 60 miles of rough road, stretching from Mammoth to the Lower Geyser Basin near Nez Perce Creek. 48 When Norris left five years later, more than two-thirds (104 miles) of this grand loop had been completed in generally the same location as today. Norris and later road builders even followed older tourist trails when choosing another route might have been wiser-Hiram M. Chittenden, an engineer assigned to Yellowstone in 1883, reported that road crews followed the original trails, with all their "irregularities and excesses of gradients, regardless of what improvements could be made by something of a survey."49 Norris' road-building style led to heavy criticism by tourists and federal officials suffering the jarring wagon rides. "The roads are outrageous," a writer complained in the Avant Courier. "A man cannot ride his horse up some of them. There is not a mule-driver or bull-whacker who could and would [not] make better roads over the mountains and through

the park than our old fossiliferous friend Norris has made."50

Improving roads within Yellowstone became a priority of all the early park managers. This focus on road building demonstrates the pressure that local entrepreneurs and tourists were applying to the park superintendents and the Interior Department to make the park accessible. The frantic roadbuilding pace also demonstrates Yellowstone's evolving role as a destination point for tourists.

### Developing Yellowstone

Montanans were quick to come up with schemes to make money from tourists, and over time, these efforts would have important consequences for American national parks. Allowing tourists to stay overnight in national parks meant that restaurants, garbage dumps, sewer and electrical plants, and other such facilities would sooner or later become indispensable. Sellars argues that such development fostered a capitalistic, business-oriented approach to national parks, focusing on the miles of roads and trails, the number of visitors each year, and the need for continued tourism development. The end result would be natural resource management to serve tourism purposes.51

Several years before the government became involved in mapping the park's future, locals had already built the first hotel and restaurant within the park, and several local entrepreneurs provided tourists with a variety of services throughout the reserve. Before federal officials had considered the long-term ramifications of a string of roads and hotels within the park, locals had already established an indelible pattern of tourism development across the Yellowstone landscape.

When U.S. Geological Survey leader Ferdinand Hayden arrived in Yellowstone with his exploration party in the summer of 1871, two men were cutting poles to fence off the geyser basins along the Firehole River. 22 Also that summer, Montanans Harry Horr and James McCartney built the first overnight accommodations at Mammoth Hot Springs (Figure 4). The small onestory log building with an earth-covered roof was variously known as Horr and McCartney's Hotel, Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel, or the National Park Hotel.53 The business partners boasted a fine restaurant, bathhouses managed by one of the "best physicians in the West," supplies for pleasure-seekers, and pack trains into the park.54 Adventurer Thomas Windham (Earl of Dunraven) called the hotel the last outpost of civilization—that being the last place where whiskey was sold. Horr and McCartney may have promised more than they could deliver. Windham described the small hotel as an "inverse ratio to the gorgeous description contained in the advertisements."55

Bozeman entrepreneurs pounced on the opportunity to guide visitors to the park. "Ho! Ho! Ho! For the Mammoth Hot Springs," read an advertise-



Figure 4. This log structure at Mammoth Hot Springs was the only place to stay within Yellowstone during the first several years. Photograph by F.J. Haynes. Circa 1885. Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.

ment by John Werks of Bozeman during the first official tourist season in 1872. "I am now prepared to carry INVALIDS and PLEASURE PARTIES from Bozeman to the celebrated Hot Springs of Horr & McCartney." 56 Zack Root's Express advertised four-horse coaches to Mammoth Hot Springs in 1875, making connections with pack trains to "all parts of the park." Root also offered mail service with stops in Hayden, Emigrant, Chico, Henderson, and Bear Gulch. 57 In 1883, Bozeman residents George W. Wakefield and Charles W. Hoffman began hauling passengers through the park, and their stage coach company charged 12 cents per mile. They carried mail, and after visitor numbers increased, had five stagecoaches operating in different areas of Yellowstone. Wakefield and Hoffman were also given permission to cut wild hay within the park to feed their horses. 58

Local entrepreneurs also put sailboats for hire on Yellowstone Lake. In 1874, Eugene S. Topping and Frank Williams received permission to operate boats on Yellowstone Lake and took early horseback visitors on boat rides during the summers of 1874, 1875, and for a few weeks in 1876 (Figure 5). Commander Topping even advertised that the first woman to come to the lake would have the privilege of naming his boat—it became the Sallie. 59 In 1880, another pair of boat

builders advertised they had " ... just built, and launched a strong and safe sailboat on the Yellowstone lake. A competent man is in charge, who will, at all proper times, be ready to accommodate all who desire to take pleasure excursions on this far-famed and beautiful sheet of water."60

Practically no idea was too far fetched if it might lead to further attention and development of the park. A Montana newspaper correspondent came up with the idea of building a soldier's home in Yellowstone, where the ...

... government has "everything of its own—the finest medical springs in the world, grounds to any extent required—and all under government control." The veterans were to be used as park rangers, thus freeing them from the "bane of old soldiers—liquor." 61



Figure 5. Local entrepreneurs Eugene S. Topping and Frank Williams built the Sallie to give tourists sailboat rides on Yellowstone Lake during the summers of 1874 and 1875. Photograph by Joshua Crissman. Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.

Although a soldier's home was never seriously considered for Yellowstone, it is another example of how locals became involved in planning the future of the new park. Montanans obviously felt they had a stake in Yellowstone's future,

and were not shy about expressing their ideas.

Montanans believed that if Yellowstone could be made accessible, safe, and comfortable, tourists would come by the thousands. Visitors writing about their recent trip through Yellowstone often predicted many more would follow in their footsteps. "The world will journey to this spot more and more," one writer predicted. "The mighty pilgrimage has but just begun." By the mid-1880s, local business owners were also aware that tourists could provide substantial income. "No class of people leave so much money in a country as tourists," the *Avant Courier* proclaimed. "There are towns and cities in Switzerland that owe nearly their entire existence to tourists ... And the day is not far off when it will become a substantial source of revenue to Montanians [sic] living in its immediate neighborhood."

Yellowstone did live up to its locals' expectations, and visitor numbers climbed with each stage of transportation improvements. When wagon roads made the journey through the park an easier adventure in 1877, annual tourist numbers doubled from 500 to 1,000. When the Northern Pacific arrived in 1883, annual visitor numbers increased five-fold from 1,000 to 5,000. Visitor numbers remained at about 5,000 for the next five years, then slowly climbed to 7,808 by 1890. When automobiles were allowed to enter the park in 1915, visitor numbers doubled again from 20,250 in 1914 to 51,895 in 1915. With the exception of a decrease in tourists during World War II, annual visitor numbers continued to grow, reaching one million in 1948, and two million in 1965. Today, as many as three million people a year visit Yellowstone.

Locals also supported a proposed railroad spur through the northeast corner of the park to reach the mining community of Cooke City. The belief that railroad development and preservation could go hand in hand was typical of Americans during the 1880s. They believed that industrialization and nature were compatible. According to Leo Marx, railroads were a mechanism that would "annihilate distance" and, like a divining rod, "unearth the hidden graces of landscape." Many believed the railroads, in opening the West, would bring forth a new version of Jefferson's pastoral vision for America. Ralph Waldo Emerson, among many other notables, saw the railroad as an instrument advancing America's claim to be nature's nation.

The Avant Courier and Livingston Enterprise argued relentlessly for building the spur to Cooke City. Both newspapers wanted the economic benefits of the mining town they thought would develop if the railroad were extended. They also feared that if a railroad did not enter the park through their communities, it would enter through Wyoming or Idaho, robbing them of the gold-mining spoils. The spur proposal led to more than a decade of legislative battles in Congress, but was eventually defeated by a growing group of sportsmen and conservationists led by George Bird Grinnell, editor of Forest and Stream magazine, and Senator George Graham Vest of Missouri. 67

Although the locals lacked the political clout to win construction of the railroad, the language and descriptions used by local supporters gives us insight into what they thought a national park should protect. Montanans who supported the railroad argued that areas outside the geyser basins and the heavily traveled Grand Rounds were not worthy of protection. A Bozeman newspaper editor noted the spur line's course would not be within miles of any of the hot springs, geysers, or wonders of the park. Montana mining inspector Professor G.C. Swallow wrote that "All well know there is not a single natural feature north of the Yellowstone and Soda Butte creek that is mentioned in the guide book as worthy of the tourists' attention. Ho Coalition of business owners published a letter addressed to Montana Territory Representative Martin Maginnis asking "Is there an inscrutable, mysterious, spirituous something about the National Park that a railroad would desecrate? Is there a hole in the ground which gurgles and sputters hot water, so sacred that commerce and civilization should not pass that way?"

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This paradoxical relationship between preserving and developing the park was also evident in letters to the editors of local newspapers. Sometimes within the same letter or article, a local business owner would decry the slaughter of Yellowstone's wildlife or damage being done to geothermal features, but then predict huge profits when areas within the park were opened to coal mining or some other form of resource extraction. "The park is too large—larger than any cause whatever demands," the Avant Courier reported in 1881. "It includes mineral districts which should be segregated, and as additional tracts valuable for minerals may be discovered, the act of establishing the park should be so amended that they may be legally occupied by settlers." The article went on to chastise the government for damage occurring to the park's natural resources and to demand the establishment of a police force to protect the gey-

ser basins from vandalism.71

#### Calling for Protection

Although much of the locals' involvement with Yellowstone revolved around tourism development, they also repeatedly called attention to serious problems in the park. Montanans lacked political strength to influence legislation in Congress, as they learned during the railroad battle. However, by raising a ruckus about problems within the park, they supported the efforts to protect Yellowstone by a powerful group of national figures. This group of sportsmen and conservationists included Grinnell, Senator Vest, General Sheridan, and Arnold Hague, a scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey. These men would ultimately win protective legislation and increased funding, and their efforts to expand Yellowstone led to establishment of the first forest reserves adjacent to the park.<sup>72</sup>

During the summer of 1873, locals circulated a petition asking congressmen to visit the park, to set a budget for a superintendent and assistants, and to fund a system of park roads. "We are urged to this request by the vandalism that is rapidly denuding the park of its curiosities, driving off and killing its game, and rendering it a disappointment to all those who desire to see this grand domain left in the state of nature," the petition stated. The Avant Courier predicted that once members of Congress saw the threats to Yellowstone's marvels, they would "do all that was necessary to make it creditable to the nation and preserve it from desecration." Describing geyser craters marred by hatchets and hammers, the Bozeman newspaper reported that the superintendent appeared to be powerless to prevent the vandalism, "... the government almost seems indifferent in regard to the importance of preserving for future generations this grandest of all natural pleasure resorts in the world."

The slaughter of Yellowstone's game animals by commercial hunters living just outside the park led to the most heated criticism of the federal government by conservation-minded locals. During the snowy winter of 1883, hunters were seen killing vulnerable wildlife with axes (Figure 6). "During the present deep snows it is but wanton murder to kill wild game," one writer argued. "The animals cannot escape and the hunter has no difficulty in approaching them." The Yellowstone Improvement Company, owner of the National Hotel, was accused that winter of awarding contracts to local hunters to supply meat for park visitors and employees. Seeing park wildlife threatened in the bargain, the Avant Courier published the following tirade against the "Despoliation" Company:

What a glorious place for a slaughterhouse! Here we [the Improvement Co.] can secure all the meat necessary to feed the men in our employ, without the difficulty attendant upon taking care for cattle or the expense consequent upon a purchase from a butcher. Such doings are infamous. Let it be known that there is no law to protect game, and no one will argue that it will not become extinct.<sup>76</sup>

Lack of adequate funding was a recurring problem for all of Yellowstone's superintendents—there was a constant shortage of personnel on the ground to police a 3,400-square-mile area, and laws and regulations were wholly inadequate. Yellowstone locals were tireless critics of these early management problems. In 1886, when Congress failed to make any appropriations for a superintendent and assistants, the Secretary of the Interior requested army troops to protect Yellowstone. Captain Moses Harris arrived with the 50 men of Troop M, First Cavalry, and almost immediately put a stop to vandalism and much of the poaching taking place. Yet a lack of adequate laws and regulations tied their hands in some cases, and in others, made them appear to be overly strict. This soon brought soldiers into conflict with locals.

Harris discovered that his only recourse for lawbreakers was to expel them from the park and confiscate their equipment. "So far as the superintendent is concerned he can make no distinction between the offense of breaking a small piece off a formation or breaking a tourist's head, carrying away a bit of incrustation or carrying away a tourist's trunk," Harris reported. 78 If serious



Figure 6. Deep snow made Yellowstone's elk particularly vulnerable to poachers, who could ski very close to the trapped animals. 1894. Photograph by F. Jay Haynes. Haynes Foundation Collection, Montana Historical Society.

lawbreakers were getting off with light punishment, some local tourists were thrown out of the park for minor infractions. While locals had clearly asked for better protection, the sometimes-severe consequences of minor transgressions struck a nerve. The *Avant Courier* reprinted the following sarcastic account from the *Livingston Enterprise*:

Frank Henry got back from his tour of the park yesterday. He says he escaped being arrested, but took big chances—killed a rattlesnake and two horse flies, drank out of a geyser, and smoked his pipe several times.<sup>79</sup>

As critics of poaching and vandalism, locals attracted needed national attention. In 1894, Grinnell's group helped bring about passage of the Lacey Act which finally established penalties and law enforcement authority to protect animals and other park resources. This important act set a precedent for similar protection in later parks. <sup>80</sup> As tourists sometimes clashing with soldiers trying to establish the first rules and regulations, locals helped define what was acceptable behavior within a park. This interaction was necessary as Yellowstone's custodians and neighbors field-tested the national park experiment.

#### Conclusion

Montanans dominated Yellowstone's early years. Their explorations identified the park's key attractions and their early touring habits paved the way for later visitors in the park. In so doing, they played a key role discovering where to go in Yellowstone and what to do once they got there. These first tourists literally cut the trails to the park's major attractions, creating the "Grand Rounds" of Yellowstone. By discovering which areas had the most interesting features, the local tourists established a pattern of human use within Yellowstone that remains virtually the same today. They valued the geysers and other geothermal features above all else, and believed the hot springs could cure illnesses.

Locals also acted both to promote and limit development in Yellowstone, creating tensions that endure to this day. Locals realized that the park needed adequate roads, transportation, and lodging, and that once such infrastructure was in place, Yellowstone would be an economic boost for their communities. While the government let Yellowstone languish, local entrepreneurs had a plan for what a national park should be, and immediately began working to make it happen. When the government did become more involved, it

followed the lead of the local entrepreneurs.

By studying how the locals responded to debates over the management of Yellowstone, we learn what they valued about Yellowstone and what they thought deserved protection. Initially, locals were only concerned about the areas surrounding the major attractions, including the geyser basins, the Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone Lake. They believed the proposed railroad spur line through the park would not harm anything of value to tourists, because it would have been far from any of the major attractions. But as the region's wildlife came under increasing pressure from commercial hunters and settlers, locals fought to protect Yellowstone's wildlife. Areas outside the major attractions, important for wildlife protection, began to be valued. In the role of critic, locals were an important voice, pushing for needed legislation and proper funding and management and criticizing park developments they saw as harmful. This close connection between Yellowstone and its nearby neighbors persists to this day and continues to shape park management policies in fundamental ways.

Yellowstone was truly an experiment. The federal government had no experience managing such a huge tract of wildlands for recreational use, and in fact, let the young park languish during its first 14 years. Yellowstone could just have easily have become an anomaly rather than a trendsetter in public land policy. Yet the combination of local involvement during the important early years, later bankrolling by the Northern Pacific Railroad, and the subsequent management of the park by the U.S. Army, created a unique kind of public land use in the West. As Sellars notes, this collaboration created a model where magnificent scenery was the principal fount of profit and exploitation of natural resources was prohibited. The construction of hotels, roads, and other infrastructure by locals, a trend that increased rapidly after federal officials became involved, fostered a capitalistic, business-oriented approach to managing parks that carried well into the next century.

This interplay between the park and its nearby inhabitants initiated a long national experience that continues to the present. Interpretations of both past and present national-park management policies need to appreciate the role local populations play in the evolution of these unique localities. In the case of Yellowstone, the locals' desire to both develop and preserve the park remains today, and that legacy has had broad implications for other reserves. In the park's early years, the large size of Yellowstone fit well with emerging concerns to preserve watersheds and wildlife habitat, and would set a precedent for the size of future parks-later, other large national parks also created thousands of acres of undeveloped "backcountry" areas. But, as Sellars argues, the concept that national parks could boast luxurious resorts and recreational opportunities, while at the same time preserving large tracts of wilderness, would "fix the fledgling national park idea in the American mind," and form an enduring, paradoxical theme in national park history.81

#### Notes

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15. Ibid., 17.

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18. Harry J. Norton, Wonder-Land Illustrated: or, Horseback Rides Through the Yellowstone National Park

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19. Meyer, The Spirit of Yellowstone, 48-51. Also see Robert E. Strahorn, The Enchanted Land (Omaha, Nebr.: New West Publishing Co., 1881); Robert E. Strahorn, To the Rockies and Beyond (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, and Company, 1881); Henry J. Winser, The Great Northwest (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883); Henry J. Winser, The Yellowstone National Park: A Manual for Tourists (New York: G.P.

20. Ibid., 31.

21. Yi-Fu Tuan, "Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 81:4 (1991): 684-96.

Majoc, Yellowstone, 80.

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24. Sears, Sacred Places, 165.

Joan Michele Zenzen, "Promoting National Parks: Images of the West in the American Imagination, 1864-1972." Ph.D. diss., College Park: University of Maryland, 1997: 216-21.

26. Some travel accounts focused on accidents involving horses, pack animals, and wagons (Avant Courier, 16 August 1877; Avant Courier, 26 August 1880; Enterprise, 18 June 1883; Enterprise, 26 February 1884). As tourists began to push farther into Yellowstone and extend the tourist season past the summer months, some were caught in winter storms (Avant Courier, 1 January 1881; Avant Courier, 17 September 1885; Enterprise, 29 January 1886; Enterprise, 19 February 1887); or the icy waters of Yellowstone Lake (Enterprise, 9 September 1884). By the mid-1880s, accounts of masked bandits robbing tourists in stage coaches and on trains added to the growing Wild West image of the park (Enterprise, 5 September 1884; Enterprise, 9 July 1887; Enterprise, 23 July 1887).

27. T.H. Vincent, "Our Geyser Trip," diary, 1882. Collection 64a, Montana State University Library

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35. Ibid.

36. Enterprise, 16 July 1887.

37. Schullery, Searching for Yellowstone, 17-30.

38. Anant Courier, 18 September 1874.

39. Avant Courier, 9 July 1875.

40. Haines, The Yellowstone Story, Vol. 1: 216-239.

41. P.W. Nostis, Report Upon the Yellowstone National Park to the Secretary of Interior for the Year 1880 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1881): 4.

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43. The trick of adding soap to make geysers erupt was discovered in 1885 by a Chinese man who established a laundry business in a large tent over a hot spring in the Upper Geyser Basin. According to a widely read newspaper correspondent of the day, when soap was added to the hot spring filled with dirry laundry, an enormous geyser eruption scattered the tent, laundry, and laundryman. See Bob Burdette, Enterprise, 28 July 1888; Haines, The Yelloustone Story, Vol. 2: 17-18.

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59. Yellowstone Foundation, A Yellowstone Album: A Photographic Celebration of the First National Park (Boulder: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1997): 77.

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Majoc, Yellowstone, 56.

- See Sarah Ellen Broadbent, "Sportsmen and the Evolution of the Conservation Idea in Yellowstone: 1882-1894." Master's thesis, Montana State University, 1997.
- Avant Courier, 22 April 1886.
- 69. Enterprise, 22 February 1890.
- Avant Courier, 28 February 1884.

71. Avant Courier, 25 August 1881.

- 72. Broadbent, "Sportsmen and the Evolution of the Conservation Idea in Yellowstone," 107-8: John F. Reiget, American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation (New York: Winchester Press, 1975): 136-137: Dennis L. Lynch and Stephen Larrabee, "Private Lands Within National Forests: Origins, Problems, and Opportunities," The US. Forest Service A History (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976): 202-204.
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