Road Guide for the
FOUR-SEASON ROAD
from
GARDINER TO COOKE CITY
Through Yellowstone National Park
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FOUR-SEASON ROAD
from GARDINER TO COOKE CITY
Through Yellowstone National Park
by Paul Schullery
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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Gardiner-to-Cooke City road through Yellowstone National Park. This is a very exciting drive, with many elements of both natural and human history. You will be traveling from the Park's oldest entrance to its newest, along the only year-round automobile road in Yellowstone. The road will take you to the very edge of one of America's great wilderness preserves, a place where we, as humans, are the visitors and the animals are at home. This road guide is designed to enhance your trip, but it is only a beginning. The road takes you to the Park as well as through it, and the possibilities are endless. Whatever your interest, whether it is hiking, skiing, photography, bird-watching, fishing or just enjoying a natural area, the road is the place to start. You are encouraged to stop at the parking areas and walk a short distance (or a long distance) away from the "civilized" part of the Park and learn some of its secrets. The road will take you there. You must do the rest.
SERVICES AVAILABLE ON THE GARDINER-TO-COOKE CITY ROAD

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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Winter</th>
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<td>Gardiner</td>
<td>Food, Lodging, Campground*,</td>
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<td>General Store, Fuel, Deputy</td>
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<td>Sheriff, Mechanical Assistance</td>
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<td>Mammoth</td>
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<td>(3 miles south)*, Ranger Station</td>
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<td>Slough Creek</td>
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<td>Lamar Ranger Station</td>
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<td>Pebble Creek</td>
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<td>Silver Gate/Cooke City</td>
<td>Food, Lodging, Campground*</td>
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<td>General Store, Fuel, Ranger</td>
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<td>Station (at entrance)</td>
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*Campgrounds in and around Yellowstone often fill up by noon in the summer—pick and claim your site early in the day.

For More Park Information

Visitor Centers: their locations appear on your Park map. Rangers are on duty to assist you.

Radio: Yellowstone has approximately 30 limited-range transmitters around the Park. Whenever you see a sign telling you to tune your radio to 1606, do so and you will receive a repeating taped message about that particular area.

National Park Service personnel, whether Rangers or other employees, use pale green vehicles with the National Park Service emblem on the door. Many of these vehicles are radio equipped. If you need advice or assistance, check with them.

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBER: 344-7381
FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSISTANCE GO TO ANY RANGER STATION

Caution

Do not approach any Park animals or attempt to feed them.
Keep all pets on a leash at all times.
Drive gently — winter roads will be icy and treacherous.
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The text is designed for visitors traveling from Gardiner to Cooke City. It can be used as well for travel in the opposite direction simply by reversing the mileages and reading from the back of the book. Two mileages are given for each discussion. The top is the distance from Gardiner and the bottom is the distance from Cooke City.

For your convenience, there is a foldout map at the back of the book. Numbers on this map refer to key paragraphs in the text.

There are many parking areas and wayside exhibits along the road. It is not the purpose of this book to replace them, so please stop and enjoy them.

You will notice that there are inset paragraphs periodically in the text. These are placed where the visitor may want more detailed information about a particular feature. They may be skimmed over by those who do not wish to linger in one spot.

Mileages in the guide start at the North Entrance (the North Gate) of Yellowstone Park, but some information is given on Gardiner as a way of introducing the countryside.

Grizzly Bear
Chapter One:
GARDINER TO MAMMOTH HOT SPRINGS

Gardiner, Montana, sits on the very edge of the Park. In fact Park Street, its "front street," is the boundary. From here you can see, at the west end of the street, a large stone arch. Near the arch is Gardiner’s distinctive information center, the Montana Centennial Car.

**Gardiner and the Roosevelt Arch**

The small community at the North Entrance of the Park dates back to the late 1870’s. It appears the name was derived from that of Johnson Gardner (no “i”), a trapper who visited this area in 1831-1832 and after whom the Gardner River is named. Where the “i” came from is open to conjecture, but the evidence is strong that old Johnson Gardner got a town misspelled in his honor. The only English place name in the Park that is older than Gardner is Yellowstone.

The first Post Office was established here in 1882, the town plat was surveyed in 1886, and in 1887 the entire place, including 21 saloons, burned to the ground. Reconstruction was immediate, however, and Gardiner quickly assumed, and has maintained, an important role as one of Yellowstone’s gateway communities. Its status was enhanced in 1902 by the arrival of the Park Branch Line of the Northern Pacific Railroad, and the following year it hosted perhaps its most famous visitor, Theodore Roosevelt.

The large stone arch situated at the west end of the street was dedicated by President Roosevelt during his 1903 visit to the Park. It was designed and built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers who were in charge of developing the Park’s road system. The 50-foot high arch, built of local stone (columnar basalt), was located so that visitors would pass through it in their coaches as they left the Gardiner Railroad Station.

Gardiner today, though primarily dependent on tourist trade, serves the surrounding ranches and several small local enterprises such as the travertine quarry on the mountainside above the town.

Either the road through the arch or the more commonly used road at the other end of the street will take you from town to the North Gate of the Park. The meadow you cross on the way is one of the best places on the entire trip to see pronghorn (commonly known as antelope), especially in the winter.

The two commanding peaks to the west are Sepulcher Mountain, named for a stone formation near its top that vaguely resembles a tomb, and Electric Peak, named for peculiar electrical disturbances encountered there by early explorers. Electric, at 3353 meters (10,992 feet), is one of the Park’s highest mountains.
North Gate - 1621 meters (5314 feet)

The North Gate is operated both in summer and winter. The Ranger on duty can give you a detailed map of the Park and other very useful information. Park roads are not marked with route signs but are easily understood with the help of the map. Campground information is posted here too. If the station is unattended when you pass it, maps are also available at the Visitor Centers.

Wildlife Exhibit

About ¼ mile beyond the gate there is a large parking area on the left with an exhibit concerning wildlife. The large open flat across the Gardner River is frequently grazed by pronghorn, deer and bighorn sheep, so take a minute and look for them. The U.S. Cavalry administered the Park around the turn of the century and they used this flat for a golf course.

To the south the Gardner River and the road disappear into a small canyon. Look up to the large bench of land on the east side of the canyon; bighorn sheep often congregate there in the colder months. Frederic Remington, a great Western artist, once said that Yellowstone has three seasons, “July, August, and Winter.” The sheep seem to agree. Only in the warmest months do they venture up to higher feeding ground.

If you wish to cross the river, drive to the next parking area. From there you can reach a footbridge. Remember, if the animals stop their normal activities because of your presence, you are too close!

Gardner River Canyon

As the road winds into the canyon, evidence of the river’s power is abundant. The walls of the canyon are soft sandstones and ancient mudflows, and the channel cut by the stream is constantly shifting. This stretch of road has always troubled Park engineers because of the continual threat of landslides, especially during high water in spring.
Life in the Canyon

The inhabitants of the canyon are very different from those you saw around Gardiner. Dippers (small gray birds also known as water ouzels) and belted kingfishers are common residents, taking advantage of the river’s bounty of fish and insects. Beaver are frequently seen from the road. The vegetation is much thicker here than out on the open prairie, common trees being cottonwood, juniper and Douglas Fir. You will also be seeing willow now and then along this and other streams. In the winter it is easily recognized by its bushy shape and purplish color.

The river has one of the most diverse sport-fish populations of any in the Park. Cutthroat trout (the native trout), rainbow, brown, and brook trout (all introduced before 1900) and whitefish all share this stream. If the proximity of water has inspired thoughts of fishing, make sure you obtain a permit. Yellowstone’s fishing regulations are pretty special, and you must be careful about tackle and limits.

First Gardner Bridge

As the road crosses a short bridge the canyon walls become considerably higher. Directly up the wall to the left is a spire-like rock formation called Eagle’s Nest Rock. Years ago this was the site of an active osprey nest, but apparently the increasing traffic and attention were too much for the ospreys, who are known for their inability to tolerate human company. We all feel like that sometimes.

Steep Cliffs and White Water

About ½ mile past the bridge the road and the river make a very sharp right turn. In the cold months the crags and ledges up to the left are favorite places for bighorn sheep. In the late fall, October and November, there is something equally interesting going on down in the river. In the small chute of white water, easily located by the huge round boulder in midstream directly above it, jumping brown trout can occasionally be seen. They are trying to go upstream through the fast water to their spawning grounds.
Bighorn Sheep

Many people come to the Gardner River Canyon in the winter just to see the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep. Wildlife photographers discover that it is easy to get fine pictures of the animals. Bighorn are well adapted to the rugged cliffsides, and watching them move about on the narrow ledges is a real thrill. The females, or ewes, have small thin horns, and the males, or rams, have much larger ones that may complete a full 360 degree curl if the animal lives long enough. These horns are never shed, though they may be broken accidentally. Remember that horns are not shed—antlers are. Deer, elk and moose all have antlers. Bison and sheep have horns. The pronghorn is somewhere in between, since it sheds only the outer sheath of its "horns", leaving a bone core over which a new sheath then grows.

The sheep mate in the late fall, and at that time you might see two of the rams butting heads in a contest over the ewes. It sometimes happens that while two of the grandest full-curl rams are engaged in battle, a younger ram slips in and herds the ewes away. Studies have shown that ewes seem to prefer older rams, who are more gentle and solicitous of them than are the younger ones.

Prairie Again

A mile after the road crosses the bridge it abruptly leaves the little canyon and enters a small bottomland. The river is broader here, flowing over wide gravel bars. Ospreys and even great blue herons have been seen fishing in this stretch. Along the right side of the road is a very dense stand of willow. There are about 18 kinds of willow in the Park and most of them are popular browse for deer, elk and moose.

45th Parallel Bridge

After the road crosses the river for a second time it begins to climb up and away from the riverbed. A sign here marks the crossing of the 45th parallel of latitude. The 45th parallel is an imaginary line that circles the globe halfway between the equator and the north pole. This same line passes through or close to Minneapolis-St. Paul, Ottawa, Bordeaux (France), Venice, Belgrade and the northern tip of the Japanese Islands. It is, here in Yellowstone, roughly equated with the Montana-Wyoming border.

If the temperature is below freezing you will probably see steam rising from the river about \( \frac{1}{2} \) mile upstream from the bridge. The steam is from a large hot spring known as Boiling River. Boiling River flows almost directly into the Gardner River.

Mt. Everts

The great long mountain across the river is called Mt. Everts. It was named for an early explorer who got separated from his party (the Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition of 1870) and wandered for 37 days before being rescued.
Mt. Everts is one of many places where Yellowstone’s geologic past is conveniently displayed. The distinct horizontal layers of rock which mark its side are sandstones and shales—sedimentary rocks deposited when this area was covered by an ocean. These particular layers were deposited in the Cretaceous Period, 70 to 140 million years ago.

The highest point on the mountain is 2392 meters (7841 feet). On the south end of the ridge you can see a shelf of harder rock which forms a cap. This is the result of a lava flow called Yellowstone Tuff. As you can see, many forces have been at work in the shaping of Yellowstone’s landscape.

Now that the road has left the river, the vegetation resumes its more arid character. This part of the Park averages only 16-18 inches of precipitation annually, compared to 40 inches or more in much of the Park. Speaking of vegetation, there is a remarkable example of climate effects evident on the slope of Mt. Everts. The slope is creased with a series of ridges and gullies, and each ridge has a substantial growth of plants, arranged in a very consistent pattern: the north-facing side of each ridge is covered with vegetation while the south-facing side is practically bare. That much of an angle makes a great difference in how the elements, especially sunlight, affect the plants’ environment.

Bunsen Peak

As the road tops one last rise and the Mammoth Campground comes into view on the right, you can see a mountain straight ahead. It was named for Robert Wilhelm Bunsen, a distinguished German physicist. You have probably heard of the “Bunsen burner,” a device he originated, but few people know that he was involved in pioneering research about geysers. It is because of that research that 2612 meter (8564 feet) Bunsen Peak bears his name. Bunsen Peak will be visible again as you leave Mammoth.

Mammoth Campground and Community

The Mammoth Campground is the only Park campground that is open all winter. Fees are normally charged only in the summer.
Across the road from the campground is part of the small community of Mammoth Hot Springs, known locally as Mammoth. Most of the people who live here are employed by the National Park Service. The small school is for the elementary grades. Older students go to Gardiner.

As the road winds around a big horsehoe bend to the right, watch for elk and deer in the campground. This is a favorite wintering ground.

The road turns to the left at the top of the hill and widens into a divided boulevard. At the end of the boulevard you may reach the Visitor Center by turning left. The same turn will take you to the next section of the drive, but first you should explore Mammoth.

Fort Yellowstone

The Visitor Center and all the buildings down the street from it were built by the U.S. Cavalry during their stay in the Park. Yellowstone was created by Act of Congress on March 1, 1972, and for its first fourteen years was administered by a civilian staff. That administration proved inadequate in some ways so in 1886 the U.S. Cavalry was sent in. Until 1916, when the National Park Service was created, Yellowstone was protected by the soldiers in one of the most unusual assignments ever given the Army.

The troops were first housed in Camp Sheridan, a temporary set of buildings that stood near the Hot Springs. Fort Yellowstone was begun in 1891. The wooden buildings in the Fort were put up in the 1890's and the stone ones, including the Visitor Center, around 1909. This front row was primarily officer's quarters. It now serves as housing for Park Service employees. The Visitor Center originally functioned as Bachelor's Officer's Quarters.

The Visitor Center is the only one you will pass on the road to Cooke City. It features a fine wildlife display as well as a good selection of Park-related literature. In summer, Ranger-conducted walks take visitors back to the colorful Fort Yellowstone era.

If you do not turn left at the intersection, the road will lead you to the Mammoth Hot Springs. The Mammoth Motor Inn, a restaurant, service station, and stores are along the road.

The Mammoth Hot Springs

The Mammoth Hot Springs are one of Yellowstone's most fascinating thermal phenomena, and are the only major area of such activity on the Gardiner-to-Cooke City road. There are many springs, from puddle- to pond-size. Most are busily depositing a form of limestone known as travertine. The springs, which can be viewed from a network of walking trails and a one-way loop road one mile to the south, are the result of surface water that has seeped deep into the earth from the mountainside above
them. The earth's crust is unusually thin here in Yellowstone. In some places there is molten rock no more than two miles down. The heat of this rock is transferred through the cooler layers above the hottest spots to the water. Because its underground flow is blocked by layers of hard rock, the water is forced up to surface as springs. The hot water often dissolves limestone as it moves along and deposits it around the spring's mouth. It has been estimated that about two tons of limestone are deposited every day by these springs—they have a flow of about 500 gallons per minute.

There are several trailhead parking areas; self-guiding leaflets are available at each.

The springs have a special magic in the winter, when dense clouds of steam veil the formations. The water often freezes, building elaborate ice terraces on top of the limestone ones. Ice and snow can be hazards on the boardwalks, so watch your step.

To continue on the road to Cooke City return to the Visitor Center and turn in front of it. Follow the signs to Tower Junction.

Chapter Two:
MAMMOTH HOT SPRINGS TO TOWER JUNCTION

The last building the road passes as it leaves Mammoth is Yellowstone National Park Chapel, built in 1913. Soon after passing the Chapel the road crosses a small stream, runoff from the Mammoth Hot Springs.

Bunsen Peak Again

The road descends for the next mile and a half to a high bridge over the Gardner River. Bunsen Peak is once again visible, dominating the view to the right. About two-thirds of the way up its slope a roughly horizontal line, above which the trees are much taller, shows how far a major fire burned in the 1880's. The forest you see below that line is the regrowth after ninety years. Recently a number of national parks, including Yellowstone, established a policy of letting some naturally-caused fires burn themselves out. These fires can be very beneficial to the life processes of the forest as a whole, no matter how much "damage" they may seem to do to a specific area. Fires create clearings where wildlife may feed and stimulate a continually changing mosaic of plant growth, containing all the varied habitats of the wilderness.

To the left of Bunsen Peak is the mouth of the Gardner River Canyon. The most impressive part of this canyon is on the other side of the mountain and can be reached by a secondary road in the summer.
The river comes out of the canyon and flows under the bridge; below the bridge it is met by Lava Creek, flowing out of its own canyon. Before you go across the bridge take a look up the Lava Creek drainage. Notice that this canyon has a U-shaped profile rather than the V-shape usually characteristic of a stream carved canyon. This canyon was not formed by the creek, but by a glacier. On at least three occasions in the past, much of Yellowstone's landscape has been scoured, scooped, and rounded by glaciers. The most recent of these local ice ages ended about 8,500 years ago. A glacial valley is distinguished from a water-carved valley by its walls — glaciers carve rounded, U-shaped walls while rivers make V-shaped ones.

For the next several miles the road passes through a forest of Douglas Fir. A mile past the bridge is a small grove of aspen trees, usually found in slightly moister areas than the evergreens. The fir here have been noticeably affected by an insect predator, the western budworm. Trees with a brownish tinge to the tips of their branches are the victims of this small budworm. The adult is a tan moth. The moth lays its eggs on the needles of the tree. When the larvae hatch they crawl under the bark. In the spring they come out and feed on the new buds and needles.

Two and a half miles beyond the high bridge the road reaches a crest on its climb along the canyon wall. There is a large parking area on the left, with short trails leading to overlooks of Undine Falls. At the falls Lava Creek spills 60 feet over a ledge of hard volcanic rock called basalt.

The road then travels through a mixed spruce-fir forest for about ½ mile, bringing you to a very pleasant picnic area on the banks of Lava Creek.
Almost immediately upon crossing the Lava Creek bridge, the road enters more open country. Ahead on the right is a parking area for the Wraith Falls trail. It is only a ½ mile walk to the falls, which are actually more of a cascade than a falls, but no less the lovely for it. Wraith Falls is part of Lupine Creek, a small tributary of Lava Creek.

On the right past the Wraith Falls parking area is a level open meadow of grasses and sedges. Fifty years ago this same spot was a thriving beaver pond. Over the years it almost completely filled in with vegetation. Now trees are starting to close in around its edges.

The road is now skirting the south side of a large open prairie-land, with vegetation typical of many such open spots in the Park. The pale green bushes are sage, and between them are a variety of grasses. There are about a dozen species of sage in the Park, the largest of which may be taller than a man. When one looks across an endless meadow of sage, it isn’t hard to imagine why the Indians were inspired to use it for so many different things; anything that common must be good for something! For instance, they used certain kinds of sage to make tea, to cure colds and to produce hair tonic. It isn’t wise to expect any kind of sage to serve as seasoning, by the way, since some will make you very ill.

The large connected series of ponds down to the left are a lively contrast to the rather arid surrounding countryside (there’s a rhyme—sage is monotonous, unless you’re a botanist). The ponds are a gathering-place for waterfowl—geese and some smaller birds nest here. Beavers are occasionally seen, though the ponds are a little too frequently visited by people to be really first-rate beaver territory.

The ponds’ most charming feature is only discovered by those who walk to the shore: the whole area is a bog, known locally as “shaky lakes”. If you walk anywhere close to the shore you will feel the ground giving a bit under your feet. Be careful, because you could break through.

About ½ mile beyond the ponds the road crosses over willow-lined Blacktail Deer Creek. A trail begins here that follows the creek to the Yellowstone River, 4½ miles to the north. The local deer are known both as mule deer and blacktail deer, thus the name of the creek. The area drained by the creek is known as Blacktail Deer Plateau, though on this part of the plateau you are much more likely to see elk than deer.
Yellowstone Elk

Elk are by far the most common large animal in the Park (except for visiting humans), with a winter population of between 10 and 15 thousand. This estimate is necessarily approximate because environmental conditions, such as harshness of the winter or wetness of the summer, can make a big difference in the number. In any case, the visitor has the best chance of seeing elk in the "off-season." In the summer they are in higher, cooler country. Fall may be the best time of all, because that is the time of the "rut" or mating. Then you have an excellent chance of seeing two bulls sparring to defend or enlarge their harems, or of hearing a bull bugle, surely one of the wildest sounds in nature.

Compared to some of the other vegetarians in the Park, the elk are pretty broad-minded about what they will eat. Grasses, shrubs, willows, aspen bark and even fir needles all get their share of attention.

Gallatin Mountains

About a mile past the creek the road begins to climb more sharply, to the left. At this point it is possible to look back to the west. On the horizon are a number of peaks, part of the Gallatin Range. At the top of the hill the road curves right and passes a parking area on the left, where you can stop and take a better look at these magnificent mountains.

Bannock Indian Trail

The road from Mammoth to Tower is in some ways much older than the Park. It served as a human thoroughfare long before it became “civilized.” For about forty years, starting in the late 1830’s, the Bannock Indian tribe made an annual trek across this area. They were coming from Idaho, on their way to bison country east of what is now the Park. Their trip was about 200 miles each way, but it was absolutely necessary if they were to retain their long-established life-style, for the bison had virtually disappeared from their home country around the Snake River Plain by 1840.
As the road winds through the forest, try to imagine what it must have been like for the first of those hunters, seeking a way through this country with their families in tow.

The great trips gradually became more difficult as the territory they crossed became white man's domain. By the time the Park was established they no longer traveled this way regularly.

On the right about a mile beyond the Gallatin viewpoint is a dense stand of timber with many trees lying on the ground. Heavy deadfall is typical of much of the Park's lodgepole pine forest too, since the pine has such a shallow root system it is easily knocked over by wind or other falling trees. Remember Mr. Everts, who got lost and had a mountain named after him? It all happened when he got off his horse while struggling through just such a tangle, south of Yellowstone Lake. The horse left without him.

Blacktail Drive

The Blacktail Drive is a one-way alternate route which may interest you. It is not paved and so may be closed in bad weather, but it has less traffic than the main road. It rejoins the main road seven miles east of here. It is not open in the winter.

Mule Deer

Look for mule deer at the edges of the little tree stands the road passes here. As with all the animals your best chance of seeing deer is very early in the morning, at least an hour before most people like to get up. Deer can be difficult to spot. They seem to have an almost magical way of fading in and out of sight. There are several hundred in the Park. In winter many of them move to lower elevations where the climate is milder. They are partial to the foliage on shrubs and trees but will also graze on grasses.

Phantom Lake

Phantom Lake got its name because it disappears in the fall. Its high-water level line can be seen along the far hillside. This is one of
several places in the Park where a fisherman might be seen contentedly casting to fish that exist only in his imagination.

As the road climbs from the lake, look up to the small pinnacles on the cliffside on your left. The weathered rock formations themselves are worth noticing, and you might also see some sheep.

**Volcanic Rocks**

This part of the Park has seen several volcanic ages. Most of the rock outcroppings here are volcanic in origin and can be roughly classified by color. The dark ones are older, from the Absaroka Volcanic Period of about 50 million years ago. The light-colored ones, more common between Mammoth and Tower, are about 2 million years old. Mixed in with these two types are assorted deposits of sand, gravel and even boulders, left behind by glaciers.

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**Hellroaring Mountain and Creek**

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**Hellroaring Creek Overlook**

As the road reaches the top of a small hill it begins to skirt the edge of an almost sheer cliff. Many wondrous things are visible in the distance to the left, but this narrow road is no place to stop! There is a large parking area ¼ mile ahead on the left. From it the view can be safely appreciated.

**The View**

Directly across the valley to the north is a canyon out of which flows tree-lined Hellroaring Creek. The creek was named by an early prospector who was sent ahead of his party to scout a route up the Yellowstone canyon. He reported back to them that the next creek was a "hell roarer," and the name stuck.

The creek flows into the Yellowstone River. The channel of the Yellowstone is marked by the row of trees running east and west along the bottom of the valley. Just down from the mouth of Hellroaring Canyon are some ponds that occasionally have trumpeter swans on them.

The conical peak directly to the left of Hellroaring Creek is 2551 meter (8,363 feet) Hellroaring Mountain.

The next creek over to the right of Hellroaring is Little Buffalo Creek. It is flowing off a large undulating highland called Buffalo Plateau.
Looking to the east up the valley of the Yellowstone and beyond, you can see the peaks of the distant Absaroka Range on the horizon. You are headed in their direction and will see more of them later.

Crescent Hill is the high prominence less than two miles to the east of this parking area.

While you are stopped at this point you might take a closer look at one of the big Douglas Firs nearby. Notice the distinctive furrowing in the bark of the larger trees. Closer up the fir differs from the pines in its single needles. Lodgepole Pine needles are in pairs. Limber Pine, which you may have seen back at Mammoth, has needles in bundles of five.

**Forest Insect Exhibit**

From this exhibit you can begin to get an idea of how important dead trees can be in the life of a forest. The mountain bluebird nests almost exclusively in the dead snags of trees, whether they were killed by insects, fire, hot springs or old age.

The mark of an infested area will heal very slowly, but that too is significant. If there is a lesson in this cycle of death and recovery it is that nature is in no hurry. A forest that is changing, dying in parts and growing in others, is the most natural kind. A stagnant forest, protected from insects and fire, may give us more board-feet of lumber per acre, but lumber is not the resource in Yellowstone. The resource is wildness, and a forest protected from its natural enemies is no more wild than a back yard flower garden.

On the right is a slope of gray rocks, looking rather like an oversized gravel pit. The road here is following the foot of a wall of volcanic rock called welded tuff, a very brittle rock that is continually crumbling away.

**Floating Island Lake**

At one time there was a more or less independent raft of vegetative debris drifting on the surface of this lake, but it finally gathered enough weight, soil and respectability to become a real island. The mountain directly behind the lake is Crescent Hill, which you may have seen from the Hellroaring overlook.

The lake is a popular haunt of water birds, especially the American Coot. In the summer the reeds along the near shore are the home of several yellow-headed blackbirds. This striking bird has a call like a broken harmonica. Visitors from other parts of the country are surprised they've never heard of such a gorgeous bird. One visitor recently asked a Ranger, "What's the name of the black bird with the yellow head?" The Ranger responded, "That's a yellow-headed blackbird—makes sense, doesn't it?" The visitor thought about it for a moment, then replied, "Oh, I don't know, it could have been a black-bodied yellow bird."
**Pleasant Valley**

From Floating Island Lake the road begins a gradual straight descent. The high point on the ridge ahead is Specimen Ridge.

As the road begins a wide right curve, the view to the left opens onto Pleasant Valley, the site of an early hotel, built in the 1880's. The accommodations were rustic at best, with curtains rather than walls. John Yancey, proprietor, catered mostly to fishermen.

Now in the summer the valley is the destination of stagecoach and horseback rides from the lodge at Tower Junction.

**Petrified Tree Drive**

A side road on the right leads back about ¼ mile to a standing petrified tree.

**Yellowstone's Petrified Forests**

Though Yellowstone has some of the world's most extensive petrified forests, there is only this one tree visible from the road. The petrification process had very special results here, as the trees were buried by volcanic ash and became petrified in a standing position. The only places they are usually visible is on slopes where erosion has cut through the soil to expose them. This part of Yellowstone experienced many periods of volcanic activity and there was often time for soil to build up and trees to grow between the violent eruptions. Because of this there are many layers of trees.

Specimen Ridge contains 27 layers of trees in a 1,200-foot high cliff. One of the most useful bits of information we can learn from these prehistoric trees is how many different climates Yellowstone has had. Besides the evergreens the Park now displays, there have been oaks, chestnuts, sycamores, walnuts and many others. The oldest are estimated to be about 55 million years of age.

There is a sturdy fence around the tree. Years ago there were two other trees near it, but many thoughtless people hunting souvenirs deprived today's visitors of
the opportunity to see them. Taking a geologic specimen is probably even more damaging to the Park than picking a flower or cutting a tree, if only because rocks grow back so much more slowly.

**Yellowstone’s Bears**

You may be wondering why you haven’t seen black bears along the roads. Of course they sleep through the winter, but few are seen near roads in the summer these days.

Bears, especially black bears, might be seen anywhere in the Park, but the odds are not as great as they were when people fed them. Bear feeding has been illegal for over 70 years but it was always so popular it was ignored. In the late 1960’s, however, with increased visitation and increased numbers of injuries, bear feeding became a major problem. Huge traffic jams, destruction of aggressive bears and a great threat of more serious injuries prompted the National Park Service to take the matter in hand. The solution was to remove all unnatural food sources from the bears’ environment. This meant not only stopping people from feeding them but installing bearproof garbage cans and closing the Park’s dumps, popular with the less sociable grizzlies.

With the artificial food sources removed, the bears have returned to a normal distribution, spread across the countryside foraging for themselves. Park Officials are stern about enforcing this policy: it is neither healthy nor natural for a wild bear to stand along the side of the road getting dill pickles bounced off his forehead.

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**Tower Junction**

At the Ranger Station the road crosses Lost Creek, a small tributary of the Yellowstone River.

Tower Junction was named for Tower Fall, a beautiful 132-foot waterfall reached by driving three miles toward Canyon. This junction is commonly referred to as Tower-Roosevelt because President Roosevelt camped near here in 1903, and there is now a lodge here named for him which is open in the summer. It seems ironic that Roosevelt, so important in American Conservation History, should have only man-made features named after him here in Yellowstone.
Tower Fall

Barrow's Goldeneye

Bitterroot
Chapter Three:

TOWER JUNCTION TO LAMAR RANGER STATION

At Tower Junction you turn left, following the sign to Cooke City. The road crosses a large meadow, treeless except for a few scattered firs. Off in the distance to the left (west) is Crescent Hill.

The low-lying hill to the right is Junction Butte, marking the junction of the Yellowstone and Lamar Rivers.

After crossing the meadow the road curves to the right and descends to the Yellowstone River Bridge. Notice the rock outcrops on the left. The brightly-colored patches of orange and green are lichens, a very simple plant form. They are extremely hardy, some varieties being able to withstand incredibly low temperatures, but they are also regarded as indicators of air quality, for some are very vulnerable to automotive pollutants. Their service in the plant world is to provide the first thin layer of organic matter upon which more sophisticated plants can grow.

The original Baronett’s Bridge across the Yellowstone River, built in 1871.

The Yellowstone River Bridge

The bridge across the river is the third to stand in this general area, the first having been built by Jack Baronett, an enterprising adventurer, in 1871. Mr. Baronett was one of the mountaineers who rescued Truman Everts. For his good work and local fame he too got a mountain named after him.

The Yellowstone River at this point has just recently left its Grand Canyon, and is about 20 miles below the famous Lower Falls. After passing under the bridge the river will be joined by the Lamar River and will then gradually curve to the northwest and head for the town of Gardiner. Even in its canyon here there are the pastel pinks and
yellows which have been so often photographed near the falls. It was because of similarly-colored canyons, many miles downstream from the Park, that the river first got its name. Indian tribes near its mouth called it mi-tsi-a-da-zi, or "Rock Yellow River." French trappers translated that to "Roche Jaune," and English-speaking explorers then called it the Yellowstone. At the bridge you might notice a strong smell of sulfur from an active thermal feature in the canyon below.

Yellowstone River Picnic Area
Ponds

These ponds are excellent waterfowl habitat: trumpeter swans often nest near them. There is a large parking area ¼ mile ahead with an exhibit which explains how the ponds were formed. As with Lava Creek Canyon, a glacier was responsible for the final contouring of this landscape. In this case the glacier came down from the north, flowing out of Slough (pronounced "sloo") Creek's canyon and covering even the highest peaks in this corner of the Park. As it came it lifted great amounts of soil and rock and hauled them along. When it receded it littered the land with large boulders.

The ponds were the result of the same glacial motions. They were either carved by the ice or created when large pieces of ice, left buried in the rocky deposits, melted to form sinkholes. As time passes, ponds, especially those lacking inlet and outlet streams, often choke with vegetation and fill in. You have already seen one example of a stalemate in the struggle between pond and vegetation back at Blacktail Ponds—there is enough flow of water to keep the vegetation from firming up so the bog cannot change. Look around and you might notice some places that make you think, "Wouldn't that be a nice place for a pond?" It might have been, once.

The boulders are playing an interesting role in the life of the vegetation here. Many of them have large Douglas Firs growing against them. The trees were able to get a start in the moist shade of the boulders they in turn shade now.

Wildlife Has The Right Of Way

The roads are used by animals in the winter, so if you happen on an animal give him lots of room. Coyotes often prowl along the edges
of the road, catching mice that come out from under the snowbank. You may come up behind a big bull moose and follow him several miles as he trots down the double yellow line. After a while you get the feeling he isn’t too concerned where he’s going, he’s just enjoying making such good time. If you can, slow down and let the animal go on ahead. It may encourage him to get off the road. Following closely will only force him to run, causing him to waste energy he really can not spare in winter. Bison are probably the most formidable obstacle you might encounter. As you can imagine, they don’t run from too many things. If a big bull decides he wants to stand sideways in the middle of the road, by all means let him. Otherwise your car could be much the worse for the encounter. There is an old saying here, that when a bison raises his tail it means one of two things: charge or discharge.

As the road begins to drop a little to the north it passes a stand of aspen on the left. Beyond the aspen rolls the Lamar River. It is flowing back the way you’ve come, to join the Yellowstone River. Ahead is a bridge across the Lamar. For the rest of the trip you will be continually within viewing-distance of a river.

The Lamar, originally known as the East Fork of the Yellowstone, was named for a late 19th century Secretary of the Interior, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar. With a name like that he almost had to go into public life! The river attracts many fishermen, but only those interested in fishing for the sport of it, because the regulations require the release of all fish. Even if you don’t fish you might find the Park’s fishing regulations interesting—they are designed to protect the native fish while still providing a high-quality angling experience, which means the number of fish killed by man must be limited.

From the bridge the road climbs steadily for ½ mile. On the left is the road to Slough Creek Campground, a small secluded campground 1½ miles from the main road, at the mouth of a small canyon. Slough Creek was named by the same man who named Hellroaring Creek—he reported to his partners that “twas but a slough.”
The drive through the canyon of the Lamar River takes you farther into Yellowstone's geologic past than you can go anywhere else in the Park. The river has cut a tight little gorge through "very hard Precambrian igneous and metamorphic basement rocks." That translates as follows. Precambrian refers to a period in the past (right before the Cambrian) from 3 billion to 600 million years ago. Basement is a term applying to the oldest rocks in an area, mostly because they are on the bottom. Usually they are the result of mud or sand that formed at the bottom of a sea and then was pressed into rock by more mud and sand. If the pressure and heat was so great that they turned into crystalline rock, like quartzite, they are called metamorphic, meaning changed. If the basement rocks solidified from molten material, they are called igneous.

The rocks and monolithic boulders on the roadside and in the river have been tumbled and shifted, not only by normal erosion but by volcanic activity. A volcanic eruption is rarely a tidy process—usually the lava seeks the easiest channels and spreads very unevenly. Sometimes there are also ash flows and even great explosions, all of which disrupt and tumble the rocks of earlier eruptions.

The canyon is about a mile long and from it the road winds out onto a broad hillside. As the road climbs slightly to the north of the river you can look far down the valley to the Absaroka Range, not quite so distant as the last time you saw it. Once again the continuous mountain across the river is Specimen Ridge: its highest point is Amethyst Mountain.

In the 1830's a trapper named Osborne Russell traveled through what is now the Park. Delighted by its beauty, he returned more than once, and left us this impression of the Lamar Valley:

"There is something in the wild romantic scenery of this valley which I cannot nor will I, attempt to describe but the impressions made on my mind while gazing from a high eminence on the surrounding landscape one evening as the sun was gently gliding behind the western mountain and casting its gigantic shadows across the vale were such as time can never efface from my memory . . . but as I am neither Poet, Painter or Romance writer I must content myself to be what I am, a humble journalist, and leave this beautiful Vale in obscurity until visited by some more skillful admirer of the beauties of nature who may chance to stroll this way at some future period."
Coyotes in Yellowstone

The valley is a fine place to observe the local coyotes hunting for dinner. A detailed study done in the Park in the 1930’s indicated that from April to November coyotes eat chiefly field mice and pocket gophers. If you get a chance, watch one hunt. The distinguished naturalist Adolph Murie once observed a coyote capture eleven mice in an hour and a half. A lot of house cats could take lessons from such an expert.

The coyote is one of the west’s most controversial creatures, but here in Yellowstone his rights are as sacred as any other resident’s. The coyote, though only of marginal influence on the populations of big animals like elk and deer, does serve to weed out the sick or unfit from the herds, as well as to consume the carcasses of dead animals. And it has a very special value to the visitor. There is a romantic element in the coyote’s life, much as there is with its rare cousin the wolf. Once you’ve watched its stealthy hunt you have a new respect for its style and skill. Once you’ve heard a pack howl into the winter wind you have a new respect for the wilderness they represent. Theirs is a bitter freedom.

The Buffalo Ranch — Lamar Ranger Station

The Ranger Station sits on the north side of the valley—if weather conditions are right you should see a few bull bison nearby in the winter. Elk also settle into this area in cold weather.

The Lamar Ranger Station was for several decades the site of a semi-domestic bison ranch. Around the turn of the century Yellowstone’s wild bison herd reached such low numbers that it was feared they would soon vanish. In 1902 a semi-domestic herd was established, first at Mammoth and a few years later here at Lamar. The purpose of this operation was to insure the perpetuation of the species, so it was very similar to any cattle ranch—there were fall roundups, scheduled feedings and herd reductions. Some of the corrals from those days still stand.
Of course a ranched bison population was not really proper in the wild Yellowstone scene, and so in the 1930's efforts were made to gradually restore the animals to a wild state. This was done by hauling some of them to other parts of the Park and by doing away, very slowly, with the feedings. The fences and other evidence of the ranch were gradually removed—the last feedings took place in the early 1950's and now a well-distributed population of about 1,000 bison roam the Park.

Chapter Four:
LAMAR RANGER STATION TO COOKE CITY

After passing the Ranger Station the road continues along the north side of the valley. Aspen trees have a firm foothold on both sides of the valley—in the winter you can pick them out from a distance because their bare gray branches stand out against the dark evergreens like a smoky haze.

Geology Exhibit and Picnic Area

The Geology Exhibit explains more about the formation of Specimen Ridge. Right beyond it is a road to the Lamar River Picnic Area, which you can see down in the cottonwood grove along the river.

Vegetation Study Exclosure

About ½ mile beyond the picnic area, on the left side of the road, a fenced off area extends up the hillside. This is one of several exclosures in the Park, areas set aside as part of a study of vegetation composition and growth rates. Notice the contrast between the vegetation inside the fence and that outside it. Some of the exclosures have been set up for several decades. Protection from the natural feeding of elk, deer and other large animals has allowed an unusually heavy growth. The scientific study of how animals affect their habitat, and vice versa, is of special importance. Though much has been learned there are still many unanswered questions. For example we know relatively little about the insects who also live here. Sometimes grasshoppers are so numerous that their combined weight is much greater than that of the elk. How much do they eat?

Soda Butte Creek

Soda Butte Creek is one of the Lamar River's major tributaries. You will be following Soda Butte Creek the rest of the way to Cooke
City. Look to the south, up the valley of the Lamar River. The river is draining a magnificent tract of undisturbed primitive land, accessible only by foot. Indeed, for some people, places like the upper Lamar are the real Park.

The hillsides to the left are favored wintering grounds of bighorn sheep.

### Soda Butte Creek Elk Trap

Off to the right, in the V formed by the two rivers, is the site of a very heavy-duty corral, built to hold elk. Until recently it was commonly believed that Yellowstone’s elk population had the tendency to grow too large for its available food supply, so intensive efforts were made to limit the herd size. On some occasions the animals were shot by Park Rangers and meat was given to appropriate institutions. Often the elk were herded into corrals and shipped to other parts of the country to restock elkless forests.

The most recent studies tell us that much of this removal was unnecessary, since natural controls, related to periodically severe winter weather, will regulate the population. The healthy will survive severe winters but some of the young, old and sick might not. Predators, such as wolves, coyotes and cougars, have little effect on the overall population of elk but do benefit greatly from the herd by scavenging. The animals that don’t survive the winter are not wasted—they are quickly recycled by scavengers. By law hunting is never permitted in Yellowstone.

### Lamar River Trailhead and Wildlife Exhibit

The exhibit at this parking area discusses the wildlife in the valley. Below is a foot bridge across Soda Butte Creek. From this parking area you have a good view of the Absaroka peaks to the east.

### Geology of the Absarokas

Beyond the Lamar River Trailhead the road enters some of Yellowstone’s most spectacular country. Here all the various geologic forces
you've read about so far each took a turn with the landscape. The floor of Soda Butte Creek Valley is sedimentary rock, the result of this area being covered by a sea about 300 million years ago. This rock, mostly limestone, was crumbled and folded by the pressures and land shifts that created the Rocky Mountains about 70 million years ago. Volcanic flows covered the limestone 50 million years ago. Since then the erosive efforts of ice and running water have cut deeply into the mountains, exposing the oldest limestones again.

Soda Butte

The large stone mound on the right is Soda Butte, after which the creek was named. This isolated thermal feature was formed by essentially the same process that is creating the terraces at Mammoth: a hot spring was once active here, and on its way to the surface the water passed through layers of limestone, some of which was dissolved and then deposited here on top. Its activity today amounts to only a trickle, but there is still enough action to release a small amount of "rotten egg gas," or hydrogen sulfide, a by-product of the dissolving process.

Soda Butte has been the site of several buildings, the most notable of which was a soldier station over at the foot of the hill, left of the road. During their thirty-year stay here the Army maintained small cabins at key points in the Park, each manned by a few troopers. From them routine patrol work was done. An example of one of the more comfortable of those cabins can be seen at the entrance to Norris Campground, 21 miles south of Mammoth.

Please do not climb on Soda Butte. The limestone is easily crumbled.

Railroads and Yellowstone

The northeast corner of the Park was once very nearly lost, for in the 1880's an attempt was made to remove it from the reservation. The mining town outside the northeast entrance, Cooke City, had no way to move ore but through the Park, and the most popular route was by wagon, over the same road you are now traveling. Since defenders of the Park would not permit a railroad in it, the miners tried to solve the problem by changing the boundaries so their route would be outside it. The affair involved mine owners, powerful railroad magnates and even the Park Superintendent, who was removed when it was discovered that he intended to stake claims on some of the land as soon as the boundary was changed. Some saw this as a conflict of interests. Fortunately the Park had more friends than enemies and the tracks were never laid along Soda Butte Creek.
Round Prairie

2½ miles beyond Soda Butte the road passes to the north of a large meadow called Round Prairie. Round Prairie, for all its natural charm (watch for coyotes and grouse), is best known as the site of a saloon built by a man named "Red" Sowash in about 1885. His business was a comfort to travelers on their way to the mines and he claimed his building was outside the Park. Shortly after the arrival of the Army the matter was investigated and it was learned that Mr. Sowash was three miles off in his reckoning. In 1887 he was evicted.

Pebble Creek

It is here in Round Prairie that Soda Butte Creek accepts the water of Pebble Creek. There is a small campground directly upstream from the bridge, and a trail starts there that will lead you up to the creek's headwaters.

Ice Box Canyon

The very narrow little gorge through which the creek passes is known as Ice Box Canyon. Because the inner canyon receives so little sunlight, ice that forms on the walls in winter often remains well into the summer. Be careful about stopping in the canyon, since there are few parking areas and visibility is limited.

At the far end of the canyon the road passes through a cut in the hill. Here you can see a good example of the conglomeration of rocks called volcanic breccia; small rocks embedded in sandy matrix almost like concrete. This was often caused by mudslides down the steep slopes of old volcanoes.

Don't Ignore the Creek

There is an old joke that goes, "Isn't it funny how rivers always flow through big cities?" It expresses much of the unintentional neglect we give rivers. The road has been following streams for over twenty miles, but little has been said about them and less about their inner world.
There are few things so full of life as a river. By comparison many dry landscapes seem almost sterile. There are fish, of course, the first thing everyone thinks of as living in rivers, but there are many more creatures, who vastly outnumber the fish. There are insects, dozens of species, millions of individuals, each adapted to its own place in the river. In the fast riffles stonefly nymphs, some as much as two inches long, press their flattened bodies to the rocks in the thin layer of calm water created by the friction of the current against the rock’s surface. In quieter water there are, among others, caddis fly larvae, busily building minute mobile shelters of tiny rocks and other flotsam. In still pools dragonfly nymphs, among the most ferocious predators on earth, pursue smaller insects and even tiny trout. As in the forest it is a matter of survival of the fittest. The world of aquatic wildlife is every bit as complex as the one through which you have been driving.

For some people, however, the real appeal of a river is the water itself—running water seems to capture their imagination. A tree may be washed from its place on the bank by a sudden flood, but more likely it will be slowly undermined, as the water loosens the soil, bit by bit, finally persuading the tree to fall. If rivers were human they would be very patient people.

Baronett Peak

The road passes through a narrow valley between Abiathar Peak—3333 meters (10,828 feet), named for a member of an early survey party—and Baronett Peak 3173 meters (10,404 feet). Baronett Peak illustrates the Absaroka geology. The very lowest slopes are the old sedimentary rocks, mostly limestone, and the bulk of the mountain above is volcanic. In the spring this side of Baronett has an added attraction, for the face of the mountain is a network of lacy waterfalls.

Unless you travel the road in the spring or early summer, the streambeds you cross here will be dry. Spring snowmelt from Abiathar Peak fills these little channels with a heavy flow.
The next few miles are moose country. Yellowstone has at least 1,000 moose, the largest member of the deer family. Unlike elk, they are rarely seen in groups. A big bull may weigh as much as 1,400 pounds, and though they are often seen along the shores and in the shallows of the Park’s larger rivers some prefer the seclusion of small meadows. They appear awkward but they are quick, even graceful, animals whose peculiar physical features (someone once said that the moose looks like it was designed by a committee) suit their needs very well. They are less troubled by snow than are elk and deer. Their long legs also help them in wading for aquatic vegetation. The spread of a bull moose’s antlers may be as much as five feet.

**Soda Butte Creek Bridge**

This is the last time the road will cross the creek, for it is only a few miles to its source near Cooke City. Two miles beyond the bridge the road passes the last picnic area in the Park and crosses over Warm Creek. There is no sign telling you so but about halfway between the Soda Butte Creek Bridge and Warm Creek you recrossed the 45th parallel of latitude.

From the Warm Creek picnic parking area you can see the bare face of Meridian Peak to the north. The most prominent mountain to the south is 3102 meter (10,170 foot) Republic Peak, which is outside the park.

**Northeast Entrance—2247 meters (7,367 feet)**

The Northeast Entrance is by far the least used of Yellowstone’s gates. It wasn’t until 1935 that U.S. Route 212 over Beartooth Pass to Billings, Montana, was completed. Even after that this entrance remained fairly isolated. The road is a vital thoroughfare for the residents of the small towns of Silver Gate and Cooke City, but the average visitor passes it by and misses some of the Park’s finest scenery. For most of the year the road to Billings is blocked by snow, and local residents can only get to the “outside world” by passing through the Park.

**Silver Gate**

Silver Gate, a rustic little settlement just outside the Park, is actually much younger than its appearance would suggest. After the completion of the Beartooth Highway to Billings the townsite was laid out and the town built, all within a few years. Its history does not go back half as far as Cooke City’s but it has assumed a significant role in the recreational use of this area. The land outside the Park here, part of the Gallatin National Forest, is becoming an increasingly popular resort and recreation area, both in summer and winter. In season one can enjoy any of the outdoor sports associated with wild mountain country, from hunting and fishing to skiing and snowmobiling. Though there is still talk of the possibilities of mining, these communities are almost totally dependent on recreational business for their income.
As Republic Mountain towers over you on the right, the road crosses Sheep Creek, another tributary of Soda Butte Creek. Watch for traffic, whether foot, horse, car or snowmobile, from the small side roads and driveways along the road from Silver Gate to Cooke City.

Cooke City is the only one of Yellowstone’s boundary towns whose existence predates the establishment of the Park. In the late 1860’s prospectors began exploring this area, as well as the future Park itself, and by 1871, the year before the Park was created, there was enough traffic coming into the area for Jack Baronent to build his toll bridge back on the Yellowstone River. It wasn’t Cooke City then, it was the New World Mining District, a place of rough buildings with owners to match.

For the next half-century and more Cooke seemed frequently on the edge of a boom as the mines, when they were worked, showed enough promise to keep hopes alive. The present name was given the town in 1880 when Jay Cooke, prominent figure associated with the Northern Pacific Railroad, promised to try to bring a railroad to the town. A rail connection was the dream of the local miners and in gratitude they named their little town in his honor.

Cooke City, you might have noticed, had considerable influence on the development of the northeast corner of the Park. Yancey’s Pleasant Valley Hotel served travelers coming this way, as did the short-lived saloon at Round Prairie and early buildings at Soda Butte. Residents of Cooke City, in fact, did some of the first road work in this part of the Park.

Cooke City and Silver Gate are both year-round settlements, though many of their citizens are seasonal. The combined winter population of the two towns is about 75.

Beyond Cooke City

The town is the last stop in this guide but it should by no means be the last stop on your trip this way. Beyond Cooke lies some of the most glorious scenery, over one of the most exciting highways, in North America. It is only open during summer and early fall. There are no roads inside the Park so high, nor are there any which bring you so close to the special wonder of alpine wilderness. If you can spare the time, assuming the road is open, go at least to Red Lodge, Montana. The 64 miles will take you two or three hours each way but it will be a ride you won’t soon forget.
Hiking and Skiing in Yellowstone

There are hundreds of miles of trails in Yellowstone, with many exciting trips possible. In order to protect both hikers and Park, a free backcountry-use permit is required of anyone wishing to take an overnight trip. Detailed information on trails, weather, bears and other important matters is available at all Ranger Stations. It is a good idea to obtain a topographic map of the Park and study it before hiking. Even day-hikers might wish to discuss their plans with a Ranger, especially if they are new to the area.

Foot travelers encounter wildlife on different terms than do automobilers. It is very important to keep your distance from wild animals. Avoid surprising them by making noise as you walk—avoid attracting them by keeping a clean camp.
Skiing in Yellowstone means cross-country skiing, an exhilarating way to explore the Park. From the Gardiner-to-Cooke City road several fine trips are possible, from an afternoon to a week. The same regulations requiring permits apply here; it is essential you discuss your plans with a Ranger. Inadequate preparation and errors in judgment are serious matters when the temperature is twenty degrees below zero.

Several good day trips (or shorter) start from the road. The Mammoth Hot Springs Upper Terrace Drive, reached by driving 1 1/2 miles south of the Visitor Center, is a 1 1/2 mile loop that takes you past a number of hot springs. The Blacktail Plateau Drive, though not a loop, is a pleasant trip. From Tower Junction it is 3 miles by snow-covered road to Tower Falls.

Snowmobiles are permitted on specified roads of the Park but never off the road. The Gardiner-to-Cooke City road is not open to snowmobiles, but many people take their machines to Cooke City to use them there or in Gallatin National Forest.

Road conditions change from day to day, and up-to-date reports are available at Visitor Centers and Ranger Stations.

Snowmobiles and snowcoaches make it possible for winter visitors to reach famed locations in Yellowstone such as Old Faithful and the Grand Canyon. Large mammals are easily seen near the road, even in the road which requires some patience on our part to give them the right of way. Snowmobiles provide a means to enjoy Yellowstone in winter; if riding the machine is more important to some, they will find the greater freedom of the surrounding National Forests more to their liking.

Snowmobiles

“Ghost Trees,” Created from Spray and Steam of Thermal Features

Snowmobiling in Yellowstone

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Road Guide for the
FOUR-SEASON ROAD
from
GARDINER TO COOKE CITY
Through Yellowstone National Park