

TRAVEL

Yellowstone's vistas can still inspire awe

BY DOUG JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

We stand along the fast-running Madison River in Yellowstone Park. It's a deep blue-black because of the late sunlight streaming in from the west.

The motorhomes and cars with campers are either exiting the park for the gateway towns or have found their way to campsites in the park.

A lone bison moves up the river's edge, heading for who knows where.

To the frequent or even first-time visitor, all is as it should be.

It is still the park of our childhood, despite the warnings about overcrowding, behind schedule building maintenance, rough roads, and, of course, the damage from the fires of 1988.

The overwhelming impression is that none of this matters. The power and the glory of the park and its ability to inspire are intact.

We were in the park last summer during the July 4th weekend. Yes, it was busy, but we never waited for gasoline, nor meals, nor did we wait for traffic jams except when wildlife crossed the roads.

In many locations we were alone, especially early in the morning and late in the afternoon.

One day as the sun was setting and we returned to Gardiner (northern entrance) on the road alongside the Gibbon River, it was us and one other vehicle, a pickup truck with Wyoming plates pulling a horse trailer. We can see elk feeding along the river's bank.

Even if you go in July or August, think about seeing some of the sights before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m.

Many roads in the park are new; others, like the road in from Cody, Wyo., are under construction. Rumors of long delays through the east gate out of Cody are greatly exaggerated, according to the Cody Chamber of Commerce. Two paving projects, one outside of the park and one inside, can cause short delays up to 30 minutes. Also, they are working on the road from Madison to Old Faithful inside the park.

Road crews are about halfway through an eight-year paving project.

Currently, the east gate closes at night, but I still think it is the prettiest way to enter the park, driving through Shoshone Canyon and up over the mountains down into Yellowstone Lake.

If you visit Cody stop at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. In addition to the Cody memorabilia there is a superb collection of western art, an almost unbelievable collection of small firearms, and the Plains Indian Museum. Even small children should be fascinated by a stop at this place.

One footnote: Bill Cody wanted to be buried in the hills above his town but instead is buried above Denver, where he died; his burial was part of a deal his penniless widow made with one of the owners of the Denver Post.

Cody has plenty of motels and places to eat as does West Yellowstone and Jackson Hole. Gardiner and Cooke City are very small towns and have less to offer.

When you enter the park the fire damage is clear. About a third of the park's land was burned in forest fires that were so intense they affected the weather. Nine summers have passed and the burned areas have been replaced in many cases with a green carpet of seedlings.

The so-called "let burn" policy that President Reagan said he never heard of was widely misunderstood. When the fire threatened the historic Old Faithful Inn the news story got international play with at least one headline talking about "total destruction."

About \$120 million was spent



The brink: The Upper Falls can be viewed a short distance from the road.

age is hidden in the northwest quadrant of the park in back country.

The geothermal features, while ever-changing, still are key to Yellowstone's appeal. At the Norris Geyser Basin we walk one of the big loops and stop at Echinus Geyser. A tiny crowd gathers and the geyser erupts after a short wait. We return hike to the parking lot and again are essentially alone.

The popular spots like Old Faithful and the two spectacular waterfalls on the Yellowstone River are busy, but there are still plenty of spaces to park.

Getting to Yellowstone from here would take three days hard drive. A flight to Billings, Mont., or other places in Wyoming can get expensive. We flew to Denver last year for \$260 round trip

trying to stop the fires fueled by aging lodgepole pines and severe drought. Only a September snow storm stopped the blazes; some fires were not declared out until early December.

Bottom line for visitors is opportunity: opportunity to see new vistas revealed by the fires, opportunity to see profuse wildflowers generated in newly enriched soil. Much of the dam-



Roadblock: Park wildlife like this huge bison can hold up traffic. This animal was wandering near Firehole River's canyon drive.

each on United Airlines out of Kent County Airport, Grand Rapids.

Yellowstone is surrounded by other attractions: Grand Teton National Park (great half-day whitewater and float trips are available along the Snake River), and numerous scenic drives in Montana (north out of West Yellowstone, out of Gardiner, and out of Cooke City).

Take plenty of pictures. It was, after all, pictures (William Henry Jackson) and paintings (Thomas Moran) that convinced Congress to make this place the world's first national park exactly 125 years ago.

Doug Johnson is a Livonia school teacher who fills in at the Observer & Eccentric. He and his wife live in Plymouth.



Photos by Doug Johnson

Turbulent: The Yellowstone River flows 24 miles through a spectacular canyon. The colors come from hot water acting on volcanic rock.

FRANKFURT Germany

Aug. 09 - Aug. 13	\$299
Aug. 16 - Aug. 20	\$299
Aug. 12 - Aug. 20	\$529
Aug. 23 - Aug. 31	\$529
Aug. 09 - Aug. 20	\$549
July 29 - Aug. 13	\$599

Children 2-17 only \$299 on all flights

Prices are per person. Taxes, fees, and airport charges are extra. Subject to availability. Rates subject to change. Travel Charter can provide you with any rail passes, hotel voucher programs and car rentals all over Europe.

Call your travel professional or (800) 521-5267

Travel Charter International
www.travelcharter.com



Looking For An Affordable Weekend Getaway Package?

Take Your Pick.

At the Southfield Hilton Garden Inn, you'll find everything you need for an affordable summer getaway including spacious guest room, use of our pool, whirlpool, and fitness center, and fresh-baked cookies at 9 p.m. For reservations, call your professional travel agent, 1-800-HILTONS, or the Southfield Hilton Garden Inn at 810-357-1100.

BounceBack Weekend* Includes continental breakfast for two. Available as early as Thursday with a Saturday night stay.

Romance Package. We'll pamper you with in-room champagne & two keepsake flutes, rich chocolates, and bubble bath - all complimentary. (available everyday)

Summer Holiday Value Dates. Enjoy the lowest rates of the summer during these special value dates: June 30-July 6 and August 29-September 1, 1997.

\$75
PER ROOM
PER NIGHT

\$85
PER ROOM
PER NIGHT

\$49
PER ROOM
PER NIGHT

Present this ad upon check-in for \$10 off on Romance or BounceBack rates

Southfield
Hilton
GARDEN INN

26000 American Dr.
Southfield, MI 48034
810-357-1100

Hand Manually
The Best Travel Software Ever!

\$15 Off

Only \$24.95

Also On Sale:
StreetFinder 1997 Edition \$34.95
Business Traveler's Suite \$44.95
Bonnet Collection (810) 643-7470

Summer Clearance Sale!

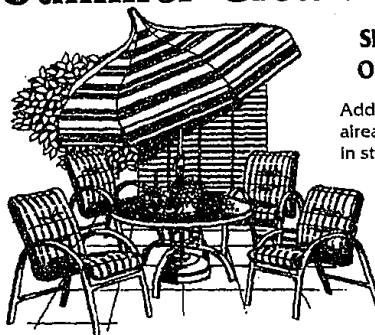
SPECIAL CLOSE OUT OF PATIO FURNITURE

Additional discounts from already low sale prices on all in stock patio furniture.

Special Group Closeout umbrellas

VALUES TO \$300

\$69⁹⁵

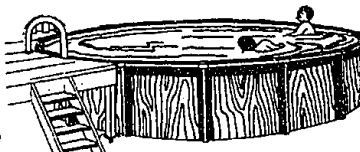


20% OFF UMBRELLAS & CUSHIONS

ABOVE GROUND POOLS CLOSEOUT

24'.....\$1249

INCLUDES... POOL
• PUMP • LADDER • FILTER



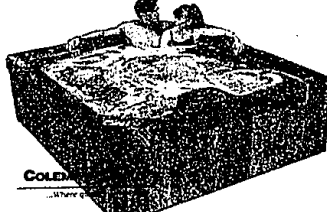
POOL TOYS 20% OFF

INGROUND POOL KIT CLOSEOUT!

CLOSEOUT PRICE **\$3995**

16' X 32'

INCLUDES... WALLS
• COPING • LINER
• 1 HP PUMP • PLUMBING
FILTER & POOL BASE
(Installation not included)



1996 COLEMAN SPAS Special Clearance of 1996 Coleman Spas

Bargains like these don't come around every day... so

HURRY IN TODAY!

Ann Arbor
3500 Pontiac Trail
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
313/662-3117

CORNWELL
Pool & Patio

Plymouth
874 W. Ann Arbor Rd.
Plymouth, MI 48170
313/459-7410

Store Hours: Mon., Thurs. & Fri., 10-8; Tues. & Sat., 10-6; Sun. 12-4; Closed Wed.