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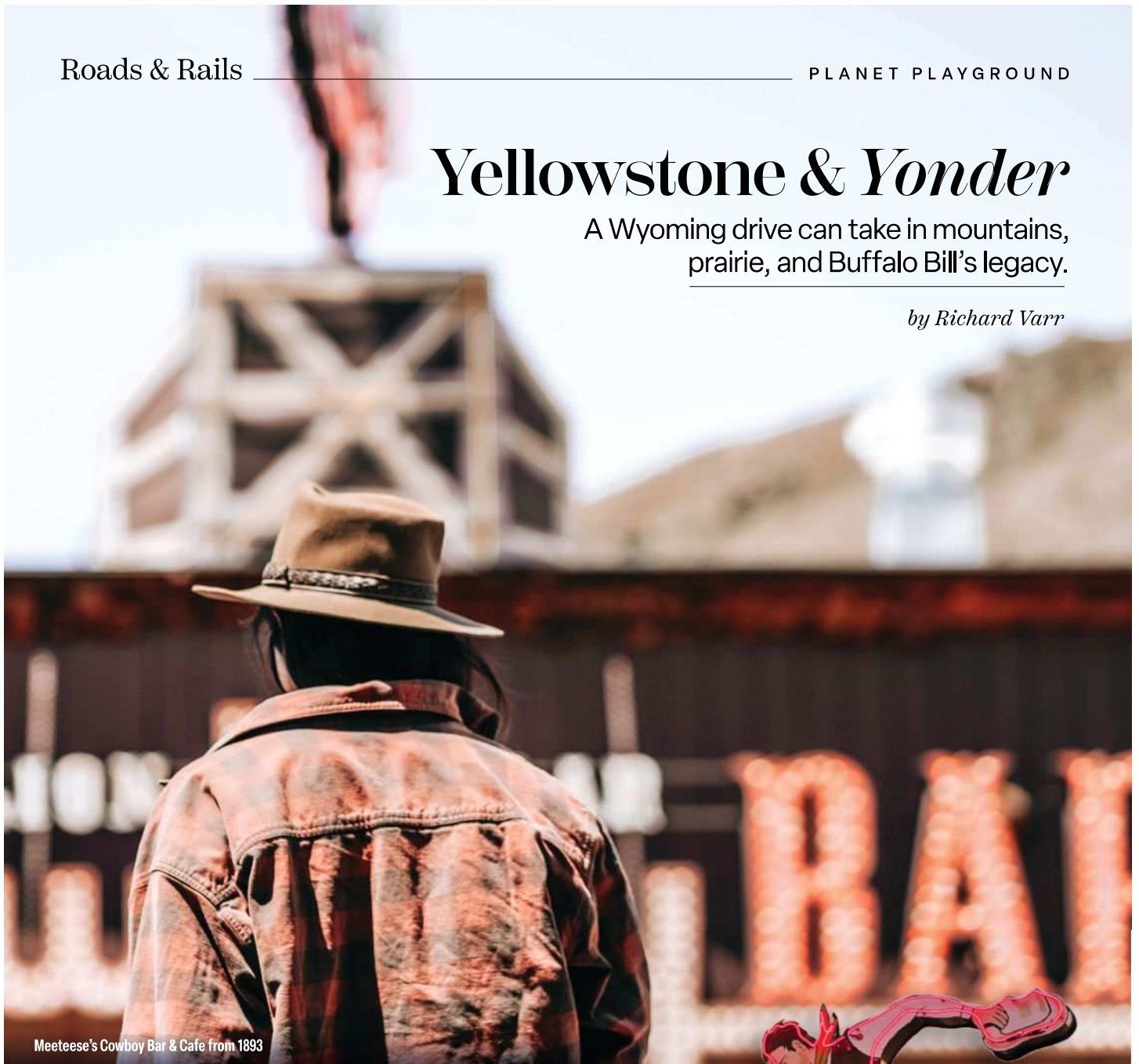


with
Two More Ships
on the Way

Yellowstone & Yonder

A Wyoming drive can take in mountains, prairie, and Buffalo Bill's legacy.

by Richard Varr



Meeteese's Cowboy Bar & Cafe from 1893

A woman sporting a puffy Western skirt and ruffled shirt cuffs sips whiskey at the bar as the tension escalates, moment by moment. “Lay ‘em down nice and easy, nice and slow,” commands a burly sheriff with a thick mustache. “You boys are under arrest.” Gunshots suddenly crackle through the

stillness – pow pow, pow pow – and two gunslingers drop to the ground. “There’s a reward for these boys,” announces the sheriff. “Five thousand dollars for Butch Cassidy and \$10,000 for his partner, dead or alive.” “Ten thousand dollars!” exclaims the woman. “I should have shot him a long time ago!”

Chuckles erupt from the crowd of seated onlookers as the Wild West shootout ends. The reenactment, its booming gunshots just blanks, takes place every summer night just a few yards from the bronze sculpture of a goateed Buffalo Bill grasping his rifle, seemingly sitting comfortably outside the Irma Hotel in Cody, Wyoming.



Glenna Haug/Unsplash, Karsten Winnigear/Unsplash

Roads & Rails

Showman's City

Named for the legendary bison hunter and soldier William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, the town is the first stop on my road trip after visiting Yellowstone National Park, coming from the park's east entrance 52 miles to the west along US 14-16-20. Known as the Buffalo Bill Cody Scenic Byway, the road twists through some of the West's mountainous panoramas, curving along



Cody still embraces its Wild West roots. Old Trail Town, for example, has a mix of authentic and relocated Wyoming log cabins. One of the most famous, the 1883 Hole in the Wall Cabin, was once frequented by outlaws Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, and is still pockmarked with bullet holes.

Buffalo Bill founded the town in 1896 and his presence remains palpable today. He built the landmark hotel and named it "The Irma" after his daughter. Inside, the original cherrywood bar was a gift from England's Queen Victoria, and locals claim apparitions from its gun-slinging past haunt guest rooms.

the Shoshone River's North Fork and through the Absaroka Mountain Range. Evergreen forests dot the bluffs, some reminding me of massive stone cathedrals with their weathered edges looking like towering spires.

From the shootout reenactments to having the world's longest-running nightly summertime rodeo,



Shoshone National Forest

A Western Center

The Buffalo Bill Museum, one of the five museums of the world-class Buffalo Bill Center of the West, highlights William Cody's achievements as a soldier and as the founder of his touring Wild West shows. Looping, grainy film clips feature skits depicting Pony Express riders, Indian attacks on a Deadwood stagecoach, and the battle known as "Custer's Last Stand." Artifacts include his Remington rifle, 1872 Congressional Medal of Honor, and his flamboyant coat, fur-lined and fringed in buffalo hide, that he wore in his shows.

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"Buffalo Bill was by far the most successful Western performer," explains Jeremy Johnston, Curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum. "In many ways, the elements of his performances continue to this day through film and television, and back in the early days, even radio shows."



Old Trail Town

Outside Cody

As I drive to tiny Meeteetse, 31 miles south on Highway 120, the landscape transforms into a panorama of hilly prairie with sparse tumbleweeds and sagebrush. Boardwalks shaded by porch roofs line the storefronts of Meeteetse's one- or two-block town center. "A lot of people talk about the nostalgia when you walk down the boardwalks and hear the echo of your footsteps," says Kristen Yoder, a local business owner and former mayoral candidate. "It brings back a time when you would hear the spurs clinking behind you."



One storefront, the Cowboy Bar & Cafe from 1893, looks like an old saloon. Yet across the street, the Meeteetse Chocolatier specializes in Belgian chocolates and truffles filled with coconut, raspberry, and even jalapeños. "Meeteetse still has that very Wild West spirit. We just tamed it down a bit and follow some of the rules instead of none," quips Yoder. "We say it's where the New West meets the Old West."



Hot Springs State Park

A Hot Stop

I continue southeast on Highway 120 for 52 miles to Thermopolis, the center of town dipping within a valley between earthen red-brown hills. Thermopolis means "hot city" in Greek, and there's a good reason for that name. Geothermal waters trickle out of Hot Springs State Park where evaporating runoff forms crusty mineral streaks in hues of champagne and dull yellow along the Bighorn River. The park's Star Plunge attraction consists of two mineral-water swimming pools that heat up to 90 to 98 degrees Fahrenheit.

Thermopolis' nonprofit Wyoming Dinosaur Center is one of the few museums to have dinosaur dig sites nearby. "Our site is just 10 minutes up the hill, one of three known with footprints and bones, and one of the few allosaurus feeding spots in the world," explains tour guide and dinosaur expert Brian Fernando. A colossal, long-necked camarasaurus skeleton with both original and replica bones dominates the museum amid a few dozen other fossil reconstructions.



Wyoming Dinosaur Center

Back in Cody, I make one last stop and I'm again reminded of how the Wild West's presence lingers on today. Rusted Colt revolvers and Winchester rifles fill display cases in the Cody Dug Up Gun Museum. "We have just under 1,400 items," says museum owner Hans Kurth. "Some are still cocked and loaded."●

