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COAST MAGAZINE

SPRING 2023

YELLOWSTONE AND BEYOND

EIGHT GREAT NATIONAL
PARK SCENIC DRIVES

BRYCE CANYON
NATIONAL PARK

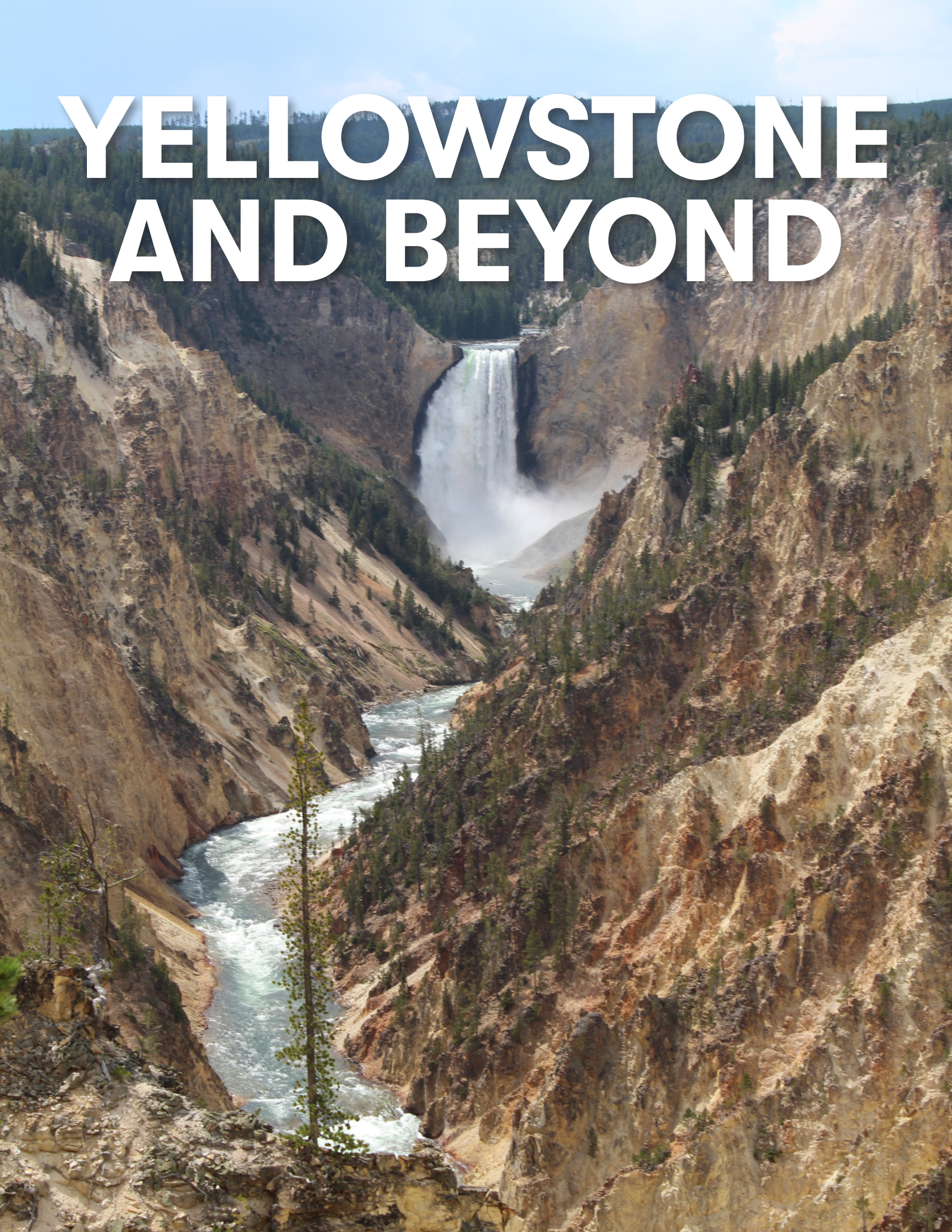
SPRING DESTINATIONS

Bass Lake Resort
Parish, New York

Ponderosa Falls Resort
Cheney, Washington

Eagles Landing Resort
Grove, Oklahoma

YELLOWSTONE AND BEYOND



Yellowstone and Beyond

Geysers, Bison, Waterfalls, Cowboys, and Native Americans

Story and Photos by Richard Varr

I'm walking up a curving boardwalk when I'm suddenly jolted with a pang of fear. Before me stands a lone bison—motionless, but still imposing—next to a steaming mudpot. Perhaps the animal is enjoying the warmth of the so-called Mud Volcano's thermal crater, maybe mesmerized by the low drone of choking sounds and gurgles.

Luckily, the boardwalk's wooden fence separates me and other curious onlookers from the beast as I recall seeing posted warnings to not approach bison, which can become dangerous if they feel threatened. Nonetheless, serendipity grants me a great photo opportunity—yet, a bit closer than I had ever expected.

Mud Volcano, with its surrounding rock ledges streaked with chalky white mineral deposits and bands of sulfur, is just one of Yellowstone National Park's 10,000 or so thermal wonders, all fueled by the supervolcano that lies beneath—a

behemoth that hasn't had a major eruption in about 640,000 years. Hissing fumaroles and craters emitting smelly sulfur gas dot the park's thermal basins, many with sporadically erupting geysers. Boiling pools gurgle, some with their Caribbean blue hues looking like enticing hot baths. Water runoff creates swirls of mineral colors like an artist's palette on rocky surfaces. And no visit would be complete without seeing the mother of all geysers, "Old Faithful," erupt at least once.

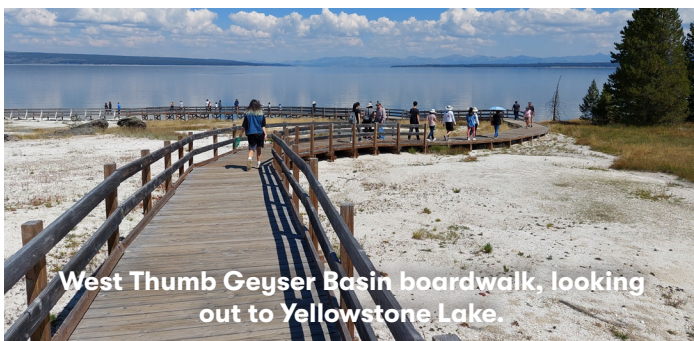
Yellowstone is where waterfalls tumble down mountain ravines and where bison and elk roam grassy river valleys. Bears, coyotes, wolves, and even mountain lions are harder to spot, but they're also within the park's nearly 3,500 square miles, larger than Delaware and Rhode Island combined. Sunset casts long shadows across Yellowstone Lake as waning sunbeams illuminate the windblown water with deep blue hues.

Trying to see all or most of Yellowstone in one visit—or even several—is simply impossible. Visitors could spend days and even weeks hiking just some of the more than 900 miles of trails or walking the 15 miles of boardwalks atop thermal basins. Roadways stretch 251 miles, including the North Loop and South Loop and the roads connecting them to five entrance gates.

The world's first national park, Yellowstone celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2022—a momentous yet bittersweet milestone. Crowds swelled in the spring, only to drop off dramatically in mid June when up to 9.5 inches of combined rain and snowmelt within 24 hours flooded northern areas—a 500-year flood event, according to the National Park Service. The deluge washed away sections of the North Entrance roadway and damaged infrastructure, closing the park for nine days. By summer's end, however, most of the park had resumed normal operations. (Editor's note: Feature was held until Yellowstone recovered.)



Bison at Mud Volcano area.



West Thumb Geyser Basin boardwalk, looking out to Yellowstone Lake.

From the East Entrance, it's a 27-mile drive to reach the South Loop, where I head north and stop at Mud Volcano, mentioned earlier, and then to an overlook with views of the steaming pools of Sulphur Caldron, one of the park's most acidic hot springs. The road parallels the Yellowstone River, which runs through grassy Hayden Valley where bison roam. I drive into a traffic jam of sorts with cars moving slowly and pulling into parking lots as visitors find the best viewing spots. At one point, a bison lazily walks in front of my car and stops. So, I wait and wait, until the animal decides to finally amble onward.

At Canyon Village, I reach one of the most breathtaking highlights of my visit—the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone and its two dramatic waterfalls, the Lower Falls and Upper Falls, crashing down within the spectacular mountainous river valley. South Rim Drive leads to the Artist Point lookout, called that because it's the viewpoint painter Thomas Moran used for his 1872 masterpiece—now hanging in the Smithsonian—of the deep canyon and tumbling 308-foot-high Lower Falls. North Rim Drive leads to the “Brink of the Lower Falls,” the point where the river tumbles into the valley below. The hike

down to the brink is less than a half mile along a descending curving pathway, where the falls' roar seemingly grows louder with every step.

Continuing on the 12-mile stretch of road where the South Loop and North Loop intersect, my next stop is the Norris Geyser Basin. The area sits atop three fault lines, thus fueling the hottest thermal activity in the park. Boardwalks weave around the steaming pools and fumaroles of the Porcelain Basin, a mostly treeless and flat expanse of land with a dramatic view from the entrance area. The Back Basin Trail meanders through woods with geyser holes and craters along its path. At the far end, the Steamboat Geyser shoots the tallest spray in the world, more than 300 feet, but actually being there for one of the rare eruptions would be a stroke of luck.

My next stop is Old Faithful Village, which for many visitors is Yellowstone's main attraction. It includes the Old Faithful Inn, Lodge, Snow Lodge, and Visitor Center, but the legendary geyser usually steals the show with eruptions well over 100 feet high every one to two hours. A short hike along the Upper Geyser Basin reveals many of that area's hissing and smelly thermal



Upper Falls in the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone.



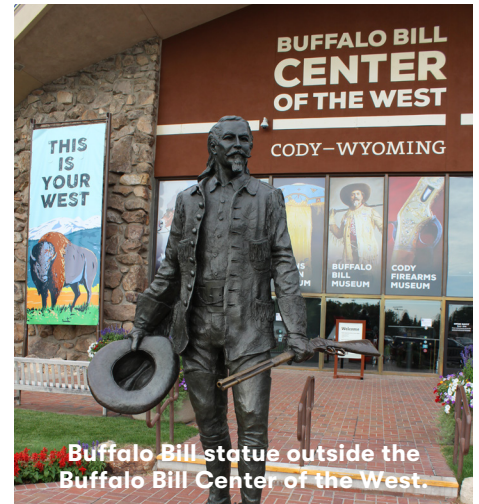
West Thumb Geyser Basin mudpots or paintpots.



West Thumb Geyser Basin thermal pool.



West Thumb Geyser Basin mudpots or paintpots.



Buffalo Bill statue outside the Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

holes—the more than 150 of them within a square mile making this area the world’s most densely packed geyser region.

Boardwalks along the Upper Geyser Basin weave around pools, fumaroles, mud pots and craters with names such as the Blue Star Spring and Sulphide Spring, and the Plume and Beehive geyser spouts, many with mineral encrusted rings. Grand Geyser erupts every eight or so hours with water spouting up to 180 feet. At the end of the walking path, the thermal waters’ bacterial life creates orange, green and yellow rings within the Morning Glory Pool.

Making nearly a full circle around the South Loop, I reach the West Thumb Geyser Basin, particularly worth a visit to see the muted aquamarine tints of the bubbling pools, some chalky and milky, while others sparkle clear to the bottom. The basin skirts the shores of Yellowstone Lake, with close-up views of a few thermal holes bubbling out of stone bases in the water.



Old Faithful erupting.

CODY, WYOMING

Just 53 miles east of Yellowstone’s East Entrance along US 14-16-20, called the Buffalo Bill Cody Scenic Byway, the town of Cody is an affordable launching point to the national park. The highway follows along the meandering path of the North Fork of the Shoshone River, carving through parts of the Absaroka Range’s jagged peaks and sloping mountains, with some of the dramatic rock formations almost looking like giant stone cathedrals with spires.

Before entering Cody, I drive along Buffalo Bill Reservoir and State Park against a backdrop of mountains for several miles. The highlight here, however, is the Buffalo Bill Dam and Visitor Center where the monstrous water retention wall reminds me of the Hoover Dam. In fact, this dam was the biggest one in the U.S. before the Hoover Dam was built.

Cody was actually founded in part by William “Buffalo Bill” Cody, the legendary Wild West icon, and it seems his presence still remains. A bronze statue of the gunman, soldier, Indian fighter, and buffalo hunter, with his thick goatee and long hair, clutches a rifle outside the Irma Hotel, built by Cody in 1902 and named after his daughter. Inside the hotel, photos of gunslingers hang on the walls of the popular restaurant with an original cherrywood bar gifted to William Cody by England’s Queen Victoria.

“Buffalo Bill was the most famous man in the world for years, so he had connections from all over,” says Ryan Hauck, Executive Director of Cody Yellowstone and the Park County Travel Council. And many say the hotel is haunted.

“Some cowboys getting drunk downstairs started shooting around and shot upwards, and shot a lady in this room,” says Hauck as he leads me through the hotel guest floors. “So, a lot of people say they’ve seen the lady’s ghost walking around in that room.”

Cody’s world-class Buffalo Bill Center of the West, which actually includes five museums, showcases Buffalo Bill’s life in the military and his series of early 20th-century Wild West shows that captivated audiences all over the country and Europe. Yet the shows included actual Native Americans as actors as skirmishes continued as a result of westward expansion. The Center’s Buffalo Bill Museum plays looping grainy film clips from some of those shows, including cowboys marching in New York City, skits of Indians attacking a stage coach and Custer’s Last Stand, shooting matches and trained horses demonstrations. In fact, Sioux warrior Sitting Bull, who defeated General Custer at the infamous Battle of Little Big Horn, joined the show years later.

“In my opinion, Buffalo Bill was really the first national celebrity in America,” asserts Jeremy Johnston, the Tate Endowed Chair of Western History and Curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum, explaining how his shows helped shape the way the Wild West is portrayed in movies and on TV. “He was able to combine elements of authenticity with dramatic presentations that have not been replicated by any performer before or since his time.”



Buffalo Bill’s buffalo hide coat in the Buffalo Bill Center of the West.

Along with his Remington rifle and Bowie knife, one display case has Cody’s flamboyant buffalo hide coat with fur trim and tassels which he wore on stage. Another showcases his 1872 Congressional Medal of Honor received after fighting a Sioux Indian attack against the Third Cavalry he once guided. There’s also a saddle used by Pres. Teddy Roosevelt, and Wild Bill Hickok’s holster and Colt pistol.

Gun and history enthusiasts will enjoy the Buffalo Bill Center of the West’s Cody Firearms Museum, the most comprehensive such museum in the country, with more than 4,000 well-preserved pistols and rifles. The Center’s other museums include the Plains Indian Museum, with such artifacts as Sitting Bull’s tomahawk that he surrendered in 1881, two years before relocation to the Sioux Reservation. Western landscapes and the dramatic 1899 wall-size painting of Custer’s Last Stand caught my eye in the Whitney Western Art Museum. And the kids will enjoy the exhibits of stuffed bears, elk, and other wildlife at the Draper Museum of Natural History, with an additional focus on the ecosystems of Yellowstone National Park.



Portraits of Buffalo Bill at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West.



The Irma Hotel’s cherrywood bar which was gifted to Buffalo Bill by England’s Queen Victoria.

Yet no place in Cody reminds me of the Wild West more than Old Trail Town with its collection of authentic and refurbished log cabins from the late 19th century. Relocated from Wyoming towns, they include the 1888 River's Saloon with its full wooden bar and gaudy red wallpaper for example, and the 1885 Bonanza Post Office. My favorite is the 1883 Hole in the Wall Cabin with its bullet holes, and where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid once walked on its creaking wooden floors. A graveyard around back includes the final resting place of trapper and soldier John Johnston played by Robert Redford in the 1972 movie *Jeremiah Johnson*.

On the outskirts of town, the Heart Mountain Relocation Center showcases a sad chapter in U.S. history on the grounds of what was one of the several internment camps for Japanese-Americans during World War II. Named for the nearby 8,123-foot-high eponymous block-like mountain peak, the center details how a total of 14,000 were forced to live in rows of barracks from 1942-1945. Only a few dilapidated original barracks remain today.



Cathedral-like rock formations east of Yellowstone's East Entrance along US 14-16-20.



Old Trail Town cabins, Cody.



Hole in the Wall Cabin at Old Trail Town, Cody.

AND BEYOND

On the way to Yellowstone's Northeast Entrance, seeing the twisting roads and vast mountain ranges make a great day trip along Highway 296 known as the 46-mile-long Chief Joseph Scenic Byway. A half-hour drive southeast of Cody leads to the tiny drive-through town of Meeteetse with its three museums, including a landmark 1901 bank building. The Meeteetse Chocolatier shop was once an old saloon, but now lures visitors with its truffles and Belgian chocolates.

Another hour drive beyond Meeteetse leads to Thermopolis which in Greek means "hot city," appropriately named because the town's Hot Springs State Park and Star Plunge Pool attraction are heated by geothermal waters. Thermopolis is also home of the Wyoming Dinosaur Center, one of the few dinosaur museums in the world to have an excavation site within a short drive.

For more information:
<https://www.nps.gov/yell>
www.codyyellowstone.org