



“The place
where
Hell
bubbled
up”

A
history
of the
first
national
park

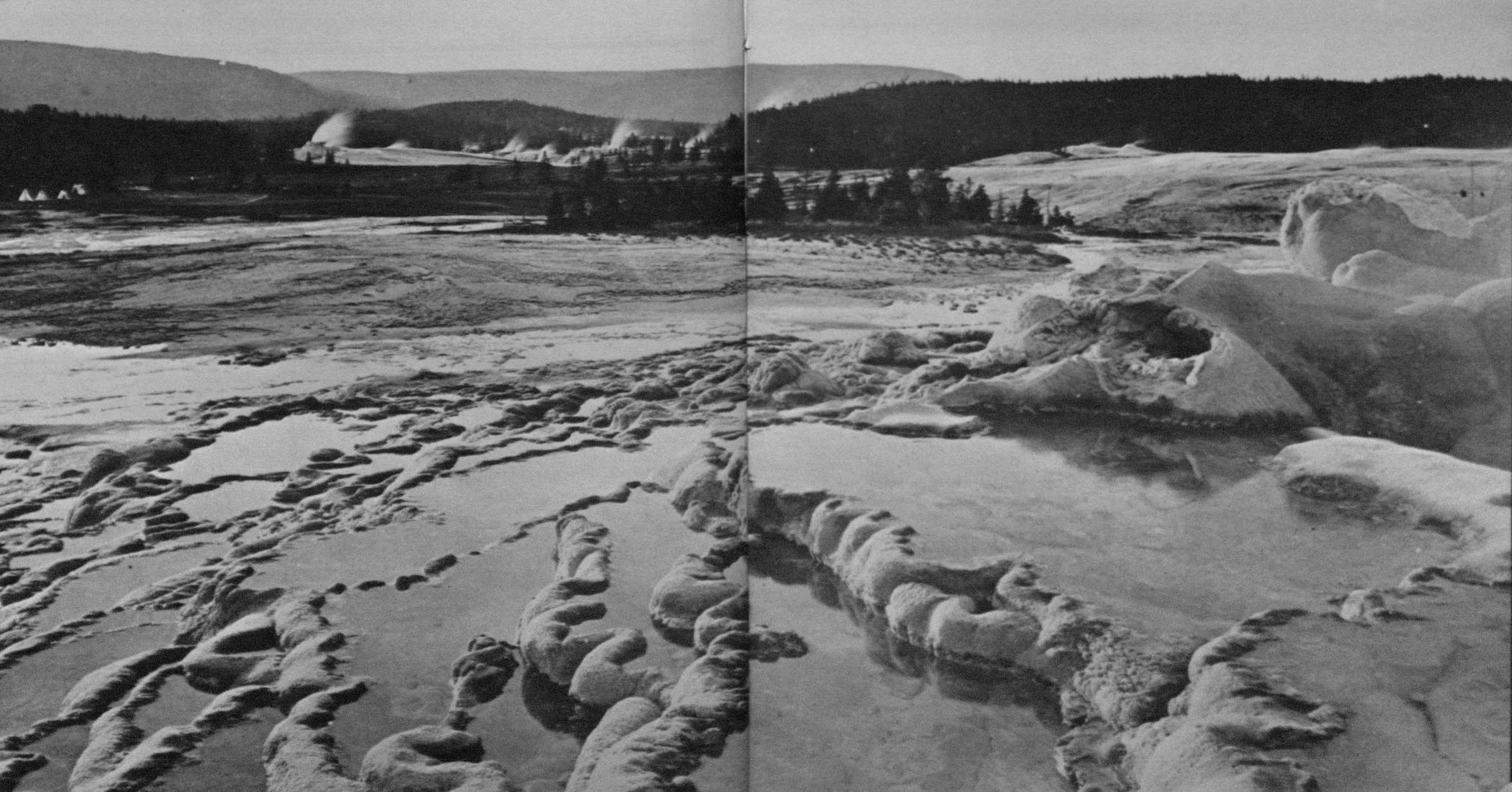
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**“The place
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**A History of the First National Park
by
David A. Clary**

1972

**Office of Publications
National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**



←
**The Upper Geyser Basin from the cone of Old
Faithful, taken by the pioneer photographer
William Henry Jackson in 1872 on his second trip
into the region with the Hayden Expedition.**

The idea of Yellowstone

One morning in May 1834, in the northwest corner of Wyoming three men waited anxiously for the end of a night of strange noises and curious smells. Warren Ferris, a clerk for the American Fur Company, had ventured into the upper Yellowstone country with two Indian companions to find out for himself the truth about the wild tales trappers told about the region. It was a place, they said, of hot springs, water volcanoes, noxious gases, and terrifying vibrations. The water volcanoes especially interested him, and now, as dawn broke over the Upper Geyser Basin, Ferris looked out on an unforgettable scene:

Clouds of vapor seemed like a dense fog to overhang the springs, from which frequent reports or explosions of different loudness, constantly assailed our ears. I immediately proceeded to inspect them, and might have exclaimed with the Queen of Sheba, when their full reality of dimensions and novelty burst upon my view, "The half was not told me." From the surface of a rocky plain or table, burst forth columns of water, of various dimensions, projected high in the air, accompanied by loud explosions, and sulphurous vapors. . . . The largest of these wonderful fountains, projects a column of boiling water several feet in diameter, to the height of more than one hun-

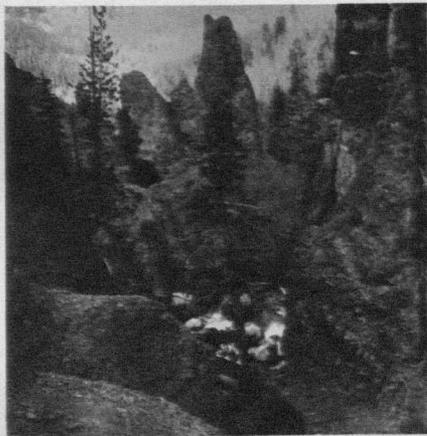
dred and fifty feet accompanied with a tremendous noise. . . . I ventured near enough to put my hand into the water of its basin, but withdrew it instantly, for the heat of the water in this immense cauldron, was altogether too great for comfort, and the agitation of the water . . . and the hollow unearthly rumbling under the rock on which I stood, so ill accorded with my notions of personal safety, that I retreated back precipitately to a respectful distance.

Ferris later recalled that his companions thought it unwise to trifle with the supernatural:

The Indians who were with me, were quite appalled, and could not by any means be induced to approach them. They seemed astonished at my presumption in advancing up to the large one, and when I safely returned, congratulated me on my "narrow escape". . . . One of them remarked that hell, of which he had heard from the whites, must be in that vicinity.

Ferris and his friends quickly concluded their excursion and went back to earning a living in the fur trade. They had not been the first visitors to this land of geysers. But they were the first who came as "tourists," having no purpose other than to see the country.





Members of the Hayden party, which explored the Yellowstone Region in 1871 and 1872, observe the eruption of Old Faithful. At left is Jackson's record of Tower Creek.

← The Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River, photographed by Jackson.

A hunter with the Hayden party looks out over the quiet waters of Mary Bay, on the east side of Yellowstone Lake. Photographed by Jackson in 1871.



Jackson considered Castle Geyser, in the Upper Geyser Basin, one of the most spectacular thermal features in Yellowstone.



It was the awesome evidence of this land's great volcanic past that drew Ferris and his comrades, and others after them, into an uncharted wilderness. For whatever the other attractions of this region—and there are many—man has reacted most to this spectacle of a great dialectic of nature, this apparent duel between the hot earth and the waters that continually attempt to invade it.

Seething mud pots, hot pools of delicate beauty, hissing vents, periodic earthquakes, and sudden, frightening geysers are foreign to our ordinary experience. But in this region a wonderful variety of such features, seeming to speak of powers beyond human comprehension, confronts visitors at every turn. So it is easy to understand why many observers have speculated, along with the companions of Warren Ferris, that this may indeed be near the dark region of the white man's religion.

Yet this Biblical metaphor, which came so naturally to men of the 19th century, fails to evoke the full sense of Yellowstone. Lt Gustavus C. Doane, who explored the country on the celebrated 1870 expedition, thought that "No figure of imagination, no description of enchantment, can equal in imagery the vista of these great mountains." There is the stately lodgepole forest, the ranging wildlife, the fantastic geysers, and the great lake, and there is the mighty torrent of the Yellowstone River, the spectacular waterfalls, and the rugged, many-hued chasm from which the river and ultimately the region took its name. And beyond all this, there is Yellowstone the symbol. The notion that a wilderness should be set aside and perpetuated for the benefit of all the people—a revolutionary idea in 1872—has flowered beyond the wildest dreams of those who conceived it.

This is the story, in broadest outline, of the people who have visited this remarkable country, of their influence upon it, and of Yellowstone's

influence upon them. It begins long ago, as all such stories must on the American continent, with the red man.

The early mark of man

For more than 10,000 years people have trod the Yellowstone wilderness. In the beginning human visits were rare and brief. Those who approached the vicinity of Yellowstone were already many generations and thousands of miles removed from their ancestral Asian origins, and most of them in the early days came to the region to hunt rather than to live.

The first men arrived during the decline of the last ice age. Their small and highly mobile population possessed a limited material culture and left little physical evidence of their presence—mainly distinctive stone tools and projectile points now classified under such terms as "Folsom" and "Clovis." They traveled along rivers and down major valleys in pursuit of such denizens of the ice age as the mammoth, the ancestral horse, and the giant bison, as well as the familiar animals of today. They supplemented game with berries, seeds, and roots. Though they were few in number, their weapons and tools made them comparatively efficient, and their hunting, combined with the warming of the climate, may have contributed to the disappearance of many primeval mammals. When the last glacial stage ended about 8,500 years ago, many animals that were adapted to colder, wetter conditions became extinct. This environmental change also altered the habits of man.

As the climate in the Yellowstone region warmed up, the surrounding plains grew extremely hot and dry but mountainous areas remained well

watered. The population in the region increased steadily as a new lifeway—hunting for small game and foraging for plants—replaced the endless wandering of the original hunters. Hunting could be done more efficiently after the small bands acquired the bow and arrow, and so large game became more prominent in the diet of man in Yellowstone.

By about 1600 Yellowstone was occupied by semi-nomadic populations that left many stone tools and projectile points, domestic utensils, and campsites. When the horse arrived in the high country of the West in the late 17th century, it upset old Indian patterns of living, and in some places produced entirely new cultures. The Indians could now follow the bison herds and other gregarious game of the plains. Mountain areas, more difficult to travel over by horseback, rapidly lost much of their population. When the first frontiersmen came to Yellowstone in the early 19th century, few people were living there. Only occasional hunting parties of Crows, Blackfeet, and Bannocks crossed its vastness, while small bands of Shoshones lived in its mountains.

The Crows occupied the country generally east of the park and the Blackfeet that to the north. The Shoshonean Bannocks and probably other tribes of the plateaus to the northwest traversed the park annually to hunt on the plains to the east. But other Shoshonean groups were probably more influenced by the horse. They had been pushing northward along the eastern edge of the Great Basin (west and south of the park), and the acquisition of horses both intensified this movement and scattered them in diverse bands. About 1700 the Comanches separated themselves from the rest of the Western Shoshones and moved southeastward into the plains. Most of the Shoshones hunted in the open areas west and south of Yellowstone. But some, either through the conservatism of their culture or the lack of opportunity, did not acquire horses. They continued to

hunt and forage on foot in the mountains of Yellowstone, where there was little competition. A band of these people occupied the highlands until 1871, when they rejoined their kinsmen on the Wind River Reservation in west-central Wyoming. Because of the importance of mountain sheep in their diet, they had become known as “Sheepstealers.” Their occupation left no more mark on the land than did the occasional visits of Crows, Blackfeet, or other Shoshones. After they left and the tribes from the outside ceased to hunt in Yellowstone, there remained only the scattered ruins of the hearth sites and brush lodges that had once been their simple homes.

The undiscovered country

During the late 18th century those wandering heralds of civilization, the fur trappers, filtered into the upper Missouri country in search of a broad-tailed promise of fortune—the beaver. The early trappers and traders were mostly French Canadian, and the great tributary of the Missouri, the Yellowstone, first became known to white men by its French label, “Roche Jaune.” None of the earliest trappers, however, seem to have observed the thermal activity in the area that would some day become a national park, although they probably learned of some of its wonders from their Indian acquaintances.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition passed just north of Yellowstone in 1806. Though Indians told them of the great lake, they remained unaware of the area’s hot springs and geysers. While Lewis and Clark were exploring the Northwest, a trader appeared in St. Louis with an Indian map drawn on a buffalo hide. This rude sketch showed the region of the upper Yellowstone and indicated

the presence of what appeared to be “a volcano . . . on Yellow Stone River.” After his return to St. Louis, Clark interviewed an Indian who had been to the area and reported: “There is frequently heard a loud noise like Thunder, which makes the earth Tremble, they state that they seldom go there because their children cannot sleep—and Conceive it possessed of spirits, who were averse that men Should be near them.” But civilized men were not yet wholly ready to believe “a savage delineation,” preferring to withhold judgment until one of their own kind reported his observations.

In 1807 Manuel Lisa’s Missouri Fur Trading Company constructed Fort Raymond at the confluence of the Bighorn and Yellowstone Rivers as a center for trading with the Indians. To attract clients, Lisa sent John Colter on a harrowing 500-mile journey through untracked Indian country. A veteran of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Colter was a man born “for hardy indurance of fatigue, privation and perils.” Part of his route in 1807-8 is open to conjecture, but he is known to have skirted the northwest shore of Yellowstone Lake and crossed the Yellowstone River near Tower Falls, where he noted the presence of “Hot Spring Brimstone.” Although a thermal area near present-day Cody, Wyo., later became famous among trappers as “Colter’s Hell,” Colter is more celebrated as the first white man known to have entered Yellowstone. The privations of a trapper’s life and a narrow escape from the Blackfeet in 1808 prompted him to leave the mountains forever in 1810. But he was the pioneer, and for three decades a procession of beaver hunters followed in his footsteps.

Though most of the trappers who entered Yellowstone were Americans working for various companies or as free traders, some Canadians also visited the region in the early days. At least one party of Hudson’s Bay Company men left a cache of beaver traps within the park. By 1824 Yellow-



Joseph L. Meek



Jim Bridger's tall tales popularized the wonders of Yellowstone, but made them unbelievable.

stone seems to have been fairly well known to most trappers, judging by the casual note of one in his journal: "Saturday 24th—we crossed beyond the Boiling Fountains. The snow is knee deep." In 1827 a Philadelphia newspaper printed a letter from a trapper who described his experiences hunting furs and fighting Blackfeet in Yellowstone. This letter was the first published description of the region:

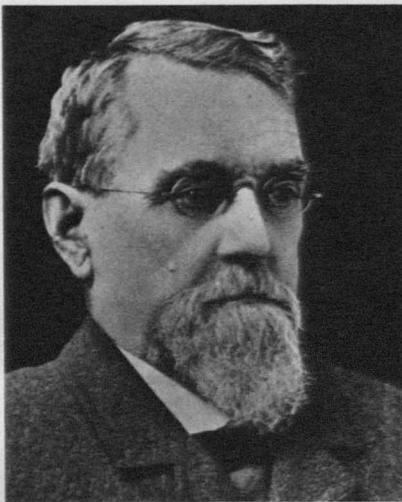
on the south borders of this lake is a number of hot and boiling springs some of water and others of most beautiful fine clay and resembles that of a mush pot and throws its particles to the immense height of from twenty to thirty feet in height. The clay is white and pink and water appear fathomless as it appears to be entirely hollow underneath. There is also a number of places where the pure sulphur is sent forth in abundance one of our men visited one of these whilst taking his recreation at an instan [sic] made his escape when an explosion took place resembling that of thunder. During our stay in that quarter I heard it every day. . . .

After 1826, American trappers apparently hunted within the future park every year. Joe Meek, one of the best known of the early beaver men, expressed the surprise of some of these early visitors: "behold! the whole country beyond was smoking with the vapor from boiling springs, and burning with gasses." Such reactions, however, gradually gave way to casual acceptance of the thermal activity.

Trappers had little for entertainment but talk; as a class they were the finest of storytellers. Verbal embellishment became a fine art as they related their experiences fighting Indians or visiting strange country. Perhaps the greatest of the yarn spinners was Jim Bridger. Though it is doubtful he told them all, tradition links his name with many of Yellowstone's tall tales.

In 1856 a Kansas City newspaper editor rejected as patent lies Bridger's lucid description of the Yellowstone wonders. Perhaps this sort of refusal to believe the truth about "the place where Hell bubbled up," as Bridger called Yellowstone, led him and other trappers to embellish their accounts with false detail. They related their visits to the petrified forest, carpeted with petrified grass, populated with petrified animals and containing even birds petrified in flight. They told of the shrinking qualities of Alum Creek, the banks of which were frequented by miniature animals. Fish caught in the cold water at the bottom of a curious spring were cooked passing through the hot water on top. Elk hunters bumped into a glass mountain. Such stories gave the features of Yellowstone the reputation of fantasies concocted by trappers. But the spread of this lore caused a few to wonder whether some fact might not lie behind the fancy.

By about 1840 the extirpation of the beaver and the popularity of the silk hat had combined to end the day of the trapper. For almost 20 years, Yellowstone, only rarely visited by white men, was left to the Indians. By the time of the Civil War, however, the relentless westward push of civilization and the burning memory of California gold drew to Yellowstone another herald of the frontier—the prospector. A rich strike was made in Montana in 1862, and the resultant stampede brought a horde of men to that territory. Despite often fatal discouragements from Indians, their lust for gold was such that they filtered into nearly every part of Yellowstone, but found not a sparkle of the magic metal. One enterprising gold seeker, a civil engineer and soldier of fortune named Walter W. deLacy, published in 1865 the first reasonably accurate map of the Yellowstone region. By the time the gold rush had died out in the late 1860's, the future national park had been thoroughly examined by prospectors. Although they were even greater liars than the mountain men, their tales of the wondrous land they



Walter W. deLacy

had seen planted a seed of curiosity in Montana that was to impel others to take a careful look for themselves.

The country discovered

Although Yellowstone had been thoroughly tracked by trappers and miners, in the view of the Nation at large it was really “discovered” when penetrated by formal expeditions originating in the settlements of an expanding America.

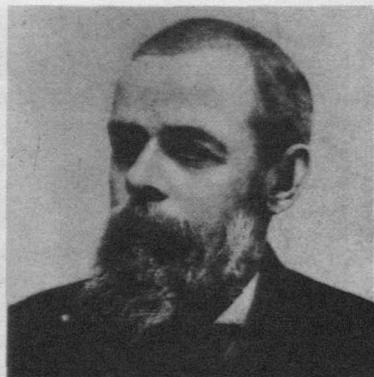
The first organized attempt to explore Yellowstone came in 1860. Capt. William F. Reynolds, a discerning Army engineer guided by Jim Bridger, led a military expedition that accomplished much but failed to penetrate the future park because of faulty scheduling and early snow. The Civil War preoccupied the Government during the next few years. During the late 1860’s, however, stories of the area’s wonders so excited many of Montana’s leading citizens and officials that several explorations were planned. But none actually got underway.

Indian trouble and lack of a military escort caused the abandonment of the last such expedition in the summer of 1869. Determined that they would not be deprived of a look at the wondrous region, three members of that would-be venture—David E. Folsom, Charles W. Cook, and William Peterson—decided to make the trek anyway. Folsom and Cook brought with them a sensitivity to nature endowed by a Quaker upbringing, while Peterson displayed the hardy spirit that came from years as a seafarer. All three, furthermore, had become experienced frontiersmen while prospecting for Montana gold. They acquired a store of provisions, armed themselves well, then set out on an enterprise about

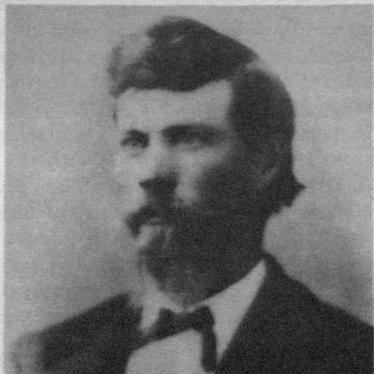
which they were warned by a friend: "It's the next thing to suicide."

That caution could not have been more wrong, for their journey took them into a natural wonderland where they met few Indians. From Bozeman, they traveled down the divide between the Gallatin and Yellowstone Rivers, eventually crossing to the Yellowstone and ascending that stream into the present park by way of Yankee Jim Canyon. They observed Tower Fall and nearby thermal features and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone—"this masterpiece of nature's handiwork"—then continued past the Mud Volcano to Yellowstone Lake. They pushed east to Mary Bay, then backtracked across the north shore to West Thumb. On their way home the explorers visited Shoshone Lake and the Lower and Midway Geyser Basins. The Folsom-Cook-Peterson exploration produced an updated version of DeLacy's 1865 map, an article in the *Western Monthly* magazine in Chicago, and a fever of excitement among some of Montana's leading citizens, who promptly determined to see for themselves the truth of the party's tales of "the beautiful places we had found fashioned by the practised hand of nature, that man had not desecrated."

By August 1870 a second expedition had been organized. Rumors of Indian trouble reduced the original 20 members to less than half that number. Among them were prominent government officials and financial leaders of Montana Territory, led by Surveyor-General Henry D. Washburn, politician and business promoter Nathaniel P. Langford, and Cornelius Hedges, a lawyer. Obtaining from Fort Ellis a military escort under an experienced soldier, Lt. Gustavus C. Doane, the explorers traced the general route of the 1869 party. They followed the river to the lake, passed around the eastern and southern sides, inspected the Upper, Midway, and Lower Geyser Basins, and paused at Madison Junction—the



David E. Folsom



Charles W. Cook, 1869.



William Peterson

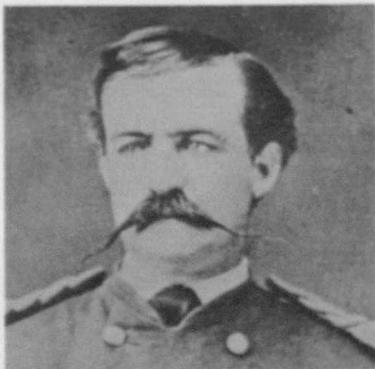
confluence of the Gibbon and Firehole Rivers—before returning to Montana. It was at this campsite that they, like their predecessors the year before, discussed their hopes that Yellowstone might be saved from exploitation.

Some of the members of the 1870 expedition lacked extensive experience as frontiersmen, and their wilderness education came hard. At times they went hungry because, according to Doane, “our party kept up such a racket of yelling and firing as to drive off all game for miles ahead of us.” One of their number, Truman Everts, separated himself from the rest of the party and, unable to subsist in a bounteous land, nearly starved to death before he was rescued 37 days later. But these problems were understandable. By the end of the expedition they had demonstrated their backwoods ability. The party had climbed several peaks, made numerous side trips, descended into the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and attempted measurements and analyses of several of the prominent natural features. They had shown that ordinary men, as well as hardened frontiersmen, could venture into the wilderness of Yellowstone.

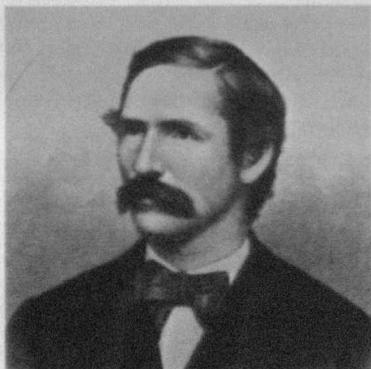
Far more important, however, was their enchantment and wonder at what they had seen and their success in publicizing these feelings. As Hedges later recalled, “I think a more confirmed set of sceptics never went out into the wilderness than those who composed our party, and never was a party more completely surprised and captivated with the wonders of nature.” Their reports stirred intense interest in Montana and attracted national attention. Members of the expedition wrote articles for several newspapers and *Scribner's Monthly* magazine. Langford made a speaking tour in the East. Doane's official report was accepted and printed by the Congress. All this publicity resulted in a congressional appropriation for an official exploration of Yellowstone—the Hayden Expedition.



Henry D. Washburn, 1869.



Lt. Gustavus C. Doane

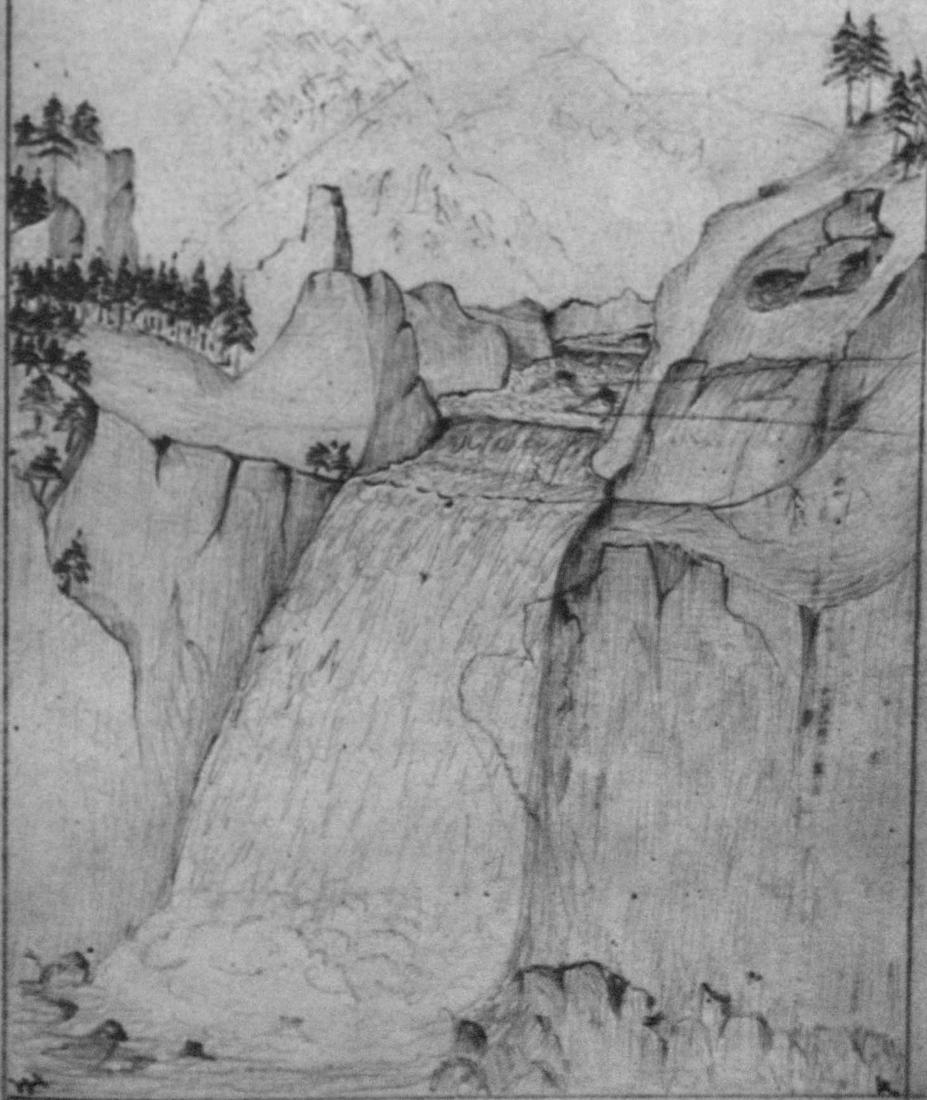


Cornelius Hedges



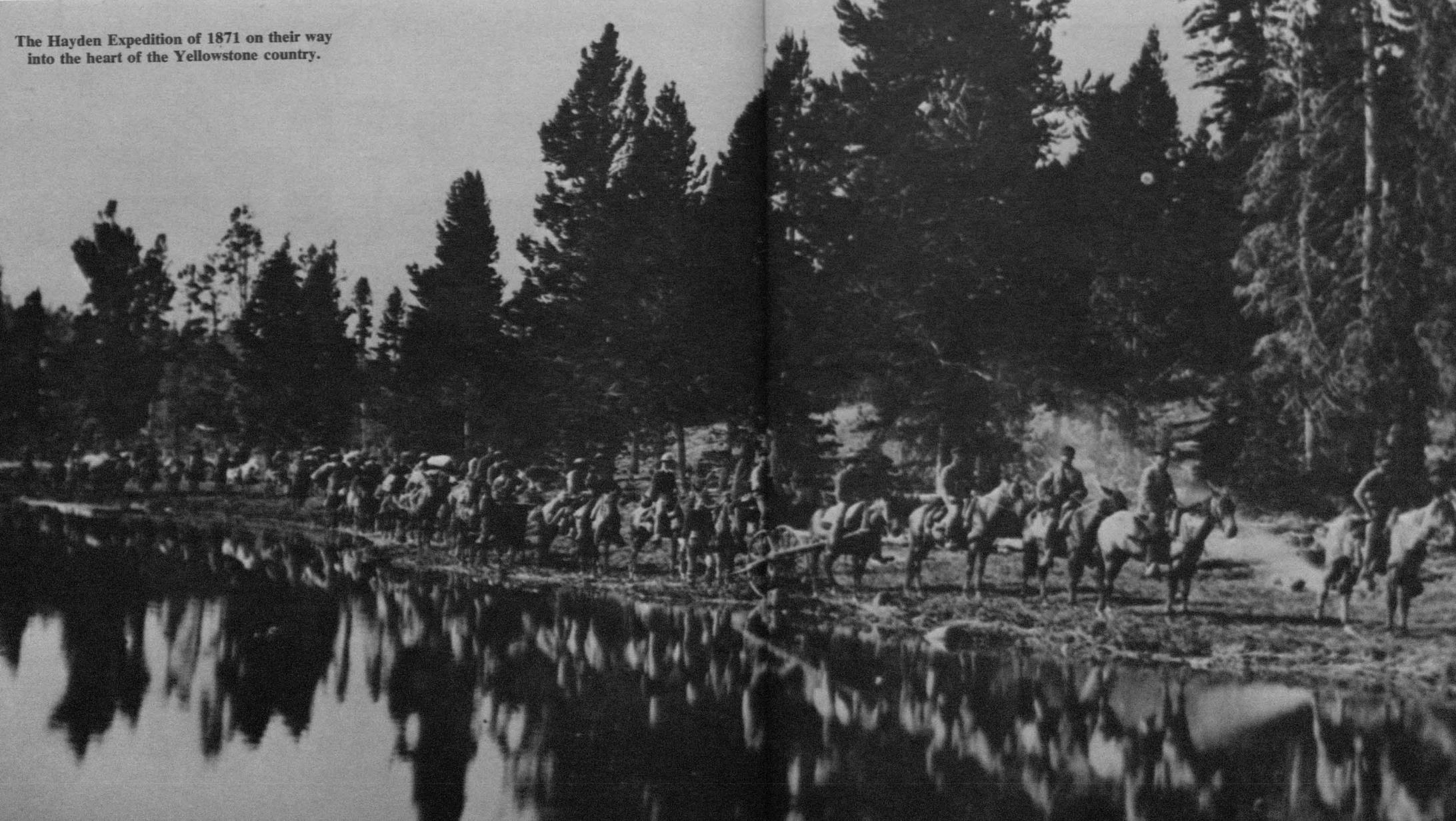
Truman C. Everts

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**Walter Trumbull's sketch of the Upper Falls
of the Yellowstone, made on the 1870 expedition.**



Walter Turnbull

The Hayden Expedition of 1871 on their way
into the heart of the Yellowstone country.

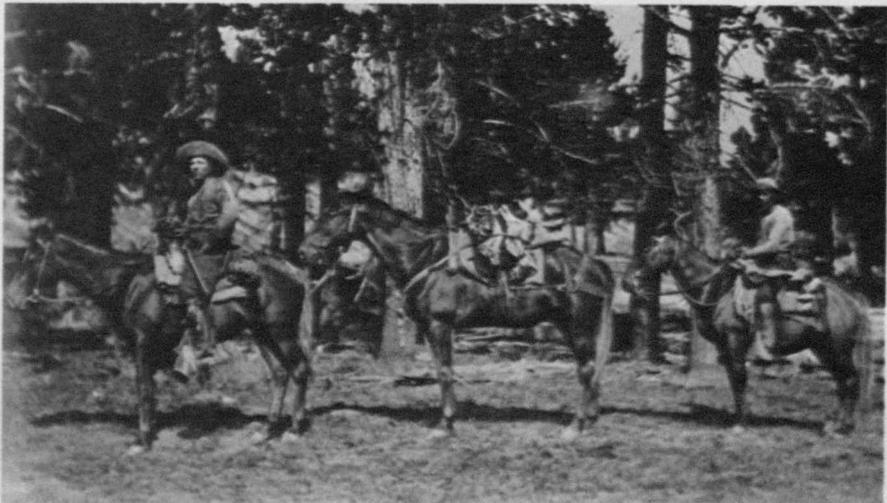


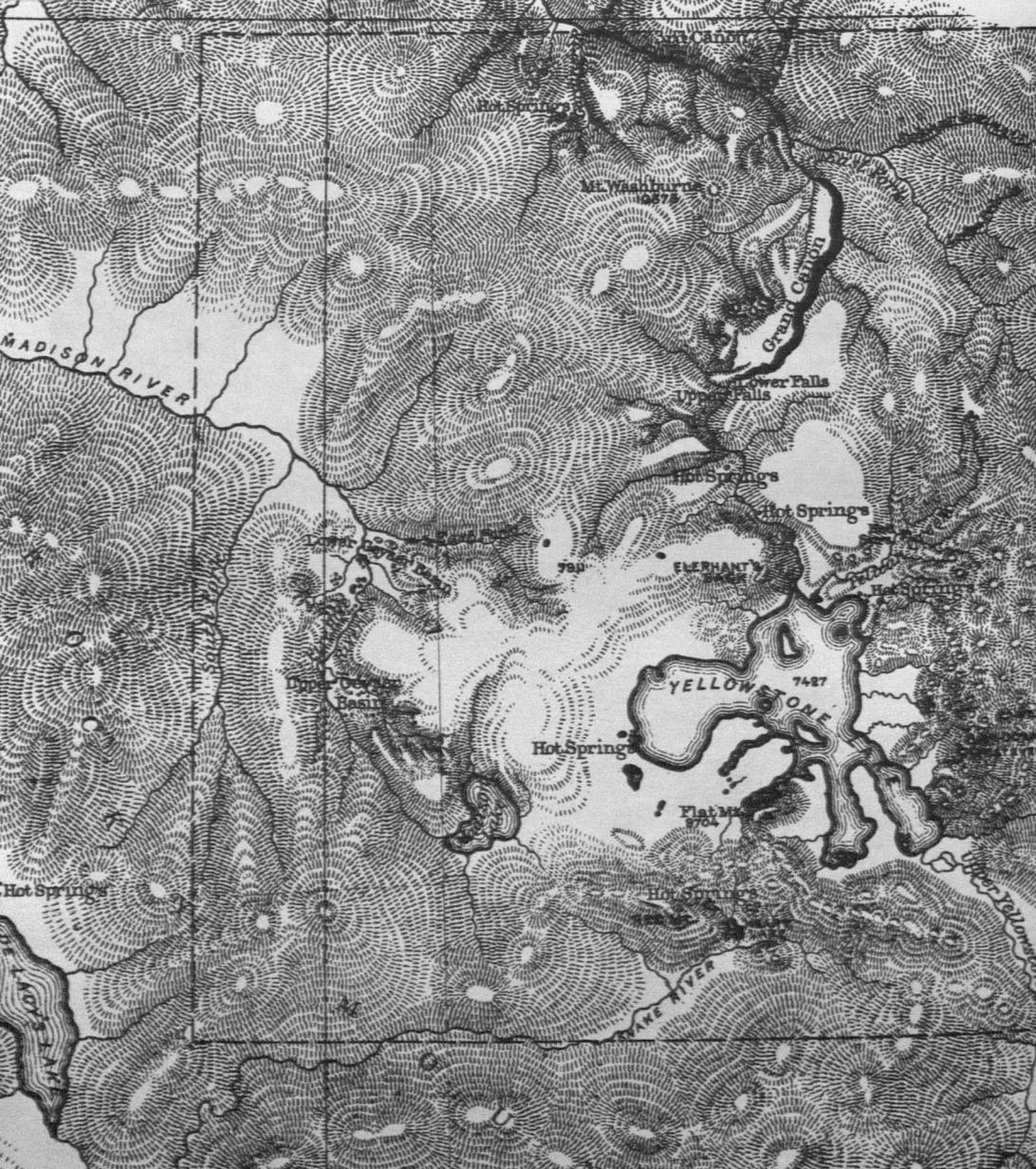


"Annie," the first boat on Yellowstone Lake, was built and launched during the 1871 expedition.

**Jackson's self-portrait.
He was the official photographer for
both the 1871 and 1872 expeditions.**

Hunters with the 1871 expedition
bring in a day's kill.





Snake River

Madison

Mt. Washburne
8974

Grand Canyon

MADISON RIVER

Upper Falls
Lower Falls

Hot Springs

Hot Springs

Lower Falls
Upper Falls

790

Elephant's Head

Hot Springs

Snake River

Deep Ocean Basin

YELLOWSTONE
7427

Hot Spring

Flat Mt.
8704

Hot Springs

Hot Springs

Snake River

Yellowstone River



Ferdinand V. Hayden (left), who led the 1871 exploration of Yellowstone, talks with his assistant Walter Paris.

← **After the 1871 expedition, Hayden published this map of the Yellowstone region.**

Ferdinand V. Hayden, physician turned geologist, energetic explorer and accomplished naturalist, head of the U.S. Geological Survey of the Territories, had been with Reynolds in 1860. The failure of that expedition to penetrate Yellowstone had stimulated his desire to investigate the region. Aside from being a leading scientific investigator of the wilderness, he was an influential publicist of the scientific wonders, scenic beauty, and economic potential of the American West. He saw the interest stirred by the Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition as an opportunity to reveal Yellowstone in an orderly and scientific manner. Drawing on the support of the railroad interests—always proponents of Western exploration and development—and favorable public reaction to the reports of the 1870 expedition, Hayden secured an appropriation for a scientific survey of Yellowstone. This expedition was supplemented by a simultaneous survey by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The dual exploration in the late summer of 1871 was more thorough than that of 1870, and it brought back scientific corroboration of earlier tales of thermal activity. Although a lot of the material vanished in the Chicago fire of 1871, the expedition gave the world a much improved map of Yellowstone and, in the excellent photographs by William Henry Jackson and the artistry of Henry W. Elliott and Thomas Moran, visual proof of Yellowstone's unique curiosities. The expedition's reports excited the scientific community and aroused intense national interest in this previously mysterious region.

Members of all three expeditions from 1869 to 1871 were overwhelmed by what they had seen. The singular features of the area evoked similar reactions in all the explorers. This was the day of the "robber barons" and of rapacious exploitation of the public domain. It was also a time of dynamic national expansion, when the Nation conceived its mission to be the taming and

peopling of the wilderness. But most of the region's explorers sensed that division and exploitation, through homesteading or other development, were not proper for Yellowstone. Its natural curiosities impressed them as being so valuable that the area should be reserved for all to see. Their crowning achievement was that they persuaded others to their view and helped to save Yellowstone from private development.

Hayden, assisted by members of the Washburn party and other interested persons, promoted a park bill in Washington in late 1871 and early 1872. Working earnestly, the sponsors drew upon the precedent of the Yosemite Act of 1864, which reserved Yosemite Valley from settlement and entrusted it to the care of the State of California, and the persuasive magic of Jackson's photographs, Moran's paintings, and Elliott's sketches. To permanently close to settlement such an expanse of the public domain would be a departure from the established policy of transferring public lands to private ownership. But the proposed park encompassing the wonders of Yellowstone had caught the imagination of both the public and the Congress. After some discussion but surprisingly little opposition, the measure passed both houses of Congress, and on March 1, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed it into law. Yellowstone would be forever preserved from private greed and "dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." The world's first national park was born.

"The wild romantic scenery"

There is something about Yellowstone that has frequently brought out the poet, or would-be

poet, in its visitors. Men who ordinarily would not bother to remark on their surroundings have in Yellowstone felt compelled to draft prose about the wonders they saw around them. This impulse was particularly keen in those who saw Yellowstone before the advance of civilization.

Little is known of the Indians' regard for Yellowstone's natural features during the thousands of years they lived there. They did not leave their impressions in written form for the reflection of later generations.

But the fur trappers did. Several of them kept journals or related their experiences in letters and reminiscences. They used their observations to spin entertaining yarns, and they sometimes compared the surrounding beauty with what they knew back home. Yet they generally resisted the "womanly emotions" of praising scenery, and most of them were reluctant to reflect on nature's charms. A Maine farm boy named Osborne Russell, who went West in the 1830's to trap, chided his companions for their insensitivity:

My comrades were men who never troubled themselves about vain and frivolous notions as they called them; with them every country was pretty when there was weather and as to beauty of nature or arts, it was all a "humbug" as one of them . . . often expressed it.

What Russell saw in Yellowstone affected him deeply. He had reverent memories of one place in particular, a "Secluded Valley," located on the Lamar River near the mouth of Soda Butte Creek.

There is something in the wild romantic scenery of this valley which I cannot . . . describe; but the impressions made upon 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 . . . for my own part

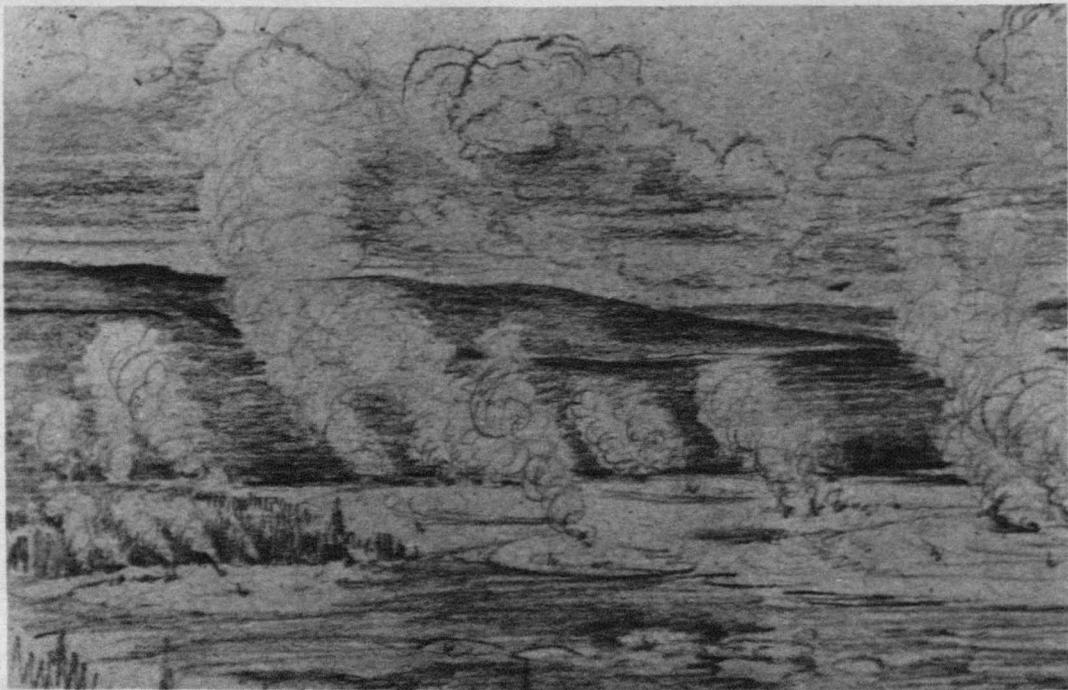
I almost wished I could spend the remainder of my days in a place like this where happiness and contentment seemed to reign in wild romantic splendor.

Thermal features drew the most frequent notice from Yellowstone's early visitors. Nathaniel Langford summarized the mystery and disbelief many people feel while observing them:

General Washburn and I again visited the mud vulcano [sic] to-day. I especially desired to see it again for the one especial purpose, among others of a general nature, of assuring myself that the notes made in my diary a few days ago are not exaggerated. No! they are not! The sensations inspired in me to-day, on again witnessing its convulsions . . . were those of mingled dread and wonder. At war with all former experience it was so novel, so unnaturally natural, that I feel while now writing and thinking of it, as if my own senses might have deceived me with a mere figment of the imagination.

But more often the hot springs, mud pots, fumaroles, and geysers seemed to suppress the poet and draw forth instead the amateur scientist. Most early accounts centered on attempts at measurement or analysis, or on speculations about the mechanisms of such features. For many of these novice geologists, the surprises at Yellowstone did not always come in the form of geysers or boiling springs. A. Bart Henderson, a prospector, was walking down the Yellowstone River in 1867, near the Upper Falls, when he was very much surprised to see the water disappear from sight. *I walked out on a rock & made two steps at the same time, one forward, the other backward, for I had unawares as it were, looked into the depth or bowels of the earth, into which the Yellow[stone] plunged as if to cool the infernal region that lay under all this*

**Henry Elliott's sketch of the Lower Geyser Basin
was part of the persuasive evidence produced by
the Hayden survey.**





**Artist Thomas Moran, climbing on
Mammoth Hot Spring, 1871.**

→
**Thomas Moran's field sketches of Tower
Fall (left) and the hot springs at Mammoth.**



wonderful country of lava & boiling springs. The water fell several feet, struck a reef of rock that projected further than the main rock above. This reef caused the water to fall the remainder of the way in spray.

Henderson recovered his analytical composure and concluded, "We judged the falls to be 80 or 90 feet high, perhaps higher."

Because wildlife was plentiful everywhere in the West in the 19th century, the abundant wildlife of Yellowstone seldom drew the attention of early visitors, except when they referred to hunting the "wild game." Occasionally a diary registered that some physical feature had been endowed with the name of an animal. Prospector John C. Davis shot at what he thought was a flock of flying geese in 1864. But after a difficult swim to retrieve his prey, he decided that it was too strange to eat, and hung it in a tree. From that small incident Pelican Creek acquired its name.

Sometimes the wildlife forced their attentions on visitors. Henderson prospected in Yellowstone again in 1870. He christened Buffalo Flat because "we found thousands of buffalo quietly grazing." But the animals were evidently not flattered, for one night, "Buffalo bull run thro the tent, while all hands were in bed." As Henderson's party continued their journey, another bull attacked their horses, nearly destroying their supplies. Sometime later, the group "met an old she bear & three cubs. After a severe fight killed the whole outfit, while a short distance further on we was attacked by an old boar bear. We soon killed him. He proved to be the largest ever killed in the mountains, weighing 960 pounds." Two days later, Henderson "was chased by an old she bear . . . Climb[ed] a tree & killed her under the tree."

But few encounters with wildlife were so unpleasant. Most travelers recognized that the

animals of Yellowstone were an integral part of the environment. To David Folsom the voices of the animals were but the voice of nature, reminding men of their smallness in the natural world and of their aloneness in a strange country:

the wolf scents us afar and the mournful cadence of his howl adds to our sense of solitude. The roar of the mountain lion awakens the sleeping echoes of the adjacent cliffs and we hear the elk whistling in every direction . . . Even the horses . . . stop grazing and raise their heads to listen, and then hover around our campfire as if their safety lay in our companionship.

The explorers of 1869, 1870, and 1871, writing for a wide audience, did their best to remain detached and to describe objectively what they had seen. But their prose sometimes became impassioned. Even the thermal features evoked poetic word pictures. Charles Cook was startled by his first view of Great Fountain Geyser:

Our attention was at once attracted by water and steam escaping, or being thrown up from an opening . . . Soon this geyser was in full play. The setting sun shining into the spray and steam drifting toward the mountains, gave it the appearance of burnished gold, a wonderful sight. We could not contain our enthusiasm; with one accord we all took off our hats and yelled with all our might.

Folsom recalled his last look at Yellowstone Lake this way:

nestled among the forest-crowned hills which bounded our vision, lay this inland sea, its crystal waves dancing and sparkling in the sunlight as if laughing with joy for their wild freedom. It is a scene of transcendent beauty which has been viewed by few white men, and we felt glad to have looked upon it before its primeval solitude should be broken by the



Two early explorers examine Lone Star Geyser.



W. H. Jackson's photographs of Grotto Geyser (left) and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, next page, were among the evidence that prompted Congress to establish the national park.



crowds of pleasure seekers which at no distant day will throng its shores.

Even the scientifically minded professional soldier, Gustavus Doane, departed from an objective recital to exclaim that the view from Mount Washburn was really "beyond all adequate description." Speaking of Tower Falls, Doane became cautiously lyrical:

Nothing can be more chastely beautiful than this lovely cascade, hidden away in the dim light of overshadowing rocks and woods, its very voice hushed to a low murmur unheard at the distance of a few hundred yards. Thousands might pass by within a half mile and not dream of its existence, but once seen, it passes to the list of most pleasant memories.

The lieutenant dropped his reserve altogether when he sang the praises of the Upper and Lower Falls in the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone:

Both these cataracts deserve to be ranked among the great waterfalls of the continent. No adequate standard of comparison between such objects, either in beauty or grandeur, can well be obtained. Every great cascade has a language and an idea peculiarly its own, embodied, as it were, in the flow of its waters So the Upper Falls of the Yellowstone may be said to embody the idea of "Momentum," and the Lower Fall of "Gravitation." In scenic beauty the upper cataract far excels the lower; it has life, animation, while the lower one simply follows its channel; both however are eclipsed as it were by the singular wonders of the mighty cañon below.

The Hayden expeditions of 1871 and 1872 were scientific ventures, composed of men of critical disposition who were prepared to take a circumspect, unromantic view of all they encountered in their path. Yet even they were

moved to comment on the beauty of Yellowstone. Henry Gannett, one of Hayden's later associates, wrote:

In one essential respect the scenery of the Yellowstone Park differs from that of nearly all other parts of the Cordilleras, in possessing the element of beauty, in presenting to the eye rounded forms, and soft, bright, gay coloring.

Nor could the scholarly Hayden completely restrict himself to scientific explanations of Yellowstone's charms. Mammoth Hot Springs, he thought, "alone surpassed all the descriptions which had been given by former travelers." When he came to the Grand Canyon and the falls, he confessed that mere description was inadequate, that "it is only through the eye that the mind can gather anything like an adequate conception of them":

no language can do justice to the wonderful grandeur and beauty of the cañon below the Lower Falls; the very nearly vertical walls, slightly sloping down to the water's edge on either side, so that from the summit the river appears like a thread of silver foaming over its rocky bottom; the variegated colors of the sides, yellow, red, brown, white, all intermixed and shading into each other; the Gothic columns of every form standing out from the sides of the walls with greater variety and more striking colors than ever adorned a work of human art. The margins of the cañon on either side are beautifully fringed with pines. In some places the walls of the cañon are composed of massive basalt, so separated by the jointage as to look like irregular mason-work going to decay

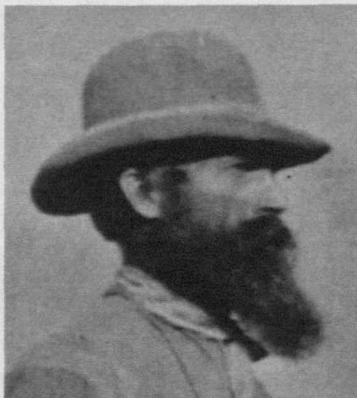
Standing near the margin of the Lower Falls, and looking down the cañon, which looks like an immense chasm or cleft in the basalt, with its sides 1,200 to 1,500 feet high, and decorated with the most brilliant colors that the human

eye ever saw, with the rocks weathered into an almost unlimited variety of forms, with here and there a pine sending its roots into the clefts on the sides as if struggling with a sort of uncertain success to maintain an existence—the whole presents a picture that it would be difficult to surpass in nature. Mr. Thomas Moran, a celebrated artist, and noted for his skill as a colorist, exclaimed with a kind of regretful enthusiasm that these beautiful tints were beyond the reach of human art.

Such were the men, from fur trappers to geologists, who preceded the civilized world into Yellowstone, and such were the feelings that nature produced in them. It was upon a stage thus set that Yellowstone entered into its greatest period—that of a wilderness preserved.

**“To
conserve
the scenery
and the
objects therein”**

The Yellowstone Park Act was essentially directed at preventing private exploitation; it contained few positive measures for administering the preserve. The park's promoters envisioned that it would exist at no expense to the Government. The costs of maintenance and administration were to be borne by fees charged concessioners, who would provide the facilities that the public needed. For a long time, therefore, Yellowstone enjoyed little protection from pillagers. It took almost half a century of trial and error to develop a practical approach to administration and to discover what a “national park” should be.



Nathaniel P. Langford, first superintendent of the park, 1872.