

Thursday September 8

We had a very leisurely breakfast at a café in West Yellowstone and an equally leisurely stroll along a few blocks of the town. We then set off for our first full day in Yellowstone Park.



***West Yellowstone Post
Office where Zena
mailed her first post-
cards home—using the
drive-through box!***

From the West Entrance it is a 14 mile stretch to Madison Junction and the point from which all our routes through the Park would begin for the four days that we are here. It is a very pleasant drive primarily alongside the Madison River and passes through some open grassland which is perfect for spotting Elk and Bison. Indeed, our first stop was along this road because we spotted a small herd of Elk in the far distance. They were too distant for photographs but with the aid of binoculars we could clearly see several females and one grand stag.

Once past Madison, we turned off the main road along a 3 mile loop road (Firehole Canyon Drive) which took us along a



***Firehole
Canyon***

***Still friends after
almost a week!***

ridge over a very fast flowing river and past a 40 feet high waterfall. There is also a natural warm water pool along this stretch that is used for swimming but today the water level was too high for bathing. We didn't have our swimming costumes with us anyway – but Keith seemed quite prepared to skinny dip if allowed, so we all breathed a sigh of relief when we saw the “No Bathing” sign!





Our first close encounter with a wild beast.

After this very pleasant short drive we returned to the main road towards Old Faithful but soon turned off again on Fountain Flat Drive, a one mile paved road which led to several walking and biking trails. From the car park at the end of the road we took a short walk to cross Fairy Creek which was a gently flowing stream in the middle of a wide grassy area. It was here that we spotted our

first bison. We had seen him (or his friend) from a distance on the walk towards the stream but now we had an excellent view of him just across the water. He was close enough for us to get some hazy photographs but, once again, the binoculars provided a good look at this large beast.



After returning to the main road for another couple of miles we stopped once again at the first of the thermal areas we would visit during the day. This one was called Fountain Paint Pot and had a ½ mile boardwalk around a variety of hydrothermal features. As the brochure (available at the start of the trail) said, “no two

features are exactly alike, yet they can be grouped into those with a lot of water (hot springs and geysers) and those with limited water (mud pots and fumaroles)”. And we did in fact see many examples of each of these and every one was different. The runoff channels from the water features were bordered by deposits of many different colors as a result, not of mineral deposits as one might expect, but rather from heat-loving microorganisms such as bacteria, called thermophiles. Colors here were mainly browns, orange, reds and greens but vary as a result of water temperature and season and sunlight changes. In addition to these brighter colors, the majority of the build-up around geysers and hot springs was a gray-white color and was silica, the major component of rhyolite, the primary volcanic rock in Yellowstone.



As we walked around the area we saw mud pots (relatively dry at this time of the year), heard the hiss and saw the steam of fumaroles and, of course, saw a number of geysers. We were extremely fortunate to be present for the eruption of Fountain Geyser which is said to be one of the most impressive in the Park. Certainly we were impressed – and perhaps a little startled – by the 30 feet high fountain only about 20 feet from where we were standing as it continued its show for over 15 minutes.



It appeared that nothing could top that experience but such is the variety of features in Yellowstone Park that every turn provided a spectacular vista, a beautiful lake or stream, or another jet of steam bursting high into the clear blue sky. Indeed, even the smallest features – the green lichen clinging to a lump of lava as the start of the rebirth of plant growth



which eventually would cover the area, the colorful flowers and short grasses blooming inches away from a near-boiling water hole, and the butterflies, dragonflies and other insects flying inches above a stream – provide as much interest and beauty as the larger and more spectacular geology of this enormous caldera.



After visiting Fountain Paint Pot it was now almost 3 pm so we decided it was time for a break for some sustenance so we drove directly to the Old Faithful Lodge for a bakery snack and coffee/tea and watched another (less spectacular than last evening) eruption of the famous geyser.

In the final two hours of our day out we took another loop road and sat for a while near the Great Fountain Geyser. The information board indicated possible activity in the next four hours but we saw little happening in the 30 minutes we spent sitting in anticipation. However we did see two eruptions of another geyser – each over 20 feet high – which had been erupting for over 100 years as indicated by the very high mound of deposits at its base.



Nothing doing at Great Fountain Geyser (top left) but its near neighbor was still going strong after 100 years!

Our final stop was at Firehole and Hot Lakes on this loop road. Here we saw jet black deposits (manganese based) and a number of small geysers that were essentially in a constant state of eruption. Once again, the runoff channels provided not only some fast flowing streams but many colored deposits and islands of green growth in what would appear to be totally inhospitable surroundings.



On the return to West Yellowstone we had a close encounter with a bison which crossed the road in front of us. Our encounter was not as close as that of another park visitor, however, who was trying to get a close-up photograph when the bison looked up and started to charge her. Fortunately, he soon lost interest and returned to his dinner but it must have been a scary moment for the photographer – it certainly was for us as our vehicle was next in line for the charge had it continued!



In all, it was a very interesting, informative and most of all spectacular seven hours of sightseeing in this one hydrothermal region of the Park. The day had remained mostly sunny and mild (mid-seventies) to provide perfect conditions and – if we didn't know better – we would say that we had "seen" Yellowstone and there was nothing more to do for the next three days. However.....

Tonight we ate at a Spanish restaurant just across the street from the hotel at which each couple shared 2-3 dishes in tapas style. Together with a beer or two (Keith) and a bottle of wine, the meal was very enjoyable.

Interesting Facts about Yellowstone National Park

Yellowstone National Park is the flagship of the National Park Service and a favorite to millions of visitors each year. The park is a major destination for all members of the family. By driving the grand loop road, visitors can view the park from the comfort of their vehicle and also take a rest at one of the many roadside picnic areas. For the active visitor, the park has thousands of miles of trails from day hikes to backcountry explorations. The main attractions are all located on the grand loop road and here are some of the top reasons to visit the Park.

Yellowstone National Park facts:

- * World's First National Park**
- * 2,219,789 acres (Larger than Rhode Island and Delaware combined)**
- * Wildlife - 7 species of ungulates (bison, moose, elk, pronghorn), 2 species of bear and 67 other mammals, 322 species of birds, 16 species of fish and of course the gray wolf.**
- * Plants - There are over 1,100 species of native plants, more than 200 species of exotic plants and over 400 species of thermophiles.**
- * Geology - The Park is home to one of the world's largest calderas with over 10,000 thermal features and more than 300 geysers. It has one of the world's largest petrified forests. It has over 290 waterfalls with the 308' Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River as its showpiece.**
- * Yellowstone Lake is the largest (132 sq. mi.) high altitude (7,732') lake in North America.**
- * 9 visitor centers and 12 campgrounds (over 2,000 campsites)**

Friday September 9

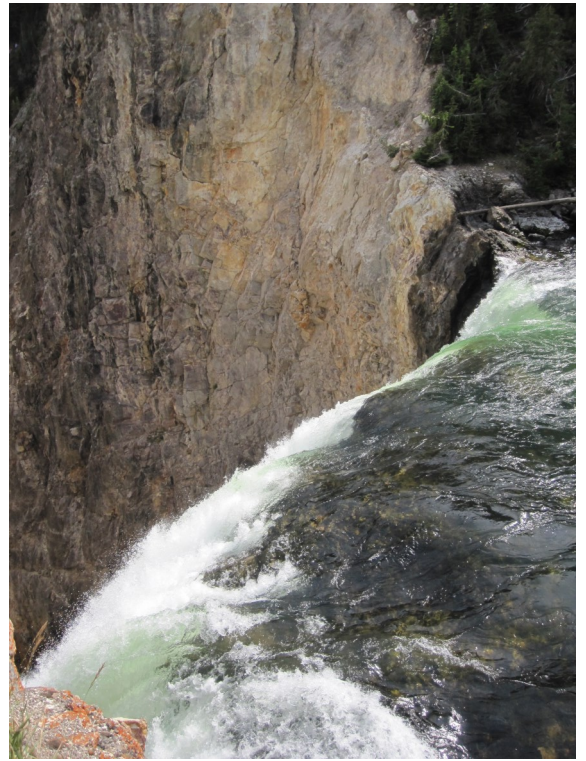
We once again dined in town for breakfast and left for the Park around 10:30. Today our destination was The Grand Canyon of Yellowstone, a spectacular gorge carved by the Yellowstone River towards the eastern edge of the Park. On the way we saw bison and (we believe) a gray wolf as well as a couple of hot springs alongside the road. At Canyon Village we visited the Visitor Center, gift shop and ice cream parlor before driving a short distance to the North Rim road alongside the canyon.

At the first overlook we saw the magnificent lower falls, a 380 feet drop which produced a huge spray which in turn provided us not only with a fantastic view but also a colorful rainbow. Three of us chose to take the ½ mile walk down to the brink of the falls (a vertical drop of 600 feet) to an overlook that was just a few feet above the rapidly flowing water as it raced over the edge of the drop.

The canyon at this point was probably about 1000 feet deep and the very steeply sloping sides contained many different colors of rocks, shale and cliff face – orange, red, white, pink and brown to name a few. Clinging to this precipitous drop were a number of fir trees to add a touch of green to the picture. We saw an osprey which visited a nest briefly (the young were long gone) before settling on a branch of a tree across the ravine.



The Lower Falls

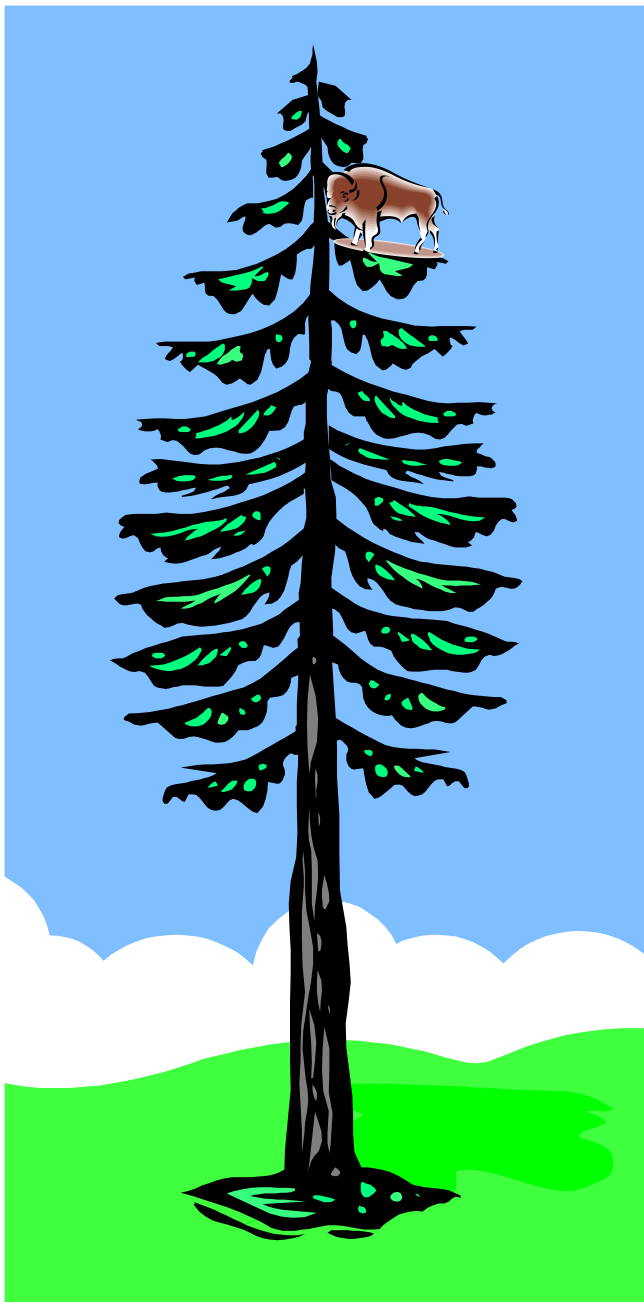


Today, as mentioned, we were watching an osprey in the Canyon. Keith (our keen-eyed bird watcher who had him covered with the binoculars) was trying to identify for us the exact branch of a specific lone fir tree on which the bird had settled. As often happens when a group gathers with binoculars and cameras pointed in one direction, another park visitor will join the group and ask questions to determine what all the fuss is about. In this case, a lady who had overheard us but clearly had joined the story a little late asked quite seriously "Is it a bison?" Zena politely (and with a straight face) set our new companion straight but the image of a bison perched on the end of a tree was now firmly etched in our minds.

On another occasion, as we watched a bison cross the road in front of our car, Zena herself presented us with another lovely picture as she suggested that perhaps the gritted surface of the road felt good to the bison as a change from the usual grass, and maybe in fact was a little therapeutic for his feet and filed away a few rough edges.

Add to these two pictures Keith's fascination with animal footprints and droppings – many of which were seen in and around the thermal areas – stir in the child-like imaginations of four adults and you have the makings of a story that we shall simply call

"A Special Day"



Mrs. Bison was awakened by the sun streaming through the branches of a neighboring tree and opened her eyes to another beautiful summer morning. She particularly liked this tree because it caught the morning sun and was cooler in the evenings when she liked to relax overlooking the grassy meadow below.

Mr. Bison had been long gone, having left for work before dawn to take up his post in the nearby grasses in time for the first of the human tourists who would be pouring into the Park for another day of sightseeing. He often wondered why it was the bison's lot to be available for the binoculars and clicking cameras throughout the day while the elk and moose seemed to be able to elude this part of the job and came close to the roads only when they felt it appropriate. As for Mr. Bear; well, he might allow himself to be seen once or twice a week – and then mostly it was a fleeting glance as he snatched a few more berries high on the mountain side. However, acknowledged Mr. Bison, his wasn't a bad job. He could spend most of the day strolling gently as he ate, or sit for a while in a dried up area and flick dirt over his back as a cooling pleasure for him and a little added amusement for the tourists. And if things became really boring he might brush heavily against a car or fake a charge at one of the camera clicking tourists who ventured a little too close to his territory.

Mrs. Bison would often accompany her husband on his daily trek but on this special occasion she had stayed in bed for an extra couple of hours before beginning her day. Now she quickly straightened the branches covering her bed and skillfully climbed down the main trunk to the ground. She grazed on grasses and a few twigs as she set out and, as she caught sight of herself mirrored in a small pond, she thought that her thick coat around her shoulders and her grooming in general were quite respectable for a mature bison. She realized, however, that she would not only look better but would feel much more attractive once her appointments of the day were complete.

Mrs. Bison headed straight for the stretch of road that she

knew would be quietest at this time in the morning. It wasn't that she minded seeing the human beings or was upset by the ubiquitous camera but she preferred a less well traveled section so that she could spend as much time as necessary without continually having to worry about the traffic. This morning it was perfect; a neighbor of hers had attracted a lot of attention and was holding up what little traffic there was so Mrs. Bison could paw away with impunity at the rough surface of the paved road.

It really felt good to get the rough edges of her nails trimmed and she was sure that it not only made her feet look and feel better but was equally convinced that it provided good exercise for her aging legs. After 15 minutes of uninterrupted pedicure she was ready to move on to the thermal area for what she considered the ultimate in luxury and pampering of this her special day.

The first of two major steps in this spa treatment was to tread lightly on to the white, powdery area around the many small geysers and hot springs. She neither knew nor cared whether this light abrasive was silica from volcanic rhyolite or calcium carbonate from limestone. All she cared about was the fact that the heat softened her nails and the powder polished them to a silky smooth finish which made her feel ten years younger and put an extra spring in her step. She never ventured too close to the clear blue springs of course because this water was far too warm for her delicate feet. Winter time was when she and Mr. Bison took advantage of that and came together for a warming bathe in January or February when the snow was thick on the ground and the spring provided some much needed relief from the bitter cold of their winter home.

After twenty minutes of this luxury it was time for the final "piece de resistance" that made this such a special day. It was time to choose the color of polish that would decorate her nails for the next two months or so and which she thought would be attractive to Mr. Bison. But there were so many choices. The browns and oranges of the 160 degree loving thermophiles were always nice but today she felt that a lighter tone might be more in keeping with the season. Further down the runoffs from the very hot springs were some very attractive pinks and a lovely greenish yellow that many of the younger bison seemed to think was the "in color" this year.



After a good deal of deliberation and some sampling, she finally settled on a rich rose pink that appeared almost as a fruity red in certain lights. This would make a change from the deeper orange that she had selected on the last visit, without going too far and getting something that she felt was too young for her age. The process of coating the nails took quite a while but just standing with her feet in this luke warm, gently flowing stream was not only an integral part of the process but also a quite relaxing way to finish the pedicure.

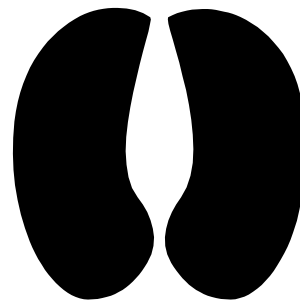
As she stood there and gazed across the cool waters of the lake, she thought of Mr. Bison as he would be finishing his shift and wondered if he had had a good day. Had he eaten well but saved enough room for the meal she hoped they would share when they both got home? Had he simply stood his ground when a brazen tourist came a little too close or had he felt compelled to make a dash toward the camera and perhaps nudged the transgressor? She knew that he didn't wish harm on anyone

but it sometimes got just a little too much for him and he had difficulty controlling his temper.

Had the elk and moose done their fair share of the day's work or had they spent most of the time across the river or hiding in the willows? Mr. and Mrs. Bison acknowledged that theirs was a supporting role to these stars of the Park but wished sometimes that they wouldn't act so much like prima donnas. As for Mr. Bear, they both knew that he would probably not have made even a token appearance and would have disappointed another large group of tourists yet again.

Now her nails were finished and it was time to leave the warmth of the hot springs area and start back home. She chose her path carefully across the meadow, avoiding small rocks and tree roots so as not to blemish the results that had taken most of the day to achieve. But soon she was in the wooded area and near her tree-top home and was looking forward to showing off her beautiful new nails to Mr. Bison.

As she carefully climbed the trunk of their fir tree with some special grasses she had picked up to surprise Mr. Bison, she spotted him strolling home looking a little weary after his long day. She knew, however, that his favorite dinner would soon wash away the tiredness and she certainly hoped that he would be as pleased as she was with her new, younger look. If so – and she was sure it would be – then this would make her special day very special indeed.



The canyon face also has a number of hot springs and fumaroles but it was much later in the day before Keith spotted the first of these – after which we then saw several areas with puffs of smoke emanating from what appeared to be solid rock.

We spent several hours on this north rim drive, stopping at each lookout to view the canyon, the river and the falls. Each stop seemed to provide not only a different angle on the canyon and river but a more spectacular view than the last. Obviously this is neither the Grand Canyon of Arizona nor the magnificent canyons of Utah, but it had elements of each and, in its own way, was equally impressive and certainly very beautiful.



After a coffee and snack stop back in Canyon Village we continued our drive, this time along the south rim of the canyon. This provided some excellent long shots of the river and the lower falls as well as another perspective on the size and scale of the canyon. Once again it was difficult to stop clicking the camera as each view seemed better than the last.



On our drive back to West Yellowstone we saw several more bison and a female moose. The moose was on the opposite side of the Madison River to our position but we were close enough to get reasonable photographs and had an excellent view of this large beast with the aid of binoculars.



We arrived back in West Yellowstone shortly after 6 pm and relaxed for a couple of hours before walking to dinner at Sydney's Mountain Grill. It was slightly more upscale than the usual West Yellowstone restaurant (table cloths and cloth napkins) but still quite rustic. The food was good, however, and we enjoyed our two hour chat to end the day.

Saturday September 10

After breakfast at our usual place we drove once again into the Park and this time headed to the north end with our ultimate destination being the Mammoth Hot Springs. We drove via Madison and Norris and then directly north on which stretch we saw a few fumaroles and springs as well as some grand vistas across meadows and towards the 10,000 feet peaks to the west. We made our first stop at Sheepeater Cliff to look at the hexagonal basalt cliffs formed at the time that the volcano produced this caldera. The small sections of cliff were interesting but it was a short walk beyond them that provided the most beautiful aspect of the stop.

The walk took us along a stretch of the Gardiner River and through (quite literally through shoulder high) willows to a small but rapidly flowing waterfall bounded on both sides by a peaceful meadow. As Keith said, if a black bear had filled our field of view this might have been the quintessential Yellowstone that could provide a book cover or a highlight of a DVD. Even without the bear, the meadow and stream was about as idyllic a scene as one could imagine on this clear and sunny morning.



Shortly before the descent to Mammoth Hot Springs we were treated to a panoramic vista across an enormous valley which opened up as we turned the final bend before the downhill stretch. Appropriately, the view was called the Golden Gate. From here it was a short drive to the Upper Terrace Drive which looped along the top of the giant hot springs area that gave this place its name.

We spent about an hour or more walking the boardwalks around a huge pool which spewed near boiling water over one edge to cascade over pure white deposits, primarily of calcium carbonate, as the major rock deposits here were limestone. The white would eventually turn to a more gray deposit but not before the thermophiles had created an assortment of colors (pinks, reds, oranges and yellows) which often would be converted into travertine solid surfaces. In fact, some of these were like a coating of ice on a water pond and when occluded colors were involved one could readily accept the similarity to the travertine marbles of Italy which created the Renaissance sculptures and structures.



Mammoth Hot Springs

The Mammoth Hot Spring Terraces have been a popular feature in Yellowstone since the early stagecoach routes up the Yellowstone River Valley. The Terraces, first described by the 1871 Hayden Survey, were given the name of White Mountain Hot Spring, even though they were well known and named before then.

The step-like terraces form as heated water moves along the Morris-Mammoth Fault. The hot water carries dissolved limestone to the surface of the terraces where pressure lessens. Carbon dioxide then escapes as gas and calcium carbonate precipitates as travertine.

The Mammoth Terraces are constantly changing shape and color. Springs which were active one to five years ago may be dry and lifeless now, yet activity may later resume. Along with changes of thermal activity come changes in color. Fresh travertine is bright white in color and as it weathers it changes to gray. Bright colored cyanobacteria and algae mats which were dependent upon a stable temperature and a flow of water also change as the microorganisms die creating a stark, bleak landscape.



It really is difficult to describe Mammoth Hot Springs in a few words – or even a few paragraphs. I am sure that whole books have not fully covered the physical features fully and certainly could not describe the feelings of visitors as they see this phenomenon for the first – or twenty first – time. First, to simply get the scale, one can imagine a ½ mile square area set on a hillside with perhaps a four hundred feet drop from top to bottom. Then, this area must be layered into terraces of varying sizes (some hundreds of feet in width, some just a few feet) to form a giant irregular staircase that only a giant could scale: but even he would find the lack of uniformity difficult to negotiate.

This whole area must now be colored in an uneven palette of colors from whiter than white to the deepest browns and oranges which appear to flow from terrace to terrace but which can never complete the total descent without several color changes. The whole may be a gray-white limestone deposit, sometimes crusted, sometimes perfectly smooth, but highlighted with many tints covering the yellow to red end of the spectrum. To this colorful base must now be added pools of boiling (or near boiling) water which form both crystal clear bathing pools (although no longer used as such and probably a little warm for comfort) or turquoise ponds, perhaps with a bubbling hot spring to add a little excitement.

Now imagine that this whole hillside is alive with streams, fumaroles, bubbling springs, rapidly running hot water overflowing every terrace and the image comes close to the almost supernatural feature that is Mammoth Hot Springs. Similar geological features exist in New Zealand and Iceland and probably many other places around the world but it is difficult to imagine that any encompass so many different examples of the effect of a very thin earth's crust as this large area. And despite all the heat and instability (the whole changes almost on a daily basis as earthquake and seasonal effects take their toll) a small fir tree or a patch of grass will take hold and birds and mammals will find something here to eat and enjoy. It is truly a wonderful natural wonder.



The Hotel Bus and some of the Elk Residents

Following a lunch in the busy area of the Mammoth Springs Hotel, we visited the Fort Yellowstone Historic District and learned of the early years of Yellowstone as a National Park. The Park was established in 1872 and was initially under threat from those who would exploit, rather than protect, its resources. Civilian superintendents could not cope so when Congress would not appropriate the necessary funds for proper staffing the Park turned to the military for help. This resulted in 32 years of military presence and Fort Yellowstone was built to house over 300 soldiers and, in some cases, their families.



We walked around these early 20th century buildings (most of which are now used as residences or offices by park staff) and learned a little of the work performed in those early days by the military. It seems that a large part of their work was in stopping poaching and other forms of exploitation, although they were responsible for the road system that still exists in the park today. Eventually, at the recommendation of President Roosevelt, the National Park Service was formed and the military “occupation” ended, although many former soldiers took on the same job but in the new role as Park Rangers.

We returned to West Yellowstone via the eastern route that took us over the 9000 feet Dunraven pass and also provided some spectacular panoramic views of the very green and lush eastern plateau of the Park. It was here that we came as close as we would to seeing a bear. A number of visitors were anxiously scanning a hillside opposite the road as a bear had been sighted here on previous days about this time in the afternoon. We waited with binoculars to our eyes and cameras at the ready but it was not to be our day. Oh well: we’ll just have to come to Yellowstone again!

We also got additional views of the Yellowstone River and the canyon in which it flows and saw a number of basalt columns that looked for all the world like a modern concrete man-made retaining wall for the canyon. Nature once again had beaten man not only in time but in engineering capability.



Tonight we had another good meal at Sydney’s where the entire staff seemed to be from Eastern Europe but provided excellent service and a very pleasant sense of humor.

Sunday September 11



Today our destination was Yellowstone Lake to the eastern side of the Park. Along the way we stopped at Old Faithful, primarily to use the facilities but we also viewed another eruption – number three on our visit. We then crossed the Continental Divide a couple of times, the first of which was at Craig's Pass where we had a photograph taken of the four of us (in honor of



Craig, Keith and Zena's son). This stop was also interesting in that there was a small lake (or large pond) which had outlets to both the East and West of the Divide – East to the Missouri River and West to the Snake and then into the Columbia River. It was called Two Oceans Lake, which made us wonder if the lake we had walked to view just south of the Park (in the Tetons) was also one which fed both sides of the Divide as it too was called Two Ocean Lake. Later "Googling" was unable to confirm this and in fact the Tetons Lake seemed too far away from the Continental Divide to provide a source to both sides.

*Two Ocean Lake which
feeds both the Pacific
and Atlantic Oceans*



We had lunch at Grant Village and then drove a few miles to the West Thumb, which is a part of the much larger Yellowstone Lake. This part of the lake is in fact the caldera from a more recent volcanic eruption that took place well after the one that forms the majority of Yellowstone Park, so it is a caldera within a caldera. Consequently it is still filled with hydrothermal features that exist at the edge of – and even within – the waters of the lake.

Once again we were struck by the variety of springs, mud pots, small geysers and fumaroles as well as by the multitude of colors in and around each geological feature. Although we by now had seen a wide variety of thermal areas since entering Yellowstone, and felt that we were becoming quite expert at identifying features, there was still more to see and learn here. The proximity to a large body of water (Yellowstone Lake is the largest mountain lake in America) also added a dimension we hadn't experienced previously and undoubtedly the lake has played its role in the formations we saw today. As one example, the very heavy snowfalls of last winter have raised the level of the lake such that several "shore line" non-active geysers are now virtually submerged whereas the brochure photographs showed them several feet above water

level.

A second example was a relatively large hot pool which was a beautiful clear blue in color but was named Black Pool. After suffering Keith's references to the Tower, "Kiss Me Quick" hats and Blackpool rock, we asked a ranger why the pool was "mis-named". The answer – which we should have known by now – was that the pool was named many years ago when it was cooler and could support thermophiles that gave it its black appearance. Over twenty years ago, earthquake activity had caused the pool to become much hotter and consequently the bacteria could no longer live there – hence it became colorless, or a turquoise blue in the appropriate light.



By the time we had completed our walk it was too late to continue on our planned route that would have taken us further north along the lake and then back to West Yellowstone via Canyon Village, so we decided to simply retrace our steps of this morning.

The change provided its reward however, as we saw not only a bison very close to the road but also a small herd of female elk. As we were watching the latter we could hear the call of the bull; a high pitched, somewhat eerie cry from within the trees. Soon he appeared in the more open land where his herd was grazing and moved among them as though trying to make a selection. We were not privileged to learn the outcome as he and most of the females slowly headed away from our vantage point and further back from the road.

So, we left Yellowstone Park for the final time on this trip and returned to West Yellowstone. We also said farewell to Wyoming, our home for the past week, and began our visit to the State of Montana. Our evening meal in West Yellowstone was at the Outpost Restaurant where we had eaten breakfast every day. Once again, the surroundings were a little rustic but the food and wine (which we had to bring with us) were good.



Monday September 12



We left West Yellowstone for Helena, MT this morning, an estimated journey of less than 200 miles in an almost due north direction. We had a little climb at first and a brief spell within the extreme western end of Yellowstone Park but then it was a long, steady downward road alongside the Gallatin River. It was a beautiful drive along the sometimes rapidly flowing river down a relatively narrow valley with lots of high rock faces and green fir trees.

Our first stop was at Belgrade where we were able to get a cup of coffee and a snack at a gas station café before driving west to the Headwaters of the Missouri State Park. On the way we had a brief stop in the small town of Madison simply to admire the architecture of this typical Western cowboy town.

*The Gallatin River and the
small town of Madison,
MT*



At the Headwaters Park we spent almost two hours re-learning the adventures of Lewis and Clark whose expedition stayed here for three days in August 1805 before starting their long, hard journey over the Bitterroot Mountains. They decided that this point was the start of the Missouri River since there were three rivers coming together to form the one they had followed from St Joseph but they could not tell which of the three (if any) could or should be the Missouri. Hence they declared that this was the starting point of the Missouri and named its three feeding rivers after the President (Jefferson) and the Secretaries of the Treasury and State (Madison and Gallatin). The Gallatin we had followed all day and the Madison was the one that had accompanied us so much in Yellowstone Park. It was the Jefferson that Lewis and Clark followed further west in search of a route to the Pacific.

The Headwaters of the Missouri River as determined by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805



We walked along a short trail that gave us both historical and geographical perspective as well as good views of each river. As we were standing looking over at the hillside from which Lewis had mapped the headwaters area, a bald eagle appeared and circled above us for several minutes, gliding silently in the thermals above the ridge. His flight path was such that capturing good photographs was difficult with our cameras but we each had a good view (with the naked eye) of this magnificent bird. We also saw a couple of Indian petroglyphs on a rock face but each required a sign board and a good imagination for identification. All in all, however, it was a very pleasant break to the journey on yet another warm and sunny day.



