

An Ecosystem to Experience Yellowstone and Beyond

Several years ago, I was fly-fishing with a buddy in backcountry Yellowstone. The dusk sky turned Technicolor and the temperature dropped as the sun slipped behind the mountains. The stream cut deeply into the terrain so tall banks obscured the view both ways. We could smell something musky, and suddenly there was an explosive splash no more than 20 yards upstream around the blind corner. A moment later, the current filled with feathers, a slick of blood, and pieces of a duck. My friend and I exchanged glances. We never saw the bear. All that remained were evidence of his kill and his tracks. We were reminded this was his neighborhood, and we were the guests and that was as it should be. And how this place was intended to be.

Think about a region so awe-inspiring that after having seen it in 1871, the members of the Hayden Expedition sat around a campfire near the Madison River and conceived of an entity both audacious and visionary: "A National Park." By 1872, it was called "The National Park." It was one of America's greatest ideas and gifts to the world: 2.2 million acres containing 10,000 thermal features, spectacular geological diversity, and native wildlife in stunning numbers. The park's creation launched a concept that has spawned thousands of national parks in countries around the world, including its dramatic sister park, Grand Teton.

My first of more than a hundred visits to Yellowstone took place when I was a child in the 1930s when bears begged tourists for food instead of hunting it in the backcountry. Things have changed since then and the wildness has returned. Wolves are back and restorative fires are allowed to burn. We neighbors think it's still America's best national park.

—C.J. Box, novelist, Wyoming

Notable National Parks

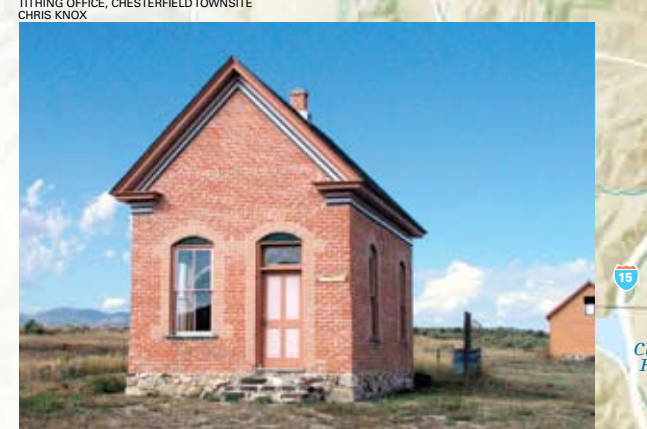
Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks lie at the heart of this region's 36 million acres, and anchor its rich legacy of conservation. Greater Yellowstone holds some of the country's first designated wilderness areas, and among its seven national forests, Wyoming's Shoshone was the country's first.

"Grand Teton National Park is a place of simple beauty. Sometimes the least complicated activity rejuvenates our spirits the most. Like skiing under the moon reflecting off the snow, marveling at night turning into day, or watching the mountains light up from top to bottom at sunrise. You might feel alone on top of a peak, but at any moment an insect might crawl from beneath a rock, a mouse could wander by, or an eagle might soar overhead."

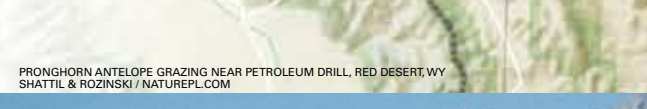
—Elizabeth Maki, Moose District Interpreter, Grand Teton National Park

"In 1872, Yellowstone became the world's first national park. The storytelling art of interpretation began here, as hotel staff and stagecoach drivers gave guided tours to curious visitors. 'Geyser gazers' hung out at the geothermal spots, exchanging detailed observations for tourist tips. We still have geyser gazers today, sitting in floppy hats on hot summer days, logging geyser behavior into notebooks, and chatting with visitors, though no longer for money."

—Lee Whitesley, historian, Yellowstone National Park



CHESTERFIELD TOWNSITE, ID
Largely reconstructed by modern Latter-day Saints, this Mormon settlement flourished astride the Oregon Trail from 1880 to 1920. The elegant architecture includes the Meeting House, the Tabling Office, and the Honeymoon House, which newlyweds were allowed to use rent-free until the birth of a child or the community's next marriage.



PHOTOGRAPHERS' CORNER: GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK, WY
SHUTE, KROEMER/OUTLINE.COM

Landscape Changes and Challenges

"The biggest challenge to wildlife here will be global warming. The numbers I've seen say the western U.S. could lose half its wild trout habitat by the end of this century. That would be devastating for fishing, local economies, and the whole ecology of the place. Grazing won't make it without fish, and Yellowstone without graziers is hard to imagine."

—Craig Matthews, fly shop owner, Blue Ribbon Flies, West Yellowstone, WY

"Three years ago, you couldn't see any drilling rigs from town. That's all changed now. We have to get the balance right between wilderness, recreation, and natural gas development. Last winter, we had four ozone alerts here, and that helped wake people up to what we could be losing."

—Mindi Crabb, Pineade, WY

"Lots of people think of sagebrush drylands as expendable. Yet, sage grouse depend on these areas, which also provide indispensable food and cover for mule deer, pronghorn, wild birds, and rodents. Fire keeps competing plants from crowding out sagebrush, but it's getting harder to allow natural fires to burn when we have to protect all the homes that border public lands. That's a big reason sagebrush is one of the most threatened habitats in Wyoming."

—Jerry Allertam, Wyoming Game and Fish biologist, Cody, WY



National Geographic and the people of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming present this Geotourism MapGuide to the Greater Yellowstone Region.

Lead project partners include the National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations, National Geographic Maps, and the Greater Yellowstone Geotourism Stewardship Council, with regional coordinators provided by Greater Yellowstone Coalition and the Yellowstone Business Partnership.

We gratefully acknowledge funding support from the following Bureau of Land Management, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Idaho Division of Tourism Development, National Park Service, Travel Montana and its partners, Yellowstone County Tourism region and the Bozeman, Big Sky, and West Yellowstone Convention and Visitor Bureau, United States Forest Service, and Wyoming Travel and Tourism.

Text by Michele Acchie, author; Tom Miller, editor; Mark Totes by David Thomas

Visit www.yellowstonegeotourism.net to learn more about the Greater Yellowstone region.

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Greater Yellowstone Region

IDAHO, MONTANA, and WYOMING including Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks



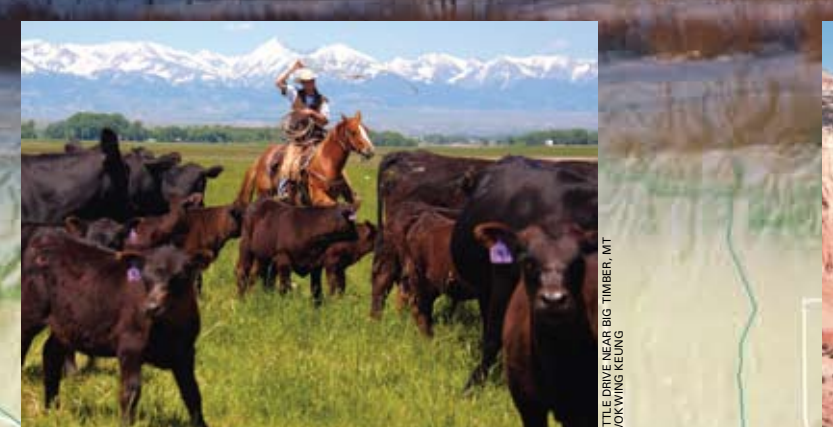
geotourism (n.) Tourism that consists of enjoying the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.



MUSEUM OF THE ROCKIES, BOZEMAN, MT
Onboards of a leather rock together in the paleontology section, where researchers first discovered that the extinct creatures were ancestors of modern bears.



ASABOKA-BEARTOOTH WILDERNESS, MT
Travel on foot or horseback in this million-acre expanse of rugged peaks above high plateaus dotted with glacial lakes. Consider taking a guide in this wilderness.



MONTANA BUNNHOUSES WORKING RANCH VACATIONS
Whoa, dudud! These are real, working cattle ranches where you might have to fix fences or ride herd to earn your campfire bread. Mokey on over to www.montanabunhouseworkingranch.com.



BIGHORN CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, MT and WY
Yellowtail Dam transformed the Bighorn River from a muddy flatland stream into a cold-tailwater fishery for brown and rainbow trout. The upstream reservoir offers 55 miles of deep-canyon navigation.



Fish Story

The Yellowstone River flows right down the block from where I live. You can float it in big wooden boats, or in rubber rafts with a bunch of people. I have a small sturdy boat the size of a truck tire. It has no real floor except for the seat, so when you pull over to a shallow spot you can stand up and fish.

Trout fishing is very big here. In the Yellowstone, you have your choice of introduced brown, rainbow, or the native cutthroat trout. Cutthroats have red slash marks under the jaws; they look like their throats have been cut. Since "cuts" are relatively rare and out-competed by introduced trout, your conscientious fisherman will always release the natives. Smaller creeks have brook trout. The brookies eat a lot of fresh water crustaceans and, to my taste, have a richer flavor than big river trout.

In July, after the runoff, a certain kind of large bug, the salmon fly, hatches on the river. It's a good time to fish for big trout. The trick is to match the hatch—see what manner of insect is presently completing its life cycle and floating on the surface. Then tie a dry fly replica on your line and cast for a fish that is rising and eating those insects. That's right: you're matching wits with an animal whose brain is the size of a fingernail clipping. Still, there's really nothing more thrilling than catching the precise fish you're casting to on a properly chosen dry fly.

—Tim Cahill, author, Livingston, MT



Four Season Recreation

From scenic drives to extreme ice climbing, you'll find outdoor recreation for every season and every body. It's never far to the nearest trailhead, trout stream, or ski area.

"Exploring wild places, our cardinal responsibility is to connect, learn, and appreciate. My young daughter and I spent one tent-bound night blindly trying to decipher sounds of thundering hooves and splashing. Morning showed the lakeshore riddled with tracks. Mama moose and calf had taken refuge in the lake while wolves chased along the shore. My daughter still talks about the night the moose outsmarted the wolves."

—Thomas Turano, author and mountain guide, Wilson, WY

"In the 1930s, fly fishing in Montana was exotic. Today we have fly rod manufacturers, fly tyers, guides, lodges, second homes, and a lot of interest in healthy rivers, all stemming from the confluence of world-class trout streams and enterprising people who saw fly fishing as another way to make a living in our remote communities."

—Kris Hauck, owner, El Western Cabins and Lodges, Ennis, MT

Mountain Men

"In the early 1800s, mountain men like Jedediah Smith and John Colter fired Americans' imaginations about the vast western territory. The exploits of these free-roaming fur trappers were legendary. Though their era faded by the early 1840s, their paths can sometimes be detected in place-names that honor them: Big Snake River, the Henrys Fork, named for trapper Andrew Henry, who spent the winter of 1810 hunkered down along his banks."

—Nancy Stratford, Island Park Historical Society president, Island Park, ID

"The 19th century rendezvous began as a vehicle for trappers and traders to meet up, and exchange furs for provisions. Our modern rendezvous continues the tradition of showing off skills, swapping stories, and having a good time—while protecting 100 acres of the historical site of the 1838 rendezvous. We try to emulate the situation as it would have been in mountain man days, down to hand-stitched clothing, muzzle loading firearms, and tomahawk-throwing contests."

—John Boesch, 1838 Rendezvous Association, Riverton, WY



A Remarkable Land

Those of us lucky enough to live in the Yellowstone region rarely step back and marvel at its diversity, chaos, and unique qualities. Despite the perennial stories about Yellowstone (and other national parks) being "loved to death," only two percent of the park is developed. Beyond the heavily-trafficked figure-eight road system, you'll find the park untouched, rugged, and spectacular. Its 3,700 square miles are remarkably untrammeled. Yet not far from the park borders, controversy simmers over development, whether for natural gas, oil, coal, or wind. Extensive resort construction and the recent proliferation of ranchettes are transforming the landscape. Want to start an argument in Wyoming, Montana, or Idaho? Ask about wolf reintroduction, grizzly bear management, fire policy, or grazing rights.

How about the rapid explosion of coal-bed methane wells? In a region where everyone is invested in the environment, opinions about its management run as hot and deep as the wondrous thermal system in Yellowstone itself. And like that thermal activity, there are frequent eruptions. These different outlooks take place amidst some of the most stunning terrain on earth. To top it off, these contemporary environmental issues bubble just a few miles away from the mouth of the Yellowstone Caldera, an ancient active volcano that, according to some scientists, may be 60,000 years overdue to explode. The fate of Yellowstone's ecosystem is fast approaching a crossroads. A wide range of opinion is taking shape while the caldera itself shows increasing signs of life. It's an exciting time to live here. —C.J. Box, novelist, Wyoming



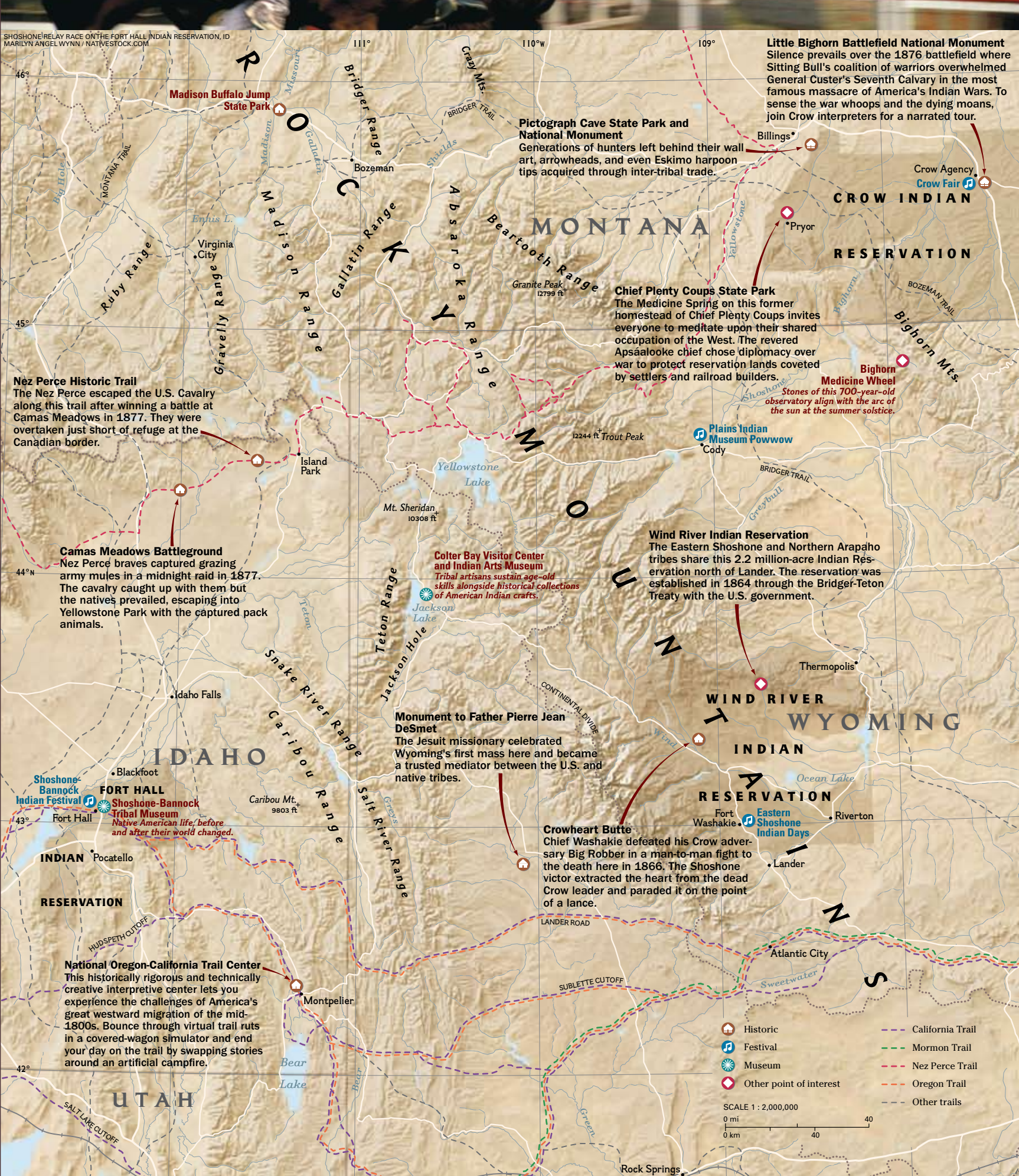
Native Peoples



From Prehistory to Contemporary Life

Eleven thousand years of following bison, berries, and the seasons ended for native peoples in the 1800s, as America came looking for gold, farmland, and a manifest destiny. Only five of the more than a dozen American tribes that traveled Yellowstone's trails were granted land here, collected onto three reservations.

"Our Shoshone people have ancient connections with Yellowstone. Many tribes were drawn to the heated waters that come from deep in the earth. Water is a great conductor of the spirit world, and the spiritual presence of this ancient water is especially strong."
—Ben Freeman, Director, Eastern Shoshone Museum and Heritage Center, Fort Washakie, WY



"There's a powerful feeling at our most sacred places, such as the medicine wheel in the Bighorn Mountains. My grandfather told stories about how the medicine wheel used to be much taller than it is now. But people took rocks from the wheel, maybe to take that feeling with them. We need to have respect, not just for Indian sacred sites, but for every place."
—Jackie Yellowstone, coordinator, Apsalooke Tours, Crow Agency, MT

"Like gatherings of the old days, people come from all over to our powwow. Dancing is the heart of the powwow, which includes horse relays, traditional games, and parades. Our traditions bring back the old ways, the old times, and keep our religion and our language alive."
—Luther Farmer, elder, Shoshone Ranches Tribes, Fort Hall, ID



At Home in the Landscape

Now that the gray wolf is back, Greater Yellowstone is again home to the full complement of animals that Lewis and Clark might have seen here on their voyage of discovery.

"Visiting, recreating, or living here, we have to alter our behavior—we can't expect wildlife to change how they act just because we're around. Bears, for example, have remarkable memories. One bag of potato chips at a campground or one bowl of pet food left outside can put that place permanently on the bear's mental map of places I go to look for food. That's why how wild bears may family behavior at this not-for-profit wild life haven and public education facility."
—Libby Scott, animal curator, Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center, West Yellowstone, MT



"We're known around the world for our public lands, but animals like elk, deer, and pronghorn depend on private land—mostly farms and ranches in our open valleys. These animals come down from the mountains to find food and milder weather. Carnivores follow. The whole ecosystem depends on private lands."
—Mark Pomeroy, US Forest Service District Ranger, retired, Madison Valley, MT, Fort Hall, ID

"Wildlife watching never changes with the seasons. In spring, elk wade in a sea of purple camas wildflowers. In winter, on snowshoes, you can track a coyote stalking a mouse to the edge of the water. Look up, and you're face-to-face with thirty yapping trumpeter swans floating on the river."
—Kyle Bobbit, year-round resident, Island Park, ID



Magnificent Wildlife

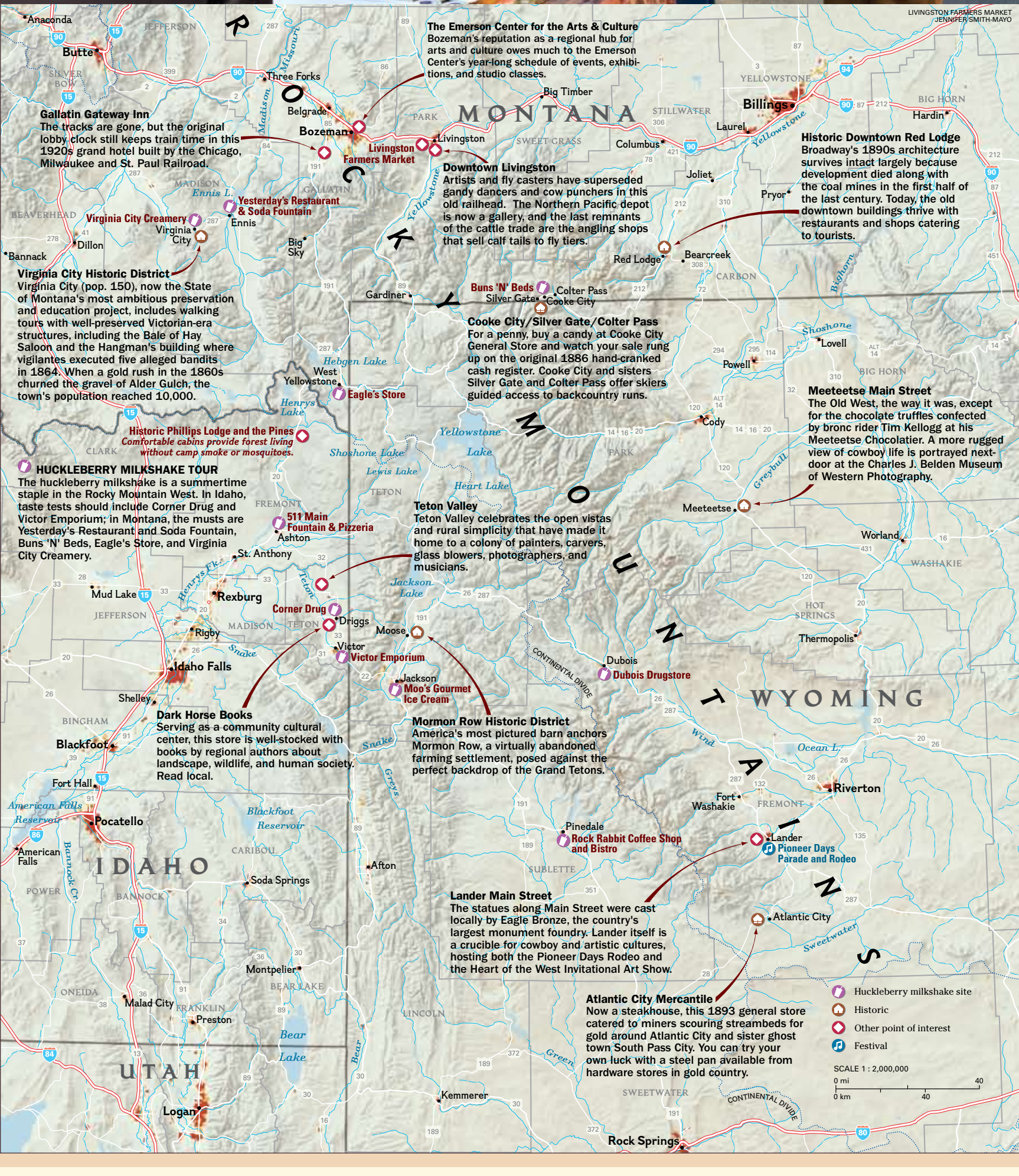


Local Living



Vibrant and Historic Communities

With one foot in the past and one stepping into the future, Greater Yellowstone's friendly towns are base camps for exploring wide-open spaces and wild places. "You can take quite a tour just focusing on historic hotels, from the Gallatin Gateway Inn, which once linked tourists arriving by rail with coaches bound for Yellowstone National Park, to the Irma Hotel in Cody where Annie Oakley, Calamity Jane, and Frederic Remington all stayed. This area is rich with historic downtowns that offer a glimpse into the past."
—Et Diehl, owner, Chamberlin Inn, Cody, WY



Shaping a Monumental Landscape

Yellowstone's geyser basins, such as Old Faithful, and hot springs point to the presence of molten rock not far, in a geologist's view, below the surface. Other forces of nature are powerfully in evidence—mountain-forming subvolcanics, glaciers, and wildfires that scorch and revitalize natural systems. Snowmelt from Yellowstone's high country becomes streams that wind through volcanic terrain to feed the Snake, Missouri, and Green Rivers.



"Yellowstone is an enormous volcano, which is difficult to see if you're looking for the familiar cone shape. In the past 2.5 million years, two of the largest volcanic eruptions known on Earth happened here. The most recent of these formed the Yellowstone Caldera, the depression where most of the park's 10,000-plus geothermal features are found. Earthquakes and other ground movements remind us that this volcano is still very much alive."
—Jacobson, Yellowstone National Park



Nature's Forces



Geotraveler Tips

Beyond the National Parks For every day that you vacation in the national parks, there are more days to explore the region. Visit a local museum, or visit a local history center like the Montana State Museum in Helena. Government, business, and conservation organizations offer tours and trails to hike, scenic byways to drive, and wildlife to watch.

Get Out of Your Car Spend time away from your wheels. Whether walking to a gym, hiking to a mountain view, or touring a museum, the sights, sounds, and smells of Greater Yellowstone are best experienced on foot.

Watchable Wildlife From grizzly bears to wolves, the Greater Yellowstone is home to the full complement of native predators. Wildlife preys are plentiful and diverse. Plan your trip for the early morning and just before sunset, and you'll have the best chance of seeing them. Bring binoculars, a spotting scope, or a camera, you should too. Bone up with your field guide, and respect the animals from at least 100 yards.

Business and Stewardship By patronizing distinctive businesses in the gateway communities on the outer edge of the Greater Yellowstone, you are helping towns that are essential for a quality visit. These communities have unique character. Let local

businesses know that you care about the conservation and preservation of open lands and that the wildlife and endless space they draw you here and will bring you back. A follow-up email or letter to lodging or dining facilities encourages their stewardship.

Climate and Preparedness The Greater Yellowstone region sits in a high elevation mountainous landscape where weather conditions can change abruptly. While the coldest months are typically winter, temperatures can drop to below zero in the middle of the year. Check the local weather report daily, inquire about road closures—especially November to May—and bring appropriate clothing for sudden weather changes. Always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return. Carry plenty of water and food.

Land of the Grizzly Bear The famous grizzly bear inhabits much of the Greater Yellowstone. Once on the verge of extinction the grizzly is now rebounding thanks to aggressive conservation measures. Basic precautions can help to keep you safe when hiking in grizzly country: Hike in groups of two or more people. Avoid hiking at night. Make your presence known to bears by clapping, calling out, or singing. This is especially important around streams and on windy days.

yourself with maps and a compass, as well as a first aid kit, flashlight, and again, bear spray.

Thinking of Owning a Home in Greater Yellowstone? If you're considering relocating to Greater Yellowstone, consider living in town rather than in a rural subdivision or ranchette. These places fragment working ranches and wildlife migrations and degrade air and water quality. By choosing a home in town you will help to conserve the qualities that make this region so special and you're less likely to find a grizzly bear wandering through your backyard. Further, take the Greater Yellowstone weather into account. The climate might feel great in June, but the sun can scorch at 105° in July—and reach down to 30° with fifty mile an hour winds in February. Visit during Greater Yellowstone's highs and lows before setting in for the long haul.

The Yellowstone National Park in the Winter Winter is an amazing time to visit the Park. Yellowstone's snow-covered landscape lends itself admirably to cross-country skiing, ice skating, snowshoeing, and winter wildlife viewing. Snowcoaches provide an environmentally friendly way of accessing the park in winter. Check the Yellowstone Snowcoach website at www.nps.gov/yell/snowcoach for a list of snowcoach tour operators.

The Yellowstone Book Pack A well-rounded geotraveler is also a well-read geotraveler. These books reveal the regional personality, illuminate its history, and portray its natural life. *Where Rivers Change Direction* (Mark Spragg), *Hawks Rest* (Gary Ferguson), *A Naturalist's Guide to Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks* (Frank C. Craighead, Jr.), *Silence and Solitude: Yellowstone's Winter Wilderness* (Tom Murphy), *Yellowstone: A Naturalist's Guide to the Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks* (Frank C. Craighead, Jr.), *Silence and Solitude: Yellowstone's Winter Wilderness* (Tom Murphy), *Best Place* (Katherine C. Smith), *Letters From Yellowstone* (Diana Smith), *The Great Tetons* (Margaret Skaumborn), *Cody: My Years in the Rockies* (Burton Foster). To make nights in the front a bit spookier, read the essential Yellowstone novel, *Free Fire* (C. J. Box).

