

GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

WYOMING

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PARK HISTORY. Just ten miles to the north of what now is Grand Teton National Park is Yellowstone National Park, established in 1872 as our nation's (and the world's) first national park. For a summary of Yellowstone's history, please see our Yellowstone Park Visit posted May 2017. In the years that followed Yellowstone's creation, conservationists' voices grew louder asking Congress to protect the 40-mile north-south Teton Range just below Yellowstone. Although not supported by most of Jackson Hole's residents nor Wyoming's members of Congress, conservationists led by Jackson Hole major landowner, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., began buying land with the intent of donating it to the federal government for NPS protection. The creation of what we know today as Grand Teton National Park occurred in stages: first, protecting the range and six lakes at the base of the mountains as Grand Teton National Park in 1929; second, the creation by Franklin Roosevelt under the Antiquities Act of Jackson Hole National Monument with the Rockefeller donated lands in 1943; third, the combining of the Monument and Park in 1950; and fourth, the later addition of land to create a corridor—the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway—to link Grand Teton to Yellowstone. Grand Teton, now approximately 310,000 acres, offers its annual visitors (in 2014 a record 4.3 million visitors) a stunning visitor experience. If you've not visited, put it on



your bucket list! When you're there, stand in a meadow and face Mount Moran to the west and try to envision the landscape mined, logged, polluted, clogged with roads, automobiles, fast food restaurants, houses, apartments, and signs of every description . . . and then write your Congressperson and two Senators and tell them to support our United States National Park Service or you will vote someone into their office who will.

OUR VISIT. I've visited Grand Teton three times, each visit entirely different, entirely spectacular! My first visit was in the summer of 1978 when my wife Sally—Sally having passed away in 1997—and I took our three kids for a seven-week trip visiting the major western national parks before the kids began heading off for college; we filled four scrapbooks with photos and a lifetime of memories. After Mary's & my December 2000 wedding, we headed west for the summer of 2001 with our golden retriever, Timber, to visit with family and friends along the way and camp in the major western national parks including Grand Teton. Our most recent visit was this past June, gathering our sixteen-member Heaton Clan (three kids & spouses, three grandkids & spouses, and two great grandkids) for a week to celebrate yours truly's eightieth birthday! We stayed in practically the same cabins in which we had stayed almost forty years ago to the day!



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GEOLOGY. You can learn a lot of geology in a short time here—it is one extraordinary laboratory for geologic observation! First, there are no foothills, the 13,000 foot mountains rising majestically from the valley floor. Second, the mountains are among the youngest in the world, a mere 10 million years young—a gnat’s eyelash in geologic time. Third, the rock that makes up the core of the mountains is half the age of the earth—approximately 2.7 billion years old. Fourth, the forces that shaped this range include the collision of tectonic plates—one driving the mountains up, the other driving the valley down. Fifth, erosion has sculpted the landscape—massive glaciers carving the valleys, alpine glaciers carving the jagged peaks, the temporal moraines forming the mountainside Snake River and spectacular crystal clear, cold mountainside lakes. We’re trying to write this in such a way that you’ll feel compelled to study or re-study your geology and quickly travel here to make you own geologic observations!

(Lesser-Known) FACT. In 1964, Congress passed the Wilderness Act, defining wilderness as land “protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” The twenty-seven national forests that surround Grand Teton and Yellowstone, coupled with the two



national parks, comprise 18 million acres known as the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem—“one of the last remaining large, nearly intact ecosystems in the northern temperate zone of the Earth.” If you were to wonder what might happen to these lands if Federal protection were removed in favor of state management, one needs to travel no further than just outside the boundaries of almost any national park. Thankfully, cooler heads have prevailed so far, enabling us to have wilderness in which to restore our souls, rivers and lakes in which to restore our bodies, fauna in which to feast our eyes, and wildlife dangerously close to losing their habitat and their lives: five hundred animal species including moose, elk, bison, pronghorn, wolf, coyote, bighorn sheep, black bears, grizzly bears, bald eagles and hundreds of species of birds! Bring your binocs, camera, time and patience; it will be wondrously rewarded!



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(Lesser-Known) FACT. As of this writing, Mary & I have eight grandkids, two of whom we took for five consecutive summers for week-long visits to national parks, concluding with our fifth summer in Grand Teton and Yellowstone. As the girls had added five years since the beginning of this exercise and were 15 and 12 respectively, we found we needed to bribe (sorry) encourage them to stay off their devices while in the parks. Via what they described as a “negotiation,” we offered an incentive of \$50 each at the conclusion of the trip if they 1) stayed off their devices while in the parks and 2) got at least 80% correct (they could consult with each other before answering) on a twenty-five question test that we would create based on information they heard Park Rangers explain throughout the week. They stayed off their devices while in the parks and aced the test! Each got their \$50! As soon as they got home, they gave the test to their parents and delighted in their superior knowledge! The test wasn’t easy. One of the questions was: “What is the approximate age of the mountain range that runs north-south through Grand Teton National Park and what is the approximate age of the rock that makes up the mountains?” Those of you who’ve read this Park Visit now know the answer; you have only twenty-four more questions to go!



Wonders

*What wonders might we have in store . . .
If we were to travel more . . .
To national parks, our souls restore . . .
Before last journey to that distant shore?*

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