

Late Summer in Yellowstone National Park



By Jonathan G. Way

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- Previous books by Jonathan Way (most recent is on the bottom):
 - Way, J. G. 2007 (2014, revised edition). [Suburban Howls: Tracking the Eastern Coyote in Urban Massachusetts](http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/SuburbanHowls). Dog Ear Publishing, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. 340 pages.
 - Way, J. G. 2013. My Yellowstone Experience: A Photographic and Informative Journey to a Week in the Great Park. Eastern Coyote Research, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. 152 pages. URL: <http://www.myyellowstoneexperience.org/bookproject/>
 - Way, J. G. 2020 (Revised, 2021). Northeastern U.S. National Parks: What Is and What Could Be. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 312 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/NortheasternUSNationalParks/>
 - Way, J.G. 2020 (Revised, 2021). The Trip of a Lifetime: A Pictorial Diary of My Journey Out West. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 561 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/TheTripOfALifetime/>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Coywolf: Eastern Coyote Genetics, Ecology, Management, and Politics. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 277 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/CoywolfBook>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Christmas in Yellowstone: A Dream Come True. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 208 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/ChristmasInYellowstone>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Mud, I mean April, in Yellowstone: Nature's Transition from Winter to Spring. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 330 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/MudIMeanAprilInYellowstone>.
 - Way, J.G. 2021. Yellowstone Wildlife during Summer. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 467 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/YellowstoneWildlifeDuringSummer>.
 - Way, J.G. 2022. A Yellowstone Summer with the Junction Butte Wolf Pack. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 481 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/YellowstoneSummerWithJunctionButteWolfPack>.
 - Way, J.G. 2022. Yellowstone in Winter: The Recovering Wolves of the Northern Range. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 394 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/YellowstoneInWinter>.
 - Way, J.G. 2022. Backpacking the Iconic Pemigewasset Wilderness. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 255 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/BackpackingIconicPemigewassetWilderness>.
 - Way, J.G. 2024. A Beary Special April in Yellowstone. Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research, Barnstable, Massachusetts. 596 pages. E-book. Open Access URL: <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/BearySpecialAprilInYellowstone>.

Pay it Forward

Dear Reader,

Late summer is generally a challenging time to be in Yellowstone due to the sheer number of people and, often, ongoing road construction projects taking place in various parts of the park. While that was the case on this trip, it is also possible to time much of the day to avoid the worst traffic by waking up early (before 4:30 AM) and arriving in the park predawn. This way, one can avoid the crowds and observe the park's famous fauna.

August, like all other months in the park, is a good time to see wildlife. While our trip started out a little slow on that front, it ended with a bang – specifically, a bison carcass that drew in many wolves and grizzly bears. While many species are preparing for the cold, other large mammals go about their day as they always have. The numerous people in the park are just one more inconvenience in their demanding lives.

This book depicts late summer in the world's first national park. The scenery is in transition from the greens of summer to the browns of fall. Backcountry hikes are very popular during this time of year with less water on the trails and it's generally a drier period to enjoy the park's many beautiful landscapes. Accordingly, we took many treks during our time in the park. We also had great wildlife sightings, particularly at the end of the trip. I stayed so busy for all 9 days of our stay that there are many storylines – as you'll read about – that played out during my time there.

To increase access for all people, rich or poor, majority or minority, I am offering this e-book for free to anyone in the world who wants to read it. In this ninth book in my *Yellowstone Book Series*, I share with you, the reader, my experience exploring the world's first national park during late summer in a photographic journey intended to awe the reader. If you enjoy it, all I ask in return is that you *pay it forward* by sharing and please consider a donation of \$10.00 to support my research and education efforts, as well as supporting the book's Open Access format. That is about the price of one movie ticket, and you get to own this book, and all of its pictures, forever. If you do not want to donate from [my website](#), you are welcome to email me and I will gladly provide you with a physical postal address: jon@easterncoyoteresearch.com or easterncoyoteresearch@yahoo.com.

Thanks in advance!

Jon Way



Dedication

To Steve's mother, Laurel Cifuni, who passed away during the production of this book. Laurel, I will miss talking to you on the nights before our trips to Yellowstone and during the other times of the year when I saw you.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Late summer is generally a challenging time to be in Yellowstone due to the sheer number of people and, often, ongoing road construction projects taking place in various parts of the park. While that was the case on this trip, it is also possible to time much of the day to avoid the worst traffic by waking up early (before 4:30 AM) and arriving in the park predawn. This way, one can avoid the crowds and observe the park's famous fauna.

August, like all other months in the park, is a good time to see wildlife. While our trip started out a little slow on that front, it ended with a bang – specifically, a bison carcass that drew in many wolves and grizzly bears. While many species are preparing for the cold, other large mammals go about their day as they always have. The numerous people in the park are just one more inconvenience in their demanding lives.

Steve Cifuni, my good friend and frequent travel companion, went on the expedition with me. He continues to be instrumental in keeping me motivated to visit all the places that we do during our many trips to the park and elsewhere. I had the fortune, like I do on all my other trips, of leaving my vehicle at Steve's parents' house in Revere, Massachusetts. We were driven to Logan Airport at 4:44 AM on August 13, 2023, by his father.

We arrived at Bozeman, Montana, via a connecting flight from Salt Lake City, Utah, at 12:30 PM Mountain Time. There, Melissa Todd of YERC ([Yellowstone Ecological Research Center](#)) left for us Dr. Bob Crabtree's old but reliable Toyota T100 (the precursor to the Tundra series) in the airport parking lot. Comically, it took us over 20 minutes to find it, but once we did, we had our vehicle for the next 9 days. Melissa works for Bob, who is a good friend of ours and a top-rated biologist who, among many other things, studied coyotes in the park for 20 years. Bob founded and continues to run YERC and is very generous in often letting us borrow one of his fleet's cars, which saves us a lot of money on the overpriced summer rental scene in Bozeman. Plus, it is nice to be in vehicles that are familiar to us.

Our friends Mark and Carol Rickman offered us summer housing in their cabin just outside of Silver Gate, Montana, like they have done many times in the past. This town is situated in a stunning, mountainous area just outside the northeastern boundary of the park. I greatly appreciate the generosity of both Mark and Carol, and to Bill Wengeler, a park ranger who lives at their cabin during the summer. He shared the place with us and Thomas Stier of Germany, who I discuss in the book.

This was my 28th trip to the world's first national park! After all of these visits and a total of 252 days in the park, I have garnered a detailed knowledge of the area which helps to put my experiences into context. This book marks [my 9th related to Yellowstone](#) (1 print book and 8 e-books).

This publication depicts late summer in the world's first national park. The scenery is in transition from the greens of summer to the browns of fall. Backcountry hikes are very popular during this time of year with less water on the trails and it's generally a drier period to enjoy the park's many beautiful landscapes. Accordingly, we took many treks during our time in the park. We also had great wildlife sightings, particularly at the end of the trip. We stayed so busy for all 9 days of our stay that there are many storylines – as you'll read about – that played out during our time there.

I want to also thank all the visitors and employees of the park who aided with our wildlife sightings. Chief among them is Rick McIntyre, wolf watcher extraordinaire and former National Park Service employee, who I have featured in all my other Yellowstone books. Rick has now amassed well over 100,000 wolf sightings in Yellowstone and is widely regarded as the person who has [observed the most wolves of anybody in history](#)! Wolf Project technicians Jeremy SunderRaj and Taylor (Bland) Rabb always provide a mountain of information on the park's wolves and other wildlife. My story would not be as complete without their knowledge.

There is a great website, <https://yellowstonereports.com/index.php>, which details the daily activities of the wolves, bears and other interesting Yellowstone flora and fauna. Laurie Lyman, a retired teacher from California and a friend of mine, summarizes the happenings of the wolves between her observations and her friends' reports when she is not in the park. Quite amazingly, she writes a daily journal of wildlife activity (focusing on wolves) on that website to keep folks like me up-to-date when not in the park. When I am there, I try and do my part by reporting to Laurie what I see to keep others informed of exciting happenings in Yellowstone.

This project came about in part because many of my Facebook, and now Instagram friends (including family members) continue to be absorbed with the pictures that I post when I travel. I always appreciate their comments and support over the years which has given me the motivation to publish many of these manuscripts. E-books are the easiest and by far cheapest way of producing these pictorial tomes. These social media posts gave me the outline for this endeavor. However, on this trip I had poor internet connectivity and didn't make as many posts as I normally do. Thus, this book more fully rounds out my experience during those 9 days in the park.

The following Facebook posts related to this expedition were made during (or after) this August 13-21, 2023, trip. Most notably the last two posts on Aug. 24 and Sept. 4 have numerous videos (mostly of wolves and bears) within the threads:

August 14: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161350113325016>

August 15: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161352143485016>

August 17: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161355574545016>

August 18: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161359287990016>

August 18. Profile pic: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161359295420016:855356479491171>

August 24: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161370691625016>

Sept. 4: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161392596435016>

Herein, I detail those 9 days in the park from start to finish in complete and in much greater detail than those previous sources. During the expedition, I took 1,576 images with the vast majority being pictures, along with 53 videos; 111 pics came from my cell phone and 1,412 from my camera. I also captured some video-stills to illustrate some scenes, which are noted in the book. I use my top 1,127 photographs here. I also referred to the 27 pages of journal notes that I took while in the park to flesh out this story. Ken Smith of Camp Oot-Oot, Maine, copy-edited the text to make it more professional. I greatly appreciate his valuable input! Also, the National Park Service provided useful maps to help direct readers to important locations that I visited.

I hope you enjoy the read and can donate to support my research which will help keep these e-books in Open Access format. Please see the *Pay it Forward* page at the beginning of this document if you want to support my work. Thank you!



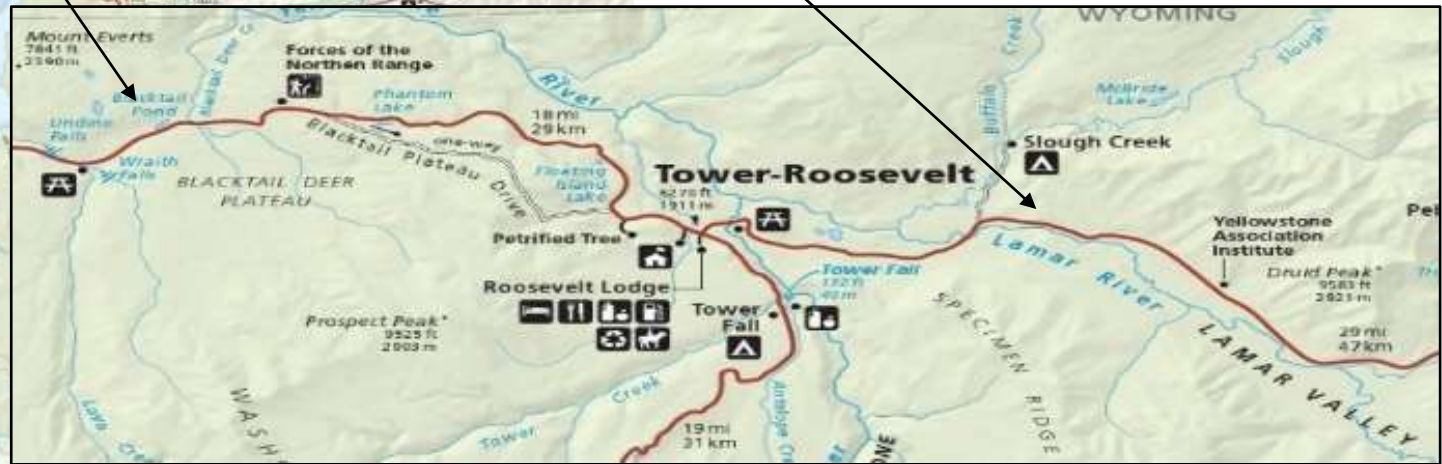
Maps of Places Visited

While the entire park is open in August, we spent the majority of our time on this expedition in the northern part, especially the Lamar Valley area east of Tower. However, we did venture south as well on a couple of the days.





A more detailed map of where we spent most of our time while in the park. Due to bear and wolf activity, we concentrated our activity between Blacktail Plateau and Lamar Valley.
 Map © of the National Park Service.



Visiting Yellowstone National Park
 Road construction is common in park roadways. Check the park's recreation web page for updates, or call 800-845-6377 for details on closures.

Special Laws
 Many areas within the park have special laws and regulations to protect natural and cultural resources. From early December to early April, certain areas may be used only as the designated groomed park roads. Call park headquarters for regulations on park road use, www.nps.gov/yell.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Unimproved Road  Improved Road  One-way Road  Restricted Access  Trail or Boundary  Road Closure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boating
 If allowed, you require all appropriate safety equipment. Always check the current rules and regulations for boating in the park. For information on boat use, call 800-845-6377. Fishing
 A Yellowstone National Park fishing permit is required for fishing in the park. For information on fishing in the park, call 800-845-6377. Accessibility
 The National Park Service is committed to providing accessible services and facilities to all visitors. For information on accessibility, call 800-845-6377. |
|--|---|

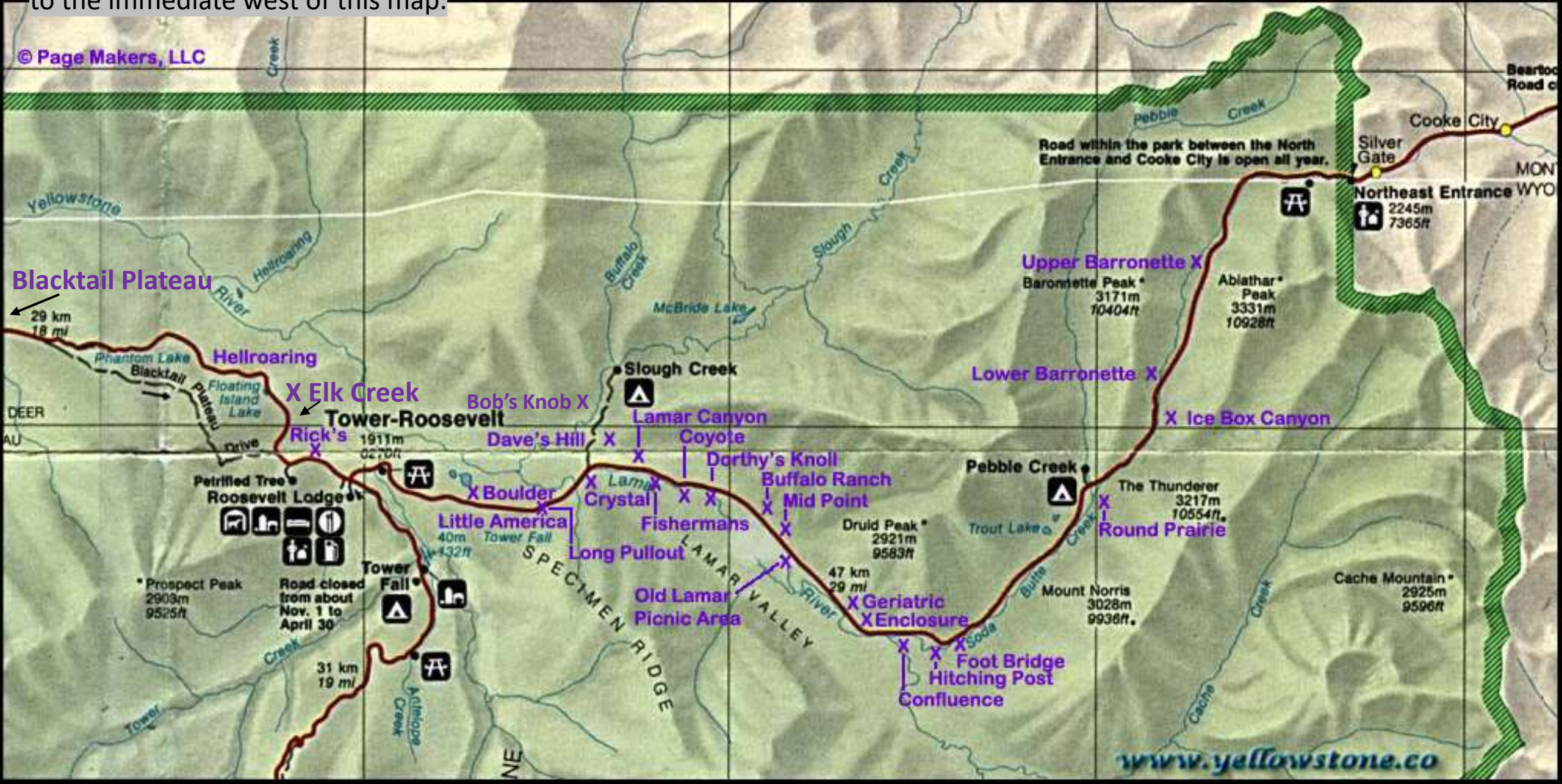
A close-up view of the northern part of Yellowstone. Map © of the National Park Service.



A topographical perspective of major areas visited during the trip, including from Blacktail Deer Plateau (left side of map) to Trout and Buck Lakes just west of Pebble Creek on the far-right side of the map. Map © National Geographic and Yellowstone Association: Trails Illustrated Outdoor Recreation Map.



The names of locations in northern Yellowstone in more detail. Purple indicates the informal names of pullouts/overlooks where I and others stop to observe wildlife. Wildlife watchers over the years have named these places. The Blacktail Plateau is to the immediate west of this map.



Day 1: From Boston... to the Wild West!

There is nothing as exhausting as a marathon day of waking up in Boston in the early morning, then traveling to Montana (via Salt Lake City) and entering Yellowstone in the afternoon. In the summer, we most often stay in Silver Gate which involves over 1.5 hours of driving just to get to the park (via Gardiner) and then another 1.5 hours in the park to finally reach our destination.

On this day, Steve Cifuni and I landed in Bozeman at 12:30 PM, but it took me forever to find our vehicle for the week. Melissa Todd, of [YERC](#), texted me the location in the airport lot (B2), but for some reason I couldn't find it until combing the airport three times. Once I found it, I was sort of embarrassed as it was as easy to locate as Melissa had indicated. That set us back about 20 minutes but once we packed the car and traveled the 40 minutes or so to Livingston, we were able to get gas and go to Albertson's to stock up on food. Gas gets more expensive south of Livingston, so we always top off our vehicle's tank there.

We finally arrived at Gardiner and entered the park at 4:00 PM via the North Entrance. We only saw a few deer on the entire drive in, and no elk until the town of Gardiner, where we found 8 bedded right on the high school football field! This is in stark contrast to our April trips where we see ungulates, mainly deer and elk, throughout just about the entire drive in. In the summer, they move to high country and out of the lowlands around Route 89 where they winter. We did see 8 pronghorn right by the booth to get into the North Entrance of the park, which is where we often see these speedy animals throughout the year.

Because we had perishable food items, we didn't spend long in the park on this day. We stopped for pictures at Undine Falls and the Blacktail Pond lot where we had observed [famous grizzly bear #761 just four months prior](#). There was a report of a grizzly bear near the 'S curve' on the Blacktail Plateau, so we stopped and used our spotting scopes. Despite 10+ minutes of looking, I couldn't find the bruin.

Most of the bison we observed on this day were east of Tower Junction, but we didn't see many compared to a normal day in the park. One exception was in the western part of Little America (east of Tower) where we observed ~50, including loud, grunting bulls following cows. August is their mating season, so the males were in full swing trying to seduce some of the females. Normally, I see hundreds – if not thousands – of bison in Lamar Valley but on this day, there were only 2-3 groups of ~50 each in distant parts of the valley. We noted them but didn't stop for closer views, knowing we'd see more in future days.

In addition to the bison, we saw quite a few groups of pronghorn in Lamar Valley, including groups of 6, 6, and 15 that were relatively close to the road (1/4 to 1/2 mile away) and visible with the naked eye. With that last large group, we decided to stop at 'Trashcan Pullout' (near the Old Lamar Picnic area on the map) and scan from the hill on the other (north) side of the road from the lot. We couldn't find any wolves but did see a smallish grizzly bear on Amethyst Bench. There are often grizzlies digging for roots in this area, so I always scan there when looking for wildlife in Lamar. Amethyst is a wide-open area, which makes it fairly easy to spot them when they are visible. A couple of wildlife enthusiasts informed me that it had been out for most of the day too, so many people were able to see this bear.

After that sighting, Steve and I were tired and content with heading straight to Silver Gate. There were just a few bison in Soda Butte Valley and beyond to the east, so the driving was smooth with no delays. During our first drive into the park on this expedition, we were fortunate to not have long waits at two construction areas: 1) to the west in Lamar Canyon, which lasted our entire trip, and 2) just east of Trout Lake where they were regrading the road near Round Prairie. The after-effects from the flood of June 2022 were causing delays 14 months later, as crews were still repairing roads.

We saw a mule deer in the yard of Mark and Carol's property, which is always a cool sight so close to 'home'. We arrived there just before 7:00 PM MT and went to bed at 9:30 PM (really 11:30 ET), after organizing our stuff, eating, and processing the 66 pictures I took on this day. I nearly passed out from exhaustion, knowing I'd be up before 4:30 AM.



Paradise Valley
on the drive
(Route 89)
south to the
park.





Yankee Jim Canyon on Route 89 on the way to the park.





Arriving to Yellowstone – The Roosevelt Arch at the North Entrance in Gardiner, MT.



Views of Mt Everts from the new park road between Gardiner and Mammoth, which used to be a dirt road. This 5 mile section was redone in the summer/early fall of 2022 after the June 2022 flood washed away sections of the old road.





When we were [in the park in April 2023](#), there was ongoing construction at the Mammoth High Bridge to fortify it. It was nice to see it now completed with no traffic light slowing us down.



Undine Falls. I always enjoy stopping at this spot on the west end of the Blacktail Plateau to stretch my legs. In my mind, I'm officially deep with the park, and I love this magnificent undulating section of Lava Creek.





Close-up views of Undine Falls.



Blacktail Pond, where we watched grizzly bear #761 feeding on a bison carcass (at the 'X' on the left picture) during most of our [April 2023 trip](#).





A good perspective of Blacktail Pond and just how close (see the 'X') the grizzly bear was to us in April 2023.



The area east of Phantom Lake. The south-facing hills on the left (north) of this picture are where elk spend much time in the winter as it is generally snow-free. There aren't many around in the summer however, as they travel to higher elevations many miles from here.





Elk Creek area and what many of us colloquially call 'One (or Lone) Tree Hill' for the lone conifer, likely a Douglas Fir, standing alone at the top of the ridge.



One major construction event that I haven't discussed yet is the making of a new bridge over the Yellowstone River. This was delayed a year due to the floods of 2022, so 2023 was the beginning of this [multi-year endeavor](#).

Next pages: Bison in Little America about a mile east of the bridge construction. Notice the bull tending the cow (bottom right), hoping to mate with her.









Cool perspective of a large bull bison passing by our car in Little America.

A sign of things to come. This is approaching Lamar Canyon from the west side near Slough Creek Campground. This light was up to a 30 minute wait, as it changed directions at predictable half hour intervals. We generally tried to time it to avoid most of that delay. It was one-lane for over a mile, with constant construction to raise the new road away from the cliffs of the Yellowstone River, which eroded during the flood of June 2022.



Entering Lamar Valley, cracked windshield and all, from the west end looking east. The windshield had been in that condition for years, and we had previously used it without incident multiple times in the past. So, its appearance was more cosmetic than anything.





An eager bull following a not so receptive cow bison in the western part of Lamar Valley.



Wildlife watching from 'Trashcan Hill' which is north and across the street from the small parking lot. We were looking for wolves (unsuccessfully) to the left (southeast; left picture) and watching a grizzly bear to the right (southwest; right picture and see next page).





Top left: This is with my camera at 83 X optical zoom. The other pictures of the grizzly bear are cropped. The view was much better through my spotting scope. Bottom left: You can just make out the hump, a defining characteristic of grizzly bears, on the animal's powerful shoulders.





Mule deer doe at 'our' Silver Gate cabin. Notice the rope-like tail that distinguishes it from white-tailed deer, which have a very full 'flag-like' tail.



Our vehicle (white Toyota T-100) and the cabin we stayed at for the duration of the trip.



Day 2: Grizzlies, Wolves, and Republic Pass Hike

Steve and I woke up to our cell phone alarm clocks at 4:25 AM on August 14th. We left the cabin at 5:20 AM to get to the Lamar Valley before first light. It was in the 40°s and felt warm compared to most of our previous trips. In total darkness, we saw a red fox cross the park road from south to north at Warm Creek which is just inside (west) of the park's northeastern boundary. From there, we continued all the way to Dorothy's Knoll Pullout, which is in the western part of Lamar Valley.

Within 10 minutes of our arrival, there was just enough light to make out the shapes of 2 grizzly bears on Amethyst Bench; the previous night's lighter animal and a bigger, darker bruin. As we were watching the two ursids, there was a wildlife watcher with a park radio (many people carry the radios and communicate with each other that way; I used to have a radio but currently do not have one) and that group received a report of wolves traveling east so we immediately packed up and headed to Picnic Pullout, as the preferable Trashcan lot was full. There, we spotted 2 grays just south of the Lamar River. They were relatively close, being only about a half mile away, which is twice as close as the average distance we normally see them from. There were also ~50 Canada geese nearby, but they were relaxed and the wolves let them be despite appearing close through my scope.

The wolf duo was mostly bedded for >30 minutes with heads up and down. I showed many people through my spotting scope, with some excited people seeing wolves for the first time – including people from France and Germany! I also showed folks the 2 bears from earlier; they were excited and appreciative of me letting them look through my optics.

At 7:30 AM, the two wolves stood up and played locally, chasing each other and running back and forth in circles through tall grass. It was very fun to watch, and I guessed that they were both young, probably yearlings. The Junction Wolf Pack, of which these two were a member of, had 15 surviving pups from last year's multiple litters (2022), which is a tremendous accomplishment. The pack now consisted of around 25 individuals, but with so many young wolves going here and there, there was seemingly constant fluidity without a consistent count being made by the full-time wildlife watchers and park researchers. This is often the case in the summer when most packs don't travel together cohesively. (Also, see p. 564 for a March 2024 update on the Junctions.)

The wolf pair soon got close to the geese but didn't seriously pursue them, yet all the birds flew off anyway. It was there that I could see that there were actually about 75 birds in that large flock. The canines continued to travel in a very non-purposeful manner, which isn't typical of wild canids, as they continued to chase and play with one another. By 8 AM, one wolf ran after two groups of 3 pronghorns each. It appeared that they randomly came about the ungulates on their travels. The first gray had traveled right past the ungulates with the pronghorn ignoring it. I was surprised how hard the pronghorn ran from the second wolf, despite it never coming close enough to making contact with them.

Early wildlife watchers at dawn at Dorothy's Pullout in Lamar Valley. The arrow points to Amethyst Bench where the grizzly bears were spotted.



A zoomed in view at dawn of Amethyst Bench from the previous page, as well as the two foraging grizzlies.



Many of the regular wolf watchers, including myself, don't remember seeing so many Canada geese in Lamar Valley. Here they are pictured along with the usual ravens and sandhill cranes.



Beautiful view of Lamar Valley looking SE from Picnic Pullout,
with Specimen Ridge in the background.





At first, I only saw Canada geese (above) but then we noticed a gray wolf (below, see arrow) and then a second gray (next page) bedded in the grass.



Early morning light often produces a lot of shadows. Here, I found a bald eagle in a dead conifer by the Lamar River which was southwest of our location. I had been scanning the area to look for additional wildlife while the wolves were bedded.



Next page: The two grays apparently were waiting for the sun to hit them, as they got up soon after that and began playing.





They were playing with an old bone, likely from a kill site, with tug-o-war initially the main activity (above left).





While I figured the geese weren't as close to the wolves as they appeared, due to a lack of depth perception through my optics, it was still surprising to see how calm the birds were as the wolves played. It is amazing how animals, especially predator and prey, seemingly know each other's intentions so well.





As the two wolves traveled (upper left and lower right), they would frequently stop to wrestle each other (lower left).











Before the two wolves appeared, the pronghorn (which were initially about a quarter mile west of the canids) were play running on the southern slopes of Lamar Valley.



Wolf approaching the pronghorns, with the actual sequence (top left, then clockwise) in order from my camera.



The pronghorn ignored the first gray (see arrow) as it traveled past them and were more focused on the second one (next page).





The pronghorn swiftly ran away from the wolf despite the canine never getting close to any of them.

Amethyst Mountain, part of the ~10-mile-long Specimen Ridge, in the background. The wolves and pronghorn were in the sunny part of the southern section of Lamar Valley.



After unsuccessfully chasing the pronghorn, who are often incorrectly called 'antelopes', the wolves soon went further west which was WSW of our pullout and observation area. There were many cottonwood trees at river level, and they often blocked our view of the traveling canids. I could tell that one of the canids was husky and clearly a male judging from the penis sheath that I could see. I couldn't tell the gender of the other, slenderer canid, but guessed it was a female.

As the wolves continued traveling west toward 'Jasper Bench' on the south end of Lamar Valley, I looked due south of our vantage point and saw a grizzly at the tree-line about a half mile away traveling east. It was dark and likely the bigger of the grizzlies I saw at dawn on Amethyst which was only about a half mile from that bear's current location. The bruin was scenting something by sniffing the air, but I lost it as I watched the wolves. I assume it went into the woods somewhere nearby.

At 8:15 AM, we headed back to Dorothy's Pullout and joined Jeremy SunderRaj and Rick McIntyre, who gave me bear spray to borrow for the week. I appreciate so many people who help us when we are in the park. Rick, wolf watcher extraordinaire, not only aides many – including myself – to see wolves, but he stores our bear spray at his home in between the 1-2 times a year that I visit the park. Rick is retired from the park service and has [written 5 books on Yellowstone's wolves](#). Jeremy is currently a biological wolf technician for the park. His daily responsibilities include monitoring the whereabouts of the park's wolves.

We didn't have the two original grays from Dorothy's Lot but did find a third gray that watchers saw earlier from the hill above Trashcan Pullout, which was out of our view from Picnic Pullout. The canid was traveling west like the first two wolves, and we lost it behind Amethyst Bench. However, it came back out and was seen on and off as it went up to Jasper Bench. There are many undulating hills in the area, so it is common to lose, then re-find animals, especially wolves, as they travel.

The wolves were using a rendezvous site up in the southern part of Jasper Bench which was out of view from the lot; one needs to climb a steep hill north of the pullout to be able to see them. A rendezvous site is an above ground resting area where adults leave the pack's pups. The mature wolves come and go to these areas while the juveniles transition from the den in spring and early summer to traveling with the pack in the fall. There was only 1 surviving pup, a black female, from this year's double litter of 8-9. Regular wolf watchers and the park's biologists weren't sure what happened other than they kept seeing fewer and fewer pups, until it was down to just that one. The female black pup spent most of her time in the Jasper rendezvous area. It has a marsh and seclusion, making it a nice spot for them.



Grizzly bear at the tree line moving east.



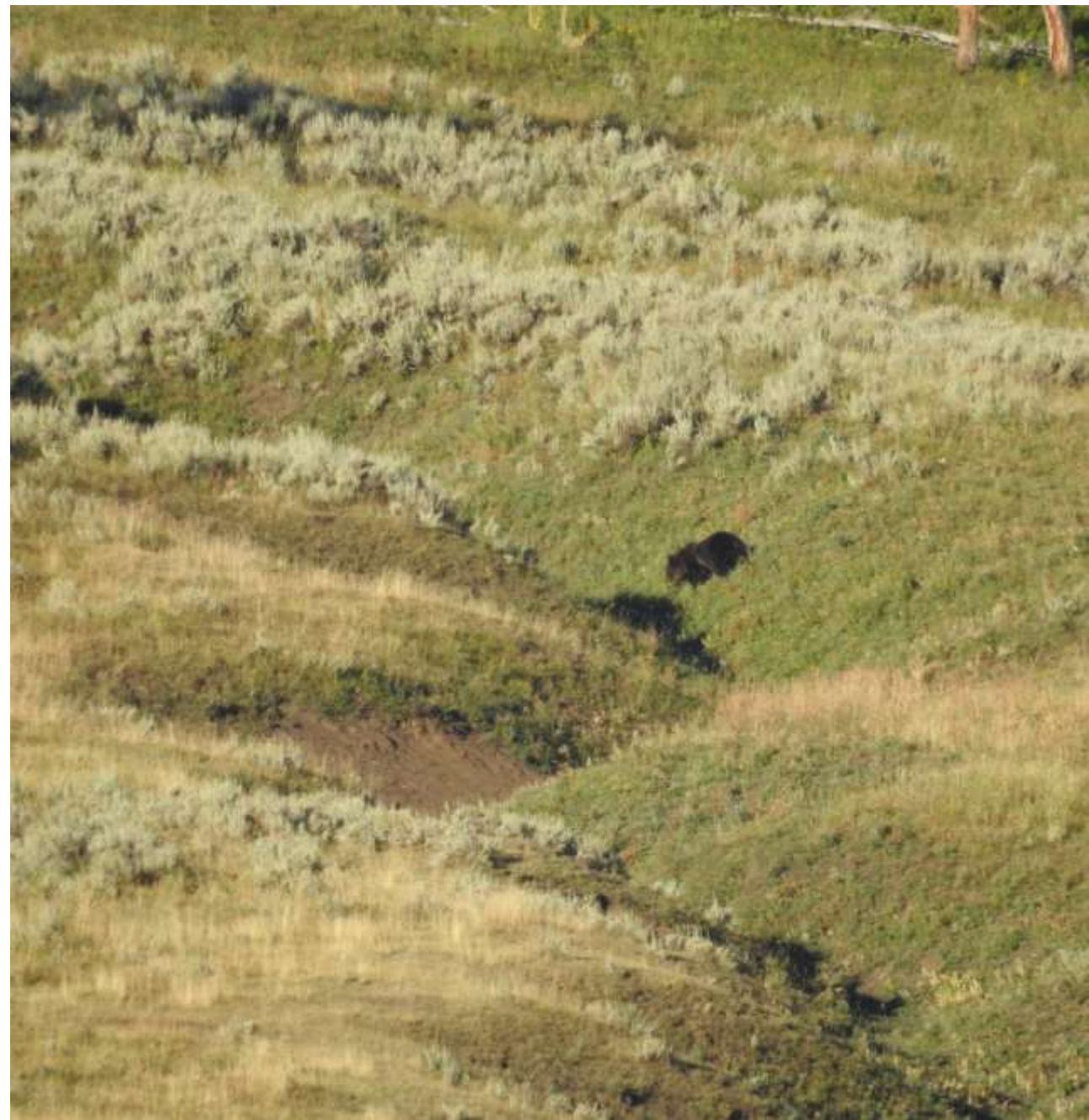
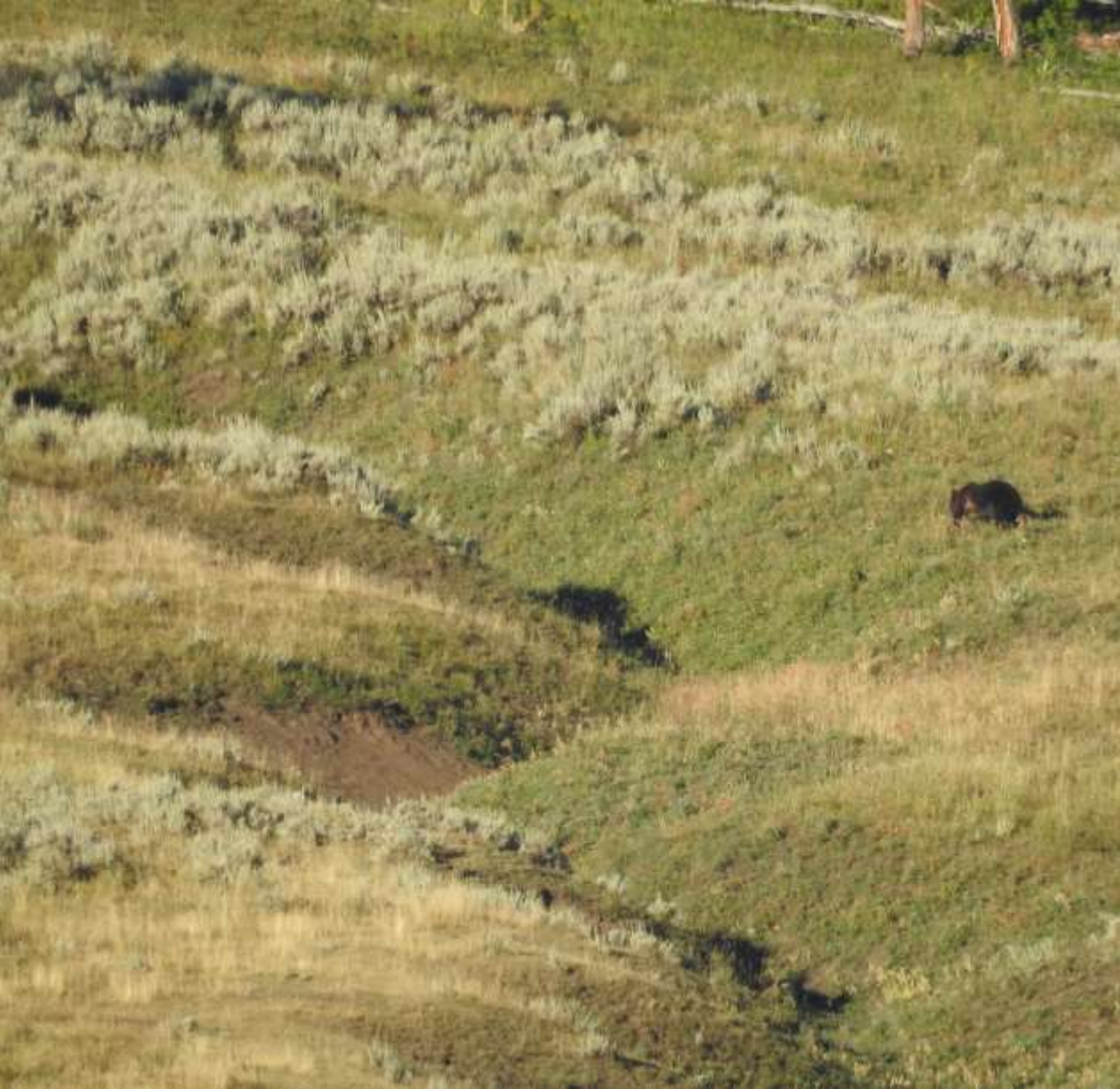




Bear scenting the air. I never found out what the bear was smelling.

Next page: I then lost the bear as it traveled into a ravine.







As the light got better, so did the view of the bald eagle, who was in a stand of dead trees.





Above: Lamar Valley with Amethyst Bench (left arrow) and Jasper Bench (the two right arrows).

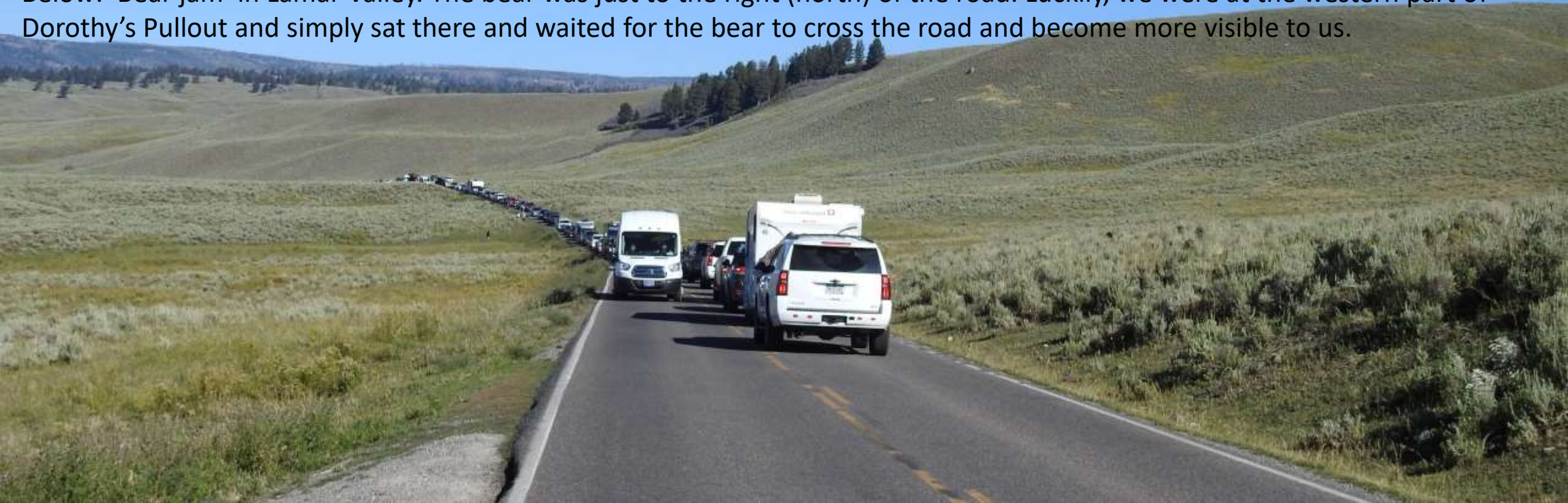
Right: Jasper Bench with Specimen Ridge in the background of both pictures.



At Dorothy's, I talked with Jeremy for roughly a half hour about park happenings. He then left the lot at 9:15 AM in his park vehicle to search for signals of the wolves wearing radio-collars. After he departed, I had oatmeal with a banana and scoop of peanut butter. I used my thermos's remaining tea water as the warm fluid – it was delicious! As I was eating, I noticed many cars backed up just to the west of our location. To my surprise, there was smallish subadult grizzly bear just to the north of the road. It was close and we were in a perfect position to observe it, while others were stuck in traffic with most of them not having a good view. We walked about 100 feet west and found a good place to observe from the side of the road.

The bear was doing a lot of digging. It then crossed the park road, heading south right between the cars. I couldn't believe how bold it was, but after all it probably grew up in that area, so cars were a part of its daily existence. I obtained great pictures of this small-to-medium-sized young bear. I also took a few video clips from only 40-50 meters away.

Below: 'Bear jam' in Lamar Valley. The bear was just to the right (north) of the road. Luckily, we were at the western part of Dorothy's Pullout and simply sat there and waited for the bear to cross the road and become more visible to us.





This was the view for most of the first 20 minutes of observing the bear. Nevertheless, I could tell it was a young grizzly judging from the smaller size but large shoulder hump, which distinguishes it from a black bear. Also, black bears usually aren't found in wide-open expanses like the central part of Lamar Valley.





I had many 'almost really good' pictures before it went into shorter grass and sagebrush where I obtained legitimately good pictures (next pages).





The grizzly as it approached the road and crossed to the south (next page). Despite the [amazing bear sightings from just four months prior](#) to this one, this was a pretty special up-close view of a wild grizzly!







It was quite sunny and hot by 9:50 AM, so Steve and I decided to head back to the cabin, getting there at 10:30 AM. I finished my daily notes to get caught up to date, then organized my pictures, and checked email. After resting, we drove a few miles east and parked on Republic Street (which is actually a dirt road) in Cooke City and started our hike up to Republic Pass at 1:23 PM.

The first 1.4 miles was on a dirt road. We later learned that we could've driven up on it and parked at the actual trailhead. We saw wolf tracks going downhill, and 3 houses up in the middle of nowhere, before we reached the official start of the hike.

The next 4+ miles offered tremendous scenery as we hiked to the pass and actually entered Yellowstone National Park from the national forest land where we began the hike. I could see the familiar Cache Creek area where I have previously hiked from the Thunderer in the park. The area is distinct with steep terrain and many dead trees from previous fires.

We only saw two people (and three dogs with them) the entire hike. They happened to be resting at the actual pass sitting on a small glacier! I waved from a distance, as I hiked over the pass and into the Yellowstone Park side of the mountain. Steve and I explored the area for 20 minutes before venturing back. We saw the people's car parked at the trailhead, but never caught up to them which surprised me given that we hike faster than most people.

It was 4:30 PM when we began the hike back to the car which was on the same trail, i.e., 'out and back', indicating a return from where one came from. It was much quicker heading downhill on the return, but still, we didn't arrive at the car until 6:30 PM. It ended up being 11.8 miles judging from Steve's Apple Watch. I was tired and my left hamstring became very sore the last couple miles. I had been playing basketball all summer and jogging a couple of miles a day with my dog, so was in very good shape, but apparently wasn't ready for the long hike which uses different muscles.

We didn't spot much wildlife on the walkabout. We heard birds throughout the hike, and I spotted a gray jay that was calling atop a tall conifer. A loud, small hawk – likely a Cooper's, but I couldn't verify it – flew by screeching. It disappeared in a cluster of tall pines before I could obtain a picture of it. I heard the chatter of red squirrels throughout the journey, but didn't actually see many of the little guys. We also saw deer and elk tracks and a lot of elk scat up on the very grassy Republic Pass, but since we weren't there at dusk – when ungulates are most active – we didn't see any.

We arrived back to the cabin just before 7:00 PM, then ate dinner and showered. I ate while Steve showered, then vice versa, to give each other some space. Afterwards, we organized our new batch of pictures, checked email, and went to bed around 9:30 PM knowing that 4:20 AM and our alarms were just around the corner. What a day!

The drive to Silver Gate among the beautiful conifers.





Wolf track early on the Republic Trail hike above Cooke City, Montana.

Next page: In the first 1.4 miles of the hike, we passed by abandoned cars and a few homes up in the mountains.







Old mining equipment left during Cooke City's gold rush years (top and below, right) and a view of the Beartooth Mountains to the north (left).





Shortly after leaving the mining equipment area (left), we reached the official beginning of the hiking trail (right).

Next page: Woody Ridge, a pretty section of the Republic Pass Trail, was visible on the east side of the trail for most of the hike.



There were many meadows as we hiked south on the trail. The map indicates that shortly after we started on the official part of the trail, we also left Montana and entered Wyoming. Both the top left and bottom right pictures include Steve just ahead of me.





Views along the Republic Trail with Republic Pass (see arrows) in the far background of both pictures, marked by a small glacier.



Woody Ridge (left) leads to the pass near Republic Peak (10,491 feet).





Bear scat (left) and a calling gray jay (right).





Views from the trail, including Republic Creek, which paralleled much of our hike (bottom right).



Breathtaking views awaited us as we neared the pass, which is just to the left of this picture.



There were also many opportunities to look to the north and see the Beartooth Mountain Range in the distance.





Left: Lush vegetation high up Republic Creek near the pass.

Right: Wildflowers in a high elevation meadow.



Republic Trail from high up, with views to the north (left) and south (right), which includes the pass and the official end of the hiking trail just beyond the glacier in view.



Next page: The view kept getting better the higher up we went. This is another view of the Beartooth Range to the north.



Similar views of Republic Peak with the pass (arrow on right picture) and trail (arrow on upper left picture) in view.



“Entering Yellowstone National Park” sign just on the other (south) side of Republic Pass.





Cache Creek area in the park with Republic Peak on the far left (top). Notice the many fallen trees in the valley of both pictures.





Cache Creek area in the park. Notice all the fallen trees from fires many years prior, including 1988 (upper left picture). Amphitheater Peak, to the west, is in the background of the two lower pictures.



The view to the south of Republic Pass and Yellowstone National Park. The picture to the left was taken by Steve with my Nikon P900 camera and the one to the right with my cell phone (iPhone SE).

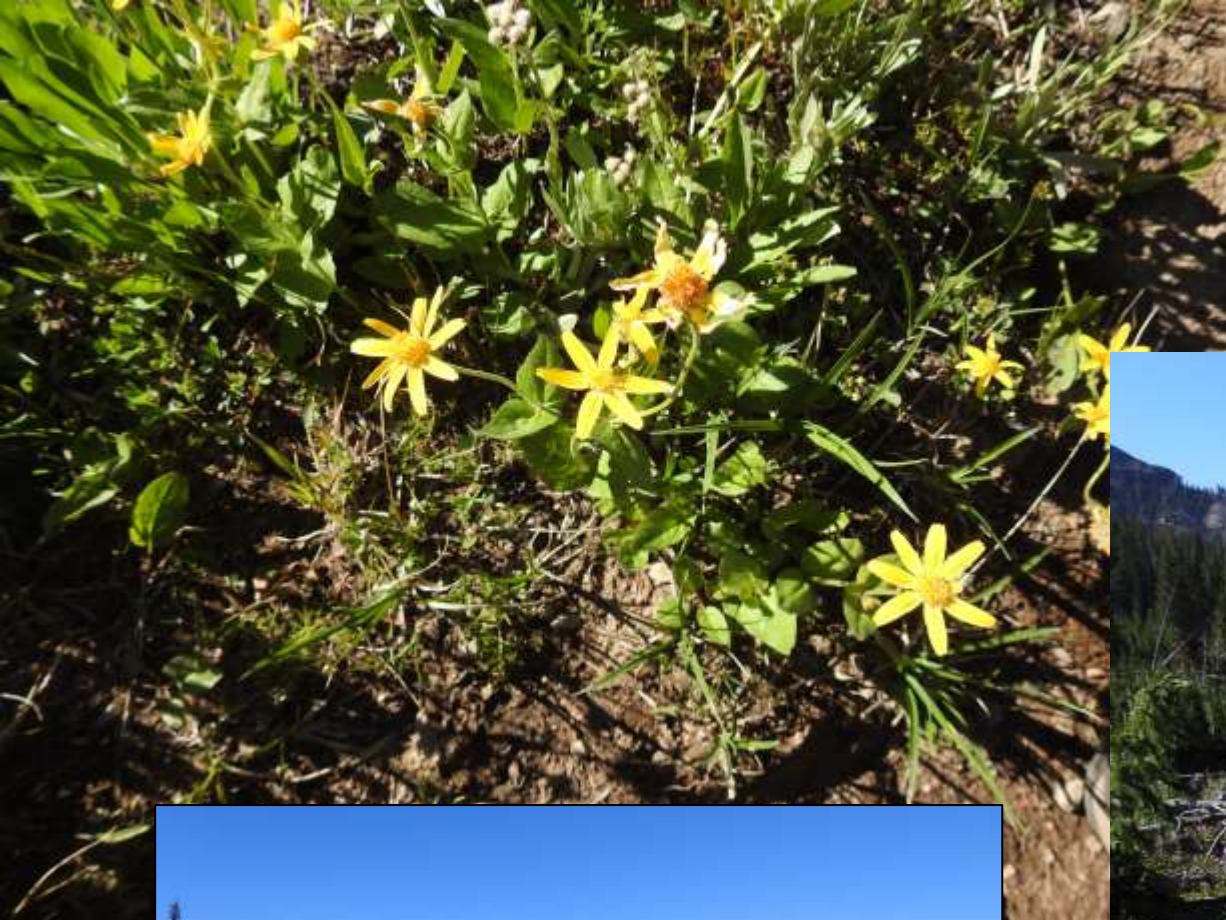


The view to the north from Republic Pass. The picture to the left was taken by Steve with my Nikon P900 camera and the one to the right with my cell phone (iPhone SE).



Next page: We then began the hike down the mountain with a beautiful view of the surrounding area.





Arnica (left) just off the trail and near a blowdown, likely from a landslide many years prior (bottom pictures). I was tired on the hike down the mountain, so I didn't take many pictures compared to the way up.



Day 3: A Grizzly Bear Day with a Ton of Driving

On August 15th, Steve and I woke up early, as usual, and left the cabin at 5:15 AM in the pitch dark. We drove straight to Dorothy's Pullout, but with only two cars there, we turned around and went back to the east and scoped at Trashcan Hill a couple miles down the valley. We were hoping to see wolves to the SE at the 'Old Druid Rendezvous', an area that wolves have used since they were brought back to the park in 1995-96. While we didn't find any wolves from there, we did spot two grizzlies digging in the middle of Amethyst Bench to the southwest, which is a daily occurrence this time of year. It is believed that there are nutritious roots and tubers up there that the bears gorge on to gain valuable calories for hibernation.

One of the bruins walked east into an aspen tree-line where it went out of sight early in the morning. As we were watching the remaining grizzly bear, we received a report from wolf watchers of yet another grizzly bear up on Amethyst. This one was bigger. The people were at the Institute parking lot which is about a mile to the west, and a relatively close about 0.75-1.0 miles from Amethyst. That is the closest one can get from the road to the Amethyst Bench area. We never saw that bear, as its view was likely blocked by the many undulating hills and drainages in the area.

Thomas Stier of Germany, who just arrived at Mark and Carol's cabin in Silver Gate the evening before, was already at Dorothy's when we went back there. Thomas, Steve, and I were sharing the loft at the cabin where there were conveniently three beds, while Bill Wengeler, Yellowstone Park Ranger, stayed in the bedroom below us. The four of us managed to stay out of each other's way by cooking, eating, and showering at separate times.

Earlier, Thomas saw one gray colored wolf briefly from the Institute. It was traveling west to Jasper Bench, an area across from Dorothy's, but we never spotted it. Dorothy's Pullout is higher in elevation, so offers a more expansive view of Lamar Valley than most lots. It has been a favorite spot for wolf watchers since the canines were reintroduced to the park.

While searching for canids, Steve and I spotted 4-5 bald eagles down on a sandbar next to the Lamar River south of our spot. Only two had white heads, meaning the others were immature. They were tugging on something while walking on the sand. They looked awkward moving around on the ground like that, so there must have been an out-of-view food source somewhere down there.

I also noticed a shocking lack of bison in Lamar. Over [1,100 bison died over the winter](#). Most of those were shot by Native Americans at the park border. This generated [international outrage](#) over the way bison are being managed.

Lamar Valley at dawn from Dorothy's Pullout with Jasper Bench at the center of the image (see arrows). Amethyst Bench, where the grizzlies were being observed, is just to the left of this image.



A perspective of the 4-5 bald eagles at the Lamar River. I could 'only' find four of them in this frame.





Lamar Valley is normally a classic summer-time hot spot for bison. On [previous trips I have often observed a couple thousand bison at a time grazing on the lush grass](#). Given that about 4,800 of the large bovines remain in the park, I would have expected to at least see a few hundred there. Yet all we saw were small isolated groups of 20-25 in pockets of the valley.

At 7:30 AM, Steve and I decided to drive west and look for wildlife in other places. We timed the Lamar Canyon traffic light perfectly and waited less than a minute there before traveling through the canyon and on to Slough Creek and Little America. As I drove the truck, Steve spotted a coyote very close to the road at 'Aspen Pullout', a scenic parking lot in Little America lined with a small aspen grove. I promptly turned around, but we could not find the canid again.

We continued to the west and stopped at Tower Junction to clean out our car. That area has a very nice recycling facility, two dumpsters, and two outhouses, so it is a nice place to stop to clean out the vehicle, remove thermal layers as it warms up, and use the bathroom. I drink more tea in the week and a half that I am there than probably the rest of the year. That equates to many additional needed bathroom visits.

We drove all the way to the Blacktail Plateau, only seeing sporadic, small bison groups. A few pronghorn were the only other large mammals we spotted. Many species migrate to higher elevations in the summer, so there are often days during the summer – especially when it is hot – when one doesn't see much wildlife, even in the protected confines of the national park.

From 8:15-9:45 AM, we scanned from the Nature Trail parking lot. This area offers an expansive view of the scenic Blacktail Plateau. Doug McLaughlin, of [Optics Yellowstone](#), goes there every morning to observe the Rescue Creek Pack. This [pack is an offshoot of the Junction Butte Pack](#) that formed in the winter of 2020-2021 when numerous males left the Junctions and met up with a couple of females from the nearby 8-Mile Pack. In summer 2023, the pack consisted of 8 pups and 10 adults, with a disproportionate number of males (Note: 'only' 15 were observed together in January 2024 and 13-14 in March 2024 at the time of this writing, including just one known remaining adult female from that original 8-Mile Pack. This was likely due to dispersal of some members of the clan).

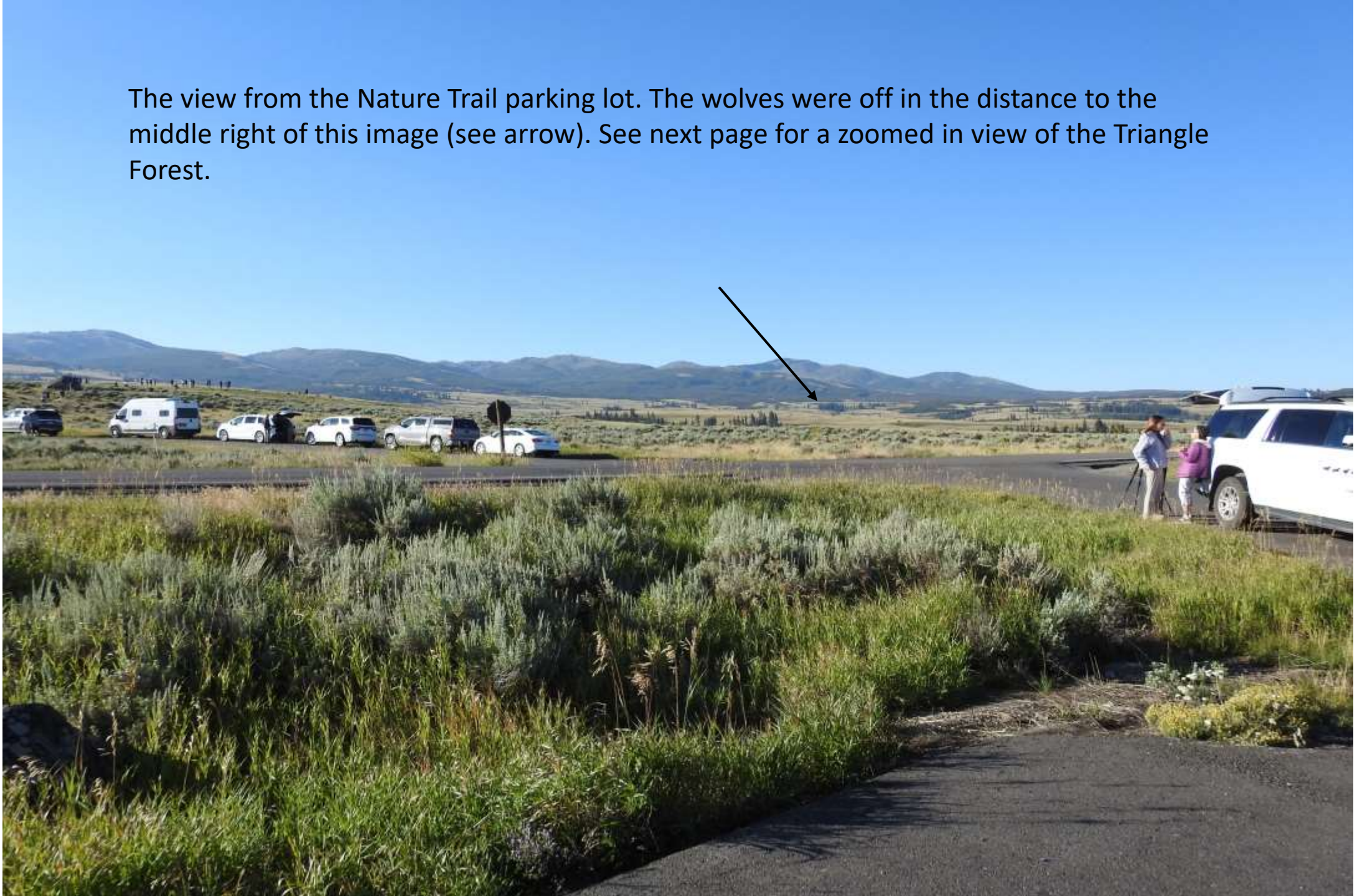
The pack was using a rendezvous site at a triangle-shaped forest to the SW of the pullout. Watchers used the 'Triangle Forest' as a base point to help others locate the wolves (e.g., "look on the west or right side of the Triangle Forest").

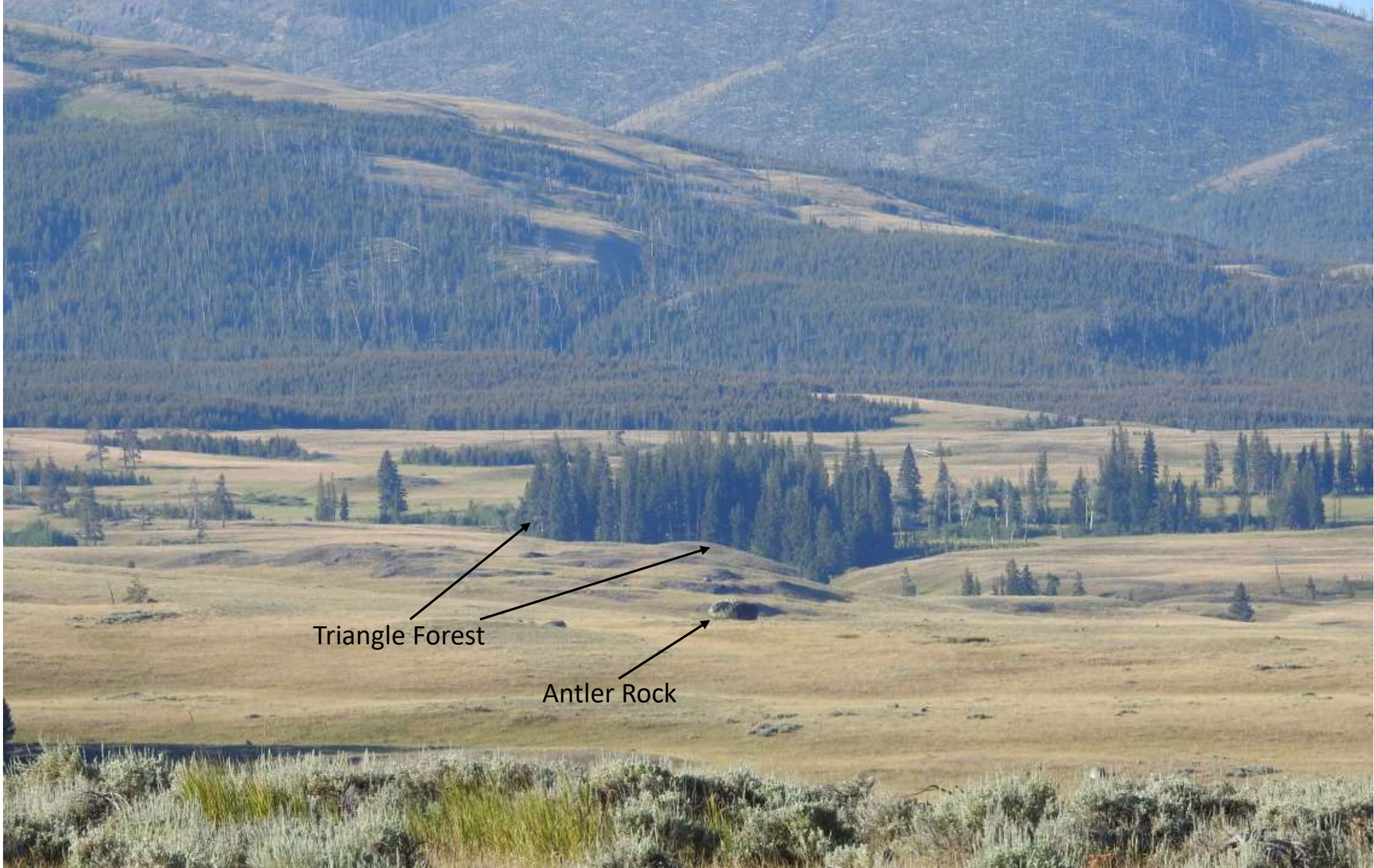
At dawn Doug had seen all 8 pups and a couple of the adults in front of the Triangle Forest but they were out of view when we arrived. After 45 minutes of searching, we spotted a black adult in that area. It traveled east behind gullies and went out of sight in 'the line of trees' to the left (east) of the forest. As I scanned the area, I was shocked to see no bison in that area where I spotted so many just four months previously.

Aspen Pullout in Little America. A beautiful area! Steve spotted a coyote in front of the aspens as we drove by, so I quickly turned around hoping to see it again, but we never could find it.



The view from the Nature Trail parking lot. The wolves were off in the distance to the middle right of this image (see arrow). See next page for a zoomed in view of the Triangle Forest.





Triangle Forest

Antler Rock

Notice the elk antlers on 'Antler Rock'. It is believed that a person(s) put them there. This is a common area to see male elk.



After about ten minutes of not seeing the wolf, I began scanning a wider area to see what else I could find. I managed to see a group of 8 pronghorn well to the east on the plateau and a single female pronghorn that was close to the park road. She was wearing a radio-collar, so park biologists could follow her.

When I began to scan back near the Triangle Forest, I saw 2 white-tailed deer bucks. They were separated by a few hundred yards as they were about 5 minutes apart, but they took the same route which I found interesting. They ended up walking right in front of 'Antler Rock', a large boulder that often has a bunch of elk antler sheds on it. It is in front of the rendezvous forest. The first one was big and appeared to have 10-points on his antlers, while the second one was a smaller 6-8 point buck. Both deer disappeared in a gulley, and I didn't see them again. I was hoping that these deer might eventually get the wolves' attention, but we never spotted any canines in the area.

While watching the deer, I also spotted a bald eagle and a hawk, most likely a red-tailed, perched on rocks. The deer walked by them, and neither mammal nor bird seemed to care about the other creature as they crossed paths at what looked like a relatively close distance. The two raptors just calmly watched the deer walk by them.

At 10 AM, we left the plateau and our observation spot and drove east a short way to drive the Blacktail dirt road which is a winding 6-7 mile path that ends at Elk Creek, very close to Petrified Tree. It was very dusty and slow going with other cars ahead of us driving at a snail's pace. We didn't spot any wildlife on the way.

Once we reached the park (paved) road, we then went south of Tower and took the Dunraven Road past Antelope Flats, which is on the back side of Specimen Ridge. We drove all the way to Hayden Valley. We saw a bull elk at Canyon Stables, where we have seen many elk over the years. Soon after, we reached 'Grizzly Overlook', which is a place where watchers – including us – have looked for wolves (and bears) in previous years. I only managed to see a lone bull bison and then a separate group of 6 of them after 15-18 minutes of scanning. It was warm out when I scanned, so most animals were already likely resting. I was surprised we still hadn't seen any large herds of bison in the park up to this point of the trip, but it was a beautiful, sunny, warm morning so it was very pleasant to stand out there looking around.

We had a great raven sighting in the parking lot. It was likely a food habituated bird that hung around looking for tidbits from park visitors. By standing on the fence railing, one could zoom way in on the bird and obtain nice pictures.



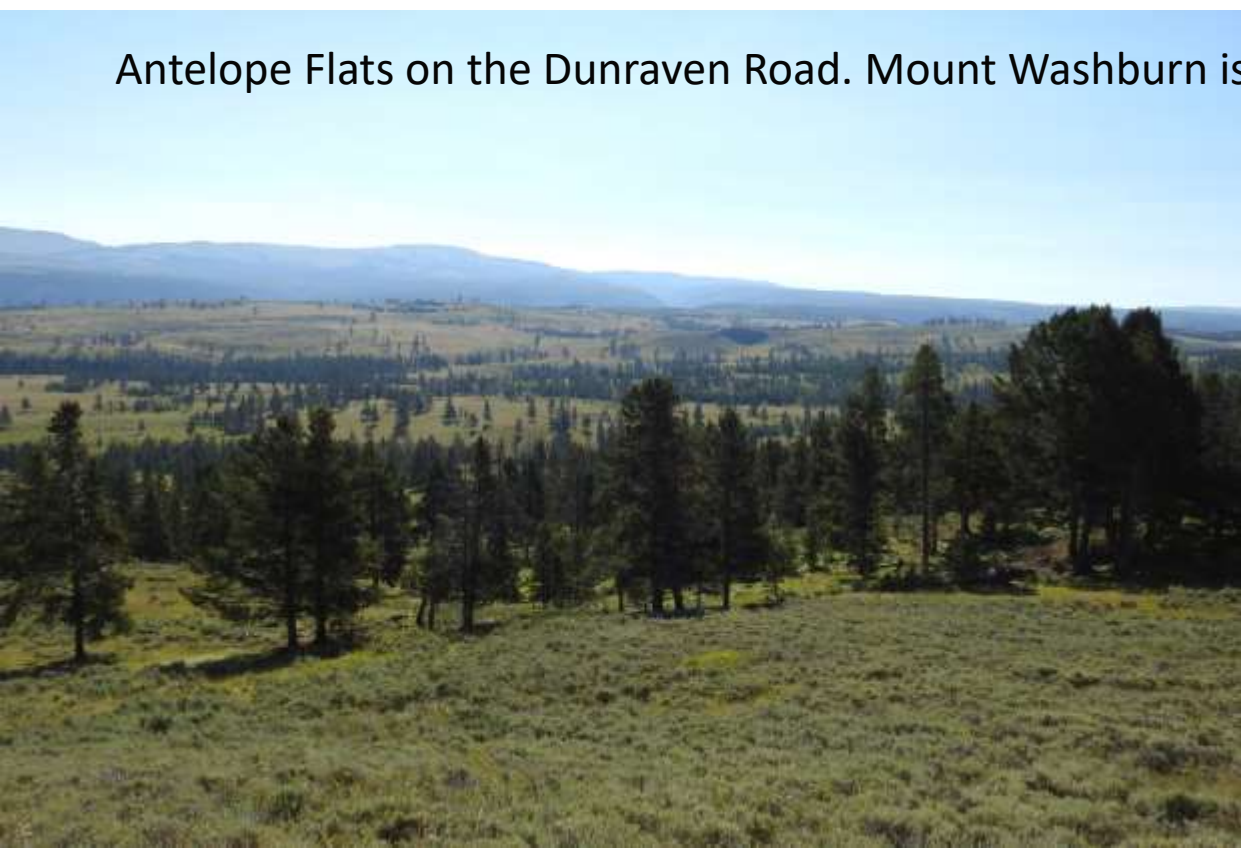
The two white-tailed deer bucks taking the same path about 5 minutes apart near Antler Rock (out of sight to the right of the images).

Next page: Bald eagle perched on a rock on the Blacktail Plateau.





Antelope Flats on the Dunraven Road. Mount Washburn is to the right of the top and bottom right pictures.





Raven on the beautiful Dunraven Road.



Mount Washburn from the Dunraven Road. You can just make out the fire lookout tower on the top (see arrow).



Cool scenes along the Dunraven Road.





Left: Bull elk near the Canyon Stables. This is not a great picture, but we didn't spend extra time waiting for a good one because we wanted to get to Hayden Valley and look for wildlife there.



Right: Raven at 'Grizzly Overlook' in Hayden Valley.



Top: Freaky picture of the raven with its eyes closed.



Right: The thick bill and larger size of ravens separates them from their close cousins, crows.





Different perspectives from the scenic Grizzly Overlook.
Notice the raven (see arrow) on the guardrail in the bottom right picture.



The view to the west of the road, on a hill above 'Grizzly Overlook', is very open with low sagebrush and lots of grass. Wolves and grizzly bears are often observed over there.



Great blue heron in the Yellowstone River.



After leaving Grizzly Overlook, we drove a few miles south through Hayden Valley to get to Mud Volcano. We hiked that 1+ mile basin, which has some great geothermal features, including mud pots, hot spring, and geysers. I have always loved the sulfur smell of that area as well, which is funny to say because it is a foul odor. But one gets used to it over time, and I associate the smell with the fantastic scenery of the area. In addition to the hydrothermal features, there was also a lone bull bison in the upper part of the area.

After leaving Mud Volcano, we drove the East Entrance Road all the way to the park border. We had lunch at picturesque Lake Butte Overlook, then saw a grizzly bear 1-2 miles east of there off the park road. Grizzlies are frequently observed in that general area. It appeared to be a young grizzly sow, and I guessed it was a bear that watchers call 'Jam', but I was far from 100% sure with that guess. We parked our vehicle on the side of the road and watched the bruin for ~20 minutes. She was in an area with a lot of deadfall, and the bear often climbed up and over, or under, the logs depending on their size. She foraged on the valley floor, eating grasses not unlike a deer does.

We didn't see much wildlife after that, only seeing 2 mule deer, who were, oddly, near two people that were fishing in a small water body. To save time, we didn't stop and continued all the way to the East Entrance Gate, but it seemed so odd to see the deer right next to the men.

Once we reached the East Entrance, the ranger suggested we drive to Cody and loop around counterclockwise to get back to our cabin in Silver Gate. We took her advise and drove the 50+ miles to Cody, then onward to Sunlight Basin and ultimately to Cooke City. It was 120 miles just from the East Entrance Gate, so it was a haul, but we drove much faster on those roads then we would have if we drove back through the park.

It was a long, long day. We drove that stretch between 2:30-5:30, with some scenic stops along the way. It was 93 degrees in desert-like Cody. We filled up with gas in Cody, and found it curious that there was only one other gas station nearby, which was in Wapiti. Cooke City has a whopping two! Gas was considerably cheaper in Cody too, which I suspected it would be given the larger population and more amenities located there.

Arriving back to our cabin in Cooke City, we were pooped and plopped down on our respective beds before making dinner and going through our pictures for the evening. We didn't head back into the park on this day, instead waiting until dawn to venture back.

Scenic area west of the park road in Hayden Valley. I often see bison on those sandstone hills.



The parking lot at Mud Volcano is often filled with RV campers.



Mud Caldron in the Mud Volcano basin. [Mud pots are formed](#) by standing surface water acidic enough to dissolve the surrounding rock into clay. They have a similar structure to hot springs, but a lower water supply making it appear as bubbling or boiling mud.

Next page: Cool perspectives of the Mud Volcano area with boardwalks leading to the features shown in this section.





Dragon Mouth Spring (below) and a nearby hydrothermal vent (top left).
Next page: Different angles of Dragon Mouth Spring.







The area's namesake,
Mud Volcano.



I marvel at the boiling mud every time I look at these geothermal features.

Mud Volcano (left) and Grizzly Fumarole (right).



Cell phone pictures of Mud Volcano.

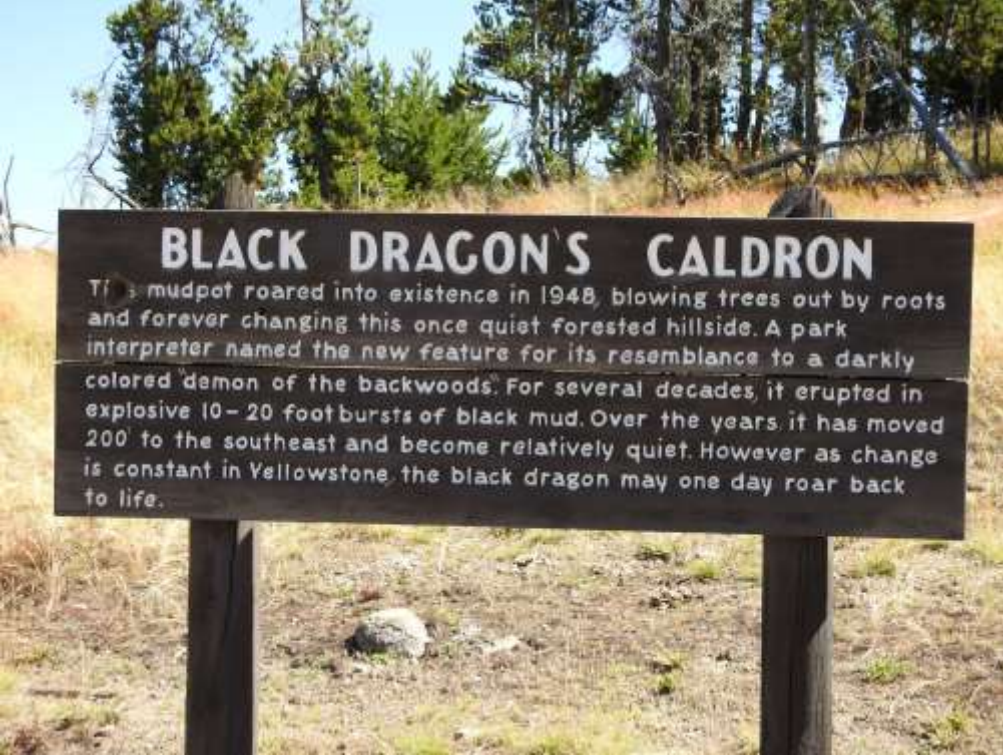


Black Dragon's Caldron (far left) and Sour Lake (right).

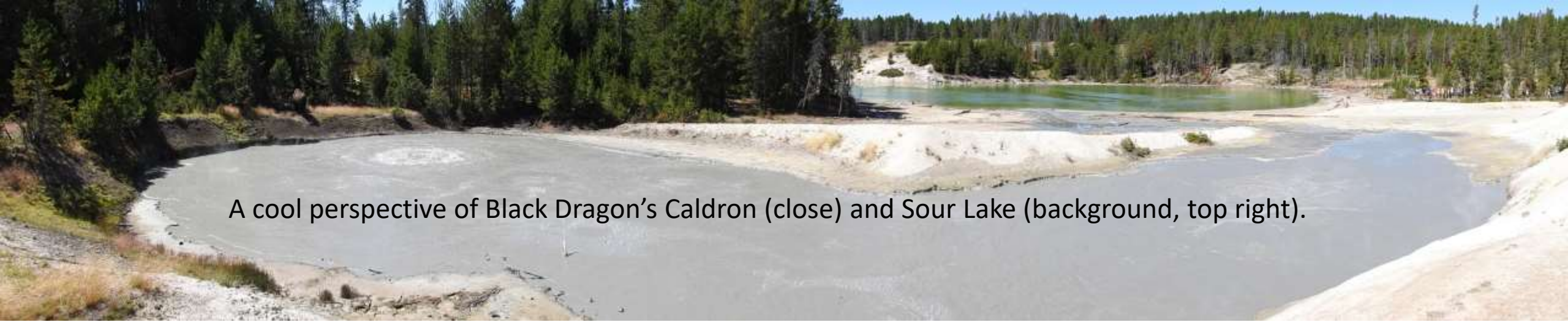


Sour Lake.





Bison bull (see circle above for perspective) at Black Dragon's Caldron.



A cool perspective of Black Dragon's Caldron (close) and Sour Lake (background, top right).





My cell phone pics of the area.





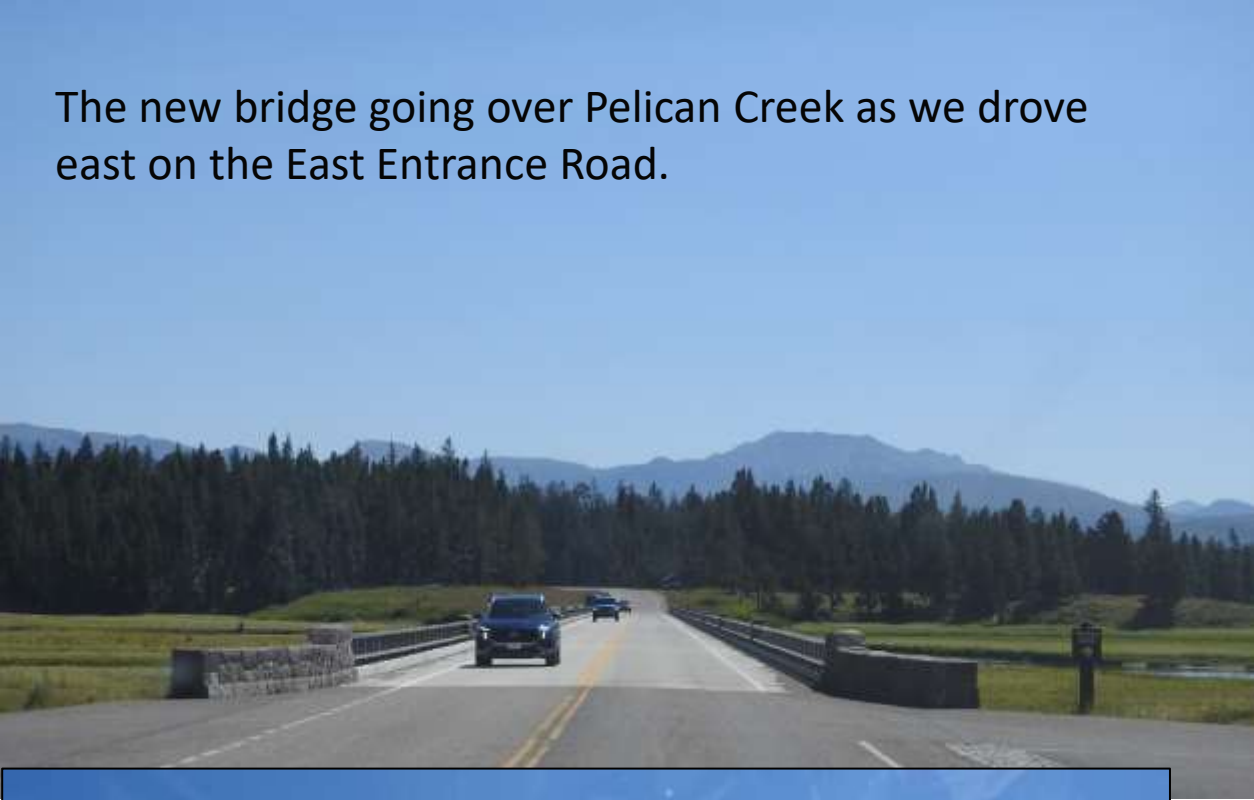
Churning Caldron.



Mud Geyser (foreground), with a great view of the southern part of Hayden Valley in the background.



The new bridge going over Pelican Creek as we drove east on the East Entrance Road.



Yellowstone Lake from the park road.



Very scenic views of Yellowstone Lake from Lake Butte Overlook.





Top: Yellowstone Lake and the park road paralleling the water.

Bottom: Pelican Valley as viewed to the north. This is a remote wilderness area where a wolf pack (the 'Mollies') roams, as well as many grizzly bears.



Pictures through my cell phone (this page) can give a slightly different perspective than my Nikon camera. I like to use both for that purpose.





Location of grizzly bear sighting. The bear spent most of the time in the valley feeding on grasses (right), but she also walked up the hill while we watched her.





While I wasn't 100% sure, I thought that this was the grizzly bear wildlife watchers call 'Jam', based on descriptions I have read of the adolescent ursid.







Right after walking over the log (top right), the bear fed one last time on grass (bottom right), then walked up the hill (top left and next page) among numerous deadfall lodgepole pines.



Grizzly bear
feeding on
berries,
possibly
serviceberries.



Our last views of the bear before we continued our drive east.





The East Entrance Road (top left) just before (west of) Sylvan Lake (top right and below).





Sylvan Pass through the windshield on a beautiful, sunny day.



East Entrance area.



The road to Cody while traveling alongside the Shoshone River.

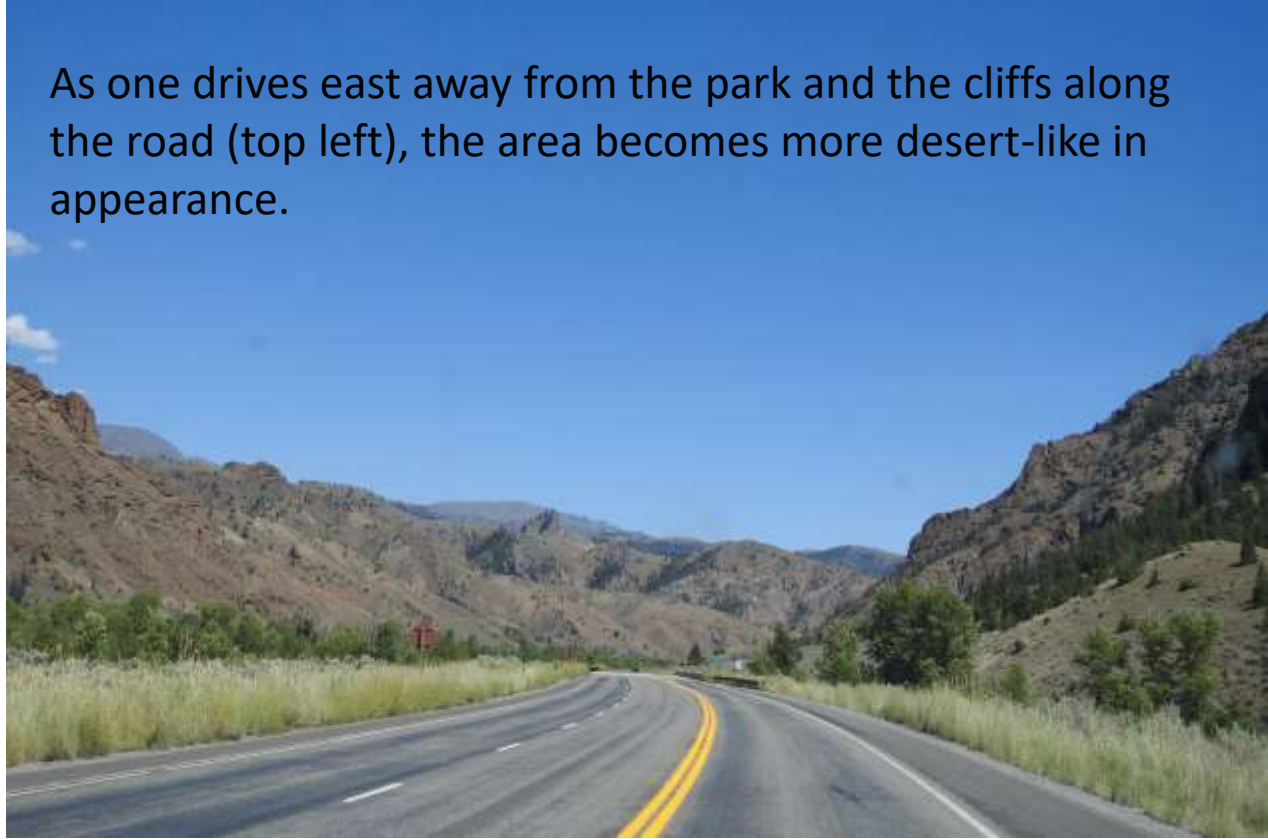


A cool landform on our drive to Cody. I don't know the area well, so am unsure if it has a name.





As one drives east away from the park and the cliffs along the road (top left), the area becomes more desert-like in appearance.



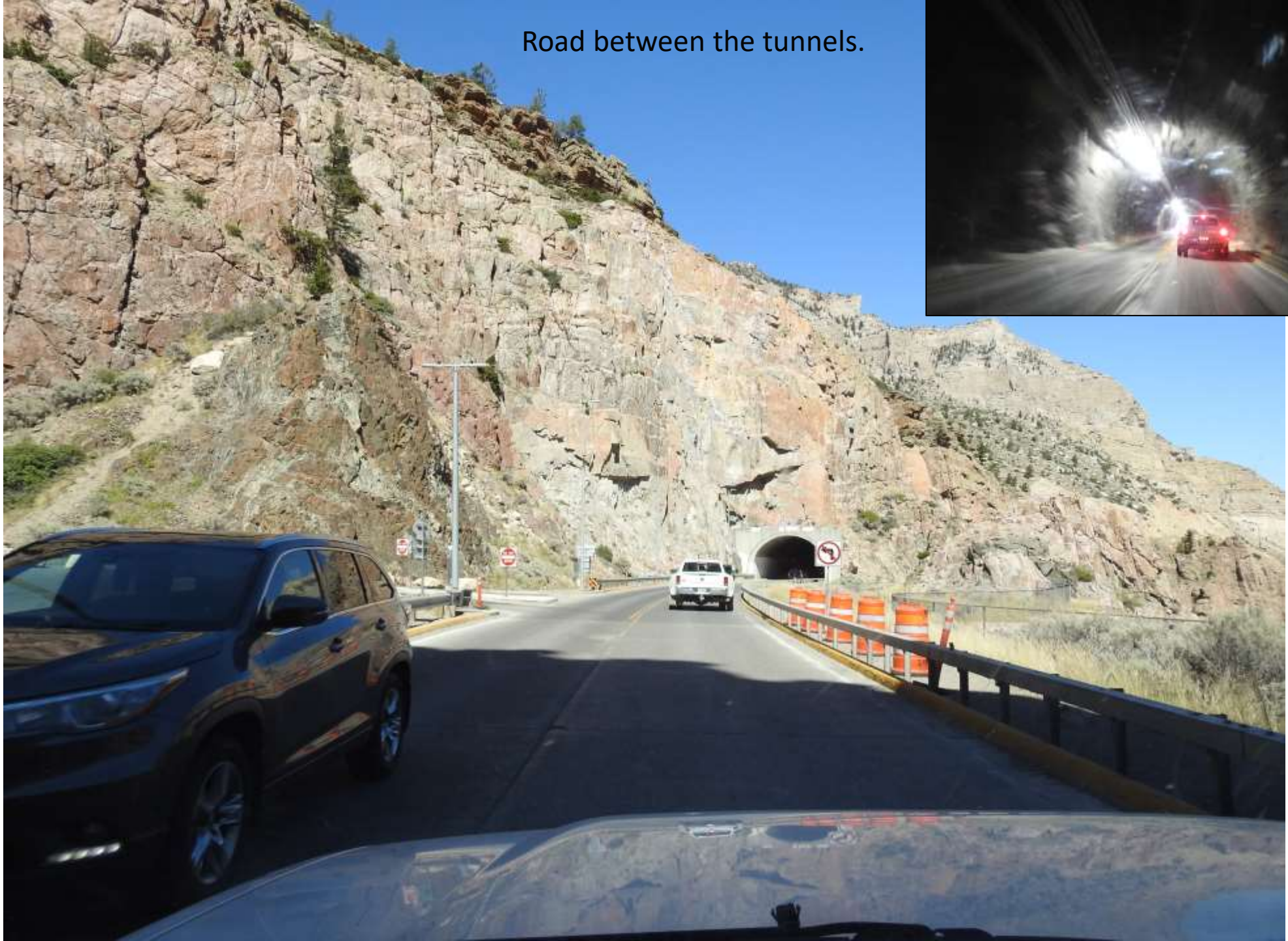


Buffalo Bill Reservoir (top left and bottom right)
as Route 14 approaches a tunnel (bottom left
and next page).





Road between the tunnels.

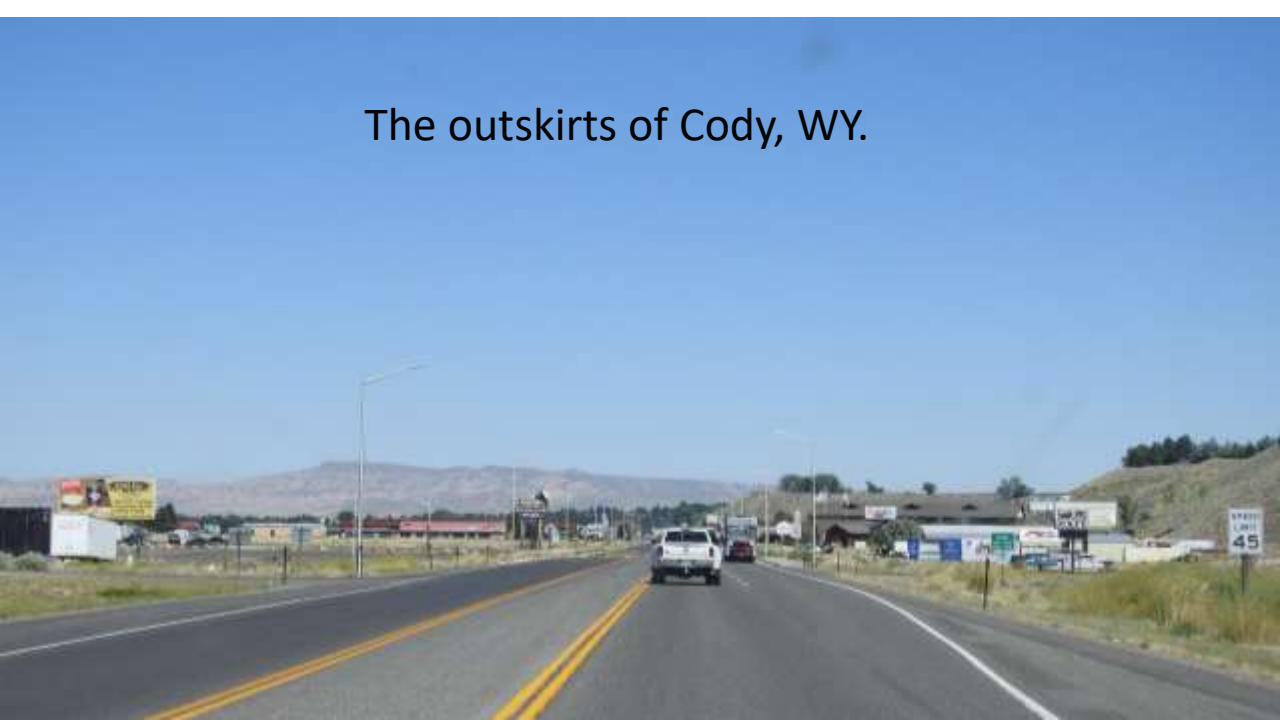


Entering the second tunnel.





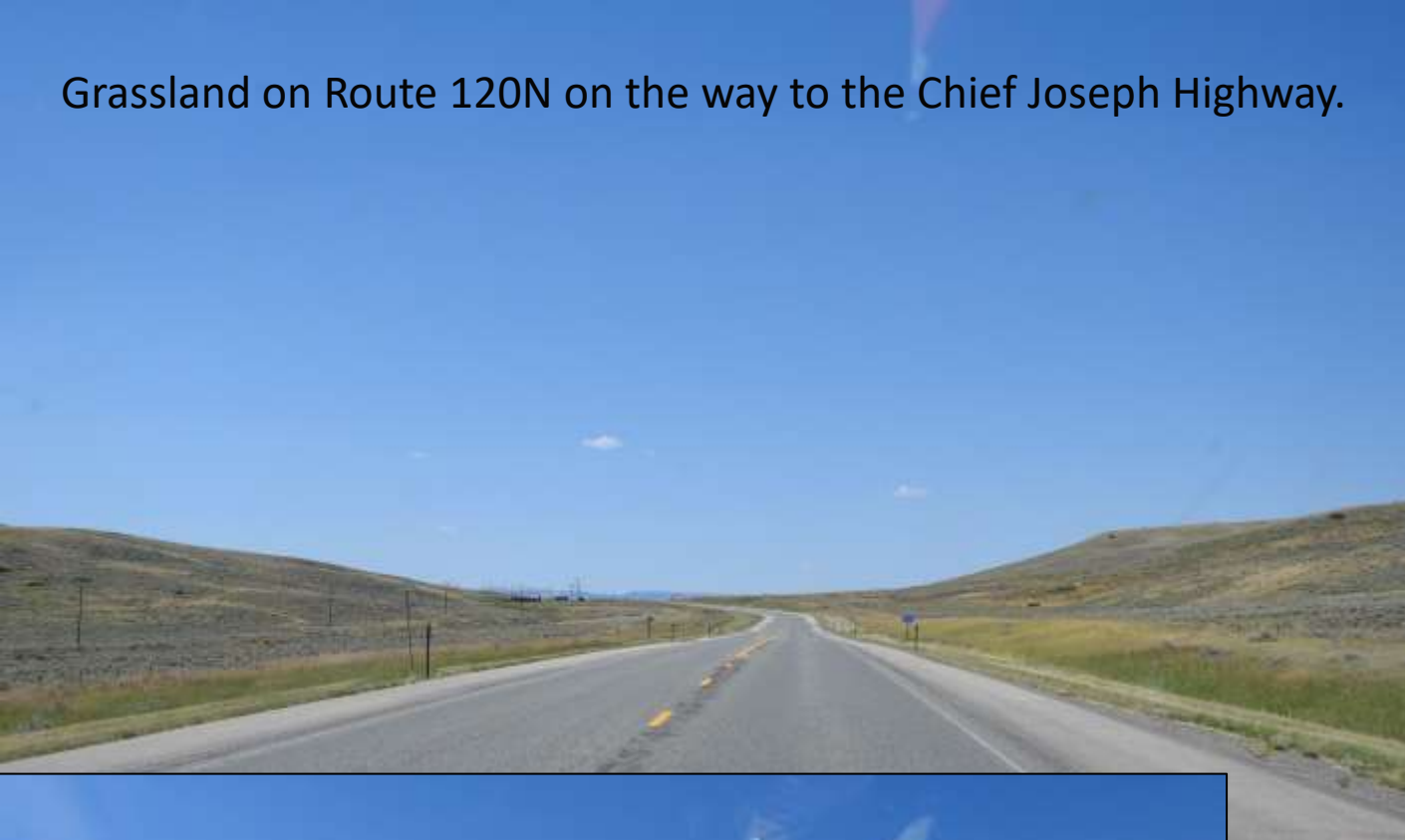
The outskirts of Cody, WY.



Cody, Wyoming.



Grassland on Route 120N on the way to the Chief Joseph Highway.



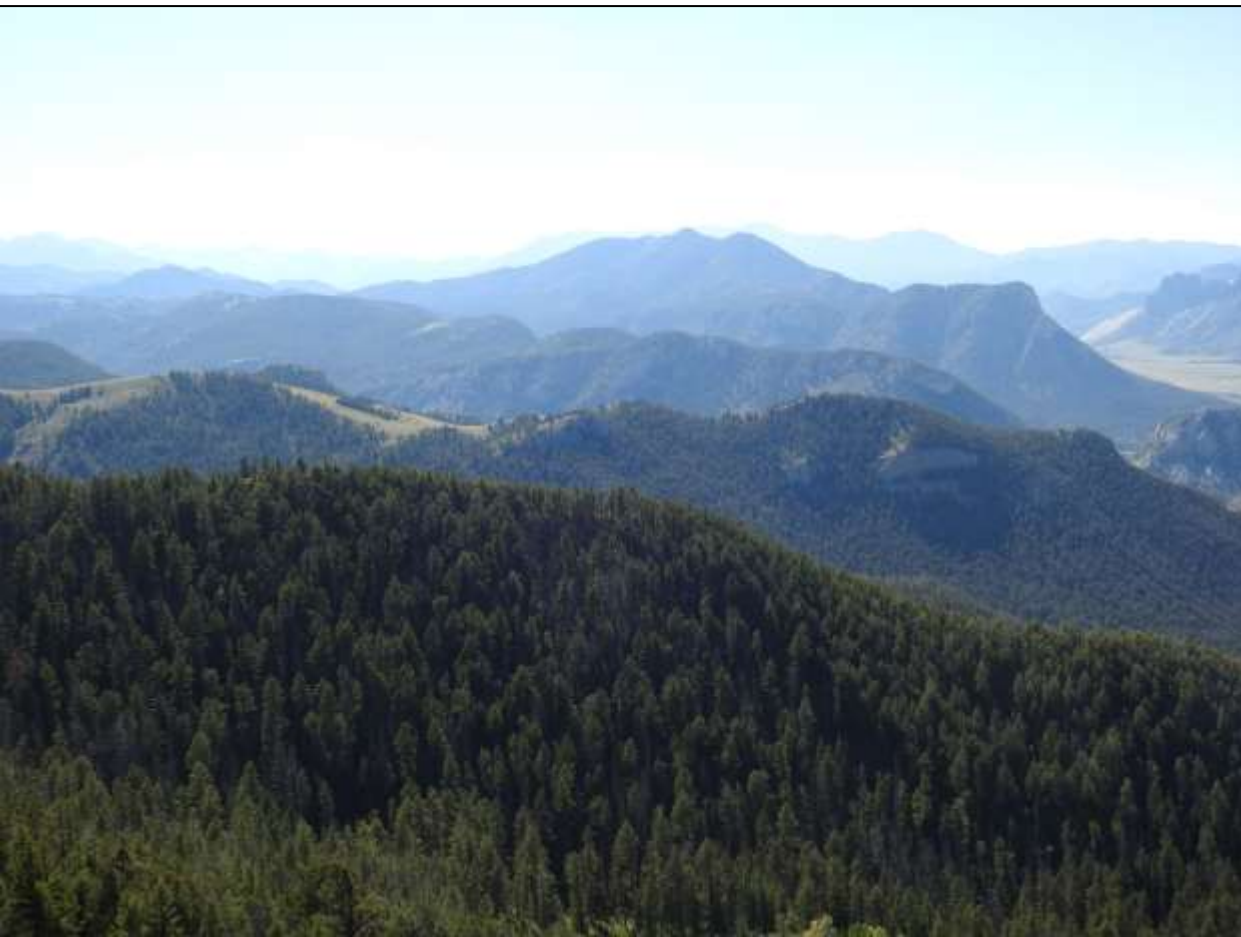
Red rock cliffs along the Chief Joseph Highway.



Red rock cliffs along the Chief Joseph Highway.



Great perspectives of the winding Chief Joseph Highway amid the Absaroka Range.





Views along the Chief Joseph Highway, including the Beartooth Range to the north (top left), a bridge over the Clark Fork's River (top right), and Clark Fork River canyon (bottom left; also see next page).





Left: A very cool flat butte near the Chief Joseph Highway.

Below: Open range cattle right along the road without any protective measures, like fencing, to keep them off the pavement (also see next page).

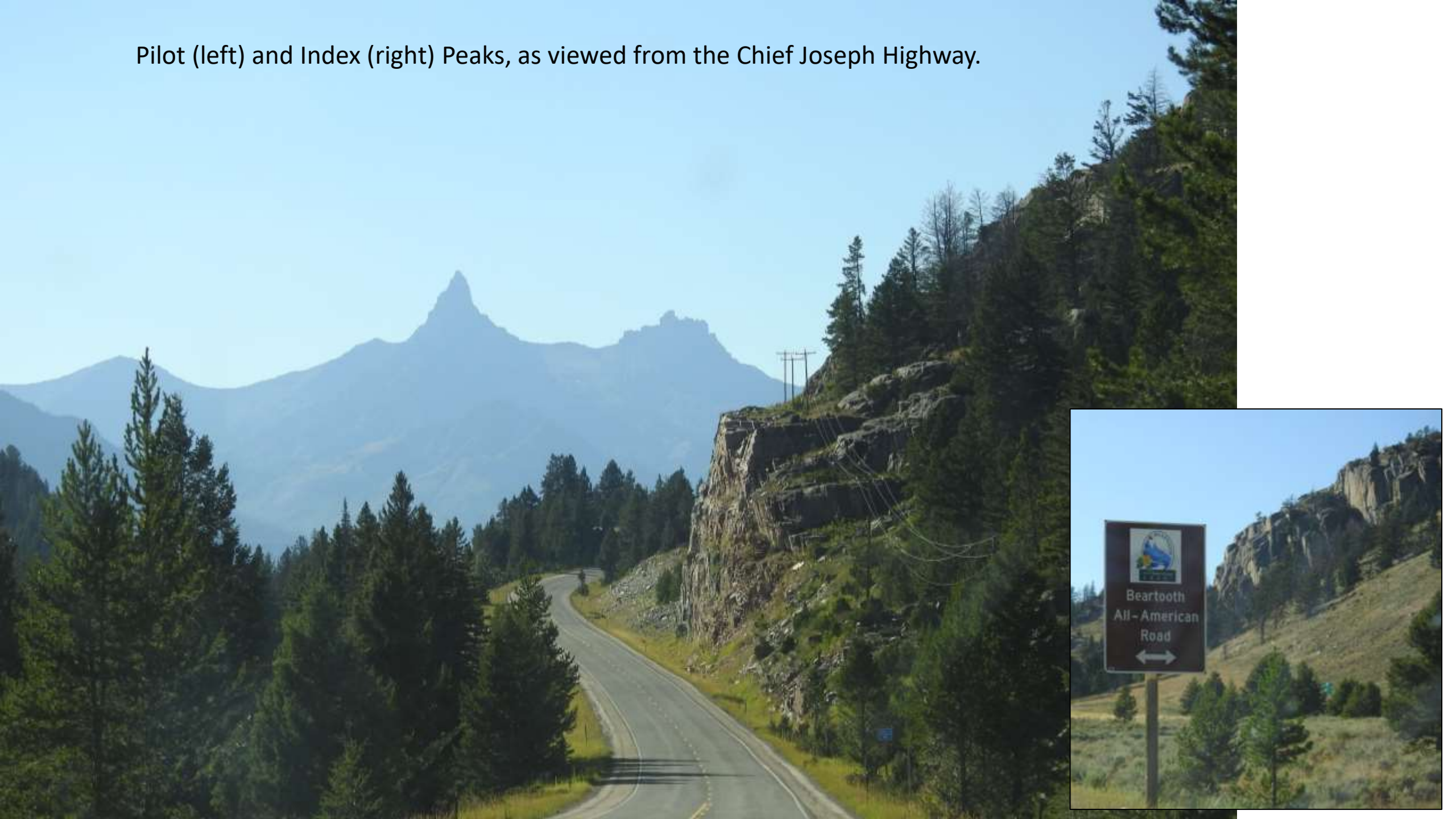




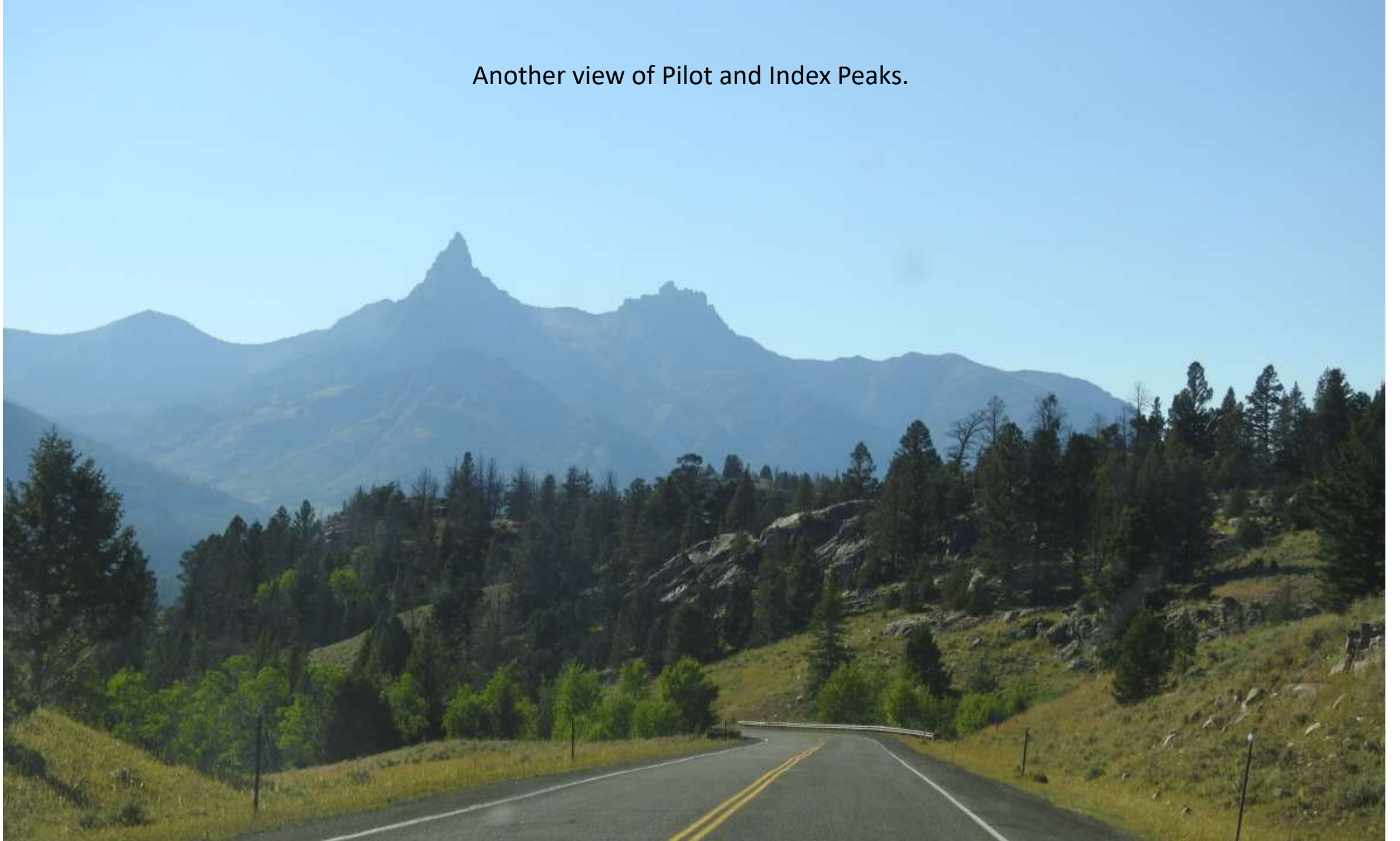
Good ole' Old West politics to expect cows on the road, rather than the livestock owner being responsible for keeping them contained.



Pilot (left) and Index (right) Peaks, as viewed from the Chief Joseph Highway.



Another view of Pilot and Index Peaks.





Cooke City in a strong afternoon sun. Our cabin was just over two miles to the west of there.

Day 4: Good Bison Sightings, Grizzlies, and Pebble Creek Hike

August 16, 2023, started out at a relatively warm 50 degrees. We left the cabin at 5:20 AM and entered the park shortly thereafter. In our headlights, we spotted a red fox on the southeast side of the road at the Barronette Mountain area in the dark. Because they are on, or very close to, the road during those early morning sightings, I slow down but don't spend much time with them to try and avoid them from getting too habituated to traffic. Sadly, road-kills of animals of all sizes (up to bison) are all too common in parks like Yellowstone.

We arrived at Exclosure Pullout at 5:50 AM, right at first light. I was the only one scoping from that eastern stretch of Lamar Valley, and I didn't find any wolves or bears in my early attempts to locate some. I did see about 40 pronghorn just to the SE in a big fan (an open, grassy area with trees on both ends) near where I saw the two gray wolves chasing the group of 6 speedy ungulates a couple of days earlier. There were 22 on the east end of the fan and 18 on the other, western side a couple hundred yards away. Those were near ~40 bison.

It is always cool to see animals like pronghorn and bison, but after about 20 minutes I left Exclosure and briefly went to Trashcan Pullout (<5 minutes) then the Institute lot, where I was unsuccessful in locating a grizzly on Amethyst Bench. After those two fleeting stops, we ended up at Dorothy's Pullout. There were no wolves visible, but bison were all over the immediate area. It was quite impressive, as they were crossing the road with many on the north edge of the road. There were lots of bulls grunting, which is a lion-like sound if you've never heard it before. I could literally smell them they were so close.

After the bison crossed the park road and traveled south into the lowlands of Lamar Valley, we were able to get out our spotting scopes and scan for animals. We did find 2 grizzly bears. One was up on 'Ski Slope', which is a ridge leading up to Specimen Ridge behind (south of) Jasper Bench. The other bruin was just above the southern part of Jasper Bench. It moved north into a gully in an area with abundant game trails, a product of generations of bison and elk traveling through the area. We soon lost that bear in a low area. Because of the distance of these bears (1.5+ miles), I didn't take any pictures of them.

We also saw 5 coyotes moving west down at the Lamar River. Two of them appeared to be pups, as they went in and out of view spread out in tall grass. It was a cool sighting. I eventually lost them as they went west toward Fisherman's Pullout, which is in the far western part of Lamar.

Bison bull (left) and cow grazing. This bull is 'tending' the cow, guarding her until she is receptive to mating. Notice another bull grunting in the background.



Bison along the north edge of the park road, including another herd in the distance (see middle left).





Good perspective of the bison by the roads with cars trying to drive by (right), while a young calf looks on (left).

Bison and the rolling hills to the north. That area is where we walk up to obtain a better view of the southern part of Jasper Bench.





Coyotes down by the Lamar River. There were 5 in total, but they were spread out, so I did not capture them in one picture together.



The coyotes moved rapidly to the west, just north of the Lamar River.







We often wonder if the cows can't wait for the rut (mating season) to end, so those loud, grunting bulls stop constantly following them.



With sporadic sightings in Lamar, we decided to head west. We timed the Lamar Canyon light at 8:00 AM to have a minimal wait. Once in Little America, we spotted 5 pronghorn and a few good-sized bison groups on both sides of the road. This is a flat, open area, so pronghorn love it likely because predators can't sneak up on them there. I spot them there year after year. After traveling through that area, I noted that we had observed many more bison than during the beginning of the trip, especially in Lamar. It was finally feeling normal again. I had missed them.

When we reached Tower Junction, we did our usual recycling and bathroom break. We typically clean out our car every other day when there, and Tower has a very good processing center, so we hold onto our recyclables until going past there. That is also where we usually empty our small bags of trash in the dumpster.

While at Tower, I had a quick breakfast of 3 fruit flavored oatmeal packets and a chopped-up banana filled with hot tea water. It was delicious! I love the simple, yet relatively nutritious meal when in the field.

After breakfast, we were getting ready to drive west to the Blacktail to look for the Rescue Creek wolves, when Rick M. stopped near us at Tower. He heard on his radio about a wolf sighting in Lamar. We decided to abandon our plans and follow him, having to wait 10-12 minutes at the Lamar Canyon light, before eventually getting back into Lamar. The bison from the early morning were now down in the valley and away from the road, so we made good time once when we got through the traffic light. We ended up driving all the way to the eastern part of Lamar where we hiked up Confluence Hill. This beautiful area is where Soda Butte Creek spills into the Lamar River, as the waterbody continues its western trajectory.

We searched for canids for 45 minutes without spotting any. We did see 30+ pronghorn, the majority from same group I had observed this morning. While we were scoping the area, Thomas from Germany joined us up on the overlook. We decided it was a good day to hike the Pebble Creek Trail after we were finished wildlife watching, especially given it was before 10 AM.

Steve and I were excited to do this 12.4 mile hike. We hadn't done it since 2006, which was right around when we first started coming out to the park together. It required two cars, as it started and finished in dramatically different areas. We left Thomas' Jeep in a lot just east of the Pebble Creek Campground (which was closed this summer due to it being a staging ground for construction efforts in the area). The starting point of the hike was up at Warm Creek near the park's northeast border, so I drove us up there in the T-100 .

We started the hike at 10:30 AM. From our previous hike, we knew that the first mile and a half was challenging with a 950 feet elevation gain. Yet, the last ~11 miles is mostly downhill. It is a beautiful area, so we were excited to start the hike.



Not the best views of the Lamar Canyon construction area, taken through the windshield as I was driving, but it gives one a perspective of the area.

Next page: Lamar River, as seen from the western part of Lamar Canyon with Little America in the background.





Bison calf (left), cow (middle), and bull (right) in Little America.



Bison next to the road in Little America (also see next few pages).







Bison bulls create wallows by rolling on the ground. Huge amounts of dust are often visible, so much so that they almost appear to be small clouds.



Pronghorn (foreground) with bison grazing
in the back of the picture.





Perspective of the pronghorn and bison in the southern part of Little America.





I always enjoy spending time with animals I don't typically observe for long periods of time. We seem to stop in Little America during every summer trip to photograph pronghorn, the second fastest mammal in the world next to the cheetah.

The 'Confluence' of Soda Butte Creek (left) and Lamar River (right).





Thomas (close) and Steve (back) scanning from Confluence Hill.
This is one of my favorite areas in the park, especially on a nice,
sunny, warm day.

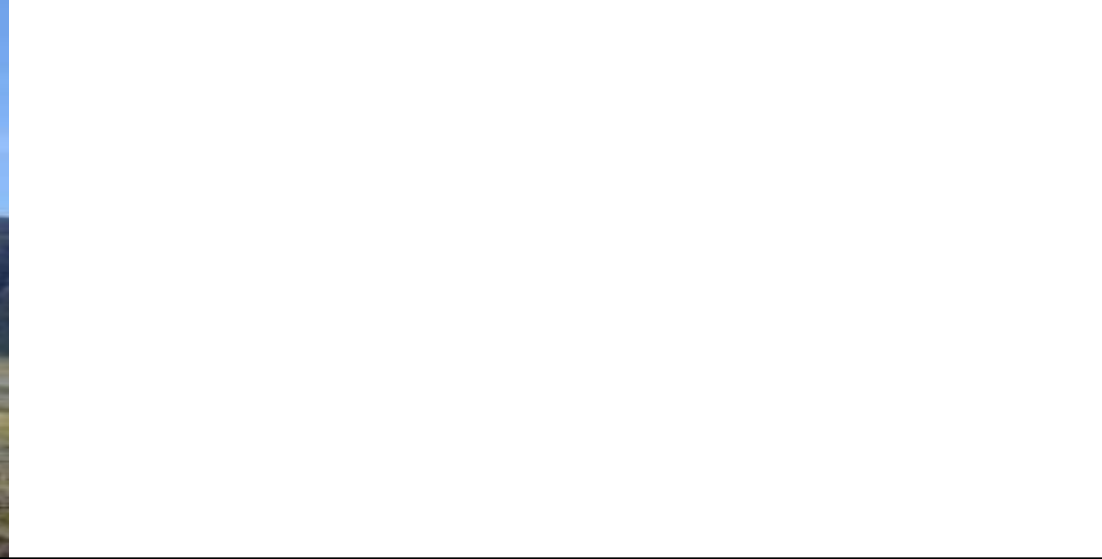


Many pronghorn (middle) and Canada geese (bottom) in Lamar Valley.









Rick McIntyre (right) scanning for wolves above the Confluence.

Perspective of the park road next to the Lamar River with Lamar Valley and Specimen Ridge in the background.

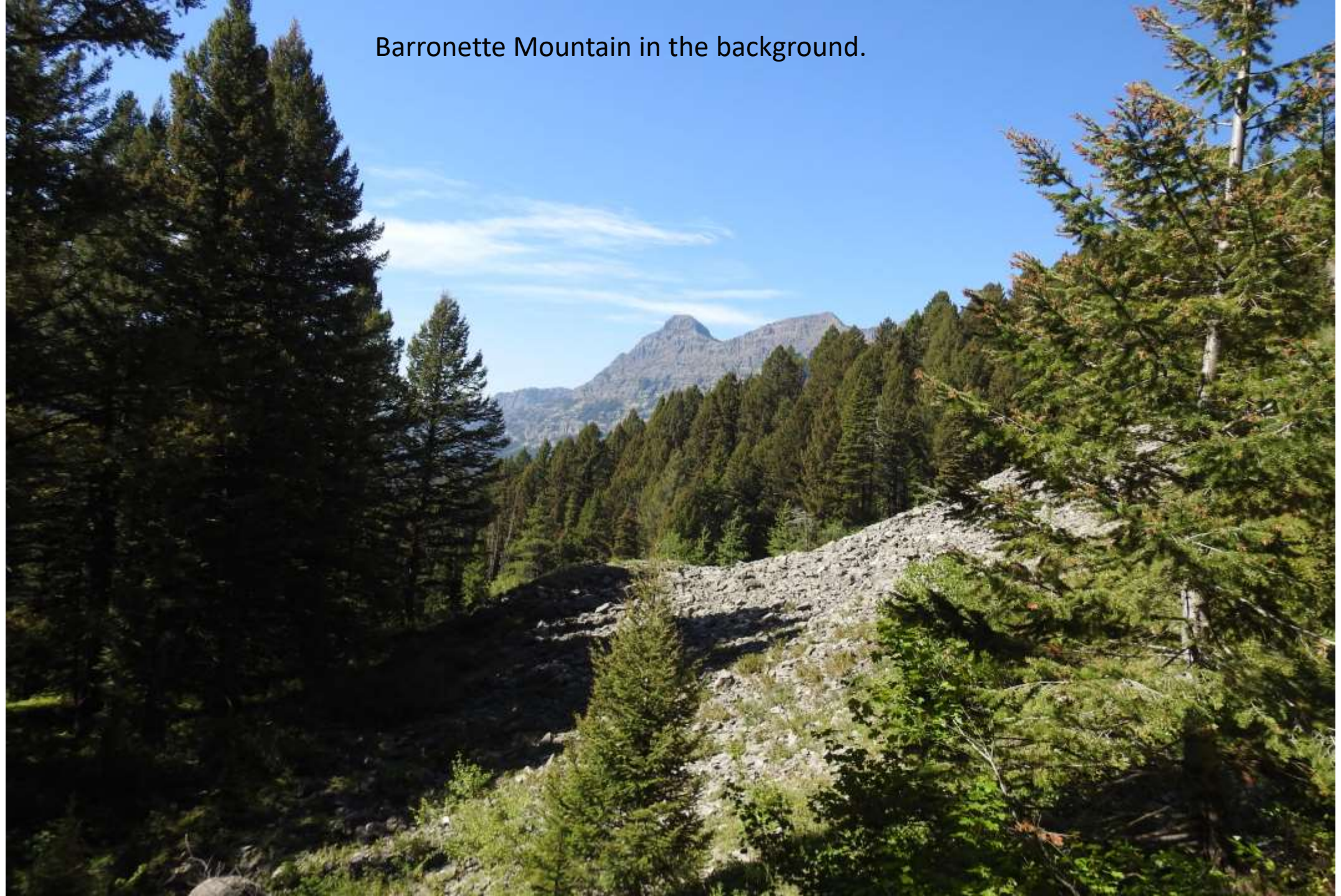




The first 1.5 miles of the Pebble Creek Trail hike was uphill and through beautiful country with lots of pines.



Barronette Mountain in the background.





The Thunderer, viewed from the Pebble Creek Trail.



The view about 1.5 miles from the trailhead, from near the top of the unnamed pass that sent us downhill and into true wilderness.



I saw a large, chicken-sized spruce grouse as we climbed the mountain to start the hike. We saw many elk tracks too. Once we reached the beautiful, open meadows a couple miles into the hike, I was shocked to not see any large mammals. In fact, we didn't even see bison tracks or scat up there. We saw some fresh deer tracks in a few wooded stretches of the hike, but didn't observe any live ungulates. I heard gray jays and red squirrels calling for most of the hike. We also saw an old wolf scat with about 5 miles left, so it was deep in the backcountry. The most common thing we saw, however, was old, dried horse scat. People take horses onto many of the trails in the park, but it appeared that nobody had been there since earlier in the summer judging by the aged poop. Despite not seeing much wildlife, the scenery was breathtaking, making the hike well worth it.

Given that most of the trail after the first couple miles was downhill, we made good time. Despite the distance, it was actually a relatively easy hike without many rocks or obstacles in our way. We stopped at about the 6 mile, roughly halfway, mark to eat lunch. It is a special feeling to be in a remote area like that and get to relax for around 15 minutes, while eating basic foods like peanut butter and jelly, raisins, and Nutty Bars.

Similar to the effects I got from hiking the Republic Pass Trail two days prior, I was sore, but not nearly as much as that first hike. My body has a natural way of rapidly adapting to my activity level. Some people even call me bionic man because I have been doing that for years, but I think it is just preparation as I stretch and exercise daily. While basketball and hiking involve completely different movements and muscle groups, they both are still obviously cardio-physical activities. I could literally feel the lack of tightness that I had from that August 14 trip up in the Beartooths. It was a nice feeling to just be tired but not hurt.

I returned to the car at 3:35 PM, a couple minutes ahead of Steve and Thomas. We were together for most of the hike, but I sped up the last mile or so, as I was anxious to get off my feet. We had two canisters of bear spray, so I wasn't too nervous about being temporarily separated from them even though it isn't recommended that hikers do that. Once all together, we headed back to the trailhead to get our car then continued east to the cabin, arriving there slightly after 4 PM.

For the next few hours, we rested, ate, and processed our data, which for me involved summarizing my field notebook and downloading all the new pictures. It gets dark after 9 PM in the summer, so we decided to head back into the park at 7:10 PM to look for critters at dusk. We arrived at Dorothy's Pullout a half hour later. Rick M. was just coming down 'Cardiac Hill', which is the ridge above (north) the lot. He saw 7-8 wolves while up there. They couldn't be seen on Jasper Bench from the parking lot, necessitating one to do the arduous climb.



Top & bottom left: Beautiful northern meadow.
Right: Pebble Creek, our constant companion for much of the remaining stretch of hike once we got about two miles in.





Three cell phone pictures of the area.





There were many beautiful meadows along the northern half of the Pebble Creek hike.



There were dry creek beds (left) and wet ones, as Steve successfully navigates one (right). Wildflowers, like fireweed (below left and see next page), were still observed in the high country because they bloom later in the summer.





This and next page: Some cell phone pics I took during the hike.







Red-tailed hawk in a dead tree.
There was a pair, as the other
one was circling high above.



Cliffs below Cutoff Mountain to the far right.



Huge rotting fungus (left) amid the wooded stretch of the trail (right). I thought it was a dead animal at first.





Different stretches of the hike. Time seems to vanish while traversing through this area.

Old wolf scat, full of fur, along the trail next to Pebble Creek.





These two images, taken along Pebble Creek, were my last cell phone pictures of that day.

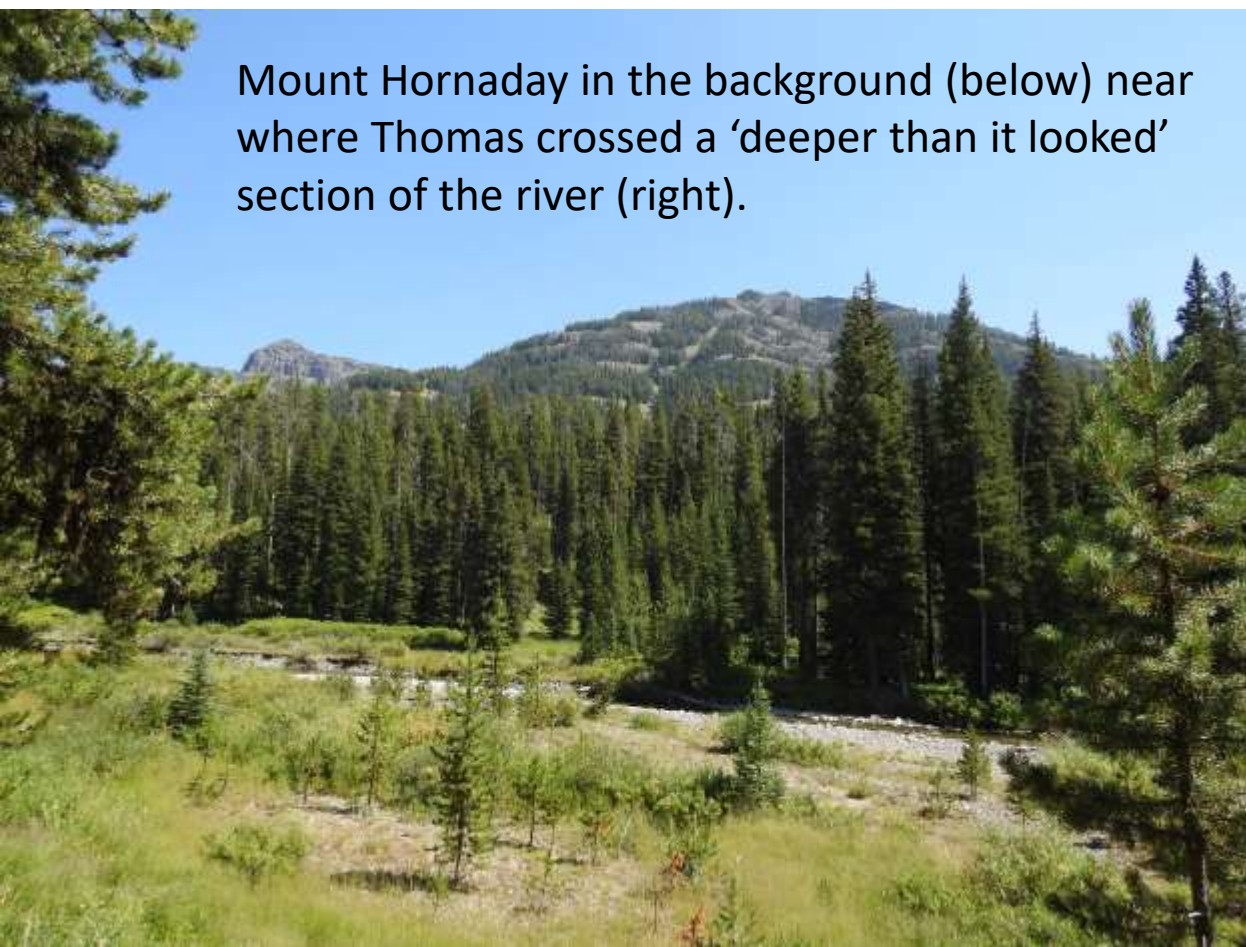


A cool knob (see arrows) on the backside of Barronette Mountain, not visible from the park road.





Mount Hornaday in the background (below) near where Thomas crossed a 'deeper than it looked' section of the river (right).



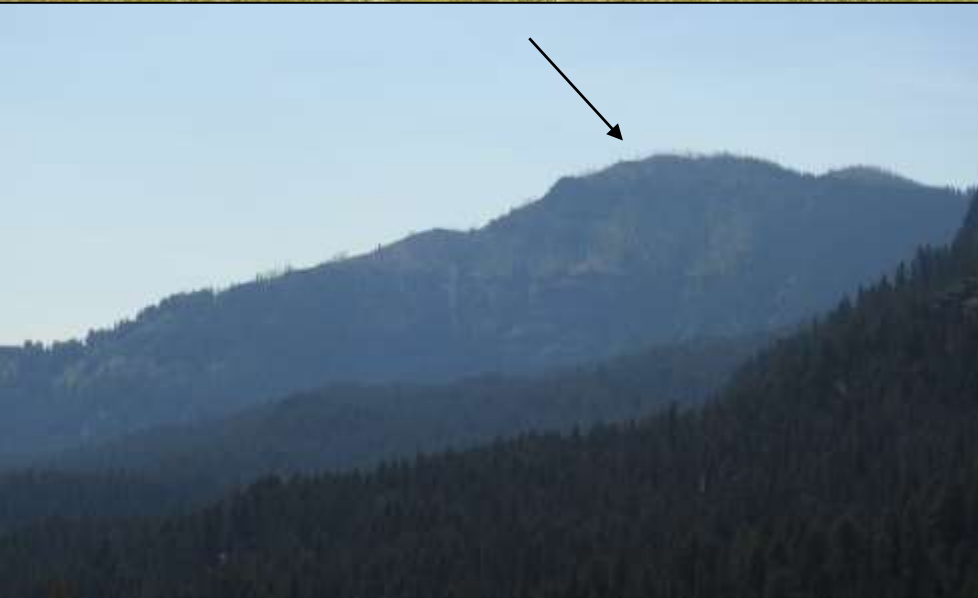


Druid Peak is to the left of these images, while Mount Hornaday is to the right and in the center of these pictures.





Mount Hornaday.



Druid Peak (see arrows) is to the left of these images and zoomed in on the bottom left.



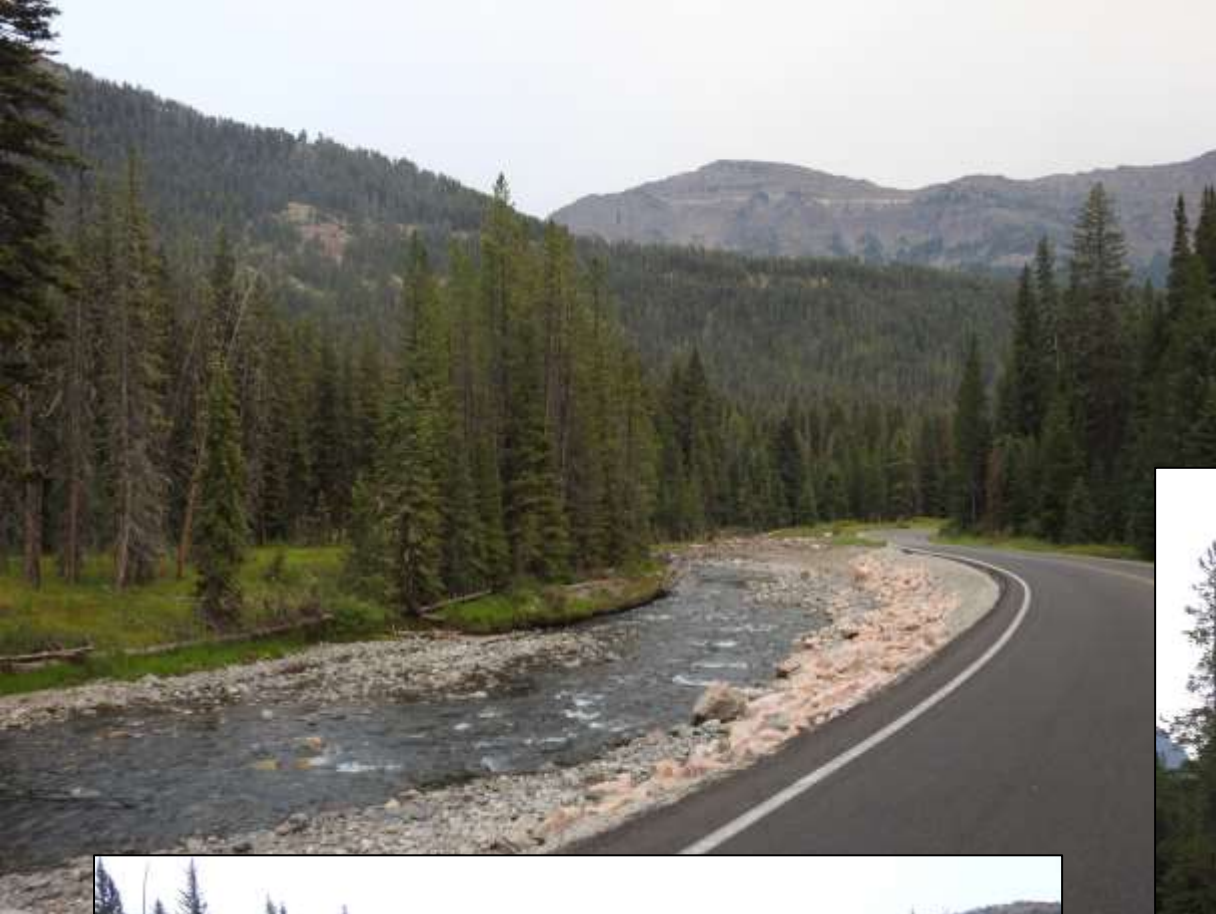


Round Prairie (left arrow) and Lamar Valley (right arrow) in a haze. This was the first day that western fires affected visibility in the park.





Despite a great hike, it can feel like it is never going to end, as was the case with the last mile plus of this one. When I saw Round Prairie (above left), however, I knew I was almost done and finally near the car (right).



Scenic Soda Butte Creek up past (east of) Round Prairie on the way back to Silver Gate, MT.



The Confluence area from road level. It felt like two days had transpired when we were last up there, so it was hard to believe we were scoping up on the hill to the right just a few hours before this image. When the days are so action packed, they feel like multiple days rolled into one. Yet, somehow, the trip's 9 days always seems to fly by.



While setting up our scopes at Dorothy's at ~7:40 PM, a man and his daughter (whom we first met in the morning) from Brooklyn, NY pointed out a non-moving bison on its side on the flats just SE of the eastern part of Dorothy's Pullout. I kept track of it, and indeed did notice that it hadn't moved through 8:26 PM. Its hooves were awkwardly in the air too, signifying that it might be dead and not just resting.

While us wildlife watchers love seeing all of Yellowstone's animals alive, a bison carcass in an observable location is an exciting proposition as we know that it is just a matter of time (usually a day or two) before wolves and bears find it and gorge themselves. Accordingly, I already knew that we would get there extra early in the morning to see if anything found it overnight.

While we were looking at the dead bison, there was a grizzly out in the middle of Amethyst Bench in its typical location. Lots of people were able to see it at dusk, even in the fading light. It was a good end to another great day in the park. We had observed grizzlies every day up until this point, similar to our [April trip](#).

We departed Dorothy's at 8:34 PM after a relatively brief evening in the park. There were a couple hundred bison out on the flats of Lamar. It was good to see them back there.

On our way back to the cabin, we saw another fox. This one, at 9:08 PM, was between Warm Creek and the Northeast Entrance. It quickly jumped off the road as we drove by, which was encouraging to know it knew how to avoid being hit.





Two bison interacting near a dead bison cow in the top of the pictures.



A distant view of a grizzly bear on Amethyst Bench at dusk. This is ~1.5 miles away from Dorothy's Pullout. It was a much better view through my spotting scope than via my camera.



Day 5: Junction Wolves, Trout Lake Hike, and a Slow Day at the Bison Carcass

It was mid-40 degrees on the morning of the halfway point of our trip. We left at 5:10 AM to get to the carcass site at Dorothy's, which was a little earlier than normal. We had another fox sighting, this time $\frac{1}{4}$ mile past (west of) Barronette Meadow in the general area of our previous sightings, indicating it is likely the same – or a pair of – foxes that live in that area.

Dorothy's Pullout was relatively full of cars when we arrived at 5:45 AM, yet there was still enough space to park. We immediately saw that the bison was in the same place as the previous night and dead, yet nothing was on it at very first light at ~5:55 AM. A good mile past (SE of) the bison, we found a grizzly in the middle of Amethyst Bench again, and it stayed there all morning. We were now 5 for 5 on our trip for daily grizzly bear sightings!

There were a few folks with radios in the lot, and they received a report of 2 wolves south of Hubbard Hill. That area is in between the Institute and Trashcan Hill, so a couple miles away from my location. I scanned in that direction and found a different black wolf in the Cottonwoods close to Picnic. It was 2.5-3.0 miles away and north of the Lamar River, which differed with the description of the other 2 lobos being south of the river. The wolf I was watching was relatively close to the park road, being maybe $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away. I tried to get folks to key in on that wolf, but it seemed that everyone was focused on the other two. Steve and I debated about driving further east to get a closer look at the wolf, but decide to remain at Dorothy's, not wanting to lose our parking spot to the growing crowd.

A couple hundred bison were still in the valley, along with many Canada geese by the river and in the grass, and 56 ravens on the dead bison. Park wildlife technician Jeremy S-R. was there and counted them into his tape recorder, which he would later translate to a data sheet. I sporadically watched the dead bison and saw a bald eagle fly to the carcass and scare off all the ravens. It was fascinating to watch that interaction. A juvenile bald also went to the carcass once it was free of the corvids.

Without much wolf action being viewed from the parking lot, Steve and I followed Rick and Jeremy up to the fourth level of Cardiac Hill north of Dorothy's at 7:45 AM. It was quite a climb to the view, but was impressive from up there, as one can see the back (south part) of Jasper that can't be seen from the park road. Once up the hill, we immediately had 4 wolves: 2 black adults (or yearlings), the surviving black pup, and a gray adult or yearling. They were at their rendezvous site near the dry appearing (although there was likely some water still in it) marsh at the south part of eastern Jasper Bench. The wolves greeted each other, then spread out, mostly going west to probably bed in the trees during the heat of the day.



Ravens were on the dead bison at dawn. It was apparent that no large animal (i.e., wolf or grizzly) had visited the carcass overnight.



Next page: Sandhill cranes are beautiful, stately birds.

There were also sandhill cranes (top 2 pictures) and Canada geese (bottom) near the carcass. These birds were in the general area but never visited the actual carcass.







Top: Wildlife watchers at dawn at Dorothy's Pullout.

Below: The view to the east of Dorothy's. The Institute is in the middle/left of the picture. The cottonwoods and river to the rear of the shot is where I saw a wolf in the distance (see arrow).

Next page: I zoomed in on this herd of bison grazing in front of the river.





Many ravens continued to stay at and around the bison carcass, but without a large animal opening it up, they couldn't get in and obtain choice bits of meat. Instead, they spent most of their time pecking out the eyes and anus region.





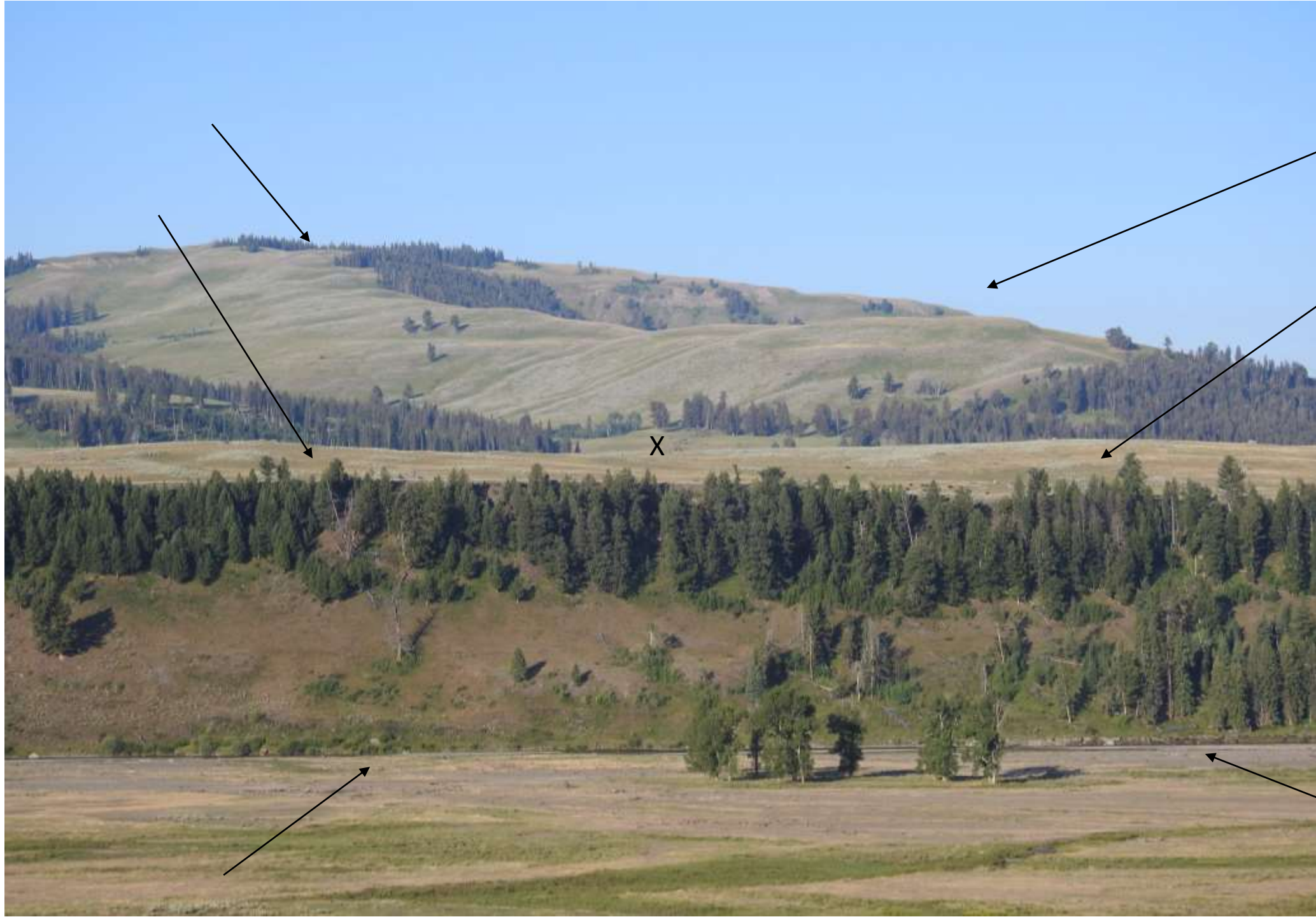
Eventually, both a mature and an immature bald eagle showed up to the site (bottom right of right picture) and flushed many of the ravens off the carcass.







Bison traveling on heavily used game trails south of Jasper Bench and below (north of) Specimen Ridge. The next page shows a good perspective of the area.



Top two arrows is Specimen Ridge.

Middle two arrows is Jasper Bench.

The bison herd from the previous page is just to the right of the 'X'.

Bottom two arrows is Lamar River and the Lamar flats.

The eagles soon arrived at the carcass to feed as well, but also couldn't get to the meat without a large predator ripping it open first.



Next page: The adult eagle stood on top of the bison like it was playing king of the mountain with the ravens, as the immature eagle watched the action.



Left: A cool perspective of wildlife watchers near their scopes, as a bison herd crosses the road north to south just east of Dorothy's Pullout (right).







The view from above while climbing Cardiac Hill north of Dorothy's Pullout.

Below: This bison watched as people climbed the hill.





We also came across this nighthawk, who was nesting out in the open in an area of short vegetation. It gave a broken-wing display (left) to try and lead us away from the nest, which we very cautiously avoided since we didn't know where it was, or at least I believed we didn't know (see next page).



Steve's pictures of the nighthawk. I thought nobody knew where the nest was, but then I later saw Steve's pictures of the adult (left) and chick (lower right)!



View from our observation area at the fourth level of 'Cardiac Hill'.



About an hour later, we saw a fifth wolf, 1382F, up in the rendezvous area. She is an aging black female wolf and former alpha female of the Junction pack who lost her status to the old 10 year old wolf, 907F. 1382 aggressively ruled with an iron fist, often pinning subordinates to the ground, so she wasn't exactly loved by the other wolves once she lost her breeding position. She had a graying face and was a cool looking wolf, despite her now lowly role in the group. She often spent time alone, but in Junction territory.

Wolf 1382 came in from the east while traveling west. We quickly lost her in the trees as well, signifying that the others were no doubt resting in that same small patch of forest. As she went out of sight, we watched a large bison herd come down (moving north) to Jasper Bench from Specimen Ridge to the south. As they traveled on the heavily used game trails, we watched another herd resting at the western part of Jasper Bench by a marsh/pond that wolves sometimes also use as a rendezvous site. While that site is partially viewable from Dorothy's Pullout, we had a more commanding view from up on Cardiac Hill.

While watching the wildlife to the south of us, I noticed 4-5 pronghorn way up hill to the north of us near Bison Peak, which is the extreme northern part of Lamar Valley. One could argue it really isn't part of the valley per se.

At 10:04 AM, we all departed the observation area and headed downhill and back to the parking lot. After having a late breakfast, Steve and I then went to hike Trout and Buck Lakes in 80° heat. It was beautiful, sunny, and dry, so a perfect day for a hike. After a busy first few days, we like to have a relatively short, easy day in the middle of our trip. Because it is only about a two mile hike, we knew we would get back to the cabin early, which was 12:45 PM on this day. That gave us extra time to get personal things done, including getting some much needed rest – I took a very nice hour long nap.

We drove back into the park at 5:20 PM, arriving to Dorothy's Pullout at 5:45. There were 4 turkey vultures and many ravens on the bloated carcass. The warm, now almost 90° temperature made the bison look like a bloated, fat, black hippo. Vultures are a relatively new phenomenon to the region, with climate change and natural range expansion as the two not mutually exclusive (i.e., a warming west has allowed the birds to expand their range) most likely reasons for their presence in Yellowstone.

As we watched the vultures and ravens at the carcass, we saw a bald eagle fly overhead north of the road. Another was perched in a tree up in the central part of Jasper Bench about a mile away. It was clear that the meat eaters were discovering this bonanza of food.

The arrows represent the marshy area that we associate with the late summer rendezvous site of the Junction Pack in the southern part of Dorothy's Bench. The patch of trees just above the right arrow is where they like to rest during the heat of the day. The lone surviving pup of their 2023 litter was particularly fond of this site, often returning to it after excursions. Because of the distance to this area, I did not take any pictures of the wolves.





Next page: Great view of the park road, Lamar River, and western part of Lamar Valley leading to Lamar Canyon, which is below and to the right of the forested mountain slope in the top center of the frame. Little America is in the background.



Jasper Bench and a more distant perspective of the rendezvous site (left, see the 'X'). Right: Rick M., Jeremy S-R., and Taylor Rabb (far right) observing from the top of Cardiac Hill above Dorothy's Pullout.





A great perspective of the area with Jasper Bench in the middle and Specimen Ridge in the background.



Left: The western part of Jasper Bench had this cool bison herd of 40-50 individuals. Wolves sometimes use this marshy area (see below left) as a rendezvous site, but the Junctions didn't in summer/fall 2023.



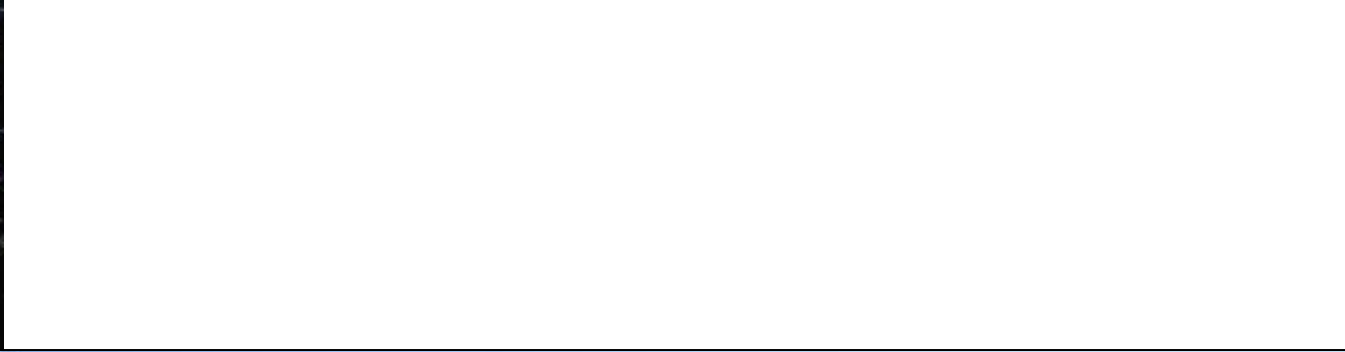




Below: View to the north (above) of the observation area. Hiking north would eventually lead to Bison Peak.

Above: Bison at the western part of Jasper Bench.





View to the east of the Trout Lake Trail showing the Beartooth Mountains in the distance and The Thunderer closer (right side of right picture).

Picturesque Trout Lake.





This and next page: Cell phone pictures I took of Trout Lake.







A cool bridge (right) and clear water (bottom left) at the SE part of Trout Lake.





I love this view of Soda Butte Valley from a spur trail off of Trout Lake Trail. Notice the park road bisecting the valley.



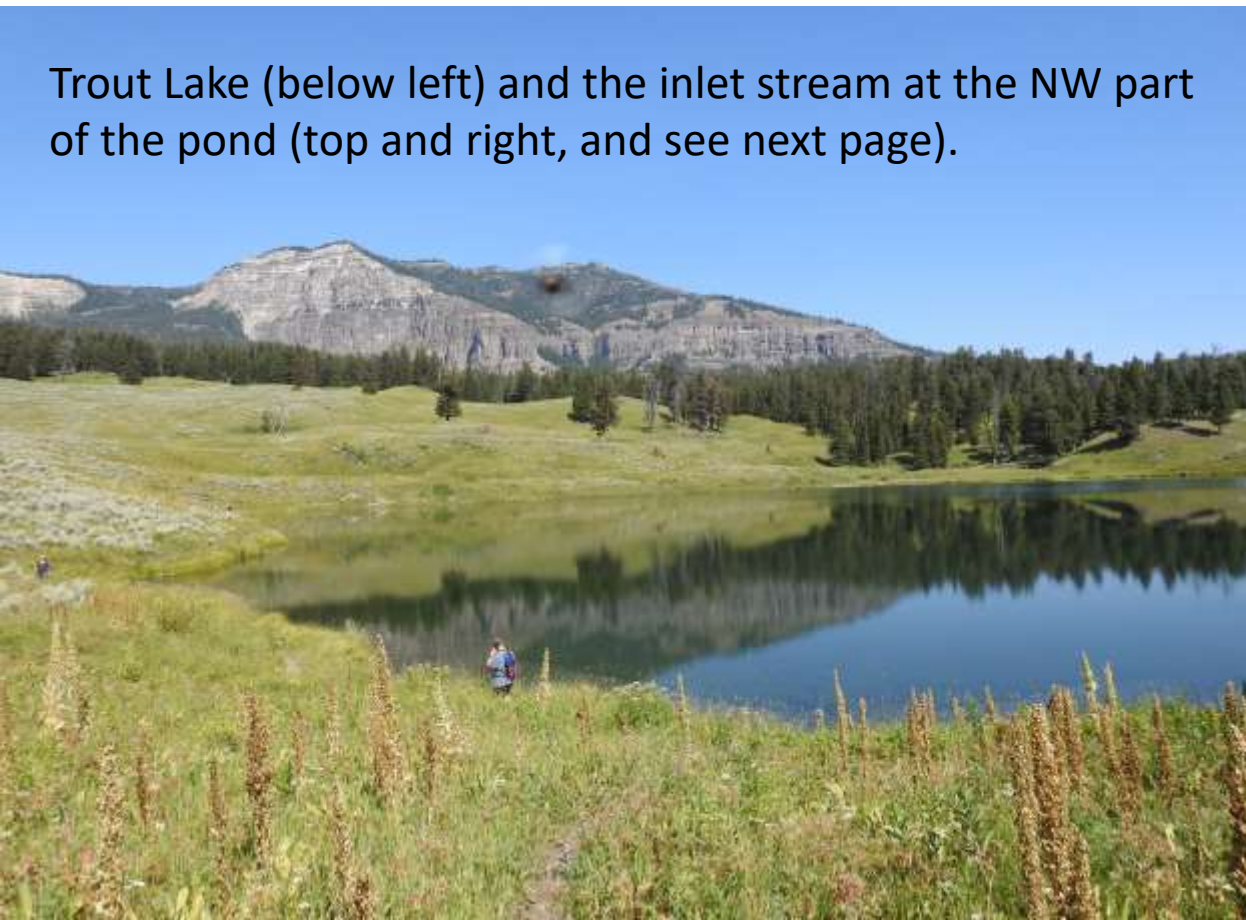


Great panoramic views of Soda Butte Valley (above) and Trout Lake from the south-central part of the pond at the spur trail (below).





Trout Lake (below left) and the inlet stream at the NW part of the pond (top and right, and see next page).





The bridge (left) over the Trout Lake inlet stream (right).

Below: Remains of the dead bison we found just east of there during our [April trip](#) (see p. 99 of that book).





Approaching Buck Lake, with my favorite tree, a twisting Douglas Fir. Buck Lake isn't officially part of the trail, but one can easily navigate there in about a quarter mile on game and social (human) trails that are above Trout Lake.



This and next page: Cell phone pictures of Buck Lake, including my favorite tree on the left of the left picture.







This and next page: Scenic Buck Lake from different perspectives.







Next page: This massive tree, I believe an old Douglas Fir, had recently fallen as it was standing for years during our previous trips to the park.



Least chipmunk up the tree on the left of the right picture. They are normally ground-dwelling animals, but do occasionally climb trees, as seen here.



One last view of the Beartooths on the hike down, taken with my cell phone. A perfect end to a great hike!



There was still plenty of light when we came back to Dorothy's Pullout to scan for wildlife at ~5:45 PM.



As for mammals, there were only bison and a few pronghorn on the valley floor. We also found the young grizzly on Amethyst Bench at 6:56 PM. It was in a lower section of the grassland, so it went in and out of sight behind hills and small valleys. Suddenly, the bear grabbed something dark and carried it off after doing a lot of digging. I wondered if it might possibly be a marmot judging by its relatively large size. The bear jogged east into a mostly aspen stand of woods with the critter in its mouth. That behavior further confirmed that the bear likely found a food source and wanted to go eat it in peace. I watched the bruin through my scope, as the view was too far and obstructed to get a decent photo with my camera.

We had observed grizzlies just about every time we scanned for wildlife during this trip. It was exhilarating. As I watched this individual, it got me thinking about our lack of black bear sightings. I normally see the common ursids many times during a typical trip, often at close range like on the side of the road. It was odd, I thought, because we went by many locations – like Elk Creek and Tower – where we often spot them. Their population is healthy in the park, so it was likely just bad timing given that we had not seen one all trip.

In addition to the vultures and ravens, there were also ~15 sandhill cranes in the general area of the carcass on the flats of Lamar near where we saw them in the morning. These birds don't scavenge, so were more in the area because of the water and grass where they like to forage on seeds, insects, and other invertebrates, rather than the presence of the carcass.

Laurie Lyman was back from California and was observing the carcass area with us on this night. When the action slowed down, she was telling me that there was not a lot of 'big game' (i.e., elk and bison) on the Blacktail Plateau this summer. She and Doug McLaughlin think that the Rescue Creek Pack of 10 adults and 8 pups are mostly eating white-tailed deer. I found that quite interesting, as the pack would have to get one nearly every day or two to maintain their nutrition.

I always enjoy hearing Laurie's opinions and viewpoints, as she is very connected with researchers and wildlife watchers in Yellowstone. This allows her to maintain an accurate, daily account of wolf and other wildlife action on the [Yellowstone Reports](#) website.

We departed Dorothy's at 8:30 PM with nothing at the carcass. On our way back to Silver Gate, we got into a bison jam at Hubbard Hill. Those bison weren't there until now so were likely coming down from higher elevations. It was another group of a couple hundred, so I reasoned there would be a good amount of bison in the valley in the morning.

We got back to the cabin at 9:12 PM. It always takes me about an hour to settle down after being in the field, so I processed all the new pictures from the evening and went to bed a little after 10, hoping to get about 6 hours of sleep with another early wake-up planned in the morning.

There were turkey vultures and ravens on the bison carcass, which resembled a bloated hippo, as it was filled with gases due to it not having been opened yet (also see next pages).





Turkey vulture flying off the bison carcass.







A bald eagle soaring above the carcass area.



'Cardiac Hill' above (north) of Dorothy's Pullout. It is steeper than it appears in this picture. This was my last picture of the evening, despite plenty of light remaining. There weren't many new things to take pictures of, and I often get slightly burnt-out mid-way through the trip of going through all my images, hence an evening with fewer photographs than normal.



Day 6: Grizzlies Find the Dead Bison, then a Marathon Day

August 18th was ultra-warm for the region, with it never dipping below 60 degrees overnight. We slept with the windows open. I wore a light sweatshirt into the park and was more than comfortable, which is rare considering I normally bundle up, even in the summer. Steve and I were very efficient and left the cabin at 4:51 AM, so we could get into the park well before first light. We figured a wolf and/or bear had to be on the carcass by the second morning, so we wanted to get there extra early. We saw 2-3 fox in the dark on the way there. The first individual was right at the Northeast Entrance gate on the other side of the road as we passed by. The second one was east of Barronette meadows, where I commonly see the little canines in the dark. There was possibly a third one at Ice Box Canyon, but it went off the road from a distance away, which made it hard to confirm it was definitively a fox.

We arrived at Dorothy's Pullout at 5:22 AM and the lot was already almost full, an indication that many others were also anticipating good action this morning. Most people stayed in their vehicles due to the darkness, but I got out of mine and set up my scope and tripod just off the parking lot. I had my camera tucked into my light jacket, which I put on knowing that I'd be outside for a few hours. I have an extra tripod 'shoe' that connects to my camera, so when I want to switch between using my scope and camera, I can simply flip a lever on my tripod and quickly attach either optical device to it.

First light came at 5:50-5:55, and as it became visible, I saw a bear on the dead bison. I totally was expecting this exact scene, as the grizzly was tugging away at the carcass. I assumed it was obtaining choice meat strips in the process. Judging by its size and color, we thought it was the adolescent from Amethyst Bench. Bears have incredible noses, so it is likely that the bear smelled the carcass from over a mile away up on Amethyst and then scent-trailed to the carcass overnight.

As it became light, ravens arrived but stayed a few meters away. Soon, dozens were near the carcass waiting for the bear to move away so they could get to the food source. As it became lighter, I also noticed 2 coyotes come in from the north, which is the direction of the park road. They bedded NE of the bear and also didn't approach the carcass.

The young bruin stayed busy chasing ravens away from the dead bison. But to my surprise, it appeared to have a tough time getting into the bison. At first light, I assumed the tugging was associated with eating meat, but now it seemed more that it was trying to break through the bison's tough skin near the anus/butt region and on the shoulder. It wasn't having a heck of a lot of success judging by the bloated bison still appearing intact.





This and previous page: Grizzly bear at the bison carcass at dawn, with a growing number of ravens watching from a close distance. The bear seemed to have difficulty breaking into the carcass. It was a younger bear and bison hides are really tough to break through.

Next page: Perspective of where the bison carcass was (marked with an 'X') from Dorothy's Pullout. It was about a half mile away and the people in the frame weren't walking to the carcass. Instead, they were going a hundred or so yards from the lot to an overlook of the area, which was still a safe distance away.





X

The two coyotes (see arrows) stayed bedded for about a half hour just to the NE of the carcass site (see next four pages).











The young grizzly chased the ravens away from the site, while others approached in its brief, few second absence (left). Then, it decided to simply lay on the bison to keep the birds away (below).



The bear was still guarding the carcass when one of the coyotes approached the site (top left).



After 30 minutes of watching the coyotes bedded, they arose and trotted off to the east, going out of sight in the slight dips and ridges on the valley floor. Right around this time, Rick and Jeremy went up high above Dorothy's to look at the rendezvous area. Once up there, all we heard from them via radio was "It was better than yesterday." So, I guessed there were more than the 4-5 wolves up there from the previous day. Rick also reported a grizzly sow with 3 COYs (cubs-of-the-year) north of the gulley that is north of the road and west of their location. I knew exactly where to look on the slope, but we couldn't find them from road-level. That area goes steadily uphill where one can look a good half mile uphill to where they were seeing the bruins.

At 7:30 AM, we spotted a grizzly at the east end of Jasper Bench. It came down to the river level and stood on its hind legs four different times looking toward the carcass. I had no doubt that it could smell it and wanted to go to it, but something scared it off, as it went out of sight E/SE behind Amethyst Bench. I guessed that it saw all the cars and people and decided to wait until dusk to approach the area.

As we were staring through our scopes to the SE from our location just off the east end of the lot, someone said, "Hey, look up at that coyote right there!" I immediately looked around and, literally 50 feet away, was what looked like a good-sized 4 month old coyote pup. I knew it was that age because pups are born in mid-April in this region. It was bizarre to see a pup by itself on the road so close to us. It happened so quickly, so I didn't get great pictures of it as it quickly traveled away to the southeast, heading toward the carcass area. The young canine had a distinct white-tipped tail, like a red fox!

At that point, the bear left the carcass and was resting to the north on an eroded, old riverbank. The incoming coyote swiftly passed by the lounging bear, then nervously headed straight to the carcass with ears back and tail held low, both signs of submission. Yet, to my surprise for a lone (probable) pup, it fed on the bison, going to the top of the shoulder region and getting a few mouthfuls in. It was there for ~5 minutes before leaving and traveling north, eventually going out of sight near the park road. I couldn't believe how independent the little guy was!

At 8:45 AM, 2 adult coyotes – likely the ones from early in the morning – came back to the carcass from the north. They approached the site, with about 50-60 ravens now there, but neither fed. I was shocked that they just left without feeding. I thought to myself how odd it was that a probable pup came to the carcass alone and fed, yet these two mature canids didn't.

The pair proceeded to travel west. We followed them through our scopes for about a mile before a ridge below (south of) Coyote Overlook blocked our view. There was no sign of the pup, but I wondered if its breath possibly smelled like bison, and that got the adults to come back to investigate.

The coyote rushed and flushed the ravens, and I assumed it would then get close to the bison carcass.





But the pair had a different idea. They scent-marked the area just to the west of the bison (top left), and then looked around (below right) before deciding to take off. They headed to the west and out of our general area (see next two pages).







The coyote pair generally traveled west but stopped repeatedly to look around (top left), and to investigate various areas (right).

A bald eagle landed on the ground near the old, eroded riverbank to the northwest of the carcass site. The ravens in the frame were at the periphery of the group near the carcass site. The eagle kept an eye on the situation but likely knew it would have to wait with the grizzly still at the bison.



A good perspective of the grizzly and ravens (at the middle left) with two coyotes (see the two arrows) nearby just before they left the area for good, and the bald eagle (circled).



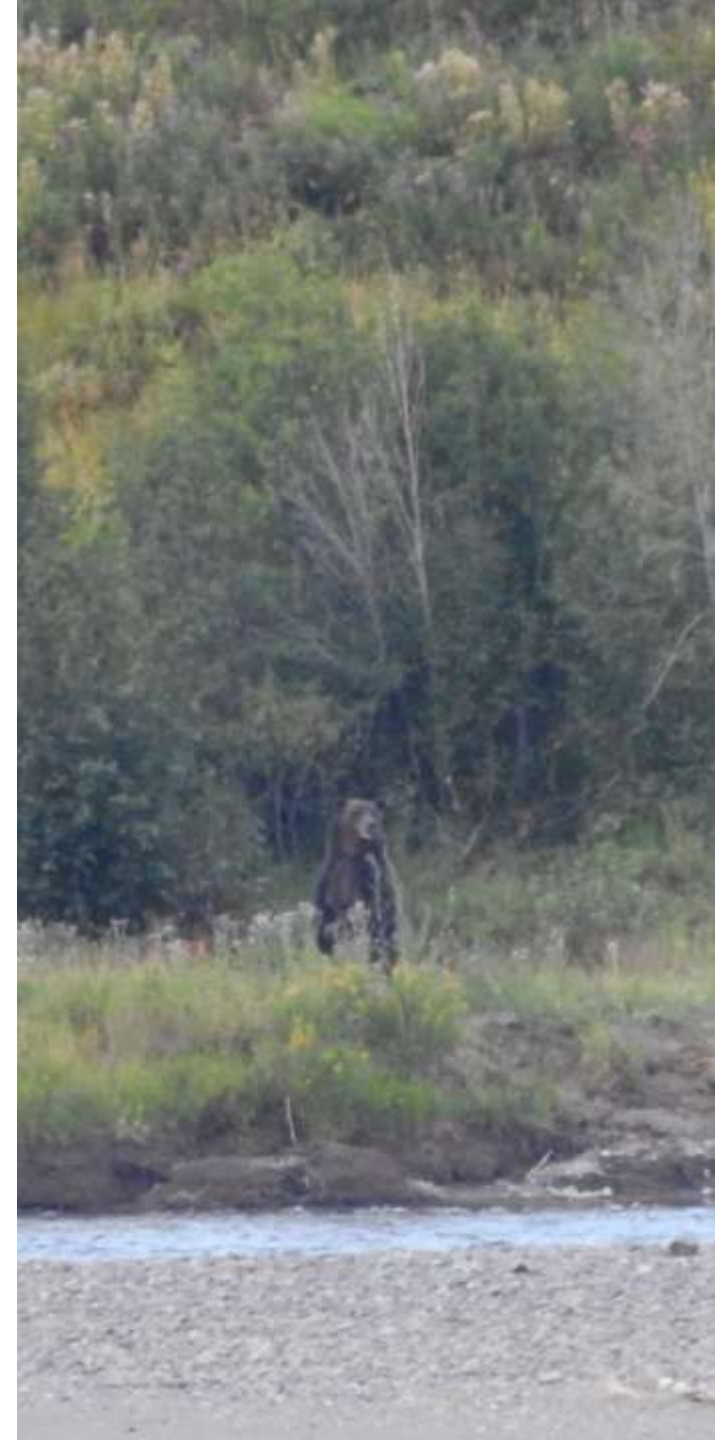
Grizzly bear #2 heading down slope from the east end of Jasper Bench. It got down to the river level (see next page).





The bear, I believe a male, stood on his hind legs to look around. It was really cool to see, as the crowd oohed and awed as they watched the action through spotting scopes and binoculars.





The grizzly looked around a few times (middle and right) and then eventually left the area (next page), not crossing the Lamar River. Instead, it traveled southeast and went out of sight behind Amethyst Bench.





Rick and Jeremy scanned from a few angles north of Dorothy's Pullout this morning. At one point, I could see them when I walked west of Dorothy's to stretch my legs after 1.5 hours of standing still. The contrast was bad as I was looking into the morning sun.



As it became lighter, the views got better with many ravens waiting for the grizzly to leave the site. However, it didn't appear that this bear had opened up the carcass yet, so even if/when it left, there wouldn't be much obtainable food for them.









The coyote pup as it left the road. I was kicking myself that I didn't have time to get a pic when it was standing on the road. Notice its unique white-tipped tail.



The coyote wasted no time traveling down to the valley floor (left), then met up with the grizzly at the old, eroded riverbank after the bruin left the carcass area (below). 'White-tip' then ran straight to the dead bison (see next two pages).









With the grizzly away, ravens swarmed the carcass site (left) as 'White-tip' approached (right, see arrows).



The grizzly was still hanging around the eroded area but hadn't bedded yet. As it was still looking around, 'White-tip' traveled through the site and disappeared, heading to the north (next page).







With the grizzly finally bedded (left), the ravens continued to swarm the carcass trying to get through the hide to obtain meat (below).

Next two pages: Soon after the grizzly bedded and White-tail disappeared, 2 coyotes came into the carcass area from the north. I theorized that those were the pair from earlier in the morning but couldn't be 100% sure.







Wildlife
watchers at
the actual
knoll, near
'Dorothy's
Knoll' lot,
observing the
pair of
coyotes
traveling west
past them.
Only one is
visible in this
frame (see
arrow).



As I watched the coyotes, I noticed the abundance of Canada geese and the many sandhill cranes on the valley floor, even near the bison carcass. There were hundreds of geese and a few dozen cranes in the general area where we were looking.

Up to this point, we hadn't seen a wolf, even with the rendezvous site nearby and a carcass even closer, which was about a half mile from Dorothy's. Finally, at 9:30 AM we briefly saw a gray traveling east at the western part of Jasper Bench. We were radioed with the location but had a poor angle to watch it for long. Burnt out from staring through optics all morning, Steve and I talked with many people in the lot and had breakfast while the action slowed down. We discussed other folks' sightings and when we thought wolves would be at the carcass; I guessed it would be this evening, or certainly by the morning.

We departed the lot right at 10 AM, which got us stuck in Lamar Canyon for around 20 minutes. That was frustrating because all we had to do was leave five minutes earlier to have little to no wait. Once through, we went to Tower to recycle our last couple of days of waste, then went to the nearby Roosevelt store for ice cream. They used to have 99 cent ice cream sandwiches, but that was a couple of years ago. It is still a tradition I like doing, which started when my son was small and used to travel with us. He is now 16 and decided after our summer 2016 trip that he didn't have the interest to go back to the park now having six previous visits under his belt.

After going to the Tower/Roosevelt area, we drove south, first going to Calcite where I obtained great pictures of the scenic Yellowstone River area. Afterward, we continued south on the Dunraven Road and went to Canyon and Hayden Valley for the second time this trip. There weren't many bison in the northern half of Hayden, just some small groups of bulls, but we had a good 100 on the west side of the road by the sandstone cliff area just north of Elk Antler Creek. That is the area which has a nice overview that I discussed earlier in this book. We then saw a couple hundred more in the last, southern meadow of Hayden Valley past (south of) Mud Volcano. All were around and close to the road, but none were on the actual pavement, making it an ideal, safe situation for man and beast. It was an intimate, special sighting.

We then drove to the Natural Bridge Trail at the Bridge Bay Campground area. It was a very cool 2.5 mile round-trip hike to the top of the natural, rock bridge. I had never done it before, and wondered how that was possible given all the hiking I have done in the park. It was warm, and the lodgepole pines that lined both sides of the trail had a really pleasant, dry smell to them. It reminded me of the pitch pines on Cape Cod, MA. It is a smell I am fond of and a scent I associate with the hot, parched conditions of late summer.



Having to wait at the traffic light, I stepped out of my vehicle and took some pictures of Lamar Canyon, one of my favorite scenic areas in the park.



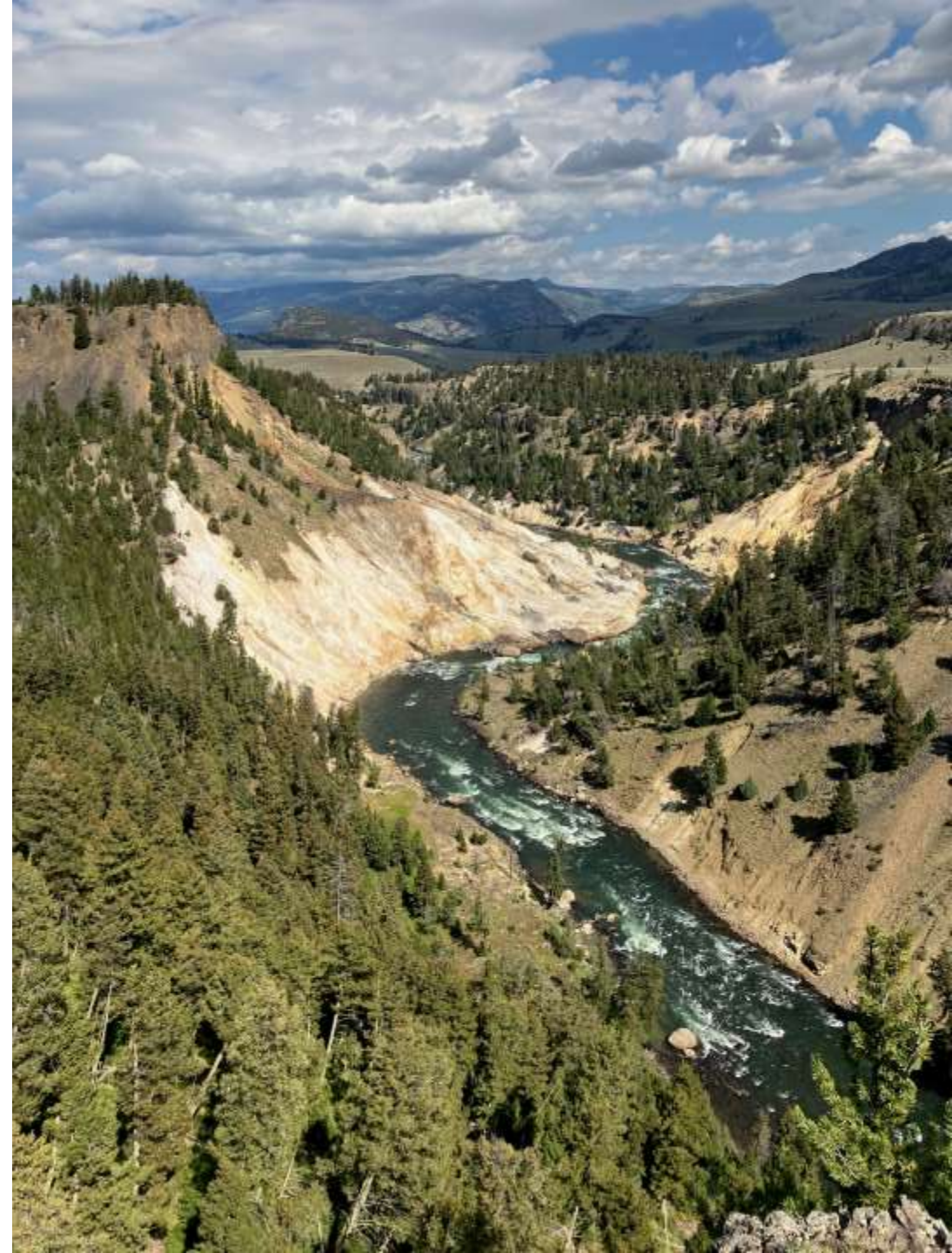




Calcite Springs, a hydrothermal area near Tower. It isn't very active, but there is a distinct sulfur smell emanating from the area. On cold days, steam often rises from the eroded area in the center of these pictures (and see the next three pages).



Cell phone pictures of Calcite Springs. I always like to compare these photographs with my Nikon camera. Sometimes the cell images are brighter and show greater color, especially for scenic shots that don't require any zoom.





One of my favorite images of Calcite Springs, taken with my cell phone.





Top: A panoramic view of Calcite Springs, including a section of the Yellowstone River Trail (see arrow) just above the basalt cliffs (below) representing volcanic activity from millions of years ago.





The back part of the Calcite Springs trail/
boardwalk (top), with the Yellowstone River
viewed to the south (bottom).





A cool view of the vertical rock cliffs next to the park road between Calcite Springs and Tower Fall.

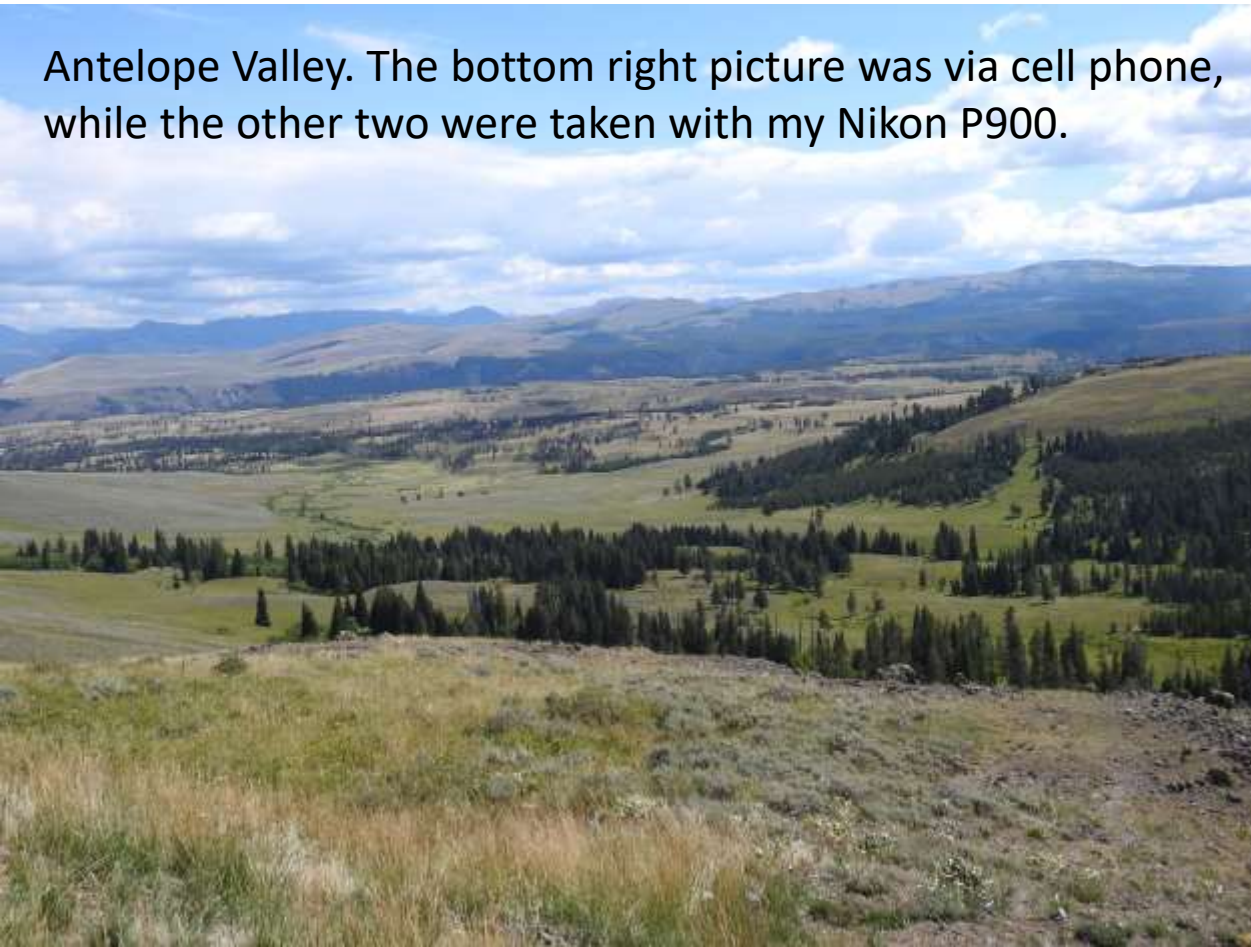


Next two pages: Antelope Valley, viewed to the east of the park road north of Mt. Washburn.





Antelope Valley. The bottom right picture was via cell phone, while the other two were taken with my Nikon P900.



The southern end of Antelope Valley leads to Mount Washburn (see arrow).





I almost didn't share these dirty windshield views, but they offer a good perspective of what one sees when driving the Dunraven Road near Mount Washburn. The drive gets much more forested as one continues south and approaches Canyon Village (bottom left).





Alum Creek, in the northern part of Hayden Valley, is a good place to see grizzly bears and wolves.







Hayden Valley, as viewed to the south, from Alum Creek.

I like this view of the western part of Hayden Valley near the sandy hills NW of Trout Creek, with bison dotting the landscape (also see next page).



Bison in the western part of Hayden Valley.







The northwestern shores of Yellowstone Lake, as viewed from the car.





The pine-laden Natural Bridge Trail started close to the Bridge Bay Campground. It was a little over a mile each way, which amounted to a 2.5 mile round trip hike.

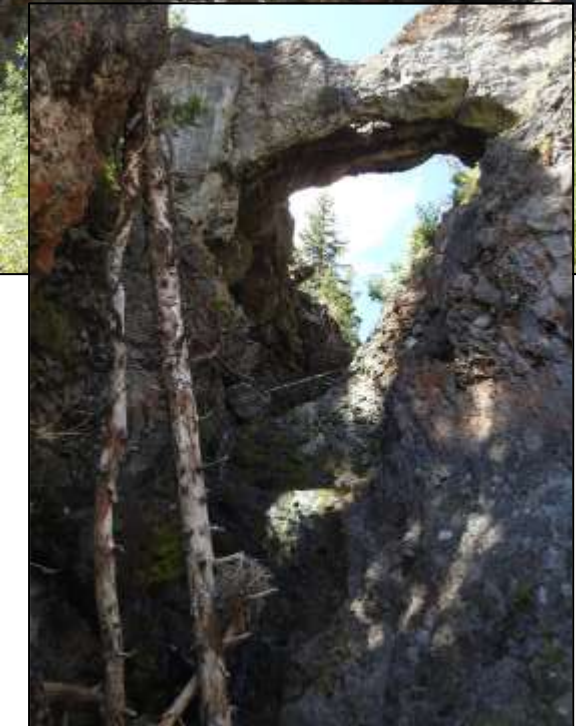




The Natural Bridge Trail split to the right (see top left), and a short distance later one could get a distant view of the bridge (lower right) before hiking closer for a better look at it (lower left).



The [Natural Bridge](#) is a 51 foot (18 m) cliff made of rhyolite rock cut through by Bridge Creek. In layman's terms, it is the product of erosion caused by water.

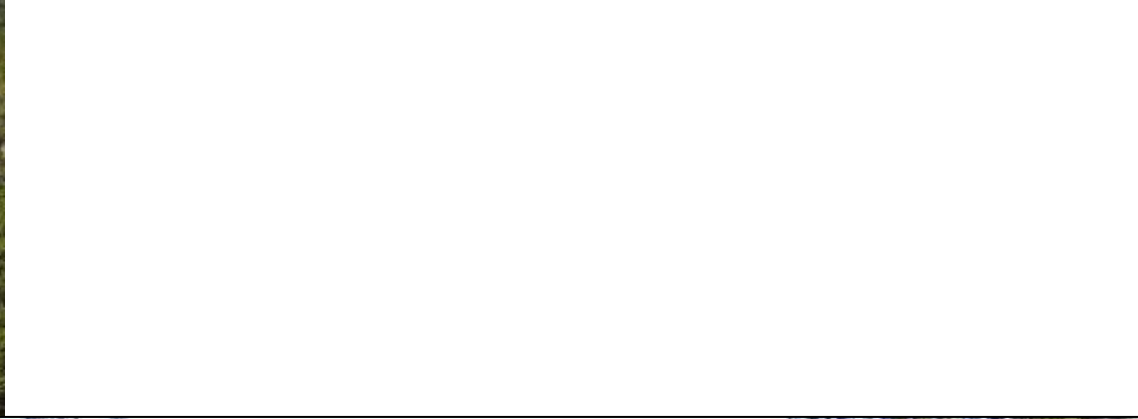






The view from the top!





Next page: A good perspective of me on the bridge, demonstrating how big it really is.





Me (left)
and Steve
(right) on
the natural
bridge.





A Columbia spotted frog in a very algae-laden wetland near the natural bridge and just off the main trail.



After our hike, we enjoyed our lunch on the shores of Yellowstone Lake at a pullout next to the water. It is very scenic around the NW shores of North America's largest high elevation lake, at [7,733 feet above sea level](#). After lunch, we continued south to West Thumb, which is a geologically active area on the shores of the lake. It has many hydrothermal features. There were two loops totaling about one mile. Every time I go there, I am reminded of what a great place it is, as the pictures clearly show.

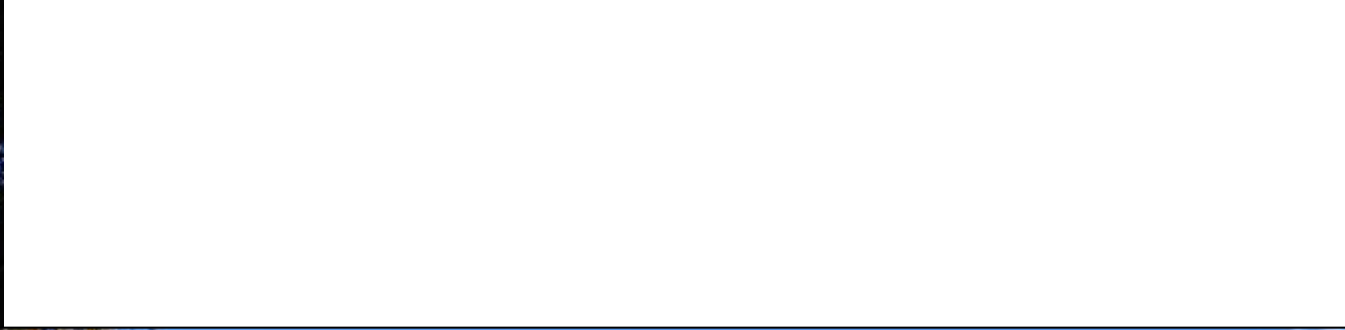
We finished hiking West Thumb at ~3 PM, mindful that we had a long trip to get back to Silver Gate. On the drive back, we saw a cow elk near the East Entrance Road junction (which we didn't take), and then watched the same two herds of bison in the southern half of Hayden Valley. Being close to the road, the southern herd again offered more great views of one of my favorite animals!

I mainly saw waterfowl in or near the Yellowstone River throughout the northern half of Hayden Valley. There were absolutely no large animals by the road. It was like a ghost town compared to previous trips through there. The one positive was that we made good time and decided to stop at Artist Point at ~4:30 PM. We found parking quite easily which is almost impossible to do earlier in the day as it is mobbed with tourists. I got some great pictures without too much of a line.

We gassed up at Canyon Village at 5 PM, and after having experienced a beautiful, sunny day to that point, it began to downpour. I decided to drive despite the sloppy conditions, which lasted for 15 solid minutes. It stopped when we passed Mount Washburn and were headed north toward Antelope Valley. There were just a couple of bison in all of Antelope, but we did see 2-3 herds in Little America after we passed by Tower Junction. The pronghorn were more in the distance on this day. I also saw a mule deer doe on the edge of the road at Junction Lake, the namesake of the famous wolf pack. This is at the western end of Little America, a couple miles east of Tower.

We got stuck at the Lamar Canyon light again. I used the 20 minute delay to summarize my notebook. We were so busy up to that point in the day, I got way behind with my notes. So, it was nice to be busy while sitting in the parked, turned off car.

Once through the light, we got into a bison jam at the eastern part of Lamar Valley at 6:20 PM. There were 200-300 of the shaggy beasts there. While frustrating to be stuck in the car, it was assuring to see so many of them. Once through the jam, we sailed home, getting back there at 6:45 PM after a full, 14 hour day. It was another long, but wonderful day in the park.



This was our lunch spot at the west-central part of Yellowstone Lake. It involved a steep descent to reach the water (top left).

Next page: The view of the mountains, which are in the Thorofare region of the SE section of the park, on the other side of the lake was beautiful.







Previous page and left: Cell phone pics of the lake on the way (right) to the West Thumb Geyser Basin.





A nice perspective of the West Thumb Geyser Basin (top and left), with Thumb Paint Pots (right) nearby.





Various features
at Thumb Paint
Pots.



Surging Spring, as taken from my Nikon camera (left) and cell phone (right). Map © of Yellowstone National Park.



Collapsing Pool (top left and bottom right), Ledge Spring (top right), and perspective of Ledge Spring with Yellowstone Lake in the background (bottom).



The boardwalk in the center of West Thumb Geyser Basin with Yellowstone Lake in the background (left) and Abyss Pool near the lake (right and next page).





Black Pool next to the lake. This was my favorite stretch of the West Thumb Geyser Basin. The scenery was fantastic, and the bacterial mats (right) were stunning.







Cell phone pics of Black Pool. These pictures seem to show more color and contrast when compared with my Nikon P900 camera images.





The bacterial mats (below right and next page) seemed to go on forever at the back (east) part of Black Pool (top part of left picture).







This and next page: I couldn't get enough of the bacterial mats at Black Pool, so I am including these pictures, which were all taken with my cell phone. The temperature of specific areas determines the different colors (and species) of bacteria.



The boardwalk went within feet of Yellowstone Lake, which offered a tremendous view of the area.





Eroded area above the boardwalk (top left), Fishing Cone (top right), and Lakeshore Geyser (bottom right and next page).



Next page: Cell phone images of Lakeshore Geyser (left) and Thumb Paint Pots area (right) on the completion of the mile loop, which we hiked in a clockwise direction.



Lakeshore Geyser next to the boardwalk.





Lakeshore Spring (left) and view of the shore of Yellowstone Lake (right) as I left the northeast part of the boardwalk to return to our vehicle.





Last views of the West Thumb Geyser Basin as I departed the SE part of the boardwalk and returned to the parking lot.





Immediately upon entering the southern part of Hayden Valley, tourists are warned to avoid bison (left). And for good reason, as bison (below right) and a pesky raven (below left) were immediately in view from there.





Bison bull following a cow (left) while the herd grazes on grass that is starting to turn golden yellow (below).







It is remarkable for people to be able to observe natural bison behavior from the park road, as this bull courts the cow by his side with her calf grazing on grass nearby (top right).



Views of Hayden Valley from the car. If it weren't for a dirty and cracked windshield, this would be a pretty good picture (left). Once I zoomed the camera in, I was able to get it to focus past those obstructions and obtain better images (below and next page).







This marathon day continued with a trip to Artist Point at the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. The traffic can be terrible there mid-day, but we were lucky and got in and out by going later in the afternoon.









Cell phone
pics of the
Grand Canyon
of the
Yellowstone
from Artist
Point.





Left: The back part of the Grand Canyon east of the scenic view (previous pages) of Lower Falls. The colorful cliffs are really cool to look at and result from the hydrothermally altered rhyolite and sediments.

Right and next: Lower Falls zoomed in. For perspective, notice how much bigger the waterfall is compared to the nearby trees.





This and next page:
Cell phone pics of
the Grand Canyon of
the Yellowstone from
Artist Point.







Lower Falls is 308 feet tall, which is the length of a football field plus eight feet! [According to the park service](#), it formed because the river flows over volcanic rock that is more resistant to erosion than the downstream rocks, which are hydrothermally altered.





Dunraven Road near Mount Washburn, shortly after the area experienced 15 minutes of heavy rain.



It often gets sunny shortly after heavy summer rainstorms. Rainbows are the result of these changes in weather, as sunlight hits a rain droplet and some of the light is reflected. The electromagnetic spectrum (i.e., rainbow) is made of light with many different wavelengths (i.e., colors), as each is reflected at a different angle. This one was in Antelope Valley on our way back to Silver Gate.







The cliffs by Tower Fall (which is to the right of this picture) on our way back.





Clockwise from top left:
Leaving Lamar Canyon and
entering Lamar Valley. It
was sunny and bright,
which caused us to forget
about the heavy rain that
occurred just 30-40
minutes earlier.



I took this picture of the pronghorn on the flats of Lamar through the passenger car window while we were driving (top left), then cropped it at 'home' in Silver Gate (bottom). I was quite burnt out from the long day, so I drove straight back to the cabin without taking another picture after this one.



Day 7: Morning Grizzlies, Rescue Creek Wolves, and Bunsen Peak Hike

August 19th began at 48 degrees, which was more normal for a predawn summer temperature. Despite the long day yesterday, we were up early and left the cabin at 5:01 AM with our supplies, including food, tea, equipment, and clothes, ready to go, as normal. We got our daily fox fix on the side of the road just west of the Northeast Entrance before Warm Creek. It was sitting on the side of the road with its long tail on the pavement. It barely moved when I went by, unlike most of the other fox sightings this week when they quickly disappeared. I surmised that it was mousing and waiting to pounce in the grass just off the road. Later, I kicked myself for not taking pictures, especially given that my camera was on the floor mat between my legs.

We arrived at Dorothy's at 5:33. I immediately set up my scope in the dark and could see the shape of a bear on the dead bison. As it became light around 5:55, I noticed that it appeared to be a different one than the previous day. It had a blondish middle third of its body with a dark back and head. It was distinctive looking and definitely feeding on the bison, unlike yesterday's situation with the younger bruin having difficulty getting in. Just as it got light out, 50-60 ravens landed nearby with some very close to the bear at the carcass.

Once I could see, I scanned Lamar and quickly found a griz on Amethyst Bench. It was likely the smaller bear on the carcass from the previous day. It quickly went SE into the woods north of the 'skinny, lone conifer' that we use as a landmark in the middle of the bench. I noted that Steve and I were now 7 for 7 in seeing (usually multiple) grizzlies each day during this trip.

Without wolves at the carcass, we left early – at 6:30 – for the Blacktail Plateau. We wanted to be there at dawn looking for the Rescue Pack and decided that today would be a good day to not chance missing much in Lamar. Wildlife sightings certainly aren't guaranteed, so it is always a gamble to leave a carcass site for a rendezvous location, even if not too much visited it during dawn. This was a nice problem to have, as both locations often produce good wolf sightings.

It took us 40 minutes to do the approximate 25 mile drive, which included getting through the light at Lamar Canyon. We set up our scopes up at 7:12 AM. Doug McLaughlin had earlier observed 6 pups and 3 adults from the Rescue Creek Pack around first light but didn't currently have anything in sight. For the first half hour or so, I 'only' saw scattered pronghorn and a bald eagle in a tree to the east of the Triangle Forest. Then, finally, I found a black wolf that soon turned into two more blacks and a gray. They were all pups on the right (west) side of the Triangle Forest. Two were chewing on bones, and they had a half-hearted play session, with some wrestling and chasing, before lying down in the grass.

A different, bigger grizzly was on the carcass in Lamar Valley on this morning. Many ravens were also in attendance.







Soon after seeing the ravens getting flushed by the grizzly, we decided to head west and look for the Rescue Creek wolves. We reasoned that wolves weren't at this carcass yet, and it was unlikely they would go to it before dusk.





Floating Island Lake, a beautiful area on the way to the Blacktail.



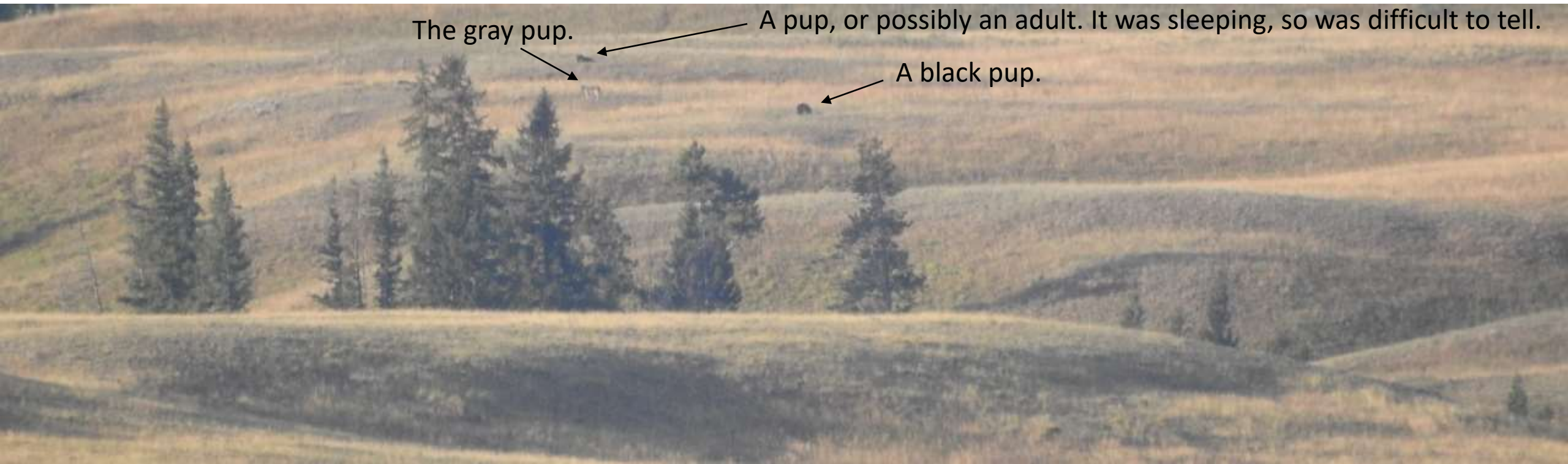
The view of Blacktail Plateau from the Children's Nature Trail.



View of the 'Triangle Forest' on the Blacktail. The pups were on the right (west) side in the general area of the two 'X' marks.



Three pups playing (2 black and 1 gray) in a tight cluster (see arrow), with a black watching them .



The gray pup.

A pup, or possibly an adult. It was sleeping, so was difficult to tell.

A black pup.



After over 30 minutes of lying down, the pups individually went into the woods with the gray – who looked like a rock when sleeping – getting up last. We questioned if it was actually a wolf until it finally moved. Fifteen minutes later, at 8:45 AM, we found a black pup on the far left (E/SE) side of the forest. It went in and out of view in a gully. I'm guessing it was one of the three that we saw earlier, but it would be impossible to tell given that there were 8 pups in the litter.

The heat waves picked up around this time too, which makes viewing difficult into the light. Given the lack of wolves in view and the strong sun, I decided to take a mental break and have my customary oatmeal breakfast, mixing in a banana, scoop of peanut butter, and hot tea water. It was simple, yet delicious. After taking in some calories, Steve and I talked with Bill Wengeler in the lot. It was his day off, so he was going to join us on a hike. We drove both our vehicles 15 minutes west to Mammoth. Bill left his car in the employee housing lot just outside of town and the hot springs in 'Upper Mammoth', and I drove the three of us up to the Bunsen Peak Trail. With two cars, we were able to hike up Bunsen and then extend the one-way hike to past Osprey Falls by taking the old dirt road down to Mammoth. It was a cool, different route of about 7 miles.

As we hiked up Bunsen, I spotted 8 elk running on the east side of Swan Flat. They looked nervous as they approached the park road. Oddly, I couldn't see anything that would have bothered them. I guessed it was a grizzly bear that they passed by, and the bear never gave chase, but I couldn't verify that.

We reached the top of Bunsen Peak at 11:30 AM and spent 20 minutes up there, including eating lunch. It was a sunny day with beautiful scenery. It is always windy up there, so I sat on a rock with another blocking most of the breeze. After that, we hiked down the backside (east) of Bunsen and then took the Bunsen Peak (dirt) Road north to Mammoth. We obtained a great view of Osprey Falls from the road. I had never been to that section of the trail before but had previously seen the waterfall from the spur trail leading to there. One can only see it from a certain angle, as it is in a canyon, so I was pleasantly surprised we were able to view it from the trail.

The old road was in pretty bad shape and was washed out in a few sections making it only possible to hike or mountain bike (which was allowed on that trail). On the hilly descent, I saw a lot of deer and elk activity, including numerous tracks and scat. In fact, I could even smell the musty ungulate odor that I often detect (including with deer in MA) when there is fresh activity. But because it was during the day, I didn't see any live animals, yet knew they were bedded nearby in the safety of the woods.



View of Mammoth Hot Springs from above (east) of the Mammoth High Bridge (left), then from on the bridge (right).





Approaching Mammoth Hot Springs (left) and then arriving there (right).





The Bunsen Peak Trailhead (left). The hike quickly went up in elevation and offered nice views of the impressive road system built into the Golden Gate Canyon section of the park (below).





In addition to the sweet view of the park road with Mt. Everts in the background (below), we also saw wildlife, like this red squirrel, on the trail (left),



The Hoodoos of Mammoth is a really cool area of tall white, spiracle rocks. It is especially cool to drive through (below right). However, the area [isn't a true hoodoo region](#), and was formed from a landslide when this was a geothermally active place. They consist of travertine rocks that fell from the top of Terrace Mountain.



Swan Lake and Swan Lake Flat with the Gallatin Range to the west.



Cell phone picture of Swan Lake Flat.





Elk on Swan Lake Flat traveling toward the road. I never could determine what they were looking back at.



The Hoodoos of Mammoth/Yellowstone, as viewed through the trees (left). A gray jay (right) looks at our group from its dead lodgepole pine perch.



Next page: View of the Mammoth area from an early, lower overlook on the Bunsen Peak Trail. Note that Mount Everts is the ridge/mountain on the right side of the pictures.



Cell phone wide angle views of the Hoodoos of Mammoth/Yellowstone.





A close-up of the Hoodoos of Mammoth/Yellowstone area. Notice the car in the short, 1-way section of road, which illustrates the hoodoos area well.



Town of
Mammoth area.

Mammoth Hot
Springs.





Loose scree on the Bunsen Peak Trail. We were about halfway up the mountain at this point in the hike.





As we got higher in elevation, our view expanded beyond Mammoth (lower arrow), as we could now also see Gardiner (top arrow) in the distance some five miles away (also see next page with the upper two arrows indicating the same locations).





Gardiner

Mammoth

Upper Mammoth employee housing area where we finished the hike.



Locations from the previous page zoomed in, including Mammoth and Gardiner again (top left), Mammoth Hot Springs and the town of Mammoth (upper right), and a closer view of the town of Mammoth (lower right).



Cell phone pictures of the greater Mammoth area. I really like the clarity of these pictures when taking landscape images.





Once we reached the top of Bunsen Peak (this page), we were afforded excellent views (see next few pages).



Swan Lake and Swan Lake Flat area. Notice the park road bisecting the area.



Cell phone picture of Swan Lake Flat area from the top of Bunsen Peak.



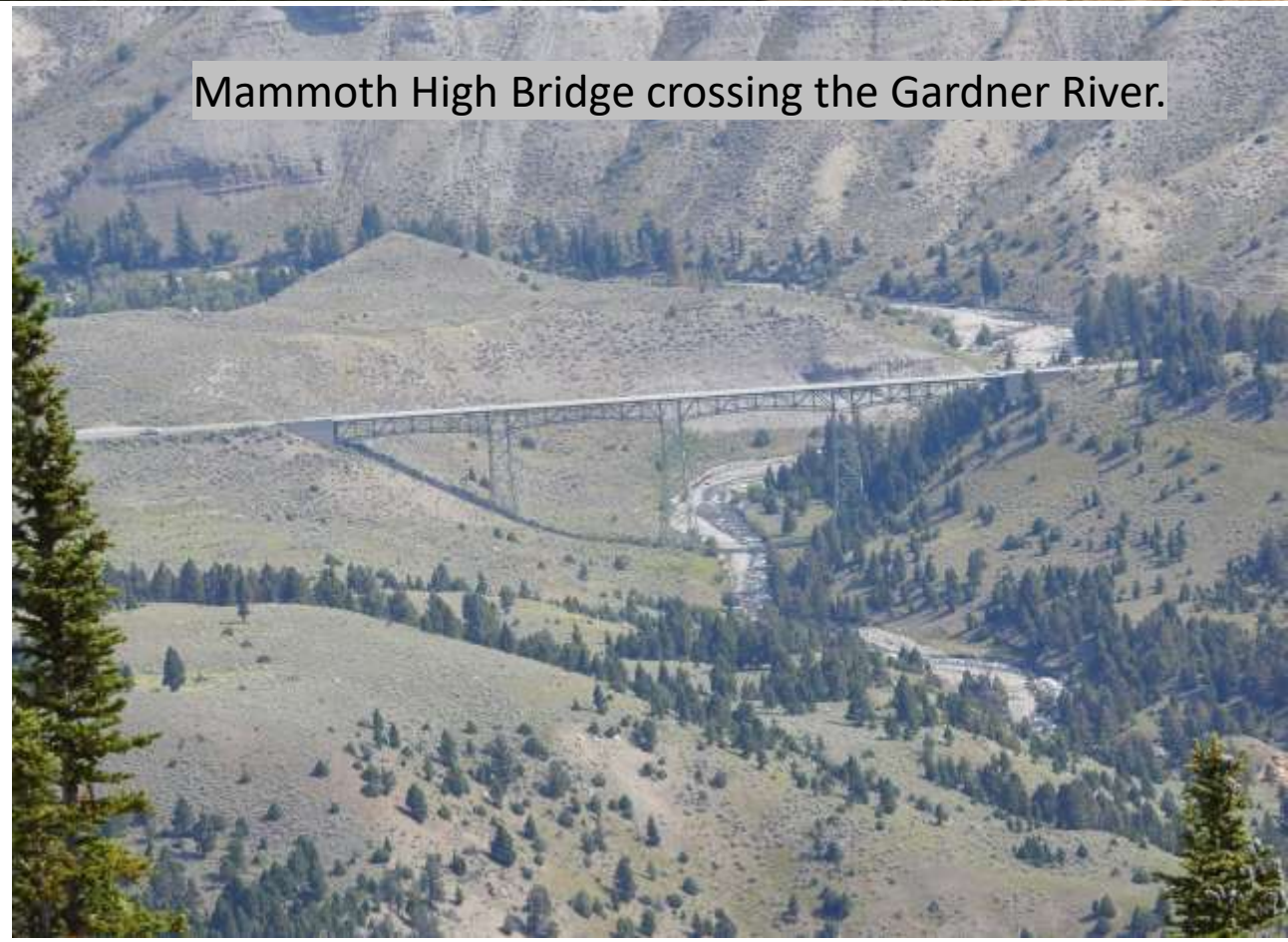
Swan Lake Flat and beyond.



Mount Everts above the town of Mammoth.

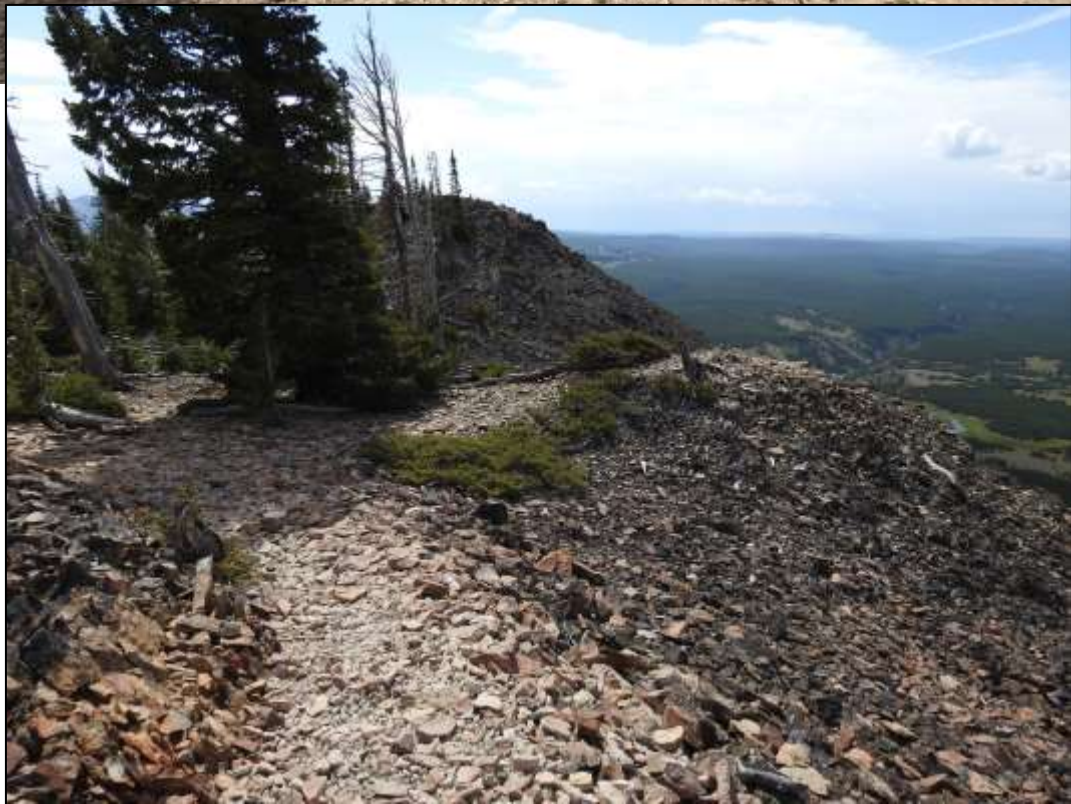


Mammoth High Bridge crossing the Gardner River.

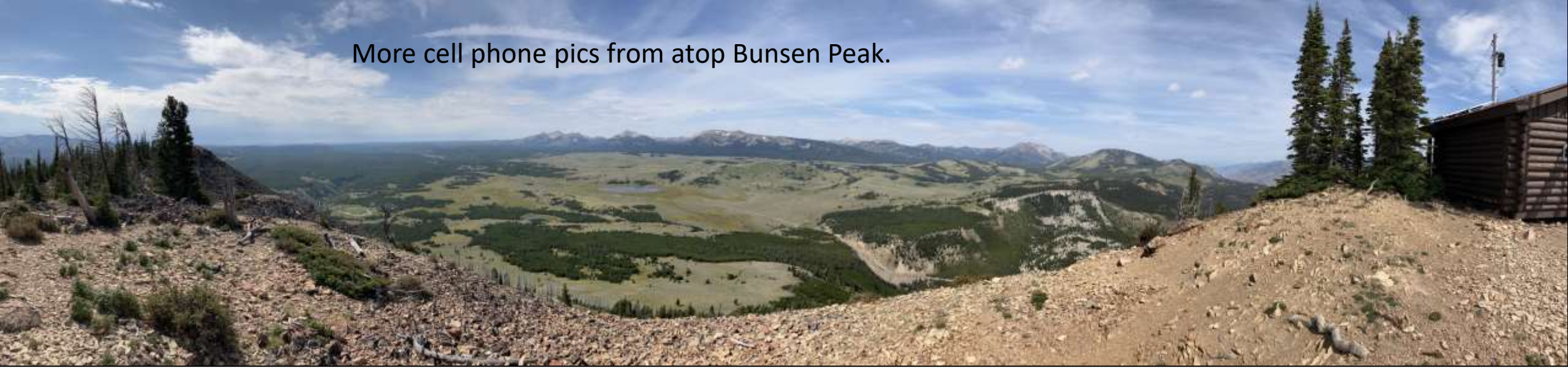




The top of Bunsen Peak.



More cell phone pics from atop Bunsen Peak.





Swan Lake (left) and a golden-mantled ground squirrel (right). They are good sized rodents, which look a lot like giant chipmunks.





The hike down the backside of Bunsen faces east with the Blacktail Plateau and Pond (see arrow) in the distance (also see next page).







Top Left: Blacktail Plateau in the background, with the foreground showing the Gardner River Canyon area.

Right: Gardner River Canyon.

Bottom Left: Grouse through the trees.





Mount Everts with the Gardner River (and see below left) and Mammoth High Bridge (see arrow).





As we descended towards Bunsen Peak (dirt) Road and the Gardner River area (left), we flushed a few grouse. The sudden explosion of their wings is startling and causes your heart to temporarily race (right).







The first grouse (top pics) looked like a ruffed grouse, while the second bird appeared to be a dusky grouse (below).



The third grouse I obtained pictures of was almost certainly a dusky grouse, judging from its appearance.



For a stretch, the Bunsen Peak Road paralleled the Gardner River Canyon, which was far below the road in these images.





While hiking along the Bunsen Peak Road, I wasn't sure we were going to get a good view of Osprey Falls, so I took these pictures with just part of it visible (see arrows). Little did I know at the time was just how good of a view of the falls we would have (see next three pages).



Cell
phone
pictures
of the
Osprey
Falls
area of
the
Gardner
River.







Super zoomed in
images of Osprey Falls.





I didn't realize how many views of Mount Everts and the High Bridge we would have on this really cool hike.





There was a very green understory as we hiked toward Mammoth (left and next page). It was also very 'gamey', with lots of tracks and scats of deer and elk, as well as the musky smell of the ungulates themselves.

Below: Bill (left) and Steve (right) hiking on Bunsen Peak Road.

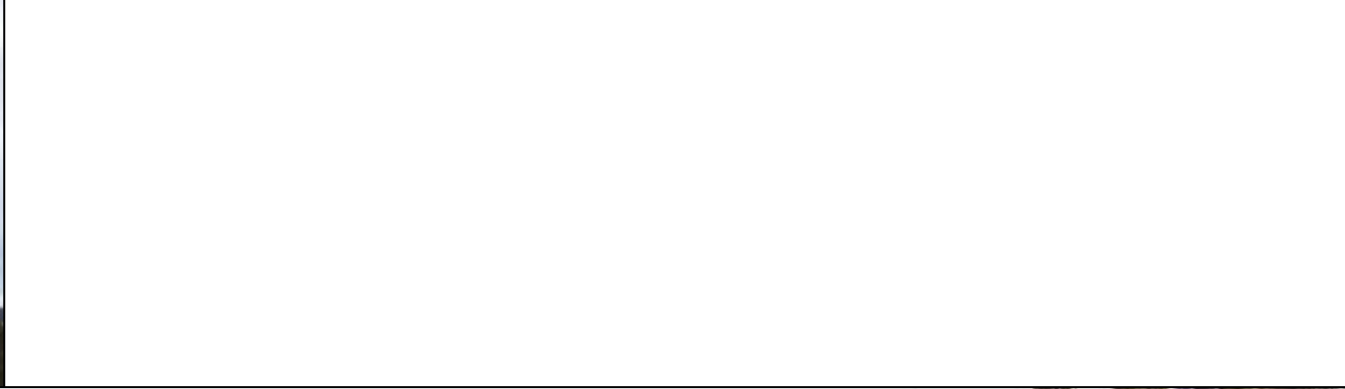


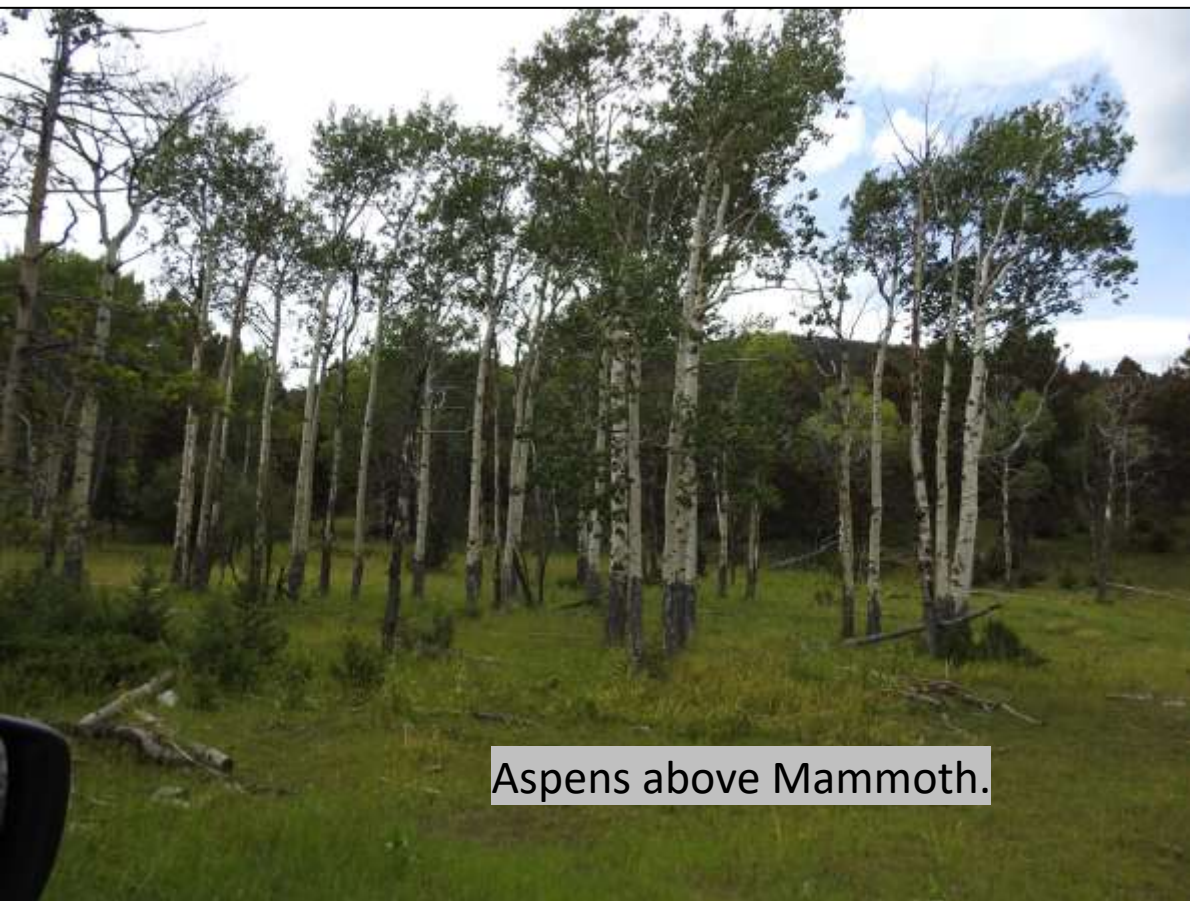




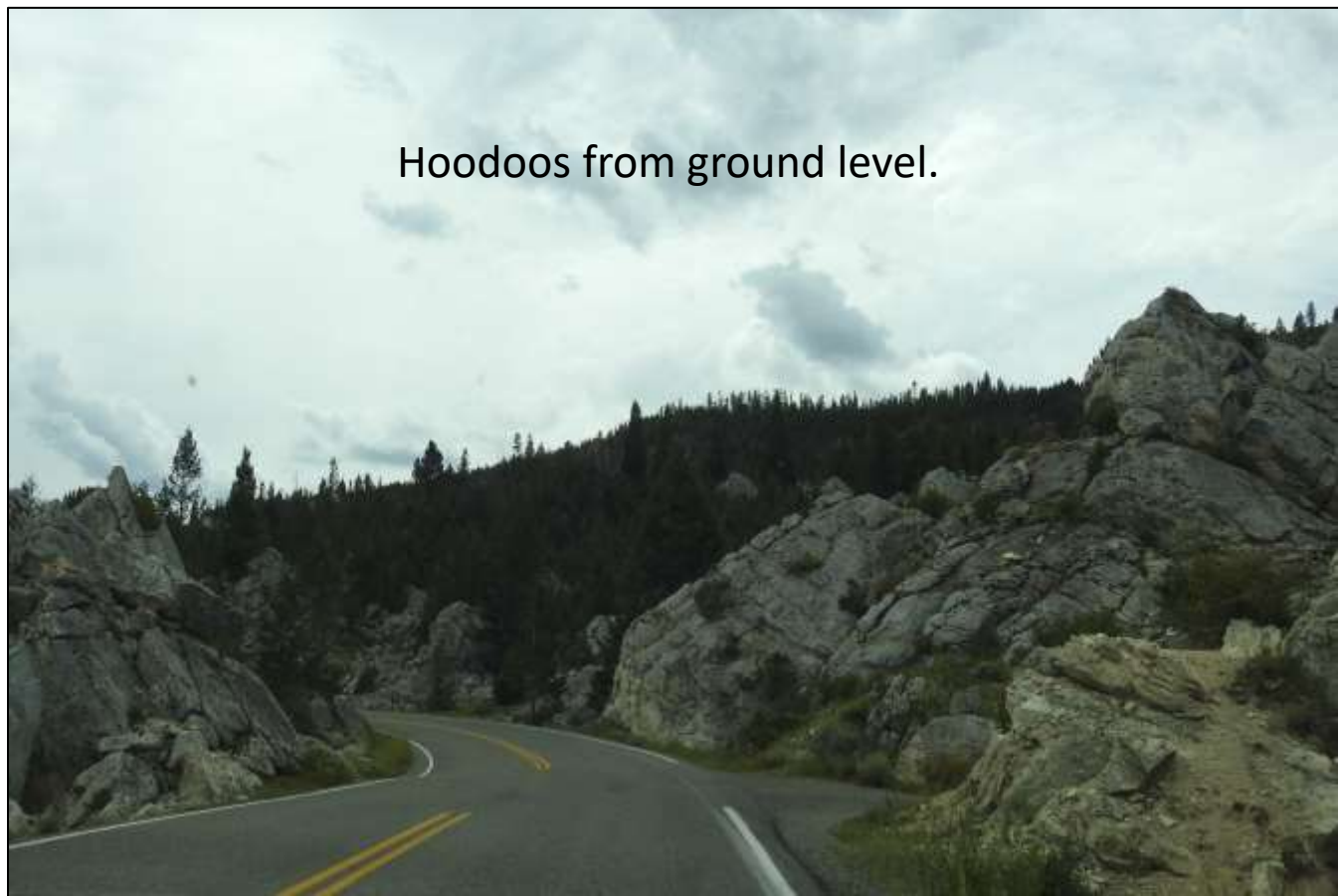
A probable Columbia spotted frog near a wetland marsh just outside of the Upper Mammoth employee housing area (also see next page). At first, I thought this may be a boreal chorus frog, but the spots are a give-away for Columbia spotted frog.







Aspens above Mammoth.



Hoodoos from ground level.

We got back to Bill's car at 2 PM and drove up in elevation the few miles back to the Bunsen Peak Trailhead. Steve and I then headed back to Silver Gate, not getting there until 3:55 PM. On our way, we saw about 200 bison in Little America at the Crystal Creek Trailhead, which is an area where I often observe them. There were also still a bunch (multiple hundred) in the eastern part of Lamar Valley, and there were also ~100 in the Confluence area as we departed the Lamar and headed to Soda Butte Valley. I quickly debated (in my head) about stopping at Confluence for pictures but decided not to because I was tired from the accumulation of activity from the past few days. They were right on the gravel bed too, and just like as I drove on with the fox in the morning, I was kicking myself for not taking a couple of minutes to stop and photograph them in one of my favorite scenic locations.

Even after getting some rest, we decided to stay in for the evening, exhausted from the past couple of days of driving and from overall lack of down time. I also wanted to get caught up on processing pictures and was looking forward to not being in the vehicle.

Instead, we went to the Range Rider Lodge in Silver Gate for a couple of drinks from 8-9 PM. The [building is a former brothel that opened in 1938](#). Now, it isn't open that often, even though it has the capability of being a bed and breakfast type inn. It is open more in the summer and usually closes in the winter. There are also occasional special events held there, like a June 2015 celebration of Rick McIntyre's ongoing career. Many wolf watchers, including myself, were there to honor him for all he had done with wolves. On this night, there was a live band and a lot of people there. It felt like a different world in this tiny town, and it is always interesting to talk to, or just watch, people from different walks of life. Plus, it gave us a mini-mental break from the past week of activities.

It started to rain as we left the Range Rider and walked to our car. We got back to the cabin fairly early, at just after 9 PM. I slept well until my alarm went off at 4:20 AM.





Waterfall on Glen Creek at Golden Gate Canyon. This is close to where we parked to hike the Bunsen Peak Trail.





Cell phone pictures of Glen Creek waterfall in Golden Gate Canyon.



'One (or Lone) Tree Hill' at Elk Creek (see arrows).





Bison and cars in Little America.







Pebble Creek Campground was closed during summer 2023, as it was used as a base for the various construction projects in the northern part of the park. Folks jokingly called this huge sandpile, 'Mount Pebble'. It was used as fill for the road projects, and while still [closed in 2024 for flood recovery work](#), plans are to eventually reopen it.

Day 8: Groaning Bears and Wolves Finally Join the Feast

It rained for much of the night and was 50° when we left the cabin at 5:06 on August 20th. Soon after, at 5:12, we saw our usual red fox, now just west of the Northeast Entrance gate. We have seen foxes in the dark on most of the mornings of this trip. It is a nice way to mentally wake up, and to keep me alert as I drive in the dark, making sure to avoid hitting any animals. My only known road-kill in this area is a red squirrel and possibly a ground squirrel. Those accidents were a few years ago, as both animals darted out in front of me, making it difficult to avoid them.

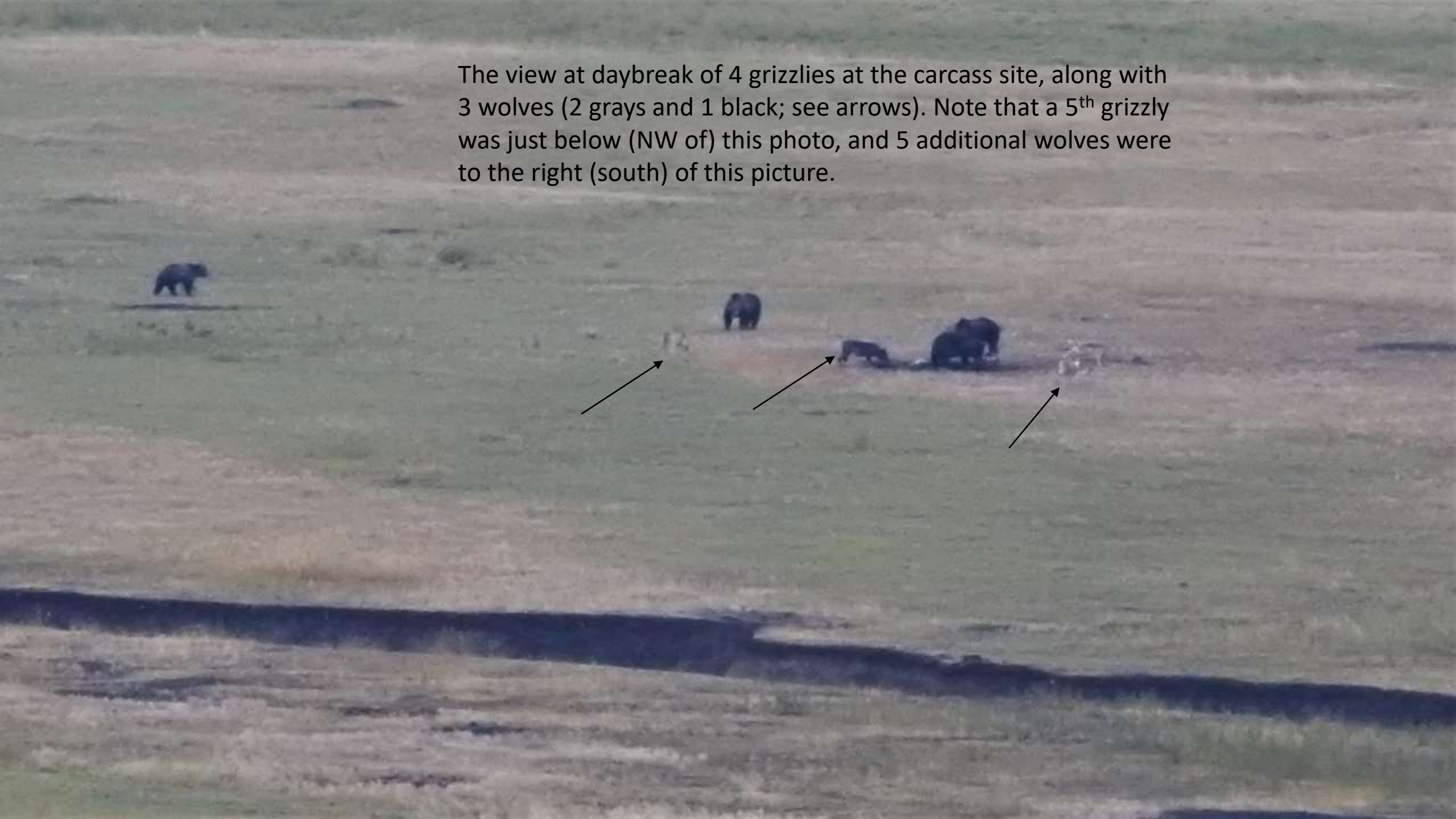
We set up at Dorothy's at 5:35 AM in the dark. Thomas had arrived a couple of minutes before us. We could hear groaning bears at the carcass a half mile away, so we immediately knew there were multiple bruins interacting at the site. And soon after that, Thomas and I could make out the faint shapes of multiple grizzlies in and around the carcass site, even with the limited amount of light available. We were excited for first light to come so we could watch the action down at the carcass. I also made a mental note that it was our last full day in the park, and I had now seen grizzlies every day to this point!

There was just enough light available at 5:55 for us to see 5 grizzlies! Four were at the carcass and a smaller one was just below the hill from where we stood. That one was closer to us, and it was watching the action from about one hundred yards away. We could also just barely make out a gray wolf interacting with the bears. Just as we found that canine, we heard a single howl coming from the east end of Jasper Bench. That single yelp soon turned into a group howl. They were down low by the Lamar River. We counted a total of 4 grays and 4 blacks, all pretty spread out, including the black pup, and now with enough light, 3 wolves (2 grays and 1 black) at the dead bison. They were right at the carcass, even with all the bears there.

The black pup approached the carcass area but never actually came to it, with 2 collared grays and a black the only ones spending a significant amount of time there. The pup and an uncollared, distinct looking gray, with dark highlights on the top of the body, bedded two scope widths to the south of the site, which was ~75 meters away.

As it became lighter, I looked at the bison and couldn't believe that it was mostly consumed. That meant that it was primarily eaten overnight in the past 10-12 hours. Given the bears at the site and all of the wolves nearby, it was no doubt hammered by both species after it got dark. 'Mighty impressive', I thought. The wolves didn't seem overeager about going there, which likely confirms my suspicions that they weren't hungry enough to test the bears because they had already eaten their fill.

The view at daybreak of 4 grizzlies at the carcass site, along with 3 wolves (2 grays and 1 black; see arrows). Note that a 5th grizzly was just below (NW of) this photo, and 5 additional wolves were to the right (south) of this picture.



The pictures weren't optimal at dawn, and I had to take wide angle photos so the camera could take in the available light. Zoomed in pictures didn't work until it became lighter out, as they were quite blurry.

Next page: Despite the lighting challenges, the pictures certainly captured the scene with 4 grizzlies and 3 wolves in one frame!







A gray wolf chasing off a smaller grizzly (left), while the other two wolves howl next to three grizzlies (below).





Three wolves at the carcass next to a grizzly bear and many ravens.







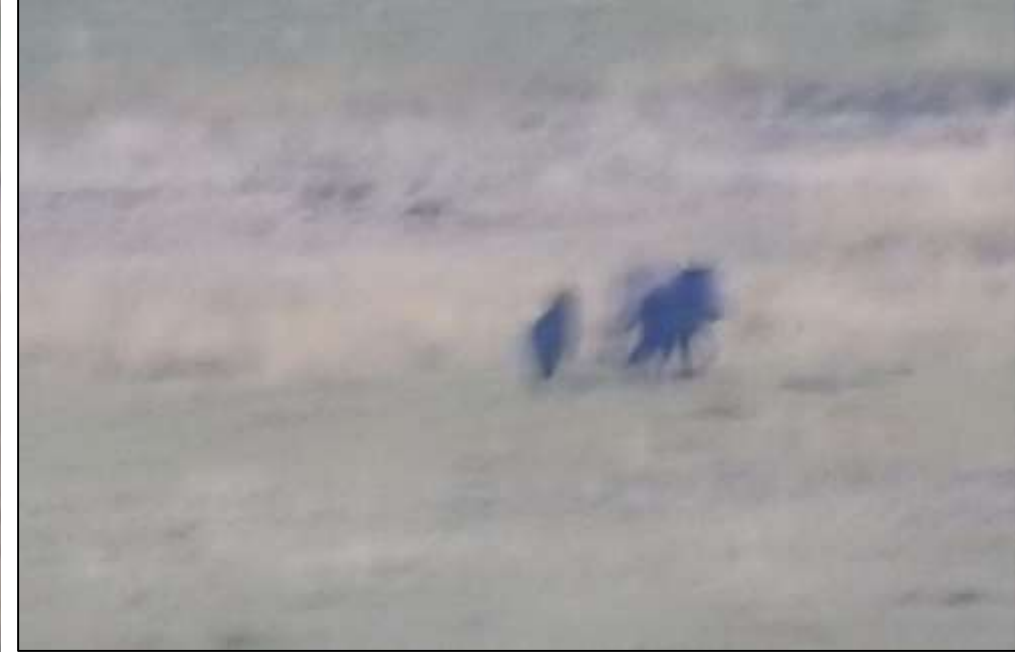
The 3rd wolf while the two grays feed alongside a grizzly. →



This picture does a good job of illustrating just how little of the bison remained after the wolves and bears fed on it overnight.
Next page: Three wolves, including the black pup and likely a black and a gray yearling, south of the carcass near the river.







While the pictures are blurry, one can see the wolves playing. Their games included chasing each other and occasionally wrestling.





These pictures are clearer and show the size differential between the two probable yearlings and the smaller black pup.

At 6:45 AM, most of the bears individually walked south and crossed the Lamar River. The wolves generally did likewise in groups of two to three. One bear stayed at the carcass and at 7:00, 1382F, the former alpha female of the Junctions, who lost her position to 907F, an old, 10 year old gray, came into the site. She even chased the medium sized griz back and forth. But she always walked with a tucked tail, revealing her clear submissive behavior – even without any other wolves in the area.

As the once black, now graying 1382 was getting scraps around the carcass as the bear fed, Thomas and I summarized the past hour of sightings and agreed that we had observed 5 grizzly bears and 9 total wolves, 5 blacks and 4 grays. While it might sound fairly straight forward when reading this book, it is often quite complicated getting accurate counts. Keep in mind that there were also many people there, and we let them look through our scopes so they were able to see the bears and wolves up-close. The wolves were spread out, coming and going to the area, which further confuses the situation. When I scope with Rick M., he often does the same thing by recapping the sightings once when the action dies down. This helped me, so when I reported our observations to Laurie L. for her daily report and to Rick M., who was parked a quarter of a mile away, I was confident they were accurate findings. As an example, some people didn't have all 5 bears because of their different locations, and due to a couple of the bears leaving the area early in the morning.

1382F hung around the carcass as a coyote joined her in the area. The coyote circled the wolf and bear but didn't get to feed much. Seven wolves crossed the river to the south at various times. I assumed they were heading up to the Jasper Bench rendezvous area. Another gray had already gone that route many minutes earlier. One of those seven wolves, a young gray with black highlights on its back, followed an adolescent grizzly eastward after crossing the Lamar River. The duo were literally side by side and seemed to enjoy each other's company, even though it was more likely that the canid was escorting the bear away from the rendezvous area. The wolf nipped at the bear's butt 3-4 times, but it seemed more like play to me rather than anything serious. The two traveled out of sight behind (south of) Amethyst Bench.

Just as they were leaving my view, I found the black pup and a dark black adult following a different, bigger griz in the same general direction. The pup appeared to get within 20 feet, yet the griz mostly ignored the young wolf. The adult black didn't seem overly concerned either, which perplexed me. They likely had 'done that dance' many times before, which means that the individuals involved all probably knew each other from previous encounters. If the adult wolf didn't know that bear, I'm certain it would have had a completely different, more serious approach to handling that situation.



While the three wolves continued to feed (below), temporarily without a grizzly on the carcass, two wolves (lower arrows) and a grizzly (upper arrow) crossed the Lamar River heading southeast (see left picture).





It appeared that one of the grays was going to leave the site for the morning (below right), but it returned (lower left) just as a grizzly came back to the site.

Next page: A better, sharper image of the action at the carcass.











A gray, likely yearling, wolf traveling right next to a medium-sized grizzly south of the Lamar River.



Wolf 1382F approaching the carcass site with a medium-sized grizzly still present.





Notice 1382's tucked tail as she assesses the situation. That is a tell-tale (no pun intended) sign of submission in the canid world.









A coyote approaches the scene, as 1382F finally gets a feeding.







Amethyst Bench

A good perspective of the carcass site (see arrow) with bear, wolf, coyote, and many ravens on it. Amethyst Bench, the flat, open grassy area before the trees, is in the distance.



Video stills/screenshots of wolves crossing the Lamar River, including the black pup on the right side on the top pics.





While most of the Junction wolves were leaving the area for the day, 1382F, the grizzly, coyote, and ravens remained at the carcass site, eating as many scraps as they could.



Our observation area as a bull bison passed by us. It gave us a wide enough birth where we didn't have to move. The sign indicates that the area beyond it was closed to humans, to avoid people getting too close to the carcass site.







The coyote continued to circle the area while the wolf and bear fed.

At 7:15 AM, the scattered wolves joined up as 3 grays and 3 blacks, including the pup, bedded together on the slope between Amethyst and Jasper Benches south of the river. The fourth black rested east of them in the open sagebrush south of the river, 100-200 meters away. At the same time, we pivoted our scopes back to the dead bison and saw a coyote with a white-tipped tail (but didn't seem to be a pup) there. It was close to the wolf and bear, but never fed because of the presence of the two larger species. There were also about 50 ravens that swarmed the carcass 2-3 times when nothing was on it.

From 7:45-8:15 AM, the 6 wolves got up and gradually walked west up slope to the eastern part of Jasper. There, by a big boulder, they did a lot of playing. It was very fun to watch, as there was chasing and wrestling, but all in a local area, so they did considerable circling as they ran by and bumped bodies. After a few minutes, they continued west toward the rendezvous area, and we lost them for 5-10 minutes behind a ridge. I then found them in the back of Jasper Bench. The fourth black had caught up to them by that point. The seven canids spent considerable time on a big flat boulder, especially the pup and a gray. Two of the grays were collared, one was a yearling born the previous April (so, technically it was 16 months old), and the other was 2 years old (28 months). Both were females and collared over the winter when the park hires a team to fire a net over about a dozen wolves. They are then sedated and processed with all getting weighed, measured, blood drawn for disease surveillance and genetic analysis, and radio-collared.

By 8:20, the wolves were mostly bedded on the east end of Jasper. It started to rain, so we walked back to the car as we were about 100 yards downhill from Dorothy's Pullout. 1382 was bedded in clear view just south of the carcass with many ravens now on the dwindling food source. The coyote and 'last' griz were walking east near each other, and soon both went out of our view. It had been an incredible 2.5 hours of morning viewing by this point. I had taken over 200 pictures!

Many people were watching with us, but no other dedicated wolf watchers were with us on Dorothy's Knoll. They were nearby, but at slightly different places along the park road. I showed >25 people, including repeat 'customers' (i.e., they looked through my scope multiple times), the wolves and bears through my scope. Thomas and Steve did likewise. There were people from other countries, including France and Germany from what I remember, and various U.S. states. I tried to limit the chit-chat while I focused on the action. The people, nonetheless, were appreciative when I shared the view through my scope with them, despite not partaking in many of the numerous conversations happening around me. I was also using my camera, which involved me flipping the scope off the tripod and latching the camera in, and then vice versa to use the scope again.



The group of six wolves (3 gray and 3 black, including the pup) on the eastern slopes of Jasper Bench. They did a lot of playing (see next two pages).







The group of young wolves moved their play session onto a square boulder up on the eastern part of Jasper Bench.



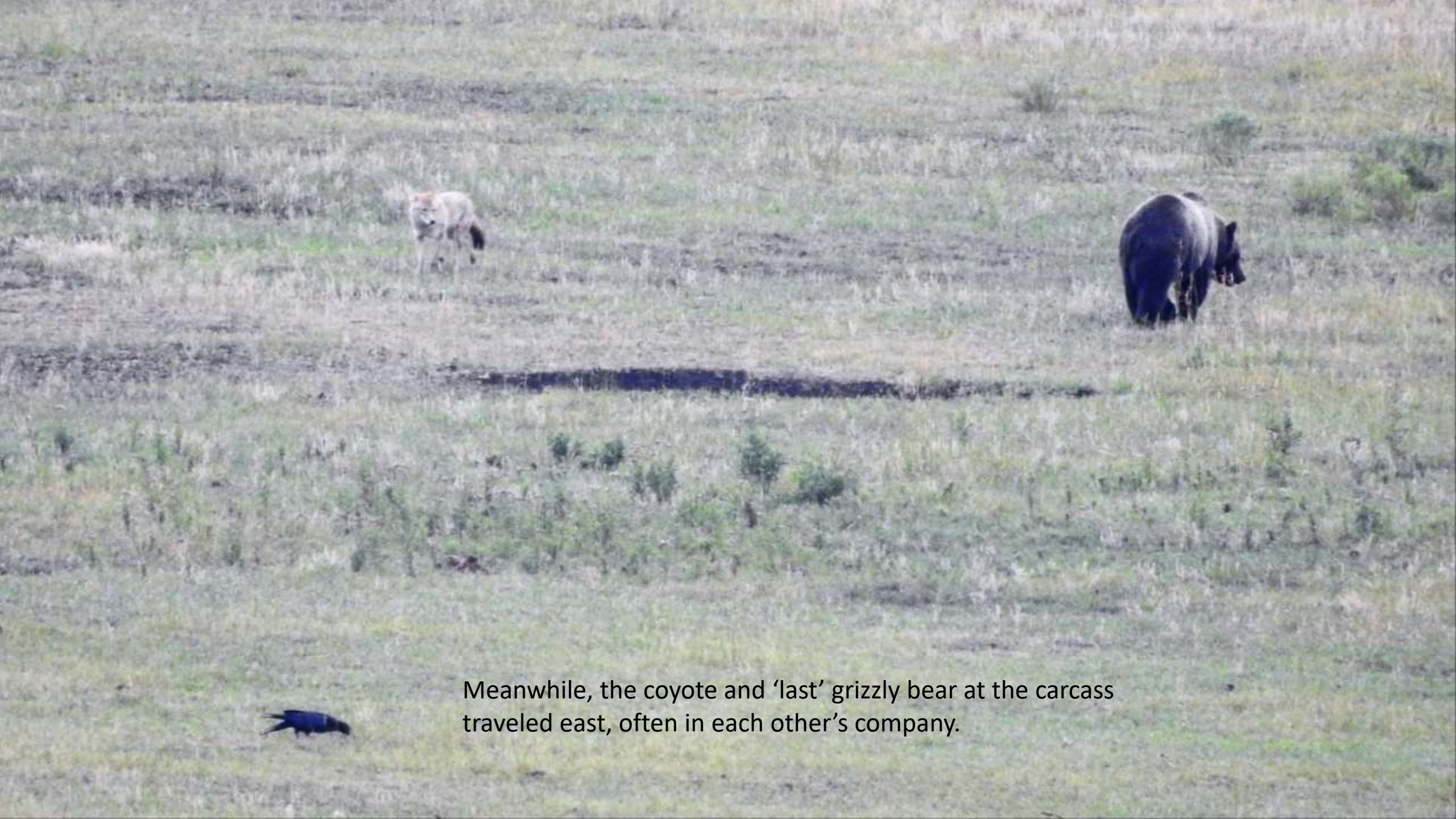
A gray adult and the black pup howl on the boulder (right), while other wolves explore as a bison passes by them without even acknowledging the wolves' presence.







As 1382F rested (top right), ravens moved in on the scant remains of the bison carcass.



Meanwhile, the coyote and 'last' grizzly bear at the carcass traveled east, often in each other's company.







A good perspective of 1382F, the grizzly bear, and the many ravens at the depleted carcass.

This and the next two pages: Amazing scenes with grizzly bear, coyote, and wolf 1382 all near each other, with ravens covering the carcass. Notice 1382's tucked tail in the frames.







The coyote passes by a skinny bison (top left and right) south of the carcass site, while wolf 1382F (bottom left) departs the area.



Arriving back at the car, I found a secluded spot behind a hill to pee out the morning tea. While it might sound comical to read that, it can be a challenge to go the bathroom with limited facilities and lots of open country. After I went, Steve wanted a more formal outhouse, so we drove 5 miles west to the Slough Creek Campground Road where there were two modern ones. He used the facilities then we went to 'Bob's Knob', which was only ~1/4 mile further up along the 2.5 mile long dirt campground road. This is where people watch the Junction pack at their den site from April to around June. By midsummer, the pack usually moves 5-10 miles east to Lamar Valley. Slough Creek also has cell phone service, unlike most of the Lamar, so we always check our messages when there. After that, I then summarized my notes in the car, not wanting to lose the details that I present here. I spent about a half hour just doing that. I also had breakfast while it rained the entire time.

This was our penultimate day in Yellowstone, and our last full day. It's always hard to believe that it is almost time to leave when I have about 24 hours left of an expedition. I was a little disappointed that wolves weren't visible at the carcass for the first couple days of it being there, but was thankful for what I had just observed. As Steve and I planned the rest of the day, we knew it would involve going back to the carcass area at dusk.

From 9:50-10:05 AM, we drove to Tower and did our usual trash and recycling run. The rain actually picked up when we got there. We had planned to hike the Lost Lake Trail, which we had recently done during our April trip, but the rain caused us to lose our motivation. Instead, we decided to drive back to the east where we saw a good-sized bison herd in the Boulder/Peregrine Hills region of Little America. They appear to love the rain, with green grass and cooler temps a result of the precipitation.

At 10:35, we went through the Lamar Canyon light after an eight minute wait. We went back to Lamar and parked just east of Dorothy's Pullout along the park road. I scoped the area again and saw a grizzly literally spread eagle on the dirt right at the bend of the old, eroded bank. The carcass was completely flat from this perspective and was mostly bone and fur. Compared to yesterday's condition, I was still shocked with how much had been eaten overnight.

We left the carcass site at 10:53 and managed to get stuck in three bison jams on the way to Silver Gate, the worst caused by just 2 bulls east of Round Prairie but before Soda Butte Picnic. This was a wooded area and not a normal place for bison. The cars wouldn't simply go around one of the bulls, who stayed on the road. The other bedded in a wallow immediately north of the pavement causing other vehicles to stop and look. I lost my patience after over five minutes of waiting and passed 3-4 cars and then encouraged the bison off the road by slowly driving towards, then by it. Given that there was a Montana license plate on Bob's pick-up truck, the people likely assumed I was a local and knew what I was doing!



Bob's Knob, named after Bob Landis because he frequently observes from there, with a rainy, foggy view north of Slough Creek and to the Junction pack's spring den area about 1.5 miles to the north.



Bison jam in Little America on our way to Tower.



Bison jam in Little America.



Our new, slightly different perspective of the carcass area. The 'X' denotes the location of the bison carcass.

Next page: Grizzly bear sprawled out on the banks of the old river channel.





One of the two bison that caused the third bison jam of our late morning trip back to Silver Gate.



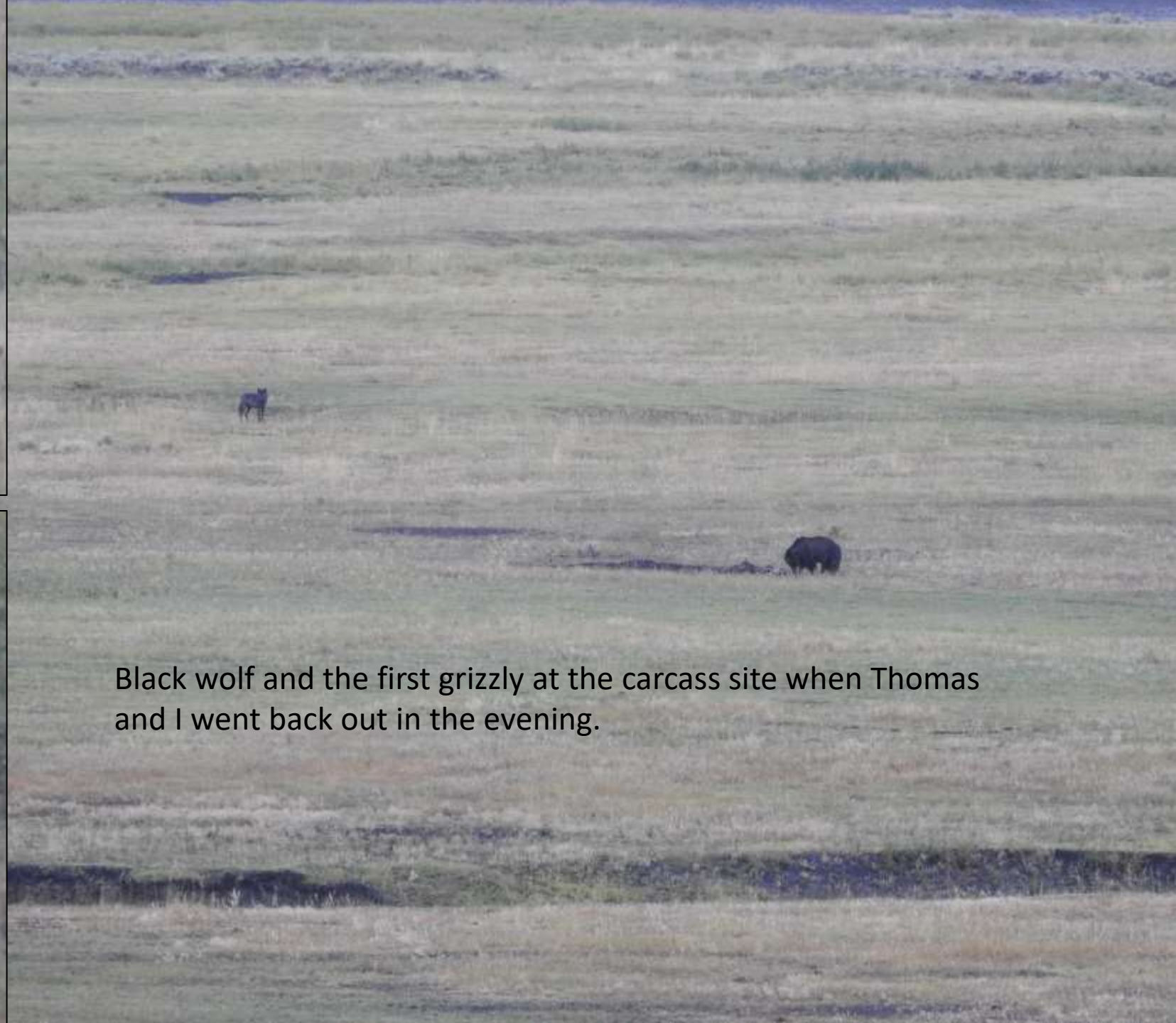
We finally arrived back to the cabin at 11:35 AM, and it was still raining. We were both happy that we changed the game plan and came back for an early rest. I did some work and then took a solid nap while it rained. That felt good, especially knowing that I had to pack most of my belongings before we returned to the park later this day.

Steve took a long walk/hike from the cabin while I slept. When he returned, he wanted to spend more time packing, so I went back into the park with Thomas at 5:45 PM while Steve remained in Silver Gate. It was still lightly raining, but we were excited to spend dusk in the park with the critters. I felt cooped up after being at the cabin for six hours. It was nice to get back into Lamar Valley where we parked along the road just east of Dorothy's at 6:15. We immediately had wolves and bears in view when we set our optics up. For the next 2 hours and 13 minutes, until 8:28 PM, we continually had animals in view. Laurie Lyman was even present, having just returned from California with her husband Dan.

We had a fantastic evening. Here is what transpired: A black wolf was initially at the carcass but soon left the area and two collared grays, #1341F and 1384F, who were bedded nearby, joined an adolescent grizzly at the dead bison. 1341 was three at the time, according to Laurie, and was noticeably larger. She almost looked like a male as she was so much bigger than 1384. The duo were chewing on bones, while the grizzly was at the main carcass site 20-30 yards away. The black wolf, likely a yearling, bedded to the south, halfway to the Lamar River. It came back however, and took a leg assembly from the carcass site, then dragged it back to its bedding location. As I watched it eating on the bones (with likely some meat scraps on it), the distinct looking gray yearling, with racing stripes down the top side of its body all the way to its tail, came from the river and met up with the black. The black wolf wasn't aggressive in rebuffing the approaching gray probably because the gray, despite hanging around close to the bones, didn't enter the wolf's personal space.

After watching those two wolves bedded in some tall grass, I scanned with my scope and found a grizzly in front of the low forest between Jasper and Amethyst Benches. It crossed the river, then traveled north directly to the carcass and displaced the first griz. It was impressive watching it determinedly beeline straight there all the way from south of the river.

As that second bear was at the carcass site, it interacted with wolf 1384F as she stayed right there while griz 1 looked on from about 50 meters away. While watching the carcass area, I also pivoted my scope and found our fifth wolf of the night, another black, that was south of the river. It was bedded in sagebrush and was chewing on a big white, bleached looking bone. After ~45 minutes, it arose and traveled west uphill to Jasper Bench and went out of sight in the eastern part of the bench heading in the direction of the rendezvous site.



Black wolf and the first grizzly at the carcass site when Thomas and I went back out in the evening.





Grizzly at the pile of bones, while wolves 1341F (left) and 1384F (right) relax just south of the bear. 1384 is chewing on what appears to be the bison's hip bones.





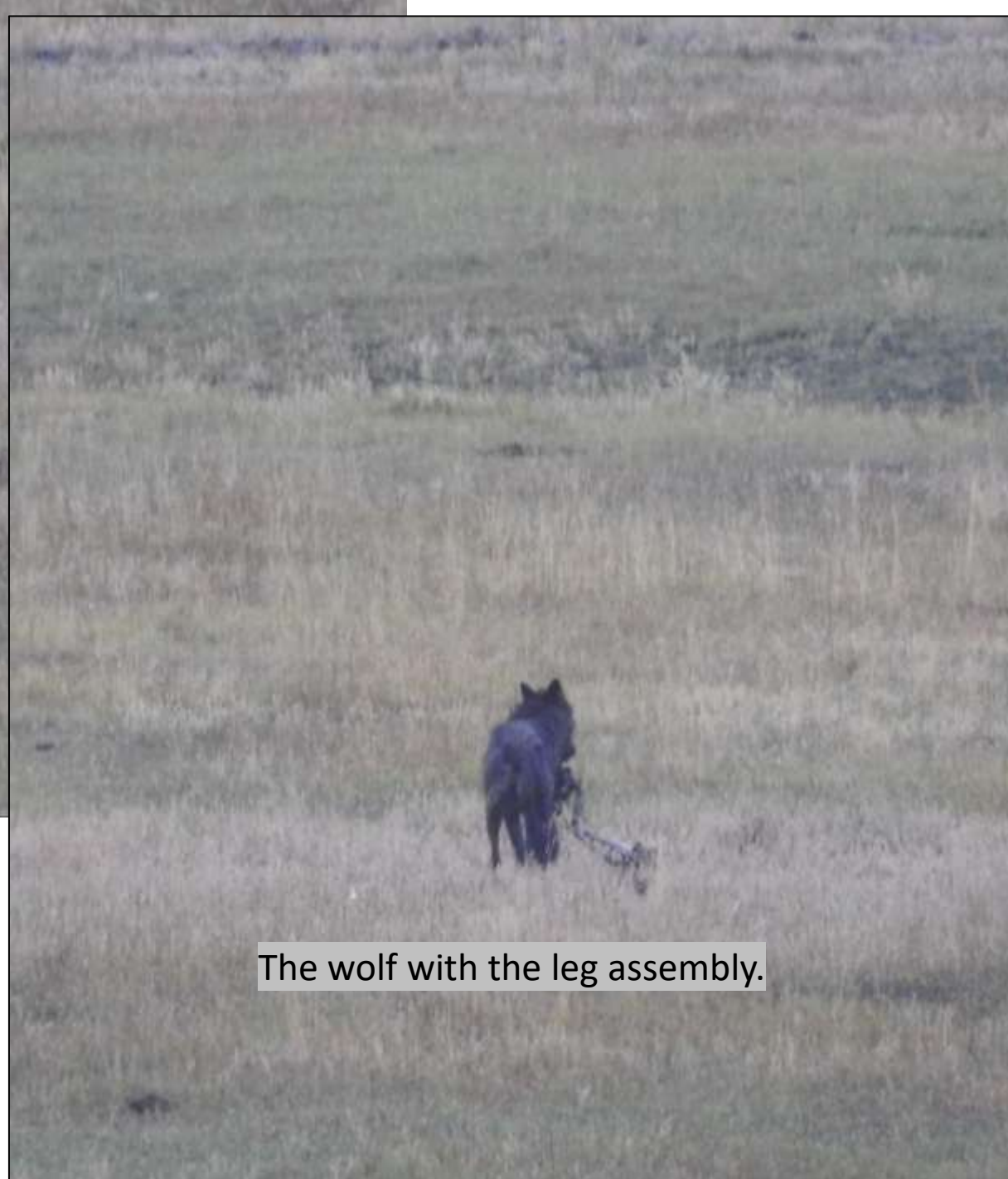


While the two grays stayed in the same area nearby, the young black returned to the site and grabbed a leg assembly, then trotted off with it (next page).





The bear at the carcass site.



The wolf with the leg assembly.



The gray we called 'Racing Stripes' came in and approached the black wolf chewing on the leg assembly. It was dusk and rather tough to see them in the tall grass, so I mostly used my spotting scope to watch them.



Grizzly #2 approaching the site, with gray 1384F looking on as the bruin charged to and displaced grizzly #1 at the carcass.






Grizzly 2
(top bear)
approaching
the carcass,
displacing
grizzly 1 in
the process.



Grizzly #2 at the site with wolf 1384F closely looking on. Grizzly 1 ran away from the site as #2 approached, which occurred immediately after the previous page's pictures. There was no physical contact made between the two.







I love this picture of grizzly #2 (and the wolf) at the carcass with grizzly 1 (lower left) looking on from a safe distance.





Grizzly #2 and
wolf 1384F
face-to-face in
a non-
aggressive
encounter.









This, previous, and next page: Grizzly 2 at the carcass, wolf 1384F traveling (previous page) and nearby (this and next page), while grizzly #1 watches (bottom bear).





While the two bears and 1384F were at the carcass site, gray 1341F and the first black wolf of the evening, with the leg assembly, were halfway to the river. 1341 moved from the carcass area to near the black to watch it feed (left), then carry the bones to and across the river (right).



As the distant black wolf with the bone disappeared up on Jasper Bench, I found our third grizzly of the evening. It was on Amethyst Bench, at the normal spot where we regularly see them. I watched it for about 20 seconds, then focused back to the closer action at the carcass site. When I looked back to Amethyst 15-20 minutes later, the bear was gone. During that scan, however, I found yet another grizzly coming in from the river. It traveled north and displaced grizzly #2!

I believe that this grizzly was the same one from Amethyst Bench, but if it wasn't it would have been our fourth grizzly sighting of the evening. From 7:15-7:45 PM, the black with the leg assembly and the racing stripe gray moved south to the gravel bar on the north side of river, as did the first and second grizzlies. The black then carried the bone assembly across the river and all the way up to Jasper Bench. It was no doubt bringing it back to the rendezvous site. I was quite impressed with its tenacity and endurance to be able to haul it that far in its mouth.

Meanwhile, griz #2 headed SE, crossed the river, and disappeared behind (south of) Amethyst Bench. Grizzly 1 got swept up in the current of Lamar River. I watched it go a solid 50 meters downstream to the west. The water level was temporarily high with the recent rain from the past 24 hours. I got the impression that the bear was not expecting that, to say the least.

I momentarily lost the bear in some vegetation along the river. When I finally found it again, it was – oddly – back on the north side of the river, even though it was heading south. It found the racing stripe gray again. That wolf never crossed the water when the black carried the bone assembly across the channel. The bear approached 'Racing Stripes' and they both walked back to the river, then crossed easily right near each other. I was shocked that this was the same bear who was just swept downstream. The duo proceeded to walk west uphill to Jasper Bench right next to each other. I was joking with Thomas and Laurie that the wolf's mom and dad probably wouldn't appreciate it bringing its play partner to the rendezvous site. As they traveled, they appeared to be about five feet apart, which meant they were about a wolf body length from each other most of the way. Unfortunately, the light was too low as it was dusk and over a mile away, so I didn't take many images of them.

As the duo traveled, they bluff charged each other a couple of times, but it wasn't serious. Rather, they were mostly amicable as they walked. The posturing actually looked more like play than aggression. It was fascinating to watch them tango under the fading light. It seemed quite clear that both seemed to go out of their way to be near each other. I was fascinated by this and pointed that out repeatedly to Laurie. I was hoping she might know more about those two individuals. She knew the wolf better than the grizzly, but agreed with me that their multi-species interaction was indeed quite unique.



Wolf 1384 with the third grizzly of the evening at the carcass. I did not take pictures of bear 3 displacing #2 because I was videoing the interaction (see next five pages, which chronologically precedes this page).





Screenshots from a video clip I took of grizzly bear #3 (top) displacing bear 2 at the carcass, as wolf 1384F (next to the bottom griz) and 1341F (lower right of bottom picture) look on.





Bear #2 departing (bottom bear) as bear 3 (top bruin) approaches, with wolf 1384F between the two.





A fantastic video still of bear 3 (top left) approaching the carcass site where wolf 1384F is (left wolf), while bear 2 (right) walks off with wolf 1341F (right) giving it some space.





This is the last of the five pages of screenshots of bear 3 (left) displacing bear 2 (right). I then started taking more pictures of the interaction (see next page).

Grizzly bear
#3 and wolf
1384F
interacting.



After resting for over an hour nearby, wolf 1341F (the left wolf) joined 1384F and the third grizzly back at the carcass.





Grizzly bear at dusk.



Next page: Screenshot stills from a video I took of 'Racing stripes' with her grizzly friend as they traveled together south of the Lamar River and began the climb west and uphill to Jasper Bench.

Back at the carcass site, 1341F and 1384F had both been bedded nearby but re-aroused when a fourth grizzly jogged into the area near dark. This was a big boy, but griz #3 held its ground. I was surprised that, when next to each other, grizzly 4 was actually a tad smaller than bear 3. It had a huge shoulder hump and a Yellowstone stripe running down the middle of its body. It appeared to be a male and was probably relatively young. Yet grizzly #3 chased #4 away 3-4 times. They then both settled down and fed together – another surprise! I am guessing that these two knew each other and decided on an amiable, least aggressive compromise.

As the two bruins interacted, the two wolves also fed, especially when the bears were chasing each other. There wasn't much left on the bison, and these four scavengers appeared to be getting the last 'drop' from the gift that kept giving.

We left at 8:28 PM in a misty rain. The wolves and bears were still in view in the fading light. It was an amazing evening with at least 4 grizzlies and 5 wolves observed. Thomas and I were both very happy that we came back out into the park on this evening.

On our drive back, we saw 2 red foxes. The first was in the meadows of Barronette where folks park to scan the cliffs for mountain goats, often observing them. The second canine was just east of the NE gate right at the park border.

We also saw a mule deer just outside of the gate, but before reaching the town of Silver Gate. What an evening!





Additional stills from a video I took of Racing stripes with her grizzly friend (bottom right of top pictures). The wolf veered off course to investigate a bison wallow (below) before joining back up with the bear. These were the last pictures or videos I took at dusk, but the two soon met up and traveled west side-by-side uphill to Jasper Bench where I lost them at dark.



Day 9: Wow: 4 Grizzlies and 9-10 Wolves on the Last Day!

August 21st, 2023, was our last day in the park on this expedition, so we packed the truck with all of our belongings and left Silver Gate. Sort of ceremonially, I said good-bye to our home for the past week and a half as I walked out. Before leaving, I swept the floors after we put our stuff in the bed of the T100. Bill came out of his room wondering what the heck I was doing that early in the morning. I wanted to clean up as best we could, but I think he went back into his room thinking I was crazy for being this active so early. Still, we were on our way into the park at 5:15 AM, ensuring we would get into Lamar by first light.

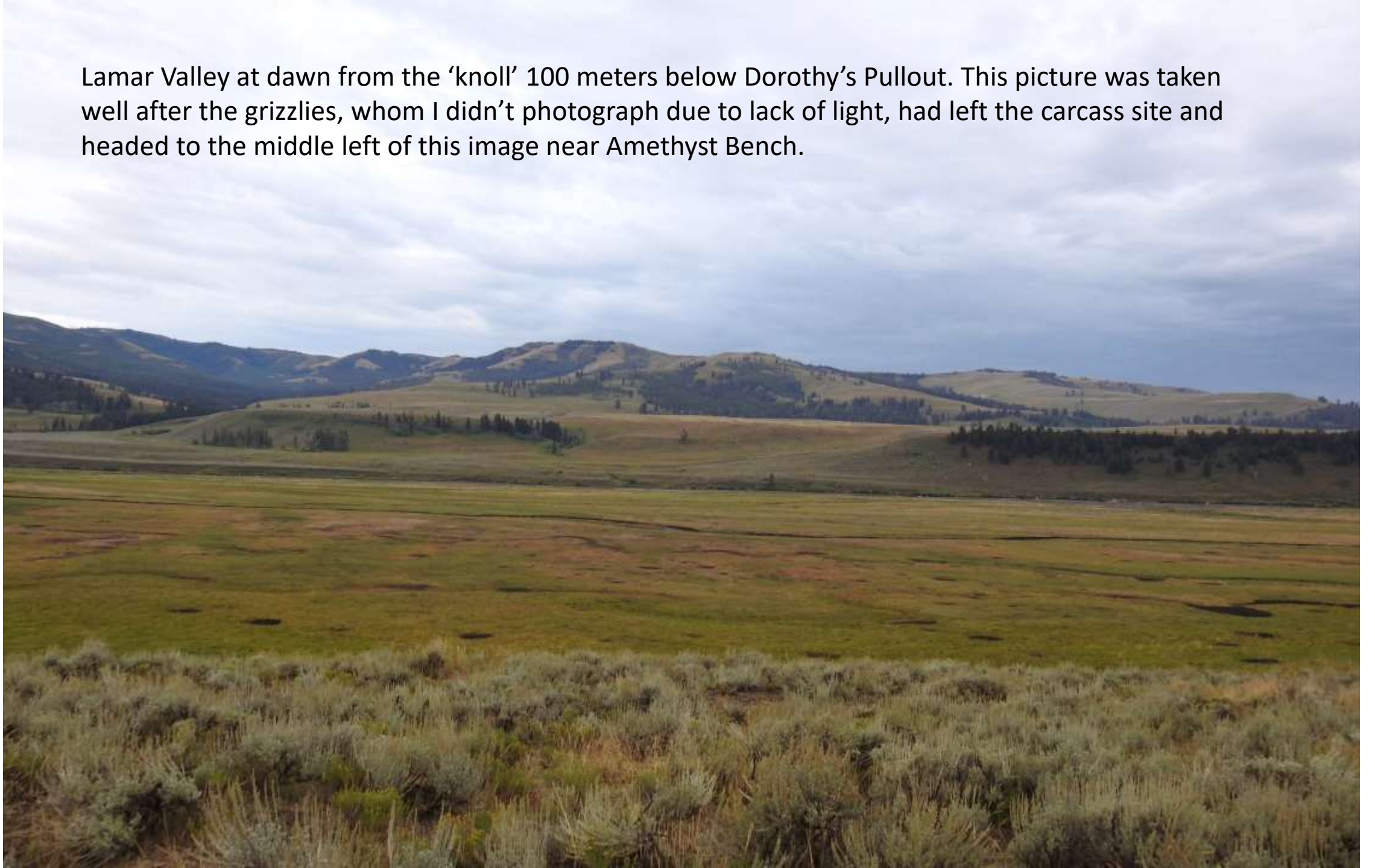
We didn't see any foxes on the drive in. I guess the previous evening was their way of saying good-bye to me.

We parked at Dorothy's Pullout, and I walked straight down the hill to the observation area. I was set up at 5:45 AM. Thomas was already there, arriving 15 minutes earlier. He provided a very helpful spot of the early sightings. We could just make out the shapes of 2 grizzlies in the dark. One had already left the carcass area and was halfway to the river once I found it. The griz on the carcass left at 5:55 at very first light. It walked E/SE out of view. A couple of seasoned wildlife watchers told us they didn't see any grizzlies, which surprised them given the carcass was 'only' three days old. They were equally perplexed when I told them that we had just watched two bears!

As it got light enough, I found a wolf which, when it become lighter, turned to be 1382F. She stayed local around the carrion site but bedded for at least 45 minutes before getting up and going to the mostly gone carcass at ~7:15 AM. As she fed on scraps, I scanned the area and found two grizzlies on Amethyst Bench. These guys were digging and foraging right in the middle of the grassy area. They stayed local there and eventually a third showed up near the 'skinny conifer'. I am guessing that it was the first grizzly from the morning judging by its appearance and the direction that bear was traveling.

Right around the same time of the Amethyst sighting, I found the black pup and a black adult at the east end of Jasper Bench just to the left (east) of the flat top boulder where we saw the wolves playing the previous day. They were mostly inactive, but at ~7 AM they were greeted by 3 grays, including two wearing collars – likely 1381F and 1384F. The group then traveled east down to Amethyst Bench, staying south of the river. It was confusing with wolves coming and going in and out of view, but we eventually had a total of 4 grays and 4 blacks, including the pup. Old female 907 was one of the grays there. Thomas counted 5 grays for 9 total, but I could never confirm that. I repeatedly counted 'just' 4 grays traveling, not the fifth. However, I trusted his observation as it was probably ahead of the groups I was watching.

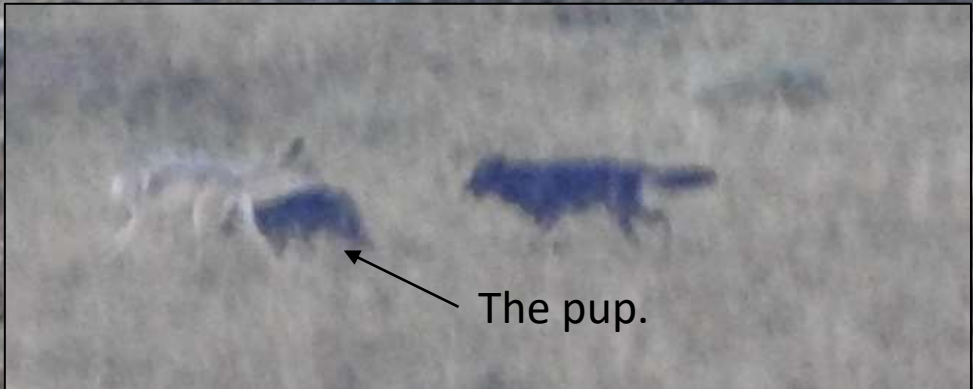
Lamar Valley at dawn from the 'knoll' 100 meters below Dorothy's Pullout. This picture was taken well after the grizzlies, whom I didn't photograph due to lack of light, had left the carcass site and headed to the middle left of this image near Amethyst Bench.





Wolves playing at dawn. In the bottom photo, one can clearly see the 4 wolves (2 grays and 2 blacks) chasing each other. In the top photo, there are actually 3 grays (see arrows) there, along with the 2 blacks, but they are difficult to see. Grays are more difficult to spot year-round, but especially during the summer when they blend in with grass and sagebrush much more than the blacks do.





The pup.



Screenshots from a video I took. There are 3 grays and 2 blacks, including the pup. They are traveling east on Jasper Bench and are about to head down the ridge toward Amethyst Bench.



As the wolves traveled east toward Amethyst Bench, the pup (left wolf in the two photos) was keeping up with the pack by maintaining a trotting and sometimes loping pace. They were spread out, with usually only 2 or 3 together at any one time.

I could tell they were heading to Amethyst Bench, so I scanned back over there, and to my surprise, I counted 4 grizzlies now on the plateau. 'Wow', I thought, the wolves were on a collision course with a quartet of bruins.

As predicted, the 8-9 wolves did travel through the bench. In fact, they casually went right past the first three grizzlies without incident but chased the northeast most (last) one. It was mostly the racing stripe gray that pursued it. I wondered if it was the bear that it recently traveled with. If so, it was almost like the wolf was trying to show off its toughness, despite knowing that the bear probably wouldn't respond aggressively. I also pondered if that would affect their future relationship if I was correct in my hypothesis. I also thought that the fourth grizzly was the second one to leave the carcass, as it was heading in that general direction when it departed. A bull bison stayed bedded without a care in the world as both wolves and bears ran by him! He eventually got up and grazed but it was almost like he wanted to make it a point to wait until the predators passed by him, like he was telling them, 'I'll get up under my own terms and conditions'.

As the wolves traveled east of Amethyst Bench and to the southern section of Lamar Valley, we drove a couple of miles east to Hubbard Hill to get a better view of them. 1382F was in view at the carcass as we left. It was just her and ravens at the consumed carcass. Her tail was not tucked on this day, which gave me hope that she might try and join the group again, instead of living on the outskirts of the pack where she was still in their territory but avoided the females.

However, as fate would have it, 1382F died on September 10-11th, just a couple of weeks after I left the park. I initially learned about it on [Laurie's online report](#), and then asked Jeremy for more details. The Wolf Project informed me that 1382F was kicked and killed by an elk in the Slough Creek area. She was also 'pretty malnourished' when they examined her, which is not surprising given how we observed her for two days scavenging for scraps. This beautiful wolf lived to be [an old adult](#).

We watched the eastward-traveling wolves from Hubbard Hill from 7:30-7:55 AM. I saw 3 grays and 2 blacks in the sage. They were quite spread out a couple of miles to the east near a bison herd. 907F, a young black, and the black pup didn't go with them and were bedded just below Amethyst on the NE side of the bench. They missed the train apparently, or 907 realized that the pup wouldn't be able to keep up with the pace of the adults, so she held back. This again gave me a count of 8 wolves, 4 grays and 4 blacks, not including 1382F at the carcass. We had a minimum of 4 grizzlies, assuming the two bears at the carcass were bears three and four to show up on Amethyst Bench. Not bad for our last day in the park.

With the sightings plateauing for the moment, I said my good-byes to friends and gave Rick back the bear spray. Luckily, it was another trip where we didn't need to use it. Nonetheless, it is important to carry it as a precaution.

The wolves (4 in this picture with a gray to the far left) traveled past these first two grizzlies (see one in the upper right) with minimal interactions, except for the gray getting a little too close to the bear in the middle of the frame.





Because the wolves were spread out, ~1.5 miles away, and it was just after dawn, the viewing wasn't great. I mostly used my spotting scope when they were on Amethyst Bench near the bears. The arrows point to the two grizzlies in the frame, as the wolves (2 in the top picture and 3 in the second) travel left to right in a general eastward direction.





Video stills of the wolves chasing grizzly #4 on Amethyst (circled), with the third bear just feeding in the top right of the middle picture (see arrow).



Bottom right: Racing stripe gray led the charge as a bull bison stays bedded (see arrow) as the two carnivores run by him.





Video screenshots/stills of 'Racing Stripes' chasing the grizzly, when, all of a sudden, they went behind a small berm (middle picture, also see middle left) and the tables turned as the bear was now facing – but didn't chase – the wolf (middle right and bottom left).

Next page: I then panned my camera to capture the rest of the wolves and grizzlies on Amethyst Bench. It was an amazing encounter!



Grizzly #3 (both pics) watching grizzly 4 and Racing Stripes interact (see previous page).

A gray and a black just to my right (west) of griz #3.



Below right: The first grizzly (see previous pages and top right of this picture) never interacted with the wolves. It appeared to just graze on grass in the distance while bear 2 was mildly engaged with 4 wolves (see both bottom pics).

Grizzly 2 (this pic) interacting with 2 grays and 1 black, and then an additional black (bottom left).





Meanwhile, 1382F was in view on the flats of Lamar near the old carcass. She was much closer to us than the wolves were on Amethyst. Unfortunately, this would be my last view of her, as she died a couple of weeks later.





1382 at the last scraps of the carcass with ravens nearby, including one flying in front of her (bottom left).











My last images of
wolf 1382F,
former alpha
female of the
Junction Pack.

The black wolf (also see next page) that remained behind with the pup and 907F just northeast of Amethyst Bench. Notice the bedded bull bison on the bottom left of the picture, just above the Lamar River.





The Junction
black pup.



Wolf watchers, including Rick McIntyre (second from front looking away), Jeremy SunderRaj (third from front looking forward), and Laurie Lyman (white sweatshirt with black vest on the left), taking a break from looking through their scopes. They, and others, are in the park for most of the year. As they continued their observations of the Junction Pack, the group got much smaller in the fall. On March 8, 2024, the total pack size was considered to be only 8-9 members, but then 11 were observed just after that on 3/13. Jeremy explained to me via email that there was likely a lot of dispersal by yearlings and some of the collared wolves just disappeared, but he said they weren't concerned that the wolves were illegally killed. Nevertheless, it was quite odd to read about the low numbers on [Laurie's reports](#), given how large the pack had been for years. Many people have referred to the Junctions as a super-pack, given its consistent size of at least 20 members. While that isn't the case currently, future observations will be fascinating as we watch what becomes of the clan.



Perspective of where we were looking to the SW of Hubbard Hill with Amethyst and Jasper Benches in the background.



Driving west, we got to the light at Lamar Canyon just after 8 AM. Luckily, we only had to wait about two minutes, which wasn't too bad. From Lamar Canyon, we drove straight to Tower and quickly recycled and dumped our trash, saving one bag to use to clean out the car once we got to the airport. We brought a bunch of old bottles, which weren't ours, from Mark and Carol's place, so the truck was quite full until we recycled them. We arrived to Blacktail at 8:30 and were shocked that there wasn't one car at the Nature Trail lot, not even Doug M.

Weighing our options, we decided to continue further west to hike Wraith Falls, which was a round trip distance of 0.85 miles. It was a perfect place to stretch the legs, and get a good view of the waterfall along Lupine Creek. Once we got back to the car after the hike, I ate breakfast and finished packing, including folding up my tripod and putting it in my luggage. We were only about five miles from Mammoth, so I chanced that I wouldn't need it again.

We got to Gardiner at 10 AM, which was our target time to make the final 1.5 hour drive to Bozeman and get there by about 11:30. Our flight was at 1:18 PM Mountain Time, so we had plenty of time built in, despite the full morning. In Gardiner, we saw 12-15 pronghorn on the flats at the North Entrance. We also saw ~6 elk in the center of town near houses.

We drove the 50+ miles to Livingston and gassed up there, leaving 30 more miles to Bozeman. We arrived at the airport at 11:40 AM and parked in a spot that Melissa would be able to find based on my text to her. We flew to Salt Lake City, which is only an hour, then went straight to Boston after a couple hour delay in Salt Lake. We got back to Massachusetts at 12:15 AM, technically on August 22, 2023.

I was planning on driving through Boston and sleeping in my car that night, as I had meetings all day at the high school where I teach. The school is 50 minutes from my house, so it wasn't practical to go home first given the time. However, my rear right wheel was locked which was quite odd. Steve had to call his dad because he went home after getting his car at his parent's house.

His dad woke up and came outside to help me. Long story short, we couldn't fix it in the dark, so I slept at their house. Steve Sr. and I got up at 6:00 and he helped me unlock the emergency brake. I was able to then drive through Boston and get to my school, amazingly I thought, 'only' about 1 hour and 15 minutes late. Luckily, I have understanding colleagues who knew what I was up to and where I was coming from.

Our last drive (and wait) through Lamar Canyon.



Little America in early morning light





Two bull bison on the Yellowstone River Bridge. This bridge was in the early stages of being rebuilt during summer 2023.



Bison on a ridge next to the road at Elk Creek.

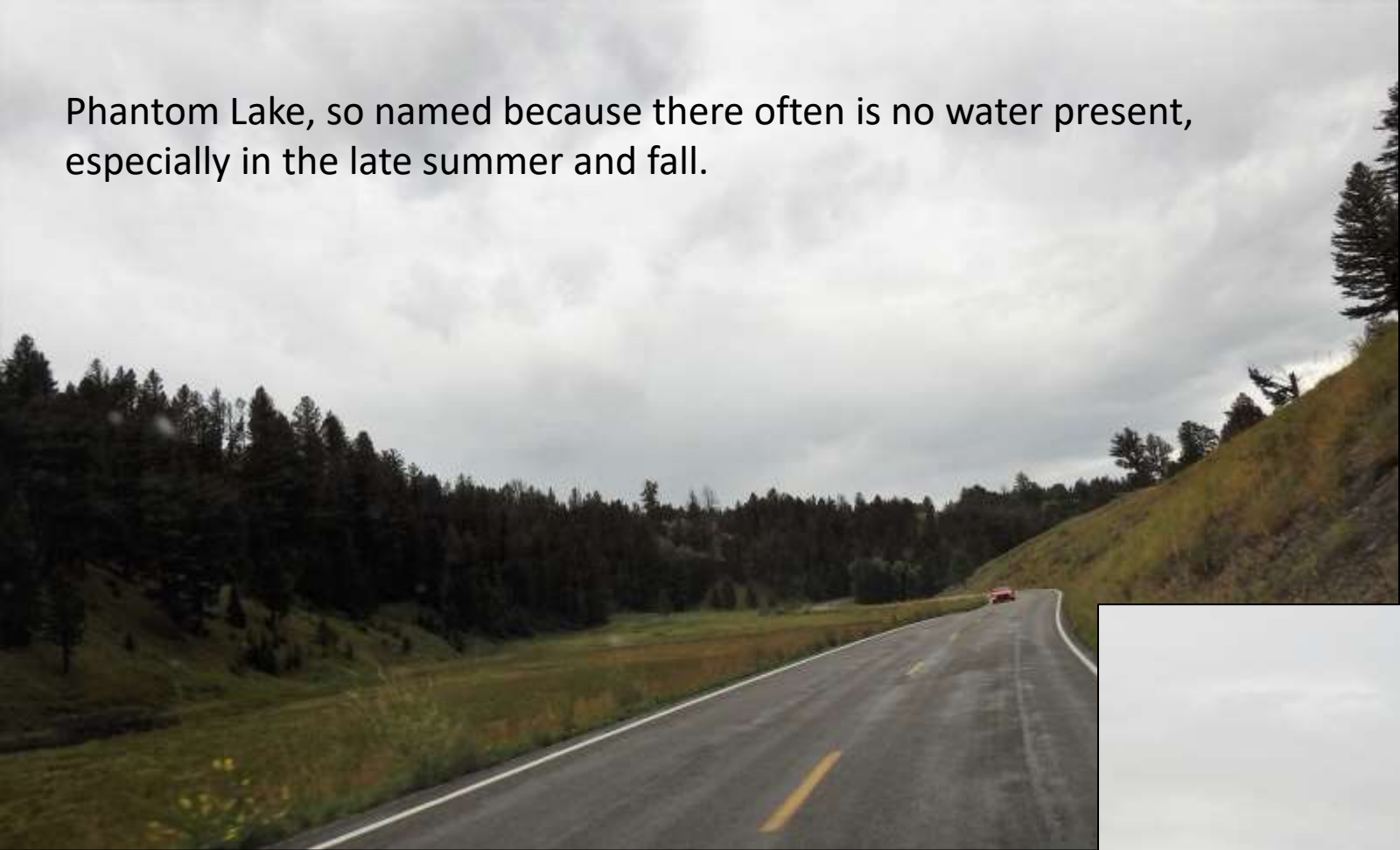




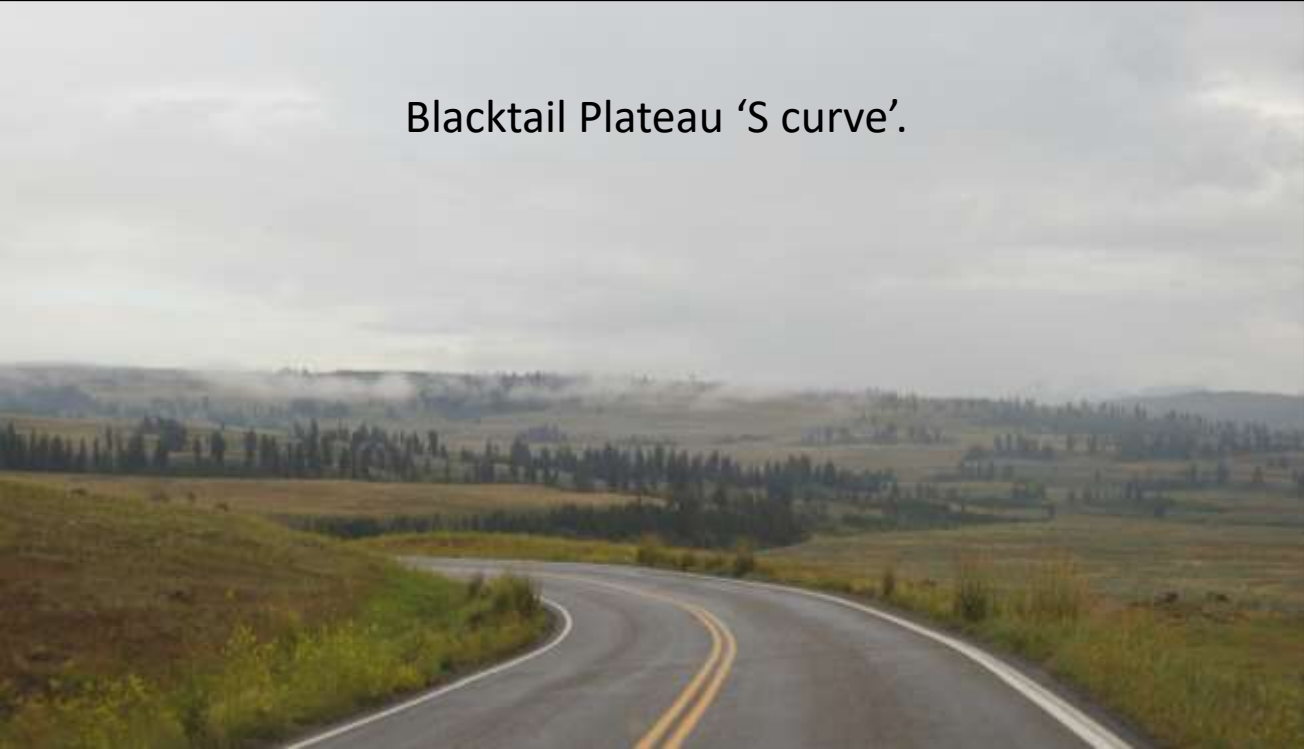
Interesting angle of the bison herd on a steep hill next to the road at Elk Creek.



Phantom Lake, so named because there often is no water present, especially in the late summer and fall.



Blacktail Plateau 'S curve'.



The 'S curve' on the Blacktail Plateau is very scenic.



Our last park activity on this trip was a short, <1 mile hike to Wraith Falls (bottom left), which involved crossing a small footbridge (top left) over Lupine Creek (bottom right).







Wraith Falls.





The town of Gardiner in the distance, while descending on the new park road connecting Gardiner to Mammoth.



Pronghorn on the flats of Gardiner at the North Entrance (also see next page).







We left the park on a beautiful day. What a trip it was!



Epilogue: 30 x 30: Protect More of Yellowstone and Beyond

As I finish this book in March 2024, I can't help but keep thinking that we need more protected areas in Yellowstone and beyond. For example, if President Biden (or a future president) declared the federal land (which is mostly national forest) north of Yellowstone in the Gardiner Basin area as a national monument, then [bison wouldn't be subject to the slaughter that I discuss in my recent book on bears](#).

These actions often have tremendous support and broad public appeal, except from some [vocal anti-wildlife local politicians](#). Critically, it also accomplishes America's goal of 30 x 30, that is, [protecting 30% of the country by 2030](#). Central to the 30 x 30 vision, and as I have noted in my previous books, is a need for [more national parks](#). Without them, we wouldn't have the wolves, grizzly bears, or bison described throughout this book. There is simply no possible way that I would have seen all the wildlife that I did without having a large area protected from human interference, especially hunting. The [National Park \(NP\) Service's mission](#) of preserving 'unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values ... for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations' is a model that the rest of the world has replicated. It has been extremely effective in protecting core wildlife populations and ecosystems as well as being an important boost to local economies, as people come to observe the animals and the scenery therein. Yet state wildlife agencies explicitly note that [hunting is their core mandate](#).

I am so inspired with this message and the wildlife found within parks like Yellowstone that I wrote an e-book pleading to create more national parks in the northeast United States where there currently aren't many. [Northeastern U.S. National Parks: What is and What Could Be](#) is a free, 310 page e-book that has over 600 pictures. It makes the case to expand the National Park System in the northeast, beyond just having Acadia National Park (NP) as its only large "natural" park, by adding 3 units: Cape Cod NP in MA, Kancamagus NP in NH, and Maine Woods NP and Preserve. These three areas are already existing federal land and could immediately be added to the NP Service by an Act of Congress. Giving national park status to these areas would provide an important, higher level of protection to better safeguard these places, and its resources, especially during politically volatile times. I strongly believe that NPs are "[America's Best Idea](#)", as Ken Burns eloquently noted, and creating these parks in the urbanized Northeast is important. This may facilitate the return of wolves and other wildlife that otherwise might not be able to gain a foothold in the region and will also help fulfill [America's 30 x 30 vision](#).