People have spent time in the Yellowstone region for more than 11,000 years. Rock structures like this are evidence of the early presence of people in the area.

History of the Park

The human history of the Yellowstone region extends back more than 11,000 years. The stories of people in Yellowstone are preserved in archeological sites and objects that convey information about past human activities in the region and in people's connections to the land that provide a sense of place or identity.

Today, park managers use archeological and historical studies to help understand how people lived here in the past. Ethnography helps us learn how groups of people identify themselves and their connections to the park. Research is also conducted to learn how people continue to affect and be affected by these places, many of which have been relatively protected from human impacts. Some alterations to the landscape, such as the construction of roads and other facilities, are generally accepted as necessary to accommodate the needs of visitors today. Information on the possible consequences of modern human activities, both inside and outside the parks, is used to determine how best to preserve Yellowstone's natural and cultural resources and the quality of the visitor experience.

History of Yellowstone National Park

Precontact

- People have been in Yellowstone more than 11,000 years, as shown by archeological sites, trails, and oral histories.
- Although the Tukudika (a.k.a. Sheep Eaters) are the most well-known group of Native Americans to use the park, many other tribes and bands lived in and traveled through what is now Yellowstone National Park prior to and after European American arrival.

European Americans Arrive

- European Americans began exploring in the early 1800s.
- Osborne Russell recorded visits in the 1830s.
- First organized expedition explored Yellowstone in 1870.

Protection of the Park Begins

- Yellowstone National Park established in 1872.
- Railroad arrived in 1883, allowing easier visitor access.
- The US Army managed the park from 1886 through 1918.
- Automobiles allowed into the park in 1915, making visits easier and more economical.
- National Park Service created in 1916.
- First boundary adjustment of the park made in 1929.

Park Management Evolves

- 1963:"Leopold Report" released, recommending changes to how wildlife is managed in the park.
- 1970: New bear management plan eliminated open-pit garbage dumps in park.
- 1988: "Summer of Fire."
- 1995: Wolves restored to the park.
- 1996: Federal buyout of gold mine northeast of Yellowstone protected the park.

Paleoindian Period

~11,000 years ago

A Paleoindian point from this period was made from obsidian quarried from Obsidian Cliff.

10,000 years ago

Sites all over the park yield paleoindian artifacts, particularly concentrated around Yellowstone Lake. Clovis peoples hunted large game and gathered resources across North America.

Hell Gap point, made 9,600 to 10,000 years ago

The Earliest Humans in Yellowstone

Human occupation of the greater Yellowstone area seems to follow environmental changes of the last 15,000 years. How far back is still to be determined—there are no known sites in the park that date to this time—but humans probably were not using this landscape when glaciers and a continental ice sheet covered most of what is now Yellowstone National Park. The glaciers carved out valleys with rivers that people could follow in pursuit of Ice Age mammals such as the mammoth and the giant bison. The last period of ice coverage ended 13,000 to 14,000 years ago. Sometime after that, but before 11,000 years ago, humans were here on this landscape.

Archeologists have found physical evidence of human presence in the form of distinctive stone tools and projectile points. From these artifacts, scientists surmise that they hunted mammals and gathered berries, seeds, and plants.

As the climate in the Yellowstone region warmed and dried, the animals, vegetation, and human lifestyles also changed. Large Ice Age animals that were adapted to cold and wet conditions became extinct. The glaciers left behind layers of sediment in valleys in which grasses and sagebrush thrived, and pockets of exposed rocks that provided protected areas for aspens and fir to grow. The uncovered volcanic plateau sprouted lodgepole forests. People adapted to these changing conditions. As early as 9,500 years ago, they were eating a diverse diet including medium and small animals such as deer and bighorn sheep.

Cody knife (c. 9,350 years ago) from the Yellowstone National Park museum collection

This favorable climate would continue more than 9,000 years. Evidence of these people in Yellowstone remained uninvestigated long after archeologists began excavating sites elsewhere in North America. Archeologists used to think high-elevation regions such as Yellowstone were inhospitable to humans and, thus, did little exploratory work in these areas. However, recent research in the park has located archaeological sites at high elevations, with several sites over 11,000 feet above mean sea level (AMSL). Today, archeologists study environmental change to better understand human uses of areas such as Yellowstone through time.

More than 2,000 archeological sites have been documented in Yellowstone National Park, with the majority dating to the Archaic period, spanning from about 8,000 to 1,500 years ago. Obsidian from several sources in the park was used as toolstone. Sites contain evidence of an increase in hunting a wide variety of game, including bison, bear, deer, sheep and goats, felines, rabbits, birds, and other small game. Campsites and trails in Yellowstone also provide evidence of early use. Some of the trails used in the park today have likely been used by people since the Paleoindian period.

Increased Use

People seem to have increased their use of the Yellowstone area beginning about 3,000 years ago. During this time, people deepened their reliance on bison hunting. Technological innovations during this period in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem include use of tipis as the main form of shelter, bison jumps and corrals, sheep traps, and evidence of widespread trade across North America. Bow and arrow technology, adopted after 1,500 before present (BP), replaced the atlatl, or spear-thrower, that had been used for thousands of years. The number

Paleoindian Period

9,350 years ago

A site on the shore of the Yellowstone Lake has been radiocarbon dated to 9,350 years ago. People likely occupied this site for short seasonal periods.

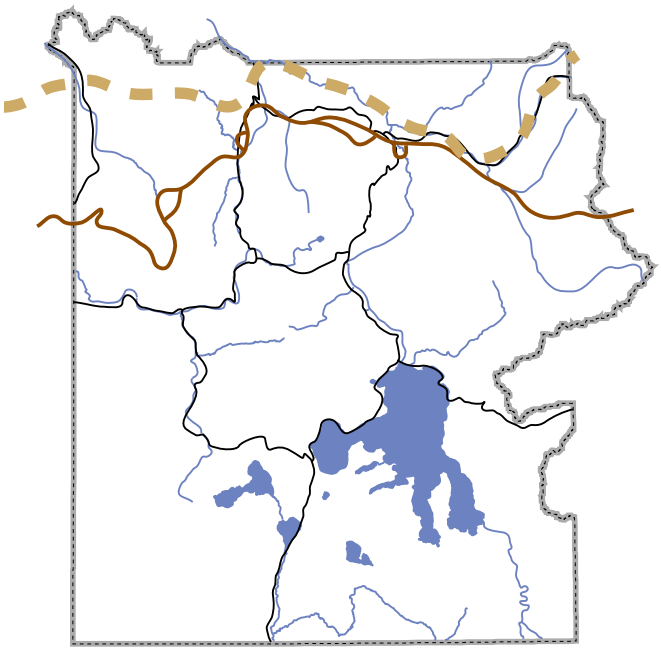
9,000 years ago

9,000 years ago until 1,000 common era (CE), people leave traces of camps on the shores of Yellowstone Lake.

CE = Common Era (replaces AD)

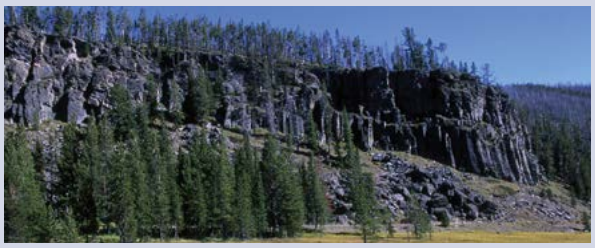
of radiocarbon dates in the park rapidly increases in the park after 1,500 BP, with a peak between 1,200 and 1,000 BP. This increased use of Yellowstone likely occurred when the environment was warmer, favoring extended seasonal use on and around the Yellowstone Plateau. Archeologists and other scientists are working together to study evidence such as plant pollen, landforms, and tree rings to better understand how the area's environment changed over time.

Some of the historic peoples from this area, such



An ancient trail, now called the Bannock Trail, is shown in two possible locations. Physical evidence of the trail is extremely difficult to find. Historic maps and journals do not match modern maps, and oral histories of tribes do not always correlate with what little evidence exists of the trail. The solid line shows the trail's location as interpreted from 1878 to about 1960. Some scholars today think the dashed line shows the main Bannock Trail more accurately, but it is still subject to discussion because of the many known 'spokes' of the trail and some errors on the 1869 map.

Obsidian Cliff National Historic Landmark



Location
Grand Loop Road between Mammoth and Norris.

Significance

- Obsidian is found in volcanic areas where the magma is rich in silica and the lava flow has cooled without forming crystals, creating a black glass that can be honed to an exceptionally thin edge.
- Unlike most obsidian, which occurs as small rocks strewn amid other formations, Obsidian Cliff has an exposed vertical thickness of about 98 feet (30 m).
- Obsidian was first quarried from this cliff for tool-making more than 11,000 years ago.
- It is the United States' most widely dispersed source of obsidian by hunter-gatherers. It is found along trade routes from western Canada to the Great Lakes and Ohio.
- Obsidian Cliff is the primary source of obsidian in a large concentration of Midwestern sites, including about 90% of obsidian found in Hopewell mortuary sites in the Ohio River Valley (about 1,850–1,750 years ago).

Recent History
About 90% of the forest on Obsidian Cliff plateau burned in 1988. The fire did not damage the cliff face, but it cleared the surface, creating optimal conditions for archeological surveys. Those surveys added substantially to knowledge about how obsidian was mined from the bedrock and collected as cobbles from the overlying glacial till. Staff are now researching the intensity of use of this obsidian, both within the park and across North America.

The kiosk at Obsidian Cliff, constructed in 1931, was the first wayside exhibit in a US national park. It was listed on the National Register in 1982. The site was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1996.

Archaic Period (8,000–1,500 years ago)

8,000 years ago

Vegetation similar to what we find today begins to appear. This period is characterized by use of large side-notched projectile points and atlatl technology.

3,000 years ago

Bison jumps and corrals begin to be used in the Rocky Mountain region. Oral histories of the Salish place their ancestors in the Yellowstone area.

1,500 years ago

Bow and arrow begins to replace atlatl (throwing spear). Sheep traps begin to be used in the mountains.

as the Crow and Sioux, arrived sometime during the 1500s and around 1700 CE, respectively. Prehistoric vessels known as "Intermountain Ware" have been found in the park and surrounding area, linking the Shoshone to the area as early as approximately 700 years ago.

The Little Ice Age

Climatic evidence confirms the Yellowstone area experienced colder temperatures during what is known as the Little Ice Age—mid-1400s to mid-1800s. Fewer archeological sites date to this time, suggesting a decreased human presence. Campsites appear to have been used by smaller groups of people, mostly in the summer. Such a pattern of use would make sense in a cold region where hunting and gathering were practical for only a few months each year.

Historic Tribes

Greater Yellowstone's location at the convergence of the Great Plains, Great Basin, and Columbia Plateau American Indian cultures means that many tribes have traditional connections to the land and its resources. For thousands of years before Yellowstone became a national park, it was a place where people hunted, fished, gathered plants, quarried obsidian, and used the thermal waters for religious and medicinal purposes.

American Indian tribes' oral histories indicate more extensive use of the area during the Little Ice Age. Kiowa stories place their ancestors here from around 1400 to 1700 CE. Ancestors to contemporary Blackfeet, Cayuse, Coeur d'Alene, Bannock, Nez Perce, Shoshone, Crow, Sioux, Lakota, and Umatilla, among others, continued to travel the park on the already established trails. They visited geysers, conducted ceremonies, hunted, gathered plants and minerals, and engaged in trade. The park's associated

Tribes used hydrothermal sites ceremonially and medicinally. The Mud Volcano area is especially significant for the Kiowa. Their tradition says that a hot spring called Dragon's Mouth (above) is where their creator gave them the Yellowstone area for their home. The Crow also have stories about this feature.

Wickiups provided temporary shelter for some Native Americans while they were in Yellowstone. No archeological, standing wickiups are known to remain in the park.

500-1700 CE

1400

Oral histories of the Kiowa place their ancestors in the Yellowstone area from this time through the 1700s.

1450

Little Ice Age begins

A Note About Terms

Native American is typically used in political and academic matters. When Native Americans refer to themselves and to personal matters, they might use *Indian, American Indian, First American, First Peoples,* or *Indigenous Peoples* instead of *Native American*.

Ethnocentrism—a tendency to see other cultures through the lens of one's own culture; relatedly, the belief that one's cultural practices and beliefs are superior to those of other groups

tribes report family groups came to lands now part of Yellowstone to gather obsidian, which they used to field-dress bison. Some associated tribes used the Fishing Bridge area as a rendezvous site.

The Crow occupied the area generally east of the park, and the Blackfeet occupied the area to the north. The Shoshone, Bannock, and other American Indian tribes of the plateaus to the west traversed the park annually to hunt on the plains to the east. Other Shoshonean groups hunted in open areas west and south of Yellowstone.

In the early 1700s CE, some American Indian tribes in this region acquired the horse. Some historians believe the horse fundamentally changed their lifestyles because tribal members could now travel faster and farther to hunt bison and other animals of the plains.

Tukudika, or Sheep Eaters

The Tukudika, or Sheep Eaters, are a band of Mountain Shoshone that lived for thousands of years in the area that would become Yellowstone National Park. Throughout the park, archeological sites reflect use of resources within this landscape by the Tukudika and other American Indian tribes.

The Name *Tukudika*

Traditionally, Shoshone names were derived from places the bands traveled to or from foods they hunted or gathered. Tukudika (also Tukudyka'a, Tukadika) means "eaters of the mountain sheep." The Tukudika lived in northwestern Wyoming, southwestern Montana, and eastern Idaho. Other Shoshone bands bore the names "salmon eaters," "elk eaters," and "bison eaters."

Because the name *Sheep Eater* can appear to equate this American Indian tribe with the bighorn sheep itself, the term was once considered derogatory. The name *Sheep Eater* suggests a Shoshone

Quick Facts

- The Tukudika were skilled hunters and artisans known for their horn bows, obsidian arrows and tools, stone-and-timber game and fish traps, sheepskin clothing, and steatite bowls.
- At least 50% of the Tukudika's diet consisted of plants, roots, nuts, and berries; the bighorn sheep was the primary source of meat.
- The Tukudika remained in the park until the late nineteenth century when they were forcibly removed to reservations. They were incorporated into the Wind River Shoshone and Fort Hall Shoshone-Bannock tribes. Some descendants prefer the name *Mountain People.*
- Chief Togwotee was the Tukudika guide for President Chester A. Arthur's 1883 trip through Yellowstone.

500–1700s CE

1600s

North American tribes in the southwest begin acquiring horses in the mid- to late 1600s. Ancestors of the Crow may have come into the Yellowstone ecosystem during this time.

1700s

Lakota Sioux begin exploring the Yellowstone area.

A family group photo, possibly taken by W.H. Jackson. Bannock elders reported this may be a photograph of Chief Tendoy, Chief of the Lemhi Shoshones. Tendoy Falls on Ferris Fork in the southwestern part of the park is named after him.

social hierarchy on which the Tukudika occupied one of the lowest rungs: whereas other Shoshone bands were hunting and consuming the "grander" bison and elk, the Tukudika were hunting the "inferior," elusive, mountain-dwelling bighorn sheep. Contemporary understanding of this name is more nuanced. The name does not signify that Tukudika ate only bighorn sheep; it means, simply, that the bighorn sheep was this group's primary source of meat. Indeed, the Tukudika's diet consisted of at least 50% plants, roots, nuts, and berries.

Tukudika Culture

Traveling in extended-family groups, the Tukudika followed the park's rivers and streams to hunt game, harvest plants, and find suitable campsites. They traveled to higher elevations in the warmer months and stayed at lower elevations during the colder months. According to the Shoshone-Bannock tribes of southeastern Idaho, some Tukudika stayed in the park year-round.

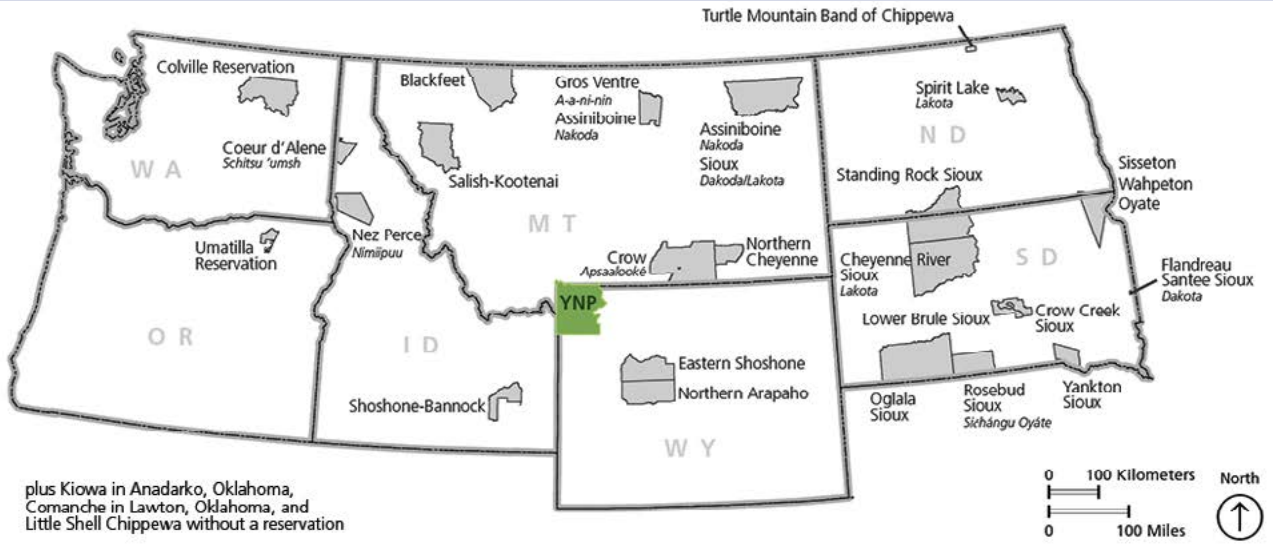
The Tukudika built simple yet versatile shelters composed of curved lodgepole and grass thatching. When situated against a rock face, these *newe-gahni* (Shoshone houses, houses built to suit a specific purpose) proved sturdy and resistant to the elements. These structures are similar to, but probably distinct from, the wickiup, or conical timber lodge, a structure found throughout the park and associated with several tribes.

When they lived in the park, the Tukudika quarried obsidian (*dupi* or *tuupi*) at Obsidian Cliff. Working in family groups, tribal members quarried obsidian with shovels made from bison or elk bone. After quarrying the obsidian, the Tukudika worked the material with elk antlers. A cantaloupe-sized rock yielded two to three arrowheads. It is reported that because of its sharpness, obsidian was the primary material for arrowheads and tools.

The Tukudika paired arrowheads manufactured from obsidian and other stone materials with well-designed, extremely durable hunting bows made from the horns and sinews of bighorn sheep. The Indians soaked the horns in geothermal waters to soften them, then shaped the pliable horns into bows. These highly effective bows were sought-after objects which the Tukudika traded with other tribes throughout the Rocky Mountains and the Northern Plains. Sheepskin was used to make distinctive, high-quality clothing, another desirable trade good from this Native American group.

The Tukudika were skilled hunters. They designed drive lines and corrals to aid in the hunting of bighorn sheep, and they built fish traps of stone and timber. Unlike most other American Indian tribes of the western United States, including other bands of Shoshone, the Tukudika did not adopt the horse. Instead, they continued to hunt on foot, accompanied by dogs (*satii*, *sadee*). These medium to large dogs resembled both wolves and huskies, and served as both work dogs and companions. Some scholars have speculated that hunting on horseback would have hindered the group's techniques for alpine

Associated Tribes of Yellowstone National Park



- Assiniboine and Sioux
- Blackfeet
- Cheyenne River Sioux
- Coeur d'Alene
- Comanche
- Colville Reservation
- Crow
- Crow Creek Sioux
- Eastern Shoshone
- Flandreau Santee Sioux
- Gros Ventre and Assiniboine
- Kiowa
- Little Shell Chippewa
- Lower Brule Sioux
- Nez Perce
- Northern Arapaho
- Northern Cheyenne
- Oglala Sioux
- Rosebud Sioux
- Salish and Kootenai
- Shoshone–Bannock
- Sisseton Wahpeton
- Spirit Lake
- Standing Rock Sioux
- Turtle Mountain Band of the Chippewa
- Umatilla Reservation
- Yankton Sioux

Note: Map shows modern tribal reservations; it does not show historic territory.

hunting. Dogs were used to pull travois (two-pole sleds) laden with game or belongings. Evidence that Native Americans, possibly Tukudika, were buried with their dogs has been found throughout the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

For cooking and storage, the Tukudika crafted bowls and other containers out of steatite, or soapstone, a metamorphic rock soft enough to scratch with a fingernail. Although steatite is a soft stone, it is surprisingly durable. Steatite deposits are plentiful throughout the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, but archeologists have not yet determined whether this material was quarried in the park. Steatite vessels may have been cached and returned to, season after season. The containers may also have been heirlooms or ceremonial vessels transported from site to site. These stone bowls are distinct from Intermountain Ware, a type of pottery made from different clays and tempers and associated with Shoshone groups.

Encounter

The stories that a culture creates and transmits are rooted in that culture's traditions, customs, social mores, and belief system. When two cultures encounter one another, misunderstandings and conflicts can arise. In the Rocky Mountain West, some of the first recorded stories of encounter between European-Americans and American Indians came from Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery expedition of 1804–6. Thirty years later, Osborne Russell, then a young fur-trapper, wrote some of the first descriptions of European-American–Tukudika encounters in the park. In 1835, he met a small group of Tukudika in the Lamar Valley, and he portrayed them favorably, if somewhat romantically. Other explorers and trappers were not so open-minded. Many accounts were one-sided, prejudiced, fearful, or even hostile. These stories and reports failed to consider the American Indian tribes' agency, self-sufficiency, and vast knowledge of Yellowstone's landscape and resources.

Prior to the establishment of Yellowstone National Park, the military was in the last stages of moving American Indian tribes onto reservations throughout the west. Early park superintendents actively discouraged tribes from visiting the newly established park to hunt or collect resources.

Change

The Tukudika continued to inhabit the Greater Yellowstone area for several years after Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872. By 1900, the Tukudika were incorporated into the Eastern Shoshone tribe of the Wind River Reservation in central-western Wyoming, and into the Mountain and Lemhi Shoshone and Bannock tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation in southeastern Idaho. Once confined to reservations, the Tukudika suffered the partial collapse of their traditional lifeways. Although the Tukudika continued to live traditionally for a generation or two after their removal to reservations, they eventually adapted to the ways of these other tribes, whose own cultural practices had already been altered by their earlier removal to reservations. Today, some Tukudika descendants live on both of the aforementioned reservations. Some of these descendants prefer the name *Mountain People* to *Tukudika* or *Sheep Eater* for its emphasis upon place rather than food source.

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late 1700s-1806 CE

late 1700s

Fur traders travel the rivers into the Yellowstone region. Tribes in the Yellowstone area begin using horses.

1804–1806

The Lewis and Clark Expedition passes within 50 miles of Yellowstone.

European Americans Arrive

In the late 1700s, fur traders traveled the great tributary of the Missouri River, the Yellowstone, in search of Native Americans with whom to trade. They called the river by its French name, "Roche Jaune." As far as historians know, pre-1800 European Americans did not observe the hydrothermal activity in this area, but they probably heard about these features from Native American acquaintances.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804–1806), sent by President Thomas Jefferson to explore the newly acquired lands of the Louisiana Purchase, bypassed Yellowstone. They had heard descriptions of the region but did not explore the Yellowstone River beyond what is now Livingston, Montana.

A member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, John Colter, left that group during its return journey to join trappers in the Yellowstone area. During his travels, Colter probably skirted the northwest shore of Yellowstone Lake and crossed the Yellowstone River near Tower Fall, where he noted the presence of "Hot Spring Brimstone."

Not long after Colter's explorations, the United States became embroiled in the War of 1812, which drew men and money away from exploration of the Yellowstone region. The demand for furs resumed after the war and trappers returned to the Rocky Mountains in the 1820s. Among them was Daniel Potts, who published the first account of Yellowstone's wonders as a letter in a Philadelphia newspaper. Osborne Russell also published an account of his fur trapping in and around Yellowstone during the 1830s and early 1840s

Mountain man Jim Bridger also explored Yellowstone during this time. Like many trappers, Bridger spun tall tales as a form of entertainment around the evening fire. His stories inspired future explorers to travel to see the real thing.

As quickly as it started, the trapper era ended. By the mid-1840s, the market for beaver dropped, and trappers moved on to guiding or other occupations.

Looking for Gold

Between 1863 and 1871, prospectors crisscrossed the Yellowstone Plateau every year, searching for gold and other precious minerals. Although gold was found nearby, no big strikes were made inside what is now Yellowstone National Park.

Expeditions Explore Yellowstone

Although Yellowstone had been thoroughly tracked by tribes and trappers, in the view of the nation it was really "discovered" by a series of formal expeditions. The first organized attempt came in 1860 when Captain William F. Raynolds led a military expedition, but this group was unable to explore the Yellowstone Plateau due to late spring snow. The Civil War preoccupied the government during the next few years. Immediately after the war, several explorations were planned, but none got underway.

The 1869 Folsom-Cook-Peterson Expedition

In 1869, three members of one would-be expedition set out on their own. David E. Folsom, Charles W. Cook, and William Peterson ignored the warning of a friend who said their journey was "the next thing to suicide" because of "Indian trouble" along the way. From Bozeman, they traveled down the divide between the Gallatin and Yellowstone rivers, crossed the mountains to the Yellowstone and continued into the present park. They observed Tower Fall, the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone—"this masterpiece of nature's handiwork"—continued past Mud Volcano to Yellowstone Lake, then south to West Thumb. From there, they visited Shoshone Lake and the geyser basins of the Firehole River. The expedition updated an earlier explorer's map (DeLacy, in 1865), wrote an article for *Western Monthly* magazine, and refueled the excitement of scientists who decided to see for themselves the truth of the party's tales of "the beautiful places we had found fashioned by the practiced hand of nature, that man had not desecrated."

1807–1835 CE

1807–1808

John Colter first known European-American to visit present-day Yellowstone.

1834–1835

Trapper Osborne Russell encounters Tukudika ("Sheep Eaters") in Lamar Valley.

The 1870 Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition

In August 1870, a second expedition set out for Yellowstone, led by Surveyor-General Henry D. Washburn, Montana politician and businessman Nathaniel P. Langford, and attorney Cornelius Hedges. Lt. Gustavus C. Doane provided military escort from Fort Ellis (near present-day Bozeman, Montana). The explorers traveled to Tower Fall, Canyon, and Yellowstone Lake, followed the lake's eastern and southern shores, and explored the Lower, Midway, and Upper geyser basins (where they named Old Faithful). They climbed several peaks, descended into the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and attempted measurements and analyses of several of the prominent natural features.

The 1871 Hayden Expedition

Ferdinand V. Hayden, head of the US Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, led the next scientific expedition in 1871, simultaneous with a survey by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

The history of science in Yellowstone formally began with Hayden's expeditions. Hayden's 1871 survey team included two botanists, a meteorologist, a zoologist, an ornithologist, a mineralogist, a topographer, and an agricultural statistician/entomologist, in addition to an artist, a photographer, and support staff. The survey brought back scientific corroboration of the earlier tales of thermal activity. The expedition gave the world an improved map of Yellowstone and visual proof of the area's unique curiosities through the photographs of William Henry Jackson and the art of Henry W. Elliot and Thomas Moran. The expedition's reports excited the scientific community and aroused national interest.

Hayden noted that in terms of scientific value, "The geysers of Iceland. . .sink into insignificance in comparison with the hot springs of the Yellowstone and Fire-Hole Basins."

The continued reports by mountain men about the wonders of the Yellowstone area, artist renderings of the area, and reports by explorers contributed to the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872.

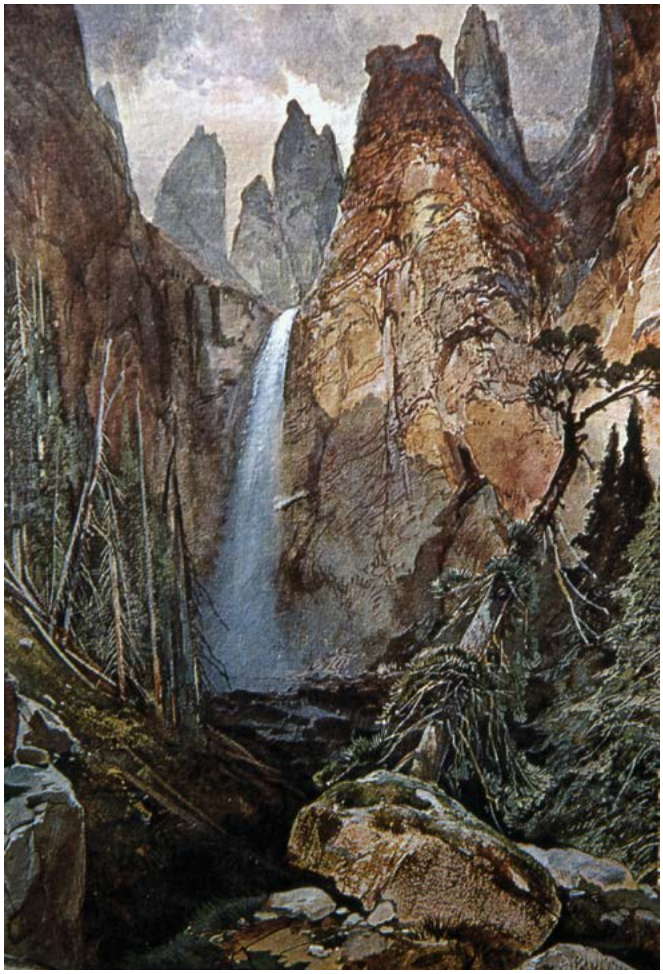
Birth of a National Park

In the United States, 1872 was a year of possibilities. Falling at the tail end of the Reconstruction Era and the beginning of the Gilded Age, this time marked a tumultuous shift in the direction of the country. Just two years prior, the final confederate states were readmitted to the Union and the 15th Amendment was ratified, granting freed black men the right to vote. At the same time, the Gilded Age was a dynamic time of expansion and industrialization. The Homestead Act had been in effect for a decade, and many families moved west with hope for a better life. Railroads would soon follow. As the country went through this transitional period, former Union General Ulysses S. Grant was serving as President. He presided over the Plains Indian Wars in the West, which were slowly waning with the Battle of Little Bighorn and the Flight of the Nez Perce still a few years away.

In this age of consumption, expansion, and national identity formation, a small group of citizens, businessmen, state officials, and members of exploratory parties lobbied the United States Congress to reserve around two million acres in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming territories as a "public pleasuring ground," setting the area aside from settlement or exploitation. After little debate, President Grant signed the Yellowstone National Park Act on March 1, 1872. On the face of it, the Act was to protect the natural wonders that had caught the imagination of

1850s–1871 CE

1850s	1860	1862	1869	1870	1871
Little Ice Age ends, climate begins to warm.	First organized expedition attempts, but fails, to explore the Yellowstone Plateau.	Gold strikes northwest of Yellowstone.	Folsom–Cook–Peterson Expedition.	Washburn–Langford–Doane Expedition; Old Faithful Geyser named.	First Hayden Expedition.



Several early trappers and expeditions passed by Tower Fall, depicted here by painter Thomas Moran, who accompanied the Hayden Expedition. One of the first trappers may have been John Colter, who left the Lewis and Clark Expedition as they returned east to join fur trappers in the Yellowstone area. He probably crossed the Yellowstone River near Tower Fall.

the nation—the thousands of geysers and hot pools, the colorful Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, and the "glass mountain" of Obsidian Cliff. But with that Act, Congress created a new cultural norm as well: that the American federal government would reserve land by creating imaginary boundaries, even crossing state or territory lines, for the public wellbeing. Thus marked an important step in public land conservation and was one of the early markers in the emerging field of environmentalism.

The world's first national park quickly became a point of national pride, putting America on even footing with Europe. According to the late historian Richard A. Bartlett, "Europe had her Greek and Roman ruins, her gloomy castles and gothic cathedrals, but Americans could boast of natural scenery that Europe could not duplicate [...] a variegated canyon painted by nature [...] and a high-altitude lake to match the beauties of Switzerland's Lake Constance. Here, in a region sixty-two by fifty-two miles, was picturesque America, mountainous, unusual, and beautiful, concentrated and on display for all the world to see." And see it they did. Visitors from around the world began making the arduous trek to this remote outpost and eventually, the national park idea spread to nations across the planet.

Formative Years

The park's promoters envisioned Yellowstone National Park would exist at no expense to the government. Nathaniel P. Langford, member of the Washburn Expedition and advocate of the Yellowstone National Park Act, was appointed to the unpaid post of superintendent. (He earned his living elsewhere.) He entered the park at least twice during five years in office—as part of the 1872 Hayden Expedition and to evict a squatter in 1874. Langford did what he could without laws protecting wildlife and other natural features, and without money to build basic structures and hire law enforcement rangers.

Political pressure forced Langford's removal in 1877. Philetus W. Norris was appointed the second superintendent, and the next year, Congress authorized appropriations "to protect, preserve, and improve the Park."

Norris constructed roads, built a park headquarters at Mammoth Hot Springs, hired the first "gamekeeper," and campaigned against hunters and vandals. Much of the primitive road system he laid out remains as the Grand Loop Road. Through constant exploration, Norris also added immensely to geographical knowledge of the park.

1872–1891 CE

1872
March 1, Yellowstone National Park Established; first "hotel" in park opens at Mammoth.

1877
1st budget for park; Nez Perce (Nee-me-poo) flee US Army through Yellowstone.

1883
Northern Pacific Railroad arrives near Gardiner, MT.

1885
First hotel at Old Faithful opens, known as the Shack Hotel.

1886
Army arrives to manage Yellowstone, creating the temporary Camp Sheridan at Mammoth.

1891
First Lake Hotel built.

Flight of the Nez Perce

Summer 1877 brought tragedy to the Nez Perce (or, in their language, Nimi'ipu or Nee-Me-Poo). A band of 800 men, women, and children—plus almost 2,000 horses—left their homeland in what is now Oregon and Idaho pursued by the US Army. Settlers were moving into their homeland and the US Government was trying to force them onto a reservation. At Big Hole, Montana, many of their group, including women and children, were killed in a battle with the Army. The remainder of the group continued fleeing, and entered Yellowstone National Park on August 23.

In Yellowstone
Only a small part of the route taken by the Nez Perce who fled from the US Army in 1877 went through Yellowstone, and the Native Americans largely eluded their pursuers while in the park. However, the 13 days that the Nez Perce spent in Yellowstone became part of the tragic story they continue to pass down to their children.

During the time they crossed the park, the Nez Perce encountered about 25 visitors in the park, some more than once. Warriors took hostage or attacked several of these tourists, killing two. The group continued traveling through the park and over the Absaroka Mountains into Montana. The Army stopped them near the Bear's Paw Mountains, less than 40 miles (64 km) from the Canadian border. This is where it is believed the flight ended and Chief Joseph said, "From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever." Some Nez Perce escaped to Canada, but after fierce fighting and a siege, the rest of the band surrendered on October 5, and most of the survivors were sent to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

Nez Perce Commemorative Sites
The Nez Perce National Historical Park, established by Congress in 1965 and managed by the National Park Service, includes 38 sites in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington that have been important in the history and culture of the Nez Perce.

Many of these sites are also on the 1,170-mile (1,882-km) Nez Perce National Historic Trail, established in 1986 and managed by the US Forest Service. The route extends from Wallowa Lake, Oregon, to the Bear's Paw Mountains in Montana. The historic trail goes through the park, and it is considered a sacred place by many Nez Perce who continue to honor their ancestors and carry on their memories through ceremonies conducted in the park. Beginning in 2006, the National Park Service undertook a multiyear archeological inventory project along the Nez Perce trail through the park. These efforts not only identified locations of several Nez Perce, US Army, and tourist encampments, but also clarified the general route the Nez Perce followed through the Absaroka Mountains.

- Nez Perce National Historic Trail: http://www.fs.usda.gov/npnht/
- Nez Perce National Historical Park: http://www.nps.gov/nepe/

As Yellowstone's second superintendent, Philetus Norris set the future course of national parks on many fronts: protection, addressing visitors' needs and interests, and science-based management. Despite a lack of support from the Department of the Interior or Congress, he pleaded for legislation that would adequately protect the park, and he had grand aspirations for Yellowstone.

Norris's tenure occurred during an era of warfare between the United States and many Native American tribes. To reassure the public that they faced no threat from these conflicts, he promoted the idea that Native Americans shunned this area because they feared the hydrothermal features, especially the geysers. This idea belied evidence to the contrary, but the myth endured.

Norris fell victim to political maneuvering and was removed from his post in 1882. He was succeeded by three ineffectual superintendents who could not protect the park. Even when ten assistant superintendents were authorized to act as police, they failed to stop the destruction of wildlife. Poachers, squatters, woodcutters, and vandals ravaged Yellowstone.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION:

Did other national parks exist before Yellowstone?

Some sources list Hot Springs in Arkansas as the first national park. Set aside in 1832, forty years before Yellowstone was established in 1872, it was actually the nation's oldest national reservation, set aside to preserve and distribute a utilitarian resource (hot water), much like our present national forests. In 1921, an act of Congress established Hot Springs as a national park.

Yosemite became a park before Yellowstone, but as a state park. Disappointed with the results of state management, 26 years later in 1890, Congress made Yosemite one of three additional national parks, along with Sequoia and General Grant, now part of Kings Canyon. Mount Rainier followed in 1899.

As an older state park, Yosemite did have a strong influence on the founding of Yellowstone in 1872 because Congress actually used language in the state park act as a model. It's entirely possible that Congress may have preferred to make Yellowstone a state park in the same fashion as Yosemite, had it not been for an accident of geography that put it within three territorial boundaries. Arguments between Wyoming and Montana territories that year resulted in a decision to federalize Yellowstone.

Soldiers pose with bison heads captured from poacher Ed Howell. When Howell returned to the park that year, he was the first person arrested and punished under the National Park Protection Act, passed in 1894.

The Army Arrives

In 1886 Congress refused to appropriate money for ineffective administration. The Secretary of the Interior, under authority given by the Congress, called on the Secretary of War for assistance. On August 20, 1886, the US Army took charge of Yellowstone. The Army strengthened, posted, and enforced regulations in the park. Troops guarded the major attractions and evicted troublemakers, and cavalry patrolled the vast interior.

The most persistent menace came from poachers, whose activities threatened to exterminate animals such as the bison. In 1894, soldiers arrested a man named Ed Howell for slaughtering bison in Pelican Valley. The maximum sentence possible was banishment from the park. Emerson Hough, a well-known

1894–1917 CE

1894	1904	1908	1915	1916	1917
1st Lacey Act makes it illegal to kill wildlife in the park.	Old Faithful Inn opens.	Union Pacific train service begins at West Yellowstone.	Automobiles allowed on park roads.	The National Park Service Organic Act establishes the National Park Service.	Private and commercial horse-drawn conveyances banned on Park Roads.

journalist, was present at the arrest and wired his report to *Forest & Stream*, a popular magazine of the time. Its editor, renowned naturalist George Bird Grinnell, helped create a national outcry. Within two months Congress passed the National Park Protection Act, which increased the Army's authority for protecting park treasures. (This law is known as the Lacey Act, and is the first of two laws with this name.)

Running a park was not the Army's usual line of work. The troops could protect the park and ensure access, but they could not fully satisfy the visitor's desire for knowledge. Moreover, each of the 14 other national parks established in the late 1800s and early 1900s was separately administered, resulting in uneven management, inefficiency, and a lack of direction.

The National Park Service Begins

National parks clearly needed coordinated administration by professionals attuned to the special requirements of these preserves. The management of Yellowstone from 1872 through the early 1900s helped set the stage for the creation of an agency whose sole purpose was to manage the national parks. Promoters of this idea gathered support from influential journalists, railroads likely to profit from increased park tourism, and members of Congress. The National Park Service Organic Act was passed by Congress and approved by President Woodrow Wilson on August 25, 1916.

Yellowstone's first rangers, which included veterans of Army service in the park, became responsible

Guidance for Protecting Yellowstone National Park

Yellowstone Purpose Statement
Yellowstone National Park, the world's first national park, was set aside as a public pleasuring ground to share the wonders and preserve and protect the scenery, cultural heritage, wildlife, and geologic and ecological systems and processes in their natural condition for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Significance of Yellowstone

- Yellowstone National Park is the world's first national park, an idea that spread throughout the world.
- Yellowstone was set aside because of its geothermal wonders—the planet's most active, diverse, and intact collections of combined geothermal, geologic, and hydrologic features and systems—and the underlying volcanic activity that sustains them.
- The park is the core of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, one of the last, largest, nearly intact natural ecosystems in the temperate zone of Earth. It preserves an exceptional concentration and diversity of terrestrial, aquatic, and microbial life. Here, natural processes operate in an ecological context that has been less subject to human alteration than most others throughout the nation—and indeed throughout the world. This makes the park not only an invaluable natural reserve, but a reservoir of information valuable to humanity.
- Yellowstone contains a unique and relatively pristine tapestry of prehistoric and historic cultural resources that span more than 11,000 years. The archeological, architectural, historical, and material collections constitute one of the largest and most complete continua of human occupation in the western US, and collectively represent the material remains of the birth of the National Park and conservation movement.
- Yellowstone was the first area set aside as a national public park and pleasuring ground for the benefit, enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. Visitors have a range of opportunities to experience its unique geothermal wonders, free-roaming wildlife, inspiring views, cultural heritage, and spectacular wilderness character.

Yellowstone Mission Statement
Preserved within Yellowstone National Park are Old Faithful and the majority of the world's geysers and hot springs. An outstanding mountain wildland with clean water and air, Yellowstone is home to the grizzly bear and wolf and free-ranging herds of bison and elk. Centuries-old sites and historic buildings that reflect the unique heritage of America's first national park are also protected. Yellowstone National Park serves as a model and inspiration for national parks throughout the world. The National Park Service preserves, unimpaired, these and other natural and cultural resources and values for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.

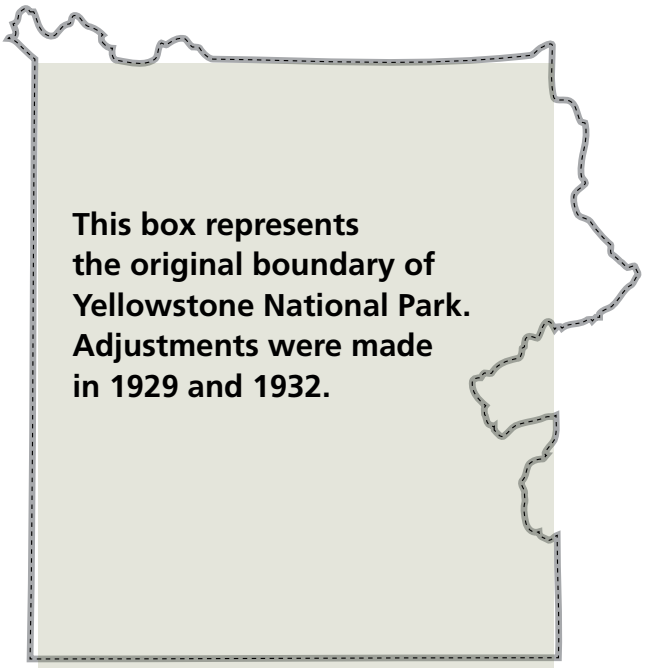
1918–1948 CE

1918	1919	1930s	1934	1943–1944	1948
NPS takes over management of Yellowstone and the Army leaves.	Horace Albright becomes first NPS superintendent.	CCC and other government-funded work crews complete work in Yellowstone.	NPS Director's Order prohibits killing predators.	Much of the park closes for WWII.	Yellowstone receives one million visitors.

for Yellowstone in 1918. The park's first superintendent under the new National Park Service was Horace M. Albright, who served simultaneously as assistant to Stephen T. Mather, Director of the National Park Service. Albright established a management framework that guided administration of Yellowstone for decades.

Boundary Adjustments

Almost as soon as the park was established, people began suggesting that the boundaries be revised to conform more closely to natural topographic features, such as the ridgeline of the Absaroka Range along the east boundary. Although these people had



the ear of influential politicians, so did their opponents—which at one time included the United States Forest Service. Eventually a compromise was reached, and, in 1929, President Hoover signed the first bill changing the park's boundaries: The northwest corner now included a significant area of petrified trees; the northeast corner was defined by the watershed of Pebble Creek; the eastern boundary included the headwaters of the Lamar River and part of the watershed of the Yellowstone River. (The Yellowstone's headwaters remain outside the park in Bridger-Teton National Forest.)

In 1932, President Hoover issued an executive order that added more than 7,000 acres between the north boundary and the Yellowstone River, west of Gardiner. These lands provided winter range for elk and other ungulates.

Efforts to exploit the park also expanded during this time. Water users, from the town of Gardiner to the potato farmers of Idaho, wanted the park's water. Proposals included damming the southwest corner of the park—the Bechler region. The failure of these schemes confirmed that Yellowstone's wonders were so special that they should be forever preserved from exploitation.

Two "Organic Acts"

The laws creating Yellowstone National Park and the National Park Service (also called "enabling legislation") are both referred to as "The Organic Act" because each created an entity. However, the name most often refers to the law that created the National Park Service. To avoid confusion, we refer to the laws by their names as listed in the US Code Table of Popular Names: The Yellowstone National Park Protection Act and The National Park Service Organic Act.

National Park Service Organic Act
Passed in 1916, this law created the National Park Service and established its mission:

> *"to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."*

National Park Service Mission
The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The National Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout the United States and the world.

1949–1963 CE

1949
First motorized oversnow vehicles allowed in park.

1955
Mission 66 begins in Yellowstone to revitalize lodging, dining, education, and infrastructure.

1959
West of Yellowstone, a 7.5 *M* earthquake strikes, killing campers in the Custer-Gallatin NF and affecting thermal features and infrastructure in the park.

1963
Leopold Report leads to the last of the bear-feeding dumps closing over the following several years.

1963
Robert Reamer-designed Canyon Hotel burns to the ground.

Yellowstone Superintendent Horace Albright, shown here with future president Herbert Hoover in 1928, was involved in the creation of the National Park Service. Later, as agency's director, he greatly increased the number of parks east of the Mississippi and expanded the agency's mandate to include preservation of historic sites, creating a more truly "national" park system.

World War II

World War II drew away employees, visitors, and money from all national parks, including Yellowstone. The money needed to maintain the park's facilities, much less construct new ones, was directed to the war effort. Among other projects, the road from Old Faithful to Craig Pass was unfinished. Proposals again surfaced to use the park's natural resources—this time in the war effort. As before, the park's wonders were preserved.

Visitation jumped as soon as the war ended. By 1948, park visitation reached one million people per year. The park's budget did not keep pace, and the neglect of the war years quickly caught up with the park.

Mission 66

Neglected during World War II, the infrastructure in national parks continued to deteriorate as visitation soared afterward, leading to widespread complaints. In 1955, National Park Service Director Conrad Wirth persuaded Congress to fund an improvement program for completion by the National Park Service's 50th anniversary in 1966. Although also designed to increase education programs and employee

Park Superintendents

Formative Years
Nathanial P. Langford,1872–1877
Philetus W. Norris, 1877–1882
Patrick H. Conger, 1882–1884
Robert E. Carpenter, 1884–1885
David W. Wear, 1885–1886

Under the US Army
Captain Moses Harris, 1886–1889
Captain Frazier A. Boutelle, 1889–1891
Captain George S. Anderson, 1891–1897
Captain Samuel B.M. Young, 1897
Captain James B. Erwin, 1897–1899
Captain Wilbur E. Wilder, 1899
Captain Oscar J. Brown, 1899–1900
Captain George W. Goode, 1900–1901
Captain John Pitcher, 1901–1907
General Samuel B.M. Young, 1907–1908
Major Harry C. Benson, 1908–1910
Colonel Lloyd M. Brett, 1910–1916
Chester A. Lindsley, 1916–1919

National Park Service
Horace M. Albright, 1919–1929
Roger W. Toll, 1929–1936
John W. Emmett, 1936
Edmund B. Rogers, 1936–1956
Lemuel A. Garrison, 1956–1964
John S. McLaughlin, 1964–1967
Jack K. Anderson, 1967–1976
John A. Townsley, 1976–1982
Robert Barbee, 1983–1994
Michael Finley, 1994–2001
Suzanne Lewis, 2002–2010
Dan Wenk, 2011–2018
Cameron Sholly, 2018–Present

1965–1975 CE

1965

Park sees 2,000,000 visitors for first time.

1966

The thermophile *Thermus aquaticus* is discovered in a Yellowstone hot spring.

1970

New bear management plan begins, which includes closing open-pit dumps in park.

1971

Overnight winter lodging opens in park and continues yearly.

1975

Grizzly bear listed as threatened species in the lower 48 states.

Today's National Park Service

Implementing the National Park Service Mission
The National Park Service mission includes the responsibility to preserve the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System. Consistent with this high standard of care, the National Park Service makes these areas accessible for public use and enjoyment.

- **Natural resources** (biological and physical, natural sounds, night skies, scenic vistas, and other aesthetic values) are managed to maintain, rehabilitate, and perpetuate their inherent integrity. Native species that have been exterminated are reintroduced and nonnative species eliminated, if possible. Livestock grazing, hunting, and resource extraction are prohibited in National Park System areas, with a few exceptions.
- **Cultural resources** (prehistoric and historic structures, landscapes, archeological and ethnographic resources, and museum collections) are preserved.

International Leadership
The National Park Service example has inspired countries around the world to establish more than 100 national parks—modeled in whole or part on Yellowstone National Park and the National Park Service idea. Additionally, the National Park Service lends its experienced staff to other countries to evaluate park proposals, management plans, and resource issues. As the first national park, Yellowstone also continues to be a leader in developing and implementing policies in the National Park Service.

The National Park Service manages approximately 83 million acres in all 50 states, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa.

- **National parks** are the oldest, most well-known part of the system and are usually areas of spectacular natural scenery relatively untouched by human development. National parks are established by acts of Congress.
- **National monuments** are areas of historic or scientific interest established by presidential proclamation.
- **National historical parks** and **national historic sites** are set aside to commemorate some facet of the history of the people of those areas.
- Many **national memorials** fit the description for national historical parks or national historic sites, but some of these are also set aside because of important historical issues not specifically linked to the site of the memorial, such as Mt. Rushmore and Vietnam Veterans.

Total National Park Service sites = 433

When Frances Pound applied for a position in 1926, Yellowstone Superintendent Albright suggested she use her nickname, Jim. She was one of the first women hired to do law enforcement in Yellowstone. Today's National Park Service workforce aims to reflect our nation's diversity.

National Battlefields	11
National Battlefield Parks	4
National Battlefield Site	1
National Military Parks	9
National Historical Parks	64
National Historic Sites	75
International Historic Sites	1
National Lakeshores	3
National Memorials	31
National Monuments	87
National Parks	63
National Parkways	4
National Preserves	19
National Reserves	2
National Recreation Areas	18
National Rivers	4
National Wild and Scenic Rivers and Riverways	10
National Scenic Trails	6
National Seashores	10
Other Designations	11
Total Units	433

As of April 21, 2026.

For a complete list see www.nps.gov/faqs.htm

1988–2000 CE

1988	1991	1992	1994	1995	1996	2000
Wildfire burns approximately 36% of the park.	Clean Air Act Amendments require air-quality monitoring at sites including Yellowstone, a Class I airshed.	Park sees 3,000,000 visitors for the first time.	Congress enacts a law allowing a percentage of park entrance fees to be kept in the parks.	Wolves reintroduced.	New World Mine, near park's northern boundary, halted.	1st Interagency Bison Management Plan.

Yellowstone Park Concession Employee Slang, c. 1920s

Concession employees in the 1920s were often college students looking for adventure on their summer breaks. Many of them came back to Yellowstone multiple times, met their spouses here, and made life-long friends. As a sign of their youthful enthusiasm, they soon developed a unique lingo to use among themselves.

- Concession Employees: Savages
- Visitors on full-package tours: Dudes
- Campers: Sagebrushers
- Dishwashers: Pearl Divers
- Maids: Pillow Punchers
- Laundry Workers: Bubble Queens and Kings
- Laundry Carts: Mollies
- Waitresses: Heavers
- Porters: Pack Rats
- Bus Drivers: Gearjammers
- Courting in the evenings: Rotten Logging

housing, Mission 66 focused mainly on visitor facilities and roads. Trained as an architect, Wirth encouraged the use of modern materials and prefabricated components to quickly and inexpensively construct low-maintenance buildings. This architectural style, which became known as Park Service Modern, was a deliberate departure from the picturesque, rustic buildings associated with national parks; their "fantasy land" quality was considered outmoded and too labor-intensive for the needed scale of construction.

Mission 66 revitalized many national parks; in Yellowstone, intended to be the program's showpiece, its legacy is still visible. It was a momentous chapter in the park's history, and as the park continues to reflect changing ideas about how to enhance the visitor experience while protecting the natural and cultural resources, the question of how to preserve the story of Mission 66 is being addressed.

The elk and bison populations were actively managed until the mid-1960s, when park managers allowed "natural regulation."

Work in Yellowstone included the development of Canyon Village. Aging visitor use facilities were replaced with modernistic visitor use facilities designed to reflect American attitudes of the 1950s. Visitor services were arranged around a large parking plaza with small cabins a short distance away. The first Mission 66 project initiated by the National Park Service, Canyon Village opened in July 1957.

Modern Management

Until the mid-1960s, park managers actively managed the elk and bison of Yellowstone. Elk population limits were determined according to formulas designed to manage livestock range. When elk reached those limits, park managers "culled" or killed the animals to reduce the population. Bison were likewise heavily managed.

In 1963, a national park advisory group, composed of prominent scientists, released a report recommending parks "maintain biotic associations" within the context of their ecosystem and based on scientific research.

Involving Native Americans

Yellowstone National Park has 27 associated tribes. Some have evidence of their ancestral presence in Yellowstone National Park through ethnohistoric documentation, interviews with tribal elders, or

2002 CE–present

2002	2007	2008	2009	2011	2015
National Academy of Sciences confirms effectiveness of Ecological Process Management (aka natural regulation).	Yellowstone's grizzly bears removed from federal threatened species list.	Scientific review panel recommends an increase in lake trout removal operations on Yellowstone Lake.	Grizzly bears returned to threatened species list. Bioprospecting final EIS completed; science agenda established for Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.	Grey wolves removed from the endangered species list in MT, ID, OR, and WA. Remain listed in WY until 2017.	Park sees 4,000,000 visitors for the first time.

A Decade of Environmental Laws

Beginning in the late 1960s, the US Congress passed an unprecedented suite of laws to protect the environment. The laws described here particularly influence the management of our national parks.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 particularly influences the management of national parks.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), passed in 1970, establishes a national policy "to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment … stimulate the health and welfare of man … and enrich the understanding of ecological systems …" It requires detailed analysis of environmental impacts of any major federal action that significantly affects the quality of the environment. Environmental assessments (EAs) and environmental impact statements (EISs) are written to detail these analyses and to provide forums for public involvement in management decisions.

The Clean Air Act (1970) mandates protection of air quality in all units of the National Park System; Yellowstone is classified as Class 1, the highest level of clean air protection.

The Clean Water Act (1972) is enacted to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters" by prohibiting the discharge of pollutants.

The Endangered Species Act (1973) requires federal agencies to protect species that are (or are likely to become) at risk of extinction throughout all or a significant part of their range. It prohibits any action that would jeopardize their continued existence or result in the destruction or modification of their habitat.

ongoing consultations. Others are affiliated because of documented spiritual or cultural connection to places or resources. Many park resources remain important to these tribes' sense of themselves and in maintaining their traditional practices.

In addition, tribes are sovereign nations whose leaders have a legal relationship with the federal government that is not shared by the general public. Consequently, representatives of Yellowstone's associated tribes participate in consultation meetings with park managers. They bring tribal perspectives to current issues such as bison management. Tribes also comment on park projects that could affect their ethnographic resources.

Complex Issues

Change and controversy have occurred in Yellowstone since its inception. In the last three decades, many issues have arisen involving natural resources.

One issue was the threat of water pollution from a gold mine outside the northeast corner of the park. Among other concerns, the New World Mine would have put waste storage along the headwaters of Soda Butte Creek, which flows into the Lamar River and then the Yellowstone River. After years of public debate, a federal buyout of the mining company was authorized in 1996.

In an effort to resolve other park management issues, Congress passed the National Parks Omnibus Management Act in 1998. This law requires using high-quality science from inventory, monitoring, and research to understand and manage park resources.

Park facilities are seeing some improvements due to a change in funding. In 1996, as part of a pilot program, Yellowstone National Park was authorized to increase its entrance fee and retain 80% of the fee for park projects. (Previously, park entrance fees did not specifically fund park projects.) In 2004, the US Congress extended this program until 2015 under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Projects funded in part by this program include a major renovation of Canyon Visitor Education Center, campground and amphitheater upgrades, preservation of rare documents, and studies on bison.

A Living Legacy

The legacy of those who worked to establish Yellowstone National Park in 1872 was far greater than simply preserving a unique landscape. This one

act has led to a lasting concept—the national park idea. This idea conceived of wilderness as the inheritance of all people, who gain more from an experience in nature than from private exploitation of the land.

The national park idea was part of a new view of the nation's responsibility for the public domain. By the end of the 1800s, many thoughtful people no longer believed that wilderness should be fair game for the first person who could claim and plunder it. They believed its fruits were the rightful possession of all the people, including those yet unborn. Besides the areas set aside as national parks, still greater expanses of land were placed into national forests and other reserves so that the United States' natural wealth—in the form of lumber, grazing, minerals, and recreation lands—would not be consumed at once by the greed of a few, but would perpetually benefit all.

The preservation idea spread around the world. Scores of nations have preserved areas of natural beauty and historical worth so that all humankind will have the opportunity to reflect on their natural and cultural heritage and to return to nature and be spiritually reborn. Of all the benefits resulting from the establishment of Yellowstone National Park, this may be the greatest.

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