

EXPLORING



The MIDWEST in 2016



This is the 2nd book about our 2016 trip to the Midwest, and a lot of great photographs had to be left out even then. Fall is such a beautiful time of the year that we could have made a book about golden autumn leaves across the country.

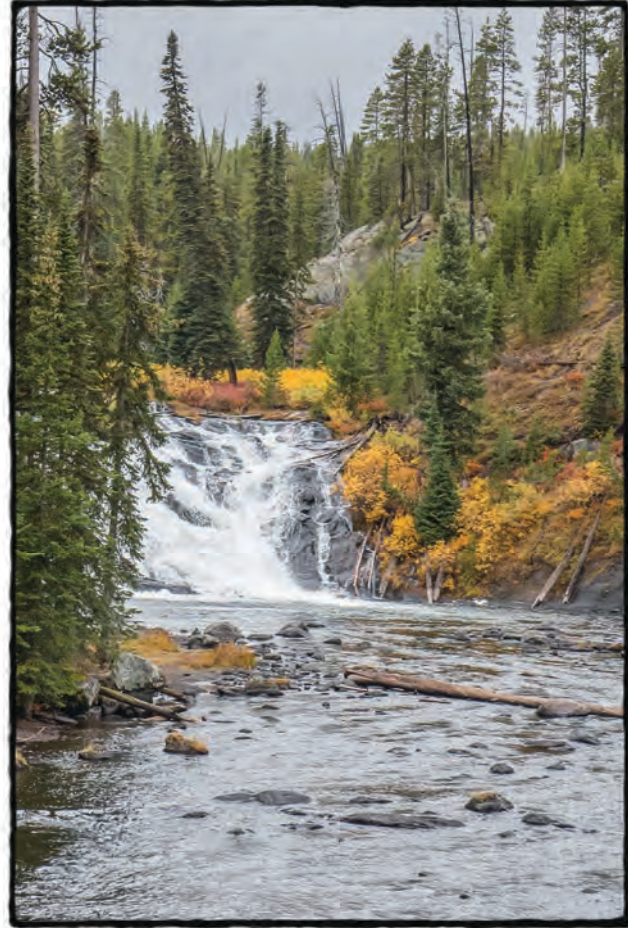
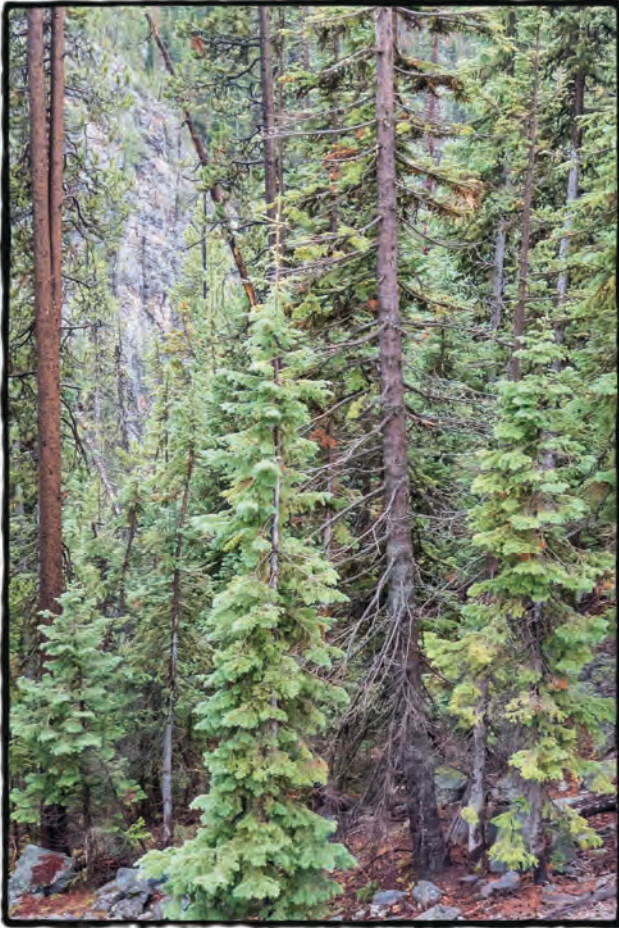
The first book ended with the Grand Teton National Park; this book picks up the journey in Yellowstone National Park. It was cold when we arrived, but started to warm up as the days rolled by. We were prepared with our down coats.

Yellowstone, due to its diversity, is probably the most exciting of all national parks to visit. We've already completed a book covering our first three trips to the park. But there is always something new - as this book shows.

We tackled the Beartooth Highway after leaving Yellowstone, and that was a very new experience. Staying at the Grizzly Lodge was another new experience.

Then we were back to familiar places, even though they had been visited 30 years ago. Devil's Tower National Monument was a place we absolutely wanted to see, as was the Badlands National Park and finally the Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota. They all lived up to our expectations, and had remained relatively untouched over the years.





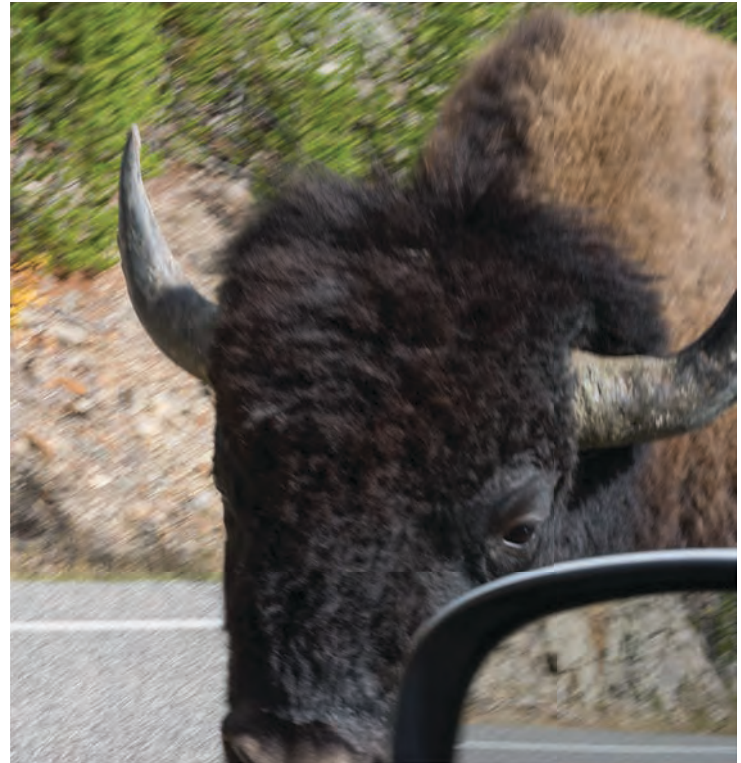
Views along the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway that connects the Grand Teton National Park to Yellowstone National Park.



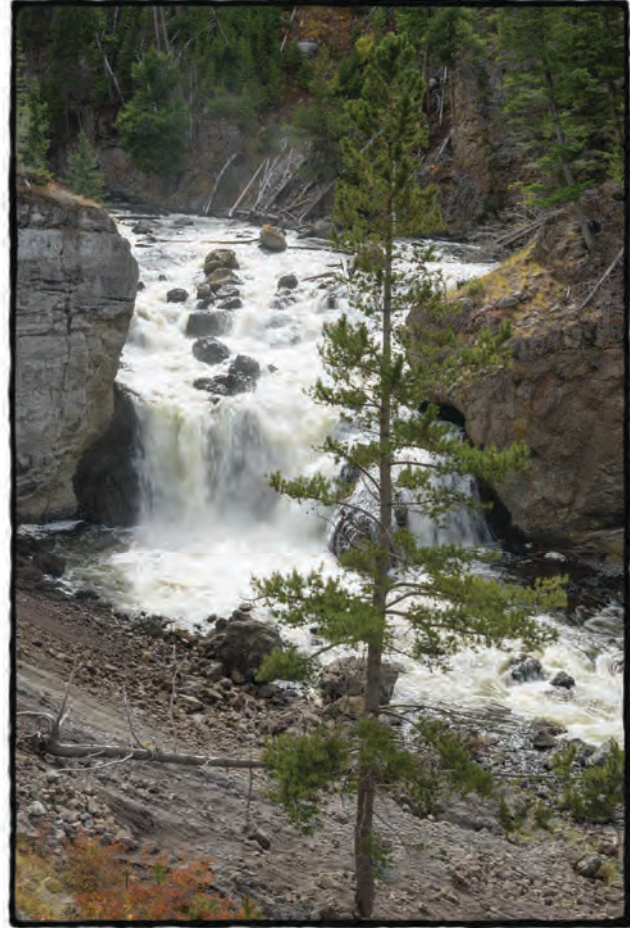


We arrived in Yellowstone via the southern entrance, and soon came to Grant Village (where we stayed for three nights) and Yellowstone Lake. We had stayed in Grant Village 30 years ago on our first visit to Yellowstone, but there had been a lot of changes (and improvements) in the facilities.

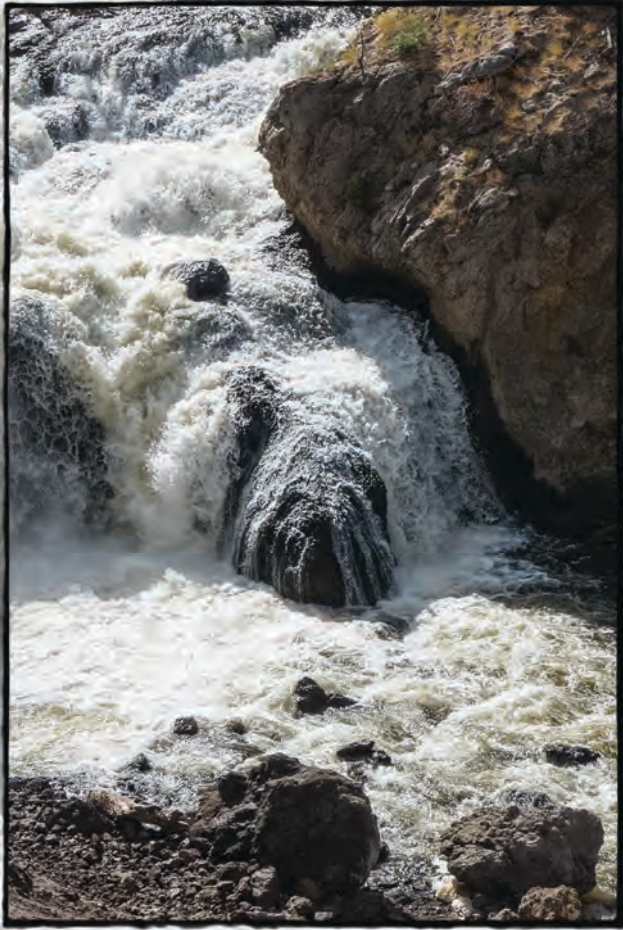




After checking in our room, we drove to the southern loop of the park; along the way we had our first typical Yellowstone experience. Cars were stopped in both directions, and meandering down the road were three large bison. Jim stopped, opened his window and grabbed his camera. Everything was fine until the lead bison decided to cross the road right where we were stopped. The above (slightly out of focus) photo was taken just before we were about to be “attacked.”



Firehole Falls is located on a small side road (now one-way) and, of course, is located on the Firehole River. We photographed the falls in '86 and there were no people around. This time we could hardly find a place to park our car - and it wasn't even the busy summer season.



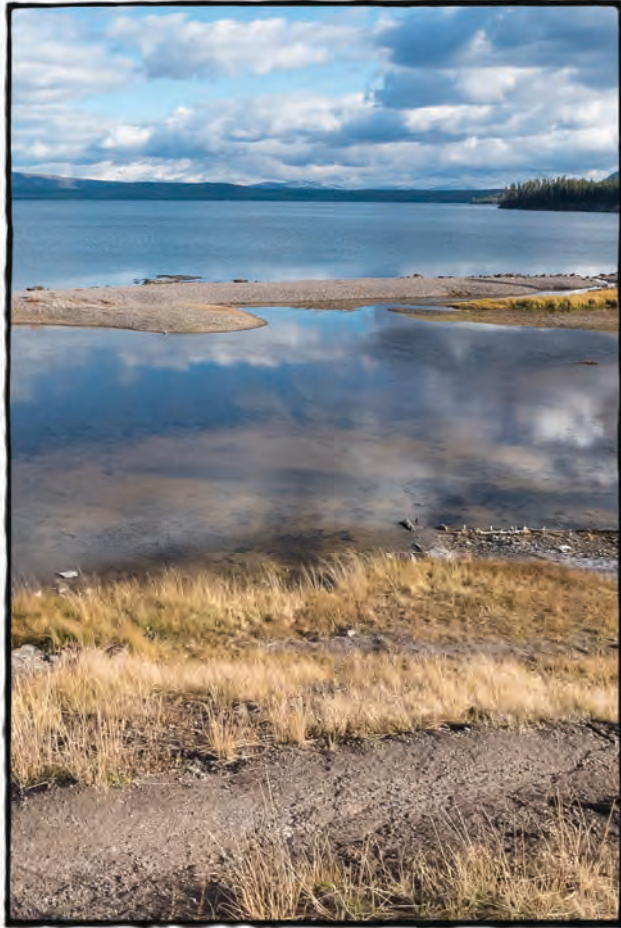


September 24, 2016

This is a popular Firehole River swimming hole that's not far from the falls, and there were even people coming out of the water on this cold day. It's hard to imagine the place on a hot summer day (frenzy). When we took the photo of the man fishing in '04 we were alone.



September 29, 2004



Our first evening in Yellowstone was spent near the lake, and we couldn't have asked for a better sky. There had been storms the previous evening and the sky remained in turmoil. The slowly setting sun gave us myriads of gorgeous photographs.

This was the first time we had ever really concentrated on Yellowstone Lake. Thirty years ago, when we also stayed at Grant Village, the June mosquitos were so bad that we ran from our room to the car and never looked back. In 2004, for reasons unknown, we ignored the lake. And in 2009 we drove quickly past the lake on our way out of the Eastern exit.

This was our year to focus on the lake (no mosquitos to stop us). To our amazement there was a significant geyser basin right on the lake known as the West Thumb Basin. We had never seen it before.

We walked the paths with steam rising all around us, the lake beside us and a sunset to write poetry about. And if that was not enough, we discovered that a herd of elk also liked the area. In the midst of the geysers roamed a giant bull elk and his harem.



Yellowstone Lake - the largest lake above 8,000' in North America









The sun beginning to set over Yellowstone Lake.





Experiencing the geysers at the West Thumb Basin.



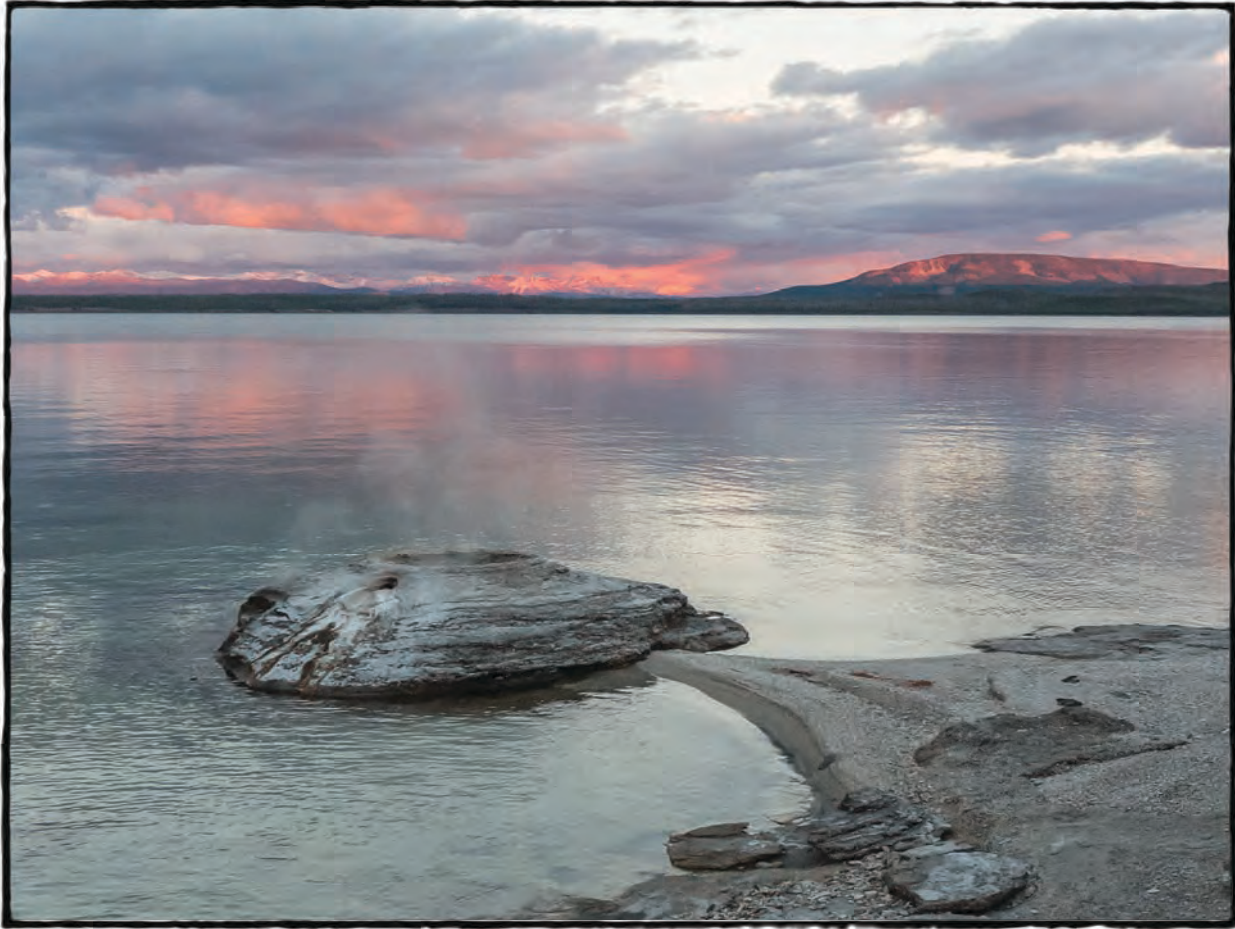


Steam, setting sun, lake and the first elk.





The family having an evening snack.



The sunset becoming more spectacular across from the Fishing Cone Geyser.





The next morning we headed East on the lower loop road and stopped at Fishing Bridge. This is another part of Yellowstone that we had ignored on previous trips to the park.

Jim went up on the bridge (it would have been filled with fishermen in the past). I decided to walk below the bridge along the shore of the Yellowstone River. Jim's photo shows that a bison is standing on the hill right above me (an interesting juxtaposition).

Near the bridge the Yellowstone River is very calm and lazy as it goes on to enter Yellowstone Lake. As you drive the loop road north the river continues to spread out, and is a perfect location for wildlife to be viewed. We also saw several types of waterfowl. Also along the way there are several different thermal features.

The Yellowstone River goes through a major transformation as it heads even further north and enters the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Here it rushes and tumbles and forms great waterfalls as it tears beneath the canyon walls.





Up from Fishing Bridge there are geysers sending steam in the air on the far side of the Yellowstone River.







In this very “lazy” section of the Yellowstone there were several different kinds of water fowl and elk.



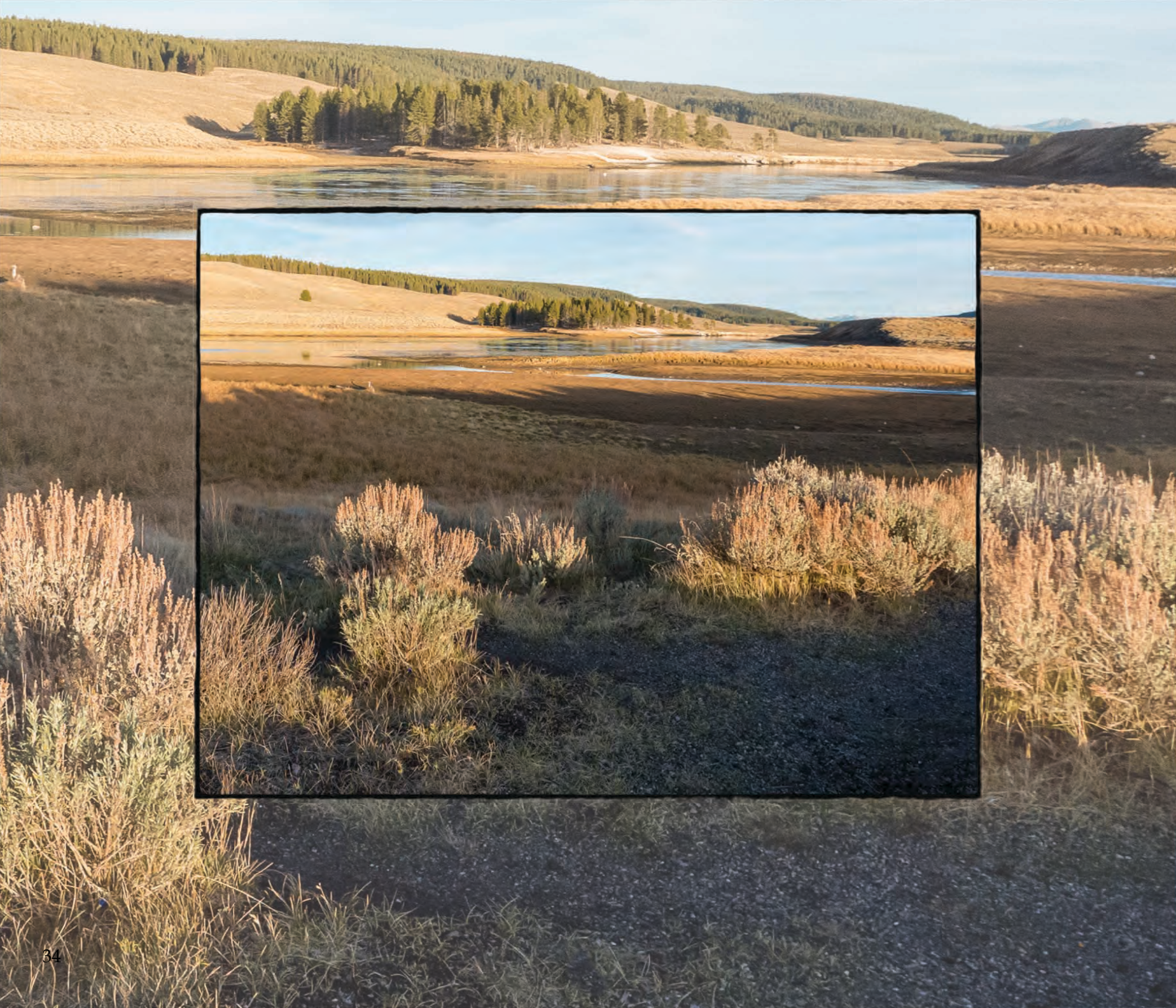
This time the painting was on a van.



Several times we saw Big Horn Sheep.



This beautiful coyote put on a show for the watching tourists.





The land glowed as the sun began to set, and then became brilliant behind the burned out forrest.



The Grand Canyon of the Colorado is always spectacular. Our photographs over the past 30 years show that there's a lot more water in the spring, but it's always beautiful.

On this trip we visited the falls and the canyon three different days, and three different times of the day. (All the pictures have been put together so as not to be confusing.) In the early morning the sun shines on one side of the canyon, and late in the day it shines on the other side. Near noon the entire canyon is lit, and you can actually see the river below. We find that the trees on the rim are also an interesting subject to photograph.

We were disappointed, because our favorite spot to photograph (Inspiration Point) was closed to all traffic due to construction. We should be glad that work continues within the park - only not when we're there.

Just north of the Grand Canyon is another section of the Yellowstone River that offers views of the fields and hills of northern Yellowstone National Park. (The diversity within the borders of Yellowstone is amazing; it's like many parks in one.)



The fully lit Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone at around 1:00 pm.











The Lower Falls at 11:00 am - (opposite) the falls at 6:00 pm













The northern section of the Yellowstone River, where the canyon enters the rolling hills of the park.









Another one way side road took us into some of Yellowstone's back country. The road followed a section of the Gibbon River and passed by the Virginia Cascades. We appeared to be the only people driving this by-pass, which was fortunate, because it was very narrow in places (*with steep drop offs*). Then it leveled off, and led us past pleasant fields and a meandering stream.









The western road of the upper Yellowstone loop was closed for major construction. This forced the park traffic to drive up the eastern road in order to reach Mammoth Hot Springs and the northern exits. Fortunately it were late in the season, otherwise we would have spent a lot of time in traffic jams.







Fishermen were frequently seen, doing their thing, in the many rivers of Yellowstone.





In 2009 (on our 12 hour jaunt through northern Yellowstone) we ended our day at the Grand Prismatic Spring, because it was close to the West Yellowstone exit. It was late in the day and in early July. The setting sun made for excellent photographs.

On our visit this time we had lots of sunshine, and the low horizon sun that occurs around 5:00 in the fall. Everything look familiar, yet different, because of the changing light.

We have photos of the scene to the left from every trip to Yellowstone. We intentionally photographed a group of tree stumps further along the trail that have remained in place for over 30 years.

This time, in the brighter light, we paid more attention to the thermal features that were off the main path. But, of course, the Grand Prismatic Spring was our major focus. It seems to be continually sending up vast quantities of water and steam; it is a great place to get pictures of Yellowstone in action.

Off in the distance we could see bison roaming around in this level, warm environment.















The boardwalk heading the the Great Prismatic Fountain.



1986



2004



2009



2016



The Grand Prismatic Spring blowing off steam and water.









The Fountain Paint Pot, located on a hill above the exploding spring, just bubbles and plops.

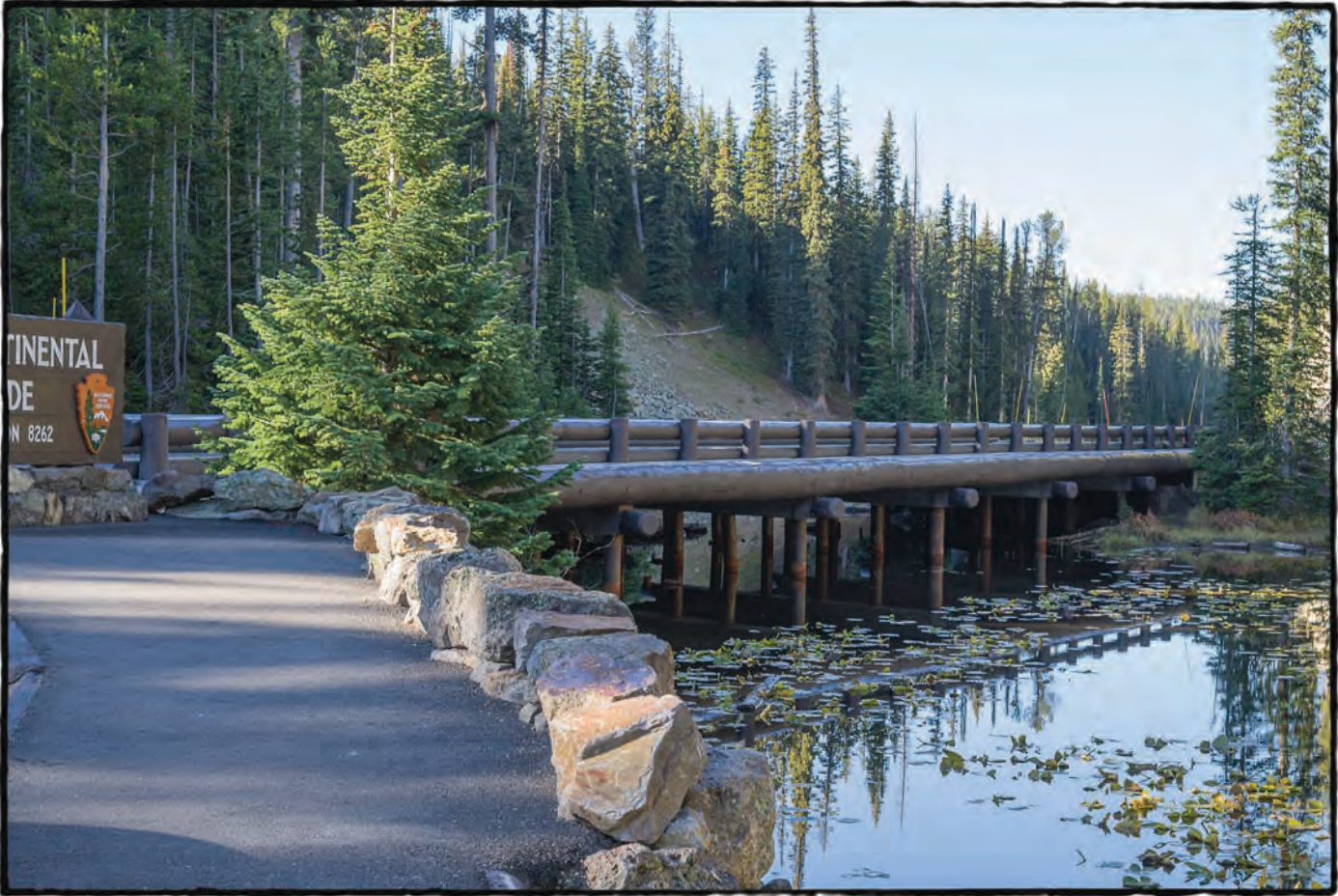




Crossing the Continental Divide (between Old Faithful and Grant Village) in late June 1986



The same place 30 years later - September 26, 2016



This stream, pond and bridge are located where the Continental Divide crosses the park. We stopped here with Sarah and Rachael in '86, but the park has really improved the site since then.





In 2004 we stayed in Old Faithful Lodge, and spent a lot of time walking the trails/boardwalks surrounding this historic place. In 1986 we didn't stay here, but ate at the cafeteria every evening. (The cafeteria was closed in 2004.)

In 2016 we visited the Old Faithful area twice (actually 3 times, since we ate dinner in reopened cafeteria two evenings). Our first visit was late at night. We looked outside the cafeteria and noticed people lined up to watch Old Faithful erupt. We went out after dinner and took our first night pictures here.

The next day in the bright sunlight we returned and did a lot of walking. In order to see all of the different geysers, springs and pools you have to walk several miles. Most of the walking is currently done on boardwalks in order to preserve the land (and you). Early on you walk near the Firehole River, which keeps showing up throughout the hike.

One of the farthest features is Morning Glory Pool, something not to be missed. Jim's legs gave out and he sent me on. My legs nearly gave out, but I made it out and back. His Fitbit said we had walked 7 miles.



Old Faithful at night.



Old Faithful in the morning.



The Firehole River near Old Faithful Lodge.





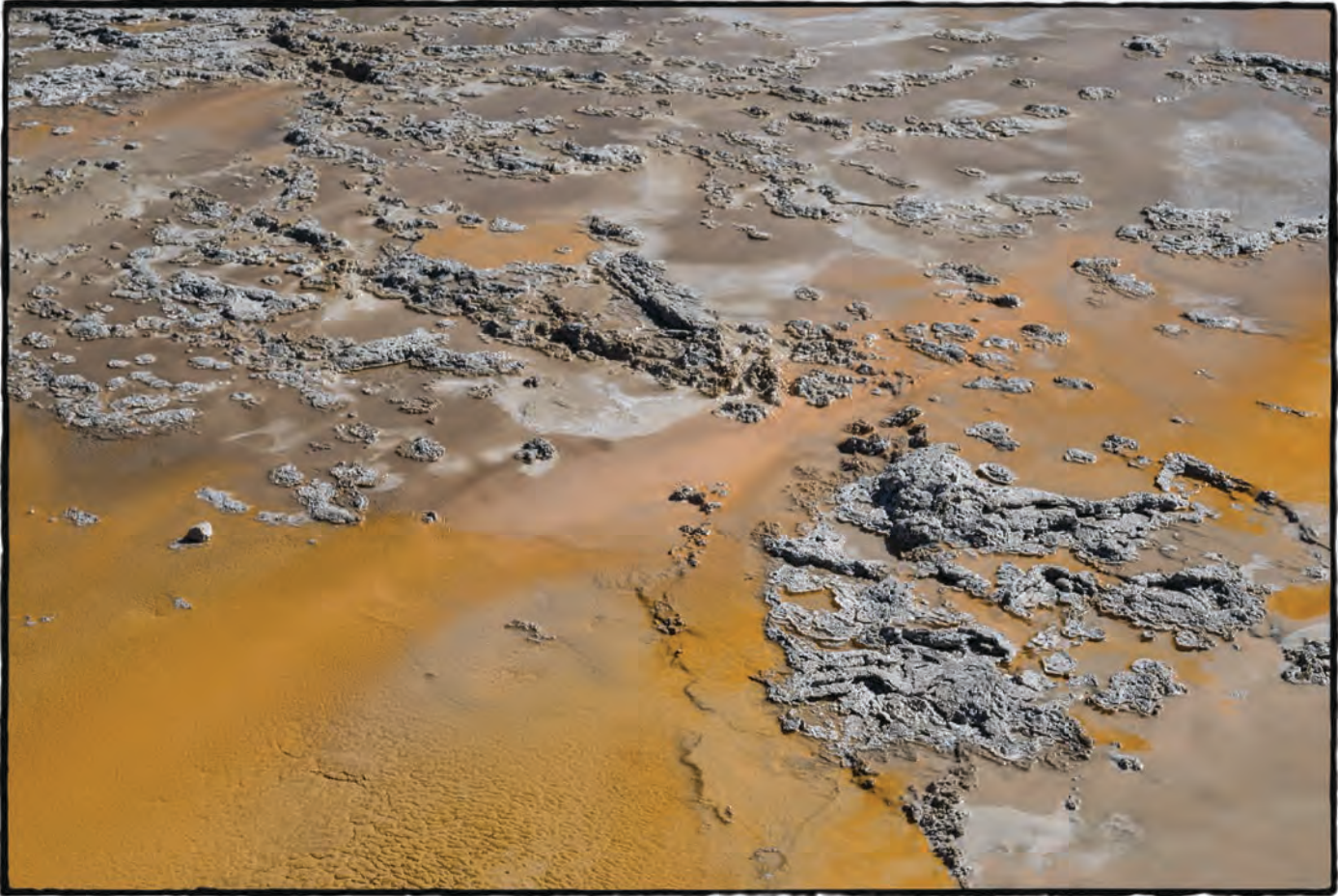






As you walk along the boardwalk there is a constant array of different colors that are created by minerals and bacteria. Each thermal feature is unique.











Some of the pools are small like the Chromatic Pool (above), but the nearby Beauty Pool (right) covers a larger area. Both have brilliant and similar colors.



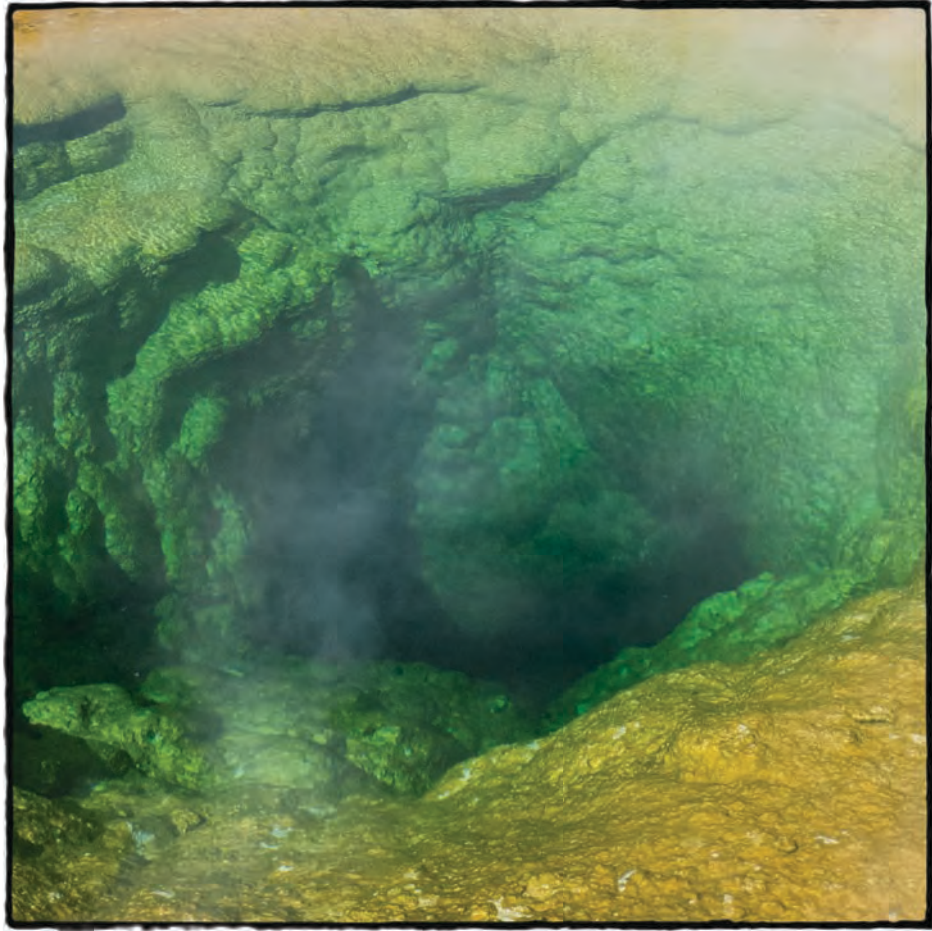




Grotto Geyser is hard to miss with its distinctive shapes.



Morning Glory Pool is one of the most photographed places in Yellowstone. People threw in coins for years and nearly plugged it up. The park cleaned it out and keep people away, but it will never be the same. (The sign noted that is was slowly losing its color and water.) The barriers make it hard to photograph today; 30 years ago there were no barriers.







Walking back to the Old Faithful Lodge is not as exciting, but the area still has lots of interesting views.



Castle Geyser is the last really outstanding geyser on the hike around the Old Faithful Geyser Loop. We sat for a while in anticipation of an eruption that was supposed to happen momentarily. But it waited until we left. It still has an impressive cone.







Across the highway from the Old Faithful is another area known as the Black Sand Basin. The Iron Spring Creek plays a major part in the scenic views we like to photograph here.







September 26, 2016

In 2004 this photograph of the Iron Spring Creek (right) was one of our favorites from the trip. This time we tried to replicate the picture, but didn't have the spectacular clouds of 2004.



September 19, 2004







Opalescent Pool in the Black Sands Basin.







Great Fountain Geyser was not erupting when we visited the area, but it still was a spectacular place to photograph.



White Dome Geyser



There were plenty of bison near the road when we went around the Firehole Lake Drive. In fact on this trip there were bison everywhere in Yellowstone. The population must be booming.



After three nights in Grant Village on Yellowstone Lake, we headed north towards Mammoth Hot Springs. The western road that we would normally have taken was the road closed for construction.

Every time we go to Mammoth Hot Springs it looks different. This area seems to be effected by earthquakes and water sources. An area that is gorgeous one year might be dried up the next year. And of course, the weather has a big impact on the sky and clouds. We had a beautiful, clear sky on this day - cloudless.

It is impossible to take bad photographs here. The lower terraces are mostly dried up, but drive up the hill to the upper terrace and there many new places that are coming alive with chemical and bacterial color.

A complex boardwalk allows you to walk out into places that were previously unavailable. The park service is doing a good job of making places accessible and safe for everyone. As we get older we appreciate not having to climb over boulders into unsafe areas - just to take an important photograph. But, we still do it when necessary.











This is one of the terraces that was previously not visible. The boardwalk allowed this view.



September 28, 2004



July 8, 2009



September 27, 2016

On the other hand, this view has hardly changed - just different cameras.



We left Mammoth Hot Springs and headed east across the northern roads of the park.

This is the place where wolf watchers gather in hopes of spotting the distant wolf packs that live here. We didn't see any wolves, but we spotted many other kinds of wildlife. There were deer stopped by the side of the road, big horned sheep, antelope, mountain goats, elk and an infinite number of bison. Except for moose and bear from previous trips, we saw more variety than ever before.

We retraced the side dirt road that we had so enjoyed in 2004. It was still a good side trip, but the color was nearly gone this far north. *(Autumn had been ahead of schedule this entire vacation - mostly to our benefit.)*

Then we headed further east towards the Northeast entrance/exit. We would spend the next two nights just outside the park here in the miniscule town of Silver Gate. To get there we passed through the rolling hills that make up the north eastern part of the park, past the Soda Butte Creek and bison, bison, bison. That evening and the next evening we would return for last views of Yellowstone.









Blacktail Plateau Drive was wonderous in 2004, but much of the color was gone this year, but still good.







Looking off towards wolf world.







July 8, 2009



September 28, 2016









Soda Butte Creek, bison and colorful Cottonwood trees in the Laramar Valley .





Silver Gate is just outside the park (which is mostly in Wyoming), but Silver Gate has a Montana address. It wasn't much of a town. Our motel was the Grizzley Lodge and it was not much of a motel. But it had a kitchen and a decent bed and was cheap compared to park rooms.





When you leave Silver Gate you head towards the Beartooth.











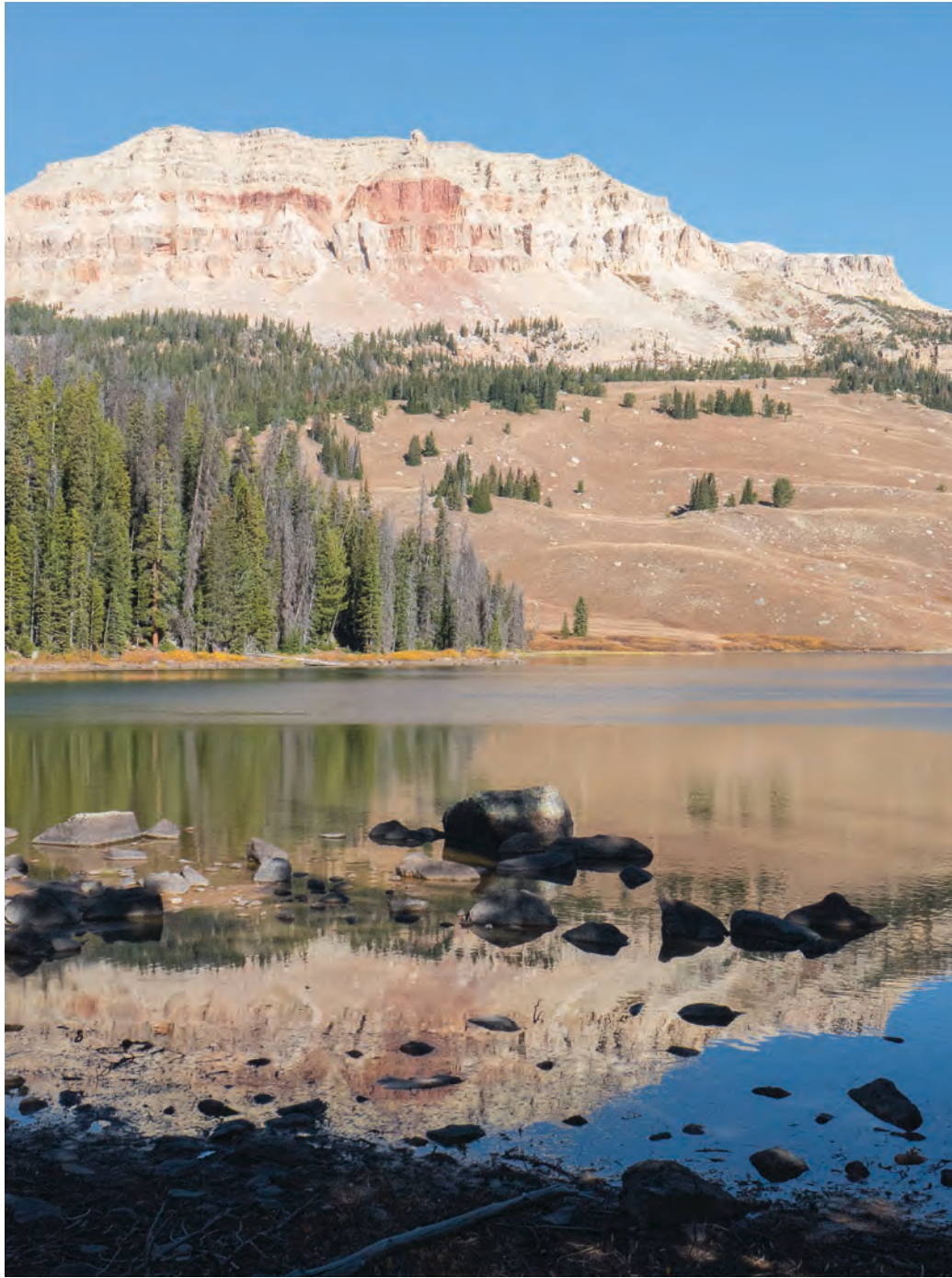
This trip to the Midwest was all about the Beartooth Highway. A friend of ours, Marge Weatherby, had driven over the Beartooth the previous year. We envied her; this road was a destination that we had wanted to go to for a long time. It was a wild and unique part of the United States known as the All American Road.

We kept tabs on the weather, since the slightest hint of snow closes the road. This was a possibility as we neared October. We had originally planned to take the road to its end, and then head towards home. The possibility of rain the next day changed our mind.

On a sunny day we drove over the Beartooth Highway up to 10,947 feet. The hairpin turns were legendary and were 10 mph speed worthy. And then we turned around and returned to Silver Gate for the night. We were relieved to be back safely.

Some of the places along the highway were unexpected. There were lakes: Beartooth Lake, Island Lake and Gardner Lake. The Top of the World Store and a huge snowplow were the only signs of civilization.







Beartooth Lake was a surprising and beautiful place on our drive along the highway.











Further along we stopped at Island Lake.





Above the tree line it was really windy, but we were at over 10,000 feet.









Looking down into Gardner Lake.





The road looks almost straight here, but not for long.





This is a safe inside hairpin turn.











East of Silver Gate is the Beartooth Highway, but before you go very far there is another road that heads south towards Cody, Wyoming. This road is called the Chief Joseph Scenic Highway. We had never heard of it, but it really added to our trip. A part of the history of the Nez Perce tribe was made on this trail through these mountains before the road ever existed. The scenery was different from the Beartooth, but equally good.

















Near the end of the highway we drove along an area that followed a steep, rocky cliff. There was no grass in sight, but despite that a silly cow walked along the road with all of the traffic.





The land opened up as we neared Cody, but still no civilization.







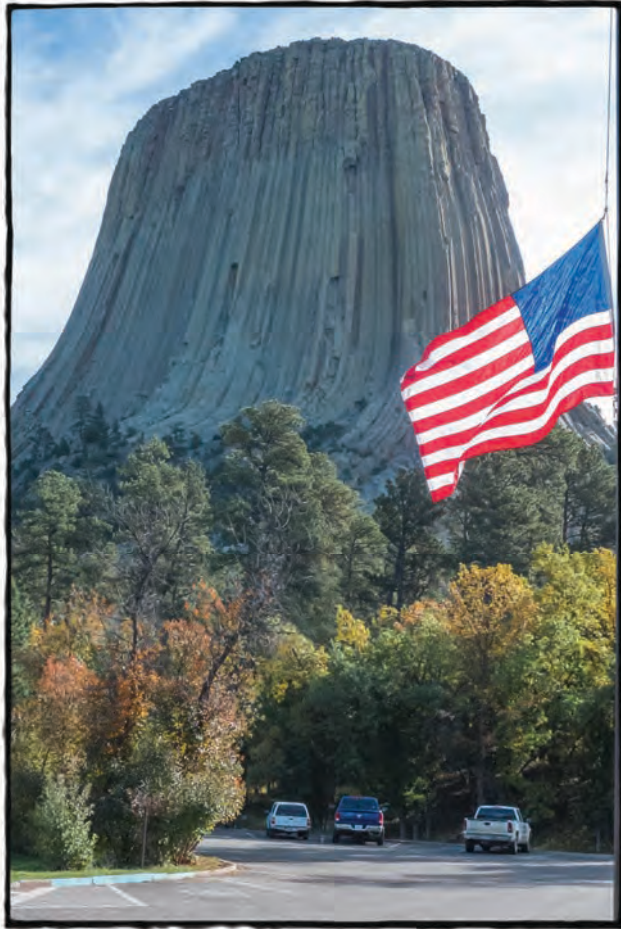




This wagon with supplies was in the middle of the road.



We went through a mountainous area where it had recently snowed.



One of the places that we really wanted to visit on this trip was Devil's Tower National Monument. Our only other visit was on the trip West in 1986. It was an essential stop then, also. The movie, "Close Encounters of a Third Kind," had recently come out, and that movie was built around Devil's Tower. It was mostly unknown to most people before then.

Reaching Devil's Tower is not direct. Mostly uninhabited back roads lead off the Interstate towards the monument. It seems like an endless drive. Jim's mother, Sally Gardner, drove a dirt road to Devil's Tower in 1932. Other than today's paved road, the drive is no different today.

When we arrived in 1986 it was late in the day. We watched the sun setting behind the sky. There was no visitor center then - nothing nearby that was civilized at all. Down the road we finally found a place where we could get a bite to eat.

Today there is a small visitor center, and nearby a couple of modern tourist places aimed at taking your money for unneeded souvenirs. Down the road exists the place we ate in '86 (*slightly improved*).



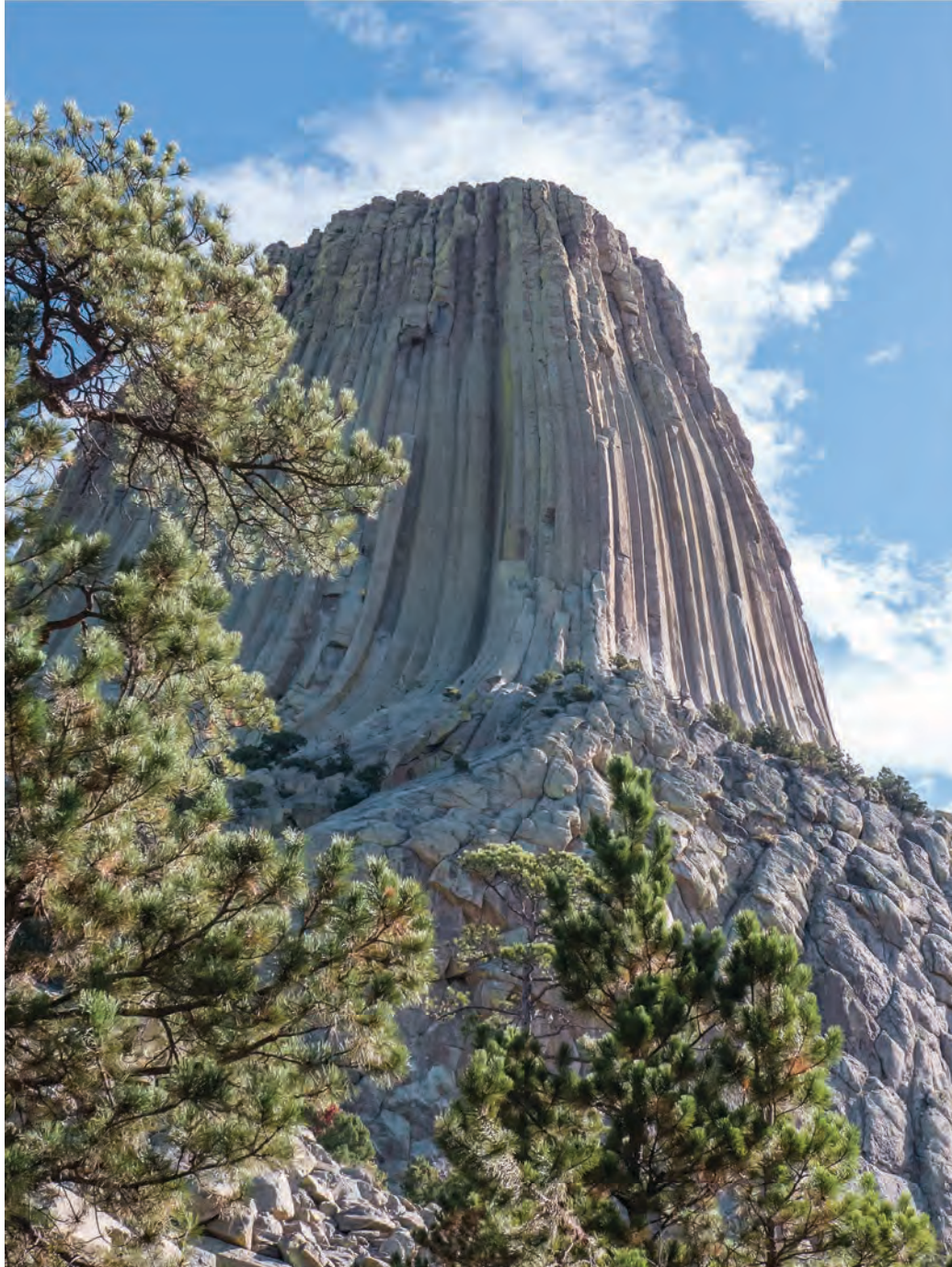
Devil's Tower



In 1932 Jim's mother took a trip out west with two friends. Her car was primitive (by today's standards), the roads were dirt, but the first glimpse of Devil's Tower then is almost the same as today. Devil's Tower is still in a very remote and unpopulated location. (This is Sally's 1932 photograph.)

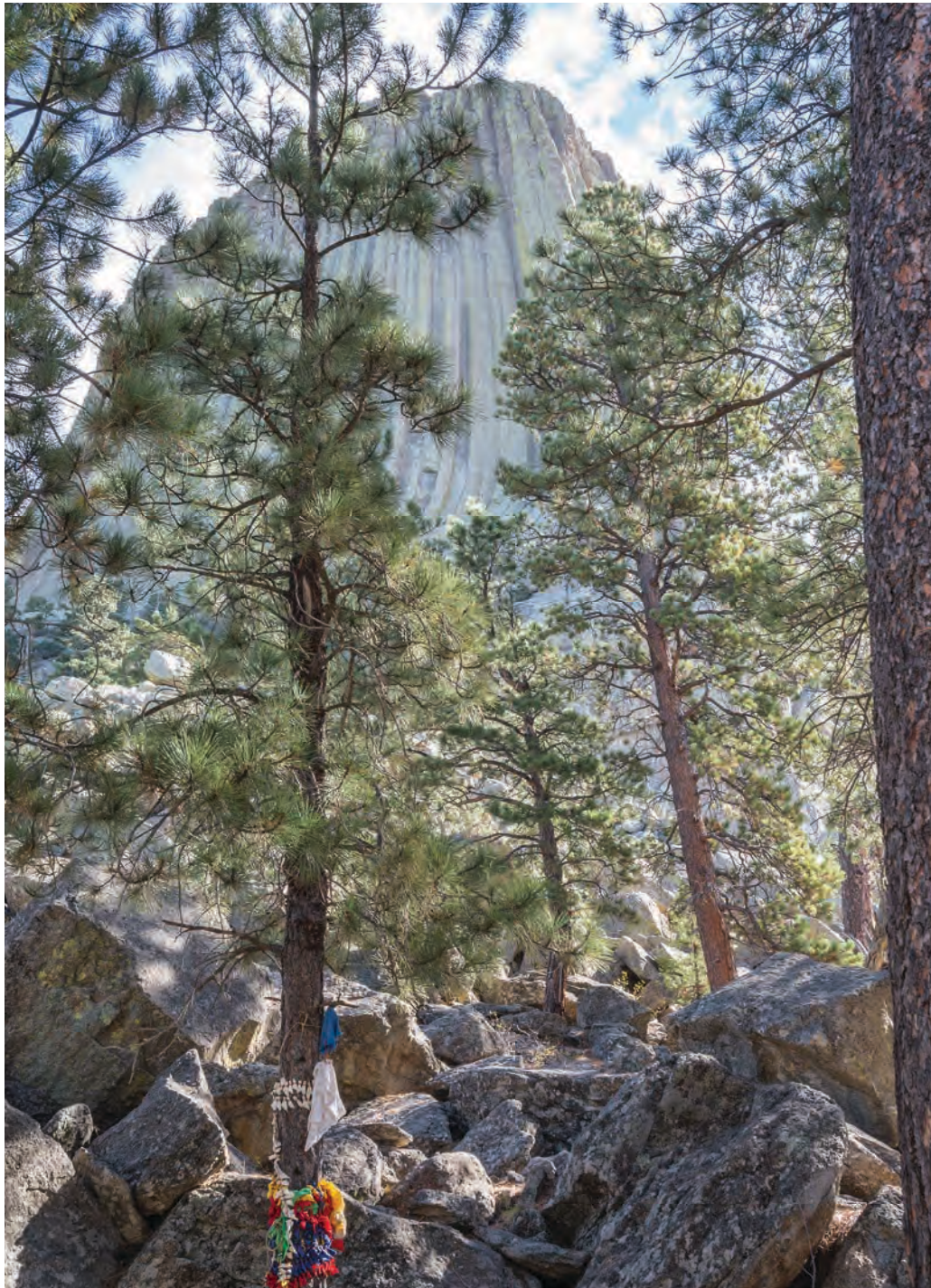


Approaching Devil's Tower in 2016 - 84 years later.



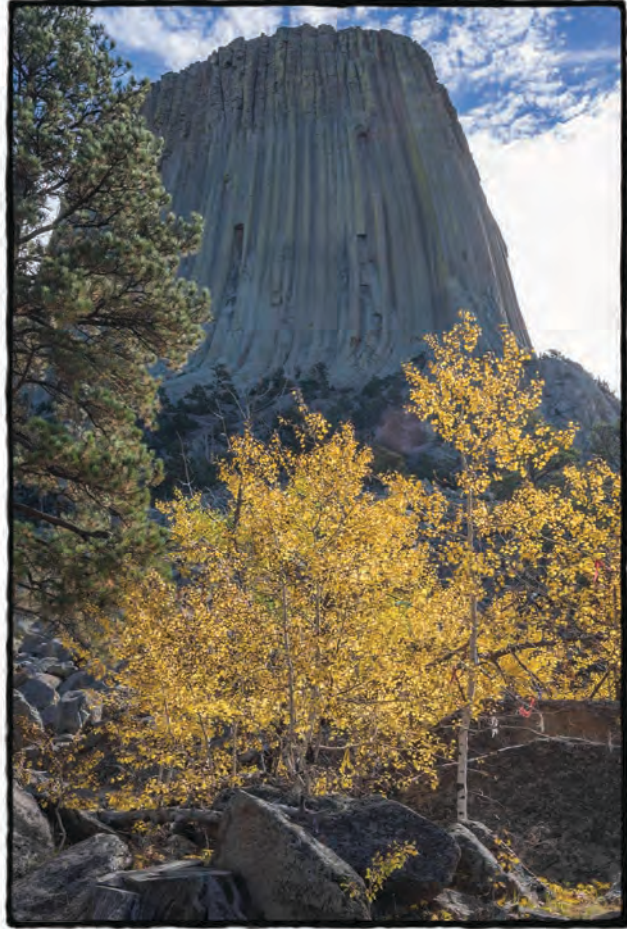
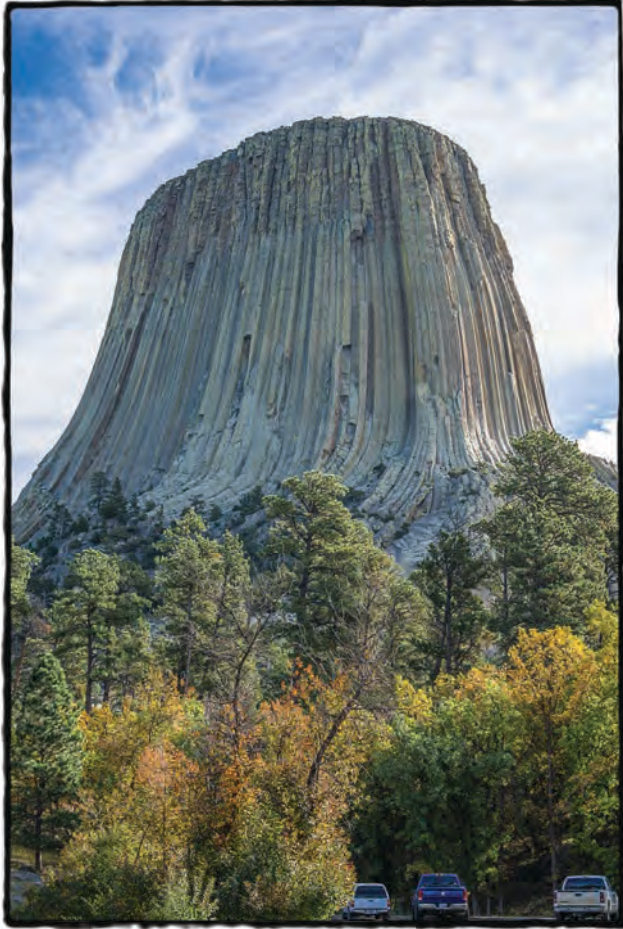


We could fill a book with just the photographs of Devil's Tower that we took on this trip. It was hard to choose.





A film photo of Devil's Tower from 1986.





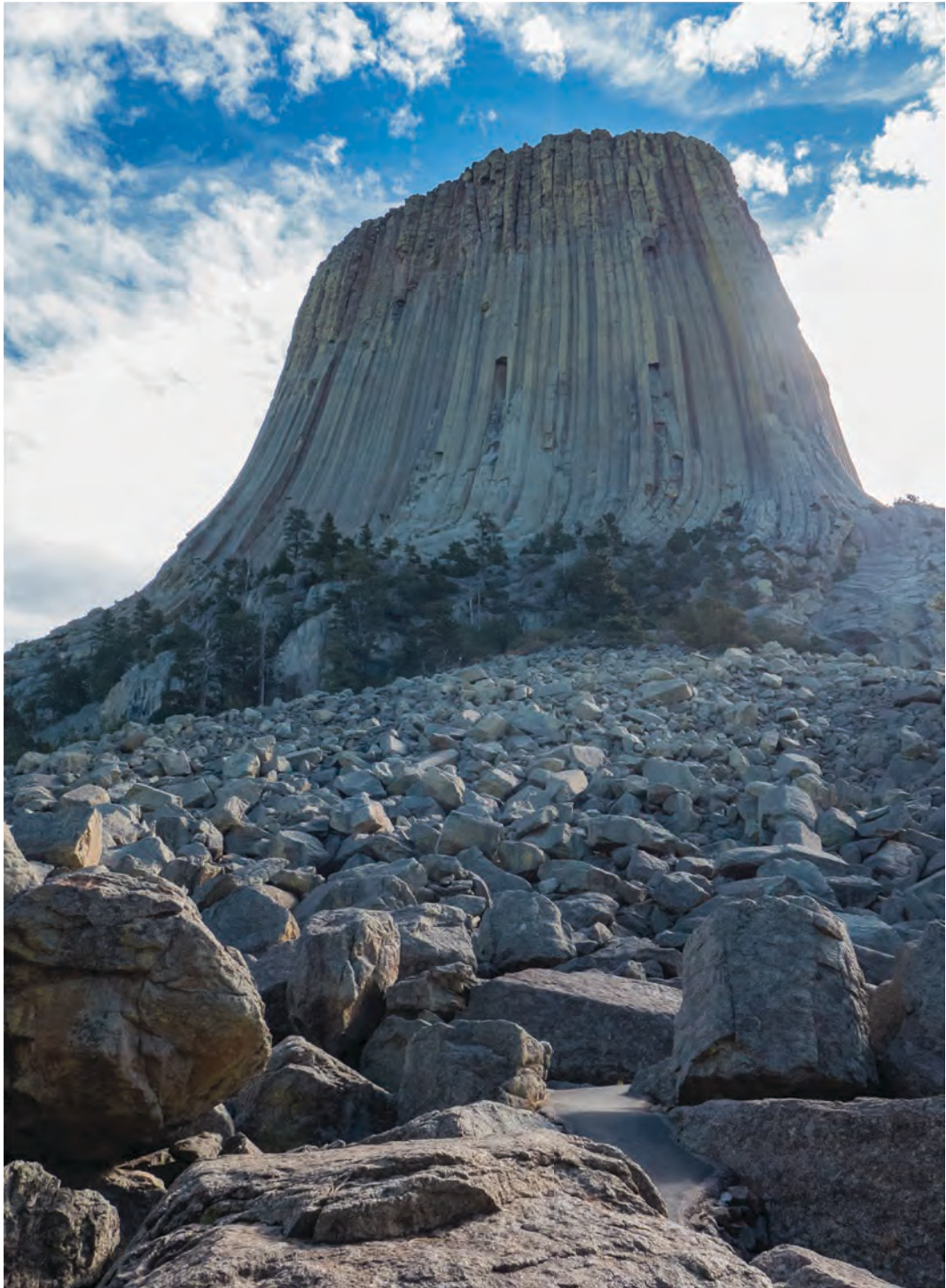
Throughout the woods at the rocky base of the tower are prayer flags, that were placed there by Native Americans (who consider this a holy site).



It is also a special site to rock climbers, who love the challenge of making it to the top of this monolith.



On June 25, 1986 Rachael, Marcia and Sarah are taking an early evening stroll around the base of Devil's Tower. The place was empty and remote. When we left we had to search for a place to eat supper. (Our meal cost us \$32.00; our motel cost \$46.00 for two rooms, and we put 11 gallons of gas in the car for \$11.00 - we kept good records even then.)





The restaurant where we ate in '86 located at Devil's Tower Junction.



Hulett, Wyoming





We left Devil's Tower by a back road and finally came to the town of Hulett, Wyoming (and a gas station). This road eventually led us into the Black Hills. And, we had a good look at the country here, away from the main highways.

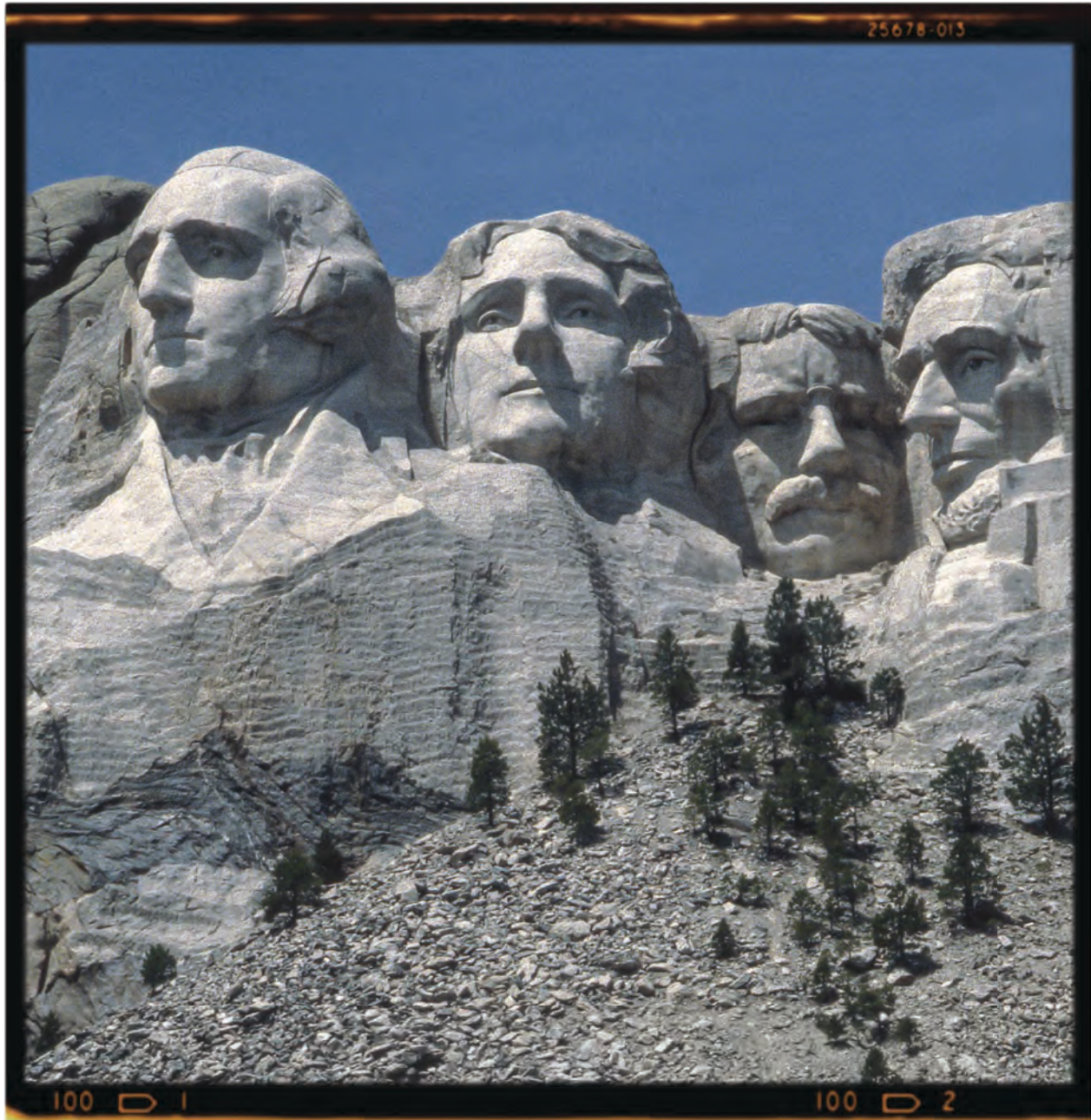




We arrived in the Black Hills via the Spearfish Canyon Scenic Byway with plenty of autumn color and a rushing stream next to the road. This was the gold rush country of the 1800's, but now featured Lead and Deadwood as a typical tourist towns. We bypassed the famous Black Hills sites of Mt. Rushmore and Crazy Horse in our hurry to reach the Badlands.



These photos of Mount Rushmore National Monument were taken in 1986 when we visited here with Sarah and Rachael on our big journey out West. On the day these were photographed the sky was fantastic and the light perfect - even if they are on "film."





When you leave Pine Ridge near the Badlands you arrive in Scenic. In 1986 Scenic was an unbelievable shanty town with a rundown church, jail and bar. We stopped the car and ran out with our cameras (*all four of us*). Rachael was standing near the bar when a couple of unsavory people walked out. Jim yelled get in the car - and away we went.

In 2016 we arrived in Scenic via the Black Hills. All of the buildings were still standing, but this time the bar (*with is antelope skulls and hand painted sign*) was boarded up. No unsavory people appeared, so we leisurely photographed the scene... and remembered.

Welcome to Scenic! The first time we entered Scenic was in 1986 on our Western vacation with Sarah and Rachael. We'd gone to the AAA and had them plan where we were to go via a "triptik" (*No mapping systems in '86, just maps.*) *Marcia's grandmother had taught in Mission, South Dakota on the Rosebud Reservation, and we asked to have it included in our special map.* This took us off the main roads. We traveled the entire way across the Rosebud Reservation and then on through the Pine Ridge Reservation (*with its infamous history of Wounded Knee*). We then turned north in order to reach the Badlands National Park. It was desolate country that belonged to the Sioux Nation.





The Scenic jail



Rachael photographing (up close) the still open bar in Scenic, which really upset her dad.



Thirty years later the saloon was closed/boarded up in Scenic, and the sign was changed to read "old" Longhorn Saloon;" the NO was removed in front of the words "Indians allowed" ... Who knows when these changes were made.



South of the Badlands National Park is the boundary of the Pine Ridge Sioux Indian Reservation.



Grassland is what surrounds the badland dunes. Part of the remaining great prairie of the United States.



From Scenic you approach the Badlands National Park via its back door. The Sioux Nation owns most of the land on the southern side of the long road that you travel to reach the park. We ended up taking a short-cut dirt road into the park, and saw some really interesting views that we could have missed.









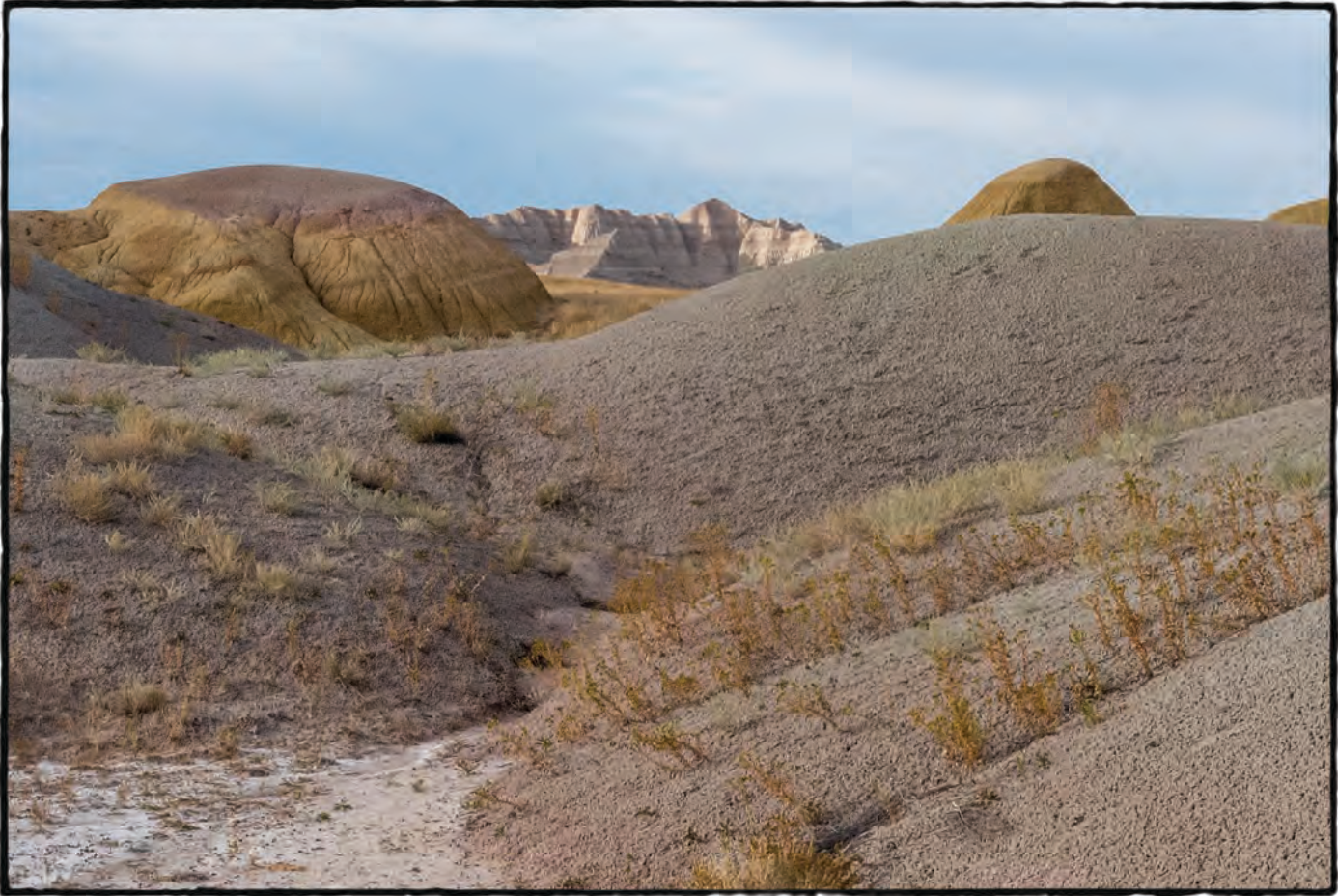




Autumn flowers added color to the landscape.











There are bison in the grassland sections of the park, but we didn't see any this time (we saw bison in 1986). There are also plenty of antelope, big horn sheep and prairie dogs.









The ancient "dunes" change color from one area to another. Sometimes the dominant color is yellow, sometimes pink and red, sometimes gray and white. Since we were in the park as the sun was setting, the colors were very changeable.











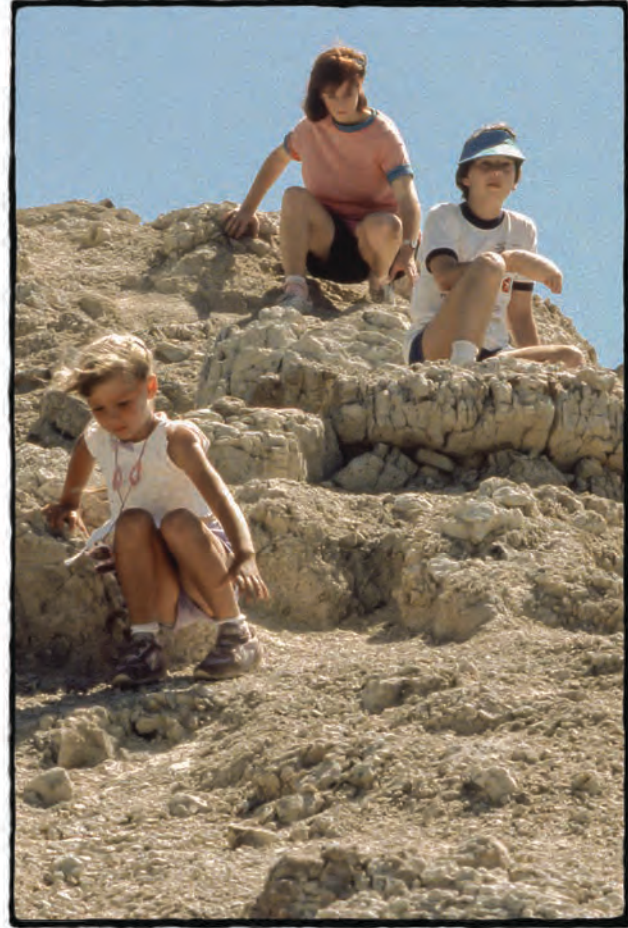
As we approached the Cedar Pass area of the park we reminisced about our stay at the Cedar Pass Lodge in 1986. We spent two nights in a relatively primitive cabin (it was the only place to stay) that was run by the Sioux Nation. In 2016 the cabins appear identical (maybe different inside) to the ones from 30 years ago. This definitely is not one of the high priority National Parks in the system. To us the park was visually spectacular (and quite different from the northern badlands of Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota).







This photo was taken in 2016, but the cottages look just like they did in 1986 - 30 years ago.



*Sarah and Rachael on top of a Badlands dune
June 1986 (note Rachael's wrapped up hand).*



Mitchell, South Dakota



The Corn Palace - 1986



The Corn Palace - 2016

In 1986, on our way out west, the drive from Pennsylvania was long and boring. Sarah and Rachael huddled in the back seat and ignored everything. Then... we arrived in Mitchell, South Dakota, where we planned to spend the night. It was here our explorations really began, as we spent the evening taking in the Corn Palace. It was a marvel of many colored corn kernels, and we didn't know it existed until we saw it in front of us. (We obviously had to revisit the Corn Palace in 2016 - this time at the end of our trip.)





EXPLORING - The Midwest in 2016 Book II

Photographs by Marcia & Jim Weikert



Designed using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom

We were not making books when we took our last big trip out west in 2011. We now realize that it is essential to “tell a story” with our books. This has led us to taking photographs “out the window of the car” to show the areas we have traveled through on our way to reaching the great destinations of our trip. We decided that this trip (*like our 2011 trip*) deserved two books. This is the second book from our 2016 trip to the Midwest. It covers Yellowstone National Park, the Beartooth Highway, Devils Tower National Monument, the Badlands National Park and the Corn Palace in Mitchell, SD.

