

NORTHWEST YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

As we had some difficulty getting parking spaces for many of the places we had visited the previous day, we left Gardiner early to arrive at the parking lot for Old Faithful around 9:00. Although this was not an incredibly early time to arrive, the gigantic parking lots were quite empty (when we left the area around noon, vehicles were waiting for parking spaces, so these lots fill up at midday despite their enormous size). Unfortunately, we missed Old Faithful's eruption twice, arriving just after it had erupted once we had parked and also on our way back from checking out the Upper Geyser Basin. Luckily, however, we did get to see an eruption of nearby Beehive Geyser, which has a typical eruption height of 200 ft, which is larger than Old Faithful's 106-185 ft. As Beehive erupts anywhere from 8 to 24 hours after the previous eruption (during the summer), it was nice that our visit to the Upper Geyser Basin area coincided with an eruption.

After visiting the Upper Geyser Basin, we also checked out the Midway Geyser Basin, most notably Grand Prismatic Spring, which is the third largest hot spring in the world (the largest is Frying Pan Lake, located in New Zealand; I noticed on this trip to Yellowstone that these geothermal areas have a much less sulfurous smell than those in New Zealand, at which it was often quite difficult to breathe). Most of Grand Prismatic Spring's vivid colors are caused by pigmented bacteria which live at different heat conditions; the intensity of the central blue color of the spring, where there are no bacteria, is caused by the high purity of the water due to its extreme heat—the reflection of more blue wavelengths occurs with increasingly pure water.

Our third stop was the Artist's Paint Pots, which were disappointing to see in person as they were not very colorful; however, the photos I took of that area with my iPhone seemed to turn out spectacular, and it appears deceptively colorful in this report.

From here, we briefly stopped at Sheepeater Cliff, which has basalt lava columns that look surprisingly similar to those in Devil's Postpile (near Mammoth Lakes and also Yosemite National Park).

We also visited the Mammoth Hot Springs, which seem to be becoming increasingly less spectacular over the years. Recent earthquake activity shifted the vent for the main hot spring, which caused the terraces to become drier in some locations; when water ceases to flow, no more travertine is being deposited by the hot mineral spring water and therefore soil can form on top of the travertine, upon which plants can begin to grow again. The colors of the hot springs are due to algae living in the warm pools.

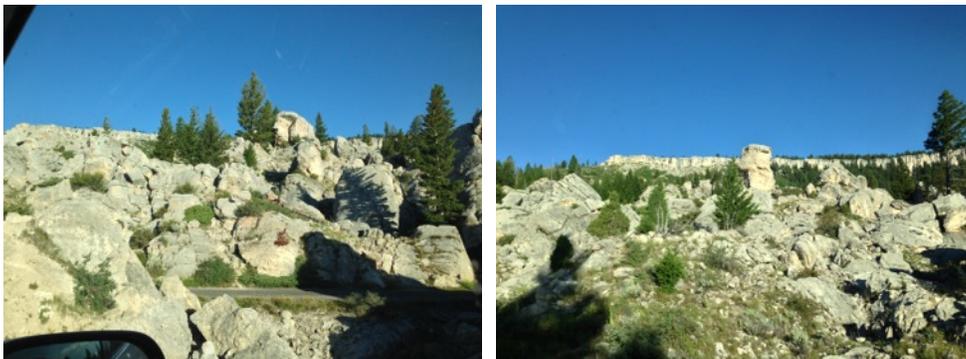
Driving by Roosevelt Arch again:



An interesting hoodoo-like formation below Mammoth Hot Springs:



These are the hoodoos, as labeled on the 1983 Trails Illustrated TOPO map (unfortunately this is the only TOPO of this area which I had on this trip); there is a short turnout which goes through these rock formations, but I'm not sure if there are any hiking trails which take off from this turnout:



While driving through Yellowstone National Park, we often noticed peaks in the distance which would be very nice to hike to the top of and get a view:



We also noticed while driving through the park in the morning (when there was not direct sunlight and the air temperatures were cool) many areas where lots of steam was rising from the ground or from streams:



After arriving at the Old Faithful area (the Upper Geyser Basin), we first walked to the top of Observation Point; there were some trees at the height of the viewpoint which prevented getting a view of much more than just Old Faithful:



Looking down towards the rest of the Upper Geyser Basin:



Another view towards the Old Faithful tourist complex:



This is the best view I could find of the main Old Faithful area and Geyser Hill:



It was somewhat breezy in this area, so blowing dust was common on the Observation Point trail:



After leaving the Observation Point trail, we checked out the north/eastern part of the Geyser Hill loop:



There were a lot of places where steam was rising from the ground:



Giantess Geysir:



I think the blue pool to the left in the photo is Vault Geyser:



This cone-shaped mound is Teakettle Spring:



Pump Geysler:



Sponge Geysler:



These bacterial mats seem to be common in Yellowstone geothermal areas:



Continuing along the boardwalk; luckily we were here early enough in the day that the boardwalks weren't too crowded yet with tourists:



Doublet Pool:



Aurum Geyser (named such because of the golden color from iron oxide around the vent):



Beach Spring:



North Goggles Geyser in front, with Goggles Spring just behind and the Lion Group rising behind both:



Continuing along the boardwalk after leaving Geysir Hill, we see some geysers with larger cones, but the geothermal features are less concentrated:



Castle Geyser can be seen in the distance; unfortunately, we did not have time to see everything in the Upper Geyser Basin, so we did not walk over to see this geyser closer:



Nice pool; I'm not sure what its name is:



The twin vents of Spasmodic Geysler:



I think this one is Oval Spring:



Grand Geysler in the background, with part of West Triplet Geysler visible on the bottom right:



Beauty Pool:



Another view of Beauty Pool:



Informative sign about Beauty and Chromatic Pools; the colors in each "ring" around the pools are due to the types of organisms which can survive in those temperatures. Reddish colors are due to protozoa which can survive at temperatures up to 133 degrees Fahrenheit, green colors are due to algae and fungi (140 and 144 °F, respectively), yellow colors are due to cyanobacteria (163 °F), and blue is partially due to archaea (199 °F, the boiling point at this elevation) and partially due to the increasing absorption of red wavelengths with more pure water:



Chromatic Spring:



Continuing along the boardwalk, we see a number of interesting features off of the main boardwalk:



Up ahead is the geyser group near Giant Geysers:



It always seems interesting to me to see a green meadow, as one would expect in this area, and then a geothermal area just beyond, with no apparent transition between the two:



The Giant Geysers group, with Giant Geysers to the right (the largest cone), and the other three (from left to right) being Bijou, Catfish, and Mastiff Geysers:



The most recent eruption of Giant Geysir was on January 22, 2010:



The information sign next to Giant Geysir; it appears that this geyser may be thousands of years old, due to the size of its cone:



Grotto Geysir; from here, we decided to head back towards Old Faithful, as we would arrive in sight of it just before it was scheduled to erupt next:



Photo of Sawmill Geysir, which was too crowded by tourists on our trip out to get photographs of:



Another photo of the Lion Group:



Heart Spring:



We had just missed Old Faithful's eruption, but we did get to see an eruption of Beehive Geyser; in this photo, Beehive's Indicator Geyser, which is a side channel off of the main vent, is shooting up water just to the right of Beehive itself:



The next three photos show Beehive's eruption. As there were a lot of tourists photographing the geyser, it was difficult to get a good photo angle due to the crowds; additionally, it was a windy day, so water from the eruption hit the boardwalk (and the tourists), and, if the wind direction changed, the crowds surged away from the water. This geyser's eruption is spectacular, as it reaches heights of up to 200 feet! The photo on the left is when the geyser's eruption is gaining height, the one in the middle is of its highest phase, and the one on the right is as the eruption was tapering off. Notice that the indicator geyser is still going in the first and second photos, but it is not going off in the last photo (I'm assuming this is because the pressure is being released so no water is coming out of the side channel):



Continuing along the trail after seeing Beehive's eruption; these are the two vents of Anemone Geyser:



I'm not sure of the name of this one:



Pouroff from Cascade Geyser into the Firehole River:



We decided to next check out the Old Faithful Inn; this is an interesting panorama looking up from the ground floor of the inn:



The Crow's Nest, which is now closed to visitors:



Due to an earthquake, the Crow's Nest was deemed unsafe to ascend:



Another panorama of the interior of the Old Faithful Inn:



This clock was very well crafted, and is quite interesting to look at, as its inner workings can be seen easily:



Our next stop was the Midway Geyser Basin; this is the view looking along the Firehole River, away from the geyser basin but near where we parked (as this area is so popular, there was almost no chance of getting a parking place in the main lot, and there were lots of vehicles parked in no-parking zones along the road; therefore, we ended up parking in a turnout a little distance down the main road):

