

Up ahead, we see that the trees are thinning out substantially, and we are approaching a large bowl below the peak:



Panorama after we leave the trees; the main trail continues to the left, switchbacks up and around the small peak in the foreground, then ascends to the main peak, Avalanche Peak, seen in the center of the photo. It appears that it is also possible to follow the ridge to the right, as we saw a trail leaving the top in that direction, although we did not take that trail ourselves and therefore I cannot confirm that a route on that side does really exist:



Panorama looking south, with Hoyt Peak in front to the left, and Top Notch Peak the prominent peak in the center:



After a lunch (of stale Jalapeño and cheese pizza bagels from Jackson WY, which is where we stocked up on food before heading to Yellowstone), we continued up the trail. There were even more flowers along this part of the trail, which made for some good wildflower photography:



This second part of the trail has some steep stretches, but overall it did not seem quite as steep as the earlier part, and therefore I think that where the trail reaches the bowl beneath the peak is the halfway point in trail distance only, rather than in elevation gain:



Luckily the wildflowers are showing up in these photos better than they did in previous ones, likely because of the somewhat contrasting rocky area that they are growing on rather than the green grassy meadows:



Two more photos of wildflowers by the trail as we continued on towards the summit:



The trail crosses a steep talus slope here, but luckily the route is very well maintained and appears to be heavily travelled, so that there is absolutely no difficulty in hiking here:



As we ascend higher, we get an increasingly better view of peaks in this area, as well as of a nice alpine lake (just below the peak to the right in this photo, Top Notch Peak):



Looking down this steep mountainside at the multitudes of wildflowers we are passing through here:



View up the valley towards Sylvan Pass:



Purple seemed to be the predominant wildflower color through here, whereas yellow had been more common further down:



Panorama of our first glimpse of Yellowstone Lake on our hike; note Grizzly Peak is visible in the nearer set of mountains just to the left of the lake:



The trail switchbacks here, as we are getting closer to the top:



There was a very faint trail heading straight from the corner of the switchback; perhaps another route to the summit, or a route down to the main road, or maybe just to an overlook:



The trail does have some slippery sections of dirt as we continue on:



We are constantly getting spectacular views of the surrounding mountains from the trail at this point:



The views make the steepness of the trail seem hardly noticeable:



Finally, we reach a flatter area, from which we can see possible routes to the summit (there are multiple trails to the top after leaving this area):



Panorama looking back towards Hoyt Peak from in the middle of this flatter area:



Up ahead, we assess the routes to the summit; on our way up, we took the leftmost route as it appeared to be the most direct to the ridge; however, the wind along this trail was ferocious, reaching speeds probably over 60 mph, and it was difficult to stay standing, let alone stay on the trail, when walking at angles to the wind. Therefore, on our trip back, we took the middle route, which was the most worn-in and had much less wind:



Looking ahead up our route to the ridge:



We stopped at a rocky windbreak for a brief respite from the wind, and had this spectacular view of the mountain peaks and Yellowstone Lake:



The ridge is in sight:



Small flowers, probably the only plant life that could handle such winds in this rocky ground:



Along the ridge the wind was a little less; it was possible to walk without always feeling like one was going to be blown off of the peak, but the wind still was a nuisance:



This is the viewpoint from which most hikers taking the middle trail seemed to turn around, as it was their first encounter with the substantial wind blowing at the top; however, the peak seen at the far end of the trail to the left in the photo has better views (and there is less wind in the small saddle between this spot and the end of the trail):



Looking down at the bowl below Avalanche Peak, and also out towards Yellowstone Lake along the ridge to the right:



Looking down towards the road and Yellowstone Lake on the other side of the peak from the side we ascended:



Looking back along the ridge we have followed; it appears there is a trail on this northwest side of the peak, which I spotted in this photo but did not see when we were hiking:



Another view looking towards Yellowstone Lake from further along the ridge:



Looking towards Hoyt Peak; it appears that there is at least a use trail to the top of that peak, and it would have been another nice hike to do if we had more time to spend in this area:



There definitely appears to be a well-used trail down this northeast side of the ridge; however, as we were already going to be driving back to Gardiner late in the day, we were hesitant to try an unknown route:



Panorama from the end of the main trail, looking in to the North Absaroka Wilderness:



Panorama with Yellowstone Lake to the left, and two well-built rock shelters seen to the right:



Panorama with Yellowstone Lake to the right and Hoyt Peak to the far left:



This begging chipmunk seemed to have unfortunately been fed by many tourists:



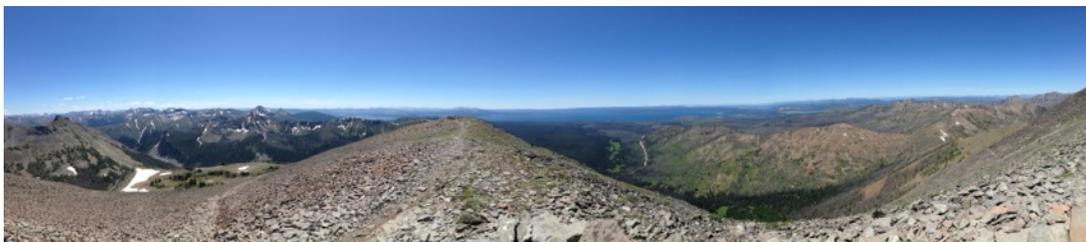
Two more panoramas from the top before we headed back down the trail:



This was another rock shelter on the ridge, located at the top of the middle trail:



Panorama from this rock shelter:



The middle trail certainly was much less windy than the trail we had taken to the top:



This trail even passed through a nice grassy area with some small wildflowers:



Wildflowers on the side of the trail, with Top Notch Peak in the background:



Grizzly Peak, with Yellowstone Lake behind it and Sylvan Lake below:



Panorama of wildflowers and peaks on our way back down the trail; note that the meadow we passed through on the way up, as well as the parking lot, can be seen in this photo. Interestingly, there did not appear to be many vehicles in the lot when we looked down from this spot, but there was one car parked in the lot but not in an actual parking space when we returned from the hike, so there may have been some hikers who started out but did not make it to the top:



Looking over towards Hoyt Peak as we lose elevation and are no longer at a comparable height (10,566 ft for Avalanche Peak, versus 10,506 ft for Hoyt Peak):



This is likely where a route down the other side of Avalanche Peak would rejoin the main trail, as well as where a route to the top of Hoyt Peak would take off:



Nice flower along the trail on the way down:



After reaching the parking lot, we drove back towards Gardiner, passing massive traffic jams of tourists photographing buffalo along the way:



Photo from near the Washburn Hot Springs Overlook (just south of Dunraven Pass) looking southeast towards the barely-visible mountain range containing Avalanche Peak:

