

# A Beary Special April in Yellowstone



By Jonathan G. Way

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# E-book

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



# Pay it Forward

Dear Reader,

Seeing a grizzly bear is a powerful thing. Since the first humans appeared in North America, people have revered, feared, and admired this magnificent animal. Seeing one can be a life changing experience. I observed at least one grizzly on all 9 days of this trip, which was amazing and is the core story of this e-book.

Yellowstone is normally in transition from winter to spring during most of April, so sightings and temperatures can vary from one trip to another. My [April trip in 2021](#) consisted of a lot of mud on the landscape, as the snow was melting during most of my time there. This trip, during April 2023, was much colder; most of the ground was still covered in snow. Despite having officially been spring for a month by that point, it felt more like winter for most of my week and a half there. Because of a long cold season, many ungulates, which are hoofed animals, died. Most notably were the bison. Each carcass produced a large amount of food for the carnivores that found them. Some of these were close to the park road, with a dead bison at Blacktail Ponds being the most visible.

Grizzly bear #769, numbered by park management staff, was already at that carcass site for a few days before I arrived and for 8 of my 9 days in the park. Yes, he spent about two full weeks at a single bison carcass! His presence was easily the cornerstone of this trip. You will see hundreds of pictures related to this bruin, in addition to the other abundant wildlife and gorgeous scenery associated with Yellowstone.

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

Thanks in advance!

A super closeup of Bruin 769!





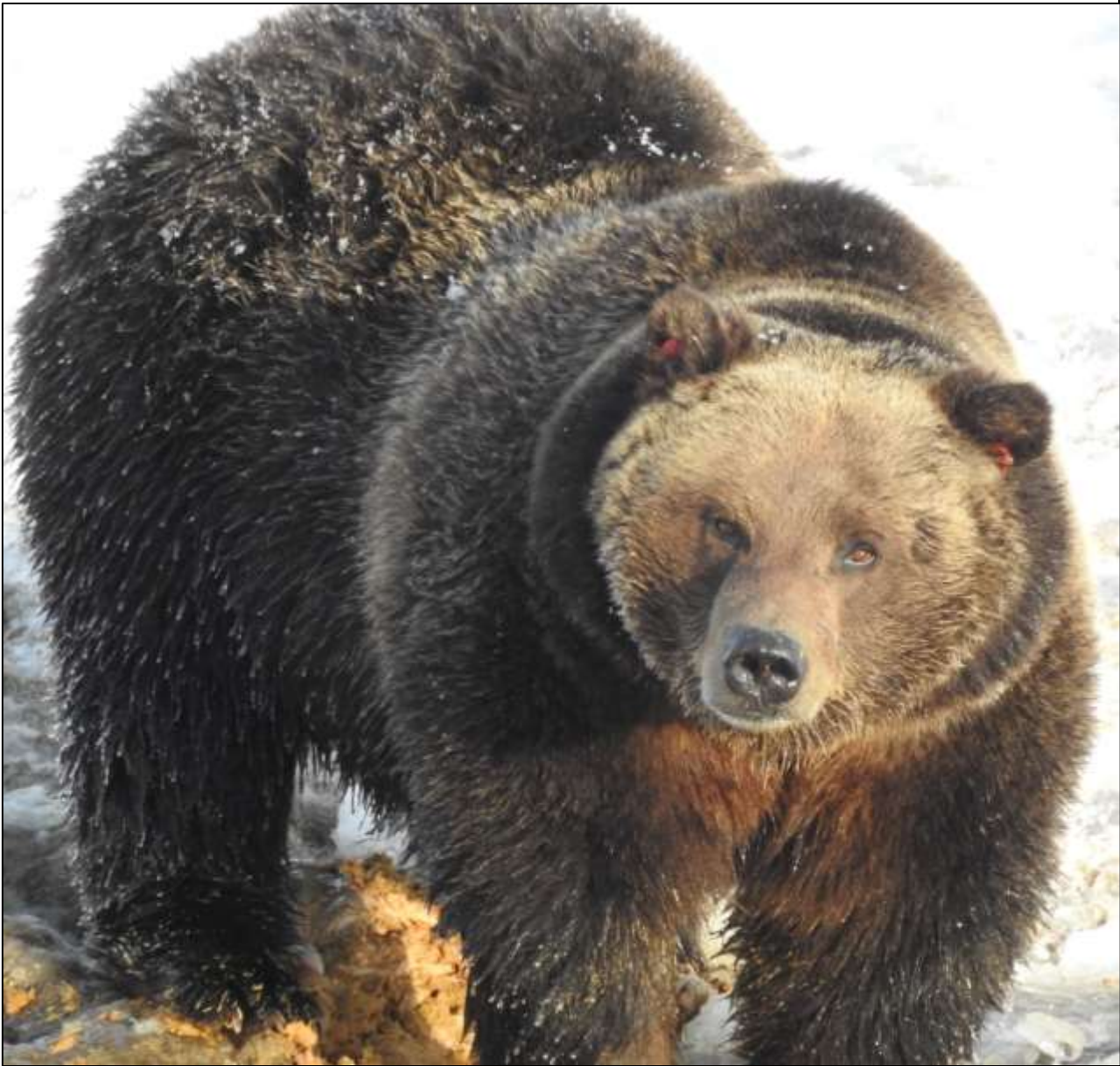
# Dedication

To grizzly bear 769, for your unwavering patience around us humans, I dedicate this book. Your two weeks on the Blacktail was a highlight of my and many other peoples' Yellowstone experience, if not our lives. Without your ubiquitous presence during that time, this book would not be possible in its present form. Also, a continued thank you to my friends and colleagues Bob Crabtree and Bob Landis for their generosity in helping to make this expedition possible.

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Grizzly bears have been revered, feared, and admired over



humanities' time on Earth alongside them.





# Preface and Acknowledgements

Seeing a grizzly bear is a powerful thing. Since the first humans appeared in North America, people have revered, feared, and appreciated this magnificent animal. Seeing one can be a life changing experience; it is always at the top of peoples' lists for desired wildlife to see in the park. I observed at least one grizzly on all 9 days of my trip. The experience, especially of watching one griz in particular, was amazing and is the core story of this e-book.

Yellowstone is normally in transition from winter to spring during most of April, so sightings and temperatures can vary from one trip to another. For instance, my [April trip in 2021](#) consisted of a lot of mud on the landscape as snow was melting during most of my days there. This trip, from April 14-22, 2023 was much colder with most of the ground still covered in snow.

Steve Cifuni, my good friend and frequent travel companion, went on the expedition with me. He continues to be instrumental in keeping me motivated to visit all the places that we do during our many trips to the park and elsewhere together. I had the fortune, like I do on all my other trips, of leaving my vehicle at Steve's parents' house in Revere, Massachusetts. We were driven to Logan Airport at 4:30 AM on April 14, 2023 by his father.

We arrived in Bozeman, Montana, via a connecting flight from Salt Lake City, Utah, at 12:15 PM Mountain Time. There, Melissa Todd picked us up and brought us to YERC's ([Yellowstone Ecological Research Center](#)) office in Bozeman. Melissa works for my good friend and top-related biologist, Dr. Bob Crabtree. Bob founded and continues to run YERC. Bob generously let us borrow one of his fleet's cars, an old Honda CRV that I have come to love like my own vehicle. It is nearly 20 years old and still runs like a charm.

Bob Landis, friend and cinematographer extraordinaire, again offered us housing in Gardiner, Montana like he has done many times in the past. This town is located in a stunning, high elevation desert area just outside the northern boundary of the park. I greatly appreciate the generosity of both Bobs to make our trip possible.

This was my 27th trip to the world's first national park. After all these visits and 243 days in the park, I have garnered a detailed knowledge of the area which helps to put my experiences into context. This book marks [my 8<sup>th</sup> related to Yellowstone](#) (1 print book and 7 e-books). However, it was my first trip since visiting the park in [winter \(late February – early March\) 2022](#), 13.5 months previously. The park saw record flooding in June 2022 which closed access to much of the park, especially where we spend the most time.

Road crews, amazingly, repaired much of the damage in the southern part of the park in about a week but it took until October to fix the washed-out roads connecting the towns of Gardiner and Silver Gate/Cooke City, Montana to the park. By that point, I had work obligations straight through until the winter, which led to the April timeline.

Despite having been spring already for a month, it was still cold. Because of a long winter, many ungulates, which are hoofed animals, died. Most notably were bison, which produce a large amount of food for the carnivores that find them. Some of these were close to the park road, with one carcass at Blacktail Ponds being the most visible. Grizzly bear #769, who was numbered by park management staff, was at this carcass site for a few days before I arrived and for 8 of our 9 days in the park. Thus, this bruin spent about two full weeks at a single bison carcass. His presence was easily the cornerstone of this visit. You will see hundreds of pictures related to him, in addition to the other abundant wildlife and gorgeous scenery associated with Yellowstone.

This journey was unusual compared to some of my past trips to the park in that the wildlife watchers were often spread out looking for different things, due mainly to the incredible grizzly bear sightings, while others focused more on seeing wolves. I want to also thank all the visitors and employees of the park who aided with our wildlife sightings. Chief among them is Rick McIntyre, wolf watcher extraordinaire and former National Park Service employee, who I have featured in all of my other Yellowstone books. Rick has had over 100,000 wolf sightings in Yellowstone and is widely regarded as the person who has [observed the most wolves of anybody in history](#)! Wolf Project technicians Jeremy SunderRaj and Taylor (Bland) Rabb always provide a mountain of information on the park's wolves and other wildlife. My story would not be as complete without their knowledge. On this trip, we also spent considerable time with Bob Landis and other people during most mornings to observe the grizzly boar before we moved elsewhere.

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



This project came about, in part, because many of my Facebook friends (including family members) continue to be absorbed with the pictures that I post when I travel. I always appreciate their comments and support over the years which has given me the motivation to publish many of these manuscripts. E-books are the easiest and by far cheapest way of producing these pictorial tomes. These social media posts gave me the outline for this endeavor. The following Facebook posts were made during (or after) this trip:

Day 1: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161088666135016>

Day 2: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161091645600016>

Day 3: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161097661910016>

Day 4 (update my cover picture): <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/2191475294465557:2191475294465557>

Also: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161104888015016>

Day 5 (posted 5 days later, on 4/23): <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161110536250016>

Day 6 (posted 4/29): <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161123198425016>

Day 7 (posted 5/20): <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161168194685016>

Day 8 (posted 5/29): <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10161187206100016>

Day 9: I never made a Facebook post on this day and use my notes and pictures to produce this chapter.

Herein, I detail those 9 days in the park from start to finish in complete and greater detail than these previous sources. During the expedition, I took 1,614 images with the vast majority being pictures, along with 53 videos. I use my top 1,106 photographs herein. In addition to those Facebook posts, I also referred to the 27 pages of journal notes that I took while in the park to flesh out this story. My mother, Robin Way, copy-edited the text to make it more professional, as she always does, as did Ken Smith of Camp Oot-Oot, Maine. I greatly appreciate them! Also, the National Park Service provided useful maps to help direct readers to important locations that I visited.

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

# Maps of Places Visited

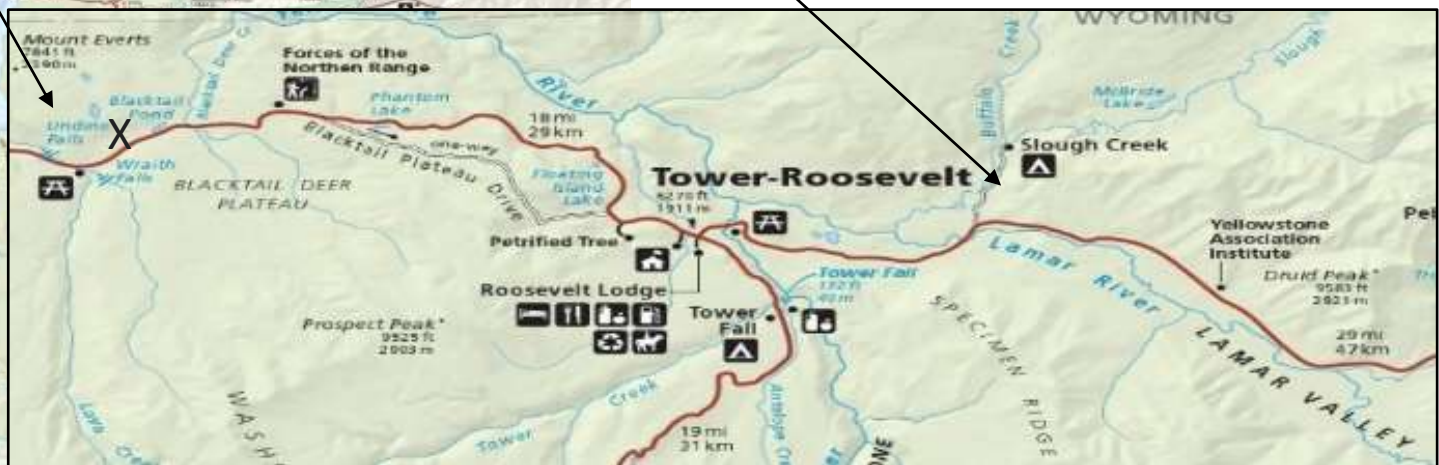
During winter and early spring, most of the park is closed with only the road from Gardiner (where we stayed) to Mammoth to Silver Gate/Cooke City open. However, at the end of this trip the park opened from Mammoth to Norris to Canyon and Norris to Old Faithful for the season, whereas the southern and east-central sections remained closed. We spent the majority of our time on this expedition in the northern part of the park.







A more detailed map of where we spent most of our time while in the park. Due to bear and wolf activity, we concentrated our activity between Blacktail Plateau and Slough Creek/Little America (see inset map below). The “X” on the inset denotes where we watched grizzly bear 769 at Blacktail Ponds. Map © of the National Park Service.



**Visiting Yellowstone National Park**  
Road construction is underway on park roads. Check the park website, [www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell), or phone 800-845-3377 for delays or closures.  
**Speed Limit**  
In park, unless otherwise posted, please drive slowly and carefully to protect yourself and wildlife.  
**Winter Road Closures**  
From early November to early April most park roads are closed. See [www.nps.gov/yell/places/roads.htm](http://www.nps.gov/yell/places/roads.htm) for details.  
**From mid-December to mid-March**, certain areas may be used only as the unplowed, groomed park roads. Call park headquarters for regulations on park road use during winter operations.





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



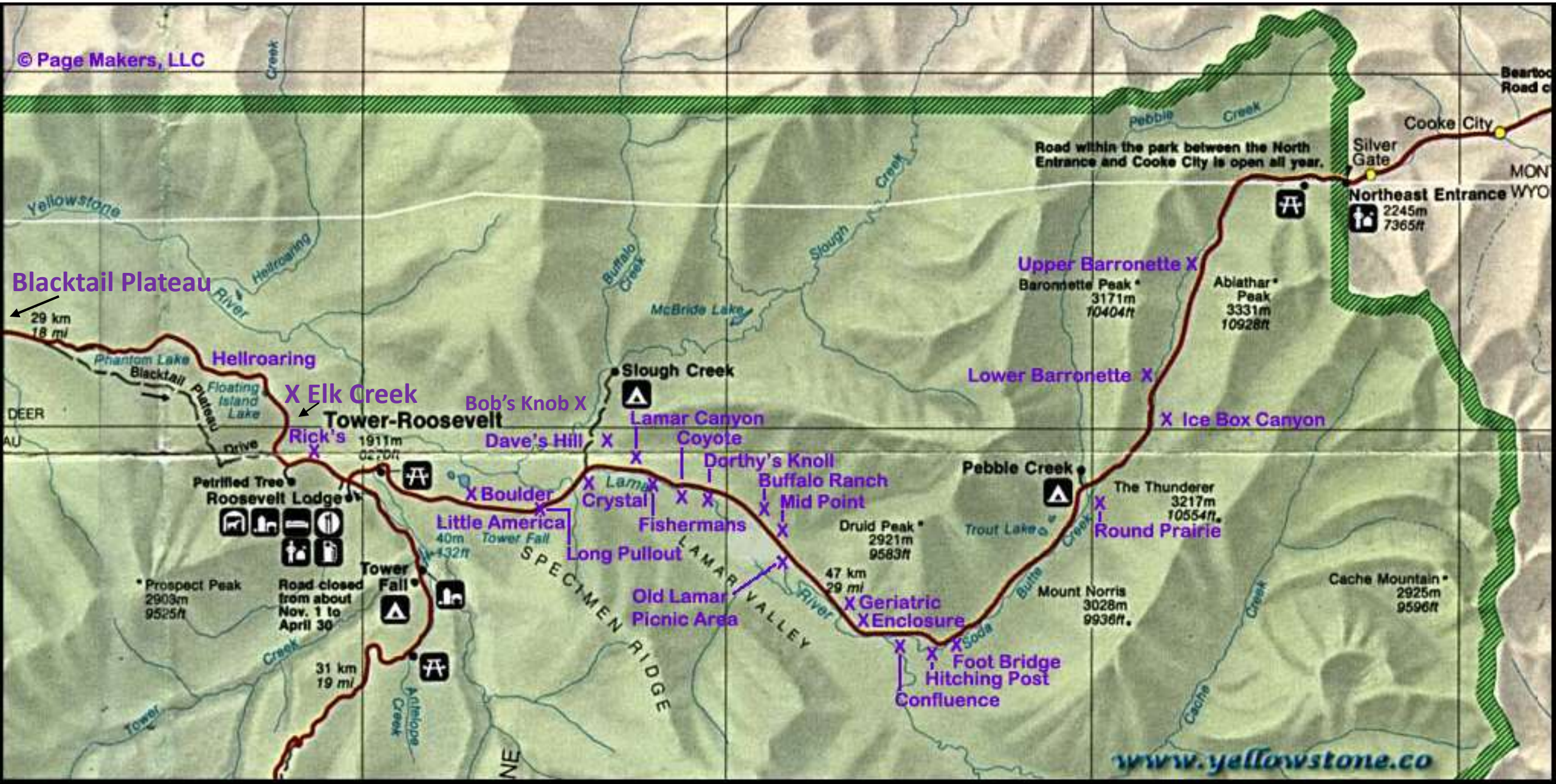


A topographical perspective of major areas visited during the trip, including from Blacktail Deer Plateau to Trout and Buck Lakes just west of Pebble Creek on the far-right side of the map. Map © National Geographic and Yellowstone Association: Trails Illustrated Outdoor Recreation Map.





The names of locations in northern Yellowstone in more detail. Purple indicates the names of pullouts/overlooks where I and others stop to observe wildlife. The Blacktail Plateau is to the immediate west of this map.





# Day 1: From Boston... to a Wild Grizzly Bear!

There is nothing like waking up in Boston in the early morning (during the region's first warm spell of the year), then traveling to Montana (via Salt Lake City) and entering Yellowstone on the same day. While only in the park for a few hours, we were able to see 6 of Yellowstone's 8 ungulates, including white-tailed deer and mule deer, elk, bison, moose, and pronghorn.

There were numerous deer of both species observed off Route 89 on our 55 mile drive from Livingston down to Gardiner. Yet I did not take any pics of them because they were observed along the highway on our drive down to the park and I didn't want to stop for them. However, mule deer were more numerous. We saw many of them in the open in Paradise Valley, plus other smaller associations! White-tailed deer are often closer to the Yellowstone River. They live in smaller groups and are much less abundant than 'mulies'. We also spotted many elk in the southern half of Paradise Valley on our drive to Gardiner with 4-5 larger groups consisting of 15-30 individuals.

Bison had a difficult winter due to prolonged snow on the ground, and many were [killed by Native hunters](#) just outside the park where they were seeking low elevation, snow-free areas where they could feed on grass. At the beginning of the winter, there were an estimated 6,000 bison in the park, and it is believed that ~1,800 had died between winter-kill and human hunting – mostly by native tribes. This created a huge controversy with [some folks calling out other conservation groups for staying silent](#), since it is native hunters contributing to the [largest proportion of the kill with the overall death amounts being the greatest since the late 1800s](#), when bison were nearly exterminated from the United States.

Despite all of the killing, we did see some bison outside of the park. With snow remaining in the park, they had no choice but to forage where they could. It was not a nice way to start this trip. It's important to realize that poor management by the state of Montana not allowing bison to roam outside of Yellowstone is the root cause behind this 'Tragedy of the Commons'.

We arrived at Bob Landis' duplex in Gardiner at 3:30 PM. We unloaded our belongings, ate an early dinner, and then packed the car with our spotting scopes, cameras, and extra clothes before heading into the park at 5:00. We immediately saw many elk and pronghorn right around the North Entrance, which is a half mile from our residence.



A canyon on Route 90 between Bozeman and Livingston, MT.





View of Gardiner from our cabin. The hill above those houses straight ahead is the beginning of the park.





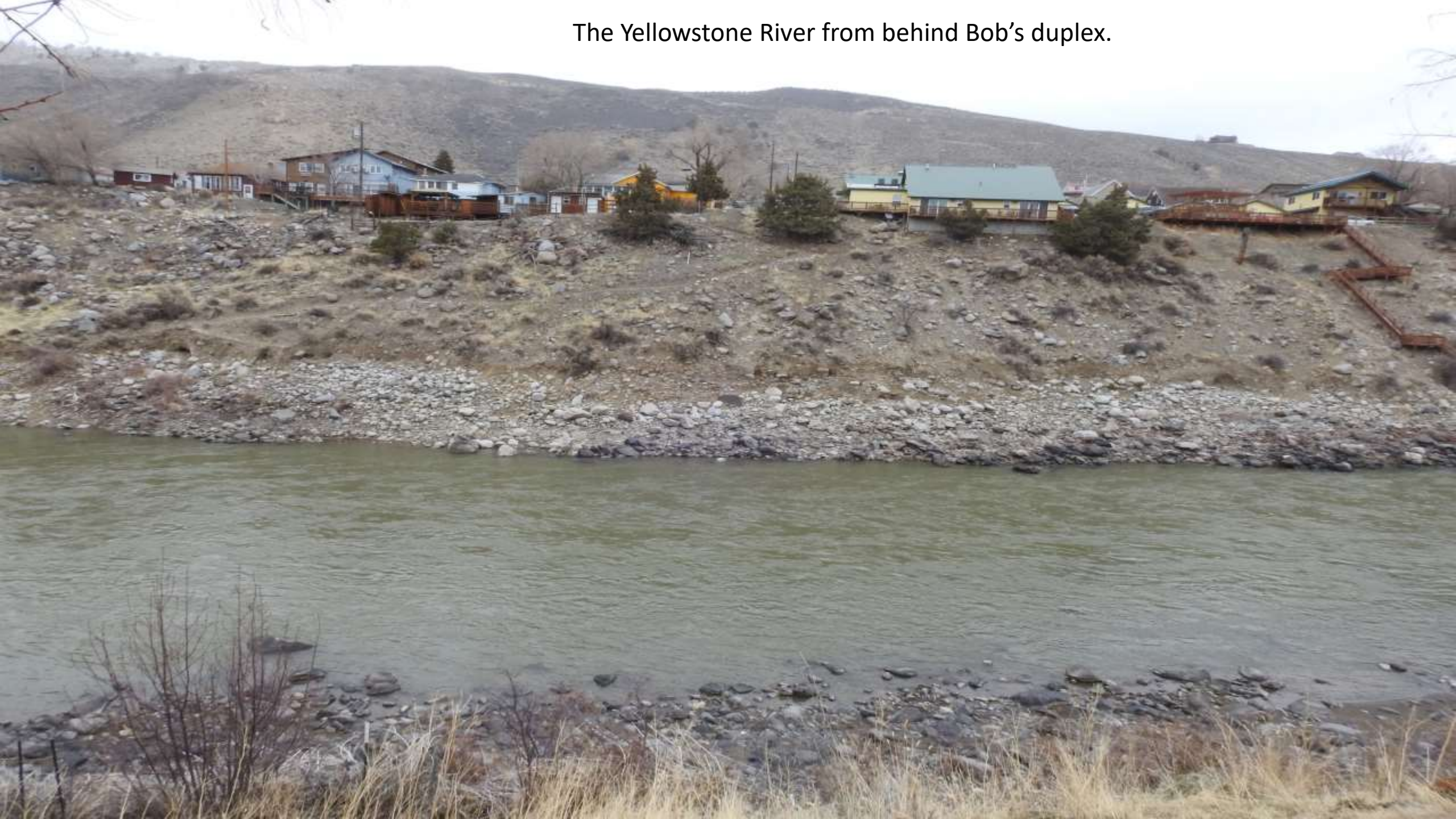


A cool view of a mountain cottontail in our small backyard.





The Yellowstone River from behind Bob's duplex.







The famous Roosevelt Arch at the North Entrance (left) and entrance to Yellowstone sign (bottom right) just behind the picture on the left.



The town of Gardiner from the same place as the previous page.



North Entrance station. The new road (due to the floods) veers to the right where that hill is, whereas the old road went straight past the booths (see next page).





The old road

The new road





Elk and pronghorn grazing.





Elk (background) and pronghorn (foreground).



After we drove past the North Entrance gate, we took an abrupt right, whereas we used to go straight along the edge of the Gardner River. This new 4–5 mile stretch of road re-directed traffic using a formerly old, dirt road to get to Mammoth inside the park. The flooding from June 2022 washed out a few stretches of the old road just past (south of) that area. It was a very cool experience to be on a totally new stretch of road in an area usually so familiar to us.

We did see small groups of bison and elk along that route up to and beyond the town of Mammoth in the park. But most of the bison that we saw were on the Blacktail Plateau where we spotted ~20 of them together. We also found 2 moose in the willows along Blacktail Creek by the outdoor restroom. A young one was browsing with a likely cow bedded nearby.

At 5:45 PM we turned around to park at Blacktail Ponds, about a half mile from the moose sighting. As we were parking our car in the lot, we had our first sighting of the big boar grizzly #769 as he was walking back to the carcass. He was collared by park staff and had a red tag on his right ear. He was about 75 yards from the road and was just arriving back to the bison carcass I had been reading about on [Laurie's reports](#). I have had a few hundred grizzly sightings over the years, but this one was spectacular given how close he was. I couldn't believe how big his belly was given that he had just awoken from ~5 months of hibernation a week or two earlier.

The parking lot was mostly full of people, but we were quiet and laser focused on the bear as it was just coming back to the bison upon our arrival. I was told his pattern was to sleep on the slopes of Mount Everts to the north during most of the day after dawn, and then come back at dusk. Luckily for us, he came back well before dark on this evening.

Back in Massachusetts it was a cold spring, but the day before we left we had temperatures in the 80s. I was so hot I slept in shorts and a T-shirt after having had my wood stove running for most of the first half of April. So, it was a minor shock to the body when it started snowing out while we were watching the bear. Pretty soon it was a white out which made it difficult to see the bruin even from less than 100 yards away.

After a few minutes on the bison carcass, which was still mostly frozen in a small muddy pool of water, he was spooked by loud trucks on the road. He walked 100 yards northwest and went into a small pond to drink and cool off. Yes, to cool off in the middle of a snowstorm! Once content with his bath, he walked up to a bare ridge and laid down at ~6:30 PM.



If you look closely, you can see bison 'patties' (scat piles) all around and behind the elk in the background.

Bottom left: Pronghorn pair grazing.







As we drove up in elevation toward the town of Mammoth, it began snowing. The elk barely seemed to notice.

Next page: Undine Falls in the snow. This area is at the western edge of the Blacktail Plateau.











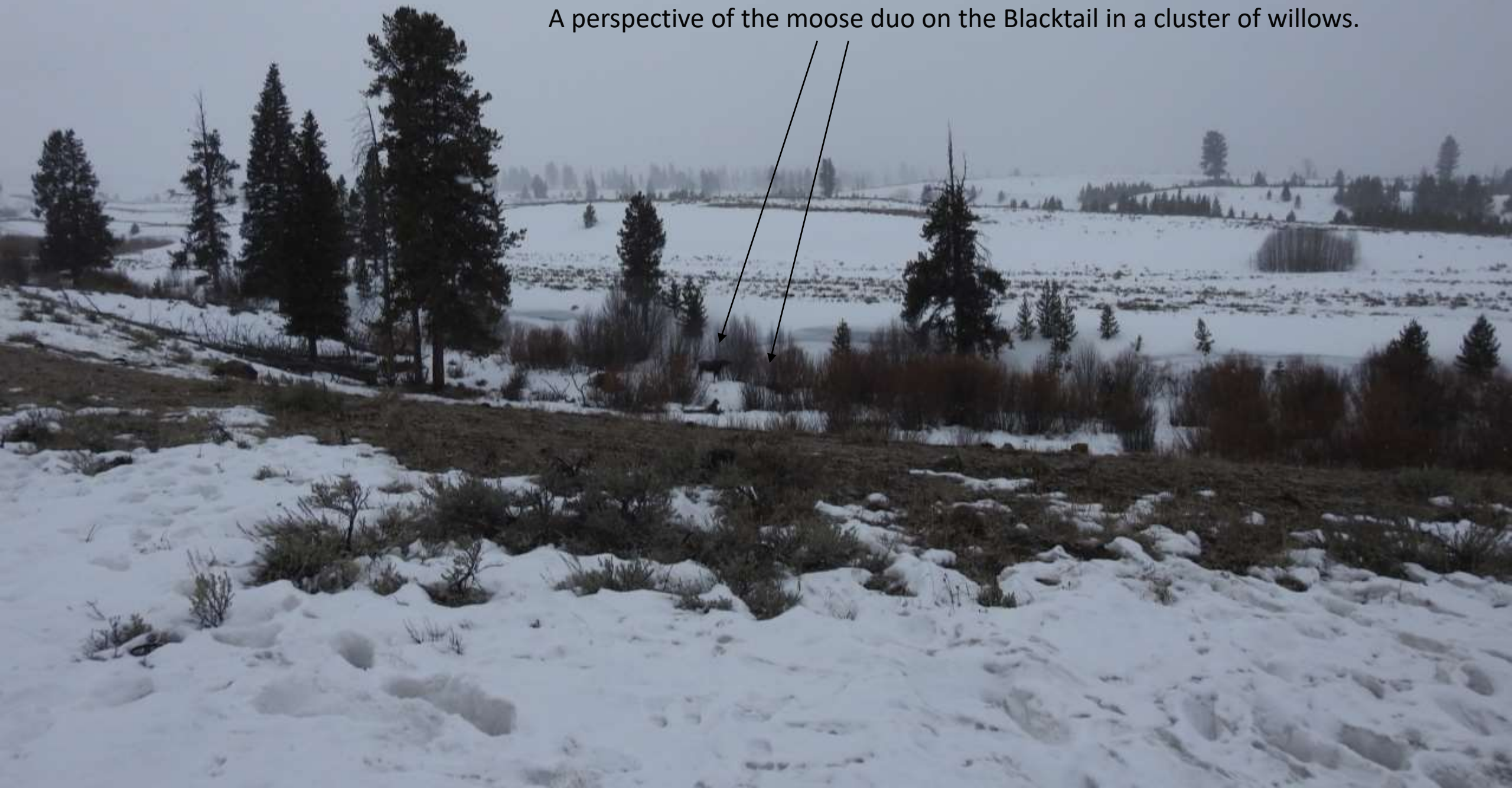
A small group of bison trying to endure until spring.







A perspective of the moose duo on the Blacktail in a cluster of willows.







Moose eating willows.

Next page: Moose pair on the Blacktail Plateau.











It became quite snowy and difficult to watch the moose as my camera lens was covered by snow and moisture.



My first perspective of the grizzly on the Blacktail as it returned  
to the carcass area.







The boar approaching the carcass site in the snow. Grizzly bears are readily distinguishable from black bears because of their large shoulder humps.



Grizzlies also have large dish-shaped faces compared to the straighter profile of their smaller cousins.







At first it was difficult to tell if it would stop snowing or if the bear would approach any closer. Because it was our first time seeing the bear there, we clicked away taking many pictures, not realizing how much better the sighting would soon get.





Left: Good perspective of people observing the bear from about 70 meters away as he arrived at the bison carcass (bottom right).







While taking these pictures, I kept thinking how amazing they would have been without the persistent snow reducing the clarity and quality.





Nevertheless, it was spectacular watching him feed on the bison so close to the park road less than 70 meters away.





After watching the boar in near white-out conditions (below), we thought that might be it for the good viewing for the evening.





But we persevered and had moments where we watched him watch us (below right).





Eventually it began to clear,  
ironically as the bruin left the  
carcass site and headed to  
one of the Blacktail Ponds.







It cleared at 7:05 PM and I obtained a few good pictures of him lying down. Grizzlies have huge claws, and it was great to obtain such of an up-close view of them on this day. I alternated between using my spotting scope for unprecedented zoomed in views and my cameras to obtain both pictures and videos.

While watching him, we heard coyotes howling to the west. Despite looking, I didn't see them. As I was standing at the edge of the parking lot, I kept thinking to myself that I was in Boston just a few hours earlier and now I was in the heart of the wilderness with one of its iconic symbols, the grizzly bear, in full view!

We left Blacktail Ponds at 7:15 PM to get home and organize our apartment. We were planning on waking up before 4:30 AM to come back out to the park and needed to get better situated. Given this sighting, we knew where we were going to start the following morning.

On our way back, we saw the same elk and pronghorn that we spotted on the way into the park. What a first day! I didn't go to bed until 10:30 PM MT (past midnight back east) because I was sorting through the 127 pictures I had already taken.









After a few minutes in the water, 769 left and walked to nearby mound (right) where he proceeded to bed down and rest (next page).









Throngs of visitors watched the big boar.





As dusk approached, he remained conked out with his impressive claws showing beneath his head. Of course, it stopped snowing just as he bedded down and greatly reduced his activity.





He would occasionally lift his head (left), usually when a loud car went by, but then would go right back to resting (bottom right). He was far enough away where vehicle traffic didn't bother him as much as it did when he was at the bison carcass.







This is the last picture I took of him on this evening.





By this point in the day, we were exhausted and wanted to get back to the cabin. We only stopped to take pictures of this pronghorn pair because they were so close. As we drove by, we just watched the elk and other pronghorn groups that we saw on our way into the park a few hours earlier.





# Day 2: A Grizzly Kind of Day, with Wolves Sprinkled in

Steve and I woke up at 4:20 AM on April 15 and left the duplex at 5:05 to get to the Blacktail in the dark. We arrived at 5:28. In the near darkness, I could hear and barely see the big boar griz on the frozen bison carcass. This was an hour before dawn, and I was the only one in the lot using my scope in the dark. The ~12 car (depending on how vehicles park there) unmarked lot was already full but most people were just resting, or even sleeping, in their vehicles waiting for dawn to come. Sure enough, at first light people emerged from their cars, which was at about 5:50 AM or 20 minutes after we arrived. It was a surreal moment to essentially be alone with a wild grizzly bear less than 70 yards away on a chilly 19 degree morning. Bob Landis used a range finder later that morning and calculated the distance from the bear to be just 66 yards!

The bear fed and quickly left the area as more cars showed up. That was very frustrating to the early, quiet arrivals like ourselves who were silently settled in. At 6:15-6:20 AM, just as the light was getting good enough for photos, the bear left and walked to the mostly frozen pond he went to the previous evening. After an hour of standing still, I was starting to do toe raises to warm my feet even though I had negatively rated fleece lined Sorel boots on.

Due to the cold temperature, it shocked me to watch the bruin arrive to the pond, bat down on the frozen water, and enter a literal ice bath to “cool” down. He was only in the water for a minute or two, then left the pond and slowly walked north, zig-zagging to get to where he was going. Bob commented that he was walking around the water bodies on land, showing his intelligence to avoid accidentally falling through ice in unforeseen areas. Before walking up the lower slopes of Mt. Everts, he briefly laid down in the snow and watched 3 loud sandhill cranes near him.

At pre-dawn, Bob had heard two coyotes due west of our location and later (around dawn when people emerged from their vehicles) I heard two to the northeast. We didn't see any despite looking. I thought that I might be rusty from using my spotting scope to find distant animals since it had been over a year when I was last in Yellowstone. Who knows, maybe the close sighting of the bear effected my long-range vision?

As the bear left the area, I thought it was odd that no other animal was at the bison carcass. I almost always see ravens at dead animals, so for no coyotes or birds to be there was indeed strange. Maybe the carcass was just too close to the road for most animals? Coyotes (not birds) might come in at night but then again, the grizzly was likely on it the entire time it was dark since people aren't there to disturb him.



Grizzly bear feeding at the bison carcass at dawn on a chilly 19 degree morning. As you can see on the next page, the bison froze back into the ice over the previous night.











As it became lighter out, the clarity got better. But with the bear's head and claws in the carcass, it was tough to obtain a good picture.

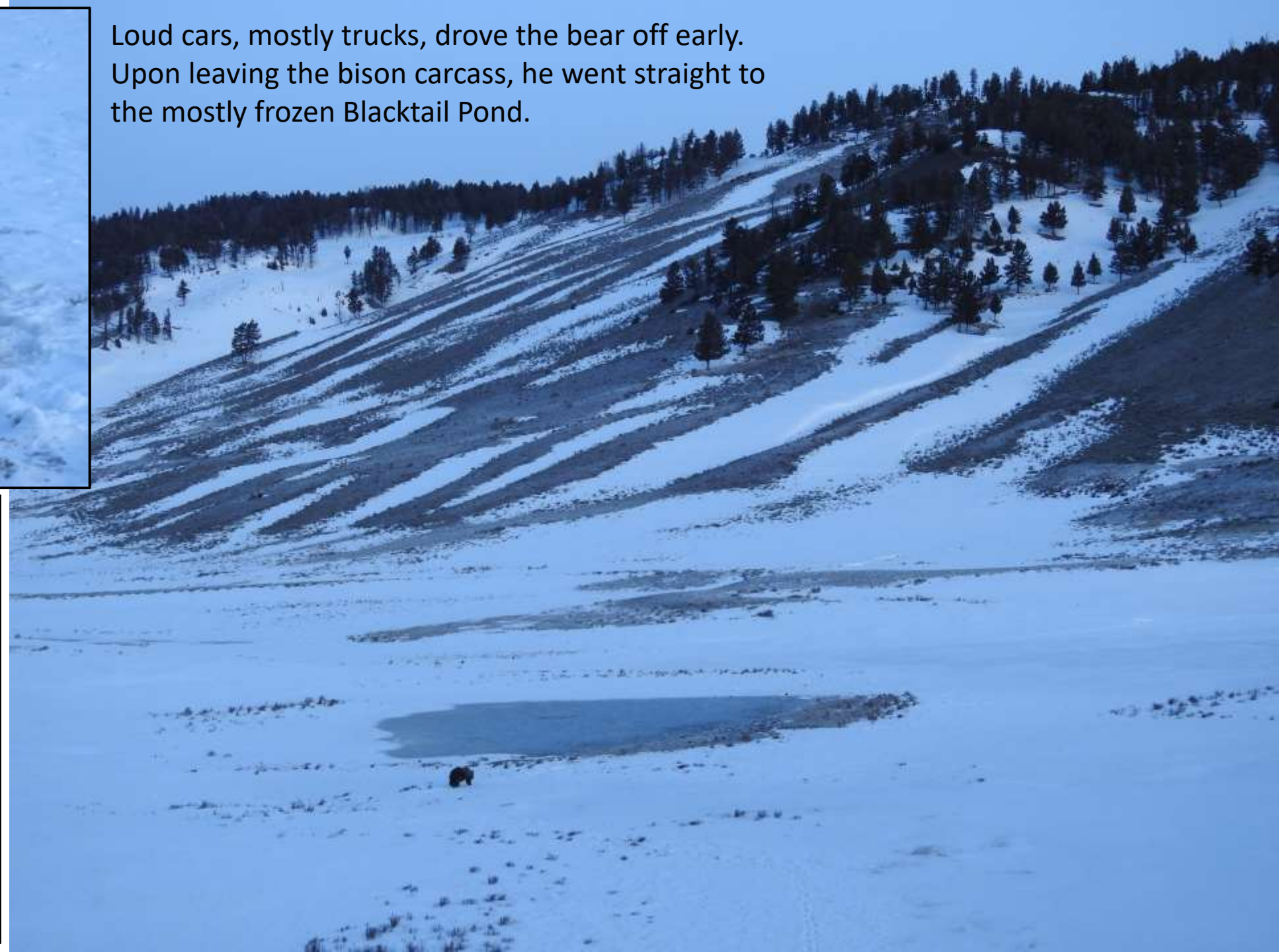




One of the thing I like about e-books is not being limited by the number of pictures I use. Thus, I'm able to share images that aren't always perfect. In my files, I have the bottom left picture named as "super close almost really good". As the sun came up, so did the contrast, as evidenced by this over exposed shot.



Loud cars, mostly trucks, drove the bear off early.  
Upon leaving the bison carcass, he went straight to  
the mostly frozen Blacktail Pond.











There, he pushed down on the ice by walking (top left) and then he sat down to put more pressure on it (right). Once he had a drink, he stood up and walked away, going out of sight for the day (next page).



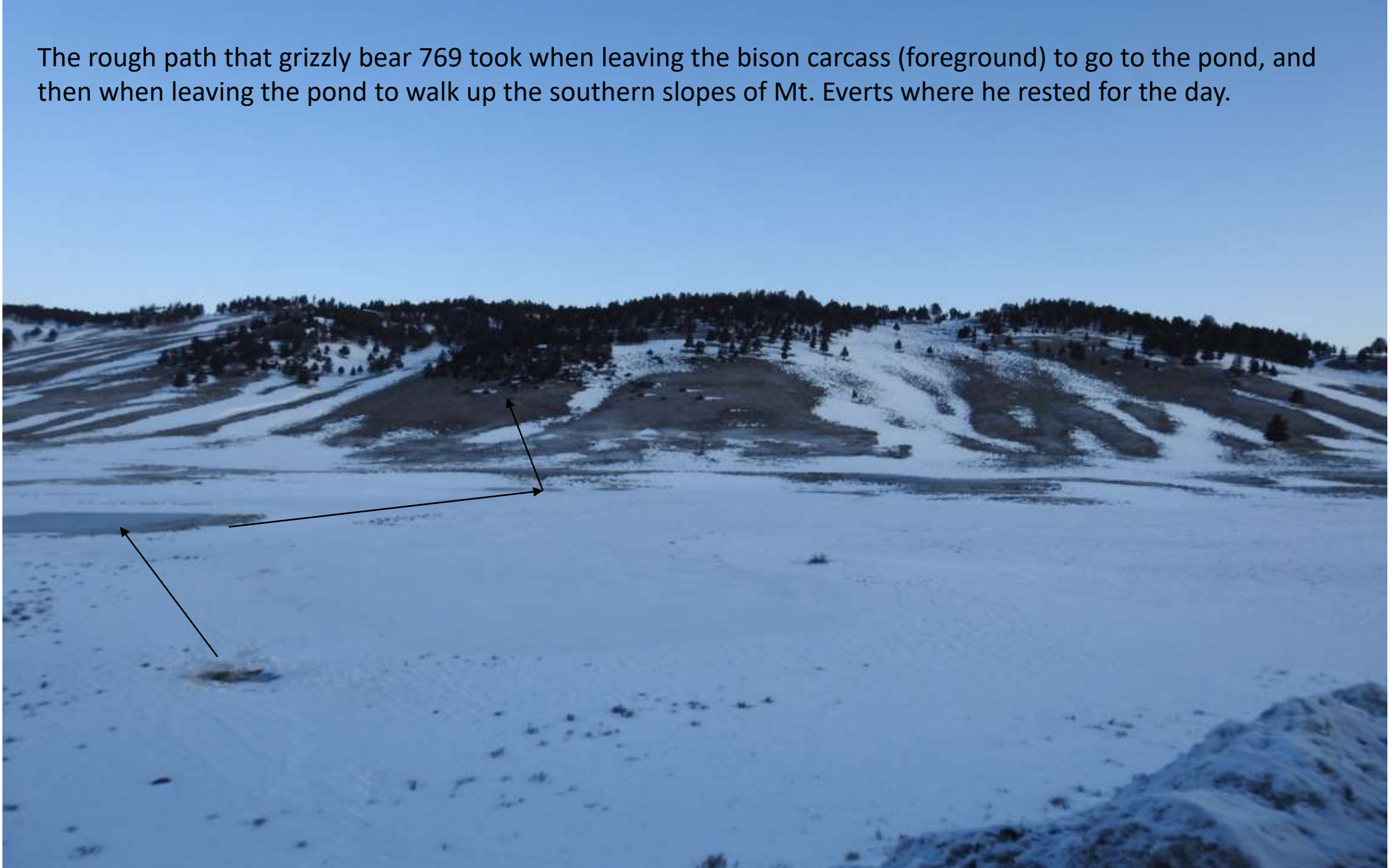








The rough path that grizzly bear 769 took when leaving the bison carcass (foreground) to go to the pond, and then when leaving the pond to walk up the southern slopes of Mt. Everts where he rested for the day.





Just after the grizzly went out of view for the morning, the sandhill cranes put on a show, first landing near some Canada geese (top left) and then calling loudly and standing on the ice by them (right). It is important to remember that it is difficult to take many pictures when it is 19 degrees out. Your body, most specifically fingertips, get cold and function slower than normal after a couple of hours of standing in the cold.





With the grizzly out of sight, we left the area by 7:25 AM and headed east. We parked at the Blacktail outhouse by the creek and were able to find two moose close to where we spotted the likely cow/calf pair the previous evening. Both were further back and bedded. When later examining my pictures, I could see they were pedicle bulls, that is males without their antlers which are shed during the winter.

After the grizzly bear and moose sightings, we headed a few miles east to Hellroaring Overlook, where Rick McIntyre and others initially had 3 gray and 1 black wolf, a few miles to the north. These animals were part of the Junction Butte pack. We started at 'Lower' Hellroaring (HR) and then drove back to the west to 'Upper' HR where watchers had 18-20 wolves! The pack was currently 24-25 members going into the April denning season, so most of them were being seen on this morning. They were spread out in an area we call the basalt cliff, with a kill just out of view to the left (west). Some had blood on their faces and visibly full stomachs to verify they had obtained some type of food item.

They were very spread out and difficult to obtain an accurate count on. I could confirm that I saw 16-18 of them a good 1.5 miles from where we stood, so the images should be taken with a grain of salt given how far away they were. Seven wolves clearly traveled east, and they were easy to count, while at least 10 stayed local. We lost those behind ridges and possibly where the carcass was.

Meanwhile, of those seven that traveled east, three of them (1 black and 2 grays) really moved east and all the way across HR Creek and then the very open slopes of HR Mountain. We guessed that those were adult females heading back to the Slough Creek area where they normally den and have pups in mid to late April. The other four stalled out and bedded down in the sagebrush. There was an odd lack of coordination among the normally cohesive group. I eventually lost the three animals going east all the way north of Little Buffalo Creek which is east of the HR area. Those canids passed by groups of 3, 6-8, 2, and 6-8 elk and some bison, essentially paying the ungulates no attention. Their mission clearly seemed to get from point A to B.

With the wolves spread out and mostly out of view, we decide to go to Petrified Tree to look at the hibernating black bear that had a reported two cubs in the den about 100 meters from the road. Unfortunately, we couldn't see much because of light contrasts and vowed to return later in the day when the light was more favorable.



Location on the Blacktail Plateau where the moose were observed. They were in the back part of this willow patch.







When zoomed in (top left), one can clearly see the mark on the bull's right forehead where the antler used to be before falling off. They were bedded down in the willows (right) so were only observed at the proper angles which involved walking along the park road to obtain different vintage points.









View from Upper Hellroaring. The wolves were lower on the far hillsides about 1.5 miles away. As you can see, the close trees make viewing extremely difficult there, especially when large groups of people block each other's views. After a few minutes, many folks showed up making it a frustrating ordeal to follow the moving wolves with people and trees blocking our views.





A cropped view of the core part of the Junction Butte wolf pack bedded above the basalt cliff that is a prominent landmark in the area. It is believed that they had a kill (likely an elk or bison) out of view to the left (west) of this picture. They were 1.5-2 miles away. There are about a dozen in view. I saw 16-18 of them. Others believed they spotted 18-20 of the pack of 24-25, which is the largest in the park.







Hint: Look just above the sagebrush in the snow.



Non-cropped views of the Junction wolves above the basalt cliff. Remember that these wolves were >1.5 miles away so there is only so much any camera can do. The best pictures from this distance are usually digi-scoped from a cell phone camera taken through a spotting scope. I usually use my 83X optical zoom Nikon P900 camera.









Black bear hibernation den viewed from the Petrified ski lot. The contrast is tough in the late morning, and even though the sow was there we couldn't get a good view of her. We came back later in this day.





Without the bear in view at Petrified (we could see the den hole, but the contrast was too poor to see inside it), we drove east through Little America and Lamar Valley to Round Prairie and Pebble Creek. Surprisingly, there were not many bison all along that ~15 mile stretch with only small groups of 1, 2, and 4. The majority were well to the west where there was less snow. We did have a nice view of a group of sandhill cranes in Lamar Valley near the Buffalo Ranch.

We drove to the Round Prairie area to see the road repairs. They were quite impressive. A few stretches had to be moved a half road-width away from the Soda Butte River as the new cliff-line, caused by the erosion from the June 2022 floods, had moved about 10 feet toward the road.

We then hiked in snowshoes up and around Trout and Buck Lakes. Most of the area still had 3-4 feet of snow, so using snowshoes was essential. Yet in a few stretches there was bare ground, which was very odd. Those dirt areas were mostly under the base of Douglas fir trees. Both lakes were still solidly frozen except the inlet creek to Trout Lake which was also surprisingly shallow. Immediately (<50 yards) east of the inlet, we found a dead, half eaten winter-killed bison. This was near the “closed to fishing” sign around the stream leading to the pond. There were coyote and fox tracks and scat in and around the carcass site but no wolves. There was a small pack of 4 wolves in the area. Called the Shrimp Lake Pack (which is a small water body just above Trout Lake), this group was started by gray female 1228, formerly of the Junction Butte Pack.

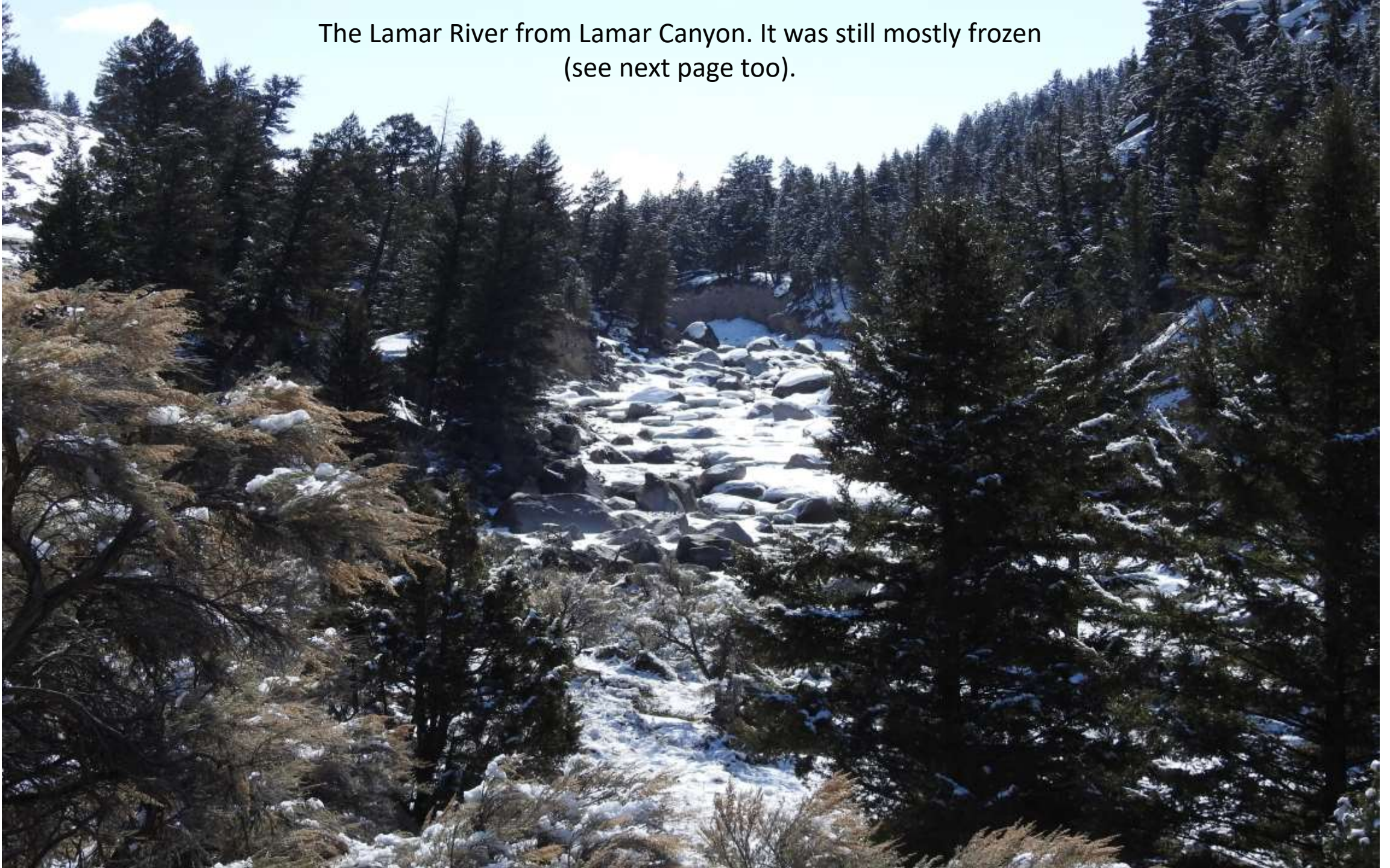
I returned to the car at 1:58 PM, slightly ahead of Steve. There were 2 bull bison in a seepage area near the parking lot that were feeding on the newly growing but stunted vegetation. It wasn't much but it was hopefully enough to keep them alive until the snow finally melted.

On our drive back to the west, we saw a bald eagle in Lamar Valley flying overhead – too quick of a sighting for a picture. We arrived back to Petrified Tree parking lot at 2:30 PM and saw the hibernating black bear and one of her cubs. The mother moved slightly while the cub was climbing around here at the mouth of the den. Supposedly there were two cubs, but we clearly only saw one on this day.

There was nothing at the Blacktail bison carcass when we drove by. We did spot numerous elk and bison from Mammoth to Gardiner on our descent back to our home for the next week, returning at 4:30 PM. My field notes ended with, “Wow! I am exhausted with 154 more images taken!” It took me about two hours to process those pictures which included downloading and naming them, then posting the highlights to Facebook. It is a very time-intensive but important part of the process.



The Lamar River from Lamar Canyon. It was still mostly frozen  
(see next page too).







Lamar Canyon and specifically the Lamar River within the canyon is one of my favorite scenic parts of the park. The river was still low and mostly frozen on top, with water moving under the ice. As the snow melts in the surrounding hills and mountains, the river swells and roars, with peak flow generally during June of each year.





Entering Lamar Valley. These images are from the west side of the 'Lamar' and viewed to the east.









Specimen Ridge

Specimen Ridge

Jasper Bench

View to the south in Lamar Valley with Jasper Bench and Specimen Ridge in the background.



Sandhill cranes in Lamar, different from the ones seen on the Blacktail earlier on this day.



Lamar Valley with Amethyst Bench and the eastern part of Jasper Bench. There now aren't many animals that spend the winter and early spring there (while there used to be in past decades), but by May and throughout the summer this area is often called 'America's Serengeti' due to the plentiful wildlife, including bears (both species, but mainly grizzlies), wolves, bison (especially), and elk, among other species. The sandhill cranes were seen on the flats to the right of the cottonwood trees (denoted with an 'X').



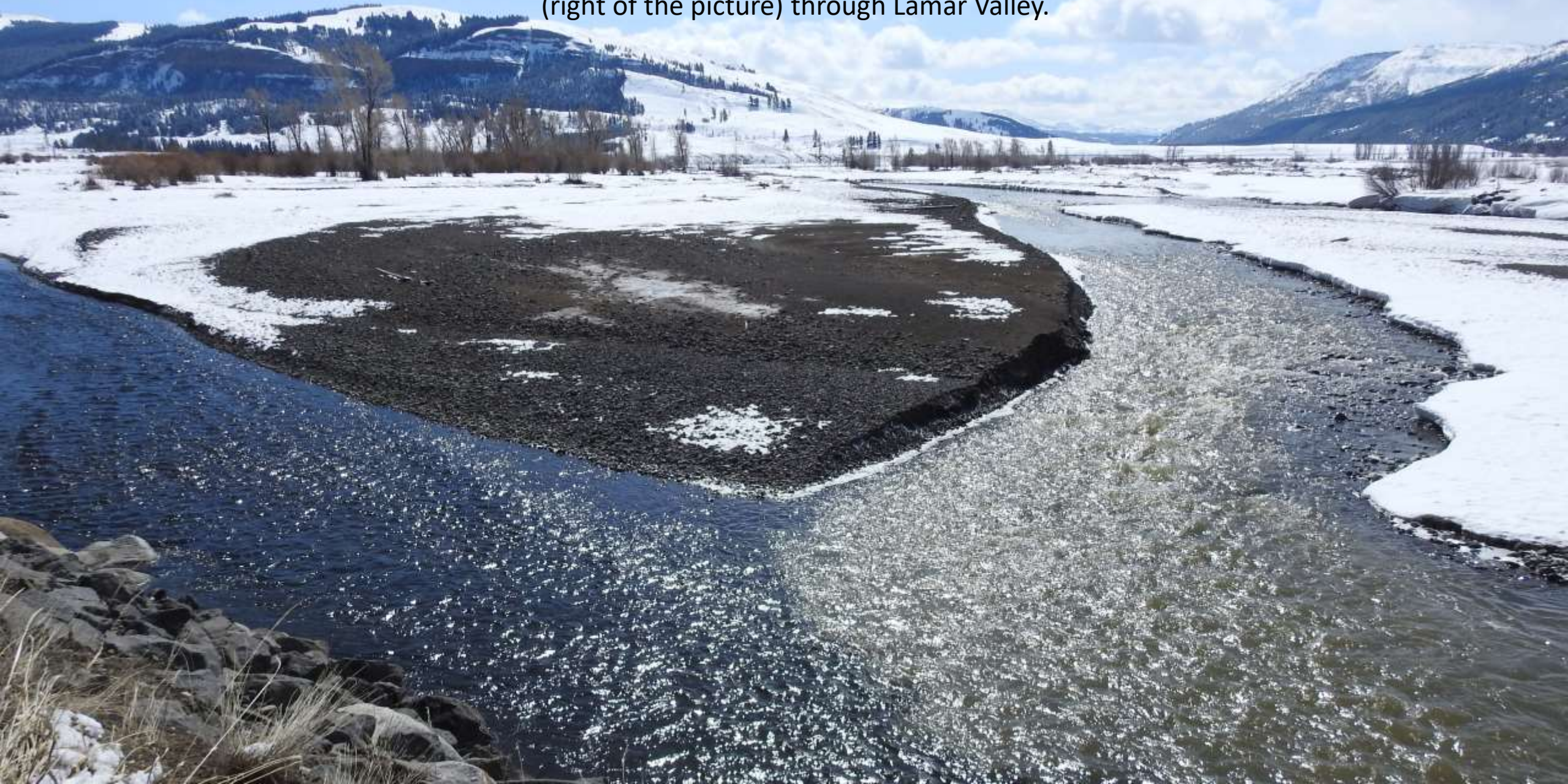


Cottonwood trees lining the road. There is a small stream (Rose Creek) that runs under the road right where the trees are.





Along with Lamar Canyon, the 'Confluence' is one of my favorite places and appears in all of my previous Yellowstone books. This area is where the merging of Soda Butte Creek (left) and Lamar River (right) occurs as the Lamar River continues west (right of the picture) through Lamar Valley.







Above: Another picture of the Confluence showing the Lamar River continuing to the west (right) with Specimen Ridge in the background.



Left: View to the east of the end of Soda Butte Creek as it merges with the Lamar River (top).

Next page: the Lamar River immediately west of the Confluence with Specimen Ridge in the background.









Picture of Druid Peak and the 'Moose Head' conifer tree from 'Hitching Post' pullout. This is the area where many generations of wolves have formerly denned, including the Lamar Canyon pack and the aptly named, and world famous (because of many TV documentaries produced on this group), Druid Peak pack.







We drove as far east as Round Prairie with The Thunderer in the background (top left). Soda Butte Creek flows through the prairie to the west, as we view it to the east (bottom right). Two bison (bottom left) graze in the narrow snow-free spring at the start of the Trout Lake Trail.





Start of the Trout Lake Trail (left; notice our parked car in the distance) and view of the Thunderer from an early overlook off the path (right).





Steve (left) and I wore our snowshoes for the entire hike and needed them >90% of the time, but we also came to these snow-free areas underneath large Douglas pines (next page).







Next page and top of this page: This large Douglas fir had stood as long as we could remember. It fell sometime between our late February 2022 trip and this one. It was a big one, being over 6 feet in diameter (I am standing on some snow)!











Trout Lake (frozen), one of my favorite hikes!





Two different views of Trout Lake.





Overlook of Soda Butte Valley (note the road bisecting the open area) from south of Trout Lake.







Trout Lake inlet stream with  
coyote tracks going over the  
bridge (bottom left and  
bottom right).



We literally stumbled upon this bison carcass very close to the inlet stream (see top of the right picture). After taking a few pictures we left the area. There was no sign of grizzly bears or wolves at the site, just coyote and red fox tracks and scat.





My favorite tree,  
the leaning  
Douglas Fir on  
the left, just  
before reaching  
Buck Lake.

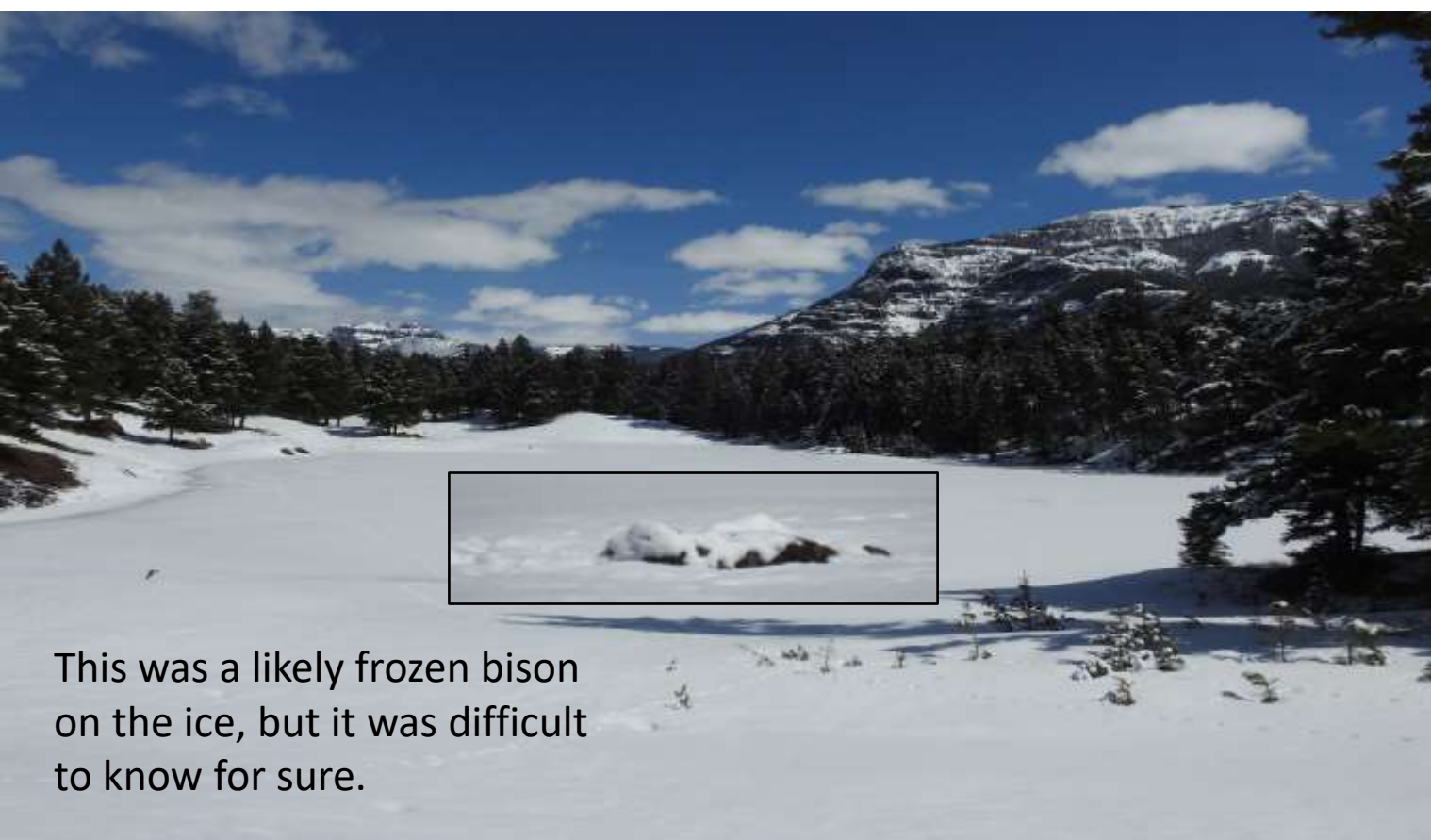






Buck Lake, frozen in time (also see next page).






This was a likely frozen bison  
on the ice, but it was difficult  
to know for sure.





A photograph of two bison in a mountainous landscape. The bison are brown with dark faces and are grazing on grass in a field with patches of snow. One bison is on the left, facing away from the camera, and the other is on the right, facing the camera. The ground is covered with dry grass and small clumps of snow. The background shows more snow-covered ground and some distant vegetation.

The 2 bulls were still grazing in the snow-free seepage when I returned from the hike at 1:58 PM Mountain Time.





After the hike, we drove west and stopped back at the Petrified Tree lot to look for the hibernating black bears. Here is a pretty view of the Elk Creek area as we look at the den (see arrow).



Everyone will immediately see the cub first, but if you look closely, you can see the sow's head sleeping just inside the den.









On this day, “only” one of the cubs was observed. The second youngster was out of view for the roughly hour that we spent there.







Roosevelt Arch in Gardiner with the mountains to the north of the park in the background.





Elk grazing in the rolling hills at the North Entrance close to the Roosevelt Arch (previous page).



## Day 3: A Grizzly Bear and a Crane Hanging Out

April 16 started out cold with low 20 degrees in Gardiner and 14 on the Blacktail. We parked in the last available spot at the Blacktail lot at 5:28 AM. Like yesterday, most people were waiting in their cars. The majority were probably asleep as there was no noise whatsoever, except for another recently arriving vehicle. It was slightly lighter than the previous day and I could immediately see the bear through my spotting scope. On cold days it is often clearer out; with no clouds, the heat leaves the atmosphere.

As it became light, the people emerged from their cars and the crowd of 15-20 was very respectful and quiet. There weren't any vehicles parked on the road like yesterday, so the bear stayed on the carcass much longer giving us incredible photos. The griz attempted to pull the bison out of the ice and it did manage to lift it but couldn't fully move it. It appeared that a leg was keeping it jammed under the ice.

While he was feeding, two coyotes traveled through the area moving west to east. The male raised-leg urinated (RLU) a couple of times, which is a scent-marking strategy done by dominant males to advertise their territory (dominant females do a modified 'flex'-leg urination). Fifteen minutes later, the pair came back traveling east to west. They went around a sandhill crane standing on a frozen pond on their way back, yet never went near the bison carcass. I got the impression that they were avoiding the people, and not the bear. The coyote pair soon crossed the road ~200 meters west of our location.

The bear gorged and eventually left the bison at 7:00 AM. I kept noting that "we got the most amazing pics!" When the bear left, it took the same meandering path it had previously taken to avoid walking over the ponds. It also went to the thawing small pond from the previous day and fully laid down in it to cool off in sub-20° temps! The crane that the coyotes traveled by closely watched the griz in the water and approached him getting very close. I couldn't figure out for the life of me why it would venture so close to the bruin, but then I got my answer: As the grizzly left his literal ice bath, the crane immediately went into the roughly 10 x 10 feet open water area that the bear created. You could see thin sheets of ice that the grizzly broke to get into the water.

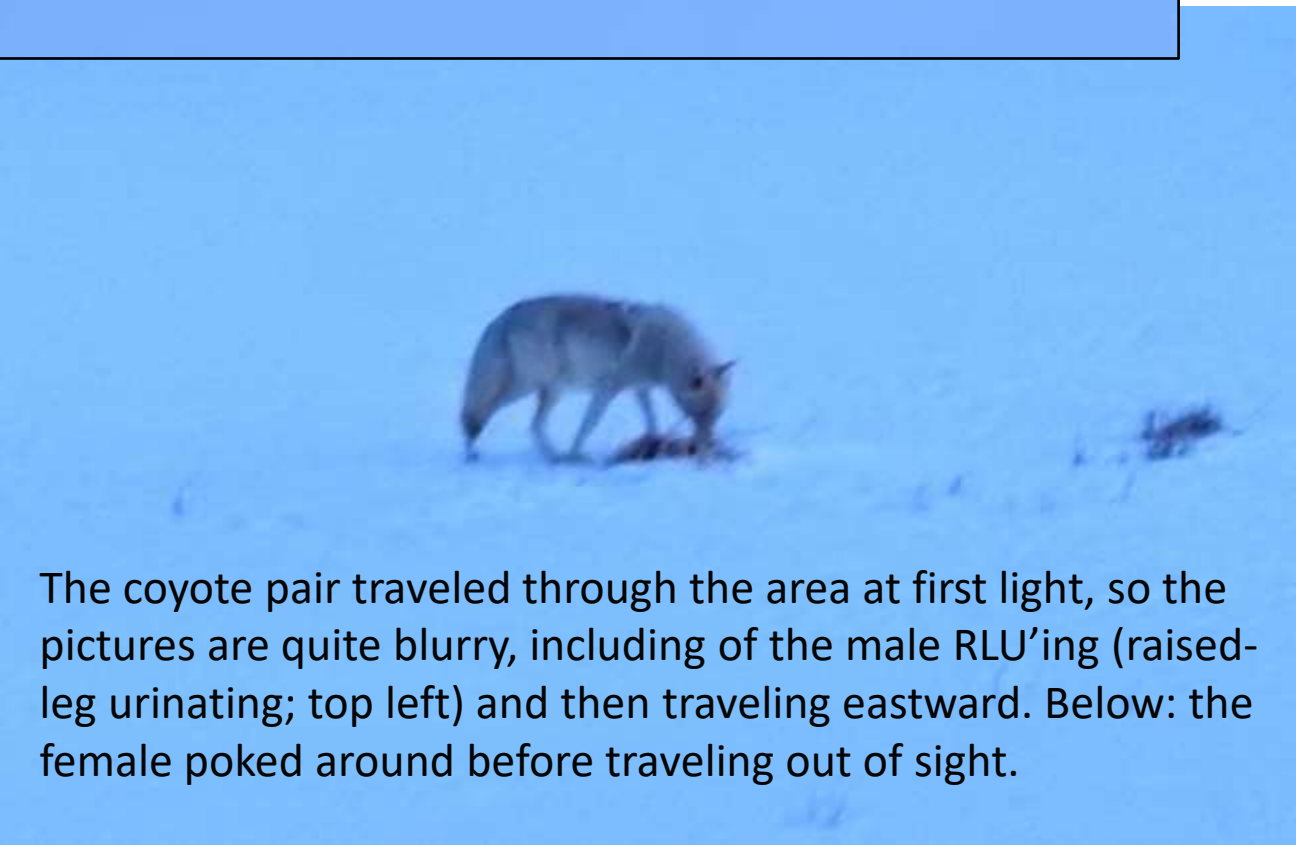
It was fascinating behavior to watch. The grizzly was soon out of sight up in the foothills where it would spend the day resting out of view before venturing back down at dusk, his usual pattern. The crane, meanwhile, stayed in that small non-frozen section of water until we left the area at 8:00 AM. It appeared to be poking around for aquatic insects and/or plants.





First light with the crane on the ice (top arrow), one of the two coyotes traveling through the area (middle), and the grizzly bear on the carcass (bottom).





The coyote pair traveled through the area at first light, so the pictures are quite blurry, including of the male RLU'ing (raised-leg urinating; top left) and then traveling eastward. Below: the female poked around before traveling out of sight.





The grizzly eating the bison. The right side of the bison was still stuck in the ice. Next page: Luckily for us, on this day he stayed at the carcass as it became light out. He really used his claws to grip onto the bison while feeding.







Here he attempts to move the carcass by pulling it out with his mouth.







He often took breaks to look at cars passing by or stopped in the road (top left), and people in the parking lot (right).





In some of the pictures, it appeared that he was smiling when he looked up (top), in between bouts of feeding (left).



With the bear at the carcass past dawn, our early pictures became less valuable with these better ones. That was a great problem to have, we thought. Bob Landis even said, "Well, I can throw away the last week of footage!", meaning he likely wouldn't use it in any of his documentaries with this day's superior video.







The bruin took a break from feeding to watch the coyote pair travel through past him.

Next page: The sandhill crane was standing on the ice on the pond not able to get to the liquid water.













The light was much better the second time we saw the coyotes on this morning. They took their time as they headed back to the west where we first saw them come from. The pair was spread out, rarely in the same frame together for a photograph.











The bear continued to feed while the coyotes (top left) crossed the park road to the south and went out of sight.

Next few pages: It was difficult to express the exhilaration of seeing the bear that close (66 yards) with good enough light to obtain full frame pictures.

















The boar griz often took short breaks to look around his surroundings. These usually offered the best photo ops. The bone sticking out of the bison is a rib.

Next page: Sometimes he would make a funny looking grimace, almost like he was smiling. Notice how old and worn his teeth are.











This and the next few pages of pictures is the grizzly's last feeding session of the morning.



















He then walked north to the pond and began interacting with the crane. Our first thought was, 'Why in the heck would that stately bird stand so close to a huge grizzly?' We were soon given that answer based on its behavior.





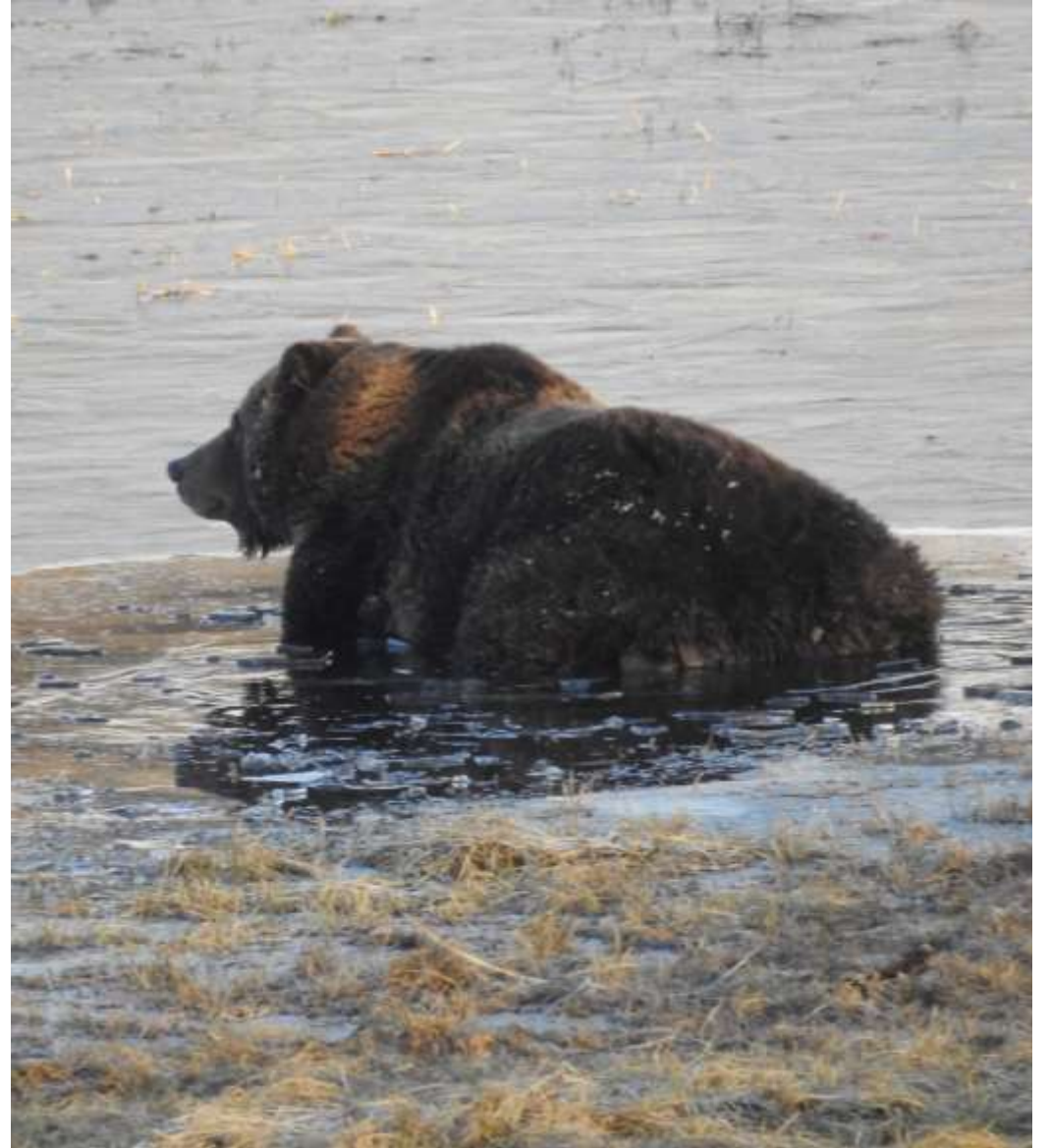




The force of the grizzly's weight easily broke the ice on this day. He then took a nice, cold bath to cool down on what we thought was a frigid morning in the low to mid teens!

















After about 5 minutes, the bear got up and walked out of the water. The crane immediately moved in, standing just a few feet from the large bruin as he passed by.







The crane watched the grizzly leave the area, then quickly went into the water and poked around for food (next page). It was at that point that I realized why the crane was so intent on following the bear to the frozen water.

















Left: The path of the grizzly to his resting area, out of our view somewhere up that hill above Blacktail Ponds.





At 8:05 AM, Steve and I parked at the Blacktail outhouse. I drink way more tea than I normally do when I'm in the park, and that equates to needing to use the bathroom 2-3 more times in the morning alone! A warm beverage is a great way to keep the core warm. I also use it as 'flavored' hot water for my oatmeal and banana breakfast.

As we were finishing up at the loo, our friend Bob Crabtree found us there. We drove to Slough Creek trailing each other. On our way, we got into our first 'bison jam' of the trip on a steep section east of Phantom Lake. This is when bison occupy the road, causing cars to stop and wait for the big ungulates to move off the pavement. In this traffic jam, the bison stayed on the road as it was difficult for them to leave due to the awkward profile of the steep hills as they were moving east. There were about 40 bison in 3 close but separated groups. Because it wasn't summer, there were a lot less cars in the park, lessening the congestion.

Rick M. had observed 11 of the Junction wolves leave the traditional den area north of the Campground Road. When we walked out to Bob's Knob, a prominent observation location named after Bob Landis, the wolves were to the east and more spread out. I only saw 2 blacks as they were traveling right past the Slough Creek Campground outhouse and trail area. We stayed for over an hour without seeing anything else, except for hearing then finding a coyote howling up in the hills at Secret Passage. That area leads into Lamar Valley and is a popular path wolves take when traveling between the two areas.

Bob had to go as he was meeting with other people. We would later join him at a restaurant in Gardiner. Steve and I next continued east, stopping in Lamar Canyon again to take pictures of the eastern part of the canyon which leads to Lamar Valley. There we saw probable cougar tracks in the snow just south of the road at the. It was sunny and the glare was bad, so the tracks weren't easy to identify. Yet they were round and fairly large, being about 4 inches wide. I guessed that it was a female as males are often bigger.

We went all the way to Round Prairie on this day and only saw scattered bison in small groups. I was amazed at how little wildlife there was east of Slough Creek/Little America. But then again, the snow depth was much deeper, and that affected wildlife (specifically bison) distribution in early spring.

A cool sighting we had was watching a kestrel hovering in Lamar. It flew above the road for about a half mile, and we followed it as it traveled along and then perched on nearby rocks. These little falcons are pretty and move so quickly.

On our drive back we saw more bison, including 10-12 on the Yellowstone River Bridge. They were all young; even the lead cow didn't look fully mature. No doubt, I thought, the [hunt at the northern park border was fracturing their social units](#).





Our first 'bison jam' of the trip, which was to the east of Phantom Lake. It was nice see bison heading further into the park and away from Gardiner where they were getting killed by people in large numbers.





















Next page, top: A panorama of Slough Creek. The 'arrow' represents the den area discussed on this page.

Next page, below: A tagged raven at the Slough outhouse area. Researchers in the park are studying raven populations.



Top: View of Slough Creek from 'Bob's Knob', an unofficial name for this observation area off the Slough Campground Road.

Right: A zoomed in version of the den area. On this trip, the wolves had yet to localize there.









I always enjoy looking at the Lamar River in Lamar Canyon, and I stop there multiple times each trip, including these past two days (also see next four pages).











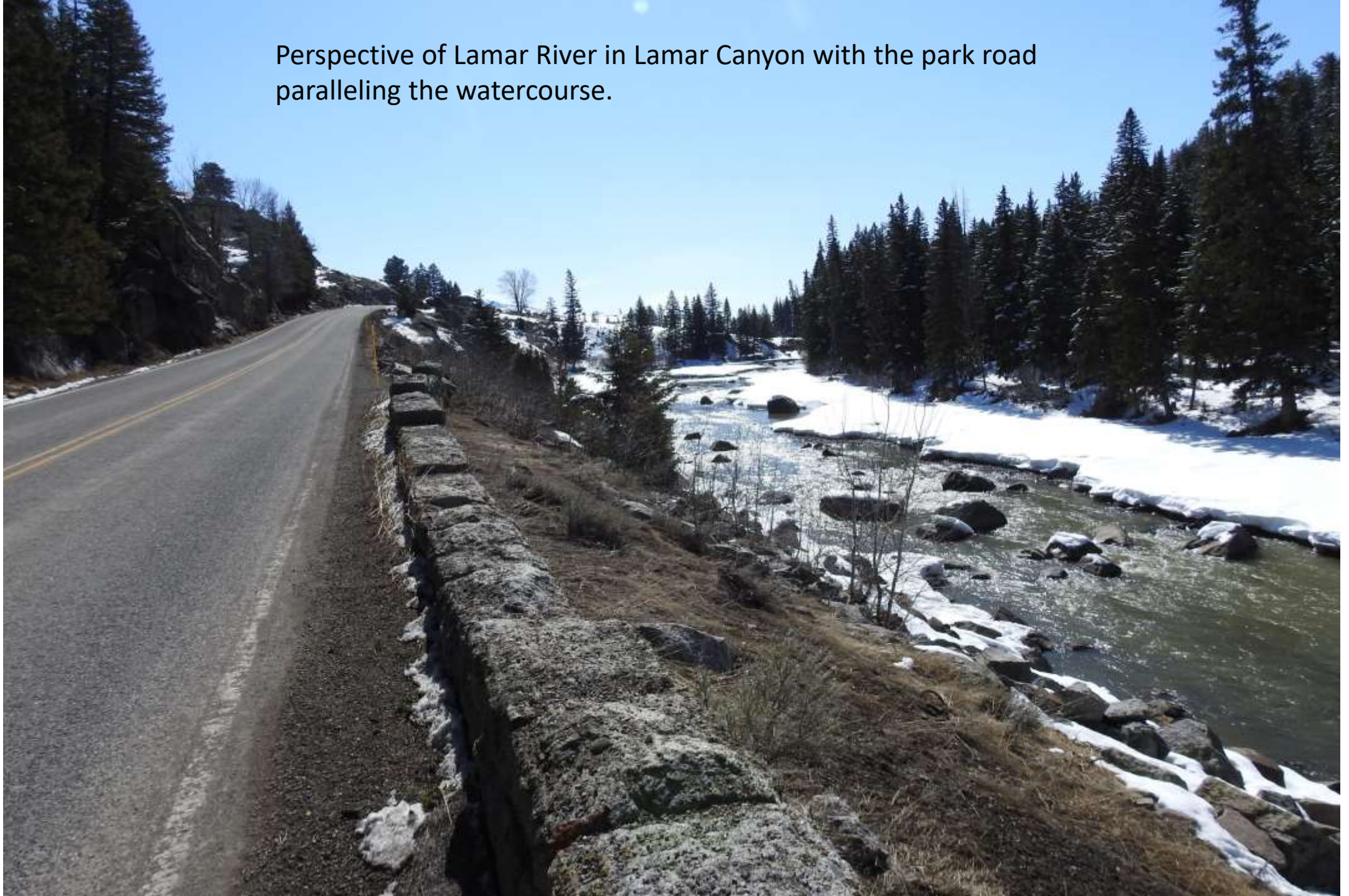






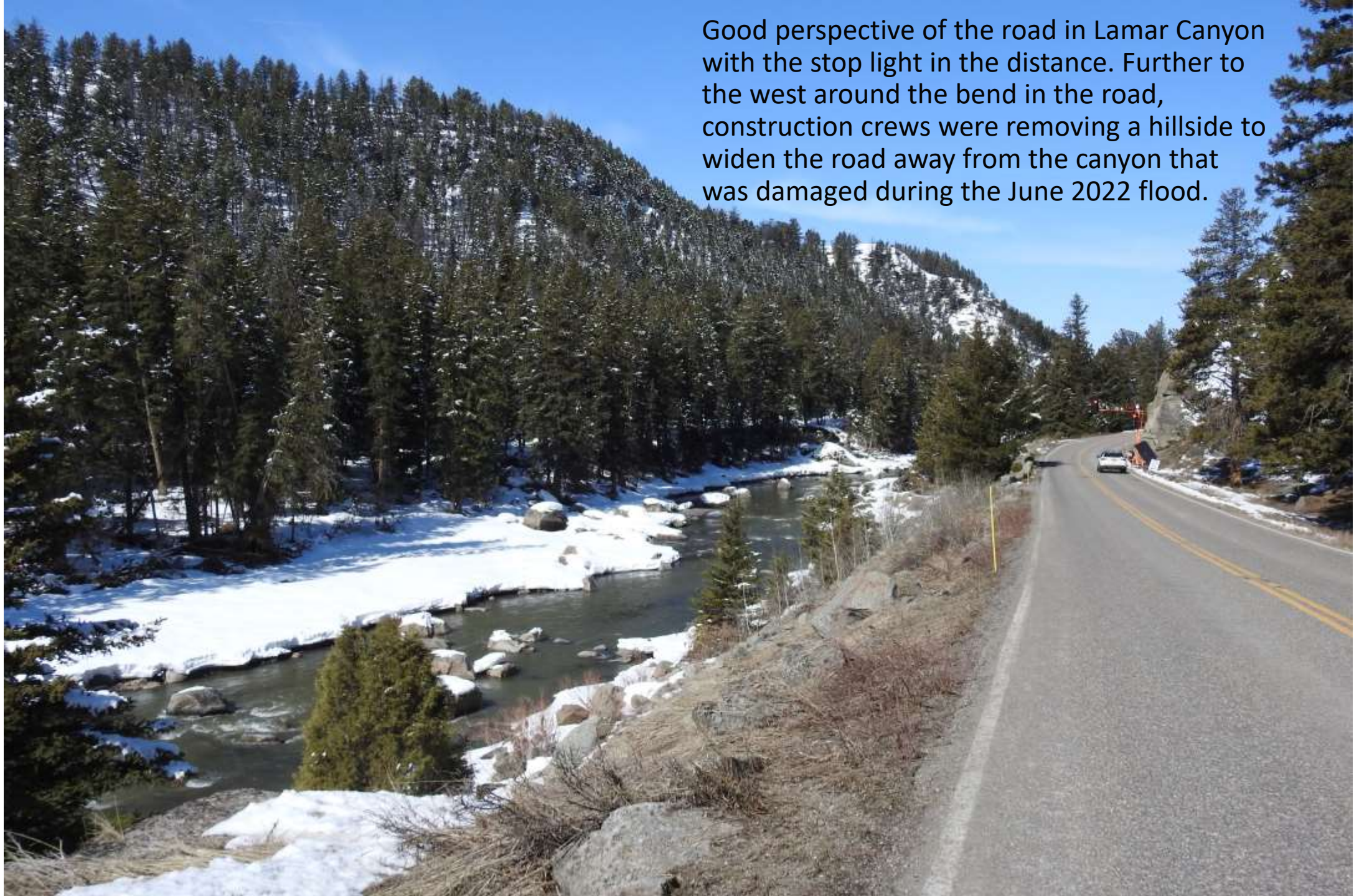


Perspective of Lamar River in Lamar Canyon with the park road paralleling the watercourse.





Good perspective of the road in Lamar Canyon with the stop light in the distance. Further to the west around the bend in the road, construction crews were removing a hillside to widen the road away from the canyon that was damaged during the June 2022 flood.





Leaving Lamar Canyon and heading east (background) into Lamar Valley.









Entering Lamar Valley on the park road.  
Also see next two pages.





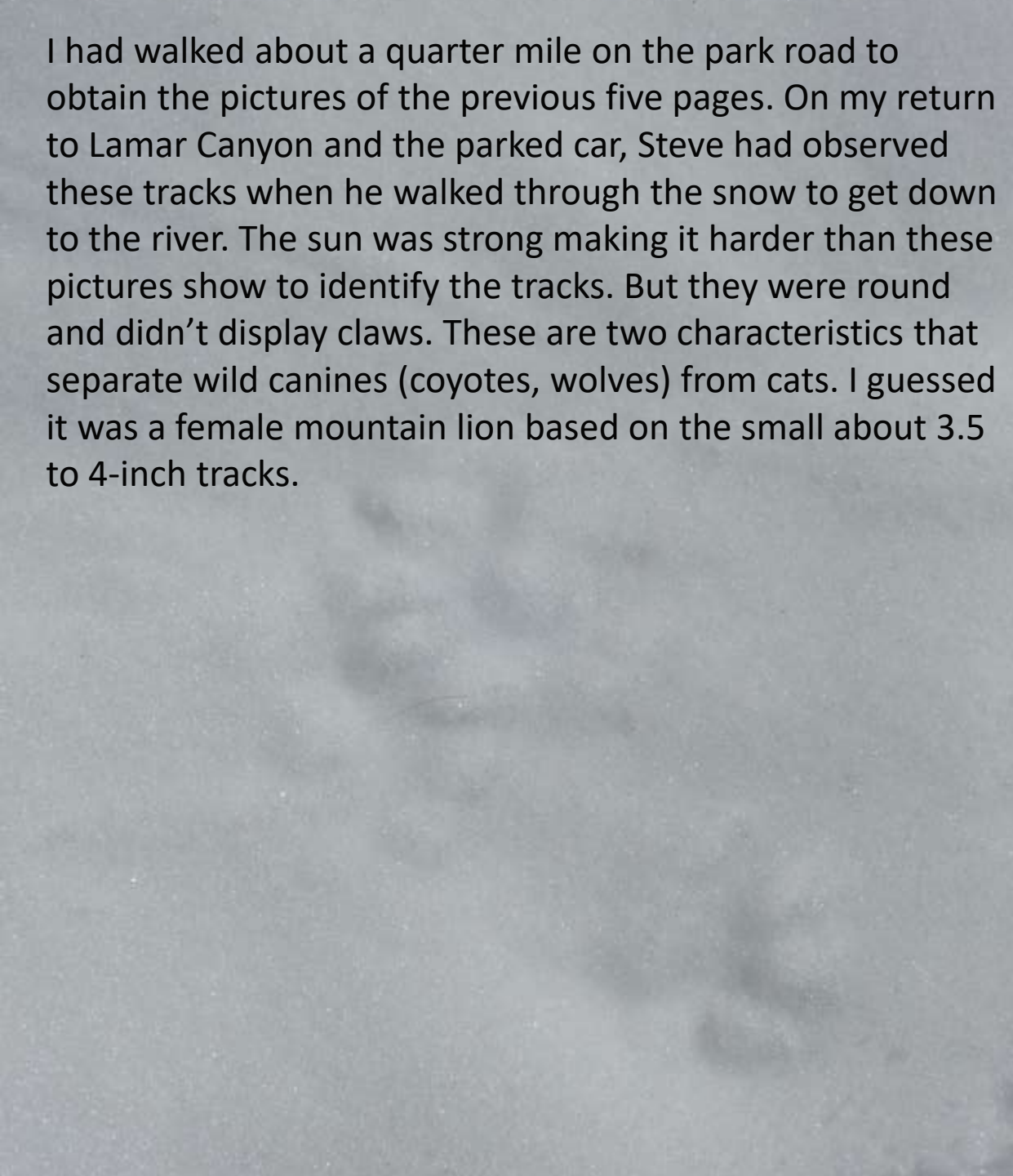








I had walked about a quarter mile on the park road to obtain the pictures of the previous five pages. On my return to Lamar Canyon and the parked car, Steve had observed these tracks when he walked through the snow to get down to the river. The sun was strong making it harder than these pictures show to identify the tracks. But they were round and didn't display claws. These are two characteristics that separate wild canines (coyotes, wolves) from cats. I guessed it was a female mountain lion based on the small about 3.5 to 4-inch tracks.









Soda Butte Valley with the Beartooth Mountains in the background.







In Soda Butte Valley we watched a red-tailed hawk perch on top of that lone conifer (also see next page, when it was in flight).













On our way back through Lamar Valley we spied this kestrel, which is a small type of falcon.







The kestrel was using this rock formation like a mini-cliff. It was fun to follow as it flew along the road corridor for a good half mile.







This group of young-looking bison were crossing the Yellowstone River via the Yellowstone River Bridge as they headed west. The park is rebuilding this overpass in a new location to the east (left) of there. It will take a couple of years to complete.









A moose was bedded ~200 meters east of Floating Island Lake but we were snobbish and decide to drive on by and not stop and take pictures. The large ungulate appeared to be unbothered by the couple of cars that were stopped in the road. We were tired and wanted to get back to our headquarters. We saw a few hundred bison between Mammoth and Gardiner, and also spotted ~12 mule deer in Mammoth, then saw more elk on the drive down to the North Entrance. We returned to Gardiner at 1:30 PM.

I spent the next couple of hours processing pictures before we met Bob C. and two of his friends at the Wonderland Café in Gardiner at 4:15 PM. We stayed until 5:10ish, then went to Yellowstone Hot Springs in Corwin Springs 7 miles north of Gardiner. This is a new place, being about two years old. They pipe hot water into a shallow pool sized area. It was a fascinating place with many people in attendance.

Bob was with Linda Thurston and Nathan Varley, owners of [Yellowstone Wolf Tracker](#), a premiere guiding service that take clients into the park to see wolves and other wildlife. We had a fun couple of hours chatting with them and learning more about Yellowstone. We also met some local property owners who rent out cabins. They were adamantly against the '[bison slaughter](#)' and were asking Bob for ways to stop it. Some bison were being killed within sight and bordering their property in a place called Beattie Gulch. They were incensed, and rightfully so.

While in the man-made hot springs, we saw a large group of elk on the slope above the hot spring, and two bighorns above them. I counted over 50 wapiti on a steep section of mountain. Unfortunately, we didn't have our optics (camera and spotting scope) so had to look at them with our naked eye from a half mile away.

On our drive back to Gardiner at twilight, we saw a bison bull next to the road, and scattered deer and elk right on the side of the highway. One must drive alertly when out there.

I didn't go to bed until 11:30 PM on this night as I went through the days 225 pictures that I took! It was a long and arduous task, but it felt good to start the next morning with my pictures organized and saved, and my camera image counter at zero!





Left: This young mule deer was one of about a dozen we saw in Mammoth. We were tired and didn't stop to photograph them, aside from this picture.

Below right: A group of bison right next to the Mammoth hotel.











Left: Two elk were bedded next to this house in Gardiner. They were just relaxing and chewing their cud (below right and next page).









# Day 4: A Grizzly and His Friends

April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023 began relatively warm with a predawn temperature of 36° F in Gardiner. I slept in a little later than Steve, waking up at 4:40 AM. We didn't depart the duplex until 5:21 AM. I was worn out from multiple hours of soaking in the hot spring the previous evening and then the late-night processing of all my photos to date.

We didn't arrive to the Blacktail parking lot until 5:51 AM – more than 20 minutes later than normal for us – but there was still space to park! It was a Monday, which meant fewer vehicles in Yellowstone. It is often hard to keep track what day of the week it is when we are there, but certain things – like traffic – do change depending on the day of the week.

The grizzly was sleeping about 30 feet away from the bison carcass at first light, which is about a half hour before dawn – when the sun rises above the horizon. The carcass was more consumed, and the bear looked full. At daylight, he left the carcass and walked away to the northwest, bedding down southwest of the small pond he had been going in to cool off. This was a new spot. Instead of entering the water, he dug a pit in the snow and then laid down in it – he was in a comical position looking like a person in a fully reclined Lazy Boy recliner.

As he laid there, a coyote – one of the two from the previous day based on appearance (it had a distinct saddle) and behavior – came in and fed. It was clearly very skittish of the road and backed off a few times from noises. It fed on the carcass but only stayed for 6-8 minutes before returning east where it came from.

At 7:00 AM, the bear got up and walked into the pond, lying down in the water. A crane was calling loudly about 200 meters away on a sage knoll just below the foothills of Mt. Everts. There was a small inlet of exposed water where there were ~20 ducks. Apparently, I thought, the crane didn't need help from the bear this morning.

However, when the bear went into the water, the giant bird flew and landed right next to him and followed the ursid as he walked in the water, which wasn't iced over. We could hear the bear splashing in the water from about 200 yards away. It seemed that he was going to head to the foothills for the day, so the crowd was surprised when instead, he came back to the carcass in full light. He arrived at the meat source and immediately tried to drag it out but couldn't. Two of the bison's legs seemed to still be stuck under ice or were caught up on something. There was likely plenty of flesh left on that underside.



Blacktail Ponds at first light.







Views of the grizzly bear (left) and coyote (right) at first light.





Good perspective pictures of the bear resting (upper arrow) and coyote (lower arrow) as it approached the carcass.







The coyote approaching, then feeding on the bison carcass while the bear was away.





The coyote chowing down.









The coyote would frequently look around (left) and left the carcass a couple of times (bottom), only to return to it again (next page).

















The coyote took off, giving the crowd a glance, as it traveled to the east and out of our view. It was impeccable timing as the grizzly bear was about to put on a show for the crowd (see next few pages).







The bear went from sleeping (left) to resting in a funny, human-like position (bottom right and next 3 pages).



















While the griz was resting, a seemingly mundane thing happened: A raven (top left) approached him. This was believed to be the first bird at the carcass in a full week of it being there.





The arrival of a trio of ravens (bottom right) certainly captured the bruin's attention (top left), for he soon stood up and left his bedding spot (next few pages). Notice the female on the right side displaying to the male (bottom right).





Before going back to the bison, he decided to take a brief bath in the pond (next three pages).















A raven, standing on ice, kept a close eye on the bear cooling off in the water. Then a sandhill crane arrived at that location (next page).





The bear watched the crane arrive (right) but then appeared to ignore it once it got close (left).















Bears don't have sweat glands, and that coupled with their incredibly thick fur makes them seek out other ways to regulate their body temperature, such as this bruin taking his regular ice water baths to cool down.

Once the crane walked past the bear, the large bruin stood up and appeared to follow the crane (next page).











Then a raven appeared on the scene with the crane and bear (left).











Then in almost unison the trio all looked down (left) and then up (right) at seemingly the same time.















After walking around and by the birds, the bruin turned south and headed straight back to the carcass. This meant he walked toward the direction of the parking lot but stopped short of the people once getting back to the bison (next page).







From these pictures it appears that the carcass is mostly gone but I soon discovered that the backside (i.e., the part underwater and under the ice) had plenty left.













The bear exposing the meatier underside of the bison carcass (right). While he could move it (right), he couldn't quite lift it out of the water (next page).









Steve (left) and Bob Landis filming the bear up close. Note the pond where the bear, crane, and raven (on the previous pages) were in the center of the picture just under my scope.





Wildlife watchers at the Blacktail pullout. As one can see, cars must park efficiently or there is “wasted” space. Two cars illegally park on the right side of the road, halfway on the pavement.





There is also a chance that it was too heavy for the bear to move the carcass, yet he managed to flip it over and ate the organs. He first opened the stomach and took some of the lining away which he snacked on between the carcass and the pond.

A raven had been calling in the trees across the road behind us but hadn't yet approached the carcass. As the bear walked away with part of the stomach, 3 ravens landed and followed the bear around. The bear returned to the carrion pile three more times, taking lots of organ morsels each visit. This was the first time the ravens had been to the carcass in the 7 days the bear had been there. Bob Landis was taking video of the ravens, as he is hoping to make a documentary on them. He commented multiple times on his puzzlement over how long it took the scavengers to finally go to the carcass.

While the ravens were there, we also heard a crow fly over the area. I found that interesting as I don't often see them in the park. Meanwhile, the ravens were putting on a show with one of the females wagging her tail to the male in a sign of courtship. Eventually two more ravens appeared but the original three were the only ones at the carcass. They would grab tidbits then fly away, presumably to cache (hide) the food, then they would soon return.

The bear eventually left the site at 8:15 AM in full sunlight. He went farther east than normal, and we left as he was walking away. I wondered if the ravens waited to arrive until the organs were exposed. It was very odd yet interesting behavior.

We were looking forward to searching for wolves farther to the east, but we first did our customary (for this trip) stop at the Blacktail outhouse. We had breakfast to fill up and get some energy for the second half of our morning.

There weren't many people out on this morning, hence the available parking at Blacktail at first light. We drove about 20 miles until finding Rick M. at Slough at 9:00 AM. He had not had any sightings yet. We scanned the den area to the north and Crystal Creek drainage to the south of the park road. We did see a bald eagle to the north, above the Lamar River, but didn't manage to find any wolves.

At ~11:15 AM we stopped at Petrified Tree for 15 minutes and saw the shape of a sleeping adult black bear. It was tough to see her in there with the contrast of the light. I did see a foot pad, so knew for sure the sow was indeed there.





The ravens (right) watched as the grizzly fed on the remains of the bison.







Close up views of him pawing at the meat. He used his long claws to obtain pieces of meat, which he licked up.









The bear repeatedly tried to pull the bison out of the water. The bison's hide was becoming bleached and looked like a cow based on the missing fur and exposed whitish colored skin.





As much as he pulled, it kept falling back into the water. You can see how much meat was remaining in this picture.















The light became optimal at this point as the sun was over our right shoulder coming from the east. We were obtaining great pictures and could see that the bear was opening organs, like the stomach. The water was becoming discolored from blood and gut parts.









This page: Bear eating organ pieces. I believe this was part of the stomach.

Next page: Bear growls at a nearby raven, while also keeping an eye on the crowd. Luckily, most people were quiet and very respectful of the nearby bear.













With the bear exposing the organs on this morning, the ravens had plenty of tidbits to eat (also see next page).

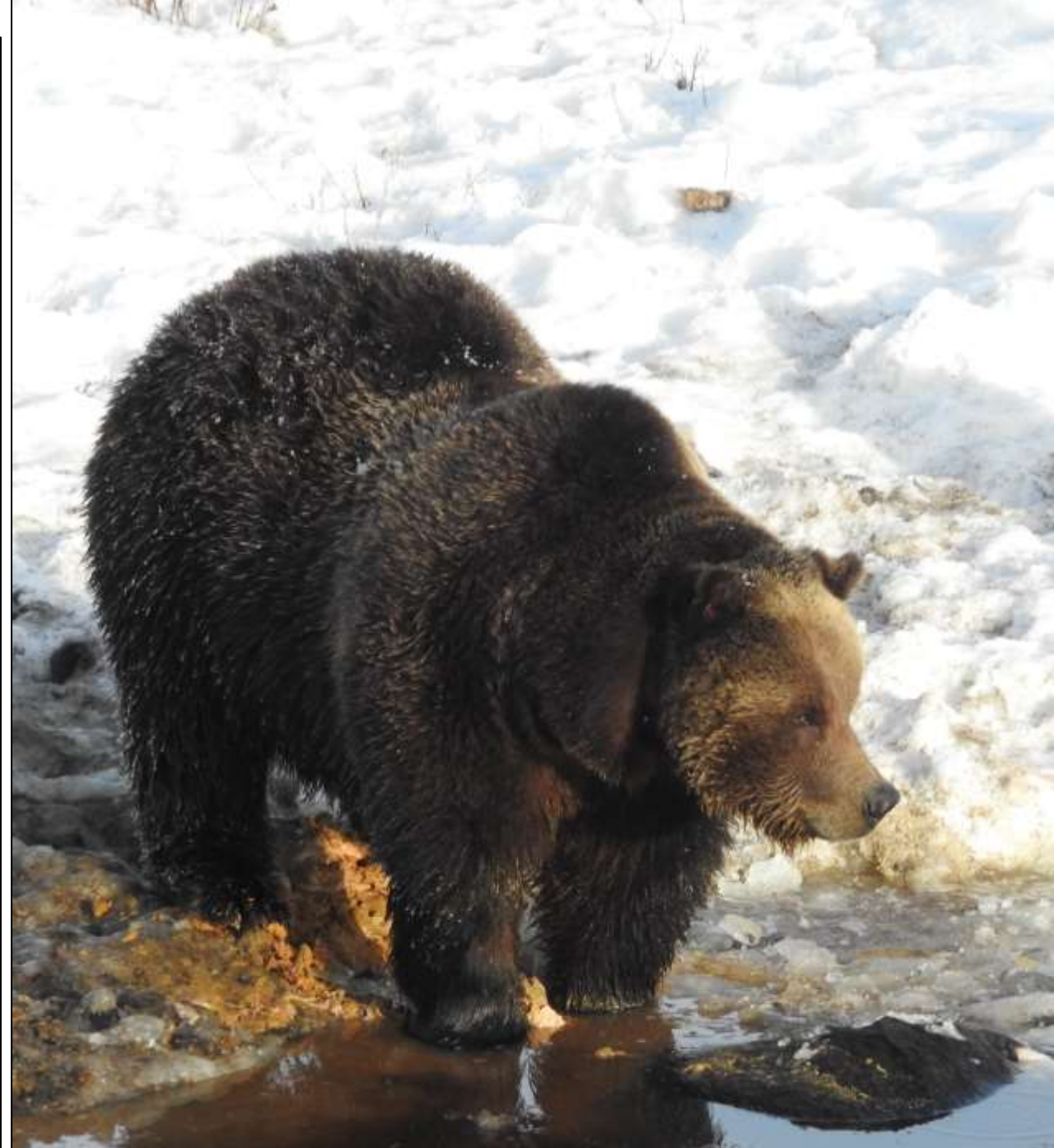














After feasting, the bear took some organ pieces away from the carcass and sat in the snow to eat them. This was about halfway to the pond it had been bathing in.







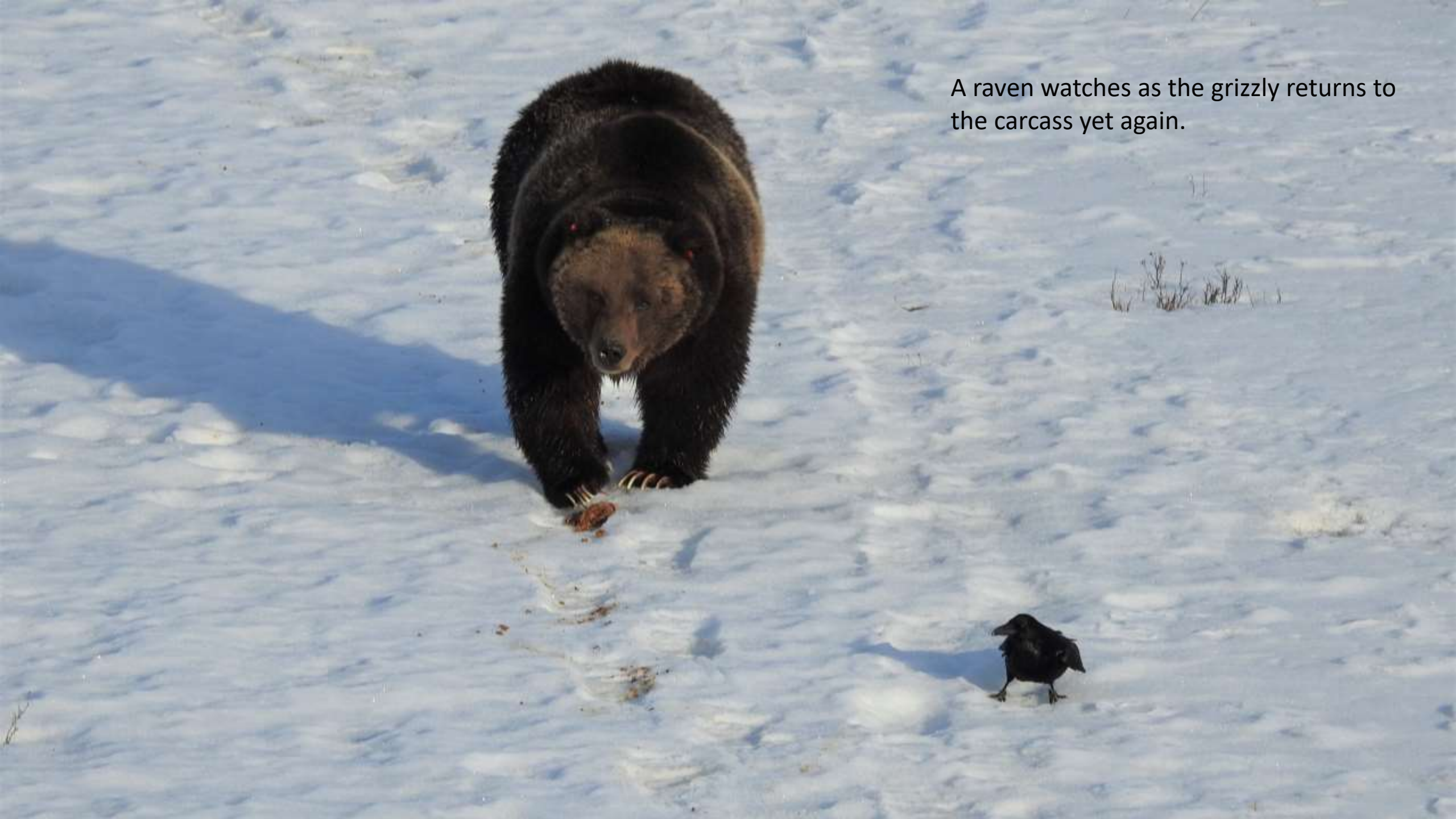
The ravens used this opportunity to go directly to the carrion pile and eat as much as they could while the bear was not there.







A raven watches as the grizzly returns to the carcass yet again.













A great perspective of the grizzly feeding on the Blacktail, with wildlife watchers (next page) quietly observing the bruin.









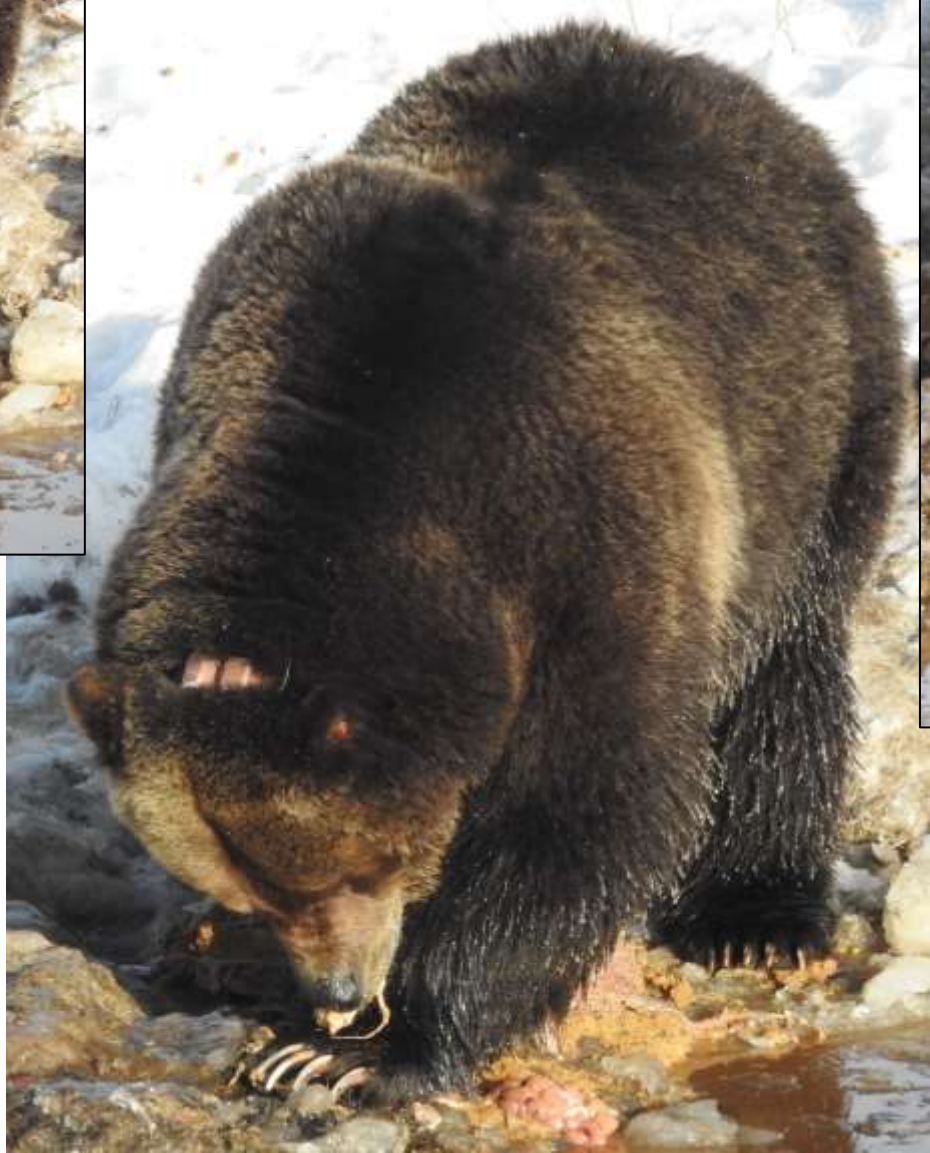


The bear returned for the final time on this morning. The entrails had started to smell, and I got whiffs of it from the parking lot.





He appeared to be satiated by this point but kept feeding, nevertheless. I kept thinking to myself, 'I can't believe how big he is for recently coming out of hibernation.' In fact, on the date of these pictures (April 17), many or all of the females and their cubs were still in their dens sleeping.



Next page: He soon left the carcass and headed uphill for the day. We left as he departed in order to try and see other wildlife while it was still early.









I have always  
loved the Elk  
Creek area and  
'One Tree Hill'.







Location (see arrow above) in Little America where we observed this bald eagle perched on a boulder.

Next page: This was the maximum capability of my camera, which was set up on a tripod and zoomed in to its farthest optical ability (x 83). I then cropped part of the picture (see next page)!

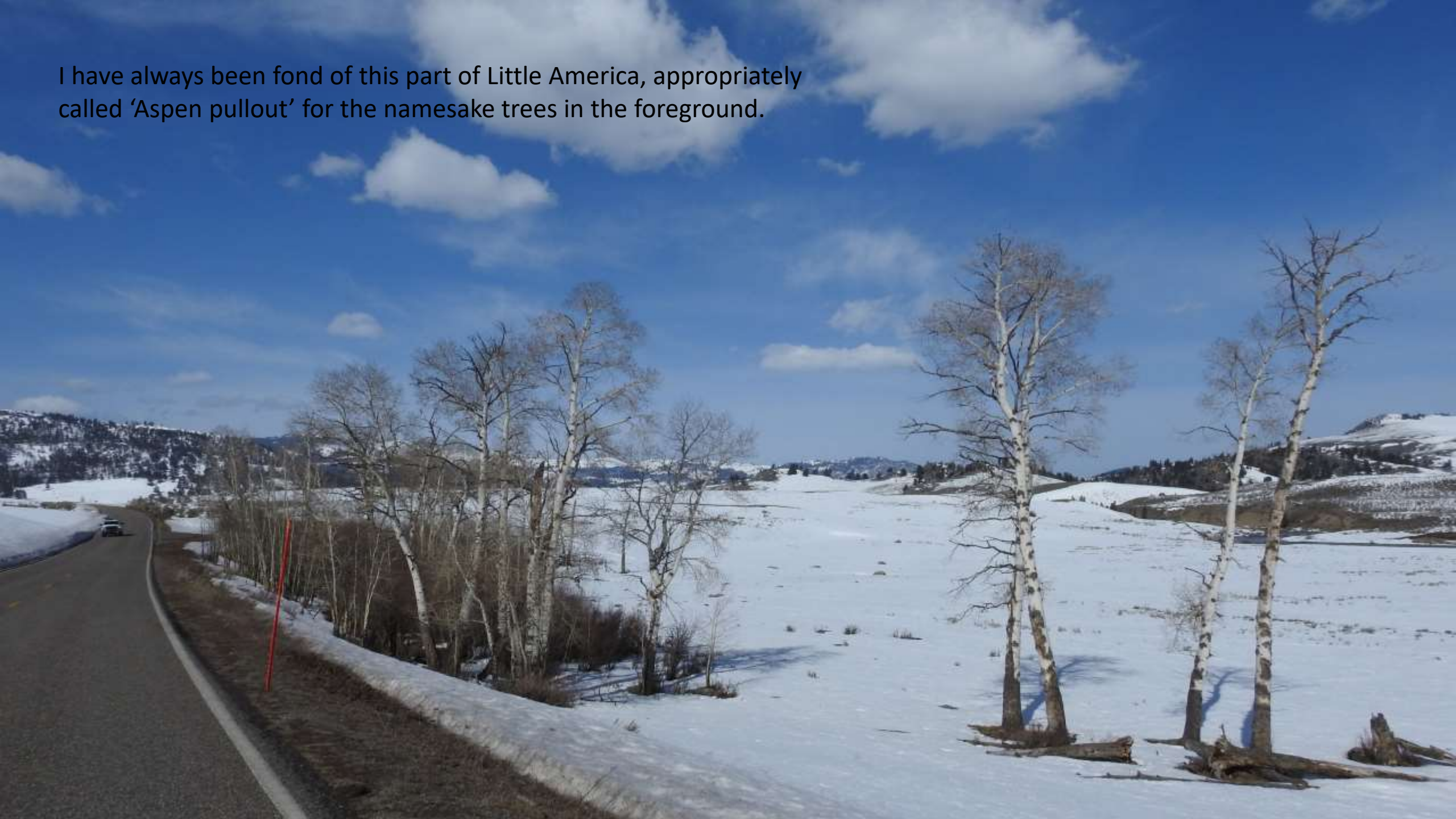








I have always been fond of this part of Little America, appropriately called 'Aspen pullout' for the namesake trees in the foreground.





We decided to head back to the duplex a little earlier than usual and then do a hike later in the day. We saw a good number of bison on the way back from Tower to the Blacktail. We got into another bison jam in the Cottonwood area. Those bison were moving east which meant they were likely to stay in the park for the rest of the spring.

As we drove west on the Blacktail we did a slow drive-by of the carcass site and saw ravens there. We also glimpsed another bald eagle; this one was flying overhead on the Blacktail. We didn't stop, since it would have taken some effort to follow it until potentially landing.

Forty bison on the west side of the Blacktail near Wraith Falls was the largest group that we encountered. We also spotted bison and elk on the new Mammoth to Gardiner Road which wasn't a surprise as that is a common place to observe both species in the winter and early spring.

We arrived back to the duplex at 12:05 PM, ate lunch and then processed pictures for a couple of hours. We rested until 4:00 PM which felt nice. We then hiked the Yellowstone River Trail up the Jardine Road above the town of Gardiner, which is in national forest land just outside the park. There were many elk up there, including in a yard next to a church. Bizarrely, they were following a guy driving an ATV. He was dropping food pellets and did that at least four times in his small maybe half acre yard. The elk were gobbling up the food.

Given that feedlots concentrate deer, potentially exposing them to disease, this didn't seem like a good idea. But I certainly wasn't going to suggest that to him. We also saw 3 mule deer in his yard.

The map indicated that the hike began below the church, but it was a very steep decline. We took a look and immediately ran into a couple more elk from a very close distance behind the building. It was going to be a difficult descent to the Yellowstone River Trail, so we decided to turn back. We passed the two elk again, then returned to the church lot.

We then left that neighborhood and drove back to the Jardine Road, climbing in elevation as we went past Eagle Creek Campground to Trail No. 313. It was a long, windy, steep, and mostly downhill trail from there. There were plentiful ungulate, mostly elk, scat and old bones in what is part of their winter range as there is less snow there. At the bottom of the trail, very close to Bear Creek and some old machinery, there were two dead cow elk. They stunk. And man, are they large animals when you are right next to them. Each one appeared to be 500 pounds. One hadn't been touched yet. The other was eaten into and was headless. They were only about 50 feet apart. I guessed that they were winter-killed but it was tough to know for sure.





On our drive back to Gardiner, we got into a bison jam. It was in a steep, canyon-like area, so the bison mostly had to travel on the park road to get to where they wanted to go.











Undine Falls, a picturesque water feature on the west edge of the Blacktail Plateau. Notice the snow cornice to the right and on the next page.







Different perspectives of Undine Falls with the  
neat snow cornice above the water.





Mammoth Hot Springs is always a dominant feature of the landscape when passing over the Mammoth High Bridge (which was under construction during this trip) as one heads back to the village/town of Mammoth.







After taking a break for a few hours at the duplex where we stayed in Gardiner, Steve and I went out for an evening hike along the Yellowstone River Trail. The first part of the hike involved trying to figure out where it actually started. We initially parked at the church off a side road off the Jardine Road. We saw a person feeding a few dozen elk in his yard next to the church, which was interesting. But we couldn't connect with the main Yellowstone River Trail from the church lot, so we turned around and headed further up the Jardine Road.







This isn't something you see everyday: wild elk following a person on an ATV! It turns out he was feeding the elk some type of pellet or grain, and they were trailing him for the food.











This was the view from behind the church. There wasn't a clearly defined trail, so we went by this elk (see arrow above, and on the right) and then turned back around and passed her again as we returned to the parking lot.



Another kestrel. 'What are the chances?', I thought. Like the one in Lamar Valley earlier this day, this bird was paralleling the road as we drove by.







The Mile 313 trail. Right: This is a view while looking back toward the Jardine Road which can be seen at the base of that mountain. We partly chose this hike knowing that there would be less snow than in the park. Ungulates, especially elk, use this area in the winter, hence the term “winter range”.





Along the way we saw elk parts, including a leg and scat (top left), a rib cage (bottom left), a carcass with fur spread out (bottom right). We also saw cacti very close to the trail, which indicates a dry, desert-like environment (top right).





A panoramic view of the canyon along Bear Creek (the valley on the left side of image), which merges with the Yellowstone River in the middle right of the picture.



Zoomed in view of the Yellowstone River area. Note: The park is in the background in these pictures (see arrow).



Bear Creek.





Before we found the two dead elk, we discovered these ears. We both found that odd. Although the elk was mostly intact, it smelled (next page), and so did the headless one 50 feet away (next page).







Yellowstone River corridor.





As we left the Bear Creek Canyon area, we soon arrived at the Yellowstone River Trail. There, we smelled another elk, but this one was out of sight, and we didn't go into the bushes to look for it. We did see another headless wapiti close to but off the trail. We found a lower jaw near that site, and it looked old as the teeth were worn down. Besides the head, the body was intact. I wondered if human(s) had done that either nefariously (i.e., for a head mount) or for legit reasons (like checking for disease). We both found it odd how many dead but not consumed elk we saw in a relatively small area.

We saw small groups of bison across the river while we were hiking. Those animals were officially in Yellowstone. We also pushed a nervous bull bison for about a half mile on the trail. We didn't physically touch him, but our movements caused him to move. We felt bad and we were in a canyon, so space was relatively limited. He wouldn't let us walk around and pass him. He eventually walked inside of Yellowstone's boundaries by moving eastward, so he was safe from a potential hunter.

As the land became flatter and he had more space to leave the trail area, we found 12 more bison right by the park boundary. They all were clearly nervous, as the [tribal hunt had claimed over 1,000 members of the herd this past winter](#). I surmised the death of their brethren was likely fresh on their minds.

We had hiked almost 3.5 miles by the time we got to the park boundary, and knew we had to climb back up the steep hill to return to our vehicle, so we turned around. This also gave the bison a break from human presence, which was another reason why we didn't go any further. On our way back, we saw 6 mule deer climbing up a hill in the general area of the trail. One was a big buck that still had his right antler. He had already shed his left rack. Then, we saw 8 more 'mulies' when we were about three-quarters of the way up Trail 313. I got some good silhouette pics of them with the setting sun in the distance.

We hadn't seen any live elk up to that point despite all the sign and carcasses. As we crested the top of Trail 313, and with about a half mile left on the hike, we spied a large, tightly bunched group of about 40 elk. They watched us from the trail and then ran north. We watched them until we were just around the bend, which was less than a ¼ mile from our car.

We returned to the car at 7:52 PM. We were pooped. While we 'only' hiked about 6.5 miles, I hadn't expected it to be such a steep and un-sturdy trail.

After dinner, I summarized my field notes and organized my pictures (naming and saving them) until about 11 PM. I was beat and said to myself, "Good night". I promptly turned off my electronics and passed out, knowing I would be up in 5.5 hours.





Pictures of  
the  
Yellowstone  
River and  
surrounding  
hills.





Top left: The bison that was following the trail (or close to it) ahead of us.



Top right: We also passed another headless elk with its worn-down lower jaw and detached ears (bottom). This was likely an old elk.







Top left: Bridge over Bear Creek (top right) as it merges with the Yellowstone River (bottom).

Next page: The mighty Yellowstone River and some rapids.











A pair of bull bison across the Yellowstone River, and officially inside the protective confines of Yellowstone National Park. At this point we were walking east and were still on national forest land. We would soon enter Yellowstone, despite still being on the north side of the river.

Next two pages: As we continued to walk, this bison would stay ahead of us as we passed by prickly pear cactus (next page) along the way.









I felt bad but wherever I went, the bison stayed ahead of us instead of simply letting us pass by him. We even tried to veer off the trail to loop around him, but the terrain made that difficult as we were still relatively (~50 yards) close to him.







We next came upon these 6 mule deer (with 5 in the pictures) running up a hill north of the Yellowstone River. The terrain is steeper than it appears. One of those deer was a good-sized buck with only his right antler remaining, having already shed the left side of his rack (bottom left and next page).





Right: Right around when we approached the park border, the bull bison finally stopped and faced us. It was almost like he knew he was in the protected portion of his range.







Top Left: Anything beyond the white posts was inside the park and then this sign (lower left) indicated that anything past there was inside the park. Part of the sign had been ripped off, but the no bikes and no dogs allowed is consistent with National Park Service policy.







Once we reached the park side of the trail (upper left), bison started to 'magically' appear, going from 3 individuals to about a dozen in a few seconds (right).







Another park service marker (top left), while a Canada goose scans its landscape at the edge of the nearby Yellowstone River (also see next page).











Some old machinery off Trail No. 313 and along Bear Creek. It was likely a former mill used to grind the ore from which the gold was extracted (using water and other chemicals) during the gold rush.







This group of 8 mule deer (not all are in the picture) are silhouetted against the skyline on our return hike to our car parked on the Jardine Road.















Soon after seeing the mule deer, I saw a few elk not knowing that they would turn into a large herd once we crested the ridge they were on (see next five pages).











Wapiti is another name for elk. It means white or white rump in some Native American languages. Their large 'white rumps' can easily be seen when they are running away (right).



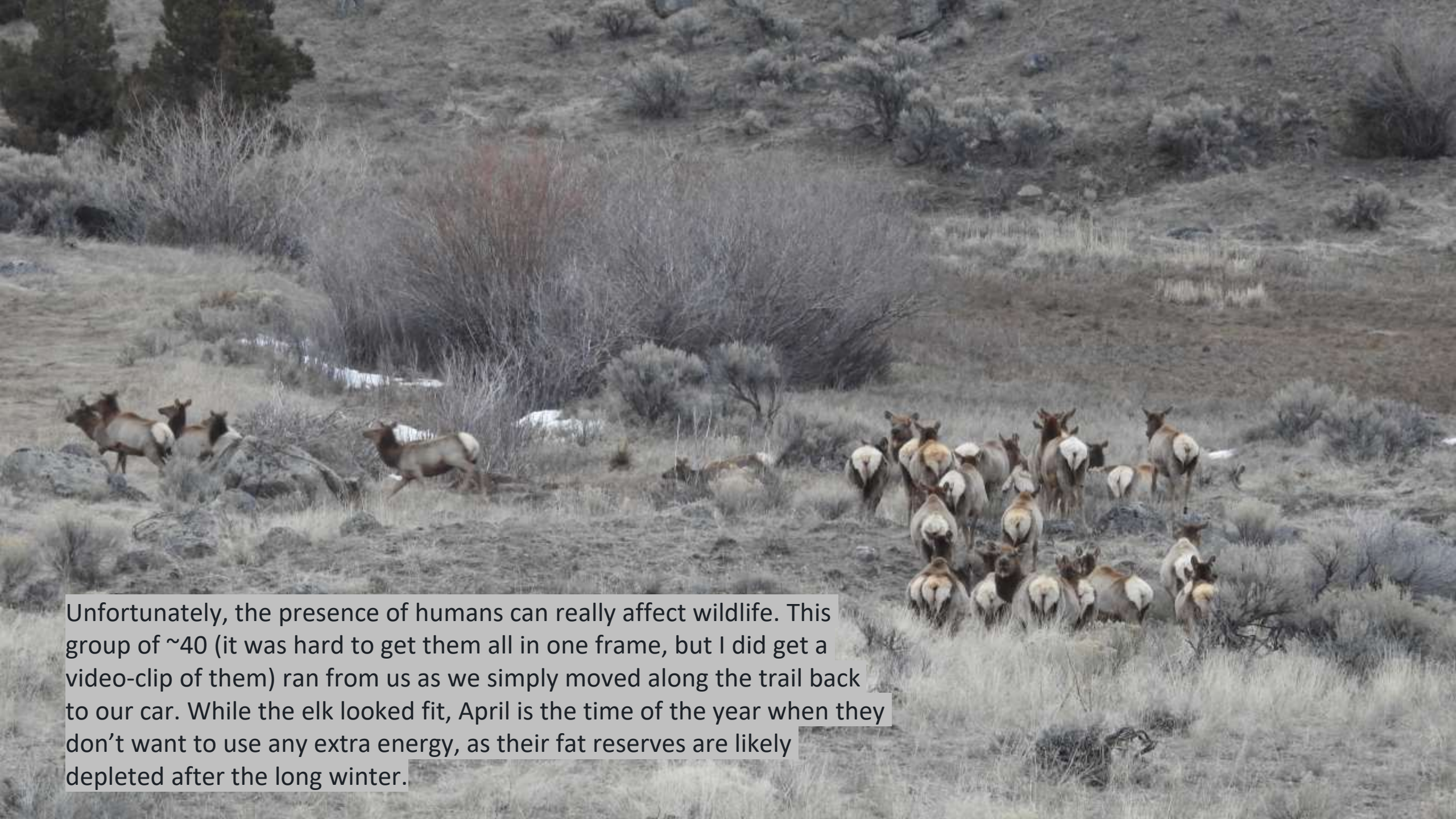












Unfortunately, the presence of humans can really affect wildlife. This group of ~40 (it was hard to get them all in one frame, but I did get a video-clip of them) ran from us as we simply moved along the trail back to our car. While the elk looked fit, April is the time of the year when they don't want to use any extra energy, as their fat reserves are likely depleted after the long winter.



# Day 5: A Grizzly Bear and a Two Wolf Pack Day

Whenever I travel to Yellowstone, I always think that a 9 day expedition will last for a while. But just about every time I visit, Day 5 (just over the halfway part of the trip) comes way too quickly. Steve or I always say something to that effect, which I noted on April 18, 2023. The day started with a relatively mild 34 degrees in Gardiner, but that quickly dipped into freezing temps and icy conditions from Mammoth through the rest of the park.

We arrived at the carcass site a little later, similar to the previous day, but still in predawn early light. Male grizzly #769 was on the carcass. He had pulled the bison out of the water, likely overnight, but kept it close to the original hole. Most of the hindquarters appeared to be largely intact. The bison's body was white and bleached, looking more like a blotched cow than a buffalo.

The treat of the morning was that there were also 5 wolves (4 black, with one of those radio-collared 1275M, and 1 gray) of the Rescue Creek Pack about 200 meters from the bear. They were on a berm in the flats to the northeast, just before the foothills of Mt. Everts. The Rescue pack consisted of ~12 adults at the time and were an offshoot of the Junction pack led by an uncollared 'Big Gray Male'. Most of the pack were males from Junction, along with a black female from a different pack. This was their second year together. (Starting in June 2023, wolf watchers observed them on the southern part of Blacktail Plateau with 8 pups, 5 blacks and 3 grays).

After about 3 days of minimal canid sightings, we finally had a good view of wolves. Bob L. said that the wolves were closer earlier when it was still dark but moved back right around when we arrived. Soon after first light, they awoke and independently traveled west through the ponds area at Blacktail. They were not very coordinated as they were quite spread out for a relatively small group. We could see about a mile to the west before trees blocked our view.

The canines continued well to the west, to around Wraith Falls, before the 4 blacks finally joined up. I never could find the gray and wondered if it stayed in the sage before the foothill near the bison carcass. We drove west to Undine Falls and scanned the area but couldn't find them. At 7:30 AM, we decided to give up on these wolves and drive to the east.

There weren't many cars on the road, and we finally connected with other watchers at Hitching Post and Footbridge Pullouts, which is about 25 miles away. Those lots are located between Lamar and Soda Butte Valleys. Very soon after we arrived, we heard a great howl close to the road at the beginning of the 'Druid Den Forest', a famous area for wolf watchers.



First views of grizzly bear 769M and two wolves of the Rescue Creek pack on a berm on a low, flat area of Blacktail Plateau.







Top left: The other 3 wolves, which were spaced away from the wolves on the previous page.

Right and next page: As they became active, they were very individualized in their movements with all traveling singly in the same westward direction.





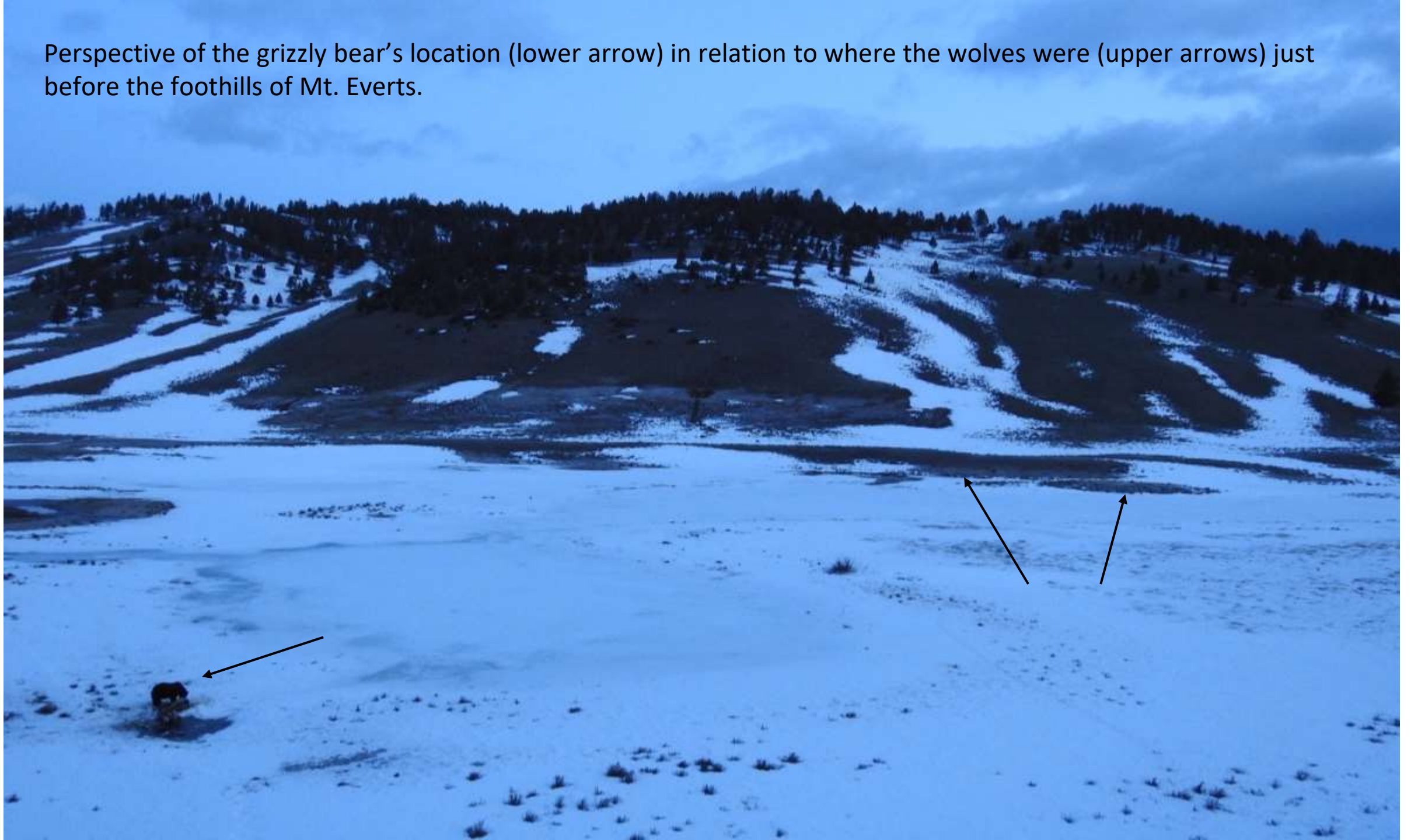








Perspective of the grizzly bear's location (lower arrow) in relation to where the wolves were (upper arrows) just before the foothills of Mt. Everts.







When the wolves started moving, it was still low light conditions. Thus, many of the pictures were blurry and not high quality. But the images became better once it became a little lighter out (next pages).

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As we focused on the wolves traveling west (top left), sort of comically, we had to remind ourselves that a 500+ pound wild grizzly bear was just below us (bottom).







Meanwhile, the wolves continued to move west, with occasional stops to scratch themselves (middle left). They would then get up (lower left) and continue traveling (middle and right images).

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As the wolves traveled out of view, we then went back to watching the bear for a few minutes. We obtained some more great daytime pictures (this and the next few pages).















The bear took a few moments to survey the crowd, many of whom were following the wolves. Maybe he felt left out and wanted the extra attention!





We left him for the morning while he was in the middle of feeding. We wanted to drive east and look for other wildlife, mainly the Junction Butte wolves.











As we traveled east, we went past Floating Island Lake, a small pond. We also saw bison, including this large bull near 'the Confluence' of Soda Butte Creek and the Lamar River.









Left: A bison (same as previous page) walking behind the Hitching Post pullout loo. This is a much less dramatic and romantic scene than the image on the previous page.



Right: The 'Druid den forest', site of where we heard, then observed, the Junction Butte wolf pack. This area is north of the park road in between Lamar and Soda Butte Valleys.



The 'Druid Den Forest' is where one of the first wolf packs in Yellowstone denned in the mid-1990s. Many documentaries, primarily by Bob Landis, were produced on these wolves. The Druid Pack no longer exists, as the Junction Butte wolf pack and a second spin-off of the pack, the Shrimp Lake Pack (a small pack of 4 wolves led by former Junction 1228F), now roam this area. However, the genes of the Druids and other previous packs live on in these extant animals.

My friend and Biological Technician for the wolf project, Jeremy SunderRaj, was there. He had 'Junction' radio-signals. They had a likely kill close to the road, literally just over a berm to the north. The howl was loud and amazing to hear so close by. Of all the times I have observed and heard them, I never tire of these experiences.

The wolves then moved in small groups north into the forest. I saw 10-12 of them, but it was hard to get an accurate count. Some would appear as others disappeared. It happened quickly, so that was our best guess. Some younger ones stayed visible for longer than others. Most traveled through an open hillside before we lost them in a line of trees.

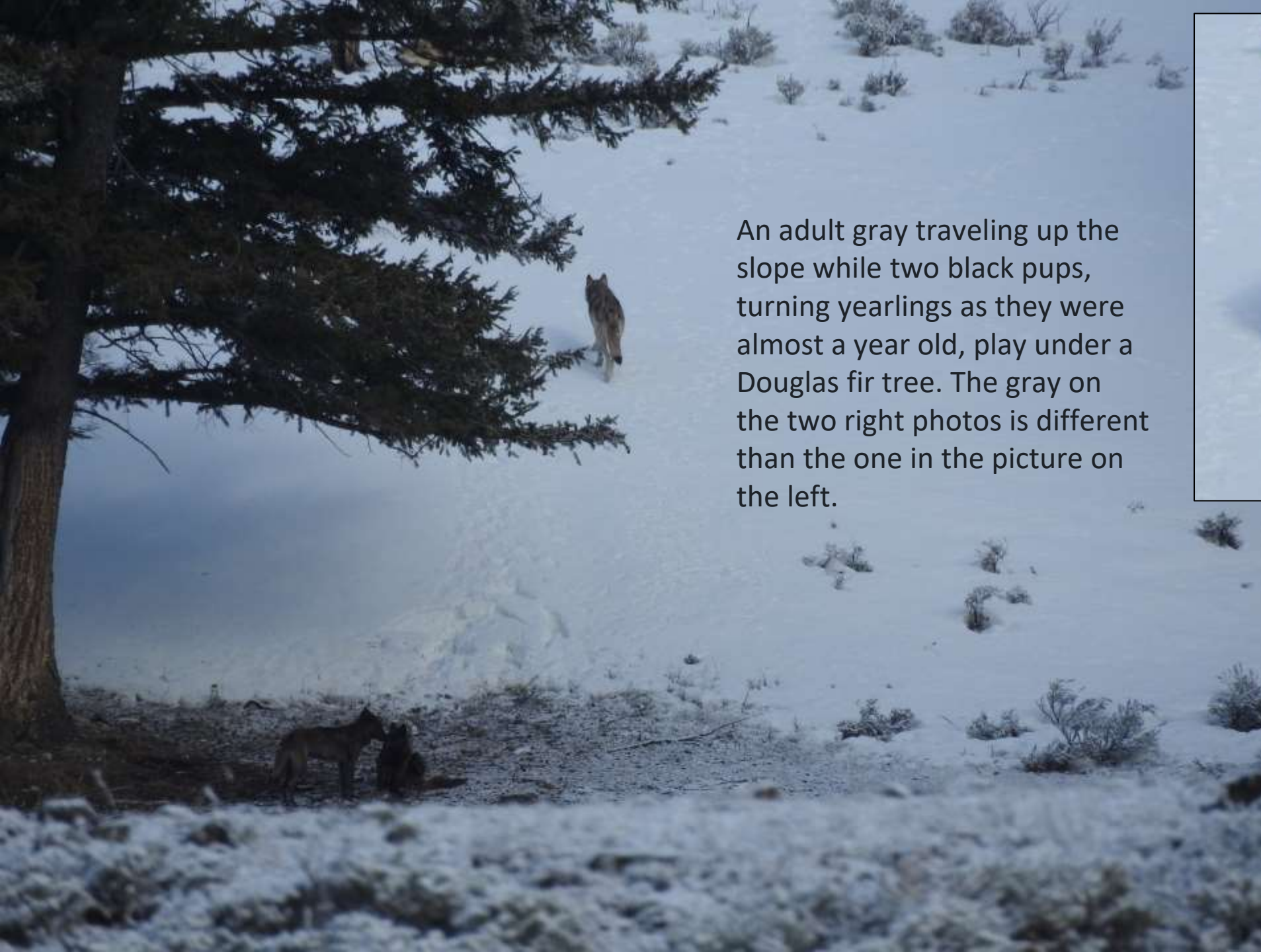
As the wolves went out of sight and the action slowed down, I could see many ravens, 1 bald eagle, and 1 coyote on the berm just above where the suspected carcass was. Clearly something was attracting all of these scavengers. Despite quietly standing in the parking lot for over another hour, the Junctions didn't reappear. There were some bull bison in the area, but they were spread out.

At 9:00 AM we decided to drive back to the west and hike the Mammoth Hot Springs boardwalk. As we traveled west, and about a half mile west of the Druid den observation area, we saw a golden eagle. We didn't see much else until seeing 2 mule deer near the boardwalk in Mammoth. We also had the usual bison and elk in that area. While hiking, we also saw a yellow-bellied marmot right at and under the boardwalk. It was likely recently emerging from hibernation and was acquiring some of the first grass of the spring.

We walked over 2.5 miles at Mammoth Hot Springs, so we got a good early cardio workout. After the hike, we saw another group of 6 mule deer on the drive down to Gardiner and pronghorn right by the North Entrance. We arrived back to the duplex at 1:00 PM and ate, checked email, processed pictures (for >2 hours), then I took an hour nap. It took me a while to get going again on this day, but at 5:30 PM we headed back into the park to see if we could see the Junctions at dusk.

We saw lots of bison spread out on our way east. It was the most we had seen so far on this trip. We arrived back to Footbridge pullout at 6:35 PM. We met a new wolf watcher there, 'Nick from Pennsylvania'. He reported that he was there all day and had a couple of sightings of 1-2 in the rolling hills. In other words, he hadn't seen much despite the effort.





An adult gray traveling up the slope while two black pups, turning yearlings as they were almost a year old, play under a Douglas fir tree. The gray on the two right photos is different than the one in the picture on the left.























These two photos show how trees (left) and ridges (right) can make it difficult to follow the wolves. For instance, once the wolf in the bottom right picture traveled 5-10 more feet ahead, it went out of view.

Next page: A bald eagle soon showed up near the carcass site which was to the left (west) of the wolf observations.





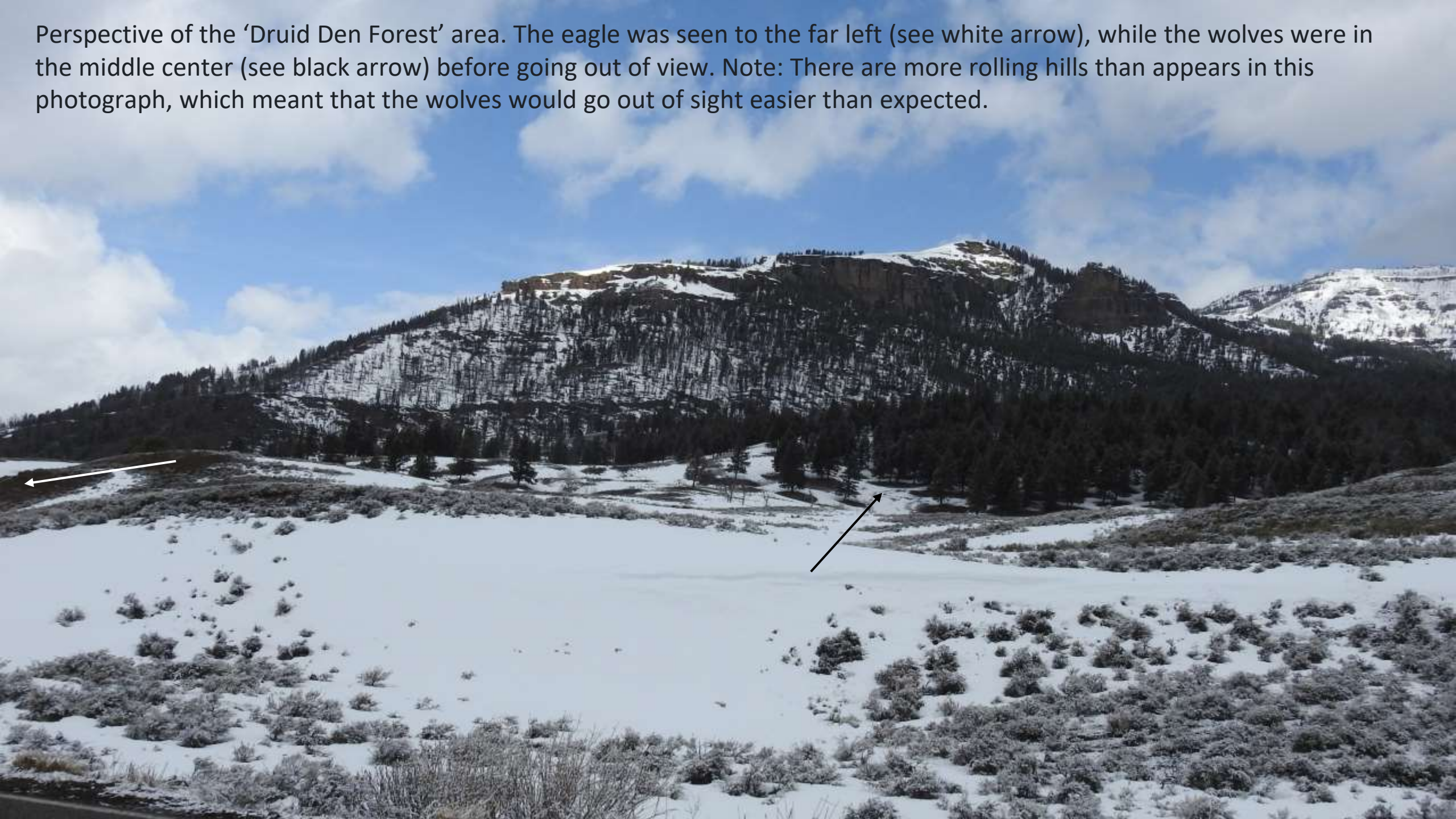




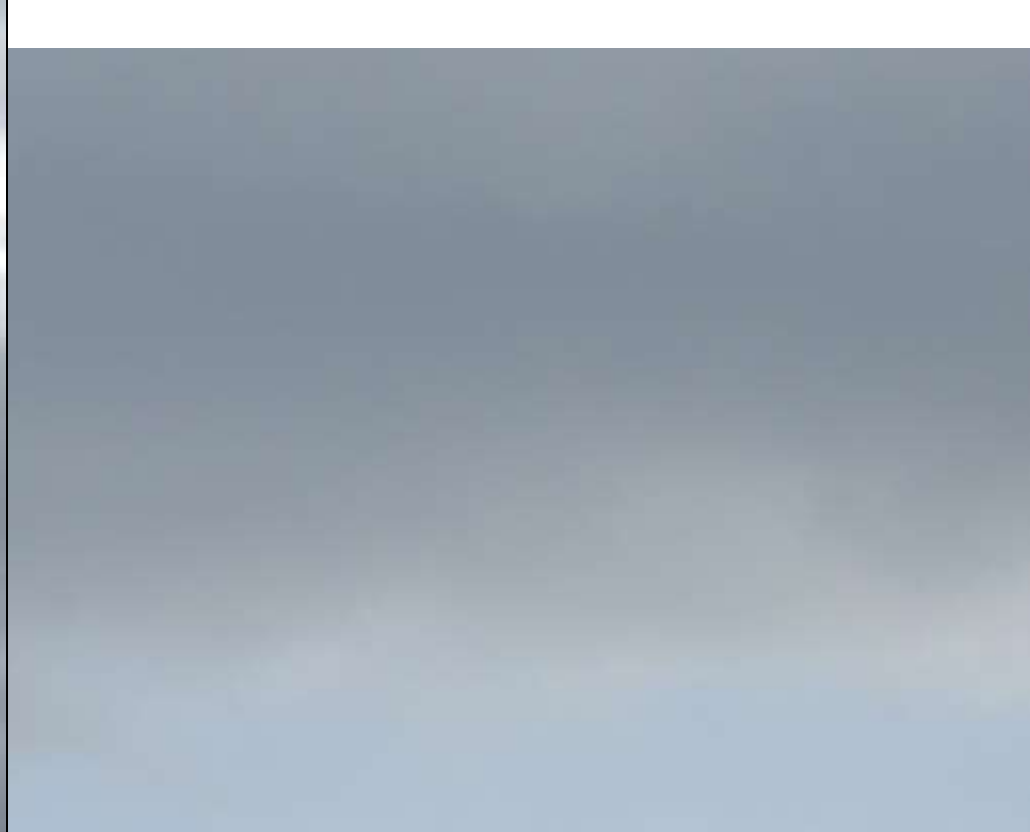




Perspective of the 'Druid Den Forest' area. The eagle was seen to the far left (see white arrow), while the wolves were in the middle center (see black arrow) before going out of view. Note: There are more rolling hills than appears in this photograph, which meant that the wolves would go out of sight easier than expected.







As we were watching the  
wolves, this beautiful  
quartet of sandhill cranes  
flew right over us!







This golden eagle was observed just to the west of the observation area in an area we call '21's Crossing' based on the famous [breeding male \(#21M\) of the Druid Peak Peak](#). 21 used to cross the park road and head up to the Druid den forest along this open corridor during his reign from 1995 to 2004.





I have always liked these cottonwood trees and routinely take pictures of them during the different seasons I am in the park.





In addition, I have always been fond of this picturesque spot with the cottonwood trees and the Lamar Buffalo Ranch (also called Lamar Institute) nestled in Lamar Valley.







Bison jam at Phantom Lake. As one of my favorite animals, I greatly enjoy most of these jams because I get to see them up close. It is an amazing experience, as long as the lines of car aren't too bad, which was the case on this day.





Left: The view from inside our car.

Below: Approaching Mammoth Hot Springs.





The Lower Terraces at Mammoth, which is the beginning of the Mammoth Hot Springs hike.







Liberty cap (left) and Palette Spring (right, below) are both prominent features in the Lower Terrace portion of Mammoth Hot Springs.



Next page: Palette Spring panorama (above) with close-ups of thermophiles (lower left) and the travertine step-like formation which is made up of calcium carbonate (lower right).







Devil's Thumb next to Palette Spring.



Next page: Palette Spring from above, which is a totally different view than from the ground level.

Mound Terrace









Palette Spring on the left with Mt. Everts in the background.



Minerva Terrace close-ups.







Minerva Terrace.







A yellow-bellied marmot in the middle of the Mammoth Hot Springs boardwalk area.

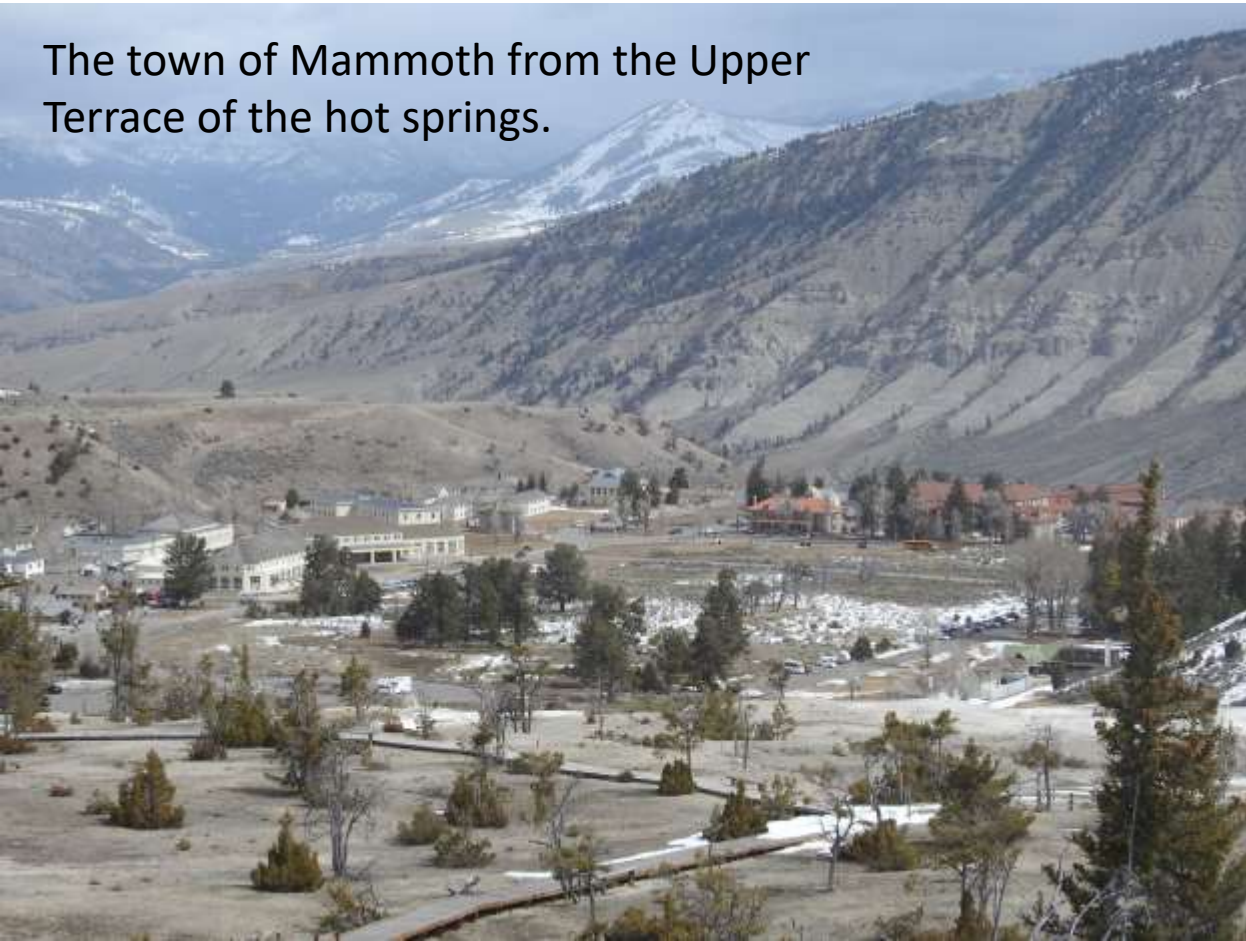








The town of Mammoth from the Upper Terrace of the hot springs.







Right: This lodgepole pine was in a unique position in the tough, rocky sediment it was growing in. It was likely quite old despite not being particularly tall or impressive looking.







Cupid Spring (left) and Grassy Spring (right) in the Upper Terrace portion of Mammoth Hot Springs. Notice the remaining snow even in the wide-open, sun-hit areas.





Mt. Everts in the background with Canary Spring (see the steam rising in the air) appearing below the mountain in the distance. The picture was taken from Grassy Spring. Notice the boardwalk on the right. I am always amazed at being able to walk into these unique ecosystems. The boardwalks provide the opportunity to experience settings that look like they are from a different world, as geyser basins certainly appear to be.











Canary Spring in the fog.







Some great travertine  
formations at Canary Spring.





It was so foggy at the Upper Terraces, and specifically at Canary Spring, that Mt. Everts was barely visible in the background.







As we hiked back to the car, we saw another marmot in the rocky terrain. A neat sighting in a very special area.





Marmots are rodents and are very closely related to woodchucks or groundhogs. Essentially, woodchucks are 'eastern marmots'.











Top: View from the new stretch of park road connecting Mammoth to Gardiner.



Below: Roosevelt Arch in the town of Gardiner. This is a very historic monument that I had the privilege to see multiple times a day when coming to and from my living quarters in town.



A wider perspective of the Roosevelt Arch with the town of Gardiner to the immediate right (north).







This and next page: Upon our return to the park, we saw these 5 pronghorns grazing right next to the road just after going by the North Entrance gate.









'Nick from PA' told us that Jeremy S-R went over the berm once the wolf watchers left and confirmed a wolf kill. It was a cow bison and was rapidly being consumed by all the carnivores – but mainly the wolves and ravens. We had watched up to 20 ravens at a time fly in and out of the gully. They were very active and loud. The corvids interacted on the ridge above where the bison was, but also flew overhead performing some cool aerial acrobatics. We also saw a juvenile bald eagle that had a half white head. It perched on a rock just north of the road between Hitching Post and Footbridge pullouts.

We stayed for exactly an hour, until 7:35 PM, when snow and wind came in. The weather made it an easy decision to head back to the duplex while it was still relatively early. There were very few cars on the road on our drive back to Gardiner. We even stopped at the Blacktail Ponds lot, but nothing was on the bison even though it appeared that there was still plenty of meat left on it.

We returned to the duplex at 8:48 PM after doing lots of driving in the past 3+ hours. It was another very productive, good day in the world's first national park!











Left: Close-up of one of the ravens as it takes a break from doing its aerial acrobatics.

Below: The Druid den forest area at dusk, before snow and wind entered the scene.





Bald eagle at dusk sitting above (north) the road on that richly colored boulder. The different colors are different types of lichen, which themselves appear to be plant-like organisms. But, in fact, they are a symbiotic partnership of two separate species, a fungus and an algae.





# Day 6: Tracking a Grizzly in the Snow

April 19<sup>th</sup> started out colder than the past few days with 24° in Gardiner and teens in the park. We left the duplex at 5:10 AM with the intent of driving straight to Footbridge pullout to look for the Junction pack. There was a dusting of snow throughout the park, and it snowed all day but without much accumulation.

The roads were slippery, which forced us to drive slowly. We arrived at Blacktail Ponds at 5:37 AM in the complete dark. I could see the grizzly's body but couldn't make out much more than that, so we continued our drive to the east. We later received reports from wolf watcher 'Frank H' that 2 wolves were by the carcass with the bear. One was black and I never received details on the second canine. The wolves left at first light, so the sighting wasn't completely clear. I was told that one had a mild interaction with the bear, but nothing too serious, before departing to the east.

Just before reaching Tower Junction, a snowshoe hare crossed the road in front of me. I almost hit it. Rick McIntyre told me that sightings of this large rabbit are rare enough that he notes his observations when he sees them.

We finally arrived at Footbridge at 6:20 AM with enough light to scope the area. Rick was already there and didn't have the wolves. We were a bit surprised given that they had a bison carcass there. We figured they would take at least two days to finish it. We were wrong.

There was a red fox on the berm above the carcass by the den forest. I obtained some good pics of the little fella. There were ~20 ravens in the area too, like the previous evening. When the fox was looking intently from the berm, I followed where it was looking and briefly saw a coyote as it left the carcass area. It went southwest toward the park road where it likely crossed out of my view. That would explain why the fox looked so nervous up there. With the coyote gone, the little canine went in the swale straight to the carcass.

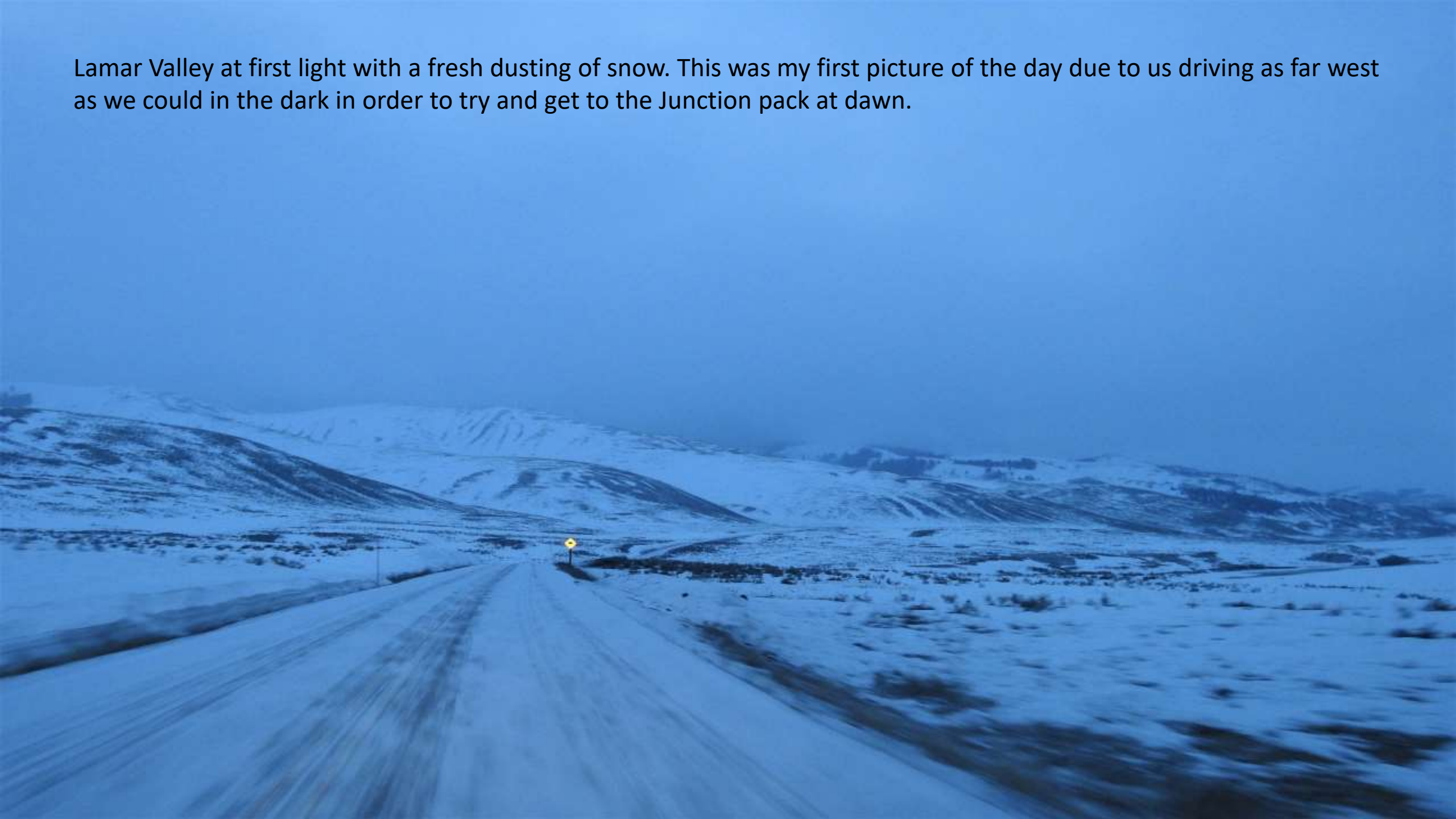
As all of this was happening, I saw a juvenile bald eagle fly by. I surmised it was the bird from the previous night but had no way to prove that based on the quick sighting.

It was a cold morning, with snow, humidity, and a steady WNW wind. I drank an extra cup of tea to warm up.

After no action for about 45 minutes, we headed to Round Prairie to look for the Shrimp Lake wolves. This small pack of four is usually observed between Soda Butte Valley and Round Prairie. They also likely range to the east in the forested area around Barronette Peak. The pack consisted of two gray-colored adults and a gray and a black pup-soon to be-yearling. 1228F's former black colored mate was apparently shot last year outside the park, which indicates how far they travel.



Lamar Valley at first light with a fresh dusting of snow. This was my first picture of the day due to us driving as far west as we could in the dark in order to try and get to the Junction pack at dawn.





Red fox on a berm just before (south of) the den forest, surveying for danger. It was right about this time when I briefly saw a coyote leave the carcass area. The fox then went down to the dead bison, which was out of our sight.







Left: The early morning pictures of the red fox were a bit blurry, but my images improved as the light came up. Our early morning observation area (below). The coyote went left toward the far part of the road in view, while the fox was in the middle right of the picture and went left to below the berm in the center of the picture where the cow bison lay.







Images of the fox  
as it went toward  
the carcass area  
and stared in our  
direction.









View of the confluence area with Soda Butte Creek to the left (south) of the road. 21's crossing area, discussed the previous day when I saw the golden eagle, is to the right just before the steep hill.



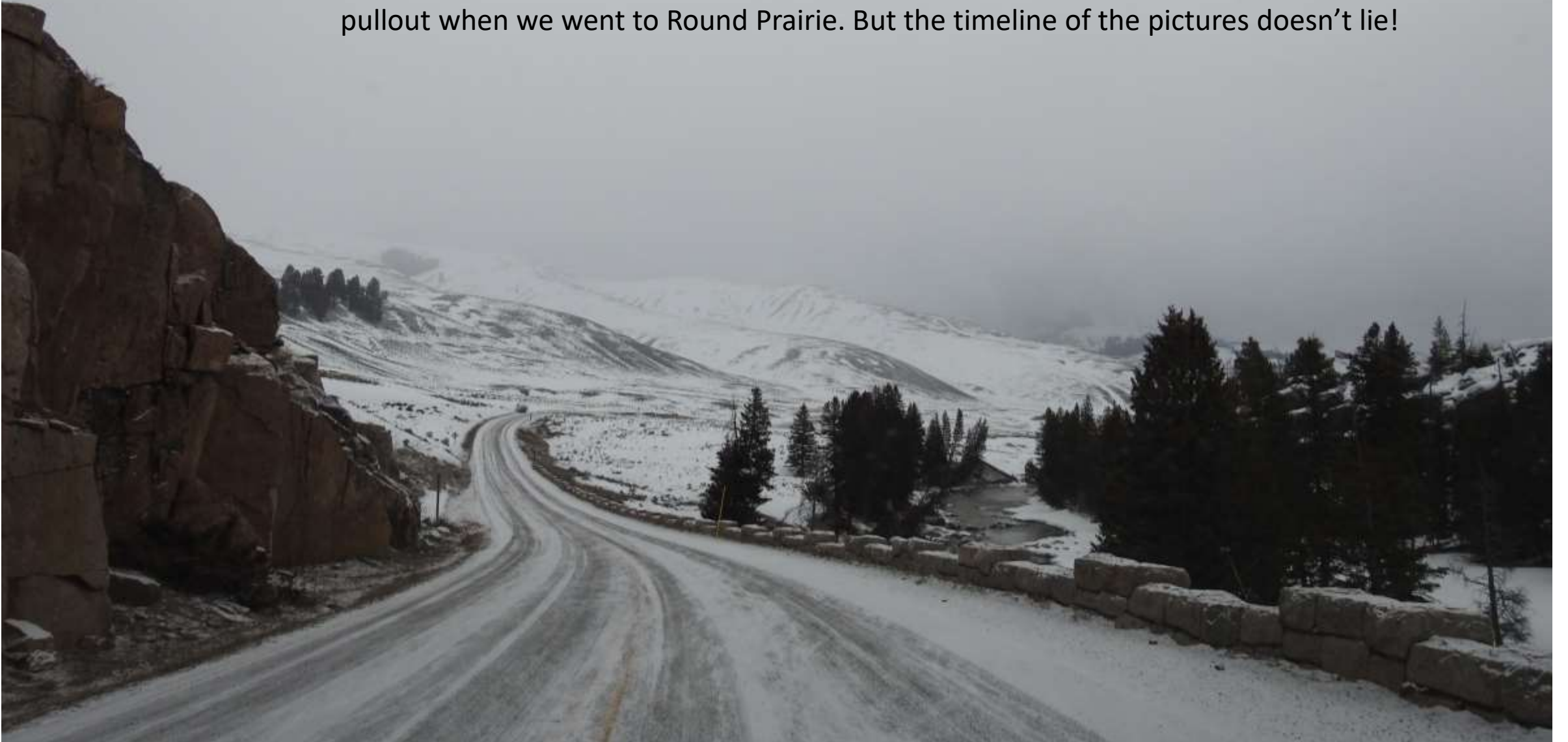


Lamar Valley and lone cottonwood next to the road.





Lamar Valley during a light snowstorm from the eastern edge of Lamar Canyon. After looking through the previous 3 pictures (and pages herein), I honestly can't remember why we drove 5 miles west only to end up 3-4 miles east of Footbridge pullout when we went to Round Prairie. But the timeline of the pictures doesn't lie!





Round Prairie. The Shrimp Lake male was in the center right of this picture.





Jeremy S-R was in the area and was the first to spot a gray wolf in Round Prairie when we arrived around 8:30. It was the alpha male of the Shrimp Lake Pack. That would be 1228F's mate. He was mostly standing in the southeastern part of the Prairie. We saw him on and off and in and out of trees for ~20 minutes. It was snowing steadily making viewing difficult. We could hear (and see) him howling but didn't spot any other wolves. We watched until 9:00 AM. Rick, Jeremy, Steve, and I had converged to the same parking lot. We were all quite cold with the unrelenting wind and snow. We went into our respective cars and turned them on to warm up.

After seeing the Shrimp Lake alpha male, Steve and I drove back to the west. Being fairly close to Silver Gate, where he lives, Rick M. went in for the day to work on his latest book, his fifth on the Yellowstone wolves. We went to the Slough bathroom lot and walked out a quarter mile to Bob's Knob. The visibility was not good with the snow, and we saw nothing.

We ended up at the Petrified Tree lot in the snow. The black bear was not visible in the den, so we decided to take a snowshoe hike at 10:45 AM. We started at the Petrified lot and hiked to Lost Lake, a popular summertime area. We then continued to Lost Creek Falls and the overlook of the Tower area. There was 3-4 feet of packed, crusty snow along most of the route. The hike wouldn't have been possible without snowshoes, as they made a world of difference in distributing our weight, so we rarely caved in while walking on top of the snow.

While just above (north of) the west side of Lost Lake, I noticed grizzly bear tracks. They were big and I surmised an early rising-from-hibernation male griz, since they usually wake up before the females do. We ended up following the tracks past where the trail splits to head down to the Roosevelt Lodge. His tracks stayed on the Lost Creek Trail and then left the path and went down into the hilly woods. We kept going and looped around the creek via a bridge on the actual trail to get up around the other side. To my amazement, once we went 150-200 yards uphill past the bridge, I picked up his tracks again on the Lost Creek Trail. That meant that he went down the steep canyon of Lost Creek and then came back up the precipitous hill on the side that we were now hiking. Even on a day when I skipped taking pictures of a live one, I got to track a different individual!

His tracks stayed mostly on top of the icy snow, but he did fall in about 2 feet two different times. This created a large roughly 8 x 6 foot crater showing his entire body shape. 'Wow,' I thought! The tracks continued to the southeast as we stopped at the cliff-like knob overlooking the Tower area. We didn't follow the tracks any further, but assumed he was well ahead of us. The view from that vintage spot is sweet, and largely unappreciated and probably unknown by most people.





Left: Jeremy SunderRaj (left) and Rick McIntyre (right) taking a break from looking through their spotting scopes. It was as cold as it appears!

Right: The Shrimp Lake alpha male wasn't easy to follow in the falling snow. That fenced area is a small bison enclosure that researchers monitor.









Soda Butte Valley in a ground blizzard with a considerable swirling wind.







Confluence of Soda Butte Creek and Lamar River in the snow.







Lamar Canyon with the Lamar River (left) and the one lane portion of the road (right). The area to the right was blasted in summer 2023 to make the road wider and further away from the cliff above the river.







We scanned from Bob's Knob (left) but didn't see anything. The Slough den area (top right) wasn't very visible on this snowy day.



The Tower Junction area (left) with the bathrooms and recycling center (right).



Tower Junction.







Petrified Tree, technically  $\frac{1}{4}$  Petrified Tree. For the longest time we assumed that the ' $\frac{1}{4}$ ' meant 0.25 miles to Petrified Tree. But then we realized it literally meant  $\frac{1}{4}$  Petrified Tree, meaning that only one-quarter of it is remaining.





Mini-avalanche



The Lost Lake Trail starts just past  $\frac{1}{4}$  Petrified Tree (middle of bottom pic). We encountered a mini-avalanche at the beginning of the trail (lower middle).



More perspectives of the avalanche.







Above: Another view of the Petrified Tree road (which is not drivable in the winter). Black bears are often seen during the spring and summer in the grassy hills on the right side of the picture.

Right: A 'U-shaped' valley on the way to Lost Lake.





Approaching Lost Lake.









The central part of Lost Lake.







The eastern part of Lost Lake.





Grizzly bear tracks near Lost Lake (see next two pages).











Grizzly bear trails  
in the snow.







Bridge going over  
Lost Creek on the  
namesake trail.  
While Steve and I  
hiked over it, the  
grizzly bear that  
we were tracking  
went down a  
steep ravine  
before there and  
came up to the  
left (northeast) of  
the bridge in  
another equally  
vertical section.  
'Fascinating  
animals', I  
thought.





Lost Creek.







Once I re-found the tracks on the other side of the Lost Creek ravine, I got some great prints that sunk in the snow more than the other side. They were huge!





The grizzly bear tracks veered to the south shortly before we arrived at the overlook of the Tower Junction area (background). We eventually hiked to the cliff on the right side of the photo.







Last set of bear tracks including a crater of where he fell in the snow. That must not have been a comfortable experience for the large bruin.





Shortly thereafter, we arrived at the cliff overlooking Tower Junction. See arrow for the actual road junction where you can go left to Mammoth, straight to Lamar Valley and eventually to the towns of Silver Gate and Cooke City, or right (out of view and closed until May) to Tower Falls and onto Canyon Village.









When we turned around, I was able to backtrack and find where the bear came out of the Lost Creek corridor and ultimately where he entered it on the other side of the bridge on the main part of the trail. It was cool to decipher the path the great bear took and was much more calming knowing that we were headed in opposite directions! While grizzlies pose a very small risk to people, and we carry bear spray as a precaution, they still get my (and just about everyone else's) heart racing just knowing that they are there. Then again, that is part of their allure!

Once leaving the bear's path, I hiked back on the south side of Lost Lake, which in the snow-free months isn't possible as there is no trail there and has steep scree, talus slopes above the pond. Steve, wanting to feel more secure, stayed on the main trail. I was shocked at how rock solid the ice was on the lake for mid-April. It wouldn't be until June, I thought, until it likely melted. The new perspective we gained from that snowshoe hike was different and worth seeing; I know I will think about that hike every time I go there during the snow-free months in the future.

Once I reached the west side of the lake, I did a tangent to get back to the main trail. I was used to seeing bison in that marshy area, but the snow was so deep; clearly the bison were foraging elsewhere. I did see some tracks and scat, so I surmised that a couple of bulls were occasionally in that area but had to go to areas that had less snow to obtain food.

The total hike was 6 miles round trip. I was done at 1:55 PM and wrote in my notes as Steve took a few more minutes to get back to the vehicle. We were tired from a busy week and headed back to town a little earlier than normal. We didn't have plans to go back out on this evening due to the lack of wolf sightings, especially regarding the Junction Butte wolves.

In sort of a mystery, as far as I know nobody saw the Junction pack all day. Park staff didn't even pick up their radio-signals. The most plausible scenario was that they finished the cow bison in the night and then traveled back to the west in their enormous 25 mile diameter territory. Nobody knew where they were, and because a plane flight wasn't scheduled for this day, they were proving to be very difficult to find via car.

We got back to Gardiner at 3 PM after stopping at the Mammoth gift shop and then gassed up, which we needed to do roughly every other day. We stayed in for the rest of the day, going over our pictures and emails. I finished early enough to watch the end of the previous night's Boston Celtics playoff game on DVR. As I am a big sports fan, especially basketball, I greatly appreciated the benefits of technology. While not a huge hockey fan, the Boston Bruins played on this night, so I watched them too. It was a great time to take a breather while also having a fruitful day.





On the hike back from the Tower overlook, I backtracked the bear to the spot where it came up out of the Lost Creek ravine (this page). Further up the trail, I then found where he initially left it to head down to Lost Creek (next page).





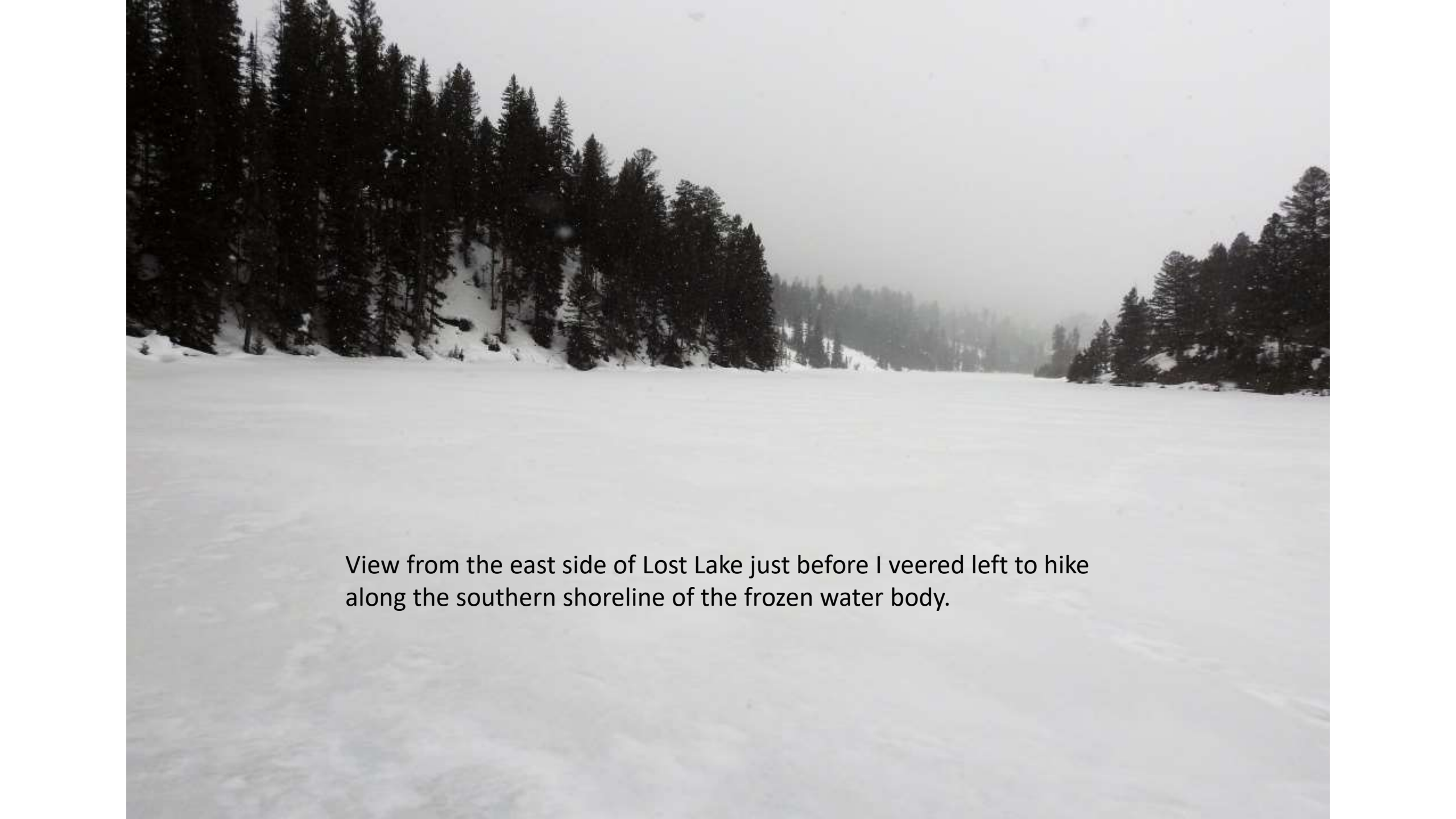


Left: The bear entered the valley right around where Steve is hiking.

Right: The far, wooded side of the picture is where the bear climbed out of the Lost Creek ravine shown on the previous page.







View from the east side of Lost Lake just before I veered left to hike along the southern shoreline of the frozen water body.





The area just above the southern shoreline was steep and wooded. It was almost magical looking up into that forest as the snow was falling in my face as I scanned the area.





The view looking east where I had just come from. Notice my snowshoe trail on the right side of the picture.







Looking to the north from Lost Lake (above). There was much less snow to the north than south of the lake (bottom). The north side was south facing (above) and in mountainous terrain that can make the difference between trace amounts of snow (above) or 3-4 feet (below).







Mountain bluebirds on bison 'patties' (scat piles) near the North Entrance where we had been seeing the pronghorns for much of the trip. They are no doubt trying to find and eat the insects attracted to the dung. This is a dramatically different scene than from Lost Lake 20-25 miles away.





View of where we stayed (right with the tan Honda CRV). Our neighbors were two employees of the wolf and wildlife watching business, [Yellowstone Wolf Tracker](#). They are a leading guiding service that takes people into the field to see wolves and other wildlife. They are well worth contacting if you are interested in visiting the area and could use the guidance in seeing the wildlife discussed in this book. Mule deer (below and see arrow on top picture) and elk are a common sight in the middle of the town of Gardiner.





View from the inside just before game-time!









# Day 7: Grizzlies and Wolves, Oh My!

I took some of the best pictures I have ever taken on this day so buckle up, this is going to be a great chapter!

April 20<sup>th</sup> started with teens in the park and another fresh coating of snow on the ground. We departed the duplex at 5:15 AM and started wildlife watching on the Blacktail Plateau at first light at 5:45 AM. Frank H. and a couple of others had already seen a black wolf around 5:00 in the dark at the carcass site. It left to the east prior to sunrise, and before most people arrived.

When we arrived, grizzly 769 was still on the carcass. The bison was now fully out of the water. Including before our trip to Yellowstone, the bear had been at this site for about 2 weeks by this point! He was really tugging on the carcass. I was able to get great pics, especially as it became lighter. Plows, dragging loudly on the pavement, scared the bear off twice. He came back to the carcass after both events, but eventually traveled to the west after taking a dip in his 'bathing pond'! This was a first for us as he usually went to the north into the foothills after feeding in the early morning. Instead, we watched him from about 100 meters away as he crossed the road to the south in front of a camper, which blocked our view. The snow was relatively deep on the route he took, but he successfully made it to the other side of the road which was a wilderness area not accessible to humans to give bear space until late July of each year.

After that great sighting, we left the Blacktail just before 7:00, hoping to get to some active wolves further to the east. As we were driving to the Blacktail outhouse, and while still at the corner of the ponds about 30 seconds away from the lot, I yelled, "Holy sh\*t", which immediately got Steve's attention.

A gray wolf was about 50 feet from the north side of the road and was trotting toward us! I thought it was a coyote at first as it was so close to the road. After taking a few pictures from the car, I immediately turned around and drove back to the parking lot we had just left. Our bathroom break would have to wait. We watched as he (which I later verified as a male through my spotting scope) paralleled the north side of the road and then approached the carcass site. He fed for 20-25 minutes in full daylight. He didn't seem to be too nervous from a full parking lot of people but did look up every few seconds. The crowd was mostly quiet, and people were respectfully disciplined by others if they made too much noise or left their car on.

It was amazing being only <70 yards from a truly wild wolf! While that was happening, others saw four more wolves SW of the bathroom. I heard at least two were black but didn't get an exact color breakdown as I was very focused on the wolf in front of me. Nick from PA told us they went west out of view up on the hills behind (south of) the ponds. We, meanwhile, were watching the wolf and taking dozens of excellent pictures.





The day started out typical with blurry views of the grizzly bear at first light. A dusting of snow kept it chilly in the park.





Then the action picked up when he left the carcass and walked over to a water hole, breaking the ice to get a drink.







He was apparently hot and needed an ice bath to lower his body temperature!



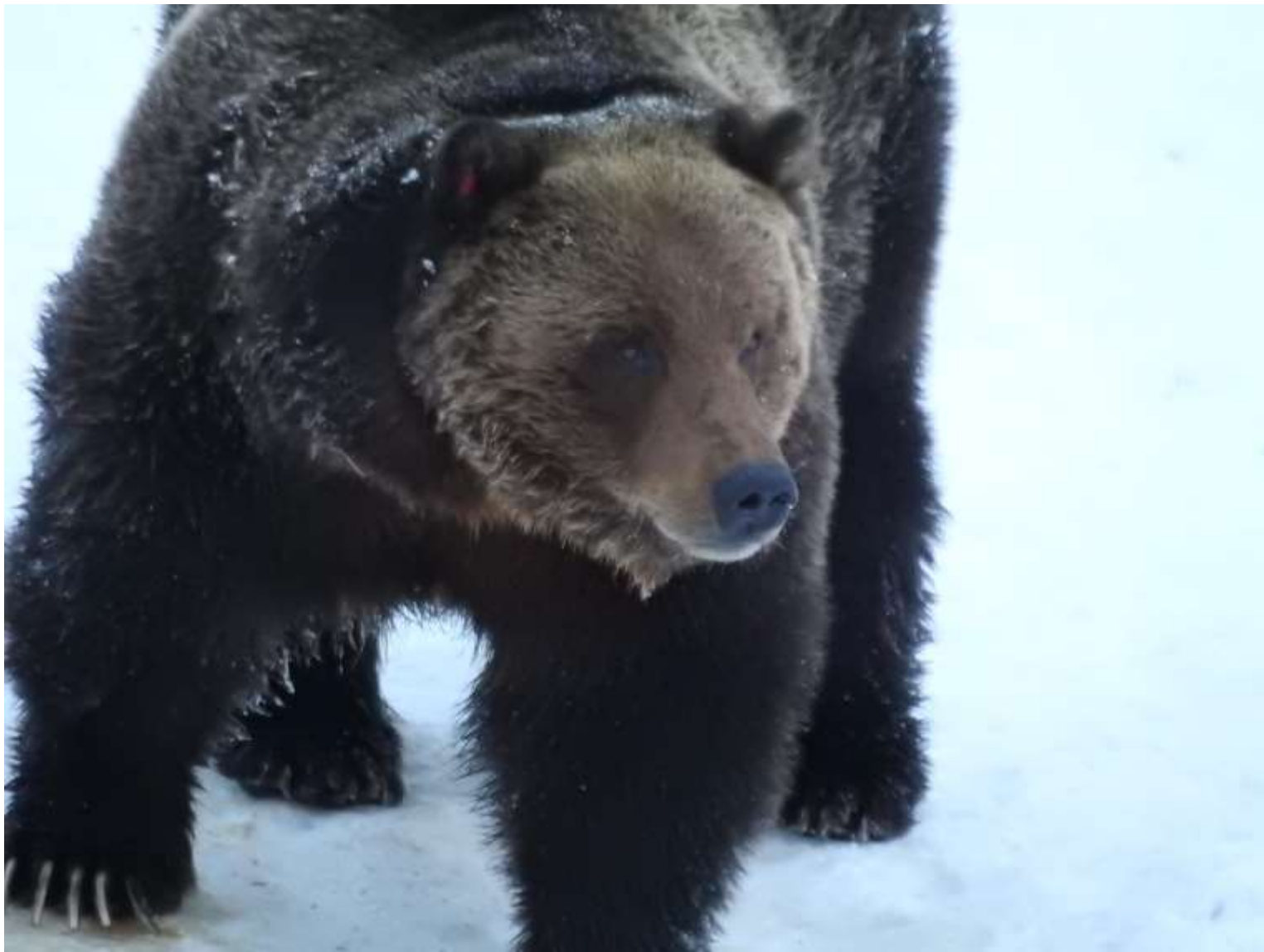




After cooling down, he then headed back to the bison carcass which was now fully dragged out of the water (see two next pages).









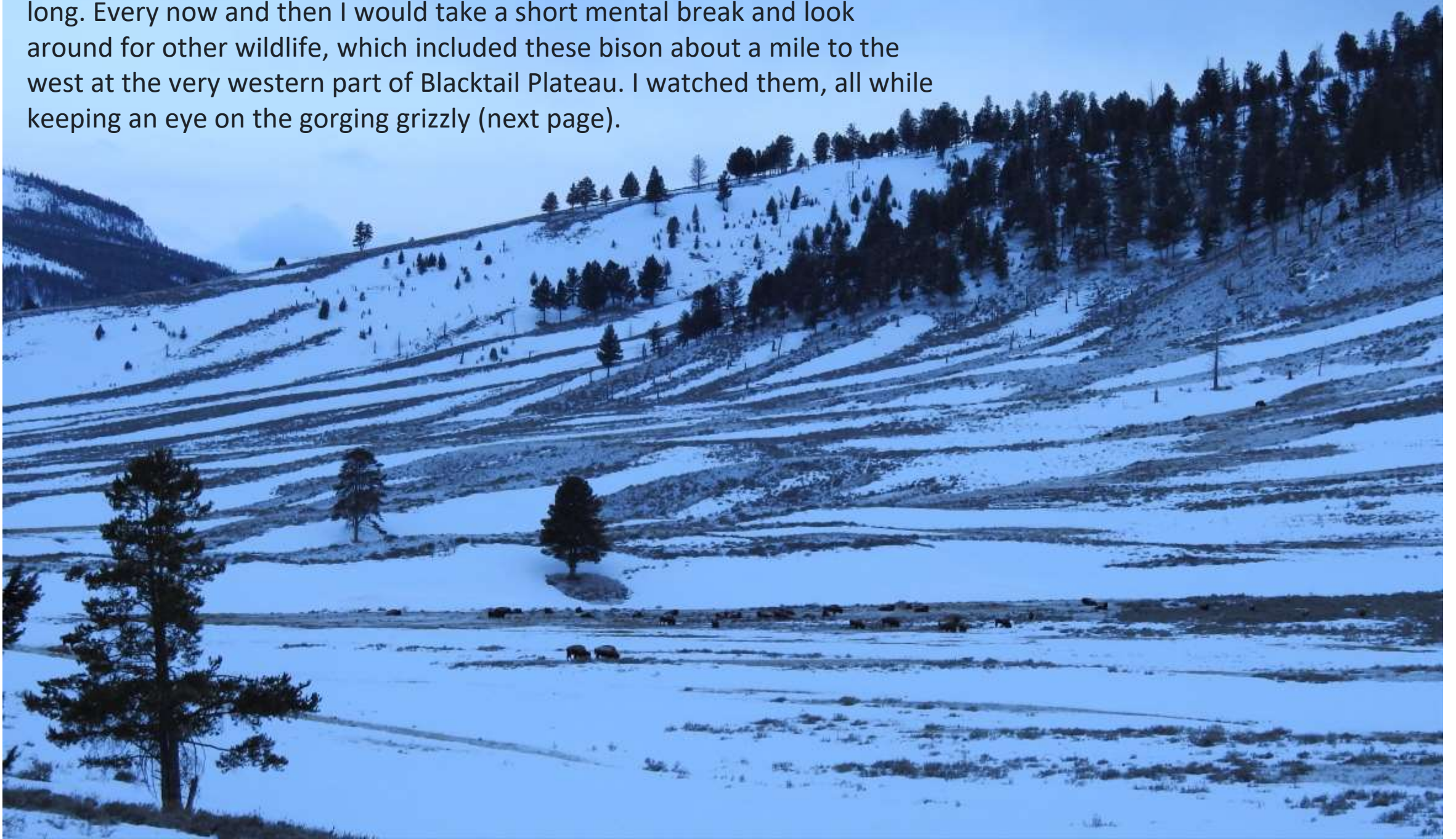








It can strain one's eye to stare through a spotting scope or camera for too long. Every now and then I would take a short mental break and look around for other wildlife, which included these bison about a mile to the west at the very western part of Blacktail Plateau. I watched them, all while keeping an eye on the gorging grizzly (next page).















These two images offer some great profiles of an adult male grizzly bear with the large shoulder hump and dish shaped face. Soon after these photos were taken, the bear walked north to bathe in the pond (next four pages).













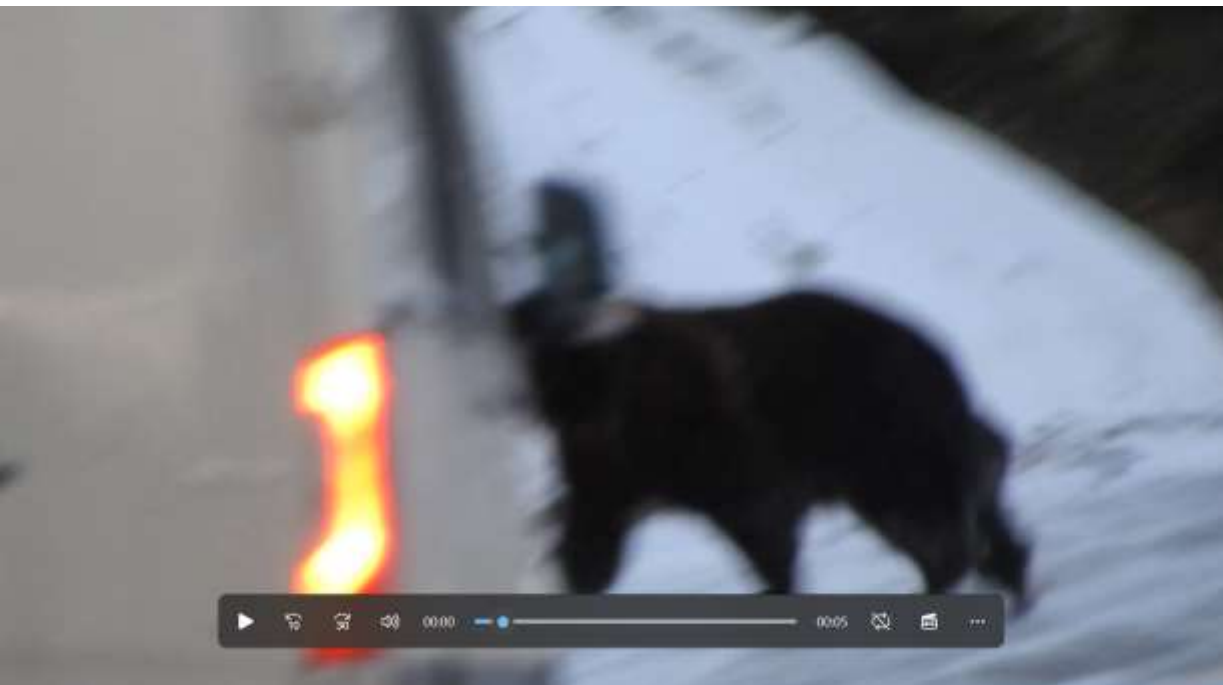
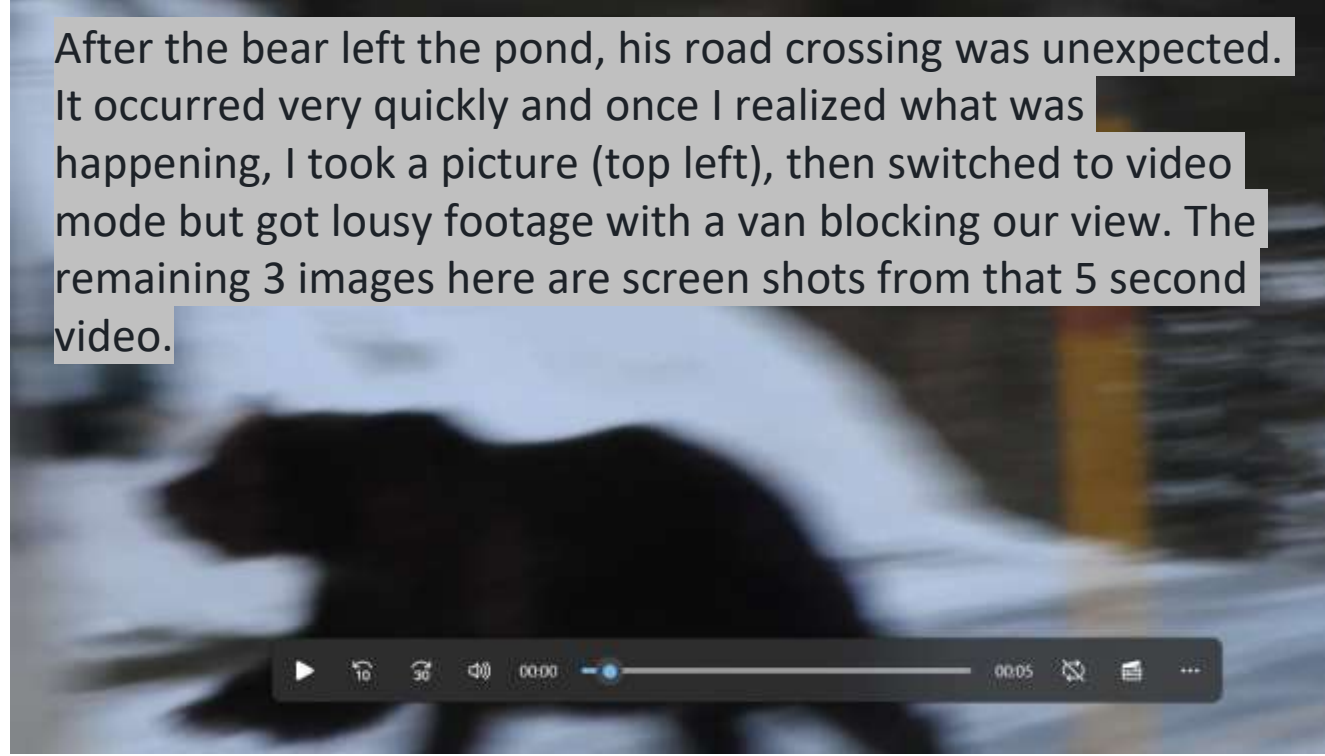






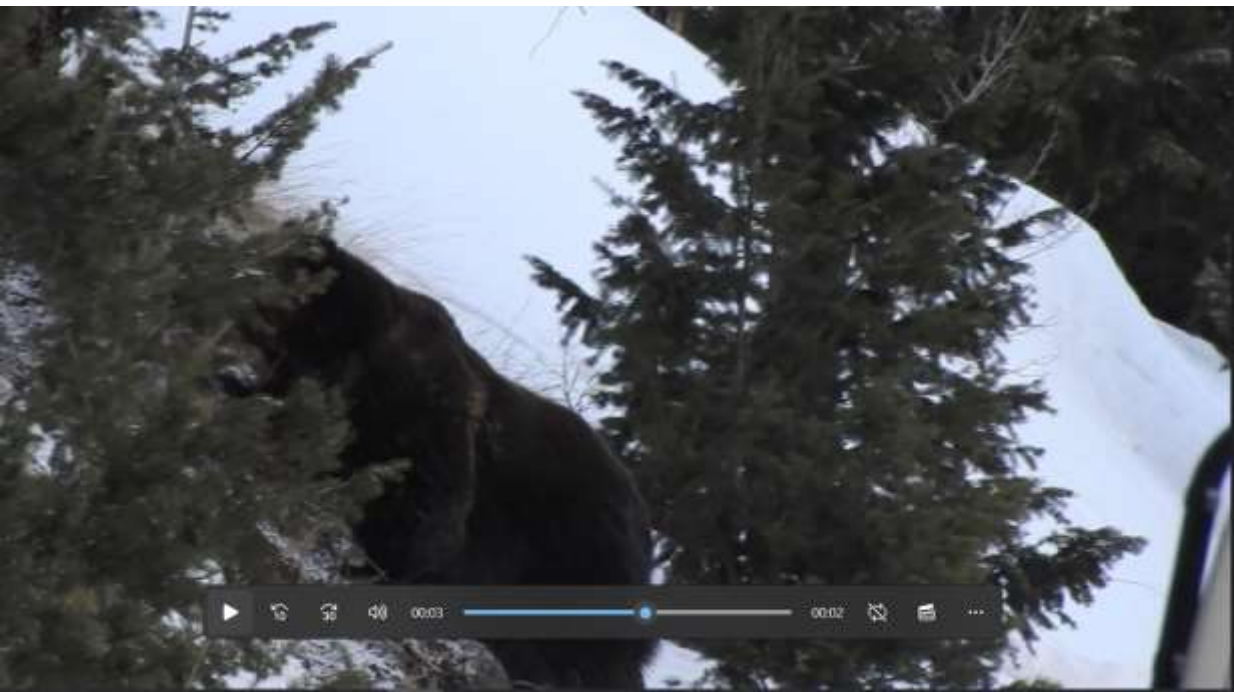
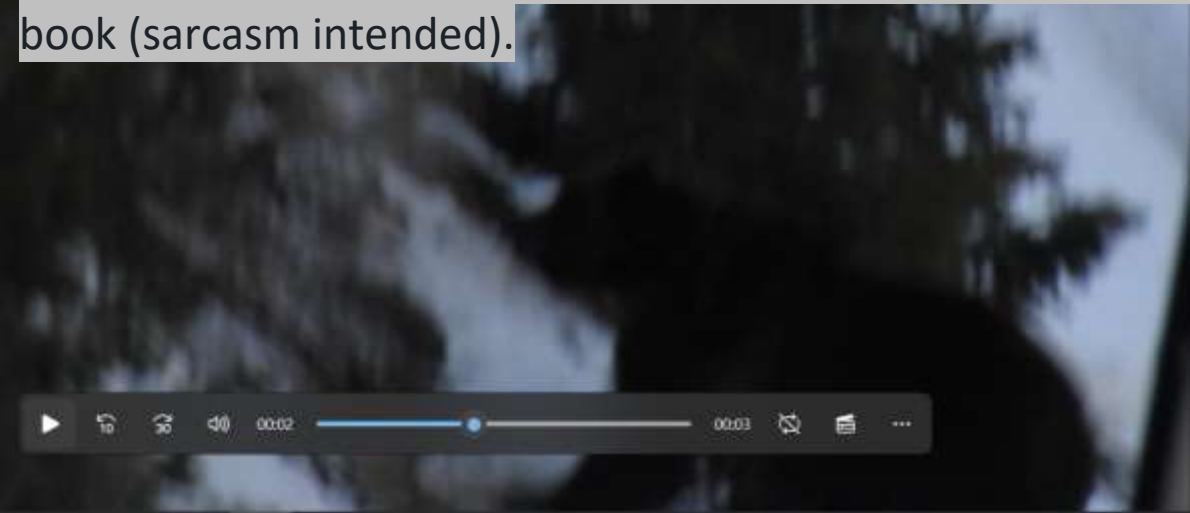


After the bear left the pond, his road crossing was unexpected. It occurred very quickly and once I realized what was happening, I took a picture (top left), then switched to video mode but got lousy footage with a van blocking our view. The remaining 3 images here are screen shots from that 5 second video.



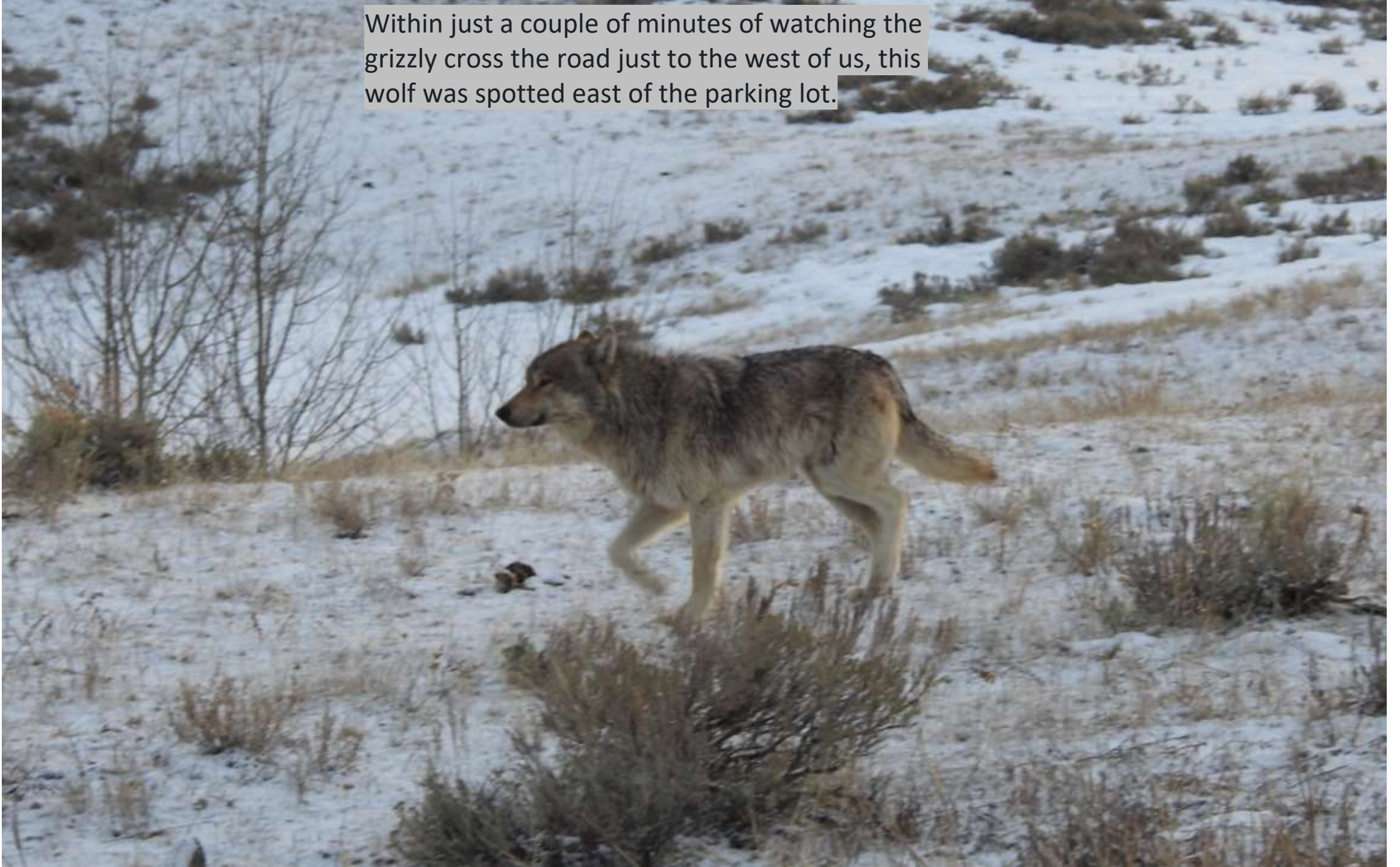


Screen captures from that 5 second video after the bear crossed the road in front of the van then went out of view. These images are just a little lower quality than most of the bear pictures in this book (sarcasm intended).





Within just a couple of minutes of watching the grizzly cross the road just to the west of us, this wolf was spotted east of the parking lot.







The wolf paralleled the park road and went straight to the carcass. It was interesting that wolves had barely been on the carcass all week and this one went to it during the morning in full daylight. It was almost like he knew the grizzly was not going to be there.







The canid immediately started eating from the hind end which is a common entry point when wolves feed from a carcass. This one made even more sense to start from there because those hindquarters had just recently been exposed when it was dragged out of the water by the bear <24 hours previously.



I made sure to take a few moments to relax and look through my spotting scope to truly appreciate what I was looking at from such of a close distance. It was certainly worth it as I am able to reflect on what an amazing an experience it was.





Many writers have noted how penetrating the stare of a wild wolf is.













Notice how long the wolf's legs are. People are often surprised how tall and skinny wolves are when they first see one in the wild.























The wolf would tear into the carcass, then periodically look around to scan for danger, then go back in for more.





Licking the carcass (top right) was a new behavior observed in between him feeding and monitoring the area. Next page: Bison hides are thick, so it requires a high bite-force to break through them.







The gray male kept feeding. I show many pictures here so one can get a feel for what it is like to watch a wild wolf at a carcass.

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Right: You can just make out the penis sheath, indicating the wolf is a male. Some animals, like coyotes, have difficulty tearing into bison because their hides are so thick. With a higher bite force, wolves manage better but it is still work for them too.







In these picture books, I always like to show unedited perspective images for the reader to gain a feel for what we are seeing in the field. In this case, I am totally zoomed out as the wolf is just 66 yards away. The bison are about a half mile away while grazing in the distance at the base of the hill.





Above: The wolf is pulling on a tendon, as the hindquarter is fully opened up by this point.





Wolves have very long legs and big feet. People often overestimate how large they really are because of these attributes.















I was so focused on the wolf and wasn't paying attention to the magpie that arrived, until I noticed it in a picture that I reviewed while I was in the field!















This is an awkward looking picture, but here the wolf is tugging on the carcass attempting to expose more meat.





I can't reiterate enough how spectacular this sighting was! Having a wild wolf that close, even after the repeated grizzly bear sightings of the past 7 days, was amazing. He was healthy, but fairly skinny, which was surprising given all the winterkill available to them that year. However, wolves are naturally very tall ('leggy') and thin, and sometimes a close sighting underscores those features.

At about 7:20 AM, the wolves to the south of us howled from behind a tall hill out of our sight. The gray immediately looked up and quickly left the bison, trotted about 75 yards east, then crossed the road to the south, presumably to join them. He went right by people and cars, many of whom didn't give him the required 100 yard distance that one is supposed to allot to wolves in the park, when navigating the road corridor. We drove west to the Wraith Falls parking lot but never saw any of the wolves or the bear when we looked to the southeast in the general direction of where they were last seen. It wasn't a great view but there were a few places where we could scan for them among the hills and trees.

We soon traveled east and arrived at the Upper Hellroaring parking lot at 8:45 AM. People were seeing the Junction wolves ~1.5 miles to the north. They were fairly low between Hellroaring Creek and some conifers near the Yellowstone River. It was hard to view them with the trees in the foreground of the pullout, and all the people there made it even more difficult to move around to obtain a better view. According to watchers, it seemed that most of the wolves were there. I counted 15 at one point but easily all 24-25 could have been in attendance. Wolf technicians for the park, Jeremy S-R and Taylor (Bland) Rabb, were there and thought they had counted most of the pack. They observe them virtually every day they are in the field, so I would trust their assessment above anybody else's.

The wolves were in and out of view, mostly testing the bison. Depending on your angle in the parking lot, you would have them clear as day one minute and then lose them behind a tree, or ridge, the next. For that reason, and their distance away, I mostly used my spotting scope (and not my camera) to observe them. I lost them for about 10 minutes behind a ridge and suddenly, they came back in view and immediately swarmed a group of bison not far west of Little Buffalo Creek which is a bit on the east side of the expansive view. Before anyone knew it, they had taken down a small buffalo. Most thought it was a 'red dog', which is a term for a bison calf of the year. There were so many wolves in the area, and so much movement, a count wasn't possible. It seemed that at least 20 of them were there. About 10-12 ate at the small carcass while others tested a cow bison, surrounding her 3-4 times. They also found another calf bison, but a few cows helped keep them at bay for a good half hour.



Just after getting into a new part of the carcass, his pack mates howled up the hill behind us out of our view. He listened for a few seconds with a stoic stare (see next 2 pages).















After listening to his pack mates howl, he then left the site traveling to the east. Notice the ground littered with animal tracks (top left).



The wolf (see him circled) then crossed the road just beyond the line of cars.







Rick McIntyre

Once the wolf made it safely across the road (see arrow), he quickly trotted out of view. This was truly an extraordinary morning for all the people in attendance. Notice the sun just coming over the horizon after all of these pictures already shown on this day.





Bison on the  
Blacktail Plateau  
near the  
Children's  
Nature/Fire Trail.



Bison just below (south of) North Butte on Blacktail Plateau.





This was the third large group of bison that we saw on the Blacktail Plateau. Fortunately, we never take these sightings for granted, even after the amazing morning with the bear and wolf.







We arrived at a busy parking lot at Upper Hellroaring pullout. Notice the trees in the foreground just beyond the parking lot; they make it difficult to follow wolves in the distance as they repeatedly block one's view when following traveling animals.





Wolf project technicians Jeremy and Taylor were there observing the wolves, along with many members of the public. Taylor showed the audience a wolf pelt, radio-collars, and a cast of a skull. While many people there were veteran wolf watchers, there were also novices who just stopped at the lot (barely finding parking) because they saw so many vehicles already there and knew we were looking at something good.







Left: Rick M. observing the Junction Pack about 1.5-2 miles off in the distance (see arrow for their general location).

Below: Notice the trees blocking one's view.







I did not take many images of the wolves from Hellroaring overlook on this day. These pics show them finishing a small carcass, likely a bison calf. I mostly watched them at a distance through my spotting scope, having to move to re-find them multiple times given the trees in the way and the number of people there.



Next two pages: Stills taken from a video I took of the wolves.  
Given the distance, video clips often come in better than pictures  
on my camera, especially when counting individual animals.



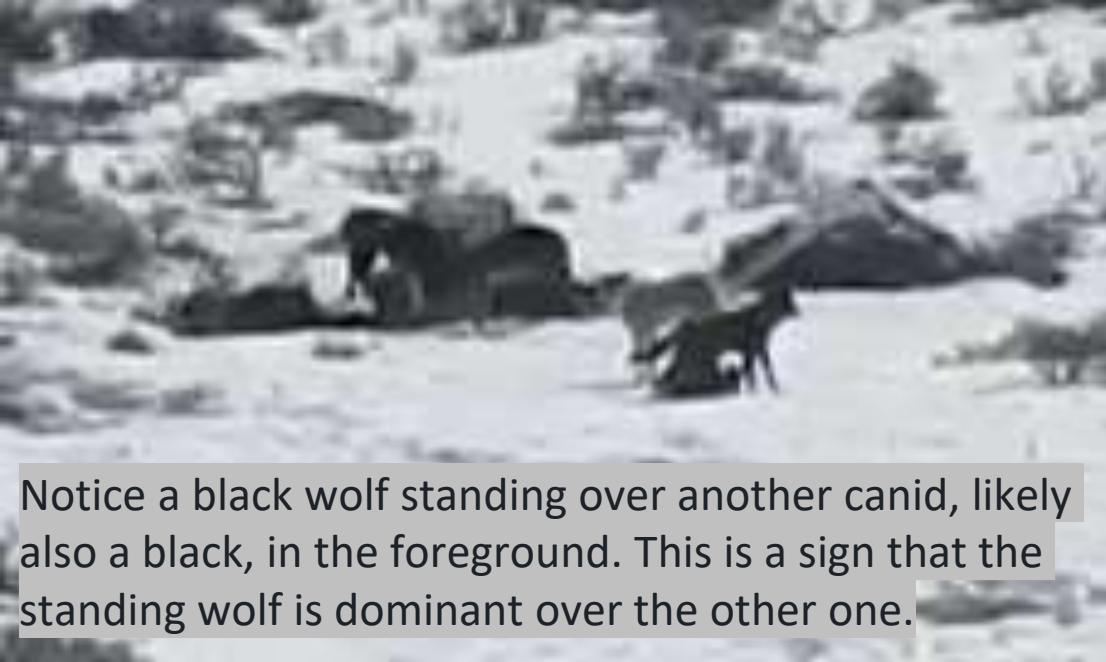
Some bison near the wolves (out of view here). While this and the previous page are not high-quality images of the two animals, it is a more typical sighting of wolves, rather than the incredibly rare scene I had just witnessed on the Blacktail. However, the sight through my Swarovski spotting scope is considerably better than this.















Another screen capture from the video of the wolves at the carcass. Here you can see a wolf (in the circle) near the group of bison previously shown. These animals are just to the left (west) of the wolves at the dead calf.



At about 10 AM, most of us were burnt out and wolf activity waned with ~10 wolves around the carcass showing little activity. It seemed that the small bison was mostly consumed by that point. Many of us began conversing with others. I talked with Jeremy about his trip to Africa and how he was able to do it very affordably, even though he was there for about a month. We both like African wild dogs, which are the gray wolf equivalent on that continent.

I also met Audra Conklin of [Lamar Valley Touring](#). I have talked with her mother before regarding my [eastern coyote/coywolf research](#). Her mom lives in Massachusetts, and is supportive of my work, but what I didn't know is that Audra grew up in my hometown of Barnstable, MA. What a small world, I thought. We discussed the possibility of me guiding for her that summer, but I needed to find housing and unfortunately, I ultimately couldn't find any in the Gardiner area.

Yellowstone is about the only place in the world that one can have conversations with people while looking through their scopes at wild wolves! In this case, the wolves were mostly resting. It was clear that the activity of the pack was dying down for the foreseeable future. Wolves often rest during the day and are more active at night and the early morning.

Steve and I conversed with other folks then left the area around 11 AM. After visiting the Tower outhouse and the recycling center in the same spot, we drove east into Little America. There, we saw cars parked. We assumed they were looking at a bear, but it turns out most people were looking south at 3 ravens pestering a badger. Badgers are in the weasel family. They don't truly hibernate, but stay in underground burrows for much of the winter. This one was out and about for sure!

Not everyone in that lot was watching the mustelid, however. Bill Hamblin, expert grizzly bear spotter from Idaho, spends multiple months in the park every year. He was observing a grizzly bear feeding on a bison carcass to the north. It was in a tough spot to see as it was shaded by trees. I was impressed with how Bill finds bears so readily. This carcass and bruin was north of the Lamar River at the base of the small unnamed mountains and hills that dominate that area.

After watching the bear, our second grizzly of the trip (not counting the footprints), we went back to the west and watched the black bears in the den at the Petrified Tree lot. We stayed there for just over an hour and could see the mother bear's body and a cub move. I mostly wrote in my notebook (and didn't take any pictures this time) to get caught up. Steve focused on watching the ursids. While there wasn't much movement or activity, one was still watching a wild black bear in a den! I always try and stay grounded and put our observations into context.





A badger emerging from its den with two pesky ravens near it. A third bird was in the immediate area.











On our return to the west, there were many bison on the Blacktail and a large group of ~150 on the southwest side of North Butte, which is a prominent landmark in the area. Since I took pictures of them in the morning, I just casually observed them this time around. After looking at the bison, we drove another 15 minutes to the west and stopped in the Mammoth Visitor Center to look at exhibits. We always stop there, and usually 1-2 other nature centers throughout the park, on our trips. It is sort of a tradition to see the same stuffed/mounted animals that are always there.

We arrived back at Gardiner at 2:25 PM and worked on our email and pictures for a couple of hours. I met with Audra and her mother around 6:00 PM at the [Wonderland Café](#) . We discussed all things canid (wolves and coyotes) and Yellowstone! This popular new restaurant in Gardiner is where I also met Bob and two of his friends. Apparently, this is THE spot in this small town! They cater to the wildlife watcher, and general tourist, so many people like to support them.

This was another full day. I passed a couple of mule deer at last light on my walk back to the duplex after leaving the café. It was a fitting end to another full and lively day in Yellowstone.



Bull bison on the Blacktail.



# Day 8: Drive-by Grizzlies and Geyser Hopping in Snow

This was a marathon day. We left the cabin at 5:08 AM with mid 20°s in Gardiner and snow, and low 20s in the park. From 5:35 – 6:05 AM, we watched grizzly 769 on the Blacktail carcass from dark until first light. Having already obtained amazing pictures on this bear, we didn't worry about missing "the golden opportunity", so drove east. There were no known Rescue Creek pack wolves nearby either. The grand opening of the west side of the park, always in the third week of April, was at 8:00 AM just above Mammoth. Thus, we had a couple of hours to explore the Northern Range before we ventured in that direction.

We drove east of Tower Junction into Little America and saw the big grizzly bear from north of 'Curve Lot'. It began snowing, making visibility poor. That precluded me from taking pictures of him, but we knew it was the same boar that we observed the previous day when we also watched the badger. Bill H. was faithfully there, having already watched the bruin. Grizzlies don't emerge en masse until May, so he was putting extra effort in trying to locate new bears. It seemed the big boars on bison carcasses were the only ones moving up to that point, while most were still in their winter dens.

We saw Rick M. on our travels and headed to Slough to look at the den area for wolves. He hadn't found any wolves yet either. It was snowing heavily which greatly limited our visibility. Jeremy S-R. was also there and had weak radio-signals from some of the Junctions. He thought they might be in a place we call 'the trough'. I had always known about the area, but asked Rick to explain the site to me. He told me, "It is a high valley northeast of the confluence of the Yellowstone and Lamar Rivers. It is not visible from anywhere on the ground. At times we can see them going into either the west or east end, then coming out the opposite side. It is near a mountainous area we call 'Mom's Ridge' (named based on where a reintroduced wolf dened in the mid-1990s). It is part of an old trail system that early park rangers used when they were patrolling the park on foot."

We stayed at Slough for about a half hour and had breakfast, a little earlier than normal, to kill time while it was snowing. Without any sightings or visibility, we then drove west, arriving at Mammoth at 8:30 AM. We used the restroom then headed to the Norris Geyser area. By getting there after 8:00, we likely missed the line of cars waiting for the grand opening.

It was quite cold and snowing heavily down to Norris then to the Madison area in the west-central part of the park. Driving was nerve-wracking on those wet, slippery roads. I had my hands at the 10 and 2 position on the wheel to make sure I had the best possible control of the car in case we slid.





Grizzly 769 at dawn on the bison carcass. This was the eighth day in a row that we saw him. Due to our hectic schedule, we only briefly stopped to watch him. Once first light came, we headed east to look for wolves before going back to the west when the west and south side of the park opened above Mammoth at 8:00 AM.





The snow picked up while we were in Little America, which limited our visibility.







The dumpsters and recycling bins at Tower. Not a very romantic location for watching Yellowstone's wildlife, but I was able to obtain these cool images of this raven.



The Elk Creek area at Petrified Tree Access Road (left; which is closed in the winter).







These bison bulls didn't care about the snow. They walked down the road like they owned it!

Bottom: Just above Mammoth is a stretch of pretty aspen trees that I took a quick drive-by photo of to save time.





The Hoodoos of Yellowstone area is a very neat stretch of road before one gets to the Golden Gate and Swan Lake Flat area of the park. This is not far above Mammoth Hot Springs.





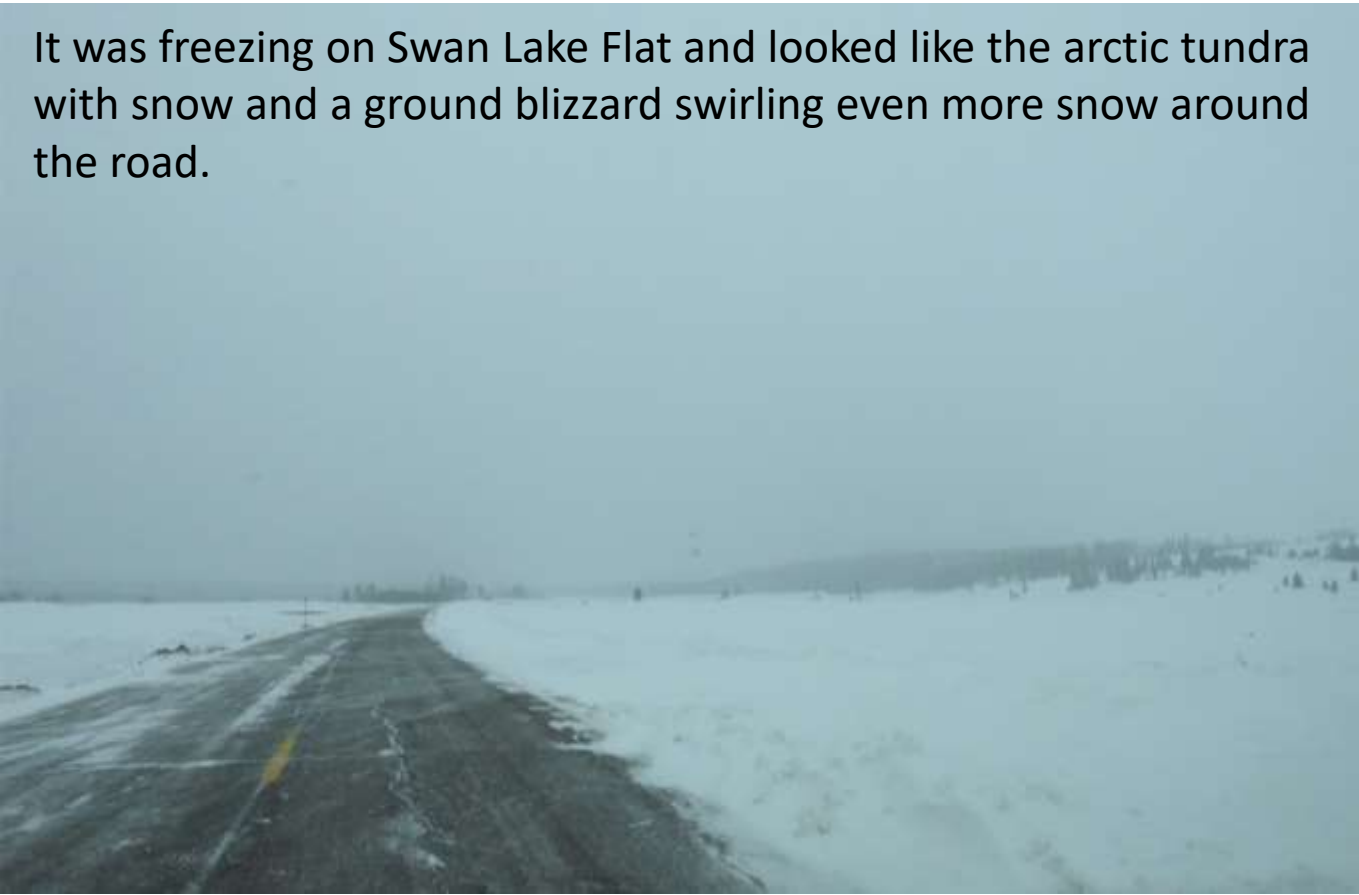


Golden Gate has an impressive road system going around the edge of a cliff (top left) and a waterfall (top right and bottom left) that was mostly frozen, except for the actual falls.



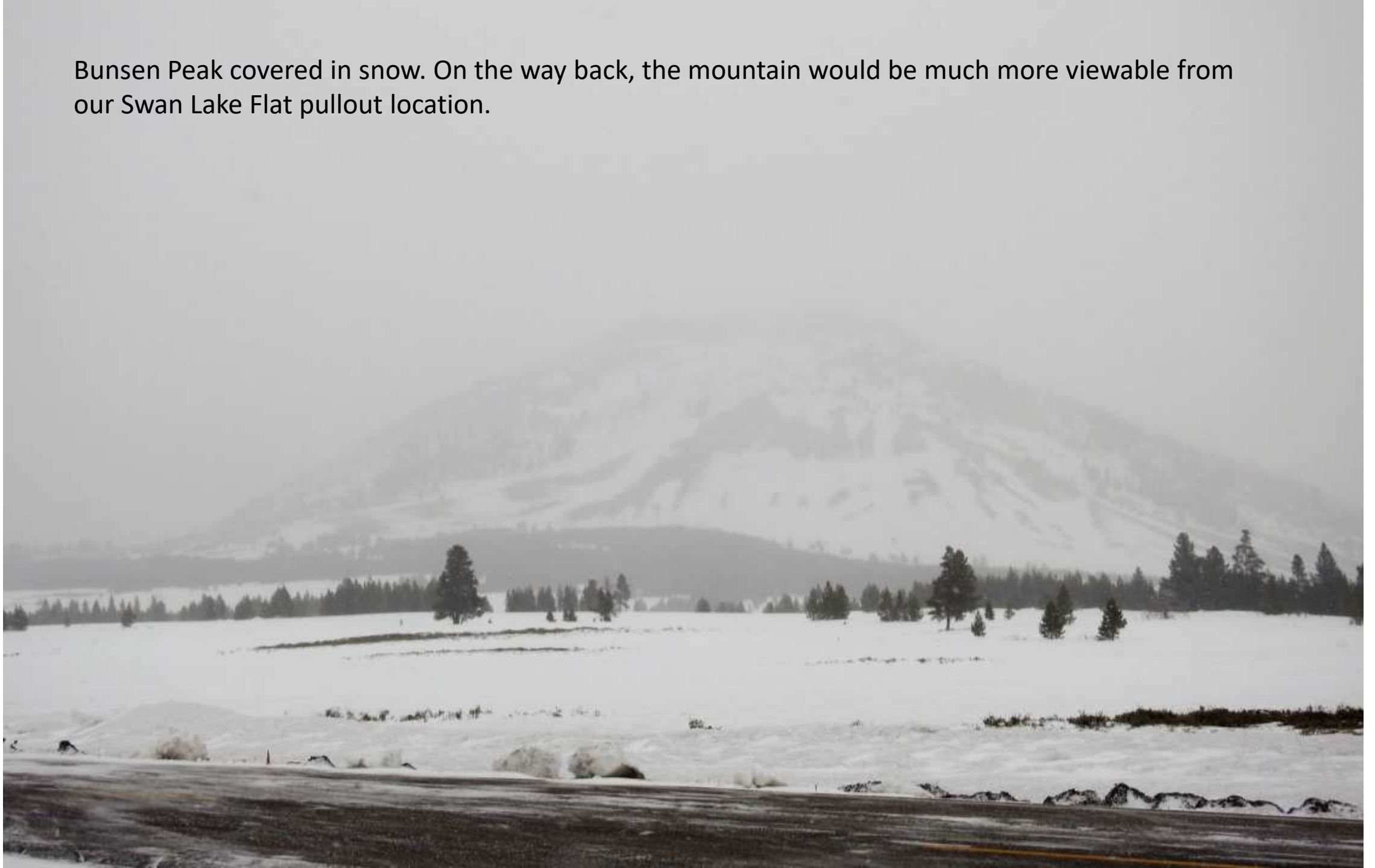


It was freezing on Swan Lake Flat and looked like the arctic tundra with snow and a ground blizzard swirling even more snow around the road.





Bunsen Peak covered in snow. On the way back, the mountain would be much more viewable from our Swan Lake Flat pullout location.





Perspectives along the Mammoth to Norris Road.











Roaring Mountain covered in mist from the large fumarole (steam vent) and cloudy, snowy weather.





Nymph Lake with a fumarole on its north (right) side. These pictures do a good job showing how heavy the snow was falling.





The overlook of the Norris Geyser Basin area is really cool from this vantage point, as you can see steam from the areas many hydrothermal features. On this morning, the 100% cloud cover prevented any views.



Gibbon Meadow.

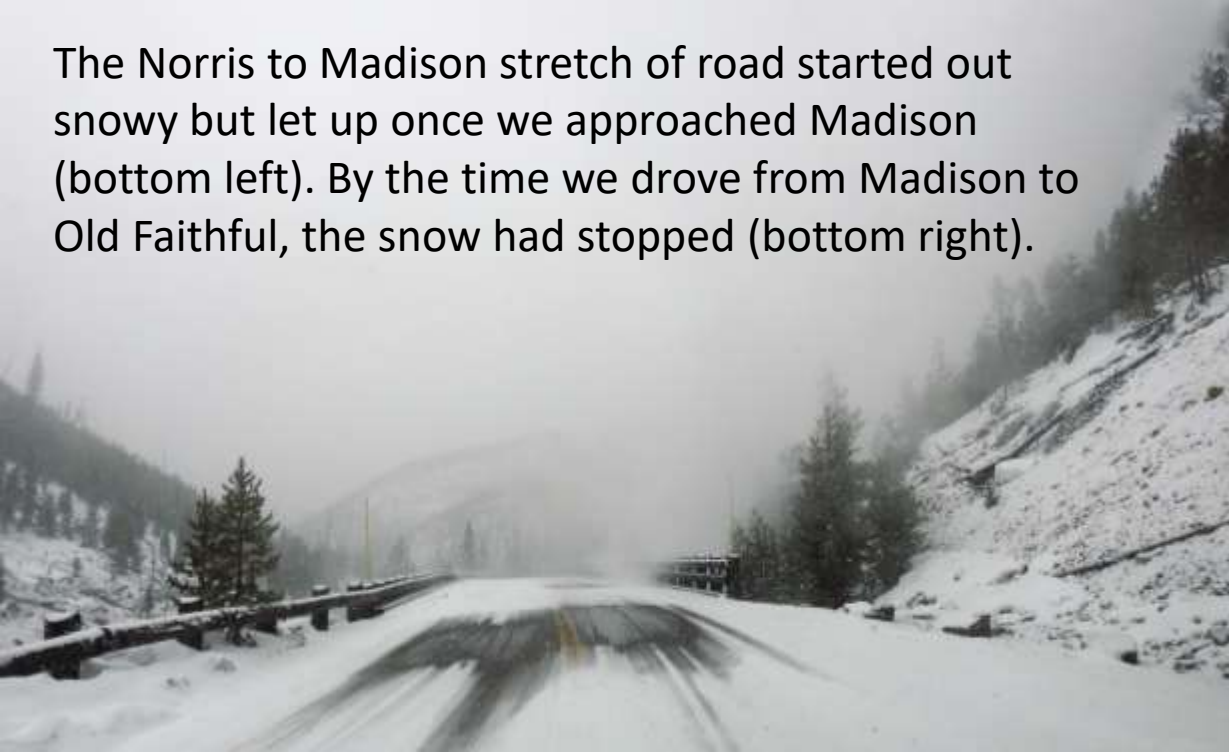


Elk Park, without one elk in view.





The Norris to Madison stretch of road started out snowy but let up once we approached Madison (bottom left). By the time we drove from Madison to Old Faithful, the snow had stopped (bottom right).





Lucky for us the snow stopped after we passed Madison Junction and headed south to the geyser basins. We first hiked the Fountain Paint Pot area in the Lower Geyser Basin, then went to Grand Prismatic, and Black Sand Basin. These sites have boardwalks that visitors follow to stay off the thermal basins. It is a win-win as the wooden (usually the fake plastic, longer lasting 'wood') boardwalks keep people out of sensitive areas, but also safely bring them to amazing views and scenes.

After touring these areas, we then went to Old Faithful which is a very large system called the Upper Geyser Basin. One can spend all day just walking around there, so you need to choose your time and routes wisely. On this day, we climbed up the Observation Trail. This short mile or so loop offers an impressive view of Old Faithful and the surrounding area. One problem, however: that area was covered in about two feet of snow and was mighty challenging to climb. Not many people had been up there on that day judging by scant human tracks. It had been a few years, at least, since I had been up there, so we didn't know if we were on the actual trail despite having a general idea where we were. We also didn't bring snowshoes because we were mostly on the boardwalks which were either clear of snow or packed down in places where you could walk on top of it, even in places where there was around two feet of ice.

It was very difficult to follow the trail and was steep and slippery in sections. We mostly stayed on top of the icy snow but did fall in a few places with 3-4 foot drifts. A couple of bad words may have come out of my mouth during those 'post-holing' incidents. We eventually got to a scenic overlook and watched Old Faithful erupt. The people looked like ants from that vantage point. It is a special area. I noted that I wanted to hike that trail in the summer when we could actually follow the proper route to see if we were in the correct place this time around.

On our way down from the observation area, we took a longer route and went over to Solitary Geyser where we post-holed quite a bit. Steve was using the 'AllTrails' app and we could see the general directions of how to get there, but it was difficult to follow trails when there is that much snow, no trail markers, and the bison create their own paths. We mostly followed the bison trails, who fell in with every step, but we would also be on and off the actual trail judging by intermittent yellow marked trees. When we arrived at the aptly named lonely geyser, we took a few pictures and realized after a couple of minutes that there was a bull bison standing behind the steaming water. I felt so bad for the bison as we could see his ribs. He was clearly just waiting out the late spring in this snow-free area hoping that the snow would soon melt so he could obtain food. He appeared to be at the end of his fat reserves, and I prayed that he would make it a few more weeks.



I am not here that often when I'm in Yellowstone, but the section of road next to the Firehole River is breathtaking and one of my favorite stretches.













Fountain Flats Drive and the Firehole River. Most of the road was closed as grizzly bears forage there when they emerge from their dens.







Lower Geyser Basin area. These flats are the unofficial beginning of a very geothermally active region.







Boardwalks and bacterial mats in the hydrothermal regions at Fountain Flats. Steam rising from Silex Spring is in the background of both pictures.





Fountain Paint Pot.





Fountain Paint Pot is in between a hot spring and a mud pot. In the spring, there is plenty of water, so it looks like a hot spring. Once it dries out it, the water thickens to a mud-like substance and hence it is a mud pot (also see next page).









Red Sprouter, another mud pot, is a very cool orangy color. It actually can be a hot spring when water is abundant and a fumarole (see steam) when water levels are low (right).







A good perspective of walking the snowy boardwalks and seeing steam and geysers in the distance. The dead coyote (next page) is at the top of the left picture on this page, but tough to see, and below (arrow).







Remains of the coyote at Fountain Paint Pots. It is impossible to know what killed the poor fellow. Starvation, wolves, or possibly the silica from the geyser basin (but unlikely) are all possible culprits.



Fountain Paint Pots flats.



Celestine Pool.







A beautiful scene unfolds as the Firehole River goes under the bridge to Midway Geyser Basin with much steam emanating from hydrothermal features.



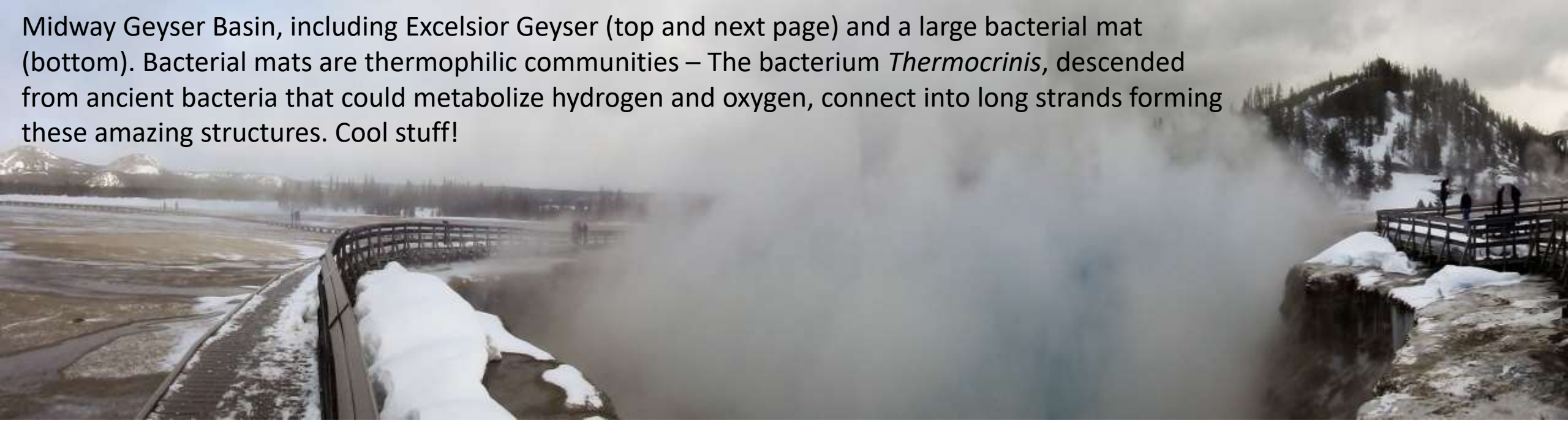




Entering Midway Geyser Basin to a land of contrasts: boiling water (top), steam (top), and nearby ice-encrusted branches (bottom).



Midway Geyser Basin, including Excelsior Geyser (top and next page) and a large bacterial mat (bottom). Bacterial mats are thermophilic communities – The bacterium *Thermocrinis*, descended from ancient bacteria that could metabolize hydrogen and oxygen, connect into long strands forming these amazing structures. Cool stuff!



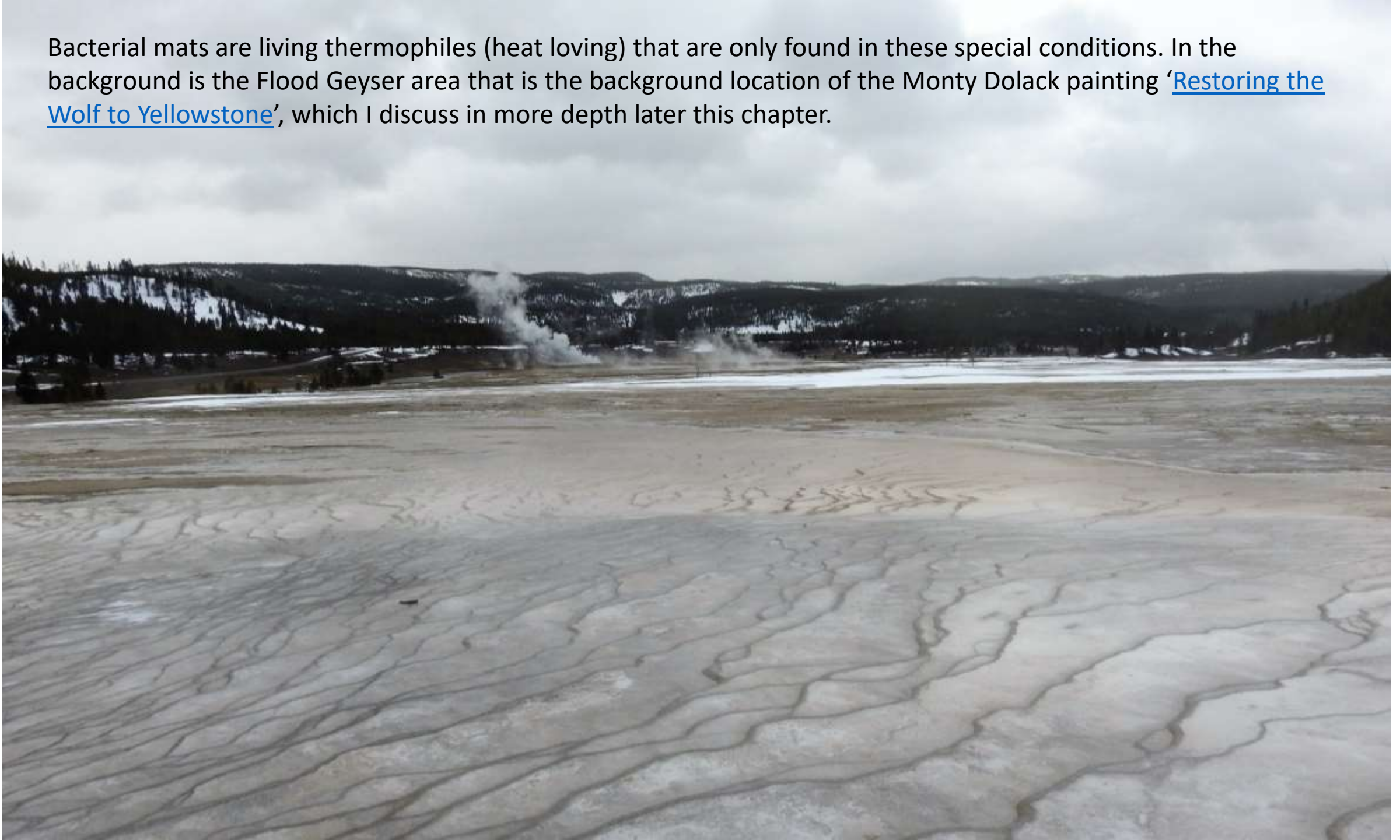


Excelsior Geyser is normally difficult to see because of the steam boiling off the geothermal feature. On this day, it was even worse and almost impossible to get a view of.





Bacterial mats are living thermophiles (heat loving) that are only found in these special conditions. In the background is the Flood Geyser area that is the background location of the Monty Dolack painting '[Restoring the Wolf to Yellowstone](#)', which I discuss in more depth later this chapter.





Similar to Excelsior Geyser, Grand Prismatic Hot Spring was very difficult to see due to a large steam plume. It is the largest hot spring in the United States and one of the biggest in the world. Notice the bison tracks at the bottom of these pictures (see arrows).







The best way to see Grand Prismatic Hot Spring is to follow a trail for about a half mile and then climb the hill in the background of these pictures. It offers a great view of the surrounding geyser basin. However, the area is closed in April due to snow and grizzly bear activity.

Next page: Notice the bacterial mat in the foreground of this spectacular area.









Top: Opal Pool in Midway Geyser Basin.

Right: Deep, icy snow on the boardwalk to and from Midway. It was a challenge for some folks to navigate it.







If you can't tell, I am enthralled with this bridge leading to and from Midway Geyser Basin, as it is situated over the aptly named Firehole River, which has many geothermal features emanating from it.







Panoramas of the Flood Geyser area (top), which is part of Midway Geyser Basin, and Biscuit Basin (bottom).





Midway Geyser area with Grand Prismatic Hot Spring (left) and Excelsior Geyser (right) in the distance.







Additional views of the Flood Geyser area, and the deep snow at the parking lot. The geothermal activity melted the snow in the Midway Geyser basin but the road corridor, with less heat in that immediate area, still had significant amounts.







A lone bull bison in the Biscuit Basin area. To save time, we just took pictures of the geothermal area from the parking lot (next page) and then moved on. I have walked that area many times in the past.











We then hiked Black Sands Geyser Basin, seeing snow and steam (top) and Iron Creek traveling through the area (bottom).





Emerald Pool (bottom) is near Iron Spring Creek (top left).



IRON SPRING  
CREEK





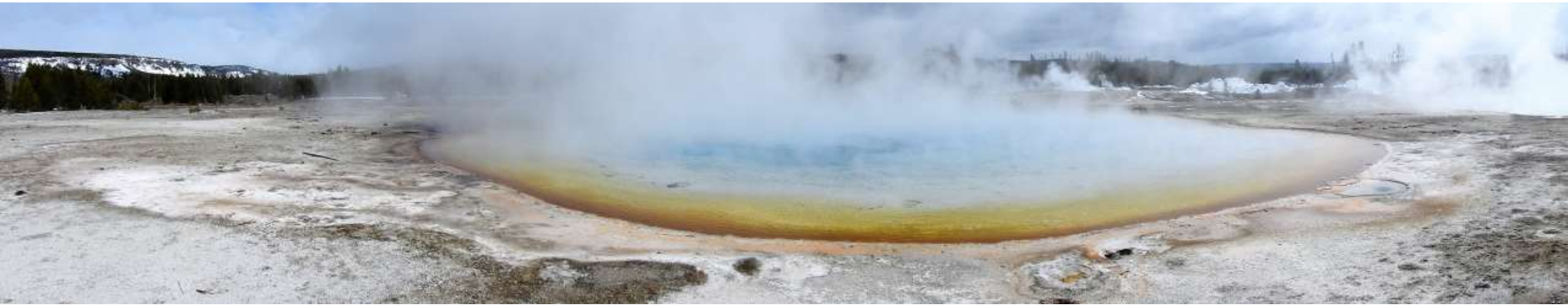
Sunset Lake (top left) and Handkerchief Geyser (bottom)  
in Black Sands Geyser Basin.











Rainbow Pool was our last new geothermal feature in Black Sands Geyser Basin. We then went to Old Faithful and the Upper Geyser Basin, our last major stop on this busy day (next pages).





Panoramas, including snow on the boardwalk surrounding Old Faithful Geyser (top) and the trail split (going right) to the Firehole River and back trails that allowed us to climb Observation Hill to view Old Faithful (bottom).







We took a few quick pics of Old Faithful, then continued on to the trails where we immediately encountered more snow, including on this bridge (right) over the Firehole River.

Next page: The Firehole River is a beautiful and scenic body of water.











The Firehole River (left) and first view from Observation Point before Old Faithful erupted (right).





The people appeared as small as ants on a hill as Old Faithful began to erupt.











The amount of water let off during an eruption, which occurs about every hour and a half, is amazing! And it is just one of more than [10,000 geothermal features found in Yellowstone](#).









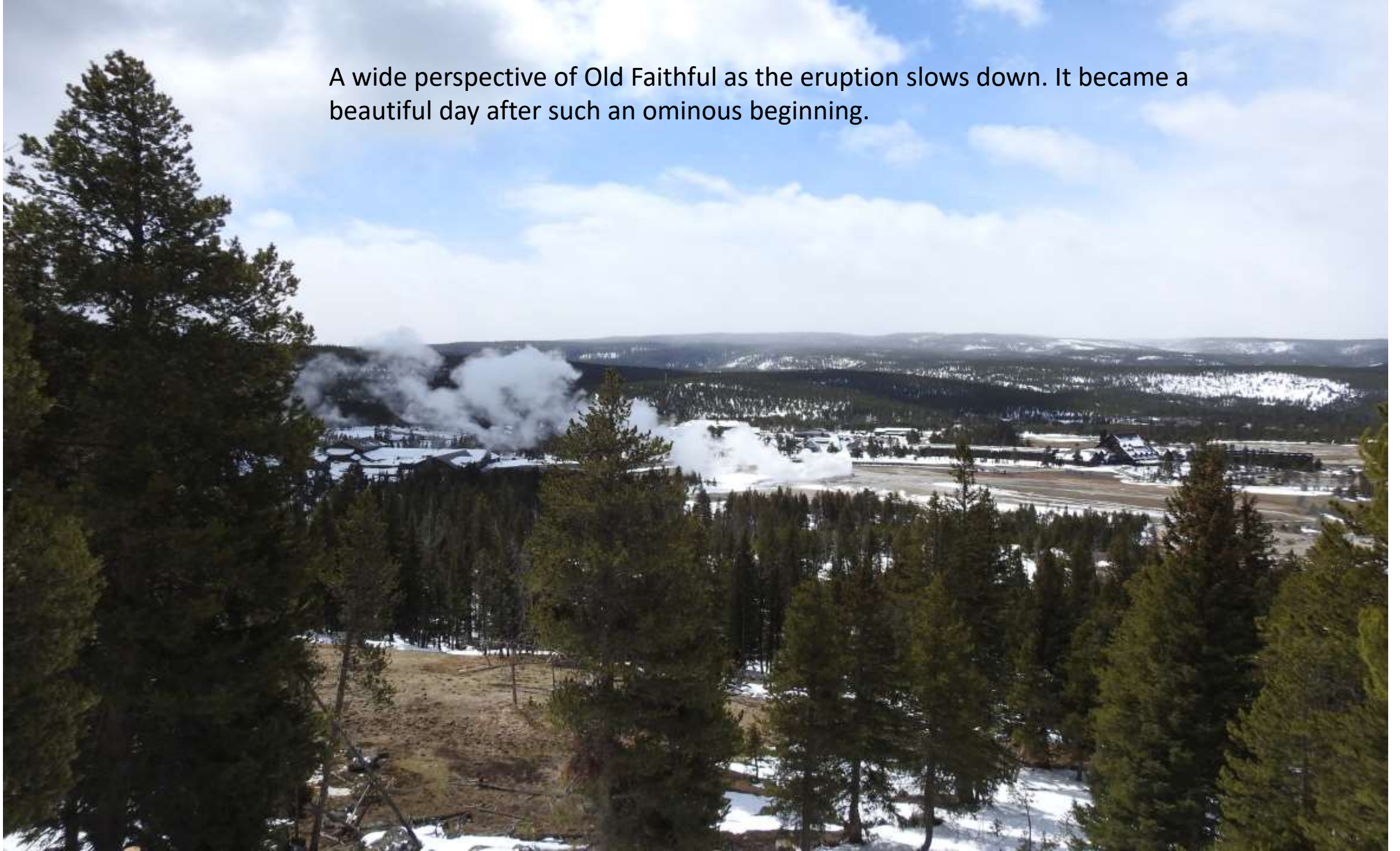








A wide perspective of Old Faithful as the eruption slows down. It became a beautiful day after such an ominous beginning.







My last picture of Old Faithful. Within a minute, the steam emanating from the hot inferno under the ground slowed down greatly. There was a cool rock formation just behind our observation area (right and next page).









Solitary Geyser in the Upper Geyser Basin backcountry.

Next page: Like a phantom, this bison just appeared from behind the steam.













It was an extra 1.2 miles for us to hike to Solitary Geyser. We had trouble following the trail back to the main loop system within the Upper Geyser Basin. After about a half mile of bushwhacking in the general vicinity of the actual trail, we reached the main area more commonly used by the general public. There, we did the shorter inner loop. We had previously walked the longer section when we were last there in [April 2021](#).

I took many pictures of the geysers and other hydrothermal features on the inner loop. I always enjoy walking through these areas. They are so different than anything you'll experience just about anywhere else. We returned to our car at 2:30 PM. I lost one of my older gloves on the way and didn't realize it until we were near the car. I then back-tracked our route to find it on the ground near the Old Faithful hotel. Steve was impressed that I found it, and that I cared so much for a ripped glove that he said needed to be replaced two years ago! I reasoned that while damaged (from my wood stove back at home), it was still very warm as it had 100 gram Thinsulate insulation.

We stopped back at Midway Geyser Basin on our return trip to Gardiner. There is a pullout off the main road near Grand Prismatic Hot Spring that is the setting for the locally famous Monty Dolack painting '[Restoring the Wolf to Yellowstone](#)'. I have that poster in my living room and look at it every day. Dolack uses artistic freedom to paint a mother wolf howling with three pups overlooking the basin. While it isn't exactly the same appearance in real life, it was successfully used in the early 1990s to gain support for bringing wolves back to the park, which ultimately happened in 1995-96. For its landscape beauty, as well as for sentimental reasons, I always enjoy taking pictures of that area!

On our drive back, we also stopped back at Roaring Mountain and Swan Lake Flats with better light. When we first went by Swan Lake it looked like the middle of the arctic tundra during a blizzard. I obtained some good 'before and after' pics.

For the entire day, once we drove past (south of) Mammoth, we only saw scattered bison. We did see loads of bison scat in just about every open, hydrothermal warmed field, but not many live animals. Most elk migrate out of the central and southern parts of the park and don't return until May. We saw elk in Mammoth but not south of there.

The snow wasn't that deep in some places like around the Norris Geyser Basin, which was closed for hiking due, ironically, to snow. But there was ~4 feet in other places. We skipped the Canyon area on this trip, as it is a 12+ mile one-way drive from Norris and we didn't want to exhaust ourselves. It was reported that the snow was up to the roofs in the village.





These pictures are from the back part of the Upper Geyser Basin's inner loop.





Back to the Firehole river. This is one of my favorite non-wolf or grizzly pictures of the trip.







Crested Pool.







Castle Geyser.







Shield Spring (top left and bottom right) and a different view/angle of Castle Geyser, which never fully erupted when we were in the vicinity.



Old Faithful Inn with loads of snow and icicles (next page) on its roof.











There was multiple feet of snow covering the roof at the Old Faithful Visitor Center, but the backside was open to visitors, to my surprise (bottom left).







Old Faithful was the furthest south that the park roads were open, so once when we finished there we drove back to the north. We stopped again at the Flood Geyser area in Midway Geyser Basin. It was fully sunlit and beautiful there.



As I make this book, and specifically insert this image, I am literally staring at my Monty Dolack painting '[Restoring the Wolf to Yellowstone](#)'! Note: The snowy part of the hill in the background (left center) is the short hike to gain a view of Grand Prismatic Hot Spring below it. Unfortunately, the trail was closed due to grizzly bear activity.





A great view of Midway Geyser Basin from the park road.







Midway Geyser Basin (left) and driving along the Firehole River (bottom right and next page).











Roaring Mountain in full sun. What a different experience than the 20 degrees and snow from just a few hours previously.







Bunsen Peak with some very interesting late afternoon light. It almost looks like a black and white Ansel Adams photograph!







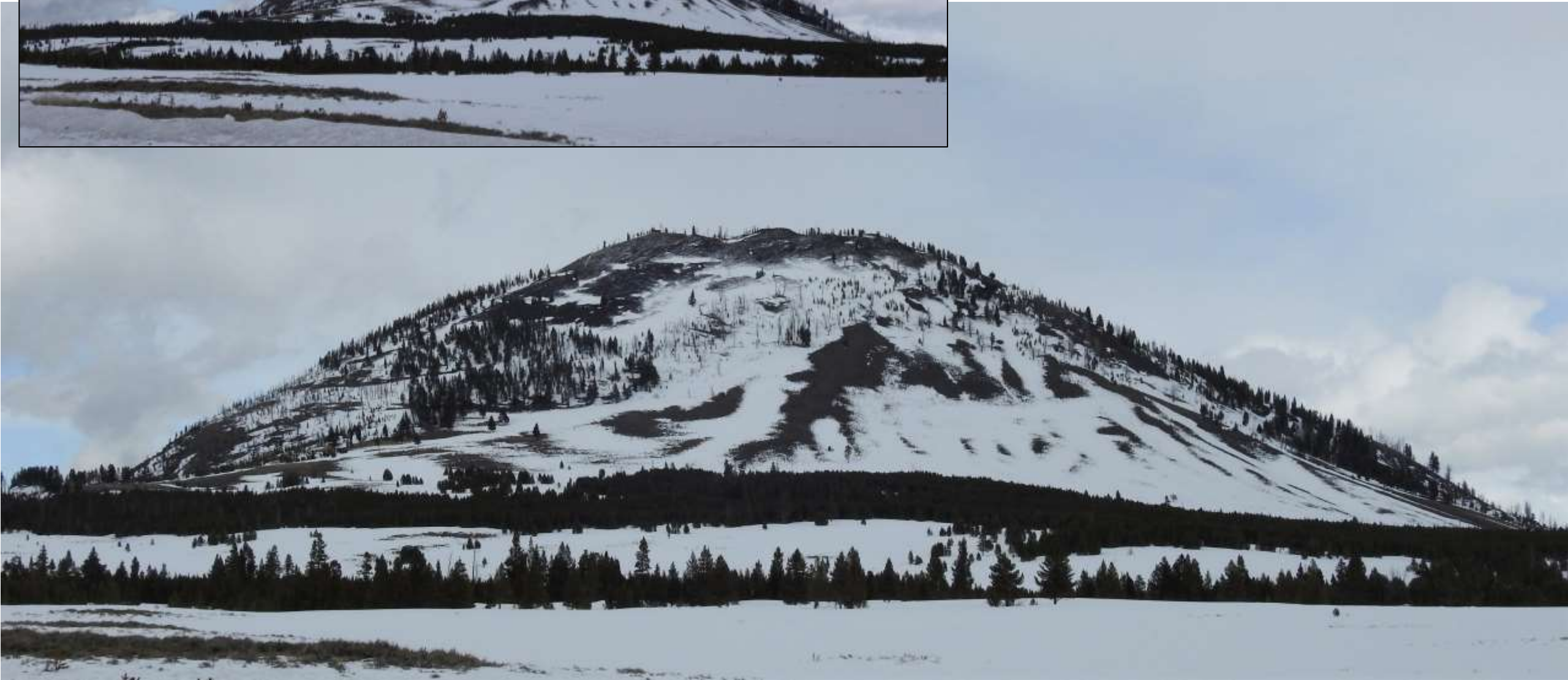
Panoramas of Swan Lake Flat (top) and Bunsen Peak (bottom) from the same location. Swan Lake is on the west side of the park road while Bunsen is on the east.







Bunsen Peak is a very popular summertime hike. I greatly enjoy the relatively modest 4.5-7.0 mile jaunt, depending on what route one takes.





In addition to seeing the scattered bison, we saw coyote tracks at Old Faithful but didn't see any live animals. We also saw a dead coyote at Fountain Paint Pots ~15 feet from the NW part of the boardwalk (pictures previously shown). It was petrified looking with some of its fur and its bones remaining. I got a good picture of its skull not knowing how it met its fate.

We returned to Gardiner at 4:30 PM. As this was our penultimate day, we had to vacuum, mop, and clean the duplex. That took us a solid 1.5 hours. We then packed most of our gear, so when we returned from the field mid-morning on the next day, we could quickly finish packing the car and head to Bozeman.

We were able to work on pictures and relax starting around 7:00 PM. Sadly, this was our last night at the duplex on this trip. I was thinking to myself that I missed the place already, and I hadn't even left yet!



Canary Springs, the most visible part of Mammoth Hot Springs, as viewed from the park road on our descent to Mammoth.







# Day 9: Bison, Wolves, and a Grizzly on our Last Day

April 22<sup>nd</sup>, our last day in the park, started at ~20 degrees both in Gardiner and in the Park. We arrived at Blacktail Ponds at 5:40 AM in the dark. There was nothing on the carcass for the first time in over two weeks! The parking lot was already full, so we quickly moved on to Hellroaring. Wildlife watchers later reported that no wolves or bears were seen all morning at Blacktail, which made us traveling further east a wise decision, especially with our limited time in the park on this day.

We scanned for over an hour and only saw scattered bison across the wide-open expanse of the plateau below Hellroaring Mountain. I didn't see one elk which is rare for that area; another watcher said he saw four wapitis. Just as we were leaving the lot at 6:55 AM, 'Nick from PA' said he heard howling. I turned off the car and stepped out to hear a long coyote group howl to the Northeast. It sounded like it was low in the valley and near the Yellowstone River. Then, a couple of minutes later a coyote repeatedly bark-howled. I scanned and scanned with my spotting scope but couldn't find them. It was very frustrating. Nobody else, at the time, had a scope to assist me in finding them. I am normally pretty good at spotting wildlife, especially when sound (i.e., howling) aides in pinpointing their location. But on this day, I either had poor location skills or the animals were actually out of view.

Attempting to look from a different angle, we next went to 'Lower Hellroaring', which is over a mile to the east. We scanned the area, which is lower in elevation, but I still couldn't find anything other than bison. Rick M. was there talking with two vans full of Utah State students. They weren't looking through scopes, so Steve and I forged on to Little America. Rick often does these impromptu talks to groups on the side of the road!

On our way to Little America, we saw a 'red dog' and its mother close to the road at 'Wrecker Grade', a hilly section of pavement near the Yellowstone River. The duo crossed the street, then a younger bison cow and bigger bull followed them. It was special to see the young bison, and I obtained good pictures of them. We saw another bison calf up on 'Vader Hill', which is a steep incline east of Tower, north of the park road, and west of the Yellowstone River – don't ask me how that name came about!

Once in Little America, we scanned from the 'Curve' and 'Boulder' lots. We found the big grizzly bear still on the bison carcass. It was the third day we had observed him there. This sighting gave us grizzly sightings on all nine of our days in the park. Indeed, it was a 'Beary Special April in Yellowstone'! The bison carcass was now visible in the open about 50 feet southwest of where we first saw it two days earlier, when it was obscured by the shadow of a tree.





A bison cow and calf crossing the road at 'Wrecker Grade' (top left), which is next to the Yellowstone Picnic area. It is named after being near the Yellowstone River. The heavy machinery was there because a new bridge was being built over the Yellowstone River. It will alter the route of the park road once completed. As mom and baby traveled across the road (bottom right), a younger cow crossed in the same place (bottom left).







The little red dog watched (bottom) as the young cow walked toward them (left).







The calf stayed very close to its mother's side, especially when they were traveling (right).



The foursome walked right through the soon-to-be construction site (notice the survey stakes) where the new Yellowstone River Bridge will be located.







Above: If you look closely, you can see the calf's umbilical cord still attached.





The pattern became routine: Stop and nurse briefly (left), then follow close to mom when she traveled (right).










Location in Little America of the grizzly bear sighting (see the 'X'). Next four pages: Given the distance of over a mile to the bear's location across the Lamar River, these photos (which are cropped) are not that bad.





A wide-angle, high-altitude photograph of a mountainous landscape. The terrain is covered in dense, low-lying shrubs and patches of snow. In the center of the frame, a large, dark-colored grizzly bear is lying on its side, positioned over a large, dark, rectangular object that appears to be a bison carcass. The bear's head is turned slightly towards the viewer. The background shows more of the same terrain, with snow patches scattered across the slopes. The overall scene is captured in a naturalistic, documentary style.

The grizzly bear is lying on the bison carcass, which is no doubt an evolved strategy to keep wolves and other scavengers away.







A super cropped photo after using the full extent of my 83-  
power optical camera.













As we were watching the grizzly feed, people reported that there were wolves east of the landform 'Junction Butte' on the south side of the river but north of the road. This meant that the wolves were relatively close to us, probably less than a half mile away. It took a while from where we were looking at Boulder, but we did finally see two blacks and a gray just south of the eastern most conifers by the river. These were members of the Junctions, in the heart of their territory, where they were first observed and named [in 2012](#). The trio rapidly went out of sight into the river corridor which was frustrating, since we had just found them 1-2 minutes earlier. The sighting was so quick in fact, I never was able to take a picture of them.

We didn't have them for a good 5-10 minutes, and by then word had spread that we had observed wolves, so many people arrived to this area, including Rick and his Utah State group. I pointed to the growing crowd where we had lost the wolves and explained that they were moving east. We were mostly looking to the north when I decided to scan more to the NE/E than the other watchers. Almost immediately, I found three collared grays. I was shocked as I hadn't observed any collared grays up to that point in the day. They were low and in the open on the flats south of the river. Just like the other three wolves, they were spread out and as we watched one disappear, another would appear – but it was clear that we had three different grays, but no blacks during this sighting. I could only imagine how we hadn't seen those wolves earlier.

We obtained great views of them traveling southeast across a frozen pond. We shared our scopes with the students, so everyone was able to see the wolves. Success! Knowing that Steve and I had to get to the Bozeman airport at around 11:30 AM, we kept looking at the time – which for me involves looking at my phone since I no longer wear a watch. 8:00 AM quickly became 8:30, which we established as our cut off point to head west. But we had wolves in view. What to do? A quandary.

We continued watching the canines and eventually all three went out of our view, seemingly getting absorbed into the rolling hills. It often doesn't seem possible to lose animals when you are watching them in a mostly open area if you have a good vantage point, like we did at Boulder pullout. But the rolling hills – characteristic of many of the places where we observe from – can play tricks on you. Usually when this happens, we just move to a new spot in the direction the animals are traveling. That was just what Rick suggested at 8:38 AM. While we didn't want to leave the area, we said our good-bye to Rick and others, then proceeded west. Based on later reports, I don't think those wolves were found again that morning.

We saw the usual bison and elk on our way back to Gardiner, with most of the wapiti being observed from Mammoth to Gardiner. We got into 3-4 bison jams of ~200 total individuals in a steep area between Phantom Lake and Geode Creek. It appeared that the bison were moving deeper into the park and further away from where people kill them.





A plane was out looking for the wolves as well. The researchers record their location, the number of wolves seen, what pack they belong to, who they may be interacting with, and other notable behaviors observed during a sighting.



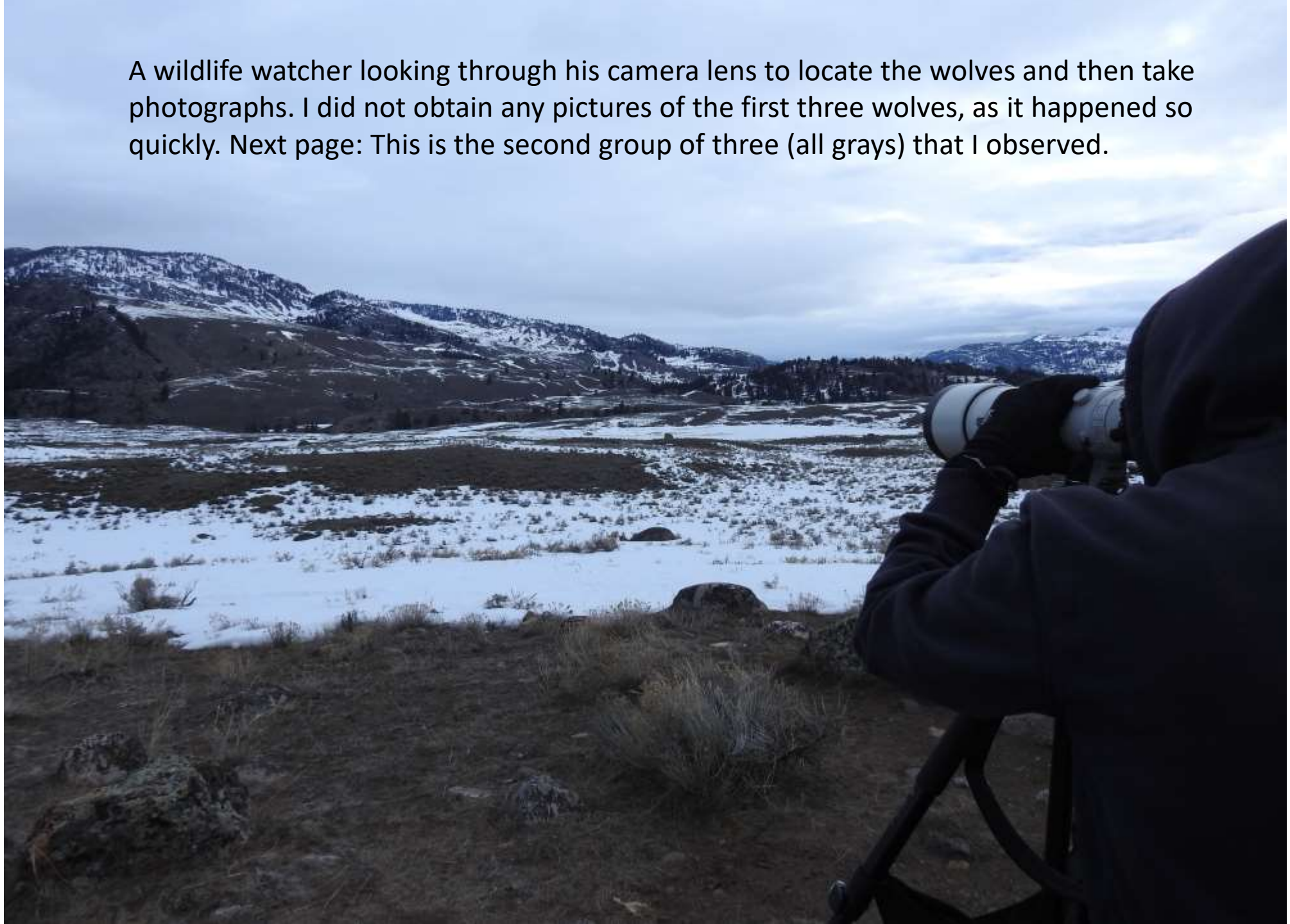


While it is a slight optical illusion, the plane appears to be just over the trees. In reality, I am certain it is further away than appears.



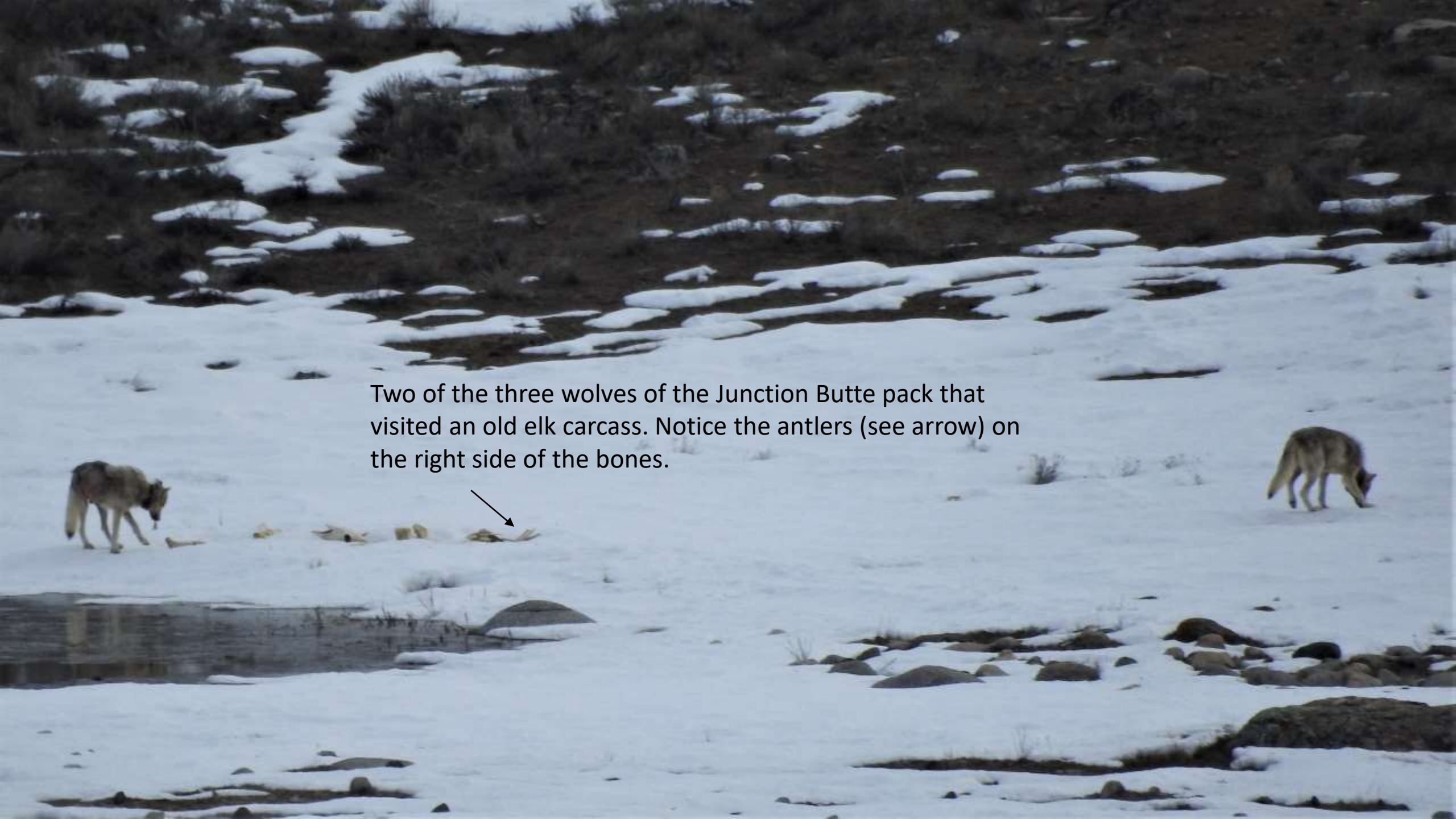


A wildlife watcher looking through his camera lens to locate the wolves and then take photographs. I did not obtain any pictures of the first three wolves, as it happened so quickly. Next page: This is the second group of three (all grays) that I observed.





Two of the three wolves of the Junction Butte pack that visited an old elk carcass. Notice the antlers (see arrow) on the right side of the bones.







The wolves did much sniffing as they meandered to the east.



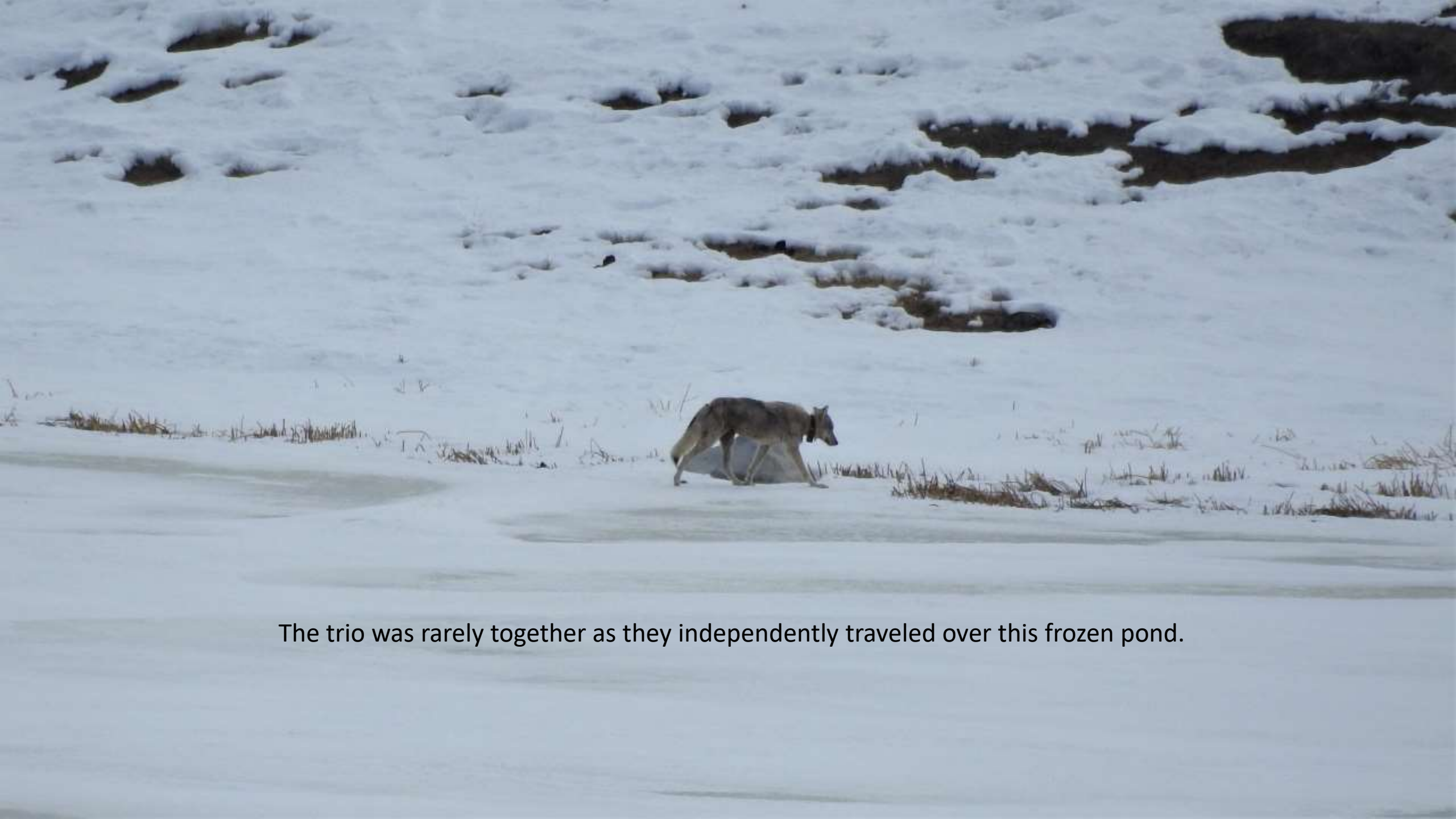












The trio was rarely together as they independently traveled over this frozen pond.









The first of a few bison jams that we encountered on our drive west to Gardiner. This is in the Geode Creek area.



















This was our second bison jam of the morning. They were in the steep, hilly area east of Phantom Lake.





During the summer, those bison jams could have been a disaster for us timewise. But on this day, it was just a couple of extra minutes each. We noted that we had observed many bison in that area as well as on the Blacktail during this trip.

Once we descended to Gardiner at ~5300 feet, we found the usual 20-25 Pronghorn down by the flats around the North Entrance. The diversity of Yellowstone's habitats and its wildlife always astounds me. Despite the short day in the park (with a long day of traveling), I still managed to take 74 pictures.

We did our final packing and light cleaning at the duplex from 9:30 – 10:15 AM, then drove the hour and a half to Bozeman. Our plane was scheduled to depart at 1:18 PM MT, so we planned it just right by having about 1.5 hours until take-off.

We flew back to Boston via a connecting flight to Salt Lake City that had a ~3 hour layover. I was able to get up-to-date with all my pictures, so I used my time wisely. We didn't land in Boston until just before midnight and didn't leave baggage claim with our luggage until 12:15 AM on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Fortunately, that was a Sunday, so I was able to sleep in since I didn't finally arrive back to my home on Cape Cod until 2:05 AM.

It was another amazing trip to the world's first National Park. Grizzly sightings everyday topped the list on this special trip. I already can't wait to go back to my true second home. Bon voyage!





The Blacktail 'S curve', a very scenic stretch of road.







Above: The very western part of Blacktail Plateau as we approach Lava Creek (right). This picture was obtained as I drove by but didn't stop. It is a pretty picnic area, especially in the summer when it is warmer and there is no snow.



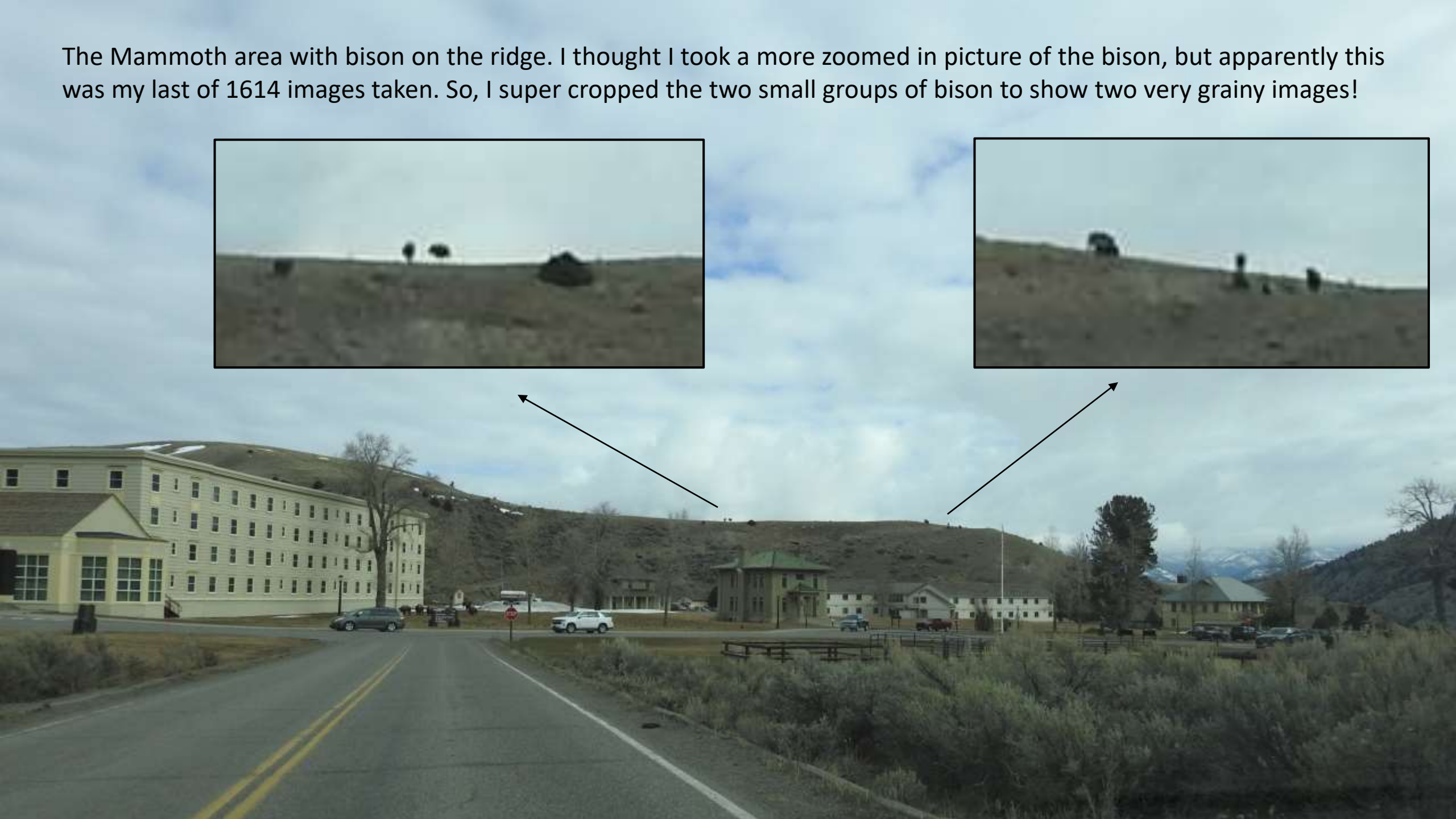




My earlier pictures of this area showed Mammoth Hot Springs (top left of both pictures) from the other side (west) of the Mammoth High Bridge. Here one sees the light and one-way traffic on the High Bridge itself. The construction was done to strengthen the bridge so it would last longer.



The Mammoth area with bison on the ridge. I thought I took a more zoomed in picture of the bison, but apparently this was my last of 1614 images taken. So, I super cropped the two small groups of bison to show two very grainy images!





# Epilogue: Value, Don't Hate - Wolves, Bears, and Bison

I hope you enjoyed this picture e-book. I was fortunate to have observed many animals, including most of the park's predators – foxes, coyotes, wolves, hibernating black bears, and awakened grizzly bears, as well as probable mountain lion (cougar) tracks. While my grizzly bear sightings were spectacular, I can't help but think of how the surrounding states want to treat these animals. I have previously detailed in prior books how the state of Montana is killing wolves at record levels, almost seemingly as payback for them being reintroduced there (read [this book](#) and [this one](#) for more info on wolves). Retired biologists have called out Montana, suggesting they should [manage wolves by science, not politics](#).

Grizzly bear management is trending in the direction of wolf oversight (or lack thereof) in the Rocky Mountains, with the [states of MT, WY, and ID petitioning the feds to remove them from the Endangered Species Act \(ESA\), specifically to be able to kill more of them](#). Despite their [incredible economic value of being alive](#), those states' politicians often cast both carnivores as liabilities and villains. It makes zero sense. Todd Wilkinson writes, "[grizzlies and wolves in Yellowstone are bullish assets that keep delivering dividends as long as they remain alive](#)." Scientists are noticing too. A [biologist who worked for years to recover and delist grizzlies from the ESA has now reversed course when Northern Rocky politicians changed his mind](#). He now thinks they should remain listed until politics stop trumping science and the will of the public.

Bison management isn't doing much better, as I've depicted in a few places in this book. The large bovines had a very difficult winter due to prolonged snow on the ground. [Tribal hunters killed well over 1,000 bison this past winter](#) when they left the confines of the park, which generated [outrage at the indiscriminate 'slaughtering' of bison](#). The animals were simply seeking low elevation, snow-free areas to obtain grass. It is believed that ~1,800 of the 6,000 died between winter-kill and human hunting – mostly by native tribes. This created a huge controversy with [some folks calling out other conservation groups for staying silent](#) on letting native hunters contribute to the [largest number of bison killed since the late 1800s](#) when bison were nearly exterminated from the United States. This also led some natives to rightfully critique other indigenous groups claiming, "[Tribal Nations Must Honor, Not Destroy, Buffalo Nation](#)". There were also [open letters written to tribes participating in the Yellowstone Buffalo "hunt"](#), claiming they were acting no different than other cultures, mainly Europeans, who nearly exterminated the bison in the first place. No doubt, I thought, the [hunt at the northern park border was fracturing their social units](#).



I look forward to seeing these animals well into the future, even while Montana's politicians are amid an all-out cultural war against economically valuable wildlife, which literally sickens me. For more, see these articles ([one](#), [two](#), and [three](#)) and contact the area's law-makers, and maybe your own too, and let them know how you feel.

As I have noted in my previous books, the importance of having national parks is critical. Without them, we wouldn't have the wolves, grizzly bears, or bison described throughout this book. At least politicians are toying with real animals that are already here. In many places they are not even there anymore, despite perfectly good habitat remaining. There is simply no possible way that I would have seen all the wildlife that I did without having a large area protected from human interference, especially hunting. The [National Park \(NP\) Service's mission](#) of preserving 'unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values ... for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations' is a model that the rest of the world has replicated. It has been extremely effective in protecting core wildlife populations and ecosystems as well as being an important boost to local economies, as people come to observe the animals and the scenery therein. I know – if they could – the wolves, grizzlies, and bison would thank the people for protecting them. I have no doubt they know how valuable Yellowstone is.

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