

Mud, I mean April, in Yellowstone: Nature's Transition from Winter to Spring



By Jonathan G. Way

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 - <http://www.easterncoyoteresearch.com/store> or MyYellowstoneExperience.org
- Previous books by Jonathan Way:
 - Way, J. G. 2007 (2014, revised edition). [Suburban Howls: Tracking the Eastern Coyote in Urban Massachusetts](#). 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.easterncoyoteresearch.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.easterncoyoteresearch.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.easterncoyoteresearch.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.easterncoyoteresearch.com/ChristmasInYellowstone>.

Pay it Forward

Dear Reader,

Yellowstone is an absolutely amazing place and I hope this collection of 430 pictures from a 9 day trip in early spring clearly articulates that. Nature is in transition from winter to spring during most of April (and into May) so I love the diversity of pictures found in this book from springtime looking images to mornings with fresh, winter-like snow. April is the mud season where much of the landscape is either melting or melted snow. This produces hazardous conditions with lots of slippery mud or even more slick ice which is especially common on trails that are already well worn into the ground; hence the odd but hopefully comical title of this book. You will see many pictures related to this subject in addition to the abundant wildlife and gorgeous scenery.

To increase access for all people, rich or poor, majority or minority, I am offering it for free to anyone in the world who wants to read it. In this e-book, I share with you, the reader, my experience out in 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 can provide you with a physical address: jon@easterncoyotereseach.com or easterncoyotereseach@yahoo.com.

Thanks in advance!

Jon Way



A member of the Wapiti Wolf pack crossing the park road down at Midway Geyser Basin.

Dedication

To the wildlife and amazing features of Yellowstone! Without your ubiquitous presence, this book would not be possible.

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Elk just north of the town of Gardiner, Montana.



Preface and Acknowledgements

April is the mud season where much of the landscape is either melting or melted snow. This produces hazardous conditions with lots of slippery mud or even more slick ice which is especially common on trails that are well worn into the ground. For locals and visitors alike it is a defining theme of the time of year, and hence the odd but hopefully comical title of this book. You will see many pictures related to this subject in addition to the abundant wildlife and gorgeous scenery.

Steve Cifuni, my good friend and frequent travel companion, went on the trip with me. He has been instrumental in keeping me motivated to visit all the places that we do during our many trips to the park and elsewhere together. We had the fortune, like I do on all my other trips, of leaving our vehicles at Steve's parents' house just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, and were driven to Logan Airport at 4:30 AM on April 16, 2021 by his father. In Montana, we obtained a very affordable car rental for our trip which was very different from my experience over the [2020 holiday season](#).

I also want to thank the people who continue to help me with obligations at home when I am gone including Tara Way, Robin and Tim Way, Michael Way, and Tom Morgan.

Bob Landis, who effectively made my '[Christmas in Yellowstone](#)' trip possible and has filmed many of the nature documentaries from Yellowstone that you may have watched in the past few decades (especially on wolves), again offered housing in Gardiner, Montana. This town is located in a stunning, high elevation desert area just outside the northern boundary of the park. I greatly appreciate Bob's generosity.

This was my 24th trip to the world's first national park. After all these visits, I have a detailed knowledge of the park which helps to put my experiences into context. In fact, I have published three other books related to Yellowstone. My first is a color print guide book, [My Yellowstone Experience](#) (2013), and was based on my first 14 trips totaling 123 days. [The Trip of a Lifetime](#) is a 561 page e-book (2020) based on my 21st journey into the park during July 2019, which lasted 7 days, as well as two additional weeks in other western national parks. [Christmas in Yellowstone](#) is based on a dream 9 day trip I took during the 2020 holiday season and was my most recent voyage to the famous park before this one. Altogether, with my most recent trip of 9 days in April 2021, I have been in the park for 213 days, or about two-thirds of a year up to that point!

I noted the following in my *Christmas in Yellowstone* book, but it is worth reiterating here: While I've been in Yellowstone many times, it has been a relatively short period of time to obtain all of the images, especially of wildlife like wolves, that I have gathered for my books. Yellowstone is one of the best places in the world to see and photograph wildlife. And as you'll notice in these pages, I go all out to make the most of my time when I am there, especially when a friend is there to push me, for example, to go for a hike on an evening when I would rather relax. The energy we exert on a 9 day trip is not sustainable for much longer. Similar to [my December trip](#), this one was no exception! Yet that doggedness, even though I was there for just over a week, helped to give me enough images and experiences to be able to create a worthwhile book, as you'll see.

I want to also thank all of the visitors to and employees of the park who aide with 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](#)! Yes, in history! I want to also thank Wolf Project technician Jeremy SunderRaj, who is essentially Rick's protégé. The two of them provide a mountain of information on the park's wolves and other wildlife and my story would not be as complete without their knowledge. Many wolves are radio-collared in the park and their signals' facilitate where to look for them and ultimately allows us to view them.

There is also a great website, <https://yellowstonereports.com/index.php>, which details the daily activities of the wolves and other 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 wolf 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 up-to-date of exciting happenings in Yellowstone. Susan and Reve Carberry, who I spent much time wolf watching with, also do an admiral job of helping Laurie with reporting.

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 appreciate their comments and support – both emotionally and financially – over the years which has given me the motivation to publish many of these manuscripts. I have found that e-books are the easiest and by far cheapest way of producing these pictorial tomes. Those social media posts gave me the outline for this endeavor, including most of the captions, albeit with some edits. Additionally, I originally published the links of those images on my '[My Yellowstone Experience](#)' website on May 1, 2021: <http://www.myyellowstoneexperience.org/2021-news-updates/>. Here is that announcement:

'Posted May 1, 2021: Pictures from Yellowstone. I was in Yellowstone from April 16-24 and saw so much including wolves every day, bison and elk all over the place, lots of coyotes, a few grizzly bears, and so much else. Here are my better pictures from that trip:

Day 1: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159615613920016>

Day 2: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159617753405016>

Day 3: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159618159820016>

Day 4: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159620272480016>

Day 5: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159622093275016>

Day 5-6: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159624960610016>

Day 7: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159634466865016>

Day 8: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159647267575016>

Day 9: <https://www.facebook.com/jonathan.way.3/posts/10159659927735016>'



Herein, I detail those 9 days in the park from start to finish in complete and greater detail than these previous sources.

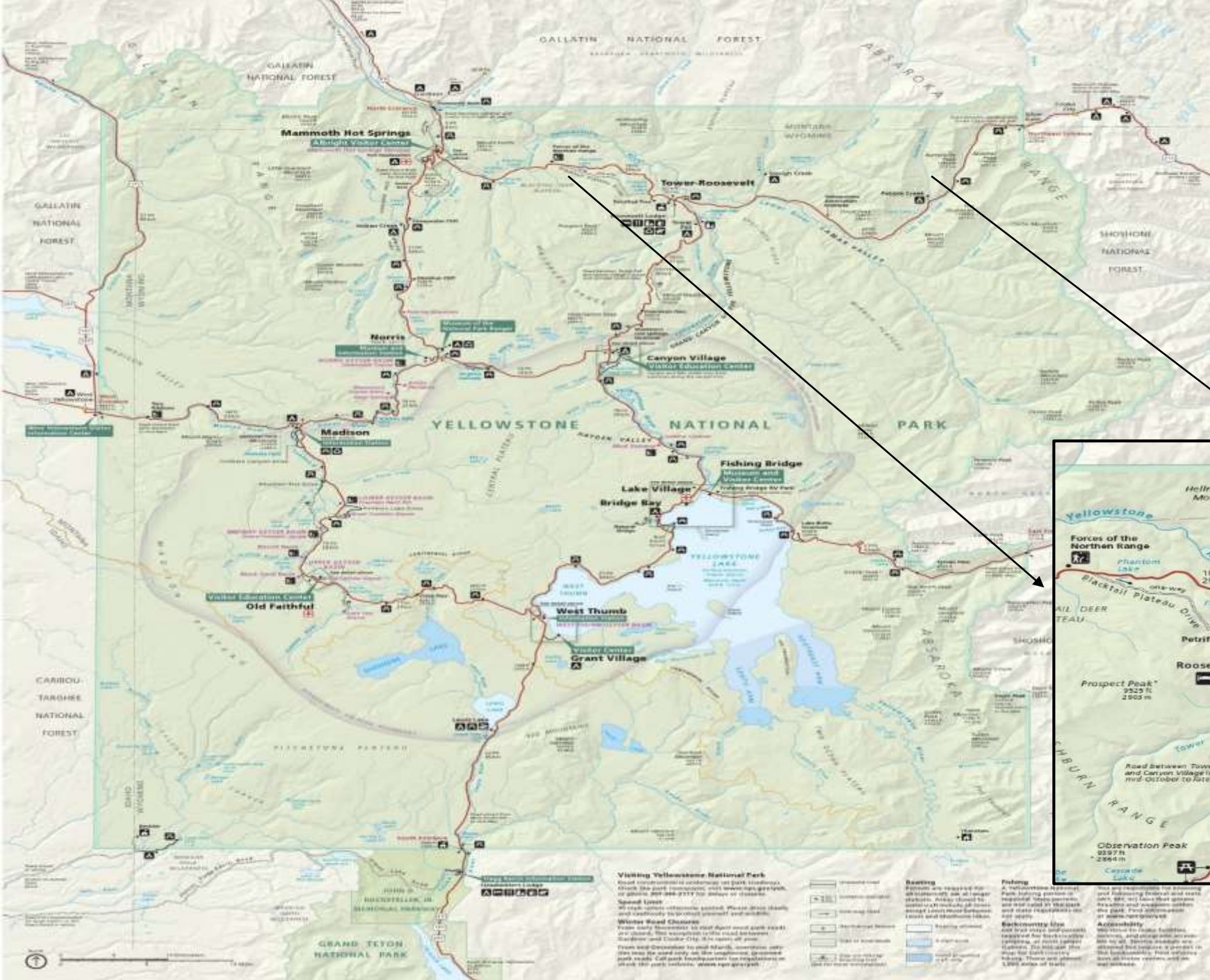
During the expedition, I took 1,259 images with the vast majority being pictures, along with a few videos. To show my Yellowstone experience during the mud season of April, I use my top 430 pictures herein. In addition to those Facebook posts, I also referred to the 25 pages of journal notes that I took 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. Her comments and support over the years has been crucial to my ability to publish all the books that I have. I can't thank her enough. Steve also provided useful comments on an earlier version. Lastly, 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!

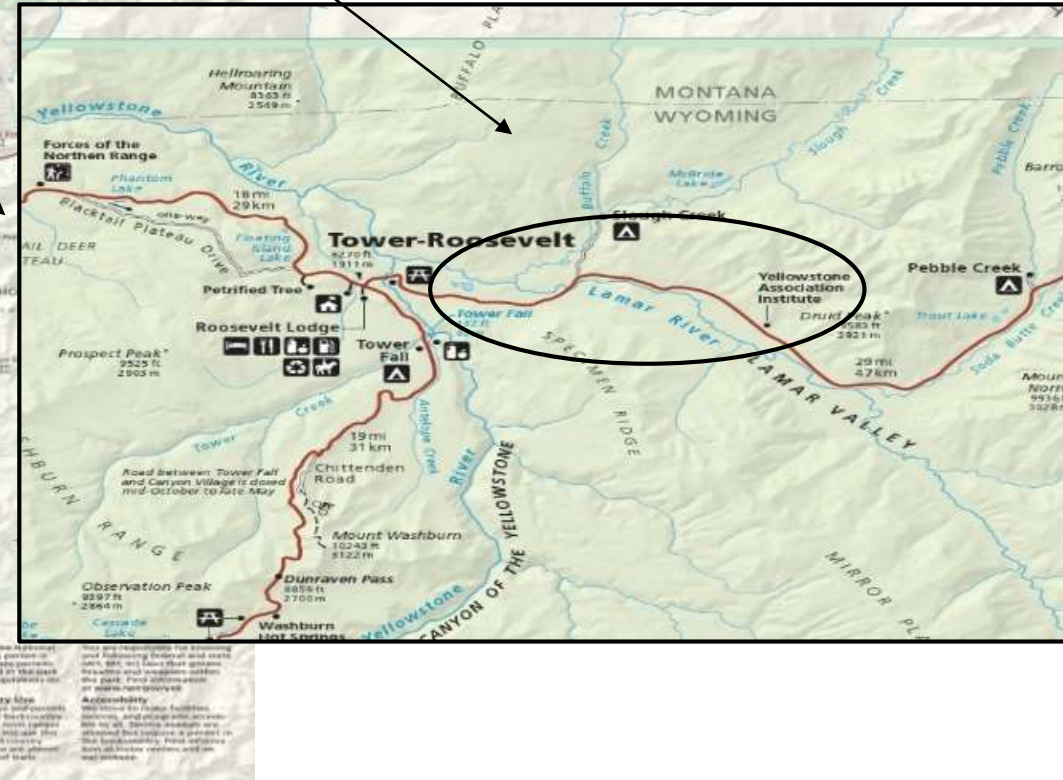
Maps of Places Visited

During winter and early spring, the majority of the park is closed with only the road from Gardiner (where I stayed) to Mammoth to Silver Gate/Cooke City open. However, the day I arrived, the park opened from Mammoth to Canyon and Norris to Old Faithful for the season whereas the southern and east-central sections remained closed. I spent the majority of my time on this expedition in the northern part of the park especially in the Slough Creek and Lamar Valley area.





A more detailed map of where I spent most of my time while in the park. Due to wolf activity, I concentrated my research in the Slough Creek to Lamar Valley region (see oval below). Map © of the National Park Service.



A close-up view of the northern part of Yellowstone where I spent the majority of my time. Map © of the National Park Service.



A topographical perspective of major areas visited during the trip including from Blacktail Deer Plateau to Floating Island Lake to the Elk Creek area (notice Petrified Tree on map) to the Garnett Hill Loop Trail (8 miles) to Tower Junction, which is where the Road goes south or east (notice Tower Fall 3 miles to the south which was closed), to Slough Creek Campground Road (Little America is the area to the west and this is where the Junction Butte wolf pack denned) to Lamar Valley, and finally to Trout and Buck Lakes just west of Pebble Creek. Map © National Geographic and Yellowstone Association: Trails Illustrated Outdoor Recreation Map.

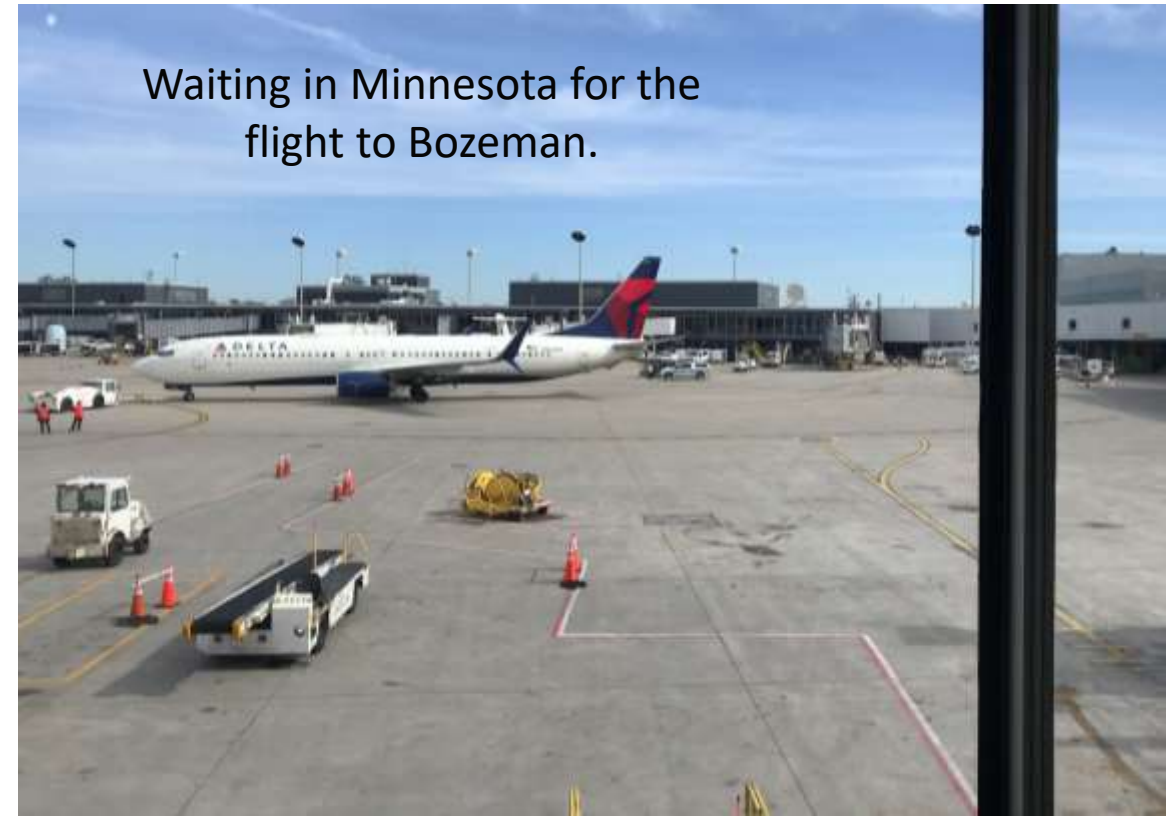


Day 1: The Start

It is always a fantastic feeling to be 'back in the saddle' in Yellowstone for another lengthy stretch of time. The first day of travel is always lengthy and involves taking a flight from Boston, MA to Minneapolis, MN then, after a couple of hours layover, from there to Bozeman, MT. It then includes the drive from the airport to our temporary home in Gardiner, MT, just outside of the park. After settling in, we had time for about three hours in the park. While it was an exhausting day to do all of that after traveling from the East Coast, I always like to enter the park on the first day as it lengthens the time that I am there. For example, a Tuesday to the following Wednesday is 9 days as long as you are in the park on that very first and last day.

The name of the game on Day 1 was ungulates! I saw more elk and bison than I have in a long time, especially elk who appear to be doing quite well. In the wintertime, both ungulates (i.e., hoofed animals) winter at lower elevations, with elk often outside or at the northern edge of the park which is at lower elevation than further south into the park. Bison are mostly in the northern part of the park but don't leave that area because they are often shot or rounded up and sent to slaughter when they do, all over an infuriating fight for grass with the cattle industry.

While in the park, we looked for the Junction Butte wolf pack north of Slough Creek, but the strong setting sun in our faces, along with a brisk wind, which made a 40 degree evening feel cold, caused us to strike out under challenging conditions. We arrived back in Gardiner at 8:30 PM Mountain Time. I took plenty of images along the way, especially of elk and bison. Here is a snapshot of some of them, along with other pictures from the first day. Enjoy!



Waiting in Minnesota for the flight to Bozeman.

Terminal waiting area in Minneapolis, MN.



Arriving in Bozeman to the mountains and magic of Yellowstone.



Below: Paradise Valley and the surrounding mountains on Route 89. It is about an hour and a half drive south from Bozeman to Gardiner and Paradise Valley is in the middle of that timespan.



Above: Elk became particularly visible in the southern part of Paradise Valley a good 15 miles north of the park.



I saw hundreds of elk on the first day alone!

Bottom: A bedded elk just north of Gardiner.



Top: A young elk close to Gardiner walking away from the roadside where it was grazing.



'Religious' elk, next to a church in Gardiner.



Top: Cottontail rabbit in Gardiner.



Right: Famous Roosevelt Arch at the North Entrance. The Gardiner K-12 school is directly behind (through) the arch.



Elk by the Gardiner North Entrance gate.



Perspective of a huge elk herd on the slope of Mt. Everts.



Some of the elk from previous pic, zoomed in.

A small bison herd right at Mammoth Hot Springs. Normally, elk hang out in this area; on this day, North America's largest mammal had reservations for the nearby grass.



Top: These bison feel entitled and ignore the signs for the bipedal animals that are constantly bothering them.



Top: Swan Lakes Flat still in a blanket of snow. Bottom: It is hard to believe that this panorama of Bunsen Peak is from the same location as the previous picture of Swan Lake area.



Bunsen Peak and sun.



Bottom: Pretty aspen stand above Mammoth.

Right: Undine Falls near Blacktail Plateau.





Bison grazing along the roadside.



White-tailed deer near Floating Island lake.
These deer were on different sides of the road.



The large white flag is a dead give away identifying them as white-tails since mule deer have rope-like tails. White-tails are not common in the park despite being the most widespread large animal in the Lower 48 States. However, I do frequently see them in the Floating Island to Hellroaring region of the park.



Bison owning the road.



Elk grazing along the Gardner River in a place called 'Chinese Gardens'.

These elk were part of a group of ~15 along the Gardner River.



Day 2: First Full Day – Wolves and Garnet Hill Hiking Loop

It was an incredibly busy first couple of days... Mud in Yellowstone during this time of year is ubiquitous as nature transitions from winter to spring with April sort of in between. On this day, we had a typical marathon-like schedule burning both ends of the proverbial candle. We started our morning in a brisk 18° F in the park by watching the Junction Butte Wolf Pack including 18 of them moving through their territory, starting at the western part of Slough Creek and eventually heading past the Tower Junction area toward Hellroaring. They passed by numerous bison and elk groups on their travels to the west.

The wolf pack denned in their traditional site which is in the open about a mile north of the Slough Creek bathroom area. It has offered unprecedented opportunities for thousands of people to view wild wolves over the years. Slough Creek separates people from the den area providing a good barrier to avoid disturbing the wolves. We spent many hours here during this trip as the pack is anchored to this site until the pups are big enough to travel mid-summer. You will notice that many of my mornings will start there.

While watching the main group of wolves on Slough flats, I also saw 3 more: 2 grays and a black at their traditional den site in the hills above Slough Creek. Two other females were possibly also there having recently given birth to pups around early- to mid-April.

Interspersed with the wolves observed were elk and bison all over the Northern Range, which is the northern section of the park from Gardiner and Mammoth to Round Prairie. I also saw a coyote below our observation spot on a hill. It was relatively close, compared to the wolves on our (south) side of Slough Creek. There are many pictures here which do a nice job of showing this busy day in chronological order. Included in this batch are images taken throughout our 5.5 hour, 9.5 mile hike where we completed the Garnett Hill Loop and a mile of the Hellroaring Trail to get to the suspension bridge over the Yellowstone River. It was beautiful but exhausting as the mud and snow sometimes felt like it took two steps to move one forward. Enjoy!

Bison bedded right next to the road in Little America at dawn.



They were really close to each other!





Top Left: In a professional photograph, the road would be cropped out of the picture. I sometimes like to include roads to give the viewers a perspective as to where the animals are and how obtainable these pictures are since the bison are literally right there.

Bottom: While a fairly mundane looking picture, these bison were blocking our (wolf watchers') attempts to climb that hill on the right side of the picture. After 10-12 minutes they finally moved far enough away to allow us to walk up "Dave's Hill" which provides a commanding view of the Slough Creek area.





Left: Meanwhile, other bison were nearby grazing across the Slough Campground Road.

Bottom: The bison moved west and were now no longer blocking our intended walking route.




Perspective of wolf watchers, bundled up in warm weather winter gear, waiting to head up 'Dave's Hill'.



Slough Flats from Dave's Hill. The wolves on the next few pictures were in the far part of the flats and the middle of the picture before the hills in the background.



A black and white photograph of a mountainous landscape. The foreground is a grassy slope where a herd of bison is grazing. The middle ground features a large, irregular patch of snow on a hillside. The background consists of more rugged, snow-dusted mountain peaks under a clear sky. The text is overlaid in the upper right quadrant of the image.


Here are 12-14 members of the Junction Butte Pack at dawn, just after 6 AM. They are about a mile west of my location.

Wolves chilling and moving up a snowfield. They were traveling southwest toward the Lamar River corridor.



The wolves moved west toward the general Tower Junction area as all 18 passed by bison, without them giving the large shaggy beasts much attention. I counted all 5 grays present in this group and also had 12 blacks; others counted 13 blacks as they traveled west.



A photograph of a coyote walking across a grassy bank. The coyote is in the lower-left quadrant of the frame, facing right. The ground is covered with dry, yellowish-brown grass and some small green plants. In the background, a large body of water stretches across the horizon, with a darker, brownish section in the middle ground and a lighter, blueish section in the far distance. The sky is not visible.

This coyote was observed at Slough Creek just before we departed our observation point.

View of Slough Creek flats with the den area up the slope in the middle of the picture. I did not get a chance to get pictures of the wolves at the den on this morning, as I was focused on the main pack which were in the flats left of this image.



As the wolves traveled west, we drove in that direction too. We quickly came upon a bison jam on the Lamar River bridge in Little America.





Close-up of the bison on the bridge.



It was amazing to see so many bison, one of my all-time favorite animals. Notice the other group of bison further along the roadway.

Bison grazing right next to the park road on dried grass in Little America. The grass will soon green-up and provide more healthy nutrition to the large bovines.





Young bison crossing the road in Little America.



Elk watching the wolves (out of our view) as they traveled west down in the river corridor below them.

Wolf watchers had brief sightings of the wolves as they were traveling low near the Yellowstone River. The ridges obstructing our view made them difficult to follow.



View of hills and mountains east of the Elk Creek area where I briefly saw the wolves on their journey west. In the next picture, the large elk herd is in the enter of this image just above the basalt cliff in the center right. They watched the wolves travel below them, often looking down in their direction.







While most elk stayed in the open grazing, some bunched up on a rock cliff, clearly grouping up after wolves came near them. No kill was made.

After searching for the wolves for about an hour longer with little success, we decide to drive back to just east of Tower and park at the Garnett Hill Loop trailhead. Immediately, we found a cow bison blocking our path as we prepared to start the 8+ mile hike. We waited about 15 minutes before starting. It is a great ramble that I repeated from [my Christmas trip](#).





Top: View of pond and mountains on Garnett Hill Loop.

Left: Ground squirrel recently emerged from hibernation.

This is the trail marker, about 2 miles into the hike, that I found on my hike during my [Christmas visit](#) that let me know I was actually on the trail. This image also gives a good perspective of the open sagebrush and grasslands typical of the first 2.5-3.0 miles of the hike.

Next page: More elk grouped up well north of the trail about 1.5 miles into the hike.





Bull bison near the trail which we had to go off to further our distance from them. We saw many small groups of 2-4 bulls on the hike. We had to get off the trail and walk around them 4-5 times. I lost count after a while.





Bottom: Panoramic of the hike with Garnett Hill on the left, sagebrush in the foreground, and the Yellowstone River below the hill to the right.

Left: Coyote tracks in the muddy sand.

Right: Bison track in the mud.





Left: Much of the trail was muddy like this scene which became exhausting to walk through after a while. This is the result of the melting snow keeping the soil very wet.

Right: Just to prove my point, a boot track encrusted in the mud.





The bull bison on the left was particular intrigued by our presence, following our every move. I sensed that we woke him up from a nap and he just stared us down even after we gave him a wider birth than normal. Eventually we got far enough away from it where it stopped staring at us.

Bottom Left: More bison tracks.



Me standing above the Yellowstone River on the Garnett Hill Loop hike was my new cover/profile picture on Facebook at the time.





Above: Trail on the left and river on the right. A very neat area ~3.5 miles into the hike.

Bottom: Yellowstone River along the Garnett Hill Loop.





Top: There was still much snow in certain sections of the hike especially on the shaded north side of Garnett which receives less sun and warmth.

Bottom: Yellowstone River along Garnett Hill Loop.



Beautiful red-tailed hawk flying overhead.





Bottom: Yellowstone River suspension bridge. We went a half mile (mile round-trip) out of our way to visit this very cool bridge along the Hellroaring Trail, which is close to the Garnett Hill Loop. It was well worth the detour.

Left: Me standing on the Yellowstone River suspension bridge.



West side of the Garnett Hill Loop along Elk Creek as we hiked south. The trail was still very muddy!





Snow, mud, and water: April in Yellowstone.

Bison super-highway near Elk Creek. Petrified Tree parking lot and the park road is at the top right of the picture. At a few sections of the hike, including here, it was difficult to follow the actual path versus the bison trails!



Bison near the Stagecoach and Chuckwagon trail area.



This is supposed to be a hiking trail as it is the ~1 mile long Stagecoach Road which goes to Roosevelt Corrals. Inset: Bison skull along the way.



More water, snow, and wetness: Must be April!



Our first herd of bison observed on the Garnett hike came toward the very end of the hike with about a mile remaining.





Left: Sandhill cranes were particular vocal at the beginning and end of the hike. These 3 were calling to two others near the previous group of bison.

Below: Sandhill crane flying overhead. Its mouth is open as it calls to others below it.





Ground squirrel scanning for danger. We saw this little guy about a half mile from the car in open, sagebrush country.

After completing the hike, we drove back to Gardiner for the evening. Here, Bunsen Peak is in the background from the Blacktail Plateau, a pretty stretch of the drive.



Yellowstone River in Gardiner where I stayed for the week.



Day 3: Wolves, My First Grizzly of 2021, Scenery, & Trout and Buck Lakes

Day 3 started out relatively warm at 27-30 degrees depending on where one was in the park. It warmed to 55° F in the park, which was the beginning of a 2 day warm front that came through the area. It was a fantastic, marathon day of wolf watching for hours, and then scenery gazing, hiking, and coyote watching. I will let the pictures do the explaining of all that happened and will start with the Junction Butte wolf pack, which are the wolves we mostly observe since they have been the dominant group in the park for several years now. I spent the end of the day getting caught up with the pictures that I had already taken, which was just under 400 in the first 2.5 days of action. Enjoy the pictures. I will continue to label the photos in detail to more fully tell the story as you look on.



Wolves (part of the Junction Butte wolves) at Hellroaring, about 10 miles west of their den location at Slough Creek, along with 2 bison. Wolf watchers saw the canines kill a bull elk the previous afternoon; here, some were still hanging out in the area. The elk was hard to see with just part of an antler tine visible (not visible in this picture). We watched the 5 wolves for 2 hours and 15 minutes before they all went down for the count, flat out sleeping. However, we mostly saw 2-3 at a time even others saw 9 total wolves there: 2 grays and 7 blacks.

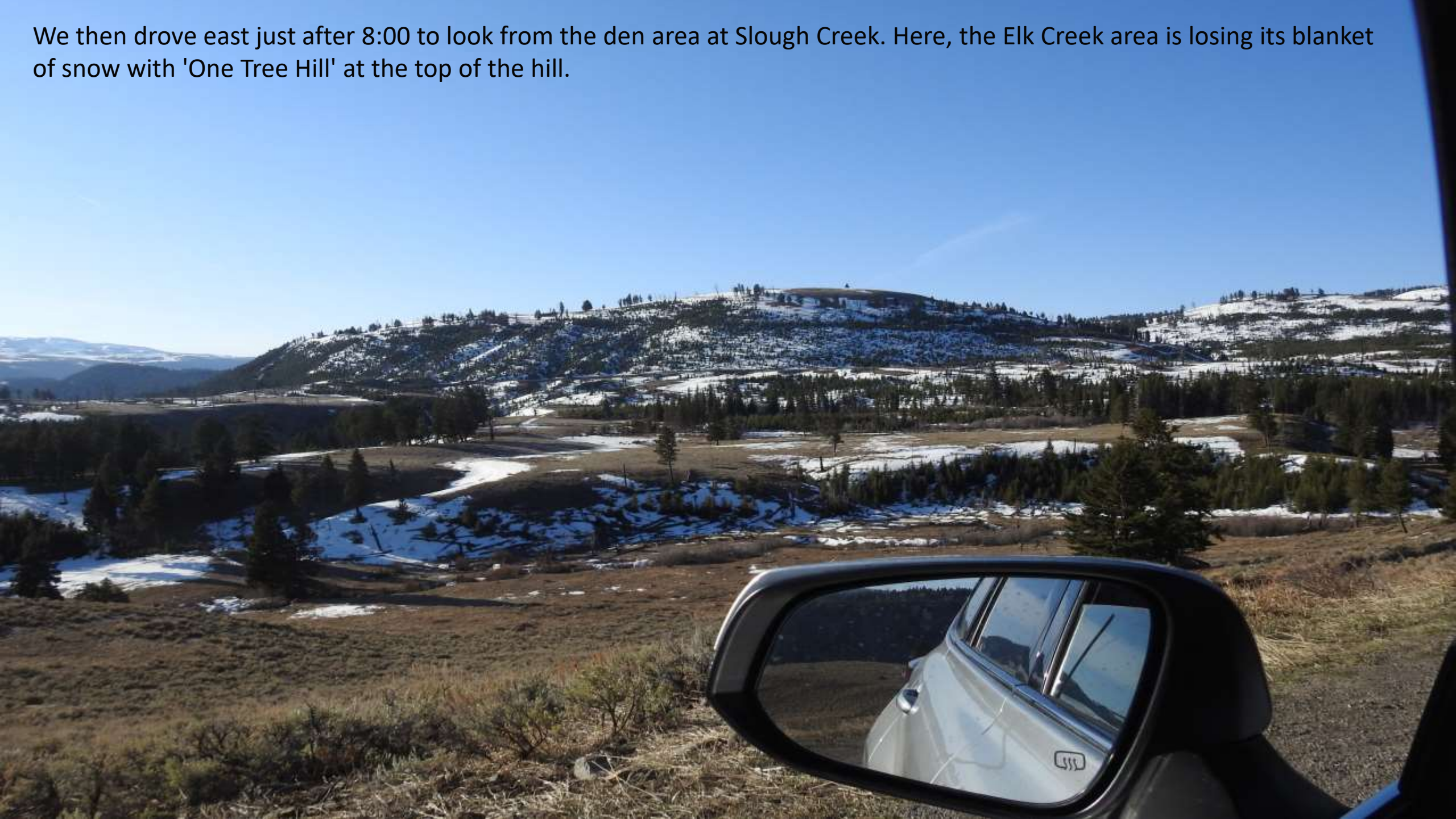


These bull bison moved through the area and pushed the wolves off.

Perspective of the Hellroaring area where the wolves were seen about 1.5-2.0 miles away. The wolves were at the back (north) part of the flats just as the hills begin.



We then drove east just after 8:00 to look from the den area at Slough Creek. Here, the Elk Creek area is losing its blanket of snow with 'One Tree Hill' at the top of the hill.



'One Tree Hill' zoomed in at Elk Creek.



Bison and reflection at Pond Pullout in Little America. We ate breakfast at this spectacular area.





Left: Close-up of some of those bison from Pond Pullout.



Right: More bison a bit to the east. These are climbing a hill in Little America near the Lamar River. We saw hundreds of bison in Little America on this day.

View from atop 'Dave's Hill' above the Slough Campground Road. We looked for animals from 8:30-10:30 AM from here on this beautiful day. Wolf/wildlife watchers are pictured here scanning for a grizzly bear 1.5 miles to the west (straight ahead in the photo) and wolves at the den area (top right of the photo).



Grizzly bear location. The big boar was just in front of the 'Horizontal Mixed Conifer-Aspen Forest' and behind the 'Marge Simpson' Tree (the one on the left in the foreground). Dedicated wildlife watchers name locations, sometimes comically, so it is easy to point out landmarks for others to find animals.





Grizzly bear, as close as my camera could get from 1.5 miles away.



Natal Den

Western Trees

Sage Den

Eastern Trees

Crescent Rock

Lion Meadow

View of the homesite above Slough Creek. There are two dens and the wolves spend much time in between the left group of horizontal conifers (Western Trees) and the right group of horizontal conifers (Eastern Trees) in the center of the picture. Above the tree is a small cliff to help orient the viewer. That grass strip, with dark patches in it, running up the slope in the middle of the picture is called the "Lion Meadow". We saw many bears and wolves during this trip in that area.

Wolf sleeping above the 'Sage Den' area in the center of this cropped photo.



Sage Den



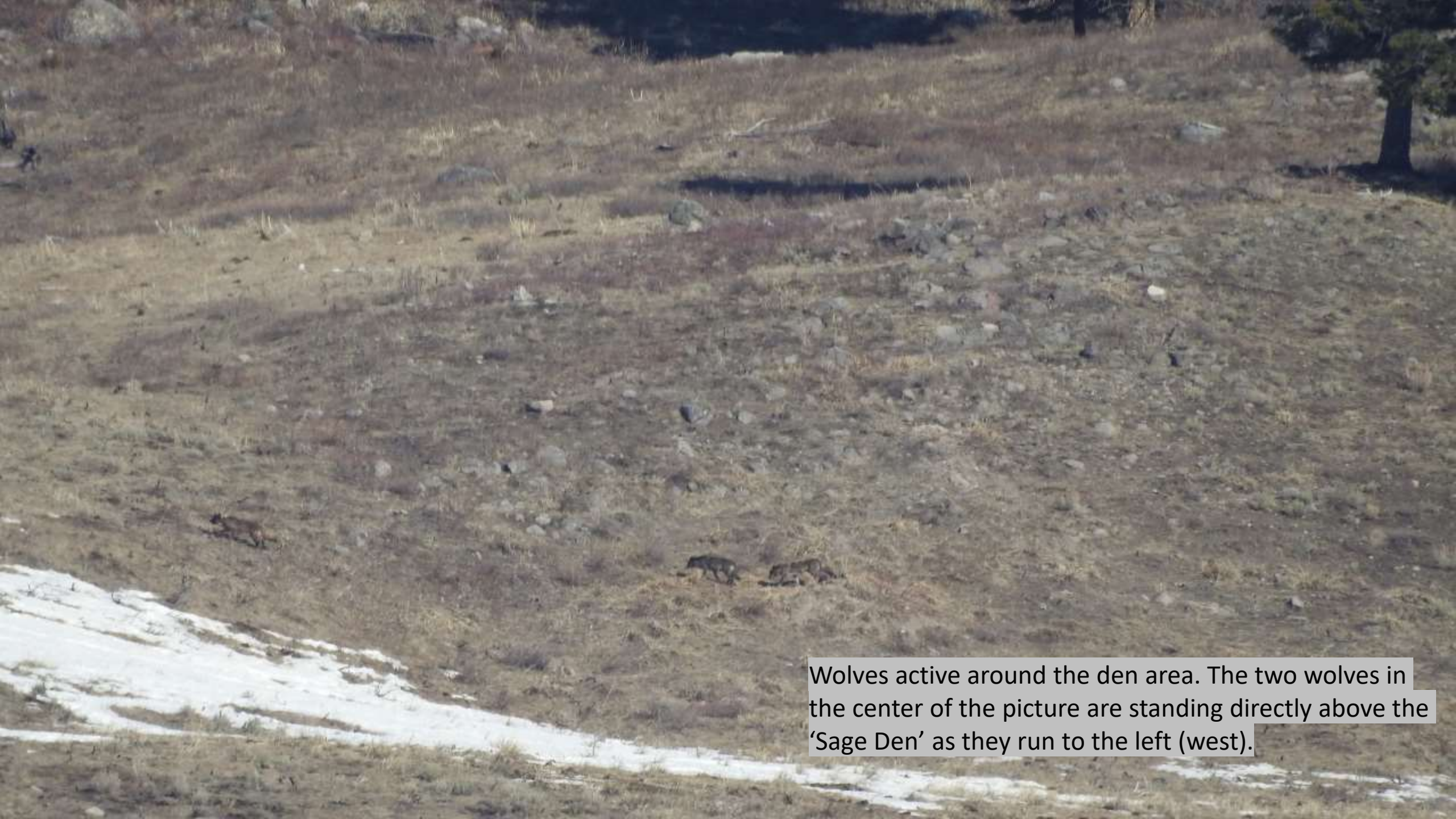
Left: Bison were everywhere during this trip as evidenced here.

Bottom: Fantastic panorama of the Slough area with the grizzly bear viewing location and the wolf den area in view.



More bison, here on the Slough flats below the den area mentioned previously.





Wolves active around the den area. The two wolves in the center of the picture are standing directly above the 'Sage Den' as they run to the left (west).



Above: Wolves (3) running to the left (northwest) above the den.



Right: More wolves appear and run down toward the 'Sage Den'.





Six wolves running to the den. We are a little over a mile from the action watching through our cameras and spotting scopes.



Some of the wolves reach and stand atop the 'Sage Den' at the bottom center of the picture.

A wide-angle, high-angle photograph of a bison herd in a grassy field. The field is dotted with irregular patches of snow, particularly in the foreground and middle ground. The bison are scattered across the landscape, some standing on the snow and others on the brownish-green grass. The background shows a vast, flat expanse of land with more snow patches and a few distant trees under a clear sky.

Bison in Slough Flats on a snow patch.



Close-up of bison on snow.

After we left the Slough Creek observation area, we drove east, coming into Lamar Canyon around 11:15 AM. Here is a view of the Lamar River in the Lamar Canyon West area.





Left: Lamar River in Lamar Canyon in the central part and viewed to the west. Lamar Canyon is one of my favorite sections of the park.

Below: Lamar River panorama from the central portion of Lamar Canyon.



A nice perspective of Lamar Canyon, the park road, and Lamar River.





Above: East end of Lamar Canyon. Below: East end of Lamar Canyon merging with the western end of Lamar Valley in the background.



Eastern end of Lamar Canyon with the Lamar River flowing westward.





Top: Lamar Valley viewed from the west to the east from the western part of the area. Below: Lamar Valley was still largely covered in snow in the flats. Jasper Bench is that tree lined flat butte half way up the hillside above the valley.



Lamar Valley and the historic Buffalo Ranch viewed to the east.

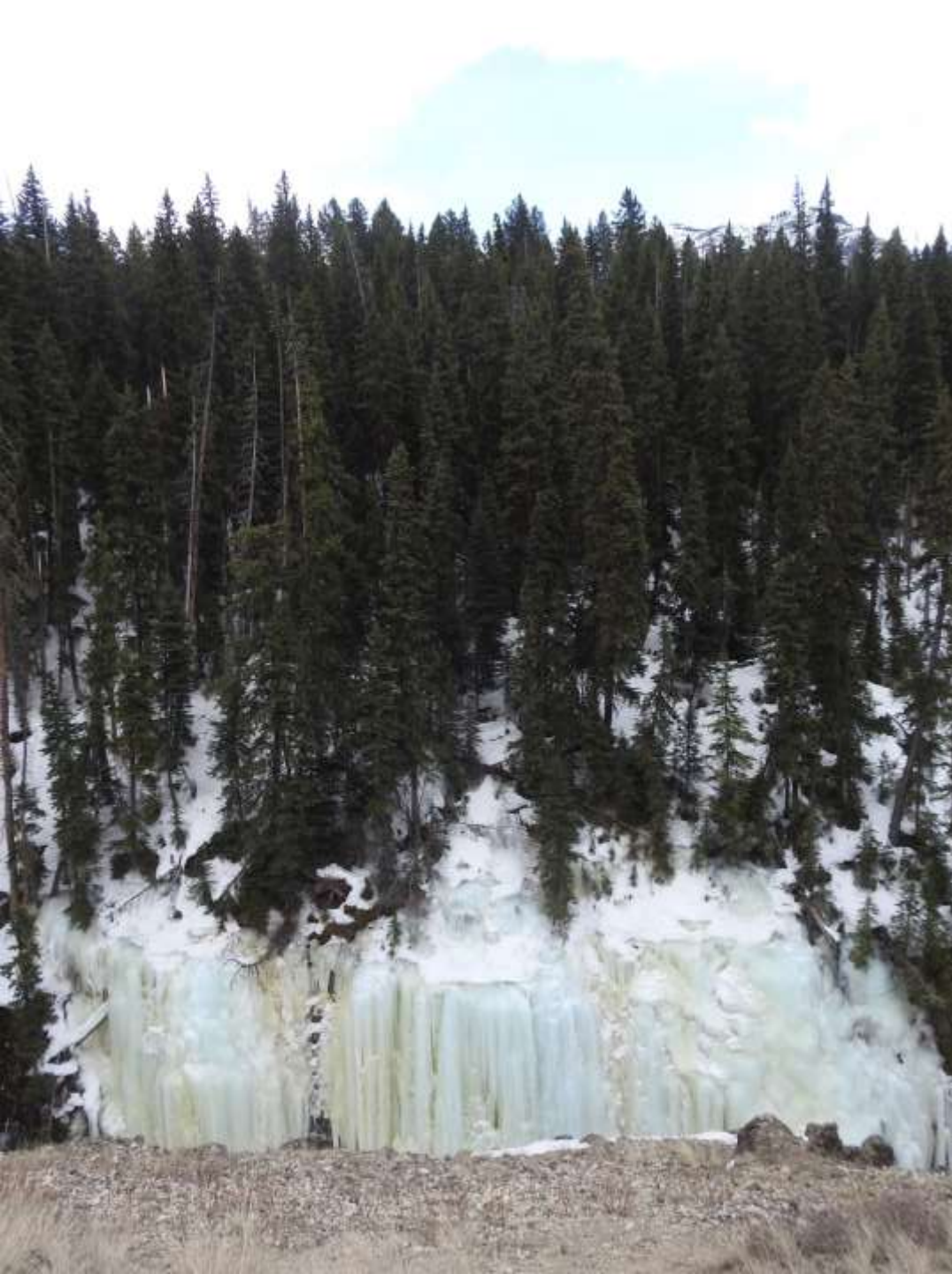




Left: The 'Confluence'.

Bottom: Confluence of the Lamar River and Soda Butte Creek, another of my favorite areas in Yellowstone.





Left: After lunch we drove further east to the northeast part of the park and went to Ice Box Canyon where we had this nice perspective.

Right: Ice Box Canyon close-up.



We then drove to Round Prairie where we had a beautiful scene of the Soda Butte River.





At 1:14 PM, we began our hike to Trout Lake on a warm, sunny, turning to overcast day. The trail was treacherous, however, with slick mud and ice most of the way up the half mile trail to reach Trout Lake.

Left: Mud dominated much of the low part of the Trout Lake Trail.

Right: Trout Lake trail turned into mud and ice as we went up in elevation.



The Trout Lake Trail offers a great view to the east at the beginning of the hike.





Above: Trout Lake still frozen in time in mid-April. Below: View of Soda Butte Valley from Trout Lake spur trail about a third of a mile from the water body.



Trout Lake inlet stream two months before trout enter the stream to spawn. Inset picture: Killdeer at the Trout Lake inlet stream. One of my sharpest bird pictures!





Left: My favorite tree, a Douglas fir, overlooking Buck Lake.

Below: Elk scat was very common throughout the area even though I did not directly observe any elk on this day within miles of this location.



Buck Lake, also frozen.



Steve and I ended up bushwhacking back from the trail connecting Buck to Trout Lakes. There was still 1.5 feet or more of snow in patches and I wanted to try something different so I headed southeast from Buck Lake. While this view isn't special it was really cool as I could see Trout Lake (background) and Buck Lake (without a good picture opportunity) at the same time from this ridge! I bet few people get up here as it is too steep from the Trout Lake side. However, there was numerous elk and bison scat up there.





On our drive back to the apartment, we spotted three coyotes patrolling the western part of Lamar Valley. The male on the right was 'RLU'ing' (raised-leg urinating) in multiple locations, clearly scent-marking the area. He also had a limp, not using his right rear leg. I later learned that many people know about him living in that area due to his distinctive gait.





Left: Two of the coyotes sniffing the area while the third trots off. They were clearly patrolling and protecting their territory.

Below right: The male coyote sniffing a hole.



Previous page: The 3 coyotes on patrol in western Lamar Valley. Notice their tails up in these pictures; that is a sign of increased vigilance and dominance.

A bald eagle flew over the area just after the coyotes went out of view over a knoll. This was a perfect last picture to end this wonderful day. After watching the coyotes and then the eagle, we drove back to the duplex where we were staying and spent the evening getting caught up on eating (we were in a calorie deficit with all of the activity), emails, pictures, and rest.



Day 4: Wolves, Canyon, and Norris

We had low 20°s and snow to start the day on April 19, 2021. Winter was back especially when frigid, arctic-like 40 MPH winds made this morning feel much worse than the already chilly temperature. It was near constant and in our faces while we observed wildlife. It felt more like February or early March than early spring. We started at Slough Creek and saw 2 wolves at the den area and an injured gray below them slowly walking along Slough Creek to the east. It eventually went out of sight barely using its front right leg (*Note: This wolf would survive and gradually recover from its injury*). As the limper was moving out of sight we received word from wolf watchers at 8:15 AM that wolves were being seen in Lamar Valley 2-3 miles to our east.

Nearly an hour and a couple of bison 'jams' later, we arrived at the western part of Lamar Valley ironically right where we saw the 3 coyotes the previous day. A group of the Junction wolves were on an elk carcass either killed by them or scavenged. I watched a collared black 1274M (numbered based on when he was captured) for quite a while before he went west back to the den, along with an uncollared black who was bedded mostly out of view in sagebrush near the carcass. An hour later (10 AM), a collared gray, 2-year old 1228F, came in from the west and fed and then bedded down near the carcass site.

After the sightings we headed to the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone and Norris Geyser Basin which was a bit of a haul as we had to drive to Mammoth and then along the western edge of the park since the road between Tower and Canyon was closed. (It actually was closed the entire year due to construction but normally doesn't open until May due to snow around Mt. Washburn.) In this new round of pics, you'll see fantastic images of a coyote near Canyon that was eating a duck along with many other animals.

It was only 28° in Canyon so you'll see me in winter gear. The higher elevation central region of the park receives more snow than the northern part. Norris Geyser Basin is a beautiful, vast area. We hiked 2.9 miles, as registered on Steve's Apple watch, to cover the entire basin's network of boardwalks.

Snow at Blacktail Ponds at first light.



Hellroaring Overlook, a regular place where we look for wolves, was snowed in so we continued on to the east where visibility was better.





Left: Bison jam in Lamar Canyon, a narrow area that made it difficult to get around them.

Below: An older bison nursing its mother.



Scenic view entering Lamar Valley from Lamar Canyon. The wolves were below the trees to the left center of the photograph.



Perspective of where the wolves were (second bench, marked by 'X'),
and where the coyotes were yesterday (first bench, closer to the road).





Left: Black wolf 1274M at the elk carcass.

Below: 1274M zoomed in.



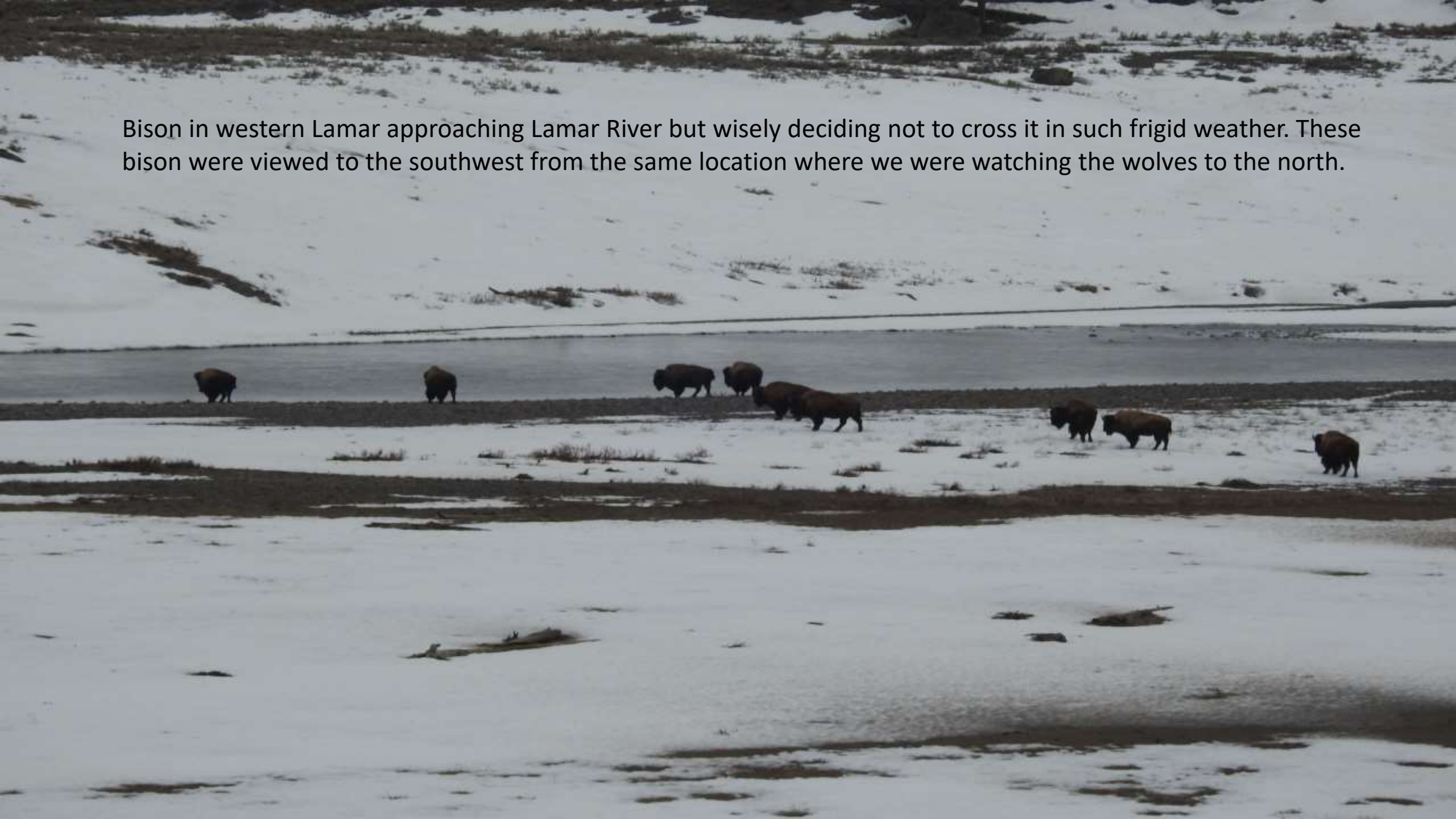
Wolf on alert with people looking up at him.



Wolf feeding on elk.



Bison in western Lamar approaching Lamar River but wisely deciding not to cross it in such frigid weather. These bison were viewed to the southwest from the same location where we were watching the wolves to the north.



Bison herd moving west just below the wolves.



Gray collared wolf, 1228F, feeding on the elk with blood on her face.



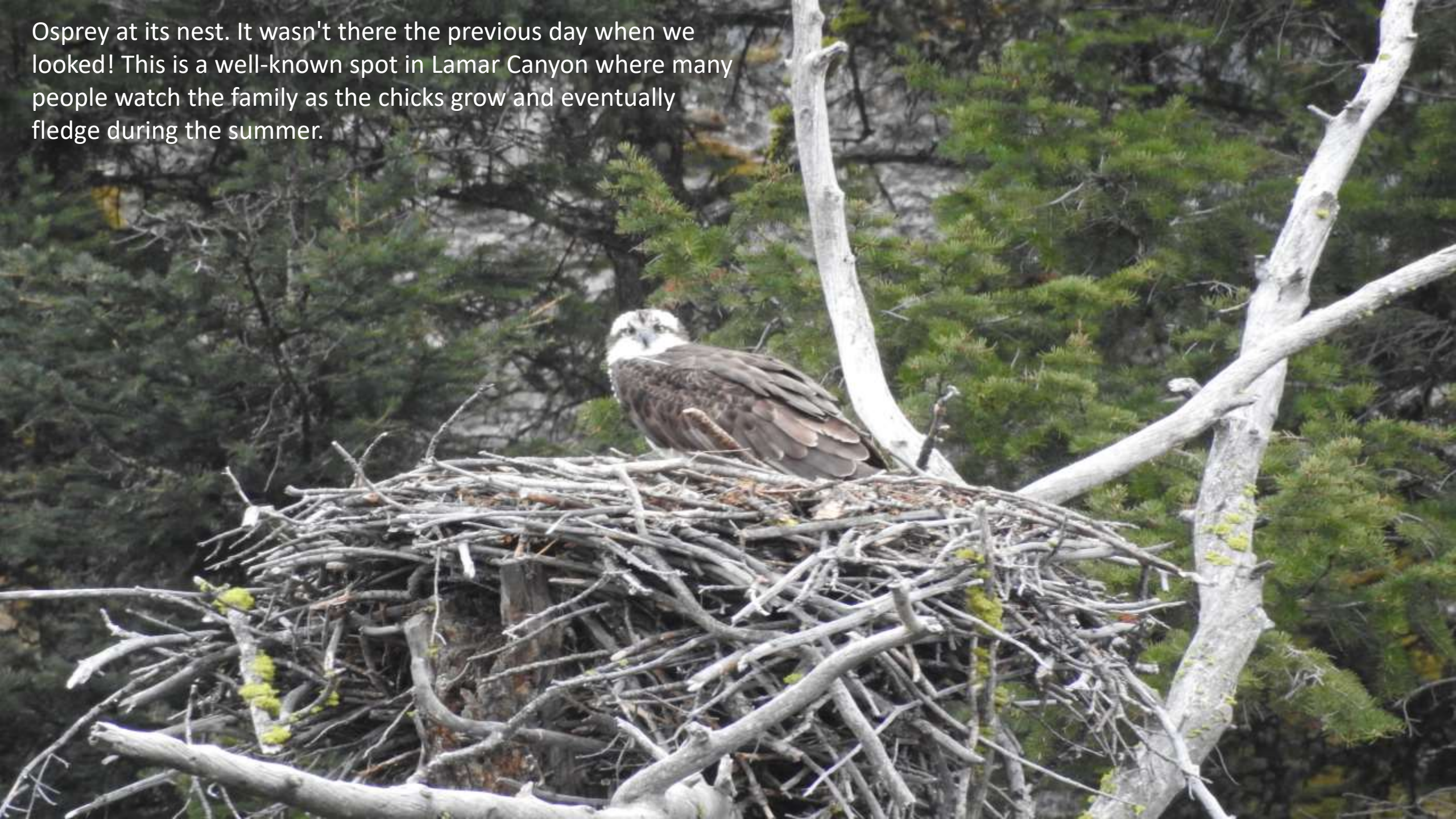


Left: Wolf looking for danger.

Below: Close-up of the best picture of 1228F after she left the carcass area.



Osprey at its nest. It wasn't there the previous day when we looked! This is a well-known spot in Lamar Canyon where many people watch the family as the chicks grow and eventually fledge during the summer.



Perspective of elk at the top right of the hill in the upper section of the picture above the Yellowstone River near Tower Junction.



Elk grazing in snow free areas.



Close-up of 4 of those elk. Notice the radio-collared cow on the left.



Blacktail 'S curve'. A very scenic area that we went by every day to get back to Gardiner after a full day in the field.



Roaring Mountain on the Mammoth to Norris Road. This area is roughly halfway between the Mammoth Hot Springs and Norris Geyser Basin.



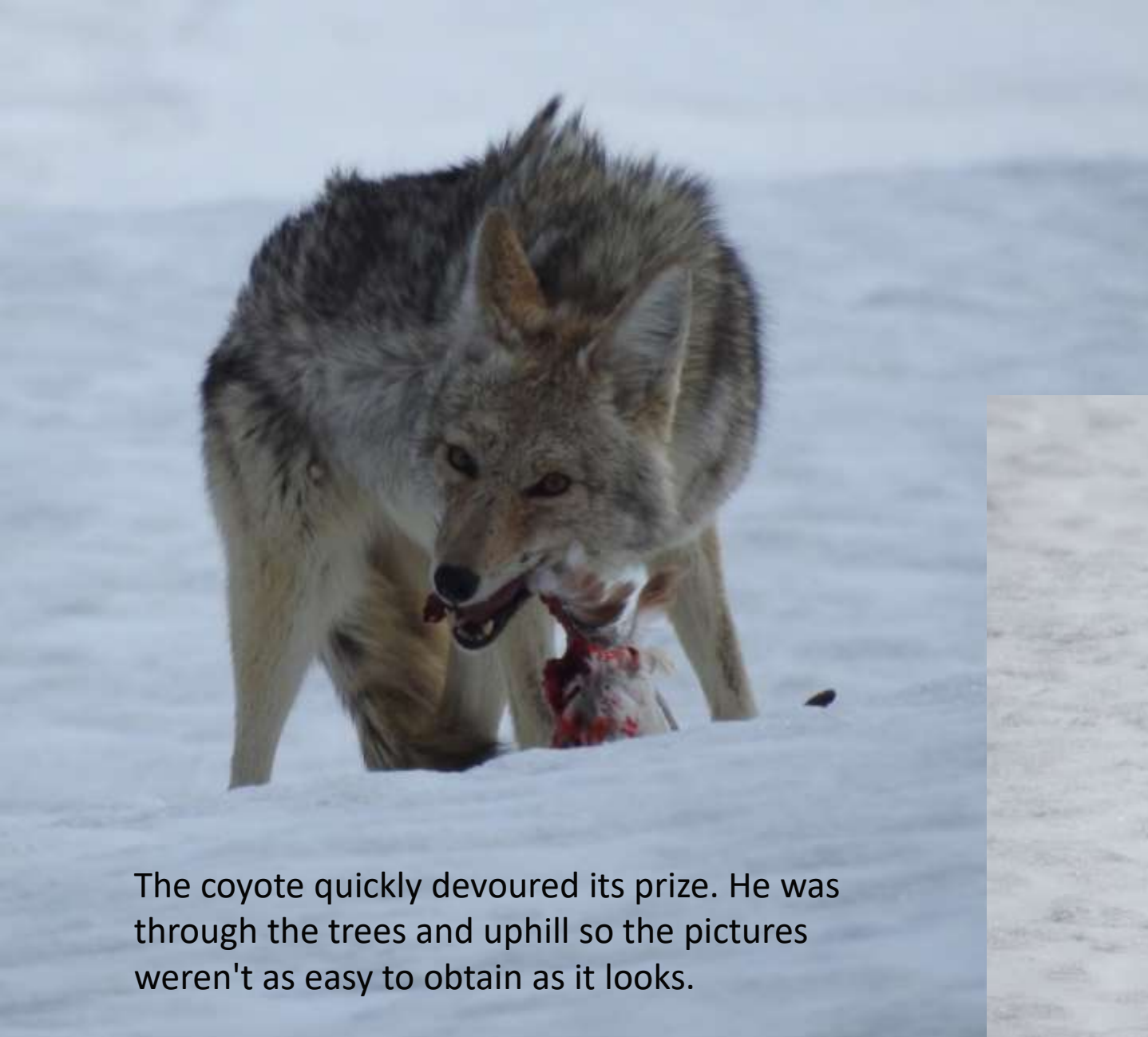


Top: Nymph Lake and surroundings on the Mammoth to Norris Road.

Left: Significant snow was still present on the Norris to Canyon Road, especially the south side of the road which is north facing and therefore receives less sunlight than the north side.

A fantastic view of a coyote feeding on a duck right off the South Rim Drive at the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. Notice the wind blowing its fur.





The coyote quickly devoured its prize. He was through the trees and uphill so the pictures weren't as easy to obtain as it looks.



Right: This image is the cover picture (the one on the left side) at the beginning of the book on page 1.



The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone at Artist Point parking lot was nearly empty with the second lot having no cars at all! This was a great time of the year to visit compared to the crammed summer.





Boardwalk to Artist Point lined with snow. This is a famously scenic area.

Viewpoint from
Artists Point.

Next page: This
area zoomed in.



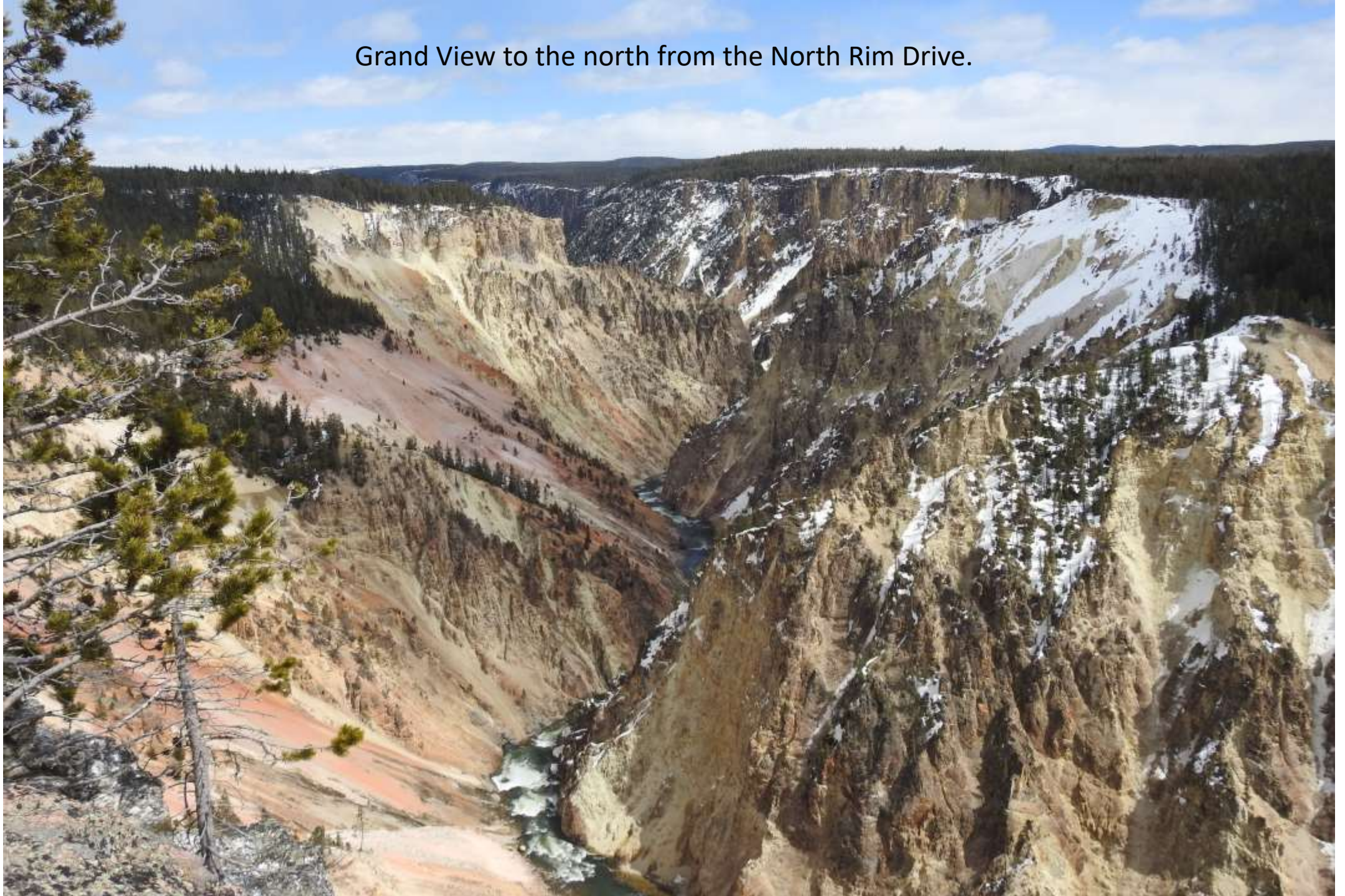


This and next page: Lower Falls of the Yellowstone viewed from Lookout Point on the North Rim Drive.





Grand View to the north from the North Rim Drive.



Raven in parking lot at the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone.



After visiting the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, the next stop was the Norris Geyser Basin where we spent an hour and half. Pictured here is beautiful, steamy Porcelain Basin at Norris Geyser Basin displaying its many fumaroles and hot springs.





Top: Panorama with the boardwalk at Porcelain Basin at Norris Geyser Basin. Bottom: Crackling Lake area at Norris Geyser Basin.



Thermophiles are living bacteria and archaea that survive in extremely warm conditions, such as these at Norris Geyser Basin.





Top: Snow on the boardwalk in the Back Basin at Norris. Bottom: Back Basin area with stream arising from Porkchop Geyser and nearby hot springs. Shallow Tantalus Creek runs through the area in the foreground.



Steamboat Springs and recently dead trees from a big eruption a few years ago.



Pronghorn grazing in Gardiner. These are some of the first pronghorn that I saw on this trip. Many more are to follow!

Next page: Elk cow grazing in Gardiner.



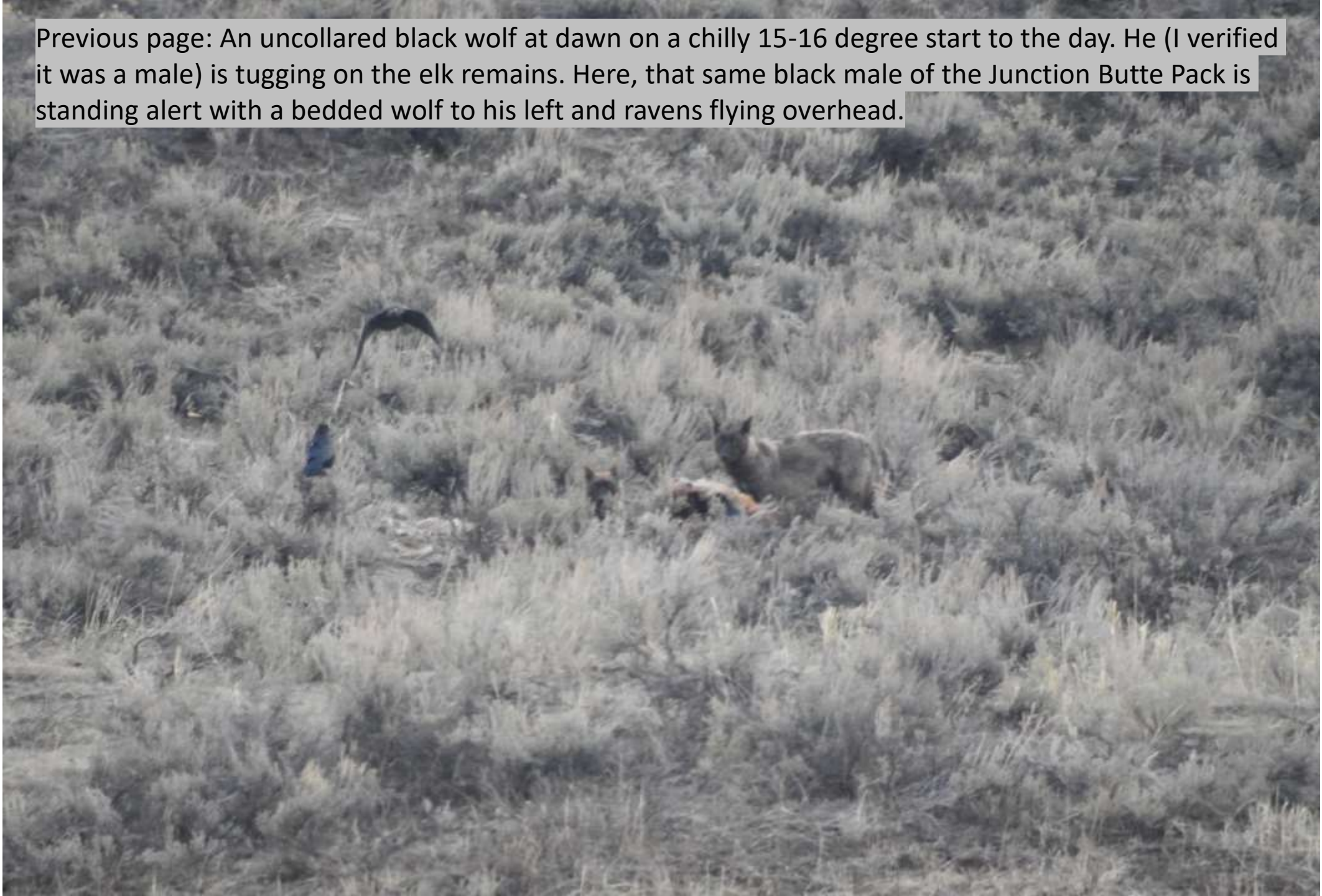
Day 5: Wolves Galore

April 20th started out cold at 15-16° in the park but it was well worth braving the elements as it was absolutely amazing for wolf and wildlife watching. I was in the park at dawn (6 am) and stayed out until after noon just wildlife watching by mostly using my spotting scope, as well as my camera as you'll see on the proceeding pages, enjoying great views of 3 wolves at the elk carcass in Lamar from yesterday where we drove straight to in the morning. We had the same cast of characters as the previous day with gray, colored radio-collared 1228F. I also saw the same two black colored wolves as yesterday, although the view of black 1274M was relatively brief and he was mostly resting behind sagebrush bushes. There were also the ubiquitous bison between the western part of Lamar Valley and all of Little America. They always fill in the downtime when wolves are out of view or aren't doing anything and are seemingly everywhere we go, which was amazing.

We watched those wolves at the elk carcass until around 9:30 AM then headed to Slough Creek. Back at the den, three miles to the west, were a grizzly bear below the den site in the 'Lion Meadow' and a total of 9 wolves: 3 grays and 6 blacks, including gray 1228F who returned along with possibly one or two of the black wolves as well. Many of the wolves were younger 1-2 year old animals; quite a few of them pestered the bear with one or two often down there checking on and keeping tabs on the bear who was nosing around in a muddy area near a bison skull. I also spotted some pronghorns in Little America, migrating back into the park from winter digs to the north where there is less snow. A bald eagle and coyote round out the pictures for today. We got in early to take a nap to rest up for a planned hike in the Gardiner area later on this day where many of the ungulates (elk and deer) are spending the winter where there is less snow at a lower elevation.



Previous page: An uncollared black wolf at dawn on a chilly 15-16 degree start to the day. He (I verified it was a male) is tugging on the elk remains. Here, that same black male of the Junction Butte Pack is standing alert with a bedded wolf to his left and ravens flying overhead.



Close-up of the wolves who were about a third of a mile away.
Not too close, but not too far away either.





Above: Uncollared black male and 1274M (left) of the Junction Butte Pack with a raven keeping tabs on them.

Right: Both wolves still feeding with the collared male now on the right.





The uncollared male leaves the carcass area.



Now it is sniffing the area (Top Left),
relieving itself of all of that food (Top
Right), then travels west (Bottom), likely
back to the den site 2-3 miles away.

Perspective of the wolf's location who is just below
the right end of the snow patch in this frame.



Great shot of the wolf before it continued on to the west.





This page: It decides to take a brief rest then looked both ways before continuing on.

Next page: After the two black males left the carcass area, this wolf, 1228F, returned to the carcass. I recognized her tail and coat collar, along with her collar, from yesterday. She had stalked a cow elk to the west and got within 10-15 feet of it but quickly gave up and trotted a half mile to get to this site. It was almost like she was playing with it, and not seriously intent on harming it.





1228F looking to the west.



Left: A coyote approaches 1228F and the carcass area.

Below: Junction Butte 2-year old female wolf 1228F staring in the direction of the park road.



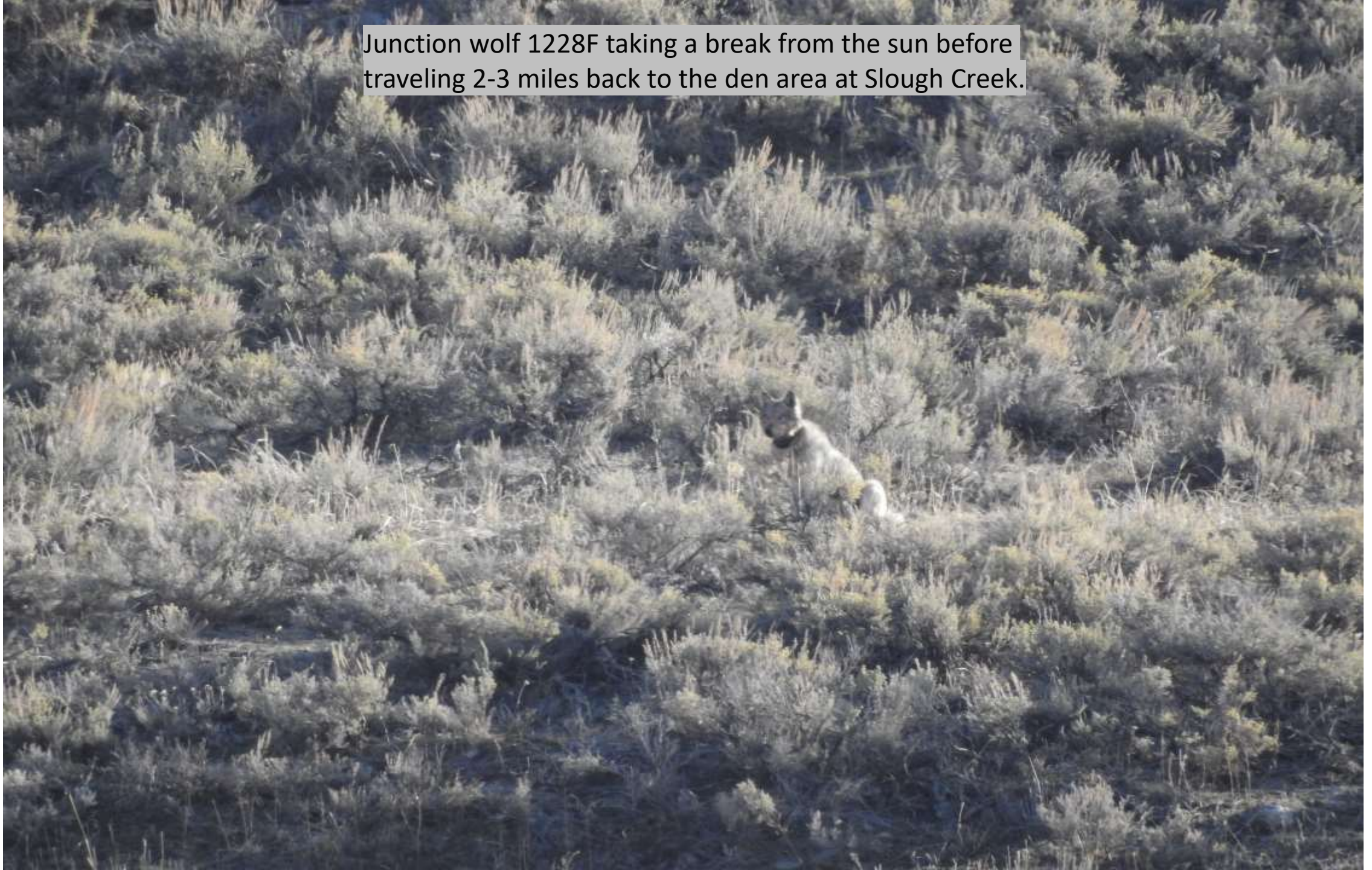
Next page: Perspective of where we were parked. This view is to the south where an eagle was perched in a tree just above the Lamar River in the center right of the frame. We were looking 180 degrees away from here while watching the wolves.



Bald eagle perched above Lamar River.



Junction wolf 1228F taking a break from the sun before traveling 2-3 miles back to the den area at Slough Creek.

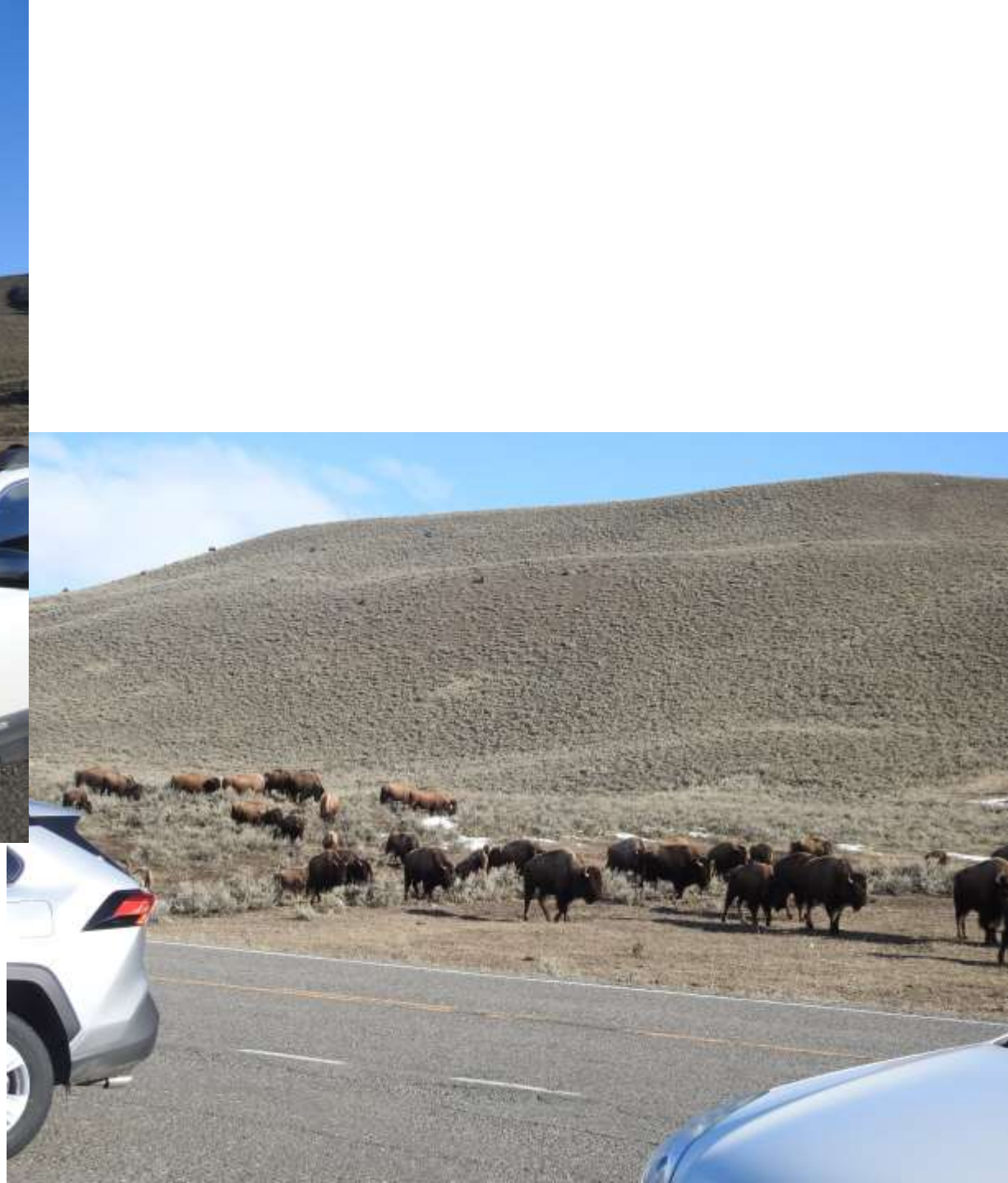


While watching the wolves we also saw many bison. They are one of my favorite animals. Here a large group is crossing the road to the north (left to right).





Then they traveled right past where we were standing just on the other side of the road.



As soon as we lost 1228F traveling over the hills and to 'Secret Passage' to the west, we departed the western part of Lamar Valley where we quickly got into a 'bison jam' which stopped traffic for a few minutes.



This thin (see ribs showing) but heavily pregnant cow passed right by us with an amazing view of Specimen Ridge in the background.




When we got to the Slough den area (very top left of picture below the left part of those trees), we had a grizzly bear (center dot in the yellow 'Lion Grass Meadow') and two wolves near each other.



SPEED
LIMIT
2



The wolves continually sniffed around near the bear with only one in view in this photo.

A wide-angle photograph of a dry, grassy field. The foreground is dominated by a white, curved line, possibly a path or a boundary. The middle ground is a vast, open area of dry, yellowish-brown grass with scattered rocks and small shrubs. In the background, there are several trees, including a large, dark evergreen tree on the right and a smaller, bare tree in the center. The sky is not visible, suggesting a high-angle shot or a very bright day. The overall scene is a natural, somewhat desolate landscape.

Meanwhile, some wolves were back at the den area with two at the actual den (in the bottom of the picture) and a third was just under the tree in the top right of the picture.



Then two other wolves came down to harass the grizzly bear for a few minutes before returning back to the den area.



Left: After viewing the bears we went back to Lamar Canyon to visit the osprey nest just above the water.

Below: There was an osprey in attendance.



View of Pronghorn in Little America. The second fastest land animal in the world next to the cheetah is just migrating back to their summer range after spending all winter in lower elevations (with less snow) north of the park.



Close-up of the pronghorns.



Coyote traveling east of Blacktail Ponds. We saw this individual as we were driving back to Gardiner.





Left: Mule deer back in Gardiner near where I was staying.

Below: Location of mule deer sighting (far left) and houses.



Day 5 Nightcap: Elk and Pronghorn Galore

To be consistent with the order of my Facebook posts, after having displayed pictures from a tremendous wildlife sighting morning on Day 5 earlier in the day, Steve and I went back into the park and ended it with a great 7.2 mile (3.6 miles each way) hike at dusk on the Rescue Creek Trail in Gardiner near the park entrance station. We saw enormous numbers of elk. It was actually astonishing to see so many together as they were at the southern end of where the majority of elk now winter, and they looked like they were getting ready to head back into the park as it greens up. We also saw many pronghorn and heard some coyotes howling in view near us at dark. While we did see some bison, the majority of those large bovines were further south into the park. Some of these elk pictures, including massive herds, are fantastic!



Deer and pronghorn by the Roosevelt Arch.

Gardner River (notice the different spelling than the town of Gardiner) just before the Rescue Creek Trail bridge with elk grazing on the banks and flats above the river. The following page shows a close-up of these elk.







Gardner River at the Rescue Creek Trail bridge.



Pronghorn, the second fastest land animal in the world next to the cheetah, are pictured here on the Rescue Creek Trail.



Perspective of pronghorn and the Rescue Creek Trail.





We were afforded some remarkable up-close views of pronghorn in the open part of this hike. Because of their speed, pronghorn seem to like to stay exposed where they are safe from just about all dangers except a hunters bullet (outside the park).





For all you birders: western meadowlark.





Above: Panorama of Rescue Creek Trail and the Turkey Peak area.

Left: Ghost-like looking mule deer in the woods on the Rescue Creek Trail.



X marks the spot. Sticks indicated where we turned around as dusk was approaching. We made it 3.6 miles out and planned on doing the other half of the hike from the Blacktail Plateau later in the week.



Left: We found a deer carcass with only the fur remaining. I secretly hoped it was a mountain lion who made the kill but had no evidence to prove that.

Below: Deer jawbone found near the pile of fur.




Descending back to the valley floor on the Rescue Creek Trail. After about 2 miles, the trail went up in elevation heading toward the Blacktail Deer Plateau. The amount of ungulate tracks on this trail was incredible.





We saw this group of pronghorn soon after getting back into the flats as we hiked back to the car.



Elk and pronghorn at dusk on the Rescue Creek Trail. These guys were just the beginning of astonishing numbers of elk that we would see on the foothills.

Elk gathering on the snow-free ridge of this hill.



Pronghorn (inset below) moving along the foothills of another ridge, while elk look down from the top of that crest (top).



And here come the amazing numbers of elk, along with some pronghorn under them.



Wow! The area literally thundered with running hooves everywhere.



With a closer-up shot of them.



Holy elk!



And a pan-out for perspective with the most elk in any one picture that I took.



There were additional elk on the valley floor at the very end of the hike.



This panorama includes the hill where the massive herd of elk was (previous pages) and the flats (right side) where the second group was (see above picture).



Two coyotes announce their presence by howling at us, with a pronghorn watching them.





One of my favorite shots of the trip and the right-sided picture on the book's cover!

Rescue Creek Trail bridge to the parking lot and park road.





Left: Mule deer in Gardiner at dusk.

Below: Just chilling!



Day 6: Wolves, Bison, and Rescue Creek

This morning started out cool with 12 degrees at Slough Creek. Many of us watched wolves for hours all-over Little America. It was difficult to keep track of them as the Junction Pack was spread out and often traveling in smaller groups. That is typical during the denning season as hunting parties go back and forth from the den.

Steve and I spent 4 hours in the same observation location, along with other wolf watchers. We had 12 wolves at the den but not all at once. Then we had 5-8 south of the Slough Road over by the 'Divide Ridge'. It was quite amazing and difficult to keep track of as they were all over and chased a young male (1230M) from the 8-Mile Pack who is normally well west of there on the Blacktail Deer Plateau.

We finished the day hiking the other side of the Rescue Creek Trail from the Blacktail Plateau side, doing a 9.7 mile roundtrip jaunt in the process. There was a lot of snow, ice and mud on this higher elevation side of the hike from the previous night, which made it a challenge to say the least. And exhausting too. But we found the 'X' spot that we made with sticks the previous evening, so mission accomplished! I will let the pictures give a more detailed account of some of our happenings including moose at dawn, bison throughout the day, coyotes, and other critters to round out this shorter-than-normal section of pictures.

Moose pair at dawn near the Blacktail Auto Road.





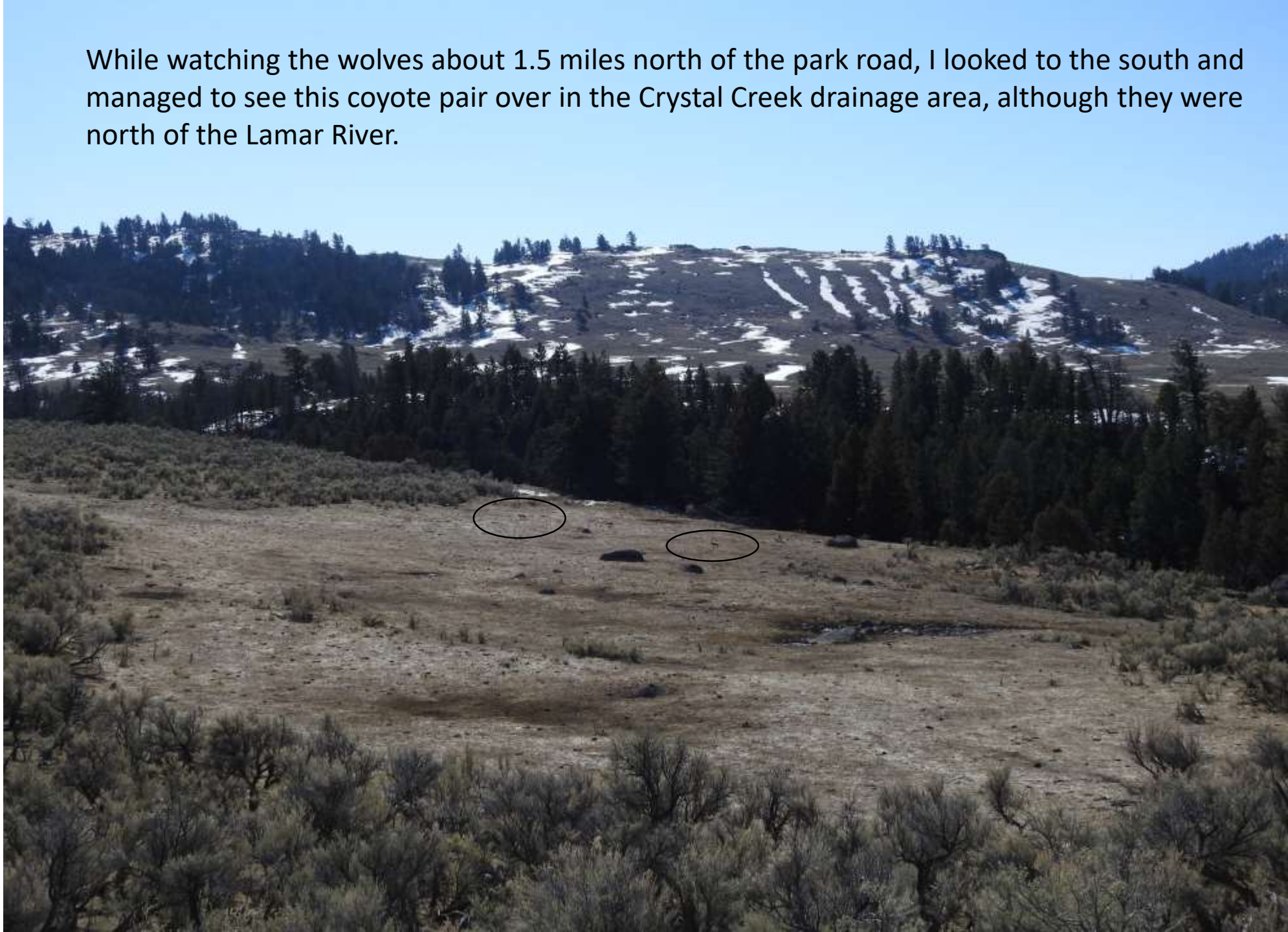
Fantastic perspective of the Junction Butte den at Slough Creek. The dens (there are 2) are between and around the horizontal running conifers in the middle of the picture that wolf watchers call the Western (left group) and Eastern (right side) Trees.





Wolves greeting each other near the dens.

While watching the wolves about 1.5 miles north of the park road, I looked to the south and managed to see this coyote pair over in the Crystal Creek drainage area, although they were north of the Lamar River.





The coyote pair zoomed in. They were much closer to us than the wolves.

Soon after watching the coyotes closer to the road, we found a couple of wolves south of the road as well. While the coyotes were earlier at the bottom of this picture, the wolves were on the back hill, eventually climbing to the top of the 'Southern Divide Ridge' area, an informal name that leads into the Lamar Valley.



Gray yearling female wolf standing on rock at the 'Southern Divide Ridge'.



Zoomed in view of the gray yearling wolf. There were other wolves in and out of view below this wolf off-and-on for over an hour but they weren't in good places to photograph them, especially with the heat waves caused by the sun.





Left: Wolf watchers at Slough Creek area including Laurie Lyman (left), Jeremy SunderRaj (middle), and Bob Landis (right). The den is on the mountain behind (north of) them.

Right: The Slough Outhouse Toilets (2) lot is often full, so many cars park along the park road. Notice the spotting scopes in both pictures. These are used to observe wildlife, often from miles away.





Above: Blacktail Plateau perspective from the Rescue Creek Trail. Below: Panorama of Blacktail Ponds area from the hike.



Rescue Creek Trail in mud and snow.





Above: Great perspective of the Blacktail Plateau from hills to the north of the park road.

Left: Elk (bottom left pile) and bison (top right 'blob') scat littered the hiking trail.

The Rescue Creek Trail was very muddy throughout, which was a theme of this trip.



Sandhill cranes walking through sagebrush, an odd location for them since they are usually in or near wetlands.



Painted Hills off the Rescue Creek Trail. Next page: Same area zoomed in.

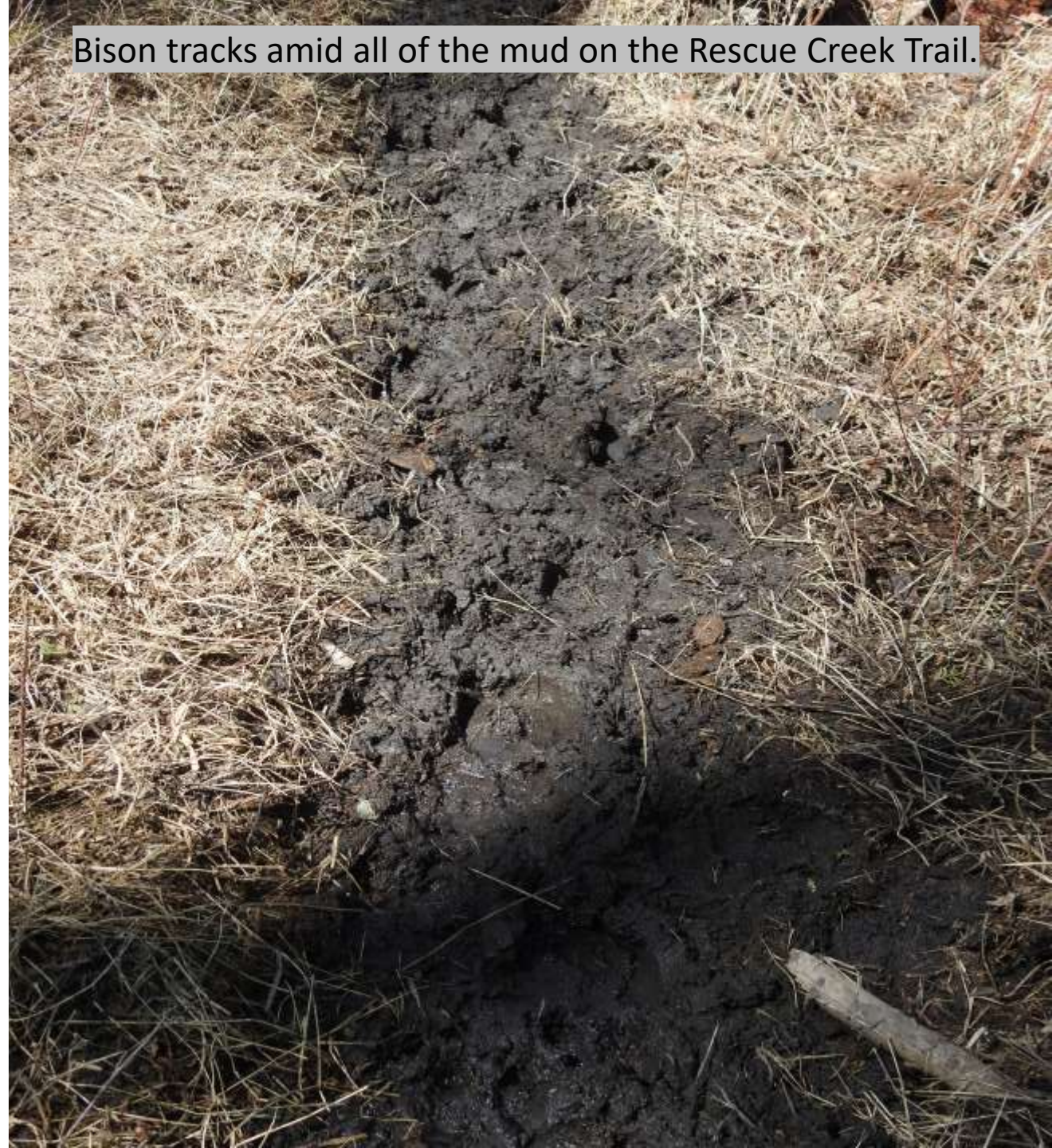




Ice and snow made part of the Rescue Creek Trail treacherous.



Bison tracks amid all of the mud on the Rescue Creek Trail.



Steve hiking downhill in a north facing snow patch.



Mule deer buck skull we found on the trail. It could have been the same individual from the fur and jaw bone that we found nearby the previous night.





Coming to the end of the trail from the previous night. It was pretty amazing to find the spot 4.6-4.7 miles into the hike from the other direction.



Top: Black Canyon of the Yellowstone viewed by climbing a ridge off the main trail.

Below: Panorama of the Rescue Creek Trail near where we turned around 4.6 miles into the backcountry.



Black Canyon of the Yellowstone River zoomed in from the previous page.





Top: Elk scat was all over the trail yet we did not see a single one on the hike.

Right: Hiking back up ice and snow on the Rescue Creek Trail. There were a couple of stretches on the hike where there were 3 foot snow drifts remaining on the trail.



View of the Painted Hills on the way back to the Blacktail Plateau.



A bull bison watching us as we hiked by him.





Left: Again, mud dominates Yellowstone in April.

Top Right: And so do bison 'patties', which littered this meadow (see next page)!



Pretty willows in Blacktail Deer Creek near the park road on the Blacktail Plateau.



Bison in the middle of Mammoth having their own picnic! I usually see elk here so this was an unusual sighting.



Bison up-close at Mammoth. Notice all of the bison scat in the area!



Day 7: Trip Down South

This was a crazy day. We skipped wolf watching in Lamar Valley and Little America to drive to the southern part of the park where the day started at 15 degrees. We visited virtually all the attractions that were open and hiked about 10 miles on boardwalks and other 'touristy' areas, but without many tourists because it was April. The pictures are pretty self-explanatory with stops at Elk Park and Gibbon Meadow, Gibbon Falls, Fountain Paint Pot, Midway Geyser Basin, Flood Geyser area in Midway (which is the setting for the famous Monty Dolack painting '[Return the Wolf to Yellowstone](#)'), Biscuit Basin, Black Sand Basin, Kepler Cascades, and of course the Old Faithful area where we walked about 5 miles! It had been quite a few years since I went to Old Faithful due to summer visits and too many people.

The sighting of the day was a wolf at the Flood Geyser area where a young collared black (really more brown in color) from the Wapiti pack was feeding on the old remains of a bison carcass. It is amazing that I observed this pack around Elk Creek and Tower when I was here for 9 days during [Christmas 2020](#) and now this wolf was over 50 miles away from there. He was feeding in the open for most of the day and happened to cross the road near us as we were coming back from Old Faithful and returning to Gardiner. I took 227 pictures on this day, probably a record for one day for me. Enjoy some of my better ones from this trip, which is worthy of a book in and of itself.

Nymph Lake and surrounding geothermal features producing the steam.



Roaring Mountain on a cool 15-16° Fahrenheit day which helped form the steam which wasn't as nearly prevalent when it was in the high 40s later on the drive home.



Steam rising about Norris Geyser Basin from an overlook in the distance.





Top: Elk Park with sunlight poking through the steam of geothermal features. Bottom: Nearby Gibbon Meadows.



Steam and sunrise at Elk Park.





Frosty bison in Gibbon Meadows.

Gibbon Falls in the early morning. Next page: Zoomed in.





Driving the Madison to Old Faithful Road along the Firehole River.



Firehole River viewed into the sun.





Bison cow and early calf of the year along the Firehole River.

Bison and geysers and fumaroles from the Lower Geyser Basin area.





Top: Panorama of the Lower Geyser Basin. The bison in the photo below are in the left center of this image.

Left: Up close view of those bison in the Lower Geyser Basin.

Fountain Paint Pot with a very cool looking, pinkish hued boiling mud.





Top: Red Sprouter at Fountain Paint Pot. Bottom: Steam and Firehole River at Midway Geyser Basin.



Celestine Pool area at Fountain Paint Pot.



Steam and the Firehole River at Midway Geyser Basin provides for breathtaking scenery.







Top: Steam from Grand Prismatic Hot Spring at Midway Geyser Basin.

Bottom: Panorama of the Midway Geyser Basin boardwalk with Grand Prismatic on the right side of the picture.



Boardwalk at Midway Geyser Basin. I have always enjoyed walking these boardwalks for the scenery and the exercise.





Great view of the sun poking through Excelsior Geyser at Midway Geyser Basin boardwalk.

Grand Prismatic hot spring steam from a distance. I love the people in the picture, which helps to show the immense size of this geothermal feature.



Grand Prismatic and Excelsior Geysers in the distance.





One of my favorite scenes in the park,
at Midway Geyser Basin from a pullout
off the park road.

Flood Geyser area.





Top: Fantastic panorama at Flood Geyser overlook. This is one of my favorite images from this trip! In this image you can also see Grand Prismatic and Excelsior Geysers in the distance (right).

Left: Many visitors had the fortune of seeing this wolf from the Wapiti Pack. It was a young, collared black at Flood Geyser. Remarkably I observed this pack in December in the Tower to Elk Creek area some 50+ miles away.



There was an old bison carcass that it was gnawing on, alongside some ravens.



Left: Perspective of where the wolf was seen, one of the most scenic places where I have ever observed an animal.

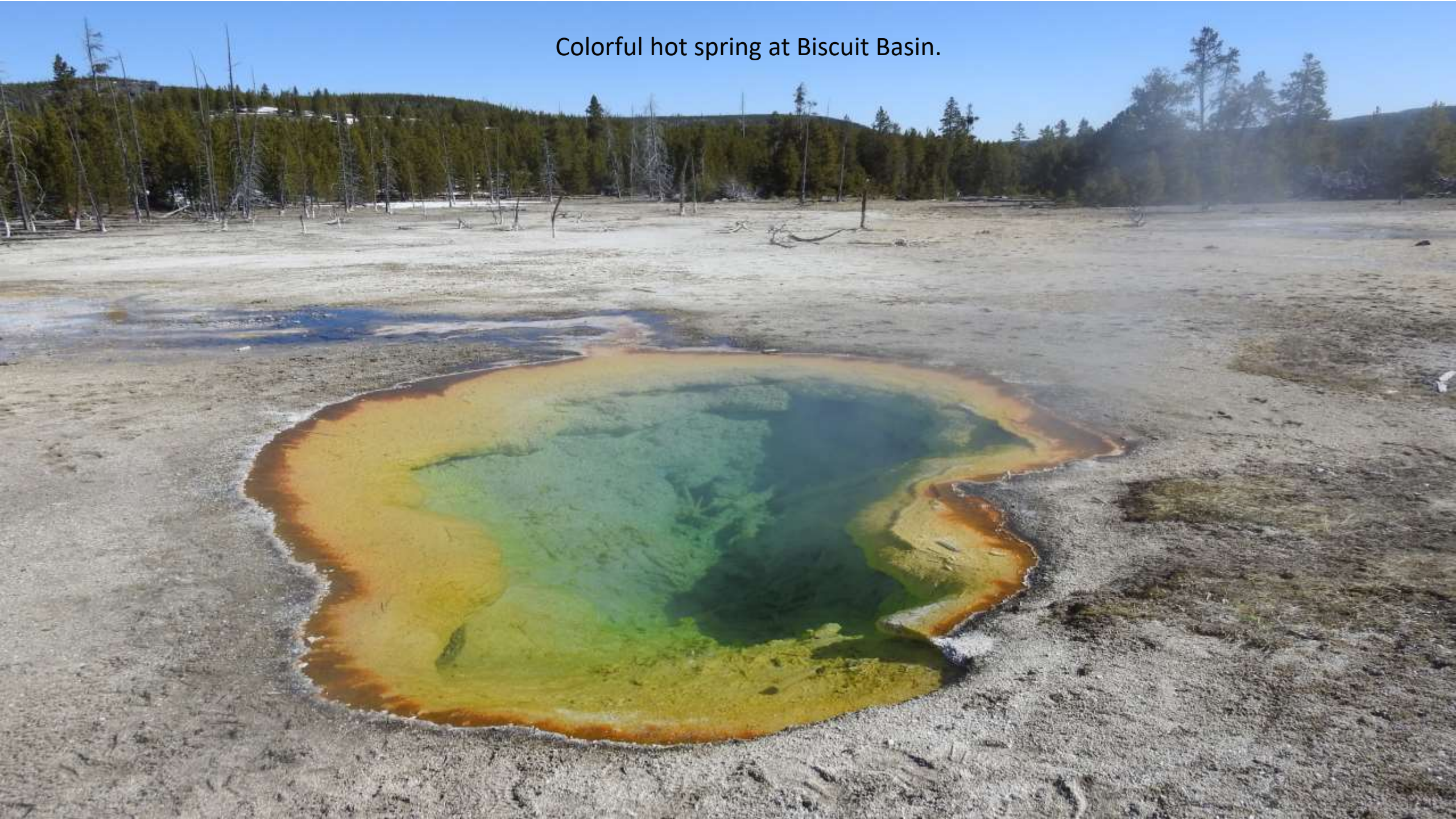
Below: Ravens are ever present around wolves and their food, always trying to get scraps.





Biscuit Basin. The boardwalk was a pleasant short hike, with many pretty hot springs and other geothermal features.

Colorful hot spring at Biscuit Basin.





Black Sand Basin and mountains.

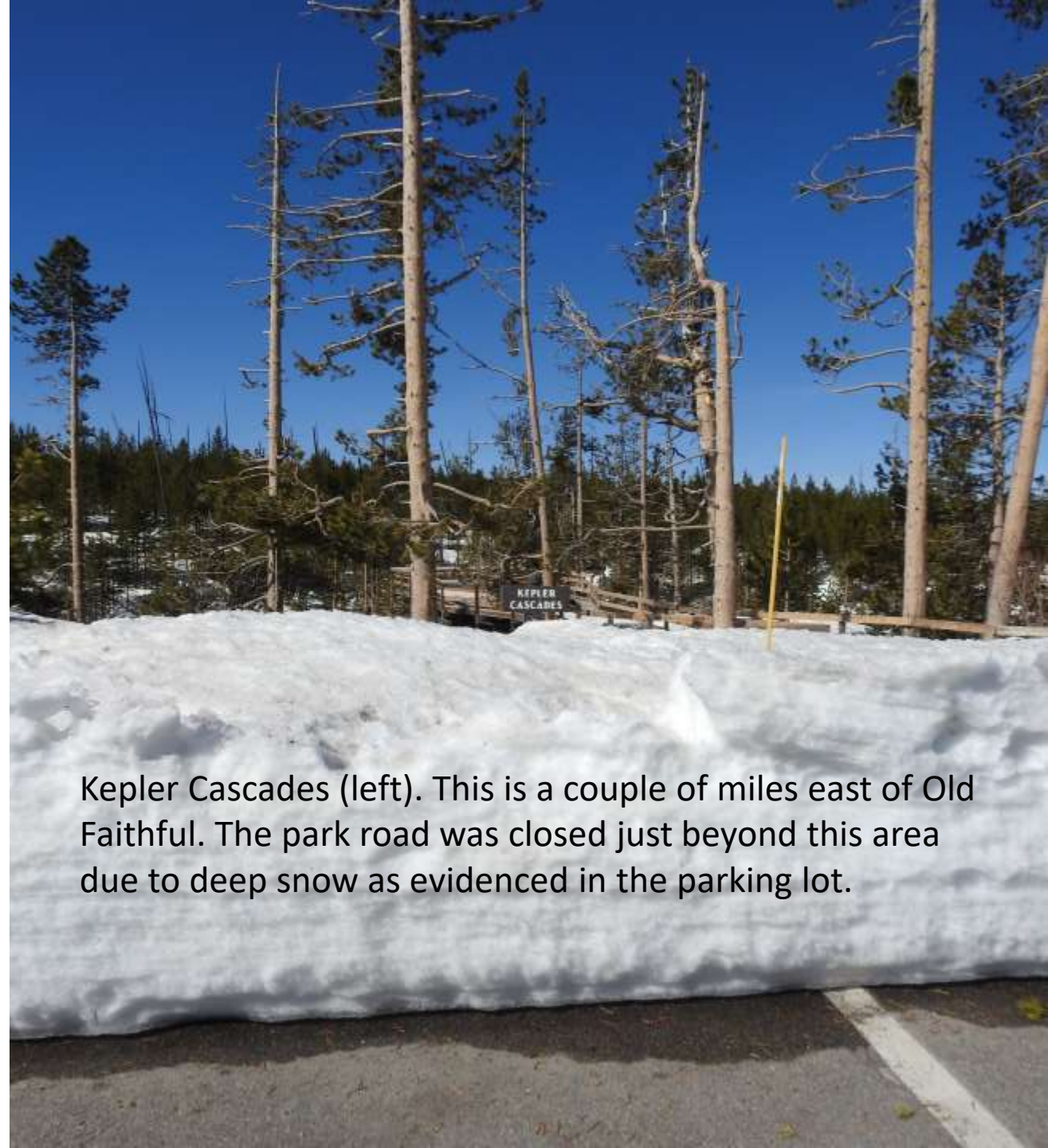
Emerald Pool at Black Sand Basin. The dark red and orange colors are living organisms, called thermophiles, which live in extremely hot conditions, something no other organisms on earth can do.





Above: Sunset Lake and boardwalk at Black Sand Basin.

Left: The park road was closed a couple of miles past (east of) Old Faithful.



Kepler Cascades (left). This is a couple of miles east of Old Faithful. The park road was closed just beyond this area due to deep snow as evidenced in the parking lot.



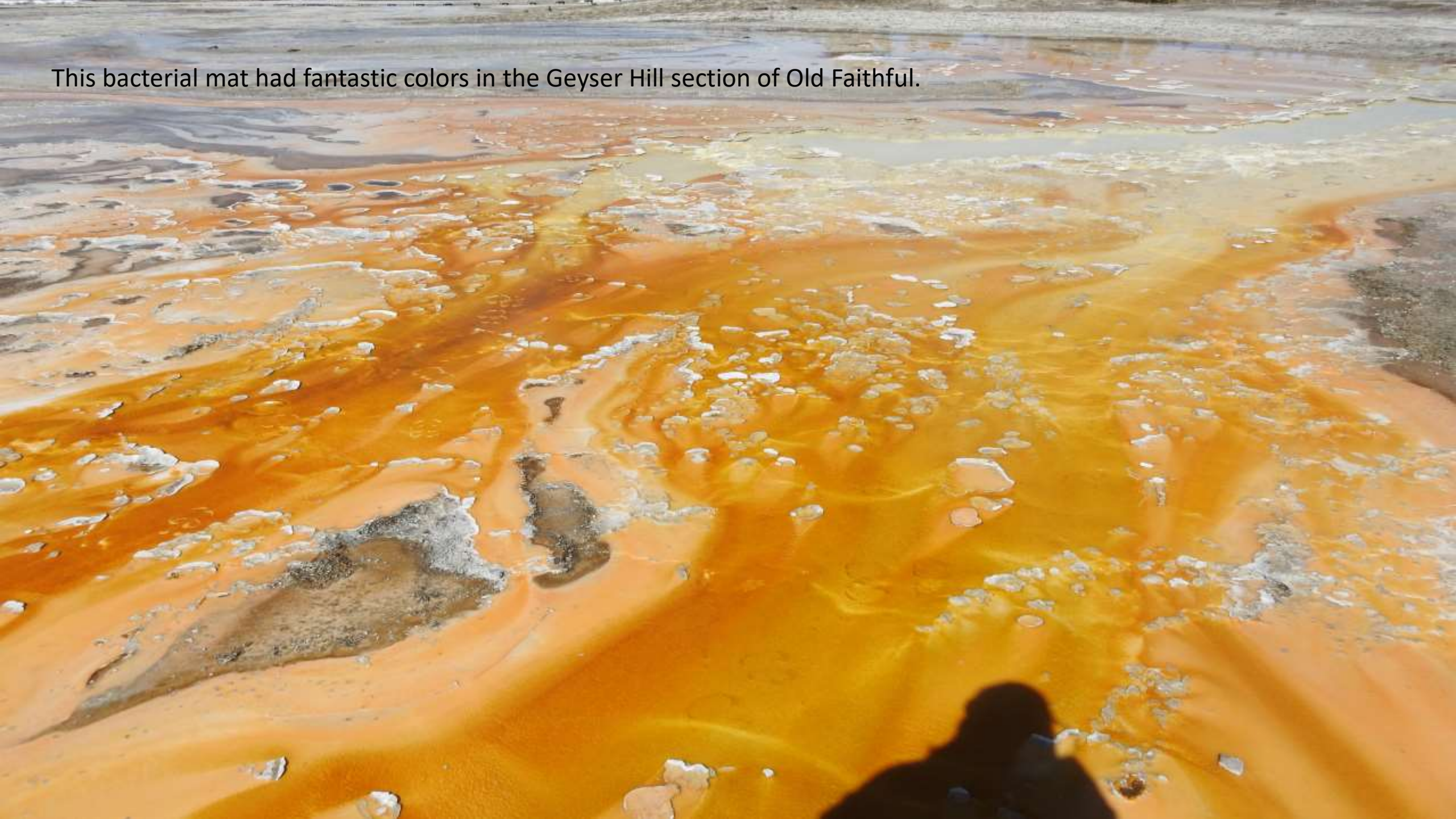
Above: Panorama of the Geyser Hill area at Old Faithful. Below: Castle Geyser area in the Upper Geyser Basin.



Firehole River near Old Faithful along the paved trail.



This bacterial mat had fantastic colors in the Geyser Hill section of Old Faithful.





Above: The boardwalks at Old Faithful provide a good perspective of the area.

Left: Firehole River in the central part of Old Faithful.

Castle Geyser.



The Old Faithful Visitor Center was still closed, and snowed in.



Old Faithful erupting.





Great perspective of Old Faithful erupting.



Beehive Geyser erupting.



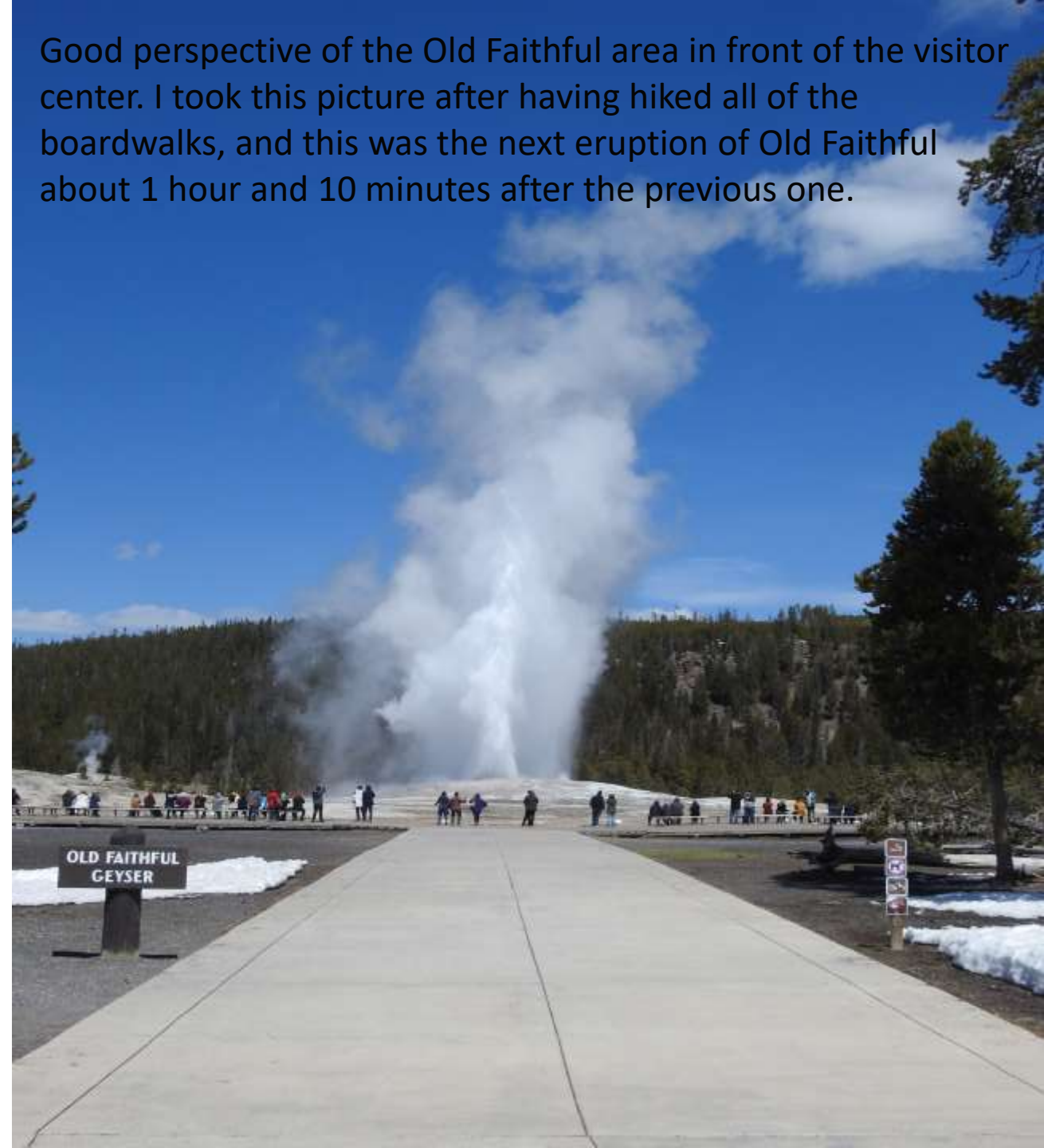
Beehive Geyser in the distance (right of center) and the Firehole River.





Grotto Geyser.

Good perspective of the Old Faithful area in front of the visitor center. I took this picture after having hiked all of the boardwalks, and this was the next eruption of Old Faithful about 1 hour and 10 minutes after the previous one.





Left: Morning Glory Pool, a very scenic hot spring.

Below: Morning Glory zoomed in.






Punch Bowl Spring.



After hiking for miles on the various geyser basins boardwalks, including the five or so miles at Old Faithful, the black collared member of the Wapiti Wolf Pack was still present in the Flood Geyser area.

A photograph of a wolf-like animal, possibly a coyote or a wild dog, walking across a grassy bank. The animal is dark brown and black, with a bushy tail. It is moving from left to right. In the background, there is a river with dark blue water, and the far bank is covered in dry, yellowish-brown grass. The foreground is a mix of dry grass and dirt.

It poked around the river for a while.

Meanwhile, a raven was near us watching our every move, no doubt hoping we fed it.



With a bluebird nearby the raven.





The wolf then crossed the road close to us heading east into the wilderness. The radio-collar allows biologists to track the animal and determine important life history traits such as home range size, movement patterns, habitat use, and survival, among many others. It went out of sight through a stand of dead trees (left).



Left: Firehole River on the drive back to Gardiner.

Below: Very cool rock formations called the 'Hoodoos' above Mammoth Hot Springs.



Day 8: Snow, Moose, Wolves, and Beaver Ponds

April 23rd was my last full day in the park with a mild 28 degree start. Animal sightings started out slowly due to it snowing throughout most of the park early on, making visibility problematic. Hearing about moose in Round Prairie the previous day, we drove there and were immediately rewarded. Among the tall (8+ feet) willows in Round Prairie, the initial sighting of 2 moose turned into 10! They were mostly bulls, but at least one was a smaller calf, probably with its mother. The males, called pedestal bulls, are just starting to re-grow antlers now so it can sometimes be difficult to tell if one is a male or female from a distance. They were feeding in the middle of the willows so would come in and out of view during the hour plus that we viewed them.

Once there was visibility in the Slough Creek/Little America area, we drove the 10 miles west to look for wolves. We saw just a few (4 total) at the den including a gray yearling, 2 light black yearlings, and a quick view of the uncollared, black alpha female that came in and out of the den. We also spotted 2 wolves on the other side of the park road, including wolf 1109F, a black colored former Junction Butte wolf who is now mostly on her own as the dominant females pick on her when she is near the pack. Another black wolf was seen with her.

After observing wolves, we explored the Lamar Valley with Bob Crabtree. Bob conducted a 20-year study of coyotes in Yellowstone from 1989-2009 from before wolves were brought back to when they became established. The day had the usual sights of bison near and on the road, and beautiful scenery all around. In the evening we hiked the Beaver Ponds Loop above Mammoth which was 5.5 miles and provided a terrific view of the area and 3-4 ice covered ponds. Some bison were nearby, and lots of elk scat was observed, but we didn't see any elk on the hike. However, on the short 5-mile drive home to Gardiner from Mammoth, I saw at least 100 along the road corridor and the surrounding foothills. Pretty amazing!



Above: More snow at the end of our trip last week. Here is the Elk Creek area at dawn.

Left: This is a view to the den area north of the Slough Creek bathroom area. With little visibility, we drove east to Round Prairie to look for moose.

Beautiful Lamar Canyon in snow.



Bison on the road in western Lamar Valley.



Bison/wildlife sign and Lamar Valley in snow.



Round Prairie in the transition from clouds to sun. This is the location where the moose were observed. The large ungulates were in the middle of that picture in those willows, which were more impressive than they appear here.





Left: Moose in Round Prairie.

Below: 2 moose feeding on willows in Round Prairie.





Left: Moose in willows.

Below: Six of the 10 moose that we observed in Round Prairie feeding on willows.



While tough to see, all 10 of the moose are in (or slightly behind a bush) in this picture. At the least, it gives good perspective as to where the moose were and the difficulty of seeing them all at once.





Close up of 4 of the moose. Most of the moose were bulls re-growing their antlers but I suspected that at least two were a cow-calf pair.



Above: Bison at Slough Creek area crossing the road near our parked vehicles.

Right: Coyote south of where we parked traveling by a creek.



Perspective from the car of where famous wolf 21M used to cross the road to head up (to the right) to the original Druid den between Lamar and Soda Butte Valleys. I first started coming out to the park when the Druid Pack was in their heyday, so this area holds a special meaning for me.





Above: Confluence of Soda Butte Creek and Lamar River. I like including human influences, such as the park road, in many of my photographs to give the viewer a better perspective of the area.

Left: Two ravens on a rock near the Slough Creek Campground Road.



Top: Aspens in Little America.

Below: Mammoth at Liberty Cap which we went past enroute to hike the Beaver Meadows Trail above Mammoth.





Left: A mix of sagebrush and juniper trees at the start of the Beaver Meadows hike which was a 5.75 round-trip loop starting and finishing in Mammoth Hot Springs.

Below: Beaver Pond trail with a great view of Mount Everts in the background.

Next page: Mud and ice were present on this hike like it was on all other rambles on this trip. Inset next page: Elk scat was plentiful even though I didn't spot any of the animals. Although, on the drive home later that evening we saw around 100 of them on the short, 5 mile stretch between Mammoth and Gardiner.







Ice and snow on the Beaver Ponds Loop.

Left: Aspens, ice, and snow. And mud!

Right: Boardwalk with very green creek. The water was cold so there did not appear to be any geothermal activity in the area so I am not quite sure why there was so much green vegetation given the brown-ness of the surrounding landscape. It is likely that a natural seep kept the area from freezing over.





Above: First Beaver Pond and view.

Left: Second Beaver Pond.



This page: Big Beaver Pond and ice. This was a very pleasant hike.

Next page: The hike had stretches that were steep with pure ice, which made portions of the jaunt treacherous (left). In more sunlit stretches, it was pure mud (right).



View of Gardiner, Montana 2-3 miles to the north with mountains above the small town.





Above: Gardiner (far left) and Mount Everts (center right) from the highest point of the Beaver Ponds Trail.
Below: Bunsen Peak (left) and Mt. Sepulcher (right) from the Beaver Pond Loop.



Day 9: The Last Day – Wolves and Elk

It is always bittersweet when leaving Yellowstone. Nothing compares to the scenery and wildlife so I always look forward to my next return. Luckily, the flight wasn't until 1:45pm from Bozeman so we could enjoy the park for a few hours by entering it while it was still dark. It was a comfortable 28-30 degrees throughout the northern part of the park.

Wolf watchers, including us, were quickly rewarded at first light by seeing 6 wolves (5 black and 1 gray) at the den area, including the uncollared alpha pair (both are black), 1048M (the beta, next in line, male), 2 yearling blacks, and 1 yearling gray. After 1048M submissively greeted the breeding male (who had his tail raised high while 1048M approached him in a crouched position like a pup does), the six wolves had a rally and howled and then the alpha pair, 1048M and one of the blacks traveled west with purpose. They ignored elk, who were all around the den site area. I counted over 100 from the observation area with 35+ being close to the den itself. After just a few minutes we lost them despite many people looking for them. I found the remaining gray and black in the den area before losing them too.

Most interesting to me were the 20 or so elk who grazed literally right in front of where the wolves hang out by the den every day. It was almost like the elk knew that the wolves were very temporarily not at home as the main pack seemed to be out hunting and the ones that were just there were no longer visible. At 7:55 AM, and just before we headed back to Gardiner for the plane departure from Bozeman, Bob Landis reported wolves being observed in Lamar Valley a few miles east of the den area. I was able to see 1228F, the gray female spotted at the elk carcass a few days ago, and a brownish-black young-looking wolf. Supposedly 2-3 more were further east but we did not see them before having to leave. It was a short day in the park as we pre-determined that we had to leave wolf watching at 8:30AM in order to drive the hour back to Gardiner to finish packing the car. That gave us enough time to gather our belongings and then arrive at the airport with plenty of time to spare. Enjoy the last pictures from 'Yellowstone April 2021 trip'. Cheers!



Junction Wolves rallying at dawn at the Slough Creek den area on my last day in the park.



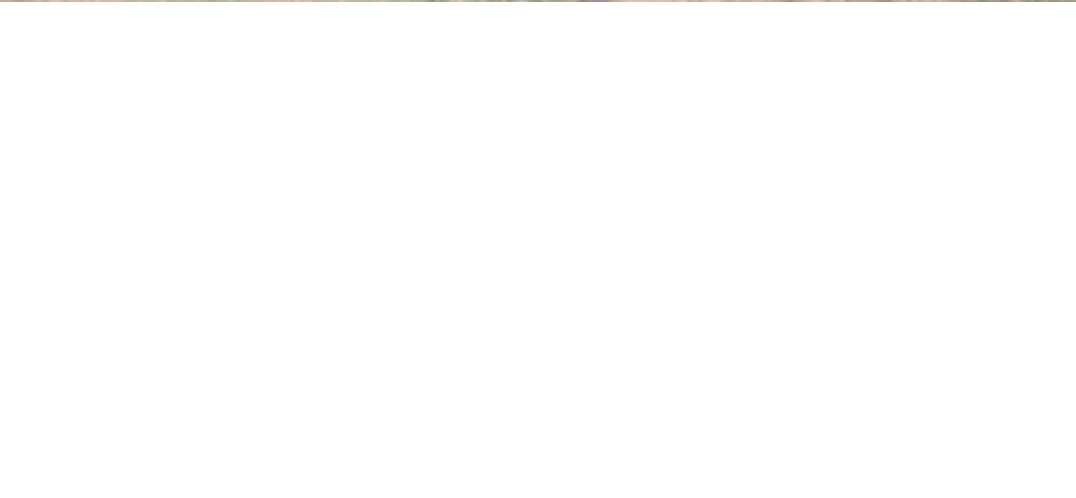
Junction wolves traveling west from the den area.



Amazingly, like they knew, once when the wolves traveled west and out of our sight, elk showed up in front of the den area with a group right at the 'Western (left group of) Trees' and others in the open (foreground of picture).



A closer view of elk grazing where the wolves normally sleep. They must've known (through scenting them and prior experience) that a large wolf family is normally there but they did not seem to have a care in the world as they slowly grazed from west to east.






Left: Soon before having to depart Lamar Valley to head back to Gardiner to finish packing, 2-year old gray wolf 1228F and a couple of other Junction wolves were found.

Right: Wolf 1228F and her big studded collar. Those brass rivets are put on the collars to try and prevent other pack members from chewing the collar off.



A light brownish 'black' yearling was also heading west, following the general direction of 1228F. There were reportedly 2-3 other wolves (I was not sure if this wolf was counted in that group) nearby but we didn't have time to find them before heading back to Gardiner.



A photograph of two sandhill cranes in a field. The cranes are standing in a field of dry, brown grass with several patches of white snow scattered across the ground. In the background, there is a large, dark, weathered tree stump. The crane on the left is facing right, while the one on the right is facing left. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Beautiful sandhill crane couple just north of Fisherman's Pullout in the western part of Lamar Valley.

One of the last bison 'jams' of this trip. I look forward to many more in the future, even while the state of Montana's legislator and governor are in the midst of an all-out cultural (and despicable) war against wildlife, which literally sickens me. For more, see:

<https://www.idausa.org/campaign/wild-animals-and-habitats/latest-news/montana-wildlife-protection/>

<https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/montana-launches-war-wolves>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/28/us/montana-wolves-grizzlies-hunting.html>

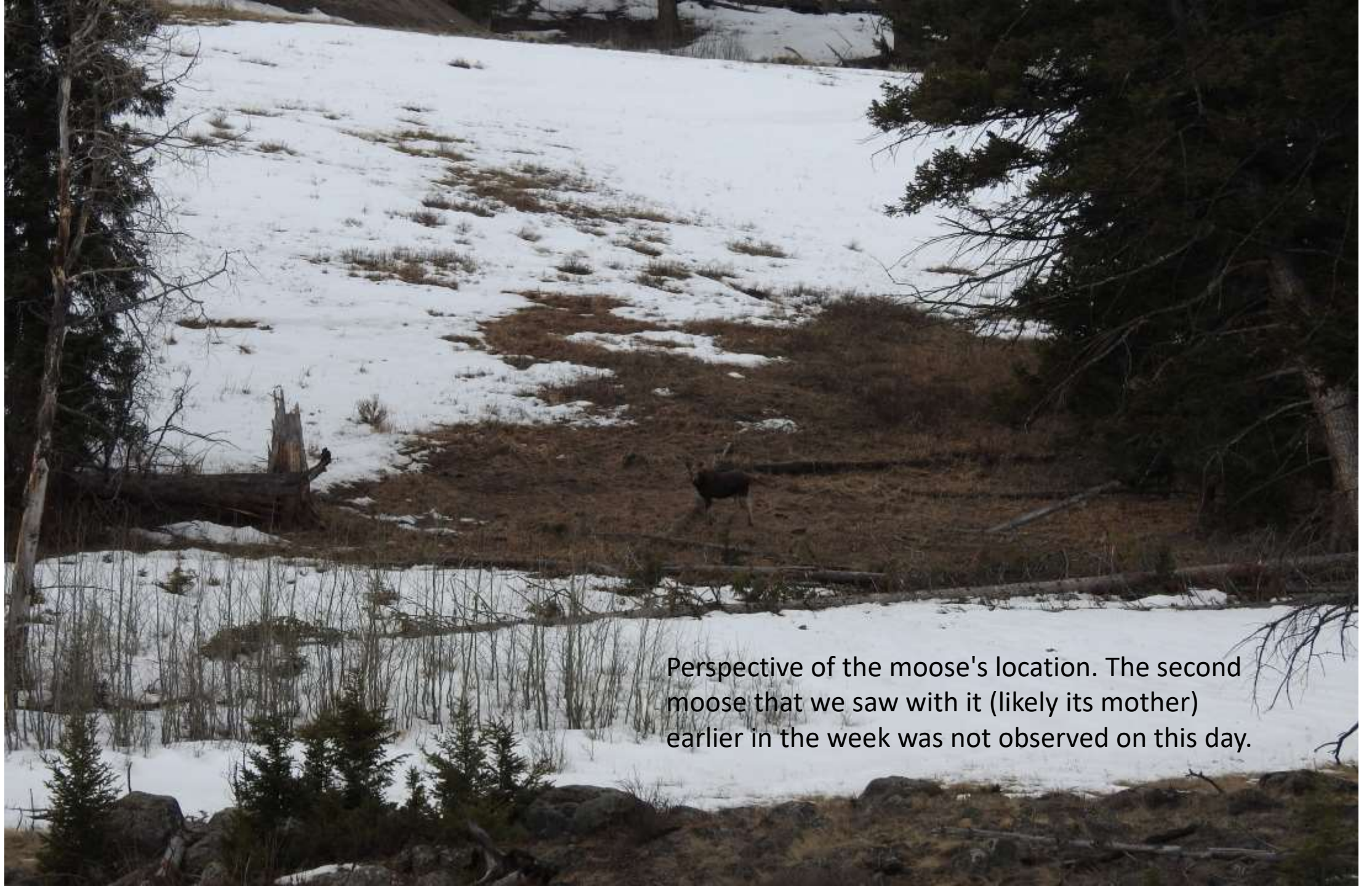




Floating Island Lake panorama (Above). I spent considerable amount of time in this area during my Christmas trip, but only drove through there on this expedition. It is always interesting to see where the wildlife is, and hence where you spend most of your time.

Young moose just east of the Blacktail dirt road (open during summer for cars).





Perspective of the moose's location. The second moose that we saw with it (likely its mother) earlier in the week was not observed on this day.



Last view of the wonderful apartment where we stayed, which was the same place that I was at during Christmas. I hope you enjoyed this book!

Epilogue

I hope you enjoyed this picture e-book. I was fortunate to have observed many animals including coyotes, wolves, grizzly bears, as well as 7 of the 8 ungulates that live in the park, including bison, moose, elk, bighorn sheep, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and pronghorn. I did not observe or spend any time looking for mountain goats, who live in high elevation areas, often on craggy peaks. Instead, we chose to hike after observing wolves instead of looking through our spotting scopes again.

As I contemplated the production of this and other e-books, I realized that I took many trips to Yellowstone during the summer in the 2010s and never formally published them. Thus, following my first 4 books on the park ([My Yellowstone Experience](#) (2013), [The Trip of a Lifetime](#) (2020), [Christmas in Yellowstone](#) (2021), and this book), I am happy to announce that my fifth book in my *Yellowstone Book Series* will be on 'Yellowstone Wildlife during Summer'. It will be an exciting venture into the great fauna that inhabit the park, focusing on the ones that I have personally seen. I am busy going over the 6,000-7,000 images that I took during those expeditions. I look forward to presenting that to you, the viewer, soon.

Similar to my previous books, I also want to continue to note the importance of having national parks. 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 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 268 pages, with over 500 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 areas, and its 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.