



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, UNITED STATES

Date - December 2008

Duration - 15 Days

Destinations

Yellowstone National Park and environs.

Trip Overview

This was primarily a research trip to try out a UK company specialising in wildlife tours and, more specifically, the local guides that they use in and around Yellowstone, as I have struggled somewhat to find competent guides in the United States. I had previously always visited Yellowstone independently and had not used a UK based operator for more years than I can remember, as I much



prefer to use knowledgeable and enthusiastic locals for all of the destinations that I run tours to. I should certainly have stuck to that philosophy, as they placed me with a 'sports' hunter for the first four days of the trip, which was never going to be a match made in heaven and I have not used them since. That said, the tour was still worthwhile, as I made some excellent local contacts and, although I have never seen so few individual species at Yellowstone, at least not on trips of more than a week, I still enjoyed some memorable encounters. No trip where you spend time watching wolf packs running across the snow can be a bad one and I was very fortunate to see a great deal of wolf activity, including a prolonged chase of a coyote that had ventured just a little too close to a carcass. The coyote survived, but only just, and it was easy to see in that one example, exactly how these keystone predators have had such a major impact on the ecology of

the park since their reintroduction in 1995. The wolves also did me a huge favour on this trip, as I certainly did not expect to see a brown or grizzly bear over the Christmas holiday, but grizzlies will not always hibernate if they have enough food to sustain them through winter and I found one guarding an elk that the wolves had killed. The carcass was frozen and the bear would lie on top of it for long periods in an attempt to thaw enough to eat. His vigil lasted at least four days and twice during my presence solitary wolves turned up to check whether the grizzly had moved on. Unfortunately most of the wolf sightings were at distance using a scope and the only two close encounters occurred when I was driving and on both occasions the wolves had covered a lot of ground before I was able to stop the car and attempt to get a picture. The grizzly bear sighting should have been much closer, as the elk carcass was fairly near the road, but the park rangers had other ideas and would not allow anyone to approach within about 100 metres. I was more fortunate with some of the other animals, as several scavenging coyotes in their thick winter coats lingered expectantly around the car and bison, red deer, mule deer, bighorn sheep and pronghorn were all encountered at close quarters. I thought that I was going to add puma to my list at one stage, as I followed fresh tracks in the deep snow for more than four hours until a river came between me and my elusive quarry. As exciting as game driving can be, there is nothing quite like tracking a large animal on foot, for although you often never see the actual creature, the thrill of walking in their footsteps and the possibility that they might just be over the next hill, are enough to make it an exhilarating and unforgettable experience. Sadly there were to be no cats on this trip, although I did pick up another dog in the form of a red fox at the Pebble Creek campsite and was delighted to see a marten on a bird feeder on the road to Cooke City. Other highlights included a lone female moose in fading light just beyond the northeast park entrance around Silvergate

and a solitary mountain goat with a spotting scope in the same area as the fox. Bald and golden eagles were regularly observed at old carcasses and on one occasion I saw both of these birds, as well as a rough-legged hawk, several ravens and two coyotes within twenty metres of another unlucky elk. When I was not looking for wildlife, I took a team of dogs out sledding, as I am normally in warm climates for much of the northern hemisphere winter and have not had this opportunity for several years. I had a team of ten beautiful Alaskan huskies and not even a heavy blizzard could spoil the fun of dashing across the snow with these incredibly athletic animals. In addition to Old Faithful, which I always watch erupt once on every visit, I took time to drive to the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Centre, near the west entrance to the park. This is a non-profit educational facility that homes a number of



bears and wolves that cannot be returned to the wild. Although not the same as seeing these animals in the wild, the centre does provide an opportunity to view the animals at close range in a natural environment and all visits support the educational programmes undertaken, as well as the upkeep of the animals. Whilst my trip was not the most productive in terms of seeing a large number of different species, and the photographic opportunities were severely restricted by bad weather, Yellowstone always looks sensational in the snow and there is always something to see, from a tiny American dipper flitting in and out of a stream, to a huge bison swaying its powerful head in the snow to clear a path to the vegetation below.

No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	Around eighteen different animals during nine sightings.
2	Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>	Approximately 20 scattered throughout the park.
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Lone individual at Pebble Creek.
4	Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>	Lone individual on a red deer carcass for several days.
5	American Marten	<i>Martes americana</i>	Individual on a bird feeder on the road to Cooke City.
6	American Bison	<i>Bison bison</i>	Various herds throughout the park.
7	Bighorn Sheep	<i>Ovis canadensis</i>	Herd of about twenty just before the Roosevelt Arch.
8	Mountain Goat	<i>Oreamnos americanus</i>	Distant view of individual in scope from near Pebble Creek.
9	Pronghorn	<i>Antilocapra americana</i>	Several near the north entrance and throughout the park.
10	Moose	<i>Alces americanus</i>	Lone female around Silver Gate.
11	Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	Relatively large herds in several areas.
12	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Several herds throughout the park.
13	White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	Two small herds just before the north entrance.
14	Snowshoe Hare	<i>Lepus americanus</i>	Several on road at night and two on one night walk.
15	White-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus townsendii</i>	Three on one afternoon hike.







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