

## 2008 YELLOWSTONE AND GRAND TETONS

Saturday, January 26. Usually I seek out some warm climate to celebrate my birthday. This year I decided to do something different – WINTER. I also decided to go someplace I had never been, Wyoming!

I caught a plane to Bozeman, Montana. It is a 4 1/2 hour flight with no meal service, even in business class! I made do with selections from the snack basket. My seatmate was on his way to Bozeman to ski, although not at Big Sky, Chet Huntley's famous resort<sup>1</sup>.

Brian<sup>2</sup> was on my flight. He had originally been scheduled on an earlier flight from Jacksonville to Atlanta to Salt Lake to Bozeman, but got cancelled and changed to a much better flight schedule Jacksonville/Atlanta/Bozeman.

Natural Habitat was at the airport to greet us and told me my sister<sup>3</sup> was already there. She was busy getting a seat assignment on her Northwest flight home. When she had telephoned them, she was told a seat assignment would cost \$15! I've never heard of such a thing. Coming on she was stuck in a middle seat because she would not pay the surcharge. At least she will go home in comfort.

John M Bozeman (1835-1867)<sup>4</sup> blazed a trail into Western Montana and founded the city that bears his name. It is a town of about 35,000, the fifth largest town in Montana, and home to Montana State University.

Tenley Thompson, one of our guides drove us to the Gran Tree Best Western Inn. It is a large motel with an indoor swimming pool. I joined Scotti and Mac<sup>5</sup> in the bar and soon Margie and Bob Hughes<sup>6</sup> arrived. We continued greeting people until it was time for dinner.

At dinner we met our other guide, Paul Brown. We were asked to introduce ourselves but it was really to introduce ourselves to them. Fourteen members of my family are taking the tour and of course we all know each other. Eight more will join us in Jackson for the weekend not having been able to take so much time off. Paul spoke about the Yellowstone eco-system, the largest in the United States. Almost all of the original animals still exist here. After dinner Tenley outfitted those who needed them with boots and parkas.

Sunday, January 27. We have two vans: one for those wearing down parkas and one for those without. Mary<sup>7</sup> has a severe allergy to down and ducks in particular. We fondly call our vans the Up van and the Down van. I have a fleece parka in addition to my down one so can sit in either van. My down parka is so heavy I can hardly move in it so I am letting it ride in the luggage van until I need it. Actually I only wore it one day on the whole trip.

We drove through historic Bozeman and headed south along the Gallatin River<sup>8</sup>, named for Albert Gallatin, Thomas Jefferson's Secretary of the Interior when the river was discovered. The valley is a rich agricultural area. We crossed the Bridger Mountains<sup>9</sup>. Paul spotted a rough legged hawk<sup>10</sup>. This bird is sometimes called the Arctic Hawk since he comes south to winter here. It is warmer here although the temperature never got above freezing the whole week! Other hawks migrate further south. We came to Livingston,<sup>11</sup> which was a rail hub for the Northern Pacific Railroad. In the early days people came to Livingston by train and then took a stagecoach into Yellowstone Park. The railroad built two hotels in the park but they are closed in winter. Paul pointed out the ravens<sup>12</sup>. They can help you find a kill as they flock to the remains.

Paradise Valley was so called because of its rich farmland and milder winters. We continued following the Yellowstone River<sup>13</sup>. A tributary of the Missouri it is the longest un-dammed river in

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bigskyresort.com/>

<sup>2</sup> My grandson, Brian Sesniak

<sup>3</sup> Peggy Kremenz

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9016082/John-M-Bozeman>

<sup>5</sup> Scotti is my daughter, Mac is Dr Denis McCarthy.

<sup>6</sup> My stepdaughter and her husband

<sup>7</sup> My daughter, Mary Harrell-Sesniak

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallatin\\_River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallatin_River)

<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridger\\_Mountains\\_\(Montana\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridger_Mountains_(Montana))

<sup>10</sup> <http://images.google.com/images?q=rough+legged+hawk&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en-us&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&oi=images&ct=title>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.livingstonmontana.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raven>

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the lower 48 states. On our left were the lovely Absaroka Mountains. The Native Americans here took their name from the mountains and were the Raven people. Early settlers misinterpreted the word Absaroka to mean crow instead of raven so today we refer to the Crow tribe<sup>14</sup> of Indians. We had a rest stop and most walked down to see the river but not me.

Then we spotted some mule deer<sup>15</sup> under a lee. Their large mule-like ears make them easy to see.

We saw our first elk<sup>16</sup>. His head and shoulders are darker than the rest of his body. He is sometimes called the wapiti<sup>17</sup> because of his white target rump and is the second largest of the antelopes.

We drove through narrow Yankee Jim Canyon named for the settler who maintained a toll road here. The toll was \$4, a steep price in those days, but it was much longer to go by the free road.

We found a carcass by the road, probably road kill, and there were magpies<sup>18</sup> and ravens scavenging it. Then we stopped by an airstrip and Paul and Tenley got out the scopes. "Wow" said Alta<sup>19</sup> looking through a scope for the first time. She later learned how to put her camera on the scope and take telephoto pictures! We could clearly see the pronghorn antelope<sup>20</sup>. With their distinctive white markings, they remind me of the springbok<sup>21</sup> of Africa. The pronghorn is the second fastest of the antelopes but their legs are too short to navigate in deep snow.

At last we got to Gardiner<sup>22</sup> at the North Gate of Yellowstone. Right in town we spotted a mule deer resting on a cleared spot near a house. Paul mused, "I guess it's warmer over the septic tank."

Yellowstone<sup>23</sup> was the first National Park founded in 1872. The Roosevelt North Gate is a triumphal arch dedicated to Teddy Roosevelt in 1903. We passed through the gate and Paul bought me a Senior Pass. I already have one but it is in some bureau drawer at home. The pass allows me to bring three others free into the park. Paul said he doesn't mind paying for the park needs the money. The trouble is that the fees all get sent to the Department of the Interior who decide on the basis of attendance where the money should be dispersed. Great Falls Park in Washington, DC is the most attended park due to the daily joggers and walkers.

We spotted a Townsend's Solitaire<sup>24</sup> on a juniper tree. This is not a common bird in the park.

The Boiling River flows out of Mammoth Hot Springs and at its confluence with the Gardiner River there is a place where people like to swim, but not this cold and snowy day. Two elk<sup>25</sup> were chewing their cud and we were told how the elk, are ruminants<sup>26</sup>. They have a two-part stomach. They store food in one and regurgitate it up when they need nourishment.

We came into Mammoth Hot Springs. Originally this was Fort Yellowstone<sup>27</sup>, an old army post. Today it provides housing for many of the park employees. The army was brought in to maintain law and order and stop the poaching in the park. When the National Parks Service was started in 1916, the army post was closed.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absaroka\\_Range](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absaroka_Range)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.crystalinks.com/crow.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://images.google.com/images?q=mule+deer&hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&hs=15O&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&oi=images&ct=title>

<sup>16</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elk>

<sup>17</sup> wapiti is a Native American word meaning white rump

<sup>18</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magpie>

<sup>19</sup> Alta Howard is my granddaughter

<sup>20</sup> <http://images.google.com/images?q=pronghorn+antelope&hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&hs=nDq&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&oi=images&ct=title>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.encounter.co.za/article/103.html>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.gardinerchamber.com/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/yell/>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Townsend's\\_Solitaire\\_dtl.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Townsend's_Solitaire_dtl.html)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.rmef.org/AllAboutElk/WhatAreElk/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas-fir>

<sup>26</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruminant>

<sup>28</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aspen>

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We had lunch in a large dining room only about a quarter full and remarked on how lucky we were to be seeing this without the huge crowds of summer. Unfortunately Mary had an attack of down allergy but she has pills, which mitigate the reaction.

Then we went out to the Devil's Peak and walked out on a boardwalk below the springs. A perky Park Ranger named Debbie Van Winkle, was waiting in the cold for the occasional visitor. She told us that what comes out of the spring are living microorganisms which harden to form the travertine<sup>28</sup> terraces. The outflow is colorful due to the different minerals. Also the terraces are constantly changing. The boardwalk came to an abrupt end where the terraces blocked it. They think they may have to relocate the rest soon. While Debbie's job is to educate the public I thought what a cold and lonely job it must be today. There is a smell of sulphur around the spring. The north range of the Park is at a lower elevation so there is not as much snow. Douglas Firs<sup>29</sup> and Aspen<sup>30</sup> dot the landscape. The Aspen grows from a large underground root structure, which can cover an acre.

We spotted our first bison<sup>31</sup>. Called buffalos, they really are not members of the buffalo family. In 1910 only 23 bison remained in Yellowstone. A breeding program was started and now they number about 4500. The male has a big head and straighter horns than the female. He uses his head like a shovel to reach the forage underneath the snow. He can weigh 2000 pounds. They stand almost motionless looking like they are on the buffalo nickel. Bison only live about 12-15 years in the wild for their teeth wear down and they cannot feed themselves in the winter.

We spotted more and more herds of bison as well as herds of elk as we made our way to the Lamar valley<sup>32</sup>. We saw a lone coyote. Coyotes<sup>33</sup> weigh 30-35 pounds and look like gray or brown dogs. By comparison the wolves can weigh 100 pounds.

Seventy years ago the wolves<sup>34</sup> were exterminated from Yellowstone. Then it was found that the aspen were not regenerating because the elk were eating the tender new shoots. It was thought that reintroducing the wolves would curtail the elk population. The program has not been as successful as hoped but at least the elk are now kept moving and new growth is appearing in the willows and aspen.

In 1985-96, thirty-one wolves were brought from Canada. They were kept in acclimation pens and fed carrion and road kill until they would feel at home. Two wolves managed to breed in the acclimation: Alpha female #9 and Alpha male #10. When they were released they went to Montana where the pups were born. Then someone shot the male and the female could not care for her litter. She was recaptured and put back in the acclimation pen. Later she was released again and joined a pack. Today most of the wolves descend from these first progenitors. Now there are a number of packs in the park, each having 10-18 members. Each pack has staked out his own territory so a lone wolf planning to start his own pack would have trouble finding an unclaimed space.

And then we found some wolves of the Slough (pronounced Slew) Creek Pack. They were on a hill at Soda Butte!

A lone gray wolf howled and howled hoping to attract a mate. Tenley pantomimed his call. "I'll take you to din-ner." I'll take you to the moo-vies". "I'll show you a good time." Brian quipped he'd tried that but it didn't work. He also took a movie of it that we hope will be posted on YouTube<sup>35</sup>

Then a red fox<sup>36</sup> crossed the road making it a three dog day: wolf, coyote, fox.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travertine>

<sup>29</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bison>

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.yellowstoneparknet.com/tower\\_roosevelt/lamar\\_valley.php](http://www.yellowstoneparknet.com/tower_roosevelt/lamar_valley.php)

<sup>33</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coyote>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.yellowstone-bearman.com/wolves.html>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/>

<sup>36</sup> <http://images.google.com/images?q=red+fox&hl=en&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&oi=images&ct=title>

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We drove on and experienced a whiteout<sup>37</sup>. All you could see were the reflectors on the posts to guide the snowplows. I was very glad I wasn't driving! I told Tenley to stop telling us things and just concentrate on driving.

We finally got to the NE entrance of the Park, The Silver Gate, named for the silver mining that once went on here.

Cooke City, Montana<sup>38</sup>, just beyond the gate, was our destination. Jay Cooke Jr. founded the city and he planned to bring in the railroad, but this never happened. Today 80-90 people call Cooke City home. In the summertime you can get out of the city to the east through the Colter Pass but in winter the only way in and out is the road we have just traveled from Mammoth. Our motel is the Alpine Inn. On the mountain slopes above the motel we could see an enormous burned out area. Cooke City had to be evacuated in 1988 when 36% of Yellowstone was destroyed by fire. The dead trees still stand<sup>39</sup> silent reminders of the disaster.

We had dinner at the Bistro Café, which to our surprise boasted a French chef and had escargot on the menu. One of the Cooke City residents married a Frenchman. Peggy treated us to wine so it was very festive. Each night after this another couple sprang for the wine.

Monday, January 25. We woke to a winter wonderland for four to six inches of snow fell during the night. After breakfast at the Bistro we left at dawn for the Lamar Valley.

Soon after entering the park we found the Druid Pack. We watched through the scopes while they got up out of their snow burrows and shook themselves to get rid of the snow. The white Alpha female and the black Alpha male decided to kick off the breeding season, which starts in February.

Tenley and Paul know all the wolves by their numbers and can tell which wolf came from which pack. Both have taken part in the collaring project, which places collars with GPS devices on some wolves so their behavior can be studied. A helicopter seeks out the wolves so a tranquilizing dart can be shot at the wolf. Then the ground team comes in with a veterinarian to collar the wolf. People can get their own wolf collar for \$2500 through the Yellowstone Park Service<sup>40</sup>.

The wolves moved down the ridge and found a bison lying down. We speculated that it might be an old bison. In any event there were two bison standing guard. The wolves would move in and the bison would stand them off. The wolves would back up regroup and then confront the bison again. It was fascinating to watch. Unfortunately I don't know the outcome for we were asked to move on by the Wolf Project people.

Rick McIntyre came over to speak with Tenley. He is one of the men in charge of the Wolf Project. We also saw Bob Landis<sup>41</sup> with a huge camera. He has made wolf films for the Discovery Channel as well as PBS. It looks like another wolf film is in the works!

We drove further down the road to a one-hole pit stop. Tenley had not advertised this as being pleasant but it was as clean as could be and came complete with toilet paper. Even the chemical toilet didn't smell since everything was frozen.

Across the road on a ridge were some big horn sheep<sup>42</sup>. We got out the scopes and Paul told us how horns stay with the animal all its life. You can tell the age of the animal by counting the rings, just as on a tree. A horn is a living, vein- and artery-filled, pointed projection of the skin of various animals, consisting mainly of keratin as well as other proteins

Antlers<sup>43</sup> on the other hand are shed every year. They branch and prong.

We watched some Goldeneye ducks<sup>44</sup> in the river. Then we found a coyote struggling in the deep snow.

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<sup>37</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiteout\\_\(weather\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiteout_(weather))

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.cookecitychamber.org/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.x98ruh.net/yellowstone/fire.htm>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/yell/naturescience/wolves.htm>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.montanamagazine.com/0406/25goodcomp.php>

<sup>42</sup> <http://207.158.12.146/big.html>

<sup>43</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antler>

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.shawcreekbirdsupply.com/goldeneye\\_info.htm](http://www.shawcreekbirdsupply.com/goldeneye_info.htm)

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The plan was to take a walk in the snow. Martha led the group with others helping to trample down a trail. I started out but only got a few feet before I fell. I wasn't hurt, the snow is so soft, but it made me realize that bundled up as I was with the heavy boots, snow was not my thing. I went back to the van to wait and pretty soon Mary and Tom appeared. Mac followed them. Then the whole group came back. They apparently saw very little but enjoyed the exercise after so many hours of sitting in the van.

We drove back to Cooke City and learned the road was closed into Mammoth so we are snowbound! We had lunch at the delicatessen. It was good to have a simple sandwich for a change.

After lunch we went to the gallery of Dan and Cindy Hartman<sup>45</sup>. They have taken some amazing wildlife photographs. Dan was supposed to give us a slideshow of his pictures but he is stuck in Gardiner and can't get home. Paul gave us the slide show instead. Then he aired a BBC film of the elk in Mammoth at breeding season. I don't recall the name but believe it to be part of the Planet Earth series. I bought a photograph of a wolf howling although I haven't the foggiest idea of where I will hang it when I get home.

We drove to the Park Entrance and took a picture of ourselves with the road-closed sign. We then were given a couple of hours off before dinner at the Bistro. They are starting to run out of things like salmon and some kinds of wine.

Tuesday, January 29. We got some extra sleep for departure isn't until ten! Breakfast at the deli and we boarded our vans in blowing snow. They tell us the road is open to Mammoth!

The Druid pack is where they were yesterday, burrowed in a blanket of snow.

A one coyote came down by the road and posed for pictures. We are told tourists feed them so they are hopeful for a treat. However it is dangerous for them because cars sometimes hit them. Later we found a poor coyote that had been hit. The rangers were notified so someone could come and put the poor thing out of his misery,

Then we were stopped by a herd of bison in the road. They were in no hurry to get out of the way. It was fun to have such a close-up view for they were all around the car!

We saw a golden eagle soar off displaying his 7-foot wingspan. And then we came to the part of the road where the drifts were much higher and could see why the road had been closed. A wind was blowing and we had some whiteout conditions although not as bad as last night.

A bull elk was in the road. They prefer the plowed road to the deep snow. Elk are in their prime by the time they are five and display their huge racks to attract the females. They shed their antlers each year and the new antler emerges covered with velvet that nourishes the growth. After four or five months, the velvet is rubbed off and the rack appears.

We had lunch in Mammoth and I had a delicious salmon club sandwich. Then we learned that the snow coach road into the park is closed. The snow coach road is not plowed. They only "groom" but even that could not be done today. To make sure we get to Old Faithful we will have to make a 100-mile detour around to the West gate of the park. I felt sorry for Paul and Tenley to have to make this long drive. After our tour ends, they will have to come all the way back to move the vans back to Mammoth so they will be ready for the next group coming north,

We drove north to Bozeman, stopping at the Gran Tree for a rest stop. Then we drove down passing the Gallatin Mountains following the Madison River south. It was a beautiful drive with snow on the lodgepole pines<sup>46</sup>.

At the Days Inn in West Gate we had another short rest stop and boarded our snow coaches<sup>47</sup> for the ride into the park. A teenager invented the wheels on these vans. His father took the idea and merchandized it, selling it to the army among others. They "tires" are triangular and have caterpillar treads. Each wheel costs \$2000. In summer they can take them off and go back to conventional tires.

It is about an hour drive into the Snow lodge.<sup>48</sup> It was after 8:30 PM when we arrived. The Snow lodge is next door to the historic lodge, which is closed in winter. It was built in 1999. It has a lot

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<sup>45</sup> <http://wildlifealongtherockies.homestead.com/>

<sup>46</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lodgepole\\_Pine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lodgepole_Pine)

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.yellowstonesnowcoaches.com/photos.htm>

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.yellowstoneparknet.com/old\\_faithful/old\\_faithful\\_snow\\_lodge.php](http://www.yellowstoneparknet.com/old_faithful/old_faithful_snow_lodge.php)

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of character for they have decorated it so that every piece of furniture and lampshade is decorated with wildlife. At dinner I wanted to try the elk steak but all they had left was well done so I settled for beef tenderloin.

Wednesday, January 30, 2008. They say it is a five-minute walk to see Old Faithful<sup>49</sup> but that must be in summer. Tenley led us out a back door into the snow. It must have been a foot or so deep. There was a sort of footpath but I couldn't handle it. I fell three times before we got to the groomed road. Then Paul appeared and gave me his arm and we got to the geyser.

Yellowstone is really a volcano crater. The biggest eruption took place 2,100,000 years ago. That eruption sent ash in the air that went for 646 cubic miles. The most recent eruption was 103,000 years ago and it sent material over 240 cubic miles dwarfing the Mount St Helens<sup>50</sup> eruption in 1980 that deposited ash in eleven states.

Under the surface magma<sup>51</sup> still boils and it causes 300 geysers in the park. Old Faithful is a cone geyser<sup>52</sup> and erupts every 94 minutes. A cone geyser sends up a stream of water and Old Faithful averages 130 feet.

The eruption was fun to watch. In the summer perhaps two or three thousand stand around to watch it. In winter there were perhaps 40. First the geyser sent up steam. Then it sent up more steam. Finally up shot the stream of water. From where I stood, the wind carried the steam away to the left so I saw the gush of water clearly. It was truly magnificent.

There was a walk planned for the group to see some of the other geysers but my experiences with walks have not been good. I walked back to the hotel with Margie and she treated me to a cup of hot chocolate while we waited for the others to return.

We checked out of the hotel and reboarded our snow coaches to head further south. We drove through the snow-clad mountains, crossing the continental divide three times. The highest point was over 8,000 feet. Yellowstone gets 300-400 inches of snow in the higher elevations each year.

Nick, our driver, talked about the fires of 1988. There were 51 separate fires and lightning caused most of them. 25,000 firefighters came to help put out the fires.

A logger tossing a lit cigarette on the ground caused the worst one. They traced the fire back to the butt and found it was an unusual brand. Only one store in the area carried it. From this they were able to find the man who started the fire and he confessed. Some good came out of the fire for it put nutrition into the soil. Nick also tells us the lodgepole pines need heat to germinate their seeds. Everywhere we see evidence of the fires but we also see the lodgepole pines are reforesting.

We stopped at a warming hut. Everyone but me walked down to see Yellowstone Lake. Parts of the lake are 430 feet deep. It has 141 miles of shoreline. I spent the time getting acquainted with the features on my new Sony digital camera, bought just last week<sup>53</sup>. It has a touch screen and a 5X lens. When they got back we had bag lunches in the hut before continuing on.

We stopped to see the twisting Lewis River named for Meriwether Lewis<sup>54</sup>. There were trumpeter swans<sup>55</sup> in the river. They have a 10-foot wingspan and weigh up to 28 pounds. They are the largest waterfowl in the world. There are about 450 in the Yellowstone ecosystem.

We walked a few steps off the road for a close look at a lovely waterfall. Then it was back in the van to head past Jackson Lake, which was formed by glaciers. In the early 1900s they started damming the Snake River<sup>56</sup> and this lake is the first of the reservoirs. At the South Gate, we left our snow coaches for the conventional vans with rubber tires that were waiting for us.

We drove on the J. D. Rockefeller<sup>57</sup> Memorial Parkway. He bought the land between Yellowstone and the Grand Teton National Park and gave it to the government<sup>58</sup>. The park was founded in

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/archive/yell/oldfaithfulcam.htm>

<sup>50</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount\\_St\\_Helens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_St_Helens)

<sup>51</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magma>

<sup>52</sup> [http://www.nps.gov/archive/yell/tours/fountainpaint/cone\\_geyser.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/yell/tours/fountainpaint/cone_geyser.htm)

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.sony.com/>

<sup>54</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meriwether\\_Lewis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meriwether_Lewis)

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.trumpeterswansociety.org/>

<sup>56</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snake\\_River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snake_River)

<sup>57</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_D.\\_Rockefeller,\\_Jr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_D._Rockefeller,_Jr.)

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.nps.gov/grte/>

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1929 but it only included the mountains. In 1950 the park was expanded to include the valley floor.

We took a short detour and spotted our first moose<sup>59</sup>. He has long legs so he can get around in the deep snow. They are not herd animals and it is unusual to see more than one or two at a time. This moose however was resting, buried in snow up to his neck and he looked as if someone had thrown a trophy head out on the snow. Paul identified him as a male who had lost his antlers. By April they will start to grow again,

The highest peak in the range is the 13,500 Grand Teton. We are destined to not see these spectacular mountains for there was cloud cover our entire visit. The valley is called Jackson Hole<sup>60</sup> because it is a "hole" in the mountains. It is named for David Edward Jackson<sup>61</sup> a mountain man and trapper who came here in the early nineteenth century to look for beaver. Year round settlement did not begin until the 1870s. Now about 10-15 thousand people live in the valley. It is a wealthy community with the average cost of a home \$1,200,000. Our Vice President, Dick Cheney<sup>62</sup>, has a home here.

We drove past the fenced National Elk Refuge<sup>63</sup>. The fence is to keep people out. The elk can jump the fence. On the hillside across the road we see mule deer thriving on the slope. At last we came into the town of Jackson<sup>64</sup> and checked into the Wyoming Inn<sup>65</sup>.

That night we drove into the center of Jackson to have dinner at the Cadillac Grill Restaurant<sup>66</sup> on the square. On each corner of the square is an arch made of elk antlers. We posed for a Kodak moment under one of the arches. The first arch was built in 1955. Boy Scouts are allowed to go out on the Elk Refuge and collect the antlers in the spring. They sell them for \$7-10 pound. Since a rack on a big bull elk can weigh 40 pounds it brings in a lot of money. Some goes back to the refuge but the Boy Scouts get to keep some and consequently are probably the richest troop in the country. Jackson is now in the process of replacing the older arches. Even in a dilapidated condition, one old arch sold for \$45,000.

Thursday, January 31. We drove back past the Elk Refuge toward the Gros Ventre Mountains. Gros Ventre means big belly.

Dowell spotted a big gray porcupine<sup>67</sup> in a tree and Tenley got out the scope. A porcupine spends a lot of time sleeping and feeds on the inner bark of the tree. All Rodentia all have big teeth.

We passed the town of Kelly<sup>68</sup> where modest houses are more affordable. One of the old log houses had been "shrink wrapped"<sup>69</sup> to preserve it. Martha spotted a coyote in a field.

The indigenous Native Americans were called the Sheep Eaters. They made a superior type of bowl and some have been found as far a field as Virginia. The tribe disappeared after the French trappers arrived about 1840 probably from disease.

We found four mule deer. Two carried wonderful racks on their head.

We stopped at the Teton Science School<sup>70</sup>. Tenley has taught at the school and she told us how every eighth grade child in the state of Wyoming comes here to learn about nature. There are many programs to learn about nature. Natural Habitat hired the tour arm of the school to provide us with our guides and itinerary.

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<sup>59</sup> <http://images.google.com/images?q=moose&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&oi=images&ct=title>

<sup>60</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackson\\_Hole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackson_Hole)

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.answers.com/topic/david-edward-jackson?cat=travel>

<sup>62</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick\\_Cheney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_Cheney)

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.fws.gov/nationalelkrrefuge/>

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.ci.jackson.wy.us/index.cfm?fuseaction=home>

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.wyoming-inn.com/>

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.cadillac-grille.com/>

<sup>67</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porcupine>

<sup>68</sup> <http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Kelly,+WY,+United+States+of+America&sa=X&oi=map&ct=title>

<sup>69</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shrink\\_wrap](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shrink_wrap)

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.tetonscience.org/>

## 2008 YELLOWSTONE AND GRAND TETONS

Decorating the school cafeteria were drawings and prints by Olaus J. Murie<sup>71</sup>. He and his wife Margaret came here from Alaska. He studied the elk and his book is still today the definitive book on the subject. Tenley tells us however that it is hard to read. He was the person who figured out that feeding hay to the elk was causing necrotic stomatitis (mouth sores). He also wrote A Field Guide to Animal Tracks with Roger Tory Peterson, the ornithologist<sup>72</sup>. Margaret Murie also wrote several books describing what it was like to live in Jackson Hole in pioneering days.

We stopped at Kelly Warm Springs where the water is 83 degrees<sup>73</sup>. Through the steam we could see mallards<sup>74</sup>, mergansers<sup>75</sup> and Goldeneyed ducks enjoying a swim. We understand bullfrogs and some species of African fish have been introduced to the pool.

Then we found a mother moose with her calf and watched them graze for some time in the bitterbrush patch<sup>76</sup>. She was a bit suspicious of us and may have had an unfortunate encounter with a human. Nearby was another moose but Tenley pointed out it was mere coincidence that he was here to enjoy the bitterbrush. Moose are not herd animals. Moose have a dewlap under their chin. In the male the size seems to be attractive to the female. Sometimes the male urinates and then rolls his dewlap in it to make him even more attractive!

We passed some old log cabins and were told this is where the movie, Shane<sup>77</sup>, was filmed. I saw this movie recently and enjoyed the scenery of the Grand Tetons. The cabins were not real cabins being unchinked and with dirt floors.

Returning to town we found a bald eagle. There have been many eagles on this trip. Then a herd of mule deer came running down the slope obviously frightened of something but we could not determine what it was.

Our last stop was at the National Museum of Wildlife<sup>78</sup>. The building itself is interesting looking as if it were made of loose stones to blend with the landscape. After lunch we had time to tour the museum. There was a traveling exhibit of Bart Walter's sculptures<sup>79</sup> called an Eye Toward Africa. He works in the field with wax, then finishes the sculpture in his studio. I liked the fact you could clearly see the musculature and skeleton of the animals. There were also some lovely pieces in the museum's permanent collection including the largest collection of Carl Rungius works<sup>80</sup>.

By cell phone we learned that the rest of the family has started to arrive. Brenda<sup>81</sup> was delayed coming into Salt Lake. Rather than go to a desk and rebook she went and talked to the gate agent. As a result she was one of the few standbys to get on the flight. Meg<sup>82</sup> has also arrived.

We went back to the Inn to pick them up. Then we headed for our sleigh ride on the National Elk Refuge<sup>83</sup>. It was pulled by two horses but was more a wagon on skis than a sleigh. We wrapped up in the blankets provided but because of the brisk breeze, it was the coldest we have been.

Thousands of elk come here to winter and they are fed. I find this somewhat of an incongruity. If the wolves were brought in to control the elk population, why then are they making it easier for them to survive the winter by having the preserve?

It was a wonderful sight to see them up close. Some of the bulls carried huge racks.

That night we had our farewell dinner for the tour at the Calico restaurant<sup>84</sup>. Evans and Charity,<sup>85</sup> Peter and Meryl<sup>86</sup>, Susan Schmidt<sup>87</sup>, and Brenda and Meg. This makes the party almost

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.rmef.org/Conservation/ConAwards/OlausAward/>

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9059469/Roger-Tory-Peterson>

<sup>73</sup> To be a hot spring, the temperature must be at the boiling point

<sup>74</sup> <http://images.google.com/images?q=mallards&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&oi=images&ct=title>

<sup>75</sup> [http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Common\\_Merganser.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Common_Merganser.html)

<sup>76</sup> <http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=PUTR2>

<sup>77</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shane\\_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shane_(film))

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.wildlifeart.org/>

<sup>79</sup> <http://bartwalters.com/index.html>

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/3aa/3aa569.htm>

<sup>81</sup> My granddaughter Brenda Sesiak

<sup>82</sup> My granddaughter, Megan Howard

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.fws.gov/nationalelkrrefuge/>

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.calicorestaurant.com/>

<sup>85</sup> My son, Evans Harrell, and his wife, Charity Scott

<sup>86</sup> My grandson, Peter Harrell and his wife



complete. Constance Harrell<sup>88</sup> is coming tomorrow and then we will be 22 strong. The menu had been printed to say Happy Birthday Meg. Mac and Scotti treated us to wine. Then my travel Sony computer fried its hard drive! Fortunately most of what was on the computer, I have in other locations. The bad part is that I lost my Journal so I will have to piece it back together from notes on my return home. The computer is under warranty so at least it will not cost anything to get it running again

Friday, February 1. Everyone did his own thing today. Martha, Dowell and Alta had their dogsled ride. Tomorrow they will be over the mountain in Pinedale<sup>89</sup> where Alta can take the LSAT exam<sup>90</sup>. The Harrell family went cross-country skiing. Others took the Gondola ride up a mountain to see the view.

I went into town on the free shuttle with Peggy, Scotti and Mac. We walked around the square sticking our neck into a couple of galleries. There is no shortage of wonderful art in this town. We went into Coldwater Creek<sup>91</sup> and I found a blouse to wear tomorrow. I had not brought anything but very casual clothing. Mac took off to see if he could find any scrimshaw, which he collects. We three ended up at the Teton Steak House for lunch. It was sort of a bother finding the free shuttle home but after walking four or five blocks and climbing over snow that had not been shoveled at a couple of crosswalks, we got back to the Wyoming Inn.

Mary and Tom with Brenda and Brian took me out for dinner in the evening to Burke's Chop House<sup>92</sup>. It was very elegant. I had a wonderful grilled chicken. Brian had a huge steak. They also showered me with presents, which I had not expected. Mary has been sick and they tell her it is pneumonia. She is a good sport and does not complain.

Saturday, February 2, 1928. And so we came to Groundhog Day. This groundhog did not see her shadow so it will be a short winter (perhaps ending tomorrow when we go home.) I never expected to become 80 years old. I guess I should be grateful I am in as good shape as I am. But old age is scary and I just pray I don't get some of the bad diseases I see in my peer group.

The program today was dog sledding.<sup>93</sup> We were picked up a little after eight and drove about 3/4 of an hour into the country to the Granite Creek area. We were delayed about 15 minutes while they plowed the road into the place. There were many dogs there, each with his own kennel, made from the huge drums on which they wrap telephone wire. These are Iditarod<sup>94</sup> dogs. We were briefed and offered some warmer clothing.

Then we mushed, two to a sled on our trip. There was a trainer for every two sleds. Dan, our trainer, has 24 dogs and he told us all about the ten pulling us. The lead dogs were named Chicken and Moose Head. He couldn't say enough nice things about 11-year old Chicken. She is well focused, as lead dogs should be. Females make the best lead dogs. Then there was Ida and Muck, followed by Forty Miles and Marquette. Then came Nanook and Eowyn and the wheel dogs were Chatham and Chippewa. Each litter is named according to a theme. Obviously Chippewa's litter was named for Indians. Eowyn came from Lord of the Rings<sup>95</sup>. Was Chicken from barnyard animals?

The dogs were wonderful. They wanted to run. I was bundled up in the sleigh as we followed a trail to Granite Hot Springs. Visions of the Inuit<sup>96</sup> people and the Iditarod races filled my head. The sled was fairly comfortable after we padded it with an Anorak parka. The sled seemed relatively stable but the one Charity was driving dumped Evans and Scotti drove another and threw Mac out of the sleigh. I was happy Constance and Dan took such good care of me. We

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<sup>87</sup> My stepdaughter

<sup>88</sup> My granddaughter

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.pinedaleonline.com/>

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.lsac.org/LSAT/about-the-lsat.asp>

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.coldwatercreek.com/>

<sup>92</sup> <http://restauranteur.com/burkeschophouse/>

<sup>93</sup> [http://www.wyomingtourism.org/cms/d/dogsledding\\_in\\_bridger\\_teton\\_national\\_forest.php](http://www.wyomingtourism.org/cms/d/dogsledding_in_bridger_teton_national_forest.php)

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.iditarod.com/>

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.lordoftherings.net/>

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.bigfoto.com/america/eskimos/index.htm>

mushed 5 1/2 miles. There were occasional snowmobiles and skiers on the road. The scenery was breath taking with fresh snow covering the hillsides and trees.

We stopped for refreshments and the dogs were anchored still in their harnesses. Soup and finger food was offered. There was a fire and some logs to sit on after we swept off the snow. One dog was tied to a tree. He was called a troublemaker. He seemed like a nice enough dog. Constance went and played with him.

Then such a woofing started! The dogs were ready to start back! I rode on the ski and steered for a little bit. It is akin to riding on a water ski. You must bend your legs and lean back a bit. I think I prefer to ride. Constance didn't seem to mind doing much of the driving.

It was over all too soon. Everyone seemed to have a great time.

My birthday dinner was at the Rendezvous Restaurant<sup>97</sup>. The three who had cars shuttled the rest of us to the restaurant, which gave us a private room by curtaining off an alcove. It did give us privacy. They were a little slow getting out the wine and hors d'oeuvres but then everything went smoothly.

My sister, who won the prize for best dressed, gave the first speech. She was wearing a brocade Indian<sup>98</sup> wedding costume that was a knockout. She read excerpts from An Exaltation of Larks by James Lipton<sup>99</sup>. We obviously are a "descent of family".

I read Samuel Ullman's prose poem "Youth"<sup>100</sup>. I try to hold to its philosophy.

"Youth is not a time of life; it is a state of mind; it is not a matter of rosy cheeks, red lips and supple knees; it is a matter of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions; it is the freshness of the deep springs of life.

Youth means a temperamental predominance of courage over timidity of the appetite, for adventure over the love of ease. This often exists in a man of sixty more than a body of twenty. Nobody grows old merely by a number of years. We grow old by deserting our ideals.

Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul. Worry, fear, self-distrust bows the heart and turns the spirit back to dust.

Whether sixty or sixteen, there is in every human being's heart the lure of wonder, the unfailling child-like appetite of what's next, and the joy of the game of living. In the center of your heart and my heart there is a wireless station; so long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer, courage and power from men and from the Infinite, so long are you young.

When the aerals are down, and your spirit is covered with snows of cynicism and the ice of pessimism, then you are grown old, even at twenty, but as long as your aerals are up, to catch the waves of optimism, there is hope you may die young at eighty."

Evans composed a poem:

"A young at heart lady of eighty  
Has seen it all, Greenland to Serengeti  
She's run into geysers, volcanoes, a rebel army  
and glaciers, a shipwreck, and a tsunami  
which she handled with aplomb and sedately".

Then Scotti gave a wonderful PowerPoint presentation of my life in pictures.

The biggest surprise was at the end when they announced they had bought me a wolf collar! I was bowled over. Now I must think up a name for my wolf. I don't think it will be "Fluffy" as Alta suggested.

Then we went back to the Inn and posed for a picture under the painting of the Grand Tetons. It was the only view we had of these beautiful mountains that have stubbornly stayed under cloud cover our entire visit.

Sunday, February 3. I spent the morning packing and in the afternoon flew home to Atlanta. And so my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party came to an end. It has been such fun to travel with so many of my family. I had the most wonderful time! There were times during the planning when I felt it would

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<sup>97</sup> [http://www.opentable.com/rest\\_profile.aspx?rid=5403](http://www.opentable.com/rest_profile.aspx?rid=5403)

<sup>98</sup> India Indian

<sup>99</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Lipton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Lipton)

<sup>100</sup> <http://main.uab.edu/Sites/UllmanMuseum/>

## 2008 YELLOWSTONE AND GRAND TETONS

never come off. Thanks to my travel agent, Susan Hopkins<sup>101</sup>, and Natural Habitat Adventures, it turned out perfectly.

In case I missed someone in the footnotes here is the list of everyone who came.

My sister, Peggy Krementz

My children: Scotti McCarthy and her husband Mac.

Evans Harrell and wife Charity Scott

Martha Howard and husband Dowell

Mary Harrell-Sesniak and husband Tom Sesniak

My stepchildren: John Wright Stevens

Margie Hughes with husband Bob

Susan Stevens Schmidt

My grandchildren:

Megan, Exton and Ata Howard

Peter Harrell with wife Meryl

Constance Harrell

Brian and Brenda Sesniak

Don't miss the great pictures my family took on the trip at [meges.smugmug.com](http://meges.smugmug.com)

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<sup>101</sup> <http://www.cityslick.net/Travel-Deals/Broad-Horizons-Travel-Inc-50801-27-1-0.html>