DESIGNS UPON NATURE

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE HISTORY OF YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK SINCE 1872

EDITED BY

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FIGURE 0.3. Tourists see bison (*Bison bison*) up close in the Lamar River Valley (2008). Photograph © Janet L. Pritchard, from her book, *More than Scenery: Yellowstone, an American Love Story* (George F. Thompson Publishing, 2022), 33. Courtesy of the artist.

Preface

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK remains a magical place more than 150 years after its creation. For many, the national park idea is among America's greatest gifts to the world, and in Yellowstone we have a place that is revered by locals as well as visitors from throughout the region, nation, and world. This book brings together a remarkable collection of geographers and historians who share a love for the park and a fascination for how its cultural landscapes as well as its natural wonders make it the special place that it is. Happily, with this book we fill in important gaps in what we know about Yellowstone, for *Designs upon Nature* is the first history of how and why those cultural landscapes—the built environment—have evolved since March 1, 1872, when Yellowstone became the world's first national park. This means roads, lodges, campsites, boardwalks, parking areas, waysides, and all the human artifacts that are part of the greater Yellowstone landscape and its ecosystems.

The story of Yellowstone's changing cultural landscape begins with the editors' introduction to the idea of a national park and the essential contributions that the built environment makes to the Yellowstone experience.

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Langdon Smith then focuses on the park's initial years. Smith, a cultural and historical geographer (now retired) at Slippery Rock University, reminds us that Yellowstone's landscape features and their larger cultural significance were inevitably wedded to the evolving idea of what a national park was supposed to be. As the first large-scale park, Yellowstone proved to be an amazing laboratory, an experiment that was shaped by a variety of local and national influences. Smith argues that residents living close to the park, especially in Montana, played an important role in defining the early agenda of park activities and development. Local travelers and entrepreneurs knew the park well and were key participants in early road-building activities and tourism ventures. Smith also assesses the "custodial" role of initial park superintendents, who were, in effect, "field-testing" the national park idea. Early park officials were soon challenged with balancing the same values of preservation and development that complicate park management to this day. Finally, Smith examines the experiences of early visitors in the park and ponders how they influenced the evolution of Yellowstone's cultural landscape.

Lee Whittlesey, in his chapter on the Mammoth Hot Springs area near the park's northern border, offers a detailed, meticulously researched portrait of one of the park's oldest developed areas. As a long-time Yellowstone archivist and historian, Whittlesey has had unique access to park records and has spent many years literally witnessing cultural landscape change in the Mammoth area (which serves as Yellowstone National Park's headquarters). Whittlesey reconstructs Mammoth's chaotic origins as a variety of private interests jockeyed for position and influence at the park's key northern entryway. He also traces the defining impact of the US Army upon the Mammoth landscape. When the Army took control of the park in 1886, it invested a great deal in Fort Yellowstone and watched over the evolution of tourist facilities in the area. Once the National Park Service (NPS) was established in 1916 and automobile use in the park increased, the Mammoth area saw tremendous growth in tourist facilities. Throughout his essay, Whittlesey relates a myriad of local changes at Mammoth to the larger evolution of American tourism and changing NPS policies. He concludes his Mammoth portrait in the early twenty-first century, noting how the local cultural landscape continues to evolve actively (as do the Mammoth Hot Springs themselves) and how they reflect the changing needs of the park's visitors and the evolving mandates of park managers.

Karl Byrand, a cultural and historical geographer (now retired) at the University of Wisconsin–Sheboygan, next explores Yellowstone's famed Upper Geyser Basin, home to Old Faithful Geyser and a complex accumulation of cultural landscape features. As one of the park's most visited localities, the Upper Geyser Basin became what Byrand calls "an urban island in an ocean of relative wilderness." Byrand's narrative begins with the birth of the park, when the area's remarkable thermal features were threatened with vandalism. An early encampment of soldiers helped maintain control over the basin, and a growing number of intrepid tourists were treated to a remarkable display of bubbling hot springs, multihued pools, and erupting geysers. An initial "shack hotel" and modest camping facilities were upstaged in 1904 with the grand opening of the spectacular Old Faithful Inn. To this day, the huge and sprawling inn epitomizes the "rustic luxury" of many national park hotels around the United States and remains an immensely important park destination on its own. Based on his research from the park archives, Byrand also reveals how changes at the Upper Geyser Basin development area track larger shifts in the visitor experience of park tourists. He notes the waxing and waning of bear-feeding grounds and swimming pools, all replaced in more recent years by a policy that has selectively removed some human landscape elements while formally preserving the legacy of others. The result is an amazingly complex accumulation of landscape elements that reflect multiple park management strategies, visitor preferences, and concessionaire initiatives, producing a cultural landscape that is as pluralistic and diverse as the agents who created it.

From the Upper Geyser Basin, a short journey to the east brings the reader to Yellowstone Lake and Yolonda Youngs's chapter on how that huge alpine body of water (one of the largest in the United States) has long served as another focal point for tourism development within the park. Youngs, a geographer at California State University–San Bernardino, also benefits from her many years of boating and guiding on the lake as well as from extensive overland journeys to the park archives. Her remarkable narrative uncovers a long story of human activity along Yellowstone Lake's shoreline, from archaeological sites more than nine thousand years old to recent controversies over the speed of motorboats on the lake. She begins her story with early narrative descriptions of the lake and then reconstructs how the lake became integrated into a larger "Grand Tour" of the park's attractions. Development areas at West Thumb, Lake (on the north shore), and Fishing Bridge

catered to the varied needs of visitors. In addition, boat concessionaires and fishing supply stores enabled visitors to enjoy time on the water. Even though the imposing Lake Hotel remains today (along with Grant Village on the south shore), Youngs describes how shifting concessionaire services and park management policies (encouraging a reduction in human activities in ecologically sensitive zones) have actually reduced the human presence along the lake and in subtle ways made the lake a less prominent part of the contemporary visitor experience in the park.

Diane Papineau's reconnaissance of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River is the next stop on our "Grand Loop tour" of the park's developed areas (and parallels the typical early tourist experience, which often culminated at the viewpoint of the Lower Falls). As with Youngs, Papineau's experience as a scholar in the park archives has been supplemented by additional time spent in the park as a seasonal employee. Papineau recounts how Native American oral traditions and the tales of fur trappers were gradually supplemented by scientific reports and by grand canvases of the Lower Falls that were used to promote the creation of the park in 1872. As with the Upper Geyser Basin, the Canyon area quickly became a must-see destination within the park. It became the site for a growing array of visitor cabins, lodges, campgrounds, and hotel services. Papineau reconstructs how each of these facilities shaped Canyon's cultural landscape and changing settlement pattern. She tells the story of Canyon's conversion to auto tourism and how older rustic-style visitor services were replaced by the modern, convenient "suburban sprawl" of Mission 66–era motel facilities. Indeed, Papineau discusses how Canyon's post–World War II evolution toward a more decentralized development pattern paralleled broader trends in urban America and how it offered a national park template reproduced in many other recreational settings around the nation.

Nearby Roosevelt Lodge in the northern portion of the park is our next stop on our journey through Yellowstone. Tamsen Hert, a distinguished historian of the American West and the retired head of the Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections at the University of Wyoming Libraries, is an ideal guide to this enduring developed area. Compared to other developed areas discussed in the book, Roosevelt Lodge was a comparatively later and smaller addition to the park's cultural landscape. Roosevelt Lodge's significance, however, lies not in its scale but rather its purpose. Compared to the larger and more grandiose hotels that were being developed elsewhere in the park

during the early twentieth century, Roosevelt Lodge was designed to cater to a clientele who were of more modest financial means and who sought to visit the park at a different pace. Although the rustic facility had its roots in the camp companies that were sprouting up in the park during the late nineteenth century, the development of Roosevelt Lodge proper shortly followed the introduction of the automobile to Yellowstone's cultural landscape. The lodge served as a facility that catered to budget-minded visitors who wanted a taste of the Old West and who no longer wished to be confined to the bonds of the Northern Pacific Railroad and the timetables of the park's transportation company. In essence, Roosevelt Lodge reflects the increasing democratization of Yellowstone and the national parks in general, when the parks began catering to a wider swath of the visiting public.

Finally, Timothy Davis, a leading historian with the National Park Service, reminds us that Yellowstone's road system is an integral element of the park's cultural landscape. Davis provides a wide-ranging narrative that reconstructs the long, sometimes tortuous story of how Yellowstone's elaborate Grand Loop Road took shape. We follow the tale from the pioneer era of Yellowstone's primitive stage roads to how the National Park Service carefully managed and modernized highways and bridges to fit the changing needs of the twentieth-century traveler. Davis reminds us—in the tradition of J. B. Jackson—that roads belong in the landscape and are important parts of the built environment, along with all of the lodges, tent camps, and hotels they helped connect. Davis also demonstrates how their evolution has shaped the way in which millions of visitors have experienced Yellowstone's various features. Overall, his chapter helps knit together the various stories of the park's individual development areas, and he shows how its road system literally carved a path from one set of park attractions to the next.

The chapters in this book not only tell the story of the development of Yellowstone's dynamic cultural landscape but also reveal a deeper story of the changing wants and needs of the American public, their notion of what a national park experience should be, and the efforts of park overseers, concessionaires, and other agents of change to cater to those who would venture into Yellowstone's magnificent landscape. It is here, within America's and the world's first national park, that the national park experience has been defined, developed, and displayed.