Day Hike Sampler

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yellowstone National Park

NPS/PEACO

Exploring the Bunsen Peak Trail near Mammoth Hot Springs

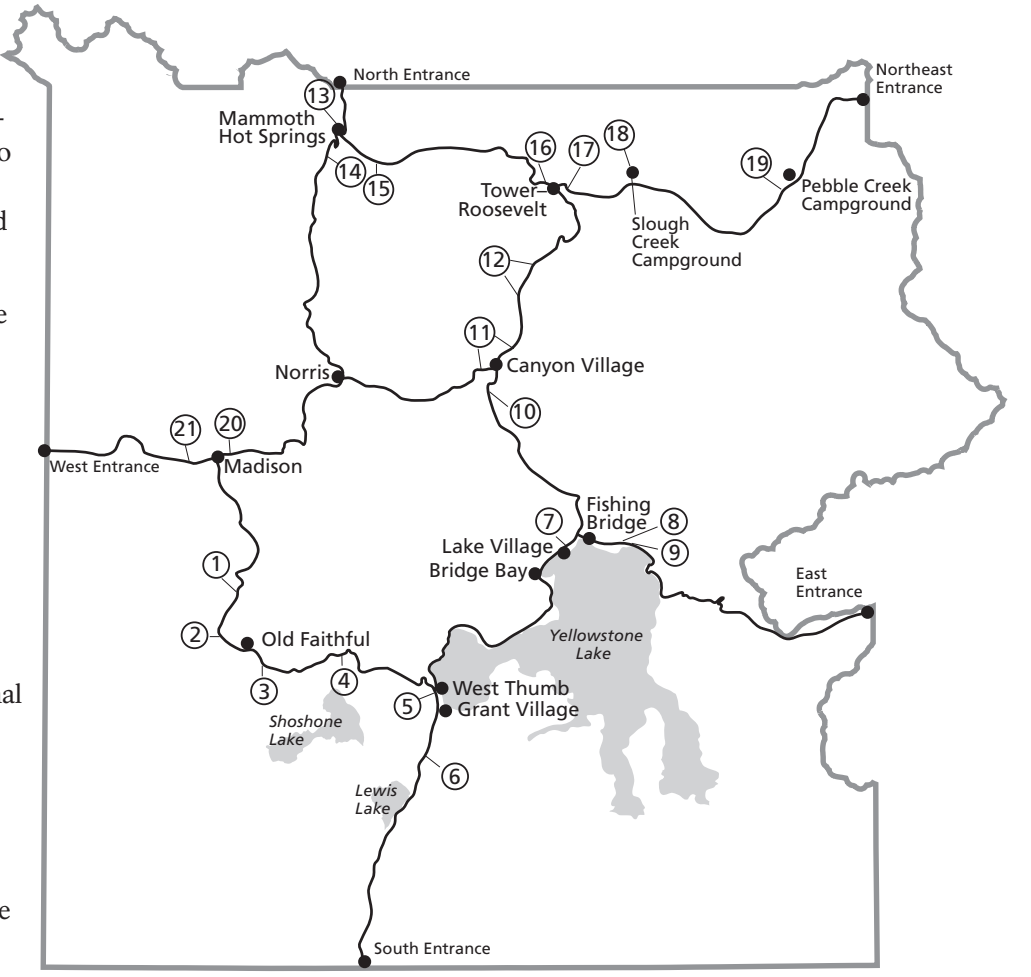
Experience more of Yellowstone

More than 900 miles of hiking trails criss-cross Yellowstone. You can explore one to seven of those miles with these suggested day hikes, numbered here by location and described briefly inside.

Overnight trips require a permit, available at a backcountry office. Day hiking does not require a permit.

For your safety—

- Check at a visitor center or ranger station for updates on trail conditions and area closures.
- Tell someone about your hiking plans, including your destination, route, and estimated time of return.
- Stay on designated trails in hydrothermal areas. Thin crust can plunge you into boiling water.
- Stay alert in burned areas. Wind may topple standing dead trees.
- Plan your hike for enjoyment. Allow yourself plenty of time to appreciate the park's views and natural wonders.



Old Faithful

1 Fairy Falls • Round trip 5 or 7 miles, 8 or 11.2 km, easy. Fairy Falls, 200 feet (61 m) high, is one of Yellowstone's most spectacular waterfalls. Choose from two routes:

- Shorter route: Park 1.0 mi (1.5 km) south of Midway Geyser Basin, cross steel bridge, walk 1.0 mi (1.5 km) to the trailhead.
- Longer route: Park at the end of Fountain Flat Drive and walk 1.75 mi (2.8 km) to the trailhead.

From the trailhead, walk 1.6 miles (2.6 km) through a young lodgepole pine forest to the falls. You can continue 0.6 miles (0.97 km) to Spray and Imperial geysers. This adds 1.2 miles (1.9 km) to the hike.
Bear management area: Trail opens in late May.

2 Mystic Falls • Round trip 2.5 miles (4 km), moderately strenuous. The trail begins at the west end of the Biscuit Basin boardwalk near Avoca Spring about 2.0 miles/3.2 km north of Old Faithful. (You can also begin 0.25 miles/0.4 km south of Biscuit Basin. Park in pullouts on either side of the road.) The trail parallels, but does not cross, the Little Firehole River for 0.7 miles (1.1 km) The trail climbs steeply to an overlook of the falls, which are 70 feet (21 m). To make a loop hike, which is 0.2 miles (0.3 km) farther with elevation gain/loss of 500 feet (152 m), continue on the trail above the switchbacks until it meets the Little Firehole Meadows Trail. Turn right, descend to an overlook of Old Faithful, and continue downhill to rejoin the Mystic Falls Trail.
Bear management area: Trail opens late May.

3 Lone Star Geyser • Round trip 4.8 miles (7.7 km), easy. The trailhead is east of Kepler Cascades pullout, 3.5 miles (5.6 km) southeast of Old Faithful overpass on Grand Loop Road. This level trail and bicycle path follows the Firehole River to the geyser. Lone Star erupts 30–45 feet (9–14 m) about every three hours. If you witness an eruption, please note the time and report it at the Old Faithful Visitor Education Center. Biking is not permitted beyond a barrier near the geyser.

Grant Village, West Thumb

4 Shoshone Lake (via DeLacy Creek) • Round trip 6 miles (9.7 km), easy. Starting at a trailhead sign at DeLacy Creek, 8.8 miles (14.2 km) west of West Thumb junction, the trail runs along the forest edge and through open meadows to the shores of Yellowstone's largest backcountry lake. Moose are seen here occasionally.

5 Yellowstone Lake Overlook • Round trip 2 miles (3 km), moderately strenuous. The trail begins at a trailhead marker near the entrance to the West Thumb Geyser Basin parking area and climbs through burned forest and a mountain meadow to a commanding view of Yellowstone Lake and the Absaroka Mountains. This trail is mostly level, with a moderately strenuous 400 foot (121 m) elevation gain near the overlook. Caution: hydrothermal area – Stay on designated trail and abide by detour signs at all times.

6 Riddle Lake • Round trip 5 miles (8 km), easy. The trailhead is about 3.0 miles (5 km) south of Grant Village junction, just south of the Continental Divide sign. This fairly level trail crosses the Continental Divide and runs through forest and marshy meadows to the shores of a picturesque little lake.
Bear management area: Trail usually opens July 15. Opening may be later if trumpeter swans are nesting on the lake.

Fishing Bridge/Lake Village

7 Elephant Back Mountain • Round trip 3.6 miles (5.8 km), moderately strenuous. Starting at a pullout 1.0 mile (1.5 km) south of Fishing Bridge junction, this trail climbs 1.0 mile (1.5 km) through a lodgepole pine forest before reaching a junction. Either trail leads in another 0.5 miles (0.8 km) to a panoramic view of Yellowstone Lake.

8 Pelican Creek • Round trip 1.3 miles (2 km), easy. Starting at the west end of Pelican Creek bridge, 1.0 mile (1.5 km) east of the Fishing Bridge Visitor Center, this easy trail travels through forest and along the lakeshore.

9 Storm Point • Round trip 2.3 miles (3.7 km), easy. Starting at a large turnout at Indian Pond, 3 miles (5 km) east of the Fishing Bridge Visitor Center, this level loop crosses meadow and forest before reaching the tip of Storm Point, where you will find expansive views of Yellowstone Lake and surrounding mountains. The trail continues along the lakeshore and through a lodgepole pine forest before rejoining the road.

Canyon

10 Clear Lake/Ribbon Lake Loop • Round trip 3 to 6 miles (4.8 to 9.7 km), easy. Start at Wapiti Trailhead on South Rim Drive to Artist Point 2.0 miles/3.2 km south of Canyon Junction on the Grand Loop Road. This relatively level trail winds through meadows and forest and passes by three lovely backcountry lakes. You can hike the entire loop 6.0 miles (9.7 km), or you can turn around at Clear Lake 3.0 miles (4.8 km) round trip, or Lily Pad Lake 4.0 miles (6.4 km) round trip. Caution: Clear Lake is a hydrothermal area. Stay on the designated trail at all times.

11 Cascade Lake • Round trip 5 miles (8 km), easy. Choose from two trailheads for this easy hike:

- Cascade Lake Trailhead, 1.25 miles (2 km) north of Canyon Junction on the Grand Loop Road
- Cascade Creek Trailhead, 0.25 miles (0.4 km) west of Canyon Junction on the Canyon–Norris Road

The Cascade Lake Trail joins the Cascade Creek Trail after 1.2 miles. if you begin on this trail, remember to bear left on your return trip. Either way, you will hike through forest and meadow to a pretty lake.

12 Mount Washburn • Round trip from Dunraven Pass 6.2 miles (5 km), from Chittenden parking area 5 miles (4 km), strenuous. From an elevation of 10,243 feet (3,107 m), Mount Washburn offers panoramic views of about 20 to 50 miles (32 to 80 km) in all directions. During July, wildflowers carpet the slopes. Look for bighorn sheep. The southern trail starts at the Dunraven Pass Trailhead and the northern trail starts at the Chittenden Road parking area. Both climb steadily about 1,400 feet (425 m). Conditions at the summit are typically colder and windier than at the trailheads, and afternoon storms are common. Carry an extra layer of warm clothing and wind/rain gear.

Mammoth Hot Springs

13 Beaver Ponds Loop • Round trip 5 miles (8 km), moderately strenuous. The trail begins between Liberty Cap and a stone house in Mammoth Hot Springs. It follows Clematis Creek, climbing 350 feet (107 m) through forest to meadows of sage and stands of Douglas-fir and aspen. After hiking 2.5 miles (4.0 km), you reach the beaver ponds. You might see beavers or their sign, but you are more likely to see muskrats and water birds. The trail continues through mixed forest and meadows, and ends on the Old Gardiner Road behind the Mammoth Hotel.

14 Bunsen Peak • Round trip 4.2 miles (6.7 km), moderately strenuous. The trail begins at the entrance of the Old Bunsen Peak Road Trail, 5.0 miles (8.0 km) south of Mammoth on the Grand Loop Road. Climb 1,300 feet (394 m) through forest to the summit, which features panoramic views. Return by same route. The nearby Old Bunsen Peak Road Trail is closed to vehicles but open for hiking and biking. *

15 Wraith Falls • Round trip 1.0 mile (1.5 km), easy. The trail begins at a pullout 0.5 miles (0.8 km) east of Lava Creek Picnic Area on the Grand Loop Road. This short, easy trail passes through sagebrush meadows, marshland, and mixed conifer forest to the base of 79-foot (24 m) Wraith Falls on Lupine Creek.

Tower-Roosevelt

16 Lost Lake Loop • Round trip 4.0 miles (6.4 km), moderate. The trail starts behind Roosevelt Lodge and climbs 300 feet up a forested hillside. At the junction, veer right (west). You reach Lost Lake in 0.2 miles (0.3 km). From there, follow the trail through a ravine to the Petrified Tree parking area. From the parking lot, the trail climbs to a sagebrush meadow, descends to the Tower Ranger Station area, and then 0.2 miles (0.3 km) to Roosevelt Lodge. If you encounter horses, move to the downhill side of the trail and remain still until they have passed.

17 Yellowstone River Picnic Area • Round trip 3.7 miles (5.9 km), moderate. Begin at the Yellowstone River Picnic area, 1.25 miles (2 km) northeast of Tower Junction on the Northeast Entrance Road. The trail climbs steeply to the east rim of the Narrows of the Yellowstone River and then follows the rim. Return the same way or make a loop by continuing to the next trail junction, where you need to turn left and descend to the road. (The Specimen Ridge Trail, strenuous and poorly marked, continues northeast.) Walk west along the road for 0.7 mile (1.1 km) to the picnic area.

Lamar Valley

18 Slough Creek (to first meadow) • Round trip 4.0 miles (6.4 km), moderately strenuous. The trail starts on the gravel road to Slough Creek Campground, climbs through Douglas-fir forest, passes through an open area, and then descends to the first meadow of Slough Creek. This trail leads to popular fishing spots and to a private ranch north of the park, so expect to see people, horses, and an occasional wagon. If you encounter horses, move to the downhill side of the trail and remain still until they have passed.

19 Trout Lake • Round trip 1.2 miles (1.9 km), moderate. The trail starts from a small pullout about 1.5 miles (2.4 km) south of Pebble Creek Campground on the Northeast Entrance Road and climbs about 150 feet (45.5 m) through Douglas-fir forest to the lake.

Madison

20 Purple Mountain • Round trip 6 miles (9.7 km), strenuous. Look for the trailhead at a turnout about 0.25 miles (0.4 km) north of Madison Junction. You climb 1,500 feet (0.47 km) in 3 miles (4.8 km) to a panoramic view of the Gibbon and Madison rivers.

21 Harlequin Lake • Round trip 1 mile (1.5 km), easy. Park at the third pullout 1.5 miles (2.4 km) west of Madison Junction on the West Entrance Road. Follow the gentle, uphill trail to a small lake.

Enjoy your hike safely and protect the park

Keep your distance. You must stay at least 100 yards (91 m) from bears and wolves. You must be 25 yards (23 m) from bison, elk, and other animals. Regardless of distance, if any wild animal changes its behavior due to your presence, you are too close.

Pack out all trash. You must keep all of your food, trash, and scented items secure unless in immediate use. Do not leave your pack unattended.

Sanitation matters. Do not wash yourself, clothing, or dishes in lakes, ponds, rivers, or streams. Bury human waste six to eight inches (15–20 cm) below ground and a minimum of 200 feet (60 m) from water. Dispose of wastewater at least 200 feet (60 m) from water or campsites.

Filter drinking water with a commercial filter, treat it with a chemical such as iodine or chlorine, or boil it at least one minute. Never drink water from a thermal area or hot spring.

Pets are not allowed on any trail or any portion of the backcountry. Service animals are allowed only by permit.

Except for some wheelchairs, wheeled vehicles are prohibited in the backcountry. Bicycles are allowed only on designated trails.

Campfires are allowed only in designated grills in campgrounds, some picnic areas and specific backcountry campsites. Liquid or gas fuel stoves or self-contained charcoal grills may be used for cooking at all picnic areas.

Do not disturb or remove any natural, archeological or historical features, such as flowers, arrowheads, or cultural artifacts.

Do not shortcut across switchbacks on steep slopes. It causes erosion and may be dangerous for hikers below you.

Possession and use of any weapons, nets, or traps are prohibited in the backcountry. Firearms are allowed in national parks pursuant to state and federal regulation. Discharge of firearms is prohibited. They are prohibited in facilities where signs are posted, such as visitor centers, government offices, and some concession operations.

Safety in Bear Country

On average, bears injure one person each year within Yellowstone National Park. Hiking in bear country takes appropriate preparation. Before you set out, be sure to learn what to do if you ever encounter a bear unexpectedly.

Remember to check at local visitor centers or ranger stations for recent bear activity before hiking, and respect all bear management closure areas. Bears and other wildlife will protect a food source aggressively. Bears with cubs are especially dangerous.

If you have a surprise encounter with a bear—

- DO NOT RUN. Back away slowly. Do not drop your pack.
- If a bear charges you, stand your ground. Use your bear spray.
- If a bear charges and makes contact with you, fall onto your stomach and "play dead."
- If a bear persistently stalks you, then attacks—fight back.
- If a bear attacks you in your tent—fight back.

Bear spray is proven to be highly successful at stopping aggressive behavior in bears.

Bear spray is sold at gift shops, outdoor stores, and bookstores inside the park, as well as in many stores in the surrounding communities.

Once discharged, bear spray should not be reused. Bear spray canisters can be dropped off for recycling at most hotels and stores, or any visitor center or ranger station.

If a bear charges at you:

- Remove the safety clip.
- Aim slightly downward and adjust for crosswind.
- Begin spraying when the charging bear is 30–60 feet (10–20 yards) away.
- Spray at the charging bear so that the bear must pass through a cloud of spray.

If the bear continues to charge:

- Spray into the bear's face.

- **BE ALERT** for bears, watch for tracks sign, or scat.
- **MAKE NOISE** in areas with limited visibility.
- **CARRY BEAR SPRAY** & know how to use it.
- **AVOID HIKING ALONE**—hike with three or more people.
- **DO NOT RUN.**

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