



## Visiting the West Thumb Area of Yellowstone

West Thumb Geyser Basin is one of the smallest geyser basins in Yellowstone yet its location along the shore of Yellowstone Lake ranks it as the most scenic. West Thumb has less geyser activity than other basins. But West Thumb, for its size, has it all-hot springs, pools, mud pots, fumaroles and lake shore geysers.

Fishing Cone has been the most popular feature. Its unusual location along the lake shore and its symmetrical cone were popularized by early stories of "boiled trout." The Thumb Paint Pots are constantly changing. In the 1920s and 30s they were very extensive and active. Since the mid 1970s, West Thumb has decreased in thermal activity. However, surveys of the lake bottom in the 1990s documented hot springs and hydrothermal vents just offshore in West Thumb. When the lake is calm you may see their swirling patterns in the water.

Known for the beautiful little geyser basin along the shore of Yellowstone Lake, this area gained popularity when the road between Old Faithful and the West Thumb of Yellowstone Lake was completed. In the 1960s, the visitor facilities were moved from the geyser basin to an area a few miles south in order to protect the natural resources.

**WEST THUMB NOTE:** West Thumb derived its name from the thumb-like projection of Yellowstone Lake and the name was given by the 1870 Washburn Expedition.

Visitors in the late 1890s and early 1900s appreciated a refreshing boat ride to Lake Yellowstone Hotel after several dusty days on rutted roads. The rustic log cabin near the parking lot was the original West Thumb Ranger Station built in 1925; it is one of the few such stations remaining. Now it serves as a summer visitor information station and a winter warming hut.

## **West Thumb Area Sites of Interest:**

### **1. West Thumb Geyser Basin Trail**

Stroll through a geyser basin of colorful hot springs and dormant lakeshore geysers situated on the scenic shores of Yellowstone Lake. Trails and boardwalks are handicapped accessible with assistance.

**Trailhead:** West Thumb Geyser Basin, 1/4 mile east of West Thumb Junction

**Distance:** 3/8 mile (1 km) roundtrip

**Level of Difficulty:** Easy; boardwalk trail with slight grade as trail descends to and climbs up from the lake shore

### **2. Yellowstone Lake Overlook Trail**

Hike to a high mountain meadow for a commanding view of the West Thumb of Yellowstone Lake and the Absaroka Mountains.

**Trailhead:** Trailhead sign at entrance to West Thumb Geyser Basin parking area

**Distance:** 2 miles (3 km) roundtrip

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderate; mostly level terrain with a moderately strenuous 400-foot elevation gain near the overlook.

### **3. Shoshone Lake Trail (via DeLacy Creek)**

Hike along a forest's edge and through open meadows to the shores of Yellowstone's largest backcountry lake. Look for wildlife in meadows.

**Trailhead:** Trailhead sign at DeLacy Creek, 8.8 miles west of West Thumb Junction

**Distance:** 6 miles (10 km) roundtrip

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderate; flat trail with no steep grades

### **4. Riddle Lake Trail**

Crossing the Continental Divide, hike through small mountain meadows and forests to the shores of a picturesque little lake. Look for moose in the marshy meadows and for birds near the lake. Bear Management Area--**trail opens July 15.**

**Trailhead:** Approximately 3 miles south of the Grant Village intersection, immediately south of the Continental Divide sign

**Distance:** 5 miles (8 km) roundtrip

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderate; level walking

## Although not hikes, check out these sites of interest in the area:

Always begin your hike by stopping at a ranger station or visitor center for information. Trail conditions may change suddenly and unexpectedly. Bear activity, rain or snow storms, high water, and fires may temporarily close trails.

### 7. Lewis Falls

Lewis Falls, named for Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark expedition, is about halfway between Grant Village and the south entrance. A roadside falls with a small parking area on the main road. A short path allows easy access to river bank or walk across the bridge to view of the falls.

### 8. Oxbow Bend (just outside the Southern Entrance of Yellowstone Park)

Oxbow Bend overlooks the backwater left by the Snake River when it cut a new southern channel. The Oxbow is known for the reflection of Mt. Moran that marks its calm waters in early morning. Use binoculars to search for bald eagles, ospreys, moose, beaver, and otter.

### 9. Cascade Corner

Cascade Corner is the name given to the far southwest section of Yellowstone National Park, beyond the edge of Pitchstone Plateau which occupies most of the area eastwards as far as Shoshone Lake and the Lewis River, and Madison Plateau to the north. Also known generally as Bechler, the region is relatively low in elevation, around 6,400 feet, and most is flat, a varied mixture of meadows, creeks, sloughs, marshes and forest; there are few thermal features, and instead **the main attractions are waterfalls** - over 20 are found here, most along the Falls River and its tributaries, others along the Bechler River and Boundary Creek. **The majority need rather a long hike to reach, up to 15 miles**, hence the region is popular with backpackers, and also notable because of the abundant wildlife (moose, beaver, wolves and black bears), the rather longer hiking season (approximately from May to November) and the general remoteness. Cascade Corner is not accessible by road from the rest of the park, cut off by mountain ranges and river canyons, and instead access is via the 19 mile Cave Falls Road, crossing Targhee National Forest land, starting at a junction with Hwy 47. Facilities at Bechler are limited to a ranger station, a few trailheads and the nearby USFS campground, and a typical weekday in summer may see only a few dozen visitors.

**Please don't limit yourself to just these places of interest... if you like history, visit the museums, walk thru the buildings or visitor center. There are more strenuous hikes, but may not be recommended for first time visitors not in good physical health. Test yourself on the short hikes. There is history and beauty all around - enjoy, and have your camera ready!**

**For more information go to: <http://www.nps.gov/yell/index.htm>**