



## Visiting Yellowstone Lake & West Thumb Area

### Yellowstone Lake & West Thumb Sites of Interest:

#### 1. Walk thru the Yellowstone Lake Hotel

Touring Yellowstone Lake Hotel is like stepping back into time... especially with a visit to the Lake Hotel. Although not as popular as the the Old Faithful Inn, this historic colonial-style hotel is the parks oldest. The Lake Yellowstone Hotel was ready to serve guests in 1891. At that time, it was not particularly distinctive, resembling any other rail-road hotel financed by the Northern Pacific Railroad.

In 1903, the architect of the Old Faithful Inn, Robert Reamer, masterminded the renovation of the Hotel, designing the ionic columns, extending the roof in three places, and adding the 15 false balconies, which prompted it to be known for several years as the "Lake Colonial Hotel." A number of further changes by 1929, including the addition of the dining room, porte-cochere (portico), and sunroom as well as the refurbishing of the interior.

In 1981, the National Park Service and the park concessionaires embarked upon a ten-year project to restore the Lake Hotel in appearance to its days of glory in the 1920s. The work was finished for the celebration of the hotel's centennial in 1991. The Hotel was placed on the National Register of Historic Places that year.

#### 2. Fishing Bridge

The original bridge was built in 1902. It was a rough-hewn corduroy log bridge with a slightly different alignment than the current bridge. The existing bridge was built in 1937. The Fishing Bridge was historically a tremendously popular place to fish. Angling from the bridge was quite good, due to the fact that it was a major spawning area for cut-

throat trout. However, because of the decline of the cutthroat population, the bridge was closed to fishing in 1973. Since that time, it has become a popular place to observe fish.

### **3. Fishing Bridge Museum and Visitor Center**

The Fishing Bridge Museum was completed in 1931. Designed so that one could see through the building to Yellowstone Lake, hence the notion of focussing on the natural resource that the building was created to interpret. It would eventually become a prototype of rustic architecture in parks all over the nation and was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1987. When automobiles replaced stagecoaches as the main means of transportation through the park, people were no longer accompanied by a guide. The Museum was built as a "Trailside Museum," allowing visitors to obtain information about Yellowstone on their own.

### **4. Bridge Bay Marina**

Bridge Bay Marina makes the most of any water exploration at Yellowstone National Park's largest lake, Yellowstone Lake, the largest mountain, high altitude lake in the United States at 7,733 feet above sea level. The lake is approximately 20 miles long and 14 miles wide. Bridge Bay is best visited from late May to late September. Many roads close in winter, so access may be limited. You can rent boats, dock your own vessel, fish, raft, kayak, sail or just explore the surrounding beauty of Yellowstone National Park. In addition, a one-hour guided tour of Yellowstone Lake is available aboard the Lake Queen. The boat departs Bridge Bay Marina and heads out and around Stevenson Island before returning. While on the water, passengers are treated to the history of the area while watching for eagles, ospreys, and shoreline wanderers such as waterfowl, and occasionally elk and bison.

## **Yellowstone Lake & West Thumb Day Hikes:**

### **5. Natural Bridge Trail**

The natural bridge is a 51 ft. high cliff of rhyolite rock that has been cut through by the erosional forces of Bridge Creek. The trail from the campground meanders through the forest for 1.2 mile. It then joins the road and continues to the right (west) for 1 mile before reaching the Natural Bridge. The short but steep switchback trail to the top of the bridge starts in front of the interpretive exhibit. To protect this fragile resource, the top of the bridge is closed to hiking. However, good views may be attained next to the bridge. The bicycle trail to the bridge begins just south of the marina off the main road.

The trail is closed from late spring to early summer due to bears feeding on spawning trout in Bridge Creek. Inquire at the Visitor Center about trail closures before hiking or bicycling these trails.

**Trailhead:** Bridge Bay Marina parking lot near the campground entrance road

**Distance:** 3 miles round trip

**Level of Difficulty:** Easy

## 6. Storm Point Trail

This trail begins in the open meadows overlooking Indian Pond and Yellowstone Lake. The trail passes by the pond before turning right (west) into the forest. It continues through the trees and out to scenic, windswept Storm Point. The rocky area near the point is home to a large colony of yellow-bellied marmots. Following the shoreline to the west, the trail eventually loops through the lodgepole pine forest and returns to Indian Pond.

**Trailhead:** Pullout at Indian Pond, 3 miles east of Fishing Bridge Visitor Center

**Distance:** 2 mile (3 km) loop

**Level of Difficulty:** Easy

## 7. Elephant Back Mountain Trail

This trail climbs 800 ft in 1-1/2 miles through a dense lodgepole pine forest. After a mile, the trail splits into a loop. The left fork is the shortest and least steep route to the top. The overlook provides a sweeping panoramic view of Yellowstone Lake and the surrounding area.

**Trailhead:** Pullout 1 mile south of Fishing Bridge Junction

**Distance:** 3 mile loop

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderately strenuous

## 8. Howard Eaton Trail

From the east side of Fishing Bridge, the trail follows the Yellowstone River for a short distance before joining a service road; the trail continues on the road for 1/4 mile. Leaving the road, the trail meanders for three miles through meadow, forest, and sagebrush flats with frequent views of the river. Wildlife and waterfowl are commonly seen here. The last mile passes through a dense lodgepole pine forest before reaching an overview of LeHardy Rapids.

To return, follow the same trail back to the trailhead. The trail does continue on for another 12 miles to the South Rim Drive at Canyon, **but is not well maintained**. This trip would require planning for a full day's hike and a return ride to the trailhead.

**This area is good grizzly bear habitat, and the trail is closed when bears are known to be in the area. Inquire at the Visitor Center before hiking.**

**Trailhead:** Parking lot on east side of Fishing Bridge

**Distance:** 7 miles round trip

**Level of Difficulty:** Easy

**Although not in the Lake & West Thumb Area,  
check out this short hike in the area:**

**9. Take the Hike to Shoshone Lake** (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 round trip

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

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.

**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>**