



## Visiting the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone

The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone is the first large canyon on the Yellowstone River downstream from Yellowstone Falls in Yellowstone National Park. The canyon is approximately 24 miles long, between 800 feet and 1,200 feet deep and between one quarter of a mile and three quarters of a mile wide. And although trappers and prospectors who visited the Yellowstone region had knowledge of the canyon, the first significant descriptions were publicized after the Cook–Folsom–Peterson Expedition of 1869. When Charles W. Cook first viewed the canyon after traveling west from the Lamar Valley on September 20, 1869 he subsequently wrote these words in his journal:

*I was riding ahead, the two pack animals following, and then Mr. Folsom and Mr. Peterson on their saddle horses. I remembered seeing what appeared to be an opening in the forest ahead, which I presumed to be a park, or open country. While my attention was attracted by the pack animals, which had stopped to eat grass, my saddle horse suddenly stopped. I turned and looked forward from the brink of the great canyon, at a point just across from what is now called Inspiration Point. I sat there in amazement, while my companions came up, and after that, it seemed to me that it was five minutes before anyone spoke.*

1890, Bozeman resident H.F. Richardson (known as Uncle Tom) was given a permit to operate a ferry across the Yellowstone River near the site of today's Chittenden Bridge and take tourists down into the canyon below the lower falls on Uncle Tom's Trail. Although the original trail no longer exists, there is still a steep stairway down to the base of the lower falls that is called Uncle Tom's Trail. The tour was concluded with a picnic and a return trip across the river.

## **Grand Canyon of Yellowstone Sites of Interest:**

### **1. Canyon Rim**

There are numerous trails and viewpoints of the canyon falls, both from the north and south rim. (In my opinion) Both, upper and lower falls, are best viewed on the South side rim trail with good viewing and photo opportunities all the way to Artistic Point which is considered the sight of Thomas Moran famous canyon painting. Other trails are: Mary Mountain Trail (21 miles one way), Howard Eaton Trail (From 3-12 miles one way, depending on destination), Cascade Lake Trail (4.5 miles roundtrip), Observation Peak (11 miles roundtrip), Grebe Lake Trail (6 miles roundtrip). Consult the park website or a day hike book for details on viewing and physical limitations.

### **2. Uncle Tom's Trail (Set of Stairs)**

Located on the South side of the canyon Uncle Tom's Trail is very different from the simple trail used by Mr. Richardson and his visitors in the early 1900's. It is still, however, a very strenuous walk (with a picturesque view of the Lower Falls) as you descend into the canyon. The trail drops 500 feet in a series of more than 300 stairs and paved inclines.

### **3. Inspiration Point (Viewing Location)**

Inspiration Point is a natural observation point. It is at a location where the canyon wall juts far out into the canyon allowing spectacular views both upstream and down.

### **4. Cascade Lake Trail**

This hike takes 3 hours and is an enjoyable walk through open meadows and over small creeks for those with limited time. Look for wildlife and wildflowers in season. Most years, this trail remains very wet and muddy through July.

**Trailhead:** Cascade Lake Picnic Area, 1.5 miles north of Canyon Jct. on the Tower-Canyon Road.

**Distance:** 4.5 miles roundtrip

**Level of Difficulty:** Easy

### **5. Grebe Lake Trail**

There is little vertical rise on this 3-4 hour hike. This trail follows an old fire road through meadows and forest, some of which burned during the fires of 1988. Once at the lake you can connect with the Howard Eaton Trail.

**Trailhead:** 3.5 miles west of Canyon Junction on the Norris-Canyon Road

**Distance:** 6 miles roundtrip

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderately easy

## Although not in the Upper Geyser Basin, check out these short hikes 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.

### 22. Mt. Washburn Trail

Mt. Washburn is the main peak in the Washburn Range, rising 10,243 ft. above the west side of the canyon. It is the remnant of volcanic activity that took place long before the formation of the present canyon. It is an excellent example of subalpine habitat and is very accessible to the average visitor. Bighorn sheep and an abundance of wildflowers can be found on its slopes in the summer. Mt. Washburn was named for Gen. Henry Dana Washburn, leader of the 1870 Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition.

**The hike to the top of Mt. Washburn is one of the most popular hikes in Yellowstone.** Two trails, each 3 miles in length, switchback to the summit where expansive views of much of Yellowstone unfold below on clear, summer days. An enclosed observation area allows you to get out of the wind. Bighorn sheep are seen quite frequently during the summer on the upper parts of the trails. Harsh alpine conditions contribute to short growing seasons for the fragile alpine vegetation on the mountain. Please stay on the trails and do not approach sheep or other wildlife to help preserve the wildness of this area.

The northern trail begins at the Chittenden Road parking area. The southern trail begins at Dunraven Pass parking area. More parking is available at the Chittenden Road Trailhead, although hikers using this trail may encounter bicycles and occasionally vehicles accessing Mt. Washburn for maintenance purposes.

**Trailheads:** Chittenden Road Parking Area, 8.7 miles or Dunraven Pass Parking Area, 13.6 miles south of Tower Junction on the Tower-Canyon Road

**Distance:** 6 miles roundtrip

**Level of difficulty:** Moderately strenuous

**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>**