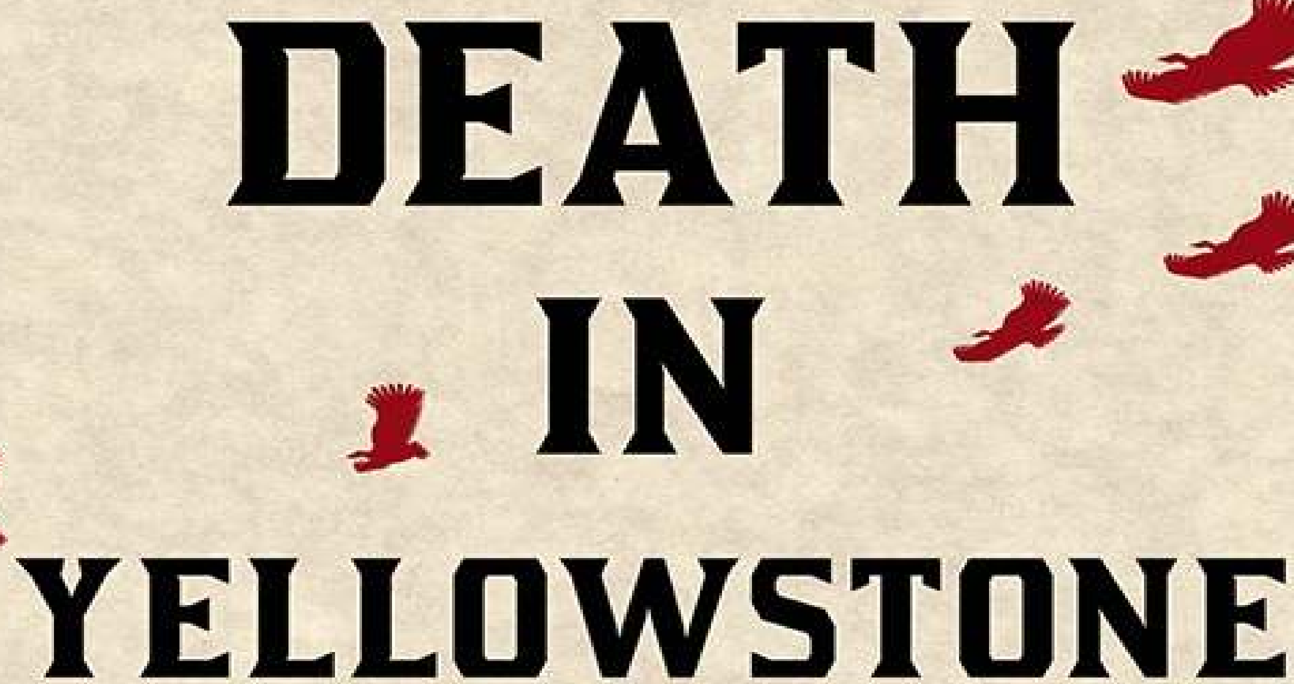

DEATH IN YELLOWSTONE

ACCIDENTS AND FOOLHARDINESS IN THE FIRST NATIONAL PARK

SECOND EDITION

LEE H. WHITTLESEY

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To Tamela Whittlesey, a remarkable partner in a wonderful journey with our daughter Tess.

To Julie Gayde Benden, who suggested the whole project.

“[In the wilderness] You’re never very far away from the edge, and if you take it for granted, it will come up and bite you!”

—Elliot Brown, 1993 rescued cross-country ski party, Aspen, Colorado

“What fools these mortals be!”

—Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

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Acknowledgments

A BOOK LIKE THIS IS DIFFICULT TO WRITE, not only because of the emotional impacts on auth and interviewees and the delicacy of subject matter, but also because in researching and publishing i I risk reopening old wounds or renewing grieving processes. Certainly it has not been my intention do either of these things. But as an historian, I am keenly aware that pieces of history can become lo when people do not want to talk about something. And for talking, writing, and helping me fir obscure materials, I have numerous folks to thank.

All Yellowstone historians owe debts to Aubrey L. Haines for so skillfully showing us the wa during his forty-plus years of researching the history of this region. I will always think of myself his student and of him as the great master. One of his remarks to us is a classic for pointing out th ephemeral nature of people and events: “History is something we have agreed to believe in.”

A number of “Yellowstone Nation” residents provided me with information for the origina manuscript based on their personal experiences. Former and present Yellowstone rangers Gerr Mernin, Bonnie Gafney, Andrew Mitchell, Jeff Henry, Mike Pflaum, Bruce Blair, John Lounsbury Stephen Dobert, Jerry Ryder, Paul Miller, Mike Robinson, Melanie Weeks, Kerry Murphy, Bo Carnes, Bobbie Seaquist, Mark Marschall, Rick Fey, Brian O’Dea, and Dan Reinhart all advised me o their roles in various incidents. Former and present T. W. Services (later Amfac Parks and Resort and, still later, Xanterra) personnel have been equally important: Andrea Paul, Leon Brunton, Lesli Quinn, Ruth Lira Quinn, Paul Shea, John Richardson, Steve Blakeley, Diane Ihle Renkin, Georg Bornemann, Jill Fitterer, Chris Marshall, Tom Woods, Mike Keller, Liz Kearney, Diane Papineau Tim Baymiller, and Sue Plummer. My fellow employees in the park’s Division of Interpretation wer kind enough to read and comment upon the original manuscript: Greg Kroll, Steve Eide, To Tankersley, Linda Tankersley, and Sandy Snell-Dobert. Members of the park research staff have als been gracious: John Varley, Don Despain, Bob Crabtree, and Rick Hutchinson. Park chief ranger Da Sholly was kind enough to read and comment upon the original manuscript. Other park employe who were helpful were Jennifer Whipple Hutchinson, Curtis Whittlesey, and Paul Rubinstein, whos photo graced the cover of the first edition of this book. Dr. Mary Meagher of the National Par Service read the original manuscript and offered me the benefit of her many years of wisdom, and regret omitting her name in oversight from acknowledgments in the first edition.

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For this second edition, Lyn Stallings, director at the Park County (Wyoming) Archives, helped me, a did Jessica Gerdes and Jackie Jerla at the Yellowstone Research Library. Archivists and museum sta at Yellowstone have been very efficient, too: Colleen Curry, Anne Foster, Bridgette Guild, Shaw Bawden, Lee Steiner, Mariah Robertson, John Wachstetter, Charissa Reid, and Jared Infanger. Marsh Karle and Jon Dahlheim in Yellowstone's Public Affairs Office were always kind and helpful, as wer their "descendants" who helped me years later: Al Nash and Amy Bartlett. My history interns an VIPs (volunteers in parks) have been good at turning up obscure items that I filed away for later: M A. Bellingham, Theresa and Steve Fisher, Michael Fox, Rachelle Schrader, Brad Snow, Juli Robinson, and Alyssa Krekemeier.

Special Yellowstone experts must be acknowledged. My friend Paul Schullery of Bozema Montana, read the original manuscript and as usual offered invaluable comments and suggestions. H and my longtime lawyer-and-historian friend, Steve Mishkin of Olympia, Washington, both read th new edition, and their careful examinations improved the manuscript. Historian Jeremy Johnston fro the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming; Xanterra interpretive specialist Leslie Quinn o Gardiner, Montana; Kerry Gunther, Yellowstone bear biologist; and thirty-year Yellowstone vetera Randy Ingersoll also read parts of the manuscript. Thanks to all of them.

For this new edition of *Death in Yellowstone*, the following people made much appreciated effor to contact me with additional details on the fatalities presented in the original book or with complete new fatalities, and those extra details about events and people (mentioned here in parentheses) appe in this edition: Aubrey L. Haines, Tucson, Arizona (Ed Wilson, Charles White, Vern Keiser); Pau Schullery, Bozeman, Montana (Matthew Carey); Mike Robinson, Bozeman, Montana (Brigit Fredenhagen and James Lee Hamer); Bruce Graham, Livingston, Montana (Charles Walter Pring John Dracon, White Sulphur Springs, Montana (Explorer Scouts drowning); H. Kim Jone Lovettsville, Virginia (Explorer Scouts drowning); Mary Eleanor Foutz, Gallup, New Mexico (Burn Wollsieffer); Steve B. Elliott (descendant of Ninian T. Elliott); Tamra Phelps, Somerset, Kentuck (descendant of Oliver Adkins); Diana Sears, Somerset, Kentucky (descendant of Oliver Adkins); Sal Kloppenburg, Corvallis, Oregon (Madison Stedman); Kent Morby, Salt Lake City, Utah (M. D. Scott Jim Barton, Three Rivers, California (a baby at Lewis Lake); Bob Flather, Galeta, California (the arm station on Wickiup Creek); Sandy Bennett, San Jose, California (Don Cressey); Shannon Wilso Tracy, California (Don Cressey); Barbara Oxford Bettevy, Pollock, Louisiana (Don Cressey Kimberly Mohney, Centralia, Washington (Edgar Gibson); Susan McFeatters, New York, New Yor (Eliza and Louise Zabriskie); Jean Lewis Ryland (Danny Lewis); Alan Dunefsky, New Paltz, Ne York (Brian Parsons); Mark Rockmore, Bethesda, Maryland (Brian Parsons); Scott Wonder, Bellevu Washington (Rick Reid); Pam Haner, Redmond, Washington (Rick Reid); John Morawetz, Cincinna Ohio (gasses); Earl Johnson, Roundup, Montana (Bill Nelson, Dick Meyers, Joe Tribble); Judson M Rhoads, Fort Collins, Colorado (his grandfather, Judson M. Rhoads); Kyle Hannon, Elkhart, India (Shane Rich); Bob Haraden, Bozeman, Montana (Mark Swift, Hugh Galusha); James V. Cou Billings, Montana (lightning); John Criger, Denver, Colorado (unknown Gardner River drownin unknown carbon monoxide death at Lamar); Rick Fey, Lake, Wyoming (drowning impressions); M Evelyn Rose, San Francisco, California (Mary J. Foster); Shirley Rush, Heyburn, Idaho (Mary Foster); Janice Weekley, Tulsa, Oklahoma (Sarry E. Bolding); Donalene O'Neill, Neihart, Monta (1950 Gardiner fire and bear story); Gary S. Bradak, Logan, Utah (Bessie Rowbottom); Earl Feli Veradale, Washington (Bessie Rowbottom); Lee Silliman, Deer Lodge, Montana (Vincent Zappala Jim Hepburn, Emigrant, Montana (C. J. Carpenter); Cheryl Williams Cummings, Wetumpka, Alaba (John Mark Williams); Mary Link, New Berlin, Wisconsin (Frank Welch); Larry C. Stokes, Wichi

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(George Trischman), Kerry Gunther, Gardiner, Montana (William Tesinsky, John Wallace), and Jef
Koechling, Boston, Massachusetts (Diane Dustman).

Finally, by way of disclaimer I must mention that although I have been a permanent employee o
the National Park Service since 1989, in this book I do not represent the NPS either formally
informally. I originally wrote this book on my own time before I came to my present job, and for th
revised edition I have done the same thing. In researching it, I have used no information that is n
available to any other writer; my sources are given in the endnotes. Interested researchers shou
know that the informational resources of Yellowstone are as vast as its natural and cultural resource
(in fact, they are arguably a cultural resource on their own). I especially recommend the great weal
of material in the library, museum, and archives collections at the Yellowstone Heritage and Researc
Center in Gardiner, Montana. Other outstanding Yellowstone collections that I have used through th
years may be found at Montana State University in Bozeman; the University of Wyoming in Larami
the Montana Historical Society in Helena; Brigham Young University Library in Provo, Utah; th
University of Oklahoma in Norman; and of course the Library of Congress and the National Archiv
in Washington, DC.

Introduction to the Second Edition

IT HAS BEEN ALMOST EIGHTEEN YEARS since Roberts Rinehart published the first edition this book, and during that time I have found that the book has held up fairly well in its informatio In my original introduction, I asked readers to write if they knew of additional fatalities that I ha missed. Sure enough, a few people provided me with actual "new" cases of old deaths. Bruce Grahan a researcher in Livingston, Montana, turned up an additional (and early! 1898!) thermal-burn fatali that I now include here. Paul Schullery of Bozeman found the early drowning of Matthew Carey, well as an 1881 death by freezing. Bob Haraden of Bozeman reminded me of deaths I had omitte involving Mark Swift and Hugh Galusha. Janice Weekley of Tulsa put me on the trail of solving th long-elusive death of Sarry Bolding. And many other correspondents provided me with addition details for already known incidents. Their names appear in the acknowledgments, and those ne details are now presented in this edition.

As I expected in 1995, I missed a few Yellowstone fatalities that were buried deeply in history. turned up many of these myself during the past seventeen years from the emerging Internet (especial in newspapers—more on that in a moment). It is good for the record that these stories can now presented here. Alongside these new stories, my original reasons for writing the book remain in plac I wrote it (1) because all the stories represent fascinating history, (2) because the stories have leg ramifications for park managers, and (3) because the book teaches important safety lessons.

I would like to believe that the original version of this book has influenced the park's safety recor if only in small ways. Regardless, the onward march of such incidents in Yellowstone has continue and so this new edition chronicles more than sixty additional human deaths. Many are from the rece period 1996 through 2012, but a fair number are older ones formerly buried in history. I reiterate he that the book does not address human deaths from auto, motorcycle, or snowmobile wrecks, nor do it address high-elevation heart attacks or deaths from illness. Far too many of those exist for me pursue them all.[1]

Those kinds of fatalities continue to keep our law enforcement rangers busy in Yellowstone durin all seasons, but we can now prevent some of them from becoming fatalities. By way of exampl several park rangers at Fishing Bridge RV Park, aided by a neighbor with a defibrillator, were able t save the life of a 67-year-old heart-attack victim on July 19, 2012. The man was not breathing and h heart had not been beating (perhaps for as long as twenty minutes) when life-support personn recovered a pulse.[2]

Since my original *Death in Yellowstone* was published in 1995, other authors have joined me writing about deaths and injuries in other national parks, and in at least one of those cases I spoke o the telephone to an author. My friend Butch Farabee joined Michael Ghiglieri to produce *Off the Wal Death in Yosemite* (2007), and Ghiglieri also produced *Over the Edge: Death in Grand Canyon* (2001 We swapped some information, and I thank those authors for that.

Almost as interesting to me as the many death incidents themselves are references I found to th way that early Yellowstone residents and writers responded generally to the subject of deaths in th first national park. A New Jersey subscriber to the *Livingston* (MT) *Post* wrote to that newspaper 1892 asking "if any tourists were ever murdered in the Yellowstone National Park." James C McCartney—one of the founders of the village of Mammoth Hot Springs in 1871 and the credite founder of the town of Gardiner, Montana, in 1880—responded to the inquiry by stating that he kne

of no such murders except for the ones that occurred during the Nez Perce war of 1877. McCartne mentioned Charles Kenck and Richard Dietrich without mentioning the violent deaths of at least tv members of the Nez Perce tribe—an old woman and a teenaged boy—whose names we do not kno but who are now chronicled in this book.[3] Just as interesting is the full-page newspaper article th appeared in the *Washington* (DC) *Times* in late 1905, provoked by the thermal death of Fannie Weel a month earlier. The article was "Dangers of the Yellowstone Park Where a Washington Woman Ha Just Lost Her Life." "In exchange for the great pleasure [nature] gives in this marvelous workshop wrote the author, who was probably John E. Sheridan, "she exacts her price . . . and the price is high. is death." Written in a style calculated to scare, this long article must have terrified its reader "Under every hands-breadth of the beauty," warned the writer about Yellowstone, "lies a pitfall." Bu then the writer ventured into unproven science when he claimed that vapors from the geysers we generally poisonous and produced a "narcotic effect" that must have "stupefied" Miss Weeks into "semiconscious state," causing her to fall into boiling water. That was stretching it, and so was th writer's statement that the brink of Lower Falls was a spot where "many venturesome sightseers hav lost their lives." The writer correctly warned of the beautiful colors of hot springs and geysers and th panoramic vistas that attracted visitors into venturing too closely onto thin crusts and near dangerous drop-offs. He ended with a note of horrific warning for his readers: "Somebody from tin to time must be drawn down into the fires to pay Mother Nature's price of a life for the delight of th thousands." Regardless of his tendency to deeply dramatize, this writer knew that caution was require in Yellowstone—as it still is today.[4]

As that article illustrates and as I stated in the first edition of this book, the nation's newspape have been and continue to be fertile sources of park history. More and more of these tales are comin to light as a vibrant Internet makes them available to us, and because of it, I am able to present ma "new" (actually old) stories in this revised volume. Through the lens of this emerging mass of histor material, I am constantly reminded that Yellowstone visitors from all fifty states and from many othe countries returned home to write interesting accounts of their trips for their local newspaper Thousands of those accounts have been turning up for the past seven to ten years, and I hope I liv long enough to see many of the others that will so emerge through time. Meanwhile, I am presentir and citing many of the "new" old ones here for you in addition to chronicling the more recent fat incidents that occurred in Yellowstone from 1995 through 2012.

Original Introduction and Recent Additions

“The Park Can Kill”

A child has died in a particularly horrible fashion in Yellowstone Park. He wandered off the boardwalk at a geyser basin and fell into a boiling hot spring.

Our hearts suffer with the parents.

But we know that there may be other deaths in the park this year from less rare incidents such as bear maulings.

Death is a frequent visitor in raw nature. And Yellowstone Park, despite the cabins and roads, is raw nature. The Park is the untamed and unfenced wildlife and the amoral energy of thermal wonders.

It cannot be treated lightly; when it is it erupts in death.

We have seen other visitors in the park who left the paths and boardwalks. We have seen visitors in the park who sat their children on bears in order to take a picture. They were lucky.

The park is not Disneyland, Rocky Mountain version. Nor is it a zoo with moats and fences separating the wild and the domesticated.

For all the trappings of men, it is wilderness. And the man who fails to accept it as such dies.

More money for more rangers to enforce the Park’s rules would help.

But until that time we urge all visitors, and urge all Montana and Wyoming residents to warn visitors again and again to obey signs in the park, to remember that Yellowstone Park is wild.

The Park is raw nature.

And it can kill.

—editorial, *Billings Gazette*, July 1, 1970

THAT SOBERING EDITORIAL SUMMED UP some of the dangers in Yellowstone National Par and noted that wilderness itself can bring death. Certainly no one who comes to Yellowstor expects death or injury to visit. Indeed, death seems antithetical to the reason for the park’s bein Yellowstone was created in 1872 “as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoymer of the people,” and the park seems to proclaim life. But there are very real dangers in true wildernes and that is part of our fascination with it. A longtime researcher of wilderness areas has noted defining them that places where one cannot be killed by a wild animal *are not* wilderness areas. fact, the word *wilderness* comes from *wilder*, a wild animal. Yellowstone National Park, of course, managed as a wilderness area.

Many visitors to Yellowstone and other national parks enter the gates with a false sense of securit These persons wrongly believe that the animals are tame and that the place surely is a lot like a ci park, with swings, horseshoe pits, golf courses, swimming pools, and total safety—a place whe lawns are watered and mowed regularly and fallen tree branches are picked up and carted away, a nicely managed, nicely sanitized. But national parks are not like that; they are places where nature ar history are preserved intact. And intact nature includes dangers.

Why would anyone write a book like this? The obvious answers are these: there are illuminatir safety lessons to be learned, there is fascinating history in the stories, and there are legal ramification for park managers. Certainly the stories are heart-wrenching. But they teach us.

I first became interested in this subject during my quest for information while I was a bus to guide and later a park ranger at Yellowstone. My interest continued at law school, where I studie many wrongful deaths and personal injury cases involving Yellowstone National Park. Death is subject that often comes up on any Yellowstone tour or in any naturalist question-and-answer sessio because this oldest of national parks does have some dangerous facets. While not pleasant, the subje is always relevant, timely, and interesting. It serves to illustrate why the park has rules and regulatio and why we must exercise reasonable care in our play.

As I delved into the subject of fatalities and injuries in Yellowstone, it became at once apparent th

there were those caused by nature and those caused by man. In the latter category are car ar snowmobile wrecks. These number in the hundreds and are not terribly interesting, so I have omitte them. But some in the man-caused category, such as murders, airplane crashes, and stagecoac accidents, are novel, interesting, and instructive, and so I have included them here. Of course, all the nature-caused fatalities are novel and instructive. After all, how often in contemporary Americ does someone get killed by a grizzly bear or by falling into a boiling pool?

In other national parks, deaths and injuries occur in some of the same ways: drownings, fall falling trees, falling rocks, lightning, and so on. But Yellowstone adds the novel ones: hot spring grizzly bears, bison, and poisonous gas. Most parks simply do not have the great variety of dangers Yellowstone. Zion National Park (Utah) reports falls from rock climbing and a few drownings, but no much else. In Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains National Park, deaths from falls, falling tree lightning, and a few freezings are the rule. In Yosemite, Grand Teton, Mount McKinley, and Rock Mountain National Parks mountain-climbing incidents occur commonly. And in California's Sequoi National Park, drownings are the leading cause of violent death, but there are some instances of eac of a few others. At the time of this book's original writing, a visitor who was struck by lightning i Sequoia was suing that park for failing to provide notice of such danger, failing to warn of the storn and failing to provide lightning protection. The judge ruled that such notice, warning, and protectio fell within the discretionary function exception to the Federal Tort Claims Act and dismissed th case.[1]

In 2011, Yosemite National Park occupied the spotlight for deaths in national parks. By late Augus of that year, sixteen people had died there from falls, drownings, and other causes. Following th philosophies presented in the earlier edition of this book, a national writer decried attempts to mak nature "tame and lawyer-vetted." "There will always be steep cliffs, deep water, and ornery an unpredictable animals," wrote Timothy Egan, "in that messy part of the national habitat not crossed b climate-controlled malls and processed-food emporiums. If people expect a grizzly bear to be benig or think a glacier is just another variant of a theme-park slide, it's not the fault of the governme when something goes fatally wrong."[2] Upon reading that column, a coworker of mine wondere whether there should be "stupid meters" erected at each park entrance gate. That is, of course, a gent poke at visitors who are naive or not paying attention or hiking barefoot on a wet and steep slope, b some visitors need to be reminded that nature can be dangerous. Meanwhile, the fatal goring of hik Robert Boardman in 2010 by a rogue mountain goat in Olympic National Park resulted in a lawsu against that park. A U.S. district judge dismissed this case in late 2012 based upon government immunity under the discretionary exception to the Federal Tort Claims Act, but plaintiffs still had th right to appeal to the Ninth Circuit.[3]

Dangers and wilderness go hand in hand. That is part of the attraction of wilderness, and danger part of the allure. The fundamental way in which we in America view wilderness, with its raw man against-nature aspects and the potential for adventure, is rooted in the idea that wilderness h dangers. Many would argue, "God save us from sanitized wilderness experiences!" Indeed, whe would the inspiration, the adventure, the interest—in short, the fun—be without some risks? In th final analysis, it is impossible to "safety proof" a national park, and those parks are often more akin Jurassic Park than to Disneyland.

Although the title of this book uses the word *accidents* for the sake of communication, I want make it clear that most of these incidents were caused by foolhardiness or negligence, or (in the cas of suicide and murder) were purposeful. Stupidity and negligence have been big elements in the stories; very few were true "accidents," especially in the "Death by Nature" section. Yet no one sti

living wants to be blamed for or feel guilty about one of these incidents. So in recounting their stori about death incidents, most of those still living will go to great lengths to avoid blame or guilt b rationalizing their actions, by claiming the incident was a total "accident" rather than due to anyone negligence, or even by fabricating parts of a story. I am not condemning anyone for this. I am simpl stating that it happens. Many lawyers believe that true accidents ("acts of God") occur very rarely, ar that someone's individual negligence is more often a factor in a death incident. Perhaps that is or reason the public does not like lawyers, because we do not wish to believe that. But in researching th book, I have come to the conclusion that, at least in most of these Yellowstone cases, the lawyers ar correct. Many people do not understand the sometimes subtle difference between negligence and true accident ("act of God"). In negligence, a person who had a legal duty to another person breach that duty and as a result causes harm. In an "act of God," a true coincidence happens, and no one ca be blamed.[4]

My friend Butch Farabee and his coauthor Michael Ghiglieri, who wrote *Off the Wall: Death i Yosemite*, have counted at least forty-eight deaths in that park since 1914 from people falling ov waterfalls, including three in one incident in 2011. Like me, these authors attribute many of thos deaths to the victims' personal negligence. People attempt brutal hikes in extreme heat or ski i extreme cold. They hike or ski alone. They drink too little water or too much alcohol. They go raftin without life jackets. They climb over guardrails and disregard signs. They go rock climbing alone i sandals. They hike barefoot on steep and even wet slopes. They enter rivers to cool off even when the cannot swim. And Ghiglieri, a near-forty-year veteran of wilderness guiding, also blames carelessne when people are taking photographs and when they are making jokes about falling (with the joke itse sometimes *causing* an actual fall!). Family members of a victim sometimes want to blame someon besides the victim, but the victim is often the one at fault.

Considerable research was necessary to turn up much of this material, as Yellowstone National Pa itself does not have complete records. I utilized all of the annual reports of the superintendent, and a of the monthly reports of the superintendent, which unfortunately exist only for the period 1917–196 I also used all known park press releases, and those case incident reports that were reachable under th Freedom of Information Act. Finally, I utilized area newspapers in great measure and person interviews, as well as the large bibliography I amassed in writing other books and article Newspapers, as every historian knows, must be used with care, most often as a supplement to mo reliable sources. Unfortunately, with all of their potential inaccuracies, caused by deadlines, distanc and other factors, newspapers are sometimes our only sources for fleeting bits of history, pieces th get too easily lost in the forward march of time, and pieces of strictly local history that get publishe nowhere else. So it is with some of my stories; they are fragmentary and nearly lost, rescued here on by means of scattered sources. For the more recent incidents, I have tried to save the details b interviewing participants where I knew of them.

Well over three hundred deaths are chronicled here and I, of course, instinctually realize somethin very important about this: every one of these deaths is or was an intensely emotional story f someone. I have learned a great deal about that from this research. I have learned about the delicat almost tender, approach that is necessary when a writer is required to deal with the emotions of som very good people in order to find out the facts. I have learned that perceptions and memories can va even among the very persons who were present at a given incident. I have learned that the inciden and their attendant circumstances can be exceedingly complex and open to vastly differe interpretations, even among fellow participants. I have learned that memories fade over time and th reminiscences can be fallible, but that we must consult them both in order to be fair to the parti

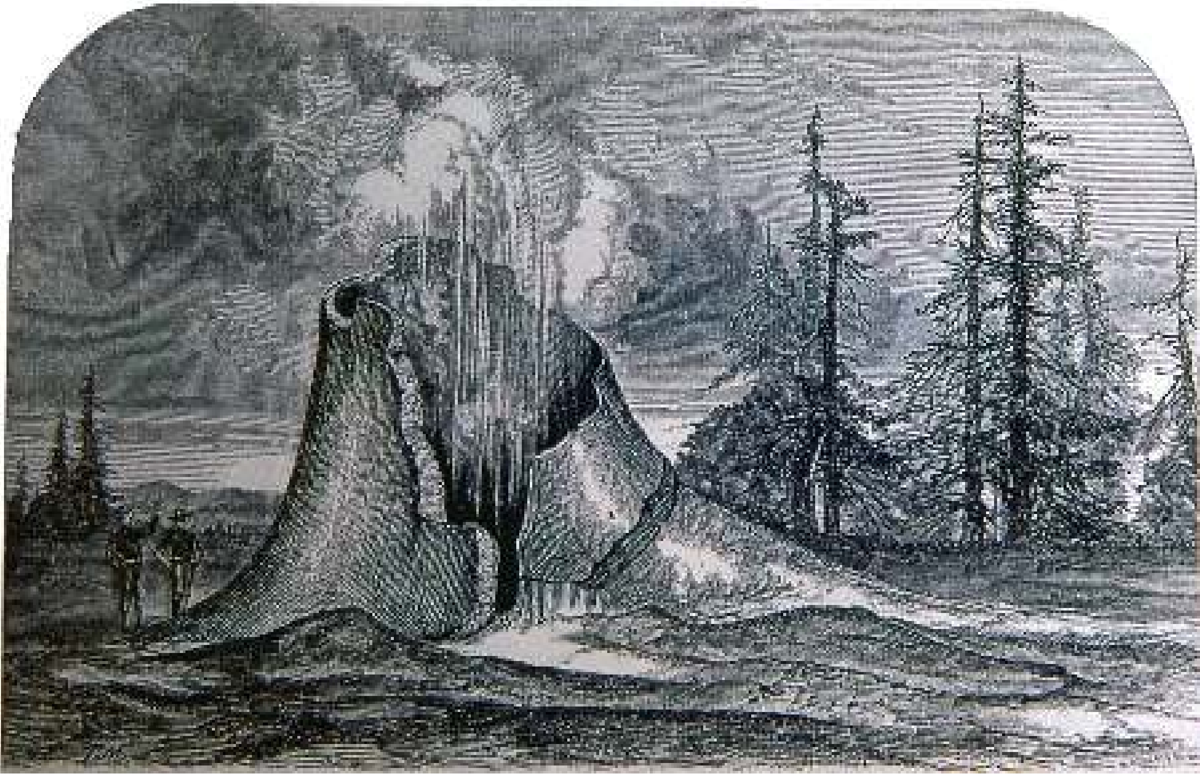
involved and to try to do justice to the story’s correctness. And I have learned to beware of th “armchair quarterback” comments of those persons who were not present at a given incident.

It is logical to assume that the record, as presented here, even after extensive efforts, is incomplet There may well be a number of instances of someone being injured in Yellowstone Park and the dying later in some faraway location. In those cases, the park may never have been notified of th death, and I have no way to find it. If you know of such a fatality involving Yellowstone, please writ to me at PO Box 228, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, 82190.

Finally, the central messages of this book, aside from fascinating history, must be these: *pl* *safely*, and think before you act.

I

Death by Nature



Hold Fast to Your Children

Death in Hot Water

He maketh the deep to boil like a pot.

—Job 41:31

IT IS A MYSTERY WHY ANYONE would dive headfirst into a Yellowstone hot spring merely t save a dog, but that is precisely what happened on July 20, 1981. David Allen Kirwan, 24, of L Canada, California, and his friend Ronald Ratliff, 25, of Thousand Oaks, parked their truck Yellowstone's Fountain Paint Pot parking lot at around one o'clock that afternoon. While the me looked at the hot springs, Ratliff's dog Moosie, a large mastiff or Great Dane, escaped from th vehicle and jumped into nearby Celestine Pool, a hot spring later measured at 202 degrees Fahrenhe The dog began yelping, and someone nearby quipped, "Oh, look, the poor thing!" Kirwan and Ratli rushed to the spring and stood on the edge of it. Ratliff and another bystander both saw that Kirwa was preparing to go into the spring, and the bystander yelled, "Don't go in there!" Kirwan yelled bac "Like hell I won't!" Several more people yelled not to go in, but Kirwan took two steps into the po then dove headfirst into the boiling water. One witness described it as a flying, swimming-pool-typ dive.

Visitor Earl Welch of Annistow, Alabama, saw Kirwan actually swim to the dog and attempt to tak it to shore, go completely underwater again, then release the dog, and begin trying to climb ou Ronald Ratliff pulled Kirwan from the spring, sustaining second-degree burns to his feet. Welch sa Kirwan appear to stagger backward, so the visitor hastened to him and said, "Give me your hand Kirwan offered his hand, and Welch directed, "Come to the sidewalk."

As they moved slowly toward the walk, Kirwan managed to say, "That was stupid. How bad am I Welch tried to reassure him, and before they reached the walkway Kirwan again spoke softly. "Tha was a stupid thing I did."

Welch was suddenly overwhelmed with the feeling that he was walking with a corpse. He could se that Kirwan's entire body was badly burned, as the skin was already peeling off. It seemed to Welc that Kirwan was blind, for his eyes appeared totally white. Another man ran up and began to remov one of Kirwan's shoes, and the men watched horrified as the skin came off with it. "Don't do that said Welch, and Kirwan responded very tiredly, "It doesn't matter." Near the spring, rangers foun two large pieces of skin shaped like human hands.

Kirwan experienced third-degree burns over 100 percent of his body including his entire head. H was taken to the clinic at Old Faithful, where a burn specialist who was coincidentally on duty cou do little for him other than to pump in intravenous fluids at a high rate. Bob Carnes, a ranger who sa him at the clinic, remembers thinking that Kirwan did not have a chance for survival. "He was blin and most of his skin was coming off." Tony Sisto, Old Faithful's acting subdistrict ranger, was als there, and he agreed. "He had no vision," said Sisto, "but was fully conscious. He talked amiably wi his caretakers, in no pain, asking the nurses to save his belt while they cut off what remained of h clothes." Ronald Ratliff's dog died in the pool and was not rescued. Oils from its body later made th hot spring have small eruptions. Kirwan died the following morning in a Salt Lake City hospital.

the men’s truck, rangers found the park’s warning literature and pamphlets. Kirwan and Ratliff ha
not read any of them.[1]

The idea of being boiled to death in a hot spring is a truly terrifying one to any rational perso
Notwithstanding the *Billings Gazette* editorial at the beginning of this book, hot-spring deaths hav
occurred much more commonly in Yellowstone National Park than have grizzly bear deaths. The par
has around ten thousand hot springs, geysers, mudpots, and steam vents scattered over its mounta
plateau. Though collectively called thermal features today, all are technically hot springs. Most a
hotter than 150 degrees Fahrenheit (sixty-six degrees Celsius), and many reach temperatures of 185
205 degrees Fahrenheit (eighty-five to ninety-six degrees Celsius). (Water boils at around 198 degree
Fahrenheit at this elevation.) These hot springs are dramatic and exquisitely beautiful features that a
also very dangerous. The 1905 writer mentioned in the introduction spent great amounts of spac
warning of thermal dangers and then stated that the beautiful color of hot springs was an attractan
“Death lurks in the path of those who venture near, fascinated by the dazzling array of hues.” Out o
twenty known human deaths from hot springs in Yellowstone, eight have been children (not includin
three teenagers). Generally, these children were not being closely supervised by their parents i
dangerous thermal areas at the times of their deaths. Because children are often oblivious to dange
around them, it is imperative that parents watch them closely in the park. Adults, too, can b
oblivious, so we must hold fast to our children, regardless of their ages.

Injuries from hot springs in Yellowstone began early. Although no known records exist of fu
trappers (1822–1840) or prospectors (1863–1869) being injured or killed by Yellowstone’s ho
springs, perhaps it happened. Nor do we know of Native American injuries or deaths from hot spring
But beginning in 1870, with the party that received credit for discovering Yellowstone, people bega
to be injured in the area’s hot springs, and the injuries were nearly always as a result of their ow
carelessness. Truman Everts, of the 1870 Washburn Expedition, was separated from the main party
Lost for thirty-seven days, he wandered to Heart Lake to seek warmth from the hot springs there an
inadvertently burned his hip in one of them.[2]

In 1871, the first known thermal injury occurred when Macon Josey and photographer H. B. Calfe
entered the area. In attempting to help a deer out of a similar predicament, Josey fell almo
completely into a “horrible seething pool” in Upper Geyser Basin near Old Faithful. His partn
Calfee noted: “I assisted my companion as quickly as possible but in one half minute he was badl
scalded from his waist down. He was so badly scalded that when I pulled his boots and socks off th
flesh rolled off with them.”

Calfee pulled Josey out and constructed a travois to carry him on, dabbing their remaining flo
onto “his raw and bleeding burns.” The travois proved unsatisfactory for “this pathless country,” s
Calfee rigged an arrangement in which Josey could sit with his legs crossed over the horse’s neck t
prevent pain to his burns. They traveled west in that manner to an old settler’s place on the Madiso
River and then north to the Gallatin Valley and Bozeman, Montana. I have tried unsuccessfully to fin
Macon Josey’s grave (probably somewhere in Montana) or anything else about him that would reve
whether or not he died from his injuries, for they were severe. If he died shortly after leavin
Yellowstone, he would represent the first human death from a hot spring in park history. But for now
Josey’s fate remains a mystery.[3]

As the numbers of tourists in Yellowstone Park increased, so did the chances of visitor injury. On
possible thermal-injury incident, if it is true, is known for 1882. According to a lengthy 188
newspaper article, traveler Walter Watson fell into a long and deep geyser tube “about 2½ miles from
Fire Hole River” that summer, while accompanied by three other men, who gave him up for dead an

left. According to Watson, the water into which he fell, some fifty feet below, was only warm, not ho—a most unusual situation in Yellowstone thermal areas. He stated that the geyser began to rise a fe hours later, carrying him to the top of the well just before it got very hot and erupted. If the who thing was a tall tale, it was a long and detailed one.[4]

At least two thermal injuries are known of for 1883.[5] One of the injured was former U.S. senat Roscoe Conkling of New York, who visited Mammoth Hot Springs that summer. A lover of hot baths Conkling asked park resident G. L. Henderson for the use of his bathhouse near Capitol Hi Unfortunately, Conkling did not know that cold water had to be added, and believing all to be readiness, stepped into the tub. He immediately sprang out, crying, "Great God, I am scalded Henderson rushed to his assistance, dumping a bucket of snow into the bath, and ordered Conkli back into it. After some time, Conkling was much better.[6]

Hot-spring injuries began occurring in greater numbers in the 1880s as visitors to Yellowstor increased. A Mr. Crossman was scalded in the Fountain Paintpot in 1884, a young boy that sam summer who convalesced at Marshall's Hotel,[7] and another man in the Artists' Paintpots in 1888.[8] lady visitor was burned in 1888[9] and another, a Mrs. Dwyer, in 1890.[10] Henry Muedeking, concessioner employee at West Thumb in August of 1893, started a long parade of thermal injurie and deaths at that location when he "strolled out one moonlit evening to the Thumb geyser, company with two hotel girls." While "monkeying around" on the formation, he broke through th crust into boiling water, badly burning his legs. Taken to Fort Yellowstone, he spent two months in th hospital there before riding the train home to Saint Paul. Muedeking would not be the last employee be injured at West Thumb. Ross P. White of Ames, Iowa, a tour guide and reportedly also Wyli Camp manager there, was guiding a group at Thumb on or about September 18, 1913, and fell into hot spring while simultaneously walking backward and talking to his group. Ross White was bad injured. A newspaper article stated that the spring burned "almost every particle of skin" from th body of the college senior.[11] Army soldiers were not exempt from injuries in the hot springs whic they were supposed to be guarding. One was burned in 1896,[12] another in 1899,[13] and a third in 1900.[14] mother and daughter were badly scalded at Thumb Paintpots in 1901 and a Chinese visitor in the sam place the same year.[15]

The two women injured in 1901 made newspapers around the country, for they were from a wel known New York family. Traveler/writer G. S. Turrill chronicled their "deaths" in Thumb Paintpots but the victims did not die. Instead, the death story Turrill heard from his brother-in-law was simp an embellishment of their injury. The incident occurred at Thumb Paintpots on July 6, 1901. Eli Garvin (Mrs. John L.) Zabriskie, age about 64, and her daughter Louise G. Zabriskie of Brooklyn, Ne York, were walking near the paintpots when Mrs. Zabriskie fell into one mud spring up to her armpit Her daughter rushed up, grabbed the mother's skirts, and attempted to pull her out. The fabric gav way, however, and the daughter fell backward into the paintpot behind her, landing in a sittin position. The two ladies, badly burned, were hastily washed off with warm water, dabbed with witc hazel by persons at the nearby lunch station, wrapped in blankets, and taken on the steamboat *Zillah* Lake Hotel. Mrs. Zabriskie was in the worse shape of the two, burned across her breast and should along with her legs and hands, while her daughter was burned mainly on her legs. The women we conveyed to Mammoth Hot Springs, where surgeon J. B. Ferguson of Fort Yellowstone cared for ther According to later newspaper reports, both survived but spent months convalescing. The two wome were from a prominent Brooklyn family, such that the woman's son (Dr. John B. Zabriskie), upo receiving a telegram from Dr. Ferguson, immediately boarded a train and headed for Yellowstone. Th women's names were misspelled (often as "LaBriskie") in many newspapers until their hometow

paper picked up the story.[16]

Photo of hot mud at West Thumb, where the Zabriskie women were injured in 1901, and a boat at dock that took them to Lake Hotel (NPS scrapbook photo 32-JN, YNP Archives)

One of the worst alleged death incidents from hot springs in Yellowstone involved four Chines laundrymen in 1889, but the best guess is that it never happened. For one thing, it supposedly occurr in the winter, a time when almost no one was historically present in the interior of Yellowstone (l alone four Chinese men running a laundry) and for another, the injury supposedly occurred "in Cany City, near the Yellowstone Park . . . a new mining town." This geography was obviously confused, f there is no "Canyon City" in or near Yellowstone and there are no accessible thermal springs at t location known as Canyon in the park. At least two newspapers picked up the story in early Februa slugging it "Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory" and proclaiming that "Yet Sing had established a wa house in a tent directly over a boiling spring." The story claimed that the spring suddenly erupted a geyser one night, scalding the four men to death and throwing their bodies some distance away. week later, *Illustrated Police News*—the nineteenth century's *National Enquirer*—picked up the sto in garish style and trumpeted it as "Boiled Chinamen in the Yellowstone Park Region," even includi a large woodcut drawing of bodies, pigtails, and washtubs being spouted into the air and stating tha was "a most singular fatality by which four Chinamen lost their lives." This ridiculousness can be other than a retelling and expanding of the Chinese-laundry fable that was already making the roun in Yellowstone by 1889. In that tall tale, a Chinese man running a laundry at Old Faithful supposed was "blown to Shanghai" when the spring, over which he had pitched his laundry tent, erupted.[17]

But reality is much more serious. As of 2013, at least twenty persons are known to have died fro hot-spring injuries in or near Yellowstone National Park, including the David Allen Kirwan fatalit The first three were children.

The details of the first human death from a hot spring in Yellowstone seem to be lost. But relative of little James Joseph Stumbo are convinced that it happened. James was born November 21, 1882, Rock Creek, Wyoming, and moved with his family to Livingston, Montana, in 1886. He died Februa 22, 1890, at the age of 7. According to descendants of his family, who still live in Livingston, Jame died after falling into a hot spring in Yellowstone National Park. That information appears in th *History of Park County, Montana 1984* and in a local tour book. A search of 1889–1890 issues of th *Livingston Enterprise* and the *Livingston Post* newspapers fails to turn up the details of the stor However, descendants told me it has been known in their family for more than a hundred years th little James's death happened that way. Unfortunately we currently know nothing else about it. B apparently it began the long, heart-wrenching history of human deaths from hot springs Yellowstone.[18]

The second such known fatality was also that of a child, and it occurred on October 5, 1898. On th day, 9-year-old Charles Walter Pring of Stacy (in Custer County near Miles City), Montana, travele with his parents by wagon to Yellowstone. The *Livingston Enterprise* reported:

> The family [was] in the vicinity of Norris Geyser Basin Wednesday of last week when the youth preferring to walk for a change, had preceded the vehicle and on reaching the geyser basin was walking by use of a cane over the formation. He reached a point where the crust near a boiling spring gave way, precipitating him into the water. He was alone and relying on his own efforts succeeded in climbing out onto the solid formation where he was found by his parents. Both legs and his left arm and side were horribly scalded. The surgeon from Fort Yellowstone was summoned, the wounds dressed and the boy removed to the Cottage hotel at Mammoth Hot Springs where he lingered in agony until relieved by death last Saturday [October 8]. The body was brought to this city Monday evening and interred in Mountain view cemetery.[19]

The *Livingston Post* newspaper added that the family had driven its wagon up from Custer County b that "since the unfortunate occurrence resulting in the death of their son, they have decided not return to their former home, but will locate in another part of the state."[20] Those devastated paren would not be the last to change their home location to a different one because of a death incident Yellowstone National Park (see David Childers, chapter 11).

Little Lester LaDuke, 4, was scalded to death at LaDuke Hot Springs (eight miles north of the par on July 23, 1905, when he fell into a bathing spring that was characterized as "one of the hottest eastern Montana."[21] The child's father, Julius LaDuke, ran the bathing resort at Horr, Montana, and th child was buried in the Horr cemetery (the grave is unmarked today).[22] Nothing more is known abo this incident, which represents an early human death from a hot spring in the Yellowstone region.

Another early fatality from a hot spring in the park occurred in 1905. There was much nation newspaper coverage of this event, and it also resulted in the full-page *Washington Times* artic "Dangers of the Yellowstone Park Where a Washington Woman Has Just Lost Her Life," which discussed in the new introduction to this book. On Friday, August 18, 1905, Fannie A. Weeks, aged 5 and a clerk for the U.S. Treasury Department in Washington, DC, was traveling by Wylie stagecoac around Yellowstone's dirt road system.[23] Her stage driver, Robert Wylie, was a divinity stude "whose guided trips were extremely interesting," according to park photographer Jack Haynes, wh remembered him. Wylie's uncle, W. W. Wylie, owned the stagecoaches and tent camps in whic

Weeks was staying.

~~At Old Faithful, Robert Wylie walked his tour group around the geyser area. Weeks was~~ ver interested in the hot springs, and Wylie warned her at one point that she was too venturesome. Th incident occurred near Grand Geyser. Standing at the edge of the crater of one of the springs ther probably Turban Geyser, Weeks "all dressed in black with a veil over her face," removed her smoke glasses to clean them of mist.[24] Haynes believed that she stepped backward without thinking and in the pool, sinking clear to her hips in water of 185–200 degrees Fahrenheit. But in a letter dictated fro her hospital bed before she died, Weeks stated that "the edge of one of the geysers gave way with m and let me down into the boiling cauldron. I am terribly scalded from the elbows. Am now Livingston in a helpless condition and under medical treatment. Do not know when I shall be able be forwarded to Washington." She landed in the spring feet first, with the water up to her wais Seeing and hearing her standing in the water screaming in pain until she became unconscious, Robe Wylie immediately jumped into the pool himself and pulled Weeks onto the side of its crater. She ha lots of petticoats on, and these, soaked as they were with hot water, continued to inflict burns for som time afterward. Wylie was himself badly burned on his legs, arms, and hands, and according to Jac Haynes, skin grafts were required to alleviate some of his injuries.[25]

Fannie Weeks was so severely burned that little hope was held for her recovery, but she lingered o at Livingston's Ebert Hotel for three weeks, finally dying on September 4. Her companion, an Eliz Hartman, remained at her side until the end, when Weeks's remains were shipped to Washington, DC for interment in Rock Creek Cemetery. Although newspapers, including a front-page story in th *Washington Post*, reported the incident as occurring at Grand Geyser, Jack Haynes remembered many years later as happening at nearby Turban Geyser but did not know that the woman had die Indeed, Turban Geyser has a much deeper and more precipitous well than Grand Geyser and woul probably have more likely been the feature being looked at from close range.[26]

Confusion over which spring was the fatal one in the Weeks incident was to continue. In 1914, Wylie Camping Company guide conducted some visitors over the formations north of Old Faithf Geyser and breathlessly whispered the horrifying story to his minions, claiming that Fannie Week had fallen into the Vault Spring near Giantess Geyser. "The lady was wearing glasses and takin notes," said the guide. "Absorbed in her note-taking with glasses steamed, the unfortunate woma walked straight into the pool." Even though the precise location and details of the incident had becom muddled, park tour guides still told the story nine years later.[27]

It was apparent from earliest park days that the hot springs were dangerous, and various attemp were made to warn visitors. An 1883 park employee, George Thomas, cautioned travelers that walkin at Norris had to be "slow and careful" because of the danger "of dropping into a hole and bein scalded to death."[28] By 1888, park tour guide G. L. Henderson had apparently posted a warning sign Norris Geyser Basin's Porcelain Terrace. Henderson noted that "Visitors ought not to cross this basi without a competent guide, and then it is at the risk of their lives. There is a [sign] board marke 'Dangerous' easily seen from the road."[29] Theodore Gerrish in 1886 commented on the "notic printed on boards in great black letters": "Do not walk on the formations."[30] Traveler Charles Gill reported that in 1892, "we frequently saw signs put up by the Government: 'Do not drive on here,' an 'danger.'"[31]

And as one would expect, each time there was an injury or (especially) a death, it served as a ne impetus to erect danger signs. Two injuries plus the 1919 death of James Hughes prompted the par superintendent to acknowledge the need for such signs:

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