

THE CampChuck REVIEWER

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Special 36.3 Special Travel Edition

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Editor, critic, layout, distribution, and general factotum ...



Streep Takes the CampChuck Hike, Bike, Kayak Challenge

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An Unorchestrated Getaway

Unlike our getaways in June to Alaska and July to Philadelphia and New York City, our August arrangements were constructed as the trip moved along.

We pre-arranged only our motel for the 2-day drive to the Tetons. After a not predetermined number of camping days, we made same-day use of Priceline and found an upscale rural ranch at way less than motel rates in Jackson. A second such online gambit decently snipped the overpriced array of motels in the town of West Yellowstone.

Some drive-by eyeballing scored our next 2 nights. Only a few miles outside West Yellowstone, at a KOA, go figure, we found an equipped, quiet, warm, and multi-room cabin – with kitchen – for substantially less than a single room in town.

Tired from a long first of three days driving home, we flopped in an OK room behind the place we happened to get dinner. Next day, Priceline did us well for our last last-minute night away.



Day by Day

1) **Fri 8/14:** Via I-80, then north at Wells, NV, drive to Best Western in Jerome, ID.

2) **Sat 8/15:** Drive to Gros Ventre Campground, Grand Teton National Park.

3) **Sun 8/16:** Get to Jenny Lake Campground before 7am to get first come, first served site. Hike Jenny paths; bike Jenny area. Evening drive included very close sighting of a 10-point elk and a post-sunset panorama from atop Signal Mountain.

4) **Mon 8/17:** Big view breakfast. Bike rides on Moose-Jenny bike paths. Drive to Lower Slide Lake formed by mile-wide mountainside collapse in 1925.

5) **Tue 8/18:** Hike Taggart Lake loop. Bike String Lake loop. Kayak String Lake. Play with French neighbors at campground including ball games and juggling lesson.

6) **Wed 8/19:** Repeat big view breakfast. Bike Jackson path; lunch in Jackson; drive to and stroll at Hansen Ranch, Swan Valley, ID. (Highway rock cracks 5 inches of windshield.)

7) **Thu 8/20:** Big Hansen Ranch breakfast. Bike Driggs-Victor path. Upper and Lower Mesa Falls. Scout places to stay. Eat Beartooth BBQ. Motel at Crosswinds in West Yellowstone.

8) **Fri 8/21:** Drive lower Yellowstone National Park loop: varied thermal action (including Fountain Paintpots, Firehole Lake, Grand Prismatic Spring, Dragon's Mouth), waterfalls (Firehole, Upper Yellowstone, Gibbon), wildlife sightings (close twice to lone bison; far from bison herd; wolf ten feet from car; bear too far to matter; herd of elk other side of river). Found a cabin with kitchen west of West Yellowstone.

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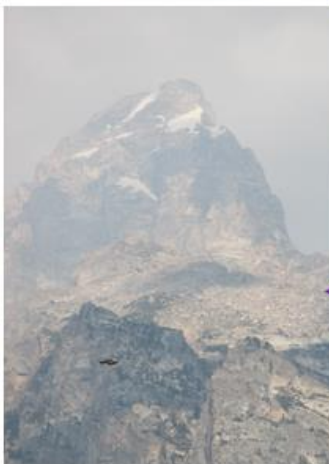
Something Just Right

There's always been something just right about bicycle speed and glad to say it still feels that way at a senior age. Bicycling the paved paths in Grand Teton National Park (essentially no bike paths when we visited in 2006), you feel the classic texture and proportion of this Rocky Mountain ridgeline. By bike on level terrain, you progress in fairly short order past the South Teton, Middle Teton, Grand Teton (highest in the Park, 13,770 ft.), Mount Owen and Teewinot.

Since the purchase we made in 2008, there's been something just right about kayaking. It's been a revitalizing way to be active out of doors. Finding lakes yet unvisited or visited once more, the maneuverings on and views from an expanse of water add a fresh dimension to being active together. Kayaking on String Lake, we looked past the notch in the Grand Teton range made by Cascade Canyon just north of Teewinot peak and south of Mount Saint John.

There's always been something just right about the baseline activity of hiking, even if it isn't as often or as far as it once was. Doing the four-mile Taggart Lake loop gave us a new perspective this time through the park. We ascended high enough, one layer up and in from the valley floor. Seven thousand feet directly up from us, the Grand(est) Teton lorded above us.

There's something just right about finding a sunny spot to temper a chilly morning. Down the road from our campsite, we made French toast for breakfast with an unobstructed view of the Teton range. Not incidentally, there was something just right about the sumptuous breakfast spread at the Hansen Ranch the morning after we left the national park.



Bike path, Grand Teton Nat'l Park

Kayaking at Stanley Lake, Idaho (didn't have camera kayaking in the Tetons)

Grand Teton (13,770 ft.)

Camping at Jenny Lake with peeks at the peaks



Manufactured Mailbag

Dear Editor,

Hasn't your wife done enough camping for you?

Enid Nufalreddy, Paiyup, UT

Dear Enid,

Not for me, my wife has always liked camping. For a few years, the drawbacks have competed with the benefits to a degree that she has flipped several times between declaring no-more-camping and let's-go-camping. She's only been my wife for 35 years. So, I don't yet understand her well enough to know if our four nights camping in Grand Teton Nat'l Park (8/2015) was the final final time.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

When will you get to my state, the only US state you haven't been to?

Juan Moore, Bowman, ND

Dear Juan,

We were less than 400 miles away from North Dakota this trip. Strategies are percolating.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

Man, this traveling, outdoorsy, nature thing of yours is really starting to bug me. Are there even movie theaters where you go?

A friend, Los Angeles

Dear friend,

The fifth installment of "Mission Impossible" marqueeed in many of the towns we drove through on this most recent outdoorsy nature thing. I won't say I don't consider a couple hours in a movie house on such trips, but it's quite easy to let it go for a few weeks at a time.

Ed.

*smoke tints the layers
green to green-brown to gray
fires stoke from afar*

**Find links to a photo set of this trip at
<http://www.campchuckus.blogspot.com>.**

Look for the "Grand Teton, Yellowstone +" link near the top right. If you click on a photo look for the "Slideshow" tab and click "Play" or click through individually.

(may work a bit differently on handheld devices)

Challenges Resolved Upon Our Return

This trip included several notable challenges. Highest on the list, the presence of smoke eventually caused us to cancel a reservation (one-third refundable) and head back to California three days early. Throughout, we exerted less than we might have though more than official advisories.

Big fires in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and northern California were doing more than wreaking havoc in their immediate areas. Haze and a smell of smoke was apparent driving east through Idaho. It was worse and persistent in varying degrees throughout our Grand Teton visit as well as the eastern Idaho corridor we explored. We didn't do Yellowstone a 2nd day.

Mornings toyed with the 30s, although it must be said that this helped keep the daytime temps moderate for the height of summer. This, along with feeling the wear and tear of covering big mileage by car, with many ins and outs of camping and motel venues, added virtual flames to the smoke.

On the bright side, after a smoky drive west across Idaho and much of Oregon, we actually felt treated, not to mention relieved, to drink the panorama of blue sky and crisply drawn natural features in the distance. Starting in the southern Oregon desert and on through our next day of kayaking Antelope Lake south of Susanville, CA, we could push onto a back burner the smoldering sense of what such a wild season of fires means.

Somewhat of a footnote in the trip challenge department, an asteroid-sized rock kicked up from a truck passing the other way on a highway south of Jackson, WY. My tenth of a second witnessing of the incident may have resulted in an inaccurate estimate of the actual size of the rock. However, for the next 1500 miles we couldn't help but see that the crack in the windshield, directly in the center of the driver's field of view, measured 5 inches ("car-taract" surgery scheduled back at home).

Single Track Mind

Our most adventure-like activity of the trip took place in Harriman State Park. The town of West Yellowstone serves as a gateway into a huge and tourist-stuffed National Park. Thirty minutes away, Harriman offers a quiet alternative.

After pedaling leisurely on its paved paths, gravel roads, and barely roads, we ventured (untypical for us) onto a single track trail around Silver Lake. Through the woods, often in sight of the lake, the surface was essentially rock free and fairly level.

About a third of the way around (where the map indicates a switch from easy to moderate difficulty), "single track" came to mean so narrow that your pedals often skimmed the wild grass that lined the trail. Sandy patches, occasional roots across the path, and steep though always short ascents required considerable concentration.

Fun, not exactly. However, it was very satisfying including a 20-minute interval watching a swan hanging out nearby. It seemed to be keeping a watchful eye on two adult and four baby swans puttering around the protector swan's corner of the lake.



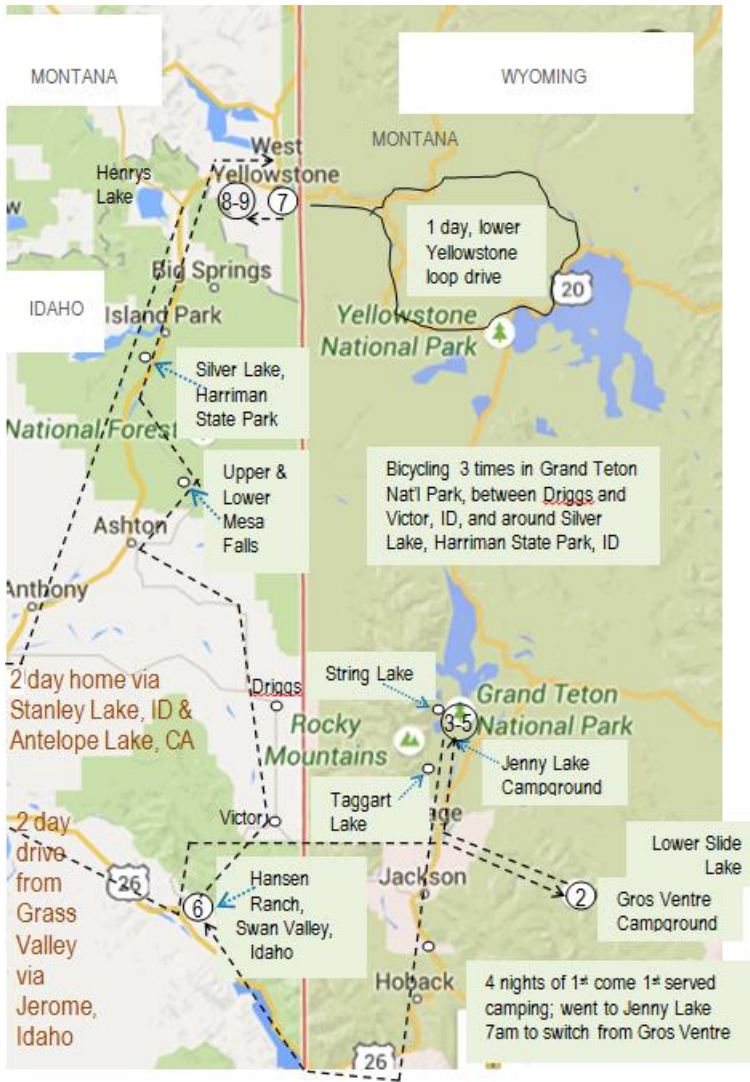
Day by Day

9) Sat 8/22: Smokiest day yet, drive to windy Henrys Lake and skip kayaking for the day. Back in West Yellowstone, cancel 3-night plan to stay in Harriman State Park (losing 2/3 of cost). Drive to Harriman and bike its roads, paths, and its single track around Silver Lake, including a long time watching swans. Stay second night in cabin west of West Yellowstone.

10) Sun 8/23: Drive past smoke hazed tallest peaks in Idaho (12K+); drive along Salmon River, kayak Stanley Lake. End long drive day at Trudy's eats and cabins.

11) Mon 8/24: Longest drive day – 520 miles – smoky through Oregon (route 20) til south of Burns (route 395); fresh, blue sky from southern Oregon into California; dinner in Alturas; Trailside Best Western in Susanville.

12) Tue 8/25: More fresh, blue sky; kayak Antelope Lake; drive home via dinner in Truckee.



Convening with Wildlife

We did quite well with wildlife sightings. Grand Teton and especially Yellowstone National Park are well known for the opportunity. Indeed, at Yellowstone expect routine traffic jams. In one case, the roadside was chockablock with parked cars and attempted parking. About 100 people clumped on a hill to watch black blur in tall grass 1/4 mile away. Binoculars corroborated, but it was barely bearly.

In our car, we stopped only several yards from an elk with a 10-point antler rack. We were a couple hundred feet from a bison twice and saw a herd in the distance. We stood a river crossing from a herd of elk. We saw lotsa birds. I was only several yards from a pronghorn deer and a few hundred feet from a moose.

Our big “score” was a wolf several hundred feet away. We drove ahead of his apparent direction and turned onto an opportune side road. The wolf loped out of the wooded grass, passed 10 feet in front of our car and scampered out of range. Photo-ready bison and elk seem only focused on grazing; a wolf is not much of a picture poser.

Would You Hang This in Your Home?



I'm not particularly an abstract art fan, but I like this rendering of ... what? Actually, it is a natural byproduct of one of the myriad geysers and other thermal features at Yellowstone National Park. Besides water spouting, steam spewing, runoff flowing, minerals staining, there's pigmented bacteria. These heat loving life forms have much to do with the vivid displays of color. Cost aside, I think I'd buy art work by pigmented bacteria before I'd buy a Jackson Pollack.

