

From: John Perry Date: May 27, 2016
Subject: Yellowstone

Dear Marilyn,

Thank you for saying that you appreciate my emails and photos; I am thus encouraged to continue. Not all the places we stay at have a sufficiently good web connection that allows me to receive and send emails, so some days may lapse between when you hear from me, but thankfully, this Thursday evening I have a good connection.

Yes, please do share my messages and photos with all, by whatever means you wish.

And yes, this is indeed a wonderful experience for us!

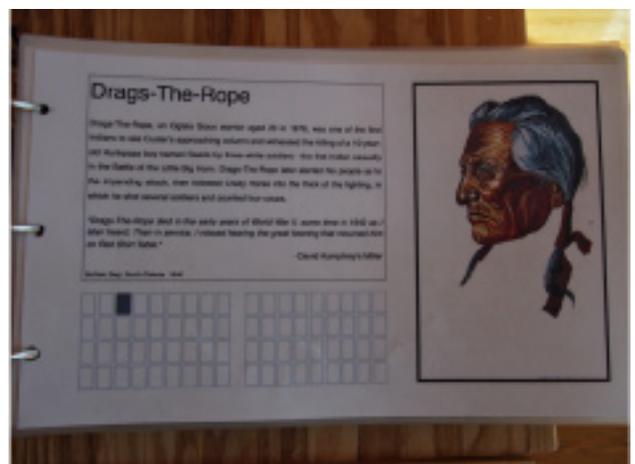
Your thoughtful comment about how geography impacts politics and economics seems quite apt; I had not appreciated this before. Our diversity is a rich treasure, then!

I am writing this from a small motel in tiny Davenport, Washington. Eastern Washington is vast, lush — but irrigated — farmland; precipitation is low in this area. One better understands the water wars out west when you see how dry this area is prone to be — and how dependent on water it is, in order to produce the food-stuffs we take for granted. I learned yesterday that in the Montana-Wyoming rolling prairie-ranchlands, the soil composition itself — comprised of a larger-than-normal amount of silicates — means that the soils do not retain much moisture even when there is adequate rainfall. The native plants and trees adapt to this marvelously, but food crops, not so much.

Anyway. We're poised here for a drive tomorrow into Seattle, where we will see our younger son David and his fiancée Kelsey. Can't wait!

This morning we left Yellowstone National Park, after a two-day layover there. Wow!

But to back up a bit, on the day we arrived in the Yellowstone area, that morning we left the Black Hills but not before a visit to the Crazy Horse monument / museum / cultural center, near Custer, South Dakota. The Crazy Horse monument is HUGE! It is being sculpted into a mountain; it has been many years in the making, and has many years to go until it is finished. Right now, his head is done and his outstretched arm is in the process of being roughed out. I don't have a photo of it. My telephoto capacity is limited; Eleanor's is better and she has a good shot, but you surely can see what it looks like online. But I do have a photo from the museum. One wall of the museum is composed of dozens of portraits painted by an artist named David Humpreys Miller, who went out west as a young man in the 1930's to listen to and paint Indians, then living, who had participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn. We thus see and hear the other side of the story of Custer's attack and defeat; this perspective is invaluable to us, I think. The first photo attached here is of one of these portrait-stories: Drags-The-Rope. I thought you might like to see this one sample.



On to Yellowstone. This was an especially important place for me; not only have I always wanted to see Yellowstone myself, but it was also one of my father's fondest dreams and yearnings. He so wanted to go out west and see the national parks, particularly Yellowstone, but he never got to go. He died about thirty years ago. So at least in part, in spirit, he got to see it through my eyes.

Attached are some photos. I'll not send ones of famous places like the falls of the Yellowstone River, nor of Yellowstone Canyon, but instead here are a few which capture some nice spots in this astounding place.

The second photo here attached is of Eleanor by Eleanor Lake! This is quite high up, so the lake in late May is still mostly ice-bound, and surrounded by snowy mountain-sides. The temperature there that day was about 42.



The third photo is from a short hike we took by the shore of with snowy mountains in the fish are told by Park officials they catch in Lake Yellow-Lake Trout are an introduced out-competing the native Cut-many Yellowstone mammals are available to those mammals ing habits and where they the (larger) Lake Trout just and eat up all the food — and Tinkering with ecosystems is works well! But sometimes we make up for previous mistakes.



Lake Yellowstone, distance. Visitors who that any Lake Trout stone MUST be killed. species, and they are throat Trout upon which depend. The Cutthroats because of their spawn-congregate, whereas hang out in deep water eat Cutthroats as well. a lousy idea! Nature have to tinker, to try to



In the fourth photo, taken high in a meadow, what's of interest is the line of rounded grey rocks that form a shelf in the hillside. These rocks are the time-and-pressure-compacted ashes from a massive volcanic eruption in Yellowstone over a million years ago. If you consider the amount of material that was ejected when Mt. St. Helens erupted, forty years ago — we've all seen photos of the devastation from that eruption — the Yellowstone eruption that produced this layer of grey volcanic rock produced, it is estimated, perhaps several hundred times as much material. Geologists think the Yellowstone hotspot erupts about every 500,000 years; the last one was 640,000 years ago. So they say we are overdue. An eruption on this scale would be cataclysmic — for a goodly portion of the continent.

In the fifth photo, with the snowy peak against the skyline (and yes, it snowed briefly that day at that altitude), in the foreground is a new lodgepole pine forest emerging amidst the skeletal stalks of pines remaining from a forest fire that hit Yellowstone in 1988. Lodgepole pines depend on fire to regenerate; they have two kinds of cones, one of which requires the hot temperatures of a forest fire for them to open and let the seeds disperse. The young pines in this forest are between 6 and 12 feet tall. This is a powerful testimony of resurrection.



The sixth and last photo is of Norris Geyser Basin; this is a familiar feature of Yellowstone, but I include it here anyway. No geysers erupted while we were there, but numerous vents constantly pour out steam and low spouts of hot water. It's loud, too; crackles and gurgles and low roars. A variety of colors can be seen amongst the vents, caused by various microscopic organisms that thrive in the hot temperatures. Talk about the extraordinary diversity of life! The hot magma which fed previous volcanic eruptions is still there underground and is still hot, fueling these vents by heating groundwater which seeps through cracks in the rock. So the Yellowstone caldera is still active; such scenes just barely suggest the massive forces at work here.

We also saw Bighorn Sheep, Bison, Elk, Pronghorns, and Blacktail Deer. No Grizzlies, but we did carry bear spray on our hikes.

Yellowstone is overwhelming. It is huge. But it also contains quietly gorgeous boreal forests, in the midst of which Eleanor and I were pleased to go for some peaceful, grace-filled little hikes.

Grace and peace to you all!

John