

Susan Kraft

Through “the Greatest Gateway to the Greatest Park”

Dudes on the Rails to Yellowstone

“**T**o-day I am in the Yellowstone Park, and I wish I were dead,” wrote a young and melodramatic Rudyard Kipling in 1889. “The train halted at Cinnabar station, and we were decanted, a howling crowd of us, into stages, variously horsed, for the eight-mile drive to the first spectacle of the Park....”¹ The young India-born Englishman was not yet famous for his words, but he nonetheless penned a memorable account of an early trip to Yellowstone, beginning with his arrival on a train. It was the fourth of July and Kipling had detrained a few miles from Gardiner, Montana, outside the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park, with throngs of flag-waving American “trippers.” The 25-year-old Kipling went on to describe a buggy ride through the park with two “old people,” including a husband who lamented the “dreffel waste of steam power” represented by the park’s geysers while his wife announced that she now had proof of hell to take home to an acquaintance who enjoyed dancing.²

The vessel from which Kipling had been “decanted” for his hellish trip through paradise was a train on the Yellowstone Park Line of the Northern Pacific Railway, the first railroad to

reach the edge of Yellowstone. This feat was perhaps the culmination of an intimate relationship, dating back to 1871, between Northern Pacific (NP) and land that would become Yellowstone National Park. Behind the belief that an area of such mystery and curiosity should be set aside for all to enjoy were some simple business goals. According to A. B. Nettleton, office manager to a Northern Pacific promoter, one William Darrah Kelley suggested having Congress “pass a bill reserving the Great Geyser Basin as a public park forever....”³ Kelley was himself a member of Congress and a NP investor. Others associated with NP would quickly join him in his thinking, seeing the potential for profit in delivering tourists to the door of (if not directly into) this unusual area of growing renown. The “Wonderland of the World,” as NP General Passenger Agent Charles S. Fee would soon describe it,⁴ was big business.

By the time of Kipling’s visit, Northern Pacific had been delivering Yellowstone-bound passengers to Cinnabar, Montana, several miles from the park border, for six years. By 1903, the railroad had worked through the litigation that had prevented it from taking passengers to the park’s northern doorstep, Gardiner, Montana. When President Theodore Roosevelt visited Yellowstone early in the season in 1903, however, his train, including his own railway car, halted on a siding, as the new tracks were not yet ready for use. The rustic NP depot in Gardiner was in place, however, and would soon be joined by the edifice of which Roosevelt laid the cornerstone during his visit. The Roosevelt Arch, completed by the Army Corps of Engineers, represented an attempt to spruce up Gardiner, a town in which, not long before, most residents had lived in tents.⁵ Other schemes aimed at beautification included a pond just outside the arch. The railroad even considered fashioning the pond in the shape of its logo, the monad, and stocking one

Postcard showing Northern Pacific train, depot, and pond in Gardiner, Montana, with the Roosevelt Arch at back. Courtesy Yellowstone National Park.



color of fish on the “yin” side and another on the “yang.”

The NP branch line to Yellowstone stemmed south from Livingston, Montana. In an 1887 letter to her aunt in Dexter, Iowa, visitor Hattie Shober paused from her account of “purloin[ing] a few specimens” from the park when the “guards” were not looking to describe her ride on the branch line. The train cut through Paradise Valley, later creating a comparison in her mind between the sights en route to the park and the park itself. With impressive views of the Yellowstone River, a smorgasbord of geological features, snow-tipped mountains, and a variety of wildlife, Paradise Valley earned its name. Shober, for one, could not help but note: “[J]ust think of that we were in Paradise, but left it to visit a portion of his Satanic majesty’s domain....”⁶ Although Shober found a different “hell” than Kipling, place names like Devil’s Thumb, Devil’s Elbow and Devil’s Kitchenette demonstrate that she was not alone in comparing the park to the underworld.

Early in Yellowstone history, visitors like Kipling were judged to be “dudes” by the park’s concessions employees, while Shober might have been branded a “dudette” or “dudine.” Wives of dudes might be saddled with the remarkably unfortunate title “dude heaver.” (In the parlance of park concessions employees, a “heaver” was a waitress.)⁷ Dudes were well-to-do individuals who could afford the cost of an extended package tour and who possessed ample leisure time. They arrived by train, were ferried around the park on five- or six-day tours in comfortable stagecoaches and buggies (and later in top-of-the-line buses or touring cars), and stayed in hotels built and owned by concerns backed by the railroads. The cavernous lobby of one such hostelry, the Old Faithful Inn, might have subtly reminded the observant dude of trestles or other railroad architecture. Small wonder; the inn’s architect, Robert C. Reamer, worked for Northern Pacific.

The north entrance, serviced by Northern Pacific and used by Yellowstone’s first dudes, was, of course, not the only way into the park. Then, as now, Yellowstone had many entrances, and the potential for profit to be made by delivering visitors to or near those other entrances was not lost on other railroad companies.

In 1901, the first train operated by the Burlington Railroad arrived in Cody, Wyoming, 50 miles east of Yellowstone. However, the road

needed to make Cody the park’s eastern gateway and bring the dudes to Yellowstone wasn’t completed until several years later. In 1924, members of the Cody family were photographed in front of the railroad’s Burlington Inn. Probably in town for the dedication or grand opening of the inn, they were relatives of William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody, the force behind the spur line that now brought the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad to the town that took his name.

However, before the east entrance road was ready for use, the Oregon Short Line, a subsidiary of the Union Pacific Railroad, reached Yellowstone’s west entrance, just over the Wyoming border in Montana, in November 1907. The following June, the first passenger train arrived on the new branch line, and a Union Pacific employee took “3 dudes’ to Old Faithful and back.”⁸ From this modest beginning, the west entrance gateway community known as Riverside would grow into bustling West Yellowstone, Montana, and, by 1923, Union Pacific would claim, in its corporate magazine, that “[t]hrough this entrance over 50 per cent of all park travel goes” and that, in the past year “[t]he Union Pacific System carried more passengers [to and from Yellowstone] than all other lines combined.” The author of the article added, “auto travel during the past year going through the West Yellowstone entrance was almost two to one greater than through any other entrance into the park....”⁹

Acceptance of the apparent inevitability of the rise in auto tourism did not come easy to the railroads, on the whole. Until the late 1920s and early 1930s, the railroads went on as before, with the assumption that passenger service would continue indefinitely.¹⁰ In fact, two railroads that threw their hats into the Yellowstone tourism ring did so only after the automobile was a common site on Yellowstone roads.

In a 1925 brochure, the Chicago and North Western (C&NW) Railway advertised an “ENTIRELY NEW ROUTE to YELLOWSTONE PARK via Lander—The Southern Entrance.” Lander, Wyoming, 150 miles southeast of Yellowstone, is one of the most far-flung towns to consider itself a gateway to the park. The 1925 brochure featured an American Indian in a war bonnet on the cover, and romanticized the long journey visitors would make “[t]hrough valleys and over plains [r]ich in Indian lore and traditions” in a “high-powered motor stage” to

Photo from Union Pacific Railroad program advertising the opening of Yellowstone's west entrance for the 1928 season. Courtesy Yellowstone National Park.



Yellowstone. Also included was the combination warning and slogan: “Costs a little more, but worth it.”¹¹ Indeed, rates for the 1926 season reveal that, while the “American plan tour” that involved either entering or exiting via Lander cost \$86.00, including lodging, tours from Gardiner, West Yellowstone or Cody cost only \$54.00, including lodging and meals.¹²

Another, somewhat closer, gateway to Yellowstone was southwest of Bozeman, Montana and about 40 miles from the park. In 1926, the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway began delivering Yellowstone-bound passengers to Salesville (soon to be renamed Gallatin Gateway), Montana. Aware of the competition it faced from the other railroads and other park entrances, the Milwaukee Road boasted “the only electrified transcontinental main line,” promising “freedom from soot and cinders.” An early brochure also pointed out that Gallatin was the only park gateway “offering a Regular Park Tour from a main line transcontinental railroad station—Three Forks [Montana]” with “no branch line travel,” and proclaimed the terminus “The Greatest Gateway to the Greatest National Park!”¹³ In 1927, the Milwaukee Road opened a stately hotel of “semi-Spanish design,” the Gallatin Gateway Inn, describing it as “the richest achievement that the hand of Man has contributed to this Wonderland.”¹⁴ Standard park buses (or, by special arrangement, Lincoln touring cars¹⁵) picked up dudes nicknamed “Gallagaters”¹⁶ for four-day tours beginning in the scenic Gallatin River Canyon and ending in Gardiner or Cody.¹⁷ The

last railroad to begin providing service to a Yellowstone gateway community, the Milwaukee Road was also one of the last railroads to continue passenger service for Yellowstone-bound visitors, discontinuing service only in 1961.

But, years before Chicago & North Western abandoned its line to Lander in 1972,¹⁸ before Union Pacific ended passenger service to West Yellowstone in 1960;¹⁹ before Burlington stopped servicing Cody in 1956, and before Northern Pacific ran its last passenger train to Gardiner in 1948,²⁰ the golden age of the dude had come and gone. After World War II it was clear, even to the railroads, that the automobilist was not only in Yellowstone to stay, but represented an ever-increasing percentage of park visitors. Even before the war began, motorists were outnumbering rail passengers by more than 12 to one at the West Entrance.²¹ And the world of the dude and that of the motorist had little in common. While the dude felt comfortable in lavish hotels, expected to change for dinner, and often selected a structured tour package, the automobilist wanted to feel comfortable and to set his own schedule, and often couldn't afford an extended vacation. But gradually, in Yellowstone, the motorist has taken over the dude's world, to the point where dress is casual in even the finest of park hotels and dining rooms, few Americans travel to the park on package tours, and scores of cars squeeze into areas that once had to accommodate only a modest caravan of stagecoaches or buses.

But the dude survives. In letters; in historic photos showing him carrying snowballs in his stagecoach in July; in the survivors among those great edifices designed to attract him—the Roosevelt Arch, the Old Faithful and Gallatin Gateway Inns, and others; in enticing railroad brochures assuring prospective female travelers that “[f]ully 60 percent of the Park visitors are women and a large percentage of them travel unescorted”;²² and in the memories and stories of those park employees who protected, educated, cared for, and entertained those visitors whose experience in Yellowstone began with a train ride, the dude lives, and will always be a part of Yellowstone.

Notes

- ¹ Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea: Letters of Travel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910).
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ A. B. Nettleton to F. V. Hayden, 27 October 1871, Record Group 57, Records of the Department of the

- Interior, Geological Survey, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
- 4 Alfred Runte, *Trains of Discovery: Western Railroads and the National Parks* (Niwot, Colo.: Roberts Reinhart Publishers, 1994), 13.
 - 5 Richard A. Bartlett, *Yellowstone: A Wilderness Besieged* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 44.
 - 6 Hattie Shober to Mary Shober, 4 September 1887, Manuscript Files, Accession #92-47, Yellowstone National Park Research Library.
 - 7 Aubrey Haines, *The Yellowstone Story*, vol. 2 (Yellowstone National Park, Wyo.: Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, in cooperation with Colorado Associated University Press, 1977), 101-102.
 - 8 Thornton Waite, *Yellowstone Branch of the Union Pacific* (Columbia, Mo.: Brueggjenjohann/Reese; Idaho Falls: Thornton Waite, 1997), 90.
 - 9 John Arnold Cannon, "A New Highway to Yellowstone," *The Union Pacific Magazine*, July 1923, 6, 9.
 - 10 Bartlett, 92.
 - 11 Teton Mountain Route to Yellowstone Park (N.p.: Chicago and North Western Line, 1925.) Railroad Brochures, Accession #97-67, Yellowstone National Park Research Library.
 - 12 National Parks Circular No. 1: Rates and Service in the National Parks for the Season 1926 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of the Interior, 1926), 6. Railroad Brochures, Accession #96-69, Yellowstone National Park Research Library.
 - 13 New Gallatin Gateway into Yellowstone Park: The Historic-Scenic Route (N.p.: The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway, 1926), 4. Railroad Brochures, Accession #96-34, Yellowstone National Park Research Library.
 - 14 Yellowstone through the Gallatin Gateway (N.p.: The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway, 1928). Railroad Brochures, Accession #96-34, Yellowstone National Park Research Library.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 Carlos A. Schwantes, *Railroad Signatures across the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 282.
 - 17 Yellowstone Thru Gallatin Gateway (N.p.: The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway [1929-1931]). Railroad Brochures, Accession #96-34, Yellowstone National Park Research Library.
 - 18 David J. Stuefen (<trainmaster@riptrack.com>), Chicago & North Western Historical Society Archives, "Re.: Lander, Wyoming." Email to author (<skraft@ycsi.net>), 30 August 1999.
 - 19 Waite, 95.
 - 20 Haines, 372.
 - 21 Schwantes, 283.
 - 22 Yellowstone National Park (N.p.: U. S. Railroad Administration, 1920), 26. Railroad Brochures, Accession #96-36, Yellowstone National Park Research Library.

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Dale Martin

Livingston

A Railroad Town and its Depot

In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, railways dominated inland transportation and employed between one and two percent of the United States population. Railroads were the economic impetus for hundreds of division point towns, located along main lines at intervals usually between 100 and 150 miles. In these communities, railroads were a pervasive presence with their extensive properties, large work forces, and around-the-clock activity, focused around passenger stations. The depot in Livingston, Montana symbolizes the town's history as a major railroad town and gateway to Yellowstone National Park.

The Northern Pacific Railroad (NP) completed its main line from Minnesota to Puget Sound in 1883. After following the Yellowstone River westward for 340 miles, the NP's route diverged from the waters to ascend its first mountain barrier, the Belt Range. Between river and mountain, in 1882, the company platted the townsite of Livingston and laid out a division terminal: switchyard, roundhouse and repair shops; fuel and water structures; and passenger station with administrative offices. Livingston also became the operating base for several branches: the important line to the north edge of Yellowstone National Park, the Cokedale spur west of town, and the Shields River branch to Wilsall, Montana. Helper locomotives assisted westbound trains up to Bozeman Pass tunnel, 13 miles away and 1,050 feet higher. Livingston grew quickly and was, by 1890, the sixth largest town in Montana. After the NP's financial recovery from bankruptcy in the mid-1890s, growing traffic encouraged the company to build another passenger station in Livingston.

The new depot reflected Livingston's importance to the Northern Pacific. The St. Paul architectural firm of Charles A. Reed and Allen H. Stem designed the buildings in the Italianate