



We savor Yellowstone's beautiful places and peak experiences. Why not celebrate with a taste of its wildness... crisp, cold, local craft beer?

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Trout, beer, buffalo: a Yellowstone odyssey

STORY BY SCOTT LINDEN

In the lengthening shadow of a majestic peak, I leaned on the tailgate and raised a bottle of malty goodness—a craft beer—honoring the cutthroat trout that had made my day on Slough Creek, the magical Yellowstone stream where grizzlies roam and anglers tremble. As any angler will tell you, there is no day better than a good day in Yellowstone National Park, and I'd just had one. Cheers to you, *Oncorhynchus clarkii*, all vivid colors and audacious character, dwelling in such a beautiful place.

Celebration is a part of sporting life—after all, we're in a beautiful place, doing what we love. What better way than by toasting Mother Nature's handiwork with a "tour" of local, fresh beer? Each passionate brewer in the region offers a literal taste of the area's rivers and streams, lakes and mountains, iconic geysers and abundant wildlife...so join me on an epic quest for enlightenment through local craft beers enroute to elusive trout, set among the eye-popping scenery of America's first national park.

Yellowstone's craft brewers combine water, hops, yeast, and malt into a scintillating mélange of beers and ales offering as much "terroir" as any Napa valley wine. There's a hint of pine, the elk's roar, and the tug of a trout in every glass. Hold it to the

light, and find the myriad jewel tones of Grand Prismatic spring; trace the rising bubbles, and you're reminded of the park's myriad geothermal features, super-heated water reaching for the sun. A bonus is the fellowship and conviviality craft beer engenders. Belly up to the bar, and you'll probably find a like-minded soul filling your glass, who just might offer you a fishing tip.

GOT YOUR WADERS? LET'S GO FISHING.

Approaching the rock-hewn gateways to the park, you'd be well served to stock up. While there are local beers in the park's stores and hotels, the dazzling array available at nearby breweries ensures you get the freshest beer in a style and flavor for anyone in your fishing party.

We're entering through the town so familiar to anglers it's just called "West" by many. The town of West Yellowstone is a kitschy tourist Mecca, last chance for souvenirs, flies, and gear, and curiously, the only nearby town without a craft brewer. Fortunately, many of the region's beers are showcased at the Slippery Otter Pub. Just blocks from the Park's west entrance, the Otter is where I taste what's new from area brewers.

The legendary Madison River tempts anglers along West Entrance Road. Silken runs and ruffles harbor rainbows and browns,



Sometimes brash, other times smooth, craft beer is a microcosm of its birthplace and a reflection of its people.

TOP: PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; RIGHT: PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW BELGIUM BREWING CO.



Yellowstone's allure: stunning scenery, geothermal marvels, cunning trout, and fortunately, plenty of craft beers. The legendary Firehole River offers three of the four. Hopefully, the anglers brought the last item.



KEEP IT FRESH AND FLAVORFUL

"Beer" is a catch-all word describing fermented beverages usually combining sprouted barley ("malt"), water, yeast, and hops. The two predominant styles are ales and lagers, differing in the types of yeast used and temperature at which they are fermented.

Despite their reputation, not all craft beers are bitter. Fashionable among hipsters are India Pale Ales (IPA), with a strong hoppy taste and floral aroma. But many brewers also boast recipes with robust malt tones and subtle hop character. That's where the art comes in, and it's the point of the unique custom of free tastes. Wine-like to spice cake, grassy to berry, craft brewing is chemistry in a glass, and everyone gets an "A" in this class.

Practical stuff: store beer in the warmest part of the refrigerator or ice chest. Ideal beer temperature is 50 to 55 degrees. Colder, and you'll dampen the more subtle flavor notes. Warmer, and well, what's the point? If you fill a growler, drink within a few days and store upright as the caps are not absolutely, completely beer-tight. Most brewpubs will cool their glasses with water just before pouring, but a frosty glass dampens flavors, diluting the precious nectar inside.

If you're driving—or minding the driver—remember that most craft beers have a higher alcoholic content than corporate brews. Alcohol by Volume (ABV) ranges from 5 percent up to 12 percent for some barley wines or Imperial ales. Responding to the market, many brewers now offer "session" ales with three-and-a-half to four percent ABV. Want a smoother beer? Check the chalkboard for those with 10 to 40 IBU (International Bitterness Units). In low-IBU beers, the predominant notes are grain. As the hop content increases, so does the IBU, with some over 80. Floral and citrus are the chief components of both aroma and flavor in high-IBU beer.



Yellowstone's native cutthroat trout await a perfect presentation by a fly fisherman. The fish are elusive; the craft beers, not so much.

where fish might be longer than the stream is deep. A carefully drifted dry fly might tempt the voracious brook and brown trout into a splashy strike. The trickle wends its way through emerald-green meadows that transport you right back to Middle Earth. The Gibbon is one of the few places you might—just might—hook a rare Arctic grayling. If you do, celebrate with Katabatic Brewing's Lower Falls Lager a classic German Pilsner available throughout the Park.

Steaming pools make for iconic photos and tricky fishing on the Firehole River, named for the volcanic springs feeding hot water into the icy stream. Give the bison a wide berth, and fish the shimmering riffles for a mixed bag of rainbows and browns. I once caught one of each species on subsequent casts of a beadhead Prince nymph. Fish a short line and dead drift, and when the bison offer a clear path back to the car, cool off with a Vigilante IPA from Bozeman's Bridger Brewing. Crisp and piney like the Yellowstone air, it's now available in cans, eminently portable in a fishing vest.

Slough Creek's three meadows each tempt anglers. Cross off your list the farthest, Third Meadow, a favorite of grizzly bears. First Meadow is every picknicker's destination. Goldilocks said it best: Second Meadow is "just right," and worth the hike. Under a cobalt-blue sky, I once watched voracious cutthroat trout beach themselves to gobble grasshoppers sunning on the sandy banks,

and the rare Trumpeter swan, brilliant white flecks on a shimmering canvas of blue-green water. There's a reliable hatch of stoneflies and mayflies in late June, challenging anglers who should keep one eye on rising trout and another watching for the occasional elk. Caught one? Thank that streamborn jewel by raising a bottle of Pine Creek Pale Ale from Livingston's Neptune Brewery. It's a medium-hopped easy-drinking ale that eases the transition from corporate brews to craft beers for newbies.

Drive north on the Grand Loop Road, and explore the upper portion of the Gibbon River. The red-headed step-brother to big name Yellowstone waters, anglers are sparse here,

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TOP: PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; RIGHT: PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW BELGIUM BREWING CO.



Malt, hops, water, and yeast. Four basic ingredients, curated by passionate craft brewers, reflect the area's spirit.

SIMPLER THAN YOU THINK

Fly fishing Yellowstone is not just the domain of tweed-wearing, bespectacled "experts." A simple roll cast, some backyard practice, and a little gear is all you need to access the awe and adventure of what some call a "three dimensional chess game."

The difference between fly fishing and other styles is in the delivery. While you loft a bait or lure by using its weight to peel line off your reel, a feathered fly has no heft. Your line pulls the fly through the air, where it gently alights on the water. If you can hit a golf ball or play a video game, you've got the hand-eye coordination to cast a fly.

If you fish at all, you've got the strategy and tactics in-hand. Fly shops will help you with a selection of artificial insects, then practice stealth, watch the water before wading, and you're good to go. The best how-to primer is actually a comic book—*Curtis Creek Manifesto* by Sheridan Anderson. It's on every respectable fly shop's bookshelf.

like killer whales after hapless seals. They fell for my fake and may for yours. Back at the parking area, uncap the growler you filled earlier at Big Sky's Beehive Basin Brewery. This very small brewer offers a rotating selection of thirst-quenching single-hop pale ales perfectly capping an epic out-and-back fishing hike.

If you enter the Park from the east, fill your cooler at brand-new Cody (Wyoming) Brewing. Stop at Tim Wade's North Fork Anglers, then throw a Stimulator pattern at some of the hefty cutthroats prowling the North Fork Shoshone after you enter the Park. Pools—right where the whitewater fades—are your best bet. Hold your tongue just right, and you might be in for the ride of your fishing life.

My editor won't let me wax poetic indefinitely, so here's a short list of the other trouty waters to explore in and near America's showcase national park: Hebgen Lake, the "braids" of the Madison near Ennis, the Yellowstone River near Livingston, and the Lamar River (watch for wolves!). He won't reimburse me for all the craft brews on my list either, but you can drive south to Jackson Hole's Snake River Brewing Co., tip a few at Red Lodge Ales, or stop at Madison River Brewing in Belgrade. In a pinch Yellowstone General Stores can fill any spaces you have in your cooler with local beer.

Vivid memories, eye-popping scenery, primordial landscape, cunning trout. Each stream—much like Yellowstone's beers—has a unique personality. Savor both. &



Decisions, decisions. Local brewers can not only recommend a beer to suit your taste, they might steer you to a great fishing hole.



Bison are frequent spectators as you wade a trout stream in the park. Their fishing tips are seldom helpful, though.

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