

Article 1: Volcano Walk - Yellowstone

90 Days, 10,000 Miles - Ride with Us on a Trip of a Lifetime!

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This is the first of a year-long series of articles that let you ride along with us and experience America as we did. So, jump up in the cab of our RV. Today, you are about to walk on top of a super volcano. Today you are going to visit Yellowstone National Park.

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You see it in the distance. It's a large, slender column of white smoke stretching up several hundred feet in the air. It is slender, beautiful, but out of place here. "I hope there's not a fire," you say out loud. Then, as you speed down the road, you see another smoke column, and another, and another. They start to look like pillars holding up the clouds. "What is going on?" you think. "This can't be real."

It can't be, but it is. You pull into a turnoff to investigate. Everyone is taking pictures. That's not smoke, it's steam. The earth here is angry, bubbling, spewing out hot sulfur gases. Welcome to Yellowstone National Park.

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You hear a lot about Yellowstone National Park and how it is unique and how you just **have** to get there. Why? If a park were to rise to the level of unique, it would have to have something no one else had, something that differentiated it from nearly every other recreational venue on the planet. Does Yellowstone have that?

Well, how'd you like to take a walk on the surface of a—dormant for now—super volcano. Yes, that's what Yellowstone has. That's what Yellowstone is. And that's what makes Yellowstone one of the most unique recreation areas in the world.

Yellowstone has one of the greatest concentrations of geothermal features on the planet. It is a pressure cooker of a place. It is a walk through a world of hot pots, geysers, plumes of steam, and multicolored microorganisms forming abstract masterpieces of art while living in some of the most hostile environments on earth.

If you visit Yellowstone early in the morning when the air is still cool, the rising warm air from the hot pots, geysers, and pools, forms steam. When you get out and walk on the boardwalks erected to keep you safe from the geothermal features and them safe from you, it's a feast for the senses.

The ground gurgles, plops, spits, and belches out sulfur-laden air. Millions of multicolored micro-organisms live their lives in resplendent brightly colored mats that blanket the sections of

the hot, stinky, un hospitable water. The deep holes have an aquamarine tinge. Some are as blue as a lagoon, stunning, inviting, but you'd boil like an egg if you decided to go into them.

The colors and textures are more intricate, delicate, enticing, than anything made by man. You go from area to area thinking nothing could be more unique, more strangely beautiful, but the next one you see is just that.

Yellowstone does not disappoint. Yellowstone is different. Five hundred and forty thousand years ago this super volcano you are walking on exploded so violently that it left a caldera, a hole, thirty by forty miles wide. Debris from that event was hurled into the air and strewn across a three-state area. Yellowstone has, Yellowstone is, a super-volcano and you are walking along the top of it.

For all our modern science, the ancient peoples that inhabited America had a better understanding of it, a more reverential, more spiritual attitude towards it. The physical presence of America is stunning. The greatest works of humankind are embarrassingly minuscule in comparison.

All the drama and political wrangling that seem to dominate our national dialogue are as insignificant as a single hornet's nest in a single tree on a single mountainside within the endless vistas of Yellowstone. The frantic buzzing contained within that solitary hive is all consumingly important to the hornets fighting for their place in their internal social order. But all this internal friction is Lilliputian, simply not that important in the bigger scheme of things that constitute this incredibly beautiful park and our incredibly beautiful country.

Our lives are not the destiny of the planet. You and I are not all that important in the broader scheme of things. The good news from that insight is that all the problems, concerns, setbacks and worries of our lives are not all that big a deal as well. The outcomes of our culture wars don't matter all that much to America's mountains, deserts, and prairies. Maybe they shouldn't matter all that much to us as well.

Every day of this trip makes Diane and I more grateful to be American. As you share this journey with us in the coming months, hopefully you are, too.

Thanks for riding with us!