

Deep Into Yellowstone: A Year's Immersion in Grandeur and Controversy

By Rick Lamplugh. 2017. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. 294 pages, 15.95 USD, Paper.

Deep Into Yellowstone is a fascinating read about Rick Lamplugh's year-round experience of living at the gateway of Yellowstone National Park. After having volunteered in the Lamar Valley for three consecutive winters at the historic Lamar Buffalo Ranch from 2012 to 2014, and writing his first tome *In the Temple of Wolves* (self-published 2013) about that experience, Rick and his wife Mary decided to move. They moved from Oregon—their home of 35 years—to Gardiner, Montana, to be close to and permanently part of the grandeur of the world's first national park. They were insulated from the world's ills when volunteering deep within the park in the Lamar, but quickly found themselves living at the edge of controversy in Gardiner. Here there was the hunting of Yellowstone wolves outside the park, the debate about the economic and ecosystem benefits of wolves, the community effort to stop a possible gold mine on the park's border, the outrage over the plan to remove grizzlies from the endangered species list, and the battle to stop the slaughter of park bison (p. 19).

Having visited Yellowstone over 20 times and written my own book, *My Yellowstone Experience* (Eastern Coyote Research 2013), on the great park, I was engaged with Lamplugh's easy-to-read writing style and engaging accounts. He immerses us in all four Yellowstone seasons, starting with winter, writing 7–9 essays during each season (31 total). There we get to go on "hikes" and cross-country skiing forays with Rick and Mary (and usually another friend or two) and learn about the special resources of the park including the park's many thermal features and its abundant and diverse fauna. We learn about the importance of predators to the ecosystem—especially wolves—and the controversy about the degree to which wolves are benefiting the ecosystem. I tend to agree with his conclusions—and that of Bob Beschta of Oregon State University (Chapter 23)—that wolves have dramatically benefited the ecosystem and have been the key to returning the park to ecological health. Lamplugh also shares incredible insights of raven-wolf behaviour and how the two have evolved together making some wonder how ravens survived before wolves returned to the ecosystem in the mid-1990s. As Lamplugh states, "The presence of wolves and grizzlies defines wildness and causes me to use my senses fully; to be in the moment, and to accept my humble place in nature's grand scheme" (p. 261).

I particularly appreciated how Lamplugh wears his heart on his sleeve and fights for the animals and resources that cannot speak for themselves. He is clearly not a fan of how the states of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming plan to hunt Grizzly Bears (*Ursus arctos*) after delisting (pp. 80–81) similar to how those jurisdictions have allowed a veritable slaughter of wolves outside the park since the states retained control of man-

aging those animals (pp. 14–15). Rick also relates to us about the tragic and angering circumstances of park bison getting captured and sent to slaughter by Yellowstone wildlife managers (a large bison trap near Gardiner is located within the park) and killed by a "firing squad" (Chapter 3) of hunters at the park's immediate border all for leaving the invisible protections of the park. Some 7000+ Bison have died at Yellowstone's borders since 1985 (p. 57). It is particularly personal for him when he is biking and skiing in areas where bison will die later on that winter. These in-depth descriptions of his experiences will inspire readers to help protect the wildlife and landscape of this treasured national park.

Rick coins the term "meanderthal", one who likes to explore/wonder, and it perfectly describes his approach to life. While on a hike or a backpacking trip, if he sees an animal track—say a fresh wolf print in a dusting of snow—he will follow the animal and see how it was behaving in its environment. Maybe he—or more aptly Mary with her keener eye—will spot the actual animal. While we are deep within the husband and wife team's adventures, Lamplugh often digresses and explains complex science in layman's terms ranging from animal behaviour such as the ecological benefits of wolves or wolf territoriality and aggression to the unique hydrothermal features and geology of the region such as how geysers function (p. 135). His detailed descriptions provided me with a reminder of the "soothing sulfur-scented breezes" (p. 132), that "timeless Yellowstone scent" (p. 123), surrounding geyser basins and other geothermal areas, as well as the slick, scented oil smell of sagebrush when rubbing its tiny grey-green leaves (p. 155). Yet there is just enough science quoted from professionals to provide the reader an accurate understanding of each issue with "eyes wide open" (Chapter 21) but not too much where one might get bored, or confused, by reading highly technical information.

Along the way, Rick takes us into the halls—literally—of local buildings where he attends meetings to help protect wolves and other creatures. While the vast majority of people support conserving animals like wolves, most don't know that a small minority is gunning for wolves as the animals leave the protection of the park's seamless borders. Fortunately, wildlife managers are learning the values of conserving wolves and have—up until now—kept hunting quotas relatively low so wolves don't get killed when leaving the park. Having people like Rick and Mary there to defend them is vital.

The end of the book focusses on folks loving our national parks to death. Currently, over four million people visit Yellowstone a year even though it's only really built to support around 2.5 million. This puts a strain on the park's incredible resources, and Rick pro-

poses solutions that benefit the park, such as having daily quotas and a reservation system so the park isn't loved to death. He correctly points out that certainly not all people, and especially not all politicians, would support these restrictions. He even notes that he is part of the problem whereby watching wildlife and habituating them to people—such as the Grizzly Bear he describes (p. 254)—can make it a target if that individual leaves the park and meets a person having a rifle, not binocular, in his eye-sights.

I really enjoyed the book and Lamplugh's writing style. In the acknowledgments he describes that he self-published the book yet there were only a few very minor errors, as it has been professionally edited. There are no pictures throughout the book except on the covers and there is no introduction to set the stage; there-

fore the book—after the table of contents—just starts in winter. However, the book is so easy-to-read that is not a distraction. There is also no index, although one is not really needed for an essay-styled book, nor is there a list of references used at the end of the book despite him clearly using many sources within the book. This last omission does not sidetrack from the value of the read because he quotes most sources by name or sometimes by book or article written. So, if you want to travel to, inquire about, or safeguard the world's first national park, I highly recommend this book. *Deep into Yellowstone* will give you a deep appreciation for Yellowstone and a better knowledge of the controversies threatening the park and its surroundings.

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