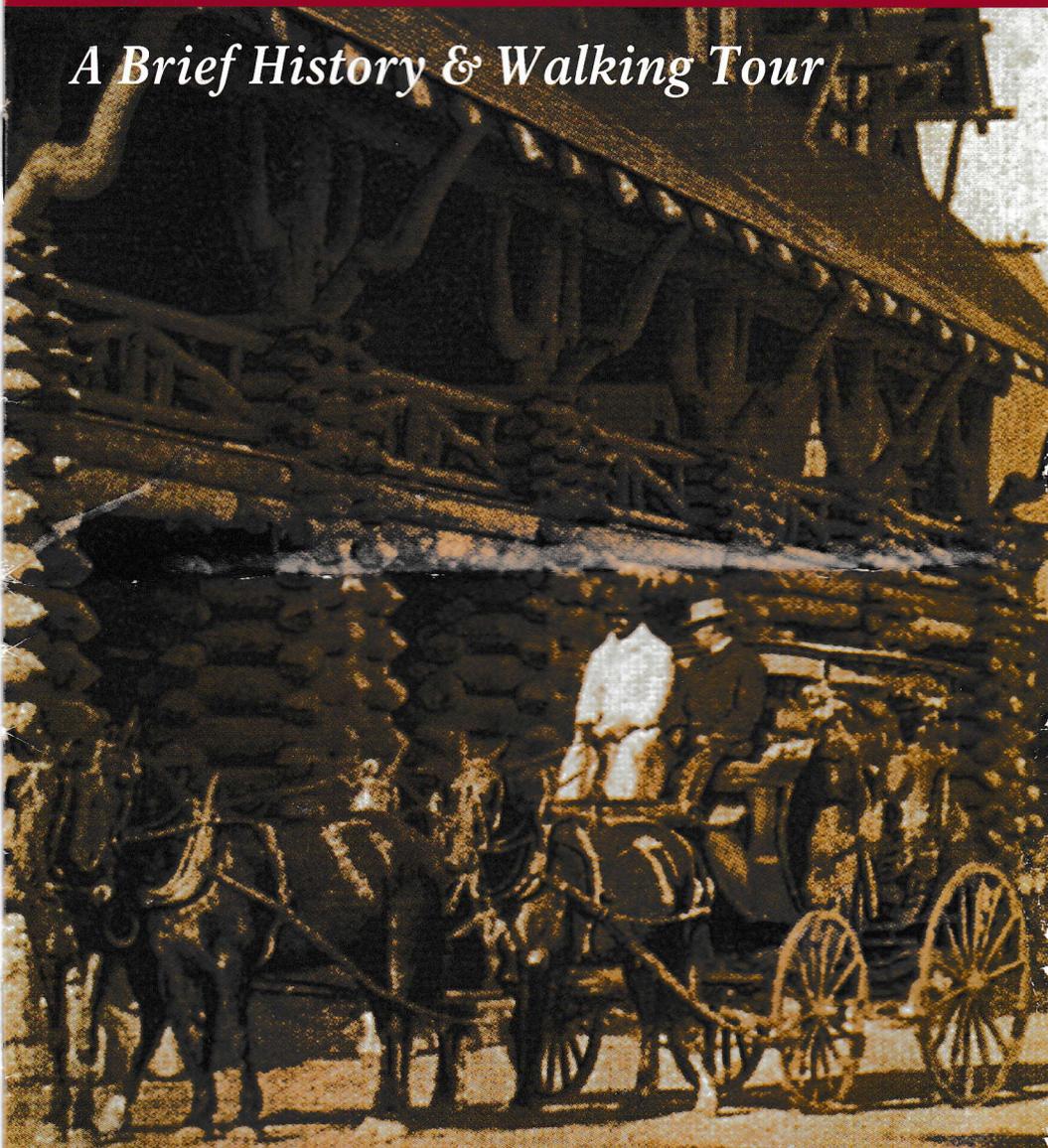


# Old Faithful Historic District

*A Brief History & Walking Tour*



Yellowstone National Park

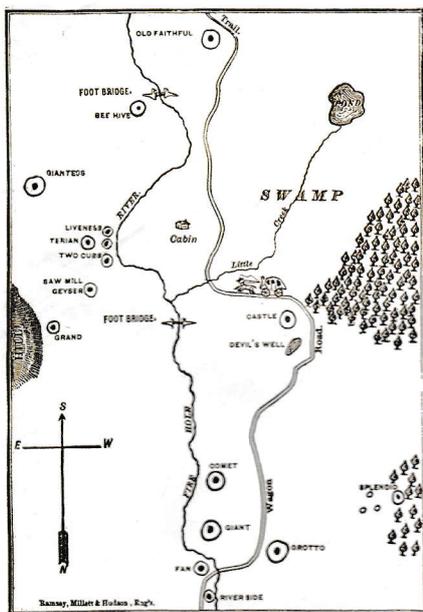
50¢ donation

## Overview

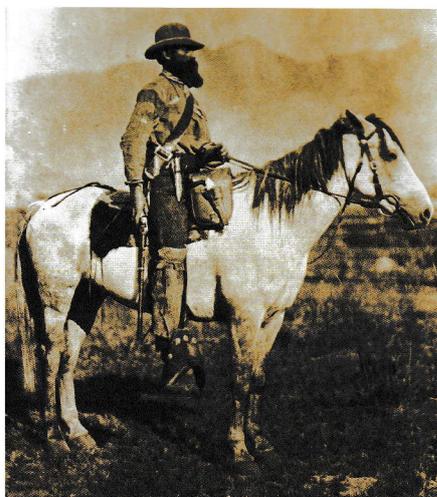
When Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872 as the world's first national park, it was far from populated centers of the country. Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho were not yet states, and few settlements existed. Travel by horse or foot was the only way to venture into the rugged terrain of the park.

Development of the Old Faithful area therefore evolved based on the pace of road construction in the park and was also strongly influenced by changing modes of public transportation.

On this tour of the Old Faithful Historic District, you will walk along roads and paths from early park years and view buildings of bygone eras.



An 1881 map shows the early wagon road in the Old Faithful area.



Nathaniel Langford was a leader of an 1870 expedition into Yellowstone, and the park's first superintendent.

## ARRIVING BY HORSE

During the park's first decade, visitors traveled on rough trails. Philetus W. Norris, the park's second superintendent, began improving the trails into roads suitable for wheeled vehicles such as wagons and stagecoaches. His first road connected Mammoth Hot Springs with the Upper Geyser Basin.

In the early 1880s the Northern Pacific Railroad completed a line to the park's north border. Visitors arriving via train usually had travel packages including stagecoach tours of the park. Overnight lodging developed based on how far stagecoaches could travel each day—and where roads existed. The hotel nearest the Upper Geyser Basin was eight miles (12.9 km) north—Fountain Hotel in the Lower Geyser Basin. From there, visitors took a side trip to the Old Faithful area. They had to return to Fountain Hotel to resume their trip—



Visitors traveling on their own, like this group, stopped wherever they chose to enjoy a picnic.

no road yet connected the Old Faithful area with Yellowstone Lake.

At the same time, a few visitors were arriving on their own through the north and west entrances on wagons or horses. They could camp anywhere in the Upper Geyser Basin or stay at a tent camp. Later, a hotel nicknamed “The Shack” served these travelers.

Finally, in 1891, the road from Old Faithful to Yellowstone Lake was completed and visitors could travel a southern loop around the park. More people came on their own and stayed in the rustic lodgings around Old Faithful. To serve their needs, stores and additional tent camps opened.

Stagecoach tourists expected finer accommodations than existed at Old Faithful. A large hotel was needed. And so, the Old Faithful Inn was begun in 1903 and opened in 1904. Now the Old Faithful area could lodge visitors of all incomes and expectations.

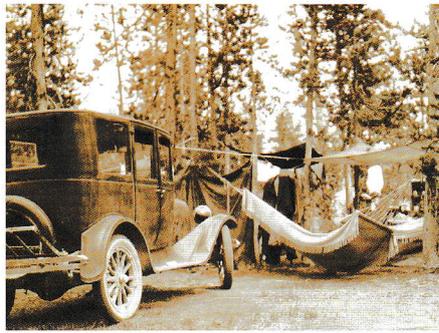
## FOR MORE OF THE PEOPLE

In the evening of July 31, 1915, the next major change in transportation rolled into Yellowstone. For the first time, visitors drove automobiles into the park. Because cars were more comfortable than wagons and less expensive than stagecoach tours, they quickly became the most popular way to tour the park. Within two years, horses, coaches, and wagons disappeared from Yellowstone roads; parking areas, gas stations, and campgrounds appeared. A building boom had begun that would continue until World War II.

Lodging options also expanded during this time. A tent camp grew into the Old Faithful Lodge, where visitors could rent cabins and find basic services similar to today’s motels. The Old Faithful Inn, which had opened a wing in 1914, opened another in 1927.

When the National Park Service decided to test automobiles on the park’s rough roads in early 1915, they asked this group to drive to the Old Faithful Inn.





Auto campgrounds popped up the year after automobiles began entering Yellowstone.

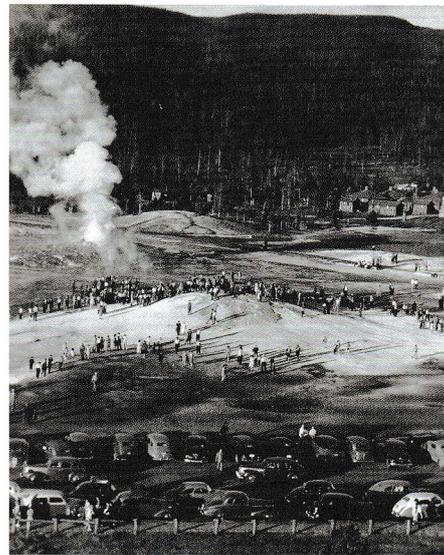
By 1930, visitors could park along an esplanade lined with shops and services, and stay near Old Faithful Geyser in rustic cabins or auto camps. They could also visit the Museum of Thermal Activity and attend nightly ranger campfire talks.

The building boom slowed during the Great Depression of the 1930s, but visitors continued to visit national parks as an economical vacation. However, visitation nearly halted during World War II. From 1943 to 1945, no formal lodging and few services were offered in the Old Faithful area.

#### AFTER WORLD WAR II

Millions of Americans descended on national parks after the war years. Like other national parks, Yellowstone was not ready. Repairs and maintenance had slowed or stopped, but visitors needed places to stay and eat, and demanded other services.

In the 1950s, the National Park Service began a decade-long effort to upgrade facilities in all national parks. The goal was to finish by 1966, thus the program was known as Mission 66. The roads in



The scene at Old Faithful Geyser in 1947. Cars are parked along what was then the Grand Loop Road.

the Old Faithful area were redesigned to efficiently move many cars. The old roadbed became walkways; the esplanade and its shops and services were replaced by sidewalks. The little museum was replaced by a visitor center with a large parking area.

This period of modernization accommodated an increasing number of visitors. It also stimulated a debate as old as the National Park Service: How to provide for public enjoyment while preserving the very resources for which the park was established. The next several decades included many efforts to achieve a better balance.

The Old Faithful Historic District, established in 1982, recognizes the importance of the area's cultural resources—its buildings, roads, and trails—and their rich contributions to the history of the area and the park.

## Stroll Through Time



Old Faithful, 1872, as seen by the Hayden Expedition and photographed by William Henry Jackson.

*From Old Faithful Geyser, this walking tour moves back and forth through time on a roughly counterclockwise route.*

*The distance is about 1.25 miles (2 km).*

*The map is on pages 8 & 9.*

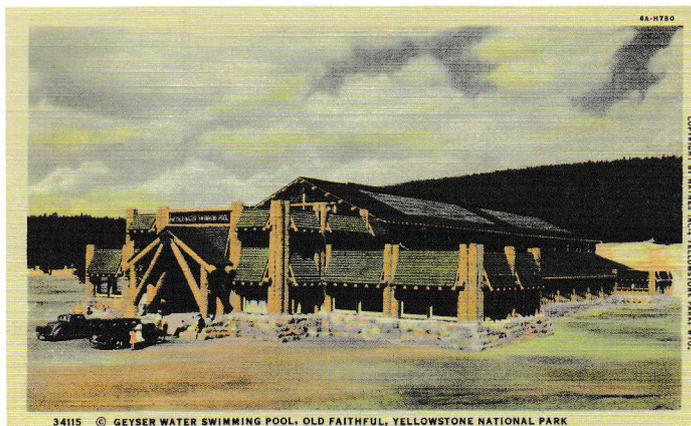
### 1. Old Faithful Geyser

The tour begins here because Old Faithful Geyser is the centerpiece of the historic district. Notice that the surrounding buildings are all set back from the geyser about the same distance— $\frac{1}{8}$  mile (0.2 km). Federal law establishes this distance; only two buildings have been allowed to infringe upon it (barely)—the Old Faithful Inn and the Old Faithful Lodge.

### 2. Ghosts of the Past

Walk to the western edge of the boardwalk (nearest the Old Faithful Inn) and step onto the asphalt path. Imagine you can climb into your car or bus right now, and wait for Old Faithful to erupt. Until 1972, visitors could do just that. (See photo, page 5.) You are now walking along the original Grand Loop Road.

Turn right onto a smaller asphalt trail and walk past the trees. The meadow includes the site of the Geyser Baths. From 1915 to 1949, visitors could soak here—and if they were lucky, they'd also enjoy the eruption of Beehive Geyser, across the Firehole River on Geyser Hill. The hot water was piped from



Solitary Geyser, which is across the river and in the woods behind Geyser Hill. The baths were closed in 1949 and razed in 1951. Such a facility would not be built today because park managers understand how easily hydrothermal systems can be damaged and destroyed.

### 3. First Store & Service Station

Return to the old road and walk to the Yellowstone General Store. This ornate building grew from the simple Klamer Store that was built in 1897. The decorative east porch and small north porch were designed by architect Robert Reamer in 1903. He used gnarled wood for the posts, similar to

what he used in the Old Faithful Inn. Charles Hamilton bought the store in 1915, enlarged the building and added a longer and equally ornate long front porch. Hamilton also built the service station, which has provided auto services since 1920. These facilities became identified by the prefix "lower" because they sit lower on the rolling terrain of the Upper Geyser Basin than do his later store and gas station.

Walk along the front of the store to the sidewalk that leads to the Old Faithful Inn. Visitors have strolled this path since 1905, when the footbridge was first built.

The modest, plain Klamer Store (left) grew into the rustic, gnarled wood Lower Store (right) by the 1920s. (It is now known as the "lower" Yellowstone General Store.) You can still see the window box at the front of the store and the original roof line, to the right of the chimney.



# Old Faithful Historic District

Listed in order of the walking tour, which is approximately 1.25 miles (2 km).

- 1 A Old Faithful Geyser
- 2 B Geyser Baths 1915; razed 1951
- 3 C Klammer Store 1894, now the "Lower" Yellowstone General Store
- D Lower Service Station 1920
- 4 E Old Faithful Inn 1903-1904 East Wing: 1913-1914 West Wing: 1927
- 5 F Museum of Thermal Activity, now the Old Faithful Visitor Education Center
- 6 G First Old Faithful Snow Lodge built 1958; razed 1998 became winter lodging 1971 Upper Store 1929, now the "Upper" Yellowstone General Store
- I Upper Service Station 1927
- J Cabin area
- K Bear Feeding Ground 1919-1936
- L Auto Camp 1920-1969
- 7 M Esplanade 1920s-1960s
- 8 N Old Faithful Lodge 1928
- O Remaining lodge cabin area

Visitor services, accessible walkways, and other information are in the official map & guide, the park newspaper, and other handouts at visitor centers.





Early visitors to the Old Faithful area could choose from a variety of tent cabins.

### Before the Old Faithful Inn

As you come alongside the Old Faithful Inn, imagine what preceded it. Simple canvas tents provided shelter for early park visitors traveling on their own; later, a ramshackle hotel (nicknamed “The Shack”) offered only slightly better accommodations.

### 4. Old Faithful Inn

The Old Faithful Inn has been hosting visitors since June 1904. Designed by Robert Reamer, it is an early example of rustic architecture

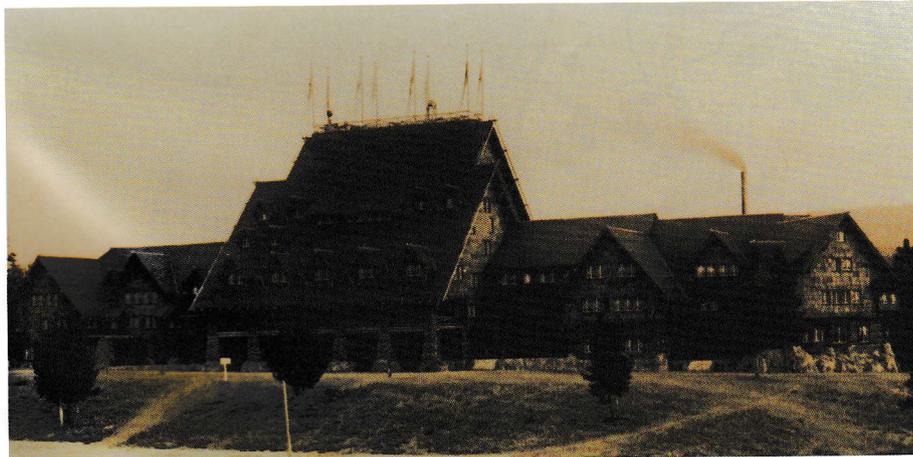


Customers complained “The Shack” was barely better than a tent cabin.

(also known as “parkitecture”). The east wing opened in 1914; the west wing in 1927. Designated a National Historic building in 1973 and a National Historic Landmark in 1987, the Inn almost burned in the fires of 1988. Pavement, steady streams of water from fire hoses, newly installed roof sprinklers, and a last-minute shift in the wind saved the building.

Consider why the building faces away from Old Faithful Geyser. Most historians believe this was done so visitors would face the geyser as they arrived.

The Old Faithful Inn has flown varying numbers of flags and banners over the years; in 2010, the number of poles was restored to the original eight.



The Inn's restoration in 2004–2006 included restoring its massive fireplace, which had been damaged in the 1959 Hebgen Lake earthquake. Compare this photo, taken in 2003, with how the fireplace looks today.

Others point out that stagecoach passengers had to disembark on the left side, as would anyone riding a horse-drawn conveyance. To do this, the coaches would have pulled up to the Inn facing away from the geyser. Reamer may have deliberately faced the building toward the expansive view of the Upper Geyser Basin. The “first view of Old Faithful” idea became reality after automobiles and buses, with passengers exiting the right side, replaced horse-drawn vehicles.

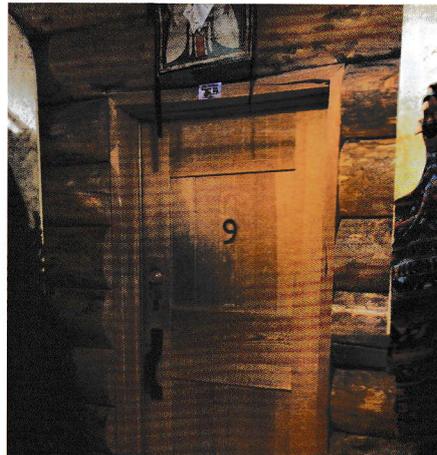
Enter the Inn through the massive red doors to view the historic interior, including the lobby (renovated in 2004–06), furnishings, the dining room, and the Bear Pit Lounge.

Exhibits, a free tour, and several excellent books can provide you with details about the Inn's history and architectural importance.



Take time now to explore the Inn, or continue on this walking tour by exiting through the door to the left of the Bear Pit Lounge.

This stairway (below) in the west wing was noted in the historic nomination for its “half-log stair and tread and gnarled railings.” In the gift shop, “ghosts” of long-gone guest rooms remain (right).





The Museum of Thermal Activity served visitors for four decades. Its exhibits explained the hydrothermal geology and showed specimens of animals and plants.

### 5. "Ghost" Museum & Visitor Center

Two earlier visitor facilities once stood on the site of the Old Faithful Visitor Education Center. From 1929 until 1971, visitors could view exhibits, talk with rangers, and attend programs at the Museum of Thermal Activity. Herbert Maier designed this and three other "trailside museums" in Yellowstone, among the first in the National Park System. The courtyard was planted with native flowers and shrubs; the amphitheater seated 800 visitors.

The museum was razed in 1972 to make room for a more modern concept: the visitor center. From 1972 until 2006, the Old Faithful Visitor Center provided information, films, and geyser predictions. It was designed to efficiently help thousands of visitors who wanted to see Old Faithful Geyser erupt and then move on. In the 1990s, engineers confirmed the building was not seismically safe, did not meet standards for accessibility, and needed major renovations. It was razed in 2006 and replaced by the Old Faithful Visitor Education Center, which was built on the same site and opened in 2010.

Several bear feeding areas existed during different times; this last one closed in 1933. It was just a short stroll away from the campground and southern-most cabins.



## 6. New & Old

From the visitor center, look across the road to the second major area of the historic district. It is anchored by the large Yellowstone General Store on the far left. Between it and the modern Old Faithful Snow Lodge is the site of the first Snow Lodge, which began serving winter visitors in 1971. Built in 1958, this structure originally housed a dorm, restaurant, bar, and gift shop. In 1971, it became a visitor lodging facility for summer and winter. It was razed in 1998 after the new Old Faithful Snow Lodge opened.

Continue walking to the Yellowstone General Store, also known as the Upper Store. Built by Charles Hamilton in 1929, its rustic architecture echoes other historic buildings in this area. As part of this look, the concrete outer walls were designed to resemble wood. This store is also known as the Basin

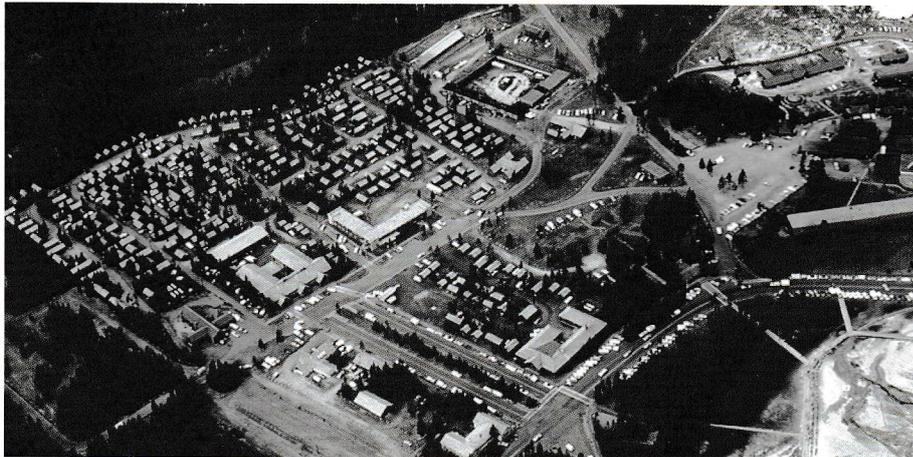
Auto Camp (BAC) store, because it used to serve hundreds of campers.

The service station beyond the east end of the general store is the Upper Service Station, built in 1927. Its symmetrical design had pumps on both sides. The east-side pumps were removed after the 1972 road changes, because drivers no longer had easy access to them.

Hundreds of cabins used to exist in this area of the historic district. (*See below.*) Most were removed in the mid 20th century. Thirteen burned during the fires of 1988; they were replaced by modern four-plexes. A few historic cabins remain in use.

The large parking areas to the east used to be a large auto camp. Begun in 1921, it expanded over the years beyond the current parking areas and picnic area. It was closed in 1969 to reduce visitor impacts on the area.

**By the 1950s, the Old Faithful area included more than 400 cabins, 3 lodges, a half dozen stores, two service stations, a small museum, a large auto campground, and two cafeterias.**





This cafeteria, always a popular dining option, opened in 1927; it was razed in 1980.

### 7. Promenade Along the Esplanade

Across from the Yellowstone General Store, a straight sidewalk heads toward Old Faithful Geyser. Imagine a short, broad boulevard in its place, with trees up the center and buildings on either side. This was the esplanade. Built as part of the 1920s building boom, it provided visitors a central, convenient location to check in to a cabin, wash clothes, eat dinner at the cafeteria, and have film developed. As you walk toward Old Faithful Geyser, you will cross two sidewalk intersections; the esplanade ended at the second, at what used to be the Grand Loop Road. The esplanade was redesigned into walkways when the road system changed.

### 8. Old Faithful Lodge & Cabins

Walk out to the boardwalk, which offers a clear view of the Old Faithful Lodge. This low, rustic building grew from several structures.

The Shaw & Powell Camping Company operated a tent camp here beginning in 1913, with the dining room, kitchen, and offices in separate buildings. Shaw & Powell's successor, the Yellowstone Park Camping Company, continued to build more cabins and buildings with no cohesive plan. Finally, in 1926, Horace Albright, superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, asked architects Daniel Hull and Gilbert Stanley to unify the buildings. Their solution: cover all the buildings with one long roof, and add a new long porch and vast lobby facing Old Faithful Geyser. The original buildings still exist, highly altered, inside the current lodge.

This undated photo shows the esplanade in spring, before the park opened to visitors. In the summer, it was a busy shopping and service area. The large building is the Campers' Cabin Registration, which burned in 1955.



This group of buildings grew into the long and elegant Old Faithful Lodge, shown below.

To see more of the historic area, take the asphalt path at the end of the boardwalk to a dirt path that leads to the lodge's corner. Here, you can see the lodge's historic cabins that remain from the original group of 400.

Walk along the front of the lodge and enter the lobby. Notice the balcony—it was part of an earlier building contained within this consolidated design.

### An Historic Aside

The bakery counter inside Old Faithful Lodge is called Larry's Snack Station, a name that hearkens to the park's early years. Larry Mathews operated simple lodging and "lunch stations" near convenient stagecoach stops such as Norris Geyser Basin. As travel patterns changed, so did Larry. He became the manager of a tent camp in the Old



Faithful area, then the Old Faithful Inn. He never ran a lunch station here, but the name honors his role in feeding visitors long ago.

*We hope you have enjoyed this walking tour of the Old Faithful Historic District. History abounds in Yellowstone National Park; explore other sites during your stay. At home, learn more at the park's official website: [www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell).*

