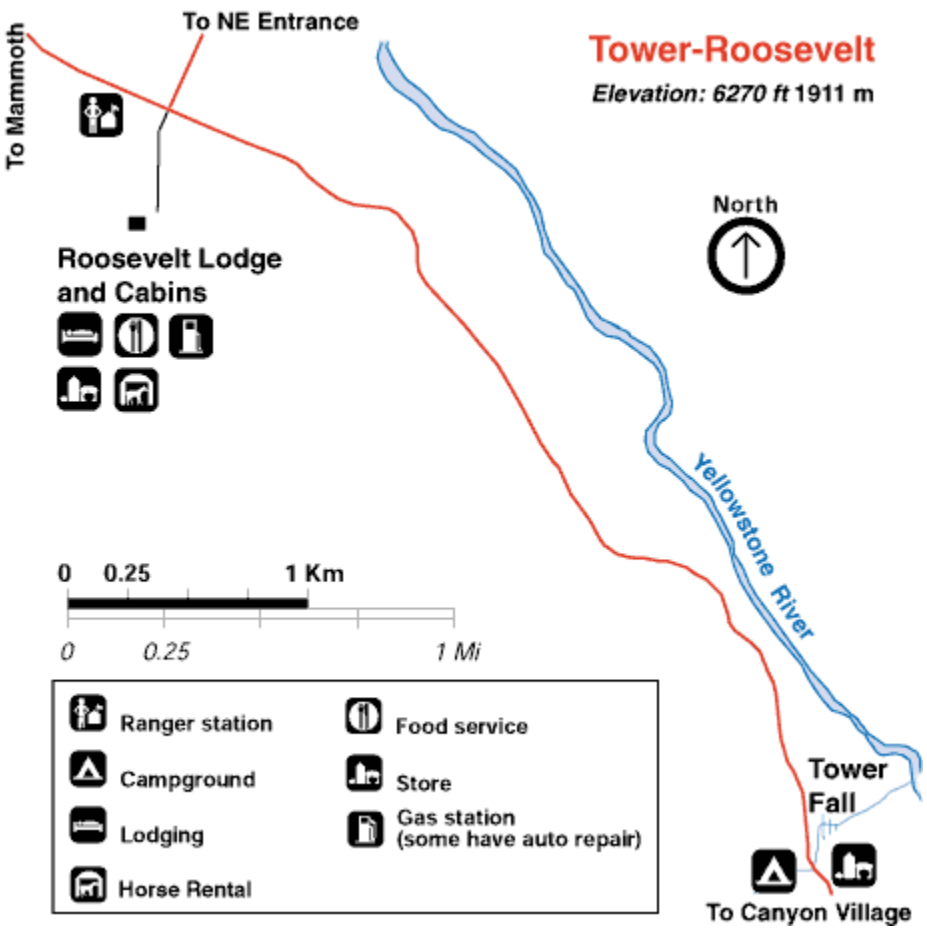
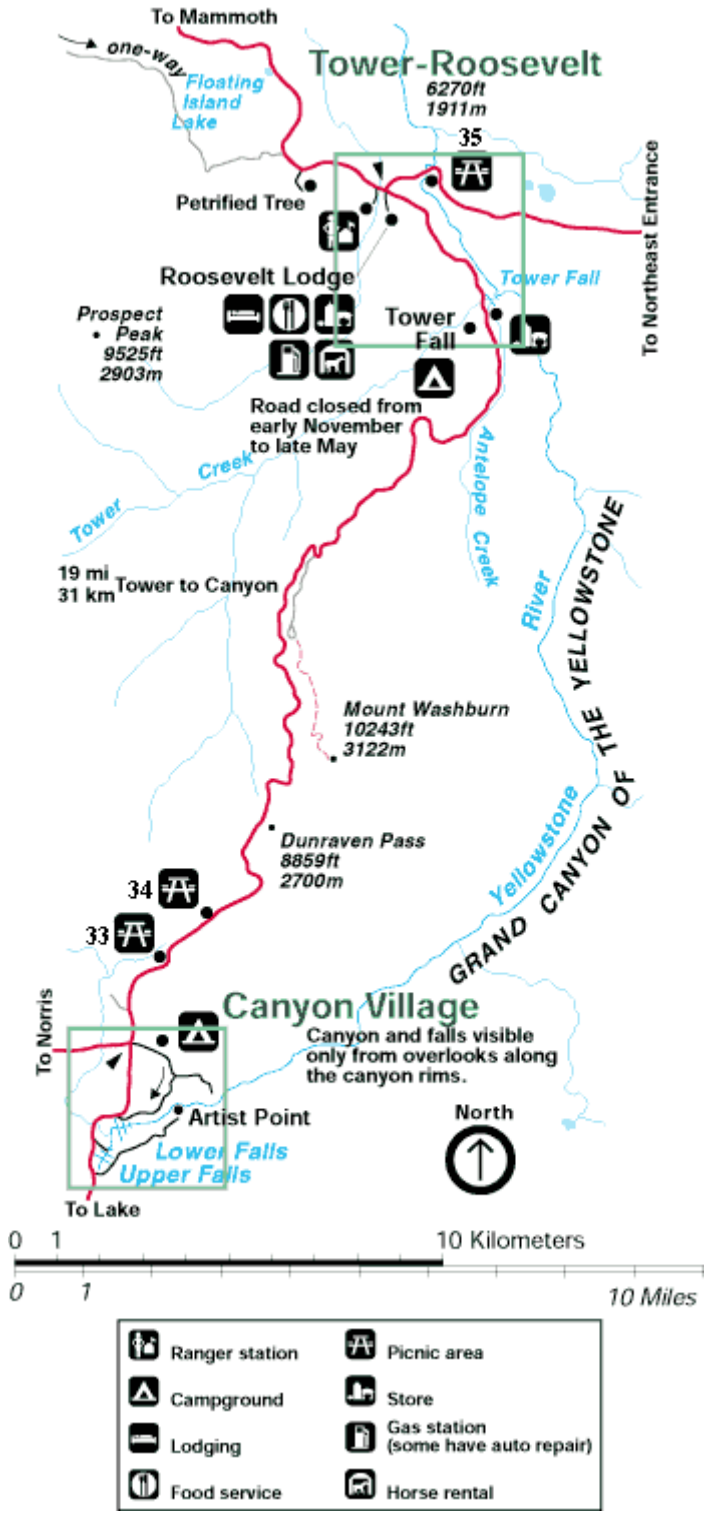
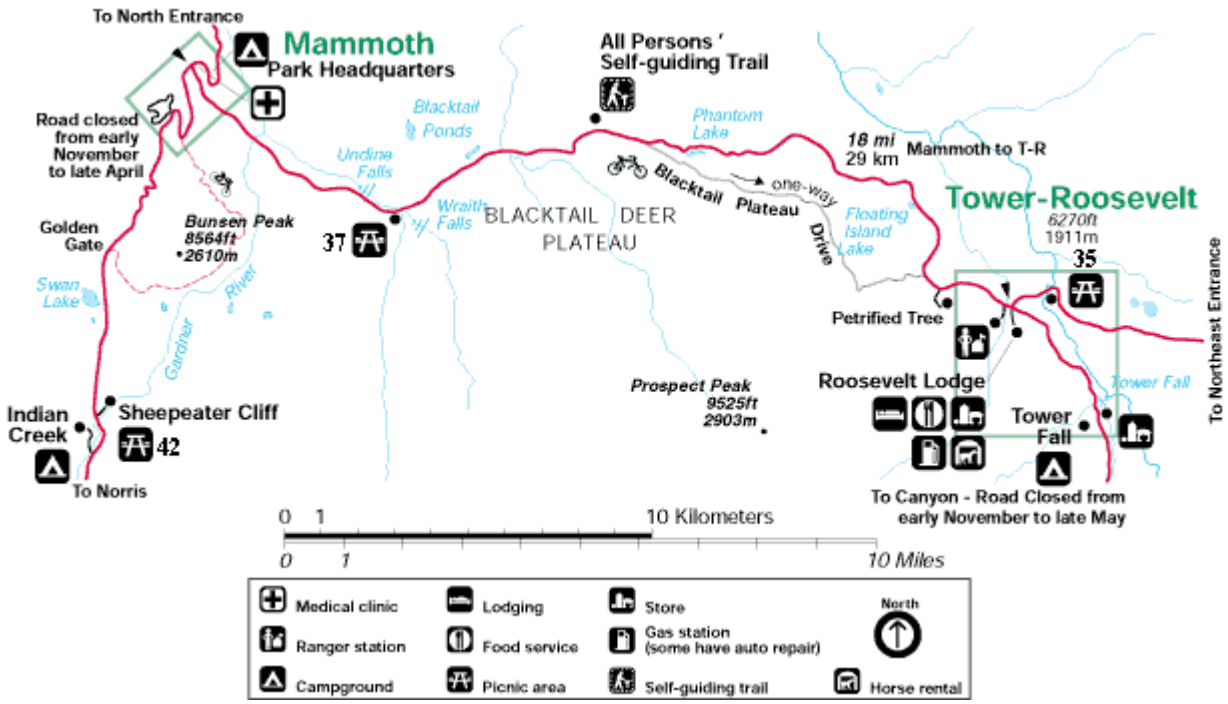
TOWER-ROOSEVELT AREA MAP



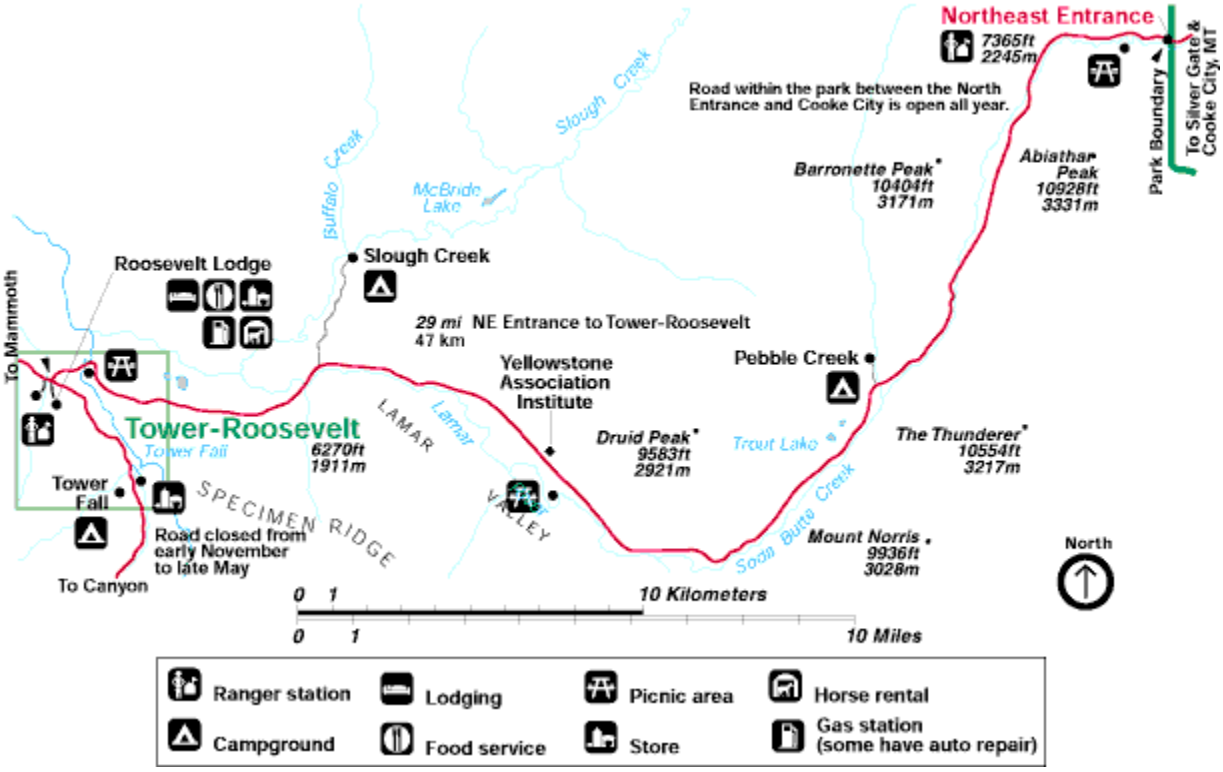
Tower-Roosevelt to Canyon Road Map



Tower-Roosevelt to Mammoth Road Map



Tower-Roosevelt to the Northeast Entrance Road Map



Day Hikes Near Tower-Roosevelt

Tower Fall Trail Closure Notice

At present, there is a partial closure of the Tower Fall trail in effect that unfortunately restricts access to the bottom of the waterfall, and will for some time, in the interest of public safety. However, the upper platform at the top of the trail still provides historic views of the falls and remains open to the public. In addition, the first two-thirds of the trail also remains open and still provides that invigorating hike and views of the Tower Creek - Yellowstone River confluence and the wildlife that inhabit the area.

One of the fascinating aspects of this incredible and diverse area around the falls is the rich geologic features presented, and that is also the cause of the challenges we are currently facing. The final third of the trail running along the Tower Creek on it's way to the lower viewing platform experienced rock and mud slides which caused the destruction of the lower viewing platform and a loss of structural integrity to several portions of the trail in this area. We were forced to close this section of the trail to protect our visitors. At present we are looking at solutions to these challenges as the hazardous conditions have gone beyond the realm of standard repair regimes.

Begin your hike by stopping at a ranger station or visitor center for information. Trail conditions may change suddenly and unexpectedly. Bear activity, rain or snow storms, high water, and fires may temporarily close trails.

Lost Lake Trail

This loop trail departs from behind Roosevelt Lodge and climbs 300 feet (91 m) onto the bench. Here the trail joins the Roosevelt horse trail and continues west to Lost Lake. (If you take the trail east, you loop back to the Roosevelt corrals on the horse trail or continue on to Tower Fall Campground.) From Lost Lake, the trail follows the contour around the hillside to the Petrified Tree parking area. Cross the parking lot and climb the hill at its northeast end to loop back behind Tower Ranger Station. Cross the creek and return to the Roosevelt Lodge cabins.

Offering views of Lost Lake, waterfowl, wet meadows, sagebrush hilltops, wildflowers, and quite often black bears, this trail has a bit of everything. Parts of the trail are used by horse parties. For your safety when meeting horses, we recommend you move to the downhill side of the trail and remain still until they have passed.

Trailhead: Behind Roosevelt Lodge
Distance: 4 miles (6.4 km) roundtrip
Level of difficulty: Moderately strenuous

Garnet Hill and Hellroaring Trails

To access the Garnet Hill Loop Trail, park in the large parking area to the east of the service station at Tower Junction. Walk down the road toward the Northeast Entrance Road (approximately 100 yards/91 m) and head west on the dirt stagecoach road about 1.5 miles to the cookout shelter. Continue north along Elk Creek until nearly reaching the Yellowstone River. Here the trail divides, with the west fork joining the Hellroaring Trail and the east fork continuing around Garnet Hill and eventually returning to the Northeast Entrance Road where it is a short walk back to Tower Junction.

The Hellroaring Trail can be reached from the fork of Garnet Hill Trail (see above) or you can start from the Hellroaring parking area 3.5 miles (5.6 km) west of Tower Junction. Follow the trail over the Yellowstone River Suspension Bridge, cross a sagebrush plateau, and drop down to Hellroaring Creek. The Yellowstone River and Hellroaring Creek are both popular fishing areas.

Note: This trail can be hot and dry during the summer months. Please remember to take water! Also, watch your footing if you go off-trail and onto the smooth river boulders along the Yellowstone River.

Trailhead: Tower Junction or 3.5 miles (5.6 km) west of Tower Junction
Distance:

1) Garnet Hill Loop: 7.5 miles (11.8 km) roundtrip
2) To Hellroaring Creek and back via Garnet Hill: 10 miles (16 km) roundtrip
3) To Hellroaring Creek and back via Hellroaring Trailhead: 4 miles (4.6 km) roundtrip

Level of difficulty: Moderately strenuous

Yellowstone River Picnic Area Trail

This often overlooked trail along the east rim of the Yellowstone River offers views of the Narrows of the Yellowstone, the Overhanging Cliff area, the towers of Tower Fall, basalt columns, and the historic Bannock Indian Ford. Tower Fall itself is not visible, but the store and highway across the river can be seen for reference purposes. The trail ties into the Specimen Ridge Trail above the Bannock Ford. (Continue up to Specimen Ridge only if you are prepared for a longer hike with few trail markers.) Otherwise continue north about one mile (1.6 km) to the Specimen Ridge Trailhead. Walk west along the road for another 0.7 mile (1.1 km) to the Yellowstone River Picnic Area. Watch for bighorn sheep along this trail but please don't approach them! Use caution along the river canyon with its steep dropoffs.

Trailhead: Yellowstone Picnic Area, 1.25 miles (2 km) northeast of Tower Junction on the road to the Northeast Entrance and Cooke City
Distance: 3.7 miles (5.9 km) roundtrip
Level of difficulty: Moderately strenuous

Slough Creek Trail

This is both a scenic walk and a fishing trail, a favorite of catch-and-release anglers from around the country. The trail follows a historic wagon trail up Slough Creek through several meadows and over Plateau and Elk Tongue creeks. From the trailhead, the trail switchbacks up a moderately steep trail and rejoins Slough Creek in about 2 miles (3.2 km) at the first meadow. While wildlife do not abound in this meadow during the summer, moose are commonly seen. Grizzly and black bears also use this valley. As on all Yellowstone trails, be alert for the possibility of bears in the backcountry. You may encounter the horse drawn wagons of

Silver Tip Ranch, a private ranch north of the park boundary that has a historic right of access.

Trailhead: Near the vault toilet on the road to Slough Creek Campground
Distance: 2 miles (3.2 km) one way to First Meadow; 5 miles (8 km) one way to Second Meadow
Level of difficulty: Moderately strenuous for first 1.5 miles (2.4 km), then easy.

Mt. Washburn Trail

The hike to the top of Mt. Washburn is one of the most popular hikes in Yellowstone. Two trails, each 3 miles (4.8 km) in length, switchback to the summit where expansive views of much of Yellowstone unfold below on clear, summer days. An enclosed observation area allows you to get out of the wind. Bighorn sheep are seen quite frequently during the summer on the upper parts of the trails. Harsh alpine conditions contribute to short growing seasons for the fragile alpine vegetation on the mountain. Please stay on the trails and do not approach sheep or other wildlife to help preserve the wildness of this area.

The northern trail begins at the Chittenden Road parking area. The southern trail begins at Dunraven Pass parking area. More parking is available at the Chittenden Road Trailhead, although hikers using this trail may encounter bicycles and occasionally vehicles accessing Mt. Washburn for maintenance purposes.

Trailheads: Chittenden Road Parking Area, 8.7 miles (13.9 km) or Dunraven Pass Parking Area, 13.6 miles (21.8 km) south of Tower Junction on the Tower-Canyon Road
Distance: 6 miles (9.6 km) roundtrip
Level of difficulty: Moderately strenuous

Tower-Roosevelt Area Natural Highlights

Petrified Tree

The Petrified Tree, located near the Lost Lake trailhead, is an excellent example of an ancient redwood, similar to many found on Specimen Ridge, that is easily accessible to park visitors. The interpretive message here also applies to those trees found on Specimen Ridge.

Specimen Ridge

Specimen Ridge, located along the Northeast Entrance Road east of Tower Junction, contains the largest concentration of petrified trees in the world. There are also excellent samples of petrified leaf impressions, conifer needles, and microscopic pollen from numerous species no longer growing in the park. Specimen Ridge provides a superb "window" into the distant past when plant communities and climatic conditions were much different than today.

Tower Fall

Tower Fall is the most recognizable natural feature in the district. The 132-foot drop of Tower Creek, framed by eroded volcanic pinnacles has been documented by park visitors from the earliest trips of Europeans into the Yellowstone region. Its idyllic setting has inspired numerous artists, including Thomas Moran. His painting of Tower Fall played a crucial role in the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The nearby Bannock Ford on the Yellowstone River was an important travel route for early Native Americans as well as for early European visitors and miners up to the late 19th century.

Calcite Springs

This grouping of thermal springs along the Yellowstone River signals the downstream end of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. The geothermally altered rhyolite inspired the artist Moran; his paintings of this scene were among those presented to Congress in 1872, leading to the establishment of the park. The steep, columnar basalt cliffs on the opposite side of the river from the overlook are remnants of an ancient lava flow, providing a window into the past volcanic forces that shaped much of the Yellowstone landscape. The gorge and cliffs provide habitat for numerous wildlife species including bighorn sheep, red-tailed hawks, and osprey.

Yellowstone River and its Tributaries

The Yellowstone River and its tributaries provide habitat for numerous bird and fish species.

Tower-Roosevelt Area Geologic Highlights

The geology of the Tower district is incredibly varied. Major landforms are expressions of geologic events that helped shape much of the Yellowstone area. Absaroka volcanics, glaciation, and erosion have left features as varied as Specimen Ridge's petrified trees to the gorges along the Yellowstone River's Black Canyon and the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone.

Mt. Washburn and the Absaroka Range are both remnants of ancient volcanic events that formed the highest peaks in the Tower District. Ancient eruptions, perhaps 45 to 50 million years ago, buried the forests of Specimen Ridge in ash and debris flows. The columnar basalt formations near Tower Fall, the volcanic breccias of the "towers" themselves, and numerous igneous outcrops all reflect the district's volcanic history.

Later, glacial events scoured the landscape, exposing the stone forests and leaving evidence of their passage throughout the district. The glacial ponds and huge boulders (erratics) between the Lamar and Yellowstone rivers are remnants left by the retreating glaciers. Lateral and terminal moraines are common in these areas. Such evidence can also be found in the Hellroaring and Slough creek drainages, on Blacktail Plateau, and in the Lamar Valley.

The eroding power of running water has been at work in the district for many millions of years. The pinnacles of Tower Fall, the exposed rainbow colors of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone at Calcite Springs, and the fearsome gorge of the Black Canyon all are due, at least in part, to the forces of running water and gravity.

In the Lamar River Canyon lie exposed outcrops of gneiss and schist which are among the oldest rocks known in Yellowstone, perhaps more than two billion years old. Little is known about their origin due to their extreme age. Through time, heat and pressure have altered these rocks from their original state, further obscuring their early history. Only in the Gallatin Range are older outcrops found within the boundaries of the park.

Tower-Roosevelt Area Historic Highlights

The Buffalo Ranch

The Lamar Buffalo Ranch was built in the early part of the century in an effort to increase the herd size of the few remaining bison in Yellowstone, preventing the feared extinction of the species. Buffalo ranching operations continued at Lamar until the 1950s. The valley was irrigated for hay pastures, and corrals and fencing were scattered throughout the area. Remnants of irrigation ditches, fencing, and water troughs can still be found. Four remaining buildings from the original ranch compound are contained within the Lamar Buffalo Ranch Historic District (two residences, the bunkhouse, and the barn) and are on the National Register of Historic Places. In the early 1980s, old tourist cabins from Fishing Bridge were brought to Lamar to be used for

Yellowstone Association Institute classes. In 1993, a cabin replacement project, funded by the Yellowstone Association, was begun. At this time all of the old cabins have been replaced with new insulated and heated structures. The facility is also used in the spring and fall for the Park Service's residential environmental education program, Expedition: Yellowstone!

You are welcome to drive by to view the historic buffalo ranch, however, there are no facilities open to the general public at this location.

The Tower Ranger Station & Roosevelt National Historic District

The Tower Ranger Station, though not on the National Register of Historic Places, is a remodeled reconstruction of the second Tower Soldier Station, which was built in 1907. The Roosevelt Lodge was constructed in 1920 and has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Roosevelt National Historic District also includes the Roosevelt cabins. Interestingly, one of the reasons Roosevelt Lodge was nominated for the National Register was due to its important role in early park interpretation.

Pleasant Valley

Pleasant Valley was the sight of "Uncle John" Yancey's Pleasant Valley Hotel, one of the earliest lodging facilities in Yellowstone. The hotel and outbuildings were built between 1884 and 1893 and served early park visitors as well as miners passing through en route to the mining district near Cooke City. Currently, the site is used by the park's main concessioner, Amfac, for their "Old West" cookouts. None of the original buildings remain.

The Northeast Entrance Ranger Station

The Northeast Entrance Ranger Station was constructed in 1934-35 and is a National Historic Landmark. It's rustic log construction is characteristic of "parkitecture" common in the national parks of the west during that period.

The Bannock Trail

The Bannock Trail, once used by Native Americans to access the buffalo plains east of the park from the Snake River plains in Idaho, was extensively used from approximately 1840 to 1876. A lengthy portion of the trail extends through the Tower District from the Blacktail Plateau (closely paralleling or actually covered by the existing road) to where it crosses the Yellowstone River at the Bannock Ford upstream from Tower Creek. From the river, the trail's main fork ascends the Lamar River splitting at Soda Butte Creek. From there, one fork ascends the creek before leaving the park. Traces of the trail can still be plainly seen in various locations, particularly on the Blacktail Plateau and at the Lamar-Soda Butte confluence.

Archeological Resources

There are many archaeological sites in the Tower District. In fact, sites are found in a greater density here than in most other areas of the park. Unfortunately, most have yet to be extensively catalogued or studied.

Tower-Roosevelt Area NPS Visitor Facilities

The Tower District has no visitor center, museum, or formal interpretive contact stations.

Backcountry Offices

The Division of Resource Management and Visitor Protection operates three ranger stations in the Tower District. These are located at Tower Junction, the Lamar Buffalo Ranch, and the Northeast Entrance. The Tower Ranger Station issues backcountry and fishing permits. The building, constructed in 1923, is a remodeled reconstruction of the second Tower Soldier Station, originally constructed in 1907.

The Lamar Ranger Station, located at the Buffalo Ranch in the Lamar Valley, provides emergency visitor services only. The ranger station is also used as housing for the Lamar ranger and is a historic structure (one of four at the Buffalo Ranch) on the National Register of Historic Places. It was constructed around the turn of the century.

The Northeast Entrance Ranger Station is a National Historic Landmark that was constructed in 1934-35.

Frequently Asked Questions at Tower-Roosevelt

Q. How high is Tower Fall?

A. 132 feet

Q. How did the (basalt) columns form (at Calcite Springs)?

A. The formation you see across the Yellowstone River was formed by a basaltic lava flow that cracked into the hexagonal columns, or "fence posts," as it slowly cooled. Similar basalt columns can be seen at the Sheepeater Cliffs along the Gardner River between Mammoth and Norris.

Q. How long is the trail to the bottom of Tower Fall?

A. From the Tower Fall overlook, the trail to the bottom (a much better view, by the way) is one-mile round trip. The trail descends about 300 feet in a half mile. Coming back out is steep and somewhat strenuous. If you have heart, lung, or knee problems you may want to enjoy the view from the top.

Q. How did the (petrified) trees get petrified?

A. Although the process of petrification is not completely understood, we do know that certain elements are required. First, the tree must be rapidly buried in order to minimize decay of the organic (woody) material. The petrified trees of Yellowstone were buried by volcanic deposits and mudflows associated with volcanic eruptions 45-50 million years ago. Second, there needs to be a concentration of silica in the groundwater surrounding the buried tree. In Yellowstone, silica-rich groundwater soaked into the trees, filling in the spaces between wood cells, and eventually hardening. The actual woody material is still there. Paleodendrochronologists (scientists who study ancient trees) can determine the species of tree by applying an acid solution to thin slices of the petrified material. The acid eats away the silica, leaving the woody material relatively intact. By studying this remaining cellular material, scientists can tell us, for instance, that a particular tree was a redwood. Lastly, erosion must uncover the tree so we can see it! In Yellowstone, glacial ice and the eroding power of running water and wind have uncovered the vast areas of fossil forests. There are undoubtedly many fossilized trees still underground that have not been exposed by erosion.