

# Boots on the Ground

By Stephen Camelio

A common statistic heard around Yellowstone is that 98 percent of visitors never venture 100 yards from the road. For those who want to be among the lucky few that become acquainted with the wonders of the park's backcountry, Institute resident instructor Robin Park recommends some hikes sure to fit your vacation and experience level.

## FAMILY

Moose Falls [2.25 miles round trip]: From a parking area near the south entrance, this short, flat jaunt brings you to a small, yet captivating, waterfall. "The wet, flat area is great moose habitat, and if you don't see any animals you can always take a dip in the swimming hole," says Park.

## BEGINNER

Yellowstone River Picnic Area Trail [up to 4 miles round trip]: Not far from Roosevelt Lodge, only a short climb on this trail separates you from majestic views of the river and Calcite Springs. "You can see some neat things, like formations of columnar basalt and calcite pillars," says Park. "And since you just follow the ridge, you can make it as long or short as you want to."

## INTERMEDIATE

Washburn Hot Springs [10 miles round trip]: Take the Seven Mile Hole Trail and then branch to the north toward Mount Washburn, and in 4.8 miles you'll encounter this backcountry thermal area. "It's cool to see these hot springs in their natural state," Park says. "But remember to stay on the trail and remain a safe distance from the springs."

## LONG

Black Canyon of the Yellowstone [up to 23 miles round trip]: This desert-like sagebrush area leads to untamed sections of the Yellowstone River. "There's the option to take the steeper Hellroaring Trail or the longer, flatter Blacktail Trail to the Yellowstone River Trail," reminds Park. "Remember, unless you are staying at YA's Overlook Campus, this is currently an out-and-back."

## ADVANCED

Sky Rim Trail [21 miles round trip]: An ambitious and strenuous day hike in the park's less-visited northwest corner, the 2,000-foot elevation gain presents a real alpine experience. "The view of Electric Peak and 360-degree panorama of the park and Gallatin area are amazing," Park says. "It also makes for a great backpacking trip."

## PACKING PRIMER

When you get out of the car, what are the essentials you should put in your daypack? Institute instructor Robin Park has insider gear tips so that you are prepared for all that the backcountry has to offer.

Stephen Camelio is a freelance writer who lives on the Wyoming/Montana border of Yellowstone National Park.

**SUNSCREEN/SUNHAT** High altitude makes sunburn worse. And because it can be cooler high up, visitors underestimate how much sun they are getting. If you forgo a hat, don't forget to put sunscreen on exposed parts of your scalp.

**BEAR SPRAY** Expensive, but worth the investment. Although not required by law, the National Park Service requires people doing fieldwork to carry bear spray, and I support that.

**WATER/FILTER** Due to the altitude and arid landscape, bring more than you think you'll need. I carry a minimum of two liters if I am going a couple miles or more. In the wetter parts of the park, a filter can lighten your load. All water in the park should be treated due to waterborne diseases.

**FIRST-AID KIT** I include matches, duct tape, toilet paper, and zip-lock baggies because — well — you just never know. And remember: if you use anything, pack out what you pack in.

**HEADLAMP** Even on a day trip, it's good to have.

**CLOTHING** The layering system works best, because the weather here is so unpredictable. Synthetics and lightweight wool that are warm and that wick sweat are ideal. Cotton is not. A rain jacket can help when afternoon thunderstorms hit.

**MAPS** I always carry them. Waterproof topos, like the National Geographic series, are great because they have clear mileage markings on trails and feature backcountry campsites.

**TREKKING POLES** Great if you need assistance with balance, are doing steep downhill, or are exploring off-trail.

**SHOES** Sturdiness and ankle support are key. Whether you go for lightweight or heavy duty, make sure to break them in before you get here.