
Stop 48. Grand Teton

Arrival datetime: Saturday, July 6, 5:00PM
Sites visited: Grand Teton National Park
Accommodations: Jenny Lake Lodge
States traveled: Montana, Wyoming

Between Yellowstone and Grand Teton was the John D. Rockefeller Memorial Parkway, traversing a small tract of land that formed an inter-park gateway so that one drove only through National Park territory when traveling between Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons. A German bus boy at the Old Faithful Inn had told us that Middle Teton was a nice accessible hike with good views. We asked the Ranger at the John D. Rockefeller visitor station about the Middle Teton hike. She was not enthusiastic. But she told us of some other nice hikes, and where to find moose. She said that if we insisted on pursuing the Middle Teton idea, we should discuss it with the Rangers assigned to the Jenny Lake Ranger Station. She said, make sure to ask the Rangers at “the Ranger Station, not the Visitor Center.” We had known that there was a difference between interpretive rangers and law enforcement rangers, but this was the first we had heard of levels of interpretive Rangers. Apparently, the ones who really knew the park were not assigned Visitor Center duty.

The Tetons had flat, accessible-looking plains and close views of mountains that made us eager to get out of the car. The lakes were deep blue and inviting. We hiked a short trail around a peninsula of Jackson Lake. Just as at Lake McDonald,

we were captivated by the colors of the smooth rounded rocks along the shoreline, deep reds, purples, and even some marble. We were amazed that some of the rock exhibited gray and white striped patterns similar to those we had seen on the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska the previous summer. Just a few weeks ago, we had marveled that the rock in Northern California exhibited the same structure. It was as if we were traveling between snapshots in geologic time.

We continued toward Jenny Lake Lodge. Bike rentals and horseback rides at the lodge were included in the room rate, so we signed up for a horseback ride immediately then checked out the bikes. Most of the bikes were in disrepair, but we finally found two working models and biked out to a shady stonewalled Jenny Lake overlook. A couple in camping chairs sipped bloody marys while they gazed through overhanging branches at the blue water. The weather threatened so we turned back toward the Lodge.

The lodge was set on the edge of a meadow were white wildflowers stretched for as far as the eye could see, fading out of view only with the horizon. The cabins were shaded by lodgepole pine. Our cabin was large enough and cool enough, luckily, for there was no air conditioning. Its only drawback was that it was starting



Grand Tetons overlooking Jackson Lake.

to get a bit buggy, and there were holes in our window screens. Michael closed them with packing tape.

Our cabin was a duplex and we found a couple lounging on the rocking chairs outside, sipping cocktails. We sat on our porch with them a bit before dinner. They were from New York and had flown out for a long weekend. Though we normally are reserved about our travels, they had seen our license plate and knew we had driven from the east coast, so we explained our trip. They lamented they had only one more day than we had months. We then dressed as required for dinner.

Dinner at the lodge was included as part of a mandatory American meal plan, and it was just great. Breakfast was not as good. But there was a nice chorus of “what will you do today?” from the wait staff. They were not inquisitive so much as helpful. We discussed the Middle Teton idea and were told that there was no real trail all the way to the top and there was still a lot of snow up there. It was unlikely that we would get beyond the trail into Garnet Canyon, where the real views were. The trail alone was described in our park literature as 8.2 miles roundtrip, with a 2160 elevation gain. We ended up on a hike in Death Canyon, where our Rockefeller Ranger had said there was a good chance of



View from Death Canyon Hike.

seeing moose. There were none, of course, but the canyon was filled with the same pink granite that made up the floor of our living room at home. We ate cheese and crackers on a rock in a rushing stream surrounded by forest, looking up at granite peaks.

We made it to the Visitor Center in late afternoon. It had a great exhibit on how the mountains were formed. Two plates converged in the area. The one to the east stayed where it was while the one to the west was shifted up, exposing the layers of sandstone and granite beneath it. Then the glaciers came sliding down the plate that was still flat. They wiped out the upper layers of sandstone from the plate that was shifted up, and cut huge swaths

into the granite, leaving the sharp peaks that are the Tetons. As the glaciers backed away over the flat plate, they left moraines and also just tons of pebbles. Where the moraines were, enough soil had formed to support forests. But most of the ground to the east of the Tetons was so pebbly that it supported only sagebrush. In some places, ice had broken off a glacier as it retreated, eroding the land below it and leaving lakes.

We decided that if we were serious about wanting to see moose, we had to follow the Ranger's advice and get out early in the morning or late in the evening. We were not much for late evenings as the timeframe conflicted with our dinner reservations, so we got up and out to



Mount Moran from Oxbow Bend at sunrise.

Oxbow Bend by 5:30AM. It was an overlook on the Snake River. We wandered about mosquito ridden paths through willow trees for a bit less than an hour, then sat in the car for another half and hour. No moose, but some of the most terrific mountain reflection on water photos of the trip.

We got back for breakfast and our 9:00AM horseback ride to Hidden Falls. It was a flat trek around Jenny Lake, then a steep ascent behind it. A fire that had occurred in 1999 charred the forest near the lake. There were still no trees, and though the plethora of wildflowers almost made up for it, the stark black stalks were not attractive. We crossed white water cascades a few times on the way, and escaped the burned area into a

forest of thin lodgepole pine. At the summit, there was a nice overview of the Lake and a quick .3 mile hike to Hidden Fall.

We returned to the Lodge for lunch, then went to Jackson Lake to rent a canoe for the afternoon. But we only lasted twenty minutes. Wind had caused white peaks on the waves on the lake and there was a fare chance we would be capsized if we got too far from land. So we turned back.

We drove to the top of Signal Mountain. It was very easy to imagine the plate and glacier activity that the Visitor Center exhibit had described. The flat plains, the moraines, the kettle lakes, the carved peaks, all were visible within one glance.



Hidden Fall.

We hung out there for at least a half an hour, moving from one side of the small set of walking paths to the other, views of Jackson Lake reflecting the mountains to the west, views of the Snake River set in the sagebrush plains to the east and southeast, views of more mountains to the northeast. We kept pulling out the binoculars to more clearly see the features of glacial landscape as described in the Visitors center, and in general marveling at the immensity of the view.

Back at the Lodge, there was a “Manager’s Reception” before dinner. We ate lobster quesadillas and drank champagne with the other guests. Our cabin-mates had told others about our trip, and we ended up sharing travel stories with one couple from Florida who were world travelers. We let the manager know we had not once yet gotten a window table, so we finally got a window table at dinner. Then we had to keep the shades closed for the first half-hour as the sun was directly in our faces.

Miles traveled:	273
Departure datetime:	Tuesday, July 9, 10:30AM
Departure weather:	65° Sunny