



*Jim Bridger's*  
Yarns  
of the  
Yellowstone

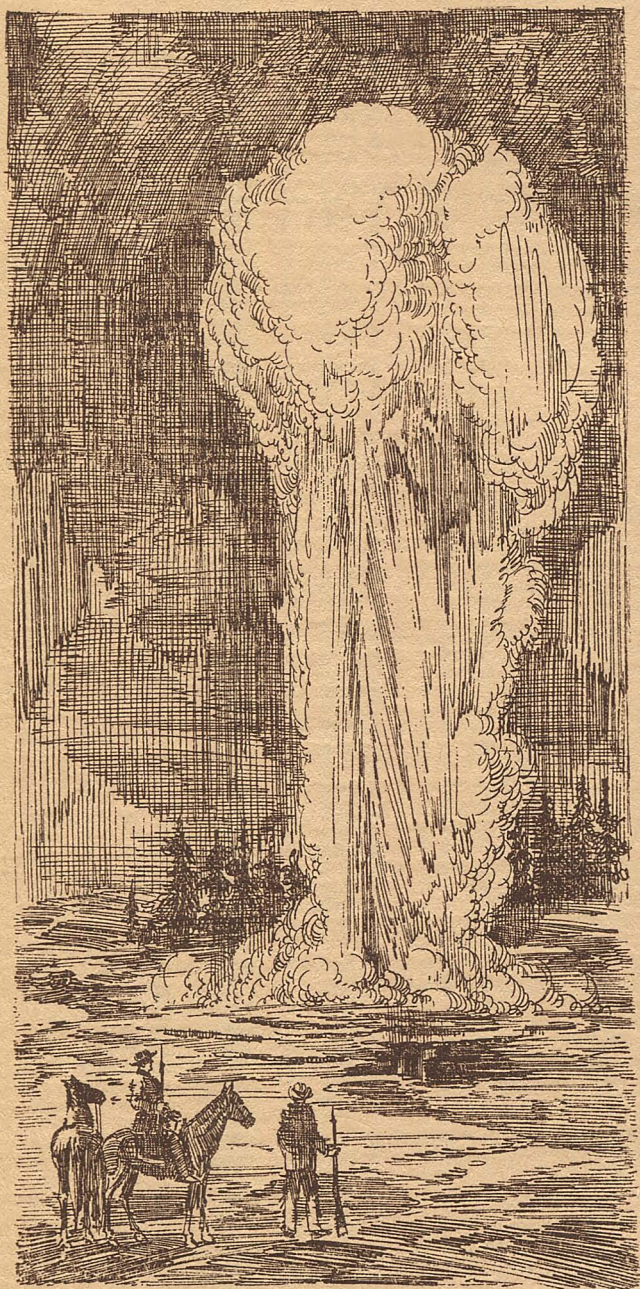


# *Jim Bridger's* Yarns of the Yellowstone

Being a collection of whimsical tales attributed to this famous frontier scout and mountain man. Collected and reprinted by the Northern Pacific Railway, with the express purpose of providing a few moments of amusement for its friends interested in Yellowstone Park.



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Old Faithful Geyser was an amazing spectacle to the pioneers, as it is to the thousands of travelers today.

## Foreword

AT THE beginning of the Nineteenth Century, no one in the civilized world had ever imagined such a phenomenal place as Yellowstone Park!

Never had a white man set foot in it. Even the Indians, watching in awe from a distance as its white geysers shot skyward, believed the region to be the abode of the Great Spirit and dared not approach nearer.

Then came James Bridger, famous frontier scout, guide, trapper and Indian fighter. While on a trapping expedition about 1830 he penetrated the mountain barrier which incloses Wonderland.

The sights there astounded him and afterward he eagerly described them to any wandering frontiersman, scout, trapper or fur-trading party he met.

General disbelief greeted his amazing descriptions. Embittered at public skepticism, not only of the simple frontier folk but also of the men of letters of his day, Bridger, it is said, exclaimed, "If they will not believe the truth, they shall have lies," and so his stories grew.

Some of the tales which Bridger compounded have come down to the present day. While some of them indeed depart a bit from the "strict truth," they have an original foundation in fact.

Those of us who love a good story (and who does not?) will not deny Jim Bridger his narrational satisfaction nor his pardonable revenge on the "doubting Thomases" of that early day. His yarns form an interesting chapter in the lore of the old frontier.

*The stories in this booklet are reprinted by permission of the publishers, the Arthur H. Clark Company from their publication "The Bozeman Trail."—Vol. 2.*

Acknowledgment is also made to H. M. Chittenden's "The Yellowstone Park," published originally by Robert Clarke.



## Mountain of Glass

*Visitors to Yellowstone Park become familiar with the celebrated Obsidian Cliff, a great mass of black volcanic glass seen on the trip between Mammoth Hot Springs and the Upper Geyser Basin. Its discovery by Bridger was a result of one of his hunting trips and happened as follows:*

COMING one day in sight of a magnificent elk, Bridger took careful aim at the unsuspecting animal and fired. To his great amazement, the elk was not only not wounded, but seemed not even to have heard the report of the rifle. Bridger drew considerably nearer and covered the elk with his most deliberate aim; but with the same result as before. A third and fourth effort met with a similar fate. Utterly exasperated, he seized his rifle by the barrel, resolved to use it as a club since it had failed as a firearm. Rushing madly toward the elk, he suddenly crashed into an immovable vertical wall which proved to be a mountain of perfectly transparent glass, on the farther side of which, still in peaceful security, the elk was quietly grazing. Stranger still, the mountain was not only of pure glass, but was a perfect telescopic lens, and, whereas, the elk seemed but a few hundred yards off, it was in reality twenty-five miles away!

## The Pebble That Grew Up

IN THE early days of the West, people who went over the Oregon Trail continuously commented upon the wonderful healthful climate, but insisted that nothing would grow in the country along the trail. One day driven to exasperation, Bridger who was with a party of the unbelievers as to the productivity of the soil along the Sweetwater, said as he was arranging his camp near the base of Independence Rock which is one mile in circumference,—“Grow? Anything will grow here. See that ’ere rock? When I first came to this section I threw a pebble across the Sweetwater. Well, that ’ere rock was once my pebble.”

## Black Magic

ACCORDING to Bridger's account there exists in the Park region a mountain which was once cursed by a great medicine man of the Crow Nation. Everything upon the mountain at the time of this dire event became instantly petrified and has remained so ever since. All forms of life are standing about in stone where they were suddenly caught by the petrifying influences. Sagebrush, grass, prairie fowl, antelope, elk and bears may there be seen as perfect as in actual life. Dashing torrents and the spray mist from them stand forth in arrested motion as if carved from rock by a sculptor's chisel. Even flowers are blooming in colors of crystal, and birds soar with wings spread in motionless flight, while the air floats with music and perfumes silicious, and the sun and moon shine with petrified light!

*Another story of this petrified region ascribed to Bridger follows:*

ONE evening after a long day's ride, Bridger was approaching a familiar camping place in this region of petrifications but from a direction not before taken. Quite unexpectedly he came upon a narrow, deep, precipitous chasm which completely blocked his way. Exhausted as both he and his horse were with their long march, he was completely disheartened at this obstacle, to pass which might cause him several hours of strenuous exertion and carry him far into the night. Riding up to the brink to reconnoiter he found that he could





not stop his horse which kept moving right along as if by its own momentum, out over the edge of the precipice, straight on at a steady gait and on a level line as if supported by an invisible bridge. Almost before he realized it he was safe on the other side and in his desired camp. His utter amazement at this miracle was soon abated when he remembered the strange character of the country he was in, and he concluded that this chasm was simply a place where the attraction of gravitation was petrified.

*The base upon which Bridger contrived these picturesque yarns can easily be discovered by Park visitors who have explored the petrifications on Specimen Ridge and various parts of the hot springs districts of the Park.*





## Nature's "Big Ben"

*The very nature of his life made Bridger's an intensely practical career and his faculty of turning everything to some useful account was highly developed. The following instance was evidently a manifestation of that trait:*

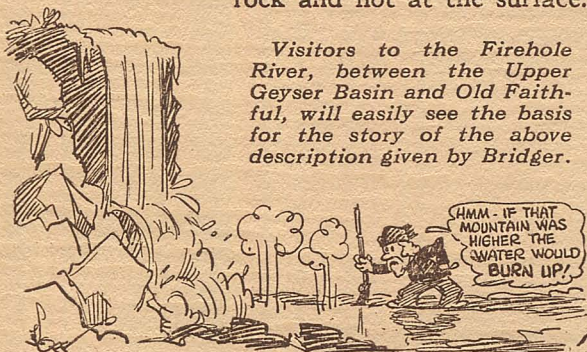
**O**PPPOSITE a certain camping ground where he frequently stopped there arose the bald, flat face of a mountain, but so distant that the echo from any sound which originated in camp did not return for a space of about six hours. Bridger converted this circumstance into an ideal alarm clock. Upon retiring for the night he would call out lustily, "Time to get up!" and true to his calculation, the alarm would roll back at the precise hour next morning when it was necessary for the camp to bestir itself.

## Water Boiled by Friction

**B**RIDGER, one day, discovered an ice-cold spring near the summit of a lofty mountain. Its waters flowed down over a long smooth slope, where it acquired such velocity that it was boiling hot when it reached the bottom.

Bridger explained that, as two sticks rubbed together produce heat by friction, so the water flowing over the smooth long slope of rock became hot. In proof, he cited an instance where the water was hot only in close proximity to the rock and not at the surface.

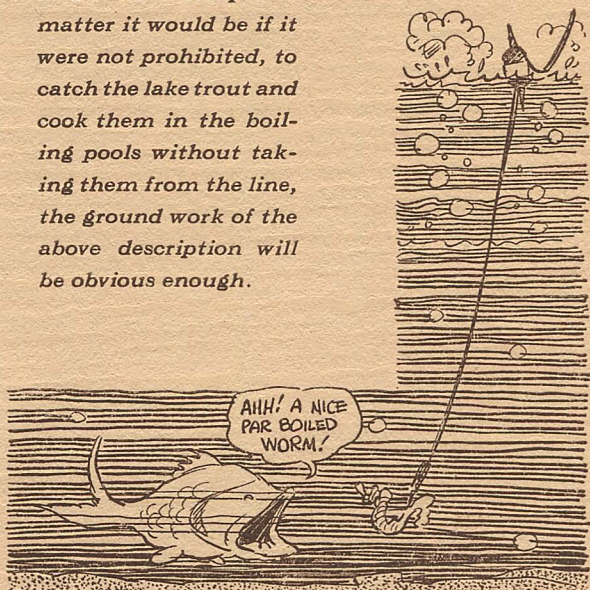
*Visitors to the Firehole River, between the Upper Geyser Basin and Old Faithful, will easily see the basis for the story of the above description given by Bridger.*

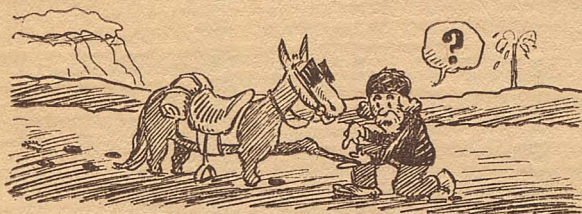


## He Liked 'em Well Done

**B**RIDGER, like all frontiersmen of his time, lived as he went along, subsisting largely on game and wild fruits taken as a part of the day's work. Along the west shore of Yellowstone lake an immense boiling spring discharges its overflow directly into the lake. The specific gravity of the hot water is less than that of the lake, owing to the expansive action of heat, and it floats in a stratum three or four feet thick on the cold water underneath. When Bridger felt the desire for fresh fish it was to this place that he went. Through the hot upper stratum he let fall his bait to the subjacent habitable zone, and having hooked his victim, cooked him on the way out!

*To those who have visited the west shore of Yellowstone Lake, and know how simple a matter it would be if it were not prohibited, to catch the lake trout and cook them in the boiling pools without taking them from the line, the ground work of the above description will be obvious enough.*





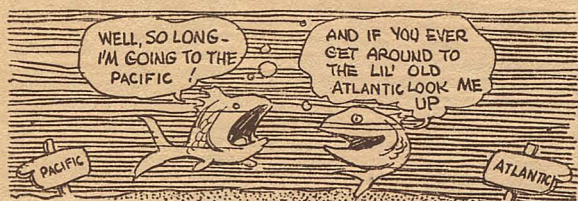
## Alum Creek

*The origin of the name, Alum Creek, a tributary of the Yellowstone River between the Grand Canyon and Lake Yellowstone, was due to an accidental discovery by Bridger.*

ONE day he forded Alum Creek and rode out several miles and back. He noticed that the return journey was only a fraction of the distance going, and that his horse's feet had shrunk to mere points which sank into the solid ground, so that the animal could scarcely hobble along. Seeking the cause he found it to be the astringent quality of the water, which was saturated with alum to such an extent that it had the power to pucker distance itself.

## Fishy Migrations

TWO-OCEAN PASS, the most remarkable pass, it is said, in the world, was discovered by Bridger in the '30's. It is eight thousand one hundred and fifty feet above sea level, and about a mile in length and the same in width. From the north a stream comes from the canyon. In the pass this stream divides, the waters on one side flowing into the Atlantic by way of the Yellowstone River, while the Pacific is fed by the same stream by way of the Snake River. Fish from these streams pass from one water to the other. Bridger used to tell



about this river and of the fish passing through it, but the story was simply called "one of Old Jim's lies," and not taken seriously. Years later the truth was discovered, and this is now one of the greatest curiosities of Yellowstone Park.

## *Land of 10,000 Wonders*

**Y**ELLOWSTONE'S phenomena are so numerous that it is doubtful whether Bridger was aware of all of them. They include:

*The 100 geysers—"pyrotechnic water-works." Water hurled skyward with amazing violence, quantity and heat.*

*Hot and cool water discharged from the same geyser.*

*Vegetation growing green in water that trickles from boiling springs.*

*Twin Lakes, one blue, the other green.*

*Isa Lake, emptying into two oceans, the Atlantic and Pacific.*

*Gaseous caverns fatal to small animals and birds which chance to enter them.*

*Roaring Mountain steaming through various vents.*

*Grand Canyon, colored as the rainbow—one of the most magnificent spectacles in all the world.*



"If I could only make one trip in my life," said a traveler, "that trip would be to Yellowstone Park."

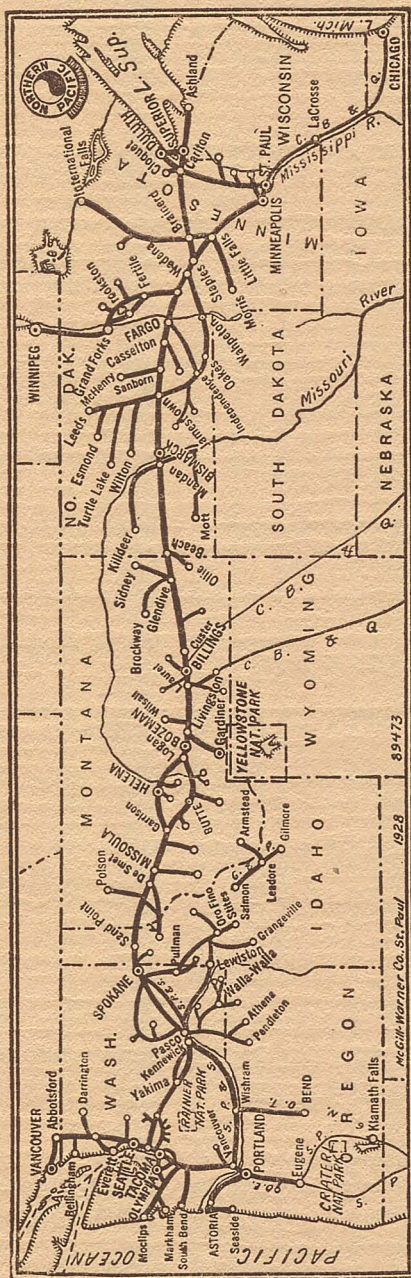
Plan now to go there on your vacation! Low summer excursion rates make the trip inexpensive. For Yellowstone album and full information, address

**E. E. NELSON**

Passenger Traffic Manager

378 Northern Pacific Ry., St. Paul, Minn.

# Map of the Northern Pacific Railway System



The main line of the Northern Pacific Railway between Chicago and Puget Sound, follows for many miles, the old pioneer trail of the intrepid explorers, Lewis and Clark. Northern Pacific trains trace the courses of rivers for 1,406 miles and pass within sight of 28 mountain ranges, comprising some of the most beautiful and inspiring scenery in America.



