

THE NATIONAL ARROW



A Good Road from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF
THE YELLOWSTONE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS NEWSLETTER?

You are receiving this inaugural copy of *The National Arrow* for one of several reasons:

You are a **friend of the Trail** who provided information, stories, or pictures to document the history of the Yellowstone Trail.

You are a **history buff, preservationist, historian, librarian, teacher or archivist** who has an interest (or might develop an interest!) in the history of the Yellowstone Trail.



You are involved in a **museum, library, archive or other organization** along the Trail that could use knowledge about the Trail to promote interest in local

or regional history. You have an interest in forwarding the heritage of the Trail by preserving its memory and artifacts and spreading knowledge about the Trail and its historic role.

You are involved in a **tourism organization** that could develop a program of heritage travel in your area using the Yellowstone Trail as a theme.

You are a part of a commercial travel or advertising concern that could use the Yellowstone Trail as a theme.

You are an **antique car buff** who could work with any of the above people to create Trail Days. **C**

REDISCOVERING THE YELLOWSTONE TRAIL

For six years, Alice and John Ridge have been searching out information about the Yellowstone Trail and about the lasting influence of auto trails. They met many people who knew the Trail in their area and some who were actively promoting it.

Trail Days, community-based gatherings inspired by the original annual day set aside to work on the Trail, have been held in Ipswich, South Dakota. That's the home of Trail Association founder J. W. Parmley. A similar event was held in Thorp, Wisconsin, home of the Yellowstone Trail Corridor,



with a parade of old autos. In the same spirit, Greenville Township, Wisconsin, formed a Yellowstone Trail Committee and planted trees along the Trail to make the Trail more attractive.

The major function of the original Yellowstone Trail Association was to mark the Trail to guide tourists over roads unmarked by government agencies. Recently, under the leadership of the Aberdeen (South Dakota) Convention and Visitors Bureau, yellow Trail markers have been erected all along US 12, the approximate route of the Yellowstone Trail in that state. The

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WHERE DOES THE TRAIL GO?

Begun in 1912 in Ipswich, South Dakota, the Yellowstone Trail was envisioned very early as an ocean-to-ocean highway to run from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound. It ran through 13 of the northern states. The Yellowstone Trail Association noted that the Trail served over 300 small towns in addition to Seattle, Spokane, Wallace, Missoula, Billings, Aberdeen, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Oshkosh, Milwaukee, Chicago, Fort Wayne, Cleveland, Buffalo, Albany, and Boston. Through much of the West it followed the Milwaukee Railroad and Northern Pacific rail routes. Its route is now on various township, county, state, US, and interstate roads. Some is now private property. **C**

THE YELLOWSTONE TRAIL ACROSS AMERICA

What was the Yellowstone Trail? Before there were numbered roads and road maps, there were named roads, usually short in length. The Yellowstone Trail, formed in South Dakota, became a transcontinental route, joining local roads into a connected chain from “Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound.” Roads, created for horses and wagons, were so bad in most of the nation that private citizen groups formed to “get out of the mud.” Automobile sales were burgeoning and owners soon discovered that there were few good places to drive the “new beauty” outside of major cities. Autos were transported to most cities on railroad flatcars to avoid the muddy or dusty rutted wagon roads.



The Yellowstone Trail Association, founded in 1912, was one of many groups pushing for long-distance roads. As an outgrowth of the Good Roads Movement, the Yellowstone Trail Association established a coast-to-coast route through the northern tier of 13 states and motivated citizens, townships and counties to build or improve the road for the benefit of both local farmers and tourists. The Trail Association was supported by communities and individuals all along the 3600 mile route, each paying a fee to be advertised to tourists. It was a win-win situation; the Trail Association got its road and communities got fame and tourist fortune.



The Yellowstone Trail Through Batavia, N.Y.

Why was it called “Yellowstone?” A goal of the 1912 founders was to direct tourists along the upper tier of states to the Yellowstone National Park through towns along “their” route. Starting in South Dakota and working both directions, they began to mark the Trail from coast to coast. Since there were no numbered highways in 1912, it was the custom to use colorful symbols to mark a route. Naturally, yellow was the Trail’s chosen color. Rocks, telegraph poles, fence posts, and anything else along the way were painted with the famous yellow circle with a black arrow pointing to the Park.

The Yellowstone Trail did much for America. When the Yellowstone Trail Association began, the concept of state aid to county roads had existed for 21 years. But the few states that participated in the concept distributed aid to counties, resulting in improvements only of local roads. There was little concern for connecting roads. Even the federal government’s RFD mail delivery program only supported short routes. The arrival of the Yellowstone Trail meant that the counties through which the Trail went were persuaded by

the Association to put their funds into a road that actually connected with the next county’s road. Roads joining roads forwarded the concept of a state highway system.

The idea of encouraging tourism had been associated with railroads. Their sometimes elaborate ads lured the Easterner to the wonders of the West. But, auto tourism and camping were new to Americans. The Yellowstone Trail Association provided maps and services of all kinds in their 17 travel bureaus, much like the AAA today. The assurance given by the Yellowstone Trail Association of the availability of camping facilities, gasoline, tourist facilities and passable roads did much to broaden the view of the public beyond the immediate horizon. This transcontinental route served to connect us as Americans.

The Yellowstone Trail Association, along with many other groups, motivated the opening of the Yellowstone National Park to a flood of auto tourists in 1915. The Association also helped persuade Congress in 1916 and later that the time had finally come to invest in auto roads. Local and state governments could not do it alone.

Can we see the “original” Trail today? In the 90 years since the Trail was founded much has changed in relation to America’s highways. The original Trail has been smoothed, moved slightly as local roads improved, and has received a better profile. It has also been overlaid by three interstate roads, nine state routes and it now bears hundreds of county letter signs. In some places it has reverted back to the farmer or rancher and rests peacefully under grass. On one farm in South Dakota you can see a slight depression of a long-ago road in the waving grass and a small rising bank as the depression turns and disappears over a low hill.



But there are a few marked places and streets named “Yellowstone” where the modern traveler can experience the Trail of old. And many, many places where one can approximate the Trail and imagine road life in the 1920’s. This newsletter is an attempt to present such adventures to the reader, supplying detailed maps of sections of the original Trail with each issue, and sharing news of current events along the Trail. **C**

2002
CELEBRATING THE 90TH BIRTHDAY
OF THE FOUNDING OF THE
YELLOWSTONE TRAIL.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FINDING, PRESERVING AND ENJOYING THE HERITAGE OF THE TRAIL

The Yellowstone Trail is unique in that it is not a single site “owned” by a single community and featured in just one museum. All of the museums in communities along the Trail have the opportunity to feature this historic road and the sights the traveler would have seen between 1912-1930. Engendering interest in local historic events that were part of a national transportation movement can be done on several levels: through museums, through auto clubs, through citizen participation, and through local convention and travelers bureaus. Digging up local history requires that we all ask questions, the answers to which reveal hidden history in communities.

About the Yellowstone Trail, one could ask: What buildings were standing then that are still here today in our community? Any garages still standing that would have seen a Model T or Maxwell or Packard or Kissel car? How was our community affected by an influx of autos during those years? What movies were showing? Were surplus Army vehicles used to build roads in our community after World War I? What was the accident rate? Where was the Trail then and what roads occupy that space now? Who was the “Trailman,” the chap who watched over the Trail, in our community?

Here are some ideas for local action:

±**Paint rocks** yellow to mark the Trail. Add an arrow pointing toward Yellowstone National Park.

±**Plant trees.** Ninety years ago folks in Ipswich, South Dakota planted a line of trees to beautify the Trail.

±**Hold a Trail Day.** Trail Days were held in the early decades of the 20th century for the purpose of getting everybody out to fix up the Trail near the community. Today this has translated into history days, reunions or holding antique car parades or runs on the Trail. Contact your local old car club.

±**Place an “On the Yellowstone Trail” logo** on the city’s welcome sign at the city limits. You know, the sign with the emblems of the civic clubs and churches.

±**Mount a display at your local museum.** Engender interest in the Trail and your community’s history with materials from your local old newspapers, pictures, Chamber of Commerce records, and artifacts from the 1912-1930 era.

±**Search for family tales related to the Trail.** Interview Grandma and Grandpa or invade the attic. Share the stories with local historians and send them to *The National Arrow*.

±**Take the Trail to the schools to promote local history.** Folks in Owen, Wisconsin, presented the national and local history of the Trail in a school throughout one day.

±**Use the “On the Yellowstone Trail” theme to promote local or regional tourism.** If you operate a tourist accommodation or a restaurant join with others along the Trail to jointly promote your businesses. One group of Bed

±and Breakfast owners along the Trail joined together to produce a brochure.

±**Read and share *The National Arrow*.** Discover what others are doing and share your efforts. Let *The National Arrow* know about you, your interests, your activities and your needs.

If you want more ambitious ideas for action, try these:

±**Learn about the Federal Highway Administration’s National Scenic Byways Program.** See www.byways.org for basic information. The Trail is a natural candidate.

±**Learn about the National Trust for Historic Preservation.** See the web sites:

www.nthp.com

www.nthp.org/heritagetourismservices.html

www.ruralheritage.org/histrds.html .

For both of the above programs you need to be part of a state agency or at least work through a state agency. Let us know if you are working along this line. We will share information through *The National Arrow*.

! **Visit www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org.** Find out what others are doing for another old highway. You will find the statement that the Lincoln Highway was “first.” Is that hype or fact? Critically, what does the statement mean? Its sponsoring organization was founded *after* the Yellowstone Trail Association. So was it the first to be mapped? To be made passable? To be paved? This is still an active question.

C



The Yellowstone Trail near Garrison, Montana

1912 Bridge Scheduled for Removal.

Advertisement

The following are available from Yellowstone Trail Publishers:

Introducing the Yellowstone Trail; A Good Road from Plymouth Rock to Puget Sound, 1912-1930. Paperback, 96 pages. \$5.95 each book plus \$1.50 S&H for any number of books.

A reproduction: *1919 Yellowstone Trail Association Guide* brochure. \$4.00 each plus \$1.00 S&H for any number of brochures.

Also Trail Logo window **stickers** and **Tee-shirts**. See www.yellowstonetrail.org or write to Yellowstone Trail Publishers, 7000 South Shore Drive, Altoona, WI 54720.

Inquiries: arrow@yellowstonetrail.org C



LET US KNOW!

Let us know about your knowledge of the Trail and its local history.

Are you interested in searching for the records and letters of your local Trailmen, the people who represented local interests to the national Association, determined the exact local route of the Trail and provided services to tourists? If so, ask us for names of your local Trailmen and Association officers. We can find them for many towns along the route. The Trailmen may have kept material in your town about the Trail which is available nowhere else.

Write to us about what's going on about the Trail in your area. What tales or ideas do you have to share?

Let us know the names and addresses of others who would be interested in joining the discussion about the Trail.

And, of course, let us know if you never want to hear from us again!

Contact information is in the green rectangle. **C**

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YELLOWSTONE TRAIL REDISCOVERED



Minnesota Department of Transportation has erected Trail markers along parts of US 212, the route of the Trail in that state.

Jon Axline, bridge expert and highway historian of the Montana Department of Transportation, instigated two explanatory signs along the Trail in Montana.

The Renville County Museum, Morton, Minnesota, recently published a collection of newspaper articles from 1910 to 1917 which dealt with the Good Roads Movement and the Yellowstone Trail. It was a part of a large display celebrating the Yellowstone Trail at the county fair last summer.

Four convention and visitor bureaus in central Wisconsin received a \$40,000 grant to promote the Yellowstone Trail as a tourist attraction. That effort is spreading to the state level, soon to include all 18 counties along the Trail in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Public Television is preparing a program about early autos and the Yellowstone Trail in Wisconsin, to be aired in July.

These and other efforts to rediscover the Trail will be explored in future editions of *The National Arrow*. **C**



Wisconsin Yellowstone Trail Committee receiving a marketing grant.

THE NATIONAL ARROW

The National Arrow is designed in the tradition of *The Arrow*, the newsletter of the original Yellowstone Trail Association early in the century. *The Arrow* was sent to members of the Yellowstone Trail Association. These members had paid dues to the Association to support its efforts to improve the highway and attract tourists to services along the route.

The National Arrow will be published sporadically as time and resources permit. It is mightily dependent on expressions of interest by the readers and the readers' submissions of news items, stories, opinions, questions, and plans. There is no cost for this newsletter.

- The purposes of *The National Arrow* are to
- ! promote the Yellowstone Trail and to increase knowledge about and interest in the Trail;
 - ! provide a communication service among interested people;
 - ! report events, government initiatives, grants, marketing efforts and plans related to the Trail; and
 - ! suggest promotional efforts, events and tourism opportunities.

Questions, stories and news items about the historic Trail and current related activities may be directed to:

John or Alice Ridge
 Mail: 7000 South Shore Drive, Altoona, WI, 54720
 E-mail: jridge@yellowstonetrail.org
 Phone or FAX: 715-834-5992.
 Web site response: www.yellowstonetrail.org **C**

The Yellowstone Trail in Yankee Jim Canyon, just north of the Yellowstone National Park.

A bit of the Trail with preservation potential.



THE YELLOWSTONE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

The Yellowstone Trail Association consists of the authors of this newsletter and any others who tell us that they are members. Sometime in the not near future the Association may become a bit more formal if the interest emerges. Let us know what you think the Association should become. And tell us what you might be willing to do. **C**