



It was my privilege to join a five-day guided “Circle the Continental Divide” press trip covering what Wyoming does to feed, entertain and encourage visitors to enjoy their state, and I’d like to tell you about it.

I arrived at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and met writer Bernice Karnop, and our guide, Mindi Crabb. We spent our first evening getting acquainted in Jackson’s rustic Million Dollar Cowboy Steak House. Upstairs was the world-famous Million Dollar Cowboy Bar where the likes of Hank Williams, Glen Campbell and Willie Nelson have performed. From the Town Square, where all corners are marked with huge arches made with thousands of elk antlers, we watched a funky re-enactment of frontier justice that claims to be our country’s longest, continuously running shootout.

Jackson’s National Elk Refuge has the world’s largest concentration of elk. In late fall, heavy snows push them from high range down to the lower habitat. Wintertime offers crunchy sleigh rides among the 7,500 antlered residents. Wyoming is also home to bighorn sheep, deer, bison, wolves and mountain lions. Of course Jackson Hole is known as a famous ski resort. I’d like to ski, too, but I’d break my neck. Snow still covered the magnificent Grand Teton and Gros Ventre (pronounced Grow Vont) mountain ranges.

We admired the Mural Room paintings by Carl Roters while eating lunch at the Jackson Lake Lodge, but enjoyed even more the panoramic view outside the dining room windows painted by God. The offered combination dinner/breakfast/overnight Snake River whitewater rafting trips made my eyes spin. I’ve rafted the Snake River in Idaho’s Hell’s Canyon but I don’t recall that it included anything like the Thousand Bubbles of Champagne Rapids.



Our trip took us along the shores of Jenny and Jackson lakes at Grand Teton National Park. Going deeper into the park would have required hiking. We crossed into the south entrance of Yellowstone National Park, turning at the Fishing Bridge east along Yellowstone Lake. Alaska’s Mt. McKinley can create its own weather, as can North America’s largest high-elevation lake. The scenery is exceptional and I advise visiting both Grand Teton and Yellowstone for no less than a week each to appreciate their amazing features.

Buffalo Bill’s Town

At Cody, east of Yellowstone is the historic Irma Hotel, built in 1902 by Buffalo Bill, who founded the town of Cody. The hotel attracted the most famous personalities of that day, Frederick Remington, Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane, as well as ranchers, cowboys, artists and other locals. Almost as famous as its prime rib dinner is the carved cherrywood bar, a gift from Queen Victoria in appreciation for Buffalo Bill’s European Wild West Show.

As we found our seats in Dan Miller’s Cowboy Music Revue across the street, we chatted briefly

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with this tall, rangy, personable cowboy. Dan greeted each person as they arrived. Dan's 12-year-old daughter, Hannah, has played the fiddle since she was 6 and she was terrific. Along with his sidekicks, Dan sang and played old favorites like "Ghost Riders in the Sky," "Tumbling Tumbleweed" and something about, "I'd like to take you to the cornfield and kiss you between the ears." Poetry, bluegrass, gospel, trivia, and talent meshed with a smidgeon of comedy, and we were completely charmed.



Wind River Country, which is southeast of Yellowstone, boasts 5 million acres of public land with 53 mountain peaks over 13,000 feet. The 2.2 million acres of the Wind River Indian Reservation are home to more than 8,000 members of the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes. St. Stephen's Indian Mission, founded in 1884, tells the story of their journey of faith via new stained glass windows, designed and created by congregation members. Margaret Coel has written the Wind River Mystery Series that takes place on the reservation and has included the mission, renamed St. Frances.

The reservation is also connected to the young Shoshone Indian mother, Sacajawea, who accompanied the 1804-06 Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery in their hunt for the most feasible route to the Pacific. She assisted with translations, provided a knowledge of camas roots when they became ill, and indicated they were peaceful travelers by her gentle presence. Historians can't agree on spelling her name, Sacagawea, Sakakawea, or Sacajawea; whether she died young in 1812 or old in 1884; or where she is buried. The reservation claims her gravesite and memorial near Ft. Washakie. Ah, sweet mysteries of life.

Nice Night

The Wind River KOA in Dubois offered a chuckwagon dinner show that provided good food followed by music and entertainment that was gentle on the ears and made us laugh. What I really loved was the rustic log cabin I slept in at the Twin Pines Lodge across the street. I want one!



Sandstone and limestone formations make up the Sinks Canyon State Park near Lander, so it isn't any wonder that the Popo Agie River (Po-po Zsha) pours into a large cavern and vanishes. The wonder comes from where it goes for two hours before it appears again at The Rise, a half-mile away. It surfaces calmer and warmer and continues its way into the valley. Although the Popo Agie is not stocked, it is full of huge rainbow and brown trout and an even bigger, "No Fishing" sign. Mother Nature is so sneaky.

Once Wyoming's largest city, South Pass City is now a state historic site. It boomed with the 1867 gold rush prospectors and those who followed with saloons, banks, jails, general stores, homes and schools, and declined nearly as fast. Gold found at various times up until 1960 brought smaller booms. A few prospectors still pan and dig for the elusive major nugget. Here

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also is where you will find Oregon Trail ruts that are still visible even though the last recorded wagon went through South Pass in 1912.

Following the Trail

We took off on a gravel side road from South Pass City following the Lander Cut-off of the Oregon Trail, crossing the Continental Divide and the Big and Little Sandy rivers. Ruts and gravesites can be seen occasionally and concrete posts mark the trail, although many have been destroyed by vandals. The Lander Cut-off, which rejoins the Oregon Trail in Idaho, provided more water, wood, and animal forage than the larger desert areas and avoided the expensive Green River ferry crossings.



After dinner and live music at Pinedale's Rock Rabbit Coffeehouse, Mindi took us for a sunset drive above Fremont Lake, Wyoming's second largest natural lake, into the Bridger-Teton National Forest that includes 13,804-foot Gannett Peak, Wyoming's highest.

Pinedale's Museum of the Mountain Man is all about the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade of 1824-40. People travel for miles to attend the lively Green River Rendezvous Days to commemorate Mountain Men like Jim Bridger, William Sublette and Kit Carson. But I want to tell you more about them in a future column because I just may have found a long, lost relative!

I enjoyed my early Christmas gift immensely, although RVers would stretch those five days into spring, summer and fall. Go, enjoy, God Bless.

Autographed copies of 2009 fourth edition [RVing Alaska and Canada](#) (\$19.95) and [Adventures with the Silver Gypsy](#) (\$14.95) are available through author Sharlene Minshall, Box 1040, Congress, AZ 85332-1040, or [Amazon.com](#). Follow her blog, [The Silver Gypsy](#), at [rvlife.com](#)