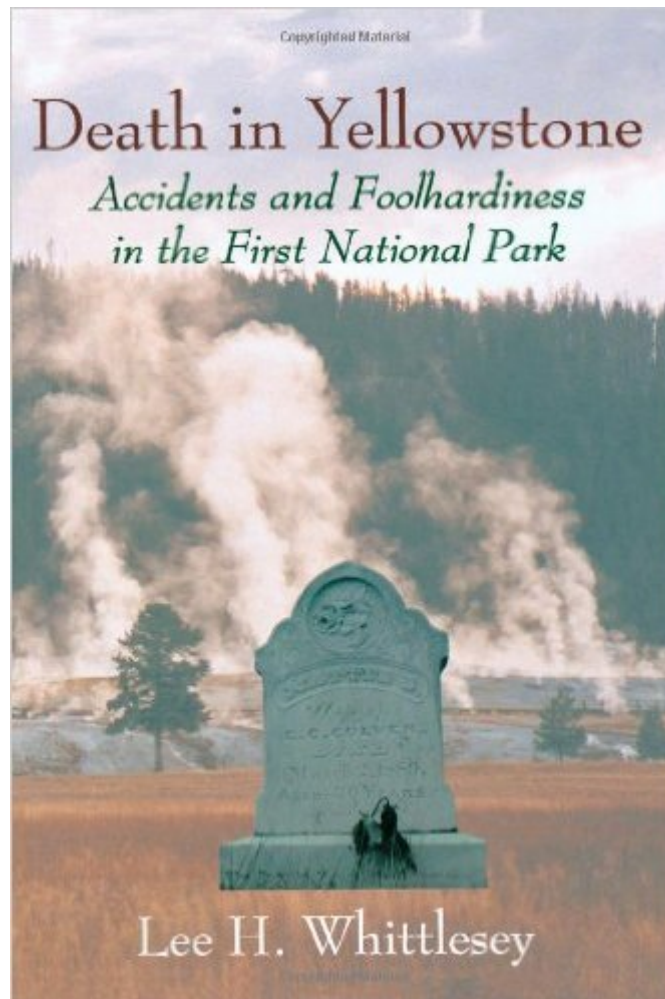


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# Death In Yellowstone: Accidents And Foolhardiness In The First National Park



## Synopsis

Intriguing stories of how people have died in Yellowstone warn about the many dangers that exist there and in wild areas in general.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Whenever I mention this book to anyone, they are horrified by the title. It is not a "Faces of Death" book of gore. Obviously, the book chronicles deaths within the Park and is therefore not exactly light reading. But, Mr. Whittlesley (the official NPS Yellowstone archivist) tells the stories of the deaths with a historian's tact. There are few - if any - people on earth that know as much about the park as Whittlesley. One version of his "Yellowstone Place Names" (the longer version of the one sold in tourist stores and on .com) is so comprehensive it is (only?) available on microfiche! Having lived in the Park, I know it's a very different world. (The story noted by Rhonda, another reviewer, about the bison goring a car - a Lake Lodge employee's Geo Metro in 1991 - is actually quite true.) Many of the deaths are from things you might think of - like climbing falls, eating poisonous plants, and hot pot incidents. Even as I am writing this, another Old Faithful employee died yesterday (8/22/00) in the Park after falling into Cavern Spring in Lower Geyser basin (see Idaho Statesman, 8/23/00, p.2A). But, the book is also full of deaths of the kind you find everywhere else in the world - like heart attacks, suicide, murders (yes, several!), car accidents, plane crashes (six of them - one site of which I've visited - with 20 deaths!), etc. The earliest chronicled deaths are in 1839 and continue through 1994. Some of the over 300 incidents are briefly related as the facts are slim. Others are told

in great detail with quotes, newspaper stories, cemetery inscriptions and exact place names. The simple chronology takes up 5 pages, while the meat of the text takes 198 pages!

At first glance, it sounds like a morbid book. Two hundred seventy six pages about people who have died in various ways in Yellowstone National Park. In reality, it is a fascinating book with an underlying message of safety and caution in National Parks. You might expect a book which is written by an historian to have an academic tone and be full of footnotes and an extensive bibliography. "Death in Yellowstone" by Yellowstone National Park Historian, Lee H. Whittlesey, does have the footnotes and bibliography. It also reads like a Stephen King novel, drawing the reader to the next page. Whittlesey even used a King technique of quoting song lyrics or some other source to introduce his chapters. Even many of the footnotes and bibliography entries are annotated with additional, interesting information. The book's subtitle, "Accidents and Foolhardiness in the First National Park", sets the tone. Nearly every chronicled death in the book really is due to carelessness on the part of the deceased; or on the part of someone else. The historian's perspective gives Whittlesey the opportunity to dig into the archives of Yellowstone as well as newspaper accounts in cities in the area taking him (and the readers) back to the 1800's and the park's earliest deaths. For recent events he often spoke with "primary sources", witnesses and family members. Each of the 25 chapters takes the reader to a different and bizarre way that death has occurred in Yellowstone National Park. The chapter titles, themselves, often give a light hearted and much needed break from the serious nature of the overall work.

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