

Interpretation

A New Yellowstone Curriculum

By Jack de Golia

Yellowstone National Park is now offering a curriculum for upper elementary grades. Called **Expedition: Yellowstone!**, it's available to help teachers and students study Yellowstone. Students are able to learn about the park either by studying it at their school or by combining classroom work with a trip (an "Expedition!") to Yellowstone.

The program allows the park to explain current policies to audiences of local students and their adult chaperones. Interest in the program is highest in the states surrounding Yellowstone: Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah. These are also the areas with intense interest in park management policies. But teachers from all over the country have purchased the materials to use in their classrooms, allowing the park to spread the word about Yellowstone specifically and national parks in general, far and wide.

Aimed at the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade levels, the curriculum materials consist of a teacher's workbook and a storybook, the latter entitled, *Expedition Yellowstone, A Mountain Adventure*. The story book was published last summer. It has original stories about the park, each about one of the major concepts in the accompanying teacher's workbook. The workbook can be used to teach mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts.

Teachers registering to participate in the program also receive logistical information for planning an "Expedition" to the park. They may reserve accommodations and are assigned a park ranger to help them plan and prepare their "Expedition." The accommodations are rustic cabins at the Lamar Buffalo Ranch in the northeastern part of Yellowstone.

During these Expeditions, park interpreters take groups on all-day hikes and walks to study concepts in the curriculum materials. It's during these extended contacts that students and parents can learn about park management. Interpreters stress the uniqueness of national parks, how they're managed in special ways, and how national parks require special behavior from people enjoying them.

Participants can also hear about and see resource management practices. As a group passes an enclosure, the interpreter uses the opportunity to tell students about long-term study of the park and how that knowledge is used by park managers. The students themselves then get a chance to learn first hand about resource management as they conduct simple plant transects surveys. These surveys increase their awareness of their surroundings and also introduce standard resource management practices.

The Expedition Yellowstone Program is allowing the Park Service to reach the next generation of citizens with the message about national parks, ensuring they will care for the legacy of national parks the current generation received from its predecessors.

de Golia is a Park Ranger, Division of Interpretation, at Yellowstone NP.



Ranger Jack de Golia and students explore a wilderness thermal basin in the remote Lamar Valley of Yellowstone NP. (Photo by Dave Price)