

**Orchid Walk #10, Lone Star Geyser**

See the 12-foot tall cone of Lone Star Geyser, wait for the eruption, and find large colonies of Bog Orchids (both White and Green), Western Coralroot orchids, plus a few Rattlesnake Plantain orchids with their evergreen leaves. There are some thermal seeps close to the trail, and an old dam. Bikes allowed on this trail, which is an old road. Some licensed outfitters lead bike rides and time the outing for the geyser eruption.

**Round-trip distance:** Approximately 6 ¼ miles to the geyser and back. The first orchids are less than ¼ mile from the parking lot.

**Elevation gain:** Almost flat. Elevation: 7640 ft at parking lot, and 7690 ft at the geyser, with very little up and down.

**Time:** About 3 ½ hours, or longer, if you wait for the geyser to erupt.

**Kids will like:** The old dam, the large cone of Lone Star geyser, and the little trunk-shaped flowers of the pink Elephanthead.

**Visitor Center:** The Old Faithful visitor center posts the approximate time when Lone Star Geyser will erupt. Then plan enough time for the orchids and other sights, either before or after you watch the geyser.

**Orchid species:** Western coral root orchids (*Corallorhiza mertensiana*), White and green bog orchids in the meadows (*Platanthera dilatata*, *Platanthera huronensis*), Ladies tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*), and Rattlesnake plantain orchid (*Goodyera oblongifolia*).

**Best time for blooms:** mid-June to mid-July for Coralroots and Bog Orchids. August for Rattlesnake Plantain (*Goodyera oblongifolia*). Late July or August for Ladies Tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*) along the shore of the Firehole River near the geyser.

**Other interesting plants:** Elephanthead (*Pedicularis groenlandica*) along the Firehole River in large numbers. They have brilliant dark pink tiny blossoms in the shape of elephant trunks. I call them “pink elephants”. This plant is not an orchid, but the way the blossoms are arranged along the stem seems similar to bog orchids to some people. Make sure you do the “sniff test,” the aroma is lovely.

**GPS:**

**Trailhead:** Approx 3.5 mi from the Old Faithful Overpass driving east toward West Thumb, N44° 26.673' W110° 48.263'.

**Orchid locations:**

--Western coralroot (*Corallorhiza mertensiana*), first ones on the lefthand side of the trail as you head to the geyser at N44° 26.504' W110° 48.232', but they occur sporadically in colonies of a few to 20+ plants all the way to the geyser. Other locations to check are N44° 26.374' W110° 48.210', and N44° 25.138' W110° 48.303' near the geyser area.

--Rattlesnake Plantain (or Giant Rattlesnake Plantain, *Goodyera oblongifolia*).

N44° 26.183' W110° 48.288', under a small fir tree. This plant is difficult to find in Yellowstone.

--Green and White Bog Orchids (*Platanthera* species):

Near trailhead: N44° 26.542' W110° 48.254'

Meadow: N44° 25.756' W110° 48.207'; Large meadow with White Bog orchids (*Platanthera dilatata*): N44° 25.392' W110° 48.085'

**Let's Get Moving!**

The trailhead is just past the Kepler Cascades parking area as you head southeast on the Grand Loop road from Old Faithful toward West Thumb. Read the trail sign, check out the map, make sure you have your bear spray, snacks, and water, and then head up the trail.

The trail is an old road that brings you to the Firehole River very soon after leaving the parking lot. Next there's a small dam on the Firehole. Now start looking for orchids. You will find both Green and White Bog Orchids (*Platanthera* sp.) in wet areas near the river and in ditches along the road. The first ones are less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from the trailhead. Do the "sniff test" to enjoy the aroma of the White Bog Orchids, also called "Scentbottle". The Green ones have a much fainter or no aroma.

The first Western Coralroot orchids (*Corallorhiza mertensiana*) are just a little further along, only about  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile from the trailhead. These Coralroots grow in drier areas under lodgepole pine. Like all Coralroots, no aroma. Watch your feet because it is easy to step on the coralroot orchids accidentally. Just as in the Old Faithful area, the Coralroot orchids sprout in large colonies. If you find one, there are probably 20 nearby.

At about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile start looking for the Rattlesnake Plantain (*Goodyera oblongifolia*) orchids to the left, partially hidden under a small fir tree. The evergreen leaves of this orchid are in a basal whorl, and the veins of the leaves are white. They grow with the evergreen wildflower Pipsissewa (*Chimaphilla umbellata*, or 'Prince's Pine'). I have found the Rattlesnake Plantain orchids in only a couple of other spots in Yellowstone, the Canyon area (see WOW #13), Mammoth (WOW #1), and on the Solfatara Trail near Norris.

At 1.7 miles there is another nice group of Bog Orchids. Then about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  miles from the trailhead you come to a trail junction where Spring Creek enters the Firehole. Stay on the main trail. At about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles there's another meadow that is absolutely chock full of White Bog orchids mixed with the greenies.

**Keep going or turn around?**

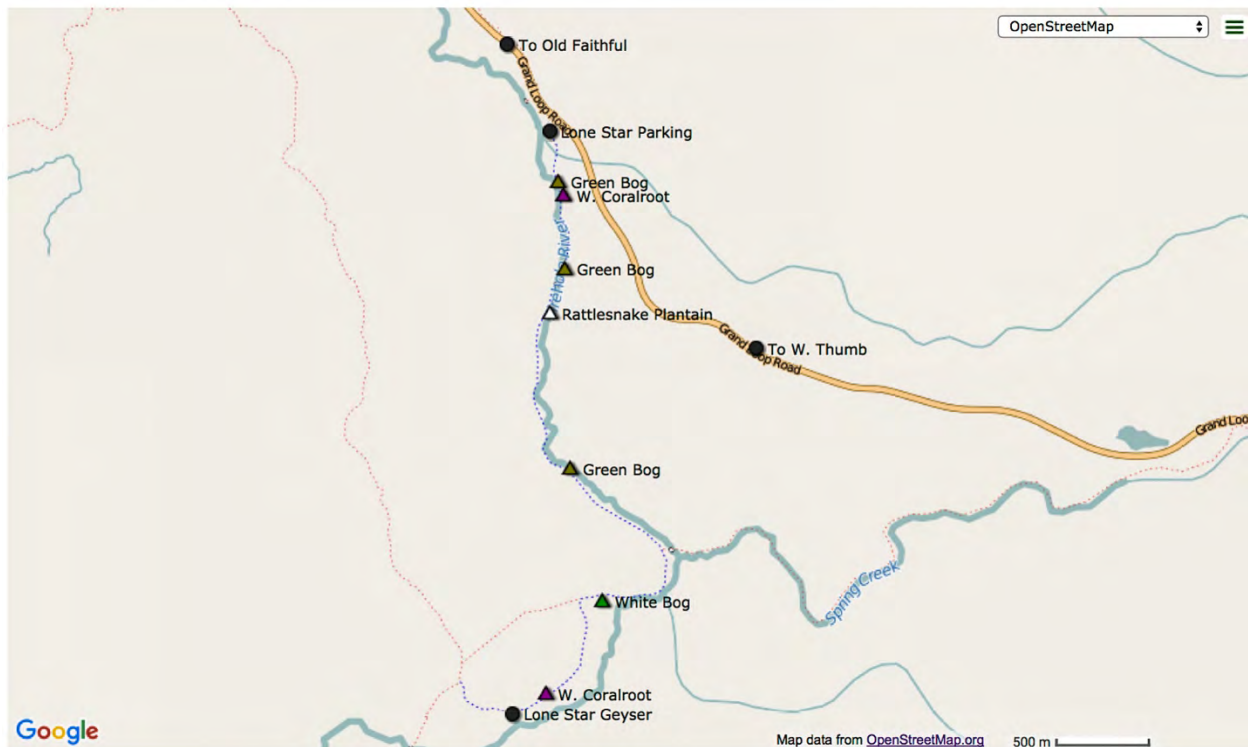
After finding at least 3 kinds of orchids in the first mile of this walk you can feel pretty smug about your orchid hunt. But don't forget Lone Star Geyser, 3.1 miles from the parking lot. It erupts about every 3 hours, and even if your timing isn't perfect the geyser has a magnificent 12 ft cone. The eruption is 30 to 45 ft high and lasts up to 15 minutes. The guided bike rides usually arrive about the right time, so wait around with the bike riders if they're there. While you're waiting for Lone Star to erupt, check the woods behind you for more Coralroots, and look along the edges of the Firehole River for the pink Elephanthead (*Pedicularis groenlandica*) flowers, another of my favorites. If it is July or August, also look for Ladies Tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*) on edge of the river.

After Lone Star erupts, maybe head back to Old Faithful and enjoy the magnificent log architecture of the Old Faithful Inn. I also love the art works in the dining room, a Thomas Moran original painting, and etched glass panels of animals partying from the Prohibition era.

And check out WOW #7 for orchids you can find right around Old Faithful itself.

**Historical orchid sightings.** In 1897 a botanist named Rydberg, who wrote the second-ever catalog of flora of Yellowstone in 1900, found White Bog Orchids (*Platanthera dilatata*) in

the Lone Star Geyser Basin. Western Coralroots were recorded in 1899 near Dunraven Peak and along the Lewis River, but I haven't found records of them either here or in the Old Faithful basin. Ladies Tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*) were found about ¼ mile from Lone Star geyser in 2003.



Map 10: Lone Star Geyser (north is up)

#### Bike Tourists Watch From Trail



#### Visual Orchid Guide for Lone Star

Colleen's Wild Orchid Walks in Yellowstone All rights reserved  
[http://www.childrenandpollution.org/Native\\_Orchids\\_Yellowstone](http://www.childrenandpollution.org/Native_Orchids_Yellowstone)

Green Bog Orchid  
(*Platanthera aquilonis*)



June 13, 2015, Lone Star Trail

White Bog Orchid  
(*Platanthera dilatata*)



June 13, 2015 Lone Star Trail

Menzies Rattlesnake Plantain Orchid  
(*Goodyera oblongifolia*)  
Leaves (under Fir in needle litter)



June 13, 2015 Lone Star Geyser Trail

Western Coral Root Orchids in bud  
(*Corallorhiza mertensiana*)



June 13, 2015 Lone Star Trail