

Old Faithful Area and Geyser Basins

WOW #7a, The Old Faithful Area

Mallard Lake Trail

Get away from the crowd by the geyser, see where bears have stripped bark off pine trees to eat the sap, find at least 4 species of orchids, and eat your lunch beside a tranquil alpine lake.

Safety on this hike:

1--Yes, carry your bear spray. Both times on this hike, I saw bear sign on trees. There are usually a few other people around, but this trail is not crowded, so keep a conversation going.

2 --Heat stress. One section of this hike gets hot because it crosses a field of volcanic rocks that are usually exposed to the sun. Carry extra water.

Kids will like: Maybe looking for frogs and insects around the edge of the lake, seeing the bear sign on the trees.

Visitor Center / Ranger Station: The Visitor Center is the large modern building between the Old Faithful Inn and Old Faithful Lodge. It posts the expected eruption time for Old Faithful, as do the Lodge and Inn. The Visitor Center also posts information on Lone Star Geyser (see WOW #10). Plus there are nice flush toilets, drinking water, and education on geyser science.

Total round-trip distance: Approximately 7 mi.

Elevation gain: Approximately 700 ft to the lake.

Time: Approximately 4 hours round trip, depending on you.

Best time for blooms: mid-June to early July (Bog Orchids and Coralroots). I have hiked this trail in late June and mid-July. There might be Ladies tresses orchids (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*) in some wet areas in late July or August.

GPS for orchids:

--Western Coralroot (*Corallorhiza mertensiana*), large colonies in at least three locations, here are coordinates for 2 of them:

N44.45822° W110.81984°

N44.45815° W110.81814°

--Spotted Coralroot (*Corallorhiza maculata*):

N44.45812° W110.81463°

--White Bog Orchids (*Platanthera dilatata*) in at least two locations. Look for them whenever you cross a wet area.

--On the shore of the Firehole River at the start of the Mallard Creek Trail, upstream from the bridge: N44° 27.493' W110° 49.337'

-- Large wet meadow chock full of these bog orchids:

N44.46004° W110.80383°

--Green Bog Orchids (*Platanthera aquilonis*).

Also look for these whenever you cross a wet area. There is a tree with stripped bark near the location of this bog orchid: N44.45994° W110.80335°.

Other interesting flowers to look for: Oregon grape (*Mahonia repens*) is a leow shrub with yellow blossoms in late June and dark blue berries later. These are extremely tart. Early in the season, there are also shooting stars (*Dodecatheon pulchella*), one of my favorite flowers.

Other attractions: Hike through a volcanic canyon, glimpse the Old Faithful geyser basin through the trees, and enjoy one of the most peaceful spots I know of in Yellowstone.

Let's Get Moving!

The trailhead sign is to the east of the Old Faithful Lodge. Drive in that direction, and you'll find 2 small parking areas. Then the footpath starts right there. You should find a footbridge across the Firehole River, and the main trail sign is across the bridge. Read the trail sign, and look at the map.

Initially the trail is mostly flat and passes through lodgepole forest that was probably burned during the 1988 fires. The first coralroot orchids (Western Coralroots, *Corallorhiza mertensiana*) are only about ¼ mile from the trailhead. Whenever you find specimens of this orchid, look around for more, and watch where you put your feet!

As the trail starts to rise gently, you should be able to find some Spotted Coralroots (*Corallorhiza maculata*). Their stems are larger than the Western Coralroots.

Now the trail begins to climb in earnest, though it is never butt-busting steep. It starts to cross some small watercourses and seeps – take a minute to look for bog orchids. Also, keep your eyes on the trees for bear sign (see photo of stripped tree below).

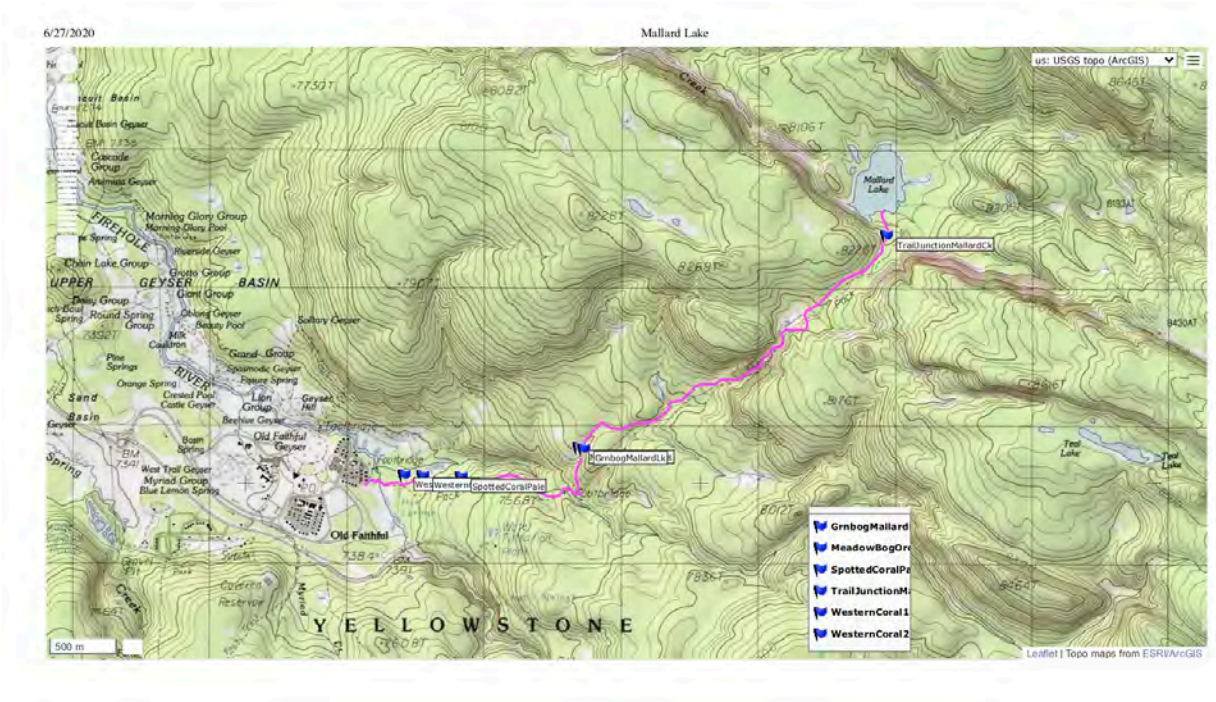
As you reach almost 7700' elevation, you cross a very small watercourse with some Green Bog Orchids (*Platanthera aquilonis*), and on your left there is a meadow with lots of White Bog Orchids (*Platanthera dilatata*). Make sure you sniff the White Bog Orchids, which have the nickname "Scentbottle". Also, near here there are numerous small trees with the bark stripped off. In 2020, while hiking with a friend, we tasted the sap, which is only very slightly sweet, mainly piney flavored, and has a bitter aftertaste.

The trail steepens slightly from here, and as you get closer to the lake you enter a canyon with obvious volcanic rock. As you emerge from the hot, rocky canyon, you'll see a wetland on your left. From here the trail is mostly flat for about a half-mile to the lake. Just before the lake, you'll see the trail junction that goes to Mallard Creek. Keep going a bit, and you're at the lake.

In 2020 at the lake, we saw a common loon diving repeatedly. Other sources indicate that there are no fish in the lake, so perhaps the loon was just prospecting.

Choose your spot to sit and enjoy this exceptionally tranquil corner of Yellowstone National Park. Ahhh...

Map: Mallard Lake Trail



file:///Users/colleenmoore/Desktop/Colleen/personal/hiking stuff/YellowstoneGPXhikes/MallardLake.html

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Photos: Mallard Lake Hike





Bear stripped bark for sap. Note claw marks on bark
6-23-2020



Mallard Lake, 7-7-2017



Western coralroot, 6-23-2020



Green bog orchid, 6-23-2020



Large clump of yellow stemmed spotted coralroot orchids
7-7-2017