

Museum Collection

RESOURCE BRIEF

**Importance**

Yellowstone’s museum collection contains more than 300,000 items that, along with the archives and library collection, document the cultural and natural history of the park. The museum collection includes archeological artifacts and fossils; uniforms, weapons and vehicles; hotel furnishings, souvenirs, and ephemera; rocks and minerals; wildlife and herbarium specimens; illustrated manuscripts; Thomas Moran watercolors and other original works of art; and over 90,000 photographs and stereographs, including more than 1,000 images by photographer William Henry Jackson. The collection is used each year by park staff and other researchers looking for background information on Yellowstone history, specific reference material, and illustrations for commercial products, school programs, special events and adult education. The televised series, “The National Parks: America’s Best Idea,” by Ken Burns contained almost 1,000 images from Yellowstone’s collections.



Thomas Moran’s watercolor sketch of the Firehole River, 1871.

**Discussion**

Thousands of potential acquisitions become available to the museum collection each year through donation, field collection, or occasional purchase. Noteworthy accessions in 2009 included early tourist images, engineering drawings of park bridges, concession items from the 1940s and 1950s, and natural history specimens collected as part of the park’s first BioBlitz.

A Scope of Collections Statement (SOCS) that park staff are updating and refining defines what should be included in the museum collection, taking into consideration the substantial expense of curation and preservation. A Collections Committee that includes the park curator, registrar, archivist, historian, and a librarian monitors acquisitions and obtains advice from subject matter experts to ensure that only items consistent with the SOCS and in at least fair or good condition are accepted. In the future, the committee will consider deaccession of items currently in the collection in order to insure that it contains only the best representation and documentation of Yellowstone’s natural and cultural history.

**Status**

Some items from the museum collection are displayed in nine visitor centers and museums in the park and at the Yellowstone Heritage and Research Center (HRC) in Gardiner, Montana, where most of the collection is stored in conformance with standards set by the National Park Service and the American Association of Museums. The 30 horse-drawn and motorized vehicles, which includes stagecoaches, wagons, touring cars, scooters, and a fire engine, are housed separately in Gardiner. Except for some restricted collections, such as Moran’s watercolor field sketches, wolf skulls, and other rare or fragile items, the HRC collection is accessible to researchers by appointment. The museum collection also includes items held in dozens of other repositories around the United States and the world. Objects are occasionally loaned to museums for exhibits.



American Indian artifacts.



Mushroom specimens.



1922 White Motor Company tanker truck.