

# A WELCOME TO WYOMING...

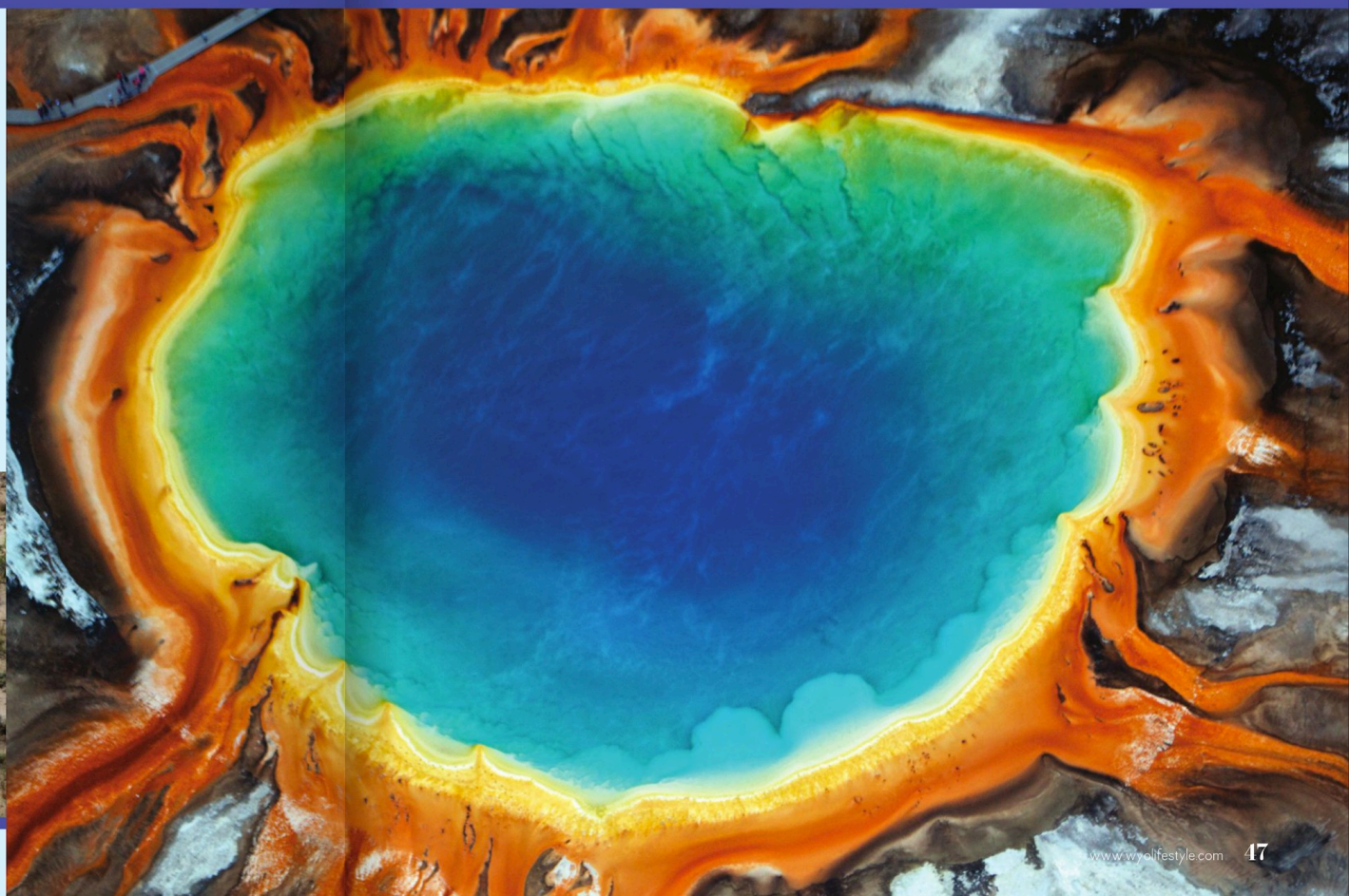
## *From the Air*

By Garrett Fisher  
Images by Garrett Fisher

*We introduced Garrett Fisher and his aerial photography in our Fall/Holiday 2015 issue. Author & hobbyist photographer Travis Klingler accompanied Garrett on a flight to discover the thrill and beauty of aerial photography near Alpine, and what continues to pull Garrett toward the sky. In this issue and future issues, Garrett gives us a tour this time on his aerial discoveries. Visit our website for back issues of WLM that you can read online, anytime: [wyolifestyle.com](http://wyolifestyle.com), click on 'issues.'*

The innocence of discovery, the naivety of adventure, and the wisdom of experience are things commonly treasured by those blazing a path into something new. In the case of my travels all over Wyoming with my simplistic 1940s era airplane, I am going to introduce my regular writing feature with *Wyoming Lifestyle Magazine* by going back to my first flight in the state.

In July of 2014, I was in the process of moving for a period of time from Colorado back to the East Coast. I decided to do something special and swing into Yellowstone for the first time as part of the migration back east. Mind you, the thought seemed especially novel and attractive, sitting in my air-conditioned office two thousand miles away, even though the airplane does 80mph and is as simple as it gets. Some of my craziest ideas have been born behind the safety of bean counting and paper shuffling.

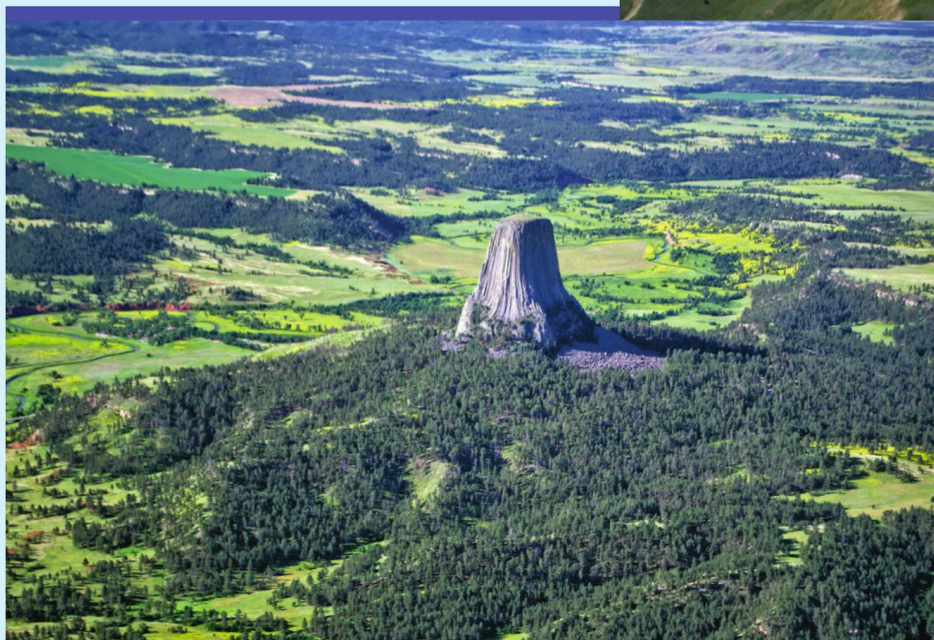
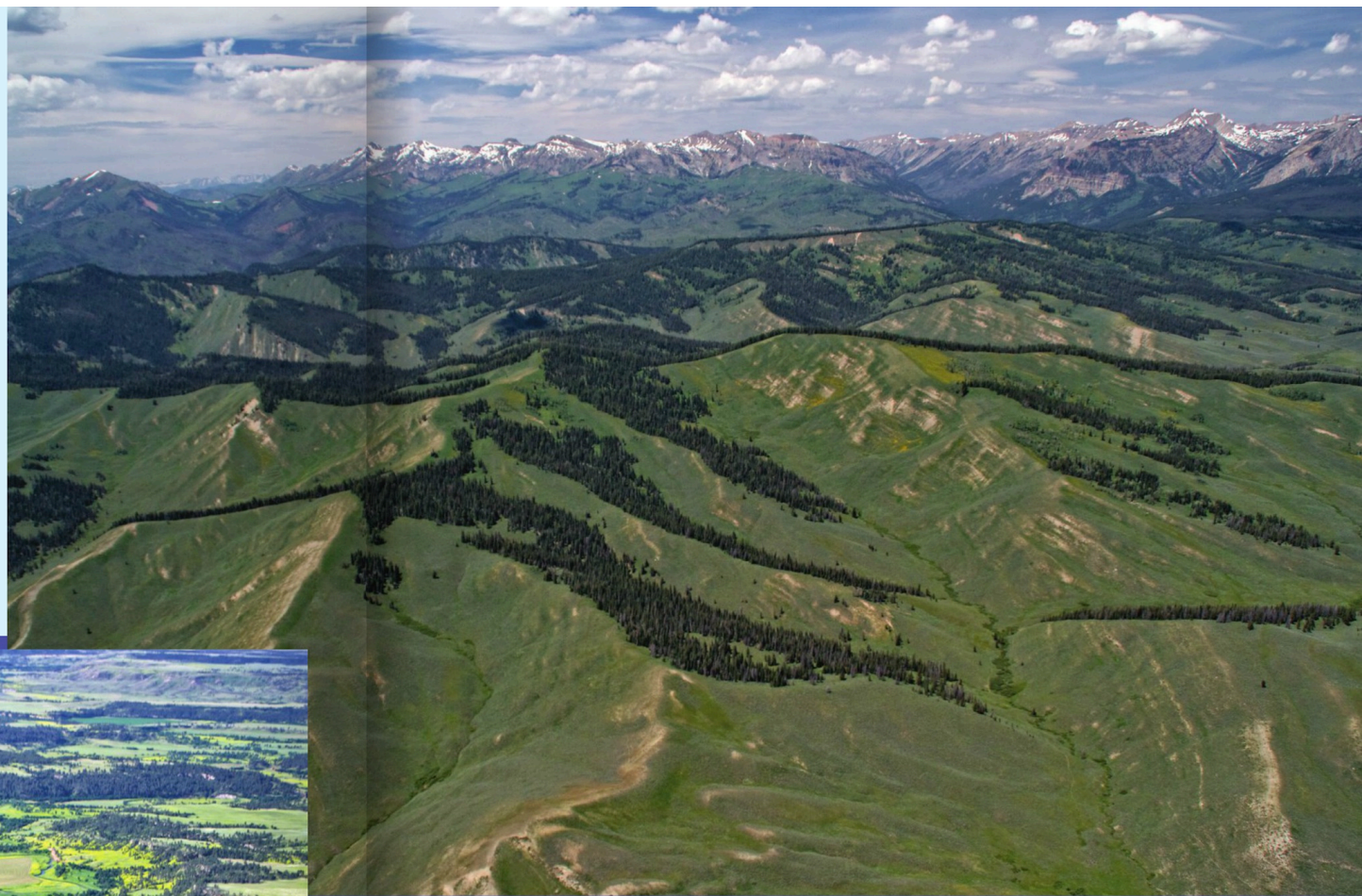


It was a trip of surprises.

I took off from the now former home of the airplane, Leadville, Colorado, at nearly 10,000' on a cold July morning, having slept in a tent behind the hangar. Passing by a lone mountain over 14,000' that I had missed for a book I was writing, I headed northwest by way of Steamboat Springs, refueling before plunging into the great desert unknown of Wyoming.

The thing is, those of us that aren't from the West tend to think that there is "nothing" in places that we have not researched. Who thinks of Wyoming back east? Or much less bothers to read up on what is there? I certainly had not, with the exception of the national parks, and therefore flew straight into terrain that was nothing short of amazing.

The first awakening was wild horses south of Rock Springs. Beautiful mustangs galloped valiantly on the open range, leaving clouds of dust behind. I swooped down and flew parallel to them, photographing like a madman with my zoom lens, thinking right at that moment that seeing just that was enough to make the trip worth it. It was a touch with Americana that I find hard to put into words and left me overwhelmed with awe.



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Next up was a series of sand dunes between I-80 and Oregon Buttes, followed by encountering an enormous elk herd on a sage-covered butte. Following the elk herd, I was treated to antelope herds, and then more horses, each of which I photographed extensively.

The Wind River Range was on my list, and I climbed into the southern section, clearing 13,000' and finding some of the most amazing mountain scenery I had yet seen in the airplane. This statement comes from someone who had just finished flying all 58 peaks over 14,000' in Colorado with the same airplane, and this just took the cake.

After fueling in Pinedale, I wound up in Jackson by way of Hoback Canyon, squeezed on the left by the Wyoming Range and the right by the Gros Ventre Range. Right over Jackson my lens broke, which soured my mood, though I had a backup camera and switched over to it.

My cantankerousness over the lens malfunction, coupled with the deteriorating conditions for photography (clouds and haze), conspired to dampen my perspective of the Jackson Hole area as I flew over it. I was undergoing an element of personal struggle at the time, reconciling my fantasies about ski towns in the Rockies with the realities I had just learned about in Colorado. I remember deciding *not* to move to Wyoming, because Jackson looked the same as the towns in Colorado: "remote, expensive, and filled with tourists." It would be literally nine months later that I would fly the same airplane within 20 miles of that *exact point* as I moved it to my new home in Alpine. Life is filled with ironies, even if it is we unto ourselves.

I then flew north at 9,500' over Jackson Hole airport (to avoid the airspace) and got thrown around like a leaf in the breeze by the strong winds raging off of the Teton. Since moving to Wyoming, I learned that 9,500' is the *worst altitude* to fly east of Grand Teton. Nonetheless, I plunged into Yellowstone, learning for the first time that the place is surprisingly flat, devoid of emergency landing locations, and scarily wild. Those of us from the East somehow come to the conclusion that Yellowstone should look like Glacier Bay, Alaska.

Seeing the hot springs was beyond words.



Fuel was West Yellowstone, Montana, followed by a high-speed flight east over the Absarokas, Cody, the Bighorn Basin, and then the Bighorn Range due to strong tailwinds. That was my first experience with the incredible winds that I now know are normal in Yellowstone, especially as they funnel over the range and into Cody, which is like a natural wind tunnel.

The Bighorns were a surprise, with a verdantly green eastern slope descending into Buffalo. I spent the night in a tent behind the airplane, off the next morning at 6 AM. West of Devils Tower, enjoying the carpet of yellow flowers over eastern Wyoming, the engine got rough. I fired a text to my wife: "Engine roughness, 24 miles SW of Hulett, WY – will try to make it there." Recall that I have no radio, so my only hope of being found was a successful landing, walking to a ranch 20 miles away, and not dying of thirst beforehand. The engine kept running thankfully, and as I got nearer to Hulett, I realized there was nothing on the facility directory. No hotel, rental car, mechanic, *nothing*. The engine still ran, so I made Spearfish, South Dakota, having ended my trip to Wyoming with quite a bit more than a touch of adventure, which would only preview the reality of flying all over the state once I moved there the next spring. How little I knew what I was getting myself into... [WLM]

*Garrett Fisher is the author of nine books, having just published his first Wyoming aerial photography book **Flying the Star Valley** in January 2016. He is in the process of publishing a long list of aerial photography books focused on the Rockies as seen from his antique airplane. Garrett blogs regularly about his aviation adventures at [www.garrettfisher.me](http://www.garrettfisher.me).*

