

The Role of Cartography in the Promotion of Rail Travel to Yellowstone National Park

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Abstract: For nearly seventy years, from the early 1880s through the 1940s, travel to Yellowstone National Park was primarily by passenger train to a park gateway town. Upon arrival, travelers would enter the park by stagecoach and later by touring buses and automobiles. The railroad's gradual decline in the years following the Great Depression and World War II occurred with the rise of travel in the family car. During the heyday of rail travel to Yellowstone, maps played a vital role for both trip planning and navigation. The railroad network map was used by travelers to visualize rail system connections, stations, and hub cities. In these linear cartograms, railroad networks and connections were emphasized over true geographic accuracy. Another important type of map used by rail travelers was the destination map. Yellowstone served as a popular destination centerpiece for many creative and artistic brochures and booklets produced for railroads such as the Northern Pacific, the Union Pacific, and the Burlington Route (Chicago, Burlington and Quincy). Two Chicago-based publishing companies, Rand McNally and Poole Bros., created lavish works of art, narrative, and cartography designed to convince potential travelers to visit Yellowstone and arrive by rail. Poole Bros., in particular, created both simple rail network maps for timetables, as well as large-format birds-eye view maps of Yellowstone that were both enticing advertisements and useful navigation tools for park visitors. Today, we can see how important these colorful maps were to the overall experience of the visitor arriving to Yellowstone by rail.

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