

When people think of Yellowstone National Park, they usually think of geysers shooting up, valleys so full of geothermal pools that the whole landscape seems to steam, and herds of shaggy bison on the distant horizon. They imagine hordes of tourists shuttling from one sight to another, pushing to see the next landmark on the tour. This is a fairly accurate picture of Yellowstone in the summer, during its heavy-traffic season when the park hosts its highest average monthly attendance. However, there is another Yellowstone, the December-to-March park, which is all but snowed in and deserted. Its geysers still erupt, its thermal pools still steam, and animals are even more plentiful. The huge crowds have gone, though, and the landscape is transformed by snow and ice to a magical realm full of strange shapes and eerie effects.

Yellowstone has been popular in the winter months only since the early 1990s. The first winter seasons attracted only a handful of visitors. News of the wintertime wonders of Yellowstone spread, however, and the off-season has become increasingly popular. The wintertime park is a bonanza for skiers, with more than 100 miles of cross-country trails. What these skiers witness on their treks is the experience of a lifetime. The steam rising from thermal pools forms strange ice shapes as it freezes along the sides of these natural hot springs. Trees are encrusted in icicles that clatter in every breeze, and waterfalls gush through looming canyons of snow and ice as the snow muffles the world in blankets.

What wintertime visitors remember most seems to be the wildlife. Herds of majestic bison and elk, which are barely-noticed features of the horizon during the summer, migrate into the warmer valleys as the winter snows begin to fall. The geothermal system of Yellowstone, which creates the abundance of thermal pools, keeps some grass healthy and growing in these valleys all winter long. The elk and bison forage for it, oblivious to nearby people. Skiers often pass these animals on their quiet routes. The icicles hanging from the stomach hairs of the bison sound like odd wind chimes as these beasts step slowly along, pushing snow with their noses and digging down to the grass. Occasionally, an elk may chase a visitor who gets too close, but usually, the animals simply ignore intruders. They are engrossed in finding food at this time of year.

By mid-March, the snows begin to recede, and the animals retreat to the quieter surrounding areas as tourists begin to return in larger numbers. Trees shed their icy ornaments, and waterfalls disintegrate and sweep away the huge chunks of ice built up along their banks. Cross-country skiing trails become hiking trails again during the summer months, and Old Faithful, who spouted all winter to a faithful few, now performs for millions again. The contrast is striking; every year more and more people decide that the park in winter is by far the more enriching experience.

Sample

# Reading

## Passage Test 950

For numbers 1 through 10, select the best choice to complete the sentence or answer the question. Write the letter of the correct answer on your answer sheet. Do not mark on this test.

1. According to the passage, the word **oblivious** means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A not paying attention to
  - B threatening
  - C hiding from
  - D afraid of
2. According to the passage, what does **bonanza** mean?
  - A where buses park
  - B the name of a farm near the park
  - C very few of something
  - D an unexpected reward
3. What is a thermal pool?
  - A an insulated pool
  - B a natural spring under ice
  - C a natural hot-water spring
  - D a geyser
4. Why does Yellowstone have so many animals in winter?
  - A because the tourists feed them
  - B because they are protected from hunters
  - C because food grows there all year and there are fewer people
  - D because they thrive on the mineral waters from the geyser
5. Which of these is **not** mentioned as a kind of Yellowstone ice formation?
  - A steam frozen into strange, icy shapes alongside thermal pools
  - B icicles hanging from the stomach hairs of bison
  - C geysers frozen into ice columns
  - D icicles hanging from trees
6. The main idea of this passage is that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A Yellowstone Park is well worth a wintertime visit
  - B Yellowstone Park is a skier's paradise
  - C Yellowstone Park is an animal-lover's paradise
  - D Yellowstone Park is the most popular state park in the United States
7. Which of the following generalizations might you make from the passage?
  - A All national parks are now open in the winter.
  - B Tourists are more frequently visiting parks now than ever before.
  - C Most Yellowstone visitors are able to see more wildlife in the winter than in the summer.
  - D Most tourists do not like winter.

8. Which of the following statements is an **opinion**?
- A Yellowstone records its highest average attendance during summer months.
  - B Elk and bison spend the winter in Yellowstone Park.
  - C The Yellowstone experience is more enriching in the winter than in the summer.
  - D Yellowstone offers over 100 miles of trails to the cross-country skier.

9. What happened during the first winter seasons that the park was open?
- A Cross-country skiers immediately took over the park.
  - B Only a few people visited the park.
  - C Naturalists complained that the bison would be hunted.
  - D Huge crowds visited for the winter holiday season.

10. This passage is probably taken from which of the following types of writing?
- A autobiography
  - B textbook
  - C historical fiction
  - D magazine article