

Origins of the Grand Teton Wolves



by **Leo Leckie**

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Whenever I have been fortunate enough to spend time along the Teton Range, I have longed to see the elusive wolves of that area. I would linger along the waterways and ridgelines that they call home ... for just the chance. But whether I would see them or not, I would still catch myself smiling to know that I am in the territories of those that descended ... from Yellowstone wolves!

The origins of the wolves of Grand Teton National Park can be traced back to two wolves, 30Fg and her alpha mate 35Mb, who were among the seventeen founding wolves reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park in 1996 from British Columbia, Canada. Ten wolf pups from western Montana were also brought to Yellowstone that year, and two of those ten would contribute to the genetic diversity of Yellowstone Wolves. The year before (1995), fourteen wolves had been reintroduced to Yellowstone from Alberta, Canada.

Wolf 35Mb was one of two wolves captured from the British Columbia's Chief pack (the other wolf, B17, was released in Idaho), and wolf 30Fg was one of seven wolves captured from the Halfway pack (five of those seven were reintroduced into Yellowstone and the other two were released in Idaho).

35Mb was a large black wolf, weighing 120 pounds or more, and he was considered one of the bigger reintroduced/founding wolves in the park. He spent his initial days of reintroduction in an acclimation pen on the Blacktail Deer Plateau with a



different female then, wolf 36Fb. This black female was another of the seventeen wolves brought down from British Columbia, but hers was the Besa pack; the very same pack that included wolves 39Fg and her daughters 40Fg, 41Fb and 42Fb – the four female wolves (two gray, two black) that would go on to found the Druid Peak pack.

After spending January until early April of 1996 in the Blacktail acclimation pen, 35Mb and 36Fb were released further south in the Old Faithful area of the park on April 5. They were immediately called the Lone Star pack; named for the famous geyser in their new territory. But

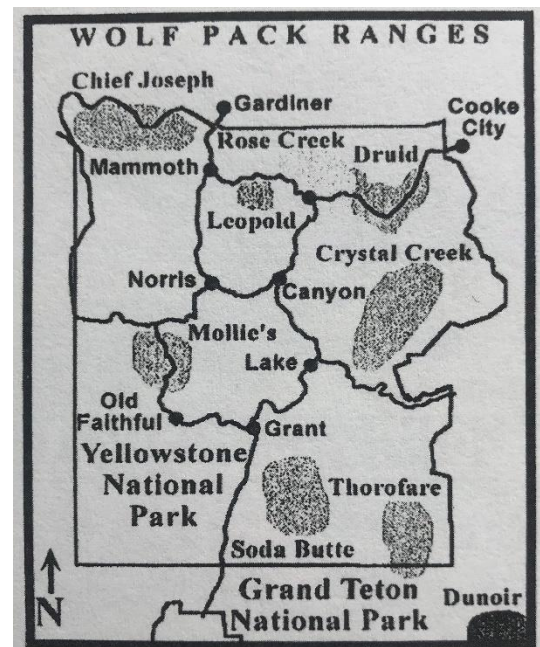
wolf 36Fb's Yellowstone life was cut short when she died nine days later on April 14 due to thermal burns at the Lone Star Geyser. A necropsy revealed that she was pregnant with pups at the time of her death, and with the loss of the alpha female the pack name was dissolved after only ten days in the wild.

After 36Fb's death, 35Mb began traveling widely – moving ever eastward toward Yellowstone Lake – until early September 1996 when he met and paired with a gray female, wolf 30Fg (who was recently released from the Nez Perce acclimation pen near the Lower Geyser Basin area of the park).



35Mb and 30Fg met in what would become their new territory, the Yellowstone River Delta and Valley, which extended from the southeast arm of Yellowstone Lake to the roadless Thorofare region. And the new alpha pair would be named the Thorofare pack in 1997 after that remote and roadless area.

More than any other pack, they relied on moose for food. This area of the park was and still is rich in moose numbers; so much so that, during one 30-day period in March, they successfully hunted three moose and one elk.

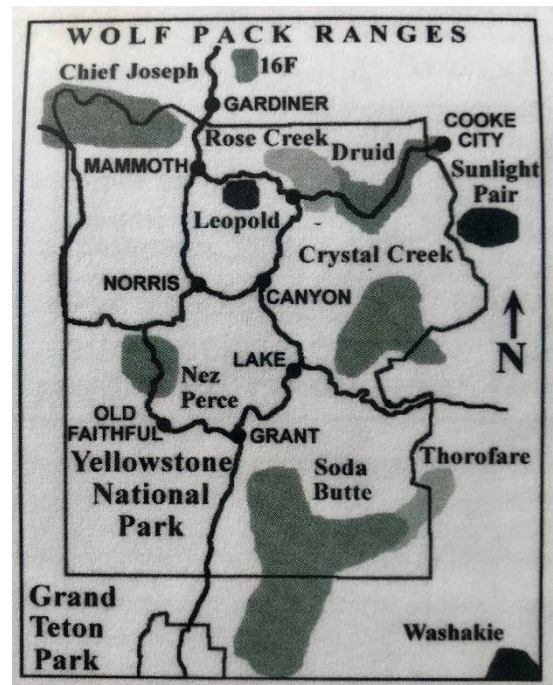


The new alpha pair produced six pups in 1997 (five black and one gray) among the most remote peaks and shoreline in the Lower 48 states. All

six pups were still alive at year's end, and the alpha pair and offspring thrived in the river valley until January 1998 ... when a new wolf pack entered their territory.

This new group of wolves was known as the Soda Butte pack, and they came together from the 1995 reintroduction of fourteen wolves from Alberta, Canada. They were released in 1995 far in the northeast corner of Yellowstone in an area of Lamar Valley known as Soda Butte Canyon. But they never favored the northern area of the park, and moved continually southward from the very first day of their release.

The Soda Butte pack eventually caught up to and skirmished with the Thorofare pack, and on January 9 alpha female 30Fg would be buried in an avalanche (along with one of her pups, wolf 127 – gender unknown) on the high slopes of Eagle Pass while fleeing from the Soda Butte wolves. The body of Thorofare alpha male 35Mb himself would be discovered a month later under a log along the shore of Yellowstone Lake. He had died from wounds received during that same conflict. The Soda Butte pack would eventually claim this remote region of the park as their territory and become later renamed the Yellowstone Delta pack.



The five remaining Thorofare pups – only one of which was radio-collared, black female wolf 129 – stayed together the rest of the winter and part of the spring. And though the Wolf Project had trouble tracking them in that extremely remote terrain, by summer of 1998 observations indicated that five remaining wolves (now yearlings) had split up.

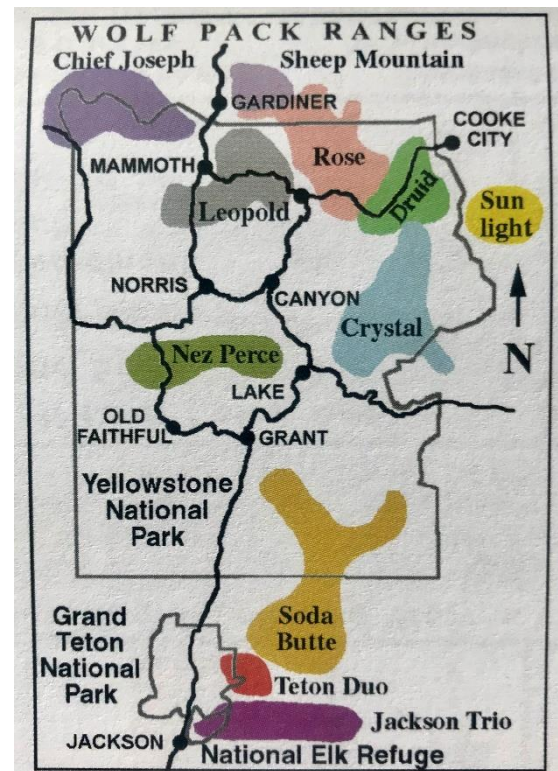
But the bloodline of the Thorofare pack continued ...

The black radio-collared female yearling wolf 129Fb and her uncollared black sister, wolf 137Fb – daughters of the Thorofare alpha pair – traveled westward and eventually met up with wolf 29Mg, a dispersing Nez Perce gray male who was also one of the seventeen founding wolves from British Columbia.

The three wolves became a group and traveled further south. They crossed over Two Ocean Plateau – named such because the waters of that plateau flow both east to the Atlantic Ocean and west to the Pacific Ocean – and over the Continental Divide, until their wanderings brought them into the valleys along the Teton Range and the other national park there.

Here they settled and established a new territory near the National Elk Refuge and Jackson, Wyoming. In 1999, they became known as the “Jackson Trio” – a threesome who would eventually become Grand Teton’s Gros Ventre pack (one of the park’s first) and contribute to the establishment of wolves along the Teton Range.

So ... whether you’re fortunate enough to hear the howling songs of their descendants while perched on a log along Jackson Lake or the Gros Ventre River, you too will smile as I do ... knowing that you are listening to the wild and free songs of the descendants of 35Mb and 30Fg ... that Thorofare alpha pair that hunted moose along the eastern shores and delta of Yellowstone Lake in the late 1990s!



Howls!

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“Jackson Trio” photo compilation created by Susi Higgins,
for whom I will always be grateful for her support of my stories and writing

Portions of this story came from my historical entries into the Yellowstone Wolf Family Tree and the life story discoveries that are revealed through that research. This tree is the first and still-only non-human family tree on Ancestry.com. Today, this now-largest and most unique family tree on Ancestry has welcomed approaches 1,000 human guests and features the genealogy, life stories and photos of over 1,300 Yellowstone wolves; canids from the reintroduction in 1995 to the wolves you see on the Yellowstone landscape today. To become a guest of the tree, go to the web portal www.wolftales.info and select the Yellowstone Wolf Family Tree menu option. Once there, be sure to follow the instructions when submitting your guest request.

**Yellowstone
Wolf
Family
Tree**



Your source for relationships and life stories.

The life stories from the Yellowstone Wolf Family Tree – including those of wolves 30Fg and 35Mb of the Thorofare pack – are also available in print in the book, *Charting Yellowstone Wolves: 25th Anniversary Edition*.

Celebrate the 25th anniversary of wolf restoration in the Yellowstone ecosystem with the complete record of wolves, their families and genealogy. Starting from Canada, this book includes all wolf charts made for Yellowstone and biographies for each of the radio collared and numbered wolves. The book takes the reader through January 12, 1995 – the day the first reintroduced wolves arrived in Yellowstone National Park – through January 2020.

This book can be purchased for \$50 at www.tracknature.com.

