

Research team releases app for tracking Yellowstone geysers

January 21 2015, by Brett Oppegaard



NPS Geysers mobile app in use.

When people throughout the world want to watch the iconic Old Faithful eruption at Yellowstone National Park in real time, they now can turn to their smartphones, through a free app, courtesy of a UH Mānoa-led research team studying mobile media and communication.

Brett Oppegaard, an assistant professor in the School of Communications within the College of Social Sciences, has led the development and production of the NPS Geysers [mobile app](#) as part of his ongoing investigations of ubiquitous computing. Working with National Park Service staff on site in Wyoming this summer, Oppegaard and the team of designers and developers started with the idea that time in this park was predicated on when Old Faithful erupted.

"People in Yellowstone don't want to know if it's noon or 1 p.m. Mountain Standard Time; they want to know how long it will be until Old Faithful erupts again," Oppegaard said. "That shifting of a community to Old Faithful time is fascinating, and represented in many analog forms at the park, such as on white boards, and on hand-spun clocks. We wanted to start building our research project on the idea that Old Faithful time reflects a new way of looking at the world. And then we wanted to open that perspective up to people both inside and outside of the park, through the affordances of mobile technologies."

The mobile app features a live web cam of the Upper Geyser Basin, which includes views of several of the park's predictable geysers, including Old Faithful. It also instantly shares ranger predictions of when the next eruptions will happen at those geysers, including Grand, Castle, Great Fountain, Daisy and Riverside. With a notification sound, the app can alert users to when Old Faithful is within its eruption cycle window, which, at minimum, allows more efficient viewing of it either in person or online.

"At its best, the app allows users to become aligned with Old Faithful time," Oppegaard said. "Even the person just sitting at a desk in some cubicle maze somewhere can be alerted that Old Faithful is about to erupt, turn on the mobile cam, and then join the real-time party of people around the globe enjoying this majesty of nature. These eruptions are fun to watch, and they bring people together."

Yellowstone's social media feeds from Twitter, Flickr and YouTube are included in the app as well, allowing easy access to the park's most up-to-date news and media, including photos and videos. Future phases of the project will add interactivity and learning games to the app.

That mobile app, available for both Android and Apple platforms through their respective markets, is the first official and

sanctioned National Park Service app available for America's first [national park](#). Yellowstone hosts about half of the world's known geysers and has the largest concentration of active ones. Funding for the project – a partnership among Dr. Oppegaard, the National Park Service, Yellowstone National Park and Harpers Ferry Center – was provided by Canon USA Inc. through the Yellowstone Park Foundation.

More information: To download the app:

For Android devices, visit play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=gov.nps.geysers

For Apple devices, visit: itunes.apple.com/us/app/nps-geysers/id901014175?ls=1&mt=8

Provided by University of Hawaii at Manoa

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