

The Petrified Wood of Yellowstone National Park

By Chase Hamilton

Yellowstone National Park, known for its beautiful land and wildlife, is home to petrified wood—fossilized wood that is formed when minerals replace trees through the course of millions of years. A long-lasting superstition within the park warns visitors that anyone who takes a piece of the petrified wood will be cursed with bad luck until it is returned.

Ranger Rick, a young, tough park ranger, had heard the stories about the curse, but he brushed them off as nonsense. He was a rational man who had no patience for folklore.

One afternoon, while leading a tour, Rick spotted a boy prying loose a piece of the ancient wood. His parents were too busy on their phone to notice. "Hey, Kid!" Rick called, marching over. "Put that back. There's a rule against taking anything from the park, especially the wood. Folks say it's cursed." The boy looked up, eyes wide, "Cursed? Like bad luck?" "That's what they say," Rick grunted. "It's more about respecting nature. Leave things as you found them." The boy thought for a moment, then pocketed the wood with a grin. Rick noticed, but didn't care enough to interfere, thinking he would learn the hard way.

That night, back at his cabin, Rick felt uneasy. The wind howled louder than usual, and his sleep was filled with strange dreams. The next morning, his truck wouldn't start, making him late for patrol. As he hiked through the park, he slipped on a muddy trail, rolling his ankle - a rare misstep for a ranger like Rick.

Over the next few days, bad luck seemed to follow Rick. His walkie-talkie shorted out during a storm, and a brown bear wandered uncomfortably close to his cabin.

Despite his rugged nature, Rick began to wonder if there was something to this curse after all. His actions, typically precise, felt groggy and fuzzy. A joke from another ranger about the curse made a deep impact on Rick.

Nights later, after another disturbing dream, he decided to take action. He pulled out the park's trail log, reading letters from visitors who had returned pieces of petrified wood, desperate to end their bad luck. Rick, usually calm and confident, felt a chill down his spine. "This is just in my head," he mumbled, but he knew it was time to break the cycle.

In the morning, Rick limped to the trail where the boy had taken the wood. He brought a small pebble from his porch as a symbol of respect from what was taken. Kneeling down, Rick buried the stone in the earth, saying, "I never will believe in curses, but I respect this land."

As he stood, the wind seemed to calm, and the weight he had been carrying lifted. Over the next few days, his luck turned around. His truck started, the nightmares stopped, and the park felt like home again. Though the legend remained, the ranger knew the curse was letting fear take control. By facing it, he had reclaimed himself.