

**UPTON LOOP
TOUR #1:**

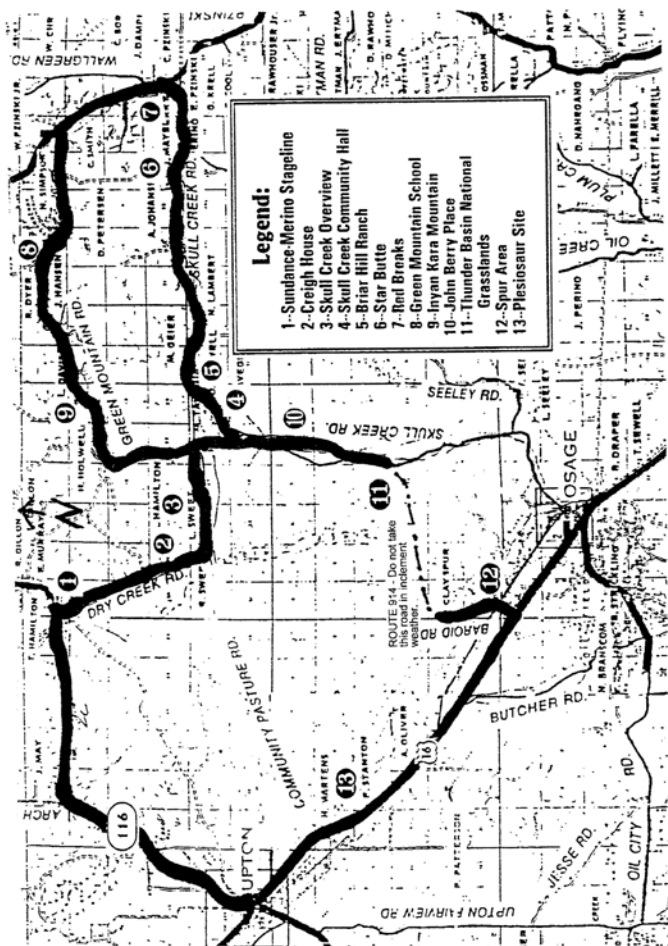
**“PRAIRIE TO
PINES”**



Upton Loop Tour #1:

Prairie To Pines

Sponsored by
The Weston County Travel Commission
and the
Upton Chamber of Commerce.
With special thanks to the
Weston County Commissioners,
Diana White, and the many others who generously
contributed their time and efforts.



UPTON LOOP TOUR #1: PRAIRIE-TO-PINES

Approximate distance: 70 miles - Big Loop
63.5 miles - Small Loop

The Prairie-to-Pines Loop Tour begins in Upton, where sagebrush and cactus sprawl out over the Thunder Basin National Grasslands to the south, and scattered evergreens cling tenaciously to hilltops and shale ridges in the north.

North and east on Highway 116, the prairie gives way to fertile valleys flanked by steep rimrocks. Rolling hills give little hint of the intricate system of gullies and sharply cut ravines concealed therein. Ahead, the old mountain Inyan Kara, silent and indifferent to the elements, keeps its own secrets.

Abundant native grasses provide excellent nourishment for local cattle herds as well as for resident pronghorn (antelope) and mule deer. As to the fences, deer jump gracefully over them, while antelope, with rare exception, prefer scrambling under the low wire. In any case, fences cramp the style of either species not one whit.

Throughout the tour, additional wildlife to watch for include: wild turkeys, bluebirds, golden eagles, killdeer, bald eagles, meadowlarks (Wyoming State Bird) as well as cottontail and jack rabbits, coyotes, and bobcats.

Observable plants include: yellow wild celery, gumbo lily, goldenrod, cattail, yarrow, and common sunflower. From mid-summer to fall, the hills will be yellow with fragrant sweet clover.

Tales of earlier days and colorful characters echo through the hills and prairie grasses. You will meet some of them on these pages in narratives set down as accurately as available data has made possible and with apologies for any inadvertent error.

For an enjoyable tour that is safe for everyone, here are good habits to observe:

- 1) when on gravel roads, travel at reduced speeds;
- 2) be alert for open range cattle and horses as well as for ranchers moving cattle or heavy equipment;
- 3) when stopping at a site, be sure to pull completely off the road into the parking space provided;
- 4) remember that all lands along the way not otherwise designated are private.



Along the way....

In the vicinity of mile marker 22, three significant landmarks are visible:

- 1) To the east, Inyan Kara Mountain (el. 6,368 ft.) rises abruptly more than 1,000 feet from the ground below it. From the summit of this well-known Black Hills landmark, hikers may view much of northeastern Wyoming.
- 2) To the north and west, Warren Peak (el. 6,656 ft.) looks to be just one more mountain in a collection of the same known as the Bear Lodge, part of the Black Hills National Forest. During the cold war, Warren Peak was singled out by the U.S. Air Force as an especially appropriate site for their first experimental nuclear-powered radar station making up part of the Distant Early Warning System.

In recent years, matters and methods of national defense have changed such that the facility has since been dismantled.

Forest Service Road 838, with portions paved and portions graveled, crosses the Bear Lodge just below Warren Peak. It is a good road that affords spectacular views of northeastern Wyoming and western South Dakota.

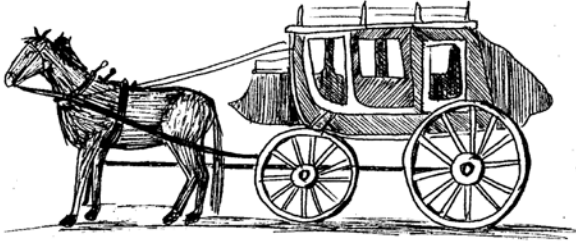
- 3) To the north-northwest, the Missouri Buttes bubble up onto the horizon. Erosional remnants of an ancient volcanic neck intruded into sedimentary rock, they are similar in geological structure to nearby Devil's Tower.

Historical evidence suggest that Devil's Tower and the Missouri Buttes were encountered by white men as early as 1743 when two French trappers, the Verendrye brothers, made their way through the area seeking a route to the Pacific Ocean.

Finally, when driving by mile marker 22, look north, close to your position, and see a colony of prairie dogs. A pair of magnificent golden eagles known to frequent the area may be on nearby fence posts, the snow fence, or in the air about.

10.9 miles from Sundance sign--

Turn east onto Dry Creek Road which brings you to just north of Cedar Knoll, an important landmark for the Sundance-Merino stageline.



Site #1: The Sundance-Merino Stageline
Mileage: 11.1

Approaching the site marker, note an old road bed to your left, that runs diagonally on toward Cedar Knoll, to your right. That was the old stagecoach road.

Although American railroads of the mid-1880's had probed seriously into westerly regions, they had not yet reached all of the more remote areas. Supplemental transportation and delivery systems were needed.

Stagecoaches were a logical here-to-whenever means of ferrying anyone willing (or sufficiently desperate) to risk life and limb traveling at break-neck speed over ground that could be called a road only by those quite optimistic. Of course, passengers' valuables could come along with them, as could the US Mail.

In 1886, the terminus of the Northwestern Railroad was Buffalo Gap, South Dakota. By 4-horse stage, the mail for Irontown (later Merino, now Upton) proceeded from Buffalo Gap to Deadwood, to Spearfish, and on, finally, to Sundance, Wyoming, where it was loaded yet again for the last leg of the journey with local rancher Dub Meeks holding the reins.

But change is always around the corner, and in the spring of 1891, the Burlington and Missouri (later Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy, then Chicago and Northwestern, now BNSF) Railroad laid a track into Irontown. Suddenly, the town that had been a destination for the stage was now a point of origin, and new routes were established with new drivers ready to gallop their teams even farther into the western backyard of civilization.

Another enterprise of the time and place was the Mason Creek School which sat on a grassy knoll about 3/4 of a mile from the highway. As with many old country schools, it was moved elsewhere as area needs changed.



Site #2: The Creigh House

Mileage: 15.5

Beautifully designed with long, crisp lines, and a marvel for its time and place, the Creigh (rhymes with "whee") mansion no longer stands. But you can see where it was from where you are.

First, notice our old friend Inyan Kara to the north. Then, north-by-northwest, there are three granaries. Now, to the right of the granaries, and beyond up into the trees--there, that's it. That's the site.

Charlie Creigh, long and tall, with a drawl that stretched clear back to Texas and a whistle that could be heard a mile away, was used to the cowboy life. Driving Texas longhorns up the Texas Trail, he took a hankering to this Wyoming land. In 1892, he took a notion to stay and build his own spread. He began modestly with a small herd of longhorns.

Most folks felt kindly toward Charlie and thought him a fine fellow, but they considered him not to be particularly handsome. In fact, with an odd mix of wry humor and truth, they generally used the word "ugly" when moved to comment on his looks.

Other opinions of Charlie's looks notwithstanding, one Spearfish, South Dakota, girl by name of Lena Oceana Goodwill cut through such superficiality and saw a good man, albeit a man 12 years her senior. On January 22, 1894, the couple wed and set about building an observably loving relationship, a fine large family, and the Creigh Cattle Company.

It was in May of 1903 that a fifth child arrived at the old log house with its sod floor and the cowboys' bunkhouse attached alongside. Charlie decided it was new house time, and what a pleasure it must have been for the Creighs to plan this new abode for themselves. And the cowboys. For, apparently, the cowboys were treated like family. Charlie, a no-nonsense fellow, was also a man who looked after his own.

And what a house! Three stories, seven bedrooms, and a huge woodburner in the basement to keep the place toasty in the winter. There was running water with a delightful pump in the kitchen and an indoor bathroom.

The great dining room boasted a blue mosaic tile hearth and a rich hardwood floor that would be perfect for dance socials later on. Add to all of that a great view, and anyone can imagine what a fine house it was. It would be even more so once the third floor was finished.

But events have a way of inserting themselves without invitation. In doing so, they change the course of folks' plans.

The Creighs and Co. had lived in the house a total of three weeks when Charlie and Bill (Meeks) were returning home with a wagonload of lumber. Rain had overtaken them, and on one steep, muddy place the wagon started to slip. The horses couldn't hold it and lost their footing. Bill was thrown clear of the crash, but it was Charlie's slicker that caught and bound him to the overturning load.

Charlie's leg was broken. It had healed badly from a break a few years earlier, and Charlie knew amputation was necessary. Immediately, he believed, but Bill refused to go along with it. Later, at home, Lena telephoned over barbed wire lines to the doctor in Newcastle.

Three doctors presided over the operation, but to no avail. Charlie had lost too much blood. The trauma to his body had been too severe. The accident had occurred on a Saturday. By that Wednesday, Charlie used his remaining strength to bid his children and dear Lena goodbye. Then he just slipped away. They buried him over at Spearfish. It was May of 1906.

That summer, neighborly cattlemen and homesteaders harvested the Creigh crops and held the last Creigh Cattle Company roundup. The family moved away. The house was sold, fell into disrepair, and eventually had to be destroyed.

Life and times go on. Look southwest. See that long, blue ridge? It's called Raven Creek Divide. Shift focus to below the skyline to find two white water towers. That's Upton (el. 4,324 ft.).

Moving on, enjoy the high meadows and ravines.



Site #3: Skull Creek Overview
Mileage: 17.1

Just past the large horse arena on the left (17.3) and cresting a little hill (17.9) is the Skull Creek Overview. We now enter that portion of the Thunder Basin National Grassland known as Skull Creek, part of an active

stream drainage system connected to much of northeastern Weston County and a valuable resource area for both ranching and mining. Early settlers to the area were struck by the number of buffalo skulls along the creek, hence the name. Notice in the distance, ahead and left, the red and blue tints of Star Butte.

Turning right on to Green Mountain Road (17.9), watch for wild bergamot (violet pompon tops), slough of water reeds and cattails, and scattered clumps of wild rose bushes.

At 18.9, turn left onto Skull Creek Road.

Site #4: Skull Creek Community Hall*
 Mileage: 19.8

As community and civic centers are to towns and cities, so are community halls to isolated rural areas. Begun in 1910 by Professor Edward J. Ward, the movement to establish community centers throughout the United States

began with using local schools for meetings, fellowship, neighborhood forums, and suchlike. As the need for space and availability outgrew what school facilities could provide, local residents would procure a piece of land, put up a building that could accommodate whatever crowds they anticipated, and call it a community hall.



The year 1935 found the Farm Bureau organization on Skull Creek growing such that 65-95 members would attend a meeting, far too many to fit into any neighborhood home or even the school. A committee was appointed to search out a solution to the problem.

A building over by Oil City was purchased and scheduled to be moved to the present site. On December 23, 1936, it was loaded onto dollies preparatory to the long haul.

Moving a large structure of any kind is inevitably fraught with negative possibilities. In the moving of this particular structure, negative possibilities became unpleasant realities, the overcoming of which required time, patience, and no small amount of ingenuity.

In the first place, loading the building was a gargantuan task. Once, loaded, however, it proceeded along the road in somewhat an orderly fashion until it neared Osage, at which point the road proved unstable for such a load, and the building slipped off the dollies. In no time at all the floor had a hole knocked through it, and the 16-foot lean-to on the back had been rendered incapable of further use. Complicating matters in the extreme, winter suddenly decided to set in with a vengeance. There was nothing for it but to leave everything as it was until spring.

* (On December 22, 2000, the hall burned down. Rebuilding is currently underway.)

On December 24, the detainment of the building notwithstanding, widening the road near the future site did go forth when a number of neighbors took it upon themselves to blast away a lot of solid rock that needed to go before the future hall could be coaxed along the way come spring.

It was March 22, 1937, when the building arrived at the 99-year lease-land on which it used to rest. Because the ladies of the community thought a basement would be in order, the men heightened the jacks and proceeded to excavate a basement, finishing it nicely with cement. In time, they replaced the ruined lean-to and added a new roof and new siding. In the fall of 1938, a beautiful new oak floor finished off the interior. That Christmas the first Christmas program was held with a dance following.

The spring of 1939 saw a new back entry and front porch added to what now was officially Skull Creek Community Hall. Dances were held regularly with the patrons bringing their gas lanterns for light. Eventually, electricity provided lighting.

A lot of work for an old building? Perhaps. Given the amount of service it has provided the community over the years, however, most folks around here probably would not give the mishaps and hard work all that much thought.

Continue left at 19.8.

Site #5: Briar Hill Ranch

Mileage: 20.0

In 1882, the Kenwaunee Coal Company uncovered enough of a 4 ft. deep vein of coal to set them scurrying in the direction of setting up a homestead of their own. To that end they hired William Holwell, a young mining engineer from Nova Scotia, to prove up on a claim. Shortly thereafter, at the base of the mountain (to your right) below the mine, a townsite began to take shape.

As per company instructions, Holwell filed for the homestead known as Briar Hill Ranch. In 1883, he was sufficiently situated that his family could head south to join him.

The coal was abundant and good. David Holwell (descendant of William H.) pronounced it the best hard coal this side of Pennsylvania. David's particular interest in the density of the coal dealt directly with the fact that hard coal is a must for blacksmithing, and David was a smith.

Quality of coal notwithstanding, the Briar Hill Coal Mine was not destined to go on for long. In 1887, a long, dark streak of coal was noticed by a homesteader over near Newcastle. Ballyhooing the discovery was not his



intent, but word does get around. Before long, that lignite grade of bituminous coal had caused visions of dollars to dance in the heads of everyone from teamsters to railroaders to passersby. A few shacks, tents, and a plethora of miners soon became a town called Cambria, and the Briar Hill Coal Mine found itself not even in the running when it came to cost effective production. Wisdom and common sense conceded the point, and the mine was shut down.

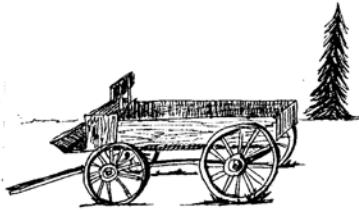
Briar Hill Ranch, though no longer the scene of coal operations, was desirable in its own right to the Holwell family. Wishing to make it their own private ranch through what they figured would be a simple purchase, they discovered themselves at odds with the townsfolk at the foot of the mountain. Differences were settled in time, however, apparently to the general satisfaction of those concerned.

Star Butte lies ahead.

Site #6: Star Butte

Mileage: 25.6

Rising conspicuously out of the Triassic Spearfish Formation, Star Butte is an erosional little butte capped with the more resistant Hulett Sandstone member of the Jurassic aged Sundance Formation. Seen from the air, the top is, indeed, shaped like a star. But there is more to the name than just the shape of the butte.



Long, long ago, when the entire area was a vast sea, there lived a peculiar little creature we now call a Crinoid. In an uncertain environment, it preserved its security in two ways: first, by attaching itself by what looked like roots to the sea floor, and secondly, succeeding rather well at looking like a thick-stemmed plant with a floppy frond top. The arms of the creature sometimes grew as long as four feet. Part of each arm was, curiously, star-shaped.

Of course, security for sea creatures ceases to be when there is no more sea. Over time, the natural shifting of sea levels plummeted the Crinoids and their associates into a geologist's delight known as Cretaceous fossils. But even in the abundance of fossil forms characteristic of the area, the little Crinoids retain a fair degree of distinction, for the star shapes that were once part of them can now be found scattered around Star Butte. The inner composition has turned to gypsum, but the shape is unmistakable.

Site #7: Red Breaks

Mileage: 27.8

With a running length of three miles, give or take a little, the Red Breaks trace very well the transition of time when all-encompassing waters covered even the high country of Wyoming and began seeking the levels of seas and oceans we know today.

At some point, the water began to recede. By its sheer weight, it had compacted the sediment below to rock-hardness. Now, however, it began to move in a way that affected the earth under it.

In time, rivers were identifiable as the residual flow of the original rush of water. A fork of one that has since gentled down to what we call Oil Creek flowed steadily through the Triassic Spearfish Formation. As a raging river, it relentlessly cut its course, ripping away portions of bank, depositing them elsewhere, and in the process, causing the beautiful formation we enjoy today.

In the end, the Red Breaks have become a composite of red shales, siltstone, and sandstone interbedded with white gypsum near the base of the formation. Note the color contrasts of the soil with the red (from oxidized iron, i.e., rust) on the one hand and dark, almost black, on the other.

At 29.2, turn left onto Hwy. 585.

At 32.8 1/2, turn left onto Green Mountain Road.

Site #8: Green Mountain School

Mileage: 33.5

The first mountain ahead, to the right, was previously called Green Mountain but is now shown on the Forest Service map as Strawberry Mountain. It is approximately 1½ miles across and is situated about 4 miles southeast of Inyan Kara Mountain.



Note the Scandinavian cemetery on the left at 33.4. At 34.7, you now enter the area of the Green Mountain School.

For scores of Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians living in the mid-to-late 1800's, the much-talked-of open lands of America were an irresistible draw.

By the hundreds they traded security in the old country for a possible chance in the new one. Awed by the vast landscapes of Minnesota and the Dakotas, they eagerly set to the task of breaking sod.

Some of the Scandinavians, however, preferred pressing on and found to their liking a parcel of prairie north of Newcastle. Anyone willing to work hard could build a good ranch there. It would be a good place to raise children.

Children need schools, and the Green Mountain School, begun in the 1890's, was one of Weston County's first county schools. Area ranchers built it on Walgren family land, low on the south slope of the mountain. The newly shingled roof of the building contrasted sharply with the many sod roofs in the vicinity. The ranchers were proud of it.

Best of all, the ranchers were able to secure a teacher to go with the new schoolhouse. She was Miss Carpenter from a ranch over on Dry Creek Road.

Whether you were a teacher, a student, or the parents of a student, the process of country school education was complicated by distance and weather. Children arrived at the school on horseback, on foot, and by wagon or sleigh. On windy, sub-zero days, some degree of frostbite was a given.

During the day, everyone shared duties. Chop wood for the heater. Carry a pail of water for the classroom from the nearby creek. Clean the chalk board. Sweep the floor. Whatever the chores, all but the very youngest helped.

The Green Mountain School served its community well. Over time, as with most country schools, it made the transition from point of necessity to point of historical curiosity. As the latter, it has been restored and now can be seen at the Anna Miller Museum in Newcastle.

At 35.7, the pond to the left often plays host to Canadian geese, mallard ducks, and other waterfowl.

Somewhere in the area of 36.3, a Mrs. Godfrey lived. She was the local midwife. In the course of her career, she helped deliver over 400 babies.

At 37.0, off to the right, watch for the Black Buttes. These buttes are a body of mushroom-shaped, igneous formations which intruded and domed older Paleozoic and Mesozoic sedimentary rocks. As to formation and age, they are associated with nearby Inyan Kara Mountain.

Site #9: Looking Back at Inyan Kara (to the rear looking back)
Mileage: 40.2



The name "Inyan Kara" means mountain-within-a-mountain. Natives to the area referred to it as a "smoking mountain," coinciding with the geological assessment of it as an igneous intrusion. With an elevation of 6,368 ft., the formation measures one and a half miles across.

In 1874, General George A. Custer and company were on expedition to the Black Hills. In July of that year, Custer, Colonel Ludlow, Professors Winchell and Donaldson, and Bears Ears (an Indian guide), and others visited Inyan Kara. Hiking to the top, they discovered heavy woods of pine and aspen. In the clearings were abundances of "...strawberries, raspberries, black and red currants, Juneberries, and small, red whortleberry (blueberry)."

Expectations of a spectacular view from the top were literally dimmed, however, because the Sioux had fired the prairie to the south and west. After a wait of 24 hours, the party decided the smoke was only growing denser, and they returned to camp.

The next year, a Dr. V.T. McGillicuddy, chief photographer for the Jenny-Newton survey, also ascended Inyan Kara and happened upon a certain rock. On it was carved "G.A.C. 74."* Yet modern day hikers bring a different report. Visible now is a rock with "74 Custer" carved into it. Why the discrepancy? Was Dr. McGillicuddy mistaken in his report? Was the report copied incorrectly? Or was there more than one rock involved? If the McGillicuddy rock existed, is it now covered over with vegetation? For hikers who love mysteries, the quest for further information would be well worth a trip to the top of Inyan Kara.

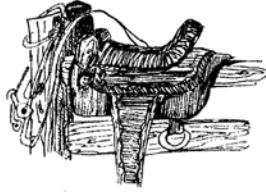
At 42.4, enter Creigh Divide. Up over the cliff to the right lies the Creigh House site visited earlier.

At 44.6, Dry Creek Road is off to the right. To complete the tour, continue on ahead. To return to Upton at this time, turn onto Dry Creek Road.

At 45.7, turn right onto Skull Creek Road. The little creek will wind gently alongside of you through chokecherry bushes, buffalo berry bushes, hayfields, and pastures.

* From THE BLACK HILLS ENGINEER (Custer Expedition Number), November 1929, The South Dakota School of Mines, Rapid City, South Dakota.

Site #10: The John Berry Place
 Mileage: 49.3



John Berry was never one to allow his life to plod on in one steady direction. A man of medium build with a "steer-horn" mustache, he had fiery red hair and personality to match. He was a well-known railroader (surveyor for the Union Pacific Railroad), a stagecoach driver, and, in 1885 at the new town of Douglas, a hotel and saloon keeper.

Somewhere amid his comings and goings, his eye fell fondly upon the fair and winsome Winifred Holwell (daughter to William) of Briar Hill Ranch. The lady was not a project to let go by, and with his characteristic get-it-done methods, he successfully steered her in the direction of the altar.

In 1893, John Berry was 35 years old, fit as a fiddle, and as ready as ever to jump feet first into whatever new enterprise might catch his fancy. Down in Chadron, Nebraska, there just happened to be a lollapalooza of one brewing that would take him--along with a select few others--on the adventure of a lifetime.

It is a fact that when folks who love and depend upon horses gather in conversational settings, talk inevitably turns to which horse is better than another, mine can surely beat yours in any race you care to set up, and so forth. Well, the Chadron contingent, having distilled the merits of Western-raised horseflesh versus any Eastern cousins of the same, determined theirs were obviously the superior animals. Why not set up a test that would prove their claims in front of the whole world?

Why not, indeed. After all, the World's Exposition was on in Chicago. And Chadron to Chicago was what, say 1,000 miles? It was, for a fact, and think of the crowds that would view the finish. And so, The Great Endurance Horse Race was talked into existence, and John Berry was drafted to draw out the route.

Of course, there were rules:

- 1) only horses bred and raised west of the Mississippi were eligible;
- 2) each rider was limited to two horses;
- 3) each rider was to be armed with a route map and was required to register at designated spots along the way;
- 4) the weight of saddle and rider was subject to a standard;
- 5) horses were to be branded with a race brand (a small 2 under the name); and,
- 6) if a horse dropped dead at the finish line, the rider would collect no prize.

As the race took on a life of it's own, assorted firms threw prizes into the pot: saddles, guns, any amount of cowboy equipment. Buffalo Bill Cody

put down \$500.00 for a cash purse providing the race would end at his Wild West Show in the Columbian Exposition.

Nine cowboys entered the competition, but only two were from this section: "Doc" Middleton and John Berry. John's entry was protested on account of his laying the route, but nobody paid much attention.

Publicity was widespread. Tension was high. So were the stakes. If you make a claim, you'd better be able to back it up. No small amount of honor rode on just what kind of showing these horses would make in such a test.

At last the race began. In reality, it was as much a test of horsemanship as of horse. A man who sensed the delicate balance of pressing himself and his mount to the edge of capability while yet keeping enough reserve to go on was a man who represented well some of the finest of what the Old West had to offer.

In the end, five contestants finished the race, although one fellow chose to ship his horse the last leg of the journey. True to his promise, Bill Cody presented the winner with prize money and a beautiful saddle.

And John Berry? Well, he was the winner. He and his horse "Poison" managed the remarkable feat in just 14 days. The reputation of the Western riding horse was secured, the perpetrators of the race rested their case, and John Berry went back to life in Wyoming.

Site #11: Thunder Basin National Grasslands

Mileage: 50.6



The designation of Thunder Basin National Grasslands was created out of desperate need during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl days of the 1930's. Homesteads by the hundreds were abandoned. Those remaining were threatened by severe financial difficulties. In 1934, the federal government began purchasing homesteads and set about refurbishing the land which had been decimated by doomed farming efforts. In 1960, the grasslands were put under management of the U.S. Forest Service. Intermingled with the National Grasslands are the Bureau of Land Management, State, and private lands.

On the western edge lies a high rolling plateau of upland plains. On the eastern edge of those plains are the Rochelle, Miller, and Red Hills, once a high plateau worn by erosion to form steep slopes. Shale uplands containing bentonite are found in the northeast near the town of Upton. In addition to bentonite, the Grasslands contain coal, oil and gas, and uranium.

The largest producing coal mine in the world, Thunder Basin, along with several other coal mines in the Powder River area of the National Grasslands, makes Wyoming the nation's top coal producer.

Western wheatgrass, blue grama, and needle-and-thread grasses thrive in the Grasslands with sagebrush and prickly-pear cactus. Near water sources you will find cottonwood. In the drier saline sites there will be greasewood. At the higher elevations, ponderosa pine and juniper grow. In the badlands are saltbushes and yucca with its prickly spines and cream colored blooms.

There are 194 birds, 42 mammals, 10 reptiles, and 6 amphibians represented in the area. Big game species include antelope, mule and white-tailed deer, elk, and mountain lion. Calling the Grasslands their home as well, are the cottontail rabbit, red squirrel, and turkey.

Game birds include the lesser sandhill crane and the curlew. Coyote, fox, bobcat, and jack rabbit are among the many species of predators and furbearers found here. Bald eagles, an endangered species, winter here, as do golden eagles. You will also find other species of eagles, hawks, and owls. Watch out for the occasional rattlesnake.

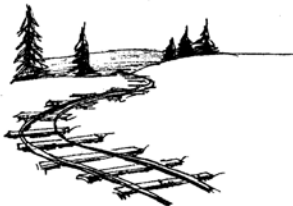
Water reservoirs have been stocked with trout, bullheads, bass, perch, and sunfish. Turner Reservoir (51.9), ahead and to your left, is one such reservoir.

In this vicinity there are red-winged blackbirds, bluebirds, and meadowlarks. During a wet year, you may see gumbo lilies growing low to the ground in or along the road. These shy little flowers can lie dormant for years of dry weather. Then, when enough rain falls to meet their moisture needs, they burst forth with delicate ivory blossoms.

Turn right: follow 914.

Site #12: The Area Of The Spurs.
Mileage: 58.1

It was in this area between Osage and Upton that a railroad spur named Jerome existed. It was located back of the Frank Mendenhall property on what today is the Art Oliver ranch. Early in the 1920's, Charlie Hagerman, Art Hagerman, and the Hoyer brothers dug bentonite by hand,



hauled it to Jerome, and unloaded it by hand onto rail cars to be shipped to Federal Foundry in Cleveland, Ohio.

Later, Federal Foundry built a plant at Jerome. When next they built the Wyodak plant at Upton, the Jerome plant burned leaving them, still, with just one plant in the area.

It was in this area that the Clay Spur Bentonite plant was begun by Frank Mondell and operated by him until he sold out to Silica Product Co. of Kansas City.

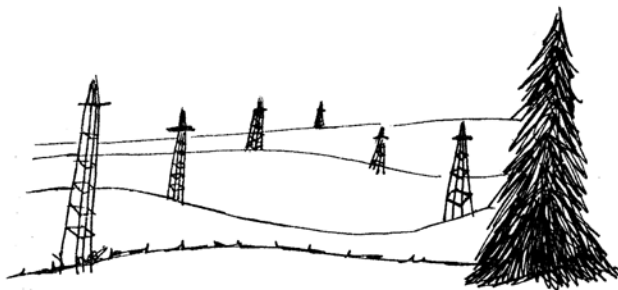
Much of the production was for the Baroid Sales Co. which had recently developed a market for use in oil well drilling as new rotary rigs came into use. Baroid was the leader and had a patent for bentonite used in drilling fluid named "Aquagel" (meaning watergel).

The first Clay Spur plant was a big wooden construction which burned down in 1930. By 1932, a new plant was built. In 1934, starting pay for workers was 40 cents an hour with a maximum of 40 hours a week.

The demand for bentonite continued to increase, and 1936 saw the necessity of adding a second and, later, a third 4-roll Raymond Mill. Two more dryers were added, as well. In 1970 the mill capacity of finished product had grown to 20 tons per hour.

Although Clay Spur came to an end in the mid-70's, Baroid left a bit of its history to the people of Weston County. The gasoline locomotive used to haul cars of crude material up to two or three miles to the processing plant has been donated by Baroid to the Weston County Museum District in Newcastle.

At 59.4, Road to left leads to small town of Osage



Osage--is it, as some say, an Indian word meaning "top of the hill?"

Perhaps. Or it may have been, as others say, the result of some sweet young thing sniffing the air and gushing, "Oh, sage!" Whatever the origin of the present name, the settlement was first named Apostle from the surname of a railroad worker.

In 1920, when a brand new gusher oil well caused nationwide stirring, large numbers of I-wanna-be-rich-too's descended upon the tiny settlement. Soon, the legally named Apostle had competition from three other next-door townsites: Sparks, Nefsy (for the fellow who had first struck oil there in 1910), and Osage. By May 5, 1920, Nefsy had won out.

Not easily discouraged, however, a company of Osage proponents staged a stunning feat of derring-do when they uprooted the Nefsy Post Office by night and moved it the sufficient number of feet to rest on the self-proclaimed Osage site. Amazingly, subsequent petitions for an official name change were granted. On November 29, 1920, the town became once and forever Osage, unincorporated and, therefore, blissfully unhampered by anything resembling city taxes.

At 60.1 : Turn right onto Highway 16 toward Upton.

Site #13: A Rare Geological Find

Mileage: 66

Picture this, if you will. First, a good-sized turtle shell. Only the shell. Now, fit into it a lizardly looking reptile with a fairly flat body, flippers, and an extraordinarily long neck, who delights in cavorting about in the great sea that once covered the very spot where you are right now. Now this was no small sea! It ran the length of our whole North American Continent. This was a long time ago. Around 110 million years ago, according to educated speculation.



But very little on earth ever seems to stay the same. In time, land masses began to put themselves forth. How? Volcanic activity, earthquakes, forces of nature in general--no doubt each played its part in creating terrain that would cause the waters to subside into oceans, small seas, rivers, creeks, and even tiny streams.

So, what of our water-loving creature? Was the change in sea level so rapid that he was left high and dry? Did he die for lack of proper accommodation? Or did his kind follow the receding water, leaving only the remains of those who had died earlier of old age--or whatever--and subsequently had settled into the sea bed?

Whatever the case, in 1985 Floyd Stanton, who along with his wife Opal, owns the parcel of land at the site, noticed some old bones in a particular area. Probably buffalo remains. After all, there had been an old buffalo jump on nearby land. Artifacts of various sorts abound in the area. What is one more pile of bones?

Then one day Stanton happened to look more closely at the pile of whatever-it-was. Oh. Not buffalo bones. Definitely not. Perhaps discreet digging was in order. The Stantons began to dig, soon deciding to call in help.

Shortly, a mining engineer with a paleontological background joined the dig, pronounced the creature a plesiosaur on the spot, and hastened to call in experts from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City. And, oh, the care with which the plesiosaur was unearthed. Pen knives and paint brushes, plaster-gauze normally used to caste broken limbs, even Elmer's glue--all such odd equipment and more was used to retrieve the creature from his resting place, this Mowry shale formation of the western Black Hills region.

At last the creature was uncovered. Lo and behold, there was--intact--the 25 foot back, neck and head of something that when it was in one piece measured 40 feet long. The tail was missing, but not to worry. The shoulder girdle, neck, and skull are the parts necessary to identify a new species.

Excitement grew rapidly because time-wise this particular plesiosaur was peculiarly out of place. Long-neck plesiosaurs were supposed to be in the Upper Cretaceous and the Upper Jurassic periods. Nothing this complete had been discovered in the period of Lower Cretaceous. Was a 40-million year gap about to cease being a gap?

Because geological conclusions sometimes seem to arrive at a pace similar to that of geological periods, the jury is still out. That this creature might be a new species was--is--a distinct possibility. If so, his name will be "Plesiosaur Stantonii" after the Stantons, his discoverers.

Back to Upton...

So ends the Prairie-to-Pines Loop Tour. For more colorful area history, feel free to stop in at the Red Onion Museum, just off Highway 16 onto Pine Street, across from the Country Corner.



Sources of information used for this work include:

- a.) primary data gathered through personal interviews and from personal observations gained in following the loop itself;
- b.) files held by the Upton Chamber of Commerce containing facts, figures, and observations by unknown authors;
- c.) THE BLACK HILLS ENGINEER, published by the South Dakota School of Mines, November 1929;
- d.) WESTON COUNTY, WYOMING--THE FIRST 100 YEARS, Curtis Media Corporation, 1988.