

devils tower

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devils tower, the first national monument

Looming over the Belle Fourche River in the northeast corner of Wyoming, where the pine forests of the Black Hills merge with the grasslands of the rolling plains, stands Devils Tower.

This imposing formation is a stump-shaped cluster of rock columns 1,000 feet across at the bottom and 275 feet across at the top. It rises 865 feet above its wooded base and 1,280 feet above the river—or 5,117 feet above sea level.

For centuries Devils Tower played an important role in the legend and folklore of Indian tribes. It became a landmark to stalwart explorers and travelers pushing their way west from the Black Hills region. Long noted for its beauty and grandeur, Devils Tower was proclaimed a national monument—the first of many to be set aside for the people of the United States—on September 24, 1906.

Fallen column on Tower Trail



Devils Tower, the tallest rock formation of its kind in the United States, is a popular subject of study by geologists, who are continuing their search for a more complete explanation of how it came into being. The tower also stimulates speculation on what must have been its great influence upon the nomadic tribes that for centuries, hunted, lived, and died in its shadow.

From vantage points that enable you to view it in its broader setting of pine forests under a brilliant western sky, and in everchanging light, the tower is seen in many shapes and colors. The natural communities of plants and animals around the base of the tower and on the 1½ acres of its isolated top are interestingly varied.

the geological story

Geologists tell us that the rocks exposed in the monument are of two general types—igneous and sedimentary.

The tower itself is igneous. It is composed of rock formed directly by the cooling and crystallization of once molten materials. As you look up at the great pillar, you will notice that its most striking feature is its curious fluted form; it appears to be made of a mass of vertical, polygonal columns. In the middle part of the tower the columns are bounded by well-developed, open, smooth joints (cracks); but as the columns taper upward, the joints may be tightly compressed; some of the columns seem to unite.

The joints were established millions of years ago while the rock was solidifying from its once hot, liquid form. Contraction occurred as the rock cooled, forming the joints, which determined the sizes and shapes of the columns developed within the buried mass. Erosion, principally by the Belle Fourche River, has since uncovered the tower by wearing away the softer rocks that once enveloped it.

Gravity, supplementing the heaving effects of freezing and thawing of water in crevices and joints, has caused many of the eroded columns to fall, crashing to the base and piling up the huge rocks into the "talus" you see as you walk around the Tower Trail. However, there is no record of any columns having fallen in recent years.

The rocks exposed in the remainder of Devils Tower National Monument are sedimentary, formed by the consolidation of materials derived from other rocks or accumulations that were deposited either on the floors or near the shores of prehistoric seas. These rocks appear as layers of shale, sandstone, gypsum, and limestone.

Devils Tower owes its prominence on the landscape to the differing rates of erosion of these rock types and to the contrast of the somber color of the igneous core to the brightly colored bands of sedimentary rock that surround its base.

from rocks to forest

The national monument is a natural exhibit of botanical plant succession. The story has to do with the changes from bare rock to soil-rich forest. One plant community gets started, to be replaced by another and still another.

Bright-colored splashes on the rock are masses of lichens. Mosses have taken over some of the more shaded habitats.

As more soil forms from the rock and dust settles in the crevices, grasses take over. Along Tower Trail you can see several little shelves and fissures well carpeted with grass. Once the grass patch is well established, cinquefoil, yarrow, pricklypear, and other wildflowers get started. Here, too, you see shrubs such as sagebrush, currant, squawbush, and serviceberry. Where shrubs are growing, you will find such trees as ponderosa pine, juniper, and quaking aspen.

So, at Devils Tower, you can see every step in the process toward establishment of a forest, from bare rock to pines.

the animals

Prairie dogs are the most frequently seen native mammals of the monument. About one-half mile from the monument entrance is a thriving prairie dog "town." A roadside exhibit tells you something of their way of life. These little ground squirrels have been almost exterminated from most of their former range; however, they are protected in the monument, as are all animals and plants.

Do not feed the prairie dogs. For an offer of candy and salted peanuts you may get a painful nip from sharp teeth. Furthermore, you should not let them get close to you, for they carry fleas that can transmit diseases to humans. Actually, it is far better to go after prairie dogs with a camera. That is safe and close enough.

Prairie dog



You may occasionally see mule and whitetail deer, as well as cottontails, chipmunks, and other small mammals.

You will see many birds in the monument. Along the Tower Trail, watch for the canyon wren, Audubon warbler, hairy woodpecker, western flycatcher, and black-capped chickadee.

man and devils tower

After you have seen Devils Tower, you will understand why it inspired the imagination of the area's early Indian inhabitants. Some of them called it "Mateo Tepee," meaning Grizzly Bear Lodge, and had several legends regarding its origin. Artifacts suggesting the Indians' way of life have been found just off of the Tower Trail and at other locations in the area.

The tower must have been an object of curiosity to early explorers and fur traders, but none ever mentioned it in their journals.

It remained for a U.S. Geological Survey party, who made a reconnaissance of the Black Hills in 1875, to call attention to the uniqueness of the tower. Col. Richard I. Dodge, commander of the military escort, referred to it as "one of the most remarkable peaks in this or any country."

Colonel Dodge is generally credited with giving the formation its present name. In his book entitled *The Black Hills*, published in 1876, he called it "Devils Tower," explaining "The Indians call this shaft The Bad God's Tower, a name adopted with proper modification, by our surveyors."

Less than a decade after the Survey party passed through, the first settlers entered the western end of the Black Hills where the tower is located. By 1880, the vicinity of Devils Tower was comparatively safe for settlers. Fortunately, among these early settlers were people who sensed the uniqueness and beauty of the tower; they asked the Federal Government to take steps to prevent it from passing into hands of those who might wish to exploit this scenic wonder for private gain.

In February 1892, Senator Francis E. Warren of Wyoming asked the Commissioner of the General Land Office for assistance in preventing the spoliation of Devils Tower and the Little Missouri Buttes, several miles to the northeast. That same year Senator Warren introduced a bill in the U.S. Senate for the establishment of "Devils Tower National Park."

But it was not until 14 years later that Devils Tower became a national monument. Following the passage of the Antiquities Act in 1906, Frank W. Mondell, Representative-at-Large from Wyoming, lent his support to the plan to have

the area preserved. It was apparently because of his influence, more than that of any other individual, that by authority of this act President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed Devils Tower the first national monument.

about your visit

The monument is open all year. In summer, the days are generally sunny, but when the sun sets or during storms you will need a sweater.

The monument entrance, on Wyo. 24, is 7 miles north of U.S. 14; 29 miles northwest of Sundance, Wyo.; 33 miles northeast of Moorcroft, Wyo.; and 52 miles southwest of Belle Fourche, S. Dak.

Continental Trailways buses serve Moorcroft. There is no regularly scheduled transportation from Moorcroft or other nearby towns to the monument. The nearest air terminal is Rapid City, S. Dak., 120 miles from the monument. Frontier, North Central, and Western Airlines serve Rapid City, and rental cars can be obtained there.

You should make the visitor center your first stop. It is about 3 miles from the monument's east entrance and close to the tower. It contains exhibits that explain the geology, history, and natural environment of the tower.

A self-guiding nature trail, called the Tower Trail, encircles the tower. By taking it, you will see Devils Tower at close hand from all directions, gain a fuller understanding of the story, and become acquainted with much of the region's plantlife. It is about a 1-hour walk along a trail that is just over 1 mile long. Take your camera with you.

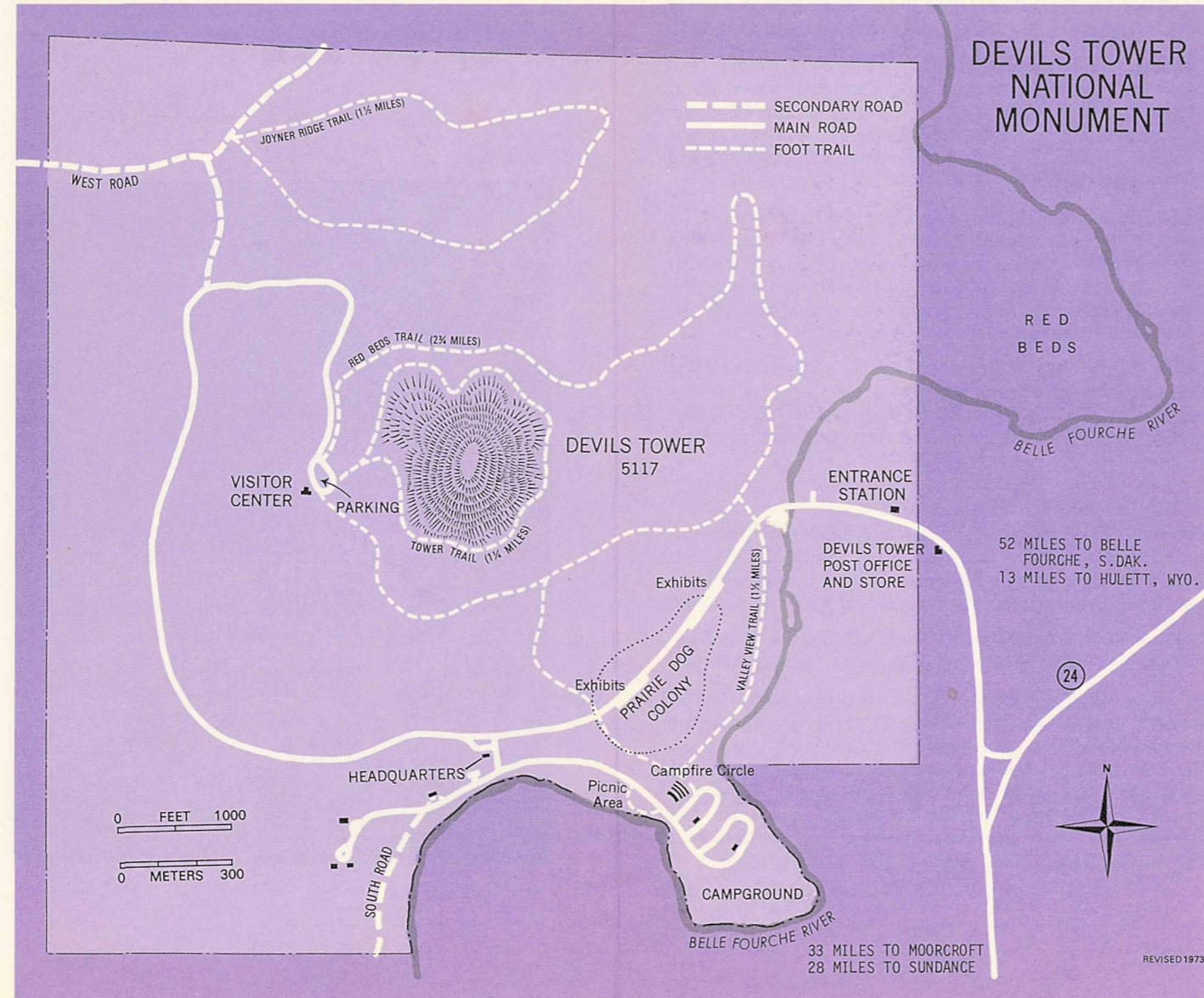
Your visit to Devils Tower will not be complete if you do not take at least one photograph of the tower. You will have to make your own rules for picture taking. There is no "best" time. When the light is flat on the south face at midday, there is good contrast on the east and west faces. When the light is flat on the west face, it is contrasty on the south.

Campsites adaptable to both trailer and tent camping are available in the monument. A water tap and modern comfort stations are readily accessible, and each campsite is provided with a fireplace and table. Campground facilities are provided on a first-come, first-served basis. Depending on weather conditions, the campground is open from approximately May 15 through September 30.

Two general stores, restaurants, and a post office are within 2 miles of the campground. There are no shower or laundry facilities in the monument, but these services are available in nearby towns. Motels and other accommodations are also available in nearby towns.



Devils Tower seen from Belle Fourche Campground



your safety

Rattlesnakes inhabit the area! Be watchful and cautious; the snakes seldom bite humans unless disturbed or mistreated. Remember to stay clear of prairie dogs. They carry fleas and bite, too.

climbing the tower

Have you wondered about climbing Devils Tower? There have been several hundred recorded individual ascents by skilled climbers.

It is a strenuous, exhausting climb. In the interest of safety, all climbers must register at monument headquarters at the time of starting and upon returning, and must give evidence that they are physically capable, have proper equipment, and have had experience in similar hazardous climbing. Approval of the superintendent must be obtained before attempting a climb.

help us protect this monument

All objects in this monument—rocks, wildflowers, trees, and animals—must be left in place and undisturbed so that others, too, may enjoy them. This protection is a matter of law; it is also a matter of good citizenship and consideration for others.

administration

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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