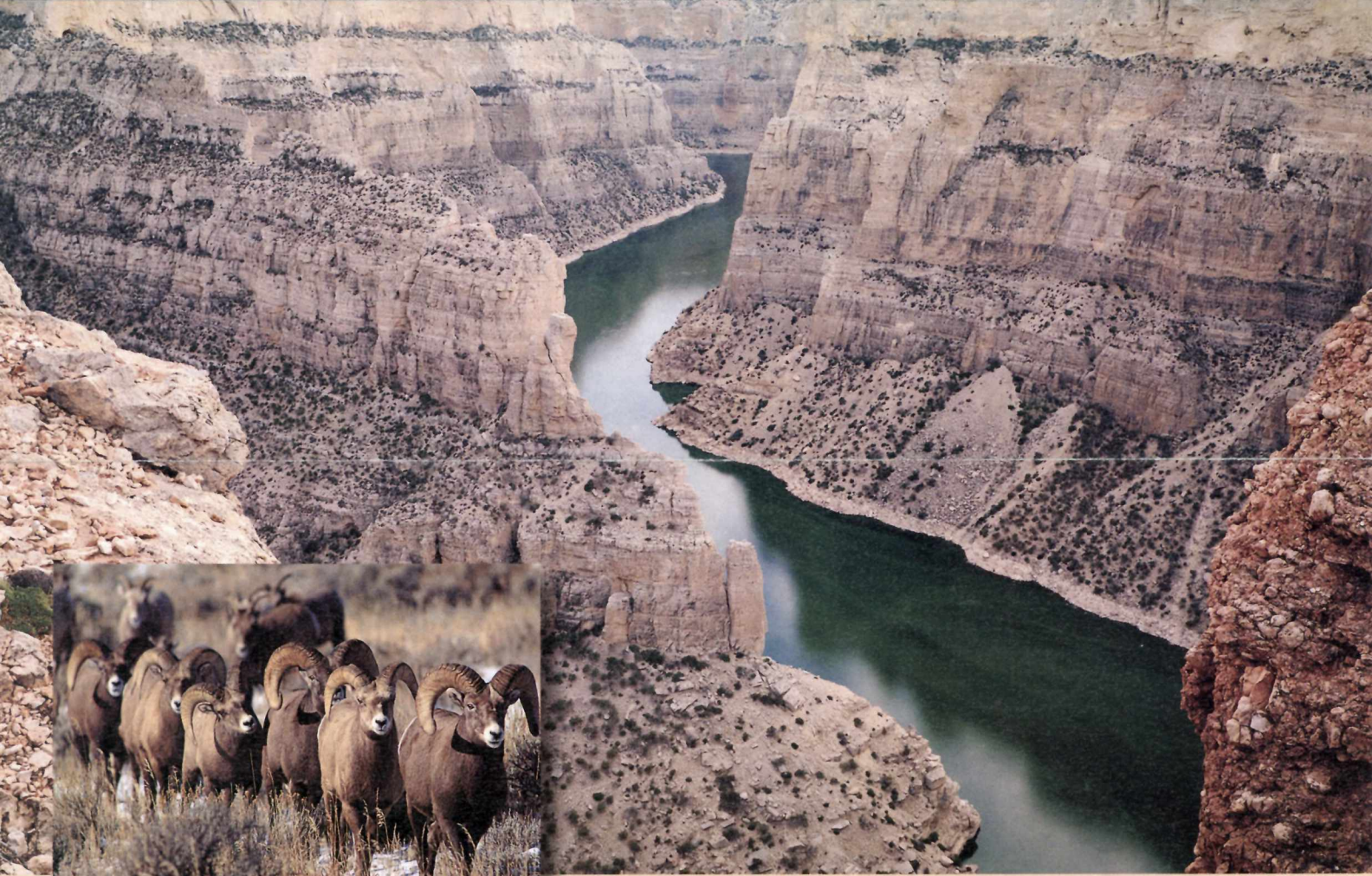


Bighorn Canyon

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Recreation Area
Montana/Wyoming



Bighorn Canyon at twilight from the Devil Canyon Overlook (above). Bighorn sheep roam the park (left).

At first glance, time seems to have stopped at Bighorn Canyon. The lake and the steep-sided canyons provide a peaceful setting for those seeking a break from the daily routine. The focus of the area is 71-mile-long Bighorn Lake, created by Yellowtail Dam near Fort Smith, Mont. Dedicated in 1968, the dam provides electric power, water for irrigation, flood control, and recreation. Boating, waterskiing, fishing, swimming, and sightseeing are main attractions.

While you enjoy the play of light and shadow on rock and water, take time to contemplate the changes that the land and the life upon it have undergone. Time and water are keys to the canyon, where the land has been shaped by moving water since upheavals of the Earth's crust built the Pryor and Bighorn mountains millions of years ago. For 15 miles upstream from the dam, the lake bisects a massive, arching anticline, exposing fossils that tell of successive times when

this land was submerged under a shallow sea, when it was a tropical marsh, and when its conifer forests were inhabited by dinosaurs. Humans arrived here over 10,000 years ago, living as hunters and gatherers. In modern times people have further altered the land.

Most of Bighorn's visitors come to enjoy the lake. Boaters, waterskiers, anglers, and scuba divers find attractions here. But the park is more than just the lake—from the wildflowers in spring and summer to over 200 species of birds—and from the stories of life forms adapting to a harsh environment to the modern search for energy. You can get more information on what the park offers at visitor centers near Lovell, Wyo., and Fort Smith, Mont. We invite you to find your own place of solitude to relax and enjoy the diversity and timelessness of this uncommon canyon waterland.

A Challenging Land

North American peoples have traveled and made their living along rivers and streams for over 40,000 years. But the Bighorn River was too treacherous and too steep-walled. People here lived near the Bighorn but avoided navigating it—until the dam tamed the river.

The broken land here also challenged the ingenuity of early residents, forcing them to devise unusual strategies of survival. More than 10,000 years ago, Indian hunters drove herds of game into land traps. These Indians lived simply, gathering wild roots and seeds to balance and supplement their meat diet. They made clothes of skins, baskets and sandals of plant fibers, and tools of stone, bone, and wood. The many caves of the Bighorn area provided seasonal shelters and storage areas for the Indians and early traders and trappers.

Absaroke means "people of the large-beaked bird" to the Crow people. Their reservation surrounds most of Bighorn Canyon. Originally a farming people, the Crow split off from the Hidatsa tribe over 200 years ago. They became

a renowned hunting people, described by one of the Lewis and Clark Expedition as "the finest horsemen in the world."

After 1800, explorers, traders, and trappers found their way up the Bighorn River. Charles Larocque met the Crow at the mouth of the Bighorn in 1805; Capt. William Clark traveled through a year later. Jim Bridger claimed to have floated through the canyon on a raft. Later fur traders packed goods overland on the Bad Pass Trail, avoiding the river's dangers.

During the Civil War the Bozeman Trail led to mines in western Montana by crossing the Bighorn River. Open from 1864 to 1868, the trail was bitterly opposed by Sioux and Cheyenne; the Crow were neutral. The federal government closed the trail in 1868 after the Fort Laramie Treaty. Fort C.F. Smith, now on private land, guarded the trail as an outpost. A stone monument commemorates the Hayfield Fight, a desperate but successful defense against Sioux and Cheyenne warriors. In this skirmish a party of soldiers and civilian hay-

cutters, working three miles north of Fort C.F. Smith, fought for eight hours until rescued by the fort's troops on August 1, 1867.

After the Civil War cattle ranching became a way of life. Among the huge open-range cattle ranches was the Mason-Lovell (the ML); some of those buildings remain. Dude ranching, reflected in the remains of Hillsboro, was popular in the early 1900s.

The Crow made the transition from hunter-gatherers to ranchers in one generation. In 1904, after 12 years of labor, they completed an irrigation system and opened 35,000 acres of land to irrigated farming. Water was diverted into the Bighorn Canal by a 416-foot diversion dam, moving 720 cubic feet of water per second. Near Afterbay Campground is Bighorn Canal Headgate, a reminder of this human response to the challenge of the land.

Congress established Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area in 1966 to provide enjoyment for visitors today and to protect the park for future generations.

Land and Life at Bighorn



Bighorn Canyon Visitor Center
The solar-heated visitor center near Lovell, Wyo., symbolizes the energy-conscious concerns of the National Park Service and modern Americans. The system is designed to store heat from the sun in a rock bin, then circulate warmed air through the building.

The park's Yellowtail Dam Visitor Center is two miles past the community of Fort Smith. You can reach it by car from the north.



Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range
In 1968 this area was established to provide a well-maintained sanctuary for wild horses. The herd size of about 120–140 is managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Bighorn Wildlife
The wildlife of the Bighorn Canyon country is as varied as the land, which can be divided into four climate or vegetative zones. In the south is desert shrubland inhabited by wild horses, snakes, and small rodents. Midway is juniper woodland with coyotes, deer, bighorn sheep, beaver, woodrats, and porcupine. Along the flanks of the canyon is pine-and-fir woodland with mountain lions, bear, elk, and mule deer. In the north is shortgrass

prairie, once home to herds of buffalo. Many of the smaller animals, like cottontails, skunks, coyotes, and rattlesnakes, are seen often throughout the park. Over 200 species of birds, including many kinds of waterfowl, have been seen here.

Each plant and animal species is adapted to the particular conditions of temperature, moisture, and terrain within one or more of the park's four primary zones.



Yellowtail Dam
The dam honors Robert Yellowtail, former Crow tribal chairman and reservation superintendent. This arch-type dam, 525 feet high, creates one of the largest reservoirs on the Missouri River tributary system.



Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area
Riparian, cottonwood forest, shrubland, and wetlands provide habitat for white-tailed deer, bald eagles, pelicans, heron, waterfowl, wild turkeys, and other species. The area is managed by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department through agreements with the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation.



Ranch Sites
Mason-Lovell Ranch (above): A.L. Mason and H.C. Lovell built a cattle ranch headquarters here in 1883. Cattle roamed the Bighorn Basin in a classic open-range operation.

Hillsboro: A one-mile round-trip trail takes you to the site of Governor William Barry's Cedarvale Guest Ranch

and the 1915–1945 Hillsboro post office.

Lockhart Ranch: Caroline Lockhart, reporter, editor, and author, began ranching at age 56. The well-preserved buildings give a feel for ranch life. The trail is one mile round-trip.

Ewing-Snell Ranch: This site was in use for nearly 100 years.



Bad Pass Trail
American Indians camped along this trail 10,000 years ago. In prehistoric and historic time Shoshone used it to get to the buffalo plains. Early trappers and traders used it to avoid the dangers of the Bighorn River. You can still see rock cairns along the route between

Devil Canyon Overlook and Barry's Landing.

Before the arrival of the horse, life changed little here for thousands of years. Small family groups wintered in caves near the canyon bottoms. In early spring they moved out of the canyon bottoms in search of plants and



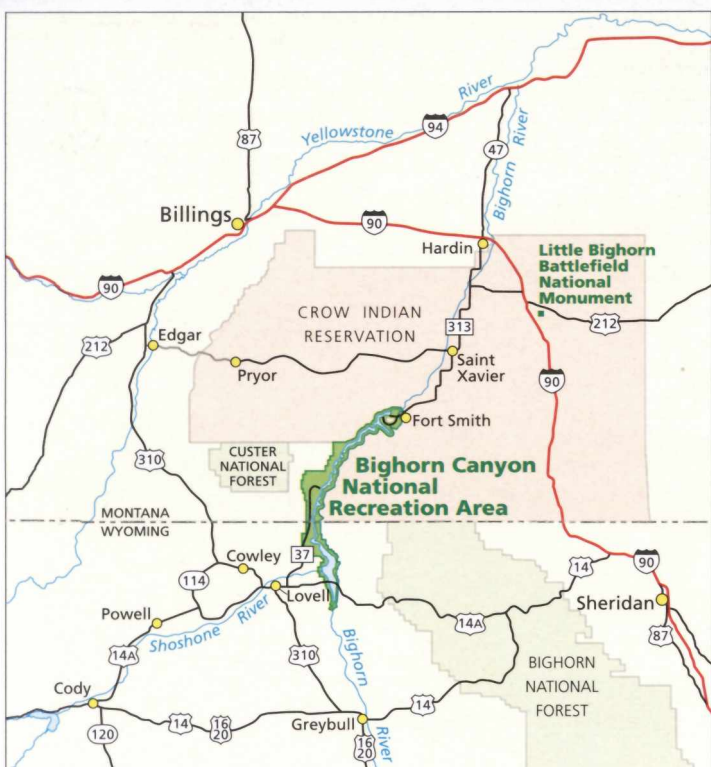
small animals, and in summer they moved to the highlands in search of game and summer-maturing plants. Large groups gathered in fall for a communal bison hunt.



Devil Canyon Overlook
Here the canyon cross-cuts the gray limestone of the Devil Canyon Anticline, a 1,000-foot high segment of the fault block that make up the Pryor Mountains.

BIGHORN CANYON (TOP)—© JEFF GNASS
BIGHORN SHEEP (TOP) AND HORSES (ABOVE)—© JEFF VANUGA
OTHER PHOTOS—NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Exploring Bighorn Canyon



Planning Your Visit

No road connects the park's north and south ends directly. To visit both, use the map at left to choose a route. Be sure to stop at the Bighorn Canyon Visitor Center at Lovell, Wyo., or the Yellowtail Dam Visitor Center near Fort Smith, Mont.

Getting Here To get to the park's south end, take U.S. 310 from Billings, Mont., or U.S. 14A from Sheridan, Wyo. To reach the north end, take Mont. 313 from Hardin, Mont. You can rent cars in nearby communities, but no public transportation serves the park. Scheduled airlines do serve Cody, Wyo., and Billings. Transcontinental buses serve Greybull, Cody, Lovell, and Powell, Wyo., and Billings and Hardin,

Mont. Unattended aircraft landing strips are at Fort Smith and Cowley, Wyo.

Facilities and Services Hotels, motels, restaurants, service stations, and grocery and sporting goods stores are in Lovell and Hardin. At the park's north end, Fort Smith has motels and a restaurant, service station, and grocery store.

Contact the park to plan your visit in advance—especially if you will be bringing a group.

Service animals are welcome in the park.

Private Property The Crow Indians own property within the boundary of the national recreation area. Tribal lands are closed to the public. Check with a park ranger for more information.

More Information Bighorn Canyon is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more visit www.nps.gov.

Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area
P.O. Box 7458
Fort Smith, MT 59035
406-666-2412

or

20 Hwy 14A East
Lovell, WY 82431
307-548-2251
www.nps.gov/bica

©GPO:2010-357-940/80486 Reprint 2010
Printed on recycled paper.



Boating Tips Get the park's boating brochure and map before you head for the water. It shows the boating facilities, boat ramps,

navigational markers, and campgrounds for Bighorn Lake. Read and heed the regulations for boating safety on the lake.

For your safety, sign the registration sheet at the boat ramps.



Diver's Flag



Swimming Area



Warning Buoy



Control Buoy

What to See and Do

A film at Bighorn Canyon Visitor Center highlights park activities. Exhibits tell you about the canyon's history and natural features and highlight park activities.

Boating enthusiasts will find a marina, snack bar, campstore (gas and oil), and boat ramp at Horseshoe Bend and Ok-A-Beh. Ramps are also at Afterbay Dam and Barry's Landing. All boaters should sign registration sheets at the ramps when entering and leaving the lake. If mechanical problems develop while you are on the lake, stay with your boat; hail other boaters and ask them to notify a ranger. Carry both day and night signaling devices. Do not try to climb the lake's steep canyon walls.

Swimmers are encouraged to use the life-guarded areas at Horseshoe Bend and Ok-A-Beh.

Camping is restricted to designated sites in developed areas. It is also allowed in the backcountry and below the highwater mark along Bighorn Lake. Fire restrictions during periods of high fire danger may close certain areas to camping. Check with a ranger for the restrictions on fires or backcountry camping.

Hiking is available in the national recreation area and in nearby forests. Ask at the visitor centers for more information.

Hunting is allowed in designated areas in accordance with state laws. Trapping is prohibited.

Fishing in Montana or Wyoming requires the appropriate state fishing license. Brown and rainbow trout, sauger, ling, and perch abound. The most popular fish, a gourmet's delight, is the walleye. Winter ice fishing around Horse-

shoe Bend is good. The Bighorn River provides excellent brown and rainbow trout fishing.

Regulations and Safety For firearms regulations, check the park website: www.nps.gov/bica. Pets must be on a leash in developed areas and in areas of concentrated public use. Trash and waste disposals into area waters are prohibited; all vessels must have a waste receptacle on board. Carry a first-aid kit as a precaution against poisonous snakebites.

All plants, animals, natural and cultural features, and archeological sites are protected by federal law. Collecting is prohibited.