

The Bad Pass

A Ten Thousand Year Old Highway

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At the beginning of the Early Prehistoric period, around 10,000 years ago, small groups of nomadic people moved seasonally to follow game and to harvest wild vegetation. This period roughly corresponded to the end of the Pleistocene, a time when the receding glaciers in North America caused some significant changes in the annual movements of the Paleo-Indians that inhabited the northern Bighorn Basin. It seems many species of animals became extinct around this time, and the Indians adapted by relying on a more diversified selection of plants and animals for their survival. Archeological sites in the Bighorn Canyon area such as the Pretty Creek, Sorenson Cave, Mangus Cave, and the Bad Pass Trail are dated to this period by the artifacts that have been found at these locations.

The Bad Pass Trail afforded an important link between the northern grasslands of the Yellowstone River Basin and the arid region of the Bighorn Basin in the south. For this reason, it became indispensable as an overland route through the Pryor and Bighorn Mountains.

Basic patterns of movement are similar for many early populations in North America. Winters were spent in a permanent dwelling, often a cave or sheltered enclosure in a canyon, which provided warmth and safety throughout the harshest months. These dwellings also served as a central location where the Indians could return annually. With the arrival of spring the people abandoned their winter homes for more mobile lodgings made of lodge poles and animal skins. The bases of these dwellings were secured by large rings of stone called tipi rings. Many rings are still visible today, both singularly and in groups, in the higher grassland regions. These sites provide supporting evidence prehistoric tribes were following patterns of both early plant growth and migrating animals. As summer approached, the Indians moved further up into the hills, where they collected suitable materials for tool and weapon making. The women of the tribe used this time for collecting plants, as well as making new lodge poles from the abundant pine trees. Social gatherings encouraged the production of the necessities of life and increased hunting productivity. In the fall, many tribes would assemble at one time in the camps along the Bad Pass Trail in preparation for the impending winter. The Middle Prehistoric era saw the introduction of the buffalo jump. Hunters would find a large grassy area where buffalo could be found grazing and construct a large V-shaped funnel at the end of which was a 15' to 150' cliff. The women would then butcher the animals at the base of this cliff where large deposits of bone have been found. Jump sites are usually accompanied by an occupation site nearby, where the tribe would dry meat and cure hides in preparation for the winter.

It is believed the next major period, the Late Prehistoric, witnessed the migration of the Crow tribe to Bighorn Canyon and the Bighorn and Pryor Mountains around 700

A.D. Advances were made both in tool making and in hunting techniques. The dog travois was introduced during this period as well as the bow and arrow. Hollywood's version of typical Indian weaponry was invented only fairly recently in comparison to the thousands of years people have hunted and lived in the northern Bighorn Basin.

Eventually by the 17th century foreign cultures introduced firearms, metal goods, and the horse, which was to become a significant addition to the Crow and other Plains Indian cultures, traditions, and lifestyles.

Trade, an annual practice among the Paleo-Indians, encouraged good relations with other bands and facilitated the mutually beneficial exchange of quality materials and goods. Agricultural items, meat, hides, and important raw materials like obsidian and shells were carried long distances on the Bad Pass and connecting trails to be traded and given as gifts to other tribes.

Indians were not the only traders who recognized the advantages of the Bad Pass. As contact with the natives increased and beaver pelts became more valuable, foreign trappers and traders penetrated even further into the Bighorn area. Frustrated with the perils of shipping pelts up and down the many river systems of the northern Rockies, fur companies began using the travel routes that Indians had used for centuries.

The first recorded use of the Bad Pass route was in a journal kept by Francois Larocque, a French-Canadian trader with the British Northwest Company, in 1805. Later, Major Andrew Henry and General William Ashley, noted and successful fur traders and co-founders of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, crossed the Bad Pass during their expeditions in 1824 and 1825. Among the many other famous mountain men that sought to make their fortunes in the Bighorn Canyon area are Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Jedediah Smith, and William "Bill" Sublette. It was these men that eventually gave the trail its name because of the rough and rugged terrain they encountered. The Bad Pass was first recorded on an exploration map in 1839.

The archeological sites surrounding the Bad Pass Trail include several semi-permanent encampments, which the Indians used as bases of activity while hunting, gathering, or trading. Professor Lawrence L. Loendorf, of the University of Arizona, spent almost 10 years studying these historical sites, and remains the leading authority on the subject. Among the many archeological sites he studied were several located at Crooked Creek and Layout Creek. The sheltered valley and drainage formed by Layout Creek has a number of significant sites, including the Pretty Creek archeological survey area, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The charcoal from Pretty Creek hearth sites has been carbon dated back 10,000 years. The various sites have yielded many important artifacts, allowing the reconstruction of an archaic and primitive lifestyle including migration patterns as suggested by Loendorf.

The Bad Pass Trail is marked by rock cairns, made by travellers as they picked up stones from their path and piled them on either side of the trail. Not only did this practice smooth the rocky terrain for future travellers, but it seems to have had some religious significance judging by the artifacts that have been found in some of the cairns.

The prehistoric trail is being accurately mapped by National Park Service volunteers (VIPs) and employees of Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. The rock cairns

bordering the trail are located on foot and marked with flags. Each cairn is then mapped by the Global Positioning System (GPS). The system uses three to four satellites orbiting the earth to triangulate and precisely pinpoint the exact location of each rock cairn. By measuring the amount of time it takes for a radio signal to travel from the satellites to an antenna placed at each cairn, latitude, longitude, and elevation can be calculated within two to five meters. The information is then fed into a Geographic Information System (GIS) computer that contains other resource databases including soil, vegetation, roads, political boundaries, and other geographical and topographical information about the national recreation area. With such accurate computer records, it is much easier to preserve and interpret the 400+ remaining trail cairns.

The northern Bighorn Basin of Wyoming and Montana is rich with a history that has only in the last few decades been scientifically researched in detail. Between the small nomadic bands of Paleo-Indian tribes that originally inhabited this area nearly 10,000 years ago, and the more recent

frontiersmen and fur traders who followed in their footsteps, lies a vast body of archeological evidence that tells a fantastic story of continuous life in the Basin. The Bad Pass Trail is an intricate part of this tale and further research and interpretation of artifacts will attest to the prehistoric and historic significance of the area. Enough emphasis cannot be placed on the importance of future discoveries that will afford us a better understanding of basic human existence in the past, and in turn, our own existence.

References

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concerns in both the operations of the Memorial and in planning the 50th anniversary program jointly with the U.S. Navy. The Survivors will receive special acknowledgement in the Service's anniversary activities.

I provided him with a summary of the Service's programs.

The next round occurred in late November when there was an acrimonious confrontation on the Memorial grounds between the superintendent and Emory, the Service's principal critic. This brouhaha found its way onto the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*. Called to the attention of the White House, Emory was given a seat next to President Bush when the President gave his December 7, 1991, address from the USS Arizona Memorial.

Somewhat overshadowed by the Navy's media extravaganza, the National Park Service, particularly the staff of the USS Arizona Memorial, held forth from December 4-7, 1991. During these four days, ceremonies at the Memorial paid homage to the veterans of the attack on Pearl Harbor and other Oahu military installations, as well as the islanders, the dead, the living, and the next of kin of those who had lost their lives. Among the treasured highlights of these days were the presentations by James Michener; getting to know men and women, including the two surviving December 7th Medal of Honor servicemen; and in a private setting after the days of ceremonies were over, seeing PHSA President Glaubitz and one of the Japanese carrier pilots embrace. Superintendent Don Magee, his staff, other NPS employees called in as reinforcements, and VIPs had all stood a little taller to insure a meaningful and relevant program that will be long remembered.

Meanwhile, production of the new film, which regrettably was not ready for public viewing at the 50th anniversary, had been deferred. An article in the December 1991 *Smithsonian Magazine*, titled "At Pearl Harbor There are New Ways to Remember," sparked a hot letter to President Bush from a veteran, this time a retired Army brigadier general. The statement that sent him into orbit read, "A new film will replace the present one next March; one point that it won't make is that eternal preparedness is the lesson of Pearl Harbor." In addressing this issue, the retired gener-

al fumed, "I object we don't need another case of Politically Correct revisionism at this memorial." He urged

...that this new PC film for the memorial should be changed so it will continue to present to our children and grandchildren the bitter lesson we learned and which you [the President] stated in your Proclamation for National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day 1991: "we reaffirm the solemn commitment that President Truman made when he declared—we shall not forget Pearl Harbor."

To assuage the concerns of those like the correspondent and other critics of the old film, who feared that the Service's treatment of the Pearl Harbor attack would be tainted by the need to be politically correct, the History Division determined to establish a blue ribbon panel to review and insure that the new film be as accurate and fitting as possible. This panel consisted of professional historians and interpretive specialists, including the Chief of Naval History; the president of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association; Capt. Donald Ross and Lt. John Finn, the two surviving Medal of Honor winners from December 7, 1941; Capt. Joseph Taussig, a Pearl Harbor survivor, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy; former chief boatswain mate Emory; and senior staffers from the American Legion. Nearly all of these people had taken part in the 50th anniversary commemorative ceremonies sponsored by the NPS at the USS Arizona Memorial.

The panelists in and around Washington met and previewed the film in Captain Taussig's office. The others were provided copies on video cassette. Their comments were collated and reviewed, and those deemed to have substance were reflected in the new film that has been shown to visitors to the USS Arizona Memorial beginning December 7, 1992. The new film has been an interpretive and public relations success. Viewers evaluating the park's programs give the film high marks. The number of letters of complaint to Congress about the old film requiring a response by the NPS have been pared to less than 5% of the former figure.

Edwin C. Bearss, former Chief Historian of the National Park Service, now serves as a special assistant to the Director, National Park Service, for military history.