

DAY 3 – WYOMING

On our way to Wyoming along Highway 90, we encountered an unexpected sign: Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument. I had not put that historical site on my itinerary, but I felt we needed to stop there before we proceeded on highway 212 to Devils Tower in the northeast corner of Wyoming.



Little Bighorn, A Place of Reflection

This land is a place to honor and reflect on the sacrifices made here on June 25 and 26, 1876, when Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors fought against a deliberate attack by the U.S. Army's 7th Cavalry, led by Lt. Col. George Custer, who sought to enforce policies that threatened their traditional way of life. How are the results of the battle felt in the West and Indigenous communities today? [Read More](https://www.nps.gov/libi/index.htm)

<https://www.nps.gov/libi/index.htm>



Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument was first set aside as a National Cemetery, memorializing the soldiers of the 7th Cavalry Regiment who died in the 1876 battle. Over time, interpretation of the battle and the participants on both sides spurred the designation of a national monument in the 1940s. Today the National Park Service manages the site to protect its cultural and historic resources for future generations. <https://www.nps.gov/libi/learn/historyculture/index.htm>



Prayer bundles hanging on a small tree. The meaning of each is a mystery – known only to the hands that tie the cloth.

Native American prayer bundles, often called tobacco ties or prayer ties, are small offerings of prayers, intentions, or gratitude wrapped in cloth and tied with string or yarn. Typically, a pinch of sacred tobacco is placed in a square of fabric and secured to a string, with the continuous string symbolizing the flow of energy. These ties are then offered to the Creator or placed in sacred places as a sign of respect and connection to the spirit world, often used in ceremonies or at sacred sites.

The act of making and offering a prayer tie is a way to connect the physical and spiritual worlds, fostering a deeper connection with the natural and divine realms.

<https://danceforallpeople.com/prayer-ties/>



The Battle of the Little Bighorn, which took place on June 25 and 26, 1876, is perhaps the best-known and most written about engagement between the U.S. Army and American Indians. As many as 2,000 Lakota and Cheyenne warriors as well as more than 600 soldiers, civilians and Indian scouts participated in the fighting.

Sign: Custer and about 41 men shoot their horses for breastworks and fight to the death. Custer was found at the crest of the hill. This was his "Last Stand."



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Bighorn_Battlefield_National_Monument



7th US Cavalry Memorial

On June 28, 1876, three days after the Battle of the Little Bighorn, survivors of the 7th U.S. Cavalry under the command of Major Marcus A. Reno began the painful task of burying Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer's command. The men were buried where they fell in shallow graves, marked with wooden tipi poles collected from the abandoned Indian village. Starting in 1877, the partial remains of Custer and many of the officers were re-interred at various locations in the eastern United States. Custer's remains were re-interred at West Point, New York.

In 1881, a granite memorial was erected on Last Stand Hill by the War Department. The remains of soldiers and attached personnel buried on the field were collected and re-interred in a mass grave around the base of the granite memorial on Last Stand Hill. In 1890, Army personnel erected more than 240 white marble markers at the locations of the fallen 7th cavalrymen.

<https://www.nps.gov/libi/learn/historyculture/7th-us-cavalry-memorial.htm>



"If this memorial is to serve its total purpose, it must not only be a tribute to the dead; it must contain a message for the living...power through unity..."
Enos Poor Bear, Sr., Oglala Lakota Elder

The Indian Memorial commemorates the sacrifice of the Arikara, Apsaalooke (Crow), Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Oyate (Lakota Sioux) tribes in the Battle of the Little Bighorn as they fought to protect their values and traditional way of life. The theme of the memorial, "Peace Through Unity", carries the commemoration further by acknowledging the need for cooperation both among Indian tribes and between tribal governments and the federal government. The relevancy and significance is further highlighted when one considers it is the only memorial to the Native American experience mandated by Congress and constructed with federal funds.

<https://www.nps.gov/libi/learn/historyculture/indian-memorial.htm>



Sign: Keogh-Crazy Horse Fight. The Indian charge shatters the Calhoun defense and crashes through the soldier position at right, held by Capt. Myles Keogh's Company I. Crazy Horse and White Bull cut down the retreating soldiers who flee northwest along this ridge in an effort to join the remnants of Custer's command on Last Stand Hill. Members of Company C and L were also found here.

"It looked to me as if Keogh must have attempted to make a stand on foot to enable Custer to get away because he and his company died in one compact mass, whereas from here on the graves are scattered in irregular clumps and at intervals about like those in the slaughter of buffaloes..." — Lt. John Bourke, 3rd Cavalry, 1877

"The soldiers were on one side of the hill, and the Indians on the other side, a slight rise between the two parties. At this point Crazy Horse came up and rode between the two parties. The soldiers fired at once, but missed him." — Red Feather, Oglala Lakota



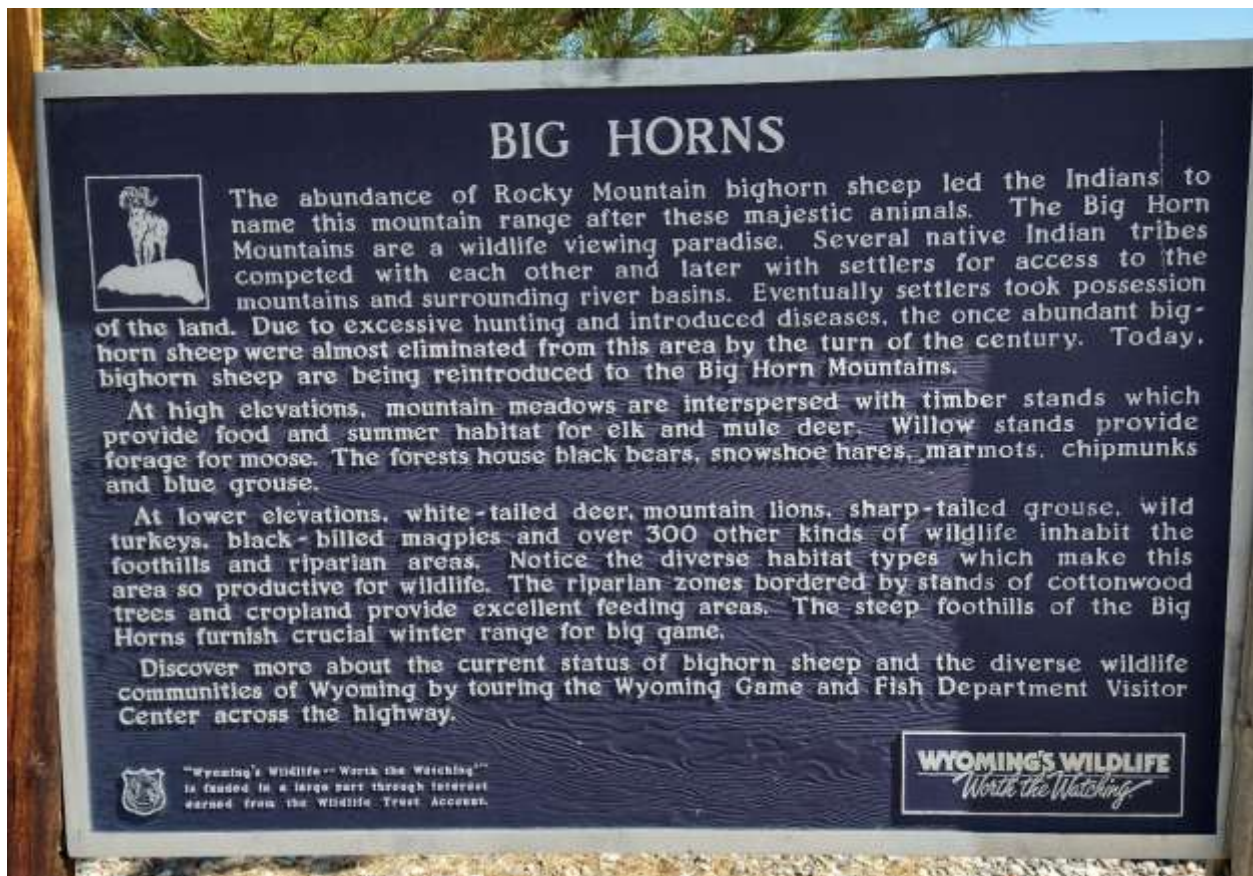
Sign: At separate skirmishing, Custer's command reunites here. Company L, under Lt. James Calhoun, skirmishes with Gall, Crow King, Two Moons, and other warriors. From here these soldiers could have attracted Capt. Benteen's column and the pack train. A Lakota and Cheyenne charge overruns this hilltop and stampedes cavalry horses held in the ravine to your left.

"A smoke was like a great cloud, and everywhere the Sioux went, the dust rose like smoke. We circled all around them...swirling like water around a stone." – Two Moons, Northern Cheyenne

"The first stand was probably made by Lts. Calhoun and Crittenden...the men and their empty cartridge shells were found in a semi circle around the crest. Calhoun and Crittenden were killed here. Along the ravine and up the side hill to (Custer Hill) was a line of dead men and horses." – Lt. Edward Maguire, Corps of engineers (Montana Column)



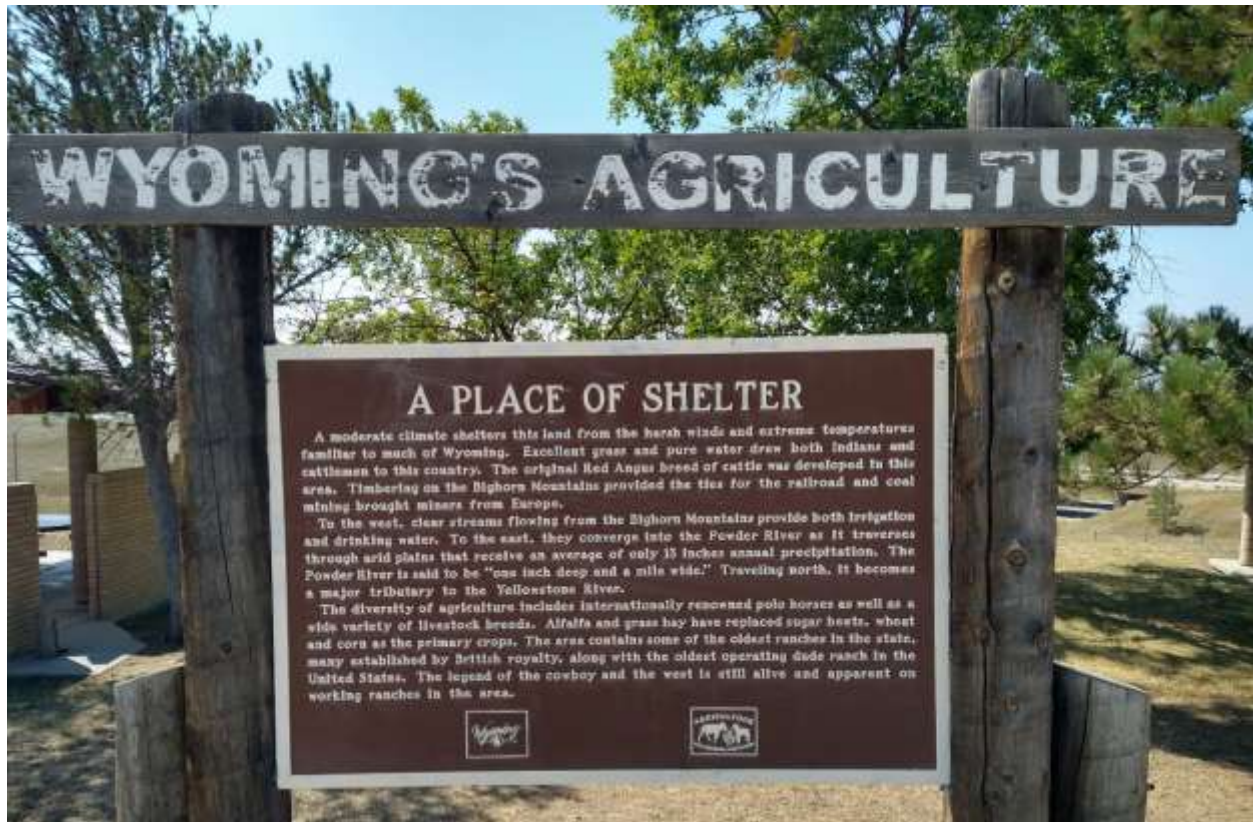




Sign: The abundance of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep led the Indians to name this mountain range after these majestic animals. The Big Horn Mountains are a wildlife viewing paradise. Several native Indian tribes competed with each other and later with settlers for access to the mountains and surrounding river basins. Eventually settlers took possession of the land. Due to excessive hunting and introduced diseases, the once abundant bighorn sheep were almost eliminated from the area by the turn of the century. Today, bighorn sheep are being reintroduced to the Big Horn Mountains.

At high elevations, mountain meadows are interspersed with timber stands which provide food and summer habitat for elk and mule deer. Willow stands provide forage for mooses. The forests house black bears, snowshoe hares, marmots, chipmunks, and blue brouse.

At lower elevations, white-tailed deer, mountain lions, sharp-tailed grouse, wild turkeys, black-billed magpies and over 300 other kinds of wildlife inhabit the foothills and riparian areas. . . .



Sign: Wyoming's Agriculture, A Place of Shelter

A moderate climate shelters this land from the harsh winds and extreme temperatures familiar to much of Wyoming. Excellent grass and pure water drew both Indians and cattlemen to this country. The original Red Angus breed of cattle was developed in this area. Timbering on the Bighorn Mountains provided the ties for the railroad, and coal mining brought miners from Europe.

To the west, clear streams flowing from the Bighorn Mountains provide both irrigation and drinking water. To the east, they converge into the Powder River as it traverses through arid plains that receive an average of only 13 inches annual precipitation. The Powder River is said to be "one inch deep and a mile wide." Traveling north, it becomes a major tributary to the Yellowstone River.

The diversity of agriculture includes internationally renowned polo horses as well as a wide variety of livestock breeds. Alfalfa and grass hay have replaced sugar beets, wheat and corn as the primary crops. The area contains some of the oldest ranches in the state, many established by British royalty, along with the oldest operating dude ranch in the United States. The legend of the cowboy and the west is still alive and apparent on working ranches in the area.



On our way to **Devil's Tower (aka Bear Lodge).**

The Tower is an astounding geologic feature that protrudes out of the prairie surrounding the Black Hills. It is considered sacred by Northern Plains Indians and indigenous people. <https://www.nps.gov/deto/index.htm>



Red Hills (sandstone) on the way to Devils Tower

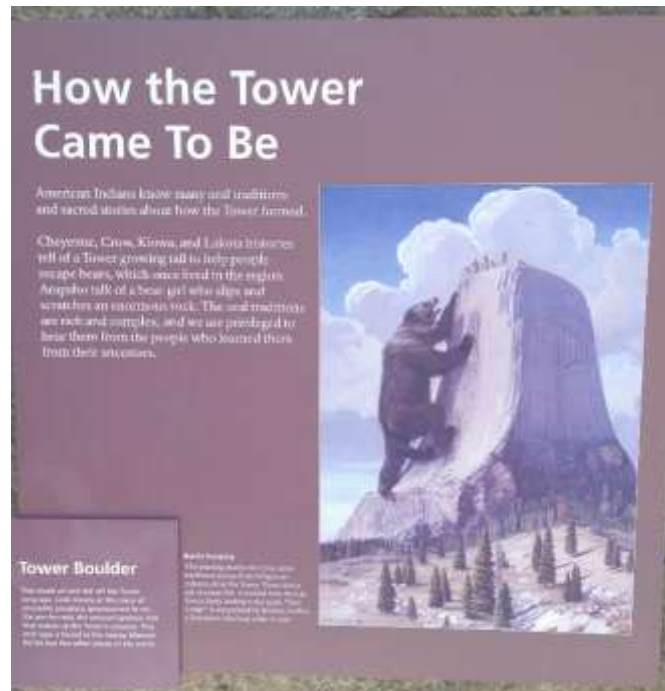


prairie dogs, along with the [marmots](#), [chipmunks](#), and several other [basal](#) genera belong to the [ground squirrels](#) (tribe *Marmotini*), part of the larger [squirrel family](#) (**Sciuridae**).



Devils Tower (also known as **Mato Tipila or Bear Lodge**)^[8] is a butte, laccolithic, composed of igneous rock in the Bear Lodge Ranger District of the Black Hills, near Hulett and Sundance in Crook County, northeastern Wyoming, above the Belle Fourche River.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devils_Tower



Sign: How the Tower came to be.

American Indians know many oral traditions and sacred stories about how the Tower formed. Cheyenne, Crow, Kiowa, and Lakota histories tell of a Tower growing tall to help people escape bears, which once lived in the region. Arapaho talk of a bear-girl who slips and scratches an enormous rock. The oral traditions are rich and complex, and we are privileged to hear them from the people who learned them from their ancestors. Barely Escaping.

This painting shows one of the many traditional stories from indigenous cultures about the Tower. These stories tell of a bear that scratched lines into the Tower, likely leading to the name "Bear Lodge." It was painted by Herbert Collins, a European American artist, in 1936.



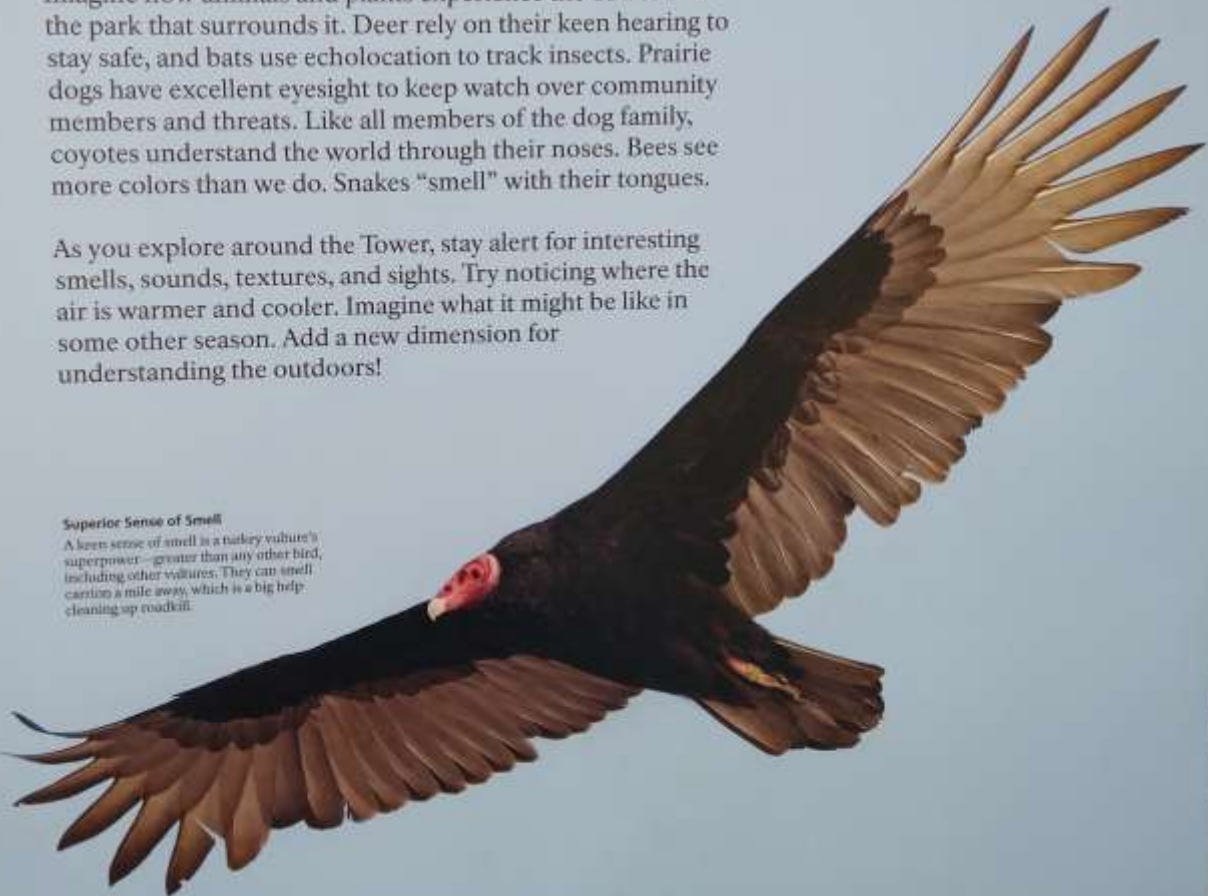
Exploring the Tower: Engage Your Senses

Imagine how animals and plants experience the Tower and the park that surrounds it. Deer rely on their keen hearing to stay safe, and bats use echolocation to track insects. Prairie dogs have excellent eyesight to keep watch over community members and threats. Like all members of the dog family, coyotes understand the world through their noses. Bees see more colors than we do. Snakes “smell” with their tongues.

As you explore around the Tower, stay alert for interesting smells, sounds, textures, and sights. Try noticing where the air is warmer and cooler. Imagine what it might be like in some other season. Add a new dimension for understanding the outdoors!

Superior Sense of Smell

A keen sense of smell is a turkey vulture's superpower—greater than any other bird, including other vultures. They can smell carrion a mile away, which is a big help cleaning up roadkill.



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Devils Tower 867' (feet) -- or 264 meters Washington Monument 555'

Sign: All Cracked up

Jumbled, eroded columns – called the boulder field – surround the Tower. At the base of the Tower, these boulders are piled up more than 150 feet (46m) deep. As you look at the model, notice that there are more boulders on the west side of the Tower. Why?

The answer may be that the columns on the west side receive more sun and contract and expand more in heat and cold. Look closely at the model – can you see where columns have fallen?

- The 1977 movie ***Close Encounters of the Third Kind*** used the formation as a plot element and as the location of its climactic scenes. The film's popularity resulted in a large increase in visitors and climbers to the monument.

<http://www.filmsite.org/clos.html> **Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)**



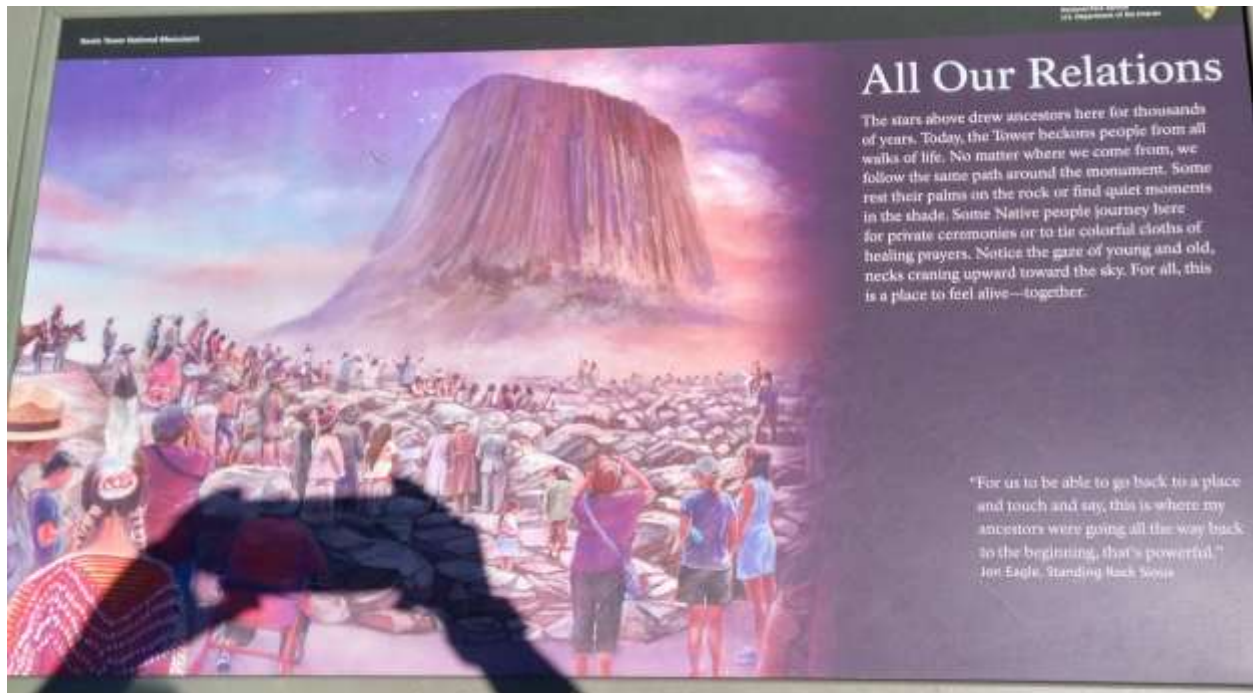
Sign: Top of the Tower

The geometric shapes of the Tower's columns lie beneath a thin layer of soil. Sagebrush, native grasses, and prickly-pear cactus grow at the Tower's summit, and chipmunks, wood rats, and snakes call it home. Climbing biologists keep track of the plant community here.

Rock climbers tackling the upper portion of the Tower complain about the crumbling rock and droppings from nesting rock doves (also known as pigeons) as they reach the summit. But the view makes the messy last few yards worthwhile.

What Makes the Tower Look Green?

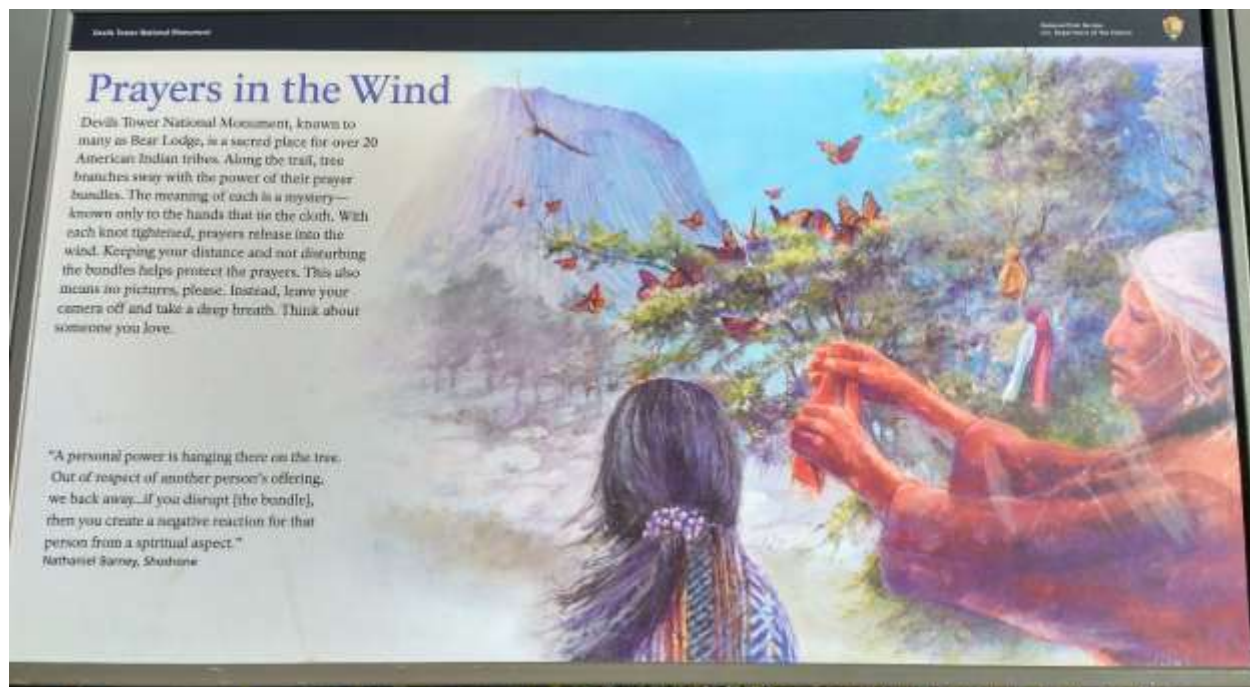
The entire Tower appears to be green because of lichens that grow all over the rock surface. Lichens grow in places that are too harsh for most other organisms. The lichens on the Tower are exposed to extreme heat and cold. They can become dormant in these tough conditions and grow very slowly. The lichens on the Tower may be some of the oldest living things in the park!



Sign: All Our Relations.

The stars above drew ancestors here for thousands of years. Today, the Tower beckons people from all walks of life. No matter where we come from, we follow the same path around the monument. Some rest their palms on the rock or find quiet moments in the shade. Some Native people journey here for private ceremonies or to tie colorful cloths of healing prayers. Notice the gaze of young and old, necks craning upward toward the sky. For all, this is a place to feel alive—together.

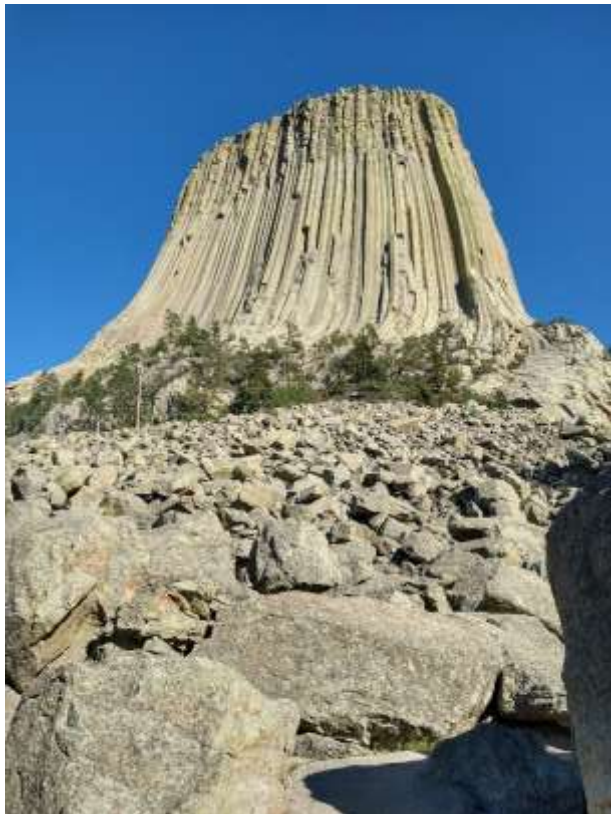
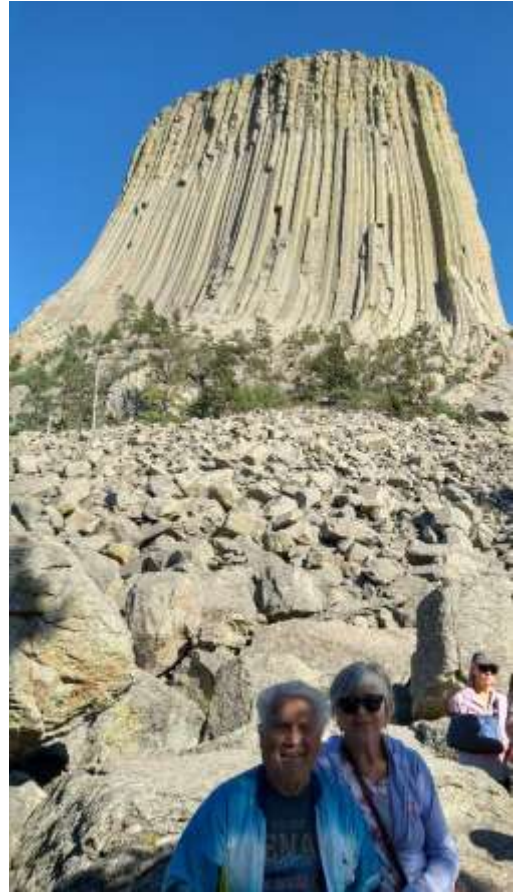
“For us to be able to go back to a place and touch and say, this is where my ancestors were going all the way back to the beginning, that’s powerful.” – Jon Eagle, Standing Rock Sioux



Sign: Prayers in the Wind

Devils Tower National Monument, known to many as Bear Lodge, is a sacred place for over 20 American Indian tribes. Along the trail, tree branches sway with the power of their prayer bundles. The meaning of each is a mystery—known only to the hands that tie the cloth. With each knot tightened, prayers release into the wind. Keeping your distance and not disturbing the bundles helps protect the prayers. Think about someone you love.

"A personal power is hanging there on the tree. Out of respect of another person's offering, we back away...if you disrupt [the bundle], then you create a negative reaction for that person from a spiritual aspect." -- Nathaniel Barney, Shoshone



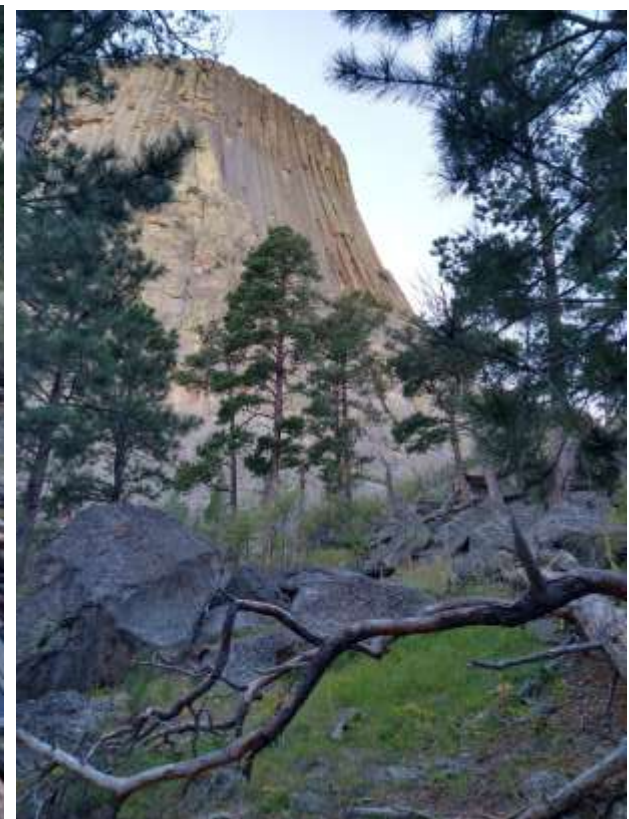
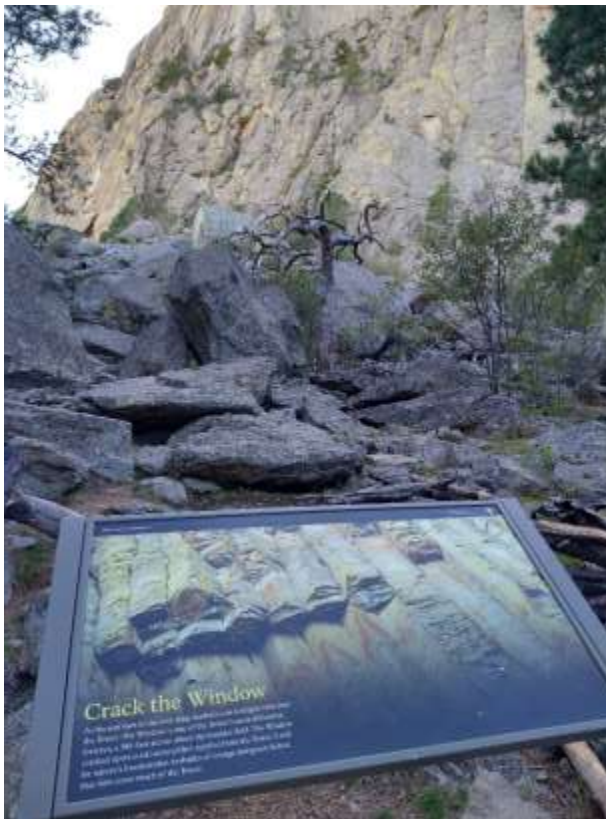
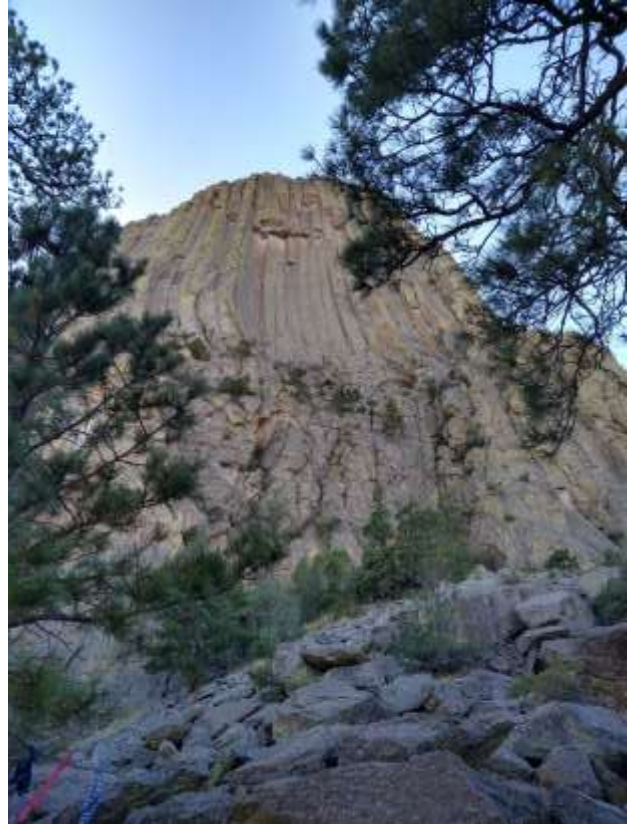


Sign: Reach for the Top

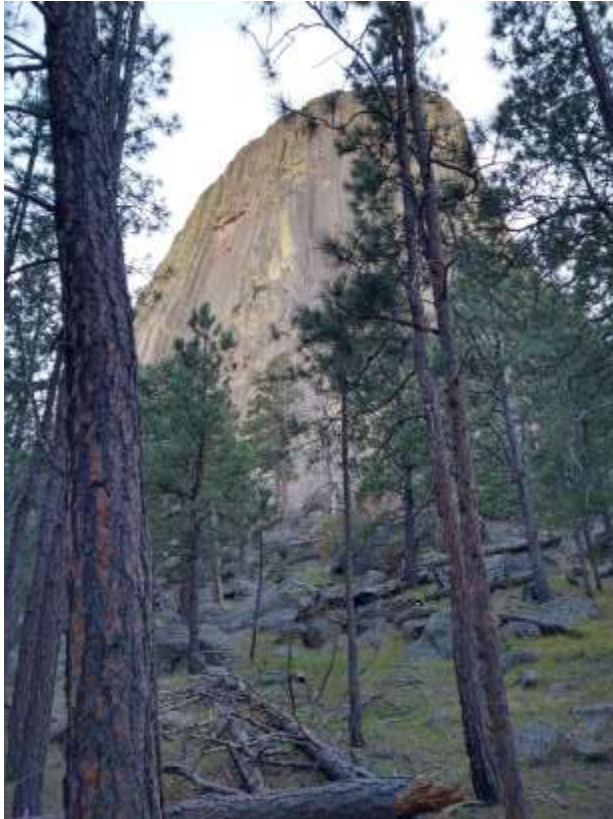
All climbers have a reason. The first climbers on record to summit Devils Tower, Willard Ripley and William Rogers, faced a bleak year on the ranch. Money was scarce, but Rogers had an idea. As Rogers gathered materials, Ripley built a ladder that snaked all the way to the summit by 1893. Then, Rogers advertised the climb as a Fourth of July spectacle. As revelers paid admission to dance and picnic, Rogers donned an Uncle Sam costume. The American Flag whipped in the wind as he climbed the ladder for the crowd. Over time, many followed the historic ascent.

With binoculars, you can spot the remnants of the 350-foot ladder wedged into a crack of the Tower. The tactile at right represents a 35-foot (10-m) section of the ladder.

On July 4, 1895, Linnie Rogers became the first woman on record to climb Devils Tower. She scaled the ladder built by her husband, William.



Sign: Crack the Window. Sun rises in the east, long shadows form a “window” (a 300-foot alcove above the the boulder field). Window opens as pillars fall.

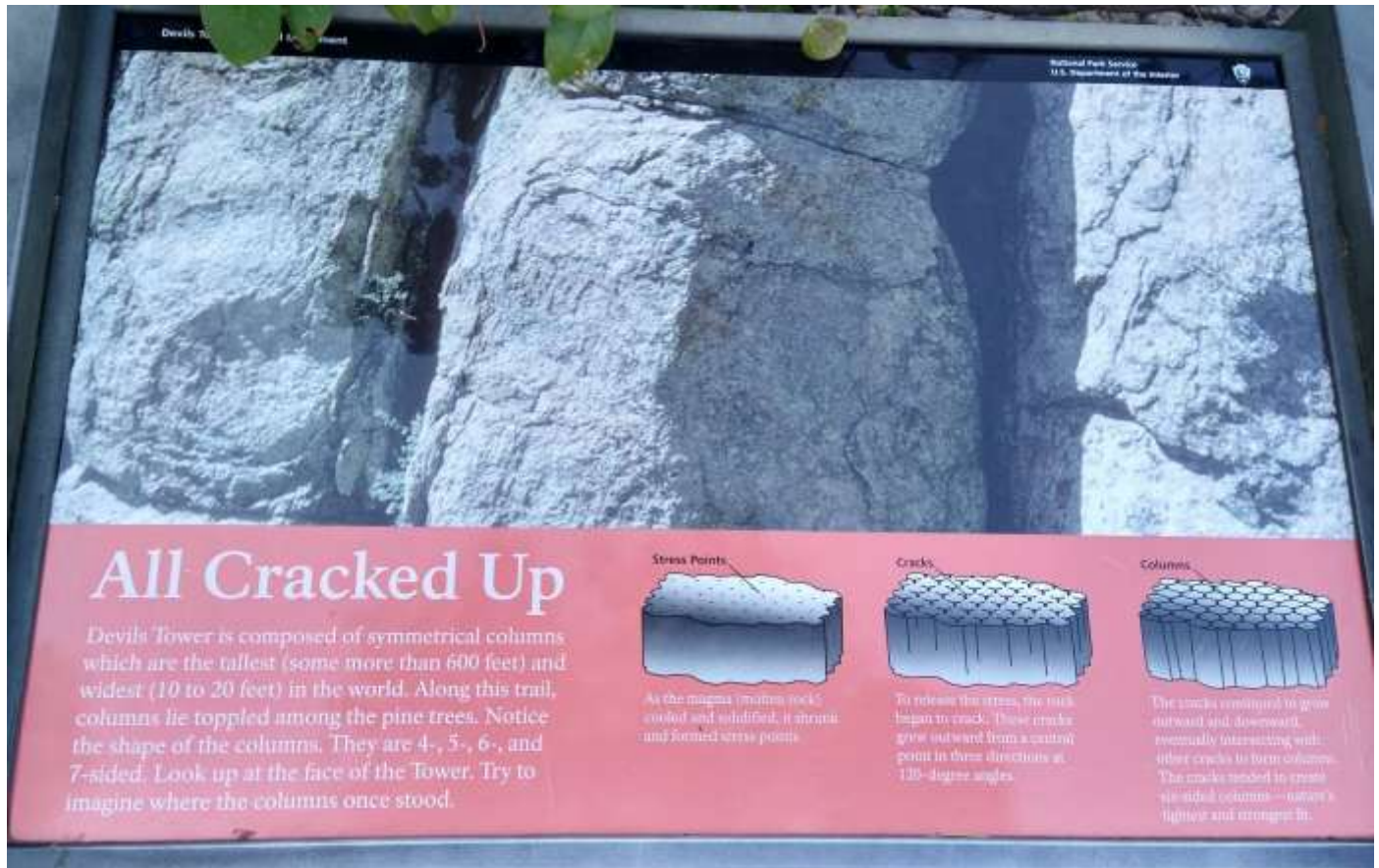


Sign: Fresh Start. Fires make way for new growth in nitrogen-rich soil.



Sign: Quiet Sounds of Nature. "See how nature—trees, flowers, grass—grows in silence; see the stars, the moon, the sun, how they move in silence. -Mother Teresa





Sign: All Cracked Up

Devils Tower is composed of symmetrical columns which are the tallest (some more than 600 feet) and widest (10-20 feet) in the world. Along this trail, columns lie toppled among the pine trees. Notice the shape of the columns. They are 4-, 5-, 6-, and 7- sided. Look up at the face of the Tower. Try to imagine where the columns once stood.

Stress points – As the magma (molten rock) cooled and solidified, it shrank and formed stress points.

Cracks – To release the stress, the rock began to crack. These cracks grew outward from a central point in three directions at 120-degree angles.

Columns – The cracks continued to grow outward and downward, eventually intersecting with other cracks to form columns. The cracks tended to create six-sided columns – nature's tightest and strongest fit.



Sign: High Life. The summit is home to plenty of native plants and small rodents.



Sign: Stress Relief. Devils Tower has cracked under pressure for millions of years. The cracks and columns you see today formed as magma cooled underground, splitting the rock into five- or six-sided columns. The boulder field in front of you formed when columns toppled to the ground.



Sign: Strike a Chord. Nature speaks in the ponderosa pine forest. What you hear depends on the season. During a winter walk, creaking branches stir the snowy silence. Many species hibernate or migrate toward warmer climates. Summer at the Tower, however, is a whole other chorus. As the forest warms, wildlife use sounds to communicate. Each has a way to warn others, attract a mate, and mark their territory.

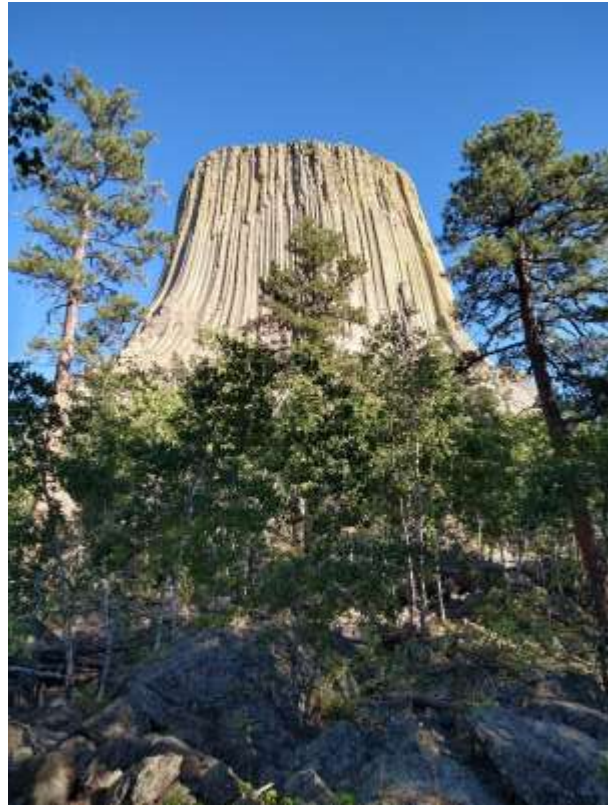
Bat – you might hear the flapping of bats just after sunset as they swoop for insects.

Turkey Vulture – these raptors silently circle the Tower on thermals of warm air and are known to grunt during a fight.

Peregrine Falcon – hear the shrill, screechy “kak-kak-kak” from above as these birds soar around the Tower.

Bull Snake – the snorts and hisses, especially in dry grass, can be mistaken for the warning shakes of a rattlesnake.

White-tailed Deer – deer “talk” with low-pitched, rattling grunts, but they also use scent to relay messages.



Sign: Trail is 1.3 miles (2.1 km) loop trail. We walked the trail in about 1 hour.



Sign: How the Tower's columns formed.

When magma pushed through rock layers millions of years ago, it cooled, hardened, and contracted. The once-molten magma fractured into columns, much like mud cracks in a drying puddle. The Tower's columns are as extraordinary as they look. They are the longest and largest natural rock columns in the world. Some are more than 200 feet (61 m) long and 8 feet (2.5 m) wide. Columns range from four- to seven-sided.

The Tower's Columns: A Closer look.

Like a massive stack of pencils held together by gravity, the Tower is made up of columns. Unlike pencils, the columns are not all straight, and they are not all six-sided. Touch these models to get a feel for how the Tower's columns formed.

- 1.** Magma (molten rock underground) pushes upward and begins to cool, probably while still beneath the Earth's surface. Imagine, as you touch this, that the magma is still hot!
 - 2.** As the molten rock cools, it hardens. It contracts and fractures, forming cracks that are about 120 degrees to each other and take geometric shapes. Trace edges with finger.
 - 3.** Erosion by rain, ice, and gravity causes the columns to break down over geologic time.
- Columnar Jointing** – the Tower is the largest example of columnar jointing in the world.



Buried Tower

Ancient rivers took millions of years to excavate Devils Tower. The waters carried away softer sedimentary rocks leaving behind the harder igneous rock called phonolite. This rock type is found here—in northeastern Wyoming, and central Montana, but mostly in east Africa.

The tower is still emerging. The Belle Fourche River (below) continues to wash away the softer sedimentary rocks. Plateaus across the valley—some higher than the tower's summit—are eroded layers of the same sediment that once surrounded and covered Devils Tower.

The Tower today stands 867 feet (264 meters) high, from the visitor center to the summit. Approximately one and one-half vertical miles of rock and sediment have washed away since the Tower formed.



Photograph of a modern river channel, with sedimentary rocks in background.

Sakakawea Formation

St. Albans Formation

Devils Tower

Haystack Springs Formation

Spokane Formation

Exposed sedimentary rock, an eroded hill that once covered the tower.

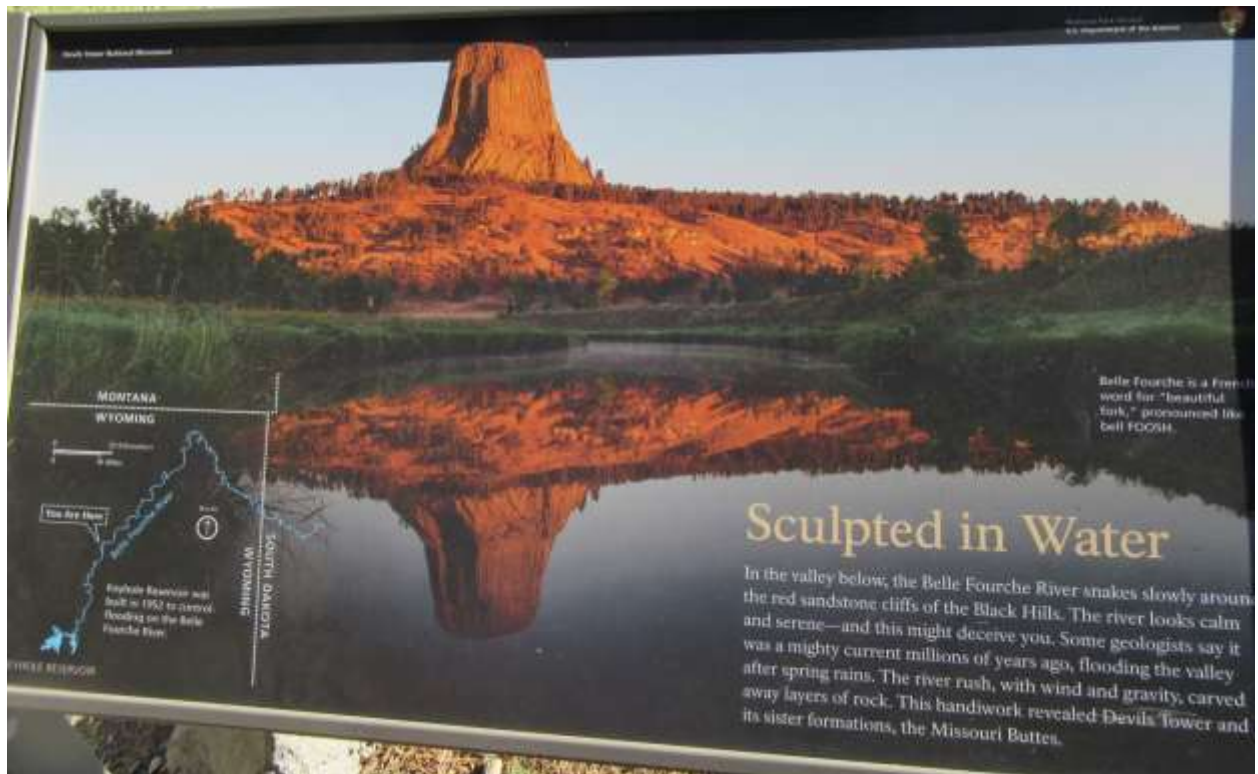
Bountiful Land

The vast valley below was once an overflowing bounty of resources. The rich grasslands and forest flooded often with fresh water, attracting elk and bison to graze. The sacred bison gave life with every part of its body, providing food and shelter as well as tools to people in the village. With each hunt and trade, women and men passed along traditional knowledge to their children.

"On the scraper it shows a dot for every hunt. Each line indicates a hide that was taken per hunt. The elk horn itself has an indentation of where her thumb is. And you think about all the hides that this woman used the scraper on."

Brina Lane Hill, Oglala Sioux





Devils Tower National Monument was the first [United States national monument](#), established on September 24, 1906, by President [Theodore Roosevelt](#).^[9] The monument's boundary encloses an area of 1,347 acres (545 ha).