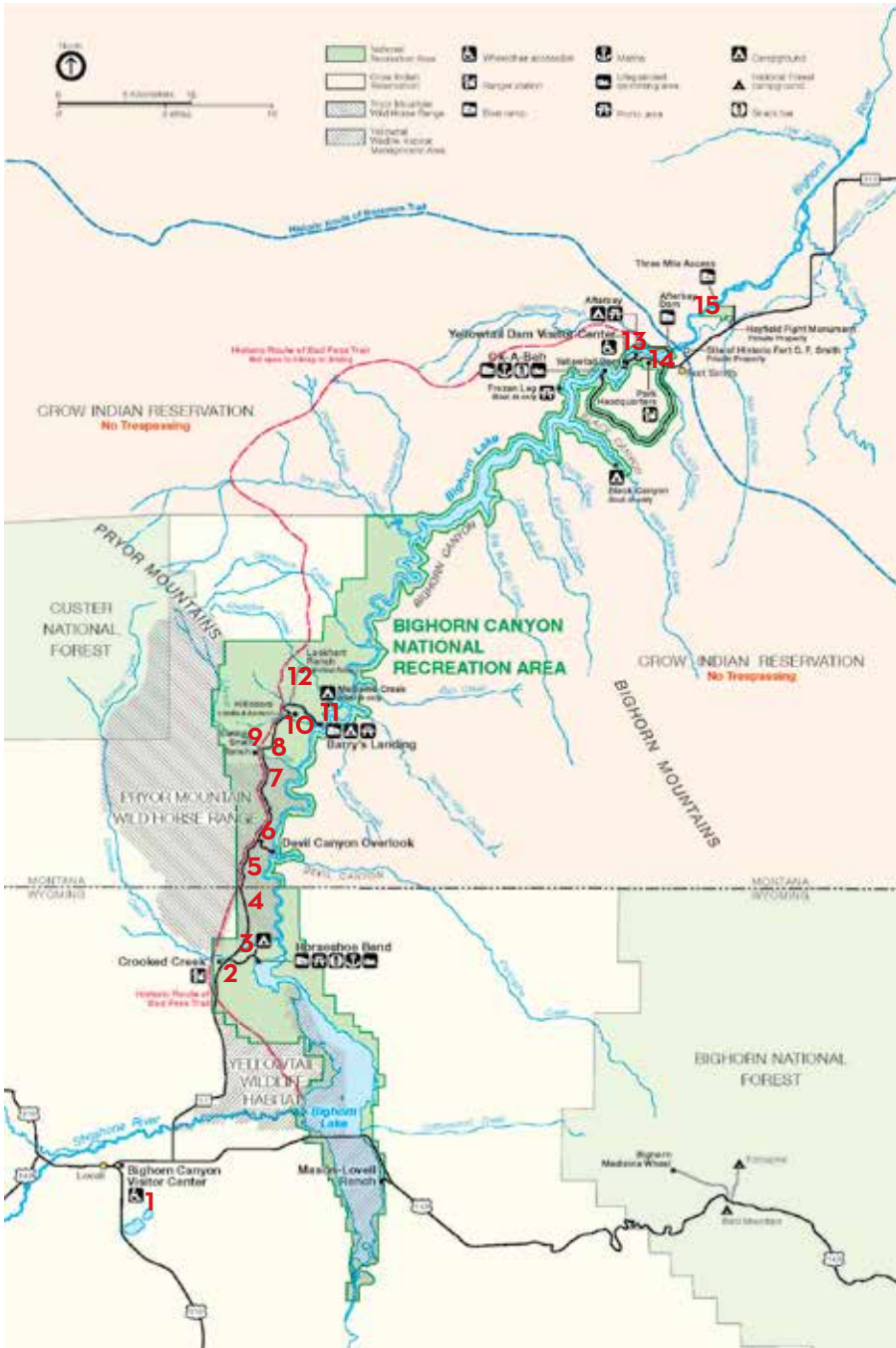


Bighorn Canyon

National Recreation Area
Hiking Guide





Experience Bighorn Canyon

Hiking the approximately 17 miles of designated trails within Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area is a great way to experience the park. You will be surrounded by the effects of both the distant and recent past. For example, the Hillsboro Trail takes hikers through a historic ranch where Dr. Barry used the recreational opportunities of Bighorn Canyon to create a successful guest ranch, a type of ranch focused on visitors and tourism. Other hikes wander through areas of disturbance, natural and human, that nature has begun to reclaim.

Whether hiking to be close to nature, for exercise, or just taking a break, stop and consider the effects of your own footsteps. What will you leave behind?

Trail Safety and Tips

Bighorn Canyon NRA is a desert with many terrific views. For your safety, please take the following precautions whenever hiking.

1. Carry plenty of water, especially on longer hikes and on hot summer days.
2. Wear good, sturdy shoes with closed toes. The canyon trails are rocky and have a lot of spiny vegetation.
3. There may be rattlesnakes anywhere in Bighorn Canyon. Although they generally shy away from people, you need to watch where you put your hands and feet.
4. Do not get too close to the canyon rim. In some places there may be weak, unstable overhangs and winds can become hazardous.
5. Don't forget sunscreen, a broad-brimmed hat, and sunglasses to keep you protected from the sun.
6. After any spring or summer hike, check your skin and clothing for ticks.
7. Stay on the trails; there is poison ivy in the park. Remember, "Leaves of three, let them be."
8. If hiking alone, let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return.

Enjoy your hike and remember to stop and look around occasionally. Sometimes the best views are behind you.

1

Visitor Center Pond

Description: Easy, Handicapped accessible, 0.26 Miles Round Trip

The Visitor Center Pond is located behind the Bighorn Canyon Visitor Center just past Lovell, Wyoming. There is a concrete loop around the pond, which offers a great place to see red-winged blackbirds and boreal chorus frogs during the summer. The pond was originally built to reflect light on solar panels that have long since been removed from the building. The pond is now slowly being reclaimed by nature and will one day become a small marshland.



Photo by Virginia DuBow

Visitor Center Pond Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground





Photo by AIRs Diane Durant & Devyn Gaudet

2

Sykes Mountain Trail

Description: Hard, 4.6 Miles Round Trip with 250 feet elevation gain

Sykes Mountain Trail is a rugged hike up a desert mountain that directs the hardy hiker to overlooks of Bighorn Canyon and Horseshoe Bend. This is a favorite hike for many but is less enjoyable during hot summer days. The trail begins at the Horseshoe Bend access road sign. You may park in the Ranger Station parking area across the road. Follow the trail markers around the hill and into the first drainage until you see a small game trail. At the rockslide, cross to the east side of the drainage. Here the game trail disappears. Continue to follow the trail markers, making your way upward. At the top, a deep canyon forces you to go east. Follow the ridge to where it begins to bend into a horseshoe. From here follow the trail markers through the shallow drainage to the overlook.

There are two hills southwest of the overlook. The taller of the two is called Crooked Creek Summit. For a longer hike cross the juniper flats and proceed to the summit. From here you can see vistas of surrounding landscapes and the mountains that enclose the Bighorn Basin.

Sykes Mountain Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground



3

Mouth of the Canyon Trail

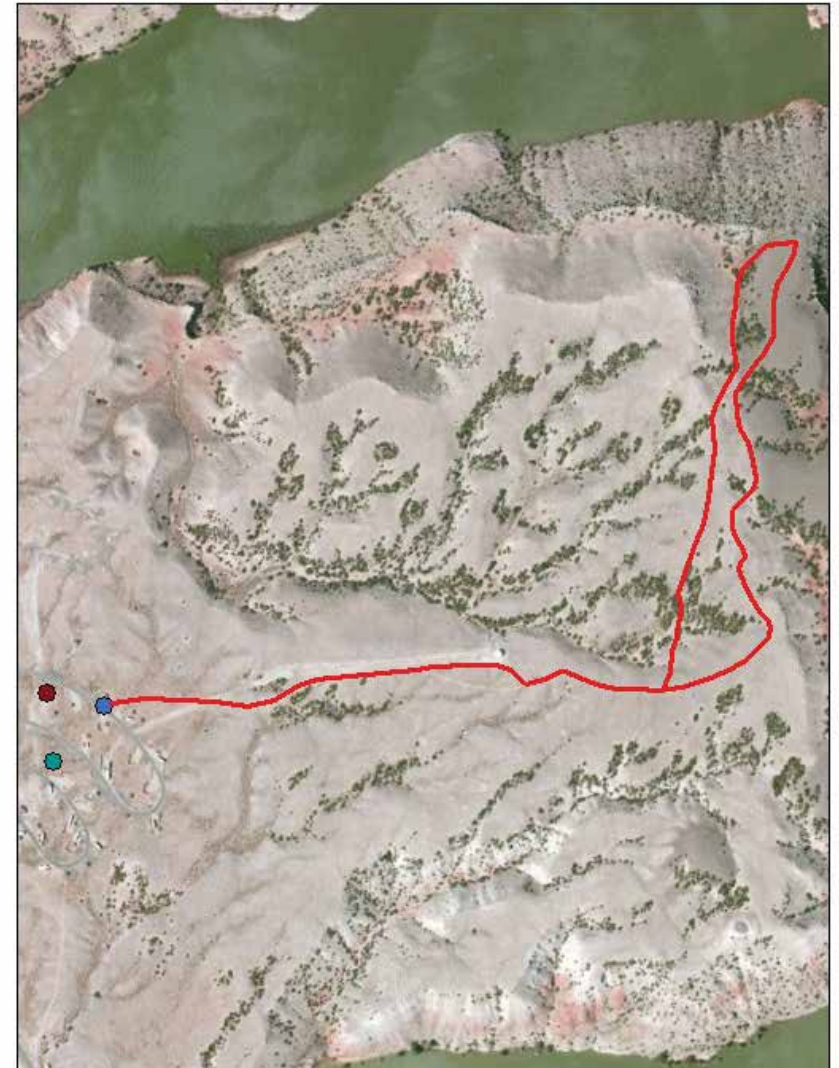
Description: Moderate, 1.8 Miles Round Trip

Seldom-seen views of the canyon, as well as spectacular views of the Pryor and the Bighorn Mountains, can be seen from this trail. The deep red Chugwater outcrops are a sharp contrast to the surrounding geologic colors of Bighorn Canyon. To explore the colors and contrasting scenery Horseshoe Bend has to offer, begin hiking at the service road on the north end of loop B in Horseshoe Bend Campground near campsite number B-15. Just before reaching the water storage tank, veer right onto an abandoned two-track. Follow the two-track up and around the hills toward the canyon. When the road disappears, follow the trail markers along the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range boundary fence. From this vantage point, you can see the mouth of the canyon and its union with Crooked Creek. This colorful setting invites one to rest and watch the horses graze below and the birds soar above. You may either go back the way you came along the abandoned two-track road or follow the trail through a juniper-lined draw to the top of the ridge and back to the road. Please stay on the trail to help preserve the cryptobiotic soil.

Photo by AIRs Diane Durant & Devyn Gaudet



Mouth of the Canyon Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground



4 State Line Trail

Description: Easy to Moderate, 1.52 Mile Round Trip

For a serene view of Bighorn Canyon, follow the trail markers from the trailhead sign just north of the Montana state line. The trail leads to the canyon rim through juniper scrubland above limestone plateaus, culminating in a breathtaking view. You can easily follow the trail markers along the ridge for several hundred feet, enjoying different views of the river-carved canyon with every step.



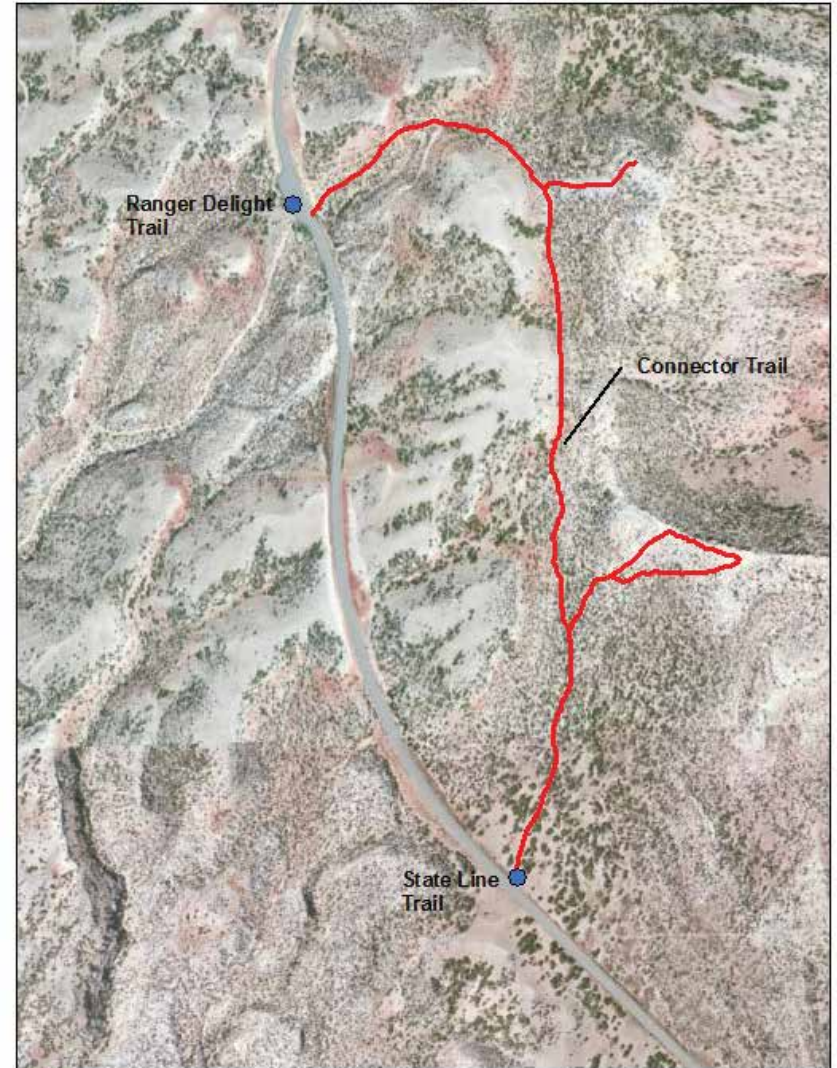
Photo by Ben Goodlad

5 Ranger Delight

Description: Easy to Moderate, 0.66 Miles Round Trip

Park in the designated area on the west side of the park road one-half mile north of the Montana state line. The trail begins on the east side of the road on the lower north edge of the draw. While following the faint road cut, it is easy to feel like the only person that has ever hiked this trail. Continue to follow the trail through the saddle and toward the canyon. At the cut-off fence post and trail marker, you can turn left and hike toward the rim. This is the end of the trail. Walking to the right will bring you into the bend of the river and give unique views of the canyon. Walking to the left, you have a good view of the ledge below with a sheep trail that treacherously traces the canyon rim. For more solitude and exploration go back to the cut-off fence post and continue to follow the road cut and trail markers to the State Line trail. The connecting trail is 0.37 miles each way.

State Line & Ranger Delight Trail



- Parking
- Restroom
- Campground



6

Sullivan's Knob Trail

Description: Easy to Moderate, 0.75 Mile Round Trip

A mile north of the Devil Canyon Overlook junction, you will see Sullivan's Knob. Begin your hike from the parking area. Below the parking area two trails meet. One, an ancient trail, known as the Bad Pass Trail, was seasonally traversed by American Indians moving between the Bighorn Basin and the Northern Plains. Nature is in the process of reclaiming this trail and at times it seems to be camouflaged by the juniper, mountain mahogany, and sagebrush. The other, a modern trail, will lead the visitor south of the hill in front of the parking area and to the canyon rim. This is a great place to try making the canyon walls echo.

Photo by AIRs Diane Durant & Devyn Gaudet



Sullivan's Knob Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground



7

Two Eagles Interpretive Trail

Description: Easy, Handicapped accessible, 0.25 Miles Round Trip
The site has been used by Native Americans for over 10,000 years. In the vicinity of the trail there are more than 140 stone circles. The stones were used by tribal families to hold down the edges of tipis. When they moved to their next encampment, they would simply roll the stones off and leave the rocks in place for their next visit. This is a historic site of cultural interest. The stones need to be left in place for future generations to enjoy and learn from this rich history.



Photo from NPS collection

Two Eagles Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground





Photo by Ben Goodlad

8

Lower Layout Creek Trail

Description: Easy to Moderate, 3.4 Miles Round Trip

The Lower Layout Creek trailhead is located at the cattle guard that marks the northern end of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. At the cattle guard, park on either side of the road making sure you are not blocking the flow of traffic. The trail begins by hiking the old two-track road south of Layout Creek. There are several opportunities to stray from the main trail to view Layout Creek Canyon as well as see the bighorn sheep and horses that use the area. The trail forks a short distance from Bighorn Canyon. Continue following the trail to the right to the bottom of the plateau. A well-trodden horse trail leads to the top of the plateau and another amazing view.

Lower Layout Creek Trail



- Parking
- Restroom
- Campground



9

Upper Layout Creek Trail

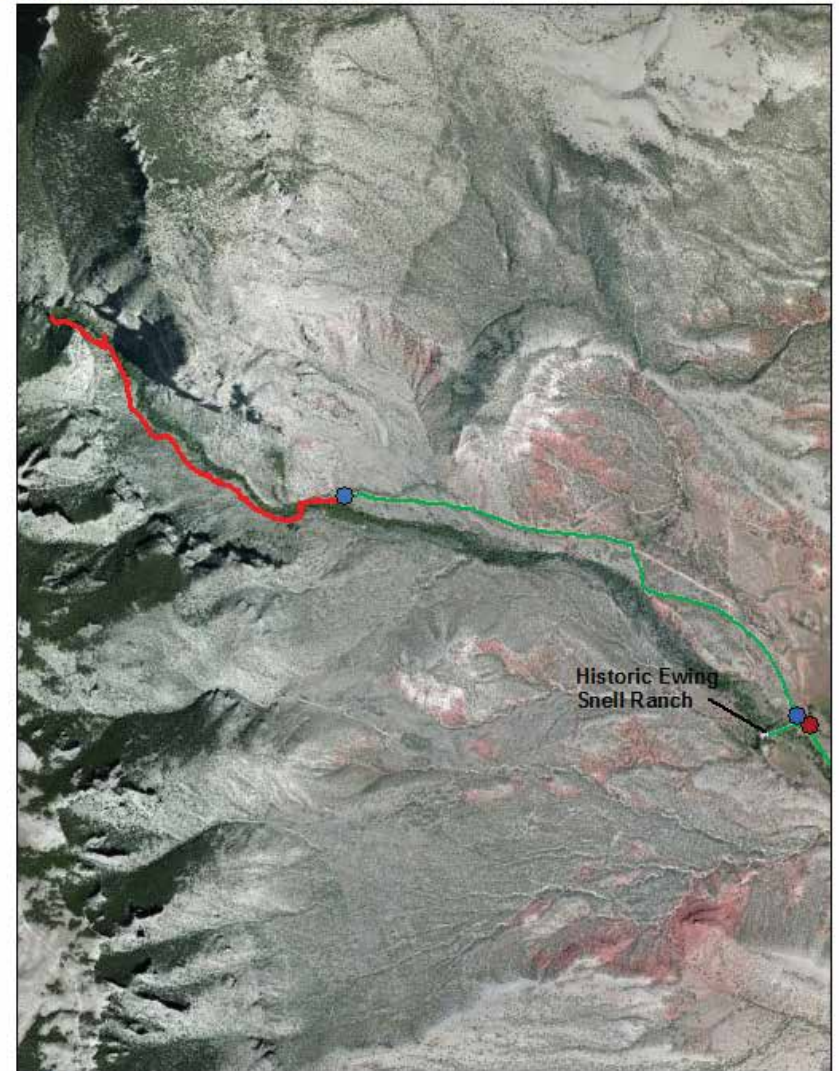
Description: Hard, 1.8 Miles Round Trip 250 feet elevation gain

Erastus T. Ewing came to Bighorn Canyon looking for gold. Finding none he decided to try his hand at ranching. He knew that to make it in this arid land he would need water. In 1897, he filed to appropriate 200 inches of water per year from Layout Creek for irrigation, mining, and milling. In passing years, other inhabitants built holding ponds and added more ditch systems

From the park road, immediately beyond the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range boundary, a historic site marker directs you to the Ewing/Snell Ranch. The Upper Layout Creek trail begins in the parking area to the right of the corrals. You may begin hiking here or drive to the end of the gravel road. The road ends in a small parking area big enough for two cars and the trail begins, following trail markers down to Layout Creek. The trail winds up Layout Creek Canyon past the waterfall to Layout Creek Springs. This lush secluded canyon offers a striking contrast to the surrounding arid plateau and emphasizes the importance of water to the land.



Upper Layout Creek Trail



- Parking
- Restroom
- Campground



10

Hillsboro

Description: Easy to Moderate, 1 to 3 Miles Round Trip

Attracted to the colors of the canyon and the possibility of those colors yielding gold, Dr. Barry began exploring Bighorn Canyon in the 1890s. During his exploration, he happened upon the Trail Creek Valley. He never found enough gold to make himself rich, but the canyon and the surrounding environment offered all he needed to make another kind of fortune. He converted to operating a guest ranch. He used the natural opportunities of hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, and horseback riding to entice more clientele to his ranch.

You may visit Hillsboro in the Trail Creek Valley one of two ways: the first, a one-mile round trip hike begins by driving up the red dirt road between Trail Creek campground and Barry's Landing to a closed gate. From there, a half-mile hike will take you to the abandoned site of Hillsboro ranch. Take some time to explore the buildings and learn how the Barrys ran the Hillsboro Guest Ranch. Don't forget to stop at the corrals below the kiosk on your way back. The second option is a three-mile loop. You may start either in the campground or at the gate and walk to the ranch. The trail continues behind Eddy Hulbert's cabin on the historic ranch road up to the park road. Follow the road to the Barry's Landing turnoff back to where you began.



Hillsboro Ranch Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground



11

Barry's Island Trail

Description: Moderate, 4 Miles Round Trip

The Barry's Island trail starts as a two-track road leading north from the Barry's Landing parking lot. The trail goes around Chain Canyon, a secret escape route for cattle rustlers in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At Barry's Island, the road to the west goes to Medicine Creek Campground, a boat-in or hike-in only campground. Continue following the road northeast (clockwise) around the island. The variation in water elevation is evident. During years of high water, the trail can be covered. If that is the case, take the bypass trail above the main trail.

Photo by AIRs Diane Durant & Devyn Gaudet



Barrys Island Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground





Photo by AIRs Diane Durant & Devyn Gaudet

12

Lockhart Ranch

Description: Easy, 0.5 or 2.1 Miles Round Trip

Beyond the Barry's Landing junction, the park road becomes unpaved. Follow this dirt road to the trailhead. The Lockhart Ranch is representative of life for western ranchers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The gentle flow of Davis and Cottonwood Creeks provided the life force of the ranch. Ditches running from Davis Creek took advantage of the natural topography of the land by using gravity to irrigate the surrounding pastures.

You can take the half-mile loop through the ranch or you can take an extended two-mile hike along the historic county road. The trail begins at the two-track road east of the corrals near the garage. Follow the road along the northern edge of Caroline Lockhart's livestock pastures. This path leads to Davis Creek. Following the two-track along Davis Creek will bring you to an old metal gate and the dirt road. Instead of going through the gate, follow the inside of the fence to the crossing at Davis Creek. Continue following cowpaths along the inside of the fence over the hill to a corner post. Seven fence posts south of the corner post a faint two-track turns southeast. Follow the two-track to loop back to the ranch.

Lockhart Ranch Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground



13

Bighorn Head Gate Trail

Description: Easy, 0.1 Mile Round Trip

Drive through the Afterbay Campground past the sign that says “No Camping Beyond this Point,” to the pit toilet at the end of the road. From here a short hike down a gravel path takes you to a quiet area near what remains of the Bighorn Head Gate. The Bighorn Head Gate was part of the original irrigation system used in the upper Bighorn Valley in the early 1900’s before the dam was built in 1965. The best time of year to view the head gate is during the winter since most of the head gate is underwater during the summer months. This is a great place for bird watching.

Photo by Ben Goodlad



Headgate Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground



14

Beaver Pond Nature Trail

Description: Moderate, 2.6 Mile Round Trip

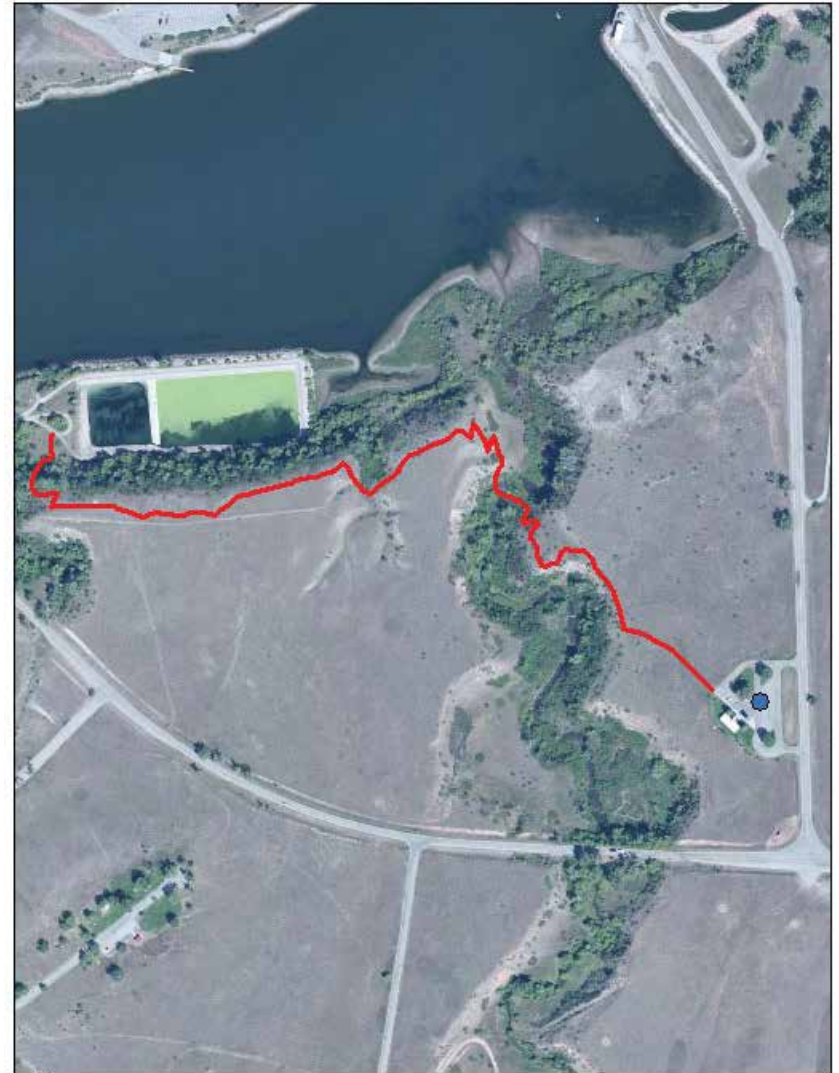
Begin hiking at the west end of the sidewalk at the Afterbay Contact Station. Travel across the yucca flats to the ridge above Lime Kiln Creek. Below, the creek is covered with gnawed trees and other building materials. This is one construction site you will want to take a closer look at. The trail begins to wind down the steep hillside to the bottom, where you can sit among the beaver ponds and marvel at these creatures' ingenuity.




If you are looking for a longer hike, cross the bridge and make your way along the opposite plateau. The views of the Afterbay are yours alone to enjoy. The trail continues to the service road. You come to a "T" in the road. Take the right to end your hike at the Afterbay Campground for a total of 1.3 miles each way.

Photo by Ben Goodlad



Beaver Pond Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground



15

Three Mile Access Trail

Description: Easy, 2 Miles Round Trip

At the west end of the Three Mile Parking Area, near the pit toilet, follow the gravel path along the Bighorn River. Travel along the well-trodden footpath skirting the field along the river. The trail ends in a grove of cottonwoods with giant downed logs perfect for watching the graceful casting of the fly fishermen that come from all over to enjoy the world class fishery supported by the Bighorn River. It is also a tranquil setting to watch the ducks floating by or just listen to the sounds of nature.



Three Mile Trail



-  Parking
-  Restroom
-  Campground



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