

## PRYOR MOUNTAIN NATIONAL WILD HORSE RANGE

The Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range was established after a two-year grassroots effort by citizens concerned about the long-term welfare of the Pryor Mountain horses. In 1968, interested individuals and groups convinced Interior Secretary Stewart Udall to set aside 31,000 acres in the Pryor Mountains as a public range for the wild horses. This was the first of its kind in the nation.



Photo by Rev. Floyd Schweiger



Photo by Gary Leppart

## UNIQUE HORSES

For more than a century, the Pryor Mountains have been home to free-roaming bands of wild horses. This herd of horses is a genetically unique population. Blood typing by the Genetics Department of the University of Kentucky has indicated that these horses are closely related to the old type European Spanish horse.

Photo by Gary Leppart

As you explore the range, look for horses with unusual coloring



Photo by BLM

which may correspond to their Spanish lineage, such as dun, grulla, blue roan and the rare sabino.

Also watch for primitive markings such as a dorsal stripe down their back, wither stripes, and zebra stripes on their legs. These unusual features are considered typical of Spanish characteristics.

So, where did the horses come from? The origins are unclear, but a common belief is that the horses escaped from local Native American Indian herds and eventually found a safe haven in the Pryors.

Like many wild horse populations, the Pryor horses live within family groups. As you travel throughout the Range, you may find over 25 family groups and assorted "bachelor" stallions. Most families (or harems) average 5-6 animals, with a dominant stallion, a lead mare, and a variety of other mares and young animals. Horses love to



Photo by Gary Leppart

follow a good leader and the Pryor horses are no different. The Pryor stallions seem to make the daily decisions for the rest of the family group, but in other populations the decision makers are often the lead mares.



Photo by Gary Leppart

Scientific studies have shown that the genetic diversity of the horses is high and the current level of inbreeding within the population is low. In some populations, inbreeding can be a problem if the numbers of horses in the herd are too low. The Pryor population has been historically managed at a successful size of between 120 and 160 horses. The population appears to be confined to this range by both natural and manmade barriers, and thus

the only source of new horses are the 20-30 foals born each year. Since the horses have few natural enemies, it is necessary to limit the number of animals. The Bureau of Land Management gathers and removes animals every 2-3 years in order to maintain a desired number of horses.

### How can I adopt a wild horse?

- Each year satellite adoptions are held at different locations throughout Montana and other states. Contact any BLM office to find out the dates and locations of the adoption nearest you.
- You must be 18 years old and a resident of the U.S. to adopt a horse or burro.
- You need to have adequate facilities and the financial means to provide humane care for all adopted animals.
- Application forms are available at any BLM office.
- If your application is approved, you will be notified of upcoming adoptions.
- If and when you adopt, you will sign a contract, agreeing to provide humane care and treatment for the horse.

## THE PRYOR MOUNTAINS ARE UNIQUE

The Pryor Mountains were named after Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor of the Lewis and Clark Expedition which traversed the nearby Yellowstone River Valley in 1806. The Pryor mountain range is actu-

ally an extension of the Bighorn Mountains but is separated from the Bighorns by the Bighorn Canyon.

The Pryor Mountains are unique in many ways. Some of the more notable aspects are the rainfall/snowfall zones and related vegetation from the southern foothill regions to the highest points in the mountain range. Annual rainfall varies from less than five inches in the foothills to twenty inches in the high country. Most of the southern portion of the Wild Horse Range is northern cold desert country.



Photo by Gary Leppart

Differences in rainfall/snowfall contribute to the most diverse plant community in Montana. As you move from the southern desert portion to the upper, lush, sub-alpine portions of the Pryor Mountains, you can see the progression of desert, low bushes to fir trees and grasses. In between these zones is a graduation of plant species. In addition, the bladderpod and Shoshonea are two examples of rare and sensitive plants that are found in the Pryors.

For centuries, the Pryors were home to small bands of Native American people. The warm, dry southern slopes provided a favorable environment during the harsh winter months, while the high

### WATCHABLE WILDLIFE

A wildlife viewing route extends from the Sage Creek Campground to the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area.

- Good birding is seen along Sage Creek and in the canyons.
- Sage Creek campground is noted for hummingbirds and green-tailed towhees.
- Look for bats roosting along the limestone cliffs.
- A small elk herd is near the Big Ice Cave, but is rarely seen.
- Dry Head Overlook has a stunning view that's a good place to see raptors—especially golden eagles.

Peregrine falcons, an endangered species, are nesting in the area since they were reintroduced in the early 1990s. Other sensitive species include the rare spotted bat and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

Ten species of bats exist in numerous caves and abandoned mines in the Pryors. The caves and mines provide roosting areas which should be avoided during the hibernation season of November to May, for protection of the bats.

### WILDLIFE AND HORSES ARE WILD. VIEW FROM A SAFE DISTANCE.

## WILDLIFE SHARE THE PRYORS WITH WILD HORSES

The Wild Horse Range has a diversity of habitat types and associated wildlife species. Larger mammal species which might be encountered include mule deer, bighorn sheep and more rarely, elk (near Big Ice Cave), black bears and mountain lions.



Photo by Gary Leppart

The bighorn sheep are a unique success story. The sheep found in the Pryors are originally from a small herd that was reintroduced into Wyoming's northern Bighorn Mountains. During the mid-1970s, they migrated across the ice of Bighorn Lake and remained on the west side of the Bighorn Canyon where their population increased. These sheep have persisted when several other deliberate attempts at reintroduction failed.

Numerous nongame species inhabit the area, including about 200 bird species. Blue grouse are popular with hunters and occupy the high elevation forests and meadow areas.



Photo by Gary Leppart

## CAVERNS FOUND THROUGHOUT THE PRYORS

The Pryor Mountains contain a number of caves, some of which are large enough to explore. Caves developed as ground water dissolved limestone while slowly moving through cracks and fissures in the rock. The cracks gradually widen to form larger and larger passageways.

If the level of the ground water is lowered after a cavern has formed, cave features called stalagmites, stalactites, soda straws or flowstone may develop. The formations are produced when minerals dissolved in the water flowing through the cave are redeposited. These features are often delicate and caution should be taken to prevent them from being broken.

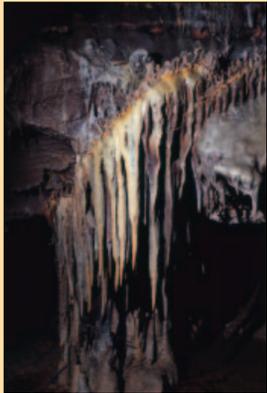


Photo by BLM, Wyoming

Caves can be very difficult to access and are often very dangerous to navigate. For information on necessary caving equipment, permits and accessibility, contact the BLM or the Forest Service.

## GEOLOGIC FORMATIONS TELL AN INTERESTING STORY

The geology of the Pryor Mountains reads like a good biography. The rocks themselves tell a story that spans from 550 million years to around 100 million years ago.

The first chapters describe an ancient sea that was filled with aquatic animals and plants. Through time, the extent and depth of the sea changed. Occasionally, uplift of the land eliminated the sea entirely, causing erosion of the rocks and sediments. Layers of different rock types, and their fossils, provide evidence of how the environment changed.

About 200 million years ago during the Middle Triassic era, southern Montana was covered by a shallow sea. Fossils of animals such as coral, clams, oysters and fish are evidence of this shallow sea.

During the Middle Jurassic era, about 150 million years ago, slow-moving streams flowed into the inland sea and large dinosaurs roamed the western states. Rocks of the Lower Cretaceous Cloverly Formation have abundant remains of crocodiles, turtles and dinosaurs, including the infamous 'velociraptor,' with its slashing hind claws. These animals provide evidence of life along the shores of the inland sea and the rivers that fed it.



## WHERE CAN I VIEW WILD HORSES?

Most visitors will have opportunities to view wild horses along Bad Pass Highway within the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. Small bands of horses are often visible from this paved road year-round. Look for horses in the low elevation lands north of the Mustang Flat interpretive sign.

Adventurous visitors will find that most of the wild horses can be found in the higher mountain meadows surrounding Penn's cabin (see map) during the summer and early fall months. However, four wheel drive vehicles will be required to make the journey to the Penn's cabin vicinity.



Photo by BLM

Photography and filming opportunities in the Pryor Mountains are excellent. All photographers and filmers are cautioned to respect the comfort zone around wild horses at all times and not to, in any way disrupt the horses' natural behavior.

Casual use activities such as noncommercial still photography or recreational videotaping do not require a permit or fees. Commercial filming and certain categories of commercial photography do require a permit and fees. For further information, please contact the BLM Billings Field Office.



Photo by Gary Leppart

elevation lands were occupied at other times of the year. This environment provided a variety of both plant and animal foods. Bighorn sheep, mule deer, bison and elk provided meat and skins while berries, roots and possibly ants supplemented diets.

Hard stone deposits called chert, exist in the Pryors and were used by Native Americans to make projectile points and scraping tools. In fact the Crow Indian tribe used to refer to the Pryors as the "Arrow-head" mountains.

The Crow Tribe considers many sites within the Pryors sacred. Cultural resources are protected by federal law on public lands and should be left as found for scientific investigation and enjoyment by future visitors.



Photo by Gary Leppart

## WILDERNESS PROVIDES HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE

Three areas within the wild horse range are designated as BLM wilderness study areas, Burnt Timber Canyon, Pryor Mountain and Big Horn Tack-On. These are managed so as not to impair their wilderness values. Congress will eventually either designate them as wilderness or release them from consideration. Recreational activities such as hiking, camping, and hunting are allowed within the interior of the wilderness study areas. Motorized vehicle travel is restricted to Sykes Ridge and Burnt Timber roads, which separate the wilderness study areas.

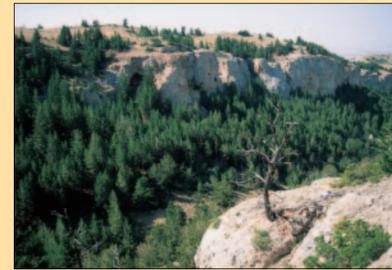


Photo by Gary Leppart

## HIKING OPPORTUNITIES

Hiking opportunities in the Pryor Mountains are excellent. However, there are no maintained trails. Be sure to take the necessary precautions as you venture into the hills. Don't overdo it; know your limitations. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return. Know how and where you can get help in an emergency.

## SAFETY FIRST

The Pryor Mountain National Wild Horse Range is a remote, rugged area where weather conditions can change rapidly at any time of the year. Four wheel drive vehicles will be needed to travel the backcountry open roads, particularly Sykes Ridge and Burnt Timber Ridge. Roads are nearly impassable during inclement weather and difficult in all conditions. (See map)



Photo by Gary Leppart

Travel light and take only what you need (food, water, flashlight, matches, first aid kit, compass, etc.). It's easy to get lost so be aware of your location when hiking and be aware of steep drop-offs. Bring appropriate clothing for changing weather conditions in the high country. This is rattlesnake country, so use caution when walking in brushy areas and around rocks.

Potable drinking water is unavailable in the mountains except at the Sage Creek and Horse Shoe Bend campgrounds (open seasonally).

Cellular phones will often not transmit in some of the more rugged areas of the Pryor Mountains. Telephones are available at the Wyoming State Tillet Fish Hatchery and Horseshoe Bend Marina. From May - September a phone is also available at the Britton Springs Administrative Site and Corrals.