

AFALCON GUIDE



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WILD Wyoming

A Guide to Sixty-three Roadless Recreation Areas Including
the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Red Desert



ACCESS: The western unit of the roadless area can be accessed from I-80 via the Bar X Road (County 21) north of its junction with County 20. The western edge of this roadless unit is characterized by checkerboard land ownership, which makes legal public access difficult. The Luman Road (County 20) stretches along the south boundary of the eastern unit. Both roads are suitable for passenger cars, but they turn to soap in the rain.

Day Hike

Luman Dunes

Distance: 4.0 miles or more, round trip.

Difficulty: Moderate.

Starting and maximum elevation: 6,624 feet, 6,650 feet.

Topo map: Red Lake.

Getting there: To reach the starting point for the Luman Dunes hike, take I-80 to exit 152, marked "Bar X Road." After exiting, drive to the north side of the underpass and follow the frontage road west for a short distance to intersect the Bar-X Road. This fair-weather gravel road runs north 2.35 miles to a junction with Luman Road (County 20). Turn right on this road, following it east for 2.5 miles to park at the road's first southward bend.

This off-trail ramble runs through the dunes to the south of Luman Rim. To begin the journey, head north toward the distant cliffs of the Luman Rim. You will cross stagnant dunes stabilized by desert grassland and shrub steppe. Once you reach the active dunes in the heart of the basin, turn east and follow the dunes' axis of migration. You can follow the sand as far as you wish. To return to your vehicle, take a bearing on the collection of low buttes and hills at the edge of a vast flat. Hike to these hills, where you will strike the Luman Road. Follow it westward to your vehicle.

Adobetown

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Location: 50 miles southeast of Point of Rocks.

Size: 85,710 acres.

Administration: BLM (Rock Springs Field Office, Rawlins Field Office).

Management status: Adobetown Wilderness Study Area (85,710 acres including 1,280 acres of state land).

Ecosystem: Wyoming Basin saltbush-greasewood desert and sagebrush steppe.

Elevation range: 6,420 feet to 7,125 feet.

System trails: None.

Maximum core to perimeter distance: 4.2 miles.

Activities: Hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, rockhounding, big game hunting (antelope and mule deer), wildlife viewing, photography.

Best season: April through October.

Maps: BLM 1:100,000 scale Kinney and Baggs.

TRAVELERS ADVISORY:

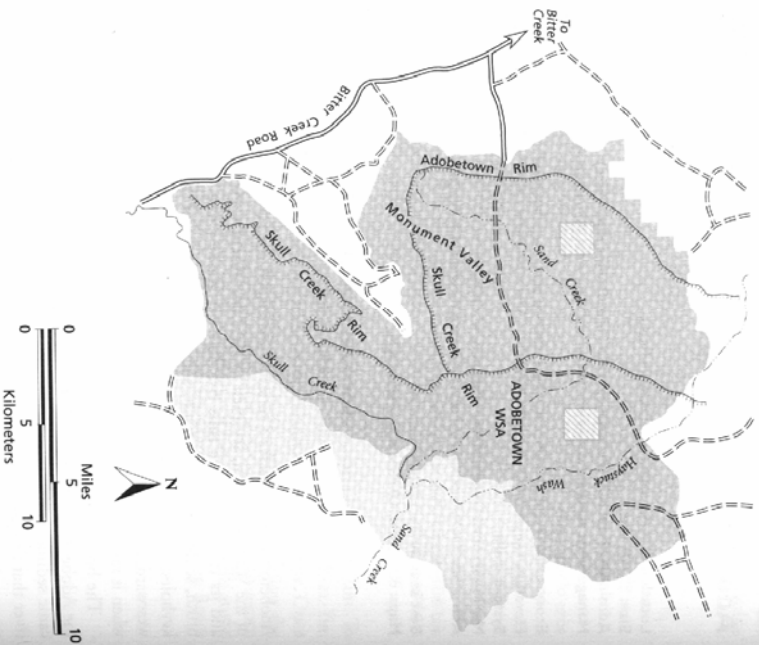
BAD WATER

Adobetown encompasses a series of arc-shaped rims that rises near the center of the Washakie Basin, sculpted by the intermittent waterways of Sand Creek and its tributaries. The rims rise 500 feet above a low-lying plain of desert brush, sculpted by erosion into a fantastic landscape of spires, balanced rocks, keyholes, and cliffs. Above the rims, a high and windswept plateau stretches westward, covered with stabilized sand dunes and alkali flats that fill with water when it rains.

The bedrock that forms Adobetown is tuffaceous sandstone belonging to the Adobe Town member of the Washakie formation. It is made up of volcanic sediments that were deposited in the Washakie Basin by a long-extinct river that flowed down from the north. Tuffaceous sandstone is soft in character and easily eroded by wind and water. In many places, its surface has been scored with vertical and horizontal grooves that give it the appearance of adobe masonry. Isolated pillars of sandstone rise as much as 2 miles east of the rimrock, and many pinnacles are clustered in groupings reminiscent of long-abandoned cities.

Paleontologists have discovered Pleistocene animal fossils within this area. Among the finds include the titanohere, a giant tapir that reached weights of

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up to 4 tons and could reach a height of 8 feet at the shoulder. Also found here were bones of the untrahere, a woolly rhinoceros. Fossil turtle shells are also common. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of constant human activity in this area over the course of the last 12,000 years. Adobetown is considered to have an unusually high density of archaeological sites, most of which have yet

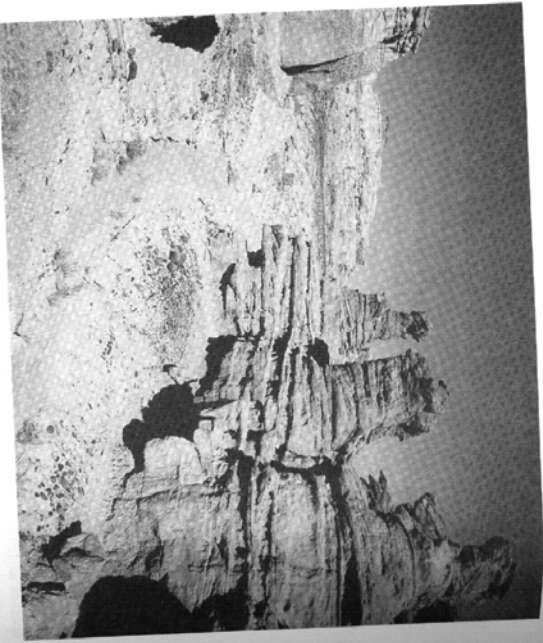
to be cataloged. Visitors should bear in mind that both vertebrate fossils and human artifacts are protected under the Antiquities Act, and it is a federal crime to collect or disturb them. Fossils and human artifacts are a priceless and irreplaceable record of Wyoming's history, and scientists can only interpret these artifacts within the context of their original position within the rock strata.

The modern mammals of Adobetown feature wild horses, pronghorn antelope, and mule deer. The wild horse population ranges between 300 and 500 animals, which can be found both above and below the breaks. In this open country of sagebrush and greasewood, the horses are easy to spot, especially due to their deeply colored white and coal-black pelage, which contrasts sharply with the dun colors of the landscape. The pronghorns belong to the Bitter Creek herd, some 11,000 strong. About 450 antelope summer within the proposed wilderness, while up to 1,200 head can be found here during the winter. Adobetown also offers outstanding habitat for mule deer. The resident population numbers around 200 head, augmented by migrant animals that move in during the winter.

The cliffs and pinnacles of Adobetown offer superior nesting sites for raptors, and its diverse array of avian predators is highlighted by golden eagles and ferruginous hawks. The ferruginous hawk has been granted Category II status under the Endangered Species Act—which means that ferruginous hawks are in danger of extinction but scientists lack sufficient population data to list the species as Endangered. The population decline of this hawk has been largely attributed to human disturbance in nesting areas, which has been linked to a nest failure rate of 55 percent in recent years. Scientists estimate that 22 nesting pairs of ferruginous hawks call Adobetown home.

If the U.S. Congress follows the BLM's recommendation, only 10,920 acres of Adobetown will be designated as wilderness and 69,430 acres will be released from wilderness consideration. Monument Valley, the Adobetown Rim, and vast acreages of sagebrush flats would be released for industrial exploitation. Views from the resulting shrunken wilderness would ultimately include a maze of drilling sites, roads, pipelines, and other artifacts of the oil extraction industry. Lost in the process would be miles of the most spectacular cliffs, canyons, buttes, and pinnacles in the area, a landscape worthy of National Park status. Due to the wide-open character of this landscape, it would be difficult to find a corner of the recommended wilderness area where the sights and sounds of industrial activity would be imperceptible. Thus, the preferred alternative presented within the EIS is a boon for the oil industry and a disaster for the American public.

There are almost no signs of past human activity within the Adobetown WSA. Several jeep trails descend from the rims to cross the vast plains of Sand Creek, but these roads would soon be swallowed up by the desert if they were closed. Small reservoirs are scattered across the landscape, built by stockmen to



Pillars near the Adobetown Rim.

retain water from the infrequent cloudbursts that occur here. Most have been abandoned, and their dams are camouflaged by a mantle of sagebrush. Wild horse traps can also be found within the breaks. Cattle and domestic sheep are still grazed throughout the wilderness study area, and this grazing would continue under wilderness designation.

The major man-made intrusions within the proposed wilderness take the form of active and abandoned drilling sites, unimproved roads and jeep tracks, and seismicographic lines associated with oil and gas exploration. Major oil reserves have been discovered along the northwestern edge of the WSA, and pockets of natural gas have been located along the western and southern margins. Geologists estimate that between 1 and 2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas may exist beneath Adobetown, at an average depth of 15,000 feet. Adobetown is underlain by low-grade oil shales, buried beneath 3,000 feet of overburden. It is not economical to mine these oil shales today, but it may become

profitable in the decades to come. As for other subsurface minerals, Adobetown has low potential, and the entire region was withdrawn from development by Executive Order in 1930.

The western half of the proposed wilderness has several oil and gas leases that were filed before the Federal Land Planning and Management Act (FLPMA). By law, the holders of these leases may explore for and develop oil and gas wells despite any future wilderness designation. It is important to note that there is no current oil and gas drilling in the Adobetown area, and many of the neighboring wells have been abandoned as uneconomical. However, according to the EIS, "it is quite probable that development would occur," and gas drilling is currently accelerating in the local area. When the BLM developed its wilderness recommendations, natural gas potential was given priority over public recreation and environmental quality. In short, the Adobetown recommendations are one more in a long line of sellouts in which government officials sacrifice the public interest in the name of corporate profit.

RECREATIONAL USES: Adobetown offers limitless opportunities for off-trail hiking and explorations among the pinnacles and draws of its many rims. The open country both above and below the rims is well suited to horse travel, and it affords access to scenic overlooks and spectacular canyons. The vast extent of this roadless area makes multi-day trips a possibility. Remember that there is no water, and you will need to carry at least a gallon a day per person. The trophy antelope hunting in this area is considered to be of high quality, and trophy mule deer lurk amid the badlands. The Adobetown area receives an estimated 25 visitor days per year from off-road vehicle users, which would be displaced to neighboring areas if Adobetown is granted wilderness status.

ACCESS: Adobetown lies far from any pavement, in the heart of a vast and empty landscape of sagebrush desert. Ranches are few and far between, and there are no services within 50 miles. Carry an extra spare tire, extra fuel, and plenty of water and food in case you get stuck. All roads in this area become completely impassable when wet, and four-wheel-drive and high clearance vehicles are strongly recommended even in dry weather. Clear out if wet weather threatens, and be prepared to effect a self-rescue should you run into trouble.

The Bitter Creek Road runs south from I-80 to Adobetown, providing good fair-weather access for all vehicles. More difficult roads run southeast to the Adobetown Rim, and the jeep roads that follow the Adobetown and Skull Creek Rims should be attempted only by experienced four-wheel-drive users. The faint jeep tracks that lead to the Sand Creek flats are difficult and dangerous to attempt, even with a tank.



The towering badland breaks of the Skull Creek Rim.

Day Hike and Scramble Route

Monument Valley Loop

Distance: 6.5 miles round trip.

Difficulty: Moderately strenuous.

Starting and minimum elevation: 6,960 feet, 6,840 feet.

Topo map: Monument Valley.

Getting there: Drive 1.80 east from Point of Rocks to the Bitter Creek Road, exit 142. Drive south on this broad, gravel road that becomes impassible in wet weather. You will reach the Bitter Creek railway siding after 7 miles; just beyond it bear left at the split to stay on the Bitter Creek Road. It winds south through empty country for another 21.5 miles to reach the Eversole Ranch. Drive through the ranch compound, then bear left. Continue straight ahead (south) as the Bitter Creek Road bends away to the west. You are now following BLM 4412, which may be deeply rutted and turns to mud when it gets wet. After 3.6 miles, turn left on a major road that leads east 4.4 miles to a pump station on the Adobe town Rim. Park just beyond the pump station.

This off-trail ramble leads through the spectacular pinnacles of the Adobe town Rim. The trek begins by descending eastward from the bottom of the grade; leave the roadbed. The road swings south near the bottom of the grade; follow the watercourse down-ward here and drop into the wash to the north. Follow the watercourse down-

ward through gabled pillars and pinnacles. When the wash emerges onto the flats, abandon it and hike eastward along the base of the rock formations. As the outcrops subside into sandy slopes, a low and rock-guarded gap appears to the northeast. Cross through the gap and turn northwest, following the base of a sage-clad hill.

You will ultimately strike a wash that runs north through a narrow canyon; follow it through the rocks. It emerges at the base of a low wall of battlements that trend east-west. Hike northwest along the base of the badlands, crossing undulating terrain en route to a long ridge of spires that extends like a bony finger into the basin. Upon reaching this ridge, take time to explore the maze of canyons and spires at its base. Then round the toe of the ridge and begin a westerly climb above a basin crowded with needle-shaped tors. Take advantage of gradual slopes to ascend from one level to the next. Just below the rounded crest of the Adobe town Rim, you will be able to turn southeast along a shelf encrusted with weathered towers. It will soon become necessary to climb atop the rims, and the last leg of the trip follows them southeast with many a westward detour to avoid eroded gullies.

Day Hike

East Fork Point

Distance: 3.4 miles total.

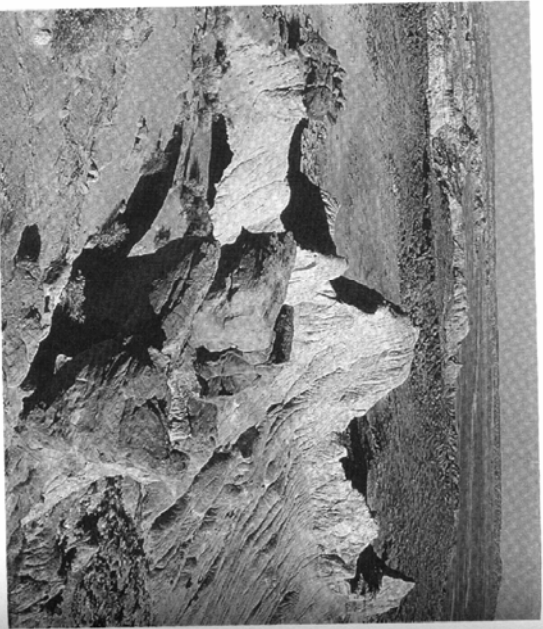
Difficulty: Moderate.

Starting and minimum elevation: 7,055 feet, 6,990 feet.

Topo map: Prehistoric Rim.

Getting there: From Bitter Creek drive past the Eversole Ranch as for the Monument Valley hikes and continue south on BLM 4412 from the major road junction. After 8 miles, you will see a ranch just ahead. Turn left (east) on a graded road and follow it to the old oil well site at its end. Drive northeast from the drilling pad on a two-rut jeep road that is difficult to find initially but is obvious once you're on it. After 1.4 miles, you will reach a junction near Windy Reservoir. Continue north and drive another 3.0 miles to reach a split. Turn right and drive east for 1.2 miles to park beside an outcrop atop the Skull Creek Rim.

This loop trek stays atop the Skull Creek Rim for aerial views of the colorful breaks and spectacular rock formations. To begin, hike north on the level mesa top. Upon reaching a fence, follow the horse trail that skirts east around its end, then continue north along the rim as pinnacles crowd the draw below. A horse trail soon leads down to the next terrace; hike toward the squat butte that rises to the north (marked "East Fork Point" on the map). From its east side, you will have superb northward views encompassing the Adobe town Rim, as well as the more colorful lower rims that stretch northward to the horizon.



Looking north from the Skull Creek Rim.

After taking in the view, double back to the south, hiking atop a lower rim-rock that demarcates a hoodoo-filled canyon below. Hike all the way around its rim, then continue eastward to visit the many promontories that jut out high above the breaks. You will ultimately arrive at a point farthest east where the mesa dissolves into unattainable pinnacles. From here the views stretch eastward across the vast basin of Sand Creek, whose broad wash can be seen snaking across the plain. The main bulkwork of the Skull Creek Rim now stretches to the south, a towering wall of pinnacles and cliffs reminiscent of the Grand Canyon.

After traveling south, turn westward along the rim of the next major canyon. Follow it past the deep chasms of its mouth and the striking pedestals of its headwaters. This rim leads back to the craggy butte at the edge of the higher shelf where you will find your vehicle.

Red Creek Badlands

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Location: 30 miles south of Green River.

Size: 11,420 acres.

Administration: BLM (Rock Springs Field Office).

Management status: Red Creek Badlands WSA (8,020 acres), unprotected roadless lands (3,400 acres).

Ecosystem: Wyoming Basin sagebrush steppe ecosystem, dominated by juniper scrub.

Elevation range: 7,000 feet to 7,900 feet.

System trails: None.

Maximum core to perimeter distance: 1.7 miles.

Activities: Hiking, horseback riding, big game hunting, rockhounding.

Best season: April through October.

Maps: Fritchole Canyon 1:100,000; Red Creek Ranch and Richards Gap 1:24,000.

TRAVELERS ADVISORY:

BAD WATER

Red Creek flows through a big basin guarded by lofty breaks that slope down into a maze of minor buttes, ridges, and draws on the basin floor. The badlands are made up of the red sandstones and shales of the Wasatch formation, colorful and highly susceptible to erosion. They offer an excellent landscape for short and medium range forays into the backcountry.

Juniper scrub dominates the badlands and is intermixed with sagebrush, mountain mahogany, and greasewood along the major draws. Cottonwoods can be found beside the major washes, where groundwater is available. Spring willow can also be found along some of the major washes. It is not a willow at all, but a flowering shrub whose closest relatives live in the rainforests of Central America. The northernmost stands of piñon pine are thought to occur within these badlands. Red Creek, which runs through the area, is home to the Colorado cutthroat trout, a rare subspecies that is a focus for recovery efforts.

The Red Creek Badlands lies within the Red Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern, which was established to manage the watershed to reduce its output of salinity and silt. The area was recommended for non-wilderness, primarily because BLM once foresaw a potential need to build erosion control structures that would slow the flow of silt and salts into the Green River. Saline runoff is now recognized as a natural part of the Green River aquatic system,