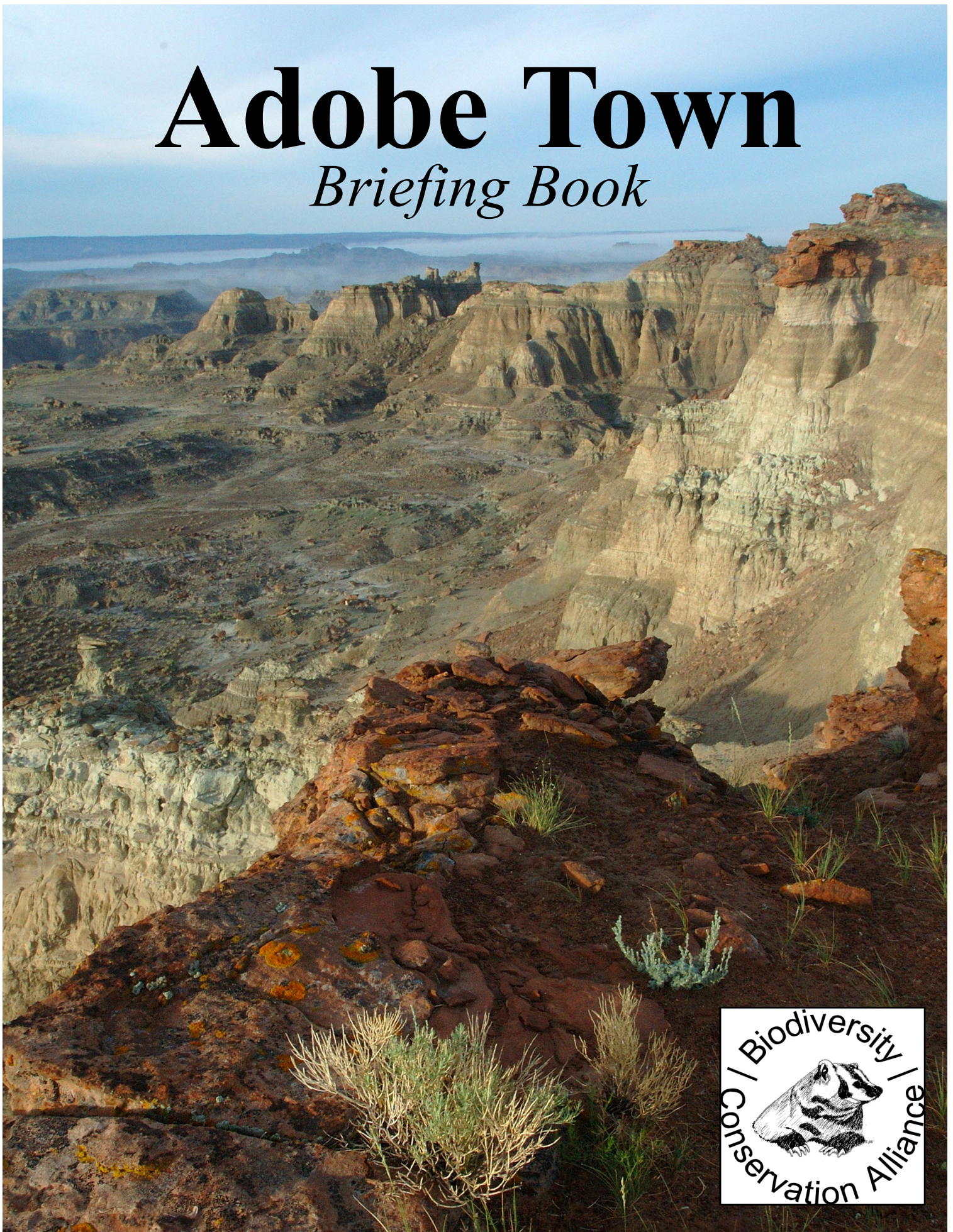
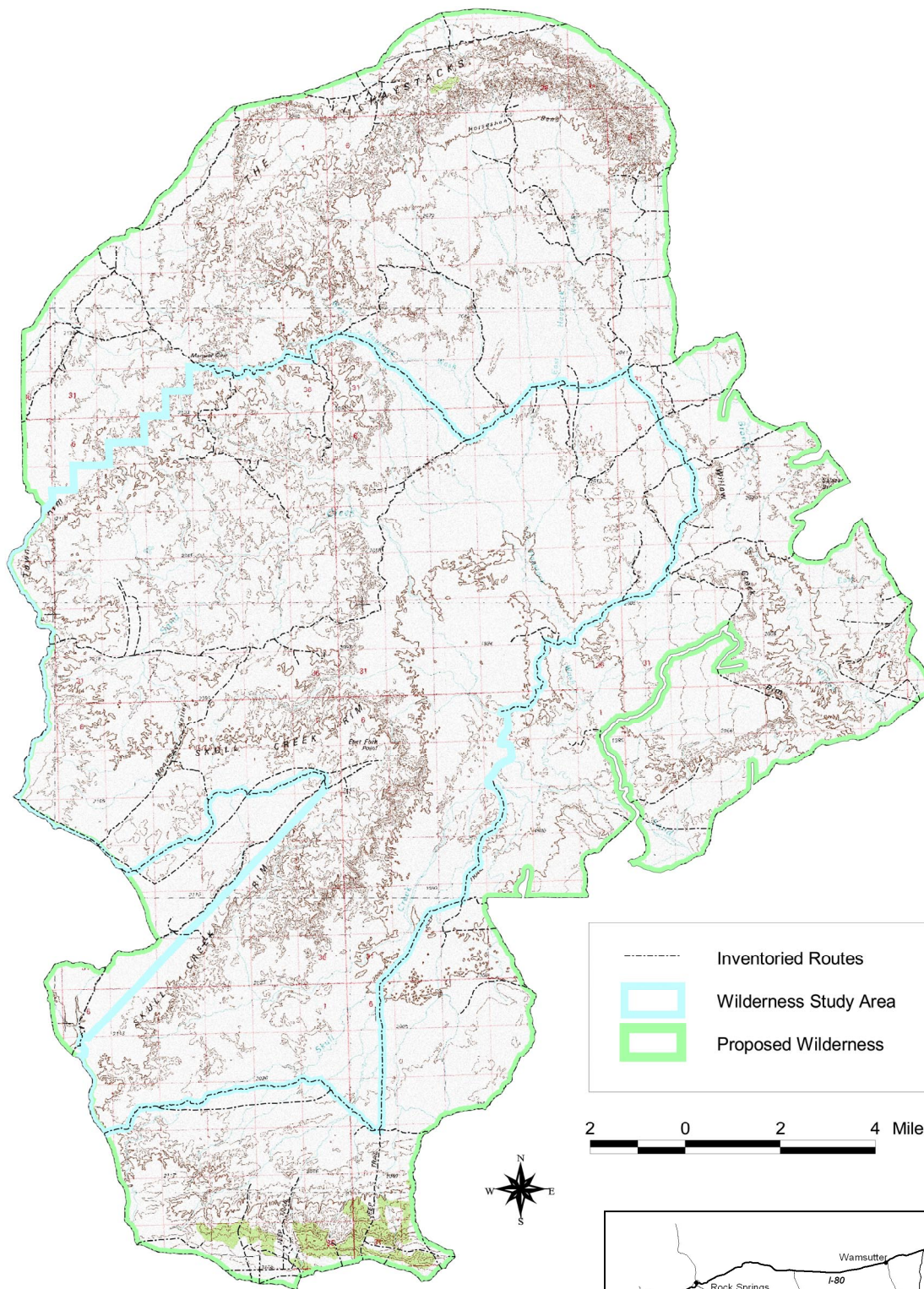


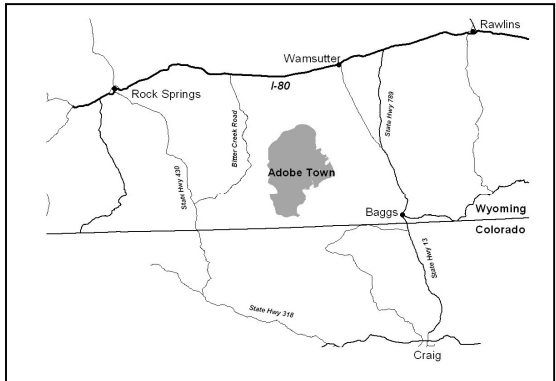
Adobe Town

Briefing Book





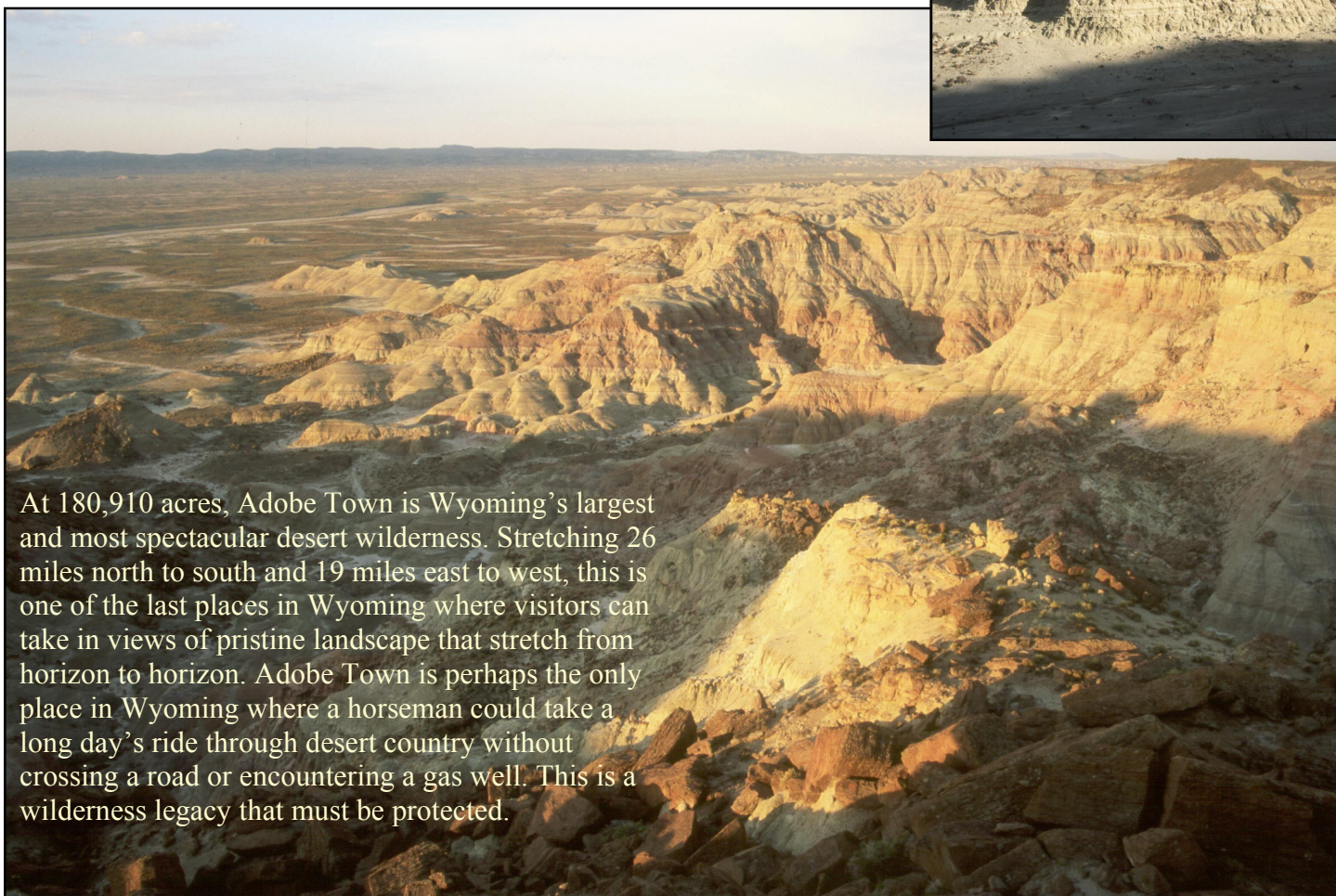
Cover photo: Skull Creek Rim. Ken Driese photo



The Crown Jewel of Wyoming's High Desert Wilderness



Storm over the Adobe Town Rim (above); Adobe Town Rim pinnacle (right); Thousand-foot cliff of the Skull Creek Rim (below). *Photos by BCA*



At 180,910 acres, Adobe Town is Wyoming's largest and most spectacular desert wilderness. Stretching 26 miles north to south and 19 miles east to west, this is one of the last places in Wyoming where visitors can take in views of pristine landscape that stretch from horizon to horizon. Adobe Town is perhaps the only place in Wyoming where a horseman could take a long day's ride through desert country without crossing a road or encountering a gas well. This is a wilderness legacy that must be protected.



Adobe Town lithograph by Gilbert Munger, *courtesy www.gilbertmunger.org*

A Landscape of Historical Importance

Adobe Town was discovered during the Exploration of the 40th Parallel in 1869. Early explorers had this to say:

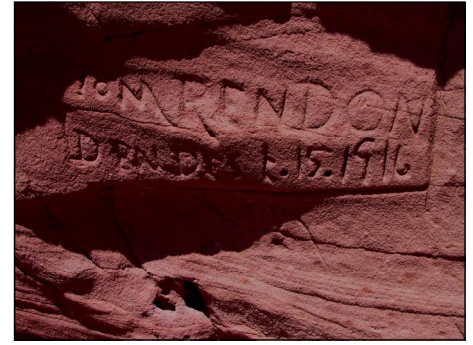
“This escarpment is the most remarkable example of the so-called bad-land erosion within the limits of the Fortieth Parallel Exploration...Along the walls of these ravines the same picturesque architectural forms occur, so that a view of the whole front of the escarpment, with its salient and reentrant angles, reminds one of the ruins of a fortified city. Enormous masses project from the main wall, the stratification-lines of creamy, gray, and green sands and marls are traced across their nearly vertical fronts like courses of immense masonry, and every face is scored by innumerable narrow, sharp cuts, which are worn into the soft material from top to bottom of the cliff, offering narrow galleries which give access for a considerable distance into this labyrinth of natural fortresses. At a little distance, these sharp incisions seem like the spaces between series of pillars, and the whole aspect of the region is that of a line of Egyptian structures. Among the most interesting bodies are those of the detached outliers, points of spurs, or isolated hills, which are mere relics of the beds that formerly covered the whole valley. These blocks, often reaching 100 feet in height, rise out of the smooth surface of a level plain of clay, and are sculptured into the most remarkable forms, surmounted by domes and ornamented by many buttresses and jutting pinnacles. But perhaps the most astonishing single monument here is the isolated column shown in the frontispiece of this volume. It stands upon a plain of gray earth, which supports a scant growth of desert sage, and rises to a height of fully sixty feet. It could hardly be a more perfect specimen of an isolated monumental form if sculptured by the hand of man.”

--Clarence King, Geologist, Report of the Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel, 1869



Ruins of Fort LaCledde along the Overland Trail, just north of Adobe Town. *BCA photo.*

Skull Rim Etchings
BCA photo



The Outlaw Trail ran right through Adobe Town. During the Tipton train robbery at the turn of the 20th Century, Butch Cassidy and his Powder Wash Gang fled southward to the Haystacks (in the northern end of the proposed wilderness), where they had hidden fresh horses to facilitate their escape. Their fresh mounts allowed them to outrun their pursuers and escape into Colorado. Recent excavations indicate that a cabin on the Powder Rim may have been a hideout for Cassidy and his gang.

Adobe Town is the site of over 12,000 years of human habitation. It is still revered as a sacred site by Native American tribes to this day. Archaeologists have uncovered an unusually high density of prehistoric sites in Adobe Town, many of which have yet to be catalogued.

Adobe Town is also bracketed by historic trails. The Overland Trail, which carried a stage line and emigrants during the 1860s, follows Bitter Creek just to the north of Adobe Town. The Cherokee Trail follows the Powder Rim along the southern edge of the proposed wilderness.

Still later, during the Prohibition era, bootleggers brewed moonshine in hidden stills within the folds of the Haystacks.



Cairn along the Skull Creek Rim
Ken Driese photo



Adobe Town lithograph
by Gilbert Munger,
Courtesy www.gilbertmunger.org

Landscapes of National Park Quality

The landscapes of Adobe Town rival the most spectacular landscapes of America's current desert parks. Adobe Town has been compared favorably to Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, and Badlands National Parks, and may in fact represent the most intricate and outstanding badlands topography in the United States.



In 1979, the National Park Service and the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service identified the resources of the Washakie Basin as possessing nationally significant and threatened natural-ecological-geological features and listed the basin as a possibility for new study and potential inclusion as a national park, underscoring the outstanding natural attributes of the area.

Below: The Skull Creek Rim provides awe-inspiring views on a magnificent scale. *Photo by Erik Molvar*



Here and left: Pinnacles of the Adobe Town Rim Rival Bryce Canyon National Park. *BCA photos*





Top: Skull Creek Rim vista.
Ken Driese photo



Clockwise from right: Butte atop Skull Rim; Eroded smaller features on Skull Creek Rim; Green arch along Adobe Town Rim; Arch near East Fork Point. *BCA photos*



“The greatest natural value of this area is that it is still a ‘howling wilderness.’”

-National Parks Service, *Inventory of Significant Geologic Areas in the Wyoming Basin Natural Region*, 1973



The National Park Service studied the Adobe Town area for National Natural Landmark status, and rated the area as having the highest rating for ecological and geological values, a rating that reflects “high degree of national significance, recommended without reservation.”

--*Potential Natural Landmarks in the Wyoming Basin*, 1976

“Why not set aside Adobe Town, and make it wilderness? Why not take a part of this huge land, and make it off-limits to mechanized industry and motorized traffic? There would remain plenty of room to drill, and to play, in the [Great Divide] resource area.”

-Editorial, *Rawlins Daily Times*, March 16, 2005



Top: Wash at the foot of Skull Creek Rim
photo by Ken Driese

Center: Pinnacle, Adobe Town Rim, *BCA photo*

Bottom: Sunrise on the Skull Creek Rim
Ken Driese photo



Panorama of southern Skull Creek Rim *BCA photo*



Left and right:
Adobe Town Rim
BCA Photos



Butte atop Skull Creek Rim *BCA photo*

Right: Aerial view of Skull Creek Rim, looking southward to the Powder Rim (on the horizon) *BCA photo*



Unparalleled Recreation Opportunities



Above: Panorama of Skull Creek Rim.

Below: Hikers at natural arch.

BCA photos



Adobe Town represents some of the wildest desert landscape in the world, and yet it is easily accessible to visitors on foot and horseback. Not only is this area a haven for primitive recreation, but it also offers outstanding opportunities for hunting, wildlife viewing, and rockhounding.

Wilderness designation would do little to impede motorized access in this area, as the most popular motorized routes would continue to allow vehicles to approach some of the most spectacular landscapes in the area.



Above: Young visitors along the Adobe Town Rim, where motorized access will remain easy when wilderness is established. *BCA photo*

Right and center-right: Explorers enjoy the nooks and crannies of the Adobe Town Rim. *BCA photos*



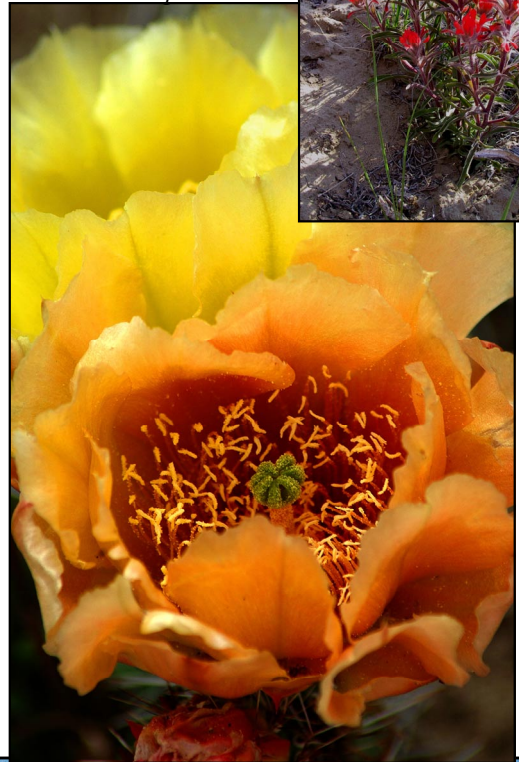
A Rich Diversity of Native Wildlife

The Adobe Town proposed wilderness provides outstanding habitat for a variety of native wildlife. The cliffs and pinnacles that stretch across the length and breadth of the area provide ideal roosting and nesting habitats for birds of prey, from the graceful prairie falcon to the majestic golden eagle and the rare ferruginous hawk. The mountain plover, until recently a member of the Endangered Species List, is known from several locations in Adobe Town. In addition, smaller sensitive species are also found in Adobe Town, such as the greater short-horned lizard and the Great Basin gopher snake. The rare sage grouse and white-tailed prairie dog also flourish in several locations in Adobe Town

The area at the foot of the Skull Creek Rim and The Haystacks is a renowned trophy antelope hunting area, producing bucks of exceptional size.

Despite only receiving 5 inches of annual precipitation, Adobe Town supports an abundance of native wildflowers that bloom throughout the summer. May and early June provide the greatest abundance of blooms.

Right: Paintbrush
BCA photo
Below: Prickly pear
Ken Driese photo



Insets (L to R): Great Basin gopher snake
BCA photo
Great Basin spadefoot tadpoles
Jason Lehrer photo
Greater short-horned lizard *BCA photo*

Background:
Roosting prairie falcons
Ken Driese photo

Wyoming's Largest Wild Horse Herd

Adobe Town is home to one of the largest wild horse herds remaining in the West. Numbering around 1,000 head, the Adobe Town Herd is a major attraction for wild horse viewers. Visitors to Adobe Town routinely see half a dozen bunches in a day's visit, and can observe the harem defense behaviors of stallions who constantly protect their mares from competitors.

Although horses originally evolved in North America, they went extinct on this continent tens of thousands of years ago. The current herds in this area descend from animals turned loose over the years by Spanish settlers in New Mexico, Native American tribes, and ranchers. Once in the wild, they resumed their natural herd behaviors. It is perceived in some circles that wild horses compete with cattle and are destructive to the range. This is true only to a limited extent: Studies from the University of Wyoming indicate that wild horses use different habitats than cattle do at the various seasons of the year, and typically use different forages than native wildlife.

If Adobe Town became wilderness, there would be ample lands to the east and west where effective management of wild horse populations could take place with the aid of motorized vehicles and aircraft.



Wild horses *Ken Driese photo*

World - Class Fossil Resources

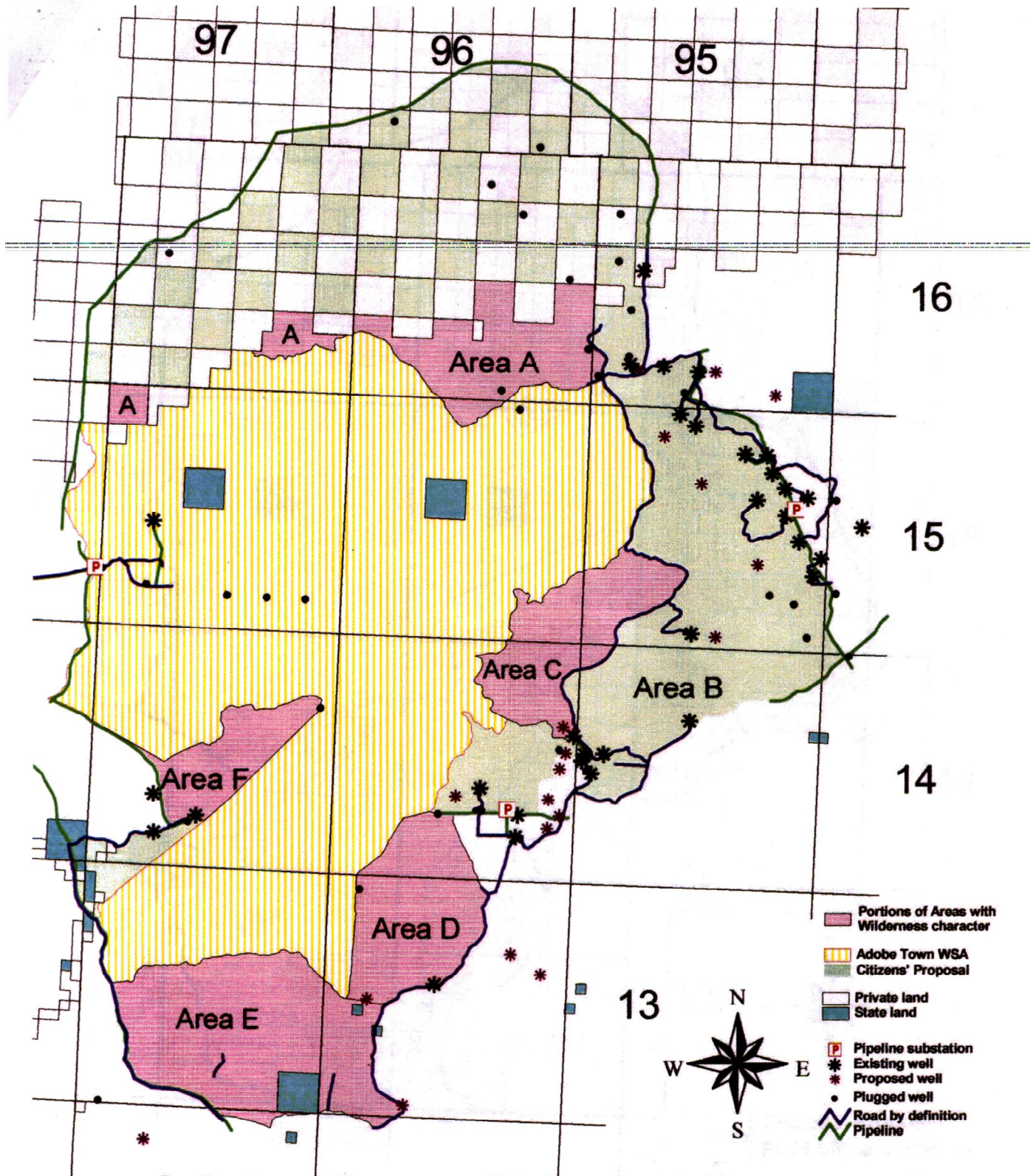
Adobe Town is known for having the world's most outstanding fossil assemblages of mammals from the Eocene epoch. Some of the original "Bone War" controversies between paleontologists Othniel C. Marsh and Frederick Cope in the late 1800s occurred around fossils found along Bitter Creek near the north end of Adobe Town. Renowned paleontologist John Turnbull of the Chicago Field Museum later made a career out of excavating the mammal fossils of The Haystacks in the northern quadrant of the Adobe Town proposed wilderness between the 1950s and 1970s.

Adobe Town is largely made up of a thousand-foot-deep deposit of volcanic ash that originated during the eruptions that formed the Yellowstone Caldera about 50 million years ago. This ash was brought south by streams and rivers, and deposited in the broad basin that was to become known as the Washakie Basin. Here, it solidified into a stone known as "tuffaceous sandstone," which forms the eroded cliffs and pillars of Adobe Town. Today, erosion is revealing important fossil resources including taeniodonts (relatives of the giant ground sloth) as well as woolly rhinoceros fossils.



Fossil jawbone, possibly from a small carnivore, in Adobe Town *Jason Lehrer photo*

This BLM map shows the agency's official assessment of lands within Adobe Town which the agency considers to possess wilderness qualities



Adobe Town Citizens' Proposal Portions with Wilderness Character

Map 1

Bureau of Land Management's Wilderness Protection Efforts

BLM recognized the unique and significant natural qualities present in the Adobe Town Area when it designated the area as an "Interim Critical Management Area" under the Management Framework Plans drafted prior to 1973.

Early BLM assessments of the area stated that "The greatest natural value of this area is that it is still a 'howling wilderness,'" assessments published in the agency's URA Step III Assessment. BLM officials heralded the unique and outstanding natural values of the area in this document as follows. "Many of the spires take on strange life-like forms - stone sentinals (sic) frozen in time standing guard over their silent desert domain. Walking amidst groups of these strange spires gives one the eerie feeling of being watched - by beings who have witnessed the evolution of Adobe Town for millennia." The document went on to state, "Contrast between colors, sunlight and shadows, and landforms is increased creating enormous vistas....Although similar landforms are found elsewhere in southern Wyoming, these are perhaps the most outstanding example, a factor which contributes to the uniqueness of the area."

BLM's management of wilderness resources in Adobe Town began with a BLM inventory of the area in the 1970s to determine which lands possessed wilderness qualities. Following requirements set forth by Act of Congress in 1976, the BLM set aside 85,710 acres as the Adobe Town Wilderness Study Area ("WSA"), to be managed for its wilderness qualities until Congress could make the final determination on Wilderness designation. The WSA represents slightly less than half of the lands that qualify as wilderness today.

While numerous oil and gas leases were grandfathered in when the WSA was established, only one well was ever drilled after WSA status was finalized. The last gas well was plugged and abandoned in November of 2003, following scrutiny by Biodiversity Conservation Alliance of the well's failure to produce sufficient gas to hold the lease and unit by production.

In 2002, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance conducted a comprehensive field inventory of wilderness qualities in Adobe Town, and submitted a petition backed by over 400 pages of photo documentation to seek protection for wilderness qualities on lands outside the WSA. In response, the BLM agreed that over 40,000 acres outside the WSA also possessed wilderness qualities, and promised to study an expansion of the WSA during its revision of the Great Divide Resource Management Plan.

BLM's assessment was not perfect. Area B was disqualified because of a "road" that fails to meet BLM criteria for exclusion from wilderness. A small unit along the eastern boundary of the WSA was improperly disqualified because

"roadless: for the purpose of the wilderness review program, this refers to the absence of roads which have been improved by mechanical means to ensure relatively regular and continuous use. A way maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road."

-BLM Handbook H-8550-1: Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review



This route is a former oil and gas access road that had been ripped and seeded and subsequently became a two-track maintained solely by the passage of vehicles. It was determined by BLM to be a "road" and used to exclude Area B from wilderness consideration. BCA photo

a gas well and its short access road extended into the unit; BLM policy clearly states that such dead-end routes can be "cherry-stemmed" out of wilderness to allow the lands surrounding them to be protected. Another small unit along the southwest edge of the WSA was improperly excluded because of several tiny (and pristine) private inholdings along its western edge. According to BLM regulations, the agency was required to readjust the boundary to exclude these private lands, which would mean that the majority of the unit would qualify as wilderness.

The agency also found that checkerboard lands in The Haystacks did not meet size criteria for wilderness due to private inholdings. Conservation groups agreed, but would prefer that the BLM manage these lands as wilderness until voluntary land exchanges could consolidate them into public ownership.

The Rest of Adobe Town

Proposed Wilderness Additions to the WSA



The lands at the base of the buttes are still open to industrial development, which could scar the viewshed. *BCA photos*

Base of the Skull Creek Rim

Unprotected lands open to full-scale oil and gas development extend almost to the base of the Skull Creek Rim. This area offers the most stunning vistas in the proposed wilderness. However, if the lands below the cliffs were converted to a gas field, the public would lose its opportunity to enjoy a wilderness experience atop the rims. Thus, the lands at the base of the Skull Creek Rim merit equal protection.

The BLM has concurred that Area C and Area D, comprising three-quarters of the Base of the Skull Creek Rim, possess wilderness qualities. The agency has quibbled with findings that the lands between these two units merit wilderness protection, despite the fact that this unit is equally pristine, and there are no human intrusions to form a boundary between it and the currently protected Wilderness Study Area. The close proximity of this unit to East Fork Point, a primary overlook on the Skull Creek Rim, make it a top priority for wilderness protection.



The Haystacks

“A dominant feature of the landscape in the northern part of the area is Haystack Mountain. It is arcuate in shape and 10 miles long. On the north end, badland slopes of variegated sediments rise precipitously 500 feet above the adjacent plains.”

-National Park Service, *Inventory of Significant Geological Areas in the Wyoming Basin Natural Region*, 1973

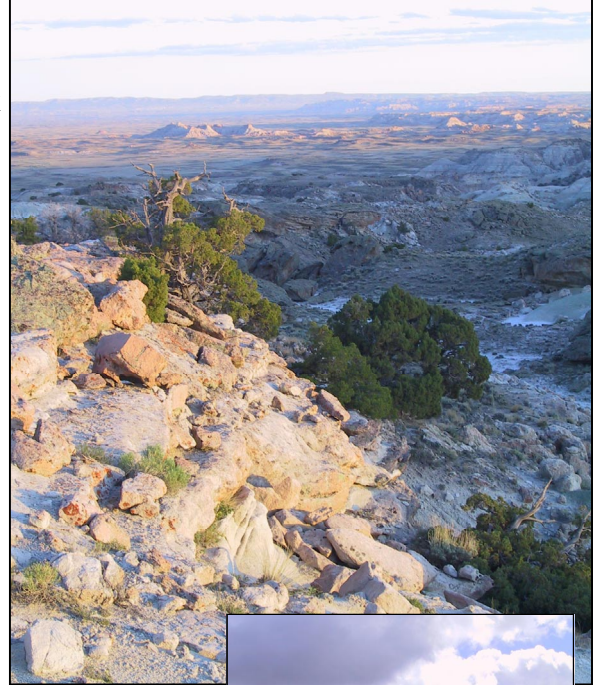


Top: Moonrise over the Haystacks
Second: View south across Adobe Town from the Haystacks
Third: Haystacks Pinnacle
Bottom The Haystacks' north face

The Haystacks are a broad arc of deeply dissected badlands that extend northeast from the Adobe Town Rim. This unit contains a substantial stretch of the Adobe Town Rim with its unearthly rock formations, as well as the even taller Haystacks with some of the loftiest and most dissected badlands in the state. According to local tradition, it was in the Haystacks that Butch Cassidy and his gang hid their fresh horses, which helped them elude their pursuers following the Tipton train robbery.

This lofty chain of ridges and badlands is home to a juniper woodland whose isolated nature within the surrounding sea of sagebrush lends it great ecological importance. It has substantial populations of mule deer and pronghorn, an abundance of nesting raptors, as well as a small population of mountain lions.

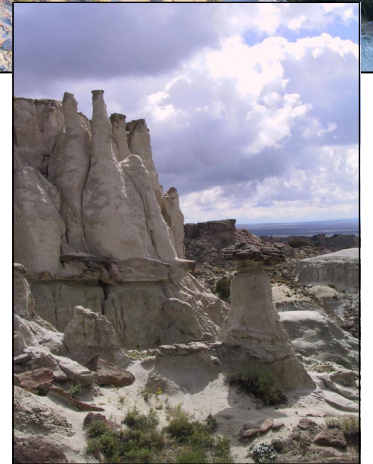
BLM should manage its lands in The Haystacks to maintain wilderness qualities and pursue land swaps from willing partners to consolidate these wilderness-quality lands in public ownership.



Photos by BCA

“To the south of the stage-road, west of Barrel Springs, is a narrow, east and west ridge, whose irregular, serrated outline forms a striking contrast to the usual level summit line of the bluff ridges of this region....This ridge rises toward the east, having its culminating point in Haystack Mountain, which has an elevation of about 900 or 1,000 feet above the surrounding plains....On the northern face of Haystack Mountain was found the petrified trunk of a large coniferous tree, lying across one of the narrow ravines, a length of about 15 feet being thus exposed, either end being still imbedded in the sandstone. The woody appearance is very well preserved, the exterior being whitened, so that the resemblance to the weathered trunk of a dead tree is almost perfect....”

-Clarence King, Geologist, *Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel*, 1869



The Willow Creek Badlands

This unit encompasses a sloping table land between the WSA and the Willow Creek Rim, and also includes wilderness-quality lands in the badlands of Willow Creek itself, which lie immediately to the east of the rim. The Willow Creek Rim is a tall, vertical scarp that bisects the area from north to south, affording spectacular views of the surrounding country. At its foot lies a maze of badlands that invite exploration on foot or horseback. The spectacular scenery alone is sufficient to lend the area outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

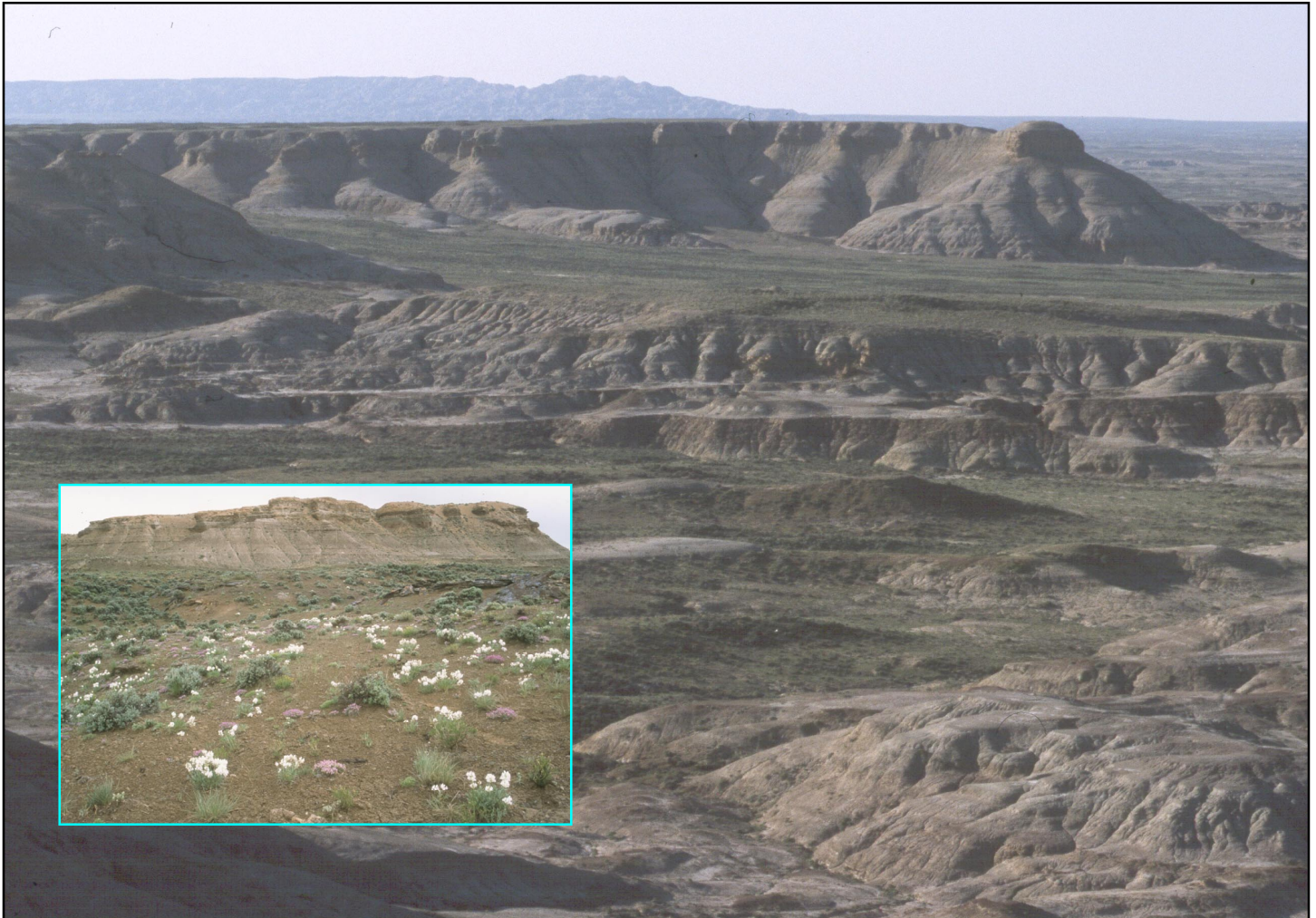
A light amount of use still occurs on a two-track way that follows the revegetation strip of the old road, but this route was created and maintained solely by the passage of vehicles and thus must be considered a "way." An improved gravel road has been built atop one of the primitive "ways" to access a drilling site east of Willow Creek Rim. Like the roads found within Adobe Town WSA, this road is a "temporary intrusion" that will need to be fully reclaimed

when the well site is abandoned. For the purposes of this report, this road has been excluded from the proposed wilderness via a "cherry-stem." Overall, this area still possesses a high degree of naturalness, with outstanding solitude and limitless recreational possibilities. It is bounded to the east by the Willow Creek Reservoir gas field.

"In the region of Church Buttes outliers of the Bridger group constitute detached bodies rising above the Plains in the most picturesque forms, eroded in the characteristic bad-land shapes; domed mounds and buttressed blocks remind one of a variety of architectural designs."

-Clarence King, Geologist, *Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel,*

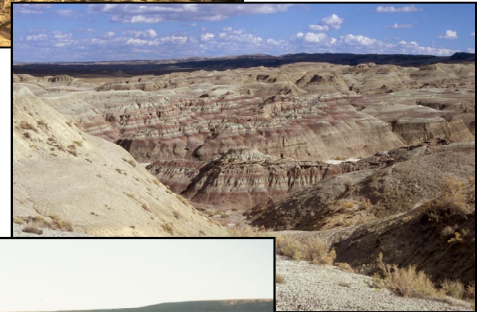
Below: Palisades of the Willow Creek Rim. Inset: The badlands east of the Willow Creek Rim come alive with blossoms during spring. *BCA photos*



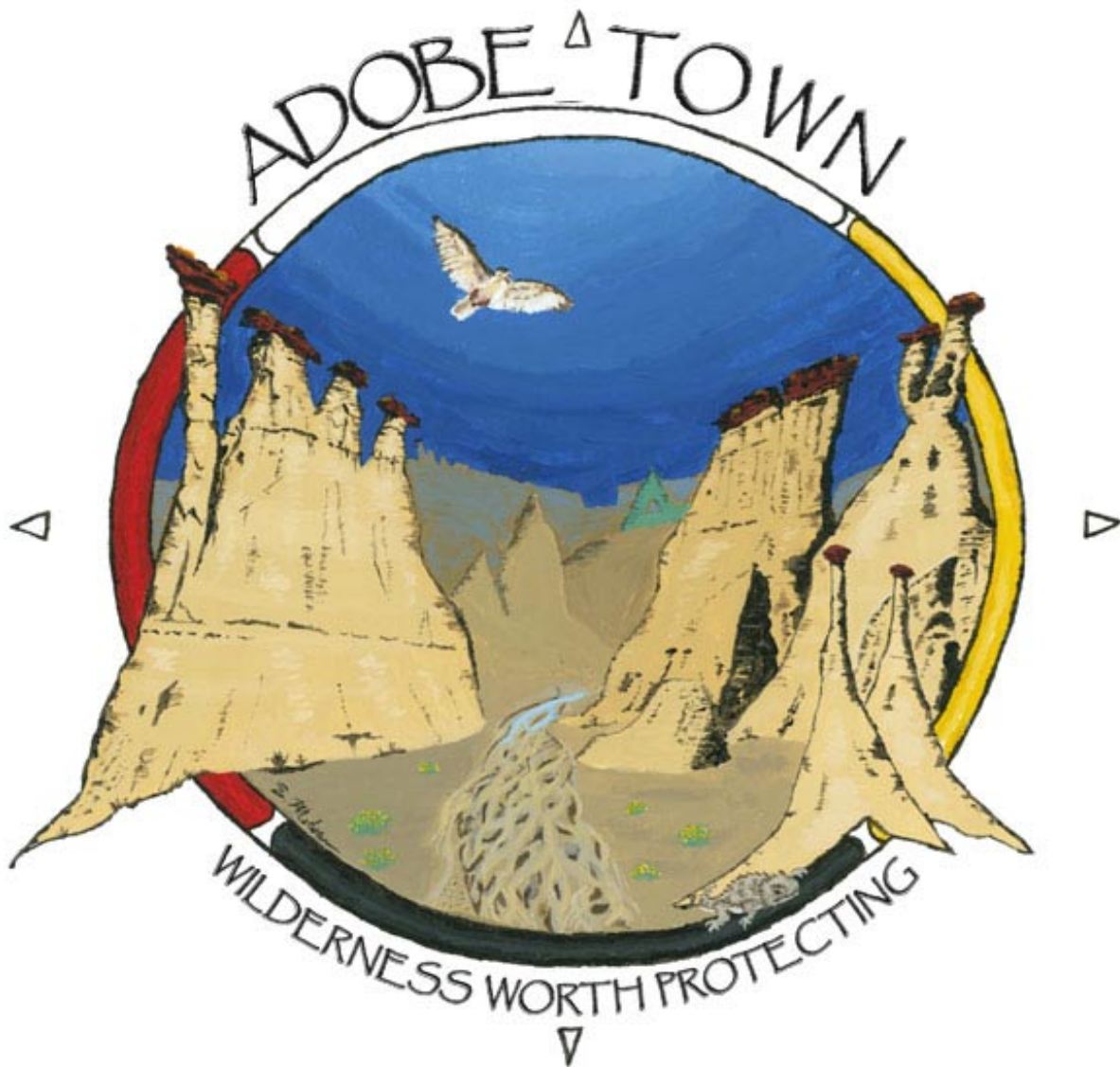
The Powder Rim Addition

The Powder Rim is a broad swell of high country that rises at the south end of the Washakie Basin. It is robed in a mix of juniper woodland and sagebrush meadows, and provides nesting habitat for sage grouse. The northern side of the rim slopes down into the Skull Creek basin, where it is dissected into clay badlands. The vast, old-growth juniper woodlands of the Powder Rim are home to 9 of the 10 juniper obligate songbirds found in Wyoming. These birds include such Wyoming rarities as the Scott's oriole and blue-gray flycatcher. This area provides perhaps the finest opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in a juniper woodland setting available in Wyoming.

This area apparently escaped the BLM's 1970s-era Wilderness Intensive Inventory entirely, even though it possesses all of the required attributes. In 2002, BLM agreed that this unit possesses the full complement of wilderness attributes and committed to studying its protection under the Great Divide plan revision. The protection of this unit would secure the viewshed from the southern end of the Skull Creek Rim from degradation.



Sequentially from top: Old-growth juniper in the Powder Rim proposed wilderness addition; Badlands at the base of the Powder Rim; juniper woodlands of the Powder Rim; View north to the Skull Creek Rim. *BCA photos*



“Many of the spires take on strange life-like forms - stone sentinals (sic) frozen in time standing guard over their silent desert domain. Walking amidst groups of these strange spires gives one the eerie feeling of being watched - by beings who have witnessed the evolution of Adobe Town for millennia.”

“Contrast between colors, sunlight and shadows, and landforms is increased creating enormous vistas...”

“Although similar landforms are found elsewhere in southern Wyoming, these are perhaps the most outstanding example, a factor which contributes to the uniqueness of the area.”

-Bureau of Land Management, *URA Step III (Present Situation)*, early 1970s