

## DEEP BENEATH THE DIRT

The Medicine Lodge site has long been known for its Indian petroglyphs and pictographs, but not until 1969 did the full archaeological wealth of the site come to light. In that year, Dr. George Frison, then Wyoming State Archaeologist, began a series of digs that uncovered a human habitation site that had been continuously occupied for more than 10,000 years. Medicine Lodge has thus become a key to the interpretation of the archaeology of the entire Big Horn Basin Area.

The archaeological investigation involved digging through approximately 26 feet of soil and rocky sediments, discovering over 60 cultural levels spanning some 10,000 years of human occupation. This important aspect of the site enables the archaeologists to examine particular lifestyles and to study how they changed over time. Some of the material items found during the dig included fire pits, food storage pits, manos and metates (grinding stones), and projectile points.

The information gleaned from the archaeological study has provided interpretive insight into the life of this area's inhabitants throughout the years. Interpretive signs located at the base of the petroglyph cliff give an overview of the information accumulated by the archaeologists. They also explain that some of what you see at Medicine Lodge Creek is part of long term archaeological research by Dr. George Frison. This includes investigations at several other rock shelters in nearby Paintrock and Medicine Lodge canyons, and at several quarry sites where raw materials for prehistoric stone tools were obtained.

Frison has also conducted major excavations at the Colby site near Worland and the Hanson site near Shell. Results from this research have been published in Frison's 1978 book, "Prehistoric Hunters of the High Plains," and several other professional articles and books.



Data from all of these sites are being used to reconstruct different aspects of prehistoric life and settlement systems ranging from those of the 11,000-year-old Paleoindian to the historic Crow Indians who lived in the area.

Analyses of stone artifacts, flaking debris, seed, bones, pollen and charcoal from the site, as well as aspects of the local geology and site stratigraphy, are all used to reconstruct the past. For example, bones found in a site can be used to determine a particular time of the year the site was occupied.

One interesting find was the recovery of rodent, deer and bird bones, which appeared to be refuse from a cooking pit. Dated at about 9,500 years old, this discovery greatly increased our knowledge about some of the earliest Americans, who were traditionally thought to have been only big-game hunters.

A new book, "Medicine Lodge Creek: Holocene Archaeology of the Eastern Big Horn Basin, Wyoming, Volume 1," edited by Dr. George C. Frison and Dr. Danny N. Walker, discusses the basic archaeology, artifact analyses, floral remains, faunal remains, rock art, geology and obsidian sourcing of the Medicine Lodge site. The book is available through the University of Wyoming bookstore at [www.uwyobookstore.com](http://www.uwyobookstore.com) or by contacting Joyce Smith at (307) 766-3264 or [jsmith@uwyo.edu](mailto:jsmith@uwyo.edu).

## PARK RULES

- Obey signs, traffic barriers and speed limits
- Motorized vehicles shall be operated only on roads, trails or areas designated for such use. A valid driver's license or learner's permit is required.
- Use of firearms and fireworks is prohibited.
- Camping in designated camping sites is restricted to one camping unit (tent, travel trailer or motor vehicle designed for camping) plus two licensed vehicles (car or boat, RV trailer) plus a maximum of 10 people (immediate family members, kids, grandparents, etc. of permit holder) may exceed this number.
- Camping is permitted for a maximum of 14 consecutive days. Valid camping permits are required.
- Quiet shall be maintained in all camping areas from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.
- All pets must be kept on a leash
- Fires are permitted in provided fireplaces/grills and must be extinguished before leaving.
- Glass containers must be used in vehicles or camping structures.
- Fishing and boating are permitted subject to the regulations of the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission
- No fishing within 20 yards of any boat ramp/dock or designated beach area
- Park dumpsters are for park refuse only - litter and trash must be disposed of in provided containers.
- A complete list of rules and regulations is available at the Park office.

## RESERVATIONS

Reservations can be made by calling the reservation center at 877-996-7275 or going online to [www.wyo-park.com](http://www.wyo-park.com). Reservations can also be cancelled online, but other changes must be made through the reservation center

WYOMING STATE PARKS, HISTORIC SITES & TRAILS

# Medicine Lodge



For early Paleo-Indians, Medicine Lodge provided food, water and shelter. Now it is a destination for those seeking relaxation and recreation.

## ARTS. PARKS. HISTORY.

Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources

*Medicine Lodge State Archaeological Site is administered by the Division of State Parks and Historic Sites, Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.*  
<http://wyoparks.state.wy.us/>

## HISTORY

Homesteaded over 100 years ago by B.F. Wickwire, the Medicine Lodge Wildlife Habitat Management Area consists of some 12,100 acres. It was purchased from Harry and Sadie Taylor in 1972 by the Wyoming Game & Fish Department to insure adequate winter range for the extensive elk herd that summer in the Big Horn Mountains. The sale also guaranteed protection of valuable mule deer and trout habitat and provided recreational access to surrounding federal lands.

In 1973, the Wyoming Game & Fish Department and what was then the Wyoming Recreation Commission entered into a cooperative agreement to develop, administer and interpret that small portion of the Habitat Area known as Medicine Lodge State Archaeological Site. The site includes approximately 30 camping spots with fire grills, picnic tables and vault toilets, as well as a visitor center and a nature trail.

## WILDLIFE HAVEN/HEAVEN

Within a 12-mile radius of Medicine Lodge five distinct vegetation zones can be found, ranging from the desert basin to the big mountain meadows. These environments, in conjunction

with the availability of water, has provided this area with a veritable “Noah’s Ark” full of animals. Coupled with easy access to the area by the public makes Medicine Lodge one of the finest wildlife viewing areas in the state of Wyoming.

Mammals, such as the mule deer, jack rabbit, cottontail rabbit and marmot, can be seen in abundance. There is also an excellent chance to see beaver, mink, fox, coyote, weasels, badgers, prairie dogs, porcupine, white-tailed deer, elk, bobcat, mountain lion and smaller mammals including mice, moles, muskrats, packrats and bats.

There are over 100 species of birds that can be seen at one time or another. Reptiles are not as abundant, but there are several snake species, including rattlesnakes and two types of lizards. Fishing is excellent, with good populations of both Brown and Brook trout. As for insects there are plenty, from butterflies and beetles to grasshoppers and ant lions. Medicine Lodge is even home to a few scorpions.

