



Crow Tipi Village A. Wolf

Activity 2 History - The Power of a Story

Trails Through the Years By Christy Fleming

The Bad Pass Trail, marked by rock cairns, weaves its way along the rugged western edge of Bighorn Canyon, from the mouth of the Shoshone River to the mouth of Grapevine Creek. One may guess from its name that the Bad Pass trail was not an easy trail. It was better than the alternatives of crossing the mountains or the dangers of possibly drowning in the untamed waters of the Bighorn River coursing through the canyon. The Crow told stories of evil spirits that resided in the canyon, serving as an additional deterrent to river travel.

Native people walked and camped along this trail for 10,000 to 12,000 years while traveling to the buffalo plains. Early trappers and traders such as Jim Bridger and Jedediah Smith used it to transport furs to St. Louis, avoiding the dangers of floating the Bighorn River. Later ranchers and settlers used the trail to get to their property on the Dry Head. As the settlers started to use the Bad Pass Trail, foot and horse traffic turned to freight wagons and then to vehicles. This

was still not an easy trip. It was a well known fact by those that drove along the trail, that they should always carry a tire repair kit with them as they were almost guaranteed at least one flat tire along the way.

Today the park road follows closely the original path of the Bad Pass, some times following over the top of it. If this trail could talk it would have years of stories to share. The stories of adventure have now turned to stories of wildlife viewing and recreation. As the years go by more stories will be added and others will study them. Who knows, maybe someday in the future, students will be studying our impact on the Bad Pass Trail.

How the Canyon got its Name



Social Studies, Language Arts, Reading, Speaking and Listening

Standards:	Wyoming Social Studies: Standard 4, Benchmark 1 & 3 Standard 5, Benchmark 4 Wyoming Language Arts: Standard 1, Benchmark I – B & C Standard 2, Benchmark II – B 1 through 3 Standard 3, Benchmark 1 through 5 Montana Social Studies: Standard 1, Benchmark 1 & 2 Standard 4, Benchmark 3 Montana Reading: Standard 4, Benchmark 4 Montana Speaking and Listening: Standard 2, Benchmark 1 & 2 Standard 3, Benchmark 1 through 4 Standard 4, Benchmark 3
Duration:	On Site Visit - 45 min. walk along part of the Bad Pass Trail Off Site Visit – This may need a couple class periods for research and presentation time
Class Size:	Any

Objectives

As students of history, we can learn a lot about different areas from legends and stories that are passed down through generations. After reading *The Legend of Big Metal* students will:

1. Understand how Bighorn Canyon came to be named.
2. Discover other myths, legends, or stories that were behind the naming of other landmarks in their area.
3. Will interview and retell a story told to them by a family member.

Vocabulary

Absaroka: The real name for the Crow. French explorers thought this word meant large black bird which they interpreted as crow.

Myth: Stories of fictions or half truths forming part of the ideology of a society or culture.

Legend: An unverified popular story handed down from earlier times.

Story: The narrating or relating of an event or series of events, either true or fictitious.

Precarious: Dangerously lacking in security or stability.

Perpendicular: At right angles to the horizontal; vertical.

Setting the Stage

Discuss the difference between myth, legend, and stories. How do these stories help us to learn about the history of an area? Can stories change over time?

Procedure:

On Site

1. Listen as the ranger tells stories about the people that lived in Bighorn Canyon.
2. Imagine yourself traveling through Bighorn Canyon as a Native American, a Mountain Man, or early settler and write a journal about what you might have experienced.

Off Site

1. Ask a relative to tell a story about your family and retell it to your class. Discuss why it is historically significant to your family's history.
2. Find a building or landmark that has an interesting name and try to find out how it got its name.

How the Canyon got its Name Cont.



Social Studies, Language Arts, Reading, Speaking and Listening

Closure: As a class, review the story of Big Metal and how it relates to the stories told either in each student's journal, the stories told to the students by family members, or the stories on how areas were named. Do the stories have any similarities? What is the importance of story telling?

Additional Activities

1. The class could put together a booklet of their family histories.
2. Have students stand in a line. Whisper something in the first student's ear and then have them relay it and see how it turns out in the end. Relate that to how stories can change over time.
3. Teachers could invite a representative from the local historic society to share stories about their area with the students.

The Legend of Big Metal Crow Legend

*But it is the country itself
and the deeply-rooted
history of the people,
who call this land home,
which casts a spell over
those who would let it.
For this is the Bighorn
and as the Bighorn, it
shall endure.*

According to Crow Legend, the name Bighorn must endure, for should the name Bighorn ever leave the water, the Crow people would be no more. Due to the legend of Big Metal, Bighorn Canyon, the water of the lake and the river will forever be called Bighorn.

In the days soon after the Crow came to this area, a boy and his stepfather went hunting. While the boy was looking over the edge of the canyon, the stepfather pushed him. The boy disappeared from view. The cruel stepfather returned to the village and “reported” the incident. There was no point searching. The mother and his relatives mourned.

However, the boy was safe; his fall broken by an outcrop of cedars. There he was on his precarious perch with no possible way of getting out or off the nearly perpendicular wall. Even human help would be impossible. Here he waited, hoped, cried and prayed. On the fourth day his prayers were answered. He heard clicking of hooves and heard a voice saying, “My child, I have heard your cries and I have pity for you. I have come to rescue you. You must do as I tell you and do not be afraid.” A huge Bighorn Sheep came and eased up below him and instructed the boy to get on its back and hold on to its horns. He was told to close his eyes and not to open them until told to do so. And when he opened his eyes, he was on top of the canyon on level ground. There were seven bighorn sheep around him, and one of them spoke and said, “I am the chief of sheep. I am called Big Metal.” Big Metal was a magnificent creature with horns and hooves of glistening metal and the hooves rang like metal when he walked around. He gave the boy his name and powers. In turn the seven sheep gave the boy a power that each possessed; wisdom, sharp eyes, keen hearing, great strength, strong heart and sure-footedness. They then gave him a warning:

“We seven rule these Bighorn Mountains. That river down there in the bottom is the Bighorn River. Whatever you do, don’t change its name. It shall be know as the Bighorn River. If you ever change the name of the river, there will be no more Absaroka (Crow). The Absaroka will be no more.”

Other animals then gave the boy “the right to practice their powers by calling upon them.” Among these gifts was knowledge, which was given by the badger. This clever creature taught

the young boy how to construct a sweat lodge and told him to build it when he returned to his village.

Upon seeing the boy return to the village, the stepfather fled as the young boy’s mother wept. Big Metal told his people about the bighorn sheep and gave them the warning which the sheep had given to him. Following the badger’s instructions, Big Metal built the sweat lodge and taught his people how to do the same.

When Big Metal grew into manhood, his people observed that he had “unusual powers – keen eyes, a fine sense of humor, a sharp mind. He was physically very active and strong. . . He became a good warrior.” Big Metal outlived four generations and before he died he told his people, “he desired to be buried next to the Bighorn River, because his fathers, the bighorn sheep, would come for him.”

One day Big Metal wrapped his blanket about himself and died. In accordance with his wishes, Big Metal was buried on the east side of his beloved Bighorn River about two miles above the mouth of Rotten Grass Creek.

Today thousands of visitors come to Bighorn Canyon drawn by the waters of the lake and the river. But it is the country itself and the deeply-rooted history of the people, who call this land home, which casts a spell over those who would let it. For this is the Bighorn and as the Bighorn, it shall endure.

Bad Pass Today, Scavenger Hunt



Student Handout

What makes the Bighorn Canyon Area so Special?

What has changed since the Native Americans and the Mountain Men traveled along the Bad Pass Trail?

Contemplate these questions while traveling through Bighorn Canyon.

Below are a few sites you may see:

- 1. Bighorn Lake:** Bighorn Lake was once a river flowing across a level plain, but over thousands of years the river cut into the earth while the mountains were pushed upwards. The green color of the lake is from the algae in the water.
- 2. Bighorn Sheep:** Nearly lost to this area, the bighorn sheep returned in the early 1970's.
- 3. Rock Cairns:** Rock cairns are rock piles that mark the Bad Pass Trail.
- 4. Wild Horses:** The Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range was the first in the U.S.
- 5. State Boundary Signs:** Watch for the Wyoming and Montana boundary signs that tell you that you're leaving one state and entering another.
- 6. Devil Canyon Overlook:** From this spot, 1000 feet above Bighorn Lake, you can see the trail tracings of wild animals and look for birds of prey.
- 7. Tipi Rings:** In the canyon area you may be able to find rings of stones that indicate where a tipi once stood. The stones held down the lower edge of the tipi and kept the wind from blowing into the tipi.
- 8. Cottonwood Trees:** Alongside the creeks in the area are the "old growth" cottonwood trees that mark the path of the streams. Because of their deep tap roots, these trees can survive in harsh desert environments.