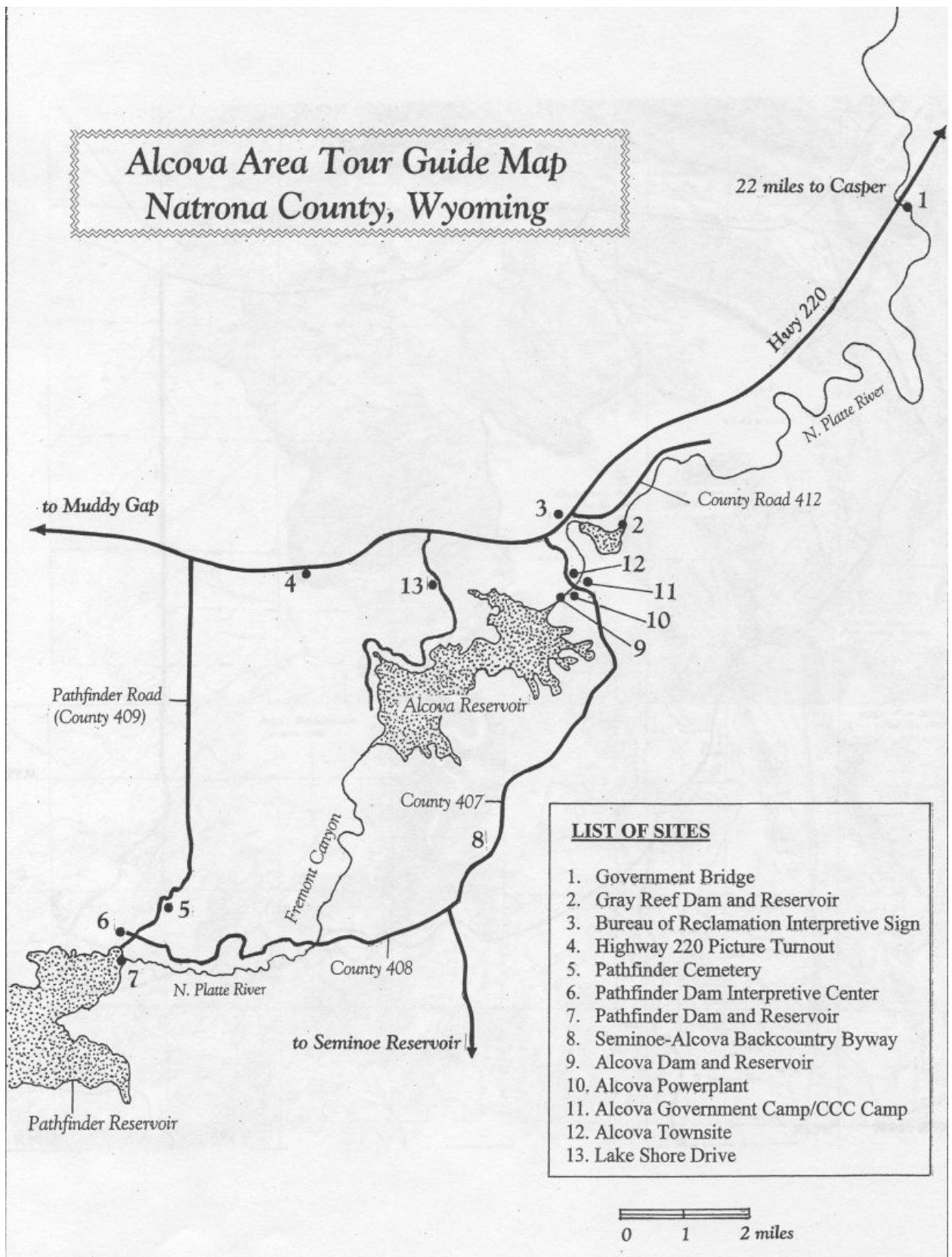


Alcova Area Tour Guide Map Natrona County, Wyoming



LIST OF SITES

1. Government Bridge
2. Gray Reef Dam and Reservoir
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12. Alcova Townsite
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0 1 2 miles

Welcome to the Alcova Area Tour Guide. Once an arid, almost desert-like region, massive irrigation projects from the early 1900s have transformed the landscape, providing precious water to farmers and attracting thousands to the recreational possibilities of three interrelated reservoirs -- Alcova, Pathfinder, and Gray Reef.

Stop 1: Government Bridge

How to find it: Government Bridge is located between Casper and Alcova. It spans the North Platte River about 22 miles southwest of Casper on State Route 220, a few miles southwest of the junction of Route 487.

About the site: Although the bridge is not related to the overall theme of early water projects, it is an interesting historic site in its own right. This steel twin-span riveted Warren "through truss" bridge was built in 1923-1924. The State Highway Department referred to it at the time as the Alcova Bridge. The contract was awarded to the Missouri Valley Bridge and Construction Company, one of the major Midwestern bridge manufacturers that contracted with counties and states for mass produced bridges. The bid was \$48,341, and Natrona County was responsible for \$22,500. This 1924 bridge replaced an earlier one known as the Government Bridge and retained the same name, which is shown on the current USGS quadrangle map. In the 1960s, the truss bridge was abandoned when the highway department constructed the current alignment and modern steel and concrete bridge in use today. The bridge is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places because of its importance to early-1900s transportation in Natrona County, and because it represents a significant engineering achievement due to its length and the use of modified through truss spans and the polygonal top chord. This type of construction is not common to a Warren through truss and appears to be the only example of such a bridge in Wyoming.

Stop 2: Gray Reef Dam and Reservoir

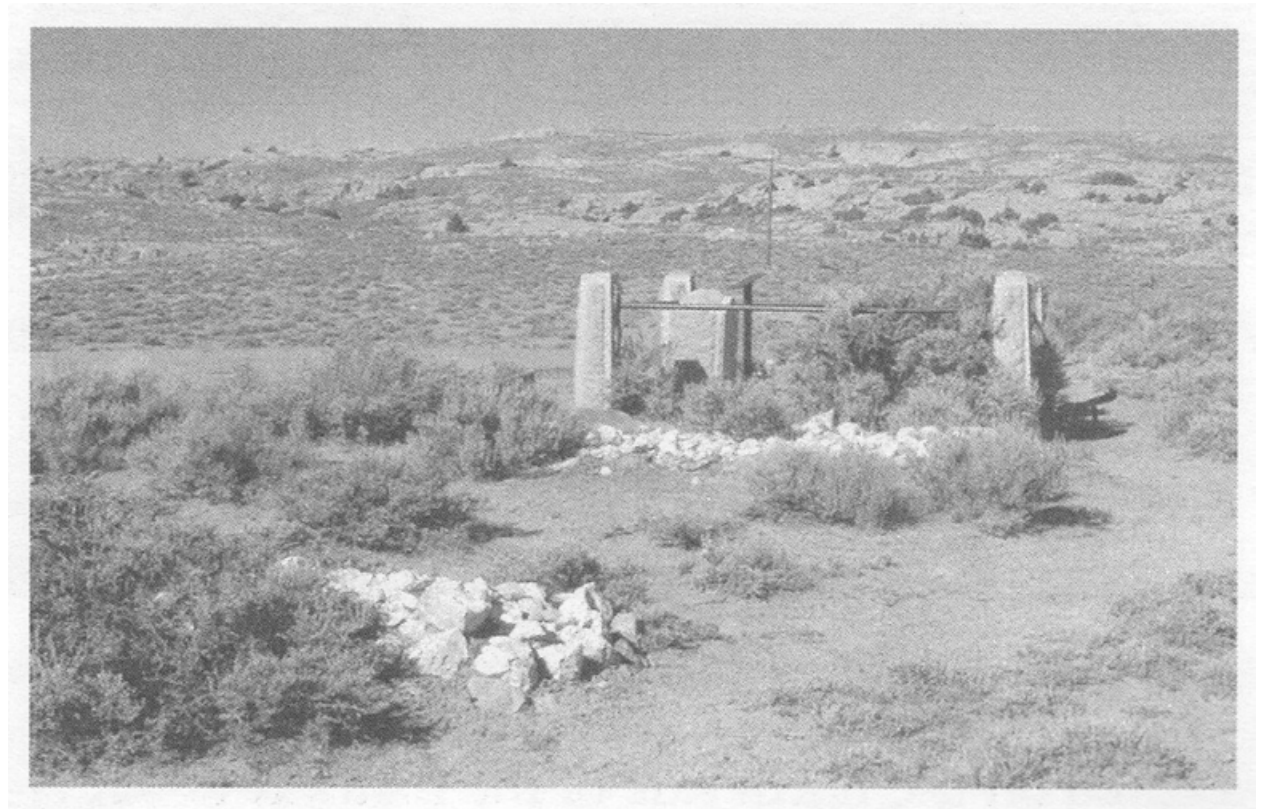
How to find it: From State Route 220, turn east onto County Road 412 about 29 miles southwest of Casper. The turn is about .5 mile northeast of the junction with the road to Alcova and is marked with a sign to Gray Reef Reservoir, which is .7 mile from the highway and 2 miles downriver from Alcova Dam. About the site: Gray Reef is a relatively recent addition to the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program and was built to regulate rather than store water. It is part of the Glendo Unit, which also includes Glendo Dam, Reservoir, and Powerplant farther down the North Platte River southeast of Douglas, and the Fremont Canyon Powerplant. The Glendo Unit provides irrigation, power generation, flood control, fish and wildlife enhancement, recreation, sediment retention, pollution abatement, and improvement of municipal and industrial water supply in the North Platte River Valley between Gray Reef Dam and Glendo Reservoir.

Stop 3: Bureau of Reclamation Interpretive Sign

How to find it: An auto pullout is located on the north side of the highway about .4 mile (2000 feet) east of the junction with the road to Alcova. About the site: The Bureau of Reclamation has placed a large interpretive sign with map that explains the general purpose of the overall reclamation project. It is an informative overview of the three reservoirs (Gray Reef, Alcova, and Pathfinder).

Stop 4: Highway 220 Picture Turnout

How to find it: An auto pullout is located on the south side of Highway 220 about 4 miles west of the junction with the road to Alcova and about 2 miles west of the Lake Shore Drive turnoff. Construction on Gray Reef Dam began in 1959 and completed in 1961. It is an earthfill structure with a height of 36 feet, a crest length of 650 feet, and contains 40,000 cubic yards of material. The spillway consists of a concrete chute near the center of the dam controlled by two 35x20-foot radial gates; capacity is 20,000 cubic feet per second. No power is generated at this site. The reservoir has a total capacity of 1,800 acre-feet with a surface area of 182 acres. It is operated in order to re-regulate widely varying water releases from the Alcova Powerplant of the Kendrick Project, providing river flowage with a minimum of daily fluctuation. Because of its function as a re-regulating reservoir, the water surface elevation of Gray Reef varies widely from nearly full to nearly empty on a daily basis, and therefore no fish are stocked in the reservoir. A barrier-free fishing pier, restroom, and primitive campground are located below the dam, where fishermen can find brown trout, cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, and walleye. About the site: Although the signboard is missing, this is a good photo point and offers an overall panorama of Alcova Reservoir to the southeast.



Stop 5: Pathfinder Cemetery

How to find it: About 5.8 miles west of the road to Alcova and 1.8 miles west of the picture turnout, turn south on County Road 409 (Pathfinder Road), a good blacktop road. Drive about 6 miles due south; the cemetery is located on the east side of the road.

About the site: A metal fence anchored with concrete posts encloses one of the graves and also contains a small plaque, erected in 1990, which is inscribed: "Pathfinder Cemetery. Seven grave sites dating from 1905 to 1912 are located in this tiny cemetery. Barney Flynn and Clint Moore, workers on Pathfinder Dam, died February 9, 1912 in a construction accident. Five men were working on the concrete ladderway on the south side of the canyon when a tram cable directly above them gave way. As the cable fell it knocked the men from their scaffolding to the bottom of the canyon killing them. The other graves are of residents of the area. The farthest to the right is that of infant Leslie Wolf(e) who died from eating poison meant for coyotes."

Although original dam construction was completed by 1909, it was modified several times between 1910 and 1997. The fatal accident occurred during the 1910-1912 modification. A local headline (February 14, 1912) reported "Five Men Killed - Broken Cable at Pathfinder Carries Workmen to their Death." The story described how a cable used to carry cement and other materials across the steep chasm broke loose from its anchorage late on a Friday afternoon; five men were killed instantly and two more were injured. The men were building a ladder on the south side of the canyon and were on the wall near the top of the canyon when the three strands at the end of the cable broke on the south bank. The general superintendent of construction and the master mechanic were standing near the end of the cable when it broke, and the strands struck them with such force that they were thrown off their feet and fell unconscious within a few feet of the edge of the canyon. Although badly injured, it appeared that they would fully recover. However, the five men who were tamping the cement were in the direct path of the broken cable, and "as it broke loose, it whipped and twisted around in such a manner that four of the men were carried off their feet and hurled to the bottom of the canyon, 180 feet below, where they struck on the rocky bed of the river and nearly every bone in their bodies was broken." The fifth man was not carried with the cable but was struck by it; he remained standing for a second where he had been working, "and turning around he leaped headfirst into the canyon ... he was alive when the other workmen reached them at the bottom of the canyon, but he was unconscious and he died in half an hour after the accident." Apparently the men were within four days of the completion of their work and "had been congratulating themselves that they were so near through with their labors and not a single serious accident had occurred." The next day the coroner held an inquest and concluded that the five men "met their death through an unavoidable accident, due to the carelessness of no one."



*Interpretive Center:
Original dam tender's residence*

Stop 6: Pathfinder Dame Interpretive Center

How to find it: Continue southwest on Pathfinder Road; a short pull-off leads to an interpretive center, which is open on a seasonal basis. Two original buildings remain onsite: a tall stone and wood frame barn and a side-gabled stone residence, which houses displays.

About the site: The two historic buildings onsite are the original dam tender's residence and the dam tender's barn. The stone house was built as the dam neared completion (ca. 1909) and was occupied by the resident dam tender for many years. In about 1980, the stone house was converted to an interpretive center, and a wood frame building from Government Camp near Alcova (see Stop No. 11) was moved to a location east of the stone/wood frame barn, so that the dam tender could continue living onsite. By the mid-1980s, it was no longer necessary to have personnel stationed at the dam. The interpretive center is administered by the Natrona County Parks Department and is open on a seasonal basis and by appointment. It houses displays and artifacts from the era of dam construction.



Pathfinder Dam today

Stop 7: Pathfinder Dam and Reservoir

How to find it: About 1000 feet to the south is another interpretive sign. A walkway leads to the breast of the dam. The general area contains walking trails, overlooks, and interpretive signs.

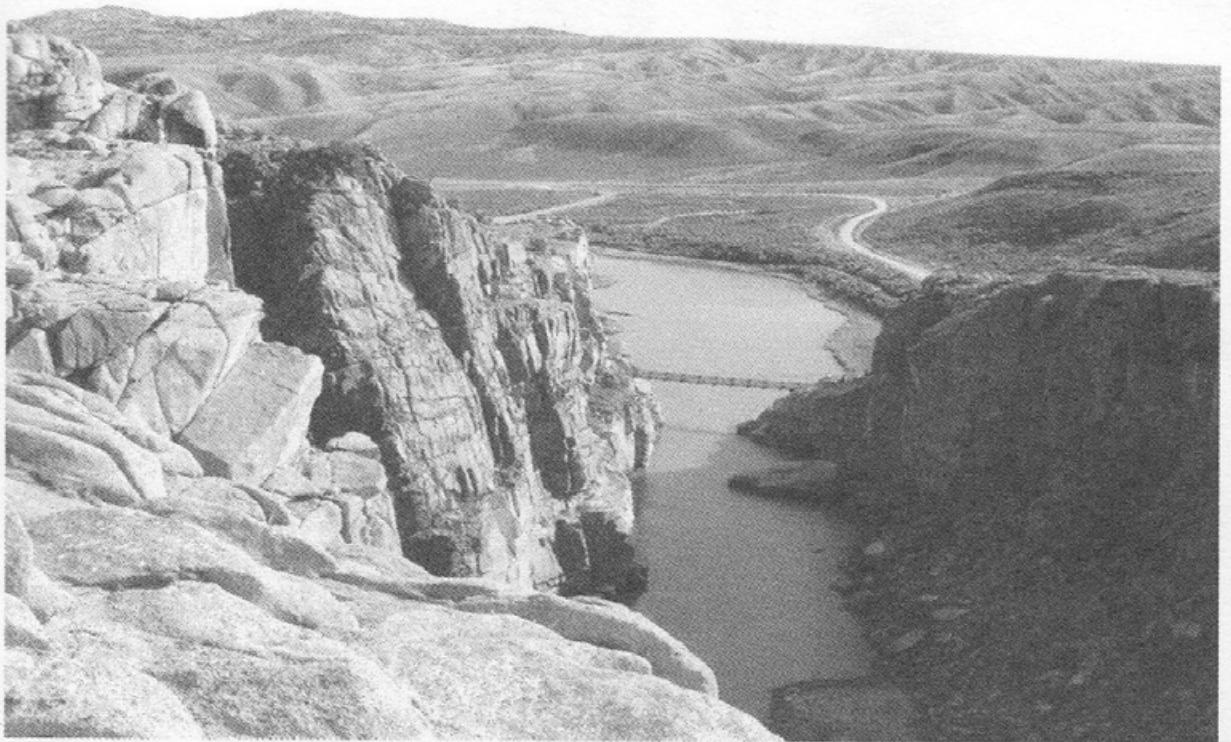
About the site: This masonry arch dam was constructed between 1905 and 1909. It was one of the two earliest large-scale dams (the other is Buffalo Bill Dam near Cody) constructed by the Reclamation Service (Bureau of Reclamation) under authorization by the Federal Reclamation Act of 1902. The dam developed the North Platte River for both irrigation water and power production. It is 214 feet high and 432 feet long and cost over \$2 million to construct. It utilized the steep-walled Fremont Canyon, which General John C. Fremont ("Pathfinder of the West") unsuccessfully attempted to navigate in 1842. The dam itself was constructed from granite that was quarried within one-quarter mile of the site, from the same formation into which the river trenched its course. One of the difficulties of construction involved transporting the huge granite blocks to the construction site. Only the facing stones were cut into rectangular blocks; the interior of the dam consists of large irregular chunks set in mortar. Most of the work required hand labor and horsepower, and other construction materials were freighted by wagon, requiring a two-day, fifty-mile trip from the railhead at Casper. One of the interpretive

signs along the dam describes the spillway, which is a natural rock spillway allowing excess water to bypass the dam, helping to ensure the dam's safety. Normally, water flows downstream through a tunnel to Fremont Canyon Powerplant to produce electricity. During the irrigation season more water is required than can pass through the tunnel. Water is then passed through the needle valves below the dam. Water first passed over the spillway in 1914. Pathfinder Dam is enrolled in the National Register of Historic Places because of its pioneering role in reclaiming arid lands and the innovative engineering required in its construction. The dam is also listed as a Wyoming Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

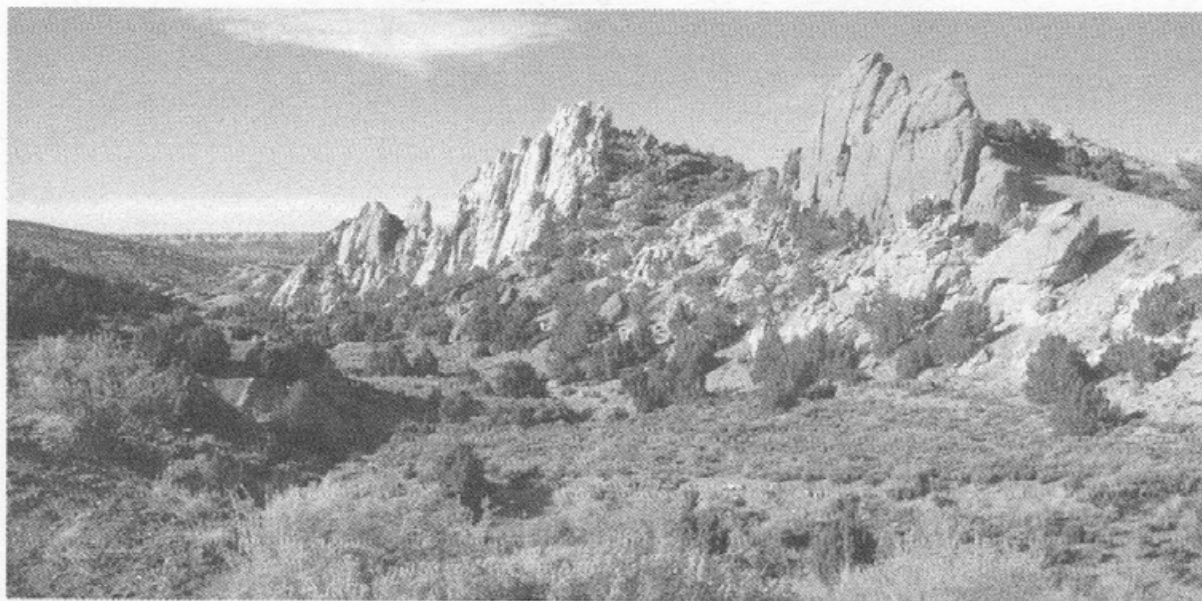
Pathfinder Reservoir was created by Pathfinder Dam with a capacity of 1,016,000 acre-feet of water. A national wildlife refuge for waterfowl is located on portions of the shores of Pathfinder Reservoir. The road continues southeast and downhill for almost a mile; a west turn at the junction leads to a parking area below the dam. A steep uphill trail leads to the dam from the parking area, and there is a footbridge nearby that spans the river below the dam.



Historic photo of Pathfinder Dam. Although this photograph is not dated, it shows several buildings, possibly a construction camp (at left) that do not appear in a 1916 photo. Therefore, this view probably was taken in the early 1910s. (Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources)



Footbridge below Pathfinder Dam



Stop 8: Seminole-Alcova Backcountry Byway

How to find it: South of Pathfinder Dam, follow a blacktop county road (408) that generally trends east and parallels the North Platte River for almost 3 miles. The road descends to Fremont Canyon, crosses the river, then leaves the river and crosses rangeland for about 3 miles. County Road 407 to Seminole Reservoir joins this road from the south; continue north for about 6 miles to Alcova Dam.

About the site: This modern county road links Pathfinder Dam and Alcova Dam. Several scenic attractions can be seen along the route, including the deep gorges of Fremont Canyon, colorful and dramatic rock formations (specifically, a hogback formation near Black Beach), and panoramic views of Alcova Reservoir. The road skirts the reservoir on the east and leads to Alcova Dam, the Alcova Powerplant, and the town of Alcova.

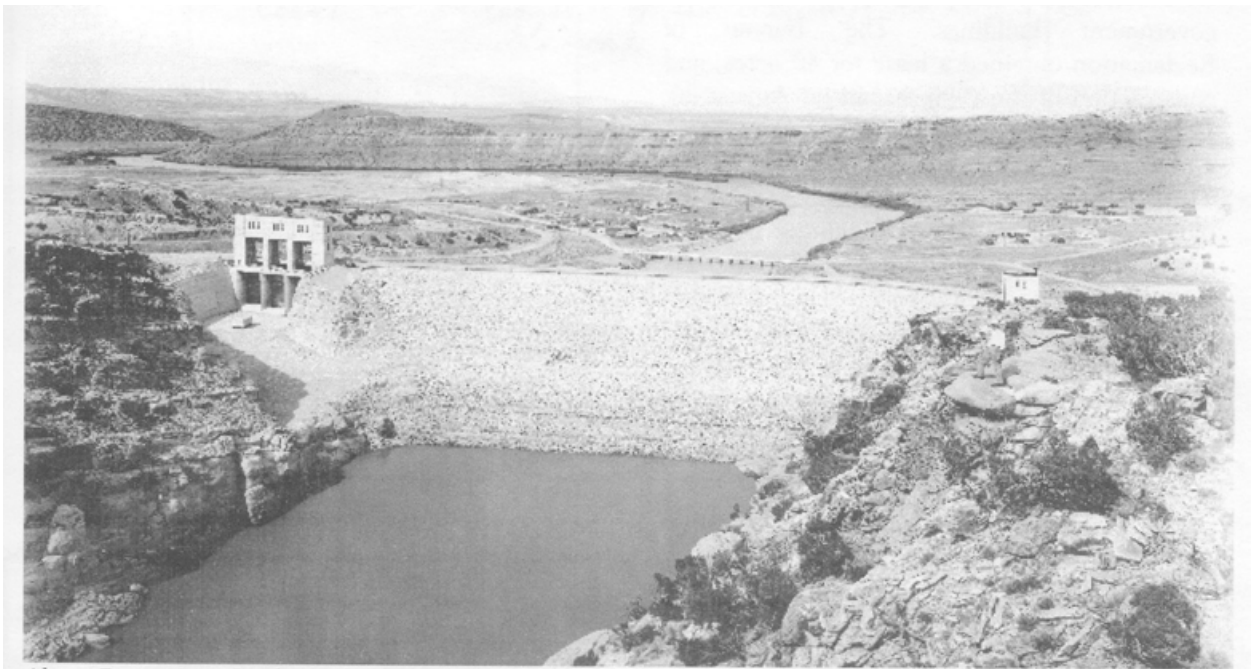
Stop 9: Alcova Dam and Reservoir

How to find it: The dam structure is located directly west of the bridge that crosses the North Platte River at Alcova. About the site: As stated in the earlier section "Making the Desert Bloom," Alcova Dam is one of the components of the Kendrick Project. Nearby and inter-related sites include Alcova Powerplant, Alcova Government Camp, and Alcova townsite, which are separate stops on the tour.

Alcova Dam is an earthfill dam located ten miles downriver from Pathfinder Dam. Construction on the dam began on August 15, 1935, and was completed and accepted by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1938. Workers constructing the dam lived in the nearby Alcova Government Camp (see Stop No. 11). The W.E. Callahan Construction Company of Dallas, Texas, was the selected bidder at \$1,482,651. A 20-foot diameter diversion tunnel was built to divert the North Platte River during dam construction. The concrete spillway was completed by November 1937. The reservoir was filled by May 1938 and

contained 125,000 acre-feet of water. The dam is 265 feet high and 763 feet long at its crest. It contains 1,635,000 cubic yards of material.

One of the functions of Alcova Dam and Reservoir is to divert water into the Casper Canal system, and the first water flowed into the canal when the laterals were completed in 1946. The reservoir serves as a forebay for the Alcova Powerplant (Stop No. 10). A higher level is maintained during the summer to provide for the Casper Canal and recreational use; the lower winter operating levels reduce the potential for ice damage to the canal gate and boat docks. The current total capacity of the reservoir is 184,208 acre-feet, of which only the top 30,606 acre-feet are active capacity available for irrigation. Alcova Dam is managed by the Bureau of Reclamation, and facilities include campgrounds, boat ramps, interpretive trails, fishing piers, shelters and restrooms. A dinosaur interpretive trail is located near Cottonwood Creek Beach.



Alcova Dam, 1941. On the north side of the North Platte River is the town of Alcova (center of photo), and on the south side of the river (at upper right) is the construction camp used by the CCC as well as by workers during the construction of the dam and later the powerplant. (Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources)

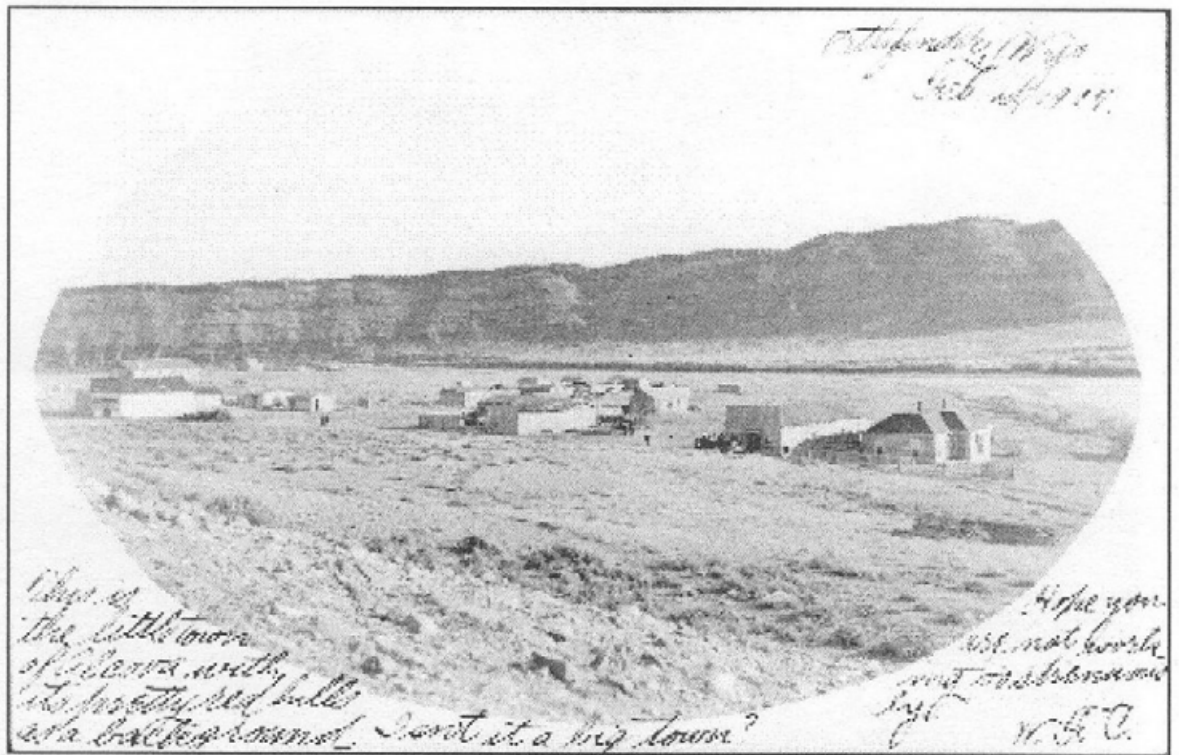
Stop 10: Alcova Powerplant

How to find it: The Alcova Powerplant is located opposite the toe of the dam on the south side of the North Platte River on the west side of the county road.

About the site: Part of the overall Kendrick Project, the powerplant was approved for construction on August 22, 1950 under the provisions of the Reclamation Project Act of 1939. The Casper Tribune-Herald announced in October 1951 that the powerplant would be unique in its use of natural hot water. Almost the entire plant would be heated by water from a nearby hot springs that flowed at rates up to 400 gallons per minute at temperatures from 100 to 115 degrees. A well drilled at one corner of the building would

tap water from the spring whose natural outlet was below the site of the plant. Savings was estimated at \$5000 per year. The Bureau of Reclamation carried out the construction between 1952 and 1955. Workers lived in the old Government Camp/CCC Camp (see Stop No. 11).

The plant uses a 165-foot drop from the reservoir to the river for power generation and consists of two units, each a 20, 700-kilowatt vertical-shaft generator driven by a 26,500-horsepower turbine. Power production began on a seasonal basis in July 1955, and after 1958 it was operated on a year-round basis.



"This is the little town of Alcova with its pretty red hills as a background. Isn't it a big town?"

(Photo of 1907 postcard, Wyoming State Archives, Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources, James L. Ehernberger Collection)

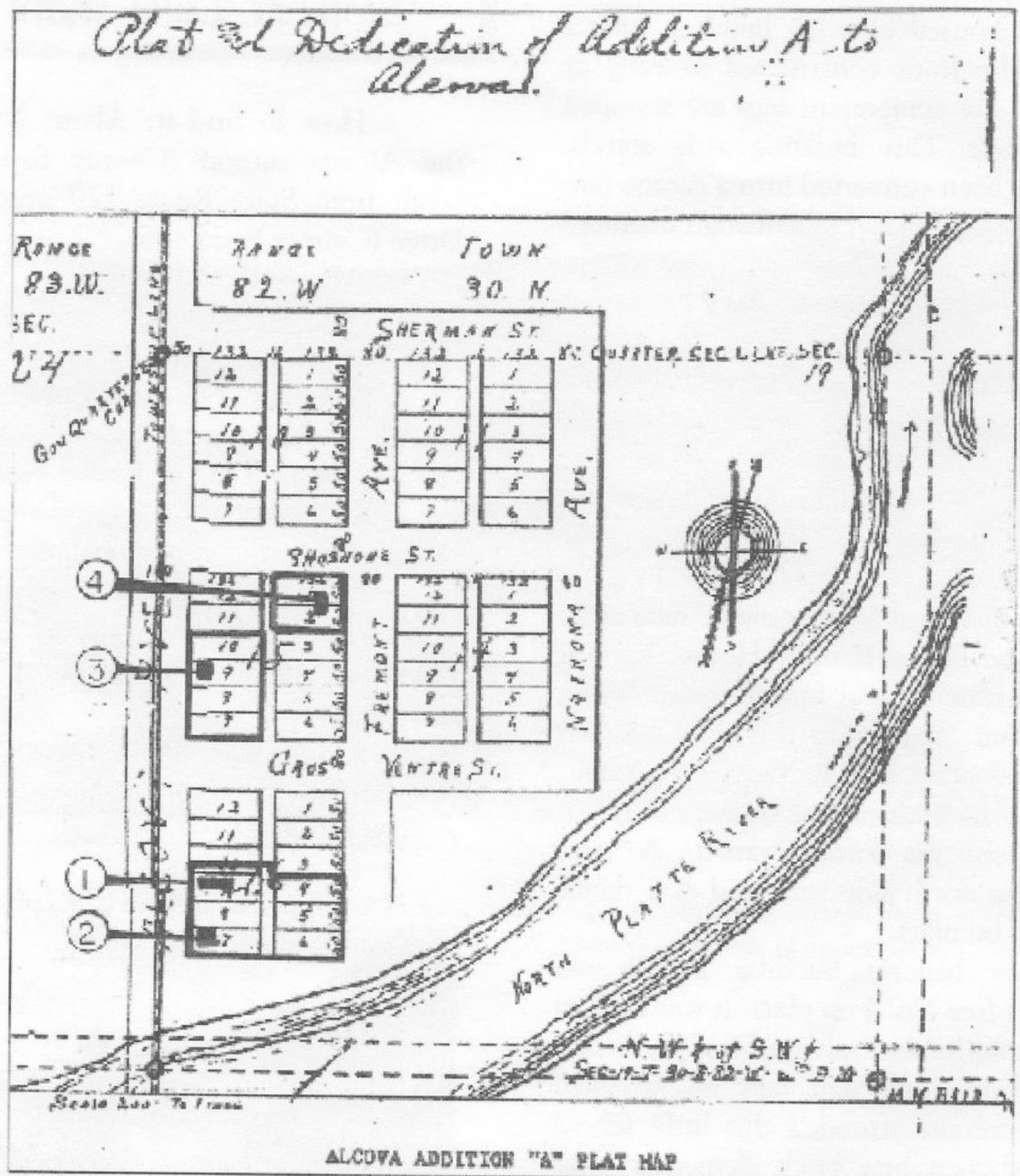
Stop 11: Alcova Government Camp/ CCC Camp

How to find it: This site is located in Alcova Centennial Park, on the south side of the North Platte River and on the east side of the county road, opposite the Alcova Powerplant.

About the site: Little remains from the bustling construction camps and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp of the 1930s and early 1940s. A side-gabled wood frame warehouse, hand-planted trees, and a curved sidewalk partially encircling the site are now part of Alcova Centennial Park. On the south side of the road opposite the park, some poured concrete foundations and scattered lumber also mark the site.

Although the Casper-Alcova Project (later Kendrick) was not officially approved until 1935, it had received preliminary approval from President Roosevelt in 1933; at that time a small camp was established near Alcova consisting of a combination field office and bunkhouse for the use of the engineering crews and inspectors. The Bureau of Reclamation continued to build a temporary residential community for the workers, generally consisting of lath-and-tarpaper dwellings. It was largely completed by 1935 and was called Alcova Government Camp. It was occupied by contractors and personnel until 1938, when the dam was completed. From 1938 to 1941, the CCC occupied an adjacent camp. Government Camp was reoccupied from 1952-1955 by workers during the construction of the Alcova Powerplant, and subsequently by workers building the Fremont Canyon Powerplant (1956-1961) and Gray Reef Dam (1958-1961). Personnel associated with the both the Alcova and Fremont Canyon powerplants continued to occupy the site during the 1960s and early 1970s. After the completion of the dam, the CCC established Camp BR-79 just east of the government buildings. The Bureau of Reclamation obtained a lease for 40 acres, and construction of the camp began on August 30, 1938. The camp was completed by October 15 and was soon occupied by about 200 enrollees. There was probably some overlapping use of the older Government Camp buildings and the newly erected CCC buildings, and it appears that after the completion of the dam in 1938, a reduced force of operations and maintenance personnel continued to occupy some of the buildings. Also, the CCC razed some of the "undesirable structures" from the original Government Camp. From 1938 until 1941, when the CCC was discontinued due to World War II, enrollees at the Alcova Camp worked on developing recreational areas adjacent to Alcova Reservoir; one of their largest accomplishments was the construction of Lake Shore Drive (Stop No. 13). Living conditions were not luxurious - inspection reports reveal that camp personnel obtained their water from a shallow well on the riverbank, the ice box was not properly refrigerated, and the subsistence store room was infested with cockroaches. Complaints concerning food were numerous. All official complaints were investigated, usually through the state's representatives, and a letter from the Office of the Director of the CCC addressed to Wyoming's Honorable John McCormack in 1939 admitted that the mess at that time was "not up to standard." During the later occupation of workers involved with the construction of the Alcova and Fremont powerplants, the camp was renovated with several new houses, a new warehouse, and a sewage treatment facility. But by 1974, the facilities were no longer needed; vacant houses were sold and moved, and by 1988, all of the buildings had been removed except for a small complex of shops at the west end. The

wood frame warehouse/shop dates from the CCC-era (1939) and is the only remaining original building.



Plat map of Alcovas (Addition A) dated 1903 by the Fremont Springs Company
(Source: Alcovas Centennial Organization 1991:14)

Stop 12: Alcova Townsite

How to find it: This old settlement is located on the north side of the North Platte River a short distance northeast of Alcova Dam. The older buildings are located near the river; modern structures are interspersed and are more common to the north, approaching State Route 220. (The site of the original hot springs has been obliterated by Alcova Dam.)

About the site: Alcova Townsite is the oldest historic site on the tour and pre-dates all of the dams, powerplants, and reservoirs. In 1891, an eastern syndicate decided to exploit the area for its hot springs and scenic locale. The name Alcova was chosen because the hot springs were situated "in a nest of coves." The Alcova Hot Springs Company platted the site on May 31, 1891, and laid out a grid of city streets and blocks on the hillside south of today's Alcova Powerplant, envisioning hotels and bathing accommodations. The healing waters of the hot springs were thought to alleviate rheumatism, arthritis, and gout. Promoters planned a daily stage from Casper; they foresaw a possible railroad connection and even a fleet of small steamers and sailboats on the North Platte between Casper and Alcova. A townsite sprang up, and a post office was established on November 18, 1892. Financial difficulties soon plagued the development of the hot springs resort. Nevertheless, developers continued to sell lots, and in 1898 new pamphlets were issued that proclaimed: "Nature with generous care having provided hot springs, climate, scenery, and raw materials sufficient to build a city that will be an honor to majesty awaits the magic and charm that will improve with modern facilities her wondrous work for the healing of mankind." These rosy visions, however, were never realized, and Alcova stagnated as a small commercial center for surrounding ranches. But in 1903, the Fremont Hot Springs Company, consisting of local developers, platted "Alcova Addition A," which is the current townsite area. By 1907, Alcova had a small scattering of dwellings and at least one major business, the Alcova Mercantile Company. This enterprise was housed in a log building with a wood frame false front constructed as early as 1896 (some of the component logs are stamped with that date.) This building still stands, although it has been converted into a garage (see No. 1 on 1903 plat). H.L. Hollenbaugh operated the Mercantile from 1903-1909 and built an adjacent log residence. It was run by a succession of owners, and at one time housed the Alcova Post Office. From 1933 to 1939 it was called the Alcova Commissary, Inc., and sold food ' automotive supplies, and fuel. The two oldest residences also remain but have been altered. One is the home built in 1907 or 1908 (see No. 2 on plat) by H.L. Hollenbaugh, who owned the Alcova Mercantile at that time. The other is the Boney Earnest House. Earnest was a pioneer rancher and frontiersman. When Pathfinder Dam was built, his Pick Ranch holdings were flooded, and he moved to Alcova in 1908. There he built a large home, using logs transported from his former ranch. A later addition on the north side was used as a dance hall (see No. 3 on plat). Another historic building is the old Alcova School (see No. 4 on plat). It was built in about 1929 from lumber salvaged from a former community dance hall and had an attached teacherage. Students attended this little school until 1954, when a new brick elementary was built on the southeast side of the river. The old school was converted into a residence. Alcova remained a quiet rural community until the mid-1930s when the Bureau of Reclamation began construction of Alcova Dam - all of a sudden, Alcova became a boom town. The adjacent Government

Camp and CCC Camp (see Stop No. 11) continued to house workers during the construction of other nearby Bureau facilities, but by the 1970s camp buildings were sold and removed. Modern facilities such as seasonal cabins have been constructed between old Alcova and the highway to accommodate boaters and fishermen.



Stop 13: Lake Shore Drive

How to find it: About 2 miles west of the Alcova turnoff (County Road 407), turn south from State Route 220 onto Lake Shore Drive (County Road 406).

About the site: This 4.5-mile winding drive along the northwest shore of Alcova Reservoir was constructed by the Alcova CCC Camp (see Stop No. 11). Enrollees worked at carving out this road between 1939 and 1941. A camp inspection report from 1940 confirms that the enrollees were engaged entirely in road construction; the report estimated that 31,200 man-days were required to complete the project. Although there are no notable stone guardrails, culverts, or retaining walls, such as those found in Guernsey State Park, there is a scenic overlook constructed with stone steps leading to a rocky promontory overlooking Alcova Reservoir.



*Men from the CCC camp at Alcova (BR-79), hand excavating high spots along Alcova Shoreline drive in 1940
(Fort Caspar Museum historic photograph, courtesy of Bureau of Reclamation)*