

Stepping Out of Bounds in Wyoming

20th AVA Biennial Convention

By Lois Petersen, Buffalo Pathfinders

The first scheduled walk for those attending the 20th AVA Biennial Convention, June 7-9 in Billings, Montana, is the William J. Mentock Trail in Buffalo, Wyoming. The 11k Mentock Trail just west of town, which is part of the more than 20-mile Clear Creek Trail System, offers a natural surface scenic walk through mostly forested areas along Clear Creek, and the opportunity to picnic in comfort along the way.

Buffalo is located at the crossroads of I-90, I-25, and U.S. Hwy 16 – the Cloud Peak Scenic Byway. The town offers the friendly, casual charm of a true Western community. During June Longmire Days, Buffalo, the setting for Craig Johnson's Longmire novels, takes on its fictional name Durant, and hosts not only the stars of the TV spin off, but also thousands of fans of the books and TV show. The show recently completed its fifth season on Netflix. Lodging options are many with a wide variety of motels, hotels and campgrounds right in town as well as guest ranches in close proximity. There are beautiful themed murals in the downtown city square, as well as a free community pool.

Buffalo is rife with history. Pioneers, outlaws, gold miners, soldiers, cowboys and Indians have all added historical relevance to the Buffalo area. In the 1800s, Chief Crazy Horse and the Lakota Indians roamed these hills and many battle fields are still evident. Since its founding in 1879, Buffalo has attracted both the famous and notorious from Teddy Roosevelt and Owen Wister to Tom Horn, Calamity Jane, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Today its history, most evident at the Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum and at the Occidental Hotel in downtown Buffalo, intermingles with quaint shops, a variety of great restaurants and the friendly people who call Buffalo their home.

Those interested in exploring more of Buffalo's Western history on foot will be happy to know there are two other AVA trails in Buffalo. The AVA-sanctioned Clear Creek Trail offers both 5k and 11k routes through not only the beautiful historic district of Buffalo, but also through lush creek-side scenery with wide open vistas of the Big Horn Mountains. Be sure and check out Fort McKinney where one of four African-American army regiments (the "Buffalo Soldiers") were stationed in the 1800s. In 1903, the remaining buildings were transferred to the State of Wyoming and became the Wyoming Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, which is still in operation today. For those pursuing special programs, this trail qualifies for the following: Amphitheaters, Bridges - Spanning the USA, Cities in Song, Doin' The Louisiana Purchase, Honoring Our Flag, National Register of Historic Places, Take a Walk In a City Park, Walking the USA A to Z. The Mountain Plains Heritage Park Trail (5k/12k) features a pioneer cabin and a look at pioneer life on the plains. This trail crosses the historic Bozeman Trail, chronicles the railroad system that helped settle the west, and encompasses a wildlife reserve. The 12k route includes a walk through Willow Grove Cemetery which marks the resting place of many local heroes.

For those attending the AVA Convention, be sure to make Buffalo and the Clear Creek Trail System your first stop – then stop again on your way home to top off your western adventure.