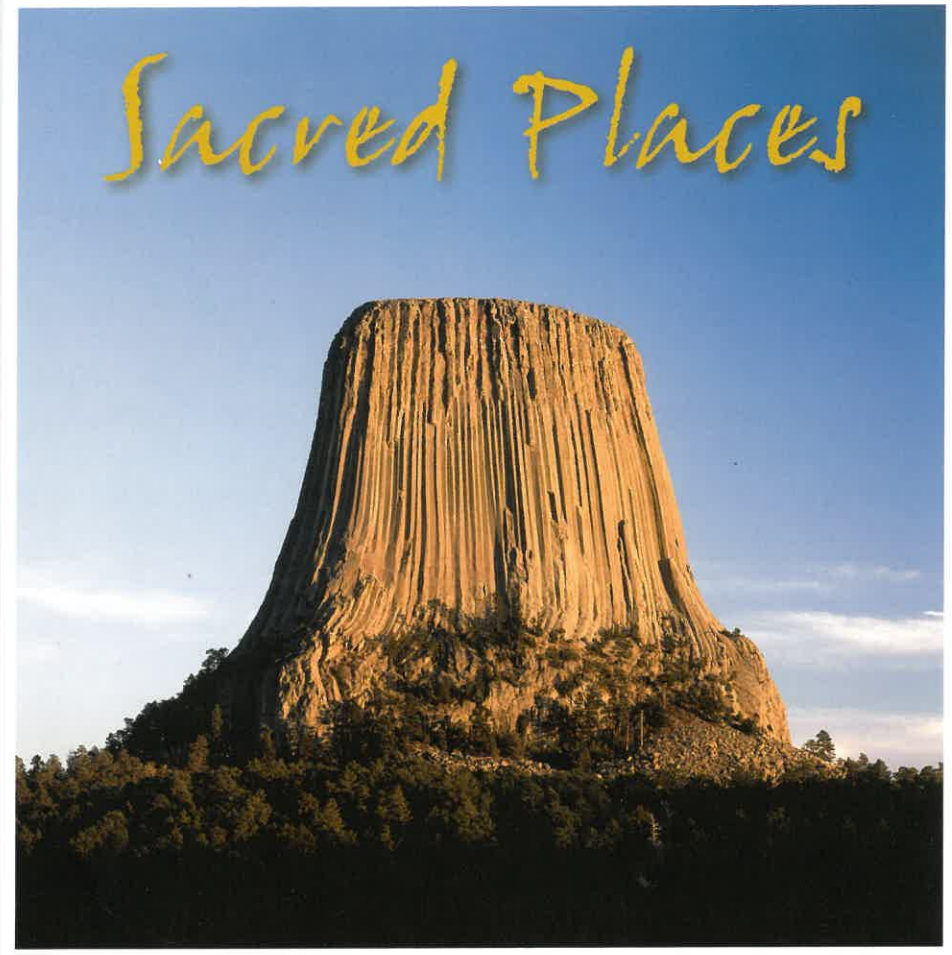
Na Kovea Tso-i-e Mato Tipi Mata Tipi Paha

Protecting Wyoming's



Wyoming Archaeology Awareness Month
September 2001

He Hota Paha wë'shaßenar Wooxe-niii-non Tso-aa

Mathōothīpila Tso-ai Niwayang Wachipi Paha Na'koo! Veē Daxpitchēe Awaasuua Tso-tsedle

When the first Paleoindians entered the Belle Fourche River valley about 10,000 years ago, they walked through a landscape of plains, rugged hills and buttes. The Black Hills and Bearlodge Mountains loomed in the east. To the north, they may have spotted a row of three strange humps, perhaps looking more like the heads of giants than hills. The huge monolith nearby, sharply etched on the skyline, would have been impossible to ignore. Fifty million years ago, massive domes of magma surged into ancient sediments, cooled and hardened. These features, what we know today as Missouri Buttes and Devils Tower, emerged as erosion carved out the hills and valleys of the modern landscape.

Rare finds of ancient stone projectile points provide testament to this first human presence around the Tower. Little is known about the lives of these ancient people. They may have hunted the grassy meadows along the river. And certainly they climbed the steep ridges to the base of the great rock itself — a portion of a finely flaked, stemmed projectile point was found embedded in the roots of a Ponderosa pine high on the talus slope of the northeast face of the Tower.

Ancient people continued to visit and live around the Tower for the next 10,000 years. Tool making left thousands of flakes of stone now hidden deep in the ground among the Ponderosa pines and the talus. Many of the tools were a part of daily life in hunting and gathering cultures — choppers, scrapers, knives, drills, spokeshaves, and hammerstones made of quartzite, chert, chalcedony and other more exotic materials, such as petrified wood and obsidian. Analysis of the obsidian shows that most of it came from the distant outcrops in what is now known as Yellowstone National Park hundreds of miles to the west. These exotic stones provide the barest hint as to the wide geographic range of the people who stopped at the Tower on their seasonal rounds. White Bull, a great Minneconju warrior and chief, spoke in 1934 about daily life at the Tower:

Sometimes, years ago, we would go to Bears Tipi and stay all winter, that is how the arrows and scraping knives came to be found there. When I was two years old [ca. 1851] I spent the winter there with the Minneconju, Itazipco, and Uncpapa bands, these bands all speak the same language. They hunted antelope, buffalo, and deer, there was also black bears and grey wolves around there. When I was fourteen years old we wintered at this place and again when I was eighteen years old. We wintered in different places around this hill each time.

The Tower evokes many strong images and metaphors, and people struck by its power carried its memory wherever they traveled in their homelands between the western mountains and across the Great Plains. To the Kiowa, who once lived far to the west, the Tower resembled the deeply furrowed stump of a giant tree and called it *Tso-aa* — Tree Rock. To others it was a great gray horn, and many thousands of years later the Lakota would call it *Mato Tipila* or Bear Lodge, because of the bears that frequented its rocky slopes.

The Tower became part of the cultural landscape that forms the essence of American Indian cultures, and memories of the Tower and its sacred usage are strong. Early in the 20th century, some Elders spoke briefly to outsiders about the Tower. Their recollections give us a sense of the Tower in the spiritual realm and the cycle of life. Sioux Elders spoke of camping for solitary vision quests and ritual purposes or entire bands coming here to worship and "because the cold winds were kept out by the hills" and because it was "fine winter country....with all kinds of animals". An Arapaho interpretation of the origins of the rock begins with a lodge camp at Bears Tipi. One Cheyenne Elder spoke of entire families who camped here while they worshiped, and another described how they fired arrows at a bear trying to climb the rock. Two Crow Elders mentioned the building of "dream houses" at the Tower, and another said, "The Indians used to throw arrows up at the Bears House by [sic] that none could throw over it."

Living in a place of worship — a sacred place with great power — is not a contradiction for many people. The line between the sacred and profane, so clearly drawn for many Europeans and Americans, has never been so distinct for American Indian people now or in the past. The original inhabitants lived in the shadow of a great provider, with rugged flanks giving commanding views of the Belle Fourche River valley and its resources, quiet sheltered meadows,

Mahdo Wakupe Aguay Za-Quid-Ipe Dabiche Asow T'sou'ä'e T'sotsedle Tso-i-e Mathōothīpi Wanāghipahā

Chan-hoo-tah-ah Mathóothì Chē Paha Tsoai

cool spring water, good stone, and a place to confront the powers of the spiritual world. Despite the tumultuous period of dispersal and confinement of the tribes to reservations, the Tower, with its dark and curious majesty, retains its potent natural and spiritual power. We now view it as a natural treasure of national importance and an icon central to the landscape of the American Indian spirit and soul.

This venerable monolithic bears silent witness to the endless circle of life around it.

For information about Wyoming Archaeology Month activities, visit our Web page at: **spacr.state.wy.us/cr/shpo/waamindx.htm**

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Photo by Richard Collier, Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office. Image used with the concurrence of the Consulting Tribes of Bear Lodge.

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Nakoevë Dakicha Ason T'sou'a'e Mato Tipila