

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED JUL 16 1976

DATE ENTERED DEC 22 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Split Rock, Twin Peaks

AND/OR COMMON

Split Rock

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

SW 1/4 SE 1/4 Section 18, T29N, R89W

CITY, TOWN

middle of road

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

Wyoming

--- VICINITY OF

CODE

56

COUNTY

Natrona

CODE

025

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER: Landmark

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

United States Government; administered by Bureau of Land Management

STREET & NUMBER

Joseph C. O'Mahoney Federal Center, 2120 Capitol Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Cheyenne

--- VICINITY OF

STATE

Wyoming 82001

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Natrona County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

City and County Building

CITY, TOWN

Casper,

STATE

Wyoming 82601

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Wyoming Recreation Commission, Survey of Historic Sites, Markers & Monuments

DATE

1967 (revised 1973)

--- FEDERAL STATE --- COUNTY --- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Wyoming Recreation Commission, 604 East 25th Street

CITY, TOWN

Cheyenne,

STATE

Wyoming 82002

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

In central Wyoming the Sweetwater River Valley and flanking mountains to the north called the Granite Range were formed by geologic forces over a long period of time. Born fifty million years ago when its metamorphic core was uparched, the Granite Range was once a link in the Rocky Mountain chain that is the north-south backbone of North America. But about fifteen million years ago the broad core of the Granite Range sagged downward several thousand feet. As a result most of the once-majestic range became lower than basins to the north and south of it, and was almost completely buried by windblown sand that accumulated to a thickness of 3000 feet. The continued sagging of the range brought about the development, ten million years ago, of Moonstone Lake--a large, shallow, briny lake that accumulated 1500 feet of sediments, some rich in uranium. Through the years and up to the present day the sediments and some of the earlier sand deposits have eroded away from the topmost peaks of the Granite Range, exposing once again the rounded knobs of granite that were buried millions of years ago.

West of the Granite Range is the Continental Divide, the backbone of the continent that snakes along the crest of the Wind River Range. East and north of the Granite Range are the Rattlesnake Hills. Paralleling the range on the south are, from east to west, the Ferris Mountains, Green Mountain, Crooks Mountain and the Antelope Hills. Except for a few major breaks such as Muddy Gap, Crooks Gap and the well-known, broad slope called South Pass, they link the southern end of the Wind River Range with the Seminoe, Shirley, Freezout and Laramie Mountains east and south. Were it not for the development of a natural gradient through the sands of ancient Moonstone Lake these various ranges would have been a formidable barrier to overland traffic during the mid-nineteenth century. But the portion of the lake between the Granite Range and mountains to the south evolved as a broad, east-west valley of gentle slopes covered with grass and sage. Cut by the serpentine, clear mountain stream called the Sweetwater, the valley contains easy slopes, fresh water, and abundant grass which attracted travelers. By pack train, wagon or handcart traveled the nineteenth century emigrant, seeking as direct a route as possible through the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. Entrance to the Sweetwater segment of that route was gained near where the trail left the North Platte River, and exit from it was made more than 100 miles west of that point, through the wide portal called South Pass.

A prominent peak in the Granite Range flanking the Sweetwater segment of that route is Split Rock (elev. 7305), located about 55 miles north of the town of Rawlins, or about ten miles north of Muddy Gap Junction. It is situated near the place where the corners of three large, Wyoming counties are joined. The summit of the rock is in Natrona County but its western slopes lap over the Natrona-Fremont county line. Three miles south of the peak is the northwest corner of Carbon County. The name "Split Rock" is derived from the deep, V-shaped notch or cleft at the summit of the peak. Geologically, the cleft is the result of the erosion of granite along old fractures and shear zones. Erosion along the fractures has removed part of the granite, leaving the prominent notch. Because it is oriented generally in an east-west direction, the notch appears as a gunsight to today's traveler using U. S. Highway 287. The appearance of Split Rock has not changed during historic times, but it was more obvious as a landmark to slower-moving, westward bound emigrants following the Sweetwater River. Those mid-nineteenth century travelers followed a route slightly different from the modern highway, one that allowed them to keep the peak in view for a full day as they approached it from the east. Looking backward it was in view for at least that long as they made their way past it, heading toward South Pass and Oregon Country.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Physical landmark
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1841-1862

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The historic significance of the geologic developments leading to the formation of the Sweetwater River Valley is that they produced a break in the Rocky Mountain chain. That break became an important part of a major, central, east-west overland route that extended from the Missouri River to and through the Rocky Mountains. Along that route--the Oregon Trail--fur trappers, goldseekers, homeseekers, merchants and troopers rode horseback or in wagons, walked, or pulled and pushed handcarts during the century that lasted from 1812 to 1912. The former date is the year the Astorians under Robert Stuart followed the trail from west to east on their journey from the mouth of the Columbia River. The latter year is said to be the one in which the last wagon train passed over the trail. Prior to 1812 portions of the trail were used by High Plains aborigines as they followed migratory herds of buffalo or other game animals, and following 1912 modes of traffic such as the railroad, automobile and airplane also followed the general corridor which was the Oregon Trail. From prehistoric times to the present the trail corridor has been used by aborigines, transcontinental travelers, or those who, like the settler, may have beaten up the dust along only a portion of it. The heaviest concentrated use of the trail came less than fifty years after it was first seen by white men in 1812. About 1850 an emigration to Oregon farms and ranches, to California goldfields and the Mormon settlements in Utah carved out wide ruts along the busiest of Western thoroughfares.

Through what is today the state of Wyoming the trail followed the North Platte River from the state line east of Torrington to Casper in central Wyoming. At a point just west of Casper the trail left the North Platte, crossed a low divide in the Rattlesnake Hills, and dropped into the Sweetwater River Valley. The valley, noted one emigrant, was a welcome relief after suffering through high wind, deep sand, alkali water and sparse vegetation.

Friday 11th (July). . .After leaving the dividing ridge between Sweet Water & Platte, we crossed a sandy plain. The wind blowing very strong it was almost impossible to proceed for the clouds of sand. The cattle suffered much & we met some on the road belonging to other companies that were left behind. Struck the Sweet Water about 4 o'clock. . . .Here one of the spires of the Rocky Mountains is seen, the hills differing in appearance and formation from any that we have yet passed. Cattle and men this evening were completely worn out. The Sweet Water was truly a pleasant sight to them. This is by far the worst day's drive we have yet had. It might not have been so had the wind not been so high, but I have noticed that it is common through all the country, from the time we struck the Platte, that high winds are frequent on the plains, in fact of almost daily occurrence. (1845 "The Diary of Jacob R. Snyder")

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Addendum

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than 10 acres *less than one*

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 3	2, 9, 2	1, 3, 0	4, 7	0, 6	0, 5, 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING			
C						

B						
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING			
D						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mark Junge, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Wyoming Recreation Commission

DATE

April 4, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

604 East 25th Street

TELEPHONE

(307) 777-7695

CITY OR TOWN

Cheyenne

STATE

Wyoming 82002

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE _____

LOCAL _____

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Paul H. Stovick

TITLE Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE May 27, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Attesting

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

12/22/76

ATTEST

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

12/20/76

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The Sweetwater Valley offered fresh water, grass that grew along the river banks and a gradual slope that led to the wide and rolling South Pass across the crest of the Rockies. In the Private Journal of Orson Pratt written in 1847 the writer provides us with his impression of the Sweetwater country.

June 22nd. . . .The mountainous aspect of the country is certainly very picturesque and beautiful. The valley of the Sweet Water varies in breadth from 5 to 8 or 10 miles, bounded upon the north and south by mountainous ridges, isolated hills, and ragged summits of massive granite, varying from 1200 to 2000 feet in height, those upon the southern boundary being the highest, and are partially covered with snow and well timbered with pine, while those on the north are entirely bare, with the exception of here and there an isolated pine or cedar in the clefts or benches of the hills. The river seems to hug the base of the hills on the north, and although its general course is to the east, its short and frequent meanderings give it a serpentine appearance; its average breadth is about 60 feet, its average depth about 4 feet, with a rapid current; its bottom consists of fine sand and gravel, while the bottom land for a few rods upon each bank generally affords sufficient grass for the emigrants; but the rest of the plain, for several miles in width, is of a sandy, barren, sterile aspect, with scarcely any vegetation but artemesia or wild sage, which seems here to flourish in great abundance, growing in places to the enormous size of 8 or 10 inches in diameter, and 8 or 10 feet in height. There is not timber upon the Sweet Water, and we are dependent altogether upon the drift wood, buffalo excrement, and artemesia, the latter burns extremely well, with a clear bright flame. In the afternoon I caught a glimpse of Wind river mountains, but the air was too smoky to discover anything but a faint blue outline.

June 23rd. . . .The Wind River chain of mountains exhibit in the distance their towering peaks whitened by perpetual snow, which, glittering in the sunbeams, resemble white fleecy clouds. (1847 "Interesting Items Concerning The Journeying Of The Latter-Day Saints From the City of Nauvoo, Until Their Location In The Valley Of The Great Salt Lake.")

As seen in the previous quotes, the Granite Range was particularly obvious to the traveler along the Sweetwater. Another testimony is in a quote taken from the Overland Journal of John M. McGlashan written in 1850.

May 23rd. . . .The country here is exceedingly picturesque, the Sweetwater winding through a valley which is four or five miles wide. On each side of the valley the mountains rise to the height of 1500 to 2000 feet. On the north broken and granite masses rise abruptly from the green sward of the river, terminating in a line of broken summits. Except in the crevices of

its summit was not a split rock but was seen as twin peaks, an interesting glimpse l'oeil. About a mile and a half south-southeast of the summit and between the Sweetwater River and a prominence in the valley called Craner Rock, is the site of the

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the rock and here and there a ledge of bench or the mountains where a few hardy pines have clustered together, these are perfectly bare and destitute of vegetation.

The range offered the traveler at least three prominent landmarks. At the eastern end of the Sweetwater Valley was Independence Rock, a large granite mass protruding from the sands of Moonstone Lake. Having the appearance of a turtle's back or perhaps a creased skull cap, the rock was a midway point in the journeys of those bound for the West Coast. It was the place at which they often arrived about July 4, in time for an Independence Day celebration. Its flinty but smooth sides also provided a register on which one could carve his name and the date. Five miles west of Independence Rock is a second Sweetwater landmark, Devils Gate. Although Oregon Trail traffic was directed a short distance away from the Sweetwater at this point, through a depression called Hell Gate, the river itself has cut a narrow gorge through the Granite Range, resulting in a canyon of no great extent, but one whose abrupt vertical walls rise impressively 400 feet from the river bed. Here also names were inscribed by passing travelers.

Fifteen miles upriver from Devils Gate is Split Rock, the last of the three granite landmarks along the Sweetwater. To some, such as pioneer photographer W. H. Jackson, its summit was not a split rock but was seen as "Twin Peaks", an interesting trompe l'oeil. About a mile and a half south-southeast of the summit and between the Sweetwater River and a prominence in the valley called Craner Rock, is the site of the former Split Rock Pony Express stage and telegraph station that was in operation in the early 1860's. The station is today gone, and has become absorbed in a ranching operation.

For a day or two following their passing of Split Rock, emigrants could look backward at the V-shaped notch as they moved up the Sweetwater Valley toward South Pass. At the base of the pass the Sweetwater country was left behind and, traveling upward, the emigrants crossed the Continental Divide, moving into the Pacific watershed and entering the long-anticipated Oregon Country. In 1849 argonaut David R. Leeper described what they encountered and thus provides this essay with an apt conclusion.

Our course now lay along the valley of the Sweetwater for about one hundred miles to the South Pass, where we crossed the great divide that separates the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The valley or gateway is from ten to twenty miles wide. The surface is undulating, occasionally mounting into hills, and the ascent so gradual that we were scarcely aware when the culmination was reached and passed. The bottoms were fairly supplied with grasses; but the uplands were dominated by the now well-nigh ever-present sage-brush. As we approached the summit, we observed several patches of snow near the roadside. A few varieties of wild flowers were

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blooming close by these lingering relics of winter, thus attesting the aptitude of Nature to respond to her environment whatever its character. When upon the summit we were seven thousand four hundred and ninety feet above sea-level, and about one thousand miles from our point of departure on the frontier. To the northward in the distance the icy crests of the sharp, craggy peaks of the Wind River Mountains were seen glittering in the sun; while far to the southward great snowy ranges lay, like cloud-billows, sleepy and dim upon the horizon.

(1849 Argonauts of 'Forty-Nine)

ADDENDUM: BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

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Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration. The Oregon Trail (American Guide Series). New York: Hastings House, 1939.

Franzwa, Gregory M. The Oregon Trail Revisited. St. Louis, Mo.: Patrice Press, Inc., 1972.

INTERVIEWS:

Paul Henderson by Mark Junge. 26 February, 1975.

JOURNALS:

Wyoming State Historical Society, "Fourth Segment of the Oregon Trail," Annals of Wyoming, LXIV, 2 (Fall, 1972) 268-286.

MISCELLANEOUS:

"At Noon We Reached Independence Rock....", A prospectus prepared jointly by the Wyoming Bicentennial Commission and the Wyoming Recreation Commission. Cheyenne, Wyoming: State of Wyoming Central Duplicating Plant, 1973, 36pp.

"Research--Trails--Oregon Trail," Vertical Files, Wyoming Recreation Commission, 604 East 25th Street, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

