

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Wyoming	
COUNTY: Park	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
AUG 14	1973

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Colter's Hell

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
On U.S. 14, 16, and 20 approximately two miles west of

CITY OR TOWN:  
Cody

STATE: Wyoming      CODE: 49      COUNTY: Park      CODE: 029

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/>	Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Occupied <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes: Restricted <input type="checkbox"/>
Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/>	Private <input type="checkbox"/>	Unoccupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Object <input type="checkbox"/>	Both <input type="checkbox"/>	Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input type="checkbox"/>
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/>	Government <input type="checkbox"/>	Park <input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Comments <input type="checkbox"/>
Commercial <input type="checkbox"/>	Industrial <input type="checkbox"/>	Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Specify) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <u>U.S. Reclamation withdrawal,</u>
Educational <input type="checkbox"/>	Military <input type="checkbox"/>	Religious <input type="checkbox"/>	<u>Highway right-of-way</u>
Entertainment <input type="checkbox"/>	Museum <input type="checkbox"/>	Scientific <input type="checkbox"/>	

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNERS NAME:  
U.S. Government

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Dept. of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation

CITY OR TOWN: Washington      STATE: District of Columbia      CODE: 08

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Park County

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Sheridan Avenue

CITY OR TOWN: Cody      STATE: Wyoming      CODE: 49

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Wyoming Recreation Commission, Survey of Historical Sites, Markers & Mon.

DATE OF SURVEY: Summer-Fall 1967      Federal       State       County       Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Wyoming Recreation Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:  
604 East 25th Street

CITY OR TOWN: Cheyenne      STATE: Wyoming      CODE: 49

STATE:  
COUNTY:  
ENTRY NUMBER: AUG 14 1973  
DATE:

## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	Excellent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Deteriorated <input type="checkbox"/>	Ruins <input type="checkbox"/>	Unexposed <input type="checkbox"/>
INTEGRITY	(Check One)		(Check One)			
	Altered <input type="checkbox"/>	Unaltered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Moved <input type="checkbox"/>	Original Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

"Colter's Hell" is an almost, but not quite, inactive geyser district. This activity has only been dwindling during historic time to its present stage of almost complete extinction, thus there are existent several accounts of its appearance during a more active and spectacular era. Colter's own descriptions, based upon his exploration of the area during his historic winter journey of 1807-1808, were entirely verbal and invariably received with skepticism. Whereupon he, in true "mountain man" fashion, proceeded to embellish facts which were already startling enough in their own right and, since his audience was usually made up of other fur traders and "mountain men", his embellishments were subjected to further aggrandizement. Therefore it becomes impossible at this late date to form a conception of how he, Colter, sincerely described all of the strange natural phenomena occurring over approximately a square mile of terrain occupying and fanning out from the mouth of the Stinkingwater River Canyon.

But another "mountain man", Joseph Meek, was there in 1830 and has left a description of the place which comes almost direct to later generations through the story of his life on the frontier as he told it to Frances Victor and she wrote it down. During the late months of the fall of 1830 Meek had been cut-off by Indians from other members of his fur brigade and in making his escape had been forced to flee deep into the interior of a region which later became the Yellowstone National Park that is so famous today. There Meek saw at least a part of the geyser fields which are now so well known as to require no description here. Meek was later able to rejoin his brigade which was having its own difficult time crossing, under severe early winter conditions, the rough Absaroka Mountain Range that separates the Yellowstone River Valley from the Big Horn Basin country. Finally the fur brigade won free and came down into the Valley of the Stinkingwater just at the "Colter's Hell" location. Which becomes a good place to take up the exact description set down by Mrs. Victor: ". . . and came upon the waters of the Stinking Fork, a branch of the Big Horn, which derives its unfortunate appellation from the fact that it flows through a volcanic tract similar to the one discovered by Meek on the Yellowstone plains. This place afforded as much food for wonder to the whole camp as the former one had to Joe; and the men unanimously pronounced it the 'back door to that country which divines preach about.' As this volcanic district had previously been seen by one of Lewis and Clark's men, named Colter, while on a solitary hunt, and by him also denominated 'hell', there must certainly have been something very suggestive in its appearance." It is necessary to read this entire chapter of Mrs. Victor's work in order to understand the full import which was that Meek, having just seen a regular geyser district in Yellowstone Park, found Colter's Hell on the Stinkingwater to be, in the year 1830, similar in formation and in spectacular displays.

One other description of "Colter's Hell" comes through the remembrances of Chief Plenty Coups of the Crow nation as he told them to Mahlon Frost and to Mahlon's young son, Ned W. Frost, the grandfather and father respectively of this writer. These remembrances concerned the Crow Chief's own childhood, during the 1840's, when his village camped above the banks

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

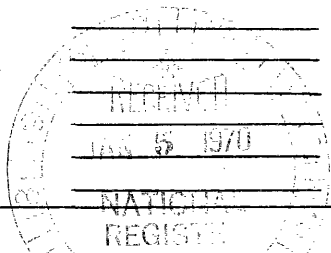
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century   
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1807

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |                                       |  |   |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Aboriginal <input type="checkbox"/>     | Education <input type="checkbox"/>    | Political <input type="checkbox"/>           | Urban Planning <input type="checkbox"/>             |
| Prehistoric <input type="checkbox"/>    | Engineering <input type="checkbox"/>  | Religion/Philosophy <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (Specify) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Historic <input type="checkbox"/>       | Industry <input type="checkbox"/>     | Science <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  | Exploration <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>     |
| Agriculture <input type="checkbox"/>    | Invention <input type="checkbox"/>    | Sculpture <input type="checkbox"/>           |   |
| Art <input type="checkbox"/>            | Landscape <input type="checkbox"/>    | Social/Humanitarian <input type="checkbox"/> |   |
| Commerce <input type="checkbox"/>       | Architecture <input type="checkbox"/> | Theater <input type="checkbox"/>             |   |
| Communications <input type="checkbox"/> | Literature <input type="checkbox"/>   | Transportation <input type="checkbox"/>      |   |
| Conservation <input type="checkbox"/>   | Military <input type="checkbox"/>     |  |   |
|   | Music <input type="checkbox"/>        |  |   |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (Include Personages, Dates, Events, Etc.)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

The significance of John Colter to the exploration of the Rocky Mountain west and to the history of that west, and Colter's niche in the nation's literature and legends are all too well-known to require detailed repetition here.

Aside from the leaders themselves and, perhaps, the Shoshone guide-woman, Sacajawea, there is no better recognized name among all of the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition than that of John Colter. And when Colter, in 1806, turned back from that expedition to spend several more years in an unknown mountain vastness he left those others after two years of exploratory travel still many hundreds of miles deep in wilderness surroundings.

Colter's place in history is chiefly based on two episodes and one attribute that made those episodes possible. The attribute was his physique; he was endowed with a physical strength equally competent for performing feats requiring great energy and speed and for withstanding the life draining fatigue of day following day of mountain - wilderness travel. Because of this attribute he was able to survive his famed historic encounter with Black Feet Indians near the Three Forks of the Missouri.

And because of this attribute he could also accomplish his solitary, winter-long fur scouting journey which led to the discovery of Yellowstone National Park. Probably this was the single episode of Colter's career which gained for him the greatest fame. But, besides discovering the region which sixty-four years later was set aside as the first and greatest of all National Parks, Colter on that journey became the first white man that can be definitely and historically pointed out as having entered the bounds of present day Wyoming. While the paths that he followed have been traced with considerable variations by several capable historians and a myriad of other "authorities" the one Wyoming location which everyone can agree that Colter reached was this place which bears his name -- "Colter's Hell". There is no doubt that John Colter when, during the fall of 1807, he stood overlooking the geyser activity below the junction of the two forks of the Stinkingwater so stood the first white man that can be definitely identified and definitely located as

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Harris, Burton, John Colter His Years in the Rockies. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1952.  
 Vinton, Stallo, John Colter Discoverer of Yellowstone Park. Edward Eberstadt, New York 1926.  
 Victor, Frances F., Eleven Years in the Rocky Mountains and Life on the Frontier. Columbia Book Company, Hartford, Conn. 1877.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN ONE ACRE		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	44 ° 31 ' 07 "	109 ° 07 ' 24 "		0 ' ' "	0 ' ' "	
NE	44 ° 31 ' 13 "	109 ° 06 ' 48 "				
SE	44 ° 30 ' 37 "	109 ° 06 ' 42 "				
SW	44 ° 30 ' 06 "	109 ° 07 ' 30 "				

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:  
 Ned Frost, Historian

ORGANIZATION: Wyoming Recreation Commission      DATE: Dec. 19, 1969

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 604 East 25th Street

CITY OR TOWN: Cheyenne      STATE: Wyoming      CODE: 49

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National       State       Local

Name: Paul H. Hestedt

Title: State Liaison Officer

Date: December 19, 1969

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Robert M. Utley  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 8/14/73

ATTEST:

William J. Smutko  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS  
 NW 12/19/69  
 SW 12/19/69  
 NW 12/19/69  
 SW 12/19/69

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Colter's Hell

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

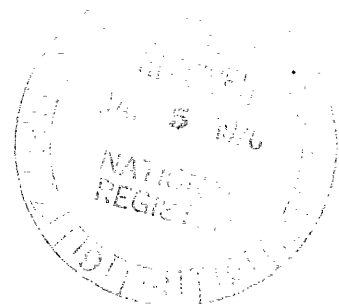
7. Description - page - 2

of the Stinkingwater and he, obviously not yet named Plenty Coups, and the other Crow children watched the geysers play.

In 1885, when Mahlon Frost established a ranching enterprise nearby, and since that time there have been, except in the river bottom and covered by the stream itself, no active geysers or even visible major hot springs at "Colter's Hell". Apparently the river in deepening its channel has cut the hot springs underground water courses and the only remaining thermal activity by 1885, or indeed today, are those covered by the flowing river waters. Added to this factor, there has undoubtedly been a decrease of the entire activity, both source of heat and quantity of water, since that day during the fall of 1807 when John Colter became the first white man ever to gaze on this seeming earthly "hell".

Today "Colter's Hell", except for a minor geyser or two, which can only lift through the surface of a flowing river during extremely low water -- and a few other stream bed hot springs which are not actually geysers, is extinct. But, lying between the city of Cody and -- two or three miles to the west -- the foot of those mountains which have been cleaved by the river and so frame a mighty canyon gorge, the alert traveler will quickly recognize that he is crossing a geyser region only recently settled into a dormant stage. He will be apprised of this fact by the three separate senses of sight, sound and smell -- the hollow ring of his footsteps; the sight of craters and geyser cones; and the prevailing odor of hydrogen sulfide.

U.S. Highways 14, 16 and 20, here drawn together in one common roadbed, cut immediately through this area called "Colter's Hell" and the road builders have provided turn-outs and parking spaces from which to view the several natural phenomena.



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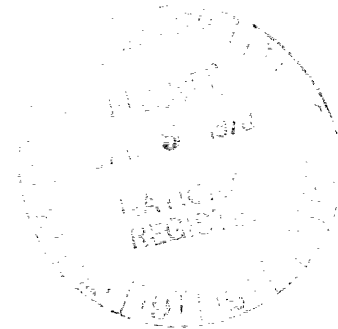
(Continuation Sheet)

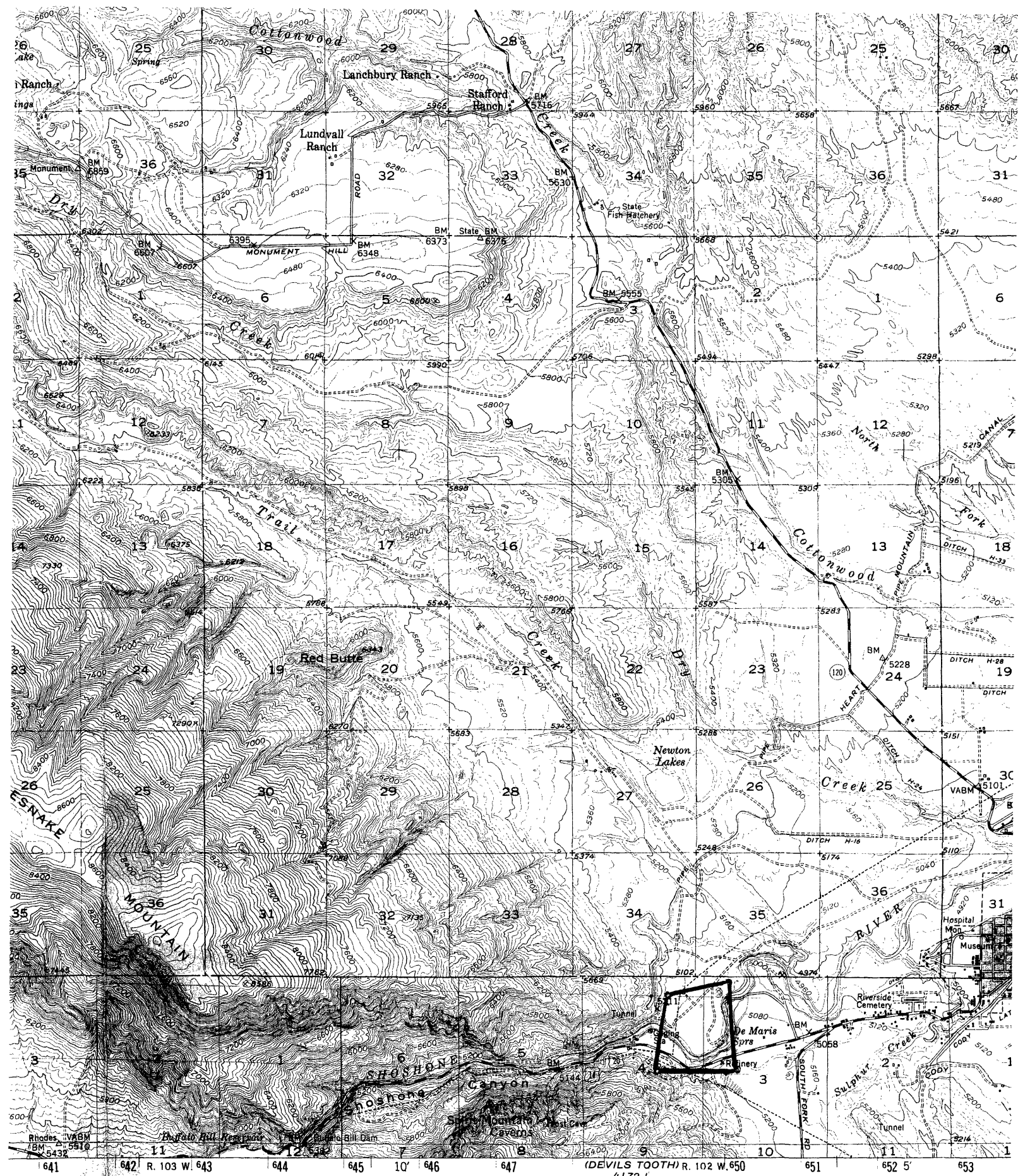
(Number all entries)

8. Statement of Significance - page - 2

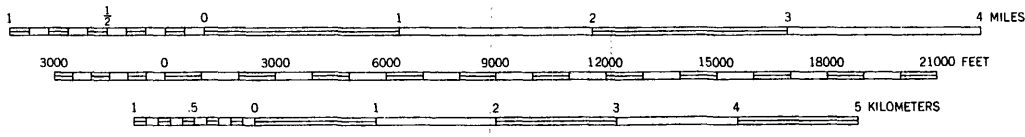
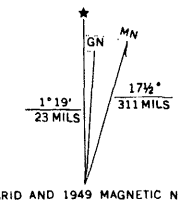
an explorer of hitherto unknown Wyoming landscapes.

Thus "Colter's Hell" becomes significant on two grounds: Nationally in its relationship to a man who figures prominently in his country's history and legends; and statewide in its position as the first terrain within Wyoming to be subjected to recorded exploration by a white man.





published by the Geological Survey  
 ment of the Interior program.  
 of the Missouri River Basin  
 ISC&GS  
 photographs by multiplex methods  
 n1944. Field check 1949.  
 1927 North American datum  
 on Wyoming coordinate system,



SCALE 1:62500  
 (DEVILS TOOTH) R. 102 W. 650  
 41721  
 CONTOUR INTERVAL 40 FEET  
 DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

UTM GRID AND 1949 MAGNETIC NORTH