

THE TREK WEST



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Take State Highway 130 north to Interstate I-80 (20 miles). Travel west to Rawlins (22 miles). Take the first exit off the interstate and follow signs for Highway 287 North. Travel on Hwy 287 33 miles to Lamon and then 11 miles to the "Muddy Gap Junction". Take State Highway 220 east (towards Casper, WY). The **Mormon Handcart Visitors' Center** is located by the Sweetwater River just off Highway 220 (about 15 miles from the junction).

During their trek from Iowa City, Iowa, to Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1856, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Martin and Willie Handcart Companies suffered one of the greatest tragedies of early pioneer travelers to the West. Stranded by a blizzard in October and November 1856, the Martin Company huddled in a cove (**Martin's Cove**) for four days, seeking shelter from the snow and cold. While the company waited for rescuers from Salt Lake City, many people died from exposure and starvation. Exhibits record the tragic circumstances of this event in the Visitors' Center. People wishing to capture the past can walk with handcarts along a designated 4.5 mile trail

Telephone: 307-328-2953

Summer Hours: Open daily 9:00 am to 7:00 pm and tours are available

Winter Hours: Open daily 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

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Continue on Highway 220 east to a rest area on the east side of the highway. There you will find **Independence Rock**. In 1840 it was named the "Register of the Desert" by Father De Smet and is the location of the first Masonic Lodge meeting in Wyoming July 4, 1862. Travelers of the Mormon Trail, the California Trail, the Oregon Trail, the Overland Stage Route and the Original Pony Express came through this area. It is also said that the westward-ho travelers must reach this huge granite boulder by Independence Day in order to reach their destination by winter. Over 5,000 pioneers recorded their legacy by carving their names and the historic date in the rock. Presently, visitors may learn about the trails through interpretive signage and may also climb to the top of the rock, its base covering over 27 acres. One can feel the presence of countless pioneers by standing on Independence Rock and tracing the signatures with your fingers.

After a picnic **lunch**, continue on Highway 220 to Alcova (a total of 42 miles from Muddy Gap Junction). About a mile north of Alcova Dam, take Natrona County Road 603/407 south. The **Seminole/Alcova Scenic Backway** is a 64 mile route passing through some of Wyoming's most arid country. But due to dams and reservoirs on the North Platte River, it is also some of the best fishing and water recreation spots in Wyoming. Driving time is about 2.5 hours, but it can take longer depending on stops to enjoy the sights and varied recreation.

Note: This road varies from two lane to single lane with pullouts for passing as it goes through the Seminole Mountains. In some places it is paved, and in other it is improved with gravel but can get quite muddy. Because of the steepness in a few spots, motor homes and vehicles pulling large trailers are not advised to travel between Miracle Mile and Seminole State Park. Passenger cars usually can be driven from May to December depending on the amount of snow.

Along the way, you may enjoy the ½ mile **Cottonwood Creek Dinosaur Trail** where a grade school class from Casper discovered numerous dinosaur bones in 1991. The Backway enters Carbon County on County Road 291 and turns from paved to gravel at this point. A fork in the road takes the Backway traveler west on Cty Rd 351 toward **Seminole Reservoir**. This short dead end road leads to **Kortes Dam**. This spot is the southernmost point of the **Miracle Mile**, actually a seven-and-a-half mile, free flowing stretch of the North Platte River popular for anglers in search of rainbow and brown trout. A short detour off Cty Rd 351 (take fork to east) reveals a nice view from the **Seminole Dam**. Next you'll come to **Seminole State Park**, a fee area that includes boat ramps, campgrounds and a beach. A boat club sells gas and limited provisions. After a refreshing break, continue on the county road 32 miles to the town of Sinclair. Jump back on the interstate and return to Saratoga.