



An American Tour:
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Wyoming's Devils Tower

Located in northeastern Wyoming, Devils Tower was made globally famous by the blockbuster movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Devils Tower is a steep-sided igneous body and, possibly, an erosional remnant of a volcanic neck. It is made of magma that solidified at a shallow level (about 700 to 3,000 feet; 200 to 1000 m) below the surface. Erosion then stripped the overlying layers of rock away. The rock at Devils Tower is about 40 million years old. The rock is called a phonolite based on its mineral composition, which includes anorthoclase, aegirine-augite, and sphene. Devils Tower rises 1,253 feet (382 m) above the nearby Belle Fourche River. [http://volcano.und.edu/vwdocs/volc_images/north_america/devils_tower.html] Geologists estimate that approximately 60 million years ago molten magma forced its way up through sedimentary rocks and then cooled underground. As the magma cooled it formed igneous rock which fractured into the basalt columns we see exposed today. Examples of similar formations, but in the form of lava flows can be seen at Yellowstone National Park's Grand Canyon and at Old Fort Hall in Pocatello, Idaho. Sixty-million years of erosion gradually wore away the softer stone and top soil that surrounded this underground formation, until the 867 feet tall stone monolith was exposed in the beauty we see today. [<http://www.outdoorplaces.com/Destination/USNP/WYDevTow/dtnm1.htm>]

Known by several northern plains tribes as Bears Lodge, it is a sacred site of worship for many American Indians. The rolling hills of this 1,347 acre park are covered with pine forests, deciduous woodlands, and prairie grasslands. Deer, prairie dogs, and other wildlife are abundant. On September 24, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed Devils Tower as the nation's first national monument.

