



Cody, Wyoming

If you want an Old West experience that feels, and is, authentic, try Cody, Wyoming. In addition to its small western town aura, Cody delivers that Old West experience through its three main claims to fame:

- Old Trail Town, a unique gathering of buildings and historical artifacts
- the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, which has five amazing museums under one roof, and
- the Cody Nite Rodeo, central player in “The Rodeo Capital of the World.”

We suggest a visit to Cody as an extension of the Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks trip that will be featured in the next *Pathfinder Newsletter*.

The best time to visit Cody is June 1 through August 31, when all attractions are open and the weather is mild.

And then, there’s the Buffalo Bill Cody Scenic Highway, a gunfight, Buffalo Bill’s Irma Hotel, and a couple of excellent restaurants....

Pathfinder Newsletter

Fall 2010

Guided Tours of Cities, Towns, and National Parks in the American West
by the authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Northern California*,
Seven Perfect Days in Arizona and *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado*

Cody is the gateway to the east entrance of Yellowstone National Park. The town was named, of course, for the man who helped found it, Buffalo Bill Cody.



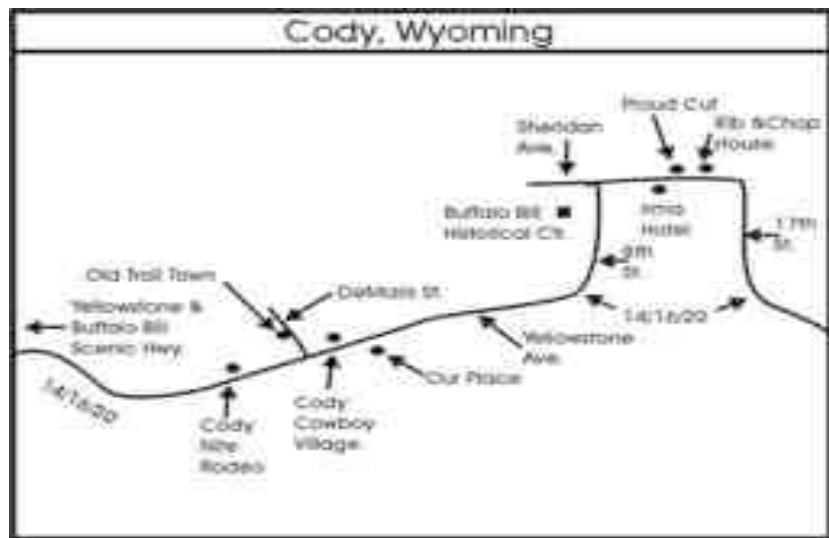
The road between the east entrance of Yellowstone N. P. and Cody is 53 miles long and takes about an hour to drive. It's known as the Buffalo Bill Cody Scenic Highway, and the valley that the road traverses it is called the Wapiti Valley. ("Wapiti" is the Native American name for elk.) Every stretch and turn of this road is food for the eyes...with colorful peaks and bluffs, evergreens and sagebrush, meadows and the meandering Shoshone River. The valley opens onto

the Bighorn Basin and the town of Cody.

And if you return to Yellowstone from Cody, you'll get to see the beautiful Wapiti Valley and its highway anew, from the other direction.

All of the recommended attractions and restaurants mentioned in this issue are on the same highway in Cody, 14/16/20, even though it changes names four times: Yellowstone Ave., 8th Street, Sheridan Ave. and 17th Street. The accompanying map shows the locations of the attractions and restaurants along this highway.

We recommend that you go to the rodeo the first night you're in town, and that you visit Old Trail Town the next morning, followed by the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. The Center has beautifully-displayed artifacts and exhibits of the past and present and is located in an attractive, modern building. In contrast, Old Trail Town has the look and feel of any western town's main street in the late 1800's, and most of its artifacts are presented in the buildings *au naturel*. To see Old Trail Town before the Buffalo Bill Historical Center is like having a well-chosen appetizer before the entrée.



Cody Nite Rodeo

Here's what travelers had to say on TripAdvisor.com about the Cody Nite Rodeo (rated 4+ on a scale of 1-5):

- "If this is your first time out west, don't miss this."
- "Surprisingly entertaining."

- “Thrilling and exciting.”
- “Well worth the price.”
- “It’s a must-do.”
- “A great fun time.”
- “Sit in the Buzzard’s Roost for top action.” (These are seats just above the chutes, for \$2.00 more.)

Whether you choose to attend the rodeo on your first evening in town or your second, the 8:00pm start should give you enough time to have a comfortable dinner. The grounds open at 7:00pm every night in June, July and August. The Cody Nite Rodeo is located at 519 Yellowstone Ave. Tickets can be purchased in advance at 1-800-207-0744 or online at www.codyniterodeo.com. Otherwise, they can be purchased at the door, at the Cody Chamber of Commerce, or at motels, restaurants and campgrounds. The seating is covered in case of rain.

If you haven’t heard, rodeo is America’s original sport; that is, it’s the only sport invented in the U.S. Which makes the cowboys and cowgirls who compete in rodeos true athletes. And they have a difficult, demanding, and dangerous time of it.

If you’ve never been to a rodeo, here’s what you’ll see:

- bareback riding, in which cowboys come out of a chute spurring their bucking horses and using only one hand to hold onto a leather rigging that’s strapped around the animal’s chest
- calf roping, an event in which the cowboy on horseback follows the calf into the arena, ropes and throws the calf down, and ties three legs with a short rope
- steer wrestling, which involves leaping from a horse, grabbing the steer’s horns and twisting them until the animal is forced onto its side and all four feet are off the ground stretched out straight
- saddle bronc riding, in which the cowboys ride their bucking horses out of the chute, continuously spurring the horses, and using only one hand to hold on
- team roping requires one cowboy to rope the horns, head or neck of the animal and the other to rope the back feet; they must hold the steer outstretched by ropes tied to their saddles
- girl’s barrel race, the only rodeo event for women, in which riders must speed in a clover-leaf pattern around three barrels to a finish line
- bull riding, the most dangerous and exciting event, in which cowboys must leave the chute and stay on the bull’s back for at least eight seconds holding on by only one hand; when they are thrown (and they all are), rodeo clowns distract the bulls so the riders may get safely away.

Other events at the Cody Nite Rodeo include: boy’s steer riding, novice barrel racing and the kids calf scramble (children from the audience try to grab a ribbon that’s on a calf’s tail).

You want Authentic West? This is the first of our three authentic attractions.

Eat and Sleep

This seems to be the best place to offer our restaurant and lodging recommendations:

The **Wyoming Rib & Chop House** is located at 1367 Sheridan Ave. It’s very popular with the locals (who told us about it), so we recommend that you call ahead for reservations

(307-527-7731)—especially if you’re heading for the rodeo afterward. They specialize in baby back ribs, Angus steaks, and seafood, but also serve burgers, chicken, lamb chops, pasta and dinner salads. www.ribandchophouse.com.

The **Proud Cut Saloon**, one block away from the Rib & Chop House at 1227 Sheridan, has a distinctly fun, western ambiance. It serves steaks, prime rib, burgers, fish, chicken, giant prawns and unusually tasty potato chips. It’s also popular with locals who recommended it to us. Reserve early, via 307-527-6905.

For breakfast, we recommend **Our Place** at 148 Yellowstone Highway, right across the street from the lodging we recommend below. This is a “mom and pop” coffee shop that serves a full line of egg dishes, pancakes and other breakfast items. Its sign outside advertises 25-cent coffee, and \$6 is the average price of menu items. Cash only; also popular with the locals; 307-527-4420. Hours are 6:00am to 2:00pm. (Much better than the continental breakfast at Cody Cowboy Village.)

We found **Cody Cowboy Village** through an Internet search, and are we glad we did! It’s rated the #1 hotel in Cody by tripadvisor.com travelers and is located at 203 W. Yellowstone Highway, next door to Old Trail Town; 307-587-7555; www.codycowboyvillage.com. It features new, beautifully-appointed log cabin accommodations, nice bathrooms, very comfortable beds, quiet nights and reasonable rates. What’s not to like? (The continental breakfast is sparse, but OK. Instead, we recommend Our Place, across the street, as described above. Our Place was also recommended by Cody Cowboy Village.)

Old Trail Town

Old Trail Town is located just off Yellowstone Ave., on the north side of the street, between the rodeo grounds and Cody Cowboy Village. (You can easily walk to it between the cabins of Cody Cowboy Village.) It’s open daily, May 15 through September, from 8:00am to 7:00pm; 1831 DeMaris Dr., Cody, WY, 307-587-5302, www.oldtrailtown.us. We spent 1-1/2 hours happily engaged in this marvelous place.



There are 26 buildings in Old Trail Town dating from 1879 to 1901. Among others, you’ll see three homestead cabins, two stores, two blacksmith shops, three hangouts of the “Hole in the Wall” gang, a buffalo hunter’s cabin, a trapper’s cabin, a school, a livery barn and a saloon. The buildings contain original furniture, vehicles, stoves, cookware, photographs, tools and other implements from the period. (Also see the photo on page 1.) All buildings display signs at their entrances that name and date

them. There are some signs inside that tell you more about the occupants.

Our favorite buildings were Curley's Cabin (one of Custer's Crow Indian scouts), the Coffin School, the Shell Store, the Hole in the Wall Cabin, the Livery Barn, the Rivers Saloon and the Museum of the Old West.

The displays in the latter come closest to those that you'll see at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. They include American Indian clothing, moccasins, arrowheads, jewelry, guns, saddles, household implements, a genuine Lewis and Clark-era canoe, stuffed animals and many other artifacts.



Outside the buildings, you'll find an array of old wagons and six grave sites of notables from the period, the most famous being Jeremiah "Liver Eating" Johnson, mountain man and subject of a movie starring Robert Redford, and Jack Stilwell, a frontiersman and sometimes outlaw and deputy sheriff. You can learn more about them at the grave sites.

Here is what some travelers have said about Old Trail Town on TripAdvisor.com (rated 4 on a scale of 1-5):

- "My friends and I thought this would be a quick stop as we headed to the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, but we had trouble tearing ourselves away!"
- "If you are expecting a whiz-bang Disney experience, you will be disappointed (but this attraction isn't advertising that!). This is a slice of history. The buildings and contents are amazing and really well done."
- "These buildings are the real deal and speak to the veracity and toughness of the people who settled the West. It was an eerie feeling to stand in the doorway of the Hole in the Wall Cabin and imagine who might have been there long ago."
- "If you have an interest in the Old West and history in general, you will enjoy it here."
- "I have to admit I had very low expectations about a bunch of old buildings. I was amazed by all the great artifacts in the buildings and the tales the buildings tell."
- "...and there are real bullet holes in the door of the Rivers Saloon!"
- "You get a sense of what the old west was actually like...you feel you are actually in a real old west town."

We say: This is the real thing, including the original cabin where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid planned their robberies! Don't miss Old Trail Town. You'll be surprised and very pleased with what you'll experience there.

Buffalo Bill

It would help your understanding of the museum's content if you know a little something about Buffalo Bill.

Before he earned his “Buffalo Bill” moniker, he was known as William Frederick Cody, born near LeClaire, Iowa in 1846. Between then and his death in Colorado in 1917, he was a wagon train messenger, cattle herder, gold miner, Pony Express Rider, Civil War soldier, and scout for the US Army. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for “gallantry in action” while serving as a civilian scout during the Indian wars.

As his name suggests, Cody did, in fact, kill a large number of buffalos to feed workers laying track for the Kansas Pacific Railroad, but he did not perform many of the heroic exploits credited to him by Ned Buntline in the popular dime novels of the time, which made the character “Buffalo Bill” famous.

Buffalo Bill Cody’s worldwide notoriety came from his Wild West show, which he ran and starred in for three decades beginning in 1883. This was an outdoor extravaganza that featured a buffalo hunt with real buffalos, an attack on a wagon train by real Indians, a Pony Express chase, Annie Oakley’s sharp-shooting, and a re-enactment of Custer’s Last Stand. It was in this way that Cody educated enthusiastic crowds of people throughout the United States and Europe about the Old West.

Cody helped found the town that bears his name, he built the Irma Hotel, and he owned a large ranch near Cody. Interestingly, even though he wanted to be buried here, his wife was talked into burying him on Lookout Mountain in Golden, Colorado.

Buffalo Bill Historical Center

This will be the *piece de resistance* of your visit to Cody. Plan on five hours here...more, if you have the interest and stamina. The center is located at 720 Sheridan Ave. (enter from 8th Street); 307-587-4771; www.bbhc.org. Open daily, May 1-October 31 from 8:00am to 5:00pm, and fewer days and shorter hours the rest of the year. The Center’s lunch room, called The Eatery, serves good sandwiches, salads, mac-and-cheese, and fruit.

This is an enthralling and visually stimulating place, containing five museums under one roof. There is so much to enjoy here that we recommend you first get the scope of the place and prioritize what you want to see and the order in which you want to see it. If you want to see all five museums, simple arithmetic will tell you to allot one hour to each and go back, if there’s time, to revisit your favorite(s). We had less interest in firearms, so used most of the saved time in two other museums.

And don’t overlook the excellent sculptures that you’ll find outside—at the Center’s entrance, in the gardens between The Eatery and the Plains Indian Peoples museum, as well as on the south side of the Center near the RV park. The sculptures honor the Plains People, the cowboy, wildlife and plants, and Buffalo Bill himself (see the photo on page 1).

In no particular order, here are the highlights of the Center:

The Plains and Indian Peoples Museum – The focus here is on the culture and art of the Crow, Arapaho, Ute, Shoshone, Cheyenne, Sioux and other American Indian peoples. You’ll see a horse-drawn travois, a teepee, clothing, moccasins, and many examples of beautiful beadwork, leatherwork, basketry, and other objects. And you’ll hear the stories of the peoples who made them.

The Buffalo Bill Museum – Prominent in the center of this museum are typical conveyances of the late 1800’s, including a stagecoach and a chuck wagon (used by cooks on cattle

drives). The perimeter displays feature Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and posters, his saddles, clothing, furniture, jewelry and other belongings. Be sure to see the old, black and white movies of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show.



The Whitney Gallery of Western Art – Paintings and sculptures of the land, people and wildlife of the West, by well-known artists, are featured in this beautifully arranged museum. Don't miss the Remington and Russell sculptures and the painting depicting Custer's Last Stand.

The Firearms Museum – This museum claims to have “the most comprehensive assemblage of American firearms in the world,” and “virtually every significant manufacturer in the world is represented.” The heart of

this assemblage is the Winchester Collection. You'll see historic and more recent rifles, handguns, and a small canon, artfully arranged by era on the walls and in glass-topped cases. Of particular interest are the Gatling gun and the Winchester repeating rifle, the guns that were the most prominent in the taming of the West.

The Draper Museum of Natural History – The most intriguing and helpful aspect of this museum is the arrangement of the flora and fauna by elevation—with artwork of appropriate landscapes in the background. In other words, as you descend four levels into the museum you can learn which animals and plants thrive above 10,000 feet, between 10,000 and 6,000 feet, between 6,000 to 5,000 feet, and below 5,000 feet. You'll see taxidermy and interesting descriptions of many animals and birds, including bears, wolves, coyotes, foxes, elk, bighorn sheep, buffalo, moose and eagles.

A Gunfight and the Irma Hotel

The story and acting could use some sprucing up, but the gunfight itself is noisy, smoky and fairly convincing, because real handguns (with blanks) are used. The actors wear period attire, of course. The popular 30-45-minute re-enactment of a street gunfight is held in a cordoned-off area at the corner of Sheridan Ave. and 12th Street immediately to the east of the Irma Hotel. The skit starts at 6:00pm every evening from June 1st through September 30. It's free, but we recommend that you pay \$2.00 to sit down front on the folding chairs. “Buy” your front row seat early (they'll put your name on it), then look in on the Irma Hotel and/or window-shop on Sheridan Ave.; you can arrive at your seat just before the show starts. If you're concerned about cancellation due to weather, call 307-527-7043.

The Irma Hotel was built by Buffalo Bill Cody in 1902 and was named for his youngest daughter. It's on the National Register of Historic Hotels. Enjoy the Old West ambiance on the first floor, then check out the cherry-wood bar in the Buffalo Bill Bar; it was given to Buffalo Bill by Queen Victoria. Famous guests of the hotel include Frederick Remington, Annie Oakley

and Calamity Jane. The hotel is located at 1192 Sheridan Ave., 307-587-4221, www.irmahotel.com.

So there you have it...western authenticity in the form of a rodeo, a town straight out of the Old West, the art and artifacts of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, a gunfight, and a turn-of-the-century western hotel. For western aficionados, does it get any better than this?

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Next Issue: "Yellowstone and Grand Teton"