

Land of the Yankee Fork State Park

Introduction: In the 1860s, gold and silver discoveries were made in the area of Bayhorse. Two men would strike gold in 1870 in a remote part of the Idaho Territory called Yankee Fork. A few years later, another hit pay dirt at the Charles Dickens mine. Then in 1876, the Yankee Fork “mother load” would be discovered at the General Custer Mine. Within a few years, hundreds of people flocked to the fast-growing towns of Bonanza, Custer, and Bayhorse. But by 1911, these once bustling towns had become ghost towns. In this region and others, frontier mining activity would grow in significance towards the establishment of Idaho as a state in 1890. The Land of the Yankee Fork State Park celebrates and commemorates this history. It brings this history to life by giving visitors an experience of the thrill of discovery by exploring the Land of the Yankee Fork in the beautiful northern Rocky Mountains. The park is managed cooperatively through agreements with the U.S. Forest Service for the Custer/Bonanza sites and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management for the bison kill site. The park consists of several unconnected properties: Challis visitor center (30 acres), Custer/Bonanza /Yankee Fork Dredge (36 acres), and Bayhorse (548 acres). So the total operational area of the park is about 614 acres.

Getting There: To get to the Bonanza/Custer Unit of the park, take Highway 75 north from Stanley, ID to Sunbeam. At Sunbeam turn north on Yankee Fork Rd. (Forest Service Road 013). Follow the Yankee Fork Road for about 4 ½ miles to the junction with the West Fork of the Yankee Fork Road (Forest Service Road 074). A left turn here will take you to the ruins and site of Bonanza. Continuing north on the main Yankee Fork Rd. for about another ½ mile will bring you to the Yankee Fork Dredge. Another 1.3 miles on Yankee Fork Rd. (Forest Service Road 070) past the dredge will bring you to the restored buildings at the Custer Townsite.

To get to the Bayhorse Unit of the park, continue north on Highway 75 past Sunbeam going towards Challis. After about 20 miles, watch for signs that direct you to the Bayhorse ghost town. Turn left on Bayhorse Creek Rd. (Forest Service Road 051). Continue for about 2 miles to the Bayhorse Townsite.

To get to the Challis Unit of the park, continue north on highway 75 past the Bayhorse turnoff going towards Challis. Go about 5 miles to the intersection of Highway 75 and Highway 93. You will see the Land of the Yankee Fork Interpretive Center on the southwest corner of the highway intersection.

Major Features:

The Landscape: Land of the Yankee Fork State Park is located in the Rocky Mountain physiographic province. The park is almost entirely mountainous, with scattered flatlands found along the Salmon River Canyon. Elevations at the park range from 5,000 feet at the Interpretative Center to almost 10,000 feet at the top of the Ramshorn Mine. Slopes range from less than five percent at the Interpretative Center to more than 80 percent near the Pacific and Ramshorn Mines near Bayhorse. The park’s major physiographic features are the Salmon River Mountains and the Upper Salmon River and its tributaries. The Interpretative Center overlooks Round Valley which is one of the few large valleys near the park. There are three small water bodies nearby. They are Bayhorse Lake, Little Bayhorse Lake, and Buster Lake at the head end of Garden Creek which is the water supply for the city of Challis. There are other small ponds, all of which are managed by

the federal government. In the alpine areas, there are numerous meadow areas, which are seasonally wetted. IDPR manages properties along Bayhorse Creek and the Yankee Fork where there are some small riparian areas associated wetlands. Beardsley Creek, which flows into Bayhorse Creek, is an intermittent stream with wetlands along the valley sides and channel bottom.

The Park: The park hosts about 40,000 visitors per year. This means that it is among the least visited state parks. But that figure may not be entirely accurate as the use areas of the park are very scattered with numerous points of access. The fact remains that it is difficult at best for park staff to get a true count of visitation to the various park units. Further, the park has very minimal recreation facilities and more specifically it does not have an RV campground or camping cabins to attract overnight and extended stays. Further, many of the access roads to the units are gravel roads and some require higher ground clearance than typical cars have. This tends to discourage some visitation. The most developed facilities are at the Challis Unit where the modern Interpretive Center has improved restrooms (flush toilets). There is a picnic area here with four sheltered picnic tables. There is a RV sanitation station and a large paved parking lot suitable for vehicles pulling trailers. There is an interpretive trail and another paved trail that connects to the Challis Bison Jump site. The Challis Bison Jump site has a paved parking lot and several interpretive panels. The Challis Unit is also the staging area for persons using OHVs to access the Lombard Trail that connects with a trail system that ultimately leads to the Bayhorse Townsite.

The Bayhorse Townsite has a paved parking lot suitable for vehicles with trailers and is another staging area for use of OHVs on the surrounding trails. There is a vault toilet here with three picnic tables. Fenced and improved trails are in place to enhance the visitor experience. An on-site host is available in season.

The Custer Townsite has a gravel parking lot, a vault toilet, six picnic tables, and several restored buildings. The Yankee Fork Dredge has a gravel parking lot and a vault toilet available. The Bonanza site has no facilities.

The History: The Land of the Yankee Fork State Park contains a great diversity of historic sites. The park has three sites that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Bonanza Townsite has at least eight ruins of buildings that were once a part of this mining town. However, other than the interpretive panel that can be found near the junction of the Yankee Fork Road and the West Fork of the Yankee Fork Road, it is difficult to know that you are standing in the correct place. While much of the townsite is on Forest Service land, the southern most part is private property.

The Yankee Fork Dredge can hardly be missed as it is the second largest structure in the park (the first largest is the Bayhorse concentration mill). The dredge sits right where it stopped production in 1952. It is owned by the Forest Service, but the Volunteers of the Yankee Fork Gold Dredge Association maintain the site and provide in-season tours.

The Custer Townsite is perhaps the most restored of the historic sites. Here you can walk among 12 significant sites and structures. Several of the structures have been restored. You can actually enter at least three of the structures to examine them up close. The Empire Saloon operates as a visitor center of sorts and the old school house across the street functions as an on-site museum. Tours are available in season upon request. There is also a self-guided trail that can be followed using *A Walking Guide of Custer, Idaho* brochure or merely walking the trails and

reading the interpretive panels.

The Bayhorse Townsite is very different and somewhat unique. It consists of about 14 significant structures and sites. The dominant structure is the very large Bayhorse concentration mill. There are not many of these imposing historic structures left to view in their entirety. At this point, none of the Bayhorse structures have been completely restored. They exist in a state of arrested decay where they have been stabilized to prevent further deterioration. The IDPR has made the area safe, by capping the hazardous slag piles and installing fenced walking trails that enable the visitor to get a close look at the buildings and sites. The townsite can be toured either by using the *Bayhorse Walking Tour* brochure or merely walking the trails and reading the interpretive panels.

The Challis Unit of the park offers the most developed facilities for history studies. The Interpretive Center functions as part visitor center where you can pick up maps and brochures and part museum that houses many of the historic artifacts that have been found at the Custer/Bonanza sites and the Bayhorse site. There is also a cultural history site here at the Challis Bison Jump.

Custer Townsite: Custer is a ghost town that was established in 1878. On February 3, 1981, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. It covers about 29 acres with about seven historic buildings and other historic attractions left on the property.

Custer has a museum located in what was once the old school house. J. F. Davis of Custer was awarded a contract to build the 24' X 36' schoolhouse in Custer on September 4, 1900. Abandoned for many years, the building was established as a museum by Tuff and Edna McGowan in 1960. Purchased by the Challis National Forest in 1966, it was restored in 1990 and remains as Custer Museum. *A Walking Guide of Custer, Idaho* is available at the museum and the Empire Saloon during the summer season. This guide provides information about the buildings and sites along the Custer "self-guided" history trail.

Behind the museum, a visitor will find the graves of Nels and Maria Johnson's darling daughters. The three died the night of January 2, 1890, when a snowslide roared down from Bald Mountain, carrying their house across the Yankee Fork.

The original assay office was located near the General Custer Mill. This building was built during the 1930s, when many unemployed men, and their families, occupied the deserted town and prospected for gold. Originally a storehouse, it now displays century-old assay items.

The Pfeiffer Residence is a frame structure that was purchased by Charles Pfeiffer after his marriage to Ellen Olsen in 1890. He managed the Pfeiffer Store, and also worked at the General Custer mine. As his family increased, he added a bedroom, kitchen and shed to the home, which was recently restored. After the mines failed, they moved to Challis.

The blacksmith shops were crucial for making and repairing the tools and equipment needed for the mines and the mills. In front of the blacksmith shops are displayed examples of old mining equipment.

The Empire Saloon building was built to be a saloon and was originally located closer to the General Custer Mine. It was one of five saloons in operation in Custer. It was later moved to its current location and converted into the office and home of Dr. Charles Kirtley. He moved to Custer in 1903, and married Josie Malm in 1907. They lived here until 1910. This building was restored in 1998 and now serves as a visitor center of sorts.

Kenneth McKenzie constructed a large log house in 1880. It was billed as one of the finest homes in Custer. Additions were made to the original one-room cabin, until it became a

rambling ranch style home. Kenneth and Lillian McKenzie lived here with their three children: Doris, Claude and Maxine. With a stained glass window over an arched doorway, a well near the window with water pumped directly into the kitchen, carpet on the living room floor, spacious rooms and two chimneys, this was a home designed for comfort and one of the finest houses in Custer. Mr. McKenzie was one of the more astute businessmen of Custer, and owned McKenzie's Saloon, McKenzie's Feed and Livery Stable, and McKenzie's Buggy Shed. Occupied until about 1914, the building was later converted into a garage. It was restored in early 1992.

The Francis Tulley Cabin was a balloon frame building and it is one of the few such structures left in Idaho. Francis Tully, a bachelor miner, lived in the cabin for many years, he played his fiddle for many dances in, and around Custer. During the 1930s, this cabin was converted into a garage and shop.

The Brockman Cabin was abandoned before being completed. This small log cabin was moved to a mining claim near Boot Hill cemetery in 1958. The remains of the structure were donated to the Friends of Custer Museum, and moved back to its original location and restored.

The Chinese Laundry and John Taylor Cabin sites are today represented by several well pits at the west end of town. The site is a reminder of the laundry services provided by Chinatown. John Taylor was a placer miner, well known by the people of Custer. He was called Taylor because the people of Custer could not pronounce his native name. The stone still visible at this site was part of Taylor's cabin.

Other sites in Custer include the former locations of Burton's Rooming House and the Thompson Dance Hall. Sandwiched between the dance hall and the Casino and McGee Saloon was the carpenter shop of Judge J.F. Davis, who lived in Custer and Bonanza for 30 years. Davis's speciality along the Yankee Fork was coffins. A pine coffin and an outer box of rough boards costs \$30.

Bonanza Townsite: The Bonanza City Townsite was laid out in 1877 and was the Yankee Fork's first mining camp. Pack trails linking Ketchum, Stanley, Loon Creek, and Challis converged at Bonanza. At its peak, Bonanza had over 600 residents, a rectangular grid of streets, and provided city services such as community wells. An underground water system piped water for drinking and fire protection throughout the town. Despite this foresight, fires in 1889 and 1897 devastated portions of Bonanza. The loss of business due to the fires and the increased activity at Custer encouraged many to relocate. Bonanza once rivaled Custer as a Yankee Fork center of culture and commerce. But today, little is left other than about 6 ruins of old log buildings. But, Bonanza does still offer some glimpses of the past, far back and more recent. Graves at Boothill Cemetery here mark some of the earliest miner's final diggings.

Yankee Fork Dredge: This gold dredge is one of the largest self-powered dredges ever used in Idaho at 112 feet long, 54 feet wide, 65 feet high, and weighing 988 tons. The Dredge operated from the early 1940s until 1952. The J.R. Simplot Company donated the Dredge to the U.S. Forest Service in 1979. The Dredge is quiet now, but the people who built it and worked on it remember the glory days on the Yankee Fork. The dredge is open from 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM daily from Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day. Tours are hosted by the Volunteers of the Yankee Fork Gold Dredge Association.

Bayhorse: Bayhorse is a historic mining town located a few miles southwest of Challis, Idaho.

The Bayhorse Townsite was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on March 15, 1976. The discovery of lode bearing ore in the area led to the development of mines in the area in the late 1870s but it wasn't until experiment and innovation in metallurgical science lead to more efficient ore reduction processes that the mines of the Bayhorse District could produce profitably.

The Bayhorse Townsite is nestled in a narrow, rocky canyon about three miles from where Bayhorse Creek enters the Salmon River. The terrain surrounding the town is rugged with steep slopes and deep canyons. Mining in this area was for the most determined prospector. Historically, the mountain passes to Bayhorse from the outlying areas were blocked by snow and winter travel was almost nonexistent. During the most productive years of the Bayhorse Mining District, ten million dollars worth of metals were extracted from the region. Today, only the mill and a few buildings and ruins remain at the site of a once thriving mining camp.

The mining camp would become a small town in about 1880. The ruins of the town can now be toured using the *Bayhorse Walking Tour* brochure. What remains today is a ghost town made up of 15 buildings and sites as follows:

1. The Bayhorse Hotel was owned and operated by Sarah Jane Archer Vance. She was born in Illinois in 1832 where her father was proprietor and landlord of a hotel. In 1887, Sarah purchased both the Bayhorse Hotel and the Nevada Hotel in Bayhorse. Her daughter, Agnes, worked at the Bayhorse Hotel where she met and married Charles (Charlie) Baker.

2. There is a small structure next to the Bayhorse Hotel site that has the style and character of 1920 to 1930 vintage and may have been used during the Depression Era.

3. The Michael Sargent Store was one of the earliest commercial structures. The store probably had several owners before Earl J. Michael and August Sargent established their business and operated it from 1900 to 1920. The Nevada Hotel was located next to the store and it was operated by Nick Millich and Sarah Vance.

4. The Stonewall Ruin might have been part of a jail or secure storage building as the walls measure nearly 24 inches thick.

5. The Log Structure Ruin is an example of the kind of buildings that were constructed in the earliest period of settlement at Bayhorse in the 1880s. The logs are hewn both exterior and interior.

6. The Charles Baker residence was originally a single story log structure with a rear addition. Sometime before 1887 a second story was added, accessed by exterior stairs on the north side. Charles "Charlie" Baker worked as an orderly during the Civil War and ended up providing medical care in Bayhorse. Although not a licensed doctor, he delivered babies and treated the illnesses and injuries of the townspeople and miners. Charlie and Agnes lived in this building until 1907 before they moved to Mackay.

7. Another log house ruin is an example of the typical log structures that were located in the residential section of Bayhorse.

8. The Tin Roof Building remains show evidence of a gable hay door and suggests it may have been a livery stable, or barn. Later, a false front was added and the roof and three sides of the building were covered with flattened tin sheet.

9. The "Green Building" structure appears to have been moved to this site sometime in the 1920s or 1930s.

10. The large and fairly intact Stone Building is believed to have been the "Wells Fargo" building. This structure of two stories, has a grade floor and a basement, and a rear addition off the basement built into the hillside. It was made to store and support very heavy floor loading. In 1882, the Ramshorn Mine was sold to John T. "Jack" Gilmer and Orange James "O.J." Salisbury,

owners of a successful stage company headquartered in Salt Lake City. As partners, Gilmer and Salisbury acquired the Holladay, Wells, Fargo & Company. The stone wall ruin (#10 on the *Bayhorse Walking Tour* brochure) to the right of this building has been omitted from this narrative as it may have been part of a structure originally attached to the Wells Fargo Building.

11. One of the most well kept buildings is the Caretaker's Residence which dates from the 1920s when there was a time of renewed interest in Bayhorse mining.

12. The 1882 Gilmer and Salisbury concentrating mill is the dominant structure of the Bayhorse site. A mill mimicking what nature did and relied on gravity to move the rock through the mill and water to wash the pulverized rock through the millworks. A typical structure, the Bayhorse mill, was built on a hillside in descending stair step levels. Ore was brought to the top of the mill and aided by gravity, moved down through the grizzly. Rocks too large to pass through the grizzly went to the jaw crusher to be reduced in size. From there the ore moved through the stamp battery for fine crushing. The crushed ore moved across sluice boxes, to settling tanks, and finally to the concentrating tables which were generally found at the bottom of the mill. Mining engineers advised that wooden mill buildings be painted with "red mineral paint" which helped preserve the wood and also acted as a fire retardant.

13. The Mine Building Structure could have been associated with the floatation process established at Bayhorse in the 1920s. This building sits on the smelter site. In 1880 the Omaha Smelting and Refining Company built a 25-ton smelter in Bayhorse. The smelter, operating by water power during the summer and by steam during the winter could turn out 80 tons of bullion per month, which went to 450 ounces of silver. The ore in the Bayhorse mines were considered "dry" – having a low percentage of lead. Dry ore was lower in value if it was transported with little processing, so a refinery was added to the smelter to produce silver bars.

14. There were originally nine charcoal kilns that supplied the fuel for the Bayhorse smelter. The vast quantity of trees required for the kilns transformed the surrounding landscape, extended the impact of the smelter process for miles around.

Challis: The Challis Unit is dominated by the Interpretive Center that contains the main artifact collections from Bonanza, Custer, and Bayhorse. This is actually a great place for your history discovery to begin. The location of the Challis Unit along the state highway also makes it the easiest part of the park to access. The Challis Unit also contains the Challis Bison Jump site that was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 5, 1975.

Geology: The geology of central Idaho is dominated by the Idaho Batholith, a huge granite rock formation that underlays much of the region. One hundred million years ago, the batholith (molten granite) emerged from the depths of the earth's crust, sometimes breaking through older surface rock as volcanic vents. Fifty million years later, additional volcanic activity occurred, deposited lava and ash which can be seen today on the colorful cliffs east of Challis.

An ancient sea that deposited thousands of feet of limestone-forming sediments once covered the region. Tectonic forces alternately compressed and stretched the land to create mountain ranges and valleys. Magmatic activity added to the complexity. Hot fluids instigated the deposit of mineral-rich seams.

Ranges like the Lost River Range are largely layered limestone, compressed and uplifted by the same forces that created the Basin and Range Geologic Province of Nevada and western Utah. The Lost River, Lemhi, and Beaverhead Ranges are the northernmost part of this Province. The jagged granitic peaks of the Sawtooth and White Cloud Ranges are known as parts of the

Idaho Batholith, originally molten, but slowly solidified far below the surface before isostatic rebound thrust them upward. The White Knob Range near Mackay and the Salmon River Mountains west of Challis are metamorphosed ancient rocks whose histories are clouded by repeated churnings over the eons that created rich ore pockets of many valuable minerals.

The geology of the region created the extensive mining activities that have contributed so much to the economy, culture, and characteristics of the county and state. Several large mines with decades of production have been a mainstay of economics in the county: The Yankee Fork and Bayhorse were early rich gold and silver mining areas. The Clayton area produced millions of dollars in silver over many years. Currently, the Thompson Creek Molybdenum Mine south of Challis is an active open pit operation. Numerous smaller, short-lived mining operations extracted lead, zinc, iron, tungsten, and other metals. Various semi-precious stones are extracted in the region although not at commercial levels.

Soils in the area are predominantly derived from the pale gray granitic bedrock of the Idaho Batholith which underlies the region. Older rocks between Sunbeam and Challis are folded Paleozoic formations, now largely buried under pale Challis volcanics, mostly rhyolite, which erupted about 50 million years ago. Gold was concentrated on bedrock in the stream bed as the Yankee Fork cut downward. When the stream reached bedrock level, it widened, leaving a narrow, rich pay streak meandering through the valley. Placer miners worked to reach the deeper gravels and the bedrock surface beneath them. Initially it was thought that Bayhorse would become a booming gold mine, but instead only a small amount of gold was found. A rich silver vein was discovered in the early 1870s, with the most productive years being the 1880s and 1890s before the vein started to play out. Silver mining operations continued until 1915 when the town was abandoned, and the mine shut down.

Ecosystems and Plant Communities: Elevation of the park ranges from 5,000 at the Challis Unit to almost 10,000 feet at the Ramshorn Mine of the Bayhorse Unit. The park contains five ecosystems/plant communities, including the montane sagebrush steppe, mixed scrub, riparian, Douglas fir forest, and rivers and streams.

Montane Sagebrush Steppe: The montane sagebrush steppe ecosystem consists of shrub communities on the slopes of lower elevation mountains and hills. It is characterized by big sagebrush, low sagebrush, bitter brush, rabbit brush, arrowleaf balsam root, and associated grasses and forbs.

Mixed Scrub: The higher elevation and south-facing slopes offer a visually open community that includes such plant species as big sagebrush, bitter brush, rocky mountain juniper, and mountain mahogany along with other shrubs, grasses, and herbs. Mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus*

ledifolius) is the keynote species. It is sometimes referred to as “ironwood” by wood cutters. It has very hardwood and burns very hot when used as firewood. It is one of only a few “hardwood” tree species in Idaho. Mountain mahogany is more properly known by the common name curl-leaf mountain mahogany. It is a North American species that is widespread across much of the Western United States as well as Baja California in Mexico. However, it exists in Idaho in scattered populations. It is clearly visible on the south facing slopes above the Bayhorse Townsite. It is a large, densely branching shrub or tree which may reach 33 feet in height. Its leathery, sticky, dark green leaves are up to 1.6 inches long and lance-shaped, and the edges may curl under. The flower consists of a small tan tube from which protrudes a long, plume-like style covered in luxuriant tan hairs. The flowers are arranged in inflorescences of up to 3. The fruit is a hairy achene a little less than ½ inch long. It grows on low mountains and slopes. It has a great many medicinal uses for various Native American groups, such as the Paiute and Shoshone. It is sometimes known to attain ages as great as 1,350 years, making it one of the oldest known flowering plants.

Salmon-Challis National Forest

On July 1, 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Salmon Forest Reserve and the Challis Forest Reserve. These were later renamed as National Forests. These two National Forests were consolidated and renamed the Salmon-Challis National Forest in February 1998. The Salmon-Challis National Forest is rich with history as evidenced through the numerous rock shelters displaying pictographs and from what are now ghost towns of the mining days. The Shoshone Indians of the Shoshone Tribe were among the first to populate this remote region. In the early 1800's, the Lewis and Clark Expedition crossed the continental divide into unchartered territory. They opened this area to trappers, fur traders, miners, ranchers, lumbermen, and missionaries. The units of the Land of the Yankee Fork State Park are scattered across the Salmon-Challis National Forest. Today, visitors can view remnants of history at sites such as Custer, Bonanza, and the Yankee Fork Dredge which are owned by the Salmon-Challis National Forest.

Riparian: Riparian vegetation is limited to a small portion of the park adjacent to the edges of the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River and Bayhorse Creek. Typical species of this plant community include cottonwood, willow, and aspen.

Douglas Fir Forest: The general character of the scenery in the park could be described as “forested.” Approximately 85% of the forest lands in the park are dominated by stands of Douglas-fir with small inclusions of lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, Engelmann spruce, whitebark pine and limber pine. This is especially true for higher elevation north-facing slopes.

Rivers and streams: The park contains segments of the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River and Bayhorse Creek that represent an important aquatic environment. The habitat of the Yankee Fork is certainly not pristine due to the dredging work that was conducted up until 1952. This has led to piles of denuded dredge tailings. However, the gravel stream bed still provides significant habitat for bull trout, rainbow trout, Rocky Mountain cutthroat trout, steelhead trout, chinook salmon, sockeye salmon, and Montana whitefish.

Wildlife:

Mammals: The mammals present in the park include: mule deer, elk, moose, pronghorn antelope, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mountain goat, cougar, bear, porcupine, badger, raccoon, cottontail rabbit, bobcat, lynx, coyote, gray wolf, river otters, muskrat, mink, beaver, red fox, wolverine, skunk, marmot, and Columbian ground squirrel. The Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*, var. *canadensis*) is the keynote species. These bighorn sheep are rather abundant in the Land of the Yankee Fork region and can be often seen on the steep slopes or coming down to the rivers and streams to drink.

The bighorn sheep is one of two species of wild sheep in North America with large horns, the other being the Dall sheep. Its compact body is muscular, with chocolate brown fur trimmed in white on the muzzle, rump and belly. Most weigh 160-250 pounds, but rams may weigh over 350 pounds and stand around 40 inches at the shoulder. Their wide-set eyes are situated well forward on the head, providing a wide arc of exceptional vision. The bighorn sheep's keen eyesight, hearing, and sense of smell help it detect and avoid predators.

The latest science shows that "bighorn sheep" are one species, with 3 living subspecies:

- Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis canadensis*)
- Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis sierrae*), formerly California Bighorn Sheep.
- Desert Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*)

Bighorn sheep live in the western mountainous regions of North America, ranging from southern Canada to Mexico. The bighorn sheep inhabiting the Land of the Yankee fork region are known to be the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep. Their steep mountainous habitat, with ledges sometimes only 2 inches wide, provides cover from predators such as coyotes, golden eagles, mountain lions, bears, and Canada lynx. The sheep are important food sources for these large predators. The males or rams have large, curved horns that can weigh up to 30 pounds which is as much as the rest of the bones in the male's body. Older rams have massive horns that can grow over 3 feet long with more than one foot in circumference at the base. The females also have horns, but they are short with only a slight curvature. They are well-equipped for climbing the steep terrain that keeps their predators at bay. It is during the mating season or "rut" that the rams join the female groups and engage in fierce competition to establish access rights to ewes. Their dominance hierarchy is based on age and size (including horn size), which usually prevents rams younger than seven years old from mating. Mating competition involves two rams running toward one another, at speeds around 40 mph, and clashing their curled horns, which produces a sound that can be heard a mile away. Lambs are born on protected rocky cliffs in May. They walk and climb on the rough slopes when a few hours old. When you see rocky cliffs, rock slides, and grassy slopes near the Salmon River, it's a good place to look for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. If the bighorn sheep feel threatened, they will retreat to the rocks for refuge. Specialized hooves for climbing and jumping on rocky slopes gives them a big advantage over predators.

The presence of Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep in the region has contributed to two regional names. The band of the Shoshone Tribe that lived in the region became known as the "sheepeaters" because of their reliance on the bighorn sheep as a food source. Then because a hunter shot a bighorn sheep ram on a slope near Bayhorse, the mine that was located there became known as the "Ramshorn Mine."

Birds: The birds present in the park include: waterfowl, songbirds, peregrine falcon, osprey, bald

eagle, golden eagle, long-billed curlew, pileated woodpecker, blue grouse, mockingbird, and lesser gold finch.

Reptiles and Amphibians: The reptiles and amphibians present in the park include: rubber boa, sagebrush lizard, garter snake, inland tailed frog, and long-toed salamander.

Fish: The fish present in the park include: bull trout, Rocky Mountain cutthroat trout, chinook salmon, sockeye salmon, steelhead trout, rainbow trout, and montana whitefish.

Cultural History: American Indians inhabited central Idaho for thousands of years prior to European contact. The Land of the Yankee Fork area lies near the boundaries of three distinct cultural areas, the Plains, the Great Basin, and the Columbia Plateau, and falls within the area occupied by the Northern Shoshone and Bannock. The people who lived in the central mountains of Idaho have been described as Tukudeka or Sheepeater Indians (referring to their reliance on hunting bighorn sheep) and Agaiduka or Salmon Eater Indians. The estimated the total population of Sheepeater's was about 1,200 persons in a subsistence area of some 27,000 square miles. One village was located in the mountains north of Clayton. There were about 30 families within this village that wintered together. Another group of families living near the mouth of the East Fork Salmon River. These local groups or bands developed a seasonal subsistence cycle as much as 8,000 years ago that consisted of short term seasonal base or field camps located on large rivers and major tributaries, to gather resources for food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. The Sheepeater Indians subsisted on seasonal procurement of seeds, roots, mountain sheep, deer, and salmon.

In 1868, two treaties were signed with the Indian tribes of this area: (1) the Treaty with the Eastern Band of the Shoshone and Bannock was commonly referred to as the Fort Bridger Treaty and (2) the Treaty with Shoshones, Bannocks, and Sheepeaters that was dated, September 24, 1868. The Fort Hall Reservation was established in southeastern Idaho by the Fort Bridger Treaty. But, the Treaty with the Shoshones, Bannocks, and Sheepeater Indians was never ratified by the United State Congress and in 1889 an agreement was signed with these Tribes that eventually removed most of the Indian people living within the Yankee Fork area to the Fort Hall Reservation.

Before settlers came to Idaho in 1860, buffalo (American bison) used to roam through this valley (Challis). Most of them had left here by 1840. After they acquired horses, 18th Century Shoshone buffalo hunters could drive a small herd over a cliff to make their work easier. Never great in numbers, Idaho's bison did, however provide a food source for local Indians. It is believed that horse mounted Shoshone Indians drove the unsuspecting bison over the Challis Bison Jump. Widely assumed that bison were extinct in Central Idaho by the 1840s, the Challis Bison Jump indicates otherwise. The site was discovered by John Ivie of Challis in early February of 1970. Later that same year in August, the site was excavated by Idaho State University. Their discoveries led them to believe that the site was a bison jump. Items recovered from the site included stone tools, arrow heads, glass trade beads and animal bones. Investigators concluded that a herd of perhaps 30 buffalo were killed at the site. Several years later, the University returned to the area and excavated a small rock overhang near the site. The overhang yielded evidence that the site had been used on different occasions over the last 5,000 years. Beginning in 2000, remains of the original excavation have been re-analyzed using new methods. The results indicate that the site is much older and used more intensively than previously

thought. Before the re-analysis of the items, based on the information recovered, it was thought that the site was used between 1840 and 1880. Recent radiocarbon analysis of the bone fragments recovered from the site indicates the bison died in about 1212 AD.

History: Michel Bourdon led a group of trappers from the Hudson Bay Company into the Challis Valley in 1822 looking for beaver.

In 1863, 23 men arrived in the Stanley Basin and began prospecting. Four years later, a party led by Joel Richardson reached a branch of the Salmon River they named Yankee Fork after their New England homes. These men did not remain long, the distance from supply points being too great, but their name for the tributary remained. This was the first known attempt of placer mining on the Yankee Fork.

In 1863, the first gold discovery was made at Bayhorse. However, Bayhorse would later be better known for extraction of silver, lead, and other minerals. It was near there that in 1864, prospectors met a man with two bay horses who told of a rich mining ground. Subsequent searches and inquiries of the man and his horses lead to the name of “Bayhorse” for the creek, town, and mining district. The rich silver mines would draw hundreds of people in search of wealth to Bayhorse.

In the spring of 1869, a party set out from Leesburg, Idaho, to prospect the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Their discoveries on Loon Creek led to the creation of Oro Grande, a mining camp that boasted five business houses. The town survived for only three years.

In 1870, Sylvester Jordan and Dudley Varney located placer gold in what is today Jordan Creek. This find led to the discovery of rich lodes that resulted in the rush to the Yankee Fork. Soon, substantial gold discoveries were being made on the Yankee Fork and more hopeful prospectors began to arrive. Most miners arrived with only the possessions on their backs. Too busy mining and packing in supplies to build cabins, the men lived in tents and cooked over open fires. Their optimism was reflected in the names of their mines, such as Lucky Boy, Golden Sunbeam, and the name of the Yankee Fork’s first settlement, Bonanza.

A lead-silver vein was discovered near Bayhorse Creek in 1872. The surface ore assayed \$50 to \$900 in silver a ton. Despite the harsh terrain, dramatic elevation change and difficult winters, determined prospectors filled the area looking for riches. W.A. Norton, Robert Beardsley and J.B. Hood located the first mines in 1872. Other discoveries led to the creation of the Bayhorse Mining District in 1877. Soon the newspapers were touting the natural advantages of the area necessary to ensure a good mining camp. The single most important one being - good ore. The rush was on and smelter, mill, and town of 300 would spring up.

Searching a hillside across the Yankee Fork on August, 17, 1876, James Baxter, Eldon Dodge and Morgan McKim stumbled upon a rich vein of ore, exposed by a snow slide, that became the most famous mine on the Yankee Fork. Named after the popular military general, George Armstrong Custer, the General Custer Mine discovery transformed a small mining camp into a lovely community and the site of the region’s most significant mining activity.

Alvah P. Challis founded Challis in 1876 as a supply center for area mines. Pack trains of horses, mules and burros from Challis were the lifeline to the outside world for early Yankee Fork miners. From 1870 to 1879, all supplies coming in, and all ore and bullion going out went by pack train. The trains were usually 14 to 20 animals, each carrying an average of 300 pounds. Packers traveled six to eight hours per day averaging 12 to 15 miles. The grueling journey often was made more difficult when packers had to contend with huge pieces of equipment such as

flywheels, boilers and cables.

No attempts were made at locating a town until February 1877. James McKim, I.S. Johnson and Eldon Dodge were chosen from among the miners present to locate the streets of a new town. The site they chose was where the pack trails from Challis, Loon Creek, and Stanley came together. McKim and Johnson had already built the first house on the new townsite the summer of 1876. The first mercantile establishment was opened by Colonel George L. Shoup and a partner.

The town of Custer sprang up around the General Custer Mine in 1878. In 1879, Sammy Holman divided his mining claim as lots for the narrow, single main street town that extended a half-mile from the General Custer Mill to Chinatown. Then Nordoff & Blick founded the Custer townsite and lots were given to anyone who would erect a building on them. The first cabins were built by Samuel Holman and "Doc" Adair. Custer flourished and what began as a tent community rapidly became a town of over 100 buildings lining both sides of its long narrow main street.

Long before the completion of the road along the Salmon River, a toll road was built from Challis through the mountains to Custer and Bonanza. Alexander Toponce obtained a charter from the Idaho Territorial Legislature to build the road. Completed in October 1879, the new road remained the only wagon and stage access to the district for the next 10 years. The Legislative charter for the toll road authorized a charge of \$4.00 for a wagon and a team of four animals, plus 50 cents for each additional animal. Initially, the stage fare was \$11.00, dropping to \$8.00 by April, 1880.

The *Yankee Fork Herald* reported on July 24, 1879:

The first saddle train crossed the new trail between Bonanza and Challis on May 21st ... Butter trains are arriving again via Challis. This commodity is rapidly snapped up at 50 cents a pound.

The *Yankee Fork Herald* reported on October 2, 1879:

The mail came in this evening for the last time on pony, and in the future will come on the Toponce-Meyers Stage.

Wagons now could haul mining equipment via the toll road into Bonanza and Custer. The 35-mile, biweekly stagecoach took nine hours between Challis and Bonanza and Custer. The tolls were collected at Mill Creek Summit where a tollgate station was erected by Toponce & Company. In 1879, that station was operated by Charles and Harriet Keene. In 1880, Daniel McKay built a large two-story hotel at twelve-mile station. It was described as, "one of the most desirable locations on the road, an excellent stopping place for both man and beast." Later, Fannie Clark bought that station.

In 1879, Colonel William Berelie Hyde and George Grayson of San Francisco gained undisputed rights to the General Custer Mine for \$200,000 and formed the Custer Mining Company. They then started the construction of a large mill in Custer to process the rich ore of the General Custer Mine. All the heavy equipment and supplies to build the mill had been hauled over the toll road built by Alexander Toponce. While the mill was under construction, packers brought in a fly wheel for the Corliss steam engine that measured ten feet in diameter with a ten inch rim. To perform this feat, the wheel was packed in two sections – each half being slung between six mules. On the trail, a storm came up, and lightning struck one-half of the wheel and

killed all six mules. Six more mules were hurried to the scene, the wheel reslung, and the trip was made without further mishap.

The huge 30-stamp mill was completed in 1880. With a capacity of 900 tons of ore a month, the mine produced an estimated \$8 million in gold between 1880 and 1888. The owners of Lucky Boy Mine bought and reopened the stamp mill in 1895. But low ore values and high recovery costs forced closure of the mill in 1904. Remnants of the ore bin are all that remains.

George and Belle Thompson built a large two-story building in Custer in 1879 to serve as a furniture store and rooming house. Belle lived in Custer for more than six months before she saw another woman.

The Nevada House Hotel in Custer was owned and operated by William Dunn and his wife starting in 1880. Mrs. Dunn did all the cooking. On the first floor, a bar room extended across the front of the building, with a separate hallway that led back to a washroom, kitchen and a large dining room that seated up to 30 people. Upstairs were four sleeping rooms on each side of a hall and a large room. Meals, served family style on three big tables, cost 50 cents and a night of lodging one dollar.

The W. Burton/Dearborn and McGowan General Store was a two-story frame building built in 1881. Ed Jones, a native of Ireland, opened the Palace Saloon in 1880 and later operated store at this site.

The first Chinese began arriving in Idaho by steamboat in about 1865, and began fanning out to mining camps. They arrived in the Yankee fork area around 1880 and would comprise a significant cultural group. They worked in the placer mines or as cooks and chore boys. Prejudice restricted the Chinese from owning mining claims, though they were able to work the claims owned by others. Small Chinatowns were established in Bonanza and lower Custer. Several Chinese had arrived in Custer and began their own businesses in Custer's Chinatown. Chinatown had its own laundry services and stores, including a Joss House, a house of Chinese worship, which was the only religious building in Custer and Bonanza combined.

Life on the Yankee Fork became more family oriented as the number of women and children increased. Preferred social activities turned from gambling and drinking in local saloons to dances at the Miner's Union Hall and events such as talent plays and melodramas. Bonanza had croquet courts and baseball fields.

The population of Bonanza peaked at 600 people in 1881 when it boasted a dentist, tin shop, newspaper, watch maker, hotels, post office, saloons and a boarding house.

The Beardsley brothers owned and operated the Beardsley Mine overlooking the town of Bayhorse before selling out to the Omaha Smelting and Refining Company. The Company also bought the Skylark Mine in 1879. This purchase led to the construction of the smelter in Bayhorse in 1880 that drew some 75 residents to work in it and the associated sawmill. The Company built the 25-ton smelter, the first in the Salmon River mining districts, to save money on shipping and increase profits. Prior to its construction, ore was shipped to Omaha, Denver, or Salt Lake City for processing. The smelter, built for \$35,000, consisted of a water jacket furnace, a five-stamp battery and a Blake crusher. It ran on water power provided by a turbine wheel. The first thirty days' run produced \$100,000 in bullion. It consumed immense quantities of charcoal imported at a great cost from as far away as Pennsylvania until the Bayhorse charcoal kilns were built. The smelter closed in 1897 due to high transportation costs. If adequate rail transportation had been available, production could have doubled.

Also in about 1880, a hunter shot and killed a large ram that fell on a shale rock outcrop. Where the ram fell, the rock showed great prospects. It assayed high in silver and the claim

became the Ramshorn Mine. Among other claim filings were the Skylark, Excelsior, Riverview, Pacific, Democrat, Juliette, Utah Boy and Post Boy. The Ramshorn, became one of the longest running mines in Idaho for the time period and in 1881, employed 60 men. Two years later, the owners constructed a tramway to carry ore from the Skylark, near the top of the mountain, down past the Ramshorn. The Tramway continued from there to the canyon floor where the tram house straddled the creek. The ore was transported from the tram house to the smelter at Bayhorse by wagon and team.

The town of Bayhorse grew up around the mines in about 1880. In the early fall of 1880 about 75 people were living in a dozen houses. The success of the smelter drew more people and businesses to the town. By February 1881 four buildings, including a store and a dance hall were constructed. Two other buildings remained vacant and open for rentals. More than 300 people were in Bayhorse by June of 1882. Businesses included several saloons, meat markets, general stores and boarding houses. The majority of the buildings were constructed of wood with local stone foundations.

In 1882, the Ramshorn Mine was sold to John T. (Jack) Gilmer and Orange James (O.J.) Salisbury, owners of a successful stage company. As partners, Gilmer and Salisbury acquired the Holladay, Wells, Fargo & Company. They would be known in Bayhorse as perhaps the builders or operators of the "Wells Fargo" building and they also constructed the concentration mill in Bayhorse in 1882.

Bayhorse had several saloons and establishments. The *Blackfoot Register* reported that the first saloon was set up as a bar in front of an unfinished building, "using two saw horses, boards and a white tablecloth."

Nine charcoal kilns were constructed at Bayhorse in 1882 and they saved transportation costs and created jobs. The conical "beehive" kilns required no bracing and were built of native stone. They were easy and cheap to build and strong enough to resist the low heat of operation. More men were employed to cut and saw wood for the kilns than to actually operate them. In total 48 men supplied the wood and 80,000 bushels of charcoal to keep the smelter operating. The kilns were abandoned by 1895 and coke was shipped in from Ketchum to operate the smelter.

The General Custer Mill closed in 1888 due to low grade ore and failing machinery. The mill was renovated and re-opened in the 1890s. But it closed for good in 1904 and that signaled the end of the glory days of gold mining on the Yankee Fork. The Custer population peaked in 1896 at 600. But never-the-less, J. F. Davis of Custer was awarded a contract to build a 24' X 36' schoolhouse in Custer on September 4, 1900 to serve the families that remained.

As the fame of the discoveries spread, people had flocked to the Bayhorse Townsite. Mining engineers, miners, stone masons, loggers, merchants, mill men, businessmen, doctors, cooks and laundrymen filled the town. Women were scarce in the beginning and when a single woman moved to town, the men were very attentive and she didn't remain single for very long. One such determined woman was Sarah Jane Archer Vance who purchased both the Bayhorse Hotel and the Nevada Hotel in 1887.

A series of misfortune struck Bayhorse in 1889. A fire destroyed a stage company barn, a dining hall and two dwellings. In the same year a shortage of water held production down and the price of silver declined. Almost ten years would pass before more substantial silver veins were discovered in the district.

The biggest years of production for Bayhorse were from about 1882 through the 1890s when a drop in the price of silver and lead eventually led to the shutdown of the mines. Mines

were started up again sporadically in the 20th Century as prices and processes improved; but the population of the town which grew up on Bayhorse Creek around the original smelter and mill was never again more than a few dozen, certainly not the 300 to 500 reported during the heyday of the mines.

Fires in 1889 and 1897 destroyed much of the Bonanza townsite, causing most of the residents to relocate to Custer and elsewhere. Lizzie King was one of Bonanza's most colorful personalities. Lizzie is buried at Boot Hill next to her two husbands. Her first husband, Richard King, was killed in an argument with a former partner. Later, Lizzie operated a dance hall in Bonanza. Robert Hawthorne and Lizzie were shot and killed soon after their marriage. Very few ruins and historical remnants remain at the site of Bonanza today.

By the turn of the 20th Century only a handful of miners remained in Bayhorse. Some businesses in Bayhorse would continue to persevere. For example, the Michael Sargent Store in Bayhorse was operated by Earl J. Michael and August Sargent from 1900 to 1920. New mineral discoveries and attempts to mine fluorspar kept some hope alive throughout the 20th Century. A serious revival of activity occurred in 1912 under a new company, with five mines in the Bayhorse district accounting for \$67,000 of precious metals. After World War I, Bayhorse appeared to experience some of its former prosperity; the school reopened, and the Post Office continued. Production of the Ramshorn mine increased tenfold over preceding years, averaging more than 5,000 tons of crude ore annually. By 1926, water shortages had slowed operations, and falling metal prices made production impractical. In the end, nearly 100,000 tons of ore was pulled from the mountains, leaving more than 25,000 tons of tailings.

In June 1909, construction began on a dam and power house on the Salmon River at Sunbeam for the purpose of powering a mill at Sunbeam. The dam was completed in May 1910 and the Sunbeam Mill was opened in 1911 but closed after only one month of operation. The Sunbeam property was sold at Sheriff's auction in April 1911. The dam and power plant were more-or-less useless without the operation of the mill. It seems that prosperity in mining the area was fleeting and this project was just one last gasp of activity aimed at trying to keep the local industry going. But the cyclic "boom/bust" nature of frontier gold mining held true. Lower grade ore and rising production costs forced mines to close and workers to relocate. The feverish activity along the Yankee Fork fell silent, and its colorful residents disappeared, leaving behind the dreams they cherished and the country they loved. By then, there are only two families reported to be living in Custer and three families in Bonanza. For 30 years, Custer had experienced frenzied activity and growth as well as periods of uncertainty and decline until its final bust in 1911.

Around 1933, the now defunct and useless Sunbeam Dam was blown up so that salmon could once again travel upstream to the Stanley area.

In the hard economic times the Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp F-83 was stationed at Bonanza from 1933-1941. They also operated from CCC spike camps at Challis, Loon Creek, Clayton and Stanley. While on the Yankee Fork, the CCC men engaged in road and campground construction and fire suppression in the Challis National Forest. The camps flourished until the start of World War II. Among their projects were construction of the Bonanza Guard Station and the Loon Creek Ranger Station and rebuilding the Jordan Creek Road and the toll road between Custer and Challis. The Toll Road became the "Custer Motorway."

Since about 1872, the valley bottom along the Yankee Fork was hand placered in the search for free gold. Later, the Snake River Mining Company tested the ground along the stream and found gold still remained in the deep gravels. After obtaining the mineral rights to the

various claims along the stream, the company decided to bring in a gold dredge and recover the gold left behind by the early prospectors. The Bucyrus Company of Milwaukee had built the first gold dredge in the United States in 1890. The Bucyrus Company built the Yankee Fork Dredge in what was known as the "California-type." It was purchased by the Snake River Mining Company in 1939, and hauled to the Yankee Fork to be assembled.

The initial pond for the Yankee Fork Dredge was constructed to allow the assembly of the massive four-story floating machine. It was a major operation to transport the equipment and pieces needed to build the dredge. Some pieces were shipped by rail to Mackay and trucked from there by Lindberg's Trucking Company of Mackay to the Yankee Fork site over Spar Canyon Road. One of the largest loads was the 55-foot, 17.5 ton spud. Sometimes it took a whole day to load just one truck with some of the pieces needed to build the dredge. Another trucking company delivered the twenty-five pontoons, each measuring 10 X 10 X 27 feet, by hauling them over Galena Summit. It took four months to build the dredge.

After completing the assembling of the dredge in 1940, the pond was filled with the 8 to 10 feet of water needed to float and operate the 988 ton dredge. The self-floating dredge operated with a giant line of 71 buckets, each capable of digging 8 cubic feet of gravel. As the dredge worked, it continuously dug its own pond in front and filled it in with tailings at the back. It dug its way five miles up the Yankee fork toward Jordan Creek. Operating until 1942 when it was shut down for World War II.

Workers on the dredge included the winchmen, stern and bow oilers, and the gold man, with only three men working each shift. A ground crew cleared the area ahead of the digging and helped set the "deadman." The dredgemaster oversaw the entire operation, deciding where to dig, when to clean up and when to shut down for repairs. Most of the men and their families lived at the dredge camp that included several log and frame cabins, a bunkhouse, cookhouse, and a guest house. Those that did not live at the camp rented cabins at Sunbeam, Bonanza or at other locations in the Yankee Fork Valley.

Even the glitter of gold, then held by government edict to a set price, was not enough to convince the investors from back east to keep operating the dredge. But Idaho industrialist J.R. Simplot thought the dredge would be a wise investment. The dredge work had restarted in 1945. Simplot oversaw its operation through most of the dredge's working life, which lasted until 1952. The dredge mined 6,330,000 cubic yards of stream gravel, leaving behind 5 ½ miles of dredge tailings and recovering an estimated \$1,037,322 in gold and silver at a cost of \$1,076,100.

Activities at Bayhorse by lessees continued through the 1930s and early 1940s in attempts to seek other important mineral deposits. A reexamination of the area in the 1950s indicated that the Bayhorse area mines could be reopened profitably. Claims were consolidated and a new company, Bayhorse Mines, Inc. began to operate the property under lease. A mill was constructed and limited operation began in 1951. In 1957, Bunker Hill Company explored in the Beardsley and Pacific Mines, but work discontinued in three to four months after exposing only low-grade fluorite and silver-lead mineralization. During the 1950s, as many as 25 people lived at Bayhorse, but by the late 1960s, there was only one person, a caretaker. In 1959, Umont Mining entered into lease and option agreements and conducted exploration activities until 1962. Interest in fluorite reserves prompted further exploration of the area in the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1960, Tuff and Edna McGowan established the Custer Museum in the old schoolhouse. Their friend Esther Yarber published a book called *Land of the Yankee Fork* in 1963. Her book captured much of the history of Custer and Bonanza and would serve to draw fame to the area.

Park History: The Custer Museum was purchased by the Challis National Forest in 1966 and became a recreation attraction.

The Challis Bison Jump site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 5, 1975.

The Bayhorse Townsite was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on March 15, 1976.

The J.R. Simplot Company donated the Dredge to the U.S. Forest Service in 1979.

On February 3, 1981, Custer was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district.

In 1987, IDPR asked for and received funding from the Idaho Centennial Commission to do a study that would result in the selection of a Centennial state park.

In 1988, The concept of developing a park in Central Idaho devoted to preserving and interpreting Idaho's mining heritage was approved by the Idaho Park and Recreation Board and Idaho Centennial Commission.

In his 1989 book, *Idaho State Parks Guidebook*, Idaho Park and Recreation Board Member Bill Loftus referred to the newly approved state park as "Centennial State Park."

In January 1990, the Idaho Park and Recreation Board voted to name the Centennial state park "Land of the Yankee Fork." Which happened to be the title of Esther Yarber's 1963 book. Other names considered were "Ghosts of Gold" and "Old Prospector."

In commemoration of Idaho's 1990 Centennial, the Idaho Legislature appropriated funds to purchase the town of Bayhorse. But, IDPR was not able to secure the Bayhorse property at its appraised value from the mining company that owned it. The Board decided to continue with the other elements of the Centennial park proposal. In cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, efforts began for the interpretation of the Yankee Fork Dredge, the townsites of Bonanza and Custer and development of an interpretive center at Challis. Ground breaking for the new interpretive center took place on August 1, 1990. Also, the Custer Museum was restored in 1990.

The Land of the Yankee Fork State Park opened in 1992. The park Interpretive Center was also opened in 1992.

In 2000, The IDPR accepted custody of the "Custer Collection" of artifacts and they were moved from the Custer Museum to the Interpretive Center in Challis to keep them safe from fire danger and theft.

Umont Mining offered the Bayhorse Townsite and mines for sale in 2004.

For many years, the Bayhorse townsite was not open to the public. In 2006/2007, IDPR purchased 547.89 acres from Umont Mining that included the town of Bayhorse, the Beardsley Mine, the Riverview Mine, the Pacific Mine, the Ramshorn Mine and the Skylark Mine. These properties then became the Bayhorse Unit of the Land of the Yankee Fork State Park. Care and planning for the safety of visitors led to the creation and development of safe areas and zones that allow the visitors to experience a fascinating part of Idaho's mining heritage and back country trails.

Bayhorse clean-up and stabilization began in May 2008 and the Bayhorse Unit was opened to the public in 2009.

Recreation Activities:

History Study: Frontier mining played a large part in the overall history of Idaho. The Land of the

Yankee Fork State Park is a keynote location that provides this historical story through ruins, structures in arrested decay, building restorations, and an excellent interpretive center. Units of the park are scattered across a large and expansive area where the visitor can literally, “get lost in history.” A large collection of artifacts from large pieces of equipment to old pieces of china and personal affects is available to illustrate the story. Books and publications about the history of the region are available at the Interpretive Center in the Challis Unit.

Picnicking: There are four picnic tables at the Challis Unit, 3 picnic tables at the Bayhorse Unit, and 6 picnic tables at the Custer Townsite.

Nature Study/Wildlife Viewing: Despite the fact that the Land of the Yankee Fork is primarily a historic park, it is set in beautiful mountains and canyons with rivers and streams flowing through them. Unique animals such as Rocky Mountain big horn sheep and mountain goats can be viewed in the area. The rivers and streams are home to struggling populations of bull trout, cutthroat trout, and salmon.

Fishing: The Yankee Fork of the Salmon River provides a fishery for rainbow trout, steelhead trout, cutthroat trout and Montana whitefish. Rainbow trout can also be caught in the “dredge ponds” along side the river.

Mountain Biking: Several of the trails are open to mountain biking. But please remember to do your best to stay on the trails and not take shortcuts, as the soils and vegetation at the park are fragile.

Off-Road Travel: The Land of the Yankee Fork is unique in that it offers an opportunity to use OHVs (off-highway vehicles) like dirt bikes, dual sport bikes, ATVs, and UTVs to explore the mountains, canyons and historic mining buildings and structures. Parking facilities for staging for this use are available at the Challis Unit and at the Bayhorse Townsite. OHV users need to pick up a *Land of the Yankee Fork State Park Bayhorse Area Trails* map to determine which trail are open to this use and which are not. There are also many of miles of roads and trails open to OHV

Please Remember

- There is a \$5.00 per vehicle per day fee required for access to the park. This is required even though there are no entrance stations operated by the park.
- Dogs must be on a leash at all times and are not permitted in the buildings.
- Motor vehicles are to stay on established roadways and trails designated for that purpose unless directed otherwise.
- The park does not operate a campground so the areas of the park are day use only.
- All historic resources are protected by federal and state laws and regulations. Please do not disturb, deface, or remove these artifacts.
- Please stay on designated and marked trails. This is especially important in the Bayhorse Townsite area as contaminated soils are present outside the established pathways.
- Because of soil contamination, wash hands before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Stay out of old mines, mining structures and buildings.
- When using off-highway vehicles, wear the proper safety gear.

use on the adjacent Salmon-Challis National Forest and BLM public lands. Users are advised to obtain maps of these trails from the specific agency.

Trails: The park has about 8 miles of trail. Some can be used by motorized vehicles, some are open to mountain bikes, and some are foot travel only. Users need to pick up a *Land of the Yankee Fork State Park Bayhorse Area Trails* map to determine which trails are open to their use. The trail map also shows topography so you can determine the degree of difficulty. The trails that tour through the historic structures in Bayhorse and Custer are the ones not to miss.

Interpretive Center: The Land of the Yankee Fork Interpretive Center was built to resemble a 19th century gold mill. You are invited to step back in time and experience the exciting and colorful mining heritage of Idaho more than a century ago. View a film on the early days, tour the museum, try your luck at gold panning, walk the Bison Jump trail and pick up maps and information. Then browse the gift shop for one of many unique souvenirs or books about the history of the area.

Resource Management Issues: The Land of the Yankee Fork SP Master Plan was completed in July 2009. There are plans for bringing utilities into Bayhorse and construction of a 50 site RV campground. There is a proposal to obtain some BLM lands through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act for placement of the RV campground.

The restoration in the Yankee Fork basin is part of a seven-year, multimillion-dollar series of projects that will repair damage done by years of dredge mining. The work is expected to improve habitat for Chinook salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout and other species of fish. In 2016, crews began putting logs in a stretch of river and modifying the channel to help return the water to more natural conditions. The work involves the Salmon-Challis National Forest, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Trout Unlimited, the Bonneville Power Administration and the J.R. Simplot Company which owns the land along the river in the project area.

The Land of the Yankee Fork SP Master Plan indicates that the park has some infestation of noxious weeds in the form of Yellow toad-flax.

Suggestions for the Future: There are several recommendations that have been made in the Land of the Yankee Fork SP Master Plan. Several of these relate to stabilization of structures and buildings at Bayhorse. Those recommendations and others that represent very favorable enhancements for the park are as follows:

- The IDPR needs to continue stabilization of buildings, structures, and mine excavations. This is important for visitor safety and to arrest the continued decay of the buildings.
- IDPR needs to pursue bringing in utilities to the Bayhorse and Custer site to prepare these places for additional recreational enhancements.
- The IDPR should consider planning for a complete restoration of the Bayhorse concentration mill and at least one other structure such as the “Wells Fargo” building. Providing conducted or self-guided tours of the mill would turn out to be a tremendous inter-state attraction for drawing tourists to the site. A restored “Wells Fargo” building could be used as an on-site visitor center/museum. These restorations would provide a significant “living history” experience.

- The Interpretive Center has now become “overcrowded” with artifact displays which inhibits effective interpretive efforts. IDPR needs to continue to pursue enlarging the Interpretive Center and developing a Collections Building that can be use for appropriate preservation, safeguarding and storage of artifacts not on display.
- the Land of the Yankee Fork SP Master Plan calls for “period buildings display” at the Challis Unit. The IDPR could either accept donations of historic buildings in the local area and move them to the site or replicas of buildings that were at Custer, Bonanza, or Bayhorse could also be constructed. The restored or replica buildings could then be furnished by displaying the numerous artifacts in the parks collection. But it seems that additional land may have to be added to the Challis Unit to facilitate this. This recommendation could be coupled with the possibility of a Recreation and Public Purposes Act lease for additional space for an RV campground as identified below.
- The habitat restoration work being done on the Yankee Fork on property owned by the J.R. Simplot Company will hopefully be continued. The finishing touches on the restoration work will include a walking trail with picnic tables placed along the trail with views of the river. The IDPR should consider approaching the Simplot Company to see if they might be interested in donating that piece of property to IDPR for inclusion in the Land of the Yankee Fork State Park. In that manner, IDPR would become the agency that operates and maintains these recreational developments.
- There has been much discussion about the park’s need to provide an RV campground. This is indeed a huge missing element in the park’s overall recreation purposes. In fact, the absence of such campground may be one factor in the park’s visitation being so low. While the Land of the Yankee Fork SP Master Plan is quick to recommend a 50 site RV campground, it remains a little short on details. The plan suggests to find a suitable piece of BLM public land and make an application for a Recreation and Public Purposes lease. Several options have begun to emerge for creating an opportunity for such a state park campground. The needs that are apparent for the siting of such campground are as follows:

1. The campground should be placed in an area that has esthetical pleasing surroundings and scenery. Such as in a forested area, along a stream or river, or with good views and surrounding mountains, canyons, or valleys.
2. The campground needs to be placed in an area that has access to utilities such as electrical and water.
3. The campground needs to have easy access, possibly close to a highway or at least a paved access road suitable for large RVs and vehicles pulling trailers.
4. The campground needs to have adequate space for 50 campsites that are laid out in loops that provide adequate spacing and privacy.
5. The campground needs to be located where OHV users have “roll-out” access to OHV trail systems that connect to units of the park. This “roll-out” access cannot include locations where OHVs have to ride on state highways or cross state highways.

The emerging options for the location of such campground are as follows:

1. Purchase the old (now defunct) RV park property that is directly across Highway 93 from the Challis Unit of the park.

Discussion: This site is near the Challis Unit properties and some staff believe that the price is right (about \$500,000). There are also some remaining buildings such as the old restrooms and an office buildings. The site also has full utilities. However, the RV park was laid out in “RV park” style. The site is now in a dilapidated state with dead and dying trees and landscape. The surroundings are not esthetical pleasing whatsoever. Further, OHV users would have to cross the state highway to gain access to the Challis Unit of the park to connect to the Lombard Trail.

2. Make an Recreation and Public Purposes Act lease application for BLM public lands that are located directly behind the Interpretive Center at the Challis Unit.

Discussion: This location would place the RV campground directly behind the current Challis Unit of the park. A paved access road could be developed through the current Challis Unit that incorporates an entrance station concept. Utilities from the Challis Unit could be extended to the new campground. As the potential site is not “flat ground,” significant re-contouring would have to take place for campground development. However, this higher ground would provide the campsites nice views of the valley and surrounding mountains. Trail connections from this site for “roll-out” access to the Lombard Trail could be easily established. This site would require the complete building of the campground from the ground up.

3. Make an agreement or lease with the BLM to take over the Bayhorse Campground that is along Highway 75 and the Salmon River and close to the junction of Forest Road 051 that leads to the Bayhorse Townsite.

Discussion: This existing campground is esthetical pleasing with access to the Salmon River. There is also easy access off the state highway. However, it current has only 11 campsites with no-hook-ups. Also, there is only a vault toilet here. There are electric utilities that run along the highway, and water is available in the campground. It is not certain if there is room enough at the site for 50 RV campsites that are adequately spaced. Unfortunately, “roll-out” access for OHVs is currently not possible. To access Forest Road 051 to ride to the Bayhorse Townsite would require riding on the state highway which is not permissable. Enhancing OHV access would require building a “pack bridge” wide enough for UTVs over the Salmon River from the campground. An estimate for construction of such a bridge was reported to be about \$500,000.

4. Make an agreement or lease with the Forest Service to take over the Bayhorse Lake Campground located 3 miles west of the Bayhorse Townsite.

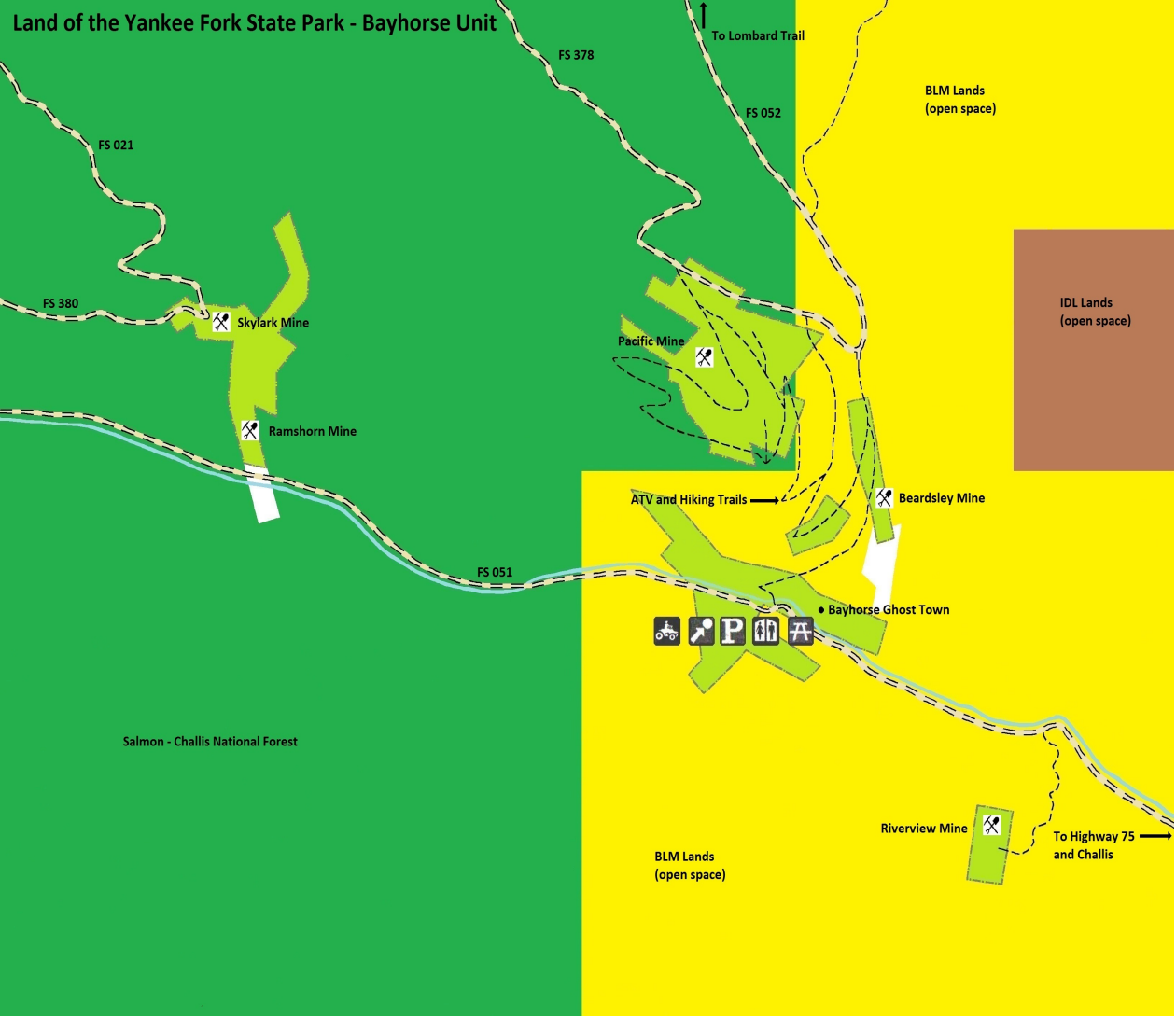
Discussion: This existing campground is esthetical pleasing with access to a beautiful alpine lake and in a forested location. However, it is a 7 mile drive on a gravel road from the state highway. While smaller RVs and trailers can make it up the road, large fifth wheel style RVs and toy hauler RVs would be somewhat discouraged and may find the access to be difficult. Further, there are currently only 9 campsites with 2 vault toilets. There is plenty of room on fairly flat ground for additional campsites. But the site is at 8,584 feet in elevation and has a very short season of operation. Currently, utilities are

about 7 miles away. The 2009 estimate for bringing electric utilities to the Bayhorse Townsite was a minimum of \$170,000. So in all likelihood the cost of bringing such utilities to the Bayhorse Lake campground would probably be twice that amount or \$340,000. This site has great “roll-out” access for OHVs to connect with trails in the Bayhorse Unit of the park.

5. The BLM is in the process of a land exchange with the Thompson Mine Corporation. If the exchange is successful, the BLM will acquire the Broken Wing Ranch which is about 4 miles south of Forest Road 051 that leads to the Bayhorse Townsite.

Discussion: The Broken Wing Ranch includes about 3 miles of Salmon River frontage on both sides of the river with plenty of flat ground and room for 50 campsites. The ranch has both electric and water utilities nearby. It has easy access from the state highway. However, a campground would have to be built from the ground up. But the disadvantages here are that it may yet take several years for this deal to be completed and the BLM would have to decide ultimately what they intend to do with the property.

Options 2 and 3 seem to have the best combination of features for the five needs for siting of an RV campground. Option 2 seems to best fit the needs in the area of a convenient location to other developed facilities in the park and would therefore influence greater use of the facilities at the Challis Unit. However, option 3 would place the campground in a “gateway” location to one of the historic attractions (Bayhorse Townsite) of the park. This would influence greater visitation to Bayhorse. However, the current campground contains only 11 campsites and even if the campground was redesigned, it is doubtful that the space available between the river and the highway could accommodate much more than maybe 20 campsites. So the goal of a 50 site RV campground would not be met by such option. Perhaps, the best long range preferred proposal could be the development of a 30 unit campground at the Challis Unit and a 20 unit campground at the Bayhorse location. The Bayhorse location would have to include the installation of a pack bridge over the river suitable for OHV travel.



Land of the Yankee Fork State Park -- Bayhorse Ghost Town

