

## Fossil Butte National Monument

If you visit Fossil Butte National Monument in Wyoming, you may meet a fish that is fifty million years old. The park was established to preserve the rock formations that contain a wide variety of fossil remains of plants and animals from a lake that covered the area long ago. The fossils are so well preserved that scientists can use them to study relationships among the plants and animals. Scientists can also use the fossils to study the effects of climate change in the area.

Fossil Lake, now a dry bed, was once more than fifty miles long and twenty miles wide at its maximum. The lake and its surrounding area were alive with gars, stingrays, herring, perch, crocodiles, turtles, insects, and horses the size of dogs.

Scientists aren't sure why so much of the lake's life was preserved as fossils. One theory is that plants and animals that sank to the bottom of the lake were quickly covered with a substance in the water that protected them. Scientists can also tell that a great number of fish were killed suddenly, but no one has yet solved this mystery.

Fossil Butte is a high desert, with hot, sunny summers and cool nights and cold winters. It usually has perfect weather for hiking. It is easy to get out of breath as you hike, though, because it is so far above sea level. You're likely to see mule deer and a variety of birds in the park. If you're lucky, you might also see elk, moose, and beaver.

You can explore the park on your own or with a ranger. There are two groomed hiking trails in the park. A research