

# A Driving Tour of the Pryors: Pryor Mountain Road and Crooked Creek Road

The Pryors Coalition: [www.PryorMountains.org](http://www.PryorMountains.org)

Revised August 2014

This is the primary motorized access into the north Pryor Mountains. It is a scenic drive providing great views, opportunities for bird and wildflower watching and a review of 400 million years of geologic history. Sage Creek Campground and Big Ice Cave picnic area are the only developed areas. The Crater Ice Cave / Big Pryor Mountain Trail begins from Tie Flat on this road. The Roberts Bench Hike begins near Crooked Creek Junction. The Cave Ridge hike begins from the Big Ice Cave picnic area. Further information on all of these is available at [www.PryorMountains.org](http://www.PryorMountains.org)

Pryor Mountain Road is not well signed, but these directions should help first time visitors. It is also called route #2308, and there are a few signs with that number. Note that odometer readings vary among different vehicles. Also road signs sometimes disappear, appear or change.

*Pryor Mountain Road is NOT an all weather road. The majority of the road is good gravel, but some sections are rough and rocky, or muddy when wet. When it is dry some standard highway vehicles can make it if driven carefully, but higher clearance vehicles like most SUVs are preferable. Four wheel drive is not needed in dry conditions. But when it is wet there are sections which are often impassable even with 4WD.*

Download a separate map of Pryor Mountain Road keyed to these directions at [www.PryorMountains.org/welcome-to-the-pryors/pryor-mountain-road/](http://www.PryorMountains.org/welcome-to-the-pryors/pryor-mountain-road/).

Note land ownership. Do not trespass off the road onto private or Crow land without permission.

The new (May 2012) **Pryor Mountain Map Set** at [www.pryormountains.org/welcome-to-the-pryors/maps/](http://www.pryormountains.org/welcome-to-the-pryors/maps/) will also be helpful – especially for the last section of this guide on Crooked Creek Road and south of the Pryors.

## Driving Directions:

Take Highway 310 south from Bridger MT. Pryor Mountain Road turns left (east) 2.5 miles south of Bridger and 0.5 mile south of the bridge over the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. (This junction is 1.4 miles south of the junction of Highways 310 and 72 from Belfry and Red Lodge.). Turn just north of the house on the east side of the highway. All mileages below are measured from the beginning of Pryor Mountain Road.



*Pryor Mountain Road turns left from Highway 310.*

### A. 0.0 miles: Pryor Mountain Road.

Turn east on Pryor Mountain Road. Just after the turn, on the right, a sign says “National Forest Boundary 24, Big Ice Cave 34.” The road is paved for 2.0 miles to where it crosses a railroad track. The road has a good gravel surface for the next 13 miles.



*B. Bowler Flats and Big Pryor Mountain*



### B. 9.5 miles: Bowler Flats.

The road climbs to Bowler Flats and a big view of Big Pryor Mountain. Pryor Mountain Road from Highway 310 into the Pryor Mountains is a drive back through 400 million years of geologic history. A geologic road log of this history can be found at [www.PryorMountains.org](http://www.PryorMountains.org).

**C. 12.2 miles: Bowler Junction.** Turn left (north). There is no sign at this junction (August 2014) and nothing is left of the old Bowler Post Office, but there are several power poles and transformers inside a chain link fence on the right (south) just before the junction. Remember this junction for the return trip. Some homestead era history of the Bowler area can be found at [www.PryorMountains.org](http://www.PryorMountains.org). From this junction Pryor Mountain Road follows section lines for a mile north, then a mile east, another mile north then turns east again.



*C. Above: Bowler Junction. Follow the red car left. Below: Transformers at Bowler Junction.*

**15.0 miles: Enter Crow Indian Reservation.** Sometimes there is a sign. The gravel road surface deteriorates between here and the old RR crossing, but is usually OK.



**D. 16.5 miles: Old railroad crossing.** Go straight across the four way junction. (It is actually a slight left turn, but do not turn 90 degrees onto the railroad bed.) The old railroad through Pryor Gap is long gone and replaced with a road. But the raised railroad bed is obvious. Some homestead era history of the railroad can be found at [www.PryorMountains.org](http://www.PryorMountains.org). After this crossing the road surface is more dirt than gravel. The five miles from here to the Forest boundary can be very muddy when wet, and impassible even with a 4WD.



*D. Railroad Grade crossing. Go straight across.*



*E. Blue "No Trespassing" sign. Go right.*

**E. 21.5 miles: Junction.** Take right fork. Left fork has large blue sign: "No Trespassing: Crow Tribal Members Only"

*F. Enter Custer National Forest.*

**F. 22.0 miles: National Forest Boundary.** Cattle guard. The next eight miles is high quality gravel road.





**G. Straight ahead to Crooked Creek and Big Ice Cave.**  
*Left to Sage Creek Campground.*

**G. 22.6 miles: Junction.** Follow Pryor Mountain Road straight ahead. Left turn goes to Sage Creek Campground in about a half mile.

**29.7 miles:** Route #2104 turns right to Tie Flat and the Crater Ice Cave / Big Pryor Mountain Trail. There is no sign at the trailhead (August 2014). See [www.PryorMountains.org](http://www.PryorMountains.org) for hiking directions.

**H. First right: Crooked Creek Road.**  
*Second Right: Big Ice Cave and Dryhead.*



**H. 30.3 miles: Crooked Creek Junction.** This is actually a double junction. First the Crooked Creek Road #2085 turns right. (**See notes below.**) Go straight ahead toward Dry Head Vista. A couple hundred feet later take the right fork #2308 toward Big Ice Cave. This is the road to both Big Ice Cave and Dry Head Vista although neither sign says both. (The left fork, #2097, is for 4WD even when dry.)

The Roberts Bench Hike begins near this junction. See [www.PryorMountains.org](http://www.PryorMountains.org) for hiking directions.

The good gravel road surface ends at Crooked Creek junction. The next four miles to Big Ice Cave includes rough and rocky sections. Careful driving is required. 4WD is not needed when the road is dry. Custer National Forest regulations do not permit motorized use on this route until late May. There may be no sign; it is your responsibility to know. Get the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) at the Custer National Forest Office in Billings or Red Lodge. For the latest road information phone the Custer National Forest Red Lodge office at (406) 446-2103.

**I. 34.4 miles: Big Ice Cave Junction.** Go straight ahead a couple hundred yards to Big Ice Cave and the picnic area.

The left turn goes about four more miles to Dry Head Vista. The rocky road is becoming more challenging for all but high clearance vehicles. 4WD is not needed when dry. This road climbs to nearly 8800 ft elevation. Snow and mud can make it impassible even after the late May opening. Do not drive off road to go around snow drifts or mud holes. Turn around and come back another day.



**I. Continue (right) to Big Ice Cave.**  
*Turn left to Dryhead Vista.*

**J. 38.7 miles: Dry Head Vista.**

The last several hundred yards to Dry Head Vista is now closed to motor vehicles to allow recovery of the fragile vegetation, and to respect an area important to Native Americans. The short and easy walk to the Vista is grandly rewarded with panoramic views of the Montana plains to the north and east, and down into the Punch Bowl Creek and Dryhead Creek drainages.

The road beyond Dry Head Vista is not recommended without high clearance 4WD vehicles. When dry 4WD is not needed for several miles, but beyond that the roads become extremely rough and challenging.

**Crooked Creek Road #2085** is a scenic **side trip**, or a route to **Cowley WY** or **Warren MT**. There are views of the spectacular Crooked Creek Canyon. Get out and walk a short way for better views or a picnic. This route had a major reconstruction during summer 2011.

The first 9 miles to the south boundary of Custer National Forest is now a good gravel road suitable for most vehicles. It is a one lane road, but has frequent turnouts for passing. It is not passable in the winter. Snow is late melting from this sheltered canyon road. After the 9 miles of newly reconstructed Forest Service road, the next 6 miles of BLM road is rougher and rocky in places. It was passable by some highway vehicles if driven very carefully as of September 2011. A high clearance vehicle is best, but 4WD is not necessary when the road is dry.

Beyond the 6 miles of rougher BLM road it is possible to continue to **Cowley WY** on a good gravel road, or turn toward **Warren MT** on either **Helt Road** (rougher and longer, but more scenic) or **Gyp Springs Road** (2 miles shorter and better gravel).

These roads are shown on the new (May 2012) **Pryor Mountain Map Set** which can be downloaded at [www.pryormountains.org/welcome-to-the-pryors/maps/](http://www.pryormountains.org/welcome-to-the-pryors/maps/)

**0.0 miles:** North end of **Crooked Creek Road** (#2085) at junction with **Pryor Mountain Road**.

**9.2 miles:** Leave Custer National Forest and improved gravel road. Enter Bureau of Land Management area. Road becomes rougher and sometimes rocky for about 6 miles.

**15.4 miles: Junction. Helt Road** turns to right (west) and skirts the southern edge of the Pryors. It is a scenic 16.4 miles of gravel road to **Hwy. 310** at **Warren MT**. The first half is somewhat rocky (but no worse than the BLM part of Crooked Creek Rd.) After that it is good gravel.

**Continuing on Crooked Creek Road** (not on Helt Road):

**15.6 miles: Junction. Gyp Springs Road** turns to the right (west) toward **Hwy 310** at **Warren MT**. Gyp Springs Road joins Helt Road at a “Y” in 7.0 miles. The Gyp Springs Rd. is better gravel, and less winding than Helt Rd. and is 2 miles shorter (14.3 miles to Warren MT).

**To Cowley WY (10.0 miles from Helt Rd. junction):**

Don't turn right (west) toward Warren MT on either Helt or Gyp Springs Rds.

Continue south for about 1.7 miles from the Gyp Springs Rd. junction. After a sharp left turn and crossing a deep gully is a “T” junction.

**17.3 miles: “T” Junction.** Turn right on **County Rd. 7 ½** (the left turn is onto Gypsum Creek Rd.).



Continue mostly south ignoring several prominent bentonite mining roads to the left and right.. (Some of these junctions had no road signs in Feb. 2012) At 5.4 miles south of the “T”, County Rd. 7 ½ changes from dirt/gravel to pavement as the road from the county airport joins from the left (east). It is 2.7 miles of paved road from the airport junction to **Cowley Wyoming** and **Highway 310**.

*Crooked Creek Canyon.  
Photo by Grant Barnard.*