Crater Ice Cave / Big Pryor Mountain Trail  
Revised 8/4/15

This is a short and steep trail from Tie Flat (near the north end of Crooked Creek Road) to Crater Ice Cave and the top of Big Pryor Mountain. In a distance of 1.7 miles (one way) it climbs 1,600 feet up the northeast corner of Big Pryor Mountain. Much of the climb is through a thick forest of Douglas fir. The climb is cool, quiet and secluded. Look for abundant squirrels and occasional dusky grouse. Striped Coralroot, an orchid, may be seen blooming near the trail – perhaps in June. Black bear have also been seen on this trail. Viewpoints are scarce on the lower trail, but peeks through the trees are increasingly frequent on the higher switchbacks. The massive view from the highest point in the Pryors (8,786 feet elevation) includes East Pryor Mountain, the Bighorn Mountains, the Beartooth Mountains, the plains of Montana to the north, and much of Wyoming including the Wind River Mountains to the south. The top of Big Pryor Mountain provides one of the ten biggest views in all of Montana.  
http://www.summitpost.org/montana-s-top-100-prominence-list/456618

Wildflowers can be profuse on the subalpine plateau in late June or July. For information about the special subalpine meadow cushion plant community see the Botanical Guide to this area.  

Getting to the Trailhead:

From Bridger MT follow the instructions and map for Pryor Mountain Road, or use the Pryor Mountain Map set at: www.pryormountains.org/welcome-to-the-pryors/pryor-mountain-road/ and www.pryormountains.org/welcome-to-the-pryors/maps/
At 29.7 miles from Highway 310 on Pryor Mountain Road turn right (south) on the two track Tie Flat Rd. #2104. (This is 7.7 miles from the cattle guard where Pryor Mountain Rd. (#2308) enters Custer NF, and 0.6 miles southwest on #2308 from the Crooked Creek Rd. junction.)

Follow #2104 for 0.1 mile to a junction with a two track trail to the right (southwest). Route #2104 continues straight ahead without a sign. This junction is the trailhead. There is now a trail sign near the trailhead. Unfortunately it is poorly placed 100 yards from Tie Flat Rd. where it is hard to see. Look for it on the right (southwest). It is too small to read until you walk much closer: “Crater Ice Cave Trail.” There is a “No Motor Vehicles” sign beside the trail sign.

Please park beside Tie Flat Rd (#2104). Although some people drive the 100 yards to park at the sign, that violates Forest Service regulations - and damages the landscape.

The Trail:

Walk southwest up the two-track trail for 0.4 miles. At first it is in open grassland and sage, but soon enters the trees. After 0.4 miles, and 300 feet elevation gain, the track arrives at a flat opening in the trees. The two old logging tracks to the right (north), signed #2002A and #2002A1, are motor-legal, but little used.
The 0.4 mile clearing: Don’t miss the trail here. A “Crater Ice Cave Trail” sign is visible about 100 feet south (left) across the old road. The trail, a narrow footpath, leaves the old road and enters the gulley to the west (right) just before the sign. (Photo right).

At first the trail is fairly primitive, formed only by the impact of previous hikers – like a game trail. The trail goes about 40 or 50 feet up the bottom of the gulley, then climbs out the right (north) side. It then continues west paralleling the gulley on its north side for a couple hundred feet through open grass and low brush (snowberry and Oregon grape) before entering thick timber. (Photo left)

As you enter the timber you will see several saw cut logs beside the trail (photo right). The trail then makes a right angle turn to the right (north).

From this right turn on the trail follows a quite obvious, old, constructed trail bed about 1 ¼ mile, 1,200 feet elevation, and 14 switchbacks to the top. It is fairly easy walking, but steeply uphill. Just below the top the trail forks. The left fork curves into the trees to Crater Ice cave. The right fork continues to the top of Big Pryor Mountain. There is a large marker post at the top, an “Unauthorized Trail” sign indicating the end of 4WD route #2088 from the south, and another “Crater Ice Cave Trail” sign.
Extending your hike:

There is a faint two track route heading NW from the top of Big Pryor Mountain. It is not legal for motorized use and thus an inviting hiking route. There is a sign indicating it is an “Unauthorized Trail” for motor vehicles. After 2.2 miles this track reaches another motorized route #2095A.

A second alternative is to follow the ridgeline south along, and parallel to motorized route #2088. It is a gentle, slightly down hill walk to Red Pryor Mountain which is a “bump” about 100 feet elevation above the ridge. If you go all the way to Red Pryor Mountain this adds an additional 6 miles (round trip), and 500 feet elevation gain (mostly on the return) to the hike.
Crater Ice Cave / Big Pryor Mountain Trail Map

Trailhead on Tie Flat Rd - Yellow Arrow
Crater Ice Cave – purple Diamond
0.4 mile Trail Sign – Yellow Diamond
Top of Big Pryor Mountain – Purple Triangle

Red GPS Track by Jim Reid

www.PryorMountains.org