

Welcome to



WYOO

AUTHOR CRAIG JOHNSON REVEALS WHAT MADE HIM FALL IN LOVE WITH HIS ADOPTED HOME STATE — AND WHY HE SET HIS WALT LONGMIRE SERIES THERE, EVEN THOUGH THE BIGHORN SHEEP OUTNUMBER THE CRIMINALS.

By Craig Johnson

COWBOYS

THERE IS A LONGING WITHIN THE HUMAN SPIRIT to find vast open spaces, and Wyoming, the least populated state in America, is a spectacular place to go to find them and to get away from everything—with the possible exception of oneself.

I found myself in my tiny part of Wyoming when I was in my 20s delivering horses for a rancher out of Montana. A guy from Oklahoma City was supposed to meet me in Ucross (population 25) to pick up the stock, but when I arrived he hadn't, so I went over to the only pay phone in town, which was hanging on the wall outside the only bar, and called the rancher I was working for to explain; he said that the fella would be there any time now—that he hadn't left yet.

"From Oklahoma City?"

"Well, just unload the horses into the public corral, go get some idiot bales (70 pounders), and bucket water from Clear

Creek to fill up that bathtub they use as a horse trough."

Covering my face with my hand, I leaned against the wall. "That's all fine and well for the horses, but what about me?"

"You'll find something to do till he gets there—it's baling season and I'm sure the local ranchers can use some help." There was a pause. "And, Craig, they've got a bar."

So, for a couple of days, under the clear skies and brilliant Wyoming sun, I bucked bales for those ranchers and sweated bullets for their cowboys; in turn, they spotted me dinners and more Rainier Beer than I could drink at the U-Turn Inn, a converted Texaco service station that was owned by a crotchety old big game hunter by the name of Buck Bader.

Nights on the top of the horse trailer with a saddle for a pillow and an old wool blanket for cover, I listened to the high plains wind scouring the blue sage and cottonwood trees, and slept under what the Northern Cheyenne call the Hanging

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Road, the thick belt of the Milky Way that stretches like a hammock of stars from horizon to horizon. I didn't know it at the time, but the ever-present Wyoming wind was also scouring me, hollowing a place where I could live for the rest of my life.

The Oklahoman showed up on day three, whereupon I loaded the horses for him and he departed to points south. It took me 15 years to get back to Wyoming, but when I did, I bought some land and started pouring concrete and stacking logs in an attempt to make that place my own; instead, I think, this tiny part of the Western world made me me.

I fell in love with the sublime beauty of the high plains and the secluded majesty of the Bighorn Mountains—forgotten because most of the world is in such a hurry to get from the Black Hills over to Yellowstone that they don't make time to explore our magnificent part of the country.

They do remember driving through, though. I get cards,

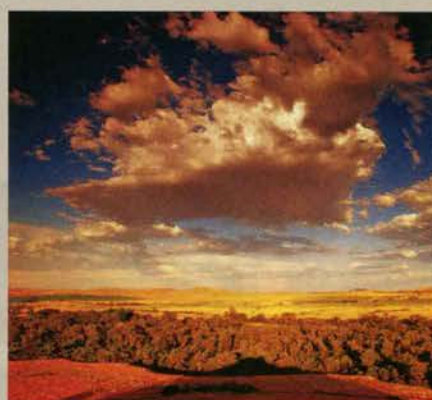
letters, and e-mails from people who read the books and watch *Longmire*, the television show that is based on my novels, people who tell me about a trip they made in the back of their parents' '63 Plymouth station wagon; they only passed through once, but they never forgot us—or this place.

A lot of the time, I get asked why it is I didn't set the *Walt Longmire* book series and consequently the A&E television show in an actual Wyoming county rather than in the fictitious Absaroka (mispronounced ab-sa-RO-ka)—after all, I just have to look out any window to see the sheriff's world. I thought, however, that if I pulled a Faulkner and made up my own kind of Yoknapatawpha County, I could make this place emblematic of the rural West and maybe of rural areas all over the world.

With Wyoming having one of the lowest crime rates in the country, though, I was stretching it by setting a murder

THE LONGMIRE LOOP

CRAIG JOHNSON TAKES US ON A TOUR OF THE TOWNS AND WYOMING WILDERNESS THAT INSPIRED HIS FICTIONAL ABSAROKA COUNTY.



Absaroka County may not exist, but if you take what I like to refer to as the *Longmire Loop*, you will get a real sense of Walt Longmire's world.

Start your tour in Buffalo, Wyoming, the model I used for Absaroka County's fictitious seat, and spend the night at the lovingly restored **Occidental Hotel** (www.occidentalwyoming.com). Have the usual at the **Busy Bee Cafe** on Main Street, and then mosey up the steps past the courthouse to the old **Carnegie Library**, the model for Sheriff Longmire's office that now houses the **Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum** (www.jimgatchell.com). From Buffalo you can thread your way out to the **Ucross Foundation** (www.ucrossfoundation.org) and take in the gallery at the **Big Red Barn** or catch a trail ride at **The Ranch at Ucross** (www.blairhotels.com).

Traveling northwest to Sheridan County, lunch at the **Big Horn Smokehouse & Saloon** (www.bighornsmokehouse.com), and then visit **The Brinton Museum** (www.bbmandm.org), home of a grand collection of Western art both classic and modern. Hit Sheridan proper 15 miles farther north and make your way to **King's Saddlery** (www.kingssaddlery.com), where you'll be enthralled by the family's Don King Museum of cowboy memorabilia.

Across the street, wet your whistle at **The Mint Bar** ([\[sheridan.com\]\(http://sheridan.com\)\), and then meander down Main Street taking in the shops, including the **Bucking Buffalo Supply Company** \(owned by my wife\), where you can pick up a signed copy of a *Walt Longmire* novel along with art, crafts, and clothes.](http://www.themintbarin-</p>
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Follow Route 14A west to **Eatons' Ranch** (www.eatonsranch.com) or the **Bear Lodge Resort** (www.bearlodgeresort.com) for a stay in the Bighorn Mountains. Continue on to the **Medicine Wheel/Medicine Mountain National Historic Landmark** (www.wyomingtourism.org), an intricate prehistoric circle of stones that is sacred to the surrounding tribes. Retrace your path back to the fork of Route 14 and head down the chute south into Shell Canyon and then west into the town of Greybull, where you might even see Wilford Brimley shopping for a new hat at **Probst Western and Outdoor Clothing Co.** (www.probstwesternstore.com).

Continuing south through Basin, stop at Manderson to cool your feet in the Bighorn River, and then head east on Route 31 to the **Medicine Lodge State Archaeological Site** with its petroglyphs and pictographs on the cliff walls.

Go south on Hyattville Road to the town of Ten Sleep, named for the 10 sleeps it took the Indians to get to each of the main winter camps from the Platte River near Casper in the south to Bridger, Montana, in the north. Grab a

cup of coffee at the **2nd Street Bakery** and look for my buddy **Jalan Crossland**, the finest mandolin player in Wyoming, or any of the other luminaries who perform at the **Ten Sleep Saloon**.

Continue back up the mountain on Route 16 through the switchbacks of red rock in Ten Sleep Canyon, past Meadowlark Lake, and maybe make the hike up to **High Park Lookout**. From there, it's over Powder River Pass and back down to **South Fork Mountain Lodge & Outfitters** in Buffalo (www.southfork-lodge.com) for relaxation next to the fireplace in one of their creek-side log cabins and the finest dinner up the mountain, as the locals say.

This part of the Bighorn Mountains is home to some of the oldest dude ranches in America, such as the **HF Bar Ranch** (www.hfbar.com) in Saddlestring and **Paradise Guest Ranch** (www.paradiseranch.com) in Buffalo.

One of my favorite spots is the nearby **Cloud Peak Wilderness**, with peaks that top 13,000 feet. Drop a line in the icy waters of Crazy Woman Creek and tempt the trout (be sure to acquire a Wyoming fishing license). They're wily, those trout, so don't feel bad if you strike out. You can always finish at Buffalo's **Winchester Steak House** (www.thewinchester-steakhouse.com). Order the trout if it's on special, and pretend it's the one that got away.

—C.J.

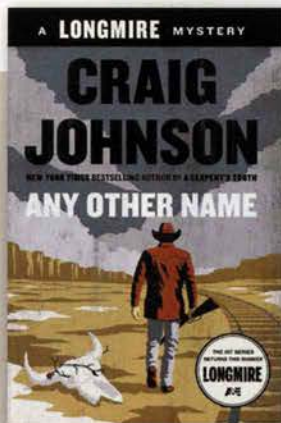
mystery series here, but the beauty of the landscape and the friendliness and diversity of the people were ultimately more important than probability. I mean, where else can you have world-class PRCA rodeos, museums, a Basque festival that includes The Running of the Sheep, and, within shouting distance just a little north, the Little Bighorn and the powwows of the Crow and Cheyenne reservations? Besides, I wasn't writing a documentary.

My ranch is near Ucross, around the bend from the spot where I had enjoyed the view from the top of the horse trailer, at the point where Clear and Piney Creeks merge in their trek from the Bighorn Mountains to the Powder River in the middle of the territory that, in 1939, could have become the separate state of Absaroka (pronounced ab-SOR-ka), the Crow word for "children of the long-beaked bird."

Sheridan street commissioner A.R. Swickard proclaimed himself the governor of the breakaway state that would encompass not only northern Wyoming from the eastern border to Yellowstone, but the Black Hills portion of South Dakota and the Crow and Cheyenne reservations in Montana. Tired of tax dollars being distributed in the southern part of the state along Union Pacific lines and unhappy with the federal government's ownership of 47 percent of the land, Swickard and the other rebels of the secessionist movement pressed license plates and even went so far as to crown a Miss Absaroka.

Swept away by the groundswell of World War II, the Absaroka movement fell along the wayside, but the allure of escape still permeates the region today. Which may be why I base my novels in the fictitious county of Absaroka rather than a real county in northern Wyoming; I'm trying to keep a little secret. After all—all I have to do is feel that ever-present Wyoming wind and look out at the landscape that re-made me to see Walt Longmire's world.

Season three of Longmire will premiere on A&E at the end of May.



THE LATEST BOOK

When Absaroka County Sheriff Walt Longmire is called in to investigate the suicide of a fellow officer, he discovers an underlying mystery involving a series of disappearing women. Thankfully, if you're a member of the *Longmire* TV posse, you won't have to worry about picking up the threads from Craig Johnson's other novels to follow the story in *Any Other Name* (The Viking Press, 2014).

Henry Standing Bear, Deputy "Vic" Moretti, and crew are along for the ride to keep Walt out of trouble (as if that's even possible) while he waits—spoiler alert—for the birth of his first grandchild. The tense pacing and high-stakes action don't disappoint in this perfect summer read.

—Steven Phelps

THIRD ANNUAL LONGMIRE DAYS

During the weekend of July 18–20, the stars of A&E's *Longmire* will be back in Buffalo, Wyoming, to turn the town into the fictional burg of Durant in honor of the popular TV show. Craig Johnson is heavily involved in the event: He says there'll be a street dance, trail rides, a softball game, a golf tournament, skeet shooting, a motorcycle poker run, and a Northern Cheyenne powwow. Get travel information and find schedule updates closer to the event at www.buffalowyo.com.

WYOMING *Luxury*



A WEEKEND AT BRUSH CREEK

A BOUTIQUE RANCH IN SARATOGA, WYOMING, PACKS GOOD FOOD AND PLENTY OF FUN INTO GUESTS' DAILY ITINERARIES.

By Hunter Hawk

ABOUT FOUR-AND-A-HALF HOURS SOUTH OF Craig Johnson's Bighorn Mountain stomping grounds (and about four hours north of Denver) is yet another Wyoming wilderness: Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest. Named in recognition of the healing powers of ceremonial Native American bows, which were crafted from regional mountain mahogany, the forest contains portions of numerous mountain ranges, 10 designated wilderness areas, and two ski areas (Steamboat Springs and Snowy Range), and stretches from just south of Interstate 80 to the Colorado state line in southeastern Wyoming.

On the northwestern edge of the forest sits The Lodge & Spa at Brush Creek Ranch, an all-inclusive boutique resort in Saratoga, Wyoming. Adventurers have a healthy slate of options: Daily activities range from time-tested pursuits (fishing, riding, hiking, shooting) to more modern fun (paintball, mountain biking, scenic Ranger vehicle tours). And then there's the food—a mix of elegant buffets, locally sourced chef's plates, and good old-fashioned cookouts.

I'd imagine every guest leaves Brush Creek holding on to a unique set of memories. Thanks to a well-tended travel journal, here are a few of mine from a recent weekend adventure.

COWBOYS

INDIANS

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY THE LODGE & SPA AT BRUSH CREEK RANCH

FRIDAY, 2 P.M. After hitting the road in Denver a couple of hours ago, I pass the rodeo-centric town of Laramie, Wyoming, just as I begin to make my way through mountainous terrain. Seemingly on cue, a local radio station does its daily broadcast of the national anthem (to honor those who've served). Hearing that anthem while looking out at this scenery highlights the majesty of it all.

FRIDAY, 4:30 P.M. I check in at Brush Creek's front office and am already in love with the view from the main compound—a line of peaks in the distance and groups of horses grazing and running free on the grass below. I'm greeted by one of the fluffy, laid-back ranch dogs just before I set my things down in my cabin. There's not much time to take in the rustic décor and extra-large, quilt-covered bed. I'm due for a sign-up session down at the activities center, where one of many ranch staffers will help me put together my two-day slate. Boots on; let's go.

FRIDAY, 6 P.M. After an introductory hike, I head to the camp dinner by the creek. It's a lively affair—cowboy band, big community tables, buffet-style servings of grilled salmon, prime rib, and chicken, with foil packets of cheesy home fries, salad, and roasted corn on the cob. I have the beef with added juice and creamy horseradish sauce. Delicious. With a full belly and tired feet, I hit the hay.

SATURDAY, 10:45 A.M. My morning hike is challenging, but the scenery is the reward, as is the conversation with my guide, Patty, who leads these expeditions when she's not teaching yoga or doing the occasional massage appointment at the spa. She takes me up hills, through sections of forest, and down rock-studded trails. Among the many things we chat about are the bison on the ranch. They're kept in a gated pasture and are nearly impossible to wrangle when they manage to escape the fences. They seem to be a big source of excitement for the folks who take the Ranger vehicle tours.

Patty talks about what she calls mini-miracles that take place here every day. I've experienced one. On yesterday's hike with a couple of college-age ranch hands, I arrived in the artists' residence area and came upon an old-fashioned schoolhouse to find one of the visiting musicians composing a tune on the piano. He played for us as we looked around. I felt like I was in a church on the prairie in the 1800s.

SATURDAY, 3:30 P.M. I join an archery group for the afternoon activity, but after a brief hatchet- and tomahawk-throwing jaunt, we start making our way across a shallow river in two sets of Rangers. Ours leads the way; resident archery expert Clint (whose accent reveals his North Carolina roots) drives us through it fine. The group behind us isn't so lucky. When we double back to discover them stuck in the middle of the river, Clint takes matters into his own hands. He manages to get their Ranger back to shore with a little pushing and some rock-moving. It is an unexpected adventure that, truth be told, I enjoy as much or more than shooting arrows.

Once everyone is out of the water, I have a little time to walk over to the on-site horse-training arena. The staff members there are busy getting a couple of horses prepped for a carriage ride in that night's wedding at the ranch, but they are nice enough to show me around. I even meet some mini-horses, kept company by a couple of calves. The black-and-white calf, Oreo, keeps trying to eat my jeans.

SATURDAY, 7 P.M. At tonight's sit-down dinner on a large dining patio with mountain views, I meet some guys who are here solely for the fly-fishing. At the other end of the table are two mother-daughter duos on a sabbatical from the stresses of their everyday lives. Somewhere else on the property the wedding guests are gathered. Looking around, I see no clenched faces; no one is in a hurry (that they don't want to be in, at least). Places like this provide a much needed respite and natural food for the soul, I suppose. I'll be sad to pack up and head home in the morning.



WELCOME TO LONGMIRE COUNTRY

BUFFALO & KAYCEE, WYOMING

**DON'T MISS
LONGMIRE DAYS
JULY 18-20, 2014**



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Explore the new west!*

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