

Johnson County Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum



Buffalo Railroad Walking Tour

The Johnson County Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum presents this walking tour for your enjoyment. This tour begins at the Johnson County Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum and ends near Bozeman Trail Steakhouse.

For 28 years the railroad was an integral part of Buffalo. During this tour you will learn how the railroad arrived in Buffalo and affected the town and residents. While searching for the remnants of the railroad, find out why the railroad disbanded. Most of the tour is designed for walking, but there are sections that can be reached by car.

BC&BM RAILROAD: “BUFFALO, CLEARMONT, AND BACK (MAYBE)”



How the railroad came to Buffalo

Buffalo residents expressed a desire for the railroad as early as the late 1880s for the transportation of livestock and goods. At the time, Buffalo was a small city accessible by poorly maintained roads. After the railroad companies bypassed Buffalo, the town decided to build a connection to the railroad. The Buffalo Railway

Company was formed in 1912 to finance the project.



“Duffy’s Bluff”

Charles Duffy was chosen as the general manager for the new Buffalo Railway Company in 1912. The route was surveyed, first from Buffalo to Ucross and later extended to Clearmont. Ranches, right-of ways, canals and water rights were purchased. By the time the route was ready for construction, World War I had started. Duffy was still able to get the needed supplies, although it took him almost six years to complete the railroad. Buffalo residents questioned his ability to complete this project and called the railroad “Duffy’s Bluff.” Just before completion, Duffy suddenly disappeared. Nothing was ever known about him after he left Buffalo.

From the Johnson County Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum, turn left and head west on Fort Street for four blocks. Turn left at Klondike Drive and head south until you reach George Washington Park. To your left will be your first glimpse of Buffalo’s railroad: Locomotive #105.

BUFFALO'S LOCOMOTIVES



#105

The #105 Locomotive, now sitting in Buffalo's George Washington Park, was bought by the railroad in 1930. The locomotive model was the Chicago Burlington and Quincy (CB&Q) Class H-2, 2-6-0 no. 1175 Locomotive. The 2-6-0 meant two leading wheels on one axle, six powered and coupled driving wheels with no trailing wheels.

The #105 had an 1898 Pittsburgh engine. Disabled by boiler issues in 1946, the locomotive was gradually stripped of parts to keep other engines running. After resting in a field since 1953, #105 was moved to the park in 1982.

The rest of the Buffalo Railway locomotives are not available for viewing. However, here is some information on each of the locomotives.



#100

The #100 Locomotive, the first to bear the Buffalo Railway name, was purchased as an obsolete 4-6-0 of unknown ancestry. The 4-6-0, first appearing in the late 1840s, represented a wheel arrangement of four leading wheels on two axles in a leading truck, six powered and coupled driving wheels on three axles, and no trailing wheels. It was very

popular during the 19th century because it could haul heavy loads up steep grades. By 1917 the #100 was proving inadequate and too light for the uphill climb to Buffalo. It was retired in the early 1920s due to its worn out running gear.

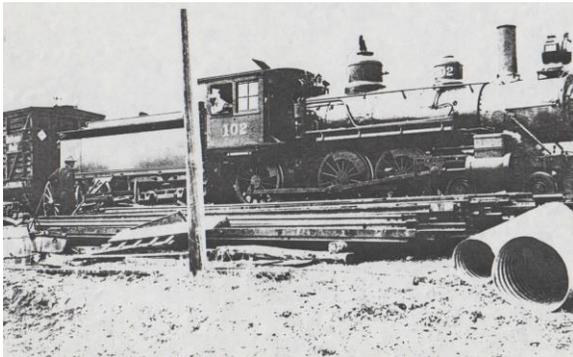


#101

The #101 Locomotive was a G-28 class 2-6-0 Mogul. The 2-6-0 could traverse uneven track, had 50% more adhesion than a 4-4-0, and cost less than the 4-6-0, which the #102 was. The 2-6-0 was designed as a freight engine that could haul modestly-sized trains in level grades. They were also light, which allowed them to operate on

tracks with light rails and minimal ballast. Track ballast was the gravel material used to bear the load of the trains. This made them popular with short lines such as the Buffalo Railway. It could

pull 18 empty cars up the grade to Buffalo. When the Roundhouse burned down in 1930, the #101 was destroyed as well.



#102

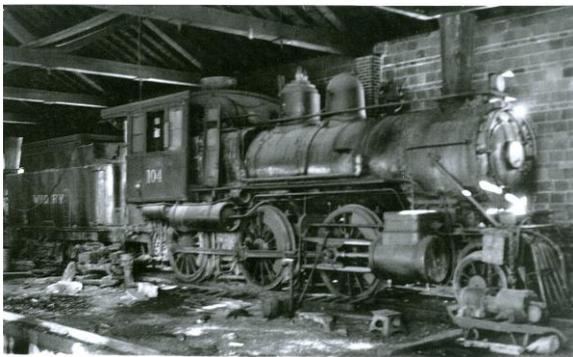
Purchased in 1917, #102 was an ex-Northern Pacific (NP) 4-6-0, most likely from the S class. The NP 4-6-0s were some of the last locomotives to operate on the Northern Pacific. Light-weight, they worked many branch lines on railways that newer locomotive power could not. They were mainly used as passenger engines before being replaced by the 4-6-2 engines. The #102 was also

destroyed in the 1930 fire at the Roundhouse.



#103

Another ex-CB&Q, Class H-2 2-6-0, #103 was acquired in 1927 when the Buffalo Railway hit its peak. The 2-6-0 was known as the “Mogul” and more than 11,000 were built between 1860 and 1910. The #103 served as the mainstay of the railway’s operations in its last years. The fate of the #103 is unknown.



#104

#104 was an ex-CB&Q Class H-2, purchased in 1927, long after the heyday of the H-2 engines. The development of the 2-6-0s peaked in the late 1800s, so many of the engines bought by the Buffalo Railway, such as the #104, did not have superheating, piston valves, etc. The 2-8-0, with greater track adhesion, also overshadowed it when it began production in 1866. The fate of the #104

is unknown.



When the first train came to Buffalo on February 28, 1918, the tracks proved problematic. Some of the rails were too light, the ties were too far apart, roads were too narrow, and there was too little track ballast. The first few years, there were many problems such as delays triggered by cold winter storms and frozen wheels and derailments caused by hitting livestock on the tracks. Once the initial problems were fixed, the railroad functioned with few incidents until the later years.



THE BUFFALO RAILWAY

The Buffalo Railway operated for almost 30 years. Its route ran for 28.6 miles. Thousands of head of cattle, millions of pounds of wool, coal, lumber, grain, and sugar beets, and many passengers moved through the railway. The capability of the business was questionable as it cost as much to ship stock from Buffalo to Clearmont as it did to ship from Clearmont to Omaha. Still the local

economy prospered, jobs were plentiful, and a home construction boom occurred as a result of the railroad.

From George Washington Park, walk back to the Johnson County Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum. Walk east on Fort Street, cross Main Street, and turn north. Walk one block and turn right on Benteen Street, heading east until you reach Potter's Depot, 89 N. Lobban.



RAILROAD DEPOT (Potter's Depot at 89 N. Lobban)

The original railroad depot was built in 1918 – 1919 as a single story building with a basement, a waiting room, a caged ticket room, an express room, and a large freight room. A second story with a crew washroom and a locker room was added in 1931. The railroad tracks passed in front of and behind the depot. After the railroad closed in 1946, it became a furniture warehouse. Today, a

pottery workshop, store, and home exist on the site.

Turn left from the Potter's Depot and head north on Lobban Avenue, past the CARQUEST Auto Parts Store. The Clear Creek Trail system will be on your right after one block. Walk east on the trail until you reach the first trail sign that says "Buffalo Flour Mill".



1980s.

FLOUR MILL AND ELECTRIC PLANT

The railroad headed north from the depot along Clear Creek, traveling past the Buffalo Flour Mill and Electric Plant. The flour mill opened in 1886 and the electrical plant was added in 1888, making Buffalo one of two locations in Wyoming to have electricity. The buildings were demolished in the



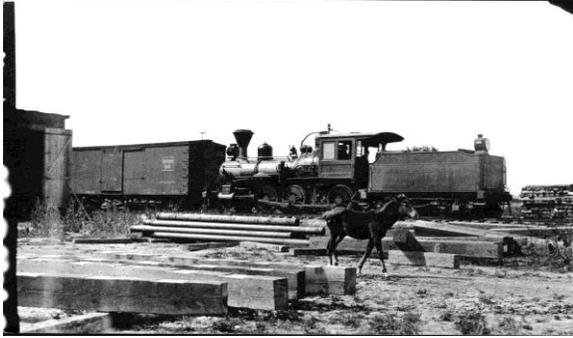
on South Bypass Road.

TIE HACKS

The logging and timber industry reached its peak during the Buffalo Railway years. Lumber ties from mills in the mountains would float down to the railroad through splash dams along Clear Creek. At the re-saw mill the ties were then graded, sized, and marked. The re-saw mill site can be seen at the Mountain Plains Heritage Park

If you wish to visit the Mountain Plains Heritage Park, the Clear Creek Trail will end on South Bypass Road. Turn right and walk or drive south until you reach Stockyard Road. Turn left and the Mountain Plains Heritage Park will be straight ahead. There are several signs and maps of the Buffalo Railway on the walking trails.

The Clear Creek Trail will take you to Hart Street/US-16. Make sure to read the signs along the way. Turn left and head west on Hart Street, also known as East Buffalo. When you reach the Subway restaurant, cross the street and continue to the building in the back of the lot, which is the Roundhouse.



EAST BUFFALO (HART STREET AREA)

East Buffalo developed because the city residents did not want the train to stop directly in Buffalo, bringing with it noise and risk of fire. A roundhouse, livestock yards, grain elevator, loading chute, coal shaft, dipping vat, set of scales, two-story tall engine house, cinder pit,

bushel elevator, and spur tracks were constructed. Here the trains stopped and unloaded the incoming freight shipments while the mail and passengers were unloaded at the railroad depot on Lobban Avenue.



THE ROUNDHOUSE

The roundhouse was a building used to service locomotives. Outside was a wye to turn the trains around for the return to Clearmont. The original was a large, rectangular brick structure with tall arched garage doorways. Destroyed along with two locomotives and several tools in a 1930 fire, a replicated building was built nearby and was large

enough to house three locomotives and heavy machinery for repairing. Since the railroad closed, several businesses have occupied the roundhouse.

THE END OF THE RAILROAD

After the death of Isaac Smith, the founder of the Buffalo Railway, out-of-state stockholders lost interest. The Wyoming Railway was in desperate need of maintenance because it had been deferred during World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. Severely in debt, the railroad was sold to C. Porter Dixon of Denver in 1946. Dixon wanted to keep the railroad operating while making the necessary repairs and purchasing new locomotives.



The Public Service Commission issued an order to cease operations after there were reports of the locomotives starting several prairie fires. Dixon was ordered to convert the locomotives into oil burners. The first converted rail train crossed a high trestle 12 miles from Buffalo and fell into the draw, suffering severe damage. Damage to the train, in conjunction with a drop in summer wool shipments, and sections of track washing out, led the railroad to cease operations in 1947.



Several creditors brought suits against Dixon and the railroad, causing Dixon to declare bankruptcy. From 1947 – 1952 the railroad was involved in a legal dispute. The Buffalo Railway was finally abandoned on October 15, 1953, ending rail transportation in Buffalo.

Photos courtesy of the Johnson County Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum and the Local History Department at the Johnson County Library.

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