

UNCOVERING THE DEVIL

by Robert Lerosé

In 1875, Colonel Richard Dodge was escorting a team of surveyors in the Black Hills. When they made their way to northeastern Wyoming, they saw something unusual near the Belle Fourche River. It was a rock formation measuring 1267 feet from the bottom of the river valley stretched against the horizon.

The top of the rock was flat and about the size of a football field. Columns with four, five, and even seven sides ran down the formation. To Native Americans, it was a sacred place. One legend said that a giant bear made the columns by scratching the rock with its claws. Some tribes called it The Bad God's Tower because it looked unfriendly. Colonel Dodge's team began calling it Devils Tower.

How was it formed? In ancient times, water covered Wyoming and the surrounding countryside. When the water receded, it left soft mud and sand that hardened into sedimentary rocks. Pressure began to build underground. Hot liquid rock called magma boiled up and shot through the

cracks in the earth. When the magma cooled and hardened, it turned into igneous rock. Devils Tower is made of an igneous rock called phonolite porphyry (*por-fe-ree*), a stiff rock made of large crystals.

The phonolite porphyry lay hidden below the surface. It took years and years for the wind and water to wash away the softer sedimentary rock. The erosion left the remaining rock in the shape of a tower.

One geologist said Devils Tower was "inaccessible to anything without wings." But two ranchers, William Rogers and Willard Ripley, wanted to be the first to climb it. They found a crack that ran up the tower and built a special wooden ladder. On July 4, 1893, Rogers made his way to the top in about an hour. On September 24,

1906, President Theodore Roosevelt declared Devils Tower the first national monument in the United States.

Weather still eats away at the rock today. Perhaps far into the future, Devils Tower may sink into the earth once again.

