

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Fossil Cabin

other name/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Highway 30 ☐ not for publication

city or town Medicine Bow ☐ vicinity

state Wyoming code WY county Carbon code 007 zip code 82329

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mary M. Hopkins
Signature of certifying official/Title

2/14/2008
Date

Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

The Fossil Cabin
Name of Property

Carbon County, Wyoming
City, County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
3	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation
Recreation and Culture

Current Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation-road related
Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation unknown
walls dinosaur bones
roof asphalt shingles
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

The Fossil Cabin
Name of Property

Carbon County, Wyoming
City, County and State

8. Description

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Transportation

Entertainment and Recreation

Period of Significance

1932-1957

Significant Dates

1932-33

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other Name of repository:

American Heritage Center, Univ of Wyoming

☐ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

The Fossil Cabin
Name of Property

Carbon County, Wyoming
City, County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than an acres

UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/3 4/1/0/9/6/0 4/6/3/5/1/7/0
Zone Easting Northing

2 / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

3 / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

4 / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Property Tax No.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nancy Weidel
organization Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office date Feb. 1, 2008
street & number 2301 Central Avenue telephone 307 742-9948
city or town Cheyenne state WY zip code 82070

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs: Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name/title Jodie Fultz
street & number Box 173 telephone _____
city or town Medicine Bow state WY zip code 82329

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

Description

Fossil Cabin

The Fossil Cabin (1 on sketch map) was constructed in 1932. It is a unique building that sits along side US Highway 30 approximately five miles east of the nearest town, Medicine Bow, Wyoming. The one-story, rectangular-shaped building measures twenty-eight feet, four inches by eighteen feet, four inches and faces southwest. No foundation is visible. The walls are constructed primarily of dinosaur bones mined from nearby Como Bluff, one of the richest dinosaur fossil beds in the world. The dinosaur bones are laid in random courses with wide mortar joints. The building purportedly weighs 102,166 pounds and used a total of 5,796 dinosaur bones in its construction. The exterior walls do contain a very small amount of rock.

The façade has three bays which include a paired double-hung, 4 over 1 lite window, a 3 foot 4 inch wide door with three divided lites, and a single double-hung, 4 over 1 lite window. The windowsills are a concrete overlay on top of bones. The northeast side of the building has two, 3-lite fixed windows. The northwest side has one set of paired 4 over 1 double-hung windows and a single, 3-lite fixed window. The southwest side has two 4 over 1 lite, double-hung windows. All windows are wood-framed with no surrounds.

A gable roof covered with asphalt shingles replaced the original flat roof in 1987. There is no chimney.

A wire fence surrounds the northwest and southwest sides, and a picket fence is located at the front of the building. The northeast side has no fence.

Stone House ca. 1932 Contributing

The house (2 on sketch map) served as a residence for Thomas and Grace Boylan and purportedly was the site of the first Fossil Museum until construction of the Fossil Cabin was completed. The gas pumps were located near the front entrance to the house. The one-and-one-half story, gable-roofed, frame building is sided with sandstone that most likely was quarried nearby. It measures 40 feet 4 inches long by 36 feet 5 inches wide. A short wing wall was attached to both the southeast and southwest ends of the house front, increasing the façade length to 70 feet 3 inches. A small rock shed is built into each wing wall on the north side. A small door accesses each shed. The building has paired double-hung windows on the façade and various sized single double-hung windows and elsewhere. There is one entrance on the façade and a double door on the north side that accesses the basement. The grade slopes from south side to north side, which provides room for a basement

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

Chicken House Contributing

The chicken house (3 on sketch map) is constructed of wood and sided with sandstone slabs. The structure measures 23 feet by 17 feet 8 inches. The parapet is crudely crenellated as a decorative motif. Plywood covers a doorway opening and a long, rectangular window opening.

Garage Non-contributing

The garage (4 on sketch map) is wood-framed and sided, and measures 22 feet 2 inches by 12 feet 3 inches. It has a gable roof and a set of double doors on the south side of the building.

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

Statement of Significance

The Fossil Cabin, also known as the Fossil Cabin Museum, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A as a unique example of a roadside attraction associated with transcontinental travel along the old Lincoln Highway and U S Route 30. The cabin was constructed in 1932 of fossilized dinosaur bones and its purpose was two-fold. Its novelty was meant to lure travelers off the busy highway to buy gas at the nearby pumps but it also served as an unscientific interpretative museum for the spectacular dinosaur discoveries made at Como Bluff. The bones to construct the cabin were gathered over a period of seventeen years from Como Bluff. Research indicates that the Fossil Cabin is the only building constructed of fossilized dinosaur bones in the United States.

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, Como Bluff is part of the Morrison Formation, which is hundreds of feet deep and contains millions of years of deposition. The Morrison Formation occurs in twelve states and the first major vertebrate paleontological sites were discovered within the formation in 1877 in Wyoming and Colorado. Important fossil discoveries in the Morrison Formation led to the study of vertebrate paleontology worldwide by the end of the nineteenth century.

Como Bluff is an east-west trending anticline approximately ten miles long, one mile wide and contains fourteen different quarries. Two employees of the Union Pacific Railroad are credited with the first significant discovery of dinosaur remains at the bluff in 1877. As news of the find spread, prominent scientists and their crews traveled to the bluff where they unearthed a number of whole dinosaurs that were sent to such museums as the Peabody in Boston and the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh. Fierce rivalries, known as "the bone wars," developed among various scientists working at the bluff as each attempted to become the first to discover a large or new specimen that could be sold for high dollar or displayed at the colleges with which they were affiliated.

Thomas Boylan, builder of the Fossil Cabin, was born in California in 1863 and came to Wyoming in 1892. He worked for various sheep and cattle companies near Lander, Medicine Bow and Rock River. Boylan filed on a homestead in 1908 located near Como Bluff. He collected dinosaur bones over a period of years with the intention of erecting dinosaur sculptures near the gas pumps located in front of his house along the Lincoln Highway. A University of Wyoming dinosaur specialist concluded that the bones were from a variety of species but that Boylan's bone collection did not include a complete specimen. Boylan instead built the Fossil Cabin with 5,796 fossilized dinosaur bones and a small amount of rock.

The Fossil Cabin's location along the busy Lincoln Highway, the country's first transcontinental automobile road, guaranteed business for Boylan's enterprise. The idea of a coast-to-coast highway was first entertained by a number of prominent men connected with the automobile industry in 1912. The Lincoln Highway Association was formed in 1913 to plan, promote and create signage for the highway. Across the country, local Good Roads Clubs also lobbied enthusiastically for the new road.

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

Named to honor President Abraham Lincoln, the highway route was laid out in 1913 and traveled from New York City to San Francisco, through twelve states, including Wyoming. The federal highway numbering system began in 1926 and most of the road through Wyoming was subsequently designated as Route 30 although many continued to call it the Lincoln Highway.

The Lincoln Highway proved monumental for Wyoming. In a proclamation "To the People of Wyoming", dated October 11, 1913, Governor Joseph M. Carey wrote:

The Lincoln Highway Association has determined that the great highway...should cross the state of Wyoming from east to west. It is thought especially fitting that on the evening of October 31st there should be an old-time jollification to include bonfires and general rejoicing...". Wyoming citizens responded with "a string of bonfires, nearly 450 miles long, lighted the route across southern Wyoming, heralding the opening of the pioneer transcontinental route.

Although initially the roadbed through Wyoming might be mud or sand, the highway was much improved by the time Boylan built his fossil cabin. Boylan took advantage of the nearby dinosaur beds to help set his gas station apart from others along the road. Dinosaurs became very popular in the 1930s so much so that the "subject had taken on something of a circus air...they became reptilian curiosities, good for drawing crowds into the museum..." Contemporary evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould writes of an "archetypal fascination" with dinosaurs. Although he cannot explain why "dinomania" takes hold at certain times, he does think at least part of the explanation might lie in "a quintessentially American source, commercialization." Certainly that is how Boylan used the dinosaur theme.

The Sinclair Oil Company adopted the dinosaur as their logo in 1932, and the company sponsored a dinosaur exhibit at Chicago's Century of Progress Exhibition of 1933-34. In 1936, the Works Progress Administration constructed Dinosaur Park, in Rapid City, South Dakota (listed in the National Register in 1990), which features large concrete dinosaurs overlooking the city. Elsewhere in the 1930s, dinosaurs were built as tourist attractions in such states as Michigan and Arkansas.

According to Jody Fultz, current owner of the Fossil Cabin, Boylan first used his sandstone house as a fossil museum before he completed the Fossil Cabin in time for the 1933 tourist season. Anecdotal information suggests that the house was built to approximate the size of the giant *Diplodocus* that at the time was the largest dinosaur ever discovered at Como Bluff. It is not known if Boylan charged a fee to get into the house or the later fossil museum. Museum display cases featured fossils, Indian artifacts and miscellaneous relics, along with candy and pop for sale. Various signs on the walls instructed the visitor in such lessons as:

"To Know the Authoritative Natural History of Life Study Its Fossils"

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

The Mom and Pop museum was a curio itself, but more importantly, the Fossil Cabin lured the traveler off the road where he or she might stop to fill the tank. Boylan's was not the only gas stop along the eighteen-mile stretch between the two towns of Rock River and Medicine Bow. There were reportedly six or eight gas stops and one, Wild Bill's near Rock River, included a petting zoo. During this time, the Wyoming Highway Commission did not keep records of the number of vehicles that traveled through Wyoming in a given year but one can assume that thousands of cars did pass by the Fossil Cabin every year due to the cross-country highway.

Boylan had postcards printed in 1935-1936 on which he named his building the "Como Bluff Dinosaurium." Another postcard called it "The Strangest Building In The World". The cabin was also known at different times as the "Creation Museum," the "World's Oldest Building," and the "Building That Used to Walk."

On April 26, 1938, Robert Ripley's nationally syndicated cartoon, "Believe It or Not", featured the Fossil Cabin and called it "the world's oldest cabin." Thomas Boylan's wife, Grace, in a letter dated June 19, 1968, recalled the time when Robert Ripley "spent three days with Mr. Boylan." Following that significant event, Boylan erected a sign outside the cabin that read "As Featured in Ripley's Believe It or Not." It is hard to imagine today how popular the syndicated Ripley cartoon once was, but at its peak, supposedly 80 million people read it daily. According to one source, Ripley received two million pieces of mail in May, 1932. (The Fossil Cabin cartoon ran again on the Ripley's Believe It or Not Internet site on January 28, 2006.)

Boylan kept a logbook for his visitors to sign. A few of those books survive today. In the summer of 1940, the average number of visitors per day, or at least the average number of people who signed the logbook per day, during a July week, was 73 people. They came from small towns and large cities in such states as Illinois, Oregon, Washington, California, and Iowa, and other states through which the Lincoln Highway runs, as well as Wyoming. Very few people visited from the southern states, most likely because they would use an alternate route for cross-country travel. Occasionally, the museum received visitors from foreign countries such as France or India. From the logbooks, it appears that Boylan operated the museum from sometime in April or May till late fall when it closed for the winter.

Boylan continued to run the Fossil Museum and gas station until his death in 1947. After that, Grace Boylan kept the museum and gas pumps going through the late 1960s. Jody Fultz remembers that Texaco supplied the gas. The gas pumps were removed sometime during the 1960s. A popular television show even visited the Fossil Cabin. Mrs. Boylan described the incident in a letter, in which she wrote, "June 4th, 1964 Candid Camera, Allen Funt in charge. Program sponsored by Durwood Kirby," which leads one to believe that Mr. Funt, host of the show, did indeed visit the cabin. It is unknown if an episode featuring the Fossil Cabin ever aired.

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

The late 1960s brought hard times for the Fossil Museum and other tourist spots along this stretch of Route 30, as construction of Interstate 80, about twenty miles south of the museum, re-routed the bulk of the traffic from Route 30 (the interstate through this area was completed in October, 1970.) Grace Boylan was concerned enough about the impending interstate that she contacted Charles Rodermal, Director of the State of Wyoming's Recreation Commission at least twice by letter in 1968 and asked "if you would be interested in the place here." Rodermal was not the only official she contacted, for she noted that "it seems that everyone from Governor wishing me success but not one person or department has committed themselves to actually helping me."

Apparently, this was not the first time Mrs. Boylan had contacted the state about the site since she wrote that "I have never had a penny (sic) from the State to help only promises." She ended one letter with "many people are asking questions about the State not doing something here." In another letter to Mr. Rodermal she lamented that "I only wish that the State of Wyoming will realize just what it has to offer the thousands of tourists that pass through the State year after year with places such as mine." It appears from the correspondence that one of the things Mrs. Boylan wanted the state to do was put in "a small rest area with at least one table and one set of rest rooms for the many tourists that stops seeking a place." It is also clear from her letters that more than just a few visitors continued to drop by the museum, but visitation no doubt declined quickly once the interstate opened. Although various state officials and employees responded to her with encouraging words, there is no indication that the state of Wyoming ever helped Mrs. Boylan in any meaningful way.

In 1974, Grace Boylan sold the Fossil Cabin and surrounding buildings and acreage site to Paul and Jodie Fultz, who bought the property not for its historic value, but as a place to raise their horses. Jodie's elderly parents lived in the Boylan house and ran the Fossil Cabin Museum until 1992. Although the original display cases were still in the museum at that time, not all of Boylan's exhibits remained. The Fultz's added new displays and also sold fossils, petrified wood, and rocks. They replaced the original flat roof with a gable roof in 1987.

In the late 1970s, the Wyoming First Club of Rock River and the Laramie League of Women Voters nominated Como Bluff as "an area of critical and more than local concern" to the Wyoming Office of Land Use Administration. They believed that such a designation would lead the way for Como Bluff to become a National Monument. Wyoming U.S. Congressman Teno Roncalio introduced legislation that would authorize a study by the National Park Service to determine the feasibility of designating Como Bluff as a National Monument, but the effort failed.

The Fossil Cabin has been for sale since 1992. Jodie Fultz ran the museum until ill health forced her to retire to Medicine Bow and lease the property with the condition that the museum be open in the summer months. A college in Colorado expressed interest in purchasing the property although an offer has never materialized. Within the past several years, a man from North Carolina offered to buy

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

the building with the purpose of moving it to that state to be used as a tourist attraction. Although Mrs. Fultz would prefer the Fossil Cabin to remain in Wyoming, she also would like to sell the property.

The Fossil Cabin/Museum is a relic of a bygone era of motorized travel when petting zoos and buildings made of dinosaur bones could entice a driver to stop and gas up. It is a unique building, perhaps the only structure in the entire country made of dinosaur bones. The idea that the Fossil Cabin could be moved to North Carolina, so out of context, is amusing but also indicative of just how underappreciated it is on its home turf. It would be unfortunate if Wyoming loses its most significant piece of roadside architecture, one so evocative of an earlier time and directly related to the first transcontinental highway.

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

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Fossil Cabin, Carbon County, WY

Geographical Data: Verbal Boundary Description

The Fossil Cabin is located along the north side of U.S. Highway 30. The boundaries include the Fossil Cabin, the Boylan House, the chicken house, the garage and a small parking lot located south of the house and east of the cabin. U.S. Highway 30 bounds the property on the south. A non-historic fence bounds the property on the west side. The property's north boundary extends 30 yards from the north side of the house. A non-historic fence bounds the east side of the property.

Boundary Justification:

Includes area historically associated with the property, the cabin, the Boylan house, the garage, and the chicken house.