For many years, people have traveled the windy bends and experienced the scenic views of Red Grade Road. Construction of the road was from 1893 to 1897. The road traverses the Bighorn Mountains and was developed to link the eastern front-range from the town of Big Horn in Sheridan County to the western side of the Bighorn Mountains. The town of Big Horn was known as Big Horn City in the late 1800s and in that time period had a larger population than Sheridan, WY until the arrival of the railroad in Sheridan in 1893.

There are different historical accounts of how this route was scouted and developed across the mountain. One account was to establish a mail route from Big Horn City to Hyattville located on the western side. Frank Grouard who served as a government scout and had orders in March of 1894 to find a practicable mail route over the mountain. In the harsh winter weather Frank Grouard and Shorty Wheelwright scouted the route. From this challenging excursion, Grouard lost his eyesight in one of his eyes from snow blindness. Grouard’s survey helped in the establishment of a much needed mail route in this growing northern region of Wyoming.

Another account from the Sheridan Post claims that in the spring of 1893 the people of Big Horn City and the vicinity grouped their manpower and equipment to begin building the first version of the road. Also, in August of 1893, the first recorded visit to Dome Lake by the exploring party of Edward Gillette occurred. Gillette, who Gillette, WY is named after, was a surveyor and chief engineer for the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad and he also surveyed Red Grade Road that would become the route to the Dome Lake Club a mountain summer resort that he founded.

When Red Grade Road was utilized as a stagecoach route, the road was redeveloped with county funds and completed in 1897. One of the stops on the route was Marrow Cabins near the historic Big Goose Ranger Station. By the early 1900s, the stagecoach routes were discontinued in the Bighorn Mountains when the railroad lines became established in the region. Today, several sections of the old mail and stagecoach route is part of the Bighorn National Forest Old Mail Trail and passes through the lower elevations of the Cloud Peak Wilderness area.

As transportation evolved to the first automobiles, the grade of Red Grade Road was a challenge for the 4-cylinder gravity feed engines. Local accounts describe automobiles traveling up the road in reverse to keep engine fluids flowing and stopping at the mountain springs to refill the radiator as part of the travels. One of these springs is located at the Springs Trailhead parking lot of Red Grade Trails just off Red Grade Road.

In 1940 and early 1941, the Big Horn National Forest Service explored a development plan and proposal for the federal and state government to build a new major highway across the mountains. This plan would roughly follow the Red Grade Road from Big Horn to a junction with existing Highway 14 near Shell Canyon. What brought the proposal to a halt was the outbreak of WWII in December 1941 when the government shifted to defense spending. In post war years, Sheridan County widened Red Grade Road and Big Goose/Woodrock forest road was completed to link Red Grade with US 14.

Over time, the Big Horn City to Hyattville route, Red Grade Road, has been utilized as a postal mail line, a seasonal stage line, a freight hauling line for various things such as timber, a travel route to Dome Lake Club and dude ranches, along with other seasonal recreational access to the Bighorn Mountains.

The Windy Bends of Red Grade Road

Scouting A Route

To Go Up the Mountain