

The Original Wyoming RV – Sheep Wagons



On the outside of the sheep wagon there were boxes to hold food, supplies, and equipment. The canvas top was stretched over hickory bows. The canvas would often be in three layers and was insulated by woolen blanketing.



The door was built in two halves -- the top half could be open for ventilation, while the bottom was closed to keep the dog in or out. A hinged window at the rear could be raised or lowered to allow



In the interior of the sheep wagon there would be a bunk across the end. The bunk would be about four feet above the floor. Above the bunk would be a small window which, in conjunction with the window and dutch door at the tongue end of the wagon, would provide cross ventilation. In the center beneath the bunk would be a slide-out table under which would be cabinets. On either side of the table under the bunk would be drawers. On the right side next to the door would be a stove in which one would burn coal, wood, or cow chips. Between the stove and the bunk would be a bench. On the left side would be another bench with more cabinets below. The wash basin would not, as in the above photo, be kept on the pull out table because the table needs to be retracted in order to climb into the bunk, boosting oneself up on one of the benches. The floor would be covered with linoleum, although the writer has seen some sheep wagons that have been modernized with carpeting. [Nothing like alighting with bare feet on cold linoleum in the winter.] In some instances, the shepherd might decorate the interior with pictures cut out of magazines. Other than the built in benches on either side of the pull-out table, there is no furniture. Sheep wagons were not limited to shepherders, but were also used in cowcamps and at the end of wagon trains as shelter for freighters much in the same manner as modern semi-tractors have sleeper cabs.

Sheep wagons were supposedly invented by Rawlins blacksmith James Candlish in 1884. Around 1900, Schulte Hardware Company of Casper standardized the wagon as 11 feet long and 6 1/2 feet wide, canvas top and stove. By 1904, sheep wagons were being manufactured in the Big Horn Basin by D. V. Bayne of Thermopolis. The wagons later could be purchased from, among others the Studebaker Brothers of Southbend, Indiana. Some are still in use in the Big Horn Basin. The Basin is not the only place in the state, however, where sheep wagons were used until comparatively recently

Life in the sheep camp would be lonely. Usually there would be one shepherd in a camp. He, with his only companion a dog, would tend to the sheep alone for months at a time. The camp would be established in the center of the pasturage. When the sheep had exhausted the grass in the area, the flock and camp would be moved to another area and the process repeated through the season