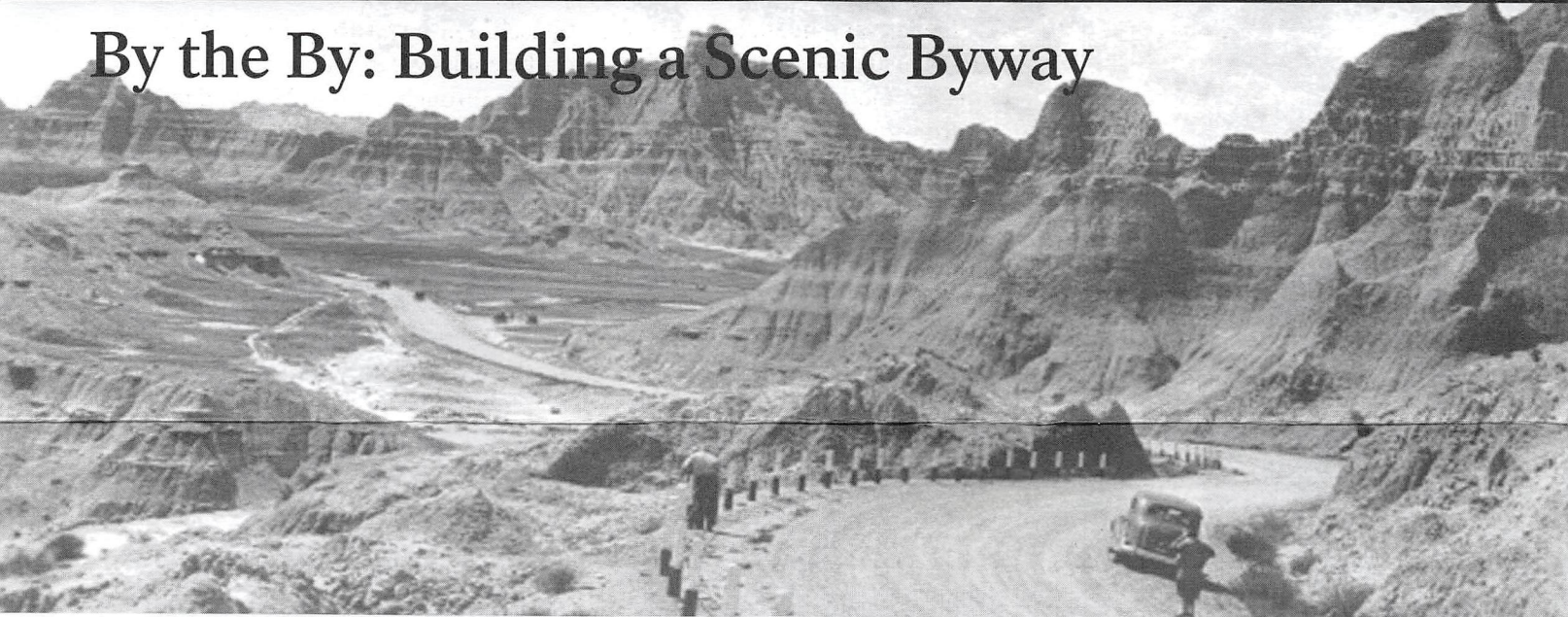


# Badlands

Badlands National Park  
South Dakota



## By the By: Building a Scenic Byway



*You are about to explore an area known around the world for its fossil resources and connection to the Plains people. Today, it also protects the largest expanse of prairie in the National Park System and the associated plant and wildlife. In 2001, working with the State of South Dakota Department of Transportation, the winding route through Badlands National Park was designated a State Scenic Byway. Efforts are currently underway to obtain National Scenic Byway status.*

### **A Political Symbiosis: Road and Park**

The story of Badlands National Park is intrinsically linked to the scenic drive – the Badlands Scenic Byway – that wends its way through the stark formations and native prairie. Legislation signed by Calvin Coolidge in 1929 stipulated that the Badlands would be designated a national monument as soon as most of the private land in the proposed area was brought into the public domain and the state of South Dakota built 30 miles of suitable road through the scenery. If there was no road, there was no national park. Period.

### **Seeing Through the Grit of the Dust Bowl**

The age of the dust bowl and the Great Depression had hit the Badlands full force just at the time when Senator Peter Norbeck and local entrepreneur Ben Millard were putting a plan into motion to purchase private land in the White River Badlands for road construction. Most of the few homesteaders who survived the Great Depression went bust and were forced to sell out.

In addition to the low land prices during the Great Depression, Norbeck and Millard were aided in acquiring property for the National Monument by the strong federal government programs of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. Inspired by the English economist John Maynard Keynes, Roosevelt was determined to end economic downturn by pumping large sums of federal money into the American economy. In 1934 the Submarginal Land Division of the National Park Service, created through the 1933 Federal Emergency Relief Administration, dedicated funds for the purchase of lands vacated deemed unusable for agriculture. Ultimately, the state of South Dakota acquired most of the land that is now Badlands National Park, then sold or donated sections to the National Park Service for a "public pleasuring ground."

## A Serpentine Scene

A blessing and a curse of the Badlands Loop Road is that it was not laid out by engineers or any type of “expert.” Initially, the South Dakota Highway Department hired engineers to carve out a route through the area; however, the first idea was to run more than half of its route through the prairie, which was much easier and less costly than building a road through the rugged terrain of the Badlands Wall. However, Ben Millard wanted the road to run directly through the best scenery and he staked out a route himself. The new road plans that Norbeck and Millard were eventually able to force the engineers to follow ran from Pinnacles southeast through Dillon Pass, then through Bigfoot Pass, and then onward through Cedar Pass where the road turned sharply north and connected to old Highway 16 (now Interstate 90).

The section of the scenic road through the Badlands between Cedar Pass and Bigfoot Pass opened in 1935. After the Sage Creek Rim Road was completed in 1937, the full length of the route was open for business. Despite the protests of Norbeck and Millard, who thought that the road should be built directly through Sage Creek Basin instead of along the rim, the engineers planned and constructed the Sage Creek Rim Road at its current location. The route of the Badlands Scenic Byway capitalizes on its beauty but continues to cause management problems as it slips and slides after heavy rains and harsh winters due to its placement over unstable geologic formations.

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## The Rules of This Road

As you travel the Badlands Loop Road, you will be creating a history of your own through your memories and experiences. Do your part by keeping the impact of your visit minimal. Rocks, fossils, plants, and animals are to be seen and enjoyed but left in place. They belong to all of us, not just those who choose to steal. Do not remove fossils and bring them to the Visitor Center. The Badlands are so fossil rich that we would soon be buried in animal remains. Leave them where found and report them to a park ranger.

You are responsible for your personal safety while in the park. The maximum speed limit on the Badlands Loop Road is 45 miles per hour with reduced speed limits in developed areas and on gravel roads. Please note that “Highway 240” and “Badlands Loop Road” are the same route and may be used interchangeably in travel publications.

Be alert for wildlife while driving in the park. Herd animals, such as deer and pronghorn, seldom travel alone. If you see one, look for more. Viewing wildlife is one of the most popular activities in national parks. However, do not stop on the roadway to watch and photograph animals. There are many blind curves. Pull off to the side of the road, preferably on a paved or gravel surface.

There are paved overlooks with bulletin boards or wayside exhibits. Additionally, there are pull-outs provided if you are a slow moving vehicle. Any time more than two vehicles are stacked up behind you, you should pull over into a pull-out or overlook and allow traffic to move.



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Please take the time to get out of your car and explore the Badlands. It is recommended that you stay on trails and refrain from climbing on the fragile formations. The buttes and ridges are soft crumbly. When wet, the terrain is as slick as ice. The majority of injuries to visitors are the results of falls while climbing features.

It is the mission of the National Park Service to manage these special places for the enjoyment of future generation. Have a safe and enjoyable visit. The Badlands will always be here, waiting for your return.