

# *Theodore Roosevelt*

NATIONAL MEMORIAL PARK

NORTH DAKOTA





# THEODORE ROOSEVELT

## NATIONAL MEMORIAL PARK

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Douglas McKay, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*



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*Section of the North Dakota Badlands where, as a rancher, Theodore Roosevelt learned first-hand of the need for conserving our natural resources*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S enduring contributions to the conservation of our country's natural resources for public benefit are commemorated by this park. In this region on the Dakota frontier he shared with pioneers experiences which helped him understand the problems of the West and made him popular with its citizens. Here also, he gained first-hand knowledge of the exhaustibility of natural resources and the need for measures to reduce wanton waste occasioned by indiscriminate exploitation of the perishable assets of our public lands for immediate, private, or sectional gain.

Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park was established by act of Congress, April 25, 1947. As extended by acts approved in June 1948, it consists of 65,558.19 acres of federally owned land in three separate units—one near Medora, another near Watford City, and the Elkhorn Ranch site about midway between the two along the Little Missouri River.

### HISTORY

No OTHER President of the United States has been so closely linked with the Dakotas as was Theodore Roosevelt when he shared the pioneer life of the Trans-

Mississippi West. His activity here began in September 1883, when he came to the Little Missouri region to hunt buffalo. At that time he also arranged to go into the cattle business. The contract whereby he became owner of the Maltese Cross brand was dated at St. Paul, on September 27, 1883. The Maltese Cross, or Chimney Butte, Ranch was about 7 miles south of Medora.

Personal tragedy was partly responsible for the extension of Roosevelt's ranching operations. Both his mother and wife suddenly passed away in February 1884, when he was a youth of 25 serving his third term in the New York Assembly. Thereafter he abandoned his political pursuits temporarily. Ranching in the wild beauty of the Badlands afforded him the opportunity to realize his boyhood dreams of living the free life of pioneer hunters, sleeping under the stars, observing the wild animals, and dealing with pioneers and sharing their experiences in the opening of a new settlement. On returning to the Badlands in June 1884, and finding that his herds had well withstood the winter, Roosevelt sought a location for a ranch of his own. The land was not yet surveyed, and so, like most of his fellow ranchers, he had little opportunity to make legal record



of his property, and no records have been found to show that he ever acquired a title to the area. This was a site some 35 miles north of Medora. In a clump of cottonwoods, on the bank of the Little Missouri, he developed his home ranch which was called the Elkhorn because of a pair of locked antlers found nearby.

Here, in the fall and winter of 1884-85, was constructed a cabin of hewn logs, made from the cottonwoods in the grove where it was situated. During 1885, other buildings were erected, including stables and corrals. His ranch buildings were possibly typical of those of other home ranches, but his cabin probably afforded more comforts than did most homes on the range. A large fireplace, private room, small bookshelf, and rocking chair offered the young statesman, turned rancher, opportunities for writing and reading. The latter was a pleasure which he did not neglect even when on the hunt and the round-up. Much of his *Life of Thomas Hart Benton* and some other articles were written while at the Elkhorn. More important for the sake of his literary work, however, were the experiences and observations which he later drew on when writing *The Winning of the West*.


Theodore Roosevelt also was interested in the actual operations of ranching. He participated not only in the supervision of his own ranch but in the hard work of the round-up. He thus gained first-hand knowledge of the work and play of the cowboys as well as the cattle owners. He boasted no great ability as a rider or a roper or even as a marksman, but he displayed his ability at leadership in successfully organizing a local stockmen's association. His fellow ranchers showed their confidence in him by electing him president of the Little Missouri River Stock Association and by having him represent them at meetings of the Montana

Stockgrowers' Association, with which they were affiliated.

When Theodore Roosevelt first came to the Badlands, the region was remote from the law and, like similar frontier communities, saw some display of "gun law." He helped demonstrate the practicability, even then, of using the regular courts. As much personal effort, he overtook three thieves who stole his boat and brought them to justice before the regular courts. As orator on a Fourth of July program at the new town of Dickinson in 1886, he boldly told the settlers about their duties


#### Theodore Roosevelt's Brands

**CHIMNEY BUTTE RANCH.**  
THEODORE ROOSEVELT, Proprietor.  
FERRIS & MERRIFIELD, Managers.



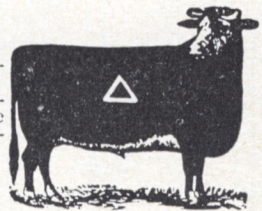
P. O. address,  
Little Missouri,  
D. T. Range,  
Little Missouri,  
8 miles south  
of railroad.

as in cut  
on left  
hip and  
right  
side, both or  
either, and



down cut dewlap.  
Horse brand,  on left hip.


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**ELKHORN RANCH.**  
THEODORE ROOSEVELT, Proprietor.  
SEAWALL & DOW, Managers.



P. O. address, Lit-  
tle Missouri, D. T.  
Range, Little Mis-  
souri, twenty-five  
miles north of rail-  
road.

as in cut, on  
left side,   
on right,   
or the re-  
verse.

Horse brand,   
on right or  
left should-  
er.

(Courtesy, Theodore Roosevelt Collection, Harvard College Library)



and obligations as citizens as well as of their privileges under our Republic.

If Roosevelt's Dakota ranching venture caused him economic loss, he appears never to have regretted this. His knowledge of people of the West, as a result of sharing their life, helped him understand their problems and won him popularity among them. The well-known military organization, the "Rough Riders," was an outgrowth of Roosevelt's experience in the Badlands. The fame resulting from its exploits during the Spanish-American War was important in his rise to the governorship of New York, the Vice Presidency, and later the Presidency of the United States. In 1918 he wrote, "I have always said I never would have been President if it had not been for my experiences in North Dakota."

He lived in the Little Missouri Badlands when it was one of the last representations of the many successive frontiers which pioneers had established in settling America. He saw a section of the wild West tamed when the realization was growing that the country's great natural resources were not inexhaustible—that even the free grass of the extensive ranges on the public domain and its once abundant wildlife would vanish if not protected from selfish and wasteful exploitation.

In the book *Roosevelt in the Badlands*, Hermann Hagedorn has given a full and interesting account of this chapter of the future President's life. He has pointed out Roosevelt's own appreciation for the intangible returns from his Dakota experiences. It was an idyllic life he led and shared with hunters, ranchers, cowboys, and pioneers, whose virtues he adored and whose faults he forgave. Here, he said, "the romance of my life began."

The lure of profits attributed to the open range cattle industry attracted several notable characters to this region. Of

Roosevelt's contemporaries there, the best known and most colorful was the French nobleman, the Marquis de Mores. Financial means at his disposal enabled him to launch different industrial ventures. His scheme for direct marketing of meats to the city table failed, but in Medora, which he founded early in 1883, are several structures which date back to the Marquis' promotion of the town. Most interesting is his country home, or "chateau," which is now a State historic site, where visitors can see the furnishings used by the Frenchman. Here Roosevelt paid occasional social calls and enjoyed discussions about horsemanship with the Marquis.

## GEOLOGY

THEODORE ROOSEVELT National Memorial Park is an area of great scenic appeal. In contrast to the flat plains to the east are the conical hills, buttes, and tablelands found along the Little Missouri River. The sands, shales, and clays are gray, blue, buff, and yellow. Interspersed with these pastel shades are black coal beds and thin red and brown bands of iron-stained sand and clay. The red baked shales add brilliance to the scene.

The origin of the surface rocks, known as the Fort Union formation, goes back millions of years to the dawn of the Cenozoic era. At that time streams originating in the newly uplifted Rocky Mountains flowed eastward and deposited their load of sediments in broad lagoons, lakes, and deltas. The rock thus produced was later uplifted and is now found over a large part of western North Dakota and eastern Montana. Climatic conditions were such that a luxurious vegetation flourished. The accumulation of forest debris in the lagoons and swamps often attained considerable thickness and when later covered by sediments was converted into coal.



The type of coal found in the park is the soft variety known as lignite.

There are several beds of coal varying in thickness from about an inch to more than 7 feet. There is also considerable variation in purity and texture. Some beds appear to be of fair quality, but most of them are thin and interlaid with bands of sand and clay. When exposed to the air, the coal slakes and breaks into small fragments. Lignite coal has a coarse, woody texture, and in much of it the outlines of leaves and flattened branches can be readily seen.

Many trees of the Cenozoic era are found in isolated sections and were buried in a standing position. Mineral-laden waters seeping through the woody structure converted it into stone and produced what is commonly known as petrified wood. Later, erosional processes carried away the covering of sediments and exposed the

*Petrified Tree*



trunks of the trees, some erect but converted to solid rock. Some of the trees were veritable forest giants several feet in diameter. Numbers of these still exist in place, but most have fallen and have been broken into fragments.

Much of the area is overlaid by a hard, reddish, bricklike rock known locally as "scoria." It is abundant in the park and surrounding country. The origin of the scoria is an interesting segment of earth history. It is believed the exposed coal beds became ignited by lightning, chemical reaction, or possibly prairie fires. The heat generated by the burning coal baked the overlying clay into a natural brick. This, of course, is more resistant to erosion than the surrounding clays and shales and offers protection against the beating rains. Many buttes and spires are capped by masses of this red, bricklike material which adds to the scenic qualities of the park.

## TREES AND FLOWERS

THERE are many groves of cottonwoods along moist river bottoms. Three species of juniper, ash, and elm grow here. Sagebrush is abundant. Other shrubs include sumac, common chokecherry, wolfberry, American plum, dogwood, buffaloberry, wildrose, and currant. Yucca and cactus are found.

Wild flowers are abundant in the spring and early summer. Some varieties persist through the summer and fall months. The more common flowers are the pasqueflower, larkspur, arnica, cowparsnip, sunflower, bluebell, goldenrod, aster, and phlox.

## WILDLIFE

WILDLIFE, once abundant, has become scarce, some species like the Audubon bighorn sheep even having been eliminated. Here, the rich grasslands and wooded gulches once furnished ample



food for thousands of bison, mountain sheep, elk, mule and whitetail deer, and antelope. The grizzly bear and wolf were also present. Within the past 75 years, practically all but the deer have passed from the scene. Antelope have been introduced and within certain limitations the original fauna will be restored.

Smaller animals are found in abundance. Among the more common are porcupines, chipmunks, prairie dogs, coyotes, badgers, beaver, wildcats, cottontails, and jack rabbits. The short-nosed horned lizards, known as horned "toads," are harmless reptiles found in the park. The pugnacious black-footed ferret, once the scourge of the prairie dog, is very rare. Bull-snakes, blue racers, and prairie rattlesnakes are native to the park; the latter is the only venomous type, but the admonition of "Look where you step" should be heeded. Also, one should not put his hands on ledges of rock or in crevices.

The park is rich in bird life. Hawks, falcons, eagles, owls, woodpeckers, flickers, sparrows, larks, swallows, buntings,

wrens, orioles, and other common species are frequently observed.

### ADMINISTRATION—LOCATION

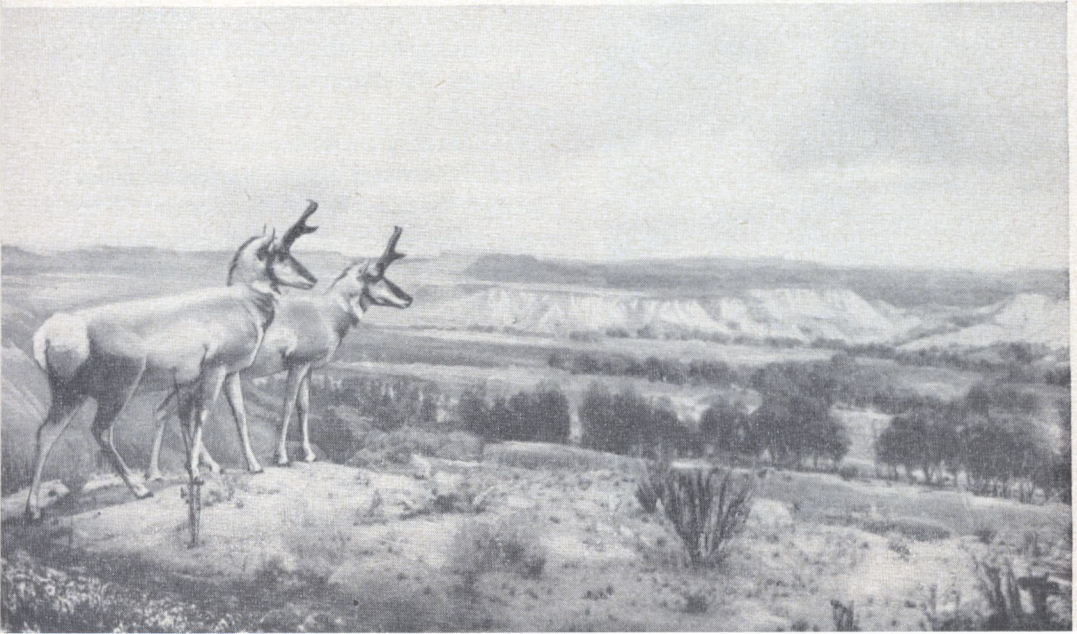
A SUPERINTENDENT is in immediate charge of the park. Address all inquiries to Superintendent, Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, Medora, N. Dak.

Park headquarters are located at Peaceful Valley Ranch, 6 miles from Medora, over a surfaced road which joins United States Highway No. 10. Medora is on the main line of the Northern Pacific Railroad. This is the only railroad with direct connections to Medora. The nearest transcontinental air fields are located at Bismarck, N. Dak., and Miles City, Mont.

The most popular means of transportation is by automobile. United States Highways Nos. 10 and 2 are suggested for east-west travelers. United States Highway No. 85, the nearest north-south highway, intersects Route 10, 18 miles east of Medora, and Route 2, near Williston. Secondary roads may be impassable after

### *Diorama—Antelope in the North Dakota Badlands*

*(Courtesy, American Museum of Natural History)*





prolonged rains. Visitors should inquire locally concerning road conditions at such times.

### *Public Services for Visitors*

PICNIC AREAS and campgrounds are available in the park, but there are no tourist cabin or meal services. Hotels, auto camps, restaurants, and garages are located in nearby cities and villages.

### HELP US PROTECT THE PARK

REGULATIONS are in force for the primary purpose of preserving the area in as near a natural condition as possible. All uses and practices inconsistent with this purpose are discouraged. Visitors are requested to assist the administration by observing the following:

The use of firearms is prohibited.

Be careful with fire. Build fires only in designated places. Do not throw burning tobacco from moving vehicles or horseback. Be sure all fires are extinguished before leaving them.

Visitors are requested to refrain from molesting wildlife in any manner. Remember, animals can take care of themselves better if not pampered by human beings.

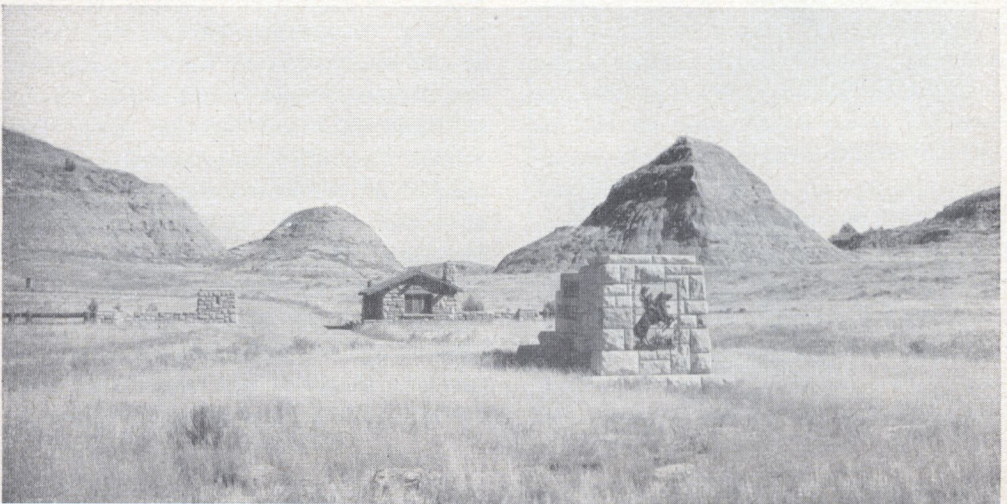
In order to perpetuate the natural condition of the park, flowers, shrubs, and trees should not be disturbed or wild animals or birds harmed or frightened; signs, structures, and natural features must not be marred or defaced; and specimens of any kind cannot be collected.

Please help to keep the area clean. Do not throw papers, rubbish, or garbage about. Place it in containers specified for that purpose.

*The National Park System, of which Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park is a unit, is dedicated to the conservation of America's scenic, scientific, and historic heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the people*

*Cover: Theodore Roosevelt on the Round-up—1885 (From *Roosevelt in the Badlands*, Copyright 1921, Hermann Hagedorn, Houghton Mifflin Co., Publisher.)*

*East Entrance to Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park*

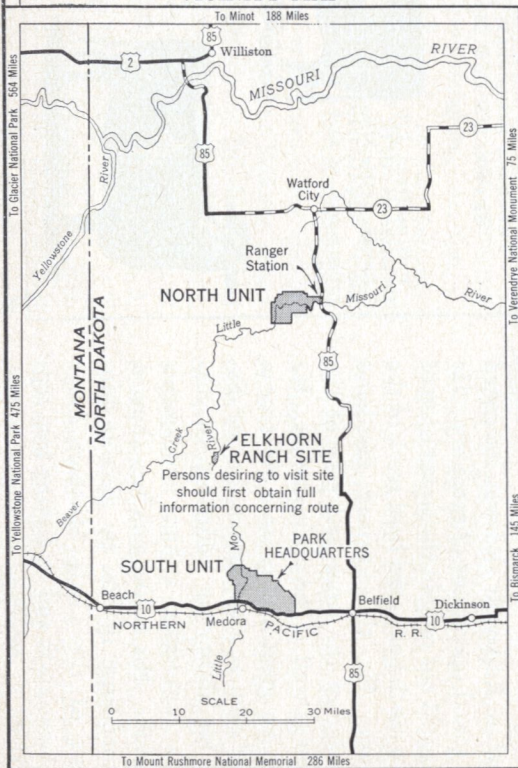




# THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL MEMORIAL PARK

## NORTH DAKOTA

### VICINITY MAP



### LEGEND

- Park Boundary
- Paved Road
- Improved Road
- Graded Road
- Parking Overlook

Note:  
Mileage shown on border of map denotes distances from Park Headquarters or Ranger Station

