

Theodore Roosevelt

NATIONAL MEMORIAL PARK
NORTH DAKOTA

THE BADLANDS OF NORTH DAKOTA

These badlands straddle the final 200 miles of the Little Missouri River and span its valley for a distance of 5 to 30 miles. Moving waters carved this valley, one of many that have cut into the ancient, pre-glacial plains. Starting some 60 million years ago, the waters carried eroded materials eastward from the Rocky Mountains and deposited them as sediments on a vast lowland. Then followed a warm rainy period of many centuries when a jungle covered a large area of the flat lowlands and swamps. Some of the swamp vegetation was buried by new layers of sediment, and eventually became lignite, a type of soft coal.

During the final development of the plains, clouds of ash, from the mountain-building volcanoes of the west, drifted eastward and settled on this land. In time, the ash decomposed and today is exposed in layers of blue bentonite clay.

After the plains had been thus developed, many streams that drained this land started to cut down through the soft strata and to sculpture the badlands in an infinite variety of buttes, tablelands, valleys, and gorges.

Starting some 6,000 to 3,000 years ago and continuing into the present, grass fires and lightning occasionally set fire to exposed veins of lignite. The heat from these fires bakes the surrounding sand and clay to a natural, red-brick material, locally called "scoria." This red scoria, very resistant to erosion, is a late addition to the colorful rocks of the badlands.

The interdependent web of life of the badlands depends upon the grasses and upon available water. Without the grasses and other plants, the animals have no food. Without water, the plants have no life. Available water dictates location, kinds, quantity, and the success of plant growth. Rainfall is mostly from May through July and averages only 15 inches a year.

Grasses can thrive on this amount of water. Therefore, they are the dominant vegetation and represent the oldest and most enduring ground cover. Bushes require more moisture than grasses, but some can grow here. The sagebrush, for instance, grows everywhere because its long roots can reach down in the soil to moisture. Trees are found only in locations most favorable to them because they require much water over a longer period.

There is enough moisture on riverbanks and in ravines to sustain groves of cottonwoods, which offer food and shelter for white-tailed and mule deer. The north-facing slopes get less sun and therefore have less evaporation. This permits the growth of green ash and juniper trees, whereas the warmer and drier south-facing drainages develop semiarid habitat plants such as yucca, cactus, greasewood, and a few specialized grasses.

Rabbits, beavers, raccoons, porcupines, and prairie dogs eat plants and, in turn, become food for coyotes, foxes, bobcats, golden eagles, and other predatory birds. Reptiles and smaller birds and mammals help to maintain control of the insect population.

Humans have caused many changes in the web of life here. By shooting or capture, they have reduced the wild horses to one small herd. And in this area, they hunted to extinction the wapiti ("elk"), wolf, bighorn, bison ("buffalo"), and antelope. But the National Park Service and the State have restored the bighorn, bison, and antelope.



Roosevelt's Maltese Cross Cabin.

This national memorial park honors Theodore Roosevelt. In his North Dakota cattle ranches during the 1880's Roosevelt had a laboratory in which he began to develop his philosophy of practical conservation. He also learned to understand the West—its problems and its rugged settlers. As President (1901-9), his national conservation policy was based upon wise use of the Nation's natural resources in the public interest—a major milestone in resource management.

Roosevelt in 1884.



THE FIRST CATTLE RANCHES

In the 1880's the western Dakotas were a vast area of unsurveyed public land that could not be privately owned or fenced. When the Northern Pacific Railroad passed through North Dakota and made the area economically accessible, adventurous men who hoped to make money in the open-range cattle business, began to move in. They needed only to buy cattle and let their stock roam at will, feeding off the grasses of the public domain.

Theodore Roosevelt, a young New York assemblyman, arrived in the badlands in September 1883 for a buffalo hunt. The bison were already becoming scarce because of slaughter by the hide hunters. Roosevelt asked a number of ranchers for advice on where to find the bison and also discussed with them the prospects for the open-range cattle business. Before returning to the east coast, he joined two other men as a partner in the Maltese Cross Ranch. As his contribution he bought 400 shorthorn cattle to graze on the public domain. His partners were to take care of the ranch operations.

After a rather unsuccessful hunt, Roosevelt returned to New York and in November was re-elected to the State Assembly. A few months later, in February 1884, his wife and mother died on the same day. His mind and spirit were heavy with grief and loneliness, and the young man returned to the Dakota ranch to regain his vigor and sense of purpose through physical and business activities. This sojourn in the badlands also enabled him to avoid campaigning as an active Republican for James G. Blaine for President. He established a second open-range ranch, the Elkhorn, as his own operation while continuing as a partner in the Maltese Cross.

Trail drives of large numbers of cattle were frequent in the 1880's. The cattle were driven all the way from the Texas-Oklahoma border on the Red River, some 1,200 miles, to the Northern Pacific Railroad at Medora and other points in North Dakota and Montana. This "invasion" was increasing the number of cattle in the badlands with little thought about the capacity of the grasses to support them. Then came disaster.

In 1886, an unusually hot and dry summer that seared the rangeland was followed by a severe winter. The intense cold was accompanied by heavy snowfalls that, in many areas, buried the grass the cattle would feed upon during winters of light snowfall. Cattle wandered for miles seeking pasture, only to die of starvation and exhaustion. Some herds were almost wiped out and many of the cattlemen went broke, including some owners of the largest herds. Roosevelt's operations were of medium size, and his herds were greatly reduced. But he was not there to witness his losses.

He had returned to New York in the late summer of 1886 to stand for re-election to the assembly; in November he was severely defeated. The next month he was in England where he married his second wife, Edith Kermit Carow. They spent the winter traveling in Europe. However, Roosevelt

did not forget his ranches, though his interest declined, and he spent only parts of 5 years—1887, 1888, 1890, 1893, 1896—in the badlands. Meanwhile he pursued an increasingly successful political career in the East. He was appointed U.S. Civil Service Commissioner in 1889, president of New York City Police Board in 1895, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1897. This post he resigned in 1898; he campaigned for and was elected Governor of New York that November to serve for 2 years. Roosevelt disposed of his investment in North Dakota in 1898.

As President of the United States, Roosevelt judged the use of the Nation's natural resources by values that were scientific, scenic, and historic, as well as economic. He fostered the establishment of the Forest Service in the U.S. Department of Agriculture to maintain the forests perpetually. He also signed the Antiquities Act which provided that areas of outstanding archeological and historical values could be set aside as national monuments by Presidential proclamation. By this act, Roosevelt proclaimed 15 national monuments and obtained congressional approval for the establishment of five national parks.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

Fees. Entrance and campground fees are collected during the summer season.

Camping. Cottonwood Campground (108 sites) in the South Unit and Squaw Creek Campground (30 sites) in the North Unit; campsites available on a first-come basis. No trailer hookups. You will find other campgrounds near the park.

Group camping is available in the South Unit only, at the Halliday Wells Campground. Groups must have a written reservation from the park superintendent. Riding groups with their own horses should write the superintendent to make special arrangements.

Picnicking is permitted at Painted Canyon, Peaceful Valley, and Squaw Creek. Please do not use the campground for picnicking.

Saddle horses are for rent at Peaceful Valley in summer only. Guides are provided with all rides.

Supplies and accommodations. *Near the South Unit*—Medora has stores for supplies, service stations, restaurants, motels, and souvenir shops. *Near the North Unit*—Watford City, 15 miles north of the park entrance; food stores, service stations, motels, restaurants, and souvenir and other shops.

REGULATIONS

Vehicles. Use motor vehicles and bicycles only on roads.

Pets. Keep them leashed and under control. They are not allowed on trails or in buildings.

Natural features. Leave all natural features undisturbed.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

The park is open all year but the best time to visit is from May through September.

Interpretive services. You are invited to attend the park's summer interpretive programs. Ask at the visitor center or the entrance station about the free campfire programs and guided walks.

Back-country trails. An extensive system of back-country trails covers the park. The back country has several primitive sites for overnight camping by small parties. For further information, ask at the visitor center or entrance station. Back-country camping permits are free.

In The North Unit

Scenic drive starts at the entrance station and ends at Sperati Point. Along the 13-mile drive are several turnouts and interpretive signs. Trailers should not be taken beyond the Squaw Creek Campground.

Longhorn steers. A small herd of longhorn steers may be seen between the entrance station and Squaw Creek Campground. Some longhorns were trail driven north from Texas along the Long X Trail which crosses the park.

Slump block. A huge section of the bluff has slipped to the valley floor. Continued erosion has moved the face of the bluff farther back from this slump. The bands of color in the slump, once horizontal, are now at an angle but it is easy to match the colors with the remnants at the top of the bluff.

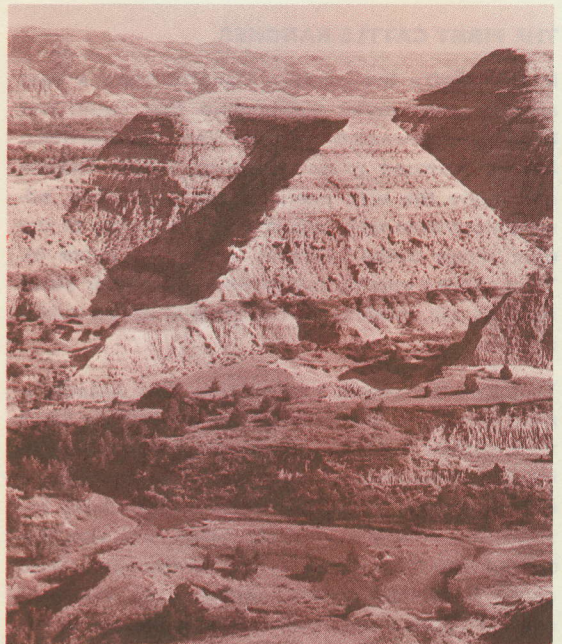
Squaw Creek Nature Trail, a ½-mile loop trail at the southeast corner of Squaw Creek Campground, is self-guiding, and will acquaint you with the river-terrace plant and animal community.

Caprock Coulee Nature Trail. About 1½ miles westward of the Squaw Creek Campground is the start of a ¾-mile self-guiding loop trail interpreting badlands coulees (dry water gulches) and breaks (interruptions in the grassy plains).

Sperati Point is the narrowest gateway in the badlands. The flow of the Little Missouri once continued north from here. Blocked during the ice age, the river broke through the gap between this point and the Achenbach Hills on the other side. While the river still flows northward to this area, it makes a sharp turn to the east.

CHATEAU DE MORES STATE HISTORIC SITE

This 27-room chateau across the river from Medora, was built in 1884 by the Marquis de Mores for his wife. He was a wealthy French nobleman who built a slaughterhouse to process beef from his large herds for shipping to the Eastern markets in the new refrigerated railroad cars. He also built the village, named for his wife Medora, and persuaded the Northern Pacific Railroad to build a station there. He was an acquaintance of Theodore Roosevelt. The chateau is open to visitors all year depending on the weather.



Typical badlands scenery.

In The South Unit

Visitor center. A stop at the museum here will enrich your visit. The restored Maltese Cross Cabin, used by Roosevelt on his visits has been relocated behind this building.

Painted Canyon Overlook is 7 miles east of Medora along Int. 94, at Exit 8. Here, on the upper margin of the badlands you have a magnificent view of its topography and colors. Restrooms, picnic shelters, tables, fireplaces, and water are available.

Scenic Loop Road is a drive of about 38 miles along a good paved road. You are invited to take side trips and to use turnouts for views of significant park features.

Scoria Point. Massive bluffs capped with red scoria show the place where a vein of lignite (coal) burned away and baked the surrounding sand and clay to this natural brick. Erosion has since removed the earth above this erosion-resistant material.

Badlands Overlook. Across the expanse of the Paddock Creek drainage are hummocks covered with scoria.

Burning lignite vein was started from a lightning-caused prairie fire in 1951. The intense heat is baking the adjacent sand and clay into bricklike scoria. Burning of the coal makes an empty space into which the land above collapses to create a broken landscape.

Buck Hill. A short walk leads to this highest point in the park—2,855 feet. Note the plant-life on the dry and hot south-facing slopes, and the tree growth on the moist and cool north-facing slopes.

Wind Canyon. A short self-guiding nature trail up the ridge overlooks the graceful oxbow in the Little Missouri River.

Peaceful Valley. During the heyday of the early cattle ranches in the 1880's, this valley was a horse ranch. The high central section of the ranchhouse was built about 1885.

to Minot 188 miles



to Glacier National Park 544 miles



Williston

MISSOURI RIVER

Watford City



NORTH UNIT

MISSOURI RIVER

MISSOURI

to Yellowstone National Park 465 miles



ELKHORN RANCH SITE

LITTLE

SOUTH UNIT

to Bismarck 138 miles

Belfield

Medora



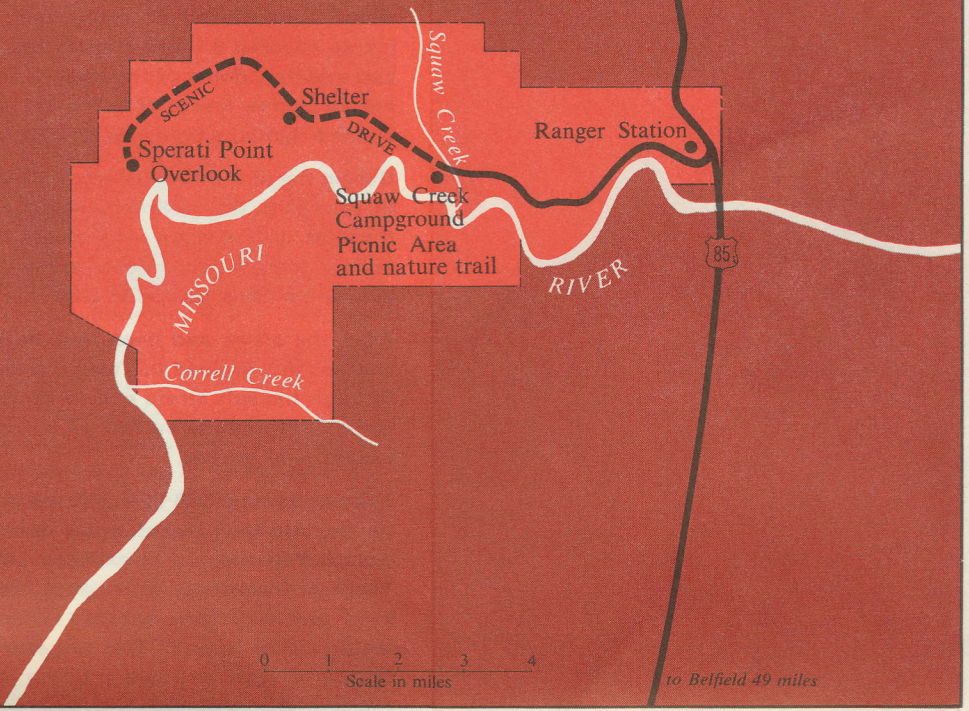
to Mount Rushmore National Memorial 286 miles

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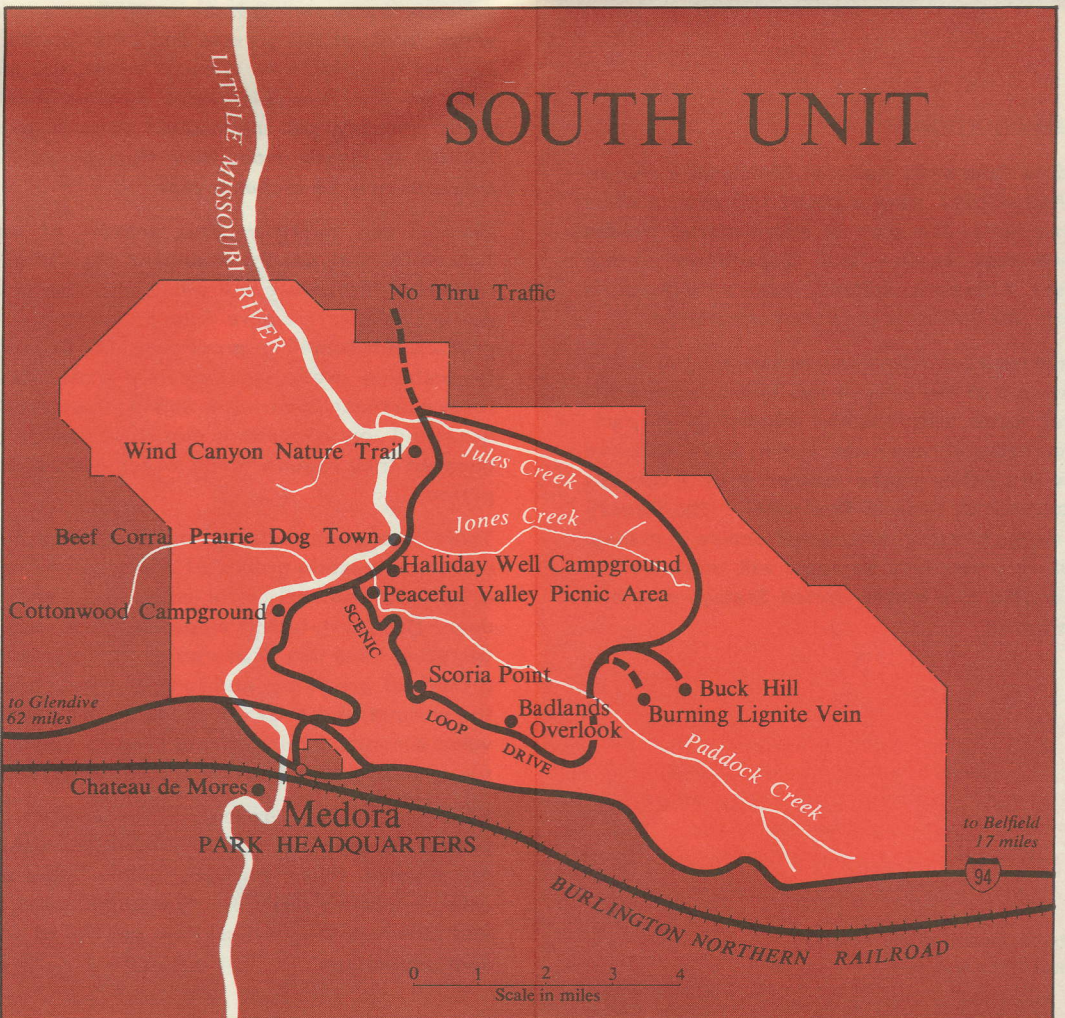
Scale in miles

to Watford City 17 miles

NORTH UNIT



SOUTH UNIT



ADMINISTRATION

Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, established in 1947, covers about 110 square miles in three units. The park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Medora, ND 58645, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

WILD ANIMALS. Respect the park animals for what they are—WILD. Do not walk up to the free-roaming bison or longhorns no matter how peaceful they appear; stay near your car. Do not feed prairie dogs or reach into their burrows.

**U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service**