

Theodore Roosevelt

NATIONAL PARK
NORTH DAKOTA

This national park honors Theodore Roosevelt. His North Dakota cattle ranches during the 1880s constituted a laboratory in which his philosophy of practical conservation had its beginnings. He also learned to understand the West here—its problems and its rugged settlers. The national conservation policy of his presidency (1901-9) was based upon wise use of the Nation's natural resources in the public interest—a milestone in resource management in this country.

THE BADLANDS OF NORTH DAKOTA

These badlands straddle the final 320 kilometers (200 miles) of the Little Missouri River and span its valley for a distance of 8 to 48 kilometers (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.

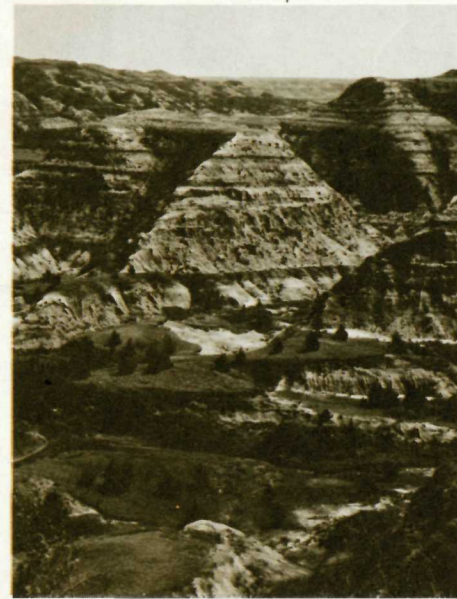
After the plains had been thus developed, many streams that drained this land started to cut down through the soft strata and to sculpture the badlands in an infinite variety of buttes, tablelands, valleys, and gorges.

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 37.5 centimeters (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.

Typical badlands scenery.



Roosevelt's Maltese Cross Cabin.



Roosevelt in 1884.

There is enough moisture on riverbanks and in ravines to sustain groves of cottonwoods, which offer food and shelter for whitetail 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. 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.

THE FIRST CATTLE RANCHES

In the 1880s 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 1880s. The cattle were driven all the way from the Texas-Oklahoma border on the Red River, some 1,920 kilometers (1,200 miles) to choice grasslands near Medora and other points in North Dakota and Montana. This "invasion" increased 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 fall of 1886; there, to his surprise, he was nominated on the Republican ticket to run for mayor of New York. In November he was severely defeated. The next month he went to England where he married his second wife, Edith Kermit Carow. They spent the winter traveling in Europe. Roosevelt did not forget his ranches, though his interest declined, and he spent only part of 5 years—1887, 1888, 1890, 1893, and 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 the New York City Police Board in 1895, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1897. This post he resigned in 1898; thereafter, he served as lieutenant colonel in the First U.S. Volunteer Cavalry during the Spanish-American War. After returning from the war in Cuba, he campaigned for and was, in November 1898, elected governor of New York for a term of two years. Roosevelt also disposed of his investments in North Dakota in 1898.

As a consequence of his observations of the decline of the wildlife in the badlands and in the West, Roosevelt had in 1887 organized the Boone and Crockett Club, which actively worked to save wildlife and forests. The club lobbied for the 1891 Forest Reserve Act and the 1894 Park Protection Act; the latter helped to preserve Yellowstone National Park.

In 1900 Roosevelt was elected Vice President of the United States with William McKinley as President. Roosevelt became President in 1901 after McKinley was assassinated. He was elected to that office in his own right in 1904. As President of the United States (1901-9), 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 value 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. During his Presidency several wildlife refuges also were established.

WARNING

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- **WILDLIFE IS DANGEROUS.** All animals in the Park are wild and unpredictable. Keep your distance. **BISON**, though apparently tranquil, are wild and if disturbed or annoyed may attack you. For your own protection, view them from a safe distance. **RATTLESNAKES** don't always give a warning before they strike. Be on the alert while walking in the park. **PRAIRIE DOGS** can inflict a painful bite if you attempt to feed them, also, their burrows may harbor rattlesnakes. Any **WILD ANIMAL** may suddenly bound into the path of a moving vehicle. To avoid accidents, drive with caution. Many species are more active during the hours of darkness, when visibility is restricted.
- **DRINKING WATER** should be obtained from approved water sources. Much backcountry water is not fit for human use.
- The **CLIMATE** in the badlands is very harsh with extremes in temperature and sudden violent storms. Prepare yourself for a variety of conditions.
- Climbing on steeper, barren slopes in the badlands can be dangerous because slippery clays and soft sediments may yield underfoot. Hikers can best avoid falls in rugged areas by staying on designated trails.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park, administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, covers about 285 square kilometers (110 square miles) in three units. A superintendent, whose address is Medora, ND 58645, is in immediate charge.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

The park is open all year, but the best time to visit is from May through October. During the winter months, portions of the park road may be closed, depending on snow conditions.

You are invited to attend the park's summer *interpretive programs*. For information about the free campfire programs and guided walks, ask at the visitor center or at park or campground entrance stations, or check any of the bulletin boards.

An extensive system of *back-country trails* covers the park. Back-country use is regulated; for further information and a free back-country camping permit, ask at the visitor center.

In the North Unit

A stop at the Ranger Station will help you plan and enjoy your visit.

A **SCENIC DRIVE** starts at the entrance station and ends at Oxbow Overlook. Along this 21-kilometer (13-mile) drive are several turnouts and interpretive signs.

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

At *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. This 0.8-kilometer (1/2-mile) self-guiding nature trail, which interprets the river woodland and badlands features, begins at Squaw Creek Campground.

Caprock Coulee Nature Trail. About 2-1/2 kilometers (1-1/2 miles) westward of the Squaw Creek Campground is the start of a 1.2-kilometer (3/4-mile) self-guiding trail interpreting badlands coulees (dry water gulches) and breaks (interruptions in the grassy plains). At the end of the self-guiding portion of the trail, you may either retrace your steps or continue hiking along the *Upper Caprock Coulee Trail* to the Overlook Shelter and back down to the trailhead. This makes a 6.4-kilometer (4-mile) loop. From the Caprock Coulee trailhead you may also gain access to the *Buckhorn Trail* and follow it for 1.6 kilometers (1 mile) to a prairie dog town. The total Buckhorn Loop Trail is about 18.1 kilometers (11.3 miles) long.

Sperati Point, accessible from Oxbow Overlook by trail, 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 bend to the east.

The *Achenbach Trail* begins at Squaw Campground, climbing from river bottomland up through the Achenbach Hills, dropping to the river again, and finally climbing to the Oxbow Overlook. Here the marked trail ends. (Length about 17.6 kilometers/11 miles).

In the South Unit

A stop at the museum in the VISITOR CENTER 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 about 11 kilometers (7 miles) east of Medora along Int. 94, at Exit 8. Here on the upper margin of the badlands is a magnificent view of its topography and colors. Restrooms, picnic shelters, tables, and water are available. Information and aid are available at the solar equipped visitor station in summer.

A small herd of *feral horses* may occasionally be seen in the area east of Painted Canyon. These are descendants of domestic horses that escaped from local ranches during the ranching heyday.

SCENIC LOOP ROAD is a drive of about 58 kilometers (36 miles) along a good paved road. There are a number of interpretive turnouts for views of significant park features. Sections of the loop road may occasionally be closed for emergency repairs. Please see map.

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

At *Ridgeline Nature Trail*, a 1 kilometer (0.6 mile) self-guiding loop trail interprets the badlands scenery and ecology.

At *Badlands Overlook*, across the expanse of the Paddock Creek drainage, you can see hummocks covered with scoria.

The *Coal Vein Trail* leads you through terrain changed by a fire that burned in this lignite vein from 1951 to early 1977. The intense heat baked the adjacent clay and sand into brick-like scoria. Surface features and vegetation were disturbed by the underground fire.

A short walk leads to *Buck Hill* (elev. 870.2 meters/2,855 feet). Note the plantlife on the dry and hot south-facing slopes, and the tree growth on the moist and cool north-facing slopes.

Boicourt Overlook affords one of the better views of the badlands in the park.

At *Wind Canyon*, a short trail up the ridge overlooks the graceful oxbow in the Little Missouri River.

The *Jones Creek Trail* is a 5.9-kilometer (3.7-mile) walk through the badlands and may be hiked from either end.

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

The *Petrified Forest* is accessible only by hiking or by horseback. Petrified wood may be seen throughout the park from along the scenic loop road.

The Elkhorn Ranch Site

A rough dirt road about 32 kilometers (20 miles) long leads from the South Unit's north boundary to the vicinity of Roosevelt's second ranch, the Elkhorn. You must ford the river to reach the site. No buildings remain. Inquire before attempting this trip. The site is part of the park and is protected by law.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

Entrance and camping fees are collected during the summer.

Firewood is not provided at park campgrounds and picnic areas. You should bring a supply of wood or charcoal, as gathering of wood is prohibited in the park.

Camping facilities include Cottonwood Campground (108 sites) in the South Unit and Squaw Creek Campground (50 sites) in the North Unit. Campsites are on a first-come basis; there are no trailer hookups. You will find other campgrounds near the park.

Group camping for organized groups is available in the South Unit at the Halliday Well Campground, and in the North Unit at a designated area in the Squaw Creek Campground. Groups must have a written reservation from the park superintendent. Riding groups with their own horses should write to 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, 24 kilometers (15 miles) north of the park entrance, has food stores, service stations, motels, camping, restaurants, and souvenir and other shops.

REGULATIONS

Regulations govern the park's use to ensure its enjoyment by all in perpetuity. Not all regulations are listed here; please read those posted at campgrounds and elsewhere. If you have any questions about regulations or activities, please ask.

Use *motor vehicles* and *bicycles* only on designated roads. Offroad vehicular use is prohibited.

Keep *pets* leashed and under control; they are not allowed on trails or in buildings.

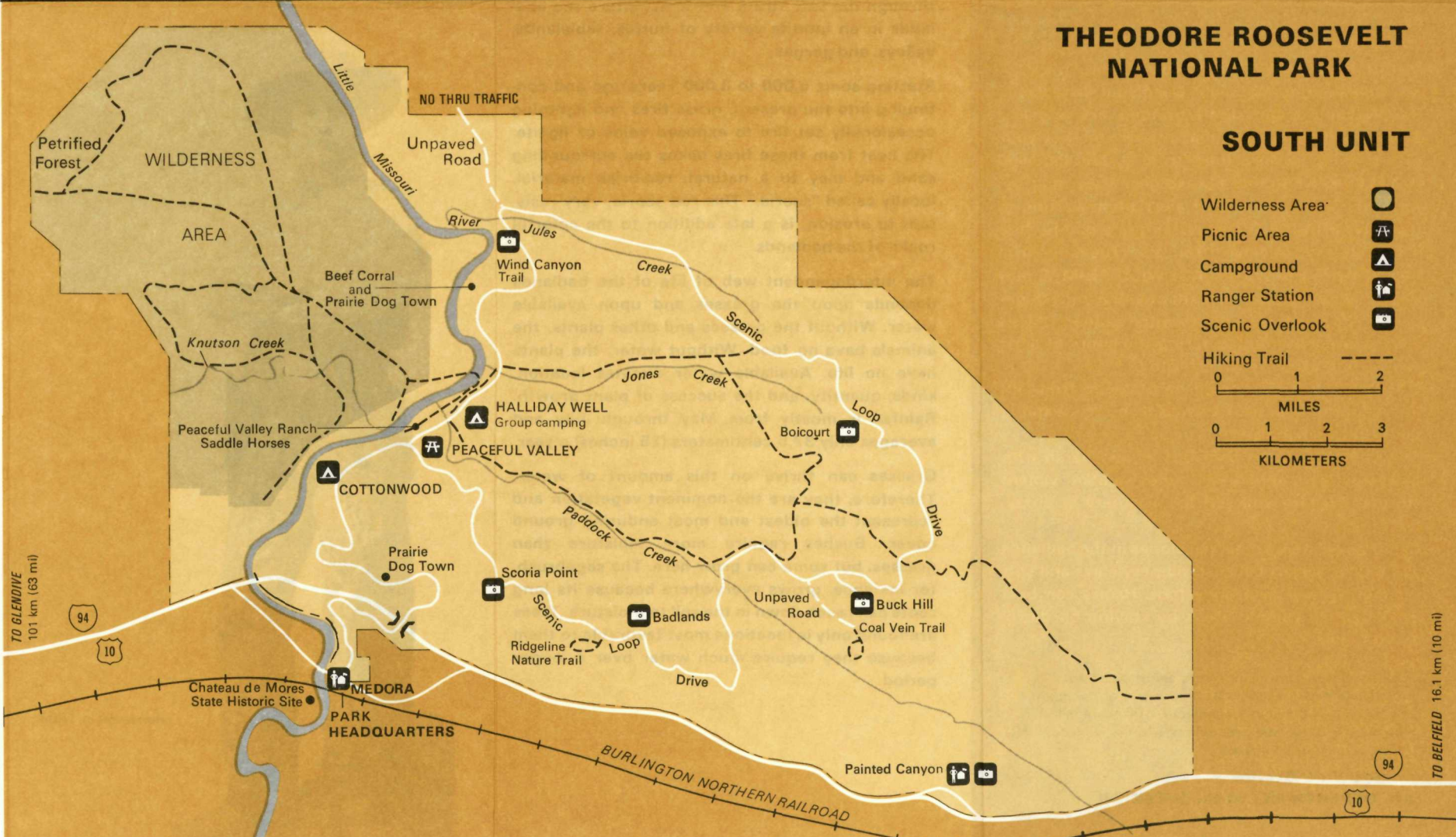
Horses are not allowed in the campgrounds or picnic areas and should not be ridden on self-guiding nature trails.

Build *fires* only in the fire grates provided at campgrounds and picnic areas. Fires are prohibited in the backcountry. Gathering downed or green wood is prohibited in the park.

All *accidents* involving personal injury or apparent property damage must be reported promptly. *Weapons* must be broken down and encased while in the park. Hunting is prohibited. Use or possession of *fireworks* or other explosives is prohibited. Leave all *natural features* undisturbed. The park environment is fragile and susceptible to damage; collecting is prohibited. Do not feed or molest wildlife.

CHATEAU DE MORES STATE HISTORIC SITE

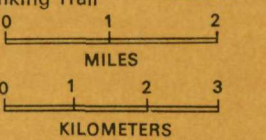
The 27-room chateau across the river from Medora was built in 1884 by the marquis de Mores for his wife. He was a wealthy French nobleman who built a slaughterhouse to process beef from his large herds for shipping to the Eastern markets in the new refrigerated railroad cars. He also built the village, 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.



THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL PARK

SOUTH UNIT

- Wilderness Area
- Picnic Area
- Campground
- Ranger Station
- Scenic Overlook
- Hiking Trail



TO BELFIELD 16.1 km (10 mi)