

Theodore Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt
National Park
North Dakota

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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A Rugged Land Molds a President

"I never would have been President if it had not been for my experiences in North Dakota," Theodore Roosevelt once remarked when reflecting on the influences that affected him throughout his life. Here, too, many of Roosevelt's attitudes about and interest in nature and conservation were sharpened and refined.

Roosevelt first came to the badlands in September 1883. Before returning home to New York, he became interested in the cattle business and joined two other men as partners in the Maltese



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Cross Ranch. The next year he returned and established a second open-range ranch, the Elkhorn, as his own operation while continuing as a Maltese Cross partner, giving him invaluable experience as a rancher and businessman. As interested as Roosevelt was in ranching, what initially brought him to the badlands was the prospect of big game hunting. But when he arrived the last large herds of buffalo were gone, having been decimated by hide hunters and disease. And in the other years that he managed to spend some time in North Dakota, he

became more and more alarmed by the damage that was being done to the land and its wildlife. He witnessed the virtual destruction of some big game species. Overgrazing destroyed the grasslands and with them the habitats for small mammals and songbirds. Conservation increasingly became one of Roosevelt's major concerns. When he became President in 1901, Roosevelt pursued this interest in natural history by establishing the U.S. Forest Service and by signing the 1906 Antiquities Act under which he proclaimed 18 national monuments. He also

obtained Congressional approval for the establishment of five national parks and 51 wildlife refuges and set aside land as national forests.

As a conservationist, Theodore Roosevelt was a major figure in American history. And here in the North Dakota badlands, where many of his personal concerns first gave rise to his later environmental efforts, Roosevelt is remembered with a national park that bears his name and honors the memory of this great conservationist.



The Maltese Cross cabin, the main house on Roosevelt's ranch, was a substantial, soundly built structure.



Roosevelt enjoyed life in the badlands wholeheartedly. He spent most of his time hunting and tending to his ranches.



Harper's Weekly graphically depicted the plight of cattle caught on the range during one of the frequent blizzards.



Roosevelt brought two friends, Wilmet Dow (left) and Bill Sewall, from Maine to help run his ranches.



This was the farmyard—corral and outbuildings—of the Maltese Cross Ranch as it appeared during the mid-1880s.

North Dakota's Badlands

About 60 million years ago, streams carried eroded materials eastward from the young Rocky Mountains and deposited them on a vast lowland—today's Great Plains. During the warm, rainy periods that followed, dense vegetation grew, fell into swampy areas, and was later buried by new layers of sediments. Eventually this plant material turned to lignite coal. Some plantlife became petrified; today considerable amounts of petrified wood are exposed in the badlands. Betonite, the blue-gray layer of

clay may be traced to ash from ancient volcanoes far to the west. But even as sediments were being deposited, streams were starting to cut down through the soft strata and to sculpt the infinite variety of buttes, tablelands, and valleys that make up the badlands we know today.

Though at first glance this landscape appears inhospitable and barren, it is home to a great variety of creatures and plants. Rainfall, scanty though

it is, nourishes the grasses that cover the land. And when the wildflowers bloom in bright profusion they add their vibrant colors to the reds, browns, and greens of earth and grass. At home here, too, are more than 125 species of birds, many of which are songbirds. We can thrill to their songs today as much as Roosevelt did. One of our sweetest, loudest songsters," he wrote, "is the meadowlark. The Plains air seems to give it a voice and it will perch on top of a bush or tree and sing for hours in rich, bubbling

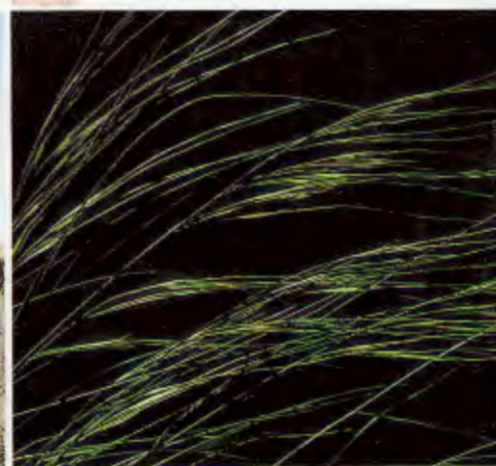
tones." Both mule deer and whitetail deer inhabit the park. The whitetails prefer the river woodlands and the mule deer like the more broken country and the uplands. Prairie dogs, historically a staple food source for many predators, live in "towns" in the grasslands. Through careful management some animals that nearly became extinct are once again living here. Buffalo, for example, were reintroduced in 1956. Keep your eyes open; there's a lot to see.



Golden eagles—two immature ones here—nest in the badlands, feeding on small mammals such as prairie dogs and rabbits. Bald eagles are seen only rarely.



Through the efforts of Roosevelt and others, bison were saved from extinction. Today they graze the badlands much as they once did, though they are now confined to the park.



A grass called needle and thread is an important component of the mixed grass prairie within the park. It provides critical habitat and forage for a variety of wildlife.



Heralding spring, the meadowlark's song drifts across the prairie. The floodplain forest, woody draws, sagebrush flats, and grasslands are habitats that support a variety of birds.



Wood's rose is one of a great number of wildflowers that delighted Roosevelt. Flowers brighten the badlands from early spring until late fall.



Prairie dogs have an elaborate social structure. This sense of community that comes from this is essential for survival from predators.

Theodore Roosevelt

What to See and Do

The park is open all year, but in the winter parts of the roads may be closed. In summer the park's varied interpretive programs include campfire programs, demonstrations, and guided walks. Get information at the visitor centers, at the park or campground entrance stations, or from bulletin boards.

Hikers and horseback riders should inquire at the visitor center for information about the backcountry trails that cover the park and to obtain a backcountry camping permit.

Besides the North and South Units, the park also consists of the Elkhorn Ranch Site, the lo-



The North Unit

In the summer, stop first at the visitor center. The rest of the year, go to the ranger station to get help in planning your visit.

If you have the time, take the 24-kilometer (15-mile) Scenic Drive that goes from the entrance station to the Oxbow Overlook with turnouts and interpretive signs along the way. Between the entrance and Squaw Creek Campground you might see some longhorns, similar to the cattle raised by ranchers in Roosevelt's time.

About 5.5 kilometers (3.5 miles) west of the visitor center are a series of slump blocks, huge sections of bluff that gradually slid intact to the valley floor. This is not uncommon in the badlands where canyon walls are too steep to support a top-heavy formation. Continued erosion has moved the face of the parent bluff farther back from its original position. Though the blocks generally tilt as they slump, the bands of color on the bluff and the block can be matched so you can get an idea of the original position of the block.

As you go along the drive, you will come to a number of trailheads. Some are self-guiding nature trails. The descriptions below will give you an idea of what to expect. Any trail will help you gain an understanding of this land and its wildlife, so get out of your car and go for a hike,

whether it be a short one or a long one. Take time to get to know the park.

Squaw Creek Nature Trail This self-guiding nature trail, which begins at the Squaw Creek Campground, goes through river woodlands and badlands. Length: 0.8 kilometer (0.5 mile).

Achenbach Trail Also beginning at Squaw Creek Campground, this trail climbs from river bottomland up through the Achenbach Hills, drops to the river again, climbs to the Oxbow Overlook along the way by a spur trail, and returns along the river bottom to the campground. Inquire about the condition of the river crossings before departing. Length: 25.6 kilometers (16 miles).

Caprock Coulee Nature Trail About 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) west of Squaw Creek Campground is the start of a self-guiding trail through badlands coulees—dry water gullies—and breaks—interruptions in the grassy plains. Length: 1.2 kilometers (0.75 mile).

Upper Caprock Coulee Trail This is a continuation loop from the self-guiding portion of the Caprock Coulee Nature Trail bringing you back to the trailhead. Length: 3.9 kilometers (2.5 miles). As a loop with the nature trail: 6.4 kilometers (4 miles).

cation of Roosevelt's second ranch. Ask at the visitor center or at a ranger station for information before going there.

Accommodations and Services Entrance fees are collected in the summer; camping fees may be collected throughout the year. Since firewood is not provided and its gathering is not permitted, bring your own wood, charcoal, or lightweight stove. Cottonwood Campground in the South Unit and Squaw Creek Campground in the North Unit are operated on a first-come, first-served basis and do not have trailer hook-ups. Other privately run campgrounds are located near the park. Camping for organized

Safety

For your protection, use caution while visiting the park. All animals in the park are wild and unpredictable. View them from a safe distance. Bison, though apparently tranquil, are wild and if disturbed or annoyed may attack you. Rattlesnakes don't always give a warning before they strike. Be alert while walking in the park. Rattlesnakes and black widow spiders often live in

prairie dog burrows. Prairie dogs can give you a sharp, painful bite if you attempt to feed them. Drive with caution: the park's winding roads and abundant wildlife may yield some unexpected surprises. Drinking water should be obtained from approved sources; water in the backcountry is not recommended for human consumption, unless boiled. Watch out for poison ivy in

wooded areas and for ticks in late spring and early summer. 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 the steep, barren slopes in the badlands can be dangerous, because slippery clays and soft sediments may yield underfoot. Stay on trails.

groups is available at the Halliday Wells Campground in the South Unit and in part of Squaw Creek Campground. Groups must have a written reservation from the park superintendent. Likewise, riding groups with their own horses should write to the superintendent to make special arrangements. In the summer only, saddle horses can be rented at Peaceful Valley; guides are provided with all rides. Picnicking is permitted at Painted Canyon, Peaceful Valley, and Squaw Creek. If you need supplies or accommodations you can find services year round at Medora (limited in winter), Belfield, and Beach near the South Unit and at Watford City near the North Unit. The Medora and Painted Can-

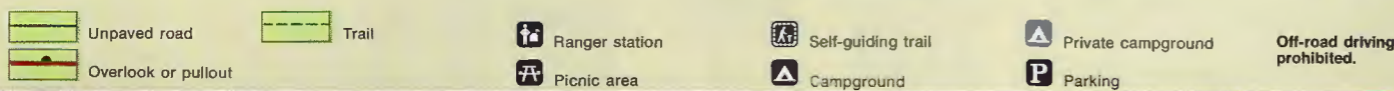
yon visitor centers are accessible to the handicapped. Further information on services for the handicapped is available.

Regulations Please read the rules posted at the campgrounds and throughout the park.

- Picnicking is not permitted in campgrounds.
- Use motor vehicles and bicycles only on the park roads. Off-road use is prohibited.
- Keep pets leashed and under control; they are not allowed on trails or in buildings.
- Horses are prohibited in campgrounds, picnic areas and on nature trails.
- Build fires only in fire grates provided at the

- campgrounds and picnic areas. Fires are prohibited in the backcountry.
- Report all accidents promptly.
- All weapons and archery tackle must be broken down and cased. Hunting is not allowed.
- Use or possession of fireworks or other explosives is prohibited.
- Leave all natural features undisturbed; collecting is prohibited.

Further Information Theodore Roosevelt National Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. For more information, write to: Superintendent, Medora, ND 58645.



The South Unit

If you are traveling west on I-94, your first introduction to the park during the summer is the Painted Canyon Visitor Center, about 11 kilometers (7 miles) east of Medora near Exit 8. The solar-equipped visitor center and rest area are open during the summer months. Here on the upper margin of the badlands is a magnificent panorama of the broken topography in its colorful hues. At the overlook, restrooms, picnic shelters, tables, water, and first aid are available. East of Painted Canyon you can sometimes see wild horses, the descendants of former domestic ranching stock.

Stop at the museum in the Medora Visitor Center to see personal items of Theodore Roosevelt, ranching artifacts, and natural history displays. The restored Maltese Cross Cabin, which Roosevelt used, is behind the visitor center.

A major feature of the South Unit is a paved, 58-kilometer (36-mile), scenic loop road with interpretive signs that explain some of the park's historical and natural phenomena.

A loop road guide, which is for sale in the visitor center, gives detailed information about the landscape. The descriptions that follow will give you an idea of what you can expect to see and find at some of the points:

Scoria Point True scoria is volcanic in origin. Locally, however, wherever a vein of coal has caught fire and baked the surrounding sand and clay into a kind of natural brick, it has been named scoria. Over the years erosion has removed the softer earth and left the bluffs capped with this harder, more resistant material.

Ridgeline Nature Trail This self-guiding loop trail gives you information about the badlands

scenery and ecology and about the role of fire, wind, and water in this area. Length: 1 kilometer (0.6 mile).

North Dakota Badlands Looking across Paddock Creek, you see a field of bumps. Erosion has worn away all but the hardest materials leaving the maze of buttes and canyons.

Coal Vein Trail From 1951 until early 1977 a fire burned in a coal vein here. The intense heat baked the adjacent clay and sand, greatly altering the appearance of the terrain and disturbing the vegetation. Length: 1.6 kilometers (1 mile).

Buck Hill A short walk leads to this hill, which has an elevation of 870 meters (2,855 feet). Note that plants and shrubs only grow on the dry, hot, south-facing slopes and that trees grow on the wetter, cooler, north-facing hill-sides.

Boicourt Overlook One of the best views over the badlands in the park is from this overlook.

Wind Canyon A short trail up the ridge leads to an overlook of both a graceful bend in the Little Missouri River and also the wind-sculpted sands of the canyon. A short way beyond the river the wilderness area begins.

Jones Creek Trail This trail that leads through the heart of the badlands reaches the road at two points. Thus it may be hiked from either end. Length: 5.9 kilometers (3.7 miles).

Peaceful Valley This was the site of a horse ranch during the 1880s heyday of cattle ranching. The high central section of the ranchhouse was built about 1885.

Petrified Forest The greatest collection of petrified wood in the park can be reached only by foot or on horseback. Besides the petrified wood here, pieces may be found scattered throughout the park, though not in such great quantity. Length: 26 kilometers (16 miles) round trip.

DeMores State Historic Site Near the town of Medora is the 27-room chateau that the Marquis DeMores built for his wife in 1884. The marquis was a wealthy French nobleman who built a slaughterhouse to process beef from the large local herds for shipping to market in the new refrigerated railroad cars. He also built the town of Medora, which he named for his wife, and persuaded the Northern Pacific Railroad to build a station there. He was an acquaintance of Theodore Roosevelt. Conducted tours through the chateau are usually offered from late May through September.

