



*I have always said I never would have been President if it had not been for my experiences in North Dakota.*

—Theodore Roosevelt, 1918

Theodore Roosevelt first came to the Dakota Territory in 1883 to hunt bison. A year later, devastated by personal tragedy, he returned to grieve and lose himself in the vastness. He became a cattle rancher and, in this broken land, found adventure, purpose, wholeness. Though his ranch ultimately failed, his love for the rugged beauty of the land brought him back time and again for the rest of his life.

Roosevelt credited his Dakota experiences as the basis for his groundbreaking preservation efforts and the shaping of his own character. As president 1901–09, he translated his love of nature into law. He established the US Forest Service and signed the 1906 Antiquities Act, under which he proclaimed 18 national monuments. He worked with Congress to create five national parks, 150 national forests, and dozens of federal reserves—over 230 million acres of protected land.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park was not the great man's own creation. It was established in 1947 as a national memorial park to honor President Roosevelt and to provide a place for us to experience his beloved Badlands in our own ways.

*My home ranch lies on both sides of the Little Missouri, the nearest ranch man above me being about twelve, and the nearest below me about ten, miles distant.* —Theodore Roosevelt, 1887

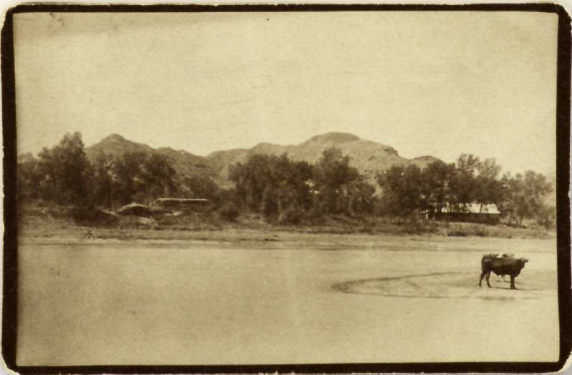


Theodore Roosevelt, 1885  
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## Working the Badlands

The Badlands saw human activity going back thousands of years, but because through-travel was difficult, there is little evidence of permanent settlement. In historic times Northern Plains tribes hunted the great bison herds.

When the railroad came to the Dakota Territory



Elkhorn Ranch, 1880s  
HOUGHTON LIBRARY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in the 1880s, people moved from the East and Midwest to try their hand at ranching. In 1883 Theodore Roosevelt invested in a local cattle operation known as the Maltese Cross Ranch, south of Medora.

The next summer, after both his wife and his mother died on February 14, he returned in search

of healing and solitude. He started a second ranch, the Elkhorn. Roosevelt considered the Elkhorn his "home ranch" and spent most of his time here when in the Dakotas.

Roosevelt became a respected member of the ranching community. Today, this regional culture continues along with another commercial boom.

Energy development surrounds the park. Round-the-clock drilling, pumping, and hauling oil and natural gas from the Bakken Shale formation takes place outside the park boundary.

The Badlands have never been an easy place to make a living. How will we meet today's challenge of balancing nature and human needs?



We still benefit today from the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The young men built the park's roads, culverts, trails, and structures in the 1930s. Right: Blue penstemon, prairie wild rose, sunflower, crested beardtongue.

ABOVE AND RIGHT—NPS

## The Rugged Beauty of the Northern Plains



Badger  
NPS / CHAD ALLENBENDER

Over thousands of years, the Little Missouri River and its tributaries have cut through the soft sedimentary layers of the northern Great Plains. Flowing water—along with wind, ice, and plants—continue their erosive action. You can see land in transition throughout the park.

Are the Badlands really bad? For human travel-



Maltese Cross Cabin  
NPS / CHAD ALLENBENDER

ers and farmers, perhaps. But bison and elk thrive with a choice of edible grasses—blue grama, western wheatgrass, buffalo grass, little blue-stem, and needle-and-thread. Spring rains renew the grasslands and bring wildflowers' bright profusion. Prickly pear cactus delights hikers who might not think its habitat extends this far north.



Feral horses  
NPS / CHAD ALLENBENDER

Woody draws have stands of Rocky Mountain junipers, while the Little Missouri floodplain supports dense growths of cottonwoods and other shrubs.

White-tailed deer forage in the river woodlands, while mule deer prefer broken country and uplands. Horses descended from ranch stock roam in the South Unit, as in



Cannonball formation  
NPS / LONG

Roosevelt's time. Prairie dogs, long a staple food source for many predators, live in "towns" in the grasslands. At home here, too, are nearly 200 bird species, many of them songbirds.

In the 1880s, Roosevelt witnessed overhunting, overgrazing, and other threats to the natural world. Conservation increasingly became



Bull elk  
NPS / CHAD ALLENBENDER

one of his major concerns. He would surely be gratified to know that through careful management, many animals that nearly became extinct are once again living here.

The bison is one such success story. They roamed the plains by the

millions until the 1800s, when wholesale slaughter diminished their numbers to a few hundred. In 1956 a small herd was reintroduced here and has grown to the point where it has to be carefully managed. Elk, bighorn sheep, and pronghorn have also been reintroduced with success.



Bison tell the tale of successful conservation efforts by President Roosevelt and countless others.

NPS / LAURA THOMAS



# Exploring Theodore Roosevelt National Park

**Three Park Units** The driving distance between the North and South units is 68 miles. The Elkhorn Ranch Unit is a 1½-hour drive from Medora. See maps for details.

**Stay Safe, Protect the Park** Federal law protects all natural and cultural features in the park. Do not collect or disturb objects. • Wild animals are dangerous and best viewed from a distance. For their sake and yours, do not approach or feed them.

• Carry plenty of water when hiking. The park's natural water sources are not potable. • Pets must be leashed and are not allowed on trails. • For a complete list of regulations, including firearms policy, visit the park website.

**Accessibility** We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information, check at a visitor center, call, or visit the park website.

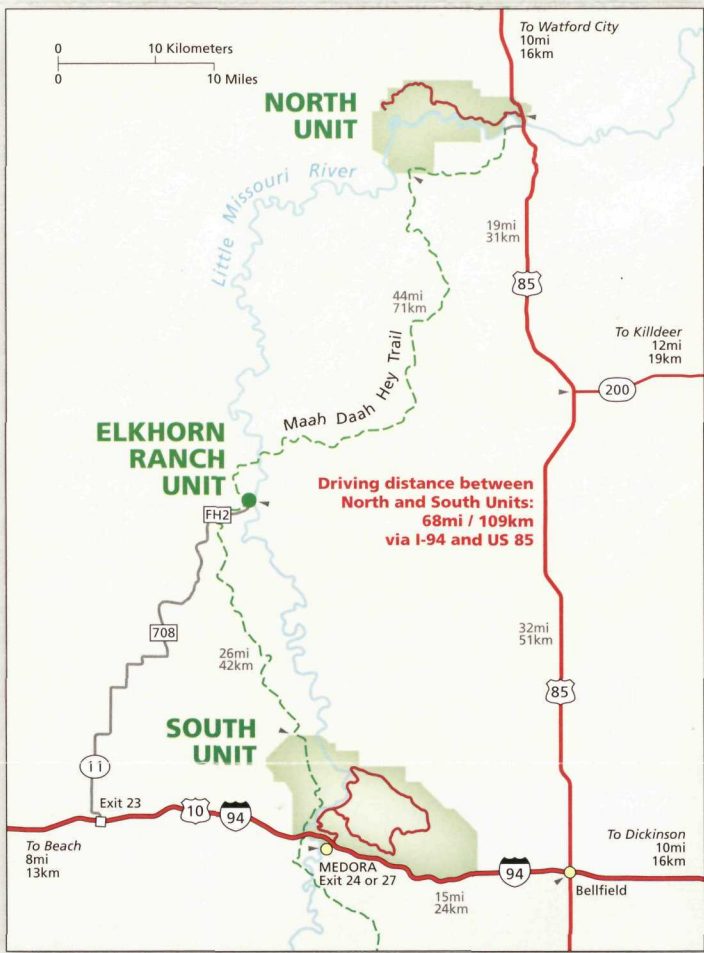
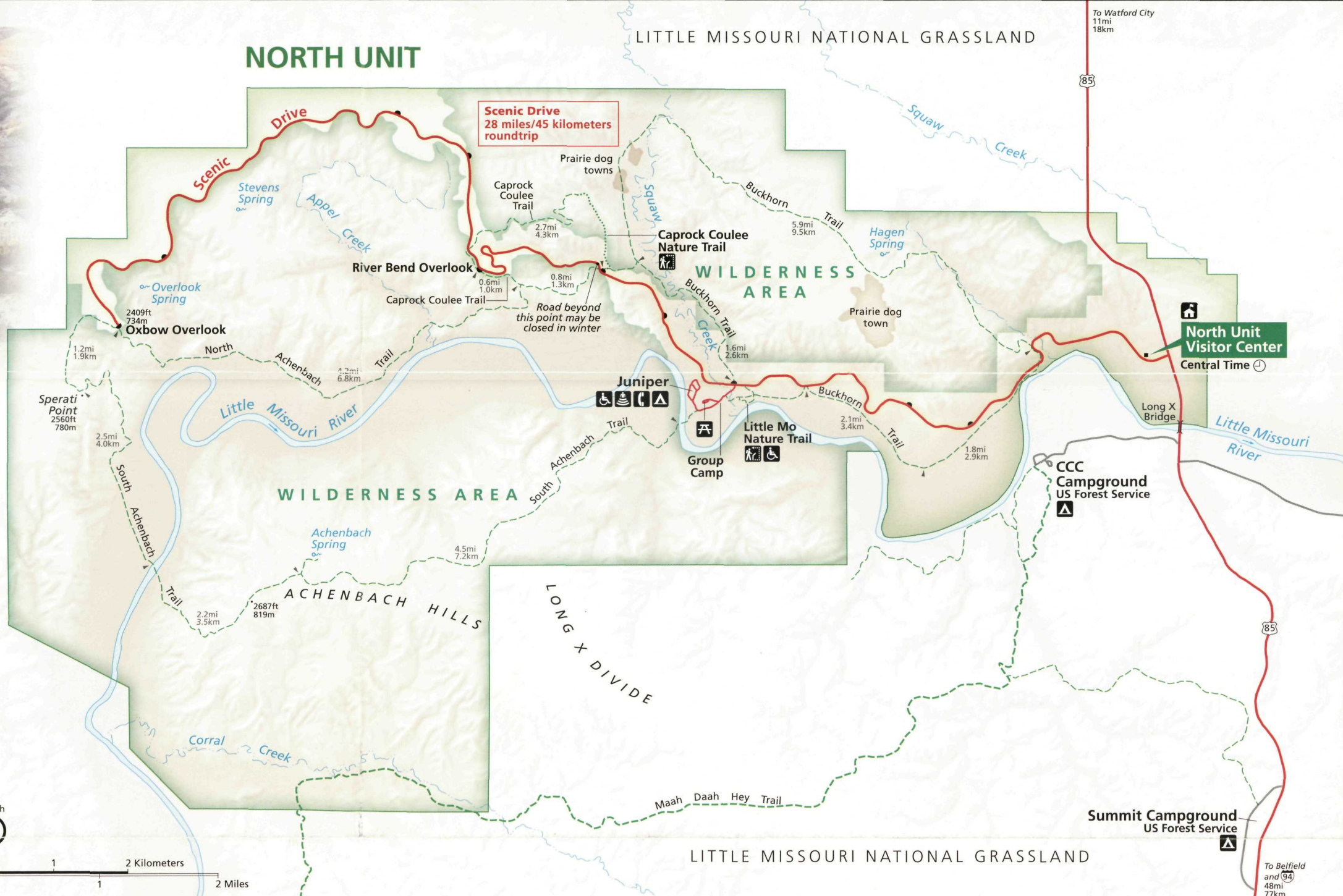
**More Information**  
Theodore Roosevelt National Park  
PO Box 7  
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Theodore Roosevelt National Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

Emergencies call 911

**National Park Foundation**  
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## NORTH UNIT HIGHLIGHTS (CENTRAL TIME)

**North Unit Visitor Center** has exhibits, a short film, bookstore, and information about activities and road and trail conditions. Open daily in summer; winter hours can vary. Closed on Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

**14-Mile Scenic Drive** The paved road starts at the entrance station; along the way are overlook pullouts and interpretive signs.

**Longhorn Steers** The park maintains this historic demonstration herd as a reminder of the Badlands cattle industry.

**Cannonball Concretions Pullout** These "cannonballs" were formed

when sand grains from an ancient river deposit were cemented together by minerals dissolved in groundwater.

**River Bend Overlook** Take a short walk from the parking area to a view of the Little Missouri floodplain. The stone shelter was built

in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

**Oxbow Overlook** Here, the Little Missouri takes a hard turn to east. The river originally continued north to Hudson Bay. During the most recent ice age, continental glaciers blocked its way, hence the turn.



Bighorn sheep  
NPS/CHAD ALLENBERGER

## SOUTH UNIT HIGHLIGHTS (MOUNTAIN TIME)

**Painted Canyon Visitor Center and Overlook** Here on the upper margin of the Badlands is a magnificent panorama of the broken topography in its colorful hues.

The visitor center, open May through October, has information and restrooms. Picnic tables are nearby.

**South Unit Visitor Center** has information, a theater, and a museum with natural history displays and some of Theodore Roosevelt's personal items. Open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

Behind the visitor center, the Maltese Cross Cabin has been moved from

its original location and restored. It is open for tours.

**36-mile Scenic Loop Drive** This paved drive has pullouts and interpretive signs.

**Boicourt Overlook** One of the best views of the Badlands in the park is from this overlook.

**Peaceful Valley Ranch** This complex spans the successive eras of the area's recent history. It was a ranch in the late 1800s, dude ranch in the 1920s, headquarters of the CCC and WPA in the 1930s, park headquarters in the 1950s and 60s, and facility for guided horseback rides until 2014.

## ELKHORN RANCH UNIT (TIMELESS)

The Elkhorn Ranch Unit is the site of Roosevelt's beloved second ranch. The buildings no longer exist, but stones mark the foundation. Exhibit panels tell about ranch life and floodplain habitat.

Before going to the Elkhorn, ask for information at one of the visitor centers. The roads are unpaved, steep, and easily washed out by storms.

In 1884 Theodore Roosevelt hired Wilmet Dow and Bill Sewall to build and run the ranch. By mid-October Sewall and Dow had moved onto the site of the Elkhorn Ranch and were cutting and collecting cottonwood logs for the ranch

house. Working through the winter, they completed the house by spring 1885.

The eight-room house stood 30 by 60 feet, with 7-foot-high walls. A porch hugged the east side. Dow and Sewall built several more buildings: two stables with a connecting roof; cattle shed; chicken house; and blacksmith shop.

By 1887 drought and blizzards had destroyed Roosevelt's herds. He gave up ranching and moved permanently back to New York to continue his political career.

