



Bison Grazing @Michael H. Francis

## A Rugged Land

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

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 Cross Ranch. The next year he returned and



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The Maltese Cross cabin, the main house on Roosevelt's first 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.

## 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 into lignite coal. Some plantlife became petrified. Today considerable amounts of petrified wood are exposed in the badlands. Bentonite, 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. 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 nearly 200 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 white-tailed deer inhabit the park. White-tailed deer 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. Bison were reintroduced in 1956 and elk in 1985. Keep your eyes open—there is a lot to see here.

established a second open-range ranch, the Elkhorn, as his own operation while continuing as a Maltese Cross partner. The Elkhorn became his principal residence, a place where he could lead the "strenuous life" that he loved. The prospect of big game hunting had initially brought Roosevelt to the West. But when he arrived the last large herds of bison were gone, having been decimated by hide hunters and disease.

By spending time in the Dakota Territory, he became alarmed by the damage that was being

done to the land and its wildlife. He witnessed the 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 got 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. 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 honors the memory of this great conservationist.

Dorsey Public Library



Harper's Weekly graphically depicted the plight of cattle caught in one of the frequent blizzards.

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Roosevelt brought friends, Wilmot Dow (left) and Bill Sewall (right), from Maine to help run his Elkhorn Ranch.

Harvard College Library



Elkhorn Ranch was located 35 miles north of Medora. Today only foundation blocks mark the site of this second home.

NPS/Bruce Kaye



"The Bad Lands grade all the way . . . to those that are so fantastically broken in form and so bizarre in color as to seem hardly properly to belong to this earth." —Theodore Roosevelt

NPS



Prickly pear cactus is a surprise to hikers who think the cold northern climate would be too limiting. Vegetation in the North Dakota badlands is as diverse as the land itself.

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Panoramic vistas, like this one from near the CCC-built shelter at River Bend Overlook, show the variety of the badlands. You can explore the North and South units on scenic drives and trails.

NPS/Tom Gray



Like bison, the prairie dog was once a major part of Great Plains life. Of the five species of prairie dogs, only black-tailed prairie dogs live in Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

NPS/Tom Gray



The wild lily is one of the wildflowers that delighted Roosevelt. Flowers brighten the badlands from early spring until late fall.

NPS/Bruce Kaye



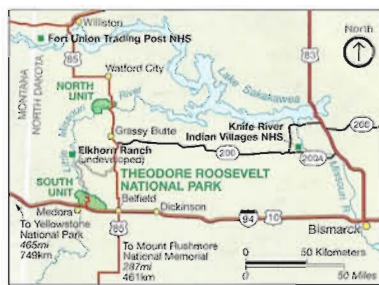
The wealth of wildlife that first attracted attention is still here. Wild horses roam in the South Unit just as they did when Roosevelt rode this land.

# Exploring the Park

**What to See and Do** Summer interpretive activities include campfire programs, talks, and guided walks. Get information at visitor centers and entrance stations or from bulletin boards in the park. The park is open all year, but portions of the roads may be closed in winter.

Hikers and horseback riders can get information about the park's backcountry trails and a free backcountry camping permit at one of the visitor centers.

The park also includes Elkhorn Ranch, site of Roosevelt's second ranch. The buildings no longer exist, but an exhibit shows the locations of the house and outbuildings. Before going there, ask for information at one of the visitor centers.



**Accommodations and Services** Entrance and camping fees are collected year-round. Cottonwood Campground and Juniper Campground

are available on a first-come, first-served basis; there are no trailer hookups. Camping for organized groups, including horse-riding parties, is limited, and reservations are required. Firewood is not provided and gathering it is not permitted; you must bring your own wood, charcoal, or cookstove. Privately run campgrounds with full services are near the park. Guided trail rides on saddle horses are available in summer. Picnicking is permitted at designated locations. Accommodations, supplies, and services are found year-round at Medora, Belfield, and Beach near the South Unit and at Watford City near the North Unit. Medora, Painted Canyon, and North Unit visitor centers are accessible to persons with disabilities. Contact the park for more information on services for visitors with disabilities.

**Regulations** Please observe the rules posted at campgrounds and throughout the park.  
 • Picnicking is not allowed in campgrounds.  
 • Motor vehicles and bicycles must stay on park roads. Off-road use is prohibited. Wear seatbelts.  
 • Keep pets leashed and under control; they are not allowed on trails or in buildings.  
 • Horses are prohibited in campgrounds and picnic areas and on self-guiding trails.  
 • Build fires only in firetraps in campgrounds and picnic areas. No fires allowed in the backcountry.  
 • Weapons and archery tackle must be broken down and cased. Hunting is not allowed.  
 • Use or possession of fireworks or explosives is prohibited.  
 • Do not disturb natural features; collecting is prohibited. All are protected by federal law.

**Safety** Use caution while visiting the park. Your safety is your responsibility.  
 • All animals in the park are wild and unpredictable. View them from a safe distance. Bison seem tranquil, but they are wild and if disturbed may attack you. Rattlesnakes don't always give warning before they strike. Be alert while walking, and do not put your hands or feet in a place you cannot see. Rattlesnakes and black widow spiders often live in prairie dog burrows. Do not feed prairie dogs—they can give you a severe bite.  
 • Drive with caution, especially at night. The park's winding roads and abundant wildlife may yield unexpected surprises.  
 • Get drinking water only from approved sources. Do not drink water from the backcountry unless it is first treated or boiled.

• Watch out for poison ivy in wooded areas and for ticks in late spring and early summer.  
 • The climate in the badlands is harsh, with extremes in temperature and sudden violent storms. Be prepared for a variety of conditions.  
 • Climbing on the steep, barren slopes in the badlands can be dangerous because slippery clay and soft sediments can yield underfoot. Stay on trails.

**Emergencies: Call 911.**

**For More Information**  
 Theodore Roosevelt National Park  
 P.O. Box 7  
 Medora, ND 58645-0007  
 701-623-4466  
[www.nps.gov/thro](http://www.nps.gov/thro)

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## North Unit

**Getting Here** The North Unit is between Grassy Butte and Watford City. From I-94 take U.S. 85 north at Belfield, exit 42. Travel north about 50 miles to the park entrance.

**North Unit Visitor Center** Here you will find exhibits, a movie, and a bookstore. Staff can provide information about activities and road and trail conditions. The visitor center is open daily in summer. Winter hours can vary; it is closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

**14-Mile Scenic Drive** If you have time, take the scenic drive that goes from the entrance station to Oxbow Overlook, with turnouts and interpretive signs along the way. Between the entrance and Juniper Campground you might see longhorns similar to cattle raised in Roosevelt's time.

About 3.5 miles west of the visitor center is 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. Along the drive you will come to a number of trailheads. Some are self-guiding trails. The following descriptions 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. Take time to get to know the park.

**Little Mo Trail** Length: 1.1 miles. This self-guiding trail begins at Juniper Campground and goes through river woodlands and badlands. A shorter 0.7-mile trail is wheelchair-accessible.

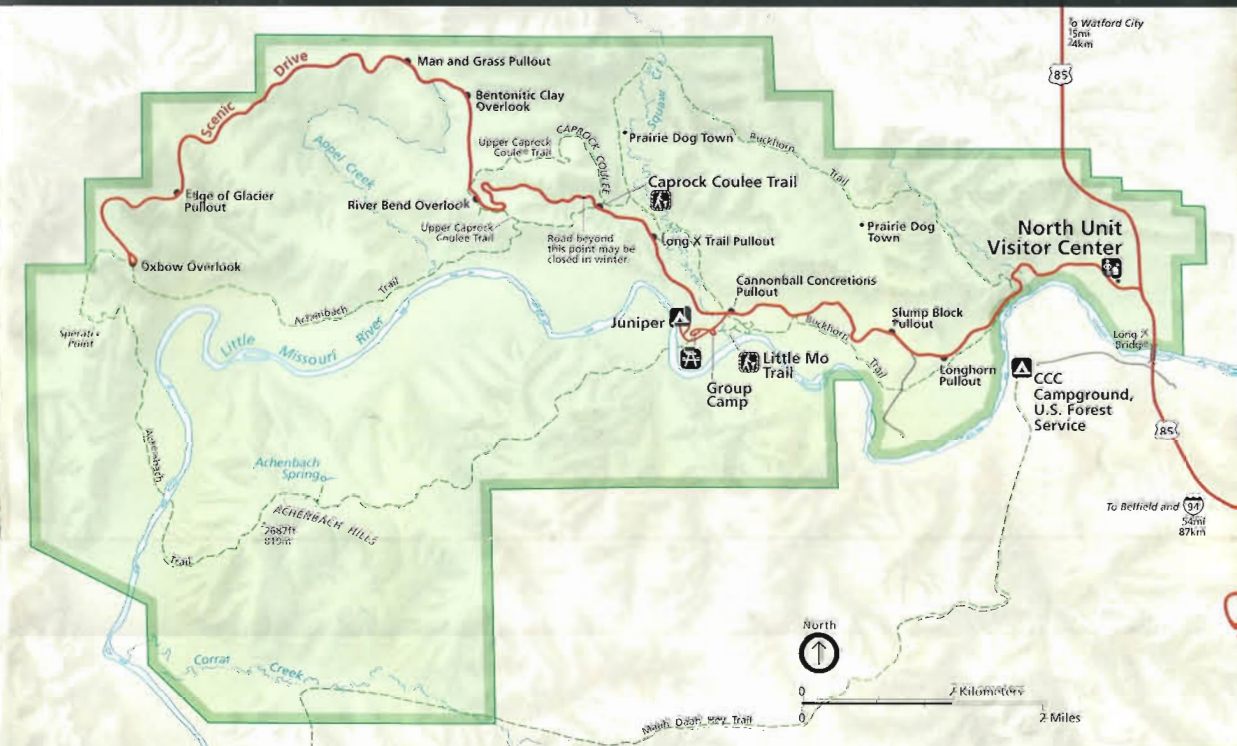
**Achenbach Trail** Length: 17.7 miles. Beginning at Juniper Campground this trail climbs from river bottomland up through the Achenbach Hills, drops to the river again, climbs to Oxbow Overlook along the way of a spur trail, and returns north of the river to the campground. Ask about the condition of river crossings before hiking.

**Caprock Coulee Trail** Length: 1.6 miles roundtrip. This self-guiding trail starts about 1.5 miles west of Juniper Campground. It goes through badlands coulees (dry water gulches) and breaks (interruptions in the grassy plains).

**Upper Caprock Coulee Trail** Length: 3.6 miles; or 4.4 miles if looping with Caprock Coulee Trail. This continuation loop from the self-guiding portion of Caprock Coulee Trail takes you back to the trailhead.

**Buckhorn Trail** Length: 12.2 miles. Several trailheads allow the trail to be hiked as a loop or done in sections. Trail goes through sagebrush flats and badlands and skirts a prairie dog town. Only black-tailed prairie dogs live in the park. Prairie dogs may be cute but remember—they are wild animals. They can carry disease and inflict severe bites. Do not feed them or get close.

**Sperati Point** Length: 1.5 miles roundtrip. The trail from Oxbow Overlook, which is a portion of the Achenbach Trail, leads to the narrowest gateway in the badlands. The flow of the Little Missouri River once continued north from this point, finally draining into Hudson Bay. Blocked during the Ice Age, the river had to find a new course and finally broke through the gap between this point and the Achenbach Hills on the other side. The Little Missouri now drains into the Gulf of Mexico via the Missouri-Mississippi system. Near this point the river leaves its old bed and follows its newer channel.



Unpaved road	Trail	Ranger station	Campground	Self-guiding nature trail	Off-road driving is prohibited in both park units.
Overlook or pullout		Picnic area	Private campground	Parking	

## South Unit

**Getting Here** The South Unit is 130 miles west of Bismarck, N.Dak. and 24 miles east of the Montana state line. The entrance to this unit is in Medora. From I-94 take exits 24 or 27. Painted Canyon Overlook is about seven miles east of Medora; from I-94 take exit 32.

**Painted Canyon Visitor Center and Overlook** Don't miss the magnificent view from this overlook. Here on the upper margin of the badlands is a panorama of the broken topography in its colorful hues. You can sometimes see wild horses and elk in the distance, and bison occasionally roam the visitor center grounds. The visitor center has information and restrooms. It is open April through October. Picnic tables are nearby.

**Medora Visitor Center** This visitor center at the park's entrance has an information desk, theater, and museum. Staff can answer questions about activities and road and trail conditions. It is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

Visit the museum to see personal items of Theodore Roosevelt, ranching artifacts, and natural history displays. The restored Maltese Cross cabin that Roosevelt used is behind the visitor center. It is open for tours. Ask for information.

**36-mile Scenic Loop Drive** A feature of the South Unit is this paved drive with interpretive signs that explain the park's historical and natural features. A *Road Log Guide*, for sale at the visitor centers, has detailed information about the landscape. Here are some highlights of what you will see at points along the way:

**Scoria Point Overlook** True scoria is volcanic in origin. Locally, where coal seams have caught fire and baked the surrounding sand and clay, the result—like a natural brick—is called scoria. Over the years erosion has removed the softer earth and left the bluffs capped with this harder, more resistant material.

**Ridgeline Trail** Length: 0.6 mile. This self-guiding loop trail reveals information about the badlands scenery and ecology and about the role of fire, wind, and water in this area.

**North Dakota Badlands Overlook** 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** Length: 0.8 mile. From 1951 until early 1977 a fire burned here in a coal seam. The intense heat baked the adjacent clay and sand, greatly altering the appearance of the terrain and disturbing the vegetation.

**Buck Hill** Length: 0.1 mile. A short trail leads to this hill (elevation 2,855 feet). Only shrubs and small plants grow on the dry, south-facing slopes, while trees grow on the wetter, north-facing hills.

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

**Wind Canyon Trail** Length: 0.3 mile. A popular trail up a ridge overlooking the Little Missouri River and the wind-sculpted sands of the canyon. A wilderness area begins a short distance beyond the river.

**Jones Creek Trail** Length: 3.5 miles. This trail leads through the heart of the badlands and reaches the road at two points. You can hike it from either end.

**Peaceful Valley** Site of a horse ranch during the 1880s heyday of cattle ranching. The central section of the ranch house was built about 1885.

**Petrified Forest Loop Trail** Length from Peaceful Valley: 16 miles round-trip. Length from park's west boundary: 3.0 miles round-trip. You have to hike or ride a horse to see the park's greatest collection of petrified wood. (Leave all rocks for future visitors to enjoy. Collecting is illegal.)

**Chateau DeMores State Historic Site** Near 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 local herds for shipping to market in the new refrigerated railroad cars. He built the town of Medora, named for his wife, and persuaded the Northern Pacific Railroad to build a station there. Guided tours of the chateau are usually offered from late May through September.

**Maah Daah Hey Trail** Length: 96 miles. This trail traverses the rugged Little Missouri Badlands between Sully Creek State Park near the South Unit and CCC Campground next to the North Unit. It connects the North, South, and Elkhorn units. No mechanized equipment or bicycles are allowed on the trail as it passes through the park. The trail goes through the Little Missouri River Grassland and state and private land.

