



Foundation Document Overview

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site

South Dakota



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of MINUTEMAN MISSILE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve, protect, and interpret the Delta-01 Launch Control Facility and Delta-09 Launch Facility associated with the Minuteman Intercontinental Ballistic Missile System, and interpret its role as a key component of America's strategic defense in the broader context of the Cold War.



Significance

Significance statements express why Minuteman Missile National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **Facilities, Technology, and Engineering.** The Minuteman II Intercontinental Ballistic Missile System facilities known as Delta-01 and Delta-09 are the best preserved examples of operational Cold War missile facilities, representing unparalleled engineering feats and collaboration between the military and civilian contractors to design, construct, and activate in a short period of time a complex and enduring system and support infrastructure for protection against nations of like power.
- **Air Force Mission.** The Delta-01 and Delta-09 facilities are symbolic of the dedication, preparedness, values, training, and esprit de corps of the U.S. Air Force personnel who operated, maintained, and supported the missile systems throughout the upper Great Plains in remote and forbidding locations during the Cold War.
- **Geopolitics.** Once top secret and restricted, the Delta-01 and Delta-09 facilities were the ultimate deterrent produced by the military industrial complex that rose to defend the United States during the Cold War and brought major changes to rural areas in the Great Plains. Minuteman Missile National Historic Site is an ideal place for considering the impacts and choices a nation, states, and communities may face in providing for a common defense.
- **Resonance.** The Delta-01 and Delta-09 facilities provide unique public access and a rare opportunity to experience a pristine Cold War nuclear weapons system, and to consider its social, political, and cultural importance in the past, present, and into the future.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- Delta-01 Launch Control Facility
- Delta-09 Launch Facility
- Delta-01 On-site Museum Collections
- Off-site Collections/Archives
- Preparedness and Dedication to Mission
- Contemplation at Delta-09
- Sense of Isolation and Remoteness



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Cold War.** The Cold War was the defining global influence on the last half of the 20th century. Cold War activities influenced political, economic, cultural, educational, and social programs throughout the United States, the Soviet Union, and other nations. In the Cold War, the “front line” was everywhere.
- **Technology.** To counter Soviet rocket superiority and deter aggression, the United States rapidly developed advanced technologies necessary to build the Minuteman missile system with the ability to respond to an attack with immediate and massive retaliation.
- **Human/Cultural.** Whether the Cold War ended peacefully due to the threat of nuclear annihilation or other factors, it is clear that the constant readiness and awesome power of the Minuteman II ICBM system played a strategic role in deterring aggression. Mutually assured destruction and the fearsome nuclear weapons that made that a possibility shaped the American landscape, leaving a mark on the men and women who built them, operated them, and lived alongside them.
- **Economic/Industrial.** The Minuteman system was a catalyst for rural electrification, improved road access, economic enhancement, education, and community stability. Research and development for weapons and delivery and support systems influenced a military industrial complex that became a fact of U.S. economic life and had far-reaching benefits beyond military uses.
- **Political.** The Cold War continues to have lasting effects. Minuteman Missile National Historic Site facilitates a public dialogue on the Cold War, fear of nuclear annihilation, nuclear weapons proliferation and disarmament, the role and dedication of U.S. Air Force personnel, and the nation’s political and military future. Debates about missile defense, energy, taxes, and terrorism all reflect the experiences of decades just past.

Description

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, in southwestern South Dakota, was established on November 29, 1999. Preserving portions of the last remaining Minuteman II intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) system in the United States, the park interprets the land-based portion of America's nuclear missile defense during the Cold War era and commemorates the people and events during this key period of American history. For thirty years, these facilities were part of a vast arsenal of 1,000 missiles in six fields that once dotted the landscape of South Dakota, North Dakota, Missouri, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska. Today, 400 Minuteman III missiles remain on alert in Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota, Colorado, and Nebraska.

The Cold War would come to define the political, social, and economic history of the second half of the 20th century. More than merely a military standoff, the Cold War offered a stable international system forged by the world's emerging two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—that lasted more than four decades. This system formed almost immediately following World War II, as the United States and the Soviet Union sought to protect and promote their respective political and economic models. These two models, capitalist vs. communist, liberal vs. totalitarian, democratic vs. authoritarian, were fundamentally irreconcilable. The conflict that arose between these two opposed economic and political systems, paradoxically based upon stability through the threat of mutually assured destruction, helped spawn development of new weapons systems, including the Minuteman Missile.

Minuteman was designed to be a “highly reliable, three-stage, solid-propellant weapon” that could endure long periods in storage and travel more than 5,000 miles to reach its target. This was more cost-effective, smaller, and better suited to mass production than any of the earlier ICBM generations. Monitored by crews who were stationed miles away, the missiles could travel over the North Pole and arrive at a target in 30 minutes. Minuteman II's 1.2 megaton warhead was the explosive equivalent of more than one million tons of dynamite. Yet the Air Force required more than simply a new missile to make the Minuteman system work; an elaborate network of silos and support facilities had to be designed and built to support the missiles with a cast of thousands of airmen working to keep the system operational for three decades.

On July 31, 1991, President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev signed the START Treaty, which limited the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear warheads either country could possess. The largest and most complex arms control treaty in history, the implementation of START resulted in the removal of about 80 percent of all strategic nuclear weapons then in existence. As part of the agreement, both

sides could preserve a certain number of weapons and facilities for interpretation of Cold War history; it was this provision of the treaty that led to the Air Force partnering with the National Park Service to preserve the facilities now a part of Minuteman Missile National Historic Site.

The 44-acre national historic site consists of three sites: a visitor center, Delta-01, and Delta-09. The Delta-01 launch control facility is where support personnel lived above ground and missile combat crews manned the underground launch control center. The historic infrastructure includes two buildings. One building was the living quarters for 8 to 10 personnel and various equipment rooms. The second building was a large vehicle storage building for military vehicles. The living quarters connected via an elevator to the launch control center. The Delta-09 launch facility, contains a deactivated Minuteman II missile in an 80 foot deep silo with a nearby underground support building. At this site, visitors can look into the viewing enclosure to see the missile.

The Delta-01 and Delta-09 sites are generally surrounded by a rural landscape and yet adjacent to Interstate 90, which is a major east-west tourist route through western South Dakota. The facilities are located along a fifteen mile stretch of Interstate 90 between the communities of Wall and Cactus Flat. The visitor center and administrative office is just north of Exit 131 on Interstate 90, about 70 miles east of Rapid City.

