

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

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What is a Historic Resource Study?

The National Park Service (NPS) is the steward of our nation's most important cultural and natural resources, and as such the NPS is charged with the protection and preservation of these resources within the national park system. To this end, the NPS Office of Policy issued NPS-28 (Cultural Resource Management Guidelines). NPS-28 presents procedures to be followed in the research, planning, and stewardship of the nation's most important cultural resources. One component of NPS-28 is the need to establish baseline research reports that serve a variety of purposes. A historic resource study (HRS) is one of several baseline type studies required by NPS-28. The HRS is "a baseline study that provides a historical overview of a park and identifies and evaluates the Park's cultural resources within a historic context."¹ The HRS is designed to serve a variety of end-users, including but not limited to, resource managers, park planners, interpreters, cultural resource specialists, and the interested public. Ideally the HRS consists of documentary research and field investigations to identify, map, and evaluate the authenticity, integrity, and significance of the resource. The HRS, which also includes the preparation of National Register (NR) nominations, forms the foundation for the completion of required documents such as the Cultural Landscape Inventory and the List of Classified Structures. The HRS also identifies data gaps and the need for additional historical studies. By definition the HRS is multi-disciplinary in character with the emphasis on history.

Badlands National Park, located in southwestern South Dakota, contains a unique and diverse range of resources (geological, paleontological, archeological, historical, cultural, and architectural) that contribute to the Park's exciting and unique history. Due to budget constraints as well as the wealth of historic and cultural resources within Badlands National Park, the HRS process for Badlands National Park will require a multi-stage process. This initial HRS report, which represents an overview and context of the Park's historic and cultural resources, is based on the results of extensive, but not comprehensive, documentary research of existing files, reports, and other records available at the Park (or other NPS facilities) and selected repositories in South Dakota and the immediate region, such as files and records at the Office of the State Archeologist (OSA) (Rapid City), State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) (Pierre), State Historic Library (Pierre), NPS-Denver Service Center, NPS-Midwest Region (Lincoln and Omaha, NE), South Dakota School of Mines (Rapid City), South Dakota University (Vermillion), and many other repositories in the area. Three primary components of the traditional HRS process are not funded at this time; these include field observations, updated resource mapping, and completion of NR nomination forms. These components are discussed below.

Field observations to determine and describe the significance, integrity, authenticity, and associative values of the Park's various resources are not part of the initial HRS work

effort. Rather, field investigations will be conducted at some future time when funding becomes available. Likewise, the current HRS will not include an updated historic/cultural resources base map. Instead, maps presented in this report reflect existing resource data provided by NPS Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps. Thus, known resources that are not currently mapped in an electronic format, or resources that are not currently in the NPS GIS database are not included in the HRS report at this time. Preparing updated GIS base maps for the various historic and cultural resources within the Park will be conducted after completion of the field observation task. At this time, the HRS will not include preparation of NR nomination forms. Not only is funding lacking for such a large task, but to date the NPS has not had any internal discussions on potential historical, archeological, paleontological, or multiple-listing NR Historic Districts within the Park. Preparation of NR nomination forms will be completed after (1) field observations and resource mapping have been completed, and (2) cultural resource specialists in the Midwest Regional Office and Badlands staff have an opportunity to discuss the presence, number, and boundaries of any NR Historic Districts (be they historical, archeological, paleontological, or multiple-listing).

The purpose of this HRS report is to review historical and scientific literature in order to develop an understanding of the natural and cultural processes and environments that influenced landscape changes, land-use history, and human settlement within the Badlands National Park throughout the prehistoric and historic periods. The HRS utilizes historic contexts and research themes established by, and for, Badlands National Park as well as research contexts and themes prepared by the SHPO and the OSA. The overall environmental history (geology, geomorphology, paleoenvironment, and paleontology) and the cultural history (archeology, history, cultural landscapes, and historic architecture) of the Park were developed through a review of existing documentation. The geological and paleontological research focused on how the geological (including paleontological) and environmental history of the Park affected the cultural history and historical resources within the Park and not on the geology and paleontology, per se. The research focus for the cultural history of the Park ranges from the arrival of the first Paleo-Indians, 10,000 BC to the development of the Park and its current boundaries. In recent years, the Park has completed a comprehensive archeological overview, an ethnographic overview, and sponsored numerous geological and paleontological investigations.²

What are “badlands”?

The term “badlands” is a word used by geologists, geographers, geomorphologists, paleontologists, archeologists and others to refer to a particular area or region that is characterized by a deeply dissected, easily eroded landscape that is difficult to traverse, supports arid to semi-arid vegetation, and has little potable water.³ Badlands topography often contains fossiliferous deposits, but the age and extent of fossil beds within badlands topography is highly variable. In addition to the famous Badlands of South Dakota, badlands topography occurs in a variety of places across the western United States, including, but not limited to, east-central Montana, west-central North Dakota, northwestern Nebraska, central Oregon, northeastern Utah, and southwestern Wyoming. As defined above, badlands are both a geologic and physiographic concept.

The first badlands topography encountered and described by Euro-American explorers, trappers, fossil collectors, and paleontologists were the Badlands of southwestern South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska (Note: this area is often referred to as the Big Badlands or more accurately as the White River Badlands).⁴ The Lakota Indians referred to this land as *Mako sica* (*mako*=land, and *sica*=bad; also *Maka sica*), and the French fur trappers referred to the area as *Les Mauvaises Terres a Traverser* (bad lands to travel across).⁵ White cautions that it is possible that the Lakota name is merely a reverse translation of the French term.⁶ It is also possible that the more accurate Lakota term is *Paha ska* (White Hills) as opposed to *Paha sapa*, the Lakota term for the Black Hills.⁷

As noted previously, the Big Badlands extend from southwestern South Dakota into northwestern North Dakota. The Big Badlands are divided into two main geographic areas: the White River Badlands of South Dakota and the Badlands of Nebraska. Badlands National Park is contained within the White River Badlands geographic area. For purposes of this HRS, the study area is limited to Badlands National Park and lands immediately adjacent to the Park. However, in reviewing the historic literature of the region and developing a historic context for this report, it was necessary to look beyond the limits of the Park boundaries. This is especially true for understanding the geological, paleontological, and archeological background of the White River Badlands.

White River Badlands

As noted by O’Harra, the Badlands are not easily defined.⁸ Geographically speaking, the White River Badlands include those portions of Shannon, Pennington, Jackson, and Bennett counties that are drained by the White River. The White River Badlands also include small portions of Shannon and Pennington counties that are drained by the South Fork Cheyenne River. Between the deeply eroded badlands topography rise fertile tablelands that, for the most part, provide relatively easy access to aquifers and are suitable for some types of crops. Some of the most scenic and historic portions of the White River Badlands, such as Sheep Mountain Table, Stronghold Table, Cedar Pass, and the Wall, lay between the White River on the south and the South Fork Cheyenne River on the north. Today much of this area comprises Badlands National Park. The Park, which contains nearly 244,000 acres, consists of three non-contiguous parcels: the North Unit, the South Unit, and the Palmer Creek Unit. The North Unit is surrounded by Buffalo Gap National Grassland, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (Oglala Sioux), and private land holdings, whereas the South Unit and the Palmer Creek Unit are contained within the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The three park units and the adjacent and interceding lands are the focus of this HRS report.

The typical White River Badlands landscape consists of spires, narrow ridges, steep cliffs, buttes, and alternating peaks and valleys that exhibit banded colors of red, yellow, tan, and brown. One of the first Euro-Americans to describe the badlands region was mountain man James Clyman, who in 1823 traversed the area on his way west. Clyman wrote, “The whole of this region is moveing [sic] to the Misourie [sic] River as fast as rain and thawing snow can carry it.”⁹ Thaddeus Culbertson, who conducted an exploration of the White River Badlands on behalf of the Smithsonian Institute in 1850

described the area as follows, “Fancy yourself on the hottest day in summer in the hottest spot of such a place without water, without an animal and scarce an insect astir, without a single flower to speak pleasant things to you and you will have some idea of the utter loneliness of the Bad Lands.”¹⁰ The stark and woeful description by Culbertson contrasts with the many writers who extol the virtues of the dramatic beauty and solitude that is the Badlands. For example, Dr. F.V. Hayden wrote in 1855, during one of his many explorations of the Badlands and surrounding environs, “...(I) looked down upon one of the grandest views I ever beheld...the area resembled some vast theatre, it reminded me of what I imagined of the amphitheatre of Rome, only nature works on a far grander scale than man.”¹¹ Equally impressed with the rugged beauty of the Badlands was Frank Lloyd Wright who visited the Badlands in 1935 and described his experience in the following manner, “I was totally unprepared for the revelation called the Dakota Bad Lands...What I saw gave me an indescribable sense of mysterious elsewhere—a distant architecture, ethereal..., an endless supernatural world more spiritual than earth but created out of it.”¹² As many residents and visitors to Badlands National Park can attest, both of the extreme views are accurate to some extent, for the Badlands represent a land of contrasts where rugged beauty and majestic landscapes are confronted by the harsh realities of climatic extremes and the struggle for life within a badlands environment.

Lakota mythology provides an explanation for the origin of the *Mako sica*. The account presented below is presented in more detail in Hall’s (1997) *Reflections of the Badlands*.¹³ According to Lakota legend, all the land to the east of the *Paha sapa* (Black Hills) were lush grasslands with an abundance of shade trees, game animals, plants for food and medicine, and lots of cool springs. *Wakantakan* (the Great Spirit) declared that all tribes that wanted to live in this paradise must agree to live in peace and harmony. Suddenly after many years of tranquility, a barbaric tribe (possibly the Shoshone, Comanche, or Crow) came from the west and drove off all the other tribes. The tribes tried to regain their land through peaceful means such as gifts, prayers, offerings, and negotiations, but to no avail. Finally, the displaced tribes gathered and formulated a plan to retake their idyllic land. The morning of the planned attack, *Wakantanka* caused a great storm over the land. Clouds blocked the sun, thunder rumbled across the land, and lightning bolts streaked across the sky. Fire spewed from the ground and eventually a wide gap opened in the earth and engulfed the contentious mountain tribe and all of its possessions. But the great chasm also swallowed the lush grasses and streams, and all the plants and birds and animals, leaving a stark and barren wasteland to forever remind the people that they should live in harmony with both nature and their fellow man and never try to gain an advantage over nature or other tribes.¹⁴

Prehistoric and historic uses of the Badlands are varied. Hall suggests that the Lakota only entered the Badlands when it was necessary to traverse the area in order to go from one location to another along a few principle routes.¹⁵ According to White, the Badlands were used for a variety of purposes that included hunting, such as bison, antelope, and deer; collecting sacred plants and wild foodstuffs, such as sweet grass, wild turnips, soapweed (yucca), and various berries; burials, sacred ceremonies, and rituals, such as the Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance; vision quests, at Sheep Mountain Table; and sanctuary, at Stronghold Table.¹⁶

Badlands National Park

Today, Badlands National Park consists of approximately 243,000 acres in three units (North Unit, South Unit, and Palmer Creek Unit) and extends across portions of Shannon, Pennington, and Jackson counties in southwestern South Dakota (Figure 1). In 1929, Congress authorized the creation of Badlands National Monument and directed South Dakota to acquire certain lands and construct a scenic road for public access. Badlands National Monument was established in 1939 consisting of 110,000 acres. In 1968, Congress authorized the acquisition of an additional 134,000 acres of tribal reservation lands (Oglala Sioux) for their outstanding scenic and scientific character. In 1978, Congress redesignated the monument as Badlands National Park. Today the Park is host to over one million visitors per year as well as various scientific research teams and university field schools. The mission of the Park is to:

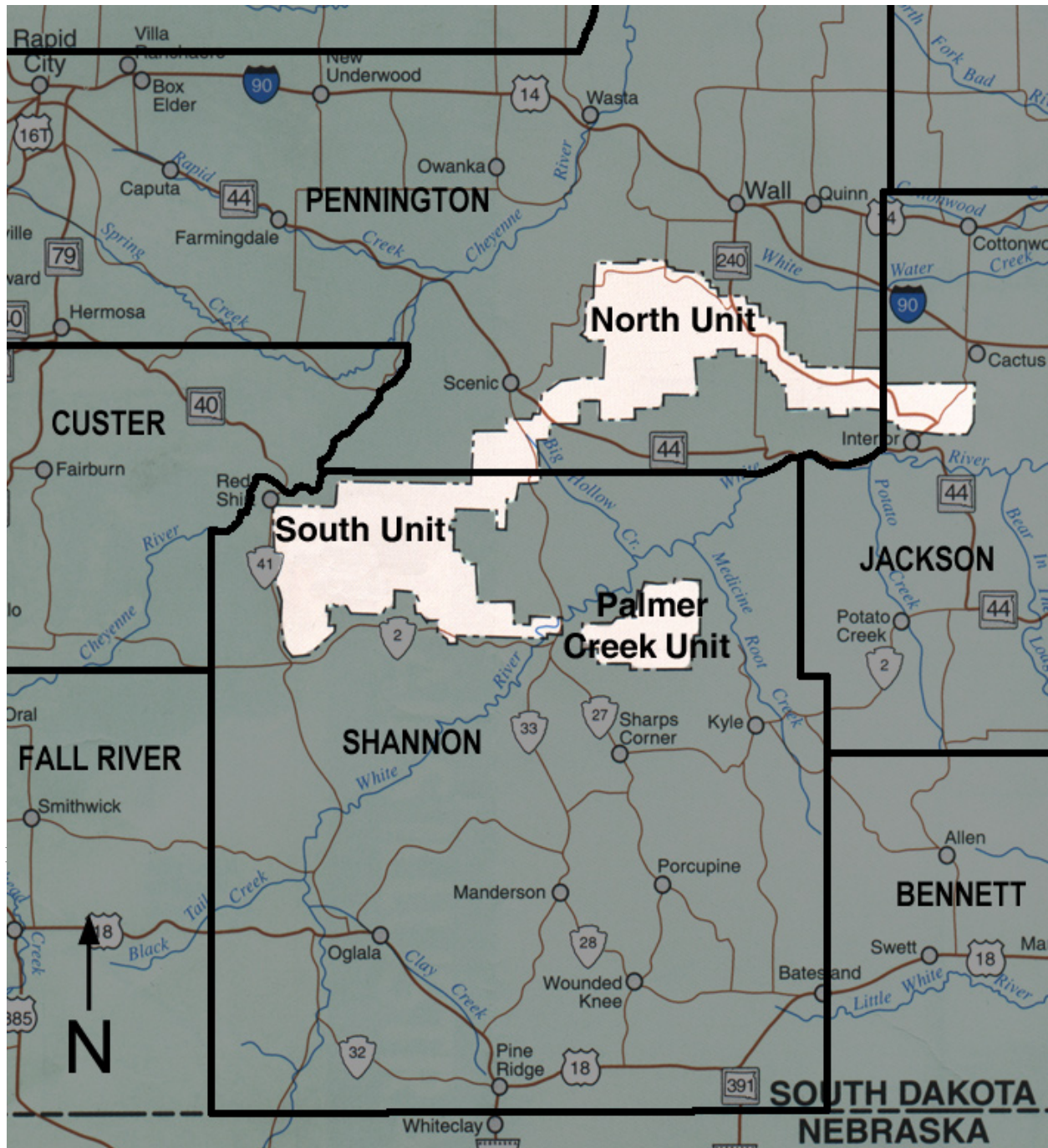
- protect the unique landforms and scenery of the White River Badlands for the benefit, education, and inspiration of the public;
- preserve, interpret, and provide for scientific research the paleontological and geological resources of the White River Badlands;
- preserve the flora, fauna, and natural processes of the mixed grass prairie ecosystem;
- preserve the Badlands wilderness area and associated wilderness values;
- interpret the history of the Sioux Nation and Lakota people.¹⁷

HRS Report Organization

Following the report introduction, the initial HRS report for Badlands National Park is divided into eight chapters based on resource type, research themes, and chronology. Unlike many national parks, the majority of historic and cultural resources associated with Badlands National Park are related to the Park's unique geologic, paleontological, and prehistoric past. Chapter 2 includes discussions from the earliest fossil discoveries in the mid-nineteenth century to the most recent scientific studies and interpretations in such diverse fields as biostratigraphy, paleontology, taphonomy, paleomagnetism, paleoecology, Cenozoic paleosols, and Quaternary geomorphology. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the prehistoric and protohistoric occupations and settlement in the vicinity of the Badlands (ca. 12,000 BP to AD 1770), and Chapter 4 presents a discussion of American Indian occupation of the White River Badlands from AD 1770 to 1891. As a result of the regions historical and cultural development, greater emphasis is placed on the history of the above resources than the shorter, though equally complex, Euro-American and American Indian relationships of the last 110 years.

Euro-American relationships with American Indians as well as Euro-American history are the focus of the final five chapters of the report. Chapter 5 presents a summary discussion of Euro-American and American Indian interaction in the West River region of South Dakota, and Chapter 6 focuses on the early development of Euro-American settlement patterns in the region. Chapter 7 discusses the agricultural and other uses of the White River Badlands through case studies of selected Euro-American and American

Indian families. The last two chapters, *Twentieth Century Economic Development and Tourism* (Chapter 8) and *The Development of Badlands National Park* (Chapter 9), primarily deal with Euro-American development of the region and the Park, respectively. Chapter 10 *Selected Bibliography* completes the report. Maps, photographs, and tables sufficient to illustrate the text are included within each chapter as needed.



Source: National Park Service.
Source: Library of Congress.

Figure 1: Map of Badlands National Park Showing Units and Geographical Boundaries.

¹ National Park Service “Bulletin 28: *Cultural Resource Management Guidelines*,” n.d. National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, chapter 2, p. 7.

² Adrien L. Hannus, et al., *The Archeology of Badlands National Park, South Dakota*, National Park Service, Midwest Archeology Center and Badlands National Park, Draft 2003; David R.M. White, *Mako Washte: An Ethnographic Overview and Oral History of the Badlands National Park*, National Park Service, Badlands National Park, Draft 2001.

³ Uri Lanham, *The Bone Hunters: The Heroic Age of Paleontology in the American West* (New York, Dover Publications, 1999), 25

⁴ C.C. O’Harra, *The White River Badlands*, South Dakota School of Mines, Bulletin No. 13, Rapid City, SD, 1920.

⁵ Ronald R. Weedon, *Natural History of the Black Hills and Badlands*, edited by Sven G. Froiland, (Augustana College, Sioux Falls, SD, 1999), 177.

⁶ White, *Mako Washte: An Ethnographic Overview*, 237.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ O’Harra, *The White River Badlands*, 1

⁹ Lanham, *The Bone Hunters*, 26

¹⁰ National Park Service, Scope of Work, Historic Resource Study, Badlands National Park, South Dakota, quoted from Thaddeus Culbertson ca. 1850, 2004, 2.

¹¹ Lanham, *The Bone Hunters*, 38

¹² Frank Lloyd Wright, “*The Badlands*,” *South Dakota History*, *South Dakota State Historical Quarterly* vol. 3, no. 3, 1973, 270-176.

¹³ Phillip S. Hall, *Reflections of the Badlands* (Freemen, SD, Pine Hill Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5

¹⁶ White, *Mako Washte: An Ethnographic Overview*, 237-239.

¹⁷ “Cedar Pass Developed Area Cultural Landscape: Environmental Assessment, National Park Service, Badlands National Park Draft 2004, 1-4 and 1-5.