

Precipitation in the region comes as sudden showers, and storms commonly drop several inches of rain per hour (Opdahl et al. 1975). This sudden influx of precipitation causes runoff and rapid erosion of the poorly consolidated sediments, forming highly dissected badlands topography. In addition, fused then broken beds of burnt coal facilitate erosion during runoff events. Seasonally, small tributaries flow down the steep valley sides along the Little Missouri River, cutting into the strata of the Fort Union Group: shales, clays, sandstones, silts, and lignite of the Bullion Creek and Sentinel Butte formations.

In general, the shales and clays are gray to brown, and the sandstones tend to appear yellowish orange to buff and tan. Blue bentonite in the Sentinel Butte Formation adds another colorful layer to the landscape. Lignite is dark brown to black. Possibly the most noticeable strata in the park are the red beds, locally called “scoria,” but more correctly called “clinker.” The colorful, interbedded strata on the hillsides of the park add much to the scenic beauty of the badlands.



Figure 1. Location Map of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.



Figure 2. Bison in the South Unit Crossing the Little Missouri River. When Theodore Roosevelt was 24 years old, he came to the region to hunt buffalo. The rugged landscape matched Roosevelt’s individualism and influenced his thinking. NPS photo by Dave Krueger.