Badlands National Park, SD Sage Creek Loop

The frontier lives on in Badlands National Park's Sage Creek Wilderness Area. Bison and pronghorn roam freely on prairies riddled with labyrinthine washes and surrounded by rock pinnacles. And so will you on this three-day, 22-mile loop. From the backcountry trailhead (1) at the Conata Picnic Area, 12 miles south of Wall, head southwest through knee-high grass (watch for rattlers), skirting the base of the Badlands formations and the occasional pronghorn boneyard.

After two miles, pass through a gated barbedwire fence (2) and veer northwest toward a clutch of rock spires. Just over a mile later, climb gravel mounds into Deer Haven (3), a juniperlined oasis amid the spires. Camp on a flat gravel bench in this natural amphitheater (there are no designated sites on this route). On day two, weave through juniper stands and ascend .2 mile to a narrow ridge (4), the route's high point at 2,900 feet.

Descend into a steep wash pocked with mud puddles and bison prints. Follow several snaking bends northwest to a T-junction at mile 4.1 (5); turn left. At mile six, bear left where a dry creekbed enters on the right (6); leave the wash .6 mile later (7). Then traverse the Sage Creek Basin, a 3.5-mile-wide grassland veined with gullies. Stop for lunch at a grass-lined pond (the route's lone water source) (8) 8.2 miles into the loop. In 3.4 miles, hike west into Tyree Basin; spend night two here (9).

On the last day, navigate south-southeast through a maze of drainages (10) toward Sage Creek Pass, a large gap in the Badlands formations. At mile 15.5, angle east along a private ranch's fenceline before ducking under another north-south running fence (11) blocking the route. Descend to Conata Basin for the threemile stretch back to the first gate and the trail to Conata Picnic Area.

Trip Planner

The Way From Wall, take SD 240 south for 11 miles. Turn right onto Conata Basin Rd. In 1.1 mile, turn right onto Badlands Loop Rd. and follow it to the backcountry access parking area at the Conata Picnic Area.

Permit Badlands National Park has no formal backcountry permit or reservation system. Contact Badlands National Park, (605) 433-5361; nps.gov/badl/



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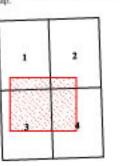
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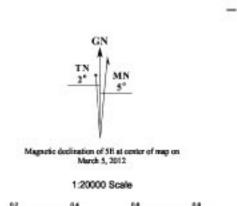




Source Map Information Index of original USGS topographic map sheets. Source date, contour interval, and map symbology may vary by source map. Please refer to the index the published date of the



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8 0.2 0.4 86 0.6 1 Kilometen Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) Projection Zone13 North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)

1000 meter UTM / USNG / MGRS Grid Zone Designation: 13T 100,000-m Squares: GJ