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Biographers of Theodore Roosevelt have long been aware of the significance of the time he spent in the Badlands of Dakota Territory during the 1880s. After an initial visit in 1883, Roosevelt returned the following year, this time overwhelmed with grief. Earlier that year he had experienced unimaginable personal tragedy when his beloved wife, Alice, and his mother died on the very same day. A few months later TR returned to western Dakota by train, bound for a landscape he hoped would bring him solace, healing, and renewal.

Over the next several years, Roosevelt returned to the Badlands for weeks or even months at a time, relishing the oddly shaped yet magnificently beautiful region around the Little Missouri River. Here he found plentiful game—deer, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, cougar, bear, and grouse. He arrived just in time to hunt the bison, which had been hunted nearly to extinction in prior years. On his hunting forays he was often accompanied by Bill Sewall and Wilmot Dow, onetime guides from Maine whom he hired to join him in Dakota. His hunting experiences in Dakota awakened in him an awareness of the importance of conserving game animals, and in 1887 he helped found the Boone and Crockett Club, the oldest wildlife conservation organization in North America.

Mindful of rising cattle prices, expansive grasslands, and free open rangelands, TR saw an opportunity in the burgeoning cattle industry. Soon he became part of a network of ranchers, boosters, and such characters as the Marquis de Morès, a French aristocrat and soldier. From his Maltese Cross and Elkhorn Ranches, Roosevelt played an important role in the Little Missouri Stockman’s Association, joined in cattle roundups, and contributed to efforts to track down rustlers, even arresting three of them himself. All the while he enjoyed being adorned in buckskin, breaking horses, and having time to read, write, and explore the Badlands. Initially scorned by some locals as “Four Eyes”—his glasses suggesting to them he was physically weak—TR proved his mettle by plunging into the hard work of the roundups and by punching out a bully at a bar in Mingusville, Montana. Eventually, he sold his ranches and herds after the severe losses he took following the brutal winter of 1886–87.

The subject of Roger Di Silvestro’s book has been treated by several other biographers and by
Hermann Hagedorn in his 1921 *Roosevelt in the Bad Lands*. Still, a newly crafted treatment of Roosevelt's Badlands years is welcome. By incorporating recent scholarship and by drawing liberally on TR's numerous letters and published writings, Di Silvestro has produced a fully documented and engaging narrative of this crucial time in Theodore Roosevelt's life before he became president.

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