



BADLANDS

Athlete scientists will document North Dakota Badlands



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A team of adventure scientists will take on the Badlands starting in April.

“100 Miles of Wild,” will put an eco-expedition in the North Dakota Badlands for 10 days beginning on Earth Day, April 22.

Teams of ultra-endurance, athlete-scientists will run, climb and trek through the rugged

terrain and document the state of an area under pressure from Bakken oil field development.

The scientists are with Adventure Science, based in Calgary, Alberta. Besides being scientists, team members are marathoners, mountaineers, ice climbers and solo explorers. One is a former Army Ranger.

Adventure Science founder and geologist Simon Donato said the project has a simple goal.

“We will discover and report first-hand the condition of the wilderness that inspired President Theodore Roosevelt’s effort to preserve the rugged, wild spaces for all Americans and the world,” he said.

Team members will stop every hour to document wildlife, biology and geology in photographs and video, make sound recordings to document noise pollution and write individual observations.

Donato said Adventure Science is neutral, and while its members appreciate wilderness, they have diverse opinions about oil and growth.

“What they share is a determination to collect information and make scientific observations ahead of the drill bit,” he said.

Richard Rothaus, archaeologist with Trefoil Cultural and Environmental LLC in Sauk

Rapids, Minn., is organizing the logistics and the route.

He said the group will consist of six scientists, plus a support staff. The eco-expedition will begin in the Killdeer Mountains and journey from the north to the south unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, including the Little Missouri National Grasslands.

“We’ll find out if there are places where we feel like we’re the only people alive or if we can hear truck traffic,” he said.

Rothaus said there is no baseline to compare this data against, though there are historical photographs that will be used to make some comparisons.

“There isn’t a baseline. Who would create it? No one envisioned anything like this,” he said.

Andrew Reinhard, one of the team’s two archaeologists, said, “Rothaus and I had been planning a relatively casual Badlands journey for the past few years. As the Bakken oil boom exploded, we realized we needed to hit this idea hard.”

Rothaus said one group will chart a straight-line course in 10 days, followed by teams of marathoners who will do the same route in five days, making concentric sweeps off the trail to document conditions.

“We’re not going to be on existing roads and roads. If there is one, we don’t want to be on it. We’re trying to get to spots that are not visited a lot,” Rothaus said.

The information will be shared with anyone interested on a website and in a book, Rothaus said. The route will be tracked on GPS and people will be able to follow along on Twitter (@100MilesOfWild, #ndbadlands) or by visiting <http://adventurescience.ca>.

Rothaus is still planning the route and trying to anticipate conditions.

“Anything can happen in the Badlands. The weather in April could bring anything from blizzards to tornadoes. There’s no drinkable water. We’re traveling more than 20,000 feet of elevation change in a short amount of time. And the rattlesnakes could be waking up,” he said.