



BADLANDS

## Group has wild trek across Badlands



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**BADLANDS** — Mother Nature threw just about everything she could come up with in late April to challenge a hardy and intrepid group of eight volunteer scientists and adventurers who took on the North Dakota Badlands by foot to record conditions in light of the Bakken industrial development in the West.

Richard Rothaus, an archaeological consultant from Minnesota, said the Adventure Science group's major conclusion after hiking and running 100 miles was that there is still plenty of wilderness out there.

“There are places that are tremendously isolated, and without a plane going over, you wouldn't know if it was now, or 10,000 years ago,” he said.

Yet, one member of the group observed: “We were walking through the wilderness and holding hands with industry.”

The last of the hikers and ultra runners crossed the Little Missouri River late Thursday afternoon, some splashing and others walking through the chilled muddy water to end the trek at the Cottonwood campground in Theodore Roosevelt National Park's south unit.

They'd endured ice, snow, hellacious wind and some warmth by campfire. They were rewarded by wildlife, deep canyons, gorgeous vistas and an experience none will forget.

Part of the group — a mix of Americans and Canadians — left on Earth Day from a point west of the Killdeer Mountains and were joined on day seven by the remainder.

They hiked, they observed, they recorded the sights, smells and sounds and created a

record for comparison in years to come.

And on their last day, a healthy looking coyote lapped around prairie dog town in warm air that smelled faintly of wild plum blossoms.

They had discussed their observations each evening before collapsing into sleeping bags that some sub-freezing nights were just barely warm enough.

They learned something about themselves, too.

“This taught me I still have so much to learn,” said Jane Davis, an ultra runner and community health educator from Wenatche, Wash.

She recorded her observations and thoughts, like the others, and said that coming from Washington, where there is no oil development, made hers a different experience.

“The oil caught my eye right away,” she said.

Andrew Reinhard, an archaeologist from New Jersey, said the weather was more than he expected, but it felt good to be “suffering for science.”

He observed fossils and the remains of old camps from the early cattle days, and only one partial spear point in road gravel near the Magpie Camp in the grasslands.

“It feels wild and it feels remote. It smelled clean like sage and cedar, but sometimes I could smell sulfur and petroleum,” he said.

Simon Donato, a geologist from Calgary, Alberta, and an ultra runner, said, from a geologist’s perspective, the journey was one of beauty.

He found — and left — ancient bison bones in the riverbank, and like the others, stopped frequently throughout the days of hiking and running to record what he was seeing, hearing and experiencing.

“There were days out there when it felt wild, and days when it felt rural and ranch,” he said. “There were times when we could see (oil well) flares.”

Jessica Kuepfer, an environmental journalist from Ontario, said she had an awesome experience running more than 70 miles of badlands.

“Right now, it’s really beautiful, and it’s so important that it’s taken care of,” she said.

The group’s data, photographs and other information will be uploaded to the Adventure Science Website and possibly into a book.

Rothaus hopes their work becomes the benchmark for another expedition, say, in five

years, to see how the Badlands are holding up with continued development.

He said the adventurers were conscious of traveling by foot through the same country that inspired Theodore Roosevelt to eventually create national parks when he became president.

“We wanted to learn: What’s that experience now? Is it still inspiring?” Rothaus said.

Their answer to the last question, he said, is a definite yes.

Anyone interested in meeting the team members can catch up with them at 3 p.m. today at the Bismarck Public Library where they will take questions and talk to whoever shows up.