

Hidden Beauty

By: Barbara Dickson

While darkness gathered, I was in a race against time, my eyes struggling to capture an everlasting picture of the grandeur below me. The retreating sun's rays blazed, casting orange, pink and purple hues against the South Dakota Badland's rugged rock formations. From somewhere across the purple chasm came the haunting response of a coyote, answering my daughter's best coyote howl. And then silence. What a fitting finish to a magnificent day.

When my family and I arrived earlier that afternoon, the Badlands had startled me. The plains of South Dakota ended so unexpectedly and within inches the earth plummeted, exposing an ocean of cliffs. One hundred miles of stone waves frozen at their crest, suspended in time.

These coloured rock breakers and jagged peaks jutted hundreds of feet high, just below my feet. Barely visible above the horizon, the Badlands appeared desolate and lifeless. The land appeared so blighted that I wondered if anything green could sustain life. The Dakota Indians labelled the area "mako sica" meaning a "bad land" and French trappers in the 1800s agreed, declaring the area a "bad land to cross."

But looking closer, a hidden beauty

awaits anyone who has eyes to see past a bad first impression. Spending time in the Badlands revealed a truth; it's a good place that's got a bad name. From the upper edge, my eyes swept across the savage beauty of a stark wildness. Below, the valley floor was blanketed in grass and wild flowers, shrubs and trees. Towering rock formations surrounded me, along with bighorn sheep, deer, eagles, buffalo and coyotes.

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Wind, rain and temperature extremes carved this spectacular land of deep ravines shaded by worn pinnacles. And with each rainfall, the Badlands are subtly reshaped, continually eroding, uncovering its past preserved beneath one's feet.

My excited family and I explored the park along the Badlands Loop Road, which began at the brink and plunged into the recesses below only to climb to the surface again, riding

the crests of the land's stone waves. And around every curve was a new spectacular view.

Standing at the brink of this vast wonderment, peace settled around me in unison with the fall of the hot summer night. Endless stars splattered the sky. Voices would shatter the enchantment of the moment, so we whispered.

"Just think," I murmured to my daughters, "God made all this. Just look at His awesome power, in the wind and water. In these Badlands, He's offered a glimpse into His creation story. These really aren't Badlands. These are God's lands."

Their silent nod marked agreement as they stood at the rim, humbled by an answered coyote call and by the size of the Big Dipper hanging in the sky.

And then I wondered. When I travel through badlands where the horizon is difficult to see, when I feel isolated and in a lonely desolate place in my life, what do I see?

Do I see only a stark, hopeless wilderness, or do I remember to look for hidden beauty? In the darkest moments in our lives, God's beauty still surrounds us. His wonder is revealed in sunsets, flowers, a cup of tea or the touch of a caring hand. In everything God reveals His goodness; we just need to discover what blessings lie beyond a first impression. ☪

