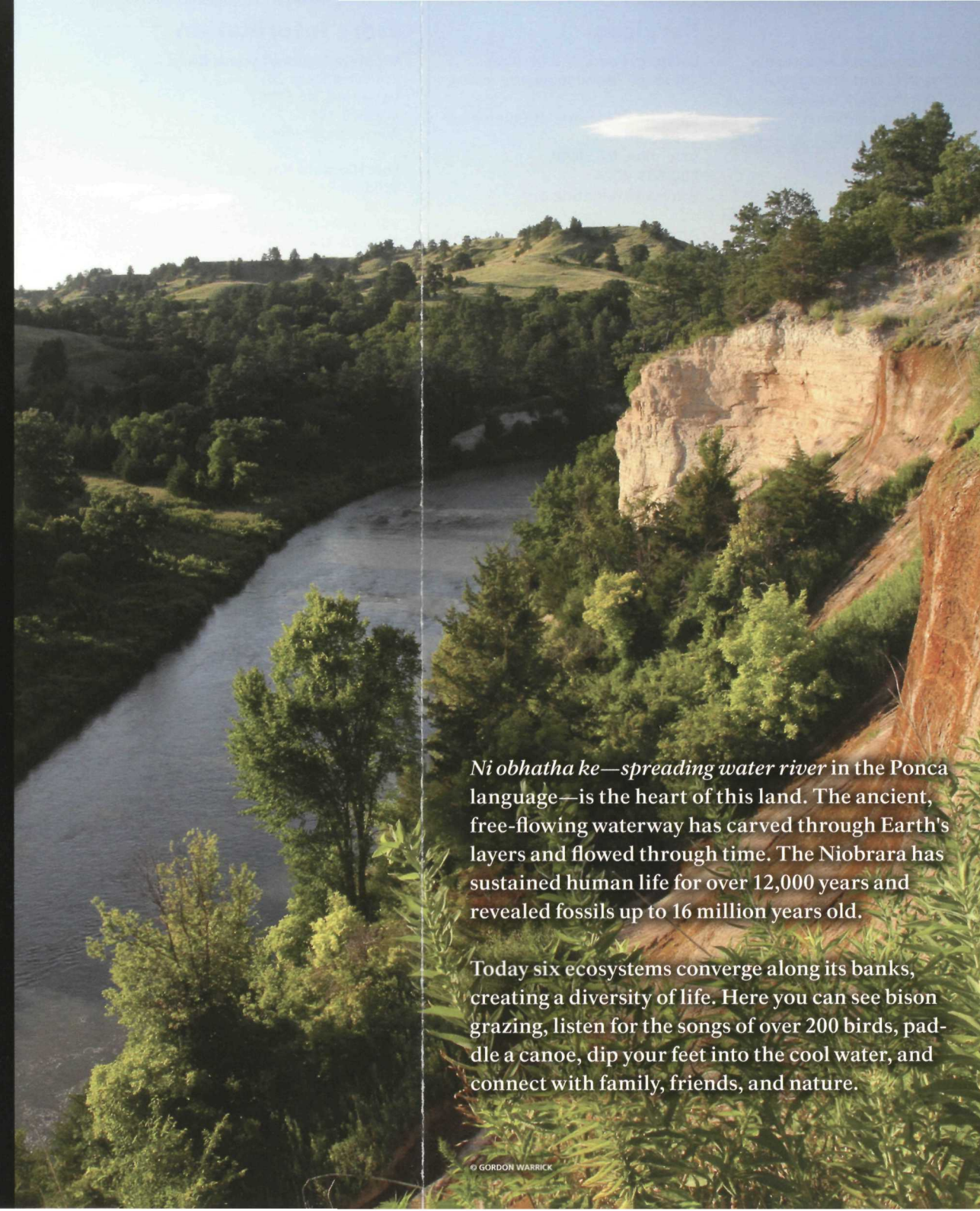




Ni obhatha ke—spreading water river in the Ponca language—is the heart of this land. The ancient, free-flowing waterway has carved through Earth's layers and flowed through time. The Niobrara has sustained human life for over 12,000 years and revealed fossils up to 16 million years old.

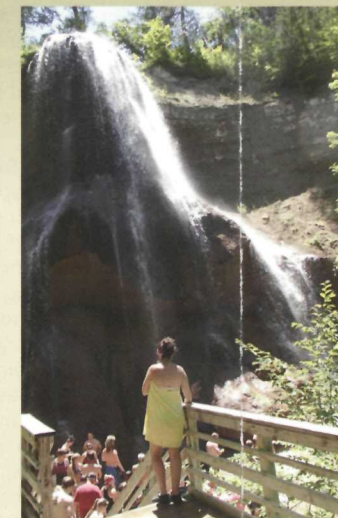
Today six ecosystems converge along its banks, creating a diversity of life. Here you can see bison grazing, listen for the songs of over 200 birds, paddle a canoe, dip your feet into the cool water, and connect with family, friends, and nature.

© GORDON WARRICK

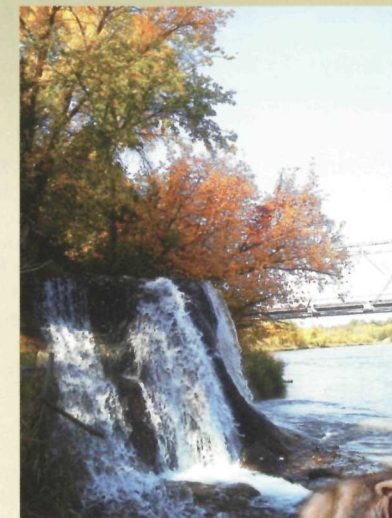
Flowing Through Time



Hardin Falls
© GORDON WARRICK



Smith Falls
NPS



Berry Falls
NPS

Over 200 waterfalls occur along the western part of the river. These tributaries flow over the Rosebud Formation. Some waterfalls drop into the Niobrara, while others are found in spring-fed streams.



Gomphotherium (four tuskers), shown above, and other fossils are found in the Valentine Formation.
© THY BUN

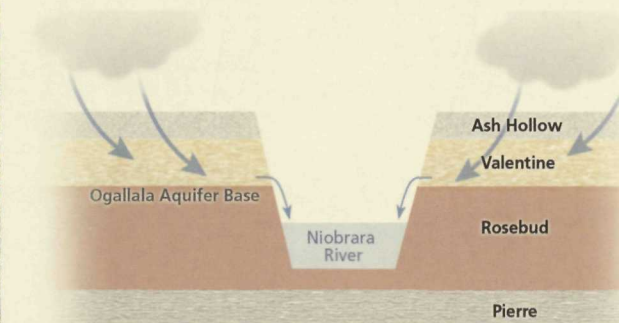
The Niobrara River begins to the west in the high plains of eastern Wyoming. It flows 535 miles east and empties into the Missouri River in northeastern Nebraska.

Over millions of years, volcanic eruptions and gradual erosion of the Rocky Mountains deposited layers of silt and sand. The Niobrara River has cut 300 feet into these prehistoric layers (*diagram below*), creating spectacular

bluffs and waterfalls that you may see during your visit.

Ash Hollow Formation The top and most recent layer is a grayish sandstone. It is best seen on hills north of the river and in roadcuts along highways like NE 12.

Valentine Formation This layer of pale, soft sandstone holds much of the area's water



Niobrara Valley Rock Formations

from the Ogallala Aquifer, and world-class fossil mammals.

Rosebud Formation Hard, pinkish siltstone forms most of the bluffs along the river.

Pierre Shale This oldest rock layer is exposed in areas of the eastern half of the river, creating striking, nearly black bluffs.

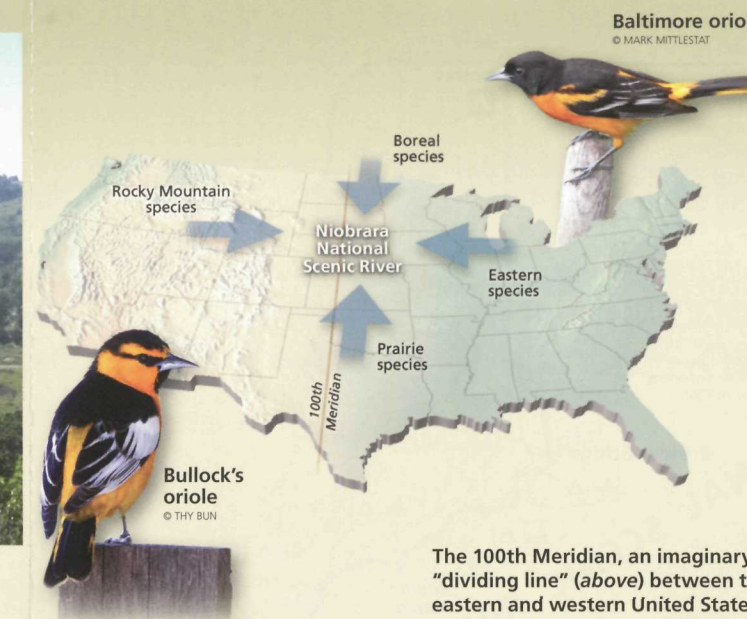
The Ogallala Aquifer, a fragile, vast underground reservoir, is partially recharged by rainwater and snowmelt. Through springs, seeps, and waterfalls it provides most of the water to the Niobrara.



Biological Crossroad



View from Niobrara Valley Preserve
NPS



The 100th Meridian, an imaginary "dividing line" (above) between the eastern and western United States, runs through the Niobrara National Scenic River. The river itself divides the Sandhills from the Badlands. Ecosystems from all directions meet here, and sometimes hybrids form.



Quaking aspen
NPS



Big-tooth aspen
SUPERIOR NATIONAL FOREST



Hybrid aspen
NPS



Bison at Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge
© CHRISTOPH HABERTHUEER

Unique, diverse, and biologically sensitive are words that describe the landscapes of Niobrara National Scenic River. Six major ecosystems converge here. East meets west, north meets south, and the Pleistocene environment of the Ice Age meets modern-day climate uncertainties.

Mixed grass, tallgrass, and Sandhills prairies; northern boreal, western coniferous, and eastern deciduous woodlands coexist here in close proximity—and nowhere else in the country. Paper birch trees and quaking and big-tooth aspen survive in north-facing areas where they are protected from summer heat and winds. Some flora and fauna have adapted by developing hybrid species, some found only in the Niobrara valley.



Great blue heron
© MIKE SUSSMAN

Floating the Niobrara



Tubers enjoy an easy float on the river.
NPS / STUART SCHNEIDER



Paddling the river.
© NEBRASKALAND MAGAZINE

Most people float the river from mid-June through Labor Day. Summer weekends can be very busy; weekdays are quieter and rarely crowded. Only experienced, properly equipped boaters should attempt a winter trip.

The 22-mile stretch from Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge, near Valentine, to Rocky Ford Rapid is the most frequently traveled. You can plan a trip on your own, or go with a local outfitter. Trips range from one hour to several days.

More Information
For river conditions and information, call the park visitor center at 402-376-1901.

River Safety

All individuals must have a US Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (PFD). Children under 12 must wear a PFD while on the river. • If you capsize, keep calm. Stay at the upstream end of your vessel. Lie on your back with your feet pointed downstream. Let your PFD keep you afloat. Swim to shore after reaching calmer water. • In summer, signs identify major rapids between Valentine and Norden Bridge. You are strongly cautioned to portage around these dangerous obstacles. • Watch for overhanging limbs and submerged logs that can overturn your vessel. • Wear shoes to protect your feet. • Be aware of land hazards like poison ivy, stinging nettles, ticks, slippery banks, crumbling cliffs, and rattlesnakes. • Do not dive or jump into the river. The Niobrara can be shallow, with many rocks. • Tying too many tubes together is

hazardous—you can get trapped under the tubes. • Cellphones may not work in the river valley. Rocky Ford has a public phone from May through August.

Emergencies call 911

River Etiquette

Share the river respectfully with other users and wildlife. • Keep noise levels low. • Tie your gear to your vessel. • Find trash and recycling dumpsters at most landings. • Do not trespass on the private land that borders the river. • Federal and state alcohol laws are enforced.



Rafters and properly equipped paddlers may enjoy the challenge of Rocky Ford Rapid; to avoid it, use the portage.
NPS

Exploring the Niobrara River

