

RED ROCK COULEE



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OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Funded by the City of Calgary, the project aims to introduce readers to little known, hidden gems in Alberta. This guide focuses on uncovering unique and under-appreciated destinations that offer rich experience away from the typical tourist routes. Whether you're seeking serene natural landscapes, charming small towns, or cultural landmarks. "Off the Beaten Path" provides insight into places that offer a fresh perspective on Alberta's diverse and expansive beauty. By highlighting these locations, this guide encourages exploration and adventure beyond the well-trodden paths, enriching travelers' appreciation of Alberta's hidden treasures.

Red Rock Coulee Natural Area is located about 50 kilometres south of Medicine Hat, it takes about 35 minutes to drive there. The area is popular with geologists, photographers, and hikers who don't mind a lack of formal trails.

Red Rock Coulee is a scenic treasure – and yet it doesn't see a lot of traffic. You'll probably have the place to yourself. Visitors are cautioned that the bedrock of this area is very bentonitic, which means that it is extremely treacherous when wet. If rain threatens, get out fast, and do not visit this area in thawing conditions, nor shortly after any amount of rain.



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This area contains large red spherical sandstone concretions that have eroded out of the softer bedrock, the best example of spheroid rock formations in Alberta. Concretions measure up to 2.5 metres across and are believed to be among the largest in the world. There are eroded steep-sided coulees and a small upland of fescue-needle grass. In places, hoodoos (columns of bedrock) have formed. Plants include gumbo primrose, sagebrush, juniper, prickly pear cactus, prairie crocus and broomweed.

How the concretions start
First you need a natural occurring nucleus just like a pearl. A bone or shell works well. The concretions grow by the concentric deposition of minerals around the grains before it hardens into rock. The concentric rings can be seen in some concretions. According to the sign at the parking lot “the process by which concretions are formed leaves them harder and more resistant to erosional forces than the surrounding material. When the parent material erodes the spheres are left exposed and then they in turn begin to erode.” The landscape here is strewn with concretions left behind after the softer rock eroded away. Look for the beautiful lichens called Xanthoria that can withstand extremes of temperatures from -46°C to 42°C.



The area is known for its rattlesnakes. Please be careful not to disturb them.

