



**SAUK PRAIRIE CONSERVATION ALLIANCE**  
**VISITOR GUIDE**  
**BADGER LANDS**  
**Sauk Prairie**  
**State Recreation**  
**Area**

This Visitor Guide is provided by:



SaukPrairieVision.org



**McFARLANES**

The Visitor Guide was developed by the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance with a grant from REI. We hope you enjoy your visit to the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area!



For 100 years, McFarlanes' has provided the Sauk Prairie area with innovative farm and power equipment, authentic parts and dedicated service. Three generations of the family built the business from the ground up, on principles like the business's motto which is: McFarlanes' Where Service is a Family Tradition.

The Visitor Guide has also been supported by the Norma & Stanley DeBoer Quiet Trails Fund of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin and the Friends of Scenic Lodi Valley.

The mission of the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance, a regional non-profit organization, is to promote cooperative conservation on the Badger Lands and in the surrounding Sauk Prairie landscape. The Alliance supports ecological restoration, public education, research and quiet nature-based recreation on the Badger Lands. The organization conducts restoration on remnant prairie and oak savanna sites at Badger, leads educational tours and offers public programs. For more information visit [saukprairievision.org](http://saukprairievision.org)

## A Brief History of the Badger Lands

### Geology is All Around Us!

The Badger Lands were created by both ancient and recent geologic events. The **Baraboo Hills** at the northern edge of the property are comprised of very hard Precambrian (1.6 billion years old) quartzite that has resisted erosion. Around 18,000 years ago, the last glacier bumped up against the Baraboo Hills, wrapped around the eastern edge, and flowed southward. The edge of that glacier ran through the middle of the Badger Lands. When the ice melted, a **terminal moraine**, a low ridge comprised of rocks, sand and soil, was left behind at the edge of the former glacier. Water from the melting glacier created the flat **outwash plain** to the west of the moraine. The outwash plain represented the edge of what is now called the **Driftless Area**, the southwest portion of the state never covered by glaciers.



### First People

Not long after the glacier began melting from our area some 14,000 years ago, humans began hunting caribou, muskox and woolly mammoths in the cold, barren Arctic-like landscape. These early humans likely established small temporary camps. The earliest record of human habitation in the area—around 12,000 years ago—is found at the Raddatz Rockshelter in Natural Bridge State Park only a few miles to the west. Starting around 1,000 years ago, the people that comprised what is known as the Woodland Culture built earthen effigy mounds throughout southern Wisconsin; several mounds are preserved at Devil's Lake. The mound builders were the ancestors of the people known today as the Ho-Chunk (formerly Winnebago). For several generations in the 1700s this landscape was home to the Sauk tribe, who were forced to move from their ancestral lands further to the east. The U.S. government acquired the land through the 1837 treaty with the Ho-Chunk Nation. In 2014 a portion of the Badger Lands returned to the Ho-Chunk Nation. Full circle!



### The Sauk Prairie

Tundra-like conditions existed following the melting of the glacier 14,000 years ago. As the climate warmed, tundra was replaced by conifer forest. About 6,000 years ago, the area became much warmer and dryer, and an increase in fire on the land (often set by the native peoples) favored a grassland ecosystem—prairie. When Europeans first viewed this area in the 1700s, they encountered a vast nearly treeless landscape—the 14,000 acre Sauk Prairie—abloom with millions of wildflowers, thick with native grasses and full of prairie wildlife—deer, elk, wolves, badgers and a preponderance of grassland birds. The prairie gave way to oak openings (savanna) at the base of the Baraboo Hills and to the east.

### European Settlement

The rich soils laid down under the Sauk Prairie were attractive to European settlers moving westward from the East in the mid-1800s, eager to establish farmsteads in the newly opened "Northwest," a place called Wisconsin. Breaking the dense prairie sod to reap its fertility was very hard work, requiring a team of oxen and plowmen working day in and day out. But broken the entire Sauk Prairie became, and farmers enjoyed—for the most part—a century of good crops and prosperity on the Sauk Prairie landscape, where they raised their families and livestock, supported schools and churches and built a community.



### Badger Army Ammunition Plant

Although plans had already been made earlier to locate a munitions factory in Sauk County, the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 brought the U.S. immediately into World War II. Thereafter, the construction of the Badger Ordnance Works (later Badger Army Ammunition Plant) on the Sauk Prairie proceeded at an accelerated pace. Within several months, 74 farm families had been forced to move off their farmsteads, the farm buildings, churches and schools were moved or destroyed, and construction of the largest propellant factory in the country began in earnest. The Plant eventually encompassed 7,400 acres and contained over 1,400 buildings and more than 120 miles of road and rail. The facility employed over 12,000 construction and production workers during its brief period of operation in WWII (1943-1945) and over 5,000 during the Korean War (1951-1957) and Vietnam War (1966-1975). The Plant was idled but kept in a state of readiness from 1975 to 1998.



### The Future: Sauk Prairie Restored!

When the Army announced in 1997 that the Badger Plant was to be decommissioned, a group of representatives from the area's conservation community came together to discuss the opportunity for a "green future" to heal the land at Badger. A painting by renowned artist Victor Bahktin, "Sauk Prairie Remembered" was commissioned to serve as the future vision of the **Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance** for the land. Following many years of public planning of the Badger property, the Alliance's green vision prevailed. Deconstruction of the buildings ensued from 2004 to 2013. The various Badger landowners are now committed to working together to create a revitalized landscape, where prairie and oak savanna are restored, sustainable agriculture is practiced, and public recreation can occur. Almost half of the Badger property is now the **Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area**, a state-owned property accessible to the general public for various types of recreational activities.



# Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area

This guide is for visitors to the 3,385-acre **Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area**, the state-owned portion of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant now open to the public. It serves as an interim recreation map while the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) prepares to improve infrastructure on and interpretive materials for the property. **Note that the only public restroom on the Badger Lands is at the Badger History Group Museum** at the entrance to the property on Highway 12, and the museum has limited hours (Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm).

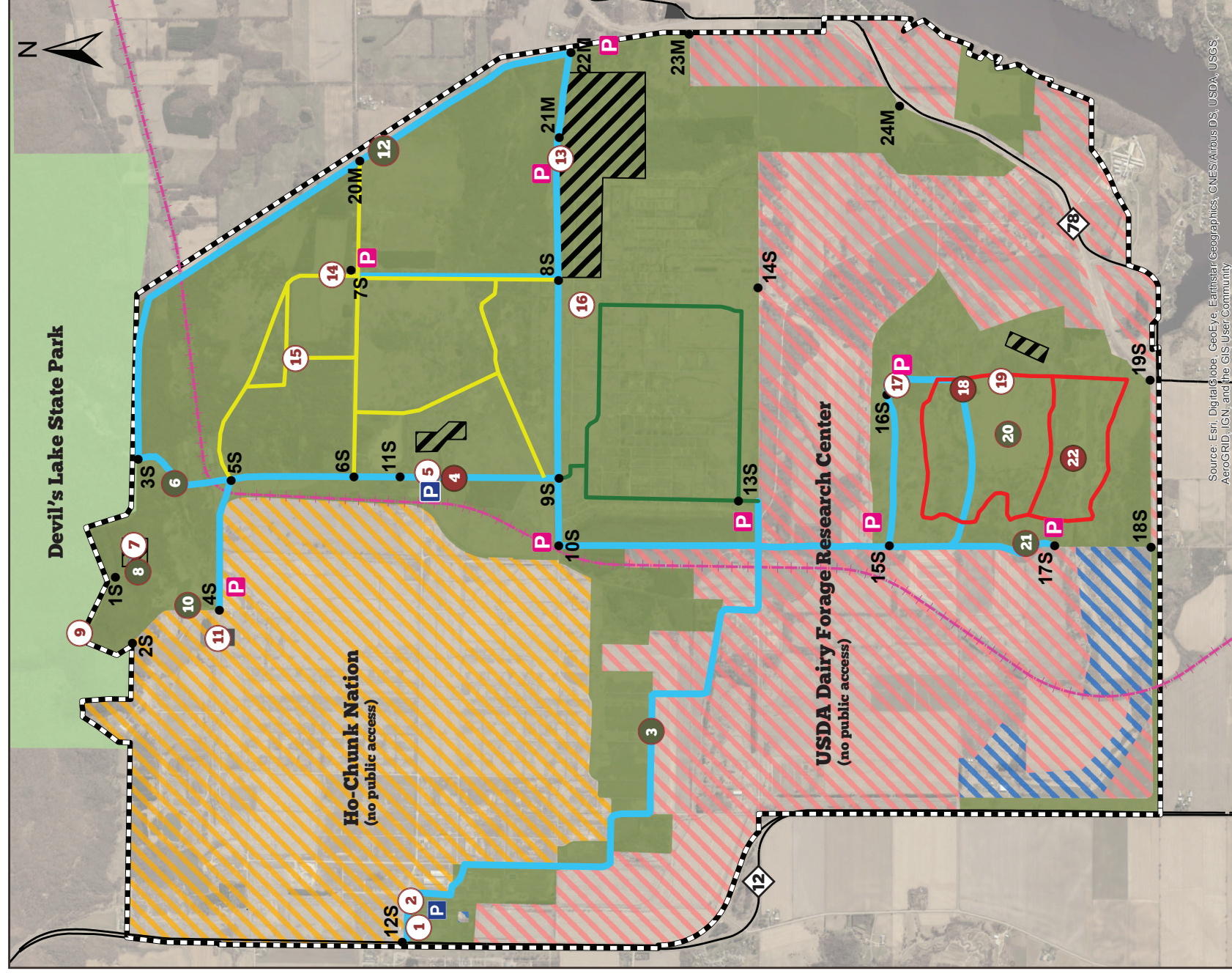
This guide shows accessible roads (blue) and a series of **preliminary marked** recreation (hiking, biking, horse riding) trails across the Badger landscape, while highlighting geologic, natural history and historic Points of Interest. NOTE: These trails are available in digital format on REI's "Hiking Project App," **HikingProject.com**. The **Great Sauk State Trail**, a biking and hiking trail, is currently under construction by Sauk County on the former rail line that crosses the Badger lands diagonally. This state trail will eventually connect the communities of Sauk City and Prairie du Sac with Devils Lake and Baraboo.

**Currently, cars and motorcycles are limited to the highlighted official roads on the property,** but a hiker can go anywhere on state land. Please refer to the DNR's website or map available at the entrance to Badger for rules and regulations at the recreation area.

**NO PUBLIC ACCESS AREAS.** The 1,550-acre parcel at the entrance to the Badger lands is owned by the Ho-Chunk Nation and is closed to public access. Similarly, the USDA Dairy Forage Research Center owns 2,200 acres of active production lands to the south, and that land, too, is off limits to public access. **PLEASE BE RESPECTFUL and SAFE, and do not trespass on Tribal, USDA or Bluffview Sanitary District lands.** (See map for details.) As some of the roads are shared by DNR and USDA, beware of farm equipment and traffic throughout the year.

Note that **Points of Interest** are unmarked on the ground. The Alliance has developed a web-based application, the "**BADGER APP**," to accompany and enhance this Visitor Guide. The Badger App offers more content about these and other points of interest on the Badger Lands. To access the BADGER APP, visit our website: **www.SaukPrairieVision.org**, and click on the link.

CREDITS:  
 Schuch-Thomson Prairie Unit owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts.  
 Photo: Joshua Mayer.  
 Badger sign and buildings: Alliance Archive  
 Steidtmann Farmhouse: Badger History Group archives  
 Badger Map developed by MSA, Baraboo & Bob Schwartz  
 Visitor Guide layout and design: Roxanne Aubrey Marina



# Points of Interest

**1 MUSEUM OF BADGER ARMY AMMUNITION** The museum, managed by the Badger History Group, maintains a vast archive of historic material associated with the pre-Badger farms and former Badger Army Plant, some of it exhibited here at the museum. Bathrooms available. Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-4pm. 608-448-0244. Email: bhg-arch@tds.net, web: badgerordnancehistory.org

**2 HISTORIC BADGER PLANT ENTRANCE** For the entire history of the Plant, all vehicles and people registered with armed guards upon entering and leaving.

**3 PRAIRIE & BLUFF VIEW** This is a view north to the Baraboo Hills across state-owned and Ho-Chunk land, a vast grassland currently being restored to prairie. Dairy Forage Research Center fields can be seen to the south. This is the approximate viewpoint of Victor Bakhtin's painting "Sauk Prairie Remembered" commissioned by Alliance founders Mary Yeekel and Virginia Metcalf, in 1998.

**4 TERMINAL MORaine & OUTWASH PLAIN** You are on top of the terminal moraine, the westernmost extent of the last glacier. The road follows the moraine going north toward the Baraboo Hills. To the west is the flat outwash plain, formerly the 14,000-acre Sauk Prairie. The former military operation with more than 1,400 buildings is now gone, and is being restored to native prairie!

**5 NITROGLYCERINE PLANT** During the production years at Badger, highly explosive nitroglycerine was produced to the east of this site, where there are now skeletal remains of production-era buildings. An explosion here killed four workers in 1945. Note: some of this area is closed to public access.

**6 POND** This natural drainage at the base of the South Bluff is full of frogs and aquatic insects. Look for families of Wood Duck, Mallard and Hooded Merganser.

**7 RESERVOIRS** These concrete reservoirs blasted out of the quartzite bluff once held 10 million gallons of water, pumped from the Wisconsin River and used for production across the entire Badger Plant. **Do not enter inside the fence; access is strictly prohibited.** Along the NW corner of the first reservoir, there are remnants of a Cambrian stream and beach with rounded quartzite rocks embedded in the former beach sand, and a large quartzite face pocked by wave-tossed rocks.

**8 SAUK PRAIRIE OVERLOOK** This platform offers a magnificent view of the outwash plain to the south, site of the original Sauk Prairie. The terminal moraine lies to the east (left). To the southwest, you can see Ferry Bluff along the Wisconsin River and Blue Mounds further to the south. Sauk City and Prairie du Sac water towers are visible.

**9 PERIMETER FENCE** All of the Badger Plant was once enclosed by this chain link fence, with the perimeter road running inside its entire length. This area is the ecological transition from the former prairie and oak savanna (to the south) to the oak woodland of Devil's Lake South Bluff on the outside of the fence, now open to allow access. A half-mile to the north is a parking area at the end of Burma Rd., which connects with the South Shore Rd.

**10 WILDLIFE PONDS** These shallow ponds were artificially created when the clay soil was removed to line the landfill. Look for waterfowl and herons.

**11 PIONEER CEMETERY** This small cemetery contains graves from early pioneers and the Sauk Prairie farm community from 1843-1941, until the Army took over the land. The Ho-Chunk owns the land surrounding the cemetery, and access (by foot only) to the cemetery from state land is by permission only.

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 REPRINT, Edition 2 (Spring 2018)

**12 PRAIRIE GRASSLAND** This area was planted to prairie grasses by the Army in the 1990s once production had ceased, to provide habitat for grassland wildlife. It has been maintained by shrub cutting and regular prescribed fires. Look for small concrete foundations of former guard towers along the perimeter road.

**13 LANDFILL** This landfill was created between 2004 and 2012 with the vast amount of unsalvageable waste from the deconstruction of the more than 1,400 buildings of the former Badger Plant, many of which contained asbestos and other hazardous materials. **Access is strictly prohibited.**

**14 DETERRENT BURNING GROUNDS** Waste chemicals were dumped and burned here during the production years from 1942 to 1975. One of three groundwater contamination plumes originated here, flowing south. The contamination has been mitigated with the help of special bacteria. There is a long-term groundwater monitoring well across the road to the south.

**15 TNT PLANT** This region once housed a TNT manufacturing facility, which was dismantled before coming into production. All that remain are interesting concrete foundations, hidden among thick forest and exotic shrubs that have invaded since 1942, when the landscape was wide open.

**16 ROCKET POWDER AREA** Large sausage-like sticks of solid propellant, used to power rockets, such as those fired from helicopter gunships during the Vietnam War, were produced at this site. Much of this area will be restored to prairie by clearing the invading shrubs and using prescribed burns to maintain the grassland landscape.

**17 THOELKE CEMETERY AND CHURCH** This cemetery features gravestones from 1859-1934. The Immanuel Evangelical Church foundation can be found in brush on the north side of the cemetery. The overgrown woodlot to the south and west of this site originated after 1942.

**18 KETTLE POND** This pond is a natural feature, a remnant of the last glaciation. In springtime you can hear several species of frogs singing from this pond, and at another, which features open-grown oaks, over the hill north of the road.

**19 STEIDTMAN FARMSTEAD** The original farmhouse (pictured on back page) was on the east side of the road and the barn was to the west, where some foundation remains. The father, Julius Steidtmann, had to be physically removed from the house in 1942. His infant son remains buried alone in nearby Thoelke cemetery (POI #17).

**20 MAGAZINE PASTURE GRASSLAND** This area once had widely scattered buildings for storing finished propellant. They were spaced to prevent an explosion in one from setting off an explosion in another, and there was no electricity or other infrastructure in the area. For decades the area had been pastured, providing habitat for grassland birds like Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark. This rolling meadow will eventually be restored to prairie grassland and oak savanna.

**21 HILLSIDE PRAIRIE** This is the only remnant of the original Sauk Prairie on the entire 7,400-acre Badger property, spared from the plow by its steep slope and distance from farmsteads. The site has been managed by volunteers with the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance since 2000. DNR land managers have used prescribed fires here to reduce the invasive shrubs and restore the prairie.

**22 SETTLING PONDS AND GLACIAL LAKE OUTLET** When the glacier melted and receded to the east, Glacial Lake Merrimac formed between it and the terminal moraine. This channel was carved as the glacial lake eventually drained westward. Water from Army production facilities was impounded here to settle before flowing into Lake Wisconsin's Gruber's Grove. **Access is prohibited where fencing occurs.**