

Kansas Historical Society

Nature Trail Activity Guide

Explore Kansas history naturally!



6425 SW 6th Avenue
Topeka KS 66615 • 785-272-8681
kshs.org

Help us preserve nature. Please stay on the trail.
Do your part to keep the trail clean.

Adapting to the Prairie

The year is ...

1450. You are on a buffalo hunt with the Pawnee Indians.
Where is the best place to find the herd?

1541. You are with Spanish explorer Coronado. Instead of finding the Seven Cities of Gold you meet the Wichita Indians.
Why did they build their homes from grass?

1883. You are homesteading in Sherman County. There are no trees to build a cabin.
What do you use?

The history of Kansas has been shaped by the interaction between people and the environment. The land, flora, and fauna have influenced all people: American Indians, explorers, traders, trail travelers, settlers, and business entrepreneurs. Our natural surroundings continue to influence our lives.

The Kansas Historical Society's nature trail was created to show the connection between Kansans and their environment.

How to Use This Guide

This booklet gives you activities to do while hiking the trail and at home. For more information about Kansas history, read the signs located along the trail.

The Kansas Historical Society's 2.5 mile nature trail is home to many plants and animals. It is open from sunrise to sunset everyday.

East Trail – Explores the tallgrass prairie

North Trail – Winds along the creek bank to investigate the woodland and stream edge

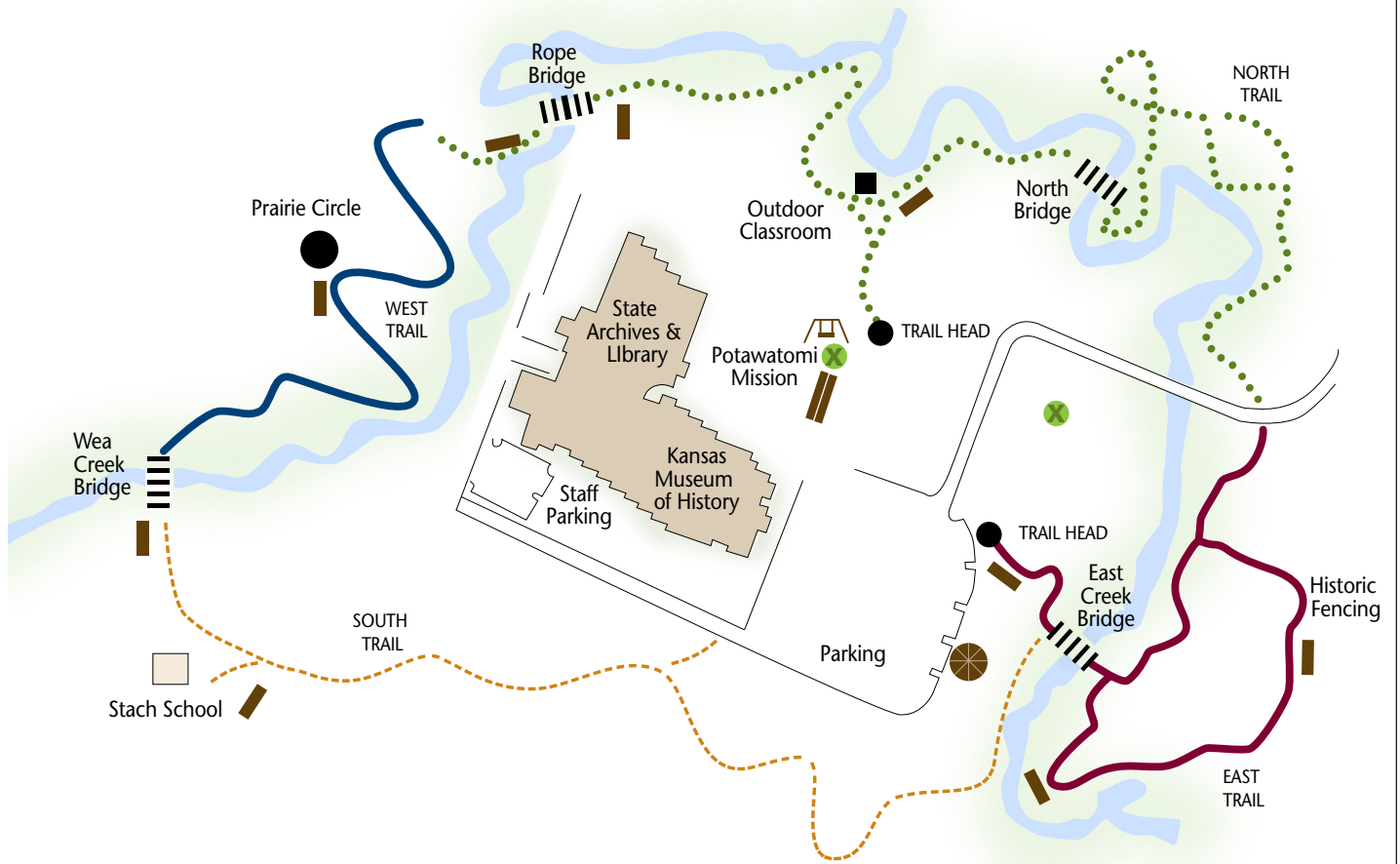
West Trail – Demonstrates one of the current relationships between people and the environment

South Trail – Leads to the historic one-room Stach School

The trail was made possible through a partnership between the Kansas Historical Society and the Westar Green Team.



Kansas Historical Society Nature Trail Map



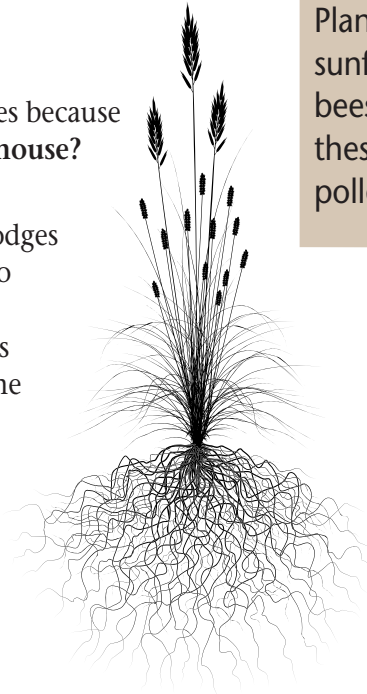
Entire trail 2 miles	
	West Trail .39 miles
	East Trail .58 miles
	South Trail .42 miles
	North Trail .64 miles
	Bench
	Picnic Area
	Playground
	Gazebo

Prairie Grasses

On the trail: Stand beside the different prairie grasses and wild plants. How do you measure up?

Q. Some Kansas settlers used sod to build houses because trees were scarce. How do you build a sod house?

A. Settlers looked at the Pawnee Indian earth lodges for inspiration. Using spades, they sliced into the thick prairie grass. The grass had matted roots that held the dirt together. The sod was cut into chunks and stacked like bricks. In the 1800s you could build a sod house for less than \$15!



At home:

Plant some Kansas sunflowers. Butterflies, bees, and birds love these plants for their pollen and seeds!

Trees

On the trail: Find four different shaped leaves. Can you name them?

At home:

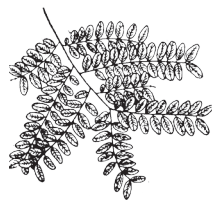
Collect fallen leaves and press between pages of newspaper to start your own nature journal.

Q. Once immigrants began settling on the Kansas prairie they started planting trees. What was one of the most common trees planted on farms?

A. *Juniperus virginiana* or Red Cedar. These trees were planted around many farmsteads in Kansas. The trees make a good windbreak because they can tolerate both drought and cold.



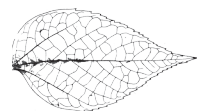
Sycamore



Locust



Cottonwood



Hackberry

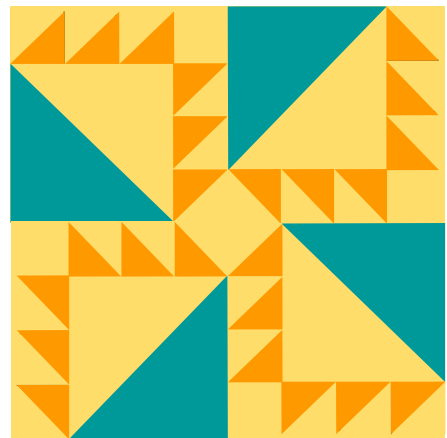
Colorful Kansas

On the trail: See if you can find something that is:

- red
- blue
- yellow
- green
- orange
- purple

Q. Early Kansans used objects from nature to add color to their lives. Wichita Indians dyed porcupine quills with onion skins, flowers, and roots and sewed them onto clothing and tipis for decoration. **What was one of the most colorful objects in a settler's home?**

A. The quilts. The women on the plains cut up outgrown clothes, traded swatches of fabric with friends and family, chose a pattern (like *Kansas Troubles*), and after many months of piecing, sewing, and quilting these scraps together, a bright blanket was done.



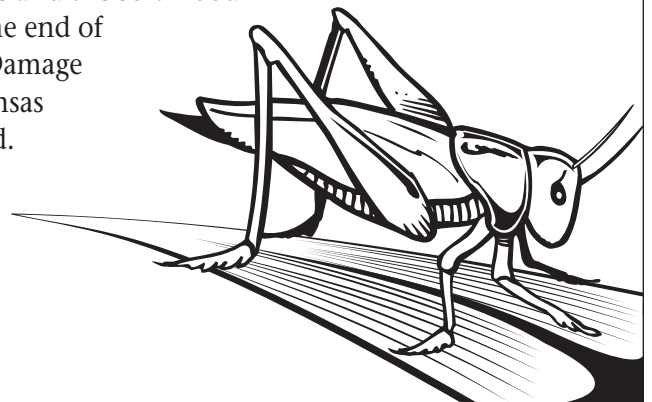
Insects

On the trail: Find three different types of insects. Look closely!



Q. Insects are part of living in Kansas. In 1874 an event occurred that settlers referred to as “the plague of locusts.” **What was it?**

A. In late July 1874 grasshoppers came to Kansas. They came on the wind and at times blotted out the sun. They attacked cornfields, gardens, and grass. The grasshoppers ate clothing off the back of settlers and the soft wood of tool handles. By the end of August, it was over. Damage was great and the Kansas prairie was devastated.



Creative Kansans

On the trail: Are those feathers from a duck or the stuffing for your pillow? Stretch your imagination and find creative uses for nuts, twigs, and berries.

Q. Settlers on the Kansas prairie made do with what they had. Dolls were made out of corn husks. Smooth rocks from the creek were marbles. The Plains Indians did the same. **How do you think they used a buffalo bladder and horn?**

A. A bladder was used as a canteen to carry water, and the horn was often used as a scoop or spoon.



At home:

See if you can find creative uses for objects in your backyard.

Animal Tracks

On the trail: Look for animal tracks. What can you find?

At home:

Put a dish of water in the yard. Dust around the bowl with flour and watch to see who leaves their tracks.

Q. American Indians and settlers in Kansas depended on wild animals for food. **What would you have eaten in the 1800s?**

A. Buffalo, deer, vegetables, wild fruits, nuts, and greens. A settler on the prairie in 1870 wrote in her diary, *"Yesterday I finished a shirt and got dinner. Buffalo steak, radishes, bread, molasses, stewed peaches and coffee. A greater variety than usual."*



Raccoon



Coyote



Deer



bird (crow)

Birds

On the trail: Listen to the calls of three different birds. Imitate their sounds. Can you identify the birds?

Q. Birds have been used in Kansas for food, pets, and even to predict the weather. **Do you know any Kansas folklore about birds?**

A. Here are a few: *a flock of birds means an early fall; if birds are quiet, it will storm; when a woodpecker pecks on a tin roof, it's a sign that wet weather is coming; if you destroy a barn swallow's nest, lightning will strike your barn.*

At home:

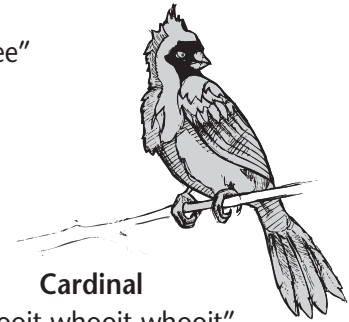
Make a bird feeder. Mix cornmeal with peanut butter, spread on a pinecone, roll it in sunflower seeds, and hang on a branch of a tree.



Blue jay
"queedle queedle queedle"



Chickadee
"chicka dee dee dee"



Cardinal
"whooit-whooit-whooit"

Our Trash

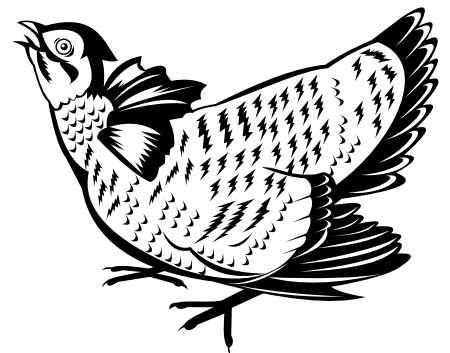
On the trail: Look around. Is there trash on the trail? Where did it come from? Why is it here? How do you connect with the Kansas environment?

At home:

Find a canvas bag not being used. Decorate it using markers. Use this bag every time you go to the grocery store instead of getting plastic bags at the check-out counter.

Q. Many Kansans today have busy lives and often times don't think about the sights and sounds of nature. **Describe your day. What would it have been like in the 1870s?**

A. Here's how a Kansas woman described her day in her diary:
"Early in the morning we can hear the prairie chickens drumming. I wonder if they are hunting nest locations. Yesterday I went to the garden ... Hoed the beans, peas, planted corn. It was very warm, and I was tired out. We have little twilight here. The sun sets, and in a few minutes it is dark."



Interested in learning more about Kansas History?

Don't forget to:

- Visit the museum galleries and see a Wichita grass lodge, pioneer log cabin, Civil War battle flags, a steam engine, and more
- Trace your family history using the archives and library
- Uncover mysteries in your own home by learning about historic preservation
- Crawl in a tipi, try on some pioneer clothes, and play at the farmyard activities tables in Discovery Place
- Plan a tour of the state by visiting our website, kshs.org, for more information about our state historic sites
- Become a member by calling 785-272-8681 or visiting kshs.org and receive free admission to our museum and sites, discounts on educational workshops, invitations to special events, publications, and Museum Store discounts.



6425 SW 6th Avenue
Topeka KS 66615 • 785-272-8681
kshs.org