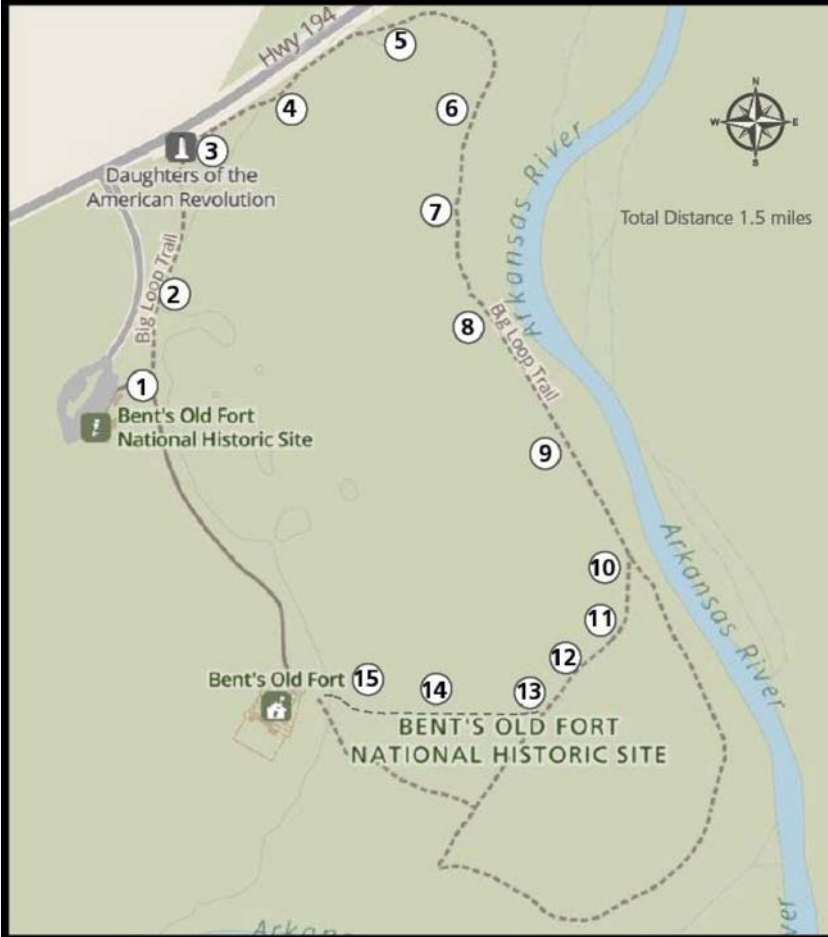


BENT'S OLD FORT
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

TRAIL MAP COTTONWOOD CUTOFF LOOP TOUR WITH STOPS



LIST OF STOPS

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TOUR GUIDEBOOK

COTTONWOOD CUTOFF LOOP TRAIL MAP WITH STOPS

<p>Stop 1:</p> <p>Grounds Orientation</p>		<p>Welcome to Bent's Old Fort! The paved path ahead leads to the fort entrance. Take in the space around you. Whose homelands are these? For hundreds of years the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho lived in this area. What brought other people here in the 1800s? (You will discover many answers to this question during your visit.) Make a left turn to access the grassy trail.</p> <p><i>*What's the longest time you've been away from home? Where did you go and why? Lewis Garrard writes, "we arrived in sight of the fort, where our animals were soon unsaddled, and turned out at the gate, to wander in quest of grass. Going in, we found Mr. St. Vrain, who introduced us to William Bent, a partner, Doctor Hempstead, and several traders. We sat down to a table, for the first time in fifty days, and ate with knives, forks, and plates."</i></p>
<p>Stop 2:</p> <p>Marsh</p>		<p>To your right is our wetlands which attracts a variety of year-round and migrating birds. Approach quietly as you peer over the grasses to see the water's surface and edges. You'll likely spot waterfowl, toads, rabbits, or even a muskrat in this marshy area. What animal do you hope to see today? How does having wetlands nearby benefit the ecology and culture of those living on this land?</p> <p><i>*Historian George Bird Grinnell writes, "The feathers from the tail of the eagle were highly valued for use in adornment and for trade with other tribes, and at the proper season of the year some [Cheyenne] men devoted much effort to catching the birds."</i></p>

Stop 3:
Bent's Fort Arch
D.A.R. History



If you could preserve a place so that it is remembered hundreds of years from now, what would it be? Bent's Old Fort is a reconstruction based on the original 1833 trading post. Not much of the building remained at the turn of the century, so the La Junta chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a marker at this site in 1912. In 1920, 4 ½ acres of site grounds were dedicated for its historic importance. It finally became a National Park Service historic site in 1976.

*"The Cheyennes are said to have met the Bent brothers on their first expedition south, and the building of Bent's Fort on the Arkansas in Colorado resulted from this meeting, said to have been in 1827." – George Bird Grinnell

Stop 4:
Wayside Panel
Santa Fe Trail



Right where you're standing was part of the Santa Fe Trail. U.S. and Mexican merchants began using the 500 mile trade route in 1821 after Mexico separated from Spain. This mountain branch stretched from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Unlike other trails during this century, it was not begun as a route for settlement, but for trade. Bent's Fort was a place to supply, fix, rest, or trade on your way to somewhere else. So, who were the people passing through and what did they need or trade?

*David Beyreis writes, "The company caravan, usually upward of thirty wagons, left Bent's Fort in April loaded with pelts and bison robes. Accompanied by teamsters, herders, hunters, and guards, the wagons managed between ten and twelve miles a day." How long did it take you to get to Bent's Fort today and what route did you take?

Stop 5:

Bent's Old Fort Sign



Smile and say "Charlie!" Look to your left for the park sign to take a group photo or selfie. Charles Bent and his friend, Ceran St. Vrain, began this trading post together, but they didn't stay long. The two went to New Mexico to start other posts and left the management of Fort William (Bent's Fort) to William Bent, Charles' younger brother. Would you trust your business to one of your siblings?

"Bent's Fort was the first permanent settlement in all the central Plains region and William Bent was the first American settler within the borders of the present state of Colorado. He went there in 1824 and lived there until his death in 1869." George Hyde from *Life of George Bent

Stop 6:

Prairie Grasses



All along the trail you'll notice a variety of grasses. This region is known as the High Plains and is part of the short-grass prairie. What wildlife is supported by these grasses? A clue to one of the major mammals found here in the 1800s is the fact that 80% of short-grass prairie is made up of blue grama and *buffalo* grass. Buffalo preferred eating the shortgrass prairie grasses to those in tallgrass prairies.

Naturalist and traveler Josiah Gregg wrote, "It is true that owing to their disrelish for the long dry grass of the eastern prairies the buffalo are rarely found so far east in autumn as during the spring..."

<p>Stop 7: Bird Sanctuary</p>		<p>It looks like nothing more than a walking trail but keep your eyes open at both ground level and treetops. What bird species do you expect to see? Common ones in this area are red-winged blackbirds, northern flicker, ring-necked pheasant, marsh wrens, yellow warblers, house sparrows, great horned owl, northern harrier, and the rarer Virginia and black rails. When James Abert visited Bent's Fort in 1846, he reported seeing the killdeer plover. Today, there is a bird species named after him, the Abert towhee.</p> <p>How are these birds different from the ones swimming in the marsh? Why is this spot a good hangout for birds? Think about their diet and potential predators. Where's the best hiding place you've ever found?</p>
<p>Stop 8: Arkansas River Uses</p>		<p>Where does your water at home come from? The Arkansas River, once called the Rio Napeste, originates on the east slope of the Rocky Mountains flowing into both Kansas and Oklahoma. Southern Plains tribes utilized this life source for centuries. Records of European explorers encountering the Arkansas River date back to Coronado in the 1500s. Before the 20th century, why have people typically lived by rivers? Does the river look navigable today? Would you want to cross this spot by covered wagon?</p> <p>*Regarding crossing the Arkansas River in June, Josiah Gregg writes, "I have witnessed a whole team down at once, rendering it necessary to unharness and drag each mule out separately: in fact, more than common exertion is sometimes required to prevent these dumpish animals from drowning in their fright and struggles through the water, though the current be but shallow at the place. Hence it is that oxen are much safer for fording streams than mules."</p>

Stop 9:

Cottonwood
Trees



As you walk beside the river, notice the line of trees on either side. These are mostly cottonwood trees which typically live over 100 years. If you visit in the spring, you'll see the white fluffy "catkins" which hold the cottonwood seeds. To your left are several dead-looking cottonwoods. What do you notice about their bark? What might be the cause? A natural fire swept through here in 2022. Because trees are so scarce in the High Plains, cottonwoods were vital for building, firewood, and even food for horses and game animals. Fires and floods were sometimes devastating and sometimes revitalizing to those living in daily dependence on the land.

*Topographical engineer W.H. Emory wrote, "The only tree of any magnitude found on this course is the cotton-wood, (*Populus Canadensis*), and it frequently happens that not one of these is seen in a whole day's journey, and the buffalo dung and wild sage constitute the only fuel to be procured."

Stop 10:

Wayside Panel
Buffalo



What's the #1 bestselling item at your favorite store? What do you think the #1 trade item at Bent's Fort was? Buffalo robes! Buffalo were plentiful in this area. Who do you think hunted and processed these robes for trade? Cheyenne and Arapaho men hunted the buffalo and the women spent ten days processing and softening each robe. What might they want to trade a buffalo robe for? Be sure to look for these trade items in our fort's trade room. Take the trail to your right!

*"The buffalo where they range, may be relied upon to support a column of many thousand men; but their range is very uncertain. This year it was westward, between the 98th degree and the 101st meridian of longitude." - W.H. Emory, topographical engineer in 1846.

Stop 11:

Dangers



What outside dangers frighten you most? Dangers along the trail were sometimes seen, like rattlesnakes, and sometimes unseen like illnesses. With increased human interaction came diseases like smallpox and cholera.

*In 1832, "William understood the dangers and warned off the Cheyennes, attempting to isolate the disease. The smallpox epidemic temporarily halted the fort's construction, striking down many of Bent's workers. William himself was poxed and confined to his bed. He recovered, but his face forever bore the scars." – Halaas and Masich, *Halfbreed*.

Stop 12:

Tree Stump
Rings



While trees are important for human use, they are also important as resources for animals. In a canopy of trees live not only birds, but skunk, porcupine, squirrel, raccoon, and bobcat – all recently spotted at Bent's Fort. At this stop, take a look at this cottonwood stump and notice the tree rings. Each ring stands for a year of growth. About how old was this tree?

On the high plains wind gusts and storms can easily take down trees. Think about how skilled the Cheyenne and Arapaho tipi and lodge builders must have been to successfully stake their encampments in such a place.

"Famous groves of cottonwood trees where the Indians had camped in winter for generations disappeared in a single season" – George Bent

Stop 13:

Turn right -
Rattlesnakes



It's always a good idea to watch closely where you're walking to stay safe. With an abundance of mice and birds around, it is not unusual to see various species of snakes at Bent's Old Fort. The most common are the garter, bull snake, and rattlesnake.

During his travels, Josiah Gregg writes, "As we were toiling up through the sandy hillocks which border the southern banks of the Arkansas, the day being exceedingly warm, we came upon a perfect den of these reptiles [rattlesnakes]. I will not say thousands, though this perhaps were nearer the truth – but hundreds, at least, were coiled or crawling in every direction."

Stop 14:

Transportation



Was your mode of transportation reliable for your visit today? During the fur trade era, travel was powered by foot or animal. From this spot, you are approaching the south side of the fort. If you entered Bent's Fort from Mexico, you would have needed to cross the Arkansas River behind you to get to this point. Securing your goods without losing your livestock would have been crucial. To the left of the structure is the corral. Many mules, horses, and oxen were not only boarded here, but trained and traded. On arrival, they would have been led through the fort grounds to graze and recuperate from weeks of weary travel along the Santa Fe Trail. As you get closer, notice the southeast door. Just inside it is our 1830s parking garage - the wagon shed.

*Lewis Garrard explains, "The maneuvers of the Mexicans of our company are really astonishing in lassoing unruly mules and horses; dodge as they may, or run about, the lariat noose is sure to fall on their unwilling necks."

Stop 15:

Fort Flag



Look above the fort to see the American flag. When you reach the front entrance, you'll notice it does not have 50 stars because at this time in history, there were not 50 states. What does the sight of the American flag mean to you? What did it mean for the various peoples and cultures who came here?

"August 2, 1846. I looked in the direction of Bent's Fort, and saw a huge United States flag flowing on the breeze, and straining every fibre of an ash pole planted over the centre of a gate. The mystery was soon revealed by a column of dust to the east, advancing with about the velocity of a fast walking horse – it was 'the Army of the West.'" - W.H. Emory

Stop 16:

Main Entrance to Fort



You made it! Was your mode of transportation reliable for your visit today? During the fur trade era, travel was powered by foot or animal. Swing around to the front entrance. If you entered Bent's Fort from Mexico, you would have needed to cross the Arkansas River behind you to get to this point. Securing your goods without losing your livestock would have been crucial. Enjoy your tour of the inside!

Lewis Garrard writes, "we arrived in sight of the fort, where our animals were soon unsaddled, and turned out at the gate, to wander in quest of grass. Going in, we found Mr. St. Vrain, who introduced us to William Bent, a partner, Doctor Hempstead, and several traders. We sat down to a table, for the first time in fifty days, and ate with knives, forks, and plates."