



# National Historic Trails Auto Tour Route Interpretive Guide

Western Missouri Through Northeastern Kansas



Emigrants crossing the Missouri  
River at Westport Landing  
— by William Henry Jackson



*"Junction of Oregon Trail with Overland Trail," near Hanover, KS.*

[The inside back cover page is for placement of an 11" x 17" regional map (Illustrator EPS file attached) that is to be folded so that it will fit into a pocket envelope adhered to the inside of the back cover.]

NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS  
AUTO TOUR ROUTE INTERPRETIVE  
GUIDE

WESTERN MISSOURI TO NORTHEASTERN KANSAS

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**33. St. Joseph Riverfront Landing** (Francis Street, St. Joseph, MO) is where emigrants and Pony Express riders boarded a ferry to cross the Missouri River into Kansas. The site, on the west edge of St. Joseph, is now a small city park in an industrial area, with historical monuments and interpretive signs.



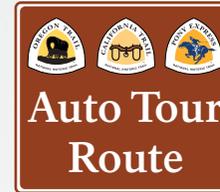
Missouri River Landing where emigrants

**Directions:** From U.S.-36 in St. Joseph, take the 9<sup>th</sup> Street exit. Drive north for 1.3 miles, and turn west on Francis Street. Continue for 9 blocks until Francis Street terminates at the riverfront.

**34. Iowa, Sac, and Fox Presbyterian Mission** (near Highland, KS) was established in 1846 to serve three Eastern tribes that were relocated to Kansas reservations. A 30-yard swale of the nearby overland trail is still visible east of the mission building. In 1849, cholera spread into the Indian community near the mission, and a smallpox epidemic took more lives the following year. The mission now houses the Native American Heritage Museum, operated by the Kansas State Historical Society. Open Wed.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sun., 1-5 p.m. Group tours by appointment.

**Directions:** From St. Joseph, MO, drive west on U.S.-36 for approximately 25 miles, into Kansas. Turn north on KS-120 (S. Kansas St.) and continue into Highland to East Main (Old U.S.-36). Turn east and drive for approximately two miles. Turn north for approximately one-half mile on county road, and then turn northwest to mission.

## INTRODUCTION



Roadside Auto Tour Route signs mark the general routes of the Oregon, California, and Pony Express national historic trails through western Missouri and northeast Kansas. Actual wagon wheel ruts, emigrant camps, Pony Express stations, and other places of interest can be visited at the sites listed in this guide. Driving directions to the sites are provided from major highways and nearby towns. To follow overland trail routes between sites, consult the overview map at the end of this publication. Generally, local brochures and guides are also available. Entrance and parking fees may be charged at some locations, and hours may vary at the discretion of site administrators. Large groups are encouraged to make prior arrangements for tours, where tours are available. Please respect private property by staying in public areas, and help protect our national heritage by leaving trail resources undisturbed.

*We cross the prairie as [in days] of old  
The pilgrims crossed the sea . . . .*

—John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)  
—From *The Kansas Emigrants*

## ACROSS THE WIDE MISSOURI

The story of the American West is not simply a tale of pioneer courage and vision—of prairie schooners swaying westward to the strains of heroic music. Rather, it is a complex weave of plots and subplots, of romance and religion, of politics and money, and of personal and national tragedy.

Traces of the people, livestock, and wooden wheels that were part of those stories can still be found on the landscape. There are traces, too, of native peoples whose lives were changed by emigration. This guide will provide descriptions of the historic places where wagon wheels cut into soft stream banks and over rolling prairie, where lonely trailside graves lie, where missionary outposts were established for Native Americans, and where Pony Express stations maintained a stable of swift mustangs, and more.

Pioneers gathered to prepare for their journey at Independence and St. Joseph, Missouri. From there, they would embark across the wide and muddy Missouri River into a strange, windswept land of unfamiliar wonders—and dangers.



Ox Yoke—used on teams of oxen pulling emigrant wagons—forced the team to pull together equally. Circa 1840s.

*... I, like every other pioneer, love to live over again, in memory those romantic months, and revisit, in fancy, the scenes of the journey.*

—Catherine Haun,  
—California emigration of 1849

**Directions:** From Marysville, drive west on U.S.-36 and turn north on KS-148. Drive four miles and turn east on KS-243 and follow signs to site.

**31. Pony Express Stable** (914 Penn, St. Joseph, MO), is the original Pike's Peak stable, built in 1858 to accommodate horses used by a local freight and stagecoach company. In 1860, the building was purchased for Pony Express use. It is now a privately operated museum. Open Mon.-Sat., 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sun., 1-5 p.m.; closed during winter holidays. The Pony Express Monument is located nearby at 10<sup>th</sup> and Francis Street.



Pony Express Stables in St. Joseph, MO.

**Directions:** From U.S.-36 in St. Joseph, take the 10<sup>th</sup> Street exit onto 10<sup>th</sup> Street northbound. Drive one-half mile to Penn Street and turn left.

**32. Patee House** (12<sup>th</sup> and Penn Street, St. Joseph, MO) is a 140-room hotel built by John Patee in 1858. The most luxurious hotel west of Mississippi River at the time, its first floor also housed the original Pony Express business office. The building, a national historic landmark, is now a museum operated by the Pony Express Historical Association. Open April-Oct, Mon.-Sat., 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sun., 1-5 p.m.; Nov.- Mar., Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun., 1-5 p.m.

**Directions:** From U.S.-36 in St. Joseph, take the 10<sup>th</sup> Street Exit onto 10<sup>th</sup>, northbound. Drive north for one-half mile and turn right onto Penn Street. Drive two-tenths mile. Patee House is at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Penn.



Historic Patee House, photo courtesy of Patee House Museum

**28. Pony Express Barn** (106 S. 8<sup>th</sup> St., Marysville, KS) is a stone barn, constructed in 1859, that was used as a Pony Express livery stable. It is now a privately owned museum (closed during winter months). A Pony Express monument is located along U.S.-36, west of town. Check locally for directions, as railroad and highway construction projects may require moving this monument.

**Directions:** From U.S.-36 in Marysville, turn south onto 8<sup>th</sup> Street and follow the signs for one block.



Original Pony Express barn and Home Station, Marysville, Kansas.

**29. Marshall's Ferry** (Marysville, KS) was one of three major river crossings on the St. Joseph Road to California. Francis Marshall established the first ferry here on the west edge of Marysville in 1852. A roadside park near the location offers interpretive panels and a reconstructed wagon ferry.

**Directions:** The park is in Marysville, KS, east of the Big Blue River and accessible from U.S.-77. Inquire locally for more precise driving directions.



Replica of Rope Ferry used in Marysville to cross Big Blue River.

**30. Hollenberg Station** (Hanover, KS) is a seven-acre state park and national historic landmark that boasts the only Pony Express station in Kansas remaining in its original location. It was initially built in 1857 as a waystation to serve emigrant traffic on the Oregon and California trails. The site also offers a picnic area, nature trail, museum, historical markers and monuments. Open Wed.-Sat., 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sun., 1 – 5 p.m.



Original Hollenberg Pony Express Station.

## ON THEIR OWN

Not fit for farming, too windswept and exposed to attract homesteaders, the “Great American Desert” that unrolled west of the Missouri River was seen as landscape to be crossed on the way to a better place. That crossing, travelers of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century knew, was, by turn, exhausting and exhilarating, and tedious and terrifying. Emigrants’ excitement and anxiety mounted as they prepared to launch their ox-drawn prairie schooners from St. Joseph and Independence, Missouri, bustling river ports at the frontier’s edge. To them, the great, gray ribbon of the Missouri was the western shore of civilized society. Once their wagons rolled off the ferry onto the Kansas side, emigrants embarked into unfamiliar country—trespassers on Indian lands, and beyond the protection of the government. On the trail, there were no markets, no hospitals, no laws, and no second chances.

From there until they reached trail’s end some 2,000 miles later, the pioneer emigrants were on their own.

*Here we were, without law, without order, and without restraint; in a state of nature, amid the confused, revolving fragments of elementary society! Some were sad, while others were merry; and while the brave doubted, the timid trembled!*

—Lansford W. Hastings,  
—Oregon migration of 1842  
*The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California*

*In the winter of 18 and 46 our neighbor got hold of Fremont’s History of California and . . . brought the book to my husband to read, & he was carried away with the idea [of emigrating] too. I said O let us not go!*

—Mary Jones,  
—California emigration of 1846

## DANGER, DEATH, AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Most emigrants lived in fear of Indian attack. Rumors of—even hoaxes about—trailside massacres drifted back to Eastern newspapers, and many travelers packed a virtual arsenal to protect themselves on the road. For the most part, though, their fears were unfounded. Historians conclude that more Indian people than emigrants were killed in clashes along the Oregon and California trails.

A more serious threat to those gathering at the congested jumping-off places along the Missouri River was a mysterious killer that could neither be seen nor fought: cholera. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, no one realized that this virulent and painful intestinal infection was caused by bacteria. Spread unknowingly from waterhole to waterhole by sick travelers, the disease dogged emigrants from the Missouri trailheads to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, some 600 miles down the road. Many died before even crossing the river into Kansas—active and well at breakfast, and in the grave by noon.

There were many more worries, too. Accidents, emigrants knew, were common on the way West. Heavy wagons crushed children who slipped beneath their iron-clad wheels; men were killed in gun accidents, often by their own hand; and women died from complications of pregnancy while on the trail. People and irreplaceable livestock were swept away during treacherous river crossings, and some perished in terrifying summer thunderstorms that stabbed the plains with lightning. And of course, the sufferings of the Donner Party, trapped by early snowfall in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in 1846, must have weighed heavily on the minds of many travelers who followed their wheel-ruts toward the Pacific.



"Emigrants Crossing the Plains" - Library of Congress.

*The heart has a thousand misgivings,  
and the mind is tortured with  
anxiety, and often as I passed the  
fresh made graves I have glanced at  
the side boards of the wagons, not  
knowing how soon it would serve as  
a coffin for some one of us.*

—Lucy R. Cooke,  
—California emigration of 1852

**26. Lower Crossing on the Big Blue** (Blue Rapids, KS) is believed to be an alternate crossing used in later years. This crossing is not mentioned in emigrant diaries and journals; however, numerous journal entries reference other crossings of the Big Blue. An interpretive exhibit at this site tells how emigrants used to make river crossings when they encountered steep embankments. **Warning!** *This is private property and a cattle pasture. Livestock may be grazing in the vicinity. Please respect the property so that others may also enjoy this site.*

**Directions:** From Blue Rapids, KS, follow U.S.-77 south approximately 3.2 miles. Watch for stone marker on north side of highway that reads "Fawn Creek School District," and turn north on gravel township road - 7th Road. Follow 7th Road north for 2.9 miles. A latched, iron gate in the fence on the east side of the roadway provides access into the pasture. The interpretive exhibit can be seen across the pasture and identifies the site where the wagon ruts are found.



Interpretive exhibits relate the westward expansion story at the Lower Crossing.

**27. Alcove Spring** (near Marysville and Blue Rapids, KS) has been called the most significant historic site on the Oregon Trail within the State of Kansas. The scenic spring was a popular campsite, mentioned in many emigrant journals. Also at about this location, emigrants left the tallgrass prairie of eastern Kansas and entered the shortgrass plains. Access to this privately owned site is provided by the Alcove Spring Historical Trust.

**Directions:** From south of Marysville, KS, at the junction of KS-9 and U.S.-77, turn north on U.S.-77 from Blue Rapids for approximately one mile. Then turn west on the county gravel road, East River Road, and follow signs for six miles to Alcove Spring. Site is well marked.



Alcove Spring, a favorite camp location for 1840s—1860s Oregon and California Trail emigrants.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Topeka, take Exit 358A to U.S.-75 northbound. Drive two miles, then turn west on U.S.-24. Continue through Silver Lake and Rossville. Along this stretch of road, the highway follows the original Oregon Trail, which stayed north of the Kansas River. Continue to St. Marys. Just west of the St. Marys Academy and College, turn north on First Street and then east on East Mission Street to the parking area.

#### 24. Red Vermillion Crossing / Vieux Cemetery/Cholera Cemetery (near Belvue, KS)

is the site on the Red Vermillion where Louis Vieux, a Potawatomi Indian, established a toll bridge in 1847. In 1849, a large wagon train camped on the east side of the creek was struck by cholera, which left 50 emigrants dead within a week. They were buried nearby. The Vieux family cemetery is also in the vicinity. Exhibits interpret the sites.



Louis Vieux Family Cemetery.

**Directions:** From Belvue, KS, take U.S.-24 westbound for 5 miles to Onaga Road. Turn north and continue for three miles. Turn west on Oregon Trail Road and drive one-half mile to James Road. Turn south on James and follow toward the river. The Vieux Cemetery is north of the road and east of Red Vermillion Creek. To visit the cholera cemetery, continue west to the bridge; park and walk north along the access road to the graves.

**25. Scott Spring** (Scott Springs/Oregon Trail Park, KS-99 at Westmoreland, KS) was another favorite campsite for emigrants. Although the spring itself is on private property, there is a roadside pullout just south of the site, and a public park with sculpture and historic signs is nearby.

**Directions:** From Belvue, KS, take U.S.-24 west toward Wamego. Turn north on KS-99 and drive approximately 12 miles toward Westmoreland. Watch for state historic site highway turnout on the west side of KS-99; proceed approximately one-quarter mile beyond, to the park on the east side of the highway.



Sculpture of oxen drawn emigrant wagon at Scott Spring Oregon Trail Park.

To avoid the fate of the Donner Party, emigrants outfitted themselves carefully before leaving Missouri. They preferred lightweight farm wagons over heavy Conestogas, and most hitched up sturdy oxen to take them safely across countless river fords and rugged mountains. They chose foods that would keep—flour, bacon, rice, beans, sugar, coffee—and just enough of those to see them through four to six months of travel. They packed the tools and hardware they would need to replace fractured wagon axles, shoe oxen, dig out of mud holes, cook meals, and build shelter. Prudent travelers left behind most of their personal belongings, including books, furnishings, heirloom china, and cherished mementos, to spare their draft animals the extra weight. The success of the trip depended on it. If the cattle started flagging, the contents of the wagon would be tossed out along the road: sometimes, the wagon itself might be cut down to make a simple cart. The loss of oxen could force travelers to turn back for Missouri on foot. Some emigrants, in fact, turned back by choice, even after reaching Oregon or California. Their “Promised Land,” it seems, was less than they had dreamed.

With all the uncertainties, why did people set out at all? Adventure, wanderlust, gold fever, hunger for land, escape from debt or prejudice or legal problems, a fresh start under a new name—all were compelling motivations. And, in fact, the emigrant death rate on the trail was no worse than that of eastern cities, where disease and poverty ran rampant. Hope wrestled with fear as Americans started out across the Kansas prairies—and hope generally won out.

*Out in Oregon I can get me a square  
mile of land . . . . Dad burn me, I am  
done with this country, Winters it's  
frost and snow to freeze a body;  
summers the overflow from Old  
Muddy drowns half my acres; taxes  
take the yield of them that's left.  
What say, Maw, it's God's country.*

—Peter Burnett,  
—Oregon emigration of 1843

*In the first place they have no bees there  
[in Oregon]; and in the second place,  
they can't raise corn, and whar they  
can't raise corn they can't raise hogs,  
and whar they can't raise hogs they  
can't have bacon, and I'm going back to  
old Missouri whar I can have corn  
bread, bacon and honey!*

—“Grant,” a back-traveler on the Oregon  
Trail, to Ralph C. Greer,  
—Oregon emigration of 1847

## ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Native Americans also harbored hopes and fears as they watched the swelling tide of foreign humanity and hungry livestock surge into their territory. For centuries before Western emigrant trails—or even the United States—were established, native societies had been disrupted by the introduction of European diseases, horses, and weaponry. Eastern tribes displaced by European settlers pressed westward, pushing other tribes out of their native farmlands and hunting grounds, and onto the plains. By the 1820s, the U.S. government began forcibly removing Indian people from their homes to make room for settlers, eventually relocating over 10,000 people from more than 20 East Coast and Ohio Valley tribes to “Indian Territory” west of the Missouri River. When emigrant wagons rolled westward out of St. Joseph and Independence between 1841 and 1869, they passed the reservations of Eastern tribes such as the Shawnees, Delawares, Sauks and Foxes, Kickapoos, Wyandots, and Potawatomis. Those reservations, in turn, were carved out of the original homelands of the Kanza (also called Kaw) and Osage peoples.

As trains of wagons moved over their land and camped by their springs, the Indian residents of eastern Kansas often offered assistance and shared their resources. They returned lost livestock, sold fresh vegetables, carried mail, and pulled wagons from the mud and ferried them across streams. Tragically, the travelers sometimes left behind more than wagon ruts and trade goods as they continued on their way: cholera, smallpox, measles, and other infectious diseases spread from the emigrant camps into Indian communities, taking many more lives.

*The Indians have all left the road at every settlement contiguous to the roadside, on account of the cholera. I noticed at Bull creek, Kaw river and Willow springs . . . that they had all run off, and left their houses and gardens, with vegetables growing, to the mercy of travelers.*

—“Veni,”  
—correspondent to *New York Daily Tribune Supplement*, 1849

*White men tell us we will be driven out . . . but we like this place and want to stay.*

—Is-ta-la-she,  
Kanza Chief, 1863

*. . . You whites treat us Kan-zey like a flock of turkeys. You chase us to one stream, then you chase us to another stream, soon you will chase us over the mountains and into the ocean.*

—Al-le-ga-wa-ho,  
Kanza Chief, 1872

**22. St. Marys Mission and Oregon Trail Nature Park** (U.S.-24, St. Marys, KS) was established in 1848 by Jesuits as a Catholic mission to the Potawatomi Indians, who had been re-settled in Kansas. The mission became an important stopping point for emigrants. Today, the site is private property owned by St. Marys Academy and College, but across the highway from the campus entrance is a public rest stop with Oregon Trail interpretive exhibits. Also nearby is the Oregon Trail Nature Park, located along U.S.-24 between St. Marys and Belvue, KS. The park, owned by Westar Energy, Inc., is on the Oregon Trail route, and offers nature trails and a view of the winding road that overlies the old Oregon Trail. The nature park is open to the public May 1-Sept. 30, 7 a.m. – 9 p.m.; and Oct. 1-April 30, 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Topeka, take Exit 358A to U.S.-75 northbound.

Drive two miles, then turn west on U.S.-24. Continue through Silver Lake and Rossville. Along this stretch of road, the highway follows the original Oregon Trail, which stayed north of the Kansas River. Continue to St. Marys. The mission complex/campus is located on the east edge of town, on the north side of the road. View it from the roadside park on the south side of U.S.-24. Continue westbound on U.S.-24 for approximately 5 miles; turn north on Schoeman Road to Oregon Trail Nature Park.



St. Marys Academy and College, formerly St. Marys Mission.

**23. Indian Pay Station Historic Site & Museum** (St. Marys, KS) Listed on the National Register of Historic Sites, this small stone structure was built in 1857 to serve as the office for the Potawatomi Indian Agency, was designated as the location for meeting the terms of the 1861 Treaty with the Potawatomi Indians. The treaty stated that the Potawatomi would receive payment in exchange for their lands. The original building was a two-room stone structure, which is now part of St. Mary's Historical Society Complex.



Site of former Potawatomi Indian Pay Station at St. Marys, Kansas.

1830s. Site is near a branch of the Oregon-California Trail. Includes original building, museum exhibits, and mission-period classroom. (Kansas Museum of History also on site — see following entry.) Open Tue. - Fri., 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; third Sat. of month, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; third Sun. of month 1 p.m.-4 p.m. Group tours by appointment. Admission fee.

**Directions:** From I-70 westbound in Topeka, take Exit 356 and turn north onto Wannamaker. Drive one-tenth mile and turn west onto SW Sixth Avenue. Follow signs to Kansas History Center and the mission.

## 20. Kansas Museum of History

(Kansas History Center, 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, KS) offers exhibits on trails, forts, and Native American History. (Potawatomi Mission also on site — see previous entry.) Open Tue. - Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sun. 1 p.m. - 5 p.m. Admission fee.

**Directions:** From I-70 westbound in Topeka, take Exit 356 and turn north onto Wannamaker. Drive one-tenth mile and turn west onto SW Sixth Avenue. Follow signs to Kansas History Center.



Kansas Museum of History.

## 21. Union Town/Herbert Reinhard Green Memorial Wildlife Park

(Gilkerson Street, Willard, KS) was an Oregon Trail village from 1848-1859. More Oregon and California trail emigrants ferried the Kansas River to avoid crowded conditions near Topeka's ferry. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks administers the 83-acre park, which preserves an Oregon Trail trace, pioneer graves, and restored bluestem prairie and native woodlands. Open daily, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

**Directions:** From Topeka, take I-70 west to Exit 346. Turn north on Carlson Road for 1.5 miles north to Willard. Turn east on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and drive three-tenths mile east to Gilkerson Road. Turn south on Gilkerson and continue eight-tenths mile (past cemetery). Green Wildlife Area is on the west side of the road.



Near emigrant ferry across Kansas River.

## POLITICS AND MANIFEST DESTINY

Emigration pressed on, in part because of the dreams and desires of individual pioneers, and in part because of continental politics. The United States was as yet a young nation, and ambitious. Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase in 1803 had roughly doubled the size of his country, adding 800,000 square miles of territory between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. Great Britain, however, continued to control the continent west of the Rockies; and Mexico ruled California, which then included most of the Southwest. Americans wanted these lands for the United States. Many claimed that such was God's plan—the Manifest Destiny of the nation. The flow of Americans across international boundaries into California and Oregon in the 1840s set that plan in motion. War and the threat of war then made it a reality: Britain gave up Oregon in 1846, and Mexico was forced to cede California to the United States in 1848. Discovery of gold in California the winter of 1848 triggered a frantic new rush to the West in the following spring.

*We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? Providence is with us, and no earthly power can.*

—John L. O'Sullivan,  
—newspaper editor who later coined the term "Manifest Destiny;" 1839

*Our manifest destiny [is] to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.*

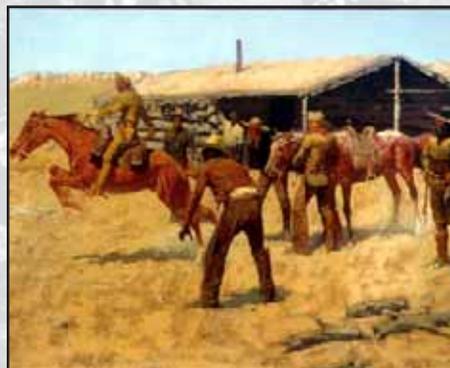
—John L. O'Sullivan, 1845

## IN A RECORD TEN DAYS' TIME

As settlement continued, a distinctive frontier culture began to evolve, and differences in politics, ideals, and ways of life wedged a crack between East and West. The crack was widened by slow communications in the days before telephones and telegraphs. Legal instruments, financial documents, news dispatches, and love letters alike took an agonizing 20 days to cross the continent by coach from St. Joseph to Sacramento.

William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William Bradford Waddell, already in the freighting business, proposed a solution: a fleet of over 500 fast horses and 80 brave young riders to literally run the mail between California and Missouri. The first team dashed out of Pony Express headquarters at St. Joseph's Patee House on April 3, 1860. They ferried across the Missouri and galloped westward with the mail toward the next waiting rider. Each successive horseman would ride at breakneck speed for nearly 6 hours, changing to a fresh horse every 10 miles, and finally passing his *mochila* (mail pouch) saddlebags to the next rider some 60 miles down the road. In that way, the post would be relayed from St. Joseph, across the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, the Great Basin, and the Sierra Nevada to Sacramento in a record 10 days' time—sometimes even less. Weekly runs would be made in both directions.

The scheme worked, setting a new standard for transportation and communication in the development of the frontier. It connected East to West, and carried some of the century's most urgent news dispatches across the continent. Even so, the Pony Express shut down after just 19 months of operation. Money problems, worsened by frequent Indian attacks on Pony Express stations and riders, plagued the enterprise—and then the Civil War erupted. Completion of the transcontinental telegraph in October 1861 struck the final blow, making the pony relay obsolete.



Frederic Remington's "Coming & Going of the Pony Express." Gilcrease Museum

onto W 95<sup>th</sup> Street. Drive approximately one-half mile and turn south onto Pflumm Road. Continue for one mile and turn east onto W. 103<sup>rd</sup> Street for a short distance to Hauser Street.

**17. Lone Elm Campground** (167<sup>th</sup> and Lone Elm, Olathe, KS) is where many Oregon, California, and Santa Fe trail travelers spent their first night west of the Missouri. Now, a 160-acre city park encompasses the wagon trail corridor and campground. Open daylight hours.

**Directions:** From Kansas City, KS, drive I-35 southbound to exit 215. Take US-169 S/ K-7 south toward Paola, and continue for 2.16 miles. Turn west onto 167<sup>th</sup> Street (portions unpaved) and continue approximately one mile to park.



Lone Elm Campground.

**18. Parting of the Trails—Gardner Jct.** (U.S. 56 and 183<sup>rd</sup> Street, Gardner, KS) is where the Oregon and Santa Fe trails split. The approximate location of the site is indicated by a historical marker, though no physical traces of the junction remain. A roadside park on U.S.-56 provides interpretive information.

**Directions:** From I-35 in Olathe, drive south and take Exit 210 to U.S.-56 and Gardner. Turn west onto U.S.-56 and continue through Gardner. The roadside park is near the junction of U.S.-56 and 183<sup>rd</sup> Street, on the west side of the highway.



Parting of the Oregon/California and Santa Fe Trails.

**19. Potawatomi Baptist Mission** (Kansas History Center, 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, KS) operated from 1847 to 1861, and was a boarding school for children of the Potawatomi Indians, an eastern tribe that was relocated to Kansas in the



Former Potawatomi Baptist Mission building pictured on the right.

Methodist mission, established in 1839 for the instruction of Shawnee, Delaware, and other Indian children. Also a popular overland trail campground. Although the buildings are temporarily closed for restoration, the grounds remain open Tue. – Sat., 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Sun., 1–5 p.m.; tours available. Call 913-262-0867 for further information.

**Directions:** From I-35 in Kansas City, KS, take Exit 233 to Mission Road/Southwest Boulevard. Turn south onto Mission Road and continue for two miles; turn west onto 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. Continue two-tenths mile to Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site.

**14. Prairie Village Ruts** (Prairie View Park, 7727 Delmar, Prairie Village, KS) is a four-acre city park with shallow wagon swales and interpretive signs.

**Directions:** From I-35 in Kansas City, KS, take the 232BC exit onto 18<sup>th</sup> Street Expressway southbound and drive approximately four miles. The road name changes to W. Roe Boulevard and then to Roe Avenue. Turn east onto W. 75<sup>th</sup> Street and continue two-tenths mile, and then south onto Delmar Street for three-tenths mile to Prairie View Park. Turn left into the park. Ruts are southeast of the covered pavillion.



Home of Moses Grinter who operated a Ferry Crossing over the Kansas River.

**15. Moses Grinter House and Ferry** (1420 South 78<sup>th</sup> St, Kansas City, KS) was the site of an 1831 ferry established by Moses Grinter to carry emigrant wagons over the Kansas River. The Grinter Place State Historic Site is open with limited hours. Call 913-299-0373 for further information.

**Directions:** From Kansas City, KS, head southbound on I-435. At Exit 9, take the ramp to KS-32/Kansas City/Bonner Springs. Turn east onto KS-32 (Kaw Dr.). Continue 1.9 miles and turn north onto S. 78<sup>th</sup> St. Drive 0.1 mile to Grinter Place (on the west side).

**16. Flat Rock Creek Crossing/Park** (103<sup>rd</sup> Street and Hauser, Lenexa, KS) commemorates an emigrant campground used by Oregon, California, and Santa Fe trail travelers. Site includes interpretive signs and original creek crossing. City park, open daylight hours.

**Directions:** From Kansas City, KS, take I-35 southbound approximately eight miles toward Lenexa, KS. Take the 95<sup>th</sup> Street Exit (No. 224) and turn west

## SEA OF GRASS, WAVES OF GRAIN

During the covered wagon era, the West Coast had filled with settlers, bringing statehood to California in 1850 and to Oregon nine years later. Settlement of Kansas lagged behind that of the coastal states, but land-hungry pioneers quickly recognized that its windswept grasslands were much more than barren “desert.” The rich soils that had supported Indian gardens for centuries could be as easily carpeted with domesticated grasses—wheat, oats, barley, corn—as with wild bluestem and buffalo grass.

Settlers began leaving the trails to homestead on the prairie, often illegally “squatting” on Indian reserves. Settlement surged in 1854, as pro- and anti-slavery groups competed to sway the newly established Kansas Territory to their own side of the slavery debate. Continuing improvements in farming tools and practices drew more emigrants to the prairie through the years. By the early 1870s, many Indian tribes—including the Kanza, for whom the state is named—had been forced out of Kansas and relocated in Oklahoma. These, and other stories, have shaped the legacy of the overland trails.

*... A horse and rider, rising and falling, rising and falling—sweeping toward us nearer and nearer—growing more and more distinct, more and more sharply defined—nearer and still nearer, and the flutter of the hoofs comes faintly to the ear—another instant a whoop and a hurrah from our [stagecoach], a wave of the rider’s hand, but no reply, and man and horse burst past our excited faces, and go winging away like a belated fragment of a storm!*

—Mark Twain,  
—1861 stage trip to California,  
in *Roughing It*

*...The Nimehaw river [is] the most beautiful spot that ever I saw in my life I would like to live here As far as the eye can reach either way lay grass and flowers meets the eye until you reach the valley of the river which is as level as the house floor. . . .*

—Lydia Allen Rudd,  
—Oregon emigration of 1852

## NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS PROGRAM

Over time, the myth of the “Great American Desert”—that vast sea of grass—has faded into obscurity. The first leg of a transcontinental journey, last to be settled, is now part of America’s heartland. Many traces of the old Kansas/Missouri gateway to the American West are still visible. Some traces are commemorated with parks, monuments, museums, and visitor centers; others are only highway pullouts near isolated grave markers, wagon swales through creek beds, and scatters of adobe and melted glass where a mail station once stood. In some places, today’s traveler can see protected patches of original tallgrass prairie, sites of native villages, and landmarks, mounds, and springs that marked the slow progress of travelers 150 years ago. Historic trails, recognized by Congress under the National Trails System Act, identify the prominent past routes of migration, trade, communication, and military action. What remains today are primarily remnant sites and trail segments of these once-prominent roads to the West.

*In the early days of this nation, before railroads and highways were constructed, people traveled on foot, on horseback, by boat, or by wagon.*

*Some of these trails remain in existence today as reminders of this diverse historic past. Stories of the Oregon Trail . . . and others bring to mind exciting and sometimes tragic chapters in our national heritage.*

—National Trails System Map and Guide,  
GPO - Reprint 1998.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Kansas City, take I-435 south toward Wichita and continue 11.4 miles to Exit 74. Exit the highway and turn south onto Holmes Road. Drive for 2.1 miles to intersection with Old Santa Fe Trail Road. Turn west. Follow the road as it curves west for 1.2 miles. The cemetery site with historic markers is 0.1 miles east of State Line Road.

**11. Westport Landing** (terminus, N. Main, Kansas City, MO) is where many eastern emigrants ended the first leg of their journey via riverboat and launched preparations for their long overland haul. Site provides an overview of the Missouri River and the original landing, interpretive signs, and a walking/biking trail. Open daylight hours.

**Directions:** From I-70 westbound in Kansas City, MO, take Exit 2D toward Main-Delaware/Wyandotte Street. Road will merge onto Independence Avenue; move to right lane and turn north onto Delaware Street. Turn east on Third Street, then north on Main Street and drive one block to pedestrian bridge.



Modern-day Westport Landing & Riverfront Park.

**12. Pioneer Park** (traffic island at Westport Road & Broadway, Westport, MO) is an interpretive site that includes 18’ terrazzo map of trails, exhibit signs, and sculpture. Open daylight hours.

**Directions:** From Kansas City, MO, take I-35 southbound toward Wichita for 1.4 miles. Take the Southwest Trafficway exit (No. 1-A, on the left) merge onto the trafficway, and drive approximately 1.5 miles. Turn east onto 39th St., continue a short distance and then turn south onto Broadway approximately 3-4 blocks to Westport Road. Park is at north end of traffic island.



1954 painting by Jim Hamill of Shawnee Methodist Mission.

**13. Shawnee Methodist Mission** (Shawnee Indian Mission State Historic Site, 3403 West 53<sup>rd</sup>, Fairway, KS) is a 12-acre state park and National Historic Landmark that preserves a

**8. Hart Grove / Marion Park** (Interchange of I-435, I-470, & U.S.-71, Kansas City, MO) was used as a campground by travelers on the Oregon, California, and Santa Fe trails. Exhibits include interpretive panels and stone markers delineating the trail corridor along Hart Grove Creek.

**Directions:** From I-435, exit and go west on Bannister Rd. (A mall is just east of this intersection) At the second light, turn south on Marion Park, then turn west on Hickman Mills; continue one block to the park. Open daylight hours.



Interpretive exhibits along Hart Grove Creek.

**9. Minor Park / Blue River Crossing** (Red Bridge Road, Kansas City, MO) is a 27-acre city park that preserves the most dramatic swales at this end of the trail. The site was a principal river crossing, mentioned in many diaries through the 1840s and 1850s. (An original wagon ford was located 300 yards north of the bridge.)

**Directions:** From I-70 in Kansas City, take I-435 South for 11.4 miles. Take Exit 74, and turn south onto Holmes Road, continuing to intersection with Red Bridge Road. Turn east on Red Bridge Road. Drive approximately 1 mile and turn right at the second Minor Park entrance; park in the south-facing lot. Several swales and a historic marker are nearby.



Minor Park swales where emigrant wagons gathered to cross the Blue River.

**10. New Santa Fe** (State Line Road and Old Santa Fe Trail, Kansas City, MO) is an 1840s village site where thirsty emigrants could purchase their last whiskey before entering Indian Territory and wagons could be repaired at the blacksmith shop. A cemetery with faint trail swales, privately owned by the New Santa Fe Cemetery Association, is all that remains of the village.



The village cemetery is all that remains of this formerly bustling community.

## SITES AND POINTS OF INTEREST

### INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI TO HANOVER, KANSAS

#### 1. National Frontier Trails

**Museum** (318 W. Pacific, Independence, MO) offers a trails museum, theater, research library, and bookstore (with detailed trail guides available for purchase). Open Mon.-Sat., 9 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.; Sun. 12:30 - 4:30 p.m.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Independence, take Exit 12 to Noland Road northbound and drive approximately 3 miles. Turn west onto E. Walnut Street and continue five blocks to Osage Street. Turn south on S. Osage Street to W. Pacific Avenue; then turn west. Center is on north side of street.



The National Frontier Trails Center.

#### 2. Upper Independence Landing

(E. Kentucky Road and N. River Boulevard, Independence, MO) was the Missouri River landing closest to Independence for emigrants arriving at the jumping-off point via steamboat. Public access to an overlook above the river is provided by Lafarge Cement Company, which owns the site.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Kansas City, MO, take I-435 north toward Des Moines. Take Exit 59 east onto U.S.-24, Winner Road. After approximately three miles, at the traffic light on the west end of the Turman Library, turn north onto N. River Boulevard, which follows the old trail route from the landing. In approximately 1.5 miles, the road splits at Kentucky Road; keep to left on River Boulevard. At next split, where the Wayne City marker is located, continue on the main road north toward the cement plant. Continue about a block, to the gravel turnaround. Overlook is on the embankment.



Upper Missouri River Landing - Lafarge Cement Company.

**3. Independence Courthouse Square** (Lexington Avenue and Liberty Street, Independence, MO) is the official start of the Oregon Trail, where wagons were outfitted through much of the emigration era. Open year-round; business hours vary.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Independence, take Exit 12 to Noland Road northbound and drive approximately 3 miles. Turn west onto E. Walnut St.; then north onto Liberty and continue 2 blocks to Lexington Street. Several emigration-era buildings are located one block north, along Maple Street.



Courthouse at Independence Square.

**4. Santa Fe Trail City Park** (2900 S. Santa Fe Road, Independence, MO) is a 45-acre park preserving one-quarter mile of ruts and swales.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Independence, take Exit 11 to U.S.-40 eastbound. Continue one-half mile and bear east onto E. 43rd Street S., then immediately turn north onto S. Chrysler Avenue. Drive 1.6 miles and turn east onto W. 31<sup>st</sup> Street S. Turn north onto S. Santa Fe Road, continue for one-third mile, and turn east into the park.

Continue for two-tenths mile; the road will curve to the south. Before completing the curve, watch for a grove of trees in a depression to the right. A remnant of original trail goes through the grove.



Emigrant wagon wheel ruts run the length of the property at the Santa Fe Trail Park.

**5. Rice-Tremonti Home** (8801 E 66<sup>th</sup> Street, Raytown, MO) is an 1844 farmhouse with an associated 1830s-era slave cabin. It is mentioned by many Oregon and California-bound diarists as a popular campsite and a place where they could purchase food. The property owner offers public access,



The Rice-Tremonti home was a popular campsite area for trail emigrants.

interpretation, tours, and events. Open May-Sept., Sat. & Sun. only.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Kansas City, MO, take ramp to I-435 southbound toward Wichita. Continue 3.2 miles to Exit 66 and take ramp onto MO-350 (Blue Pky) eastbound toward Lee's Summit. Continue 1.7 miles and turn right onto ramp toward Blue Ridge Boulevard; drive one-tenth mile and turn north onto Blue Ridge Boulevard, which follows the original Oregon Trail route from Independence Square. Continue for three-tenths mile to Rice-Tremonti Home.

**6. Eighty-Fifth & Manchester Ruts** (7558 E 85<sup>th</sup> Street, Kansas City, MO) are the grassed-over evidence of three trails, which is rare in an urban setting. The ruts are on private property maintained by the Cave Spring Association, which permits public access.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Kansas City, take I-435 south toward Wichita. Continue 6.8 miles and take Exit 69 to 87<sup>th</sup> Street; turn east on 87<sup>th</sup>. Drive one mile; turn north onto Oldham Road. Drive three-tenths mile and turn east onto E. 85<sup>th</sup>. Drive two-tenths mile to Manchester Avenue. The Oregon, California and Santa Fe Trails cut through a corner of 85<sup>th</sup> and Manchester.



Amid the busy streets of Kansas City, emigrant wagon ruts have been preserved.

**7. Schumacher Park** (6601 E. 93rd Street, Kansas City, MO) offers interpretive wayside exhibits near an undefined trail route planted in native prairie grasses and wildflowers. Although the park has no evidence of ruts or swales, it does provide a good example of how the Kansas prairie appeared to 19th century emigrants.

**Directions:** From I-70 in Kansas City, take I-435 south toward Wichita. Drive 6.8 miles; at Exit 69, turn east on E. 87<sup>th</sup> Street. Drive three-tenths mile and turn south onto Hillcrest Road. Drive eight-tenths mile and turn east onto E 93<sup>rd</sup>. Continue for five-tenths mile to the park.



Schumacher Park interpretive exhibits shelter.