



# Trails on the Prairie

You are standing on a bluff above the Arkansas River, an international boundary between the United States and Mexico during the early years of the Santa Fe Trail. This area was prone to flooding and the ruts offer an excellent illustration of how the freighters worked with the terrain to make the easiest passage.

## Making Their Way

Wagons were hauled up onto this high ground to avoid the wet bottomlands around the river. Aerial photographs show the marks left on the land.

## Choosing a Path

The trail split only a few miles west of here. Traders chose either the Mountain Route or followed the Cimarron Route via multiple river crossings into Mexico.

*We next came to the Cimarron [river], where everything looked lush and green, but not a tree or a bush. The river...here is nothing more than a dirty pool of stagnant water.*

Rebecca Mayer, 1852



Fort Dodge, shown ca. 1867, protected travelers on the trail.

Courtesy of Boot Hill Museum



The ruts became deeper as more wagons traveled past.

Courtesy of Boot Hill Museum



Wagons traveled abreast, leaving parallel ruts. The deeper, curving mark on the landscape is the remains of Soule Canal.

Courtesy of Boot Hill Museum