

Tallgrass Prairie

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve
Strong City, KS



Historic Ranch and Southwind Nature Trail Self-Guiding Tour

Introduction at the top of the hill

Use the tour map on the back to follow the numbered posts and exhibits which correspond to the text below.

Described in 1883 as “the best improved farm in Chase county,” the Spring Hill Farm and Stock Ranch became a showpiece for cattleman Stephen F. Jones and his wife Louisa. In 1878 they came to Kansas from Colorado wishing to graze cattle on the “fine prairie grasses” of the Flint Hills and then ship them by rail to market in Kansas City. His ranch grew to 7,000 acres, specializing in Hereford, Durham, and Galloway cattle. During the 1880s, ranching was moving from open range to enclosed pasture grazing.

Jones found an abundant supply of limestone on his ranch and built over 30 miles of stone fence as reported by the 1885 census.



As you tour the headquarters area, you will see that Jones accomplished his goal of creating a showpiece farm and stock ranch in Chase County, Kansas.

Stops ① and ② Three-Story Limestone Barn and Corrals

Stephen Jones used his massive 60 x 110 foot barn to house animals, shelter equipment, and store the hay and grain that fed the livestock during the winter months. In 1885, Jones’ livestock numbered 200 swine, 30 horses, 8 milk cows, 4 mules, and hundreds of cattle foraging on the ranch’s prairie grasses. The barn, like other buildings on the ranch, was built into the side of the hill for natural insulation and access.



Stops ③ ④ ⑤ and ⑥ Outbuildings, Scratch Shed, Chicken House, and Carriage House

See Curious Outbuildings exhibit at this location in front of the carriage house.



Stop ⑦ Limestone Ranch House

Mr. Jones’ impressive ranch house was completed in 1881. The Second Empire architecture included practical adaptations to this location and life on the prairie. Tall opposing windows took advantage of the prevalent summer winds, allowing a cooling draft through the home. By nestling the house into the hillside, Jones took advantage of the earth’s natural insulation to aid in heating and cooling the structure.



The Visitor Information Desk is located in the house from November through April and in the barn from May through October.

The bookstore is open year-round and carries food items and theme-related merchandise.

Stops ⑧ and ⑨ Curing House/Spring Room and Outhouse

See Vital Necessities exhibit at this location directly ahead. To reach Stop ⑩, follow the steps up the hill behind you.



Stop ⑩ Cistern and Ice House

Stephen Jones selected this site for his ranch headquarters and named it for the natural springs found on the hillside. A cistern was built into the hillside to collect and store the cool spring water. The cool water was piped under ground and down the hill to the house. The limestone building behind the cistern is the ice house, where ice could be preserved for use during the hot prairie summers by packing the ice in prairie hay or sawdust.



Stop ⑪ Beyond the Ice House to the Prairie Overlook

The large and imposing stone structures of the ranch are dwarfed by the vastness of the landscape. You are encouraged to follow the path on an easy three-minute walk to a scenic tallgrass prairie overlook. For centuries, the interplay of climate, fire, and grazing have combined to produce and sustain the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. Throughout most of the tour, you have observed the influence of people on the prairie. Now, consider the influence of the prairie on the people. What are you feeling as you step from the shade and comfort of the trees into the exposed openness of the overlook? You are mirroring what settlers experienced over a century ago when they stepped from the forests

into the openness of the prairie beyond the Mississippi River. Many people judged this almost treeless land to be worthless. The pioneers soon realized the value of the prairie’s rich soil. Today less than 4% of North America’s tallgrass prairie remains. Although the Flint Hills were too rocky to plow, settlers discovered its many resources, something long known by American Indians. The Flint Hills have furnished people with edible and medicinal plants, year-round spring water, stone for tools, weapons, fences and buildings, wind for power, rich bottomland for farming, and lush grasses for grazing, both on which bison, and more recently cattle, could fatten.

Stop ⑫ Lower Fox Creek School

After hiking the Southwind Nature Trail make time to visit the Lower Fox Creek School. Built in 1882, this one-room school provided a setting for educating local area students until 1930, when it was abandoned and reverted to the ranch owner. Feel free to peek through the windows as you imagine children studying their lessons.



Lower Fox Creek School was built in 1882.



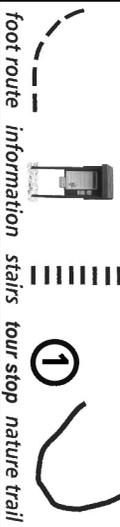
Photo taken in 1916.

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LEGEND

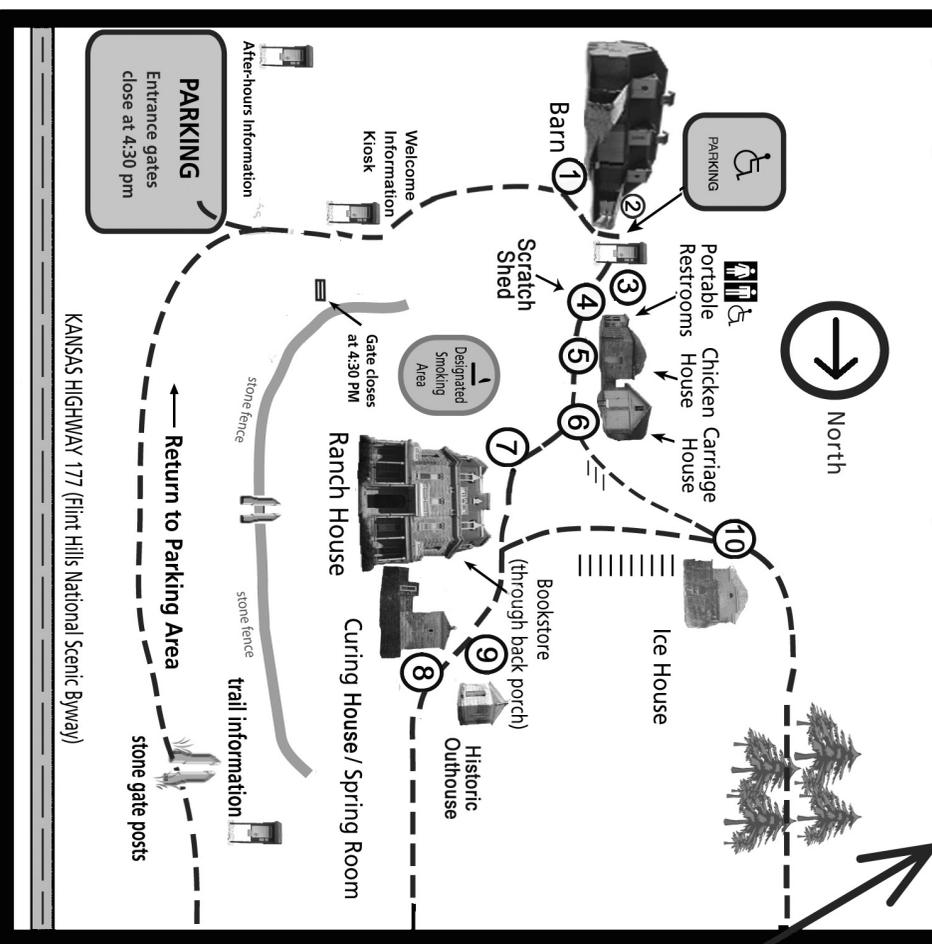


The scenery of the prairie is striking and never fails to cause an exclamation of surprise.

Judge James Hall, 1839.

Enlarged Area

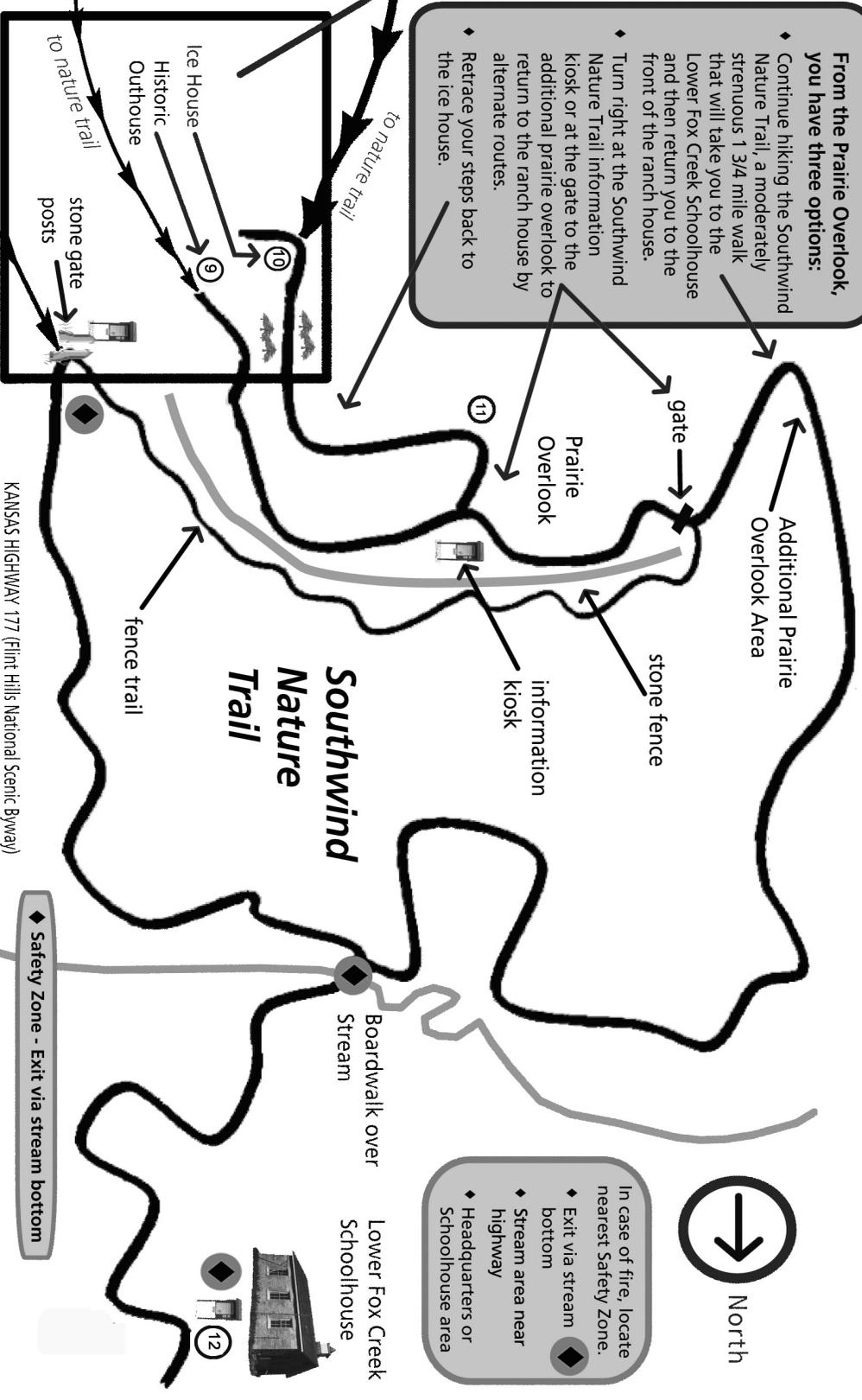
Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters



The Visitor Information Desk is located in the barn (May - October) and on the back porch of the ranch house (November - April). Drinking water, exhibits, brochures, and a 10-minute site orientation video are available there. Books, gifts, and refreshments are sold in the Park Education Resource Center (bookstore).

From the Prairie Overlook, you have three options:

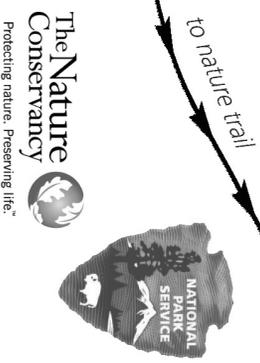
- ◆ Continue hiking the Southwind Nature Trail, a moderately strenuous 1 3/4 mile walk that will take you to the Lower Fox Creek Schoolhouse and then return you to the front of the ranch house.
- ◆ Turn right at the Southwind Nature Trail Information kiosk or at the gate to the additional prairie overlook to return to the ranch house by alternate routes.
- ◆ Retrace your steps back to the ice house.



- In case of fire, locate nearest Safety Zone.
- ◆ Exit via stream bottom
 - ◆ Stream area near highway
 - ◆ Headquarters or Schoolhouse area

Guidelines for safe use:

- Smoke only in designated smoking area south of ranch house.
- Stay on designated trails and walking paths.
- Keep pets on leash and attended at all times.
- Do not climb or sit on stone fences or rock walls.
- Do not remove any rocks, plants, animals, or artifacts.
- Be aware of severe or extreme weather and plan accordingly.
- Be aware of uneven and slippery walking surfaces.
- Report safety hazards immediately to park staff.



Historic Spring Hill Ranch Walking Tour and Southwind Nature Trail Map