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The Santa Fe Trail (Sandy Carlson, editor)

Stopping Along The Trail

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STOPPING ALONG THE TRAIL

Before the era of the railroad, the Santa Fe Road, as it was originally called, was the most important route to the Southwest. The original trail entered the eastern edge of the Flint Hills region in Wabaunsee County, continuing southwest through Lyon, Morris and Marion counties. Travelers considered the Flint Hills portion of the trail to be a safe journey compared to the dangers facing them on west; however, this portion was not without incident.



THE SANTA FE TRAIL
THROUGH THE FLINT HILLS

WILMINGTON

Strategically located at the junction of the Santa Fe Road and the Military Road from Fort Leavenworth, the Wilmington area is quite historical. The Dragoon Creek Crossing; the Havana Stage Station; and, lastly, Soldier Creek Crossing are all significant to movement on the trail. Thirty-five soldiers unexpectedly died of cholera at Soldier Creek – thus the name.

LOG CHAIN CREEK

Log Chain Creek was named by travelers when their heavy wagons got stuck in the muddy crossing. Creek crossings were inevitable. Log Chain Creek, like other Flint Hills creeks, had a rock bed, but it was not as solid, easily giving way to mud. Animals sank, wheels and axles broke, wagons upset, and all involved were covered in the muddy quagmire. Log chains were used to pull the wagons out.

BUTTERMILK LANE AND CHICKEN CREEK

Buttermilk Lane was a 3.5-mile stretch of trail where travelers purchased fresh produce, including buttermilk, from local farmers. The community of Waushara sprung up at the east side of Buttermilk Lane, and a post office opened in 1858. At the west end of Buttermilk Lane was Chicken Creek. The origin of the name is unknown and left to the imagination.

ELM CREEK

Two miles southwest of Chicken Creek at the crossing of Elm Creek was a house used as a mail station. The fireplace in the house had a “hiding place” built into it where occupants took refuge in times of danger. In 1862, Bloody Bill Anderson and his gang shot the front door full of holes, attempting to harm Constable Jacoby. The Kansas Historical Society is now in possession of that door.

142 MILE CREEK

Three miles further was the crossing at 142 Mile Creek, named for the number of miles between it and the trail’s eastern terminus at Fort Osage, Missouri, where the survey of the trail began in 1825. In 1854, Charles Withington built the first store in Lyon County (formerly Breckenridge County) to accommodate weary travelers. His blacksmith shop was equipped with 10 forges, which indicates the scope of his business on the trail. Withington also established a toll bridge, one of only a few toll bridges along the trail.

BLUFF CREEK

Bluff Creek was about six miles further west and for a few years was the family home of Bloody Bill Anderson.



Diamond Creek
Cally Krallman

ROCK CREEK

Five miles further was Rock Creek, known by the Indians as Ne-Co-Its-Sa-Ba or Dead Man’s Creek, named because of an early battle between Indian tribes. A.I. Baker established a trading post in 1854 on the Kaw Reservation. Later the spot became Agnes City. Rock Creek crossing was later annexed into Morris County.

BIG JOHN CREEK

Big John Creek and Big John Spring were named after “Big” John Walker, the guide for the 1827 survey party headed by George Sibley. The area around Big John Spring, just east of Council Grove, became a popular campsite along the Santa Fe Trail. Along the creek to the south was Chief Ishtalasea’s village, one of three Kaw villages on the reservation in Morris County. In 1860, the population

of this village was 271. According to some diaries, travelers sometimes traded with the Indians in this area.

COUNCIL GROVE

Council Grove is one of the most historic towns in Kansas; however, there was no settlement for the first 25 years of the Santa Fe Road. During much of the Santa Fe Trail era, Council Grove was the home of the Kaw Indian Reservation. Freighters and travelers appreciated the groves of hardwood trees for wagon repairs; lush prairie grasses for the animals; plenty of elk, deer, turkey, antelope, and some bison for food; and clean water. Travelers felt safe between Missouri and Council Grove, so Council Grove became the gathering place, the Rendezvous, to prepare for more dangerous travel west.

DIAMOND SPRING DIAMOND OF THE PLAIN

The famous prairie fountain, Diamond Spring, was near the Kaw Trail as well as the Santa Fe Road. The spring was known for its high-quality spring water, which quenched the thirst of those eating trail dust all day. A stage station and small settlement grew up here prior to the Civil War, but it was destroyed, the station owner killed and, his wife injured in a raid by Missouri bushwhackers, led by Dick Yeager and Quantrill's guerrillas

in 1863. The station was never rebuilt, but Diamond Spring continued to be a valuable water source and popular campsite as long as the trail was active.

SIX MILE CREEK AND STAGE STATION

After the station at Diamond Spring was destroyed, the stage moved its operation to Six Mile Creek, so named because the crossing was six miles west of Diamond Spring. Business activity here was short-lived, just three or four years.

LOST SPRING

Certain times of the year Lost Spring would literally disappear and stop flowing. The Kaw called the spring Nee-nee-oke-pi-yah, and the Mexicans referred to it as Agua Perdida, both terms meaning "lost water." George Smith was the first to operate a boarding house and tavern here in 1859, but he lost it in a card game to a drifter named Costello. Costello made a number of improvements to the station but began to cater to the lawless element of the area. Consequently, the station soon became known as a hangout for ne'er-do-wells. Eleven men were said to have met their deaths at Costello's station.

COTTONWOOD CREEK

Seventeen and a half miles west of Lost Spring was Cottonwood Creek,



Rain on the Cimarron
Cally Krallman

known as Moore's Ranch in the 1860s. Cottonwood Creek was a difficult crossing. The banks were steep and the channel was deep, so the crossing had to be navigated carefully. Double or triple teams were needed to pull the wagons up the banks. If possible, wagons crossed the stream immediately upon arrival so the wagon crossing could be completed before a rainstorm might cause the creek to rise and delay crossing, perhaps for days. After

Cottonwood Creek, the trail left the Flint Hills tallgrass prairie and entered the mostly treeless shortgrass prairie where buffalo chips were the fuel of choice for the rest of the journey to Santa Fe.

Vicki Patton is a retired educator and librarian who enjoys the history, culture and the people of the Flint Hills. Special thanks to Ken McClintock and Mark Brooks, Council Grove historians.