

Trails to the East & West

The Santa Fe Trail began in 1821 when William Becknell took trade items west and found a ready market in Mexico. He passed through this area before the village of Independence was platted in 1827 as the county seat for newly formed Jackson County. Independence soon became the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail, and large freighting wagons rolled past the courthouse square to and from Santa Fe for the next two decades.

By 1835 the growing frontier village had a second road surveyed and built southwest of town towards Santa Fe. Beginning in the early 1840s, tens of thousands of emigrants came to Independence from the east to get outfitted and depart west to Oregon and California.

Today these routes are part of the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California national historic trails.



Trails Leaving Independence

Painting by Charles Goslin

Noise and confusion reigned...Traders, trappers, and emigrants filled the streets and stores. All were in a hurry, jostling one another, and impatient to get through with their business. The salesmen were overworked, but good nature aided them in preserving their tempers. Mules and oxen strove for the right of way. 'Whoa' and 'haw' resounded on every side; while the loud cracking of ox goads, squeaking of wheels and rattling of chains, mingled with the oaths of teamsters, produced a din indescribable.

- William G. Johnson, Independence, Missouri, April 12, 1849



1 Gardner Junction Park
Dedicated in 2008, the park is located near the junction where the Oregon and California trails split from the Santa Fe Trail. This one-acre park features prairie flora that traders and emigrants would have encountered in the 1800s.



2 Lone Elm
A famous frontier trail campsite and rendezvous point, Lone Elm was used for almost four decades by thousands of Santa Fe traders and emigrants on the Oregon and California trails.



3 Minor Park and New Santa Fe Swale
The 27-acre Minor Park preserves dramatic swales left behind as wagons crossed the Blue River. The New Santa Fe cemetery also has a trail swale.



Look for these signs to trace the route of the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California national historic trails. Please be courteous when viewing a site on private land.

For maps and further information, please visit:

- Santa Fe National Historic Trail www.santafetrail.org
www.nps.gov/safe
- Oregon National Historic Trail www.octa-trails.org/
www.nps.gov/oreg
- California National Historic Trail www.octa-trails.org/
www.nps.gov/cali
- Lexington Historical Museum <http://lexingtonmuseum.org/>
- Arrow Rock Visitor Center <http://mostateparks.com/park/arrow-rock-state-historic-site>
- Trailside Center www.trailsidecenter.org/
- Johnson County Museum www.jocomuseum.org/



4 Rice-Tremonti House
Built in 1844, and located eight miles from Independence, the Rice Farm quickly became a popular camping site for travelers on the Santa Fe and the Oregon-California trails. There was space for wagons, springs for watering, and corn and prairie grasses for feeding animals.



5 Aull House
In the 1820s and 1830s, caravans were outfitted in Lexington. The town was the headquarters for the Aull Brothers (traders) and Russell, Majors, & Waddell (freighters). The river route of the Santa Fe Trail passed in front of the Aull house, built around 1850.



6 Arrow Rock
The Arrow Rock bluff appeared on maps in 1732. The Osage Trace, which became the Santa Fe Trail, crossed the Missouri River here. Arrow Rock was a landmark for explorers, traders, and travelers.