

Santa Fe Trail Sites to the West & South

Pioneered by William Becknell in 1821, the Santa Fe Trail was a 900-mile overland road that connected Franklin, Missouri, with Santa Fe, New Mexico, and was an important commercial trade route. Near here, trail travelers had to decide which route to take to continue west towards Santa Fe.

The Cimarron Route presented the most direct path to Santa Fe. Wagon traffic began in 1822 and continued until the late 1860s using several crossings of the Arkansas River near the 100th meridian. Lack of water and passage through American Indian lands made the smoother Cimarron Route no less hazardous than the Mountain Route.

Today both routes are part of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail.



Wagon trains loaded with trade goods took from six weeks to two and one-half months to make the trip. Indian attacks happened more on the Santa Fe Trail than emigrant trails. The Comanches and Apaches of the southern high plains resisted travelers crossing their lands.

Traveling the Cimarron Route

The ground was covered with numerous plants and there were many shallow basins of water between the Arkansas and the Cimarron. These small holes or basins are called 'Sand-pan' by the drivers. The water is neither clean nor pure and we had to drink water that I would not wash my face in, but we were glad to get it for ourselves and our animals.

Rebecca Mayer, 1852

For maps and further information about other sites to explore, please visit:

Mountain Route

- Kearny County Museum
www.lakinkansas.org/history
620-355-7448
- Big Timbers Museum
bigtimbersmuseum.com
719-336-2472
- Boggsville Historical Site
www.phsbc.info
719-384-8054

Cimarron Route

- Historic Adobe Museum
www.grantcoks.org
620-356-3009
- Morton County Historical Museum
www.mtcoks.com/museum/
620-697-2833
- Cimarron Heritage Center
www.cccok.org/museum/
580-544-3479

Sites to the West - Mountain Route



Charlie's Ruts

Located just east of Lakin, Kansas, on Highway 50 is a fine set of parallel ruts ascending a hill to the east. Look for them on the north side of the highway and marked with a Kansas State Historical Society marker.



Boggsville Historic Site

Boggsville is about two miles south of Las Animas on Colorado 101. This small complex of two trading stores was owned first by John W. Prowers and then Thomas O. Boggs. Both buildings remain today in a deteriorated but stabilized state. Boggsville was the last residence of Kit Carson.



Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site

Bent's Old Fort is north of the Arkansas River, eight miles east of La Junta on Colorado 194. This private trading post hosted trade and travelers from 1833 to 1849. The park, including the reconstructed fort, is open to the public.



Sites to the South - Cimarron Route



Lower Spring/Wagon Bed Spring

Lower Spring was well known to all travelers who took the Cimarron Route because it offered the first reliable water supply they encountered since leaving the Arkansas River. During the era of cattle drives from Texas, this site became known as Wagon Bed Springs, the result of cowboys sinking an old wagon bed in the spring.



Point of Rocks

Located in the Cimarron National Grassland, Point of Rocks provided a lookout along the Cimarron Valley for both Indians and traders, with one branch of the trail running between the rock and the river. This landmark remains as it was during the trail era; it is still surrounded by grasslands where wagon ruts can be seen.



McNees Crossing

This rock crossing was named for Robert McNees, killed here by Indians in 1828. Traders used the crossing as a campground and as a place to celebrate the Fourth of July in 1831. This site retains much of its original appearance. Wagon ruts may be seen in the area.