

Bottomland Trail

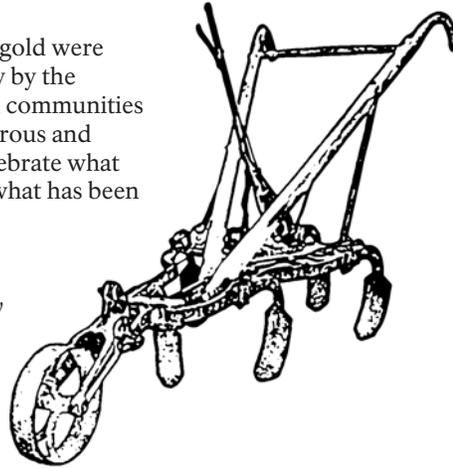
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve
Strong City, Kansas



... the prairies we panned for agricultural gold were not wasteland turned to productivity only by the industrious hand of man. They were vital communities of plants and animals, nations both wondrous and wild, nations now all but gone. As we celebrate what we have gained shall we not also mourn what has been lost?

*Land of Grass and Sky :
A Naturalist's Prairie Journey*
Mary Taylor Young



Enjoy walking through this bottomland, a future prairie restoration area. Gain an understanding of this unique prairie ecosystem and its importance to the cultural history of the Flint Hills. The 3/4 mile walk takes you through bottomland and riparian areas of Fox Creek, discovering historical points along the way. The development of the Bottomland Trail is being supported by a generous gift from the Cloud Foundation.

Bottomland Prairie, Why is it different?



The shallow, rocky soils and steep slopes of the upland areas of the Flint Hills have hindered cultivation, allowing preservation of the native grasslands. Historically, only the floodplains (bottomlands) of streams such as Fox Creek and the Cottonwood River were plowed. There the bedrock is covered by a layer of stream-deposited sediments, which develop thick soils that were deep, rich, and flat, suitable for farming.

Nationwide, less than four percent of tallgrass prairie remains. The majority of this tallgrass prairie is upland prairie. The bottomland floodplain prairie community truly is a rare relic. This prairie community differs in size and composition from its upland prairie neighbor, because of deeper, richer soils and access to more available water. Large plants such as cup leaf sunflower, sawtoothed sunflower, eastern gama grass, and prairie cord grass are some common additions to the bottomland community.

The Living Color, Wildflowers & Wildlife!

Bottomland prairie is a lush growth of plants and is home to numerous animals. Trees and grass provide habitat for wildlife; the creek holds a variety of fish and invertebrates. Grasses and wildflowers can attain maximum growth, reaching seven to ten feet high during late summer. Hardwood trees such as black walnut and hackberry are also common lowland plants that like the moisture of the soil along Fox Creek. Look for some of these common plants listed below.



Big Bluestem
Andropogon gerardi



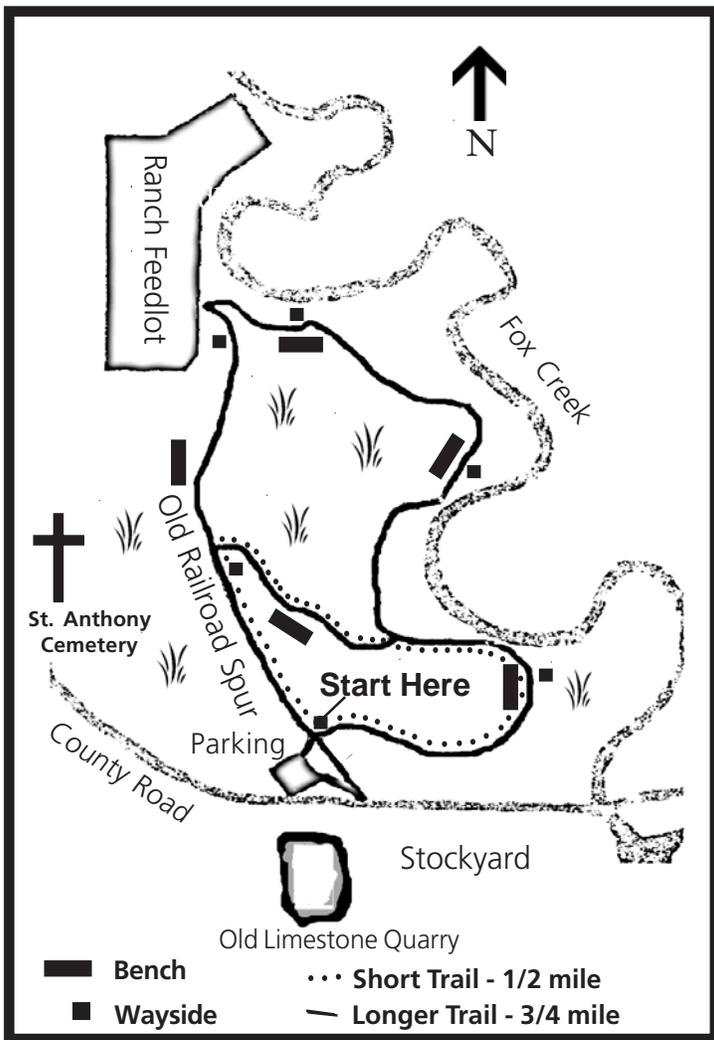
Giant Ragweed
Ambrosia trifida



Buffalo Gourd
Cucurbita foetidissima

Switchgrass
Panicum virgatum





Bottomland Trail Map

Trail is open year-round during daylight hours.

Smoking and biking on the trail are prohibited. Please enjoy the trail by staying on the designated path.

Restoring the Bottomland Prairie

With the many uses of this rich, deep soil, most of the original plant community has disappeared. Row crops (corn), stockyards, rail spurs, and ranch roads were part of the landscape over the last 120 years. These changes in the native ecosystem have allowed plants that are non-native and invasive to dominate the area. The preserve's General Management Plan includes restoring this bottomland area to native prairie grasses and wildflowers. We invite you to return to the Bottomland Trail to experience the changes as the restoration progresses.

Limestone Quarries

Limestone, the abundant rock that guarded the upland prairie soil from the plow, also provided people with their shelter. It even comprises the state capitol building in Topeka, Kansas. The thick, tree-covered area across the county road from the parking lot hides a limestone quarry site from the late 1800s.

Railroads and Stockyards

The elevated ranch road, that makes up the last section of this trail, is a remnant of a railroad spur that cut into the bottomland area. Local rail spurs ended the need for long cattle drives to main rail stations like Abilene and Wichita. The stockyard next to the spur was used as a loading and unloading point for receiving and sending cattle. The stockyards were also used as water and feed rest stops for other "traveling" cattle, only the cattle didn't get the choice of first class or coach.

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is a partnership between the National Park Trust and the National Park Service. The preserve offers a variety of activities: 1881 ranch house tours, hiking trails, prairie bus tours (May -October), and more. The historic ranch headquarters, Southwind Nature Trail, and school area are open daily 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day. The Bottomland Trail is open daylight hours year-round.



Common Sunflower
Helianthus annuus

For information call or write:
Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

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Websites: www.nps.gov/tapr www.parktrust.org



Indian Grass
Sorghastrum nutans

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