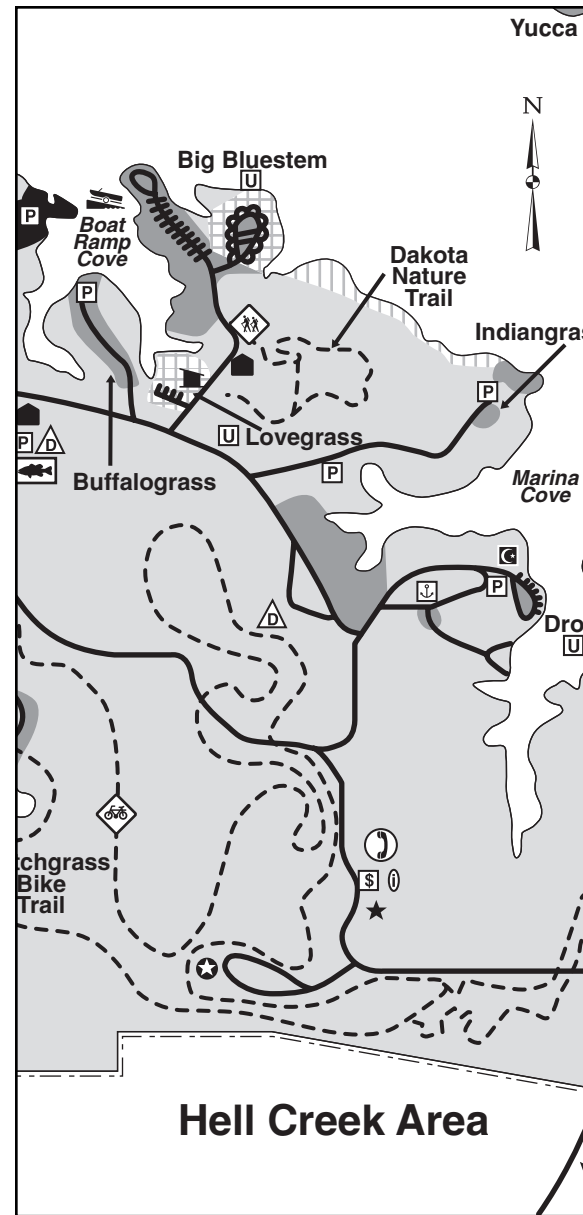
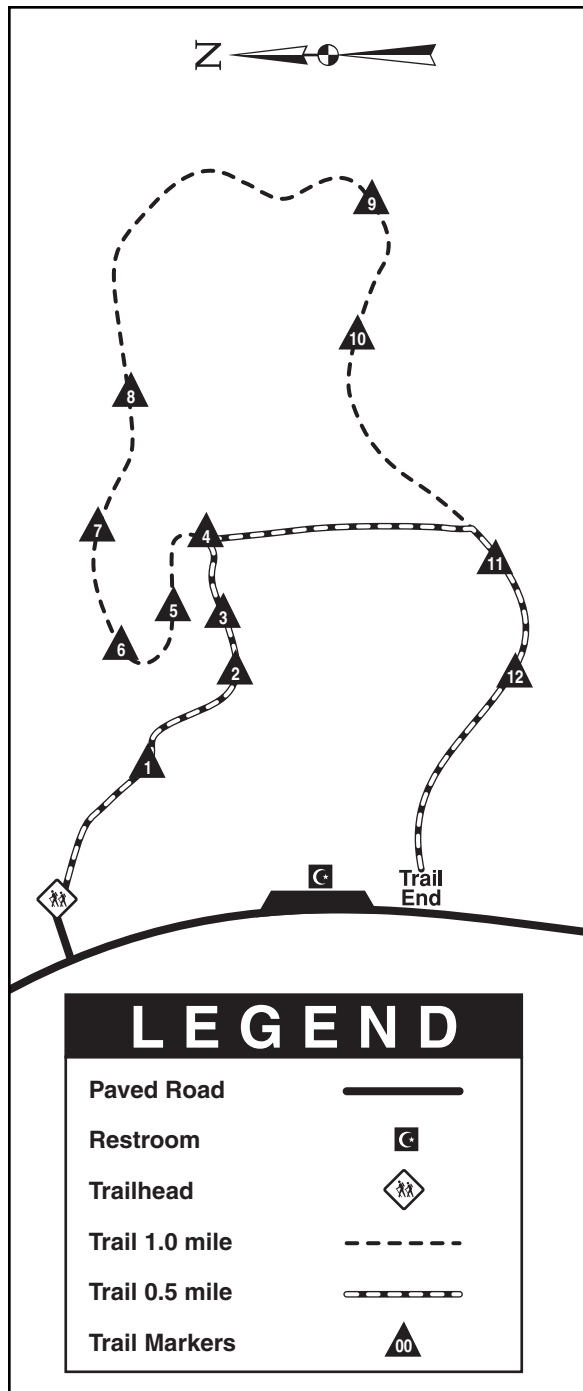


THE KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE AND PARKS . . .

...welcomes you to the Dakota Trail. The trail consists of two loops. A 1-mile loop includes all the interpretative stations listed in this brochure and should prove to be a challenge. The 1/2-mile loop contains four of the stations and is better for those looking for a milder hike. The interpretative stations are designed to help you learn more about the features of the prairie in Wilson State Park.

You are invited to return at different times of the year to witness the seasonal changes—the colors of fall, the bloom in spring, and other exciting events. Feel free to keep this brochure, but if you do not wish to do so, please return it to the trailhead for use by other visitors.

We hope you enjoy your hike on the Dakota Trail. Thank you for taking the time to learn about some of the unique features that make this area special.



General Area Map

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs described herein is available to all individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or handicap. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to Office of the Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, 1020 S Kansas Ave. Suite 200, Topeka, KS 66612-1327 12/03

The Dakota Trail



A Nature Trail at Wilson State Park



Wilson State Park
RR 1, Box 181
Sylvan Grove, KS 67481
(785) 658-2465 (Park Office)
(316) 683-8069 (Regional Office)
e-mail:
WilsonSP@wp.state.ks.us
Department Website:
www.kdwp.state.ks.us

Trail Features



1 SKUNK BUSH



This common shrub is found statewide. Its proper name is aromatic sumac, but it's known as "skunk bush" because of the unpleasant odor of the crushed leaves.

These plants provide good wildlife habitat; small mammals and birds build nests here, while others eat the seeds and bark in winter.

2 WORKING TOGETHER

The crusty, yellow-green material on the rocks along the trail are lichens. Lichens are actually two organisms – fungi and algae – working together to survive. The fungi maintains a moist environment for its algae companion and supplies it with nutrients. The algae captures energy from the sun for both itself and the fungi. The lichen wears away the rock, helping to create soil.

3 NORTHERN EXPOSURE

The north side of a hill tends to be cooler and wetter, because of the lack of direct sunlight. Trees prefer this to the hotter, drier southern sides. A hill's north side is protected from the area's southwesterly winds. Shrubs and other woody plants tend to grow and survive better on these protected slopes.

Be Careful!



This is poison ivy. It grows as a shrub or vine, but always has 3 egg-shaped leaflets, with either jagged or lobed edges. In fall, it will have grape-like clusters of small white fruit. Avoid touching any part of the plant; it may cause severe skin irritation.

4 SMOKY HILLS

This high vantage point provides an excellent view of Wilson Lake and the beautiful Smoke Hills of Kansas.

5 HACKBERRY

Hackberry trees can be found on demanding sites like this hillside. They prefer the rich soil of bottomlands but will grow almost anywhere. These trees can be recognized by the warty appearance of the back, the narrow oval leaves with tapered tips, and the small, dark fruits that mature in early fall. This species is subject to the disease witches' broom, which forms small, dense clusters of deformed twigs along the branches. Hackberry is common all along the trail. See if you can find it.

6 AMERICAN ELM

This tree is the most common elm native to Kansas and is typically found along streams and rocky hill-sides. While it can grow to a height of 60 feet or more, this rocky site usually limits growth to under 20 feet. The large dark green leaves make elms a good shade tree, but it has brittle branches, a short lifespan, and is susceptible to Dutch elm disease (which threatens to exterminate the species.)

7 SANDHILL PLUM

Sandhill plum is a common shrub in the sandy hills of Kansas. It has showy, white flowers in April, usually before the leaves come out. The fruit matures in June-July and is readily eaten by many birds and mammals. People also gather the fruit for use in jelly and preserves. This shrub normally grows in dense thickets, providing excellent wildlife habitat and soil erosion control.

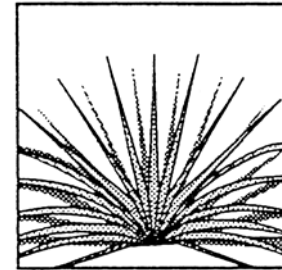


8 LARGE SANDSTONE ROCKS

The large rocks on this hillside are prime examples of Dakota sandstone, which is the same rock in the bluffs around Wilson Lake. You can see how the rock is made of layers of sand, put down over time. Sandstone is easily eroded by both wind and water; eroded rock contributes to the naturally sandy beaches found along the shores of Wilson Lake. Dakota sandstone formations are the most common geologic feature in this part of Wilson Lake. Look for other outcroppings in the area.

9 SOAPWEED

A species of yucca, soapweed is common in western Kansas and grows in dry, sandy, or rocky pastures. Soapweed helps wildlife, providing shade and nesting sites for small mammals and birds. It has narrow, straight, pointed evergreen leaves. In May and June, soapweed has large, showy flowers that hang from a tall stalk. The resulting seed pod matures in late summer and can last through the winter. The plant draws its name from the fact that Native Americans ground this plant's roots to make soap.



10 STONE POSTS

As the prairie was settled, area ranchers needed fenceposts. Lack of trees for wood prompted them to resort to another abundant resource – limestone. These posts were quarried from the limestone formations created by a prehistoric sea that once covered this region. After long hours of difficult labor, ranchers produced the limestone posts that are still serving their purpose today.



30,000 to 40,000 miles of limestone fence lines were used in the Smoky Hills of Kansas.

11 SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

This vantage point shows how plants respond to a southern exposure. The hillside tends to be hotter and drier than the north side, limiting the growth of many trees. Grasses, forbs, and small shrubs all grow well. Without fire and grazing to hold them back, forbs, sandhill plum, soapweed, and scrubby trees are able to invade the prairie and out-compete grasses. This transition from grass to shrubs and small trees is known as plant community succession.

12 PRAIRIE HABITAT

This rocky grassland is home to a diverse group of wildlife: mammals, birds, and reptiles are common in prairie habitats. Take a moment to look around. You may see coyote, deer, cottontail rabbit, deer, mouse, meadowlark, dickcissel, kingbirds, and many different snakes and lizards. (Remember – wildlife viewing requires quiet.)

While you're waiting for something to come walking or flying by, enjoy the prairie's native grasses; blue grama and little bluestem. If you're visiting in spring, summer, or early fall, you should find yourself surrounded by wildflowers.

