

Welcome to the Carrizo Auto Tour

A Road Less Traveled

Along the 180-mile route of the Carrizo Auto Tour, you can explore pioneer homesteads and the Santa Fe Trail, interpret Plains Indian rock art, and walk where sharks once swam. In addition, the spectacular landscape provides varied and abundant wildlife habitat and excellent bird watching opportunities, especially at sunup and sundown when animals are most active.

Plan on approximately 5-8 hours to drive the loop and visit the major sites along the route.



Highlights

- Carrizo Canyon
- Picture Canyon
- Aubry Cutoff of the Santa Fe Trail
- Fort Union - Granada Military Road
- Wildlife Viewing
- Colorado Birding Trail



Reminder:

Stop and enjoy the services and “small-town experience” provided by the towns along the route. Gas can be found in Kim, Springfield, and Campo.

Ethical Considerations

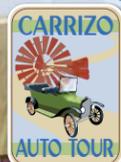
- Respect private property and the rights of others to enjoy their activities undisturbed.
- Keep wildlife wild. Don't disturb or feed them.
- Drive responsibly to protect the environment. Travel only where motorized vehicles are permitted.
- Help preserve our heritage by protecting historical and archaeological sites.
- Report any acts of vandalism to Comanche National Grassland offices:

La Junta (719) 384-2181 Springfield (719) 523-6591

Safety Considerations

- Begin with a full tank of gas, a good spare tire, plenty of water, and a map of the Grassland. Remember, cell phone coverage is patchy and there is no drinking water along the route.
- The Carrizo Auto Tour is comprised primarily of dirt roads that may become extremely slick and impassable when wet; only state highways are paved.
- The Grassland can be quite windy, thunder and hail storms are common and tornadoes do occur. Be prepared for sudden weather changes.
- Slow down. The Grassland is open range and you may encounter livestock and wildlife on the roads and trails.
- The Prairie and Massasuaga Rattlesnakes, both poisonous, call this place home.

Fasten your seat belt, explore a road less traveled, and discover the wonders and beauty of the Comanche National Grassland!



Comanche National Grassland
Caring for the Land and Serving People



The DUST BOWL



Black Blizzards

A bleak period in American history, the 1930s environmental catastrophe (caused by sod busting and prolonged drought) mirrored the economic depression of the day. Black clouds often appeared on the horizon—within minutes turbulent dust storms or “black blizzards” rolled over the prairies and towns like crashing waves, obscuring the sun and turning day into night. Despair was plentiful and hope was scarce.

In 1933 and 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Act and Emergency Relief Appropriations Act which gave the Federal Government authority to purchase failed croplands in an effort to begin healing the devastated land. Under these and other New Deal programs, thousands of farms were purchased and retired from cultivation, and families settled elsewhere providing economic relief to many.



Many people died of dust pneumonia as a result of dust storms.



1936 Ford immobilized by sand.

In December 1935, experts meeting in Pueblo, Colorado estimated that 850 million tons of topsoil blew off the southern plains that year in storms like the one above in 1935.



Hugh H. Bennett speaks to farmers in Springfield, Colorado. In April, 1935, Bennett testified before a Congressional committee about the need for new farming and soil conservation practices. While speaking, a dust storm from the western plains darkened the skies throughout Washington, D.C. “This gentlemen, this is what I have been talking about.” Congress quickly passed the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 and the Soil Conservation Service was soon established.

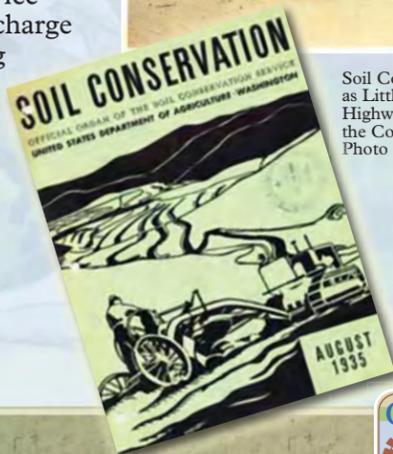


Grassland Restoration

The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937 gave the Department of Agriculture authority to manage lands for restoration, protection from soil erosion, and resource protection. The government established the Soil Conservation Service and placed this agency in charge of reclaiming and restoring the damaged land. On June 23, 1960, the National Grasslands were created and the recovered lands of the Dust Bowl were placed under the management of the USDA Forest Service.



Soil Conservation Office, now known as Little Washington, located along US Highway 287 south of Springfield on the Comanche National Grassland. Photo taken after 1935.

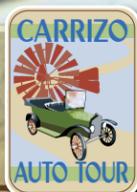


Comanche National Grassland Accomplishments

Perhaps the most valuable lesson learned from the Dust Bowl era was that the 1930's sod busting and agricultural methods developed in wetter parts of the U.S. didn't work in his arid high desert ecosystem.

Today, National Grasslands are managed to conserve the natural resources of grass, water, and wildlife habitat while protecting prehistoric and historic resources. Good stewardship is encouraged as the Grassland works with local ranchers and others.

The Grassland also contributes to the local, regional, and national economies by providing recreation opportunities that bring visitors into the region.



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SHARKS

On the Plains



Once A Shallow Sea

From the fossils and rock formations exposed in these canyons and plains, we know the climate has changed frequently and dramatically throughout earth's history causing shallow seas to inundate this area many times. One of the most startling recent paleontological discoveries on the plains is that of shark teeth - and not just any shark, but those of the strange megamouth shark.



Shortly after its discovery in 1975, news reports began to refer to the megamouth shark as the "Pac-man shark" because of the similarity of its head to a popular video game of the time.



T. Yamanaka/AFP/Getty

The megamouth shark is a filter feeder, so its teeth are very small for straining small particles of food from the water. The whale and basking shark are other filter feeders.



Each sample of this amazing rock layer contains hundreds of small teeth, bits of bone and shell fragments. Wave action along the ancient shoreline concentrated the organic particles into this layer, just like shell strands along modern beaches.

Megamouth Shark Discovery

Near the historic town of Tobe, about 18 miles southwest of here, samples of limestone were collected in 2002 by a Forest Service paleontologist and sent to DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. In the samples, 22 different species of sharks and rays, 15 species of bony fish, and as many as six marine reptiles, represented by over 18,000 pieces of specimens were collected!

Among the specimens were some very peculiar teeth belonging to the megamouth shark, considered to be a "living fossil" species. A relatively new animal to science, the megamouth was discovered in 1975 off the coast of Hawaii.



Ancient Shark, New Name

In 2007, the fossil animal was named in the scientific journal, *Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*, and was christened *Paleomagachasma comanchensis*, ('ancient megamouth of the Comanche') in honor of the Comanche National Grassland where it was discovered.



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FIRE

On the Grassland



Can Fire Be Good?

Fire is an integral part of many ecosystems because it quickly returns the nutrients of decaying vegetation to the soil. This regeneration is especially important in grasslands because it helps provide high-value forage for wildlife and domestic livestock.

Since European settlement in the 1800s the frequency and size of wildland fires in southeast Colorado has decreased due to aggressive fire suppression efforts, grazing, roads, and the discontinuous (checkerboard) land ownership. Without fire, the vitality and productivity of grassland ecosystems have suffered.

Fire's Many Benefits

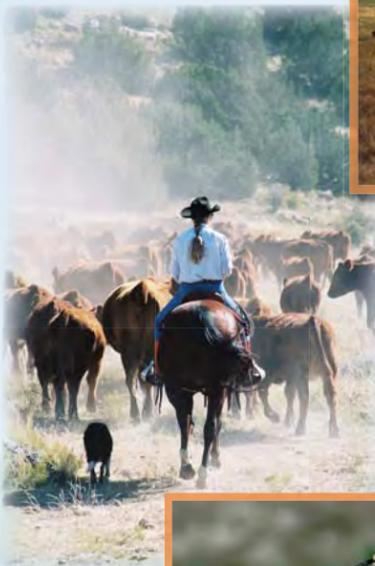
Prescribed fires help protect the Grassland from catastrophic wildland fires by reducing the hazardous fuel load. As a result, wildland fires burn with less intensity.

Today, the Forest Service uses fire and livestock grazing to encourage vegetation diversity, improve wildlife habitat, and reduce hazardous fuels.

Reducing outbreaks of insects, diseases, and noxious weeds by promoting vigorous, productive, resilient and diverse ecosystems are other benefits of prescribed fire.



Low-intensity burns increase the availability, palatability, quality, and quantity of grasses and forbs for domestic livestock.



Lesser prairie chicken



Mountain plover © Bill Schmoker

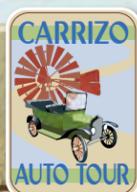
Beneficial But Dangerous!

Although fire is beneficial to ecosystems, grassland wildfires can be extremely dangerous. Strong winds and flashy fuels may create unpredictable fire behavior.

PLEASE obey all fire restrictions while traveling on the Grassland.



ONLY YOU



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Preserved in Stone

Picture Canyon History

Early Plains Indians

Picture Canyon's rich record of human activity dates back to the 17th or early 18th centuries when Plains Indians left images of human figures, animals, and abstract designs on sandstone walls. These designs were made by carving in to the rock (petroglyphs) and painting on the rock (pictographs). Sometimes both techniques were used on the same design.

Often rock art panels are associated with camps, semi-permanent homes and other activity locations. Drawn by the area's perennial springs and lush riparian habitat, early inhabitants found relief from harsh weather conditions sometimes found on the open plains.



Other Immigrants

Plains Indians weren't the only folks to frequent the canyon. Remnants of early 20th century homesteads can also be found. These early settlers did well for a while but droughts between 1900 and 1920 forced many to leave. A second wave of farming homesteaders settled the area in the 1920s.



Father and sons in their drought-stricken field, ca. 1900s.

Preserve Our Heritage!

Relics of the past hold clues that archaeologists use to reconstruct life here long ago. These cultural resources are ancient, fragile and irreplaceable. If destroyed or removed the information they reveal is lost. Rock art, untouched since its creation, can be erased in a thoughtless moment.

Thank You..

for observing the rules of this area and for helping us preserve this valuable resource.

Protect Our Past

All cultural resources on public lands are protected by law. The Antiquities Act and Archaeological Resources Act impose fines and penalties for disturbing or removing artifacts.

Report any acts of vandalism to the Comanche National Grassland offices in:

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Seas, Uplifts, Streambeds and Dinosaurs in the Canyon

The Beginnings

The Dakota Sandstone exposed along the walls of Picture Canyon was deposited along the west shoreline of a Late Cretaceous shallow sea about 100-65 million years ago. As a result of the uplift of the Rocky Mountains and changes in stream gradients, streams cut into the rock and formed Picture Canyon and other canyons along the Colorado-Oklahoma border.



Artist's rendition of iguanadons, (larger creatures) and a ornithomimosaur, (smaller, ostrich-like). Tracks of both can be found in the Picture Canyon area.

Traces and Trackways of Ancient Life

Isolated dinosaur tracks and trackways are often found in Dakota Sandstone and some have been found here in Picture Canyon. One dinosaur tracksite in a nearby canyon is even a rare example of social behavior in small theropod dinosaurs (meat-eaters that ran on their hind legs). Many undocumented dinosaur tracks and trackways can be found in the area.

Abundant trace and plant fossils including stems, twigs, cones, and the first flowering plants can be found in Picture Canyon's rock layers. So look closely—you may discover clues about plant and animal life millions of years ago!



Artist's rendition of an iguanadon, whose large, rounded, three-toed prints can be found in this area.



Tracks made by *Magnovipes* can be seen in the red rock above. A close-up view of a similar print is shown in the photo to the right.



Trace and plant fossils

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Welcome to Picture Canyon

The rugged sandstone canyon walls of Picture Canyon provide visitors with scenic views and the opportunity to discover a variety of plants and wildlife, unusual rock formations and fossils, Plains Indian rock art and early 20th century homestead remains.



Spotted towhee
© Bill Schmoker



Canyon wren
© Bill Schmoker



Ladder-backed woodpecker
naturepicsonline.com



Long-billed curlew
© Bill Schmoker



Lewis' woodpecker
courtesy naturepicsonline.com



Bullock's oriole
naturepicsonline.com

Highlights

Unique rock art, petroglyphs and pictographs can be found along the canyon walls.

Excellent bird watching - look for: Bullock's oriole, Scaled quail, towhees, wrens, Ladder-backed woodpecker, Eastern phoebe, Blue grosbeaks, Rufous-crowned and Cassin's sparrows, and Long-billed curlew.

Fascinating Herptiles - look for: Coachwhip, Racer, Western rattlesnake, Ringnecked snake, Western hognose snake, Woodhouse toad, Plains leopard frog, Bullfrog, Collared lizard, Great Plains skink, and Texas horned lizard

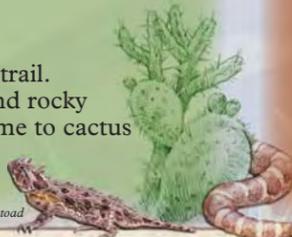


Collared lizard courtesy naturepicsonline.com

Safety & Respect

-  Respect the rights of other users to enjoy their activities undisturbed.
-  Leave no trace by using existing fire grates, and disposing trash and waste properly.
-  Shooting firearms in developed recreation areas such as picnic areas, trailheads, and interpretive sites is prohibited.
-  Carry water with you. Spring water is not safe to drink.
-  Stay on the trails and look for rock cairns with upright wood posts that mark the trail.

Pay attention to the trail. Shortgrass prairie and rocky canyon areas are home to cactus and rattlesnakes.



Texas horned toad

Ethics

-  Keep wildlife wild. Don't disturb or feed them.
-  Drive responsibly to protect the environment. Travel only where motorized vehicles are permitted.
-  Help preserve the unique prehistoric and historic resources in the canyon by:
 - Not touching rock art. Oils from your hands promote deterioration of the drawings and rock surface.
 - Not drawing or scratching graffiti on rocks or cliff faces. Graffiti defaces a fragile, irreplaceable legacy and is illegal.
 - Not shooting at canyon walls or near historic ruins.
 - Not building campfires within 100 feet of canyon walls or near historic ruins.
-  Report any acts of vandalism to Comanche National Grassland offices:

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Scaled quail
© Bill Schmoker



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A National Archive Written in Stone

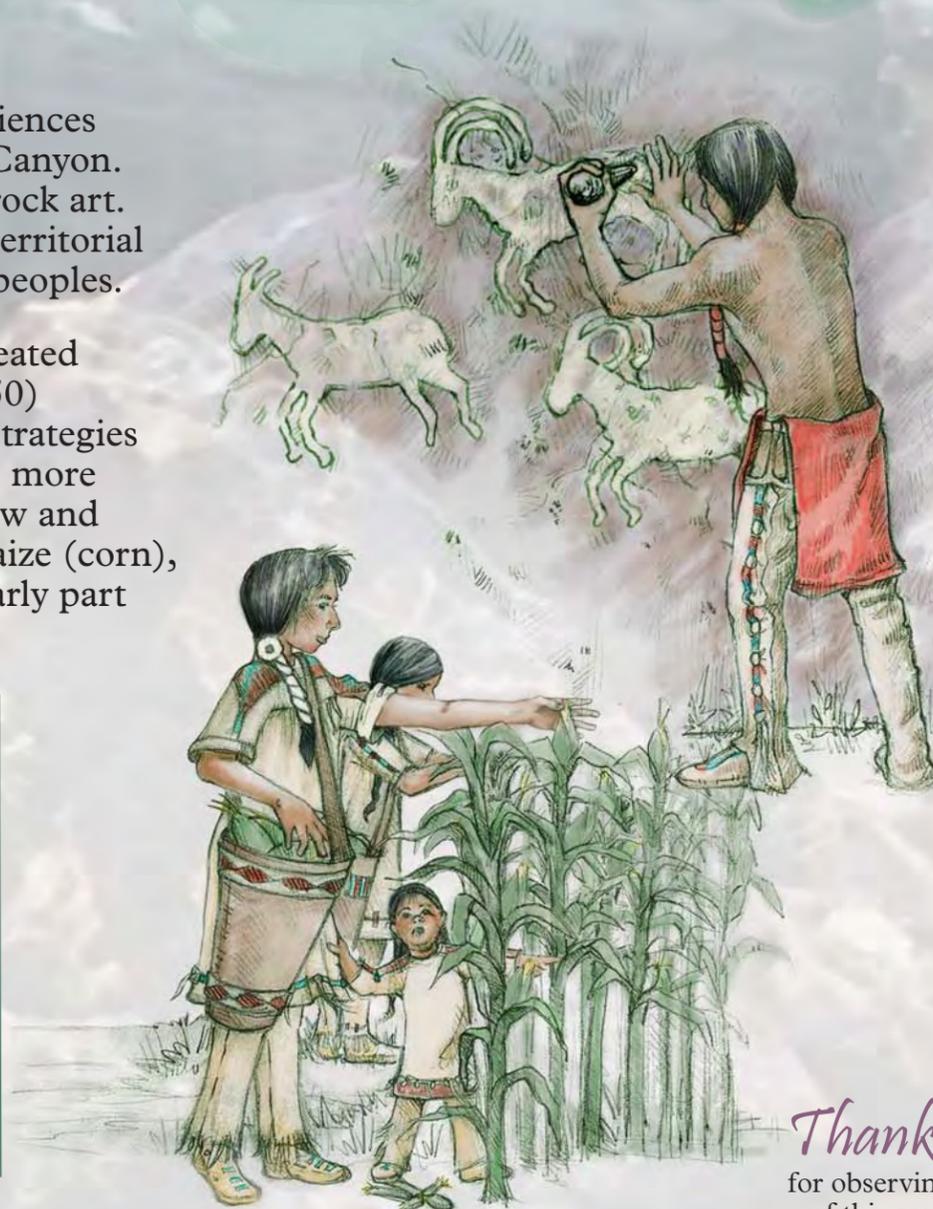
Life Experiences in Stone

For centuries Plains Indians etched their experiences in the soft, exposed sandstone walls of Carrizo Canyon. These carved records are called petroglyphs or rock art. Carrizo petroglyphs have been used to identify territorial boundaries and cultural identities of these past peoples.

Archaeologists think these petroglyphs were created during the Late Prehistoric stage (A.D. 100-1450) which marked important changes in economic strategies and demographics. Hunting technology became more efficient with the widespread adoption of the bow and arrow. Domesticated food crops, particularly maize (corn), beans and squash, first introduced during the early part of this stage, became increasingly common.



Can you find the circle with an arrow running through it plus the quadrupeds (deer, or possibly sheep) underneath and curving upward to the right of the circle?



Quadruped (four-legged animal) rockart with horns curving backwards grace a Carrizo Canyon wall.

Preserve This Heritage!

Unlike the National Archive in Washington D.C., these important records are not protected by a controlled environment and are vulnerable to natural processes like weathering and human impacts.

Vandalism occurs increasingly as remote rock art sites become more accessible. Chalking, scratched graffiti, and gunshot damage (the most destructive) can be found in Carrizo Canyon.

Without your help these ancient and fragile petroglyphs could be lost forever. Please help the U.S. Forest Service protect this irreplaceable legacy of the past.

Thank You..

for observing the rules of this area and for helping to preserve this valuable resource.

Protect Our Past

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Ladder-backed woodpecker
naturepicsonline.com



Welcome to Carrizo Canyon



Bewick's wren © Bill Schmoker

Carrizo, which means "reed" in Spanish, is named for the abundant wetland vegetation found throughout this scenic area. People and wildlife have frequented the canyon for thousands of years taking advantage of the reliable water, food and shelter found here.



Ladder-backed woodpecker courtesy naturepicsonline.com

Cassin's kingbird © Raymond L. Martin



Eastern phoebe © Hwyay Kwong Lim



Canyon wren © Bill Schmoker

You are here



Legend

- Carrizo Loop Trail 1 mile (dashed green line)
- Rock Art Spur Trail (dotted yellow line)
- Accessible Trail (dashed purple line)
- Bench (brown square)
- Stairs (orange zigzag)
- Picnic Area (table icon)
- Restroom (toilet icon)

Black-chinned hummingbird courtesy naturepicsonline.com



Highlights

Excellent wildlife habitat for a broad array of bird species including:

- Black-chinned hummingbird,
- Ladder-backed woodpecker,
- Eastern phoebe, Cassin's kingbird,
- Mississippi kite, and Canyon and Bewick's wren.

Bullsnakes, Collared lizards, and Texas horned lizards can be found sunning themselves among the rocks. The ponds provide homes for many fish species along with snapping and softshell turtles.

Many visitors also enjoy viewing prehistoric rock art along the canyon walls.



Collared lizard courtesy naturepicsonline.com

Safety

- Drink plenty of water and use sunscreen.
- Do not cross Carrizo Creek when stream flow is high.
- The Prairie and Massasauga rattlesnakes, both poisonous, call this place home.
- Weather is extremely variable; thunder and hail storms are common and tornadoes do occur, so be prepared.
- Please contact the Comanche National Grassland offices in La Junta (719) 384-2181 Springfield (719) 523-6591 for additional information about seasonal restrictions or closures.



Ethics

- Respect the rights of others to enjoy their activities undisturbed.
- Keep wildlife wild. Don't disturb or feed them.
- Drive responsibly to protect the environment and travel only where motorized vehicles are permitted.
- Leave no trace by using existing fire grates, and disposing trash and waste properly.
- Shooting firearms in developed recreation areas such as picnic areas, trailheads, and interpretive sites is prohibited.
- Please help preserve our heritage by protecting the work of the region's earliest artists. Do not touch or deface this irreplaceable legacy of the past.



Horned toad



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Carrizo Canyon- A Prairie Oasis

Shelter in the Storm

Centuries of flash flooding have caused the soft Dakota Sandstone to erode, carving out Carrizo Canyon and creating shelter from prairie storms. Wildlife, including many species of birds and reptiles, make this place their home.

Carrizo Canyon provides diverse habitats and a year-round water source for migrating and nesting bird species. Several species found here are at the edge of their range such as the Ladder-backed woodpecker and Chihuahuan raven-commonly found to the south.

Other unique species are the Black-chinned hummingbird, Lewis' woodpecker, Eastern phoebe, Cassins kingbird, Mississippi kite, and Canyon and Bewick's wren.



Along the water's edge, riparian and wetland vegetation include sedges, rushes, bulrushes, willows, cottonwood, cattails and many common reeds. Juniper, currants and wild grape grow along the canyon edges.



Black-chinned hummingbird courtesy naturespicsonline.com



Lewis' woodpecker courtesy naturespicsonline.com



Juvenile Mississippi kite © Greg Lavaty

Storms Continue Life

During large rainstorms, water levels in Carrizo Creek can rise six feet or more and may cause significant flooding! As the stream channel fills, the ponds along its course become connected allowing fish and other aquatic life to disperse downstream into normally barren areas. This system of fish dispersal is common in dry climates where water sources are scarce and temporary.

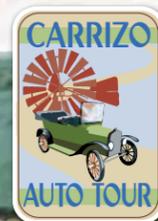
Today, Carrizo Creek is one of only three perennial streams on the Comanche National Grassland. Along its course are spring-fed ponds that offer a water source for many types of wildlife including several fish species. Channel catfish, sand shiners, and Plains killifish as well as snapping and softshell turtles are found beneath the water's edge. Listen for the croak of non-native bullfrogs too!



snapping turtle © JG Photo



bullfrog © Karl R Martin



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The Great Plains Courier Aubry Branch of the Santa Fe Trail

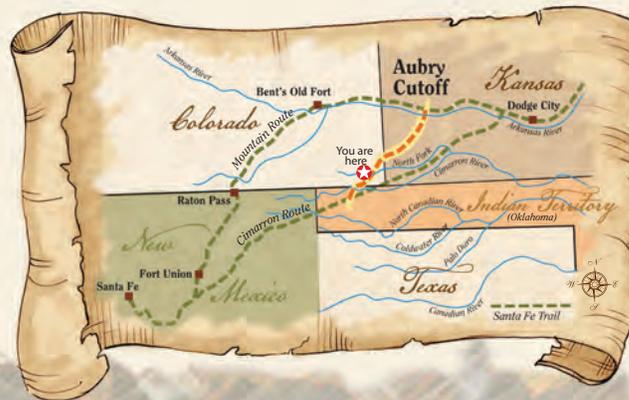


Adventure Calls

François-Xavier Aubry was born December 3, 1824 near Quebec. In 1843 at 18, he left his home and moved to St. Louis, Missouri where he began working as a clerk for a French-Canadian merchant company.

In 1846, lured by the talk of trade, making money, and adventure on the Santa Fe Trail, he gave up his job as a clerk and became a full-time trader. By 1850, Aubry had traveled multiple routes with the goal of finding the shortest sand-free path that provided adequate water and wood. In 1851 he found it—establishing what became known as the Aubry Cutoff.

On August 18, 1854, Aubry died in a small cantina in Santa Fe after being stabbed during an argument with journalist Richard H. Weightman (known as a newspaper bully) over the best route for the future transcontinental railroad.



“Skimmer of the Plains”

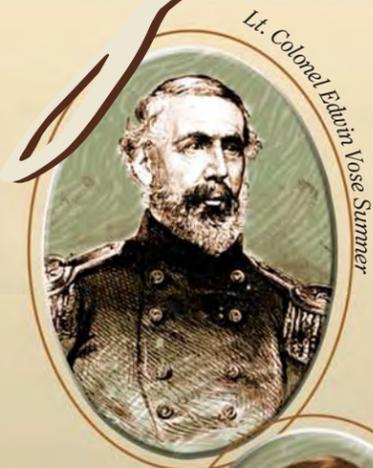
From 1846 to 1854, Aubry was among the busiest, most influential merchants on the Santa Fe Trail. His caravans were usually large, and his speed and reliability in getting goods to the right market ahead of others was legendary. The average length of Aubry's trips was 37 days, while other merchants would up to 90 days to deliver their goods to Santa Fe.

Along with this mercantile reputation, he developed a talent for individual travel. Aubry's 780 mile trip on horseback from Santa Fe to Independence, Missouri in five days, eighteen hours was extraordinarily quick for its time. His trip earned Aubry the title “Skimmer of the Plains.”

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Granada Fort Union Military Road



Lt. Colonel Edwin Vose Sumner

A Better Route for the Military

Shortly after Fort Union was established in New Mexico in 1851, Lt. Colonel Edwin Vose Sumner, commander of the Ninth Military Department at Fort Union, ordered the young Lt. John Pope to scout a better route along the Sante Fe Trail for military freight.

For years, the route Pope discovered was a little used trail. When the Atchison, Topeka & Sante Fe Railroad reached Granada, Colorado in 1873, the 200-mile segment between Granada and Ft. Union, New Mexico became the major supply route for military and civilian goods heading southwest to New Mexico and Arizona.



Lt. John Pope



From the *Diary* of
Lucinda Wiseman Trieloff

July 26-27, 1877 -
"We had some trouble to find water but did find plenty such as it was for we have not had real good water since leaving Granada six days ago."

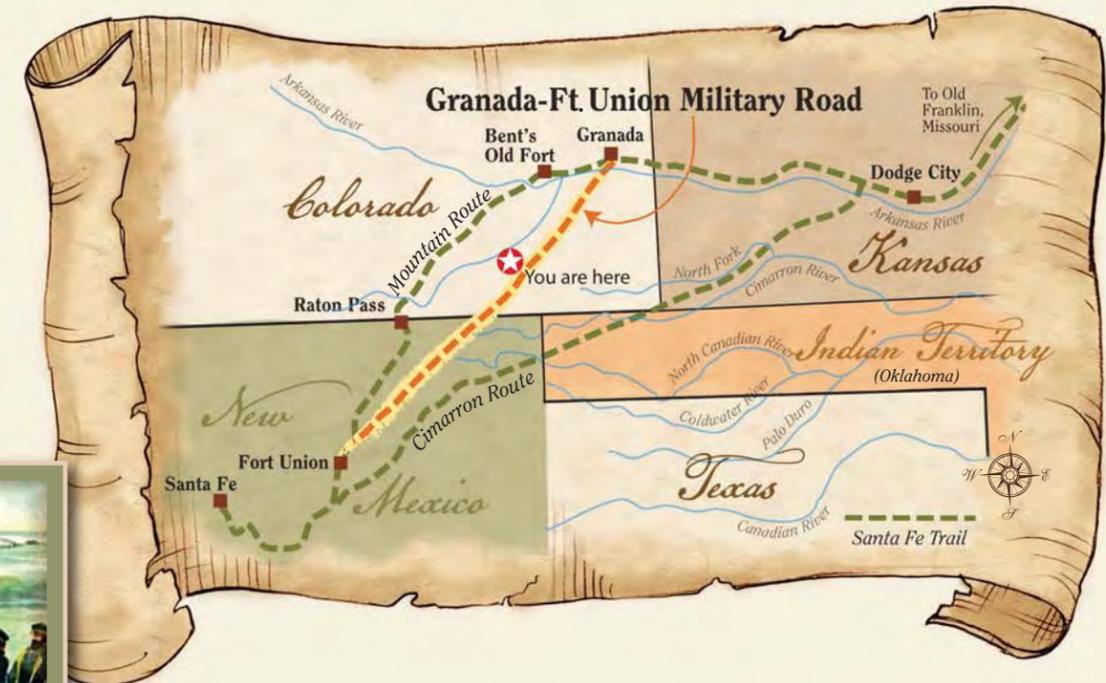
Written along the north side of Mesa de Maya - somewhere near the historic town of Tobe and the site of this panel.



Army train crossing the plains, *Harpers Weekly*, 1868

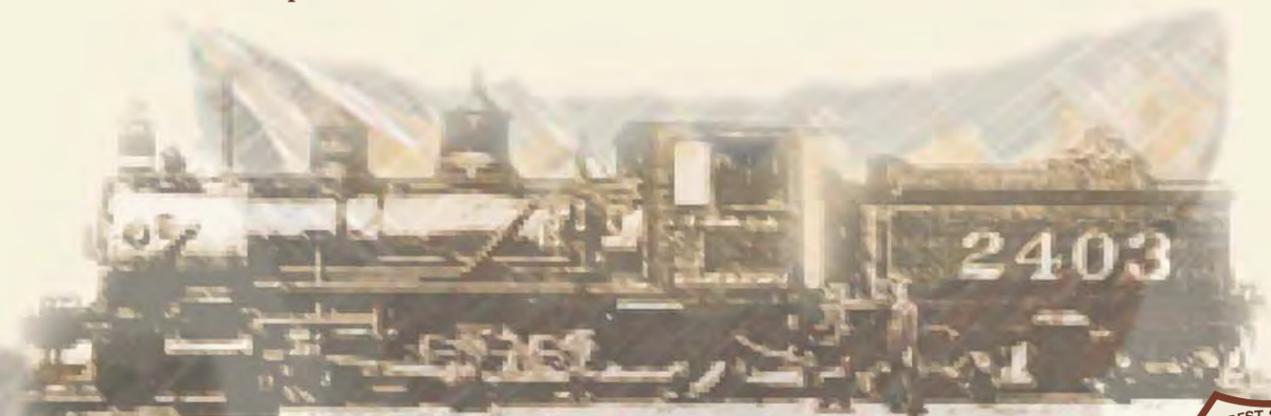


By 1874-1875, the volume of civilian freight transported across the Fort Union route probably surpassed military freight. With the arrival of the railroad in Granada many wagons were needed to carry commodities from the railhead to New Mexico.



Progress Brings an End

After the first steam engine reached Trinidad, Colorado in 1878 and Santa Fe two years later, the Granada - Ft. Union military road fell into disuse. Today a 6-mile segment of the route is preserved on the Comanche National Grassland.



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