

Homestead Trail



Research, Education,
Conservation

TICK ALERT! From May through September tick populations are high in wooded areas like this, where deer and other animals are found. Please protect yourself with an insect repellent and stay on the trail to avoid contact with brush and grasses where ticks wait in ambush.



Wildlife – Who's Here?

- ✓ Deer - This area is heavily populated by deer year round. You may see signs of deer beds or browse lines along the edge of the gallery forest.
- ✓ Turkey - Open, wooded areas are ideal habitat for turkey. They may be seen lurking behind a tree or displaying in the field.
- ✓ Birds - A wide variety of bird species make their home here or stop on their migration routes. Bird boxes have been built to encourage their presence. Enjoy the sights and sounds of these creatures and visit the wildlife observation lean-to.

Native Plants and Trees

- ✓ Tallgrass Prairie 'Big Four' – Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Indiangrass, and Switchgrass.
- ✓ Bur Oak, Chinquapin Oak, Hickory, Black Walnut, Hackberry, Black Locust, Honey Locust, and American Elm.

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1. In 1878 Andrew Hokanson and his two brothers arrived in Kansas to buy farmland. They traveled from their homeland of Sweden hoping to start a better life. The 95 acres originally purchased by the brothers was described as prime farmland. Surveyors mentioned that they had “soil first rate, timber Burr oaks, Elm, and Hickory”. The area at the time consisted mainly of grassland with trees growing only along creeks. The homestead was set up in a traditional Swedish manner, with a planting of fruit trees in the center surrounded by a house, barn and outbuildings. The trees that were chosen for the center planting were two red mulberries.

As you walk along the Homestead Trail, let yourself imagine what impacts settlers have made on this land and what influences the land may have had on them.

2. The stone buildings and other foundations that you see along the trail were quarried from nearby limestone ledges. What devices would have been used to move these large limestone slabs into place? Why would they have chosen limestone rather than wood as the main building material?

3. This field was once part of the tallgrass prairie. With settlement came agricultural uses for these lush fields. The sod was plowed and planted with brome. Remains of feed troughs suggest this was a feedlot for cattle. When no longer in use, the area took on the different look of an abandoned pasture.

Disturbed by heavy grazing, the Black Locust and Honey Locust, weed tree species have flourished.

4. Andrew Hokanson, unlike other settlers in the unpredictable climate of the Flint Hills, found that his farm was successful. One factor allowed him that success - water. Without the continued water supply from the springs here at the homestead, these settlers might have moved on. This springhouse was once fed by water from the above grassland. A stone fence runs up the hill, perhaps to keep any stock animals out of this drainage area.

Springs- Water, always essential to survival, was important in choosing a homestead site.

Perennial springs are few in this area since the source of water is mostly annual rainfall collected in the shale under the prairie sod.



5. The area to your left or north was once open prairie. Woody species have encroached here because fire was not used to maintain the native prairie. The settlers' fear of fire allowed trees and other woody species to gain a foothold. Although this hillside is part of an annual burn in the Konza management plan, fire has difficulty entering this area.

6. The large field you're looking down on was once heavily used for crops. The rich, fertile soils here and along the lower areas near the creek, were excellent for planting. This field has given

in to “weed” species: flannel mullein, cheat, brome, cedars, honey locust, and elms. It has been well over 100 years since this stretch of land has been true prairie.

7. In the 1950's the Federal Government paid landowners to build dams and catchment areas for water collection and erosion control. These berms were for control of runoff from the hills and erosion in the fields below. Bulldozers were brought in to create these large mounds.

8. Wildlife is teeming in these woods the Hokansons once thought of as home. Now deer are the local residents with their close neighbors a wide array of birds. The wildlife observation lean-to will allow you to enjoy the sights and sounds of this unique setting. A local Boy Scout, his troop and several volunteers put up birdhouses to entice more species to nest near this abandoned homestead.

Wood rat nests may sometimes be seen in the protective stone fences that Mr. Hokanson built.

9. With the settlement of the prairie came changes. The tallgrass prairie could not remain unaltered by the effects of man. Crops, cattle, and homesteads like this have forever changed the face of the prairie. Today, on Konza Prairie, we are lucky to have this site dedicated to understanding and saving the tallgrass prairie.

What other signs of the effect of man on the prairie have you observed here?
