



Scotts Bluff National Monument © NPS

FACT SHEET

National Parks in Nebraska

Agate Fossil Beds National Monument • California National Historic Trail • Chimney Rock National Historic Site • Homestead National Monument of America • Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail • Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail • Niobrara National Scenic River • Oregon National Historic Trail • Pony Express National Historic Trail • Scotts Bluff National Monument

The trails of westward expansion traverse the state of Nebraska. People making their way to new homesteads, gold fields, and farmlands experienced firsthand the trials and triumphs of nature found in this great state. Visitors can continue to do so today as many of these historic sites are protected as part of the National Park System.

Agate Fossil Beds National Monument - Located along the banks of the Niobrara River in Northwestern Nebraska, Agate Fossil Beds and its surrounding prairie are preserved in a 2,270 acre National Monument. Once part of "Captain" James H. Cook's Agate Springs Ranch, the nearby beds are an important source for 19.2-million-year-old Miocene epoch mammal fossils. Cook's ranch also became a gathering place for Chief Red Cloud and other Oglala Lakota people.

California National Historic Trail - Multi-state trail carried

over 250,000 gold-seekers and farmers to the gold fields and rich farmlands of California during the 1840s and 1850s.

Chimney Rock National Historic Site - This unique formation - the most noted on the Oregon Trail - has come to symbolize the greatest voluntary migration in the history of mankind. The visitor center features museum exhibits explaining the westward migration of the nineteenth century and the significant role Chimney Rock had in the memories of those who traveled the trails west.

Homestead National Monument of America - The Homestead Act of 1862 was one of the most significant and enduring events in the westward expansion of the United States. By granting 160 acres of free land to claimants, it allowed nearly any man or woman a chance to live the American dream.

Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail - In 1804, Meriwether Lewis & William Clark began a voyage of discovery. They departed from Camp Wood located in what was to become Illinois. President Jefferson had privately requested Congress to fund the expedition shortly before the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. They traveled over a three-year period through lands that later became 11 states. Most of the 3,700 mile-long trail follows the Missouri & Columbia Rivers.



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Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail - Led by Brigham Young, roughly 70,000 Mormons traveled along the Mormon Pioneer Trail from 1846 to 1869 in order to escape religious persecution. The general route is from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Salt Lake City, Utah, covering about 1,300 miles.

Niobrara National Scenic River - This 76-mile reach of the Niobrara River in north central Nebraska was added to the nation's Wild and Scenic River System in 1991. The Scenic River preserves a superb example of a Great Plains river and protects a unique ecological crossroads where six distinct ecosystems and their associated flora and fauna mix, some at or beyond their normal geographic limit.

Oregon National Historic Trail - As the harbinger of America's westward expansion, the Oregon Trail was the pathway to the Pacific for fur traders, gold seekers, missionaries and others. Beginning in 1841 and continuing for more than 20 years, an estimated 300,000 emigrants followed this route from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City, Oregon, on a trip that took five months to complete.

Pony Express National Historic Trail - Between April 1860 and October 1861, this trail was used by young men on fast paced horses to carry the nation's mail across the country, from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California.

Scotts Bluff National Monument - A prominent natural landmark for emigrants on the Oregon Trail, Scotts Bluff, Mitchell Pass and the adjacent prairie lands are set aside in a 3,000-acre national monument. The monument museum contains exhibits about the human and natural history of the area and also holds a unique collection of watercolor paintings by William Henry Jackson.

Key Issues Facing National Parks in Nebraska

Taking care of America's national parks should be a national priority. With the 100th birthday of the National Park System approaching in 2016, it is more important than ever to address the ongoing problems that our parks are facing. The National Park Service is suffering from an operations funding shortfall now exceeding \$800 million annually. In addition, several billion dollars are needed to protect archaeological sites and historic buildings, and repair the extensive backlog of maintenance projects. Many park friends in Congress have spent years highlighting the fiscal crisis in America's national parks. The Administration has responded with a budget request for 2008 that would increase the National Park Service operating budget by \$258 million -- a strong step in restoring

our parks and improving the experiences of visitors. This budget also launches the National Park Centennial Challenge, which if properly framed and enacted could help restore the parks for their 100th birthday and for generations to come. In addition to the operational shortfall, the National Park Service has a \$1.9 billion land acquisition backlog consisting of over 11,000 tracts of land and covering more than 1.8 million acres. In many instances, failure to acquire these lands makes operating the parks more complex and costly. Unfortunately, funding for national park federal land acquisition has declined dramatically in recent years, from \$130 million five years ago, to only \$23 million in the fiscal year 2008 request.

- The great majority of the land within the Niobrara National Scenic River corridor is privately owned. As a result, much of that land is vulnerable to uncoordinated or inappropriate development.
- Agate Fossil Beds National Monument is a rather small site amidst private ranch land. Rangers face the challenge of establishing a more natural scene where everything else is ranch and of trying to protect wildlife that is fair game whenever it crosses out of the park.
- In 1999, the General Management Plan for the Homestead National Monument outlined plans for the Homestead Heritage Center. However, the groundbreaking ceremony to initiate construction was not held until April 2006.
- There is currently no trail-wide inventory of the archaeological resources found along the Lewis & Clark Trail. As a result, it is impossible for trail staff to accurately assess the threats faces and to adequately protect them from destruction, desecration, looting, and vandalism.

Park Visitation in Nebraska

In fiscal year 2005, the national parks in Nebraska welcomed 233,810 visitors.

Budget Information

In fiscal year 2006, the operations funding for the 10 national parks in Nebraska was \$3.8 million. For fiscal year 2008, the Administration is proposing a 30.8 percent increase, which would bring operations funding to \$5 million.

Contact Information

For more information on the national parks in Nebraska, please contact NPCA Legislative Director Blake Selzer at 202-223-6722, ext. 250.



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