



## Hiking Trails



Throughout time, Scotts Bluff has been viewed as a landmark for those trekking a trail through history. Even a short walk at Scotts Bluff National Monument offers a glimpse of the varied resources of the area. Short- and mixed-grass prairie, wildflowers, native trees and shrubs, geologic features, historic features, and many species of birds and mammals are some of the things you may encounter during your visit.

**This is a national monument, so all animals, plants, and rocks are protected by law and can not be removed or harmed.**

- Please do not deface the bluff or take any rocks as souvenirs.
- The wildlife of the area is best viewed quietly from the trails. Harassment of the wildlife is illegal.
- Please do not gather wildflowers or other plant parts. These plants are a very important part of the fragile mixed-grass prairie ecosystem.

Help us to keep the scenery striking and litter-free.

The trails are open from dawn to dusk, seven days a week, year round. All private vehicles, hikers, and bicycle riders entering the monument are required to purchase a park entrance fee pass. Inquire at the visitor center about hiking the South Bluff area or the north side of the monument. For more information, contact the visitor center at (308) 436-4340.

**Pets are allowed on the trails, but we ask that they be kept on a leash at all times.** This helps to ensure the safety of your pet, the wildlife that lives here, and other visitors to the monument.

For your safety, **please stay on the paved pathways.** The rock along the Summit Trails and Saddle Rock Trail is soft and crumbly; leaving the paved trails can be extremely dangerous.

**Prairie rattlesnakes** are common in the area. They are generally shy and avoid humans, but will strike if threatened. The snakes can easily be seen from the trail, off-trail they can be hidden in the environment.



## Summit Trails

On clear days, from the summit parking area you can see two prominent landmarks. To the east is Chimney Rock, 23 miles (37 km) away. To the west is Laramie Peak, 98 miles (158 km) away. Two paved trails lead from the parking area to either the North or South Overlooks.

### North Overlook Trail

**Length: 0.5 miles (0.8 km)**

**Surface: asphalt**

The North Overlook provides one of the most amazing views of the North Platte River valley and the badlands that forced wagon trains to detour through Mitchell Pass. Along the trail, the highest point on the bluff is marked at 4,649 feet (1,417 m) above sea level. This marker now sticks up above the surface of the surrounding rock, showing the amount of erosion that has occurred in the 60 years since the marker was placed. It is easy to see how soft the rock is and why it is important to stay on the paved trails in this area.

### South Overlook Trail

**Length: 0.4 miles (0.6 km)**

**Surface: asphalt**

The viewpoint at the end of this trail allows you to see Mitchell Pass, the visitor center, and remnants of the Oregon Trail. The trail also offers you a view of the geological layers of the bluff. Two volcanic ash layers are visible in the rocks. Can you find them?

## Saddle Rock Trail

**Length: 1.6 miles (2.6 km), one way.**

**Surface: asphalt**

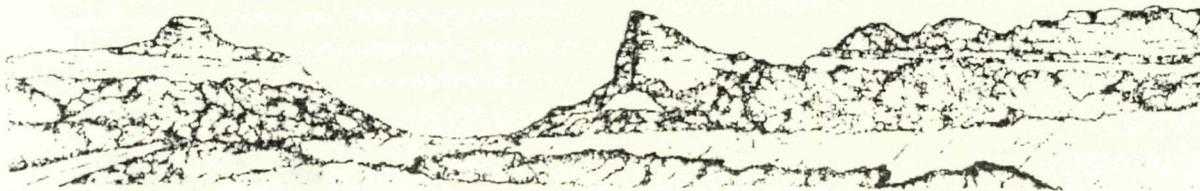
**Strenuous**

**Elevation change 426 feet (130 m)**

This trail leads from the visitor center area to the summit of Scotts Bluff. The first one-third of the trail is relatively level as you travel across the prairie to Scott's Spring. According to one legend, the spring is one of the sites where the remains of fur trapper Hiram Scott may have been found in the early 1800's. The spring is fed by a natural "cistern" that collects rain and snowmelt runoff from the bluff and releases it to the surface.

The steepest portion of the trail is the next half-mile (0.8 km), from the spring to the foot tunnel. The tunnel and trail, along with the summit road and visitor center, were built in the 1930's as federal works projects. This part of the trail passes through a very active rock fall area. Rocks break off regularly here, and slide or fall down the steep side of the bluff. **Walking off trail or climbing on the rocks in this area is extremely dangerous and prohibited. Please stay on the trail.** This area is occasionally closed following rock falls, until the debris can safely be cleared. Check at the visitor center for conditions.

This trail offers good chances to view soaring birds such as prairie falcons, golden eagles, red-tailed hawks and turkey vultures.



## Oregon Trail Pathway

**Length: 0.5 miles (0.8 km), one way.**

**Surface: asphalt**

**Moderate**

**Elevation change 85 feet (26 m)**

The Murphy and Conestoga wagons (displayed April through October) in front of the monument administrative building mark the start of the trail.

When the trail surface changes from asphalt to dirt, you begin walking **on** the Oregon Trail. Today, after nearly 150 years of erosion of the soft rocks, individual wheel ruts are not visible. What is visible is called a “swale,” which is the deep roadbed that was created by wagons travelling single file through Mitchell Pass.

After crossing Mitchell Pass, the trail becomes paved again, and the Oregon Trail is marked with wooden posts. Near the end of the hiking trail is the site where William Henry Jackson camped and sketched while working as a bullwhacker on a wagon train in 1866.

Some of the more common plants along this trail include great plains yucca, skunkbush sumac, wolfberry, juneberry, Rocky Mountain juniper, and rabbitbrush. Poison ivy and prairie rattlesnakes are common in the tall grass and brush along the sides of the trail, making it important to stay on the trail.

## Bike Path

**Length: 1.2 miles (1.9 km), one way.**

**Surface: asphalt**

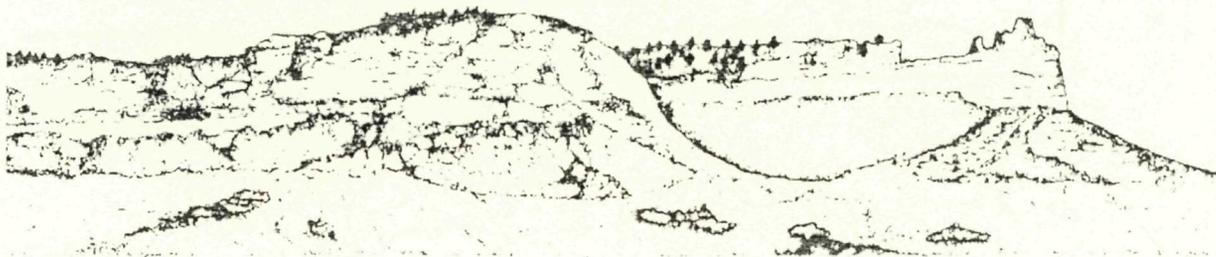
**Moderate**

**Elevation change 50 feet (15 m)**

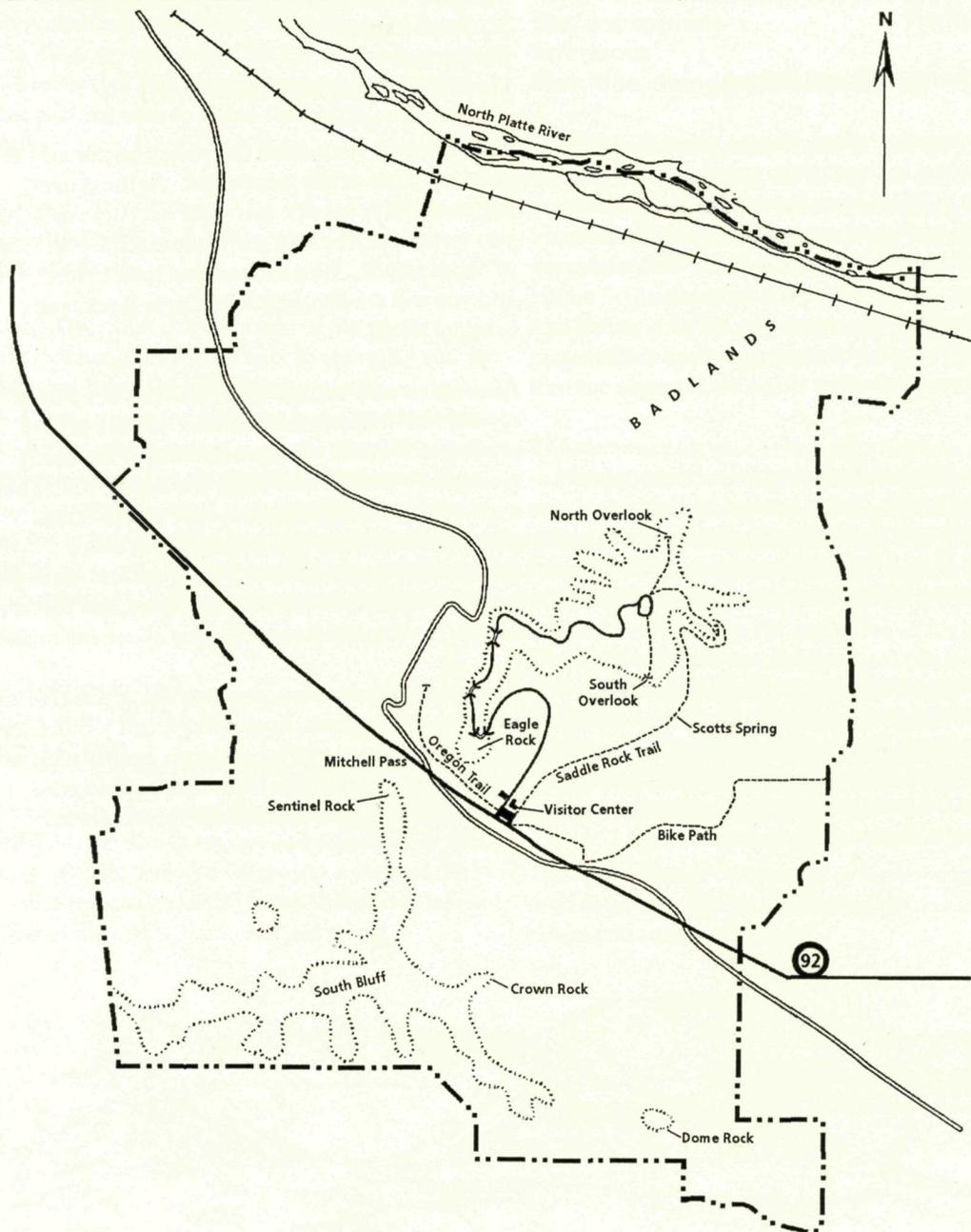
The bike path leads from the visitor center area to the east boundary of the monument. As the name suggests, **bicycles are allowed on this trail**. As you travel east, the trail gives some of the best views of Saddle Rock. Turn around and look behind you and you will see Mitchell Pass, Eagle Rock, and Sentinel Rock.

After about one-half mile, the trail crosses a large ravine, which shows that the base of the bluffs is eroding along with the top and sides of the bluffs. Notice how juniper and other shrubs are found only within the ravine in this area. The ravine offers shelter from the sun and wind and has more abundant moisture, allowing the trees and shrubs to survive. Only the hardy prairie grasses and plants can survive the dry, wind swept prairie above the ravine.

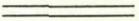
Some of the more common plants along this trail are the great plains yucca, Rocky Mountain juniper, and the grasses common to mixed-grass prairie such as western wheatgrass, little bluestem, buffalo grass, side-oats grama, and needle-and-thread grass.



# Map of Scotts Bluff National Monument



## Map Legend

-  Monument boundary
-  Hiking trail
-  Oregon Trail remnants
-  Paved road
-  Railroad tracks

**\*Map not drawn to scale\***

## Creation of Scotts Bluff National Monument

Scotts Bluff National Monument was set aside on December 12, 1919, by presidential proclamation. President Woodrow Wilson acted to preserve and protect a small remnant of the Oregon Trail, which was an important piece of the story of America's westward movement.

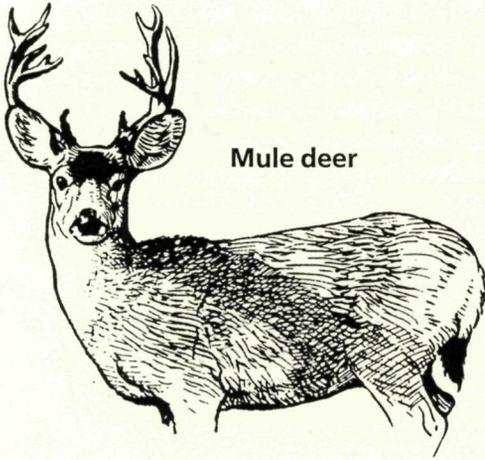
This action also set aside an area that has geological and natural significance. Visitors today can experience the same mixed-grass prairie and much of the wildlife that could have been seen 150 years ago, and can wonder at the fossil remains of 20 to 30 million-year-old creatures that once lived here.

It is the mission of the National Park Service to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein," and to "provide for the enjoyment" of these in such a way that will leave them "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

**Elevations At Scotts Bluff National Monument**

	Feet	Meters	Rise In Elevation
North Platte River	3880	1183	Local base level
Scotts Bluff National Monument Visitor Center	4146	1263	266 feet (81 meters) river to museum
Scotts Bluff summit	4659	1420	513 feet (156 meters) museum to summit
<b>Total rise from river to summit</b>			<b>779 feet (237 meters)</b>

# Common Plants and Animals

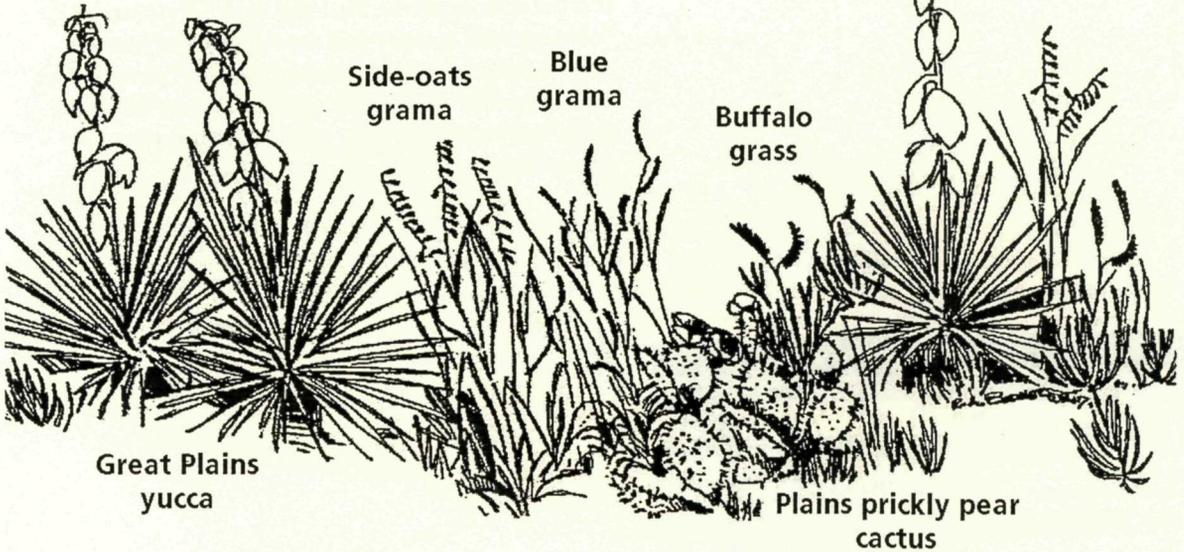
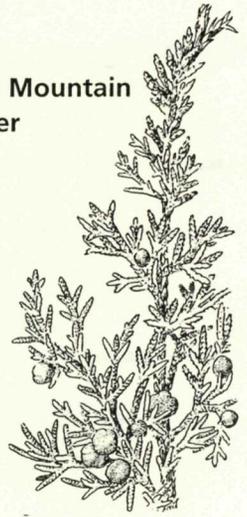


Mule deer



American  
kestrel

Rocky Mountain  
juniper



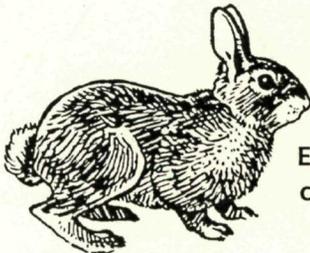
Side-oats  
grama

Blue  
grama

Buffalo  
grass

Great Plains  
yucca

Plains prickly pear  
cactus



Eastern & Desert  
cottontail rabbit



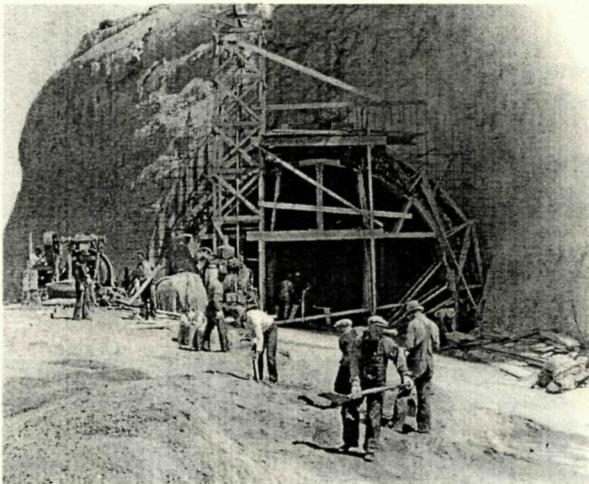
Black-billed  
Magpie

# The Summit Road

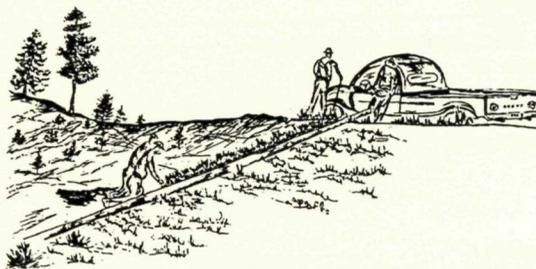
The summit road is open for vehicular traffic from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily, weather permitting, with extended hours during the summer months. **For safety reasons, hikers and bicyclists are prohibited on the summit road while it is open to vehicular traffic.** When the summit road gate is locked, the road is open to hikers and bicyclists during daylight hours.

## History of the Summit Road

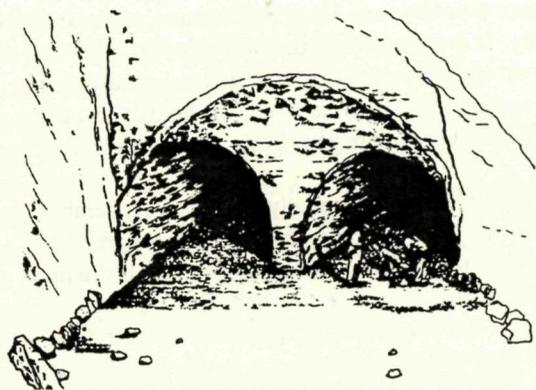
The summit road was opened to the public in 1937 after 3 years of construction by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). Work was done year round and only stopped during bad weather and when funding ran out. Tremendous detail was given to making the road blend in with the bluff as much as possible. The road is nearly invisible from below. Three tunnels were cut during construction, most of which was done by hand with pick and shovel.



Construction of tunnel # 2.



Workers stabilizing slopes of summit parking area in 1933.



Excavation of Tunnel #3

During the summer months a ranger-led summit shuttle provides transportation and orientation to and from the summit. This free service is available to visitors unable to drive the road due to vehicle size limitations and for hikers wanting to hike one-way on the Saddle Rock Trail. This service is financed by the national monument's fee demonstration program. Inquire at the visitor center for further information.



Scotts Bluff National Monument  
P. O. Box 27  
Gering, Nebraska 69341  
(308) 436-4340  
[www.nps.gov/scbl](http://www.nps.gov/scbl)

## Safety

Be prepared for the weather during your visit to Scotts Bluff.

**Summer weather** can bring high temperatures and low humidity. **It is important to have plenty of water with you to prevent dehydration**, especially during longer walks or hikes. Wear a hat and light-colored clothing to help regulate your body temperature.

**Winter weather** varies greatly. October, November, and April are generally mild; December through February are the coldest months. Wind chill is the most dangerous factor of winter weather. During cold weather, do not leave skin exposed to the air, and dress in layers to avoid overheating.

### WEATHER AVERAGES BY MONTH

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
HIGH	38	44	50	61	71	82
LOW	12	16	23	32	43	53
PRECIP.	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.8	3.0
	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
HIGH	89	87	78	65	50	40
LOW	59	56	46	34	22	14
PRECIP.	2.0	1.0	1.1	0.9	0.6	0.5

Temperature in degrees Fahrenheit.

Precipitation in inches.

**Prairie rattlesnakes**, while common, do not pose great danger to humans. If given the chance, they will try to avoid humans.

- If you encounter a rattlesnake, stop where you are. This gives the snake time to find a way to escape from you. This also allows you to locate the snake and be able to move away from it safely.
- To keep small children safe, do not allow them to walk unattended, either ahead or behind you.
- Avoiding tall grass, cracks or holes in rocks, and not putting hands or feet into places you can not see into, will help you to avoid snakes altogether.

**If bitten by a rattlesnake, do not panic. Seek medical attention as soon as possible.**

