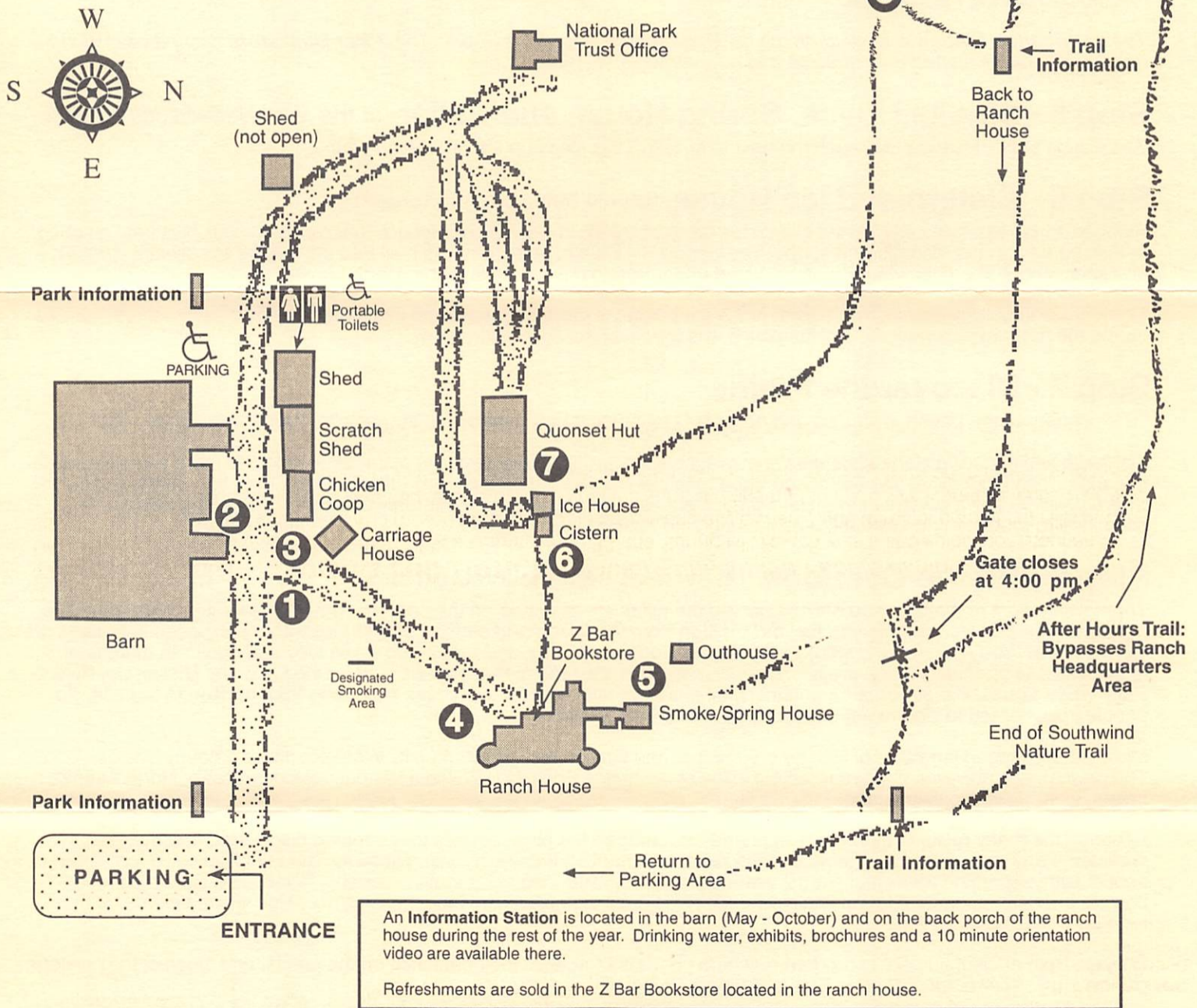


## PRAIRIE AND THE PEOPLE A Walking Tour of the Ranch Headquarters Area

Within the natural and historic features of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve there lies a story to tell - a story of people and their relationship with the land. As you tour the ranch headquarters area and the Southwind Nature Trail, think about the many ways the prairie has influenced the people and the people have influenced the prairie.

Use the map to locate the numbered posts that correspond to the text below. We want you to have a safe and enjoyable tour. You can help us care for the preserve by staying on the self-guided walking tour route, smoking only in the designated area, and leaving the grounds as you find them. Staying on trails will also help you avoid poison ivy, ticks and chiggers. Please keep pets on a leash. They are not allowed in the buildings. Lightning and other forms of severe weather are dangerous, pay attention to developing thunderstorms. Be aware of uneven and slippery walking surfaces in some areas. For your safety, do not climb or sit on the stone fences. Report any safety hazards immediately to park staff. Thank you!



### Stop 1 - Z Bar / Spring Hill Ranch (at the *Prairie for the People* exhibit)

Described as the "best improved farm in Chase County" in 1883, the Spring Hill Ranch was a showpiece for Stephen F. Jones. Jones, a wealthy cattleman who moved here from Colorado, eventually owned 7,000 acres of prime Flint Hills grazing and crop land. When developing his ranch, Jones utilized what his surroundings had to offer. His Hereford, Galloway, and Durham cattle grazed on "fine prairie grasses." Because livestock management was evolving from open range to pasture grazing, Jones needed fencing. He found an abundant supply of fencing material right on his own ranch - limestone. The 1885 census reported that the Spring Hill Ranch featured thirty miles of stone fences!

Jones engaged in other agricultural practices besides ranching. The rich bottomland soil along Fox Creek was planted in corn, oats, potatoes, and sorghum.

The ranch has changed hands many times since Jones sold it in 1888, but cattle still graze portions of the present 10,894 acres. Historically, large grazing animals including bison played an essential role in maintaining the prairie ecosystem. Cattle are now the primary grazing animals in the Flint Hills. For the many ranches in this region, prairie grasses provide a renewable resource.

As you walk around, look for other examples of how people adapted to the prairie and used its resources to develop and operate the ranch.

## **Stop 2 - The Barn** (at the *Little Barn on the Prairie* exhibit)

Stephen Jones's massive barn, measuring 60 by 110 feet, was practical and built to last. The limestone used in its construction was sturdy and fireproof. Limestone also kept the barn cool in the summer.

Although it may appear that Jones was extravagant when building his barn, he needed a big barn. In 1885 Jones's livestock numbered two hundred swine, thirty horses, eight milk cows, and four mules, in addition to the hundreds of cattle foraging on the ranch's prairie grasses. Jones used his barn to house farm animals, shelter equipment, and store the hay and grain that fed the livestock during the winter months.

Note how the barn fits into the landscape. Like other buildings on the ranch, workmen built the barn into the side of the hill. Why do you suppose they built the barn this way?

*The Information Station is located in the barn from May - October.*

## **Stop 3 - Carriage House and Chicken House** (at the *Curious Outbuildings* exhibit)

See exhibit at this location.

## **Stop 4 - The Limestone Mansion** (near the rear of the ranch house)

Workers finished building Mr. Jones's impressive ranch house in 1881. The design of the house, while featuring an ornate Second Empire architectural style, included practical adaptations to this location and the conditions of life on the prairie. To take advantage of the prevalent summer winds, tall windows on opposite sides of the house allowed a cooling draft through the home. By nestling the house into the hillside, Jones took advantage of the earth's natural insulation to aid in heating and cooling the structure.

*The Information Station is located on the back porch from November - April. The Z Bar Bookstore is open year-round and carries theme related merchandise and refreshments.*

## **Stop 5 - Smoke House, Spring House and Cellar** (at the *Vital Necessities* exhibit)

See exhibit at this location. To reach the next stop, follow the steps up the hill behind you.

## **Stop 6 - Cistern and Ice House** (on hill behind ranch house)

Stephen Jones carefully selected the site for his ranch complex. It was no coincidence that his house was built near a spring. In fact, he named his ranch for the spring; The Spring Hill Ranch. A cistern was built into the hillside to collect the water and keep it cool. The cool water was then piped underground down the hill to the spring house.

The limestone building behind the cistern is the ice house. If properly stored and insulated, ice could be preserved for use during the hot prairie summers. For insulation, the ice was packed in prairie hay.

## **Stop 7 - Discover the Prairie**

"The scenery of the prairie is striking and never fails to cause an exclamation of surprise." - Judge James Hall, 1839.

The large and imposing stone structures of the ranch are dwarfed by the vastness of the landscape. To more fully appreciate this wide-open landscape, you are encouraged to follow the path on an easy two - three minute walk to a scenic overlook where you will view a portion of the vast tallgrass prairie. For centuries, the interplay of climate, fire, and grazing have combined to produce and sustain the tallgrass prairie ecosystem.

## **Stop 8 - Prairie Overlook** (at overlook near the three exhibits)

Throughout most of the tour, you have observed the influence of prairie on the people. Now, consider the influence of the people on the prairie. What do you feel as you step from the shade and comfort of the trees into the exposed openness of the overlook? You are mirroring what settlers experienced a century-and-a-half ago when they stepped from the eastern forests into the openness of the prairie. The sky opened in this land of the tallgrass beyond the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Puffy white clouds, like airborne mountains, cast shadows over an ocean of grass stretching from horizon to horizon. To people accustomed to life among trees, this new land was foreign.

Many people judged the value of land by the number and size of trees growing on it. What good was a nearly treeless land? The newcomers, however, soon realized the value of the prairie's rich soil. Within a few decades nearly all of North America's tallgrass prairie was plowed under for crop land.

Although the many rocks in the Flint Hills prairie discouraged the plow, settlers to the region discovered that these hills provided many resources, something that the region's American Indians had long known. The Flint Hills have furnished people with edible and medicinal plants; year-round spring water; stone for tools, weapons, fences and buildings; wind for power; and rich bottomland for raising crops. The hills have also produced lush prairie grasses on which bison, and more recently cattle, could fatten.

People - from ancient hunters to modern ranchers - have left traces of their presence on the prairie, and much of their history can be found here at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve.

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## **From the overlook, you have three options.**

- You can hike the Southwind Nature Trail, a moderately strenuous 1 3/4 mile walk that will take you to the Lower Fox Creek Schoolhouse and then eventually return you to the front of the ranch house.
- You can turn right at the Southwind Nature Trail information sign. This will return you to the ranch house by an alternate route.
- You can retrace your steps back to the ice house.

We hope that you enjoyed your visit. Come back again and return often.