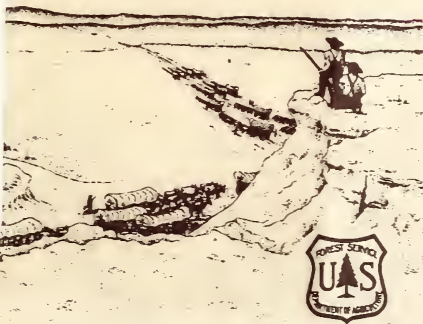


Like a Ribbon across the Prairie

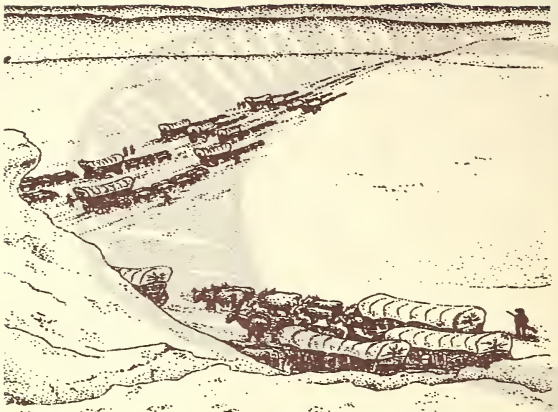
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"Like a ribbon across the prairie" is a phrase that aptly describes the winding of the historic Santa Fe Trail across the USDA Forest Service's Cimarron, Kiowa, and Comanche National Grasslands. Today, these Kansas, New Mexico, and Colorado grasslands provide recreational opportunities, conservation of grass, soil, and water, and appropriate resource use for the public benefit. But for a moment in history, they served as a corridor of commerce for travelers on the Santa Fe Trail.

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**The Santa Fe Trail on the
Cimarron, Kiowa and Comanche
National Grasslands**



The Santa Fe Trail was primarily a commercial road. From 1821 to 1846 it carried American trade goods, Mexican silver and mules, and other items between the United States and Mexico. After the Mexican-American War, Trail traffic continued with commercial and military freighting, stagecoach travel, mail delivery, and more until it was replaced by the railroad in 1880. In 1987, the Trail was designated by Congress as the Santa Fe National Historic Trail. The USDA Forest Service is working in partnership with the National Park Service and others to preserve the Trail.

From its eastern - most point at Old Franklin, Missouri, the Trail traveled west to Cimarron, Kansas, where it split into two routes. The original Trail, the Cimarron Route, headed southwest across the corner of Colorado, Oklahoma, and into New Mexico. The Mountain Route headed west into Colorado and then south to New Mexico, across the rugged Raton pass.

The routes joined again at Watrous, New Mexico. Follow the Trail through each National Grassland. Ruts, worn into the ground by thousands of oxen and mule - drawn wagons, are still visible on all three grasslands, and along the way you will see old limestone fenceposts that mark the actual Trail route. Exhibits can be found at many of the sites mentioned in this brochure. We welcome you to visit each of these locations to relive the days of the Santa Fe Trail and to experience the National Grasslands of today.

Follow the Ribbon

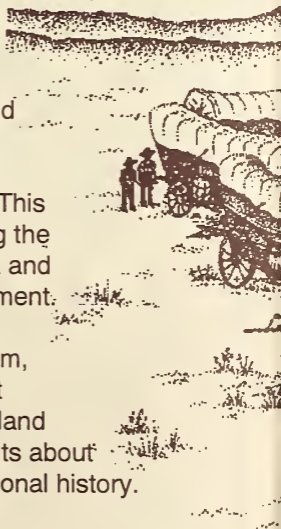
The Cimarron National Grassland

The Cimarron National Grassland near Elkhart, Kansas, contains 23 miles of the Trail's Cimarron Route, the longest Trail segment on public land. A 19-mile "companion" trail, a mowed swath across the prairie, parallels the actual Trail route, and was constructed for non-motorized traffic. Two trailheads provide drinking water, restroom facilities, vehicle and trailer parking, stock unloading facilities and ramps for mounting and dismounting horses.

Point of Rocks, the large outcropping of rock, rising above the prairie, was visible for long distances from both directions along the Trail. It was a landmark and guide for travelers. The panoramic view of the Cimarron River Valley from Point of Rocks was excellent for seeing other travelers or game. Today you can drive to the top to enjoy the view.

A short distance east of Point of Rocks is Middle Springs, a small oasis on the prairie where water rises from an ever-flowing artesian spring. It was the only reliable watering spot for 30 miles each way along the Trail. Today the spring is home to tall trees and brushy undergrowth which attract migrating birds, but during Santa Fe Trail days, it probably was a treeless and muddy waterhole, trodden and stirred by buffalo, livestock, and Trail travelers. This welcome resting spot along the Trail now has a picnic area and walking trail for your enjoyment.

The Morton County Museum, located on Highway 56 just west of the National Grassland office in Elkhart, has exhibits about the Santa Fe Trail and regional history. Don't miss it.



The Kiowa National Grassland

The winding ribbon of the Cimarron Route crosses the Kiowa National Grassland (part of the Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands) 15 miles north of Clayton, New Mexico, off Highway 406. Time, weather, and erosion have not erased the deep wagon ruts stretching across two miles of the Kiowa National Grassland. Imagine the rumble of freight wagons, cracking of bullwhips, thunder of buffalo, and quiet conversation in Spanish and English by the campfire. Here, you can experience the stark isolation of prairie travel and glimpse the subtle prairie tapestry that was savored by countless Trail travelers. Today you can step back in time and enjoy virtually the same prairie vistas and unspoiled beauty that travelers experienced more than 100 years ago.

The Trail across the Kiowa National Grassland lies between McNees Crossing and Turkey Creek, both resting and watering areas for weary travelers. Rabbit Ears Mountain and Round Mound can be seen looming to the west.



The Comanche National Grassland

The Mountain Route of the Trail coursed northwest after splitting from the main Trail at Cimarron, Kansas. Along its length, the Mountain Route unraveled the Aubry Cutoff a few miles east of the Kansas/Colorado line, and the Granada-Ft. Union Road just west of the state line. Segments of these two branches can be seen on the southern portion of the Comanche National Grassland; remnants of the Aubry Cutoff are located southeast of Springfield, and portions of the Granada-Ft. Union Road can be seen near Kim.

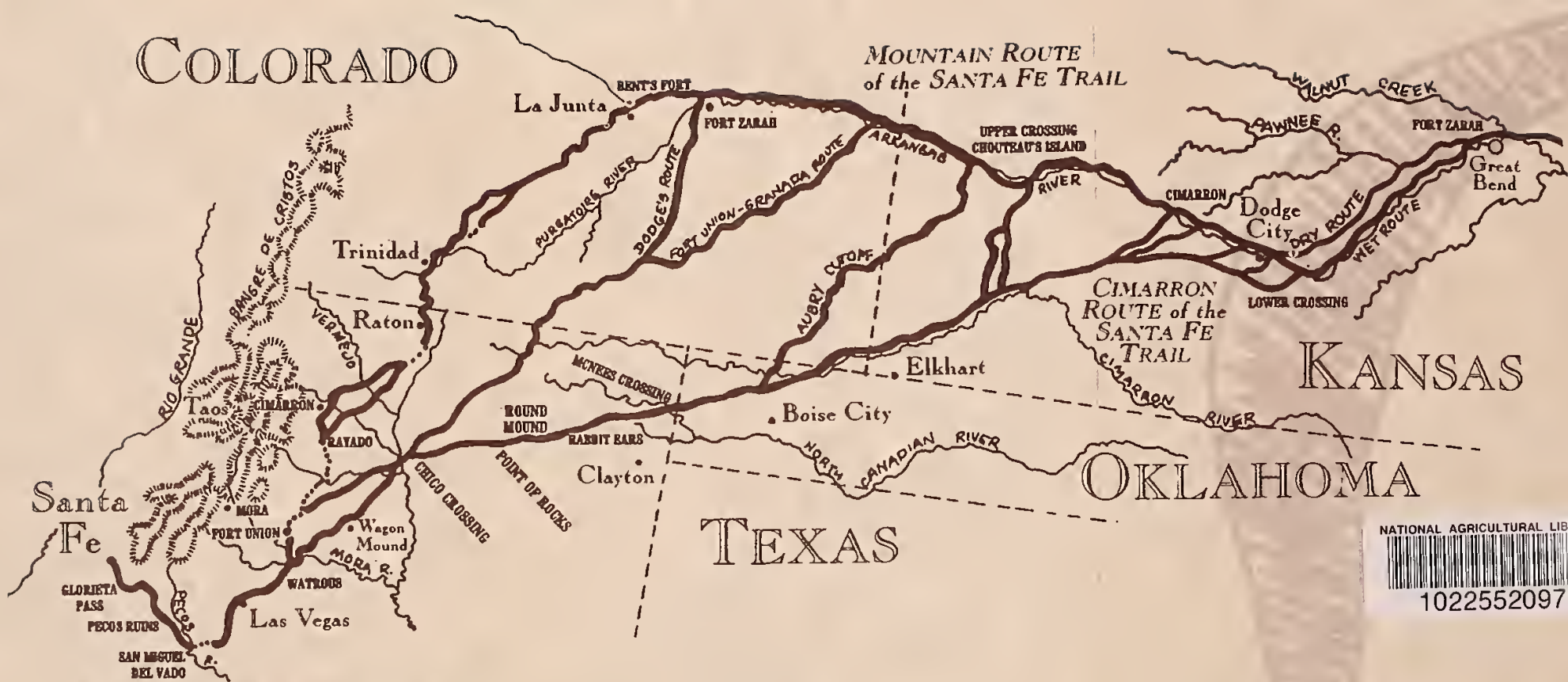
As it continued its westward path, the Mountain Route curved to the north tracing what is now Route 50. Here, the changing horizon from plains to mountains was a major milestone on the journey, surely causing great excitement among the travelers. The mountains may have also produced apprehension in anticipation of climbing over rugged Raton Pass with heavily laden wagons. Today Trail travelers can turn south at La Junta on Highway 350 to the Sierra Vista Overlook on the northern portion of the Comanche National Grassland.

Here you can imagine these same feelings as you view the mountains to the west.



You can stop for a picnic at Timpas further south on Highway 350 (restrooms, but no water available) or continue on to Iron Spring. This spring was the first reliable water source after leaving the comforts of Bents Fort, and later became the site of a stage station. Today, good Trail ruts can be found here.

COLORADO



Map from Hawk Publications
Angel Fire, New Mexico USA

NEW MEXICO

For Further information contact:



Cimarron National Grassland
242 Hwy 56 East
P.O. Box 300
Elkhart, KS 67950
(316) 697-4621

Comanche National Grassland
1420 E. 3rd St.
La Junta, CO 81050
(719) 384-2181

Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands
714 Main Street
Clayton, NM 88415
(505) 374-9652

Comanche National Grassland
27162 Hwy 287
P.O. Box 127
Springfield, CO 81073
(719) 523-6591



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Long Distance Trails Group Office
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