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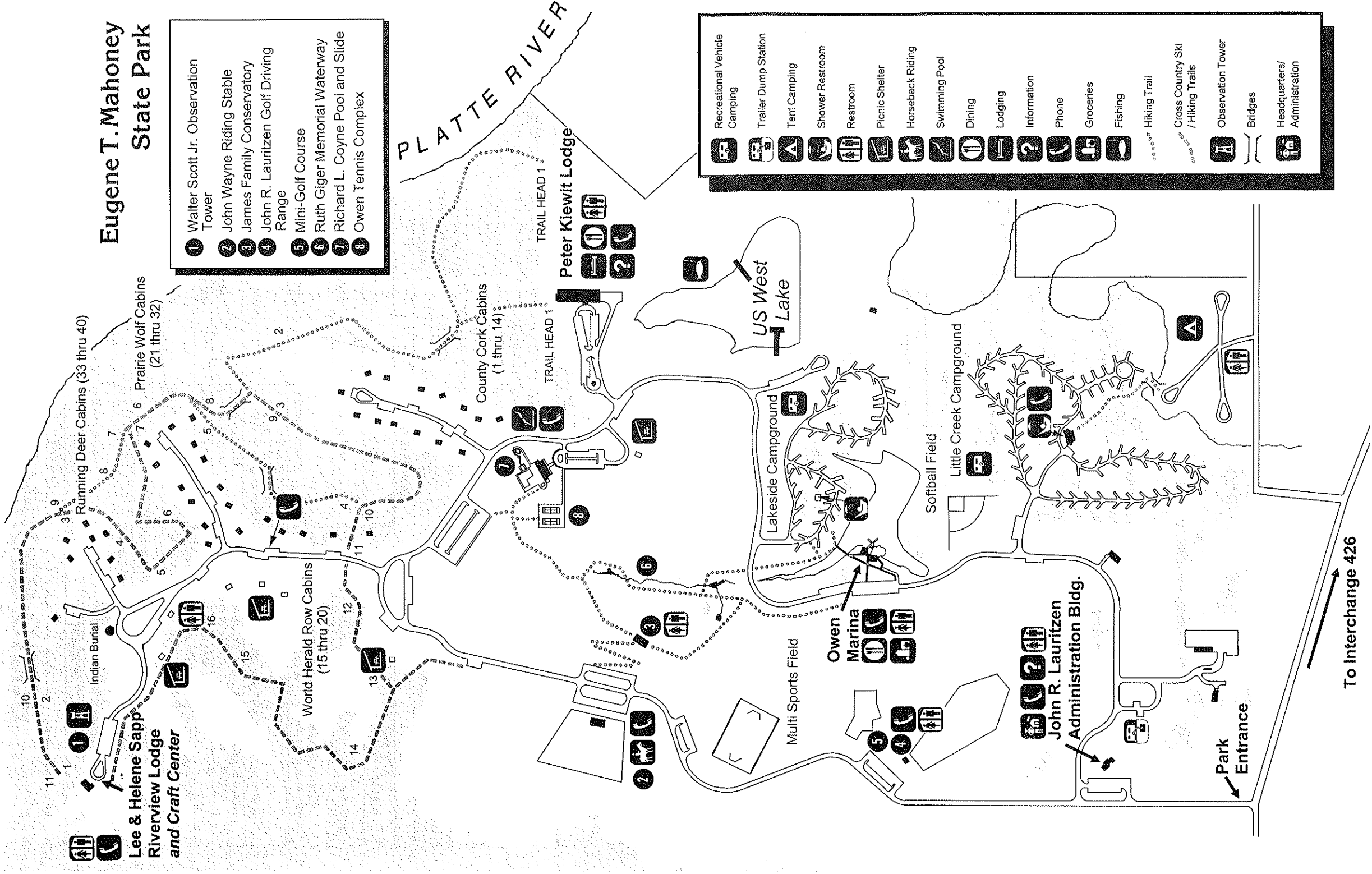
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Eugene T. Mahoney State Park



- 1 Walter Scott Jr. Observation Tower
- 2 John Wayne Riding Stable
- 3 James Family Conservatory
- 4 John R. Lauritzen Golf Driving Range
- 5 Mini-Golf Course
- 6 Ruth Giger Memorial Waterway
- 7 Richard L. Coyne Pool and Slide
- 8 Owen Tennis Complex

- Recreational Vehicle Camping
- Trailer Dump Station
- Tent Camping
- Shower Restroom
- Restroom
- Picnic Shelter
- Horseback Riding
- Swimming Pool
- Dining
- Lodging
- Information
- Phone
- Groceries
- Fishing
- Hiking Trail
- Cross Country Ski / Hiking Trails
- Observation Tower
- Bridges
- Headquarters/ Administration

To Interchange 426

EUGENE T. MAHONEY STATE PARK FALL VISITOR SERVICES GUIDE

BUILDINGS				
LOCATION	SEASON	HOURS	SERVICES/COMMENTS	
John R. Lauritzen Administration Building — Park Office	Memorial weekend through Labor Day	8 a.m. - 8 p.m.	Information, reservations, cabin & camping registration, permits, trail rides reservations & tickets, swimming pool season passes, special-use reservations.	
	Rest of year	8 a.m. - 5 p.m.		
Administration Building Theater	Daily shows Year-round	Ask at Office	Presentations on Nebraska and Mahoney State Park.	
Peter Kiewit Lodge	Year-round	24 hours	Room registration, information, meeting & conference facilities, park restaurant, gift shop, recreation room.	
Gift Shop	Year-round	Same as restaurant	Located in the Peter Kiewit Lodge.	
Lee & Helene Sapp Riverview Lodge — Group Facility	Year-round	By reservation. 8 a.m. - 10 p.m.	Upper level available for meetings, retreats, family reunions. Seats 144 at tables. \$225 including kitchen.	
Owen Marina	May 1 - Oct. 31	9 a.m. - 8 p.m. Mon.-Thur. 8 a.m. - 9 p.m. Fri.-Sat. 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. Sun.	Camp Store, fast food service, paddleboat & recreation equipment rental.	
Walter Scott Jr. Observation Tower	Year-round	Sunrise - sunset	Free. Located near Riverview Lodge. 70-foot tower gives panoramic view of park and Platte River Valley. Open weather permitting.	
James Family Conservatory	Year-round	9 a.m. - 4 p.m.	Educational exhibits on plant and aquatic life. Greenhouse also open when staff is present. Waterfall.	
Group Picnic Shelter Rental	Year-round	8 a.m. - 10 p.m.	Inquire at Park Office. Bur Oak & Wild Turkey shelters available for rent. Reservation fee — \$25 per day.	
FOOD SERVICE				
LOCATION	SEASON	DAYS	HOURS & SERVICE	
Park Restaurant located in Peter Kiewit Lodge	Memorial weekend through Labor Day	Sunday	7:30 - 10 a.m. Breakfast Bar / 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Buffet.	
	Rest of Year	Monday - Saturday	7:30 - 10 a.m. & 5 - 9 p.m. — Menu / 11 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Buffet.	
		Monday - Thursday	7:30 - 10 a.m. Breakfast / 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. & 5 - 8 p.m. Menu.	
		Friday - Saturday	7:30 - 10 a.m. & 5 - 9 p.m. Menu / 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Buffet.	
		Sundays & Holidays	7:30 - 10 a.m. Breakfast Bar / 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Buffet.	
Owen Marina	May 1 - Oct. 31	Daily—See hours above.	Sandwiches, chips, soft drinks, candy, coffee, etc.	
ACTIVITIES				
TYPE	RSVN'S	COST	SCHEDULE	LOCATION/COMMENTS
Trail Rides	at Park Office	\$6 per ride	Memorial weekend through Labor Day Labor Day - Oct. 31	Riding Stables
Richard L. Coyne Swimming Pool and Water Slide. Daily Admission: Adult \$3 / Child \$2. Season Pass: Adult \$65 / Child \$45 / Family \$120			9, 10, 11 a.m. daily, plus 2:30 & 3:30 Saturdays and Sundays.	
John R. Lauritzen Driving Range	No	Balls \$2/bucket Clubs free	1-7 p.m., M-F 10 a.m. - 7 p.m. S-S	Driving Range. Weekends only in early May.
Miniature Golf	No	\$2 per person	1-7 p.m., M-F 10 a.m. - 7 p.m. S-S	Miniature Golf Course. Weekends only in early May.
Paddleboats	No	\$3 per half-hour	9 a.m. - 8 p.m.	Owen Marina. 3-hour limit.
Recreation Equipment	No	Fees vary	9 a.m. - 8 p.m.	Owen Marina. Softball, volleyball, soccer, tennis, football, fishing rods and reels, horseshoes, etc.
Ruth Giger Memorial Fishing Bridge	No	By regulation	Sunrise - 9 p.m.	Open to children 15 & under and to handicapped adults.
US West Fishing Lake	No	Permit may be required. See regulations.	24 hours	Regulations posted. Some bait and tackle available at Owen Marina. Permits available at Park Office
Crafts Center	No	Materials only	12-6 p.m., T & Th 9 a.m. - noon & 1-6 p.m. Sat. & Sun.	Located in Lower Level of Riverview Lodge. Leathercraft, ceramic painting, woodwork, bird houses.

Hours are subject to change.

WELCOME!

Welcome to Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, Nebraska's newest outdoor recreation complex. The park opened on May 23, after five years of planning and development. We hope you have an enjoyable visit, and please ask park employees if you need information or have a question.

CHECKING OUT?

When it's time to pack up and head for home, please return the keys to the same place we gave them to you. Cabin keys to the Administration Building; Lodge room keys to the Lodge front desk.

PETS

Please keep pets attended and leashed at all times when on the park grounds. Please, no pets in the Kiewit Lodge or other public buildings.

HIKES . . .

There are six miles of hiking trails in the park. Most wind through the oak forest between Kiewit and Riverview lodges. A nature trail loop, identifying common trees and shrubs, is located near Kiewit Lodge. Paved trails connect Owen Marina, Giger Waterway, James Conservatory and the Coyne Pool complex. Please don't hike on the park horse trail.

. . . AND BIKES

Please ride bikes on the park roads only.

FISHING

Fishing is permitted on both the Owen Marina Lake and US West Lake. Largemouth bass, bluegill and catfish are found in both lakes, however, there are no catchable-size fish in US West Lake at this time. Trout are stocked in US West Lake during fall and winter months. Please abide by regulations and enjoy a fishing outing in the park.

HORSESHOE PITS

Horseshoe pits are located in Little Creek and Lakeside campgrounds and in the day-use picnic area.

SAND VOLLEYBALL

Court is located near the swimming pool.

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park
RR 3 Box 305
Ashland, NE 68003
Phone: (402) 944-2523

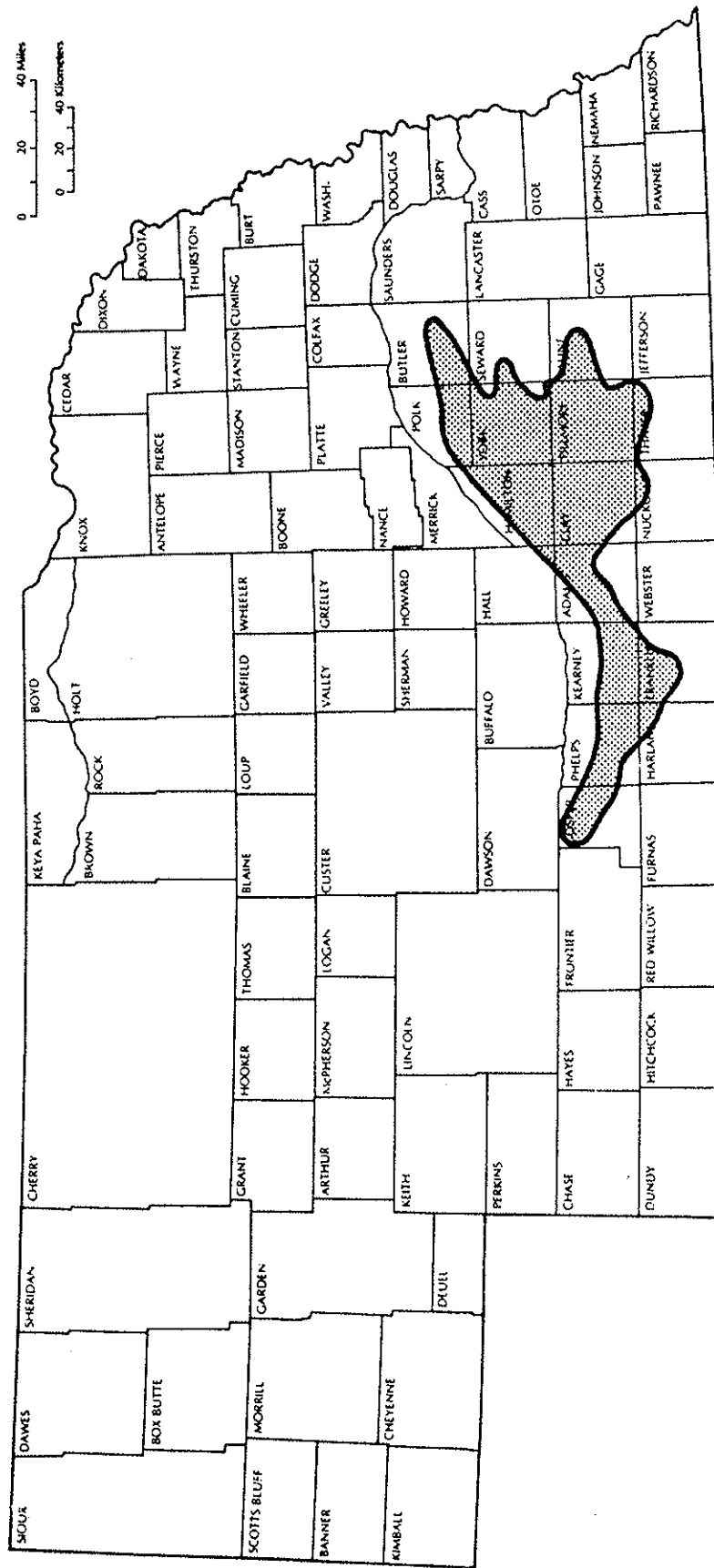
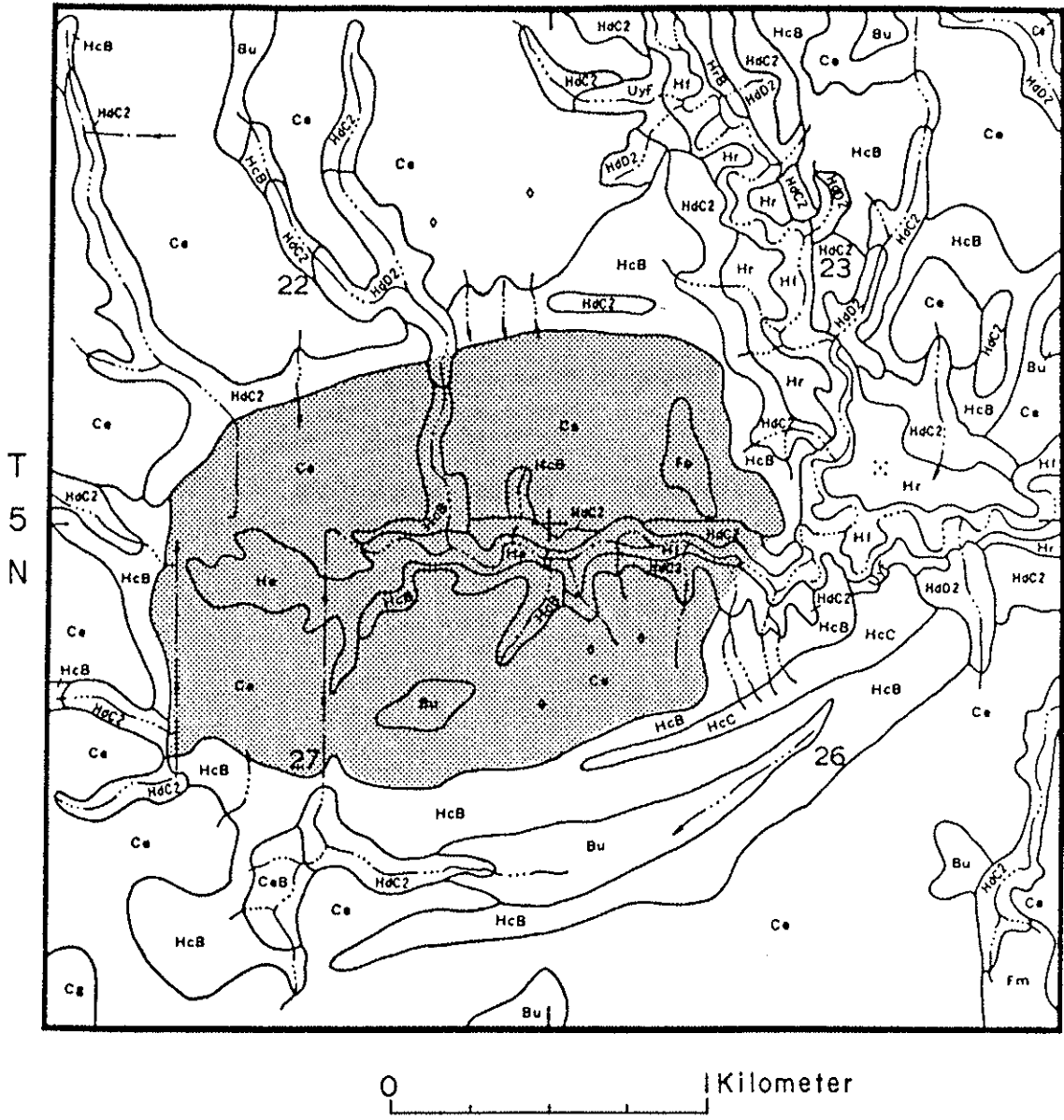


Figure 3. Approximate boundary of Rain Basin Area, south central Nebraska. (Adapted from Starks, 1984)



- Bu Butler silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- Ce Crete silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- Cg Crete silt loam, thick solum, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- Fm Fillmore silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- Fo Fillmore silt loam, drained, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- HcB Hastings silt loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes
- HcC Hastings silt loam, 3 to 6 percent slopes
- HdC2 Hastings silty clay loam, 3 to 6 percent slopes, eroded
- HdD2 Hastings silty clay loam, 6 to 11 percent slopes, eroded
- He Hobbs silt loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes
- Hf Hobbs silt loam, channeled
- Hr Hord silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- HrB Hord silt loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes
- UyF Uly-Hobbs silt loams, 0 to 30 percent slopes

- DRAINAGE**
- Intermittent
- Drainage end
- Canals or ditches
- Drainage and/or irrigation
- DEPRESSION OR SINK**
-
- MISCELLANEOUS**
- Sandy spot

Figure 2. Soil map of sections 22, 23, 26 and 27 T. 5 N., R. 5 W. Clay County, Nebraska. Shaded area indicates the floor of a breached basin. (Hammer et al., 1981)

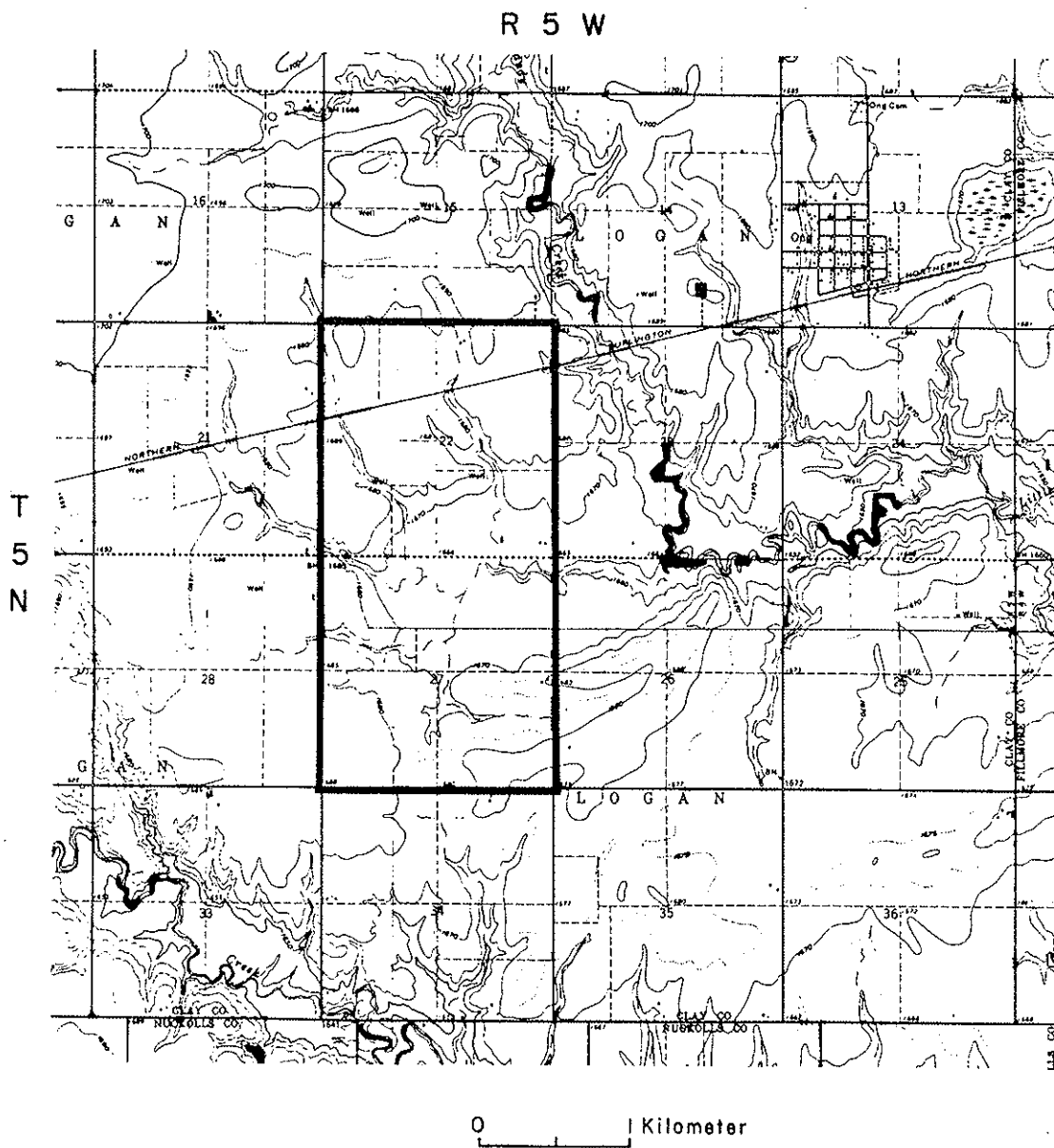
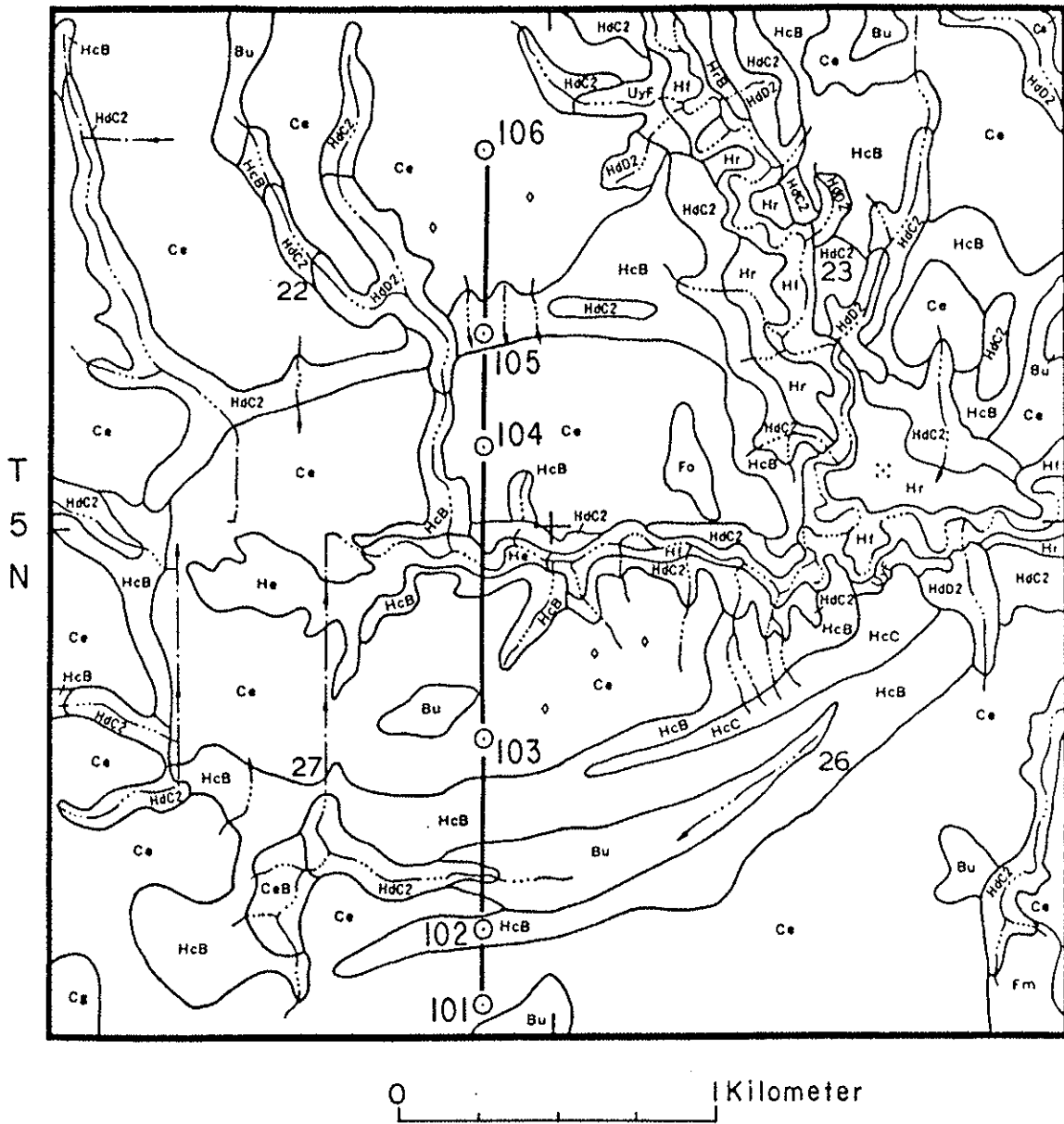


Figure 7. Topographic map of the southeast part of T. 5 N., R. 5 W. parts of Ong and Davenport quadrangles, Clay County, Nebraska. Sample area 1 indicated by heavy line surrounding sections 22 and 27.



- Bu Butter silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- Ce Crete silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- Cg Crete silt loam, thick solum, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- Fm Fillmore silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- Fo Fillmore silt loam, drained, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- HcB Hastings silt loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes
- HcC Hastings silt loam, 3 to 6 percent slopes
- HdC2 Hastings silty clay loam, 3 to 6 percent slopes, eroded
- HdD2 Hastings silty clay loam, 6 to 11 percent slopes, eroded
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- Hf Hobbs silt loam, channeled
- Hr Hord silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes
- HrB Hord silt loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes
- UyF Uly-Hobbs silt loams, 0 to 30 percent slopes

- DRAINAGE**
- Intermittent
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- Drainage and/or irrigation
- DEPRESSION OR SINK**
-
- MISCELLANEOUS**
- Sandy spot

Figure 5. Soil map of sample area 1, sections 22, 23, 26 and 27 T. 5 N., R. 5 W. Clay County Nebraska. Soil sample sites 101 to 106 are indicated along the transect. (Hammer et al., 1981)

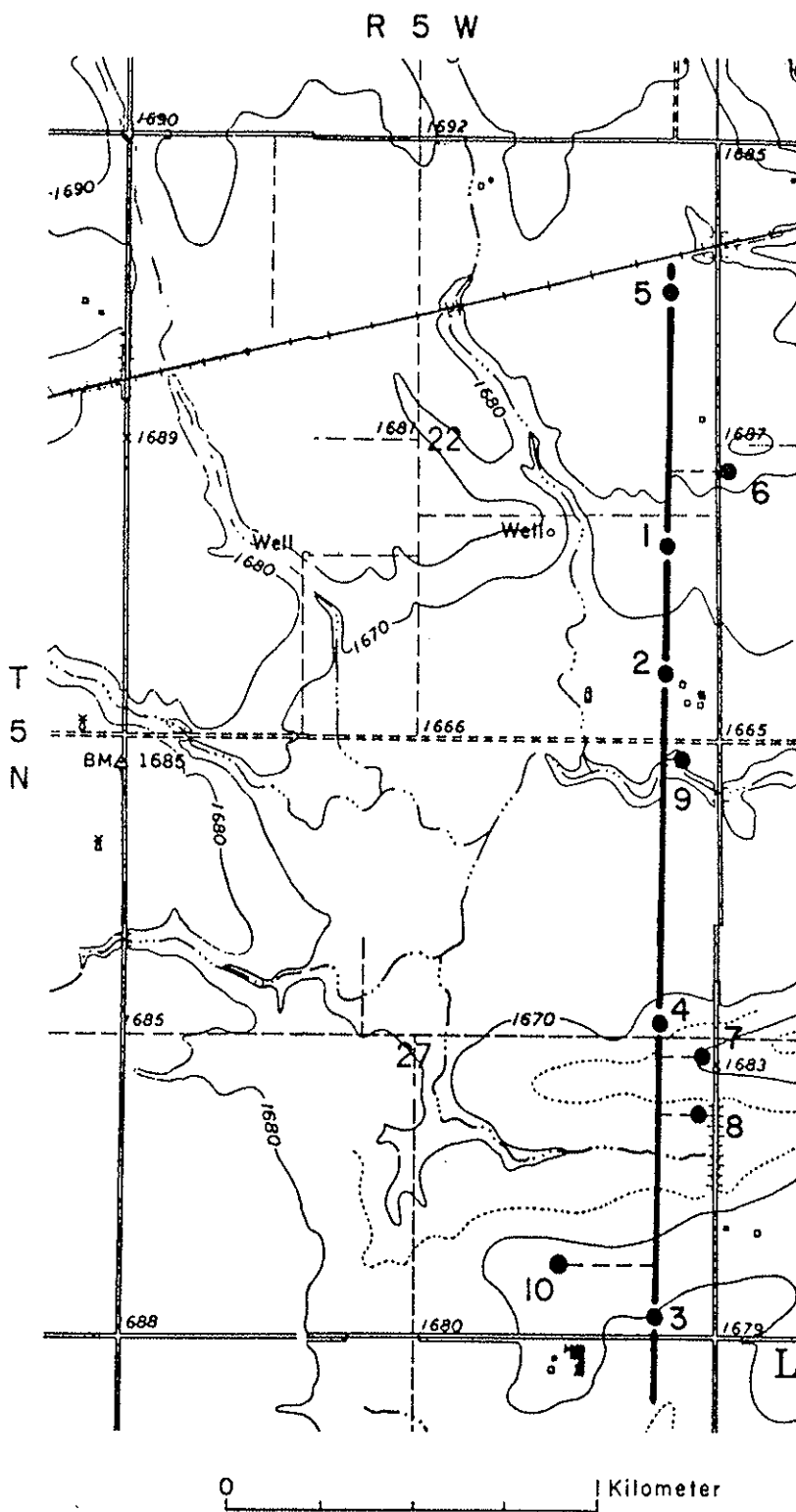


Figure 13. Topographic map of sections 22 and 27 T. 5 N., R. 5 W. Clay County, Nebraska. Subsurface investigation sites 1 to 10 are indicated along the transect.

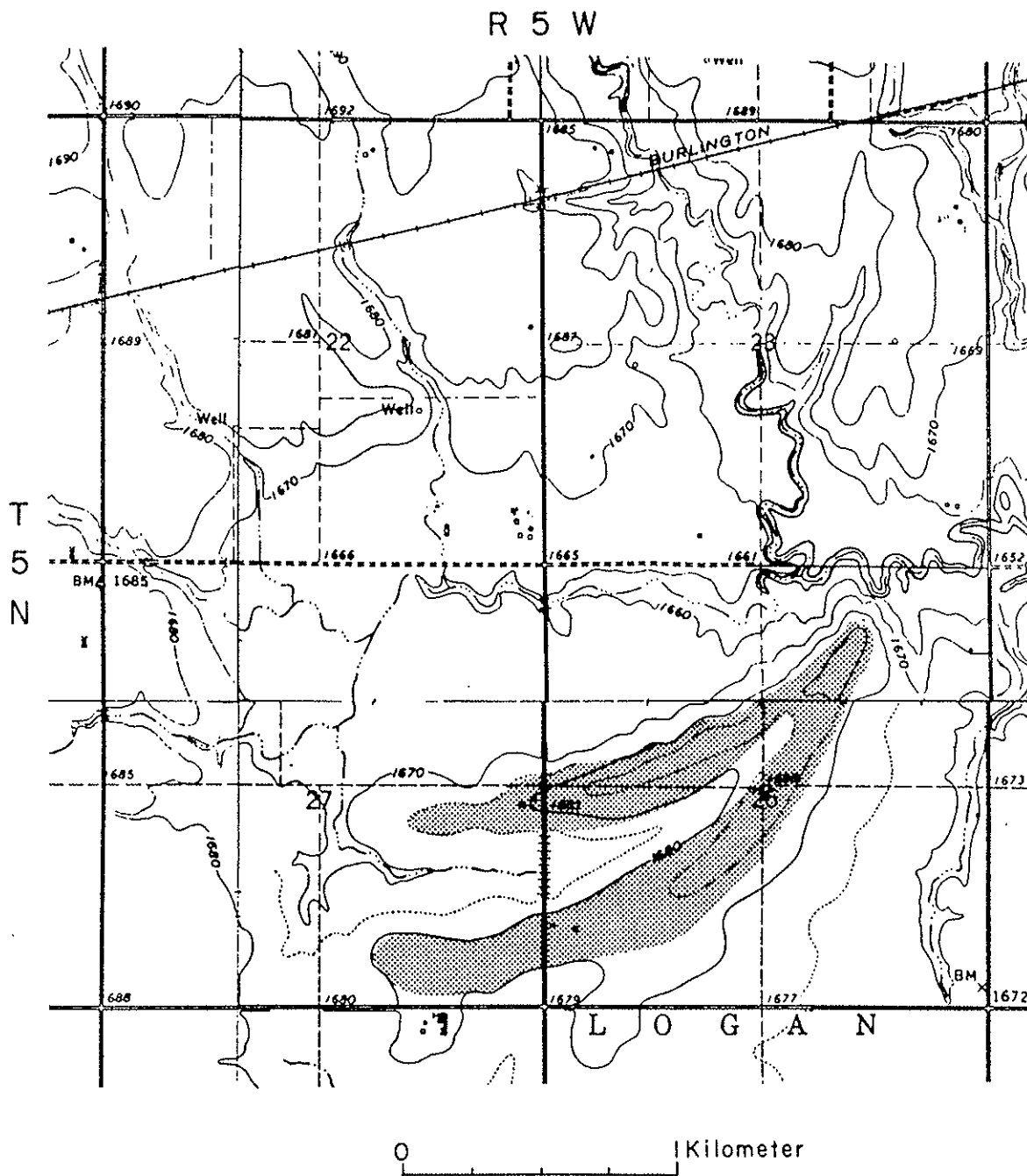


Figure 17. Topographic map of sections 22, 23, 26 and 27 T. 5 N., R. 5 W. Clay County Nebraska. Shaded area indicates the ridge accompanying the basin at sample are 1.

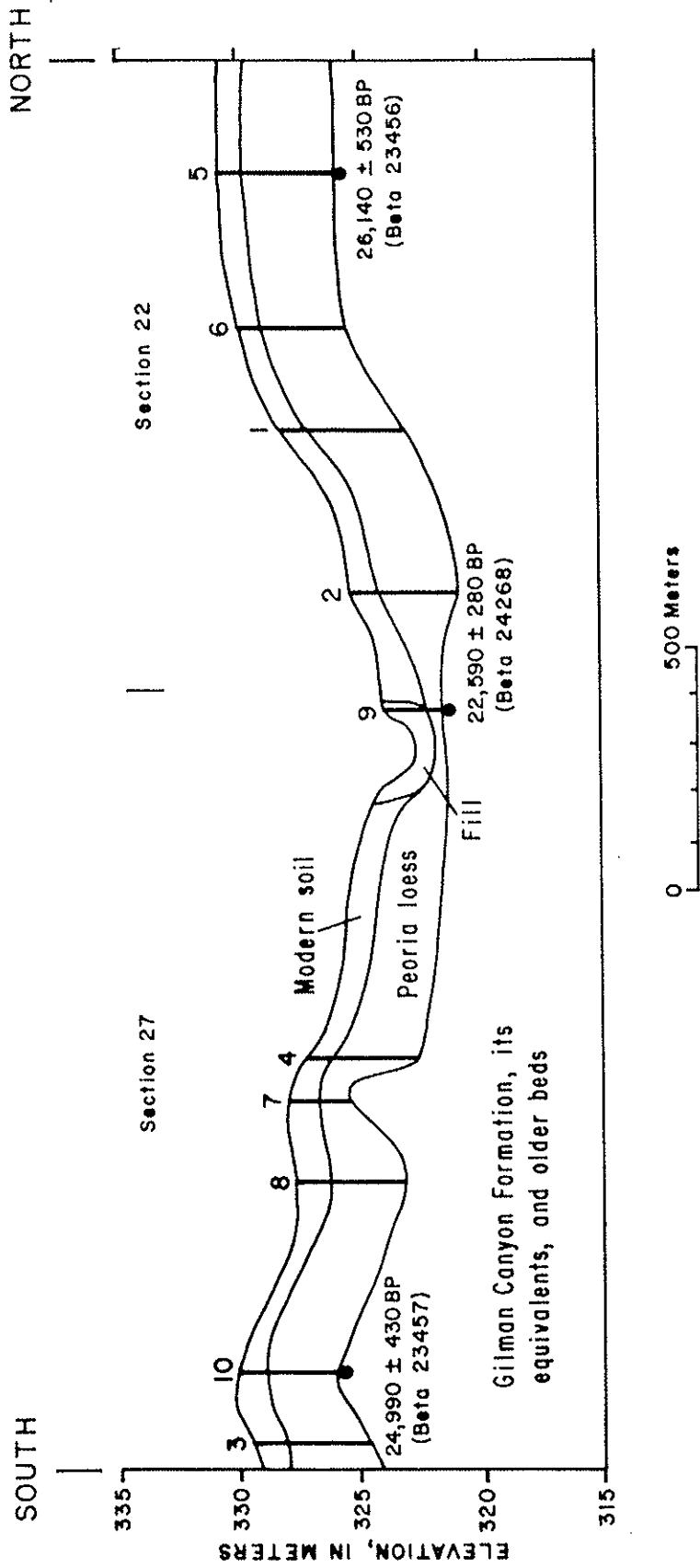


Figure 67. Cross section along transect at sample area 1. Sections 22 and 27 T. 5 N., R. 5 W., Clay County, Nebraska. 144

Little remains of once-busy stopover on Oregon Trail

(In 1866, James Meline wrote "A ranche is not a dwelling, nor a farmhouse, nor a store, nor a tavern, but all of these, and more. It is connected with a large corral, and capable of standing an Indian siege. You can procure entertainment there . . . and they keep for sale canned fruits, knives, playing cards, saddles and goggles . . .")

As soon as the popularity of the Oregon Trail faded, so did Spring Ranche. In the ensuing years, the community became known as Spring Ranch, as people dropped the 'e' off the name. Today, only the dilapidated hotel and depot remain, and the once bustling town has become a ghost town.

This place also has its own memorable ghosts -- Elizabeth Taylor and Tom Jones, whose names were often spoken in hushed tones because of their notorious reputations. They were accused of killing ranch hands instead of paying them. Eventually, both were hung while still in their mid-thirties.

Spring Ranch, the town

Once a bustling town in south central Nebraska and an important stop on the Oregon Trail, winds now howl through the decaying buildings of what little

remains of the village of Spring Ranch.

Nestled in the quiet valley of the Little Blue River, this all but forgotten village hides, with its age, the secrets of an era that is past.

More than 100 years ago, fragments of the transient population of about 250,000 moved across the Great Plains, stopped long enough to make a permanent mark at Spring Ranch.

There were many types, settlers, draft dodgers, Pony Express riders, and Indians. They came by horse, by wagon, by stagecoach. There were families, drifters, do-gooders, killers and thieves, and most of them wanted to go west.

In 1865, the traffic was very heavy through Spring Ranch, since there were no other settlements in Adams and Clay County except Pawnee Ranch and Liberty Farm, both Pony Express stations.

An average of 300 teams a day went through, and stages were running, one each way, daily. Buffaloes, elks, antelopes and wild turkeys abounded. Everything was sold by the pound.

First settlement

Hon. J. B. Weston made the first settlement in Clay County in 1857. He built a log house at the Pawnee Ranch but soon transferred his

claim to Fred and George Roper. They held it until 1864 when they were driven off by the Indians.

In 1858, James H. Lemon kept Liberty Farm Ranch as an agent of Wells Fargo & Co.

A man by the name of Metcalf was the first to build and make a settlement at Spring Ranch. That was a temporary situation, so James Bainter has the honor of being the first permanent settler in Clay County. He took the first homestead in the county in 1864, and opened a store of general merchandise dealing in livestock and produce.

The first townsite of Spring Ranch was located about a half mile northwest of the original site. The town was then moved to the south side of the Little Blue River, and established in 1870 by James Bainter, Robert Cargill, Lewis Thayer and D. W. Evans.

The mill, cemetery, the first church, and the post office were built on this site south of the river. It was a stopping place for stage coaches and as an Oregon Trail route as early as 1850. The railroad came through in 1886. It was then that the decision was made to move the town to where it is now located on the north side of the Little Blue River.

Businesses grew rapidly, with

two stagecoach stations, post office and hotel, general store, millinery store, wagon shop, flour mill, blacksmith, a bank, barber shop, pool hall, molasses mill, broom factory, lumber yard, implement store and elevator.

Railroad gets stormy start at Spring Ranch

The railroad came through Spring Ranch in 1886. History reveals that a terrible snow storm occurred that year, which came suddenly out of a clear blue sky. The temperature dropped to below freezing in a matter of minutes. Twenty men who worked for the railroad froze to death as a result of that storm.

With the coming of the railroad, Spring Ranch was moved from the south side of the river to the north side. To obtain a depot in town, it was necessary for the town people to subscribe money to the railroad.

Livestock was shipped out and equipment was brought into town on the rail line.

The track was removed in 1940. The depot and land were sold. Henry Davis, who still resides in the community, purchased the railroad right-of-way, and Fred Ockinga bought the depot.

Bauman's Butcher Shop

Look for Coca Cola Products

at the

Child 'grown old' relates memories of 1885 hanging

SPRING RANCH -- A story is recorded in the special edition of the history of Spring Ranch -- 1870 to 1990.

Mrs. Joe Hile, at age 89, and living in Russell, Iowa, shared information in the book about her life in Clay County as a child and as a young adult. She had attended school at Spring Ranch at the time when Tom Jones and Elizabeth Taylor were hung from the bridge.

Mrs. Hile was little Pearl Wheeler in 1885. She was born in Wisconsin in 1876 and came to Spring Ranch in an immigrant (railroad) car with her family just previous to the March 15 lynching. In fact, her father, George Wheeler, the newcomer, was asked to join the "necktie party" but "declined as he didn't know the circumstances."

She reinforced the story that the Joneses robbed the neighbors, burned their buildings, and rustled cattle. "They had just killed a man driving by their place with a load of brush," she related in an interview for the book.

"No law enforcement officer could control them. They lived in seclusion in a den-like house on the bottom land of the Little Blue River, much below the other residents. Their depredations had gone on for ten long years," she said.

Once Pearl's little friend, Nannie Graham, living at Fairfield, told her that the Jones gang had been at their house. On their way home, after being arrested and jailed at Clay Center (the county seat), the

men demanded to stay overnight at Grahams. The family did not dare refuse.

"Nannie had been afraid for her life," related Mrs. Hile.

Panoramic view

Children learned of the lynching at school on Monday, though it had occurred early Sunday morning -- Saturday night to the vigilantes.

The bodies were not discovered until Charles Mazour, a little Bohemian, fled to Spring Ranch in terror trying to explain it in his very broken English. A woman walking over the bridge reported it.

"The Spring Ranch school house stood on a high hill west of the town." Mrs. Hile said, "with the Oregon Trail snaking along near by. All the children had to do to see the panorama of Nebraska's early history plodding steadily west beside the "big canvas-covered wagons" with their ever-rolling wheels, was to step outside.

"The teacher would let us go to watch when a train appeared.

"There were Indians, too.

"Some of the wagons would have slogans like "In God we trusted; In Kansas we busted."

Ghost town

Spring Ranch, or Sprang Ranche as it was sometimes spelled, still bears the aura of Nebraska history, despite the fact that it is now a ghost town.

The roads were surveyed by chains from this or that young tree in 1858, according to the data

recopied September 15, 1873. The Little Blue River sprawled around the roads in every direction, with many deadends.

There is a rivalry in the Spring Ranch area of who knows the most stories about the lynching and circumstances around it, Mrs. Hile explained in that interview.

But, essentially, they agree on the facts.

"The hills were high and the ravines deep," she said. "The bridge where the two were hanged was a road bridge." She was emphatic about that.

Newspapers of the era published a variety of descriptions of the bridge, drawing denials from descendants of Spring Ranch natives, including old residents of the town as well as the railroads.

Mrs. Hile related that "Men were buying rope in a Spring Ranch store before the Jones brother and sister were hung." It must have been the first mob, according to the story written in the Omaha World Herald Sunday Magazine dated May 21, 1961.

The headline of one read, "Brother and Sister Hanged from a Railroad Bridge," while the story stated, "a mob of about 50 men surprised the house of Jones, and calling out Tom Jones and Mrs. Taylor, hanged them to a bridge over the Little Blue."

The Bee wasn't the only paper that did this. So did the Nebraska State Journal on the same date. One headline read "The Participants of a Murder Hanged to

a Railroad Bridge" while the story said "a bridge about 40 yards from their home."

The Nebraska Signal in Geneva, in reprinting the 80-year-old article on March 4, 1965, noted, "A man and woman, accused of murder in Clay County, were hanged from a Little Blue River bridge."

Although the three papers declared that the mob numbered 50, the real story is that there were two mobs. Several weeks earlier, the first mob did number 50 to 75, but as they headed toward the focal point, disappeared into the shadowy ravines by twos and threes, Mrs. Hile's story says.

The vigilantes of March 15, 1885, numbered about 15 and met close to their victims' home.

Old timers were right

The newspapers hung their victims to railroad bridges which did not exist so the old timers were right, the account says.

Mrs. Hile's family, the Wheelers, were closely connected with people and events involved with the lynching. They were living in the small seething community. Not only were there physical depredations, but there were unexplained disappearances of people living with the Joneses, even to the mysterious death of Elizabeth Taylor's husband in 1882.

Actually, only five men, the leaders, were arrested for the lynching. The trial was a fiasco -- the case was dismissed.

Spring Ranch Cemetery has unique place in state history

SPRING RANCH -- The 113-year-old Spring Ranch Cemetery is unique in Nebraska because it is the burial site of the only two people to be lynched in Clay County.

Elizabeth Taylor and her brother, Thomas Jones, were buried after a group of about 15 vigilantes roused the pair out of her home and hung them from a river bridge. The lynching of a woman is rare in the annals of history, and it is believed that she is one of only two or three to be hung by a mob in all of the United States.

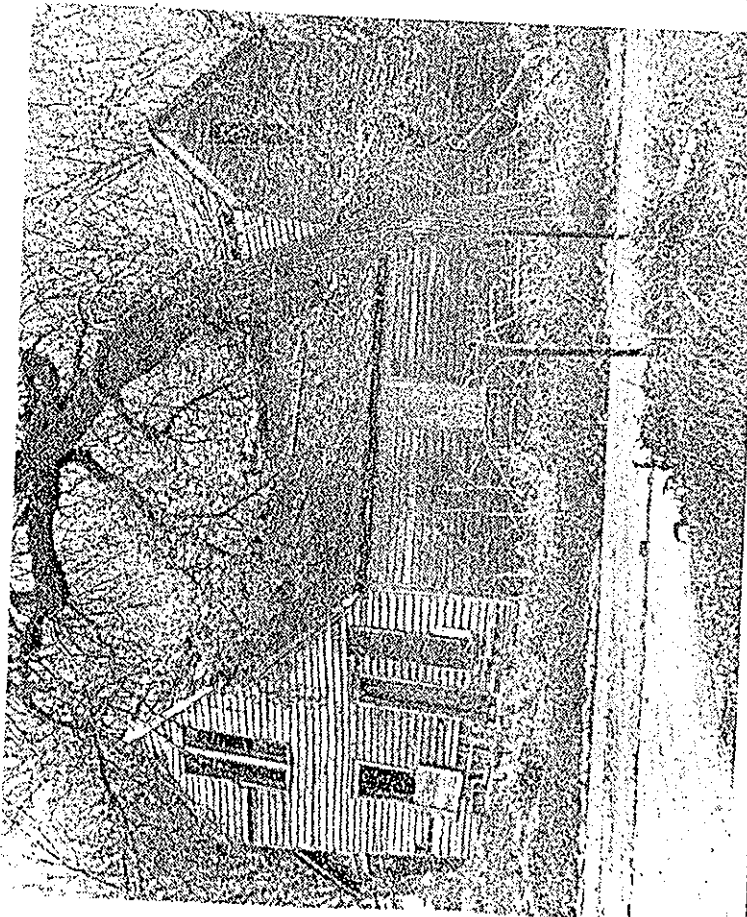
The Spring Ranch Cemetery Association was organized January 14, 1880, just five years, two months and one day before the legendary hanging took place.

At that meeting, it was voted to

have a wagon road to the cemetery. At a later meeting on January 31, 1880, the decision was made to set off 10 lots in the southwest corner of the cemetery as a Potters Field. The sexton was paid \$2.50 for digging graves.

Records indicate that the first burial in the cemetery area was in 1872, before the formal organization even took place. In 1890, a sizeable number of children were buried in the cemetery after dying from diphtheria and the flu.

After the cemetery board was disbanded, the county took over the moving of the site. Members of the Spring Ranch Homemakers Extension Club clean the cemetery once a year. They dedicated a marker at the cemetery in 1970, commemorating a century of life in the community.



EERIE SOUNDS that sometimes whistle through the open windows and doors of the old hotel are keen reminders of a bustling business where travelers on the Oregon Trail could replenish their supplies or get refreshed for the next long portion of their journey westward. CCN Photo by Evelyn Aufdenkamp

Ghostly breezes inhabit old hotel

SPRING RANCH -- The hotel, now a mere shell of what it once was, was one of the most important buildings in the town of Spring Ranch. The building housed many families. It was used as a grocery store, plus eggs and cream were purchased by the owners from local residents. People could also buy gas there.

The hotel had six private rooms upstairs, a large hall and a large

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Complete Car and Truck Care



Edgar, Nebraska

Phone 224-8145

Oregon Trail travelers left tracks in history

SPRING RANCH -- The Oregon Trail, the transcontinental "highway" of 150 years ago, was known to traders, ranchers and overland stage drivers as the "Military Road".

The trail started northwest at Independence, Missouri, and for a distance of 41 miles, it was identical with the Santa Fe Trail. The 242-section from the Kansas River to the Little Blue crossed Clay County and headed toward the Platte River. From beginning to end at Fort Vancouver, according to historical records, it added up to a total of 2,020 miles.

The story of the overland trails tells of the westward march of the American people. The wagons, as many as 400 a day, left deep furrows across the prairies, and some of those are still visible in the Spring Ranch area on pasture ground.

Along these trails, thousands of men, women and children traveled with ox teams, carts, wheelbarrows and on foot, headed west to settle in what was then virtually unknown territory.

The Oregon Trail began in Nebraska as early as 1813, when a small band of returning Astorians traveled, leading their one poor horse, tramped their weary way down the Platte Valley to the Otoe village. From there, they took canoes for their journey down the river.

Those first Oregon travelers left no track deep enough for others to follow, so they simply told people about the way. Fur traders on horseback and on foot followed nearly the same route.

It's recorded that on April 10, 1830, a man named Milton Sublette left St. Louis with ten wagons and one milk cow. The group returned to St. Louis the same summer, bringing back ten wagons loaded with furs and the faithful cow that had provided the travelers milk all the way. Those were the first wagon wheels on the Oregon Trail across Nebraska. Others followed, and thus was formed the historic trail.

The cow and the original old horse which had carried the burdens 17 years earlier for the Astorians had made their own tracks along the trail, but those have long since disappeared.

During the Gold Rush days of 1849 to 1860, the Oregon Trail became the greatest traveled highway in the world, wider and more beaten than a city street, and hundreds of thousands passed over it.

Indians who watched the wagons travel west called the route the "Great Medicine Road of the Whites".

A priest named Father DeSmet tells of the wagon trains he met on the Oregon Trail in 1858:

"Each train consisted of 26 wagons, each wagon drawn by six yokes of oxen. The trains made a line 50 miles long. Each wagon is marked with a name as in the case of ships, and those names served to furnish amusement to the passers-by. Such names as The Constitution, The President, The Great Republic, The King of Bavaria, Louis Napoleon, Dan O'Connell, Old Kentucky, were daubed in great letters on each side of the carriage.

"On the prairie, the wagoner assumes the style (role) of Captain, having (been) placed in command of his wagon and 12 oxen. At a distance, the white awnings of the wagons have the effect of a fleet of vessels with all canvas spread."

The people of Spring Ranch have always been aware of that community's role in frontier history, particularly since the Oregon Trail cuts through the town and township.

Overland stages were the main means of travel before the advent of the railroad coach.

The great trails across Nebraska, with Oregon Trail just one of them, served as highways for the Overland Stage from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean.

The most commonly used vehicle for this purpose was the light Concord coach, called that because they were first built in Concord, New Hampshire. They usually accommodated nine passengers inside and often one or two on the outside with the driver.

With the Overland Stage came the Overland Mail. Through Nebraska, this service primarily followed the Oregon Trail.

In commemoration of the mail route during the bicentennial year of 1976, activities included the retracing of the Old Oregon Trail by a group of riders. The trip began on June 16, 1976, at Independence, MO. The riders tried to stay on the actual Oregon Trail as much as possible. On July 3, they rode a double leg. The first group of riders left Spring Ranch at 5 p.m. for a 25-mile ride. By early September, the group had completed the ride through Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon.



FRANCIS HUFF was only 25 years old when he died of appendicitis along the Oregon Trail. On his grave marker is written this inscription, "Remember friends as you pass by, As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so shall you be, Remember this and think of me." He was a traveler from Marshall County, Indiana.

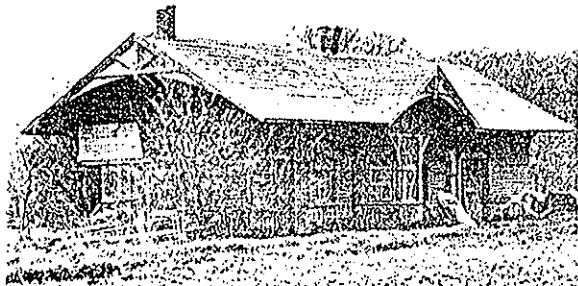
Photo Raclene Schliep

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Swim Rings	Fans	Grass Seed
Fishing Supplies	Tools	Beach Balls
	Weed Trimmers and Line	Sprinklers
		Garden Hose

Saathoff Hardware
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Phone 224-3185 Edgar



THE OLD DEPOT stands as mute evidence of the trains that made regular runs through Spring Ranch. The first year that the railroad was in operation, a sudden snowstorm blew in, causing the deaths of 20 railworkers.

CCN Photo by Evelyn Aufdenkamp

Lynching of Liz Taylor -- victim or a murderers?

SPRING RANCH -- Numerous versions of the lynching of Elizabeth Taylor and her brother, Tom Jones, have been handed down through the years since the event occurred March 15, 1885.

One that has been most consistently agreed upon says that two teenage boys murdered a man by the name of John Roberts of Spring Ranch on January 8, 1885.

As a result, their mother and uncle, Elizabeth Taylor and Thomas Jones, were hung by a band of vigilantes at a wagon bridge across the Little Blue River about three miles southeast of Spring Ranch.

The land is now owned and operated by Sonnie and Marlon Fike Jr. and is the site of the Manna Resort Christian Camp.

Tom Jones lived in a sod house with his mother, and his sister lived nearby. Elizabeth Taylor was described as a dark-eyed Welsh woman, stockily built. According to Spring Ranch tradition, she was regarded as a ruthless citizen of the area. She received public notice with the sudden and mysterious disappearance of her husband, and nothing else is apparently recorded about him.

Those two farms were situated near an old feeding station on the Oregon Trail. In addition to the two teenage sons, she apparently also had two younger children. An ever-present group of cowboys and cattle thieves seemed prone to carry out her specific plans.

Family stories shared through the years say that trouble often arose between Mrs. Taylor and the gang around her. Two or three of them disappeared mysteriously, as had her husband. Her sons were said to have learned early the ways of their mother.

John Roberts and Liz Taylor had many disputes over Roberts taking lumber from her 80-acre tract. In spite of her threats, he took the wood. The traditional story says that as he passed by her house, she sent her sons out to shoot him. This incident infuriated the people in the countryside and spurred them into action.

Vigilantes gather

A vigilante committee gave the Taylor and Jones families 30 days to get out of the county, but the warning was ignored.

One evening, about 75 men on horseback met at the Spring Ranch mill to discuss the situation.

Since Mrs. Taylor and Jones had become partners in their ranching operation, it was the intention of the vigilantes to hang both of them. When the time came, however, most of the riders had dropped out of the posse, and too few remained when the destination was finally reached.

More subtle plans were formulated and a stool pigeon, in the person of a cowboy, went to work for Mrs. Taylor, making himself part of her household, and apparently intended to avail himself of her so-called "womanly affections".

Another meeting was held March 14, 1885, at the mill and this time, 15 men carried out their deadly plan.

The cowboy had persuaded Mrs. Taylor and her household to visit the nearby home of her mother, Mrs. Jones, and Tom Jones. Late at night, a party of 50 men from all parts of the surrounding area, who had been victims of alleged outlaw activities went to Mrs. Jones' sod house. The cowboy had, earlier in the evening, removed the bullets from all the guns in the house and had fulfilled all the necessary plans for the coming of the mob.

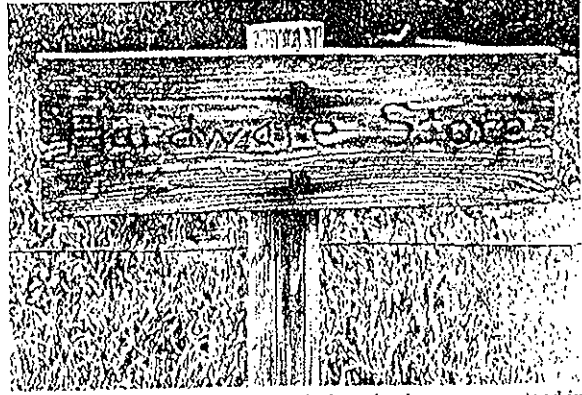
Elizabeth Taylor, 36, and Tom Jones, 33, were forcibly taken from the sod house. Their hands were tied and they were led to a nearby wagon bridge. There the mob tried to extort a confession from them.

Mrs. Taylor is said to have acknowledged that her brother had hired a man to burn John Llewellyn's barn.

When the crowd's intentions became evident to the pair, the brother and sister prayed loudly in their native Welsh language for several minutes. They were then led under the bridge. Men tied halter ropes around their necks and to the bridge, placed the two on horses, then fired their guns to startle the horses so they would run away. The lynching has been reported to have taken place at about 2 a.m.

Frightened farmhand discovers the bodies

Nine hours later, in the daylight, a farm hand in the community was hunting in the vicinity of the bridge



WOODEN SIGNS mark the sites of where businesses once stood in Spring Ranch, all along what was the town's main street. CCN Photo by Evelyn Aufdenkamp

and saw a woman's shoes. Thinking that this was peculiar, he took another look and discovered the hanging. Dropping his gun, he ran for the home of his employer and hid himself in his room for several hours before he was able to control his fright enough to tell what he had seen.

Legend has it that the shock to his nervous system was so great that, from then on, he suffered a permanent speech affliction.

Mrs. Taylor's frame home was cleared for an inquest conducted by the Clay County sheriff. When a young herdsboy, who had lived in her home for some time and who had been present for the lynching, tried to tell who some of the mob had been, he was told by the sheriff to answer only what was asked of him.

"Insufficient evidence"

Eight men were arrested for the lynching, but Judge E. P. Burnett of Sutton ruled that the evidence was insufficient to convict any of them. They were freed after a trial at Harvard.

The other prisoners were taken to the home of a neighbor and told when and how they might leave the county.

March 15, 1885, placed Mrs. Taylor in the dubious notoriety of being a cold-blooded murderer and as long as folk tales are handed down from father to son, she may well live in the annals of Spring Rancho township history as either a victim or a murderers.

A row of five tombstones marks the burial sites of the parents, Margaret and John W. Jones, as well as Mrs. Taylor's husband, in the Spring Ranch Cemetery, and the lynching victims.

Hanging knot being displayed at museum

(The following letter was handwritten to Ward K. Newcomb, Clay County Clerk, to accompany the knot which remained from the lynching of Elizabeth Taylor and Tom Jones. A copy of the original letter and the knot are preserved and on display at the Clay County Museum.)

Sutton, Nebraska
January 1, 1913

W. K. Newcomb
Clay Center, Nebraska

Dear Sir:

Enclosed find the relic we were talking about. It is no good to me. It may change my luck if I part with it.

We read in the Good Book that the Philistines sent the Ark back after a certain number of years so as to cleanse their conscience but this is not the case here.

I still feel sorry for Tom but old Liz got what she deserved.

Be good. All things come to him who waits. You never thought you would get in possession of this rope.

Yours truly,
P. F. Anties



ONLY THE KNOT remains from the notorious deed of March 15, 1885, when the Disciples of Judge Lynch pronounced a verdict of death by hanging for Elizabeth Taylor and her brother, Tom Jones, ages 36 and 33 respectively. This knot is on display at the Clay County Museum after being preserved through the years in the office of the Clay County Clerk. CCN Photo by Evelyn Aufdenkamp

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