

1931

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Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

Extension
Circular
5574b

NEBRASKA STATE PARKS

Compiled by
Nebraska State Board of Agriculture
Department of Publicity

The information and facts concerning Nebraska State Parks, contained in this study course, have been prepared from data supplied by the Nebraska Game, Forestation and Parks Commission, which has control of all state parks and state-owned lakes and recreation grounds.

The state parks system in Nebraska is developing rapidly. Five state parks and many fishing lakes and recreation grounds are under the control of the Nebraska Game, Forestation and Parks commission. The number of fishing lakes and recreation grounds increases rapidly. On January 1, 1931, the number was 39. These acquisitions are steadily changing the life of the people. A more inviting outdoors is being created with nature's beauties within easy driving distance of any home. The lakes are being stocked with game fish. The wooded lands are being planted with game birds. Well conceived state laws are protecting game birds and fish from wanton slaughter. The recent acquisition of a 1,000 acres in Scotts Bluff county in the picturesque hills of that section, known as the Wild Cat Hills Game Reserve, has given a refuge where big game, such as buffalo, elk, deer, and antelope, are being propagated in natural surroundings and safe from molestation. Altogether these many public properties, well scattered over the state, constitute a public service that is being more and more appreciated and enjoyed as their recreational and educational benefits become known.

Administration

The parks and public recreation grounds of the state are administered by the Game, Forestation and Parks Commission. Until May, 1929, these properties were under the control of a State Park Board. Very limited funds were available for use of the Board and little was accomplished in developing the parks. Progress in creating a state park system was very slow.

With the creation of the Commission the situation changed rapidly. Funds were provided thru the imposition of hunting and fishing license fees, all of which go to the Commission. Ten per cent of such funds are set aside for the maintenance of the five state parks. The remaining funds are expended by the Commission in maintaining hatcheries, fishing lakes and recreation grounds and in buying new properties as the funds will allow.

The Commission is composed of five members, appointed by the Governor for a term of five years each. The Governor is ex-officio chairman and the state game warden is ex-officio secretary of the Commission. The members, aside from the Secretary, do not receive a salary but receive per diem and traveling expenses when actually on duty.

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Acquirement of Properties

With the single exception of the Gretna fish hatchery, which was acquired with funds derived by a legislative enactment, all state-owned properties under control of the Commission have been acquired either by gift or purchased with funds from hunting and fishing license fees. This condition indicates the state of public interest in parks and recreation grounds in Nebraska. The recreational mood is steadily growing. In the next decade a state-wide development of parks and playgrounds will be witnessed. This movement has also a far-reaching economic benefit, for as trees and water multiply the climate changes for the better, there is greater rainfall and conditions for crops and live stock are improved.

Arbor Lodge State Park

Arbor Lodge State Park was acquired by the State in 1923 thru the generosity of Joy Morton, a son of J. Sterling Morton, founder of Arbor Day. It contains a portion of the homestead of Mr. Morton. Morton Park, a tract of 23 acres, which had been deeded in 1888 by Mr. Morton to the city of Nebraska City for use as a city park, was deeded back to the Morton estate by the city and is included in the grant to the state. There are 65 acres in the park now owned by the state. The deeds to the property were formally made by Mr. Joy Morton on September 27, 1923, and the day was made the occasion of elaborate ceremonies at Arbor Lodge and in Nebraska City.

The Mansion. The stately mansion of 52 rooms is probably of more interest to the average visitor than any other feature of the park. The original house was remodeled and enlarged in 1871 and again in 1879 to care for the growing family. At the death of Mr. Morton in 1902, the property passed to the control of his eldest son, Joy Morton, of Chicago. The son remodeled the building, taking away the double deck porches, except at the west end, and adding the three story front portion of imposing Colonial architecture as it stands today. The whole building was stuccoed. For 20 years the building was used as the summer home of Joy Morton and his family.

On the lower floor are: The Reception Hall, with its broad staircase of mahogany and enamel. At the stair landing is a large painting depicting the signing away of their lands in Nebraska by the Pawnee Indians. The Title Room, once the library, includes exhibits to show pictorially the successive owners of the land from the Indians down. The Drawing Room is at the south end of the hall and contains paintings of Mr. Morton and Caroline Joy Morton in their bridal days. The Sun Parlor, west of the Drawing Room, is furnished with hand made mission furniture. The skylight is of opalescent cathedral glass. Concealed lights give the same beautiful artificial lighting effects at night as are given by sunshine during the day. The French doors open on the beautiful lawn.

The Denver Room, named in honor of General Denver, who occupied it while negotiating the treaty of 1857 with the Pawnee Indians, is just north of the Sun Parlor and once served as a library. It now houses the collection of Indian material presented to Arbor Lodge State Park by the widow and heirs of the late Major Keeling of Falls City. Adjoining the Denver Room on the west side is the Document Room, for many years used by Mr. Morton as his office. His old desk, the Admiral Dewey chair and the old leather couch are still there. The glass cases are lined with sample letters and documents,

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representative of thousands written by Mr. Morton. A picture of President Cleveland's cabinet, in which Mr. Morton served as Secretary of Agriculture, and a picture of the famous "Steam Wagon" hang on the walls. The Dining Room is across the hallway from the Denver Room. It is a portion of the original building. The walnut woodwork and beamed ceilings are distinctive. Beautiful and rare specimens of old china are displayed in the china closets. The Music Room adjoins the Dining Room. An upright piano, one of the early musical instruments at Arbor Lodge, is found here. There are several fine paintings on the walls.

On the second floor at the north end of the hall is the Cleveland Room, so named for President and Mrs. Cleveland, who occupied it on their visit to Arbor Lodge. The room is furnished as it was in 1905. A beautiful view of the drive may be seen from the balcony of this room. The bedrooms of Mr. and Mrs. Morton are furnished as they were when they used them. The hall has many interesting pictures. The other rooms on this floor are devoted to the exhibition of interesting relics and curios.

The Stables. The stables were built in 1900 at a cost of \$10,000. The interior has been rearranged and now contains old vehicles used at the Lodge as well as other interesting equipages. A stage coach, such as was used on the Overland stage line in about 1860 and driven by such men as "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Thomas Ryan, sit silently now in the carriage space. There are fine specimens of early harnesses and saddles.

The Monument. Near the east end of the park stands the Morton Memorial. Against a background of evergreens a heroic bronze statue of the Tree Planter stands. The memorial and statue were designed by Rudolph Evans and was made possible by penny and nickel contributions of school children of the United States. Behind the statue is a curved bench decorated with bronze tablets depicting historic events. The memorial was unveiled in October, 1905. The dedication address was delivered by ex-President Cleveland. Many great men of the nation were present for the ceremonies.

The Log Cabin. Standing near the main entrance to the park and just across the drive from the monument square is a log cabin erected in 1890 as a memorial to the old settlers. It is typical of the houses used by early settlers in the wooded sections of the state.

The Sunken Garden. Just south of the mansion is an Italian garden built-up terrace and filled with flowers and closely clipped lawn. Hedges and brick walls separate the different units. The central walks end in a rustic pergola covered with vines. Paths lead to rose beds and iris beds on the right. The sun dial in the garden bears this inscription: "Days Fly, Flowers Die; New Days, New Ways; Love Stays."

The Pine Grove. In the northwest corner of the park is a grove of white pines planted in 1892. It is very likely the oldest artificial grove of its kind in the state. The trees originally numbered 10,000 and by being set 4 x 4 feet apart were compelled to grow tall and straight.

The Arboretum. A recent survey found 138 species of trees and shrubs in the grounds east and north of the mansion. This is probably the largest collection of woody species to be found in the state. Prominent men and women at different times have planted trees on the grounds. Important species are identified with metal labels and also give the history of each tree.

Victoria Springs Park

A group of mineral springs in Custer county is the site of this park. In 1923 citizens of Custer county offered, and the Legislature accepted, a 60-acre tract containing these springs as a state park. The springs themselves are a distinguishing feature of the park. Two log cabins built in 1873 are interesting structures. There are fine camping and picnic grounds. The mineral water is much sought. The park is 19 miles northwest of Broken Bow, 6 miles east of Anselmo, and 9 miles north of Merma. It is located near federal highway No. 2, known as the Potash Highway. It is a popular playground for thousands of people every year.

Stolley State Park

This beautiful park, adjoining Grand Island, was given to the state by citizens of Grand Island and Hall County in 1927. It consists of 42.83 acres and is a portion of the homestead of William Stolley, a pioneer of central Nebraska. Mr. Stolley loved trees. In 1861 he planted 5,000. Thousands have since been planted. Some magnificent specimens have resulted. In portions of the park typical wild forest conditions prevail. The homestead was located on the old Oregon Trail. One of the present buildings contains the timbers used in the block house, known as Fort Independence, and maintained as a protection against Indians in the early days. An old log cabin, thatched with slough grass, and the first frame school house to be erected in Hall county are in good state of preservation. But the beauty of the place is the great trees that whisper praise of the pioneer whose vision saw the naked prairie clothed with sentinels of beauty. A fine old farm home is occupied by the caretaker. In the grounds are cool retreats where picnic parties and tree lovers come to enjoy nature in one of her most delightful moods.

Chadron State Park

The Legislature of 1921 set aside a section of school land in Dawes county, nine miles south of Chadron, to be used as a state park. This is a rugged, wooded section of Pine Ridge, an extension into Nebraska of the Black Hills of South Dakota. The tall hills and deep ravines are covered with pines. Spring-fed streams, rugged crags and weird natural rock formations are characteristic of this park. Nature is seen in one of her wild moods. Chadron Creek runs thru the park and gives it a sylvan look. Cabins and camping sites for visitors bring thousands of tourists every year. A fine graveled highway, No. 19, passes the park.

This park is quite different from any other of the state parks. Man has done little here. Nature is shown in her untouched mood. The scenery is mountain-like.

Fort Kearney State Park

This park, when the plans for it have been realized, will vividly recall the early history of Nebraska. It is located on the old Oregon Trail on the south bank of the Platte, six miles southeast of Kearney. The 80 acre tract presented to the state by the Fort Kearney **Memorial** Association, an organization of Buffalo and Kearney county citizens, contains the parade grounds and the site of the stockade and fort buildings of the old army post. Ruins of the old outer works can still be seen. Mounds of earth still mark the sites of the old buildings. The tall cottonwoods keep sentinel watch as they did when the place rang with the call of bugles and the rattle of sabers. Plans are in the making to restore the old fort and make it live again as it did when it was the most important army post on the plains from 1848 until its abandonment in 1871.

This park is reached by highway No. 10 between Kearney and Minden.

State Fish Hatcheries

Nebraska has four state-owned fish hatcheries. The Gretna plant on the north bank of the Platte, with its shade, lily pool, fish ponds and picnic grounds, is visited every summer by thousands of people. Other hatcheries are at Valentine, Benkleman and Rock Creek. In 1929 these hatcheries supplied 2,154,979 game fish and frogs to stock the streams and lakes of the state. The species propagated are bass, perch, catfish, bullheads, crappies, sunfish, pickerel, trout and pike. Nebraska streams and lakes are rapidly becoming places of delight for fisherman since these hatcheries began stocking with better species of game fish.

"DAYS FLY, FLOWERS DIE; NEW DAYS, NEW WAYS; LOVE STAYS"