**Ash Hollow State Historical Park Walking Trails**

*Welcome to hiking at Ash Hollow. Binoculars, spotting scopes, blinds and bird books are free for loan at the Visitor Center. All miles are round trip. Water and restrooms are available at the Visitor Center and at the lower picnic area.*

**Windlass Hill:** 1.25 Miles, Moderate – steep inclines, stroller accessible

Trail starts at parking lot near historical display of wagon above sod house. Trail crosses bridge over gulley washed out by erosion from main Oregon Trail descent down the hill. At the top of the hill are markers indicating the Oregon Trail. Photos in the Visitor Center entry show the extensive line the trail followed along the ridge of the hill as it goes into the breaks of Ash Hollow.

Visitors can see multiple indentations in the side of Windlass Hill where pioneers lowered their wagons. In the fall, trail areas can easily be seen by the red grasses that filled in after the trail was no longer in use.

*Imagine pioneers encountering their first rough descent on the trail. People would have walked down the hill while wagons were lowered using brakes, logs in wheels, oxen tied to the back and other devices to slow the descent.*

**Visitor Center to Spring Pond:** .75 Miles, Moderate – steep decline to spring pond.

Trail starts at Visitor Center and goes to the cave where archeologists found remains of human habitation spanning 6,000 years. Going back to the “Spring Pond” sign, visitors can walk down the hill enjoying the limestone and clay outcroppings along the path.

*Imagine Nathan Pattison etching a rock to mark the grave of Rachel – his 19-year-old wife of just three months. In the 1850’s cholera struck pioneers on the trail and hit especially hard at Ash Hollow. The Ash Hollow Cemetery is visible to the west from about half way down the trail. Few pioneers stayed long enough to carve stone markers for their loved ones, needing to press on over the mountains before snows fell.*

**Oregon California Trail:** 3 Miles, Easy walk- level gravel road, grassy paths and sand washes. Spring pond to Rock School.

Park at the picnic area and begin at the pond then walk back along the gravel road. A mowed grassy path lies to the south of the paved entry road. Take the path along the bluff to the rock school. There are multiple mowed paths to explore along the way but all end up at the school. This trail has wildlife viewing signs along the way. Of special interest is the trail along the Ash Hollow Formation outcropping which includes fossil plant life and swallow nests. Look for deer, porcupine and other wildlife on this trail.

The trail follows the path of wagons along the bottom of Ash Hollow on the east side. Pioneers would have travelled along grassy areas beside the sand draw as sand would make travelling difficult for oxen and wagons. Look for swells that follow the line of the power poles near the parking area. These swells are the result of wagons tearing up grass and wind blowing dirt out of the trail for many years.

*Imagine pioneers entering into Ash Hollow and finding their first clean water in the springs after miles of drinking river water, finding the first trees they had seen for two hundred miles, finding blooming roses and an idyllic setting. Imagine a trading post near the old school with a Frenchman, his Lakota wife, children and white wolves as pets. Imagine hundreds of wagons, people and animals – a virtual moving city – camped all through the hollow and into the North Platte River valley.*

**Medicine Wheel**: 1.5 miles round trip. Easy. Slight incline. Mowed grass.

Park at the parking lot east of the visitor center at the crest of the hill. This trail goes to an overlook of the North Platte River valley. Watch for eagles, cranes, vultures, swans, hawks, pelicans and other birds in various seasons. The Mormon Trail followed the north side of the river. The Oregon Trail came through Ash Hollow and then west at the mouth of Ash Hollow along the south side of the North Platte River.

Fort Grattan was located directly north of the bluff near the river. To the east is a wooden medicine wheel marking the solstices and equinoxes.

**3 Mile Loop:** Moderate. Start at the Visitor Center and walk down to the Spring Pond. Follow the path to the parking lot then along the gravel road (Oregon Trail Hike) to the Rock School. Go up the hill on the paved road to the top of the hill and back to the Visitor Center. This is a great walk with some amazing vistas.

**West Side of Highway:** Open hiking throughout 400 acres (1.5 x .5 miles) of original prairie. No designated trails. Deer paths. Park in designated area on west side of highway south of the cemetery. Boundaries are marked by fences and game commission signs. Look for deer, turkey, porcupine, bobcats and other wildlife. Use caution when hiking off trail.