

Explore Spring Creek Prairie

For those who want to see a relic of western history in eastern Nebraska, trail ruts associated with the Nebraska City-Fort Kearny Cutoff can be found at Audubon Spring Creek Prairie near Lincoln. The cut-off was one of Nebraska Territory's most important roads. Opened in 1860 as the shortest route from Missouri River ports to Fort Kearny and points west, the road was established by military freight contractors Russell, Majors & Waddell with the help of other Nebraska City interests. The shortcut provided an additional advantage of being an all-weather route because it was located principally along the ridges, which tended to stay drier during inclement weather. As a result, it became a year-round highway used for commerce, immigration, and local traffic. This popular road was also known as the Great Central Route, the Airline Route, and, later, the Steam Wagon Road.

The Cutoff facilitated such rapid settlement and commercial development south of the Platte River that it is considered to have played a major role in the relocation of the capital from Omaha to the new village of Lincoln in 1867. The importance of the road for freighting began to wane that year, after the transcontinental railroad was completed through central Nebraska. Some immigrants and freighters, however, continued to use this section of road for transcontinental traffic after other improved alignments, such as the Steam Wagon Road, had been established closer to Lincoln in 1864. Mormons likely used this trail between 1864-66.

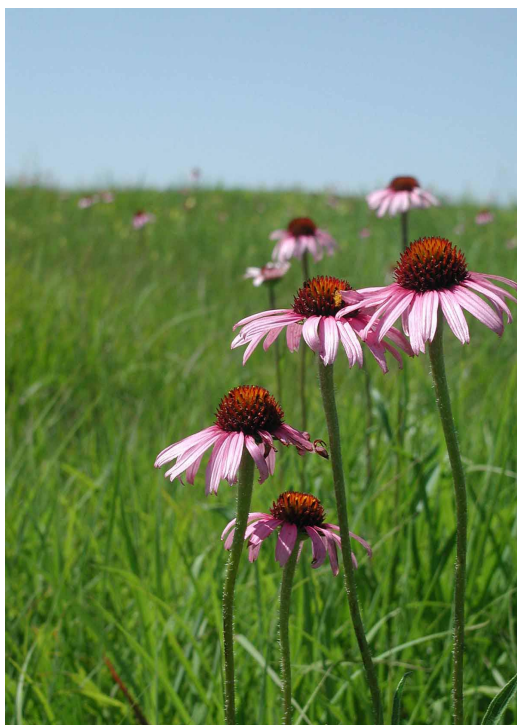
The Spring Creek Prairie ruts are important for several reasons. Foremost is their rarity, since most of the road has been obliterated by modern agricultural and urban development. Ruts have been preserved here primarily because the ground was never plowed, a fact that has also

preserved the prairie itself. The ruts are also significant for being along the oldest (1860-64) of the three major alignments of the Cutoff.

Finally, the Spring Creek ruts have further interest because they preserve traces of a descent situation from the ridge tops. Four or five sets of descent ruts reveal a complex pattern to the roadway that probably developed from varying terrestrial conditions, the braking requirements of heavy wagons, and, to some extent, individual preferences for making the Spring Creek crossing. It seems likely that travelers would leave the ridge road at this point primarily for water or possibly for overnight camping. From here, the road ran west and northwestward toward the Camden Crossing of the Blue River. Short sections of ruts are visible here and there in the unplowed pastures northwest of Spring Creek Prairie.

Note: Alert readers may have noticed a spelling difference between Fort Kearny and the city of Kearney, which derived its name from the fort. Why? Blame it on human error. According to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission website, the first Fort Kearny was established by Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny on Table Creek (present-day Nebraska City), as a result of an 1844 report of the Secretary of War, recommending the construction of a chain of military posts from the Missouri to the Rockies to protect the Oregon migration. On March 12, 1848,

Col. Powell and Lt. Woodbury marched out of old Fort Kearny at Table Creek with an advance guard. By May 1, Table Creek was abandoned, and by June all officers and men of the Missouri volunteers had arrived at the "head of Grand Island" to erect the "first military station on the route to Oregon." The new post was first named Fort Childs, in honor of Col. Thomas Childs of Mexican war fame (and Woodbury's father-in-law). The construction of the post began at once, with a crew of 175 men erecting temporary sod shelters, manufacturing bricks and adobes, and cutting timber for later permanent structures. By December 30, the new post was renamed Fort Kearny to honor General Stephen Watts Kearny. It was ready to fulfill its mission of guarding the Oregon Trail and other western routes. Information from the city of Kearney's website says that due to a postal error, an "e" was inadvertently added to the city's name and then never



changed. This article was reprinted with permission of Nebraska Audubon. (SC)

Spring Creek Prairie

Spring Creek Prairie is located 15 minutes southwest of Lincoln. From Denton, take SW 98 Street three miles south, and after an "S" curve, look for the entrance sign on the east side of the road. Turn into the driveway and proceed down to the ranch house. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday throughout the year. Weekend hours are seasonal. Call 402-797-2301 for the current seasonal hours for the prairie. Admission by donation, free for Audubon members and children 12 and under. (SC)

Environmental Focus



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- Establishing Wildflowers & Native Grasses
- Attracting & Managing Wildlife
- Choosing & Growing Trees for the Acreage
- The ABC's of Septic Systems
- Weed Control
- Establishing & Maintaining a Pond

**Come to the Acreage Owners Expo
August 18, 2001**

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

**Agricultural Research and Development Center (ARDC)
Near Mead, Nebraska**

For more information, see article on page 2 or contact Don Janssen at 402-441-7180. (BPO)

Dispelling The Daddy Longlegs Myth



Have you heard this one?: "Daddy-longlegs are one of the most poisonous spiders but their fangs are too short to bite humans."

This tale has been lurking around for years. It is NOT TRUE, but to clarify it, several points need to be explained first.

What are daddy-long legs? In the animal class Arachnida, there are several lower level divisions called orders. Spiders are in the order Araneae, ticks and mites are in the order Acari. The creatures most people refer to as daddy-longlegs are in their own separate order which is Opiliones. Common names for this order are 1) daddy-longlegs, 2) harvestmen, and 3) opilionids. They are characterized by having one basic body segment which shows segmentation on the posterior portion, at most, two eyes, and all eight legs attach to the pill-like body segment. They are usually found under logs and rocks, prefer moist habitats, and often have long flexible legs (although in some other parts of the world some Opiliones may have short

legs.) They do not produce silk, so therefore, they are never found in webs unless they are being eaten by spiders. Because they are found under logs and other stuff which people do not turn over very often, most folks don't run into daddy-longlegs very often. But, nearly all of us have seen them at one time or another.

Daddy-longlegs make their living by eating decomposing vegetative and animal matter although are opportunist predators if they can get away with it. They do not have venom glands, fangs, or any other mechanism for chemically subduing their food. Therefore, they do not have poison and, by the powers of logic, cannot be poisonous from venom. Some have defensive secretions that might be poisonous to small animals if ingested. But, because they do not have fangs, this myth is false.

So, if you see a daddy-long legs, it is perfectly safe to pick it up and have it crawl on your hands and play with it for awhile. It cannot bite you and is not venomous.

Source: Rick Vetter, University of California, Riverside.

Website: <http://spiders.ucr.edu/>
Rick is a staff research associate in the Department of Entomology at UCR since 1980 and has written many publications in scientific and medical journals in the area of venomous arthropods. He conducts extension workshops on tick and spider identification. (BPO)

August Household Hazardous Waste Collections

Friday, August 10 Union College, Parking Lot, 52 and Cooper Three blocks south of 52 and Calvert 3 - 7 pm

Saturday, August 11 Nebraska Wesleyan University Parking lot, 56 and Huntington 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Items that you can bring for disposal:

Heavy metals: items containing mercury such as thermometers and thermostats.

Solvents: mineral spirits, turpentine, paint strippers and thinners, oil-based paints, varnishes, stains, polishes, and waxes.

Pesticides: weed killers, garden sprays, wood preservatives, roach powder, rat poisons. You may also bring EPA banned products, like DDT, chlordane, 2,4,5-T, pentachlorophenol, silvex, PCP.

PCB's: Ballasts from old fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances including radios, motors, and televisions.

Leave products in their original container and keep the label intact. Open, leaking, or rusted containers should be placed in a clear plastic bag during transport. Do not mix chemicals.

Do not bring latex paint, medicines, explosives or ammunition, fertilizers, used oil, general household trash, antifreeze, or batteries. Questions? Call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040. (BPO)