Post Rock and Black Gold

Minerals Under the Prairie Sod

Imagine it's 1880, and you've just driven your family hundreds of wearying miles by wagon here to central Kansas. You're anxious to build a house, but you're surrounded by unbroken prairie—not a stick of construction-grade wood in sight. With what do you build?

Settlers quickly found the answer beneath their feet. First, they built their "soddies" with blocks of prairie earth. Then, they discovered a more durable building material—limestone. Greenhorn limestone stretches beneath about three million acres of Kansas. This thin limestone layer, just 8-12 inches thick, yielded high-quality building material for homes, churches, bridges, and more. One common use for limestone was fence posts. Still visible along the Byway, limestone post rock once supported an estimated 40,000 miles of fencing in the state. Watch for the many enduring examples of native limestone handiwork as you travel the Byway.

Wetlands & Wildlife
NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY

Stone Fence Post
Ted Lee Eubanks

Pumping Unit/Ted Lee Eubanks

Kansas Crude

The industrial heartbeat of this part of Kansas is the "ka-thump ka-thump" of pumping units sucking crude oil out of the ground. Pumps dot the landscape along much of the Byway. Oil production began in this part of Kansas around 1930, peaking in the 1950s. Oil and gas production remains important to the regional economy; in 2006, more than 3,200 oil wells and 177 gas wells operated in Barton and Stafford Counties.

Fossil in limestone/Brad Penka

Fossil in limestone/Brad Penka

Motion and Change

Can you smell the ocean? Well, maybe not now, but several times over the past 300 million years, you could have. Seawater brimming with corals, shellfish, and other marine life periodically submerged this land. As organisms died, they accumulated on the ocean floor. Over time and with pressure, shells became limestone and organic materials transformed into oil and gas.

KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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