

Wild West Superhighway

In the 1800s, the Santa Fe Trail was the Interstate-70 of the American West, and Conestoga wagons were its freight-hauling tractor trailers. Between 1822 and 1879, the trail was a commercial thoroughfare between Missouri and Santa Fe, guiding wagons, stagecoaches, and military men to and from the southwestern frontier. During the 1860s and 70s, thousands of wagons carrying fortunes worth of goods rolled over the trail. In 1880, the railroad reached Santa Fe, and the days of the Santa Fe Trail came to an abrupt end.

Located at the trail's halfway point, this region was a key stop for travelers. Wagon trains found drinking water near the Peacock Trading Post at the Walnut Creek Crossing. Nearby Fort Zarah and Fort Larned (now a national historic site) protected wagon trains from tribal raids.



Commerce on the Santa Fe Trail



Great Bend c. 1870/Kansas State Historical Society

Welcome to the Wild West

In the 1870s, this region was the Wild West, a land of bison and wolves, of American Indians, settlers, cowboys, and cavalry. Great Bend was a new, rugged cowtown, with its rail depot the final destination for cowboys driving longhorns north from Texas.



Fort Zarah/Barton County Historical Museum

Motion and Change

Start your exploration of the Santa Fe Trail at the Barton County Historical Society Museum and Village. An official Santa Fe Trail Interpretive Site, the museum houses period buildings, tools, housewares, and clothing, plus exhibits about American Indian and settler life, trading posts, and Fort Zarah.

Santa Fe Trail
Kansas State Historical Society



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