



# PRAIRIE CULTURAL

Self-guided Tour

**PLAINS CONSERVATION CENTER**



# Welcome!

Look for the numbered posts along the trail. The numbers on the posts correspond with the numbers in your brochure.

Please help us preserve the resource by staying on designated trails and practicing leave no trace.

**Do not attempt to enter any of the structures.**



The plains were home to many Native American tribes, one of them being the Cheyenne. The plains are a harsh and desolate environment characterized by little precipitation, heavy winds and the historic presence of wildfire. Native people had to adapt to these conditions by being as mobile as possible. Tipis make excellent mobile homes, perfectly suited for life on the plains. They were easily set up and taken down when harsh weather came in or when the giant herds of bison began to migrate. Plains Native Americans relied heavily on bison for food, shelter, tools, and so much more. Bison were essential to their way of life.

The artwork on the painted tipi was done by Cheyenne artist George Levi. The Cheyenne leader in the painting had a dream where he is shown where bison were on the plains. The painting shows the Cheyenne leader pointing his scout towards the location of the bison.

- ▶ **TOUR TRIVIA:** How long do you think it would take to set up a tipi? How long to take it down?



Plains Native Americans were nomadic, meaning they were constantly moving their homes from place to place. In contrast, European and eastern settlers arriving to claim the lands of the plains as their own brought with them the practice of farming and were therefore far more stationary. In 1862 Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act. The act gave settlers the opportunity to own land if they were able to farm it and make economic gains on it for a minimum of 5 years. When settlement began, pioneers were amazed at the quality of the soil and the crops it produced. Prairie soil is deep and rich in nutrients from millions of years of formation. Excessive plowing and poor land management depleted the soil of its nutrients and stability. This combined with drought resulted in extreme erosion that led to the Dust Bowl of the 1930's.

- ▶ **TOUR TRIVIA:** True or False? The Dust Bowl affected over 100 million acres of land in the southern plains.



Due to the lack of trees available on the plains, settlers had to use other resources to build their homes and necessary structures. That available resource was prairie sod. Prairie grasses have deep, intertwining networks of roots that hold the soil in place. Homesteaders cut out strips of sod from the earth and stacked it on top of each other to construct shelters. Sod buildings are difficult to maintain. Animals dig holes in the sod and precipitation causes it to sag, as you can see on our chicken coop.

- ▶ **TOUR TRIVIA:** True or False? Prairie grasses can sequester more carbon out of the atmosphere than forests can.



This sod house is a replica childhood home of one of the founders of the PCC, Dr. John Johnson. This particular sod home was very nice for its time. Installing wood panels outside of a sod home added protection and stability. The ability to afford timber indicated that a homesteader was doing well. Inside, the walls and floors are also covered with wood panels and it has a small loft. On the outside, there is a summer kitchen.

The wagon just outside of the home was the family vehicle. Everything a family brought with them to live in the west had to fit inside of that wagon. How many of your belongings do you think you could fit in that wagon?

- ▶ **TOUR TRIVIA:** How long do you think it took to take a wagon to Denver and back for supplies?



In rural areas of the U.S. in the late 19th Century, children went to school in a one-room school house. Every grade was taught in that one-room, all at the same time. Children attending school were given various responsibilities to maintain the school. Some were tasked with gathering dried cow patties on their way to school to fuel the fire that kept them warm. Others were asked to fetch water for the class during recess. Most children did not go to school past the eighth grade because their families needed them to maintain their farms and ranches.

Many schools also served as the local chapel or as a community meeting hall.

- ▶ **TOUR TRIVIA:** True or False? Teachers during this time were very strict, and would punish students for being left-handed.



A blacksmith was a person that forged tools from metals such as iron and steel. During the late 1800's every tool and nail was handmade. A blacksmith needed a designated workspace to heat up metal so hot it almost liquefied, enabling them to mold the metal into whatever shape they wanted. Most small towns or villages did not have their own blacksmith, requiring settlers to travel to get tools to build their homes and farm their lands. Some traveling blacksmiths also visited settlers during their rounds traveling the countryside.

- ▶ **TOUR TRIVIA:** In an average 1200 square foot house, there are about 12,000 nails used to construct it. How long do you think it would take a blacksmith to make 12,000 nails?



This trail leads to the dugout. A dugout is a small sod house built into the side of a hill. Settlers would build dugouts first and lived in them while they built a larger, more permanent, sod house. After they moved into their sod house, the dugout was used as a storage area for food. Keeping food in the ground helps preserve it because temperatures are usually cooler and more constant.

- ▶ **TOUR TRIVIA:** Do you think that you and your family could live in this dugout for several weeks?



This sod house represents a more typical home settlers would have lived in during the late 1890's, as compared to the Johnson soddie. It is only one story and does not have the wood paneling on either the outside or inside. As the sod wore away and was infiltrated by wildlife, settlers made repairs using a method called chinking. Chinking is where mud is mixed with dried grasses and used to plug holes. During harsh weather conditions like blizzards or windstorms, settlers would bring their livestock into their homes to protect them from being injured or killed. Imagine if you and your family, along with your two cows, eight chickens, three pigs and four sheep, all had to hunker down inside during a blizzard!

► **TOUR TRIVIA:** Where did people during the 1890's get their food?

## Trivia Tour Answers

1. It takes two people 15 minutes to set up a tipi and three minutes to take it down. 2. True 3. True 4. It took eight hours to travel to Denver. A trip to Denver and back for supplies was a two day trip. 5. True 6. It took a blacksmith 5 minutes to make one nail therefore, it took 125 days to make 12,000 nails. The average sod house used far less than the homes we have today. 7. No right/wrong answer 8. They raised the animals and grew the plants that they ate. Sometimes a trade with other people for food they did not produce themselves took place.



### Plains Conservation Center

21901 E. Hampden Ave., Aurora, Co 80013  
303.326.8380 • [AuroraGov.org/PlainsCenter](http://AuroraGov.org/PlainsCenter)

### Visitor Center Hours

Wednesday - Friday: Noon- 4:30 p.m.

Saturday/Sunday: 9 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.

### Hiking Hours

Monday - Friday: 6:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.

Saturday/Sunday: 8 a.m - 4:30 p.m.

Monday and Tuesday: Closed

### March-October

Friday: 6:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

Saturday/Sunday: 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

