

Lost Spring Station



National Park Service
Santa Fe National Historic Trail
www.nps.gov/safe



Santa Fe Trail Association
Cottonwood Crossing Chapter
www.santafetrail.org

Water

Sources of water were crucial to travelers along the Santa Fe Trail because they could not carry adequate supplies of water with them. Lost Spring was an over-night camping spot that provided water needed by people and livestock. It was conveniently located a day's travel west of Diamond Spring and a day's travel east of Cottonwood Creek. Some say the spring got its name because it dried-up in some years, thus becoming "lost." The Lost Spring, identified in the 1857 survey and located approximately one mile to the northeast of this sign, is probably the spring mentioned in diaries and other documents prior to 1857. Today's Lost Spring, located a few yards to the northwest of this sign, is the Lost Spring associated with the Lost Spring Station.

Gambling

Lost Spring Station was established in 1859 by George Smith who soon lost the station to Jack Costello in a poker game. The station was located south of this sign on the mail stage route. Costello soon acquired a partner, Thomas Wise, and together they operated the station. At the station, the various contractors who transported the U.S. Mail obtained supplies and fresh animals to pull the mail wagons or stages. In addition, the station provided lodging and supplies for others traveling the Santa Fe Trail. Similar stations located at intervals along the Santa Fe Trail were commonly known as "road ranches."

Mail

Post offices in this part of Kansas were first established along the Santa Fe Trail. As merchants, homesteaders, and town builders moved into the area, the post offices changed locations in response to the pattern of settlement and development. The Lost Springs, Kansas post office illustrates this pattern. For almost three years during the 1860s, a U.S. Post Office named "Lost Spring" was operated at Lost Spring Station on the Santa Fe Trail. Some fifteen years after that post office closed, a new post office named "Lost Springs" was established one mile east of this sign in the original town of Lost Springs. The town and the post office later moved to their current location to position the town along the route of the new railroad. The move was necessary for the economic survival of the town.



Santa Fe Trail

From 1821 to 1846, the Santa Fe Trail was an international road for American and Mexican traders. In 1848, the Mexican-American War ended, and New Mexico Territory was added to the United States. The trail became a national road for commercial and military freighting, stagecoach travel, emigration, and mail service. The trail was replaced over time by the westward expanding railroad, which reached Santa Fe in 1880.

Because of its significant role in American history, the U.S. Congress designated the route a National Historic Trail in 1987.

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| 1821
William Becknell uses pack mules on first trading expedition over the Santa Fe Trail. | 1822
William Becknell is first to use wagons to transport trade goods on the Santa Fe Trail. | 1825
U.S. Government orders a survey of the Santa Fe Trail (Sibley Expedition) and makes treaties with the Kansa and Osage Indians. | 1829
Major Bennett Riley (namesake of Fort Riley) introduces use of oxen to pull wagons on the Santa Fe Trail. | 1846
Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny commands the Army of the West down the Santa Fe Trail and captures Santa Fe during the Mexican-American War. | 1848
Freighting of U.S. Government supplies begins to dominate Santa Fe Trail traffic. | 1850
Mail wagons begin operating on the Santa Fe Trail under U.S. Government contract. | 1854
Kansas Territory is established. | 1857
The General Land Office survey established today's land boundary system. The survey recorded the location of the Santa Fe Trail. | 1858
Mail stages begin running weekly on the Santa Fe Trail. | 1859
George Smith establishes Lost Spring Station. | 1859
George Smith loses the station to Jack Costello in a poker game. | 1861
Kansas becomes a state. Joshua Smith is first Lost Spring Postmaster at Lost Spring Station. | 1863
The Homestead Act of 1862 becomes effective January 1, 1863. | 1865
Marion County is organized. | 1866
The railroad reaches Junction City, Kansas. Use of the Santa Fe Trail through Marion County ceases. | 1868
Jack Costello turns over Lost Spring Station to his partner Thomas Wise. | 1908
J. B. Shields is instrumental in erecting the Lost Spring Station monument now located adjacent to this sign. | 1976
Lost Spring (located just northwest of this sign) is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. |
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