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## Plum Buttes

In the pasture directly north of Avenue L, there are many small grassed over sand dunes. This is on the south half of Section 29 of Pioneer Township. This was the site of three tall sand dunes called "Plum Buttes". They acquired this name from the fact that there were wild plum bushes growing around their bases in trail days.

There were three buttes and in mid summer the plum thickets which grew on and about them provided many plums. They were not buttes in the topographic sense; rather they were unusually high sand dunes standing perhaps eighty to a hundred feet above the prairie. They were there when the first wagon passed but soon after the last wagon passed, by some whim of weather, nature, and wind erosion began their reduction.

Plum Buttes was an important landmark for travelers of the Santa Fe Trail, as they could be seen immediately after crossing Cow Creek. In all this distance, as with much of the plains, there was not a single tree to obstruct the view. Ralph Hathaway's father, who was born on this farm in 1882, told Ralph that the Buttes, although reduced in size, were still quite prominent when he was a boy. One in particular was easily seen when looking westward. Ultimately they were destroyed by the same force that built them, the Kansas wind.



From Plum Buttes, the Trail heads due west for about five miles. The DAR marker that had been at Ralph's Ruts for years was recently moved closer to the original 1906 location. The D.A.R provided a replacement marker which is now at Ralph's Ruts.

## Getting There

Ralph's Ruts are located 4 miles west of Chase, Kansas on Highway 56 and 3/4 mile north on 4th Avenue. For additional information, contact Carolyn Kern at 620-257-8155.

## Sources

From the Little to the Big Arkansas - The Santa Fe Trail Across Rice County, Kansas by Ralph Hathaway.

### Get Involved in Trail History!

There are many ways to learn more about the historic sites on the Santa Fe Trail.

- Visit other Trail related sites
- Visit a local museum
- Follow the local auto tour of the Trail
- Join the Quivira Chapter
- Join the Santa Fe Trail Association
- Walk in the ruts that made history!

For more information visit the SFTA website at: [www.santafetrail.org](http://www.santafetrail.org) and our chapter Facebook page at: Quivira Chapter of the Santa Fe Trail Association.

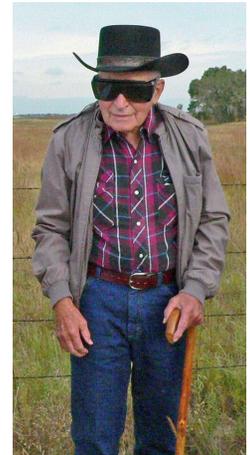
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# Ralph's Ruts & The Plum Buttes Massacre

The Quivira Chapter  
Santa Fe Trail Association



Dedicated to Ralph Hathaway and his efforts to preserve his half mile of the Santa Fe Trail



## Ralph's Ruts

In the northeast quarter of section 34, Pioneer Township, the Santa Fe Trail takes a more westerly direction. Along the west side of this quarter, trail ruts are faintly visible. It was on the next quarter, the northwest quarter of section 34, that the Plum Buttes Massacre occurred. This is the farm on which the grandparents of Ralph Hathaway, John L. and Mary E. Hathaway, filed a homestead claim in 1878. While breaking sod on the northeast forty acres of this quarter, John L. Hathaway and his sons plowed up a pistol, a watch, pieces of hardware from burned out wagons, and bits of broken ironstone china which was grim evidence that some group of travelers had met with some sort of tragedy at this location.

Franz Huning was one of many traders hauling merchandise over the Santa Fe Trail in the 1860's. His home was in Albuquerque, New Mexico. His wife Ernestine had moved there in 1863. Prior to this particular trip, he had gone to Dayton, Ohio to bring his mother-in-law and her youngest son, Fritz, to Junction City, Kansas where his wagon train was to be assembled. The railroad had reached Junction City in November of 1866. These relatives were to accompany him west and they intended to make their home in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The wagon train traveled south from Junction City some thirty miles and "struck" the Santa Fe Trail at a place called Lost Springs.

Huning was apprehensive about the danger of Indian attacks in the area between Cow Creek and the Big Bend of the Arkansas River and had hoped to have a military escort as far as Fort Zarah. There were troops stationed at the Little Arkansas Crossing. Huning requested a military escort from "Captain Burns". This was probably Captain Edward Byrne of the 10th Cavalry who was in charge of buffalo soldiers stationed there in 1867.

Huning accurately establishes the point of attack as being near Plum Buttes: "about midways between Cow Creek and the Big Bend of the Arkansas and about fifteen miles from Fort Zarah,

twenty five miles from Little Arkansas, and about thirty five miles from Fort Harker." Huning further states that the attacking party appeared to be members of three tribes: Cheyenne, Kiowas, and Arapahoes.

The attack came from the southeast, probably from behind a small hill in the northeast quarter of Section 34, Pioneer Township. Huning shot the leader of the war party. This shot divided them into two parties. One swept through the center of the train driving four wagons and the carriage with the mother-in-law and her son off the road until they stalled in the deep sand about 200 yards off the road.

The other party rushed at the head of the train but the lead teamster stuck to his lead lines and so they only got the loose mules and Huning's riding mule with the saddle, which later came back to the train. Huning did not get another shot off because his gun jammed. In a short time the Indians emptied the wagons of their contents and loaded the captured mules with them. Some barrels of whiskey they set on end, stove in the heads, and set fire to them. Huning saw a big crowd in one place with much noise and laughter and then heard a pistol shot. The pistol shot killed the old lady. According to the teamsters, the boy had been killed at the first onset of the attack.

As soon as the Indians had left, Huning and the remainder of the party left with the remaining wagons. It was just before sunset and they traveled until midnight to arrive at the Big Bend in the Arkansas River. This was the next reliable source of water after leaving Cow Creek and was a favorite overnight campsite on the Santa Fe Trail.

Huning traveled on to Fort Zarah, where he asked for an escort to go back to the scene of the tragedy to check on the possibility of survivors. His request was granted and three or four soldiers and several of his teamsters returned with Huning to the scene of the massacre. The area was so filled with smoke that there was danger of an Indian ambush. Huning returned to the Big Bend campground and moved his wagon train on to Fort Zarah. He returned the following day, September 11, 1867 and was able to remove the bodies, which were buried temporarily near Fort Zarah. The next spring on his annual trip east, Huning had the bodies moved to Ellsworth, Kansas which had become the Kansas Pacific Railroad shipping point.

the Hathaway homestead are some of the most pronounced and fine Santa Fe Trail ruts to be found along the full length of the Santa Fe Trail. These have become known among trail buffs and historians as "Ralph's Ruts". These forty acres have been saved from the plow because Ralph's grandfather discovered it was too sandy to become satisfactory cropland. Having been left in the native sod the ruts have been well preserved. One unique feature of these ruts is that there are seven, instead of the four that you find at most rut sites. This is probably due to the sandy soil at this location. The ruts became so deep and the layer of loose sand offered so much rolling resistance to the wagon wheels that from time to time some of the drivers simply moved over to one side and made a new path parallel to the others.

The trail ruts are still present for another one-half mile on the farm owned by Ed and Carolyn Hathaway Kern, the northeast quarter of Section 33 of Pioneer Township. The ruts closest to the road were somewhat disturbed by oil development back in the 1930's. However, they can be clearly seen if you walk into the pasture.

## Gunsight Notch

Farther west on Avenue L on the northeast quarter of Section 32 in a pasture owned by the Ringwald family are some very good trail ruts. Toward the west end of this pasture there is a ridge running north and south. Several trail ruts converge to cross this ridge. Almost sixty years of trail travel wore a wide notch

in this ridge and some refer to it as the "gunsight" notch. Two very deep ruts on the east slope of this ridge are especially impressive. On the west side of this ridge, several ruts appear again.

