

Exploring Nebraska roots

By Chris McCubbin
Staff Reporter

Every now and then almost everybody becomes a tourist. Every so often some deep, mysterious psychological urge forces people to go to, stare at, and make appreciative noises about a pasture that 150 years ago was used as a battlefield or a particularly significant tree.

To most people Nebraska is not exactly vacation heaven. Some say it suffers from a decided lack of scenic vistas. Oh, there's Chimney Rock, of course, but that's a long way off. There is a certain subtle glamor to be found in the sandhills, or standing on the edge of the Platte Valley, but nothing near the Grand Canyon/Niagara/Swiss Alps class.

Consequently most Nebraska tourist attractions focus on the state's history.

Here are a few tourist attractions within a day's drive of Lincoln.

Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, Grand Island, 96 miles west on I-80, contains an extensive and elegant collection of pioneer artifacts. Behind the main building is a reconstructed 19th century railroad town (containing the birthplace of the late Henry Fonda).

Although administered by the Hall County government, the Stuhr Museum is like no other county museum in the country. Good Housekeeping magazine rated it as one of the 10 best living history museums in the United States.

The museum is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven days a week in the summer. Adult admission is \$5.

Pioneer Village, Minden, 135 miles west on I-80.

"Not a tourist trap!" proclaims one of the three or four thousand billboards advertising Harold Warp's Pioneer Village. And it's not.

Pioneer Village is a museum along the same lines as the Stuhr. Not as elegant, but even more extensive. The Pioneer Village brochure defines it as "the only museum of progress in the U.S."

It includes displays on the evolution of lighting, the evolution of flight, the evolution of music, the evolution of the bicycle, the evolution of farm machinery, the evolution of the snowmobile...

Pioneer Village is open from 8 a.m. to sundown, 7 days a week. Adult admission is \$4.

Willa Cather Historical Center, Red Cloud, 136 miles southwest.

For a more low-key historical adventure, visit Red Cloud, the hometown of Willa Cather. In addition to a Cather museum and archives, the Willa Cather Historical Center includes the Cather House, Cather's church, Grace Episcopal, St. Juliana Falconieri Catholic Church, featured in Cather's novel "My Antonia," and the Burlington Depot, which doubles as an art gallery. There's also the 610-acre Willa Cather Memorial Prairie.

Adult admission is \$1, hours are 8 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays, and 1 to 5 p.m. during weekends in summer. Tours are given at 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Homestead National Monument, Beatrice, 40 miles south on Hwy. 77.

When the Homestead Act of 1861 went into effect, Daniel Freeman was there just after midnight on the first day to file his claim. Now this eager-beaver's homestead has been made into a national monument.

The monument features an authentic

prairie cabin, the Freeman School, a one-room schoolhouse that operated from 1872 to 1966, and a restored tall-grass prairie.

Open 8:30 to 5 p.m. every day. Admission is free.

Arbor Lodge, Nebraska City, 51 miles southeast on Hwy. 2.

The turn-of-the-century mansion of J. Sterling Morton, originator of Arbor Day. Besides the 52-room mansion, Arbor Lodge features an estate-wide arboretum with over 25 varieties of trees and shrubs.

Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the summer. Adult admission is \$1.50.

For more information on Nebraska tourist attractions call 800-228-4307.



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