

Wetlands and Wildlife Scenic Byway

Wetlands and Wildlife Scenic Byway moves through radiant wetlands full of wildlife, prairie vistas with immense skies, and rural communities shaped by nature and the entrepreneurial spirit. Clouds of Sandhill and Whooping Cranes descend; and pelicans, Bald and Golden Eagles, shorebirds, ducks, and geese gracefully rest here, capturing the spirit of this byway.

Length: 76.7 miles / 122.7 km

Time to Allow: 90 minutes to drive or five hours to enjoy the byway



Local Information

Great Bend Convention & Visitors Bureau

3007 10th Street
Great Bend, KS 67530

Telephone Number: 620-792-2750

Send E-mail

Visitor Services

Food



There are places to buy food and dine in Hoisington, Claflin, Great Bend, Ellinwood, Hudson, St. John, and Stafford.

Gasoline



Gas and other automotive services are available in Hoisington, Claflin, Great Bend, Ellinwood, St. John, and Stafford.

Information



Pick up byway brochures at the Great Bend Convention & Visitors Bureau, Barton County Courthouse, Stafford County Courthouse, Kansas Wetlands Education Center, Quivira Visitors Center, corridor community Chamber of Commerce offices, area hotels, at any of the 17 Kansas Travel Information Centers, and at the Kansas Tourism Office. On the web, visit

[www.kansasbyway.com](<http://www.kansaswetlandsandwildlifescenicbyway.com/>)
and [www.visitgreatbend.com](<http://www.visitgreatbend.com/>).

Lodging



Overnight lodging is available in Great Bend, Hoisington, Ellinwood, and Stafford.

Restrooms



Restrooms are available in Hoisington, Claflin, Great Bend, Ellinwood, St. John, and Stafford.

Retail



There are many places to shop in Hoisington, Claflin, Great Bend, Ellinwood, Hudson, St. John, and Stafford.

Special Considerations

Tour groups needing additional assistance such as itineraries and/or receptive operator information may contact the Great Bend Convention & Visitors Bureau at 620-792-2750.

Restrictions

The KWWSB is predominately a two-lane roadway managed by state and county road departments. KDOT and the counties do regular maintenance on the road surface, including clearing snow and debris, managing appropriate traffic signage, clearing the ditches and mowing the ground cover where appropriate. Its capacity includes through traffic, local service, commercial farm, and recreational use.

Seasons

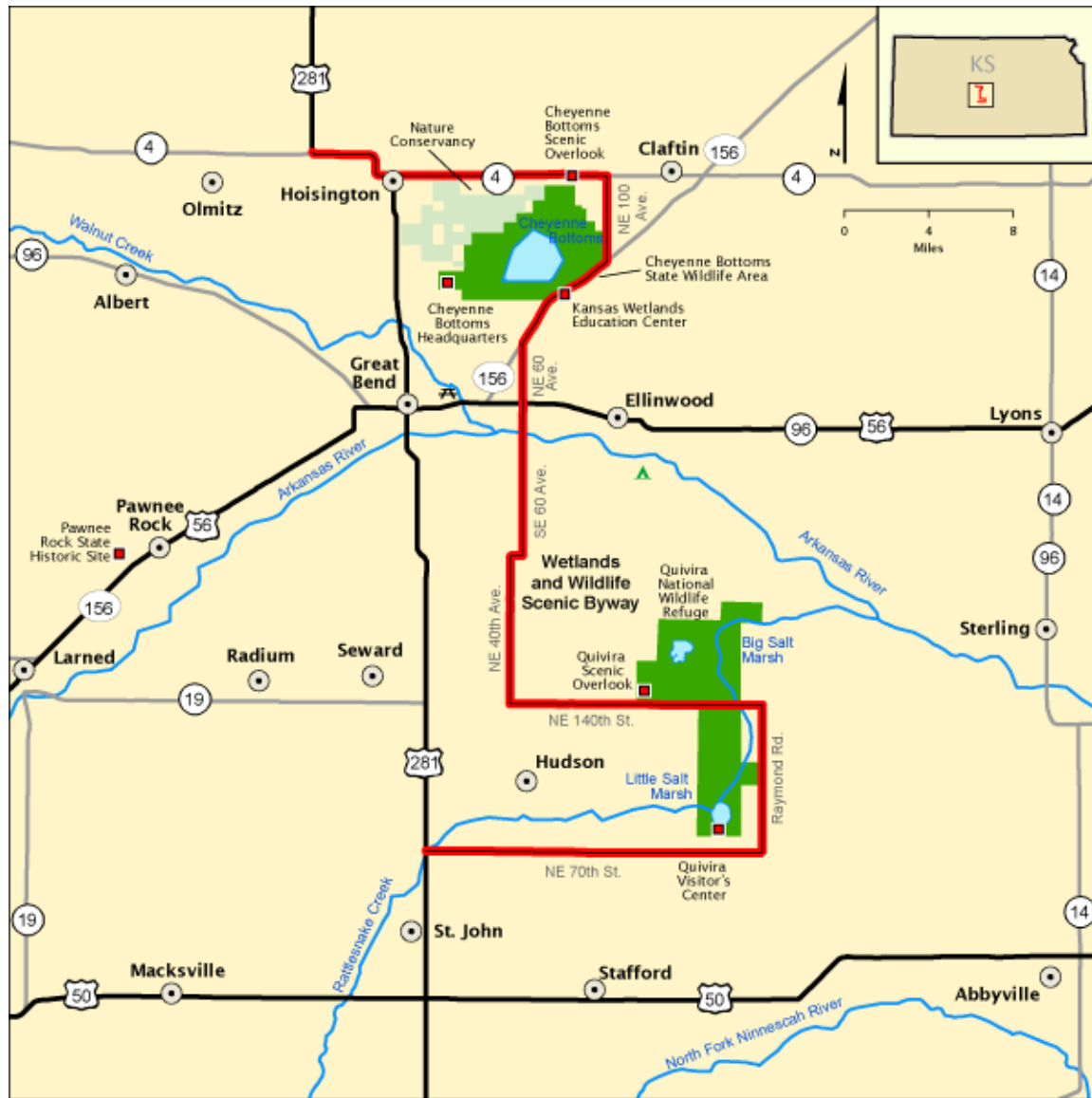
Best Time to Drive

Late spring will promise the best viewing of shorebird migration on the Central Flyway while fall will showcase the waterfowl migration.

High Season

In late June and early July during wheat harvest, travelers could encounter large, slow-moving farm equipment on the county roads.

Map and Directions



Legend:

Point of Interest	Campground	Featured Byway	Water	State Border
Park	Picnic/Rest Area	America's Byways	Wildlife Refuge	Urban Area
Mountain	Interstate	Other Byway	Wilderness Area	Tribal Nation
City	U.S. Highway	Other Road	Other Federal Lands	Military Base
Capital	State Highway	Trail	Other State Lands	

Driving Directions

The byway begins in Barton County at the west junction of US-281 and Highway K-4 (five miles west of Hoisington, Kansas).


- Go east on Highway K-4 for 15 miles.
- Turn right (south) onto NE 100 Ave. and follow this road for four miles.
- Turn right (southwesterly) onto Highway K-156 and follow this road for about six miles.
- Turn left (east) onto NE 30 Rd and then make an immediate right (south) turn onto a blacktop road (NE 60 Ave./RS-980).
- Stay on NE 60 Ave. for 17 1/2 miles until you reach NE 140th Street/RS-1484 in Stafford County. When you have traveled 10 of the 17 miles, you'll reach Stafford County where there is a correction line (the road will jog over 1/2 mile to the west and then back south). Don't change roads, but at the county line the road name changes to NE 40th Ave./RS-980 for the remaining seven miles.
- Turn left (east) onto NE 140th Street/RS-1484 and follow for 12 miles (the last mile of the 12 miles is in Reno County and is called 95th Ave./RS-554).
- Turn right (south) onto Raymond Rd/RS-506 and follow for seven miles.
- Turn right (west) onto 4th Ave./NE 70th St/RS-636 and follow for 16 miles to the byway's end at the junction with US-281.

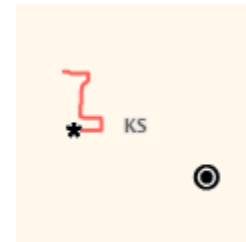
Getting to the Byway



Nearby cities

Wichita, KS (100 miles / 160.93 km, 1 hour 50 minutes)

- Start:**  US-54/400 westbound, Wichita, KS
N 37.677° W 97.357° [?]
- Directions:**
- Take US-54/400 west to Pratt.
 - Get on US-281 and go north past St. John to 4th St. where the byway begins.
- Junction with byway:** * Intersection of US-281 and 4th St, Hutchinson, KS
N 38.058° W 98.748° [?]



Road Trip: Exoduster History along the Wetlands and Wildlife Scenic Byway

Departure: St. John, KS, Kansas

Destination: Hoisington, KS, Kansas

Time to allow: 1 day

"Kansas with her freedom and broad prairies, with the memories of John Brown and his heroic struggle, seems naturally the State to seek." -- George T. Ruby, New Orleans Weekly Louisianian, April 26, 1879

The Great Exodus of 1879 was a mass movement of African Americans from the Southern United States to Kansas. The Kansas Exodus was the first general migration of African Americans following the Civil War. 20,000 freed slaves (known as Exodusters) flowed into Kansas between 1879 and 1880. John Brown and his fiery abolitionist friends combined with the anti-slavery Civil War reputation of "Bleeding Kansas" made it seem a fair place where freed men and women and their families would be welcome.

Spend a day on the Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway as you trace the Exoduster migration and settlement in Barton and Stafford Counties. Begin at the Martin Cemetery in Stafford County and end in Barton County at the Hoisington Cemetery. The tour will take you to local cemeteries, museums and memorials to experience the stories of Exodusters, Buffalo Soldiers and other Union Army veterans.

Exoduster tour brochures are available at the Historical Museums and Great Bend Convention & Visitor's Bureau. Download a copy of the Exoduster Brochure from the Wetlands and Wildlife Scenic Byway website.

Day 1

- **Start: St. John, KS**

A large colony of "Exodusters" settled in St. John and Stafford County after a plea to the city from Kansas Governor John St. John (whose name the town had recently adopted in hope of becoming the county seat). Today St. John is a charming small town whose town square is surrounded by historic buildings.

- **Stop 1: Martin Cemetery**



From previous stop: 9 minutes / 5.3 mi (8.5 km)

Directions: From downtown St. John, head south on N Broadway St toward E 2nd Ave. Turn left onto E 1st Ave and then turn right onto US-281. Follow US 281 for three miles and then turn right onto US-50. The Martin Cemetery will be on the right about a mile and a half down the road.

Suggested time at this stop: 20 minutes

Established in 1906 and last used in 1954, this small, serene cemetery on US Highway 50 is populated by Exodusters and their descendants. Freed slaves settled in this part of Kansas beginning in 1879. By 1914 the African American population of Stafford County was 425.

- **Stop 2: Stafford Cemetery**



From previous stop: 10 minutes / 9 mi (14.4 km)

Directions: Drive east on US 50 toward Stafford for about nine miles. The Cemetery will be on the right.

Suggested time at this stop: 25 minutes

Nearly a century ago, J.R. Carmichael, a local stonecutter, carved a limestone stump as a Grand Army of the Republic (an association of Union veterans) memorial to Stafford's Civil War veterans. While visiting, seek out Carmichael's own headstone.

- **Stop 3: Stafford County Museum**



From previous stop: 5 minutes / 1.4 mi (2.2 km)

Directions: Head east on US-50. Turn left onto S. Main St. The Stafford County Museum will be on the right.

Suggested time at this stop: 1 hour

At this stop, the story of Stafford County's Exodusters is told through an exhibit, historic glass negative photos and the film "The Black Frontier." The museum also has Civil War artifacts, an extensive genealogical library, and a self-guided area cemetery guide.

- **Stop 4: Eden Valley Cemetery**



From previous stop: 1 hour 59 minutes / 44.6 mi (71.4 km)

Directions: Head north on Main St. and continue onto NE 80th Ave. Turn right on NE 70th St., which is where you'll begin following the byway. Drive east for about eight miles and then turn left and follow N Raymond Rd. for seven miles. Turn left onto W. 95th Ave. and continue west as it turns into NE 140th St. Turn right on NE 40th Ave./N Hudson Rd and head north. Turn left on NE 180th St and drive west for about six miles. The Eden Valley Cemetery will be on your right.

Suggested time at this stop: 20 minutes

Many Exodusters and their descendants rest in peaceful Eden Valley Cemetery, including relatives of ground-breaking Harlem Renaissance filmmaker, Oscar Micheaux. Look for the headstones of Micheaux's grandmother, Melvina Micheaux and aunt Harriett Robinson. As you look at Samuel Gracey's stone, picture him leading his family out of slavery in a daring and dangerous late night escape to the free state of Kansas.

- **Stop 5: Barton County Historical Museum and Village**



From previous stop: 19 minutes / 11.5 mi (18.4 km)

Directions: Head east on NW 180th St and continue for about two miles. Turn left onto US-281 and drive north for 9.5 miles. The Barton County Historical Museum and Village will be on the left.

Suggested time at this stop: 1 hour 30 minutes

Sitting on the banks of the Arkansas River and sheltered by huge cottonwoods, the Museum has everything from a quilt collection to a research library and archive (including Grand Army of the Republic records and ceremonial artifacts). The Village itself is a little slice of life on the prairie with a one-room schoolhouse, an early stone house and a railroad station. The Museum features an exhibit of "The Civil War and The Exodusters in Central Kansas."

- **Stop 6: Barton County Courthouse Square**



From previous stop: 2 minutes / 1 mi (1.6 km)

Directions: Head north on US-281. The Courthouse is on the right.

Suggested time at this stop: 15 minutes

Standing in the center of the town square, the Barton County Courthouse is a fine example of Modern Eclectic architecture. Designed by W.E. Hulse & Co., Hutchinson, KS, the building was completed in 1918 and boasts marble floors and stairways. "The Rifleman" monument stands guard on the north side of the courthouse to honor local veterans, both white and black, who fought for the cause of the Union in the Civil War. When you stand near this statue you are standing directly on the famous Santa Fe Trail.

• **Stop 7: Barton County Arts Council Gallery**



From previous stop: 1 minute / 0.05 mi (0.1 km)

Directions: The Barton County Arts Council Gallery is located across the street from the Courthouse on the corner of Main St. and Forest Ave.

Suggested time at this stop: 30 minutes

This is Great Bend's first stone building (ca 1872) and now houses a gallery and performance space in Great Bend's vibrant downtown. The gallery hosts an exhibit recognizing the independent spirit of the Great Exodus of 1879, also known as the Exoduster Movement, and its influence on the Harlem Renaissance. The gallery also honors the memory and works of Oscar Micheaux, novelist, filmmaker, entrepreneur, and grandson of Exoduster families who settled in both Barton and Stafford Counties.

Note: The gallery is only open Monday - Friday from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm, so plan accordingly.

• **Stop 8: Great Bend Cemetery**



From previous stop: 6 minutes / 2 mi (3.2 km)

Directions: Head north on Main Street. Turn left on Broadway Avenue and drive for about two miles. The Great Bend Cemetery is on the right.

Suggested time at this stop: 20 minutes

Your Cemetery Tour brochure will guide you through this cemetery where 12,000 people from all backgrounds and walks of life are buried. Veterans of the Civil War are honored at the Grand Army of the Republic Circle. The gravestone of George Washington and Catherine Walker, both born into slavery, is a monument to this educated, hardworking couple who became wealthy in Kansas. The Walkers had 12 children and farmed 480 acres in Stafford County. In 1938 they hit a 1600 barrel a day oil well on their homestead! Be sure to visit the resting place of ground-breaking African-American film maker Oscar Micheaux. A descendant of Exodusters, Micheaux is the only person buried in this cemetery who has a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame.

- **Stop 9: Hoisington Cemetery**



From previous stop: 47 minutes / 28.7 mi (45.9 km)

Directions: Head east on Broadway Ave and turn right onto Wilson St. Turn left onto KS-156/KS-96 and continue on KS-156 to meet up with the byway. Follow KS-156 and then turn left and head north on NE 100 Ave. Turn left onto KS-4 and follow for about ten miles into Hoisington. Turn left onto N. Cedar St. The entrance to the cemetery will be on the left.

Suggested time at this stop: 20 minutes

Explore colorful African American history in Hoisington in the Hoisington Cemetery. The vibrant black population of South Hoisington, many of whom came to work on the railroad, were descendants of the Exodusters who homesteaded in Barton and Stafford Counties. You'll find charming folk-art headstones in this cemetery.

- **End: Hoisington, KS**



From previous stop: 4 minutes / 0.6 mi (1.0 km)

Directions: Head south on Cedar Street. Turn right and head west on East 7th St. to Main St. (also US 281) and turn left on West 5th St. toward downtown.

Hoisington sits in the midst of the Cheyenne Bottoms Basin. The mystery and abundance of these giant wetlands is reflected in what is deeply valued here - community, family, faith, hard work, and respect for the natural world. Take time to visit Cheyenne Bottoms, climb the observation tower, and reflect on the inspired and sometimes troubling stories you uncovered along the Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway. Then let yourself be immersed in the sights, sounds and smells of the wetlands and you will know why so many chose to come to this place in Kansas and make better lives for themselves.

Totals for Day 1

Total Distance Traveled: 104.15 miles / 166.6 km

Total Travel Time: 3 hours 42 minutes

Total Stopping Time: 5 hours