

# TELL ME A STORY... OF THE OLD WEST.

Traveling the Smoky Valley Scenic Byway and  
Western Vistas Historic Byway



This two-day itinerary takes you off Interstate 70 and onto two Kansas byways rich with scenic and historic landscapes.

## Day One: Smoky Valley Scenic Byway

WAKEENEY

Depart I-70 at Ogallah (Exit 135). Head south on K-147 (the Smoky Valley Scenic Byway) to Brownell (27 miles). Go west on US-4 toward Ransom (10 miles). To continue along the byway, go north on US-283 to WaKeeney (29 miles). Total distance: 66 miles

### The Story – Smoky Valley Scenic Byway (60 miles)

The vista of ranches along the route includes some of the last open ranges of the high plains and a sampling of Fort Hays limestone and niobrara limestone. The discovery of gold in the western Kansas Territory (known now as Colorado) created a “rush” of immigrants, miners and con men seeking to make real their dream of easy riches. In 1865, the Butterfield Overland Despatch established passenger and freight stage service from Atchison, Kansas to Denver, Colorado. The Kansas Pacific Railroad (later the Union Pacific Railroad-Eastern Division) began pushing west, parallel to the Smoky Hill trail run by the Butterfield line. As the stage lines and railroads expanded west, settlements began to form along the route.



### The Byway Experience Today

The Smoky Hills are named for their hazy blue-gray hues at sunrise and sunset. The area is steeped in the rich history of the westward movement of the pioneers along the Smoky Hill Trail and those early settlers whose vision was to make this fertile untamed land their own. Hoping to preserve the natural beauty along their byway, residents began hand-gathering wildflower seeds, then re-seeding road shoulders, creating a beautiful spring and summer carpet of color. The mixed prairie grasses transition to short grasses along the byway. Grazing pastures or farmland dotted with windmills are frequent sites in the Smoky Valley.



### View from the Car Window:

Trees are rare along the prairie, but their presence holds some clues to the land. See a group of trees? Look for a homestead or farm. See a strung-out ribbon of trees? They probably border a river or creek. “Horse high, bull strong and hog tight” describes rows



of trees lining roads or fields planted not only as protective wind breaks, but also to keep out wandering cattle. In the fall, it is easy to spot an unusually-shaped green fruit on the trees or ground along the road. These are “hedge apples,” a product of the Osage Orange or “hedge” trees.



**Don't Miss:**

Butterfield Overland Despatch markers and trail ruts; Emanuel Lutheran Church, built from native limestone quarried along the byway.



**On Your MP3 Player or Radio:**

Judy Collin's Wildflowers album (1967) or Tom Petty's Wildflowers (1994).



**1 Worth a Detour – Cedar Bluff State Park**

An unpaved gravel road, passable in good weather, bisects the byway at Cedar Bluff State Park. Here you'll find primitive camping, RV camp sites and cabins, fishing, boating, hunting, swimming, hiking, BMX tracks, stunning 100' limestone cliffs that drop into the reservoir, and wildlife viewing – especially deer, hawks, ducks, geese and owls. At the Cedar Bluff Visitor's Center, ask if Threshing Machine Canyon is open. It's worth the visit.

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**2 The Story – WaKeeney**

WaKeeney was founded halfway between Ft. Leavenworth and Denver, hoping to provide wagon trains, the Butterfield Overland Despatch stage line, western immigrants and, eventually, the railroads a waystation for rest and supplies.

**The Byway Experience Today**

Albert Warren and James Keeney purchased land from the railroad and plotted their “Queen City of the High Plains.” Times were tough for the fledgling town and its settlers, but the arrival of the railroad assured growth would come. A courthouse was built, along with many other businesses on a wide, brick Main Street. Today, that street accommodates a 40' Christmas tree and some 6,000 lights to transform WaKeeney into the “Christmas City” of Kansas during the holiday season.



**Don't Miss:**

Dine at the Western Kansas Saloon & Grill, located in the Old Krause Hardware store. Patrons upstairs used to drop a coin through the hole in the floor to alert gamblers in the basement that lawmen were on their way.

Continue west to overnight in Scott City before starting the Western Vistas Historic Byway.

*Directions: From WaKeeney, rejoin I-70 and travel west 25 miles to Exit 93. Go south on K-23 through Gove to Dighton. Head west approximately 24 miles on K-96 to Scott City, the starting point of the Western Vistas Historic Byway. Total distance: 94 miles*

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## Day Two: Western Vistas Historic Byway

SCOTT CITY • OAKLEY • WALLACE • SHARON SPRINGS

*Directions: Travel US-83 North from Scott City to Lake Scott State Park detour to Monument Rocks National Landmark, then continue north to Oakley (50 miles). Head west on US-40 to Wallace and end the byway experience at Sharon Springs. Total distance: 103 miles*

**The Story – Western Vistas Historic Byway (102 miles)**

The badlands of Western Kansas are visually breathtaking, with pinnacles of limestone rising above the plains. These vast open plains provided herds of migrating





bison with rich grasslands for grazing and immense space for what would become known as “America’s Breadbasket.” The success of those early farmers and ranchers helped draw additional emigrants from the East. They came on horseback, by wagon train, and, eventually, by rail as Americans continued to explore their destiny in the West. The press of immigration soon began to intrude on the hunting grounds of tribes of America’s Plains Indians. This led to a series of battles and the placement of several forts along the Smoky Valley Trail toward the “wildest Fort in Kansas”—Fort Wallace. This geographic area is world renowned for its fossil discoveries and fossils continue to be found today.



**Famous People:**

The immense buffalo herds that had provided necessary food and supplies for the American Indians were decimated largely by indiscriminate hunting by the late 1880’s. William F. Cody earned his nickname “Buffalo Bill” in 1868, after a buffalo-hunting contest with William Comstock held near present day Oakley. Conflict with the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Prairie Apache and other Indians fighting to protect their way of life, brought famous Union Generals: George Armstrong Custer, William T. Sherman, Phil Sheridan, and the famous “Buffalo Soldiers” of the US 10th Cavalry to the region, to name a few.



**On Your MP3 Player or Radio:**

Enjoy listening to Diamond W Wranglers, Kansas musicians who sing of cattle drives, riding horses, nature’s splendor and a nostalgic look at cowboy life.

**1 The Story – Scott City**

The El Quartejejo Museum will lead the visitor through a historic timeline including fossils, early Indian encampment scenes as well as a replica of the El Quartejejo ruins. See Old Western Art at the Jerry Thomas Art Gallery.

The Colorado, Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad Company (CK&O) was chartered in 1913 to utilize the Scott City to Winona rail line previously laid by the Gulf and Northern Railroad in 1910. Financial difficulties persisted and with the onset of World War I the federal government took control of the line as a war measure. By December 21, 1917, the rails were junked, providing badly needed steel for the war effort, and the rolling stock was sold.



**2 Worth a Detour:**

Located just south of Lake Scott State Park, Battle Canyon represents the last desperate encounter between American Indians and the United States troops in the State of Kansas during the year 1878. A historical monument overlooks the cave, two canyons and bluffs where the battle took place.



**Don’t Miss:**

Keystone Gallery in Scott City; Buffalo Bill Sculpture; Fick Fossil & History Museum in Oakley; and Fort Wallace Museum & Cemetery in Wallace.

**3 The Story - Lake Scott State Park & El Quartejejo Ruins**

Ladder Creek Canyon was acquired by the State of Kansas in 1929. The next year, Ladder Creek was dammed to create 100-acre Lake Scott. Between 1933 and 1942 over 35,000 Kansans were enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and more than 2,700 supervisory personnel were employed on 48 projects scattered around the state. Today, the facility offers canoe and boat rentals, fishing, camping, riding and hiking. The park has 55 utility campsites, many with electrical and water hookups, as well as cabins, 100 primitive camping sites and three shower buildings.

El Quartejejo, or “Little Barracks,” is the northernmost pueblo in the United States, and only pueblo discovered in Kansas. Believed to be the former home of Pueblo Indians from New Mexico seeking to escape Spanish domination in the 1660s, it was established along the Ladder Creek tributary of the Smoky Hill in present day Scott County. There are indications that Spanish and French took over the outpost, but it was abandoned after 1763. Discovered in 1898, the ruins are made of stone and adobe and may have had as many as seven rooms. Near the ruins are indications of a primitive irrigation system used to supply fields with water. Located within Lake Scott State Park, El Quartejejo was designated in 1964 as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service.



#### **Worth a Detour:**

Western Vistas has identified secondary and unpaved routes that contribute to the story of Kansas and western migration. Along these routes are historic sites including the town of Russell Springs, the Wallace Branch of the Western Cattle Trail, the Butterfield Overland Despatch (B.O.D.)/Smoky Hill Trail, The Nature Conservancy site, and Mt Sunflower, the highest point in Kansas.

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#### **4 The Story – Monument Rocks National Landmark**

Time and erosion carved breathtaking rock formations throughout this region. Rising as high as 70 feet along the Smoky Hill, the eighty million year old arches, buttes and pinnacles, including Monument Rocks and “Little Jerusalem,” provide unique examples of Kansas natural history and beauty.

#### **5 The Story – Oakley**

The Fick Fossil & History Museum in Oakley houses a collection of exhibits ranging from the prehistoric to the modern. From skeletons of mosasaurs – marine reptiles that once swam in the waters of the vast inland sea that covered this area more than 65 million years ago – to more than 1500 photographs of pioneer Kansas are on display. Visit one of the “8 Wonders of Kansas Art” by stopping at the twice life-sized bronze sculpture of Buffalo Bill on his horse in pursuit of a buffalo.

#### **6 The Story – Wallace**

Incursions into the rich hunting grounds by eastern settlers and domestic livestock set the stage for conflicts that became the Indian Wars of the West. Fort Wallace, known as “the Fightin-est Fort in the West” was established in 1865 to protect travelers and the small settlements struggling to survive along the Smoky Hill Trail. Fort Wallace was the westernmost of a string of forts along the Smoky Hill Trail. By 1867, the fort housed more than 500 troops and fought more battles against Indians than any other in the West. Little remains now of this strategic outpost except the cemetery; stop at the Fort Wallace Museum for more of the history of the town and region.



Kansas is called “The Breadbasket of the Nation” for good reason. Kansas’ climate makes it possible to grow more wheat here than in any other state. But it’s not the only crop: Kansas often leads the nation in the production of sorghum, corn, milo, and sunflowers. Travel Kansas in early summer to witness first-hand the “amber waves of grain” made famous in “America the Beautiful.” This rich mixture of grains and wide-open plains led to the importation of cattle.

*Directions: From Sharon Springs, travel north on K-27 (approximately 30 miles) to rejoin I-70 at Goodland.*

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## **Smoky Valley Scenic Byway (60 miles)**

### **① Cedar Bluff Reservoir, State Park and Wildlife Area**

32001 147 Hwy  
Ellis, KS 67637  
Phone: (785) 726-3212  
<http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us>

### **② WaKeeney WaKeeney Travel & Tourism**

Phone: 1-877-962-7248, (785) 743-8325  
[www.wakeeney.org](http://www.wakeeney.org)

### **Western Kansas Saloon & Grill**

121 N Main St  
WaKeeney, KS 67672  
Phone: (785) 743-2050

## **Western Vistas Historic Byway (102 miles)**

### **① Scott City Scott City Chamber of Commerce**

Phone: (620) 872-3525  
<http://www.scottcitycofc.com>

### **② Battle Canyon**

520 W Scott Lake Dr  
Near Lake Scott State Park  
Scott City, KS 67871  
Phone: (620) 872-3525  
<http://www.scottcity.com>

### **③ Lake Scott State Park & El Quartejejo Ruins**

520 W Scott Lake Dr  
Scott City, KS 67871  
Phone: (620) 872-2061  
<http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us>

### **④ Monument Rocks National Landmark**

Jayhawk Rd.  
4 miles east of US-83, 25 miles South of Oakley  
Oakley, KS 67748  
Phone: (785) 671-1000  
[http://www.nature.nps.gov/nml/Registry/USA\\_Map/States/Kansas/NNL/MR/index.cfm](http://www.nature.nps.gov/nml/Registry/USA_Map/States/Kansas/NNL/MR/index.cfm)

### **⑤ Oakley**

**Oakley Area Tourism Office**  
Phone: (785) 672-4839  
<http://www.DiscoverOakley.com>

### **⑥ Wallace & Sharon Springs Wallace County Economic Development**

Phone: (785) 852-4935

