

Welcome to Broken Hills Interpretive Trail!



1. **Glacial Retreat**

When glaciers last retreated from the prairies at the end of the great Wisconsinian ice age (approx. 10,000 years ago), they left behind large blocks of ice swollen with sediment and debris. The glaciers dropped off those big blocks of ice, much like hunks of snow and ice fall from wheel wells in the winter after a long road trip.

As they melted in the warmer post-glacial climate, some ice blocks left piles of sediment. These are called “knobs”. When ice blocks contained little sediment, often a pothole formed, lower than the surrounding till. These are called “kettles”. These knobs and kettles are what give the upland prairies a dimpled complexion, full of sloughs and potholes.



When you live in this country, you will meet women and men - ranch and farm people - that bear the marks of time, sky and land on their faces and in their souls. Look into their faces and you can see the prairie wind, the blowing snow, and the hunger for moisture. Water, at work and rest, lay at every juncture of their history. We can imagine the prairie landscape as an aging face molded by the presence and absence of water.

This is a hike that explores the impact of water on the beauty of the prairies, both by working and resting. Water, in the form of glacial ice and melt water, has shaped the prairies to its current personality. As the surface ages gracefully, prairie inhabitants seek life from the moisture found on it.



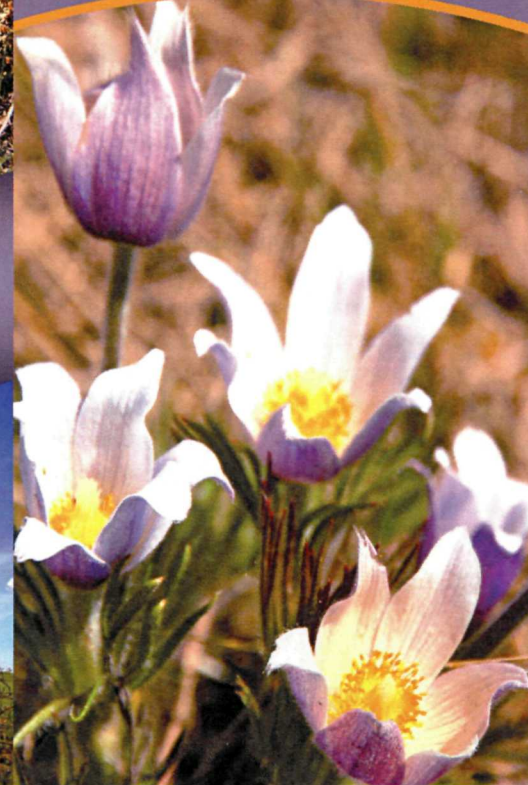
Grasslands
National Park

Broken Hills Interpretive Trail

*Observe the impact of water on
the prairies landscape*



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2. Bird Life

Waterfowl and shorebirds are dependent on the water that gathers in potholes and sloughs in the spring. Almost half of all the North American waterfowl breed and nest on sloughs and marshes of the prairie grassland region in Canada. While exploring the prairie, you will discover some of these sloughs in the uplands that border this hike. You will also see how some of the former ranchers took advantage of these depressions by creating little dams or man-made sloughs for cattle. You may even be fortunate enough to see some birds stopping for a rest and feeding on invertebrates in these sloughs.



3. Erosion

The power that water and wind can exert on your skin, always demanding moisture where there is none to spare. Brokenness can be the product of this battle, leaving the landscape chapped, cracked and exposed, much like what your hands experience during a prairie winter. These forces can be seen here along the Broken Hills.



4. Adaptations

A combination of steep slopes forcing run-off and poor soil conditions create a tough struggle for vegetation. Look for the skeleton weed that has almost no leaves in order to reduce water loss. The gumbo-evening primrose blooms at night to conserve water.



5. Creating a Valley

The Frenchman River Valley is the result of glacial melt water. Two glaciers surrounded the area of Grasslands National Park. The larger came from the Arctic and extended at various times between the northern limits of the Park and Pinto Butte (Highway 18). The second arm extended from the Cypress Hills region, and reached around the southern portion of the West Block, into the Broken Hills. Their meeting resulted in the sharing of beautiful secrets.

The northern glacial arm rested at a higher elevation than the southern arm. Melting glacial waters needed an outlet, and like the sagging skin that comes with age, it took the easiest route down. These waters cut deep grooves into the landscape. Of course, standing in the melt water's way, was the other glacier. This forced the gathering waters to flow in the gap between, which created the Frenchman River Valley.



6. Life Sustaining

Animals, birds, insects, fish, grasses, flowers, and shrubs all depend on the Frenchman River for sustenance and nourishment. Some of these species could not survive elsewhere on the prairies. Here at the river, is a means to rejuvenate parched thirsts, and drying skin cells. You can discover northern leopard frogs, freshwater crabs, long-nose dace, striped chorus frogs, and many other animals.

