

NEBRASKA

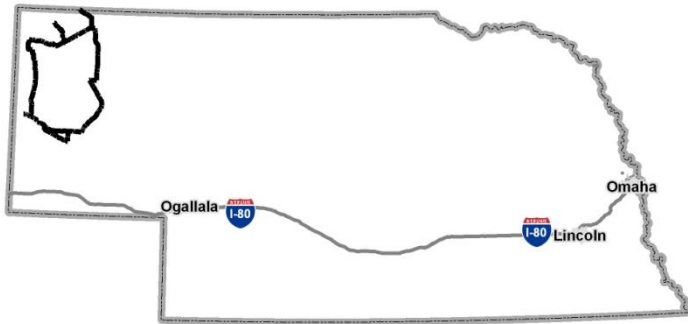
Group Travel Planner



Tour 14 **Valleys, Buttes and Bluffs: A Tour of Western** **Nebraska**

2009

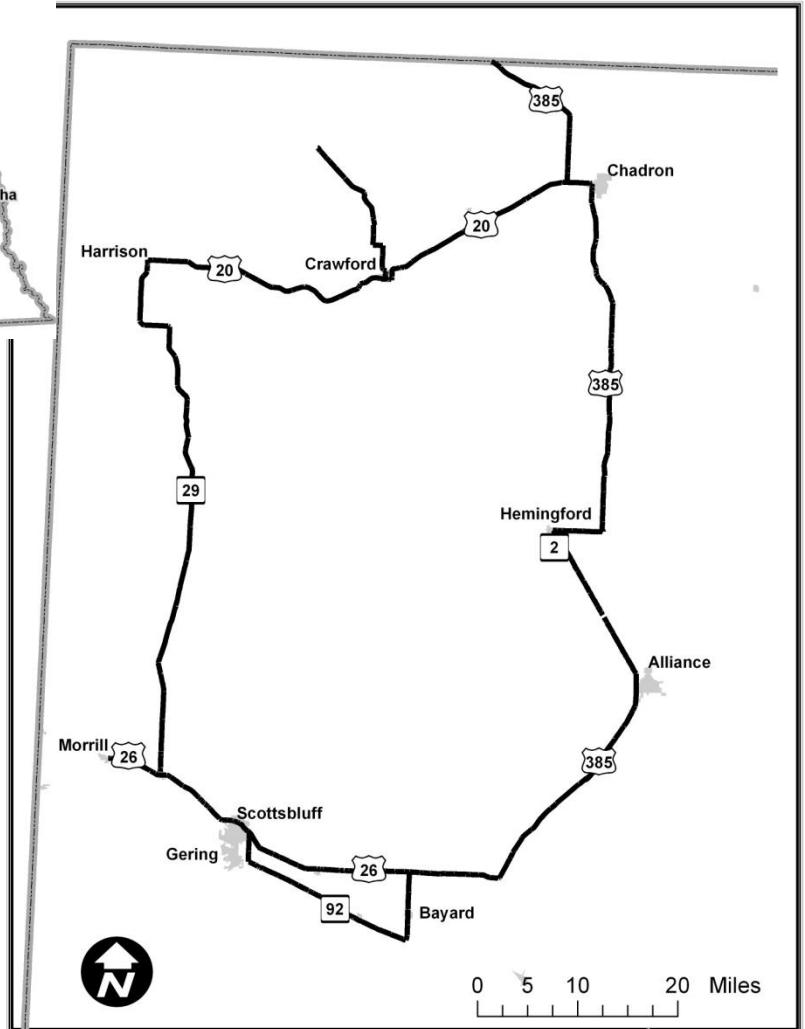
Tour 14 Valleys, Buttes and Bluffs A Tour of Western Nebraska



Day 1

Nestled between the picturesque **Pine Ridge**, 308-432-4401, to the south and the immense and wide-open High Plains country to the north and west, Chadron enjoys one of the most scenic locations of any Nebraska town. This community of more than 5,000 people and the surrounding area boast excellent attractions and tourism services to keep your group happy and wanting to come back for more! Established in 1926, [Chadron State Park](#), 308-432-6167, is Nebraska's first state park and full of outstanding group activities, such as paddleboats, black powder demonstrations, hiking and sightseeing. The park is nestled within towering pine trees and rugged buttes, affording group tours with ample photo opportunities. Services can be provided to groups for meals and meetings. Advance notice is required for groups.

The [Museum of the Fur Trade](#), 6321 Highway 20, 308-432-3843, is located just outside Chadron. This one-of-a-kind facility displays artifacts from the lucrative fur-trading industry that was once a thriving business in northwest Nebraska in the early 1800s. The Bordeaux Trading Post, built in 1837, stands on the museum grounds and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



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Attractions in Chadron include the [Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center](#), 1000 Main St., 308-432-6401, located on the campus of Chadron State College. The center is dedicated to the study of Nebraska and High Plains culture, literature and history. The Heritage Room hosts a collection of Sandoz's books and poems. The [Dawes County Historical Museum](#), 341 Country Club Road, 308-432-4999, shares the story of the area throughout several buildings of the museum complex, such as an original log house and barn, schoolhouse and railroad caboose.

Come to Alliance for the next best thing to Stonehenge. [Carhenge](#), 308-762-1520, is one of Nebraska's crackerjack attractions and has stirred much controversy since its creation in 1987. An exact replica of the world-famous Stonehenge in England, Carhenge uses old cars in place of stones. The project was the brainchild of architect Jim Reinders. He and his family gathered for a family reunion in Alliance and wanted to come up with a project to dedicate to Reinder's father. Jim spent many years in Europe and studied Stonehenge at great length. In 1987, he returned to his family farm and constructed Carhenge. At first it met with mixed reactions from local residents; however, Carhenge has now become a national sensation and a unique Nebraska attraction.

Alliance has one of the state's best historical museums—the [Knight Museum of High Plains Heritage](#), 908 Yellowstone Ave., 308-762-2384. A variety of displays interpret the history of the city and the importance that the railroad played in its growth.



The [Carnegie Arts Center](#), 204 W. 4th St., 308-762-4571, features local and regional artists, gifts and a sculpture garden. **Sallows Conservatory and Arboretum**, 308-762-2384, features tropical and sub-tropical plants, and walking paths wind through the flower displays of the Sunken Gardens. Downtown Alliance offers a variety of shopping and dining opportunities. Step back in time to a slower, more relaxed pace at [Dobby's Frontier Town](#), 320 E. 25th St., 308-762-4321. This recreation of a turn-of-the-century western town boasts a homesteader's cabin, mercantile, bootlegger's cabin, post office, jail, baled straw house, and much, much more.

Sweet Sage Spice and Gourmet Shoppe, 806 Box Butte Ave., 308-487-5599, in Hemingford, 20 miles northwest of Alliance on Highway 2, is an old-fashioned variety store with a full line of antiques, collectibles, candles and art from local artists.

"Towering to the heavens" is how one pioneer described Chimney Rock near Bayard—the most recognized landmark along the Oregon Trail. At the base of the

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spire, the [Chimney Rock National Historic Site Visitors Center](#), 308-586-2581, offers visitors fascinating stories from pioneer diaries about their trek westward. An audio-visual presentation and an impressive gift shop are on site.

To experience what it was like as a pioneer, nothing compares to the [Oregon Trail Wagon Train](#), 308-586-1850, one mile from Chimney Rock. Put on your best western duds and step back in time to the 1850s as your group boards a Conestoga wagon train for a bumpy ride alongside actual wagon ruts. Your group will enjoy campfire songs, stories and the most mouth-watering meal prepared over an open fire. It's the perfect way to end your day as an illuminated Chimney Rock lights up the night. Reservations required.

Welcome to Scottsbluff/Gering, also known as the "Twin Cities." West of Gering is [Scotts Bluff National Monument](#), 308-436-4340, a prominent landmark used by American Indians and pioneers along the Oregon and Mormon Trails. A drive (or hike along the 1.6 mile Saddle Rock Trail) to the top of the monument allows a tremendous view of the entire North Platte River Valley. Wagon ruts are still visible at the base of the monument, and a gift shop and museum are located in the visitor center where the importance of the trails and the area's colorful history are featured.

Explore the history of farm and ranch equipment with vintage horse-drawn and steam-powered engines in the [Farm and Ranch Museum](#), 2930 M St., 308-436-1989. If your group tour comes during the third weekend in September, make plans to watch live demonstrations of various farming equipment during the annual Harvest Festival.

Enjoy pine-covered canyons and rugged rock buttes at the **Wildcat Hills Nature Center**, 308-436-3777, a short drive south of Gering. Nestled within the [Wildcat Hills](#), the nature center is located in one of the most beautiful regions of Nebraska. An abundance of native wildlife can be enjoyed from the information center's deck or along the more than three miles of hiking trails throughout the park.

Two museums in Gering that are worth visiting are the [Wyo-braska Museum of Natural History](#), 850 U St., 308-436-7104, which houses more than 300 mounted zoological specimens from around the world; and the [North Platte Valley Museum](#), 308-436-5411, which chronicles the history of the area through a variety of impressive displays, including a sod house, one-room schoolhouse, and agricultural equipment from bygone days.



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The main lines of the western migratory trails converged at **Robidoux Pass**. Today, you can visit the reconstructed [Robidoux Trading Post](#) in beautiful **Carter Canyon**, south of Gering. Don't miss the blacksmith shop monument and pioneer graves near the trading post. Contact the Gering Convention and Visitors Bureau for tour information: 308-436-6886. The trading post is located on a dirt road, and no services are available along the road or at the site.

Across the North Platte River, Scottsbluff boasts a very impressive arts center—the [West Nebraska Arts Center](#), 106 E. 18th St., 308-632-2226. It features a variety of artistic activities, including a gallery and gift shop that sells locally made gifts.

The [Riverside Zoo](#), 1600 S. Beltline Highway West, 308-630-6236, is an impressive facility that features more than 300 animals representing 97 animal species from around the world. Excellent picnic facilities and walking paths are available. Enjoy a panoramic view of Scotts Bluff National Monument as you sip a refreshing glass of wine at the [Prairie Vine Vineyard and Winery](#), 308-623-2955.

The **Fillingham Exotic Animal Farm**, 308-623-1164, in Morrill, west of Scottsbluff on Highway 26, offers guided tours of exotic animals throughout the 275-acre farm. Some of the rare animals include a Z-donk, a zebus and an onyx. Reservations for guided tours are required.

Day 2

[Agate Fossil Beds National Monument](#), 301 River Road, 308-668-2211, south of Harrison, is a fossil lover's paradise. Fossilized mammals from 19 million years ago are easily visible in the walls and canyons of the 3,000-acre national monument. There are miles of easy-to-navigate hiking trails throughout the property and the visitor center interprets the history and significance of the area. Agate Fossil Beds tells the story of "Captain" James Cook—a former professional hunter, guide, Army scout and owner of the nearby Agate Springs Ranch. For 50 years, the ranch was a haven for American Indians, such as Chief Red Cloud. Cook welcomed and fed his guests, and in return they repaid his generosity by presenting him with gifts throughout the years. In time, these gifts became a sizable and important collection of American Indian artifacts, which are now permanently displayed in the visitor center. This is truly a unique collection and a must-see exhibit!

Grab a quick snack or something to drink in Harrison, also known as "Nebraska's Top Town." With an elevation of 4,878 feet above sea level, it enjoys the highest elevation of any Nebraska community. Make sure you have your camera ready; Harrison is surrounded by some of the most scenic countryside in the state.

Take the **Bridges to Buttes Scenic Byway** to Crawford, home of Nebraska's largest state park—[Fort Robinson State Park](#), 308-665-2900. It was at Fort Robinson where the great Lakota warrior Crazy Horse surrendered in 1877. A stone marker

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shows the spot where he was mortally wounded. Fort Robinson also was the site of the famous Cheyenne Outbreak and home to the “Buffalo Soldiers,” an African-American garrison in a segregated army. Many activities are available at “Fort Rob,” including buffalo stew cookouts, theatrical presentations at the Post Playhouse (group rates available), historic tours and museums, and Jeep rides through the majestic, pine-covered buttes. The [Trailside Museum of Natural History](#), 308-66-2929, houses a mammoth skeleton that stands 10 feet tall and an art gallery of American Indian and western art.

Enjoy an exclusive three-day guided trail ride through the Land of Crazy Horse and northwest Nebraska’s ruggedly beautiful high country. [High Country Ranch Ride](#), 617 West Ash Creek Rd., 308-665-1580, will give your group tour a chance to live like a true Old West cowboy. Homespun entertainment, great food cooked outside, and some of the most stunning scenery in the world—what more can you ask for? Saddle up, your horse awaits!

Enjoy a mouth-watering meal at the **Ranch House**, 445 Second St., 308-665-1231. Afterwards, spend time browsing the extensive upstairs art and antique gallery. So come on in, and let them rustle you up something tasty and delicious at this National Register of Historic Places landmark.

The [Ponderosa Ranch](#), 524 Saw Log Rd., 308-665-3983, lets your group tour members become cowboys and cowgirls for a day, a week, and anytime in between. Spend time working alongside actual cowboys at a working ranch. Brandings, vaccinating calves, gathering strays, fixing fences, and trimming horse hooves are just some of the many daily ranch hand activities that your tour will experience. The best part is ending the day with a delicious cowboy-sized meal served family style. They’ll throw in free the scenic beauty, colorful sunsets and sunrises, and a peaceful retreat where you can completely enjoy your surroundings.

[Toadstool Geologic Park](#), 308-432-0300, northwest of Crawford, resembles the famous South Dakota Badlands and is one of the most dramatic landscapes in Nebraska. Over the centuries, the clay and sandstone in the area have been eroded by wind and rain to form toadstool-shaped formations. The park also contains valuable fossil deposits and the longest known mammal trackway of the Oligocene epoch—more than one mile. A one-mile loop trail from the campground highlights many fine examples of eroded clay/sandstone formations. A reconstructed sod house gives a glimpse into the past when prairie homesteaders used the only abundant building material available—sod.



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Hudson-Meng Bison Kill Site, 308-432-0300, is located a short drive northwest of Crawford. More than 10,000 years ago, a great catastrophe killed hundreds of bison, the largest mammals on the Great Plains. More than 600 bison skeletons have been unearthed here and the mystery of how and why they died in one place at one time is still under investigation. Feel free to make your own suggestions!

Along the way to Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed, make sure you stop at [High Plains Homestead](#), 308-665-2592, to enjoy some of the best pie in the world at the **Drifter Cookshack**. While there, spend some time visiting the recreated Old West village on the property, which features a working blacksmith shop, antique store and the Dirty Creek Saloon, where you can enjoy a cool, refreshing beverage. Make sure to stop by the old-fashioned general store to pick up that special gift or rustic souvenir. Note: All but three miles to Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed, Toadstool Geologic Park and High Plains Homestead are on a well-maintained gravel road (Highway 2/71). No travel on the gravel roads should be attempted during or after rain.