



Driving Tour



Jasper County's Conservation Areas, Parks, and Historical Sites

The driving tour identified originates and ends in the City of Newton. It can be spilt into two different routes, one for each half of the county, and does not need to originate in Newton, but can be accessed at various places along the suggested route. The route crosses a minimal amount of gravel road, however, some gravel was necessary to reach some of the areas identified.

The tour circuit follows Highway 14 north out of Newton, and then west to Baxter. In Baxter is the trailhead of the Chichaqua Valley Recreation Trail:

Chichaqua Valley Recreation Trail is an abandoned railroad right-of-way that has been converted to a recreation trail going from Baxter, through Ira, Mingo, Valeria, and terminating near Bondurant, in Polk County. The 20 mile, blacktop-surfaced trail crosses the forested banks of the Skunk River. Young trees lining the trail are punctuated by vistas of rich farmland left by Iowa's last Ice-age glaciers. Recreation along this trail is mainly bicycling, jogging and walking in the spring, summer, and fall; and cross country skiing in the winter. Rest stops and picnic shelters are found at Baxter, Ira, Mingo, and Bondurant. These areas as well as Valeria offer parking for trail access.

Continuing west about 7 miles on Highway F-17, you will come to a sign with an arrowhead symbol. This sign directs you south on a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile paved road to Ashton Wildwood Park and Observatory:

Ashton Wildwood Park is composed of 113 acres of upland oak-hickory woods. Walking trails down the forested slopes provide a viewing of a wide variety of spring wild flowers. There is a self guided $\frac{1}{2}$ mile trail that is interpreted by a brochure to be found at the trailhead. Many of the large oak trees in this park pre-date the arrival of the pioneers by hundreds of years. Picnicking, camping, and softball facilities are available at Ashton Park. An Astronomical Observatory is located at Ashton Wildwood Park. The observatory is open for free public programs and observing on the dates posted by the door of the observatory, or by calling (641) 792-9780.

By back-tracking the $\frac{1}{4}$ mile road to Highway F-17, the circuit continues on Highway 330 and 117 to Mingo, where there is another access, restrooms, and a picnic shelter constructed over the top of a small creek, on an old railroad bridge.

The tour circuit then takes the visitor south through Colfax and Prairie City to The Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge and Prairie Learning Center. One of the largest reconstructed prairies in the world is being planted in this area, and visitors are welcome to learn about prairie and view the displays in the prairie learning center. Bison and elk roam areas of the refuge that are open to auto tours.

After a stop at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, the visitor can choose to return to Interstate 80 by back-tracking through Colfax, or continuing on to Monroe, where the first pioneers in Jasper County built their log cabins. The visitor can at this point return to where their tour began, or continue on to a tour of the eastern half of Jasper County. If the option is to return to Newton, by way of Highway 14, they will pass the Jasper County Museum on the way in to Newton. This museum has many well done historical Native American and pioneer exhibits. There is also an impressive bas-relief, sculpted mural depicting humans use of the natural resources of Jasper County throughout history.

If the option is to continue the visitor can drive north from Monroe on Highway 14, and take highway F-62, going east to Reasnor. Just ½ mile southeast of Reasnor is a 16 acre State Preserve named Kish-Ke-Kosh Prairie. This is a native, unplowed prairie preserve growing on wind blown sand and loess from the last glacial period in Iowa, that ended about 12,000 years ago. The area is named for Chief Kish-Ke-Kosh, who was associated with Chiefs Black Hawk and Keokuk, and who was the leader of a Fox Indian band who often lived in this area.

From Kish-Ke-Kosh prairie, keep going east on the gravel until you come to E. 56 St. South and turn south on this road. When the road bends around the the east again, you will be a the access to the Pheasants Forever Unit of the South Skunk Wildlife Area.

The South Skunk Wildlife Area consists of several tracts of land ranging from a couple of acres to the Pheasants Forever Unit which is 253 acres. Not all of the areas are easily accessable, for more information please contact the Jasper County Conservation Board office in Newton. The Pheasants Forever Unit was purchased by The Jasper County Pheasants Forever group and given to the Jasper County Conservation Board to be used as a public hunting area. This large tract of land has been restored to its natural wetland state with native forbs and grasses. Not only does the area benefit pheasants, but many species of non-game wildlife as well, such as small mammals, waterfowl, amphibians and reptiles.

Continue following the gravel road until you come to E. 64 St. South and turn south. To the west is another tract of land in the South Skunk Wildlife Area, consisting of bottom land timber. You can continue going south where you will

cross the South Skunk River at Beyer's Bridge. This area is also managed by the Jasper County Conservation Board and a boat ramp is located here for access to the river.

If you chose to stop at Beyer's Bridge, you will need to back-track up the gravel road. Turn east on S. 112 Ave. East. Go about ¼ mile and to the south, you will see another large tract of land that is very flat and covered with native grasses:

The Carpenter Wildlife Area is 120 acres of restored wetland and prairie. It is open for hunting during hunting seasons, and a place for the public to explore the beauty of our native prairies and wildlife during the spring and summer months. You can park your car along the road and walk out into the wildlife area. If the weather is wet, you may want to be wearing boots!

Keep heading east on the gravel until you get to Highway T-14. Take Highway T-14 north. You will return to F-62 and continue east to Sully. From there stay on F-62 to Lynnville where there is to be seen one of the few remaining mills in Iowa that still can operate with water power:

Wagaman Mill, also known as the *Old Mill*, was constructed in 1848. It has been used as a saw mill, carding mill, flour mill, feed mill, and as a generating station for electricity. The mill is located on the north edge of Lynnville. Complete interior restoration and interior interpretation of the wheel house has been done, and is available for public viewing during the summer months. A picnic shelter and foot bridge across the North Skunk River are found on this historic site, and allows the visitor to enjoy the mill exterior and dam on the North Skunk River when the mill is not open for visitors.

From the mill the visitor can continue the tour north on Highway T-38, across Interstate 80, to the Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve:

Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve is a 450 acre park and nature preserve located ¼ mile north of the Lynnville exit, off I-80. Within the preserve is an extensive trail system for hiking and cross-country skiing, as well as a shelter for both summer and winter use. On the rolling terrain of the preserve are to be found prairies, woodlands, a 25 acre lake, a marsh, ponds, and wildlife plantings. There are 7 miles of hiking trails within the preserve, to offer excellent viewing of a variety of native wildlife species and habitats. There are restrooms and drinking water available in this park.

Continuing north from the Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve the visitor can reach Highway 6. From Highway 6 the visitor can go east, toward Grinnell, and then take highway T-38 north to Highway F-27. This paved highway leads to the Rock Creek Recreational Trail:

The Rock Creek Recreational Trail, is a 4 mile blacktopped trail going from Grinnell to Rock Creek State Park. In the spring, summer and fall it is used primarily for biking, jogging and walking; and cross country skiing in the winter.

Follow along the trail south and you will arrive at a large lake at Rock Creek State Park:

Rock Creek State Park. This is a 1,800 acre park that provides modern camping, boating, swimming beach, fishing, and boat rental. There is a long all-purpose trail around the lake that is open to hiking and equestrian riding during the warmer months, and snow mobiling and cross country skiing during the winter.

Continuing west from Rock Creek State Park on Highway F-27, you reach Highway 224. Turn south on Highway 224 and you will come to the town of Kellogg. Head west on Railroad Street and north on Water Street. Take Water Street all the way to the end, where you will reach the entrance to the Reimer Refuge.

Reimer Refuge, a 120 acre wildlife preserve, was bequeathed to the Jasper County Conservation Board in 2001 from Dorothy Reimer Goodwin. This farm had been with the Reimer family since Frederick W. Reimer, a German immigrant, purchased the land in 1876. You can take a walk across the rolling hills, through the timber down to Coon Creek and then back north to a tall grass prairie restoration.

For the next stop, you will have to back-track north on Highway 224 to the gravel road N. 59 Ave. East. Turn west on this gravel road and follow the brown arrowhead signs to the Mariposa Recreation Area. This is one of the most picturesque areas in Jasper County, with its lake nestled in between the hills in the park.

Mariposa Recreation Area is a 151 acre outdoor recreation area located northeast of Newton. A 17 acre lake lies among hills covered with pine trees. Fishing and picnicking are the most popular attractions at the area. There is a primitive camping area and a ½ mile nature trail at Mariposa. One of the favorite activities at Mariposa is to feed the numerous ducks and geese on the lake, so bring some bread or other food along. There is also a fenced area with bison. This is an excellent park for a picnic, and there are many picnic tables, a covered shelter available. A popular wooden play structure and restrooms are located in the main picnic area. There is no charge for camping in this area.

Just ¼ mile south of the entrance to Mariposa Park is located another native, unplowed prairie area:

A. C. and Lela Morris Prairie is one of Jasper County's few remaining native tallgrass prairie areas. The 20 acre A. C. and Lela Morris Memorial Prairie is a native tallgrass prairie. It is beautiful with its summer flowering prairie flowers. You can imagine the bison grazing in the prairie, the Native Americans hunting there, or the pioneers traveling westward with their wagons through the prairie.

From Morris Prairie and Mariposa it is an easy trip on a good paved highway, if you wish to return to Newton on Highway T-12. If you haven't had a chance to visit the museum yet, that would be a suggestion.

Jasper County also has numerous public access and hunting areas that are open to the public, but are not specifically listed with this tour circuit:

Jasper County Public Hunting and Access Areas. There are numerous access areas, wildlife preserves and public hunting areas located throughout Jasper County. For more information on these areas, contact the Jasper County Conservation Board office, Newton, at (641) 792-9780.