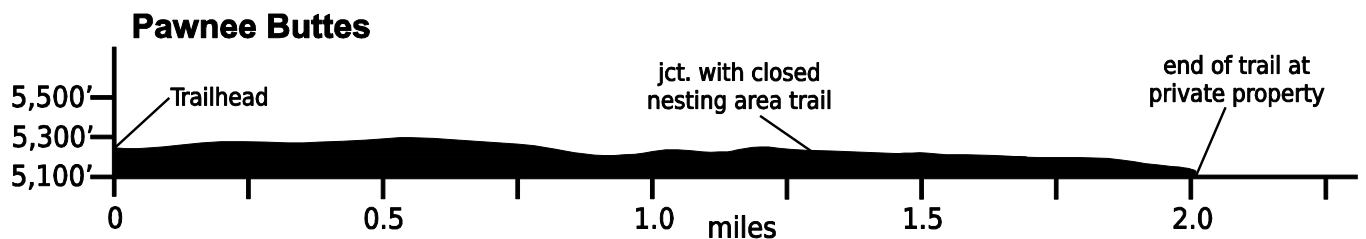


Feb. 8, 2021

Public Trail Information: Pawnee Buttes

Trail(s): Pawnee Buttes #840	
Ratings / restrictions:	Hikers - Easy Stock riders - Easy/Difficult Dogs on hand-held leash with hikers Bicycles allowed See complete REGULATIONS below INFORMATION OF INTEREST
Cautions:	Rattlesnakes; extreme heat Bicycles on trail
Typically accessible:	Year-round
Wilderness:	None
One-Way Length:	2.1 miles (from trailhead to slightly beyond the eastern base of the western Pawnee Butte)
Beginning/Peak Elevation:	5,243 / 5,306
Gain/Loss/Net Gain:	118 / 218 / -100
Map(s) - Trails Illustrated:	None
Map(s) - USGS 7-½' Quadrangles:	Pawnee Buttes (most of trail), Grover SE (trailhead area)



TRAILHEAD LOCATION:

Pawnee National Grassland: The Pawnee Buttes Trail is located in the eastern area of the Pawnee National Grassland.

To reach the Pawnee Buttes Trail, beginning from I-25 near Fort Collins, take CO-14 east approximately 50 miles to CR-105 (about 16 miles east of Briggsdale). As you pass CR-103, on the way to CR-105, you may notice a Pawnee Buttes sign indicating a turn onto CR-103. This gravel road was the suggested route before CR-105 was paved in 2020. Turn left (north) on CR-105 (no Pawnee Buttes sign) and drive about 3.4 miles where CR-105 merges for a short distance with the paved CR-390 in Keota. About 0.5 mile further north on CR-390, CR-105 separates with a turn to the right and becomes a gravel road. There is a Pawnee Buttes sign indicating this turn.

At this point there are two choices to reach the trailhead. The first is 7 miles shorter, but includes more travel on gravel roads. The gravel roads in this area can be in poor condition, especially after a recent rain, and are traveled by heavy trucks servicing the extensive oil and gas operations in the area.

For the shorter route, turn right (north) onto CR-105 (gravel) and travel 3 miles to the intersection with CR-104. Turn right (east) on CR-104 (gravel) and travel 3 miles to CR-111. Turn left (north) on CR-111 (gravel) and proceed 4 miles to GDR-685. Take this gravel park road north 2 miles to the trailhead parking lot. Be especially careful driving on GDR-685

as it can be deeply rutted with large holes that can be challenging to navigate.

For the longer route with less gravel road travel, continue on CR-390 (paved) past the right turn onto CR-105 for 8.5 miles to CR-112. Turn right (east) on CR-112 (gravel) and travel 8 miles to GDR-685. Take this gravel park road north 2 miles to the trailhead parking lot.

There is a large parking lot for passenger vehicles and stock trailers at the trailhead. Toilets, covered picnic areas, and interpretive signs are located there.

The main trailhead for hikers is on the north side of the parking lot. Be sure to read BOTH sides of the trailhead sign, because a trail map with the closed areas marked, and trail regulations are on the back (north) side. Although the sign states that dogs must be under voice control, Weld County animal control regulations require dogs to be leashed on all public lands.

The equestrian trail starts at the southwest edge of the parking lot. Go through the swinging gate, turn right and follow the road west about 1/8 mile, then turn right. There is room at this second trailhead for 4 or 5 cars to park.

TRAIL: This trail provides an opportunity to view the Buttes up close. The trail is unmarked but easy to follow due to its wide, bare path. The Lips Bluff Trail is rocky with some steep drop-offs which may be challenging for stock riders.

WATER: **None** for people; there is a water tank for horses west of the parking lot on the north side of the road between the parking lot and the stock trailhead.

CAMPING: Allowed; see REGULATIONS below INFORMATION OF INTEREST.

SEASONAL: NOTE: During snowy or muddy conditions, 4WD or AWD is recommended for travel to the trailhead. Although the official Pawnee Buttes Trail (#840) is open year-round, the Overlook and Lips Bluff areas are **CLOSED March 1 through June 30** for nesting hawks, eagles, and falcons.

DESCRIPTION: The trail begins by crossing a flat shortgrass prairie as it heads to the northwest. About 0.1 mile from the trailhead is a short trail to the right that leads to an area with an expansive view of the buttes. The trail passes through a fence about 0.6 mile from the trailhead. Watch closely from the trailhead to the fence for horned lizards near the many ant colonies. Just past the fence is the junction with the trail that leads up and over Lips Bluff. As signs indicate, this section has a seasonal closure to protect nesting raptors. The main trail continues to the left and passes between the Overlook area (to the north and west) and Lips Bluff (to the east and south), descending gently around gullies until reaching a low point where it crosses a large arroyo about 1 mile from the trailhead. There are soapweed yucca plants more or less all along the trail and numerous Rocky Mountain juniper trees near the arroyo and on the northern face of Lips Bluff. The junction with the northern end of the trail over Lips Bluff is 1.4 miles from the trailhead.

The trail then proceeds northeast to the base of the western Pawnee Butte before passing by the southern face of this Butte and continuing in the direction of the eastern Pawnee Butte. The USFS trail ends shortly beyond the western Pawnee Butte, at a large wooden sign indicating the end of the trail and private land beyond. Although the eastern Pawnee Butte is nearby and lies partially on USFS land and partially on private land, it is surrounded by private land. Hikers who proceed past this point must be respectful of the private land.

REGULATIONS:

- Collecting artifacts, arrowheads, vertebrate fossils, or barn wood is prohibited. Remember the Leave No Trace principle: Leave What You Find.
- Hawks, eagles, and falcons nest in the rocky cliffs of the Buttes and bluffs. They should not be disturbed.
- Although the Pawnee Buttes Trail is open year-round, there is a seasonal closure from March 1 through June 30 of the Overlook and Lips Bluff areas to protect nesting hawks, eagles, and falcons. Remember

Take a hat, sunscreen, and water. Daily maximum temperatures generally exceed 90°F in July and August, and occasionally top 100°F, so it is best to hike or ride this trail in fall, winter, or spring, or early in the day in summer.

INFORMATION OF INTEREST: The Buttes stand approximately 250 feet above the surrounding prairie and were formed as the surrounding sediments were removed by erosion. The upper surfaces of the Buttes, which are composed of relatively hard sandstone and conglomerate, protected the underlying, softer, clay-rich sedimentary rock from erosion. Due to their unstable nature, climbing on the Buttes is not recommended.

The Pawnee National Grassland is a native shortgrass steppe (i.e., shortgrass prairie) dominated by buffalo grass and blue gramma. It typically receives only 12-15 inches of rainfall annually. The Grassland supports a surprising diversity of plants and wildflowers (over 500 plant species have been documented in the area), many of which bloom in early spring. In addition to an abundance of native plant species (that include at least four species of native thistles and several species of native spurge), numerous plants were planted by homesteaders and early farmers and many of these still persist. Furthermore, a number of introduced noxious weeds occur on the grassland, including Dalmatian toadflax, Canada thistle, Musk thistle, Scotch thistle, Diffuse knapweed, Russian knapweed, Houndstongue, Saltcedar, and Kochia.

Approximately 300 bird species (including the Colorado state bird, the Lark Bunting) occur on the Grassland, and many of them nest either on or near the Pawnee Buttes. The western area of Pawnee National Grassland contains a self-driving birding tour described on the USFS website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/arp/recarea/?recid=32186>.

Almost 50 species of mammals (including pronghorn), and numerous species of reptiles (including the western rattlesnake) have been documented on the Grassland.

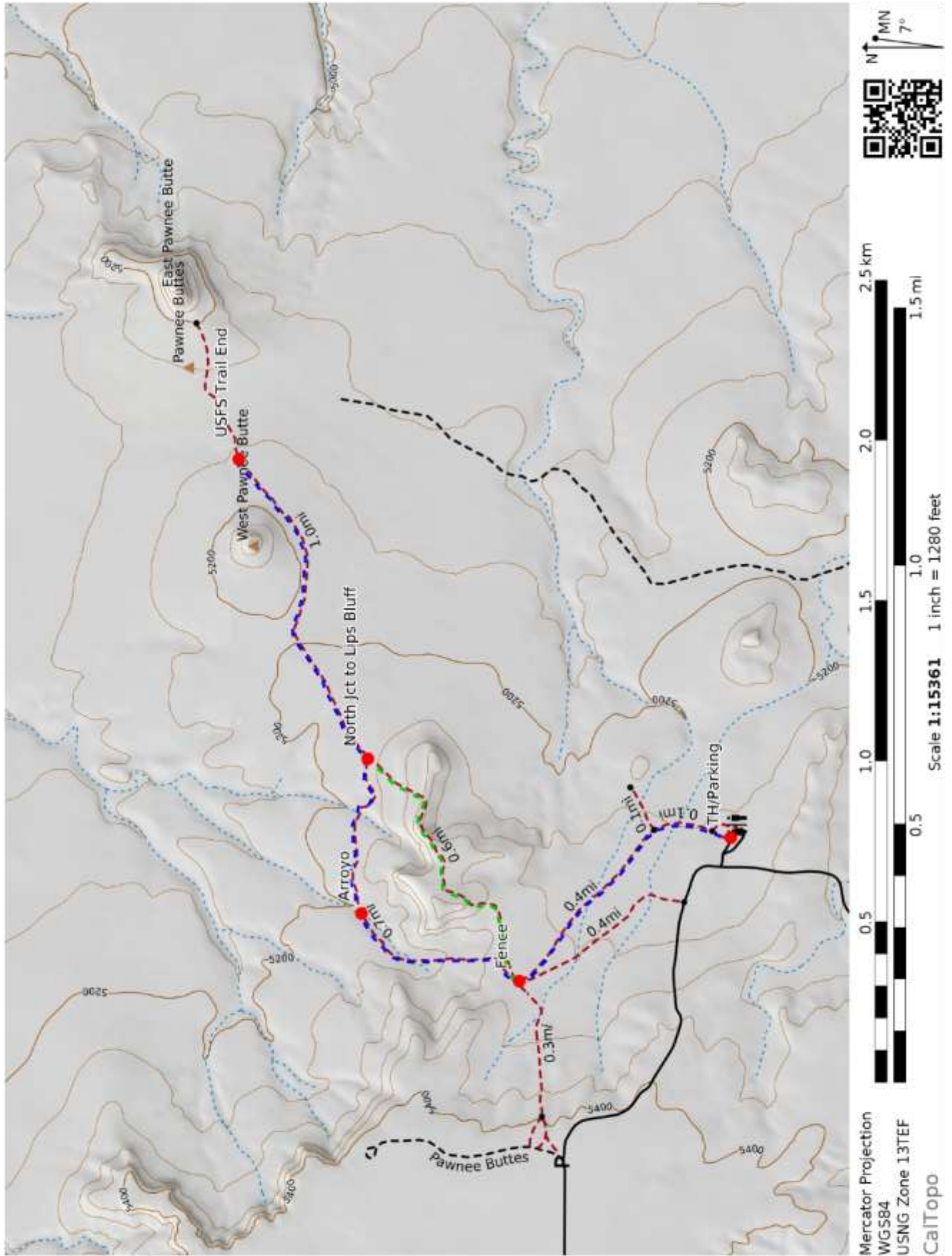
to remain on the main Pawnee Buttes Trail during this closure period to minimize disturbance to the nesting birds. See map on trailhead sign, or go to:

https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd541784.pdf

- Camping and Fires – Recommend at least 100 feet from trail and water. Prohibited within 200 ft of Lips Bluff, Pawnee Buttes Overlook, windmills, and any developed sites, such as parking lots, restrooms, and the Pawnee Buttes trailhead.
- Dogs – By Weld County regulation, dogs must be on handheld leash at all times. Stock – To avoid spreading noxious weeds, recommend beginning 72 hours prior to the ride, stock should be fed only pellets or certified weed-free hay. Required: throughout the trip, stock *must* be fed only pellets or certified weed-free hay.
- Bicycles and Other Wheeled Conveyances – Allowed.
- Motorized Transport – Prohibited.
- Group Size – Any single group of more than 74 people must have a USFS permit.

Mileage	GPS Coordinates: datum = WGS84	Lat/Long	UTM
0	trailhead and parking area (on GDR-685)	N40°48.49' W103°59.36'	585 ²⁴⁵ mE 451 ⁷⁹⁵³ mN
0.6	fence and junction with south end of trail over Lips Bluff	N40°48.84' W103°59.67'	584 ⁷⁹⁵ mE 451 ⁸⁵⁹⁹ mN
1.0	trail crosses arroyo	N40°49.11' W103°59.52'	585 ⁰⁰⁰ mE 451 ⁹⁰⁹² mN
1.4	junction with north end of trail over Lips Bluff	N40°49.10' W103°59.18'	585 ⁴⁸⁵ mE 451 ⁹⁰⁸⁴ mN
2.1	end of USFS trail at private property	N40°49.32' W103°58.50'	586 ⁴³⁶ mE 451 ⁹⁵⁰³ mN

(See next page for trail map.)



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