KANSAS
GYPSUM HILLS
Scene Byway

The landscape of the Gypsum Hills is truly breathtaking. Two scenic overlooks have been provided for visitors to stop and absorb the grandeur of this land. No matter what season or time of day, viewers are rewarded. A 20-mile scenic drive off the Byway affords additional glimpses of the landscape. The area is noted for its abundant wildflowers in spring and brilliant foliage in autumn.

Such landmarks as Twin Peaks and Flower Pot Mound dot a landscape marked by mesas and canyons. The names of creeks reflect the region’s heritage: Cedar, Little Bear, Mule, Indian and Nescatunga. At the Byway’s western edge, the landscape changes. The rolling grasslands and farms of Comanche County mark the transition into the High Plains where wide-open spaces and endless skies offer inspiring sunrises and awesome sunsets.

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Traveling the Gypsum Hills Scenic Byway is a little like stepping back in time. The 41-mile route traverses through Barber and Comanche counties past the ancient red shale and sandstone formations of the rugged Gypsum Hills.

Named for the underlying layers of gypsum, the Gypsum or "Red" Hills are a phenomena unique in Kansas. Their distinctive color comes from the iron in the soil that "rusts" when exposed. The red bluffs and stark flat-topped buttes are capped with white gypsum and accented with dark green cedars to create a painted landscape of timeless beauty.

Life on the Land.

Nature has populated the Gypsum Hills with a wide variety of residents. Deer, coyote, turkey, pheasant, quail and prairie chicken abound. Beavers, bobcat, porcupine and armadillo are also at home in the Gypsum Hills. In earlier times, great herds of bison grazed freely.

In the 1870s, young "Bat" Masterson and Wyatt Earp were among those who came to hunt the great bison herds of the Gypsum Hills. Other famous figures of history also left their mark on the region. Temperance leader Carry Nation lived in Medicine Lodge. She began her crusade in Barber County when she smashed a saloon in Kiowa. Visit her home and the Stockade Museum, replica of the original stockade in Medicine Lodge during the Indian Wars.

From the late 1870s to 1885, the Comanche Cattle Pool covered the Gypsum Hills. Fifteen cattlemen "pooled" their holdings into a herd of 80,000 head. It was the largest cattle operation in frontier Kansas with pool cowboys working some two million acres of land.

Today, ranchers tending chores on horseback still appear in the landscape. The total experience is one of serenity and relaxation. It fills the soul and spirit.