

## 2021 Nebraska Passport Trip on the Sandhills Journey National Scenic Byway

2021 marks the 11<sup>th</sup> year for the Nebraska Passport Program. It began with a federal grant with 80 sites around the state for people to go visit, get a stamp, and win prizes. Now it has 70 sites across the state, and other organizations have plagiarized and started their own passport programs. The Nebraska tourism passport lasts until September 30. To get the minimum prize – 10 stamps need to be collected. Selfies are allowed as well if the location is closed. Go to [www.visitnebraska.com](http://www.visitnebraska.com) to get a passport book. As of the end of July, over 100 visitors have been to all 70 sites.

The Sandhills Journey National Scenic Byway has 8 sites directly on the SJNSB or just a few miles off, plus this tour will take you on a circle drive so you can collect the minimum of 10 stamps. If your vehicle has a CD player, send \$8 to Sandhills Journey Byway, POB 28, Mullen, NE 69152 prior to your trip to get a full narrative of our 272 miles and then some.

This tour makes for a great variance of offerings on our byway no matter when you decide to visit us. Of course, each community has other gems just waiting to be explored besides those listed here.

Things to pack – New phones these days have great cameras or bring an actual camera. Bug spray, sunscreen, fishing poles and or golf clubs if you are so inclined. Binoculars, telescope if you have one and lawn chairs if you have room are some of the must haves as well. Don't forget a ball cap to shade your eyes from the sun.

It has been researched, most visitors travel east to west so that is where we will begin, plus our audio CD goes that way.

**Grand Island – Tommy Gunz Bistro** – [www.tommygunzbistro.com](http://www.tommygunzbistro.com) , 1607 S Locust St, 308-395.3880. Hours 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. (Downtown) This prohibition era restaurant and lounge provides scratch made meals, brick oven fried pizza. Families welcomed.

**Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer** – 3133 W. Hwy 34 [www.stuhrmuseum.org](http://www.stuhrmuseum.org) 308-385-5316  
hours – Mon-Sat 10 a.m. – 4 p.m (Eastern edge, few miles off I-80 at exit 312 or 314.

On 200 acres, considered one of the largest living history museums in the nation. Various activities throughout the year. See the home of famous actor Henry Fonda, enjoy Railroad town, plus antique cars, farm equipment and tools in one building.

From Stuhr, travel north to the junction of Highway 30 – which is Nebraska's other national scenic byway. Travel west to **Kearney**. Here collect stamps at

**Buffalo Records** – 19 E 21 St (Downtown on the bricks) [www.buffalorecordshop.com](http://www.buffalorecordshop.com) 308-224-2290 For music lovers enjoy looking through vinyl records and other musical history. Live performances happen here too.

**Kearney Area Children's Museum** – 5827 4<sup>th</sup> Ave [www.kearneychildrensmuseum.org](http://www.kearneychildrensmuseum.org) 308-698-2228

Hours – Tues-Wed , Fri- Sat - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thurs 10 a.m. to 8 p.m; Sun. 1 to 5 p.m. More than 20 interactive exhibits from art, science, agricultural and others, fun for the whole family.

From Kearney travel north on the main drag, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue – twenty-one miles on Hwy 10 will get you to Hazard, on the SJNSB. Turn west, or right – Broken Bow, is your next destination for a stamp.

**Broken Bow** – Not on the state passport, but a must see to learn more about our byway, especially if you do not have the audio CD – stop at the **Red Barn** on the east edge of town. If you did not get the CD earlier, you can pick one up here for \$5. This is our visitor center where volunteers will meet, greet, and educate you about our 272 miles. If you are traveling with a canine friend, great place for all to stretch their legs even if the barn is closed. Hike around the trail to read the informative kiosks. A ¾ mile trek uphill to the observation point will give you a 360-degree vista as well as kiosk on electricity.

Up the road, downtown is **Chapin's Furniture and Decorating**. 846 S "E" St. [www.chapinsfurniture.com](http://www.chapinsfurniture.com) 308-872-2450. This is more than a furniture store. Offering décor, boutique items, clothing as well as furniture, it is a one-of-a kind.

From Broken Bow, at the collection of windmills at Merna, travel south on state highway 92 to Arnold.

**Arnold - Grazers Bar and Grill** - 208 W. Arnold Ave. [www.grazersbarandgrill.com](http://www.grazersbarandgrill.com) 308 – 848-2900. This village has a lot to see and would make a great overnight, via a campsite or a motel, just go to their website to search.

After a night's rest at Arnold, back track north to Merna and head west to Anselmo.

**Anselmo** – take the spur north, across the railroad tracks to **Victoria Springs State Recreation Area** – 43400 Hwy S 21 A [www.outdoornebraska.gov/victoriasprings](http://www.outdoornebraska.gov/victoriasprings) 308-749-2235. Nebraska State Park permit is required. Great place to fish, hike, learn about the history of the area, picnic, camp or rent one of the two cabins if available. Part of the Nebraska Game and Parks centennial offerings (1921), this was the first state recreation area designated in 1923.

Again, backtrack south, over the tracks – before leaving **Anselmo**, see the historic St. Anselm's church, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, deemed the 'Cathedral of the Sandhills'.

Have you noticed, how the landscape is beginning to change? The eastern segment of our byway are farms mainly corn and soybeans, where man adapted the land to fit his needs. From Anselmo, you enter the vast expanse of the Sandhills (we locals spell it one word, always capitalized) – beginning with the gently rolling ocean of grass on the east to mini mountains of grass on the west, before entering farm ground again of corn, sugar beets, wheat, and potatoes. In the Sandhills, man adapted to the land to make it the best beef producing area in the world.

From Anselmo you will pass under the Burlington Northern, Santa Fe railroad bridge over our byway at Dunning, seeing the Dismal River first and then up the road, seeing the Middle Loup River. Both rivers are part of the Loup River system and are spring fed beginning as small streams near Mullen. They merge just a few miles to the east to become one.

Ten miles west of Dunning, a short mile west of **Halsey** is the **Nebraska National Forest, Bessey Ranger District** near Halsey, the correct name versus Halsey National Forest which many refer the forest as.

40637 River Loop Rd - [www.fs.usda.gov/redarea/Nebraska](http://www.fs.usda.gov/redarea/Nebraska) 308-533-8107 Office hours are from Mon-Fri 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. A 'pay to play' fee is required, but well worth it to enjoy this pristine man-made, hand planted forest in the middle of the Sandhills. Hiking, biking, river recreation, bird watching, horseback riding, star gazing can be enjoyed. It is also the largest public ATV (all terrain vehicle) playground now in the state. The Scott look-out tower, open year-round, is the only functioning fire tower left offering a spectacular 360-degree vista after climbing the 99 steps to the top. Another gem while in the forest is the Bessey Nursery, the oldest nursery in the forest service and one of six remaining in the nation. Call 308-533-2207 to book the hour-long tour.

From Halsey, travel through the villages of Thedford, and Mullen – both which have great places for food and drink or refueling if need be.

**Hyannis** has the next stop to get a stamp at the **Hyannis Hotel Inc.** 102 S. Main St. [www.hyannishotelinc.com](http://www.hyannishotelinc.com) 308-458-2344. Hours are Mon-Thurs 11 a.m.-9 p.m., Fri-Sat- 11 a.m. -1 a.m. This historic hotel is on the National Registry of Historic Places also. Dining, drinking at the bar or staying overnight all can be enjoyed here.

Have you read the county signs as you are traveling? Have you ascertained eight of our ten counties on the SJNSB were named after Civil War Generals? The ones on either end, Hall on the east end was named after a gallant Union fighter whose highest rank was captain, while on the west, Box Butte, the last county you enter on this tour, got its name from the box shaped butte north of **Alliance**. – **Shelmadine Print Shop** - 323 Box Butte Ave. [www.shelmadineprint.com](http://www.shelmadineprint.com) 308-761-3230. Hours are Mon-Wed 9:30 -5:30 p.m; Thurs – 9 a.m. -2 p.m. Fri- 9:30-5:30 p.m. Sat- 9a.m.-2p.m Sun – by appointment. Find cozy, cool custom screen-printing offerings, some which can be handprinted on the spot. Also offers other Nebraska goodies. Of course, while in Alliance, so many other attractions await.

We loved you have taken the SJNSB to get your passport stamps, and though we loved to have you return (there is always next year) – we recommend going home a different route – north or south on the 385 Gold Rush Scenic byway. You have your passport book now, so plenty of other opportunities to collect stamps. Maybe we gave you the bug to visit all 70 stops this year before September 30<sup>th</sup>. Don't forget to return your entry sheet by Oct. 8, 2021. Details in book