

Sica Hollow State Park Trail System

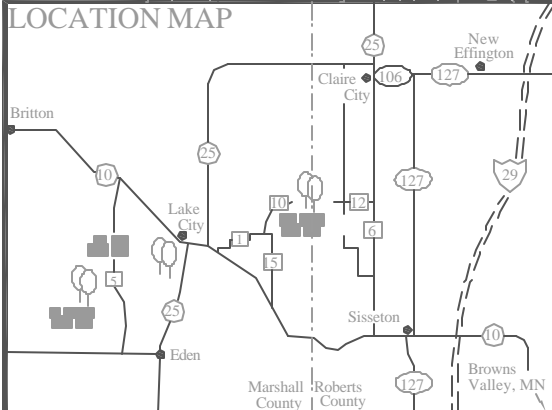
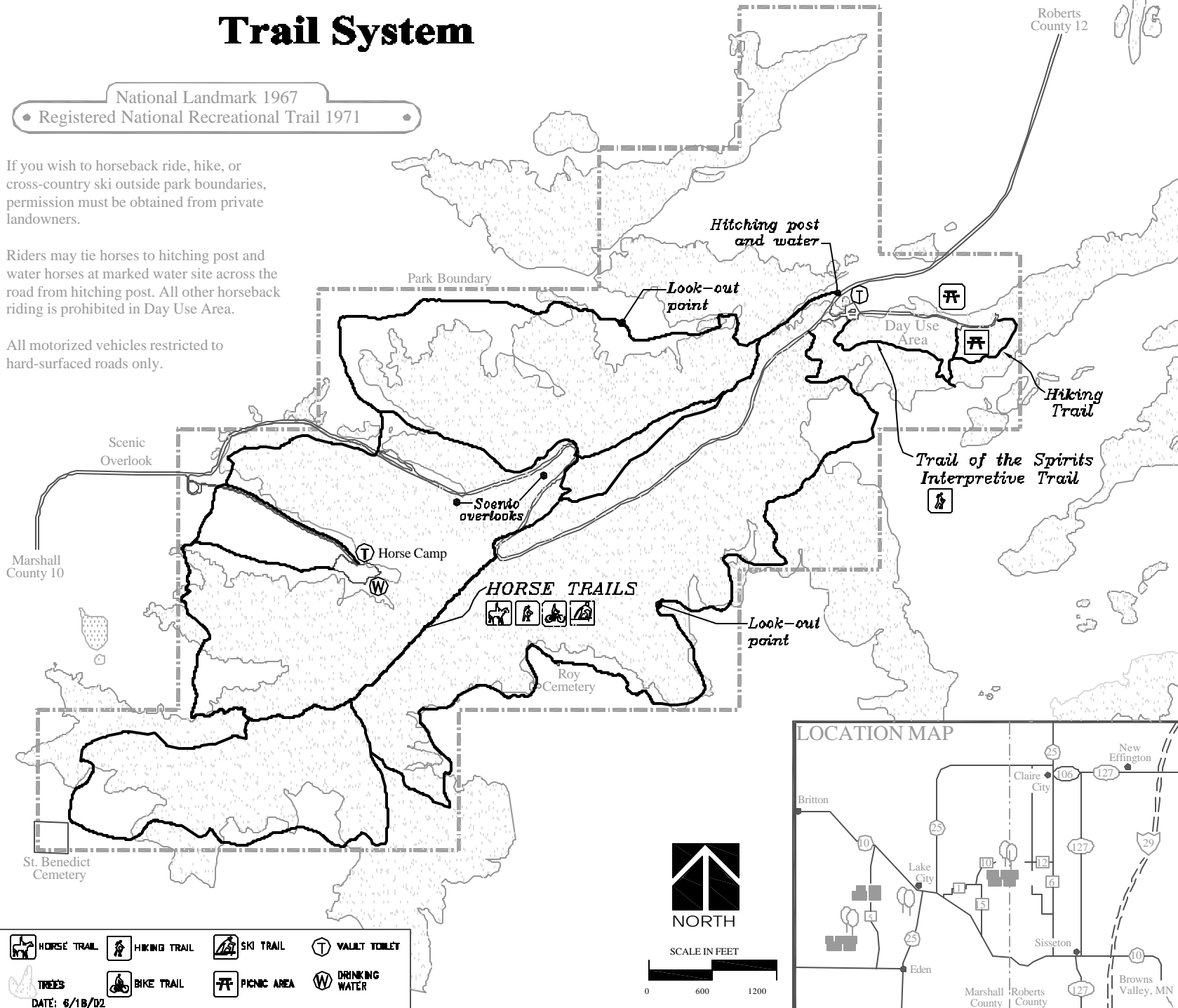
National Landmark 1967

Registered National Recreational Trail 1971

If you wish to horseback ride, hike, or cross-country ski outside park boundaries, permission must be obtained from private landowners.

Riders may tie horses to hitching post and water horses at marked water site across the road from hitching post. All other horseback riding is prohibited in Day Use Area.

All motorized vehicles restricted to hard-surfaced roads only.



HORSE TRAIL	HIKING TRAIL	SKI TRAIL	VAULT TOILET
TREES	BIKE TRAIL	PICNIC AREA	DRINKING WATER

DATE: 6/18/02

Sica Hollow State Park

Horse Trails

Type of trail: Hiking, biking, horseback riding, viewing nature and cross-country skiing

Length of trail: 15 miles

Trail surface: Dirt

Rated: Varies

Fee required: Park Entrance License

Location of the trailhead: Access at several points, preferred access is the horse camp or parking lot of horse camp

Facilities at or near the trailhead: none

Facilities along the trail: Toilets, picnic tables, hitching rails

Special considerations: Poison ivy in places, difficult terrain, recommend carrying water

Special features: Multiple trail junctions allow user to create different length trails

What lodging opportunities are provided IN the park: Horse camp, by reservation only

Nearest facilities for purchasing snacks, sunscreen, etc: In Sisseton - 15 miles SE

Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park: In Sisseton - 15 miles SE

Nearest Chamber of Commerce:

Sisseton Area Chamber of Commerce, 509 Veterans Ave, Sisseton, SD 57262, (605) 698-7261

Emergency phone numbers:

Ambulance - 911

Sheriff - 911

Fire Department - 911

Do most cell phones work on this trail? Yes, on hilltops

Sica Hollow State Park

Sica Hollow Horse Trail

The horse trail at Sica Hollow State Park is approximately fifteen miles long. The trail, at its outer edges, travels along both the south and north rims of Sica Hollow. There are several junctions along the trail where users can make their individual excursions either shorter or longer depending on the route chosen. Trail users also have the option of traveling along the asphalt road to the next trail junction or back to their vehicles.

The trail covers a wide variety of habitats from upland prairie with its constantly changing wildflower display throughout the summer months, to creek-side wetland habitat with small crustaceans and even minnow species. There are relatively steep gullies as well as high ridge point extending into Sica Hollow that give the viewer a magnificent overlook of the entire Hollow.

With the variety of habitats, plus natural fresh water springs and protection from the fierce winters, one can understand why Sica Hollow was home to human inhabitants for centuries. The types of terrain found here provide food, water, and protection for all the creatures that choose to live in Sica Hollow. The hollow, with its variety of landforms, is actually home to a microclimate that has created the western-most extension of the Eastern Hardwood forest, which includes a naturally reproducing maple and linden forest. Trail users are encouraged to bring a plant identification guide to help in identifying the 200+ plant varieties and prairie flowers that may be encountered along the trail. Many of these plants are considered rare in South Dakota. Animal species are also abundant in Sica Hollow with the grey tree frog easy to observe especially in wet years.

Although this is labeled a horse trail, other users such as hikers and mountain bikers use the trail system. Each user is asked to be considerate of other users, to help maintain the trail in good condition and to carry a litter to the garbage containers located in the various parking area. Since these are dirt trails, users are asked to limit usage during wet weather speeds erosion.

Be sure to make plans to visit Sica Hollow State Park when the autumn colors are at their best.

Sica Hollow State Park

Trail of the Spirits

Registered National Recreation Trail (since 1971)

Type of trail: Hiking and interpretation

Length of trail: .5 mile

Trail surface: Dirt

Rated: Moderate, somewhat hilly, and even trail surface

Fee required: Park Entrance License

Location of the trailhead: Parking lot, lower picnic area near large spring

Facilities at or near the trailhead: Toilet, parking, and picnic tables

Facilities along the trail: Toilets and bench

Does this trail connect with any other trails: Yes, additional .5-mile interpreted trail

Special considerations: Poison ivy in scattered locations

Special features: Hiking only

What lodging opportunities are provided IN the park: Horse camp, by reservation only

Nearest facilities for purchasing snacks, sunscreen, etc: In Sisseton - 15 miles SE

Nearest motels/restaurants OUTSIDE the park: In Sisseton - 15 miles SE

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Do most cell phones work on this trail? Yes, on hilltops

Sica Hollow State Park a National Natural Landmark (1967)

TRAIL OF THE SPIRITS

Registered National Recreation Trail (since 1971)

This is a foot trail only - vehicles and horses are prohibited.

NATURAL HISTORY

To most, these prairie hills appear out of place on this otherwise flat plain. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow called these rugged timber-covered ravines “Mountains of the Prairie” in his poem, “Hiawatha.” Known as the Coteau des Prairies (hills of the prairie) by French fur traders, these hills, ridges and elevations are over 2,000 feet above sea level. This highland extends from the North Dakota border, about 12 miles north of Sica Hollow at a place called Windy Mound, southward to 50 miles below Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Held in awe and esteem by American Indians, this nature-rich hollow has a fascinating history. Unexplainable natural phenomenon resulted in fear-inspired legends and prompted the area to be named Sica (pronounced SHE-cha) by the Santee Sioux. Sica means bad or place of evil spirits. The natural bounties of the land were used during the daylight hours, of course, because after dark the hollow was considered “sica”.

Several icy cold springs flow into Roy Creek. These waters meander into the Little Minnesota River, then into Big Stone Lake, the Minnesota River, the Mississippi River and eventually empty into the Gulf of Mexico.

The Trail of the Spirits begins by crossing the stepping stones across Roy Creek. This designated footpath veers gently uphill and winds to the left.

STATION 1

Clusters of poison ivy are found along the trail. It will be to your benefit to enjoy the natural aspects of the Hollow by following the designated trail. Because all parts of this plant may cause a severe skin reaction in any season, learn to recognize its three leaflets, woody stem, or clusters of striped, white, BB-sized berries. The old saying, “Leaves of three, let them be” assists in identifying this plant.

STATION 2

The lush foliage in Sica Hollow receive moisture from springs which are recharged by rain and melting snow. For centuries the springs have been a stable source of water for plants, wildlife and man. Notice the water-loving plants growing in the spring-fed bog.

The red stems of the dogwood shrub are quite showy year-round. American Indians mixed the inner bark with tobacco to smoke in their ceremonial pipes. They called the mixture kinnikinnick (kin-ni-kin-nick).

Marsh marigolds are not common throughout the northern plains. This herb is, however, abundant in marshes and at the base of seepage slopes. As a member of the buttercup family, the flowers are striking waxy, yellow color. The American Indians ate the new spring growth as greens.

STATION 3

The lopsided heart-shaped leaves of the American linden tree are easily recognized. Some people call this tree basswood or bee tree. Its fragrant flowers are very popular with honeybees. The flowers are borne in clusters at the end of a stem attached to a strap-like leafy growth. The tree later develops pea-sized nuts that are favored throughout the winter months by squirrels, birds, and chipmunks. Mature basswood trees generally develop hollow cavities which are used as year-round homes by birds and mammals.

STATION 4

The ironwood tree offers a sharp contrast during the winter because their dry leaves hang onto the branches. Songbirds find this storehouse of available leaves handy for building nests. The leaves are similar to those of elm, but have finer, sharp, saw-toothed edges. The trees are often called hophornbeam because the seeds are borne in hanging clusters of hop-like seed sacs.

The litter of leaves, twigs and other dead plant life that cover the ground is called humus. It should be deep and spongy with decayed material to absorb rain and snowfall and provide a forest floor for sprouting seeds. Nature struggles to build up humus on slopes, but her efforts are in vain if hikers and skiers leave the trails and destroy the ground cover. Please stay on the marked trail because erosion will result and the fertile humus and soil will be washed into Roy Creek below.

STATION 5

The growth is thick and layered under the canopy provided by this hardwood forest. Trees such as ironwood, elm, oak, maple and basswood shade shrubs such as currant, gooseberry and dogwood. In this vicinity, meadow-rue, columbine, Virginia waterleaf and wild violets are abundant. These herbaceous (nonwoody) plants represent just a few of the more than 200 species of plants found in Sica Hollow.

Wild strawberry or earth mulberry grows everywhere except in the desert. Numerous species of wildlife such as prairie chickens, pheasants, quail, rabbits and white-tailed deer eat the berries, leaves and stems of this plant. American Indians prized the fruits and also the leaves to prepare a tea which helped to prevent scurvy due to its vitamin C richness.

Notice the dark, rough bark of the willow tree. The narrow, lance-shaped leaves make this tree easy to identify. It grows primarily in areas of abundant moisture. American Indians boiled the bark of willow and drank the brew for relief of headaches. One of the chemicals in aspirin is found in willow bark.

STATION 6

Grapevines grow throughout the park. The vines reach upward toward sunlight by grasping and wrapping around nearby or overhanging branches. Their tendril-like fingers help grapevines achieve support as they spread upward. Their dark purple fruits are sweetest when harvested after the first frost.

STATION 7

Bittersweet vines nearly cover the foliage in this area. Unlike grapevines, bittersweet has no tendrils or twining outgrowth used for grasping objects as they climb. Bittersweet simply wraps its stems around the branches of shrubs and trees. In the fall the bright orange fruits are eaten by songbirds. The collection of berries for commercial sale in flower arrangements and Christmas ornaments has nearly eliminated bittersweet in many regions.

STATION 8

In any season, the prickly ash shrub can be easily identified by its dark-stemmed spiny branches. Clusters of red, BB-sized berries develop in the fall. American Indians and frontiersmen sought the berries and roots of this shrub for medicinal purposes. It was commonly used to relieve the ache of rheumatism and to ease the pain of toothaches, hence its American Indian name "toothache tree."

On the opposite side, reaching upward in the same way as bittersweet, are moonseed vines. The clusters of black fruit in the fall resemble wild grapes, but moonseed fruit is considered poisonous and should not be eaten. The toxic ingredient is similar to that of strychnine.

STATION 9

Two identifying features of the sugar maple are the five-lobed leaves and the paired-wing seeds which spin like airplane propellers as they drift to the ground. Lumbermen consider the wood of sugar maple as one of the most valuable grained hardwoods. South Dakota is on the extreme western edge of the tree's range, and rarely are there reproducing and, therefore, self-sustaining native stands of this species elsewhere in the state.

STATION 10

During the spring, this rapidly flowing stream often emits moaning sounds. It is believed that during the winter, air is trapped in the bog which borders the creek. As the snow melts and the ground thaws, the gradually released air makes a sound comparable to that made when one blows over the top of an uncapped bottle. American Indians thought the moaning sound was made by spirits from the underworld.

Follow the steps to the right a short distance ahead. Look closely as you walk. Unique plants like the nodding white trillium, wild ginger and bloodroot all have bashful blossoms that are hidden from view by large leaves.

STATION 11

At least seven springs flow from the earth in this vicinity. The bogs created by these springs are quite treacherous and a false step can put a careless hiker waist deep in the soft ooze. American Indians perhaps saw a youngster or animal sinking in the bog because one legend tells of a monster from deep within the bowels of the earth reaching up to snatch and pull unsuspecting victims into her lair.

Making the legend even more believable is the rust-colored water flowing from the springs which often disgorges bits of rust-stained scum or moss. Early American Indians thought these were pieces of flesh spewn back by the spirits that lived in the swamp. The rust color is caused by the high iron content of the soil. Sinking into an apparent solid piece of earth could seem to be confusing, but with a steam the color of blood, imagination was all that was needed to create a spirit legend.

The green blossom of the Jack-in-the-pulpit preaches his silent sermon to a congregation of wild violets and other spring neighbors. All parts of the plant, especially the roots, will burn the mouth like liquid fire if eaten raw, hence the American Indian name memory root. Ring-necked pheasants and wild turkeys eat both the bright red fruit and the leaves. Many American Indians relied on the dried and powdered roots for flour.

A short distance ahead, the trail branches to the right.

STATION 12

At this station two different plant communities – the woods and the grassy field, join together to form a transition zone known as an ecotone. Generally there are more birds, animals and plants found in this type of area because of the availability of cover for escape and food.

Birds, for example, can find seeds, insects and worms in the grassy fields, along with fruits such as chokecherries and currants near the edge, and shelter in the woods. The edge of the woods tend to build a covering of leaves which reach to the ground, protecting the rest of the forest from drying winds and sunlight. Plants at the edge protect themselves from grazing animals by arming themselves with thorns

such as can be found on hawthorn, wild plum and wild rose. Others, such as chokecherry and sumac, protect themselves by their bitter taste.

The ground cover in the field consists of many grasses, including big bluestem, little bluestem, Kentucky bluegrass, sideoats gramma and green needlegrass.

Return to the main trail and proceed right along the path.

STATION 13

Notice how the wild roses have grown in this moist, lush environment. The fragrant blossoms are usually pink but may vary from white to deep red. The fruits are called rose hips and become red when mature in August. Rose hips, with their delicate apple-like flavor, are a great source of vitamin C and were often used to prevent and cure scurvy. They constitute a valuable winter food for wildlife. In some rose species, extracts from the petals are used for perfume, medicines and flavorings.

Burdock, or beggar's buttons, is a cousin of the thistle. The adhesiveness of the prickly seedpods, took this world-wide traveler across Europe with the Roman Legions, brought it to the Americas with the early settlers, who have since distributed it throughout most of the United States and Canada. Throughout the year, these hooked seedpods attach themselves to clothing and to animal coats. When aspiring medicine men of some American Indian tribes fasted, they sometimes drank the bitter brew of burdock. According to legend, this was supposed to keep the acquired lore "sticking" in their minds.

STATION 14

For hundreds of years calcium, carried by the runoff of spring water, has built up on humus and other vegetation to form rock-like features such as those by this post. Called tufa (pronounced too-fa), the hardened calcite look like fossilized moss.

The right junction is the Roy Creek Trail and leads to a picnic area. In the spring, after periods of rain, portions of the loop may be underwater. The TRAIL OF THE SPIRITS follows the pathway to the left.

STATION 15

The roots that once anchored this tree were not secure enough, causing the large tree to blow down in a windstorm. Do not assume the tree will die, because in death it will give life to fungi, bark beetles, ants and scores of other organisms. The decaying tree will also provide a winter home for squirrels, raccoons or a hibernating snake or mouse.

During mid-summer, Joe-pye weed may be found in the vicinity. It is said to be named after an American Indian medicine man, "Joe-pye," who used extractions of the roots to cure typhus fever. Joe-pye weed, also know as white snakeroot, is poisonous to livestock, with the poison being transmissible to humans in milk.

STATION 16

This creek originates in the bog area and eventually joins Roy Creek. Notice the lush growth of plant life along its edges. The stalks, stems and leaves of these plants contain a high percentage of water and include such species as watercress, marsh marigolds, cow parsnip and jewelweed.

Jewelweed is also called "touch-me-not" because in the fall their ripe seedpods literally explode when touched, thus scattering the seeds. The orange blossoms, stems and leaves are often crushed and rubbed on areas of the skin to help cure areas affected by poison ivy.

Until recently, the rotting stumps of larger trees once harvested for fuel and building material could be seen here. American Indians and settlers visiting the area at dusk observed a ghostly glow in the Hollow. Investigations proved these eerie phosphorescent lights to be emitted from the rotting stumps, creating an effect known as foxfire or swamp gas, a by-product of methane gas caused by decaying vegetation. Early American Indians thought it was the light of the spirits.

STATION 17

Year-round water plays an essential role in the welfare of wildlife, providing homes for a variety of aquatic insects, minnows, frogs, crayfish and other creatures. Each of these becomes part of the food chain for mink, raccoon, hawks and other wildlife. No matter the season, look closely along the banks for tracks, droppings or other signs indicating animals or birds have visited the stream.

STATION 18

Native hardwood forests have covered the ravines of the Coteau des Prairies for hundreds of years. Sica Hollow is one of the largest wooded areas on the Coteau. Unusual because of its sharp contrast to the surrounding plains, the American Indians called the distant hills “Paha Tanka” or great hills. George Catlin, noted western artist who visited here in 1835, called them, “This wonderful anomaly in nature, undoubtedly the noblest mound of its kind in the world.”

STATION 19

Western snowberry, commonly called buckbrush, has pinkish bell-shaped flowers which appear in July, followed by round, shiny, white fruits that persist throughout the winter, providing an important food source for winter birds. American Indians used the stems and roots as food and the fruit as a laxative. They also pounded the roots and steeped them to make a medicine for treating colds. Snowberry favors open hillsides and replaces prairie grasses that are overgrazed by livestock.

Headed to the left toward the starting point, the trail follows the road to the next station.

STATION 20

Notice the numerous lichens (pronounced “like-ens”) growing on trees in the vicinity. These tiny plants grow in colonies in a variety of colors—yellow, brown, and green. Some lichens growing on rocks produce acids strong enough to speed the decomposition of the rock they adhere to. This is one of the ways new soil is formed. Their presence indicates a relatively pollution-free environment.

Lichens do no damage to trees since they are not parasites. They merely cling to the tree for an anchor and manufacture their own nourishment. Lichens are thought to be among the first plants that inhabited earth.

Look west to the hilltops beyond the parking lot. This area was one of the last to be affected by glaciers. The hilltops at the northern end of the Coteau des Prairies are less rounded from erosion than those farther south. Many American Indians sought out the highest summits for praying, fasting and vision quests. They felt the hilltops brought them closer to Wakon Tanka (The Great Spirit).