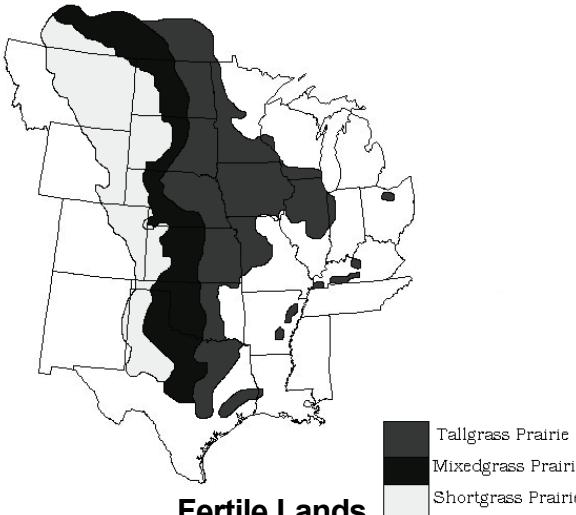


Former Range of Grasslands in the U.S. and Canada



Native Americans and early pioneers, awed by the beauty and abundance of the prairie, used its riches to survive. Even today, our modern economy and people's livelihoods depend on the expansive lands where prairie once covered much of the Great Plains.

People commonly call Iowa the tall corn state, but tallgrass prairie once extended from horizon to horizon across this landscape. Corn thrives in Iowa because of rich topsoil that the tallgrass prairie built over a period of 10,000 years. The prairie produced this soil through annual die-off and renewal of plant mass above ground and extensive root systems that stabilized soil below ground. Unlike cultivated crops, roots of prairie plants penetrate deep into the earth, sometimes reaching depths of over 20 feet.

As European settlement blanketed much of the Midwest, farmers plowed up the prairies, taking advantage of the rich soil to produce fruitful farms. Ninety-eight percent of the tallgrass prairie disappeared.

Throughout the Midwest inspired individuals have begun to promote conservation of our native vegetation. People and governments have worked to protect the few remnant prairies and to restore prairie landscapes in the hope of saving this diverse ecosystem for future generations. Prairie preservation and restoration combines science and expertise, but everyone can help. Learning to identify native plants, using native plants in our home gardens, and contributing time and effort to the restoration of prairies are ways that we can become part of the growing effort to recover a piece of our natural landscape and our natural heritage.

Restored Prairie

In honor of Herbert Hoover's love of nature, and in an attempt to share an exquisite natural resource with the public, the National Park Service restored an 81 acre prairie. The restored plot was established in 1971. It represents the vast tallgrass prairie that once covered approximately eighty-five percent of Iowa.

Please feel free to walk through waving grasses and colorful wildflowers along the mowed trail. Please remember to keep pets on a leash.



Big Bluestem

Andropogon gerardii Vitman L.

Grasses make up the dense turf that characterize tallgrass prairie growth. During dry months many native grasses survive on very little water during times of drought. These efficient grasses have acclimated to existing conditions.

Reaching heights of around eight feet tall the Big Bluestem lives up to its descriptive name. Also known as "turkey foot", big bluestem is one of the more dominant of the tall prairie grasses. Varying in appearance with the seasons, the big bluestem can display a grayish-blue tint in the spring which turns to a light tan in the late summer. With a root system that can extend over 8 feet deep into the soil, big bluestem is an excellent choice for stabilizing areas susceptible to erosion. Being one of the more dominant plants found in most tall grass prairies, big bluestem helps establish a thick layer of sod vital to creating healthy habitat for native plants and animals.

Herbert Hoover

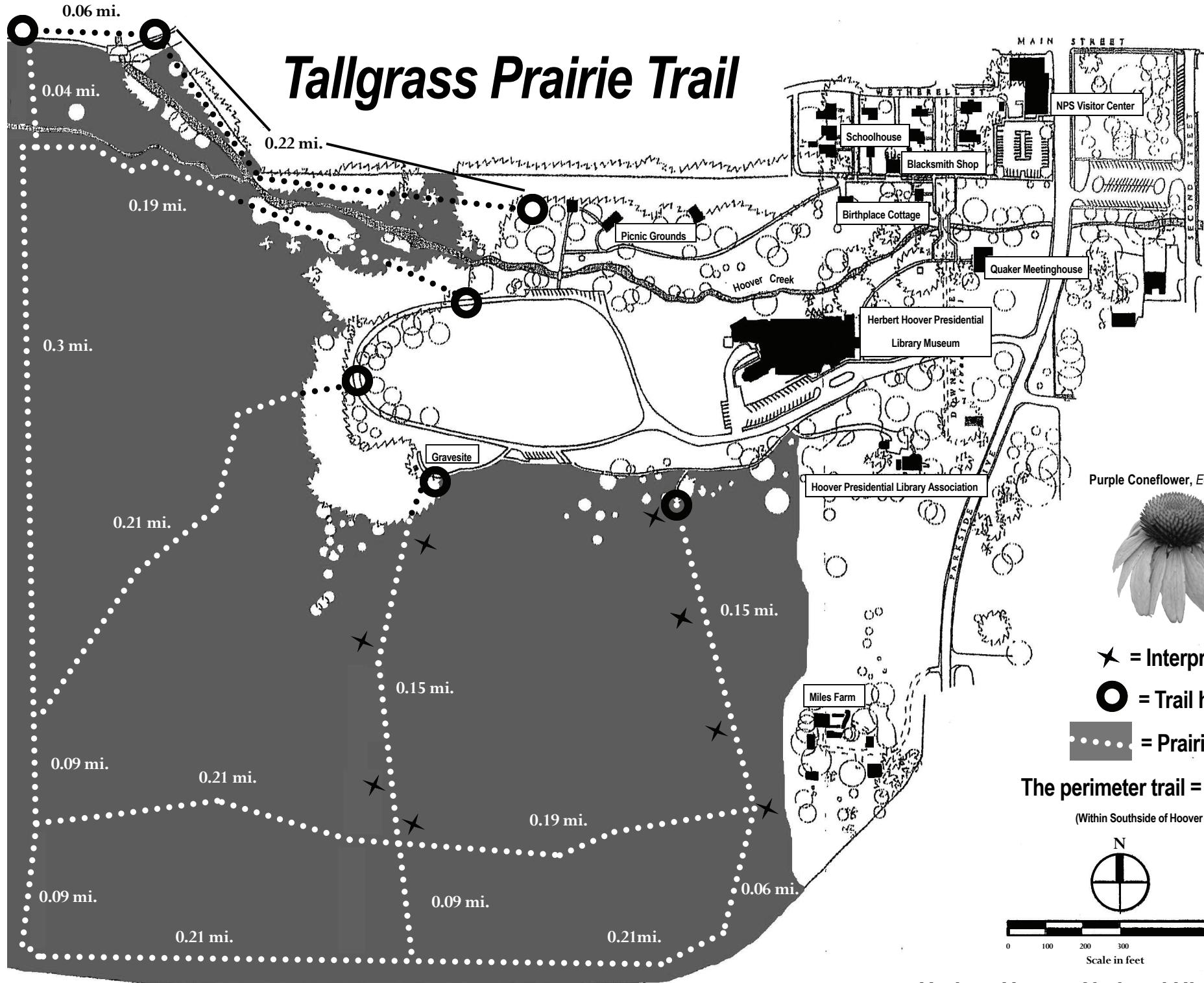
National Historic Site
Iowa



Tallgrass Prairie Trail Map



Tallgrass Prairie Trail



Herbert Hoover National Historic Site