**Public Trail Information: Pawnee Buttes**

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**Trail(s):** Pawnee Buttes #840  
*Ratings / restrictions:*  
Hikers – Easy  
Stock riders: Easy  
Dogs on hand-held leash only  

**Cautions:**  
Rattlesnakes; extreme heat  

**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  

**USFS Regulations:**  
National Forest  

**Map(s) - Trails Illustrated:**  
None  

**Map(s) - USGS 7-½’**  
Pawnee Buttes (most of trail), Grover SE (trailhead area)

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**TRAILHEAD LOCATION:**  
Pawnee National Grassland: From I-25, take CO-14 east approximately 52 miles to CR-103 (about 13 miles east of Briggsdale). Drive north on CR-103 following the directional signs (and CR-98) to Keota. From there, go north on CR-105, then east on CR-104, to CR-111. Follow CR-111 north to GDR-685 and then follow GDR-685 northeast to the trailhead.

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

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.

Stock riders—remember that only processed feeds or certified weed-free hay can be brought onto the Pawnee National Grassland, and that horses (and other stock) should be fed only these products for 48 to 72 hours before being brought onto the Grassland.

**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.

**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:** Camping is allowed on public land within the Grassland, but camping is prohibited within 200 ft of Lips Bluff, Pawnee Buttes Overlook, windmills, and any developed sites, such as parking lots, restrooms, and the Pawnee Buttes trailheads.

**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:**  
From the trailhead, the trail meanders 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. 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 Lipps Bluff. 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 after passing around the southern side of the western Pawnee.
Butte, at a large wooden sign stating “End of Trail” “Private Land Beyond this Point”. Although the eastern Pawnee Butte is nearby and this butte lies partially on USFS land and partially on private land, it is surrounded by private land, and hikers who proceed past this point must be respectful of the private land.

Take a hat, sunscreen, and water. Temperatures topping 100°F can be encountered in July and August, so it is best to hike or ride this trail in fall, winter, or spring or early in the morning.

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

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.**

**Special Regulations:**

- Although the official Pawnee Buttes Trail is open year-round, there is a nearby seasonal closure from March 1 through June 30 to protect nesting hawks, eagles, and falcons. Public access to the Overlook and Lips Bluff is prohibited (see map on trailhead sign). Remember to remain on the Pawnee Buttes Trail during this closure period to minimize disturbance to the nesting birds.

- **Weld County Regulation:** Dogs must be on handheld leash at all times

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>GPS Coordinates: datum = WGS84</th>
<th>Lat/Long</th>
<th>UTM</th>
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<tr>
<td>trailhead (on GDR-685)</td>
<td>N40°48.49' W103°59.36'</td>
<td>585245mE 4517953mN</td>
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<td>junction with end of closed nesting area trail</td>
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<td>end of trail at private property</td>
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