



SMITH FALLS STATE PARK

Jim McAllister Nature Trail

SPARKS, NEBRASKA

Hiking Time: 1-2 hours



There is a lot going on here for an easy leg stretcher with your dog. The Niobrara River has spent eons grinding 300 feet out of the chalky white sandstone base of northern Nebraska. Almost 250 waterfalls, most just a couple of feet tall, have been identified in a 35-mile corridor. In these canyons can be found such unexpected Great Plains residents as Ponderosa pine, paper birches, red cedars, and aspens.

Seaman will see all that and more on the *Jim McAllister Nature Trail* passing through the Sandhills prairie land for 1.5 miles. From a secluded side canyon, approached via trail across a grassy field and spilling 63 feet into the Niobrara River is the champion of Nebraska waterfalls, spring-fed Smith Falls. The classic fan-shaped falls hug an exposed cliff face as the waters broaden into an attractive chimney shape. The wooden walkway leads down to the plunge pool but there is nothing more than splashing here for Seaman. No worries - there is plenty of dog paddling in the nearby Niobrara River.

A highlight of the Smith Falls State Park trail system is the Verdigre Bridge, a 160-foot steel truss span that was constructed to bring Model A automobiles into the town of Verdigre. **The bridge was disassembled after being taken out of service and put together here so Seaman doesn't have to swim across the Niobrara River, although he could.**



TALLGRASS PRAIRIE NATIONAL PRESERVE

Southwind Nature Trail

STRONG CITY, KANSAS

Hiking Time: 1-2 hours



Once upon a time 170 million acres of tallgrass prairie covered North America. Today, 96% of that ecosystem is gone. Most of what remains is in the Flint Hills of southeastern Kansas where the limestone and shale deposits repelled even John Deere's best steel plows. The *Southwind Nature Trail* is Seaman's best chance to experience the Great Plains like his ancestors following the Conestoga wagons when pioneers described this landscape as "an ocean of grass."

The Preserve was once Spring Hill Ranch where Texan Stephen Jones began running cattle in the 1870s. **This is an exceedingly pleasant outing for your dog, trotting on dirt ranch roads and finely crushed stone paths.**

There are 70 species of grasses flourishing here, dominated by Big Blue-stem. A single blade might have a root system descending over eight feet underground - deep enough so the plant will emerge in the spring even without rainfall. Given more ideal growing conditions these tallgrasses can reach eight feet into the sky creating wide chutes of hiking lanes for your dog. The grasses are high enough to provide shade on a hot summer day.

The 1.75-mile canine hike loops past stone fences and along the bottomlands of Fox Creek. A spur across the stream leads up a small hill to a stone school donated by Jones. It will all leave Seaman nostalgic for the loss of America's most endangered ecosystem.