

Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob

NRHP SITE IN MENDOTA HEIGHTS, MN



© DAKOTA COUNTY



Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob

is a place of cultural importance to the Dakota community and of significance in the history of Minnesota statehood. Oĥéyawahe was listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in March 2017.

Historic Pilot Knob

is a natural area owned by the City of Mendota Heights. It is the part of Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob that is open to the public.

Directions to Historic Pilot Knob

Historic Pilot Knob is located at 2100 Pilot Knob Road, Mendota Heights. From I-494, take the Pilot Knob Road exit, then drive north until the road ends. From State Highway 13, take the Acacia Blvd. exit west to Pilot Knob Road. Turn right into parking lot or park along Acacia Blvd.

Historic Pilot Knob can be visited every day during daylight hours.

There are interpretive signs and trails; there are no other facilities.

COVER - SETH EASTMAN WATERCOLOR C. 1847. MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

For centuries, Dakota people placed their deceased relatives on scaffolds built on high places, such as Oĥéyawahe, as shown here in a view by Seth Eastman from around 1847. The body was wrapped in skins or cloth, placed on a scaffold for several days or weeks, then buried in the earth. This view is from the top of Oĥéyawahe, looking toward the present-day MSP international airport.



SETH EASTMAN WATERCOLOR C. 1847. MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A Dakota woman prepared a hide in the area of Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob in the 1890's or earlier. After 1862 some Dakota women in Mendota supported themselves by making moccasins and other items to sell in St. Paul and the surrounding area.



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



This is the north slope of Oĥéyawah, "a hill much visited," also now known as Woĥakŷya Paha, "the hill of all the relatives," a sacred place named by Dakota people centuries ago. This hill has been a gathering place for Dakota, Ojibwe, and Iowa people, and a place for ceremonies and burials. Pilot Knob was the site of signing of the Treaty of 1851, which transferred 35 million acres of Dakota land to the United States. In the winter of 1862-63, 1300 Dakota men, women, and children were confined in a fenced camp on the opposite river bank, where many died. Some were buried here.

Hekia ahapna Ikce Wicaŷia paha kŷn de Oĥéyawahŷ eya cazyatapi. Dehan isto Woĥakŷya Paha eyapi. Wakany dapi naka nina ohodapi. Ikce Wicaŷia ded waceĥiyapi k a nakun woĥakŷye ewicawapapapi. Ded nakun Treaty of 1851 owapi. De wowapi kŷn Dakod makece maka oŷpe ĥekĥopawiwŷe ĥekĥopawiwŷe wikcema yanni sam zaptan un icup. Hehan 1862-1863 waniyeŷu ecun wicokasĥe ti wan kagapi. Nakun cunĥasĥe wan ahomni ehdepi. He detapnan mni akasamŷu. Ded Ikce Wicaŷia wica, wiyany k a nakun wakany iza wicopyya pazo wicayuhapi. Wicoĥa rap. Nakun unġe ded wicahapi.

A Place to Appreciate Dakota Heritage

In 2017, Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1870 Many Dakota people begin to return to their former homes, including Mendota, where some Dakota had remained. The Mendota Mdewakanton Dakota Community continues today.

1862-63 During the U.S.-Dakota Conflict, non-combatant Dakota people are held for the winter in a concentration camp below Fort Snelling. Many will die, and some will be buried on Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob. Later, the U.S. government forcibly removes most Dakota people from Minnesota.

1851 In a treaty signed on Pilot Knob, the Dakota cede most of the area now known as southern Minnesota to the U.S. government.

1848 Pilot Knob is proposed to be the site for the Minnesota territorial capitol.

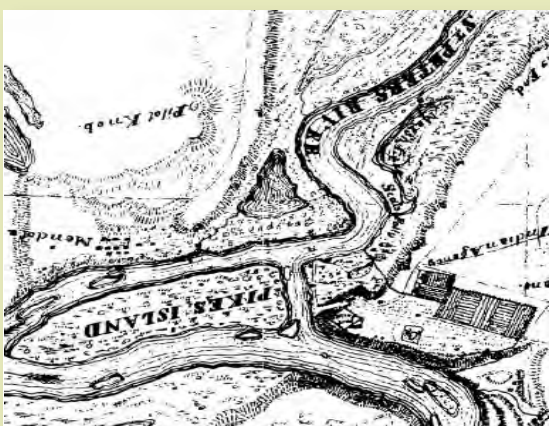
1834 Henry Hastings Sibley (later Minnesota's first elected governor) takes charge of the American Fur Company post at Mendota.

1823 First steamboat arrives at Fort Snelling.

1820 The establishment of Fort Snelling brings an American military presence.

1805 Lt. Zebulon Pike, first U.S. government official sent to area, reaches the mouth of the Minnesota River.

1700s Dakota and allied native peoples inhabit much of Minnesota when French traders and missionaries first enter the area.



An 1850 map by R. Jones Colby, showing the confluence of the St. Peters (Minnesota) and Mississippi rivers. The diamond walls of Fort Snelling are left of Pike Island and Pilot Knob is at bottom right.

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A Place to Learn About Early State History

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Historic Fort Snelling and downtown Minneapolis, from Pilot Knob

In the 19th century, as today, visitors to Pilot Knob could view what traveler J. Wesley Bond called, in 1851, a "grand spectacle, of rolling prairie, extended plain and groves, the valley of the Minnesota with its meandering stream," as well as Fort Snelling and the growing towns of Minneapolis and St. Paul.



© BRUCE WHITE

Oĥéyawahe is a traditional sacred site to the Dakota people. It looks over the mouth of the Minnesota River, or Bote Mini Sota, which many Dakota people consider the center of the earth. The landscape has been altered in the past 200 years, yet the wakan of this place, its sacred essence, remains. By its intrinsic nature, Oĥéyawahe continues to be an important place for the Dakota community and others to return to for gatherings and ceremonies.

Please treat Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob with the respect accorded to cemeteries and other sacred places.

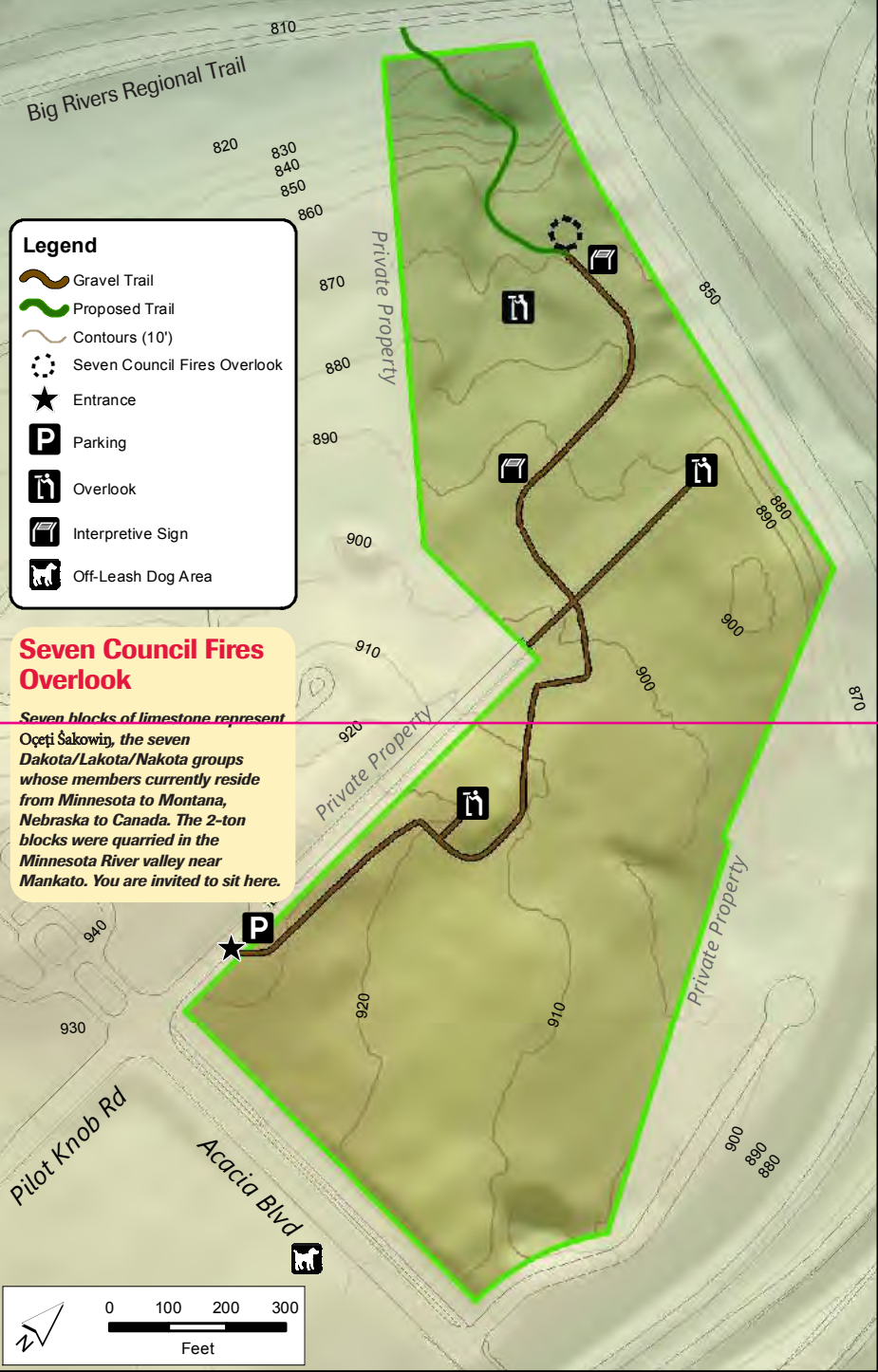
A Place of Reverence

Within Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob is Historic Pilot Knob, the public portion where people can visit to experience the historic views and learn about the history and culture of this significant and sacred place.

Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob — A Place to Reflect on Many Stories

For centuries, Oĥéyawahe has been a sacred indigenous burial ground and gathering place, earning its Dakota name, meaning "a sacred place much visited; the place where people go for burials." Oĥéyawahe/Pilot Knob is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a 112-acre site, comprising public and private land.

HISTORIC PILOT KNOB A City of Mendota Heights Natural Area



A Place to Read the Landscape

Look across the river valley to Fort Snelling. This broad valley was carved by glacial meltwater about 12,000 years ago. Between 12,000 and 10,000 years ago, the valley was cut deeper by large volumes of water carried by Glacial River Warren, which was an outlet for Glacial Lake Agassiz in northwestern Minnesota. The flood plain you see today is the result of the Mississippi River and the Minnesota River, which is the remnant of Glacial River Warren, depositing sediment over the last 10,000 years.

Imagine 12,000 years ago, when Glacial River Warren merged with the Mississippi River just below Pilot Knob, at present-day Pike Island. As water rushed through the river valley, a massive waterfall formed downstream just south of downtown St. Paul. The waterfall gradually retreated upstream. About 10,000 years ago, the waterfall split in two at Pike Island. One channel moved up the Minnesota River until it was extinguished near Savage. The other channel moved up the Mississippi River, then split again to form Minnehaha Falls and St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis.

People have dramatically altered the landscape seen in Seth Eastman's 1847 painting (see brochure cover). As settlers poured into the area in the mid-1800s, Pilot Knob was developed for dairy and truck farms. Look for clues that remain from former farmsteads, such as building foundations and trees in wind rows.

Ohéyawahe/Pilot Knob has been used as burial ground by people for centuries. Settlers continued this custom by establishing cemeteries on the hill – St. Peter's in 1840 (before the northern part of the hill was bisected by highways) and Acacia Park Cemetery in 1925. At that time a portion of the knob-like top of the hill, once used by steamboat pilots for navigation purposes and the feature that gave the hill its English name, was removed during landscaping at Acacia Park Cemetery.

A Place to Watch Migratory Birds

Located on the bluffs above the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, Ohéyawahe/Pilot Knob is perfectly perched in the fast-lane of one of the world's great avian superhighways: The Mississippi Flyway. This flyway is the route for nearly half of North America's migratory birds. Ohéyawahe/Pilot Knob is also located in an Important Bird Area (IBA), a place identified by Audubon Minnesota as vital for bird conservation. Ohéyawahe/Pilot Knob's bluff-top location in the flyway means great opportunities to spot a wide range of birds—from seasonal migratory visitors, to birds that remain year-round.



Eagles soar in a steady flight with wings held straight out.



Vultures soar in a rocking motion with wings held at an upward angle.

A Place to Learn About Prairie and Oak Savanna Restoration

Two hundred years ago, Ohéyawahe/Pilot Knob was covered by prairie and oak savanna. Native grasses dominate in a prairie, with native wildflowers blooming from April to November. Oak savanna is similar to prairie, but also contains scattered bur oaks and oak groves.

Mendota Heights contracts with Great River Greening to restore Historic Pilot Knob to prairie and oak savanna and to manage the trails for public use. Special challenges for restoration of this site are its steep slope, invasive species, remnants of prior development, and the need to use methods that are culturally sensitive.

Restoration efforts include sowing prairie grass seed, planting pollinator shrubs and wildflowers, planting oak saplings and acorns, controlled burns, mowing and pulling invasive weeds, spot use of herbicides, cutting and removing brush, and conservation haying and grazing by goats and sheep.



Volunteers use fencing to protect newly planted oaks from browsing by deer and rabbits.



Sheep graze on yard grasses, remnants of prior farmsteads.



Hoary Vervain
Verbena stricta

Black-eyed Susan
Rudbeckia hirta

Wild Bergamot
Monarda fistulosa

Gray-headed Coneflower
Ratibida pinnata

Prairie wildflowers, or forbs, co-evolved with insects and birds over thousands of years. Re-establishing these native plants not only increases the beauty of Pilot Knob, but also provides food and shelter for many native animals.

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The rusty patched bumble bee, added to the list of Endangered Species in 2016, was noted in a native bee survey done on Historic Pilot Knob. Surveys monitor the effectiveness of the restoration in supporting native wildlife.

A Place Reclaimed as Public Land

After the land of Pilot Knob hill was offered for sale by the U.S. government in the 1800s, it was purchased by a variety of private owners. In 2002, developers announced a plan to build 157 townhomes on the north slope. A broad coalition of Native Americans, local residents, historians, archeologists, faith communities, and environmental groups united to preserve this land as a public natural area.

In 2006 the City of Mendota Heights, with help from The Trust for Public Land*, purchased 8.2 acres of Pilot Knob hill from the private landowners. In 2007, the City acquired another 17.2 acres from Acacia Park Cemetery. These 25 acres are designated Historic Pilot Knob and are managed as a natural area, free and open to the public. Historic Pilot Knob is a place that everyone can visit to enjoy the view and wildlife, to learn about ecological restoration, and to reflect on the history and meaning of this sacred place.

* Additional funders that assisted with these purchases include Dakota County (through its Farmland and Natural Areas Program), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (through its Remediation Fund, Natural and Scenic, and Metro Greenways programs), Minnesota's Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources), F. R. Bigelow Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, The Scrooby Foundation, and private citizens.

This brochure was developed and produced by Pilot Knob Preservation Association.

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PKPA also thanks the City of Mendota Heights and Dakota County for their support. For information about parks and trails in Mendota Heights, visit www.mendota-heights.com; for Dakota County, visit www.co.dakota.mn.us.

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For detailed information on topics in this pocket guide, visit www.pilotknobpreservation.org