



DOUGLAS COUNTY, KANSAS

A HIGH KNOLL 15 MILES FROM ELM GROVE: VICINITY OF BLACK JACK

Thomas J. Farnham

1839 June 3 & 4

“Our friends having returned from the mill with for which they had been despatched [variant spelling], we left Elm Grove on the 3d of June, traveled along the Santa Fe trail about 15 miles, and encamped upon a high knoll, from which we had an extensive view of the surrounding plains. The grass was now about four inches in high [sic], We remained here a day and a half, waiting for two of our number who had gone in search of a horse that had left our encampment at Elm Grove. ...we shouldered our rifles and galloped away for a deer in the lines of timber that threaded the western horizon. Our first hunt in the ... wilderness! It was attended with no success; but was worth the effort.—We had begun to hunt our food.

In the afternoon of the 4th, our friends returned with the strayed animals. The keepers immediately fired the signal-guns, and all were soon in camp. ...”

*****In far southwestern Johnson County, the Santa Fe Trail splits from the Oregon and California trails. Thus two separate trail routes cross over the Johnson-Douglas county lines. The Santa Fe Trail goes westerly across the southern edge of Douglas County while the Oregon and California trails course westerly/northwesterly through the county. The knoll described above is on the Santa Fe Trail in Douglas County. Roger Boyd, a longtime researcher of the Santa Fe Trail in Douglas County, thinks 15 miles beyond Elm Grove would be in the vicinity of the well-known Black Jack ruts. Boyd poses that the “knoll” could have been one of two nearby locations, that is, just to the east of Black Jack ruts or at the top of a hill about a half mile west of the well-known ruts. The surrounding area would have been much more visible in the nineteenth century due to significantly fewer trees. **Sources:** Farnham, Thomas J. *An 1839 Wagon Train Journal Travels in the Great Western Prairies the Anahuac and Rocky Mountains and in the Oregon Territory*. Seattle: Wash.: Northwest Interpretive Assn., 1983 [reprint of 1843 edition], quote on p. 6. Also: Boyd, Roger. “Question Regarding a SFT Site,” email to Mary Conrad on March 25, 2020.