



JOHNSON COUNTY, KANSAS

“NORTH FORK OF BLUE RIVER”: BRANCH OF COFFEE CREEK -

Jesse C. Douglas
1838 November 2
“Friday, 2nd Nov.

This morning broke upon us rainy and disagreeable. The Conductor being anxious, however, to complete the journey now so near at an end, gave the word for a move, and at 8 o'clock we were on the road [most likely left from Red Bridge Crossing]—the rain increasing as we advanced. At 9 we crossed the boundary line, and found ourselves in the heart of a prairie with scarcely any trace to mark our route. The journey was continued and at 12 a large portion of the emigrants on horseback became detached from the wagons, and wandered over the prairie four [as written] hours in search of the trace of the wagons. It was found at length, and we reached the camp ground set-out for at 3 o'clock, having travelled [variant spelling] a distance (it was computed) at twenty-five miles, although we are now but twelve miles from the encampment of yesterday. Our encampment is known as the North fork of Blue river. Subsistence beef and corn. Forage corn.”

*****An 1838 forced removal of Potawatomi used various roads from Indiana to southeastern Kansas. From Lexington, Missouri to somewhere in Johnson County, Kansas, this entourage followed the general trajectory of the Santa Fe Trail. Douglas is the diarist for William Polke, the federal conductor of more than 800 Potawatomi forced to walk from northern Indiana to eastern Kansas. Douglas calls this campground in what is now Johnson County, Kansas the “North fork of Blue river”. Over the years, various persons suggested that this large Potawatomi entourage stopped at Lone Elm Campground, farther west in Johnson County. Due to the description of this camp and the number of miles, trail historian Craig Crease thinks this camping site would have been more likely in the vicinity of what is now Black Bob Park, located north of 151st Street and east of Black Bob Road in Olathe, Kansas. This Potawatomi entourage came to be called the Potawatomi Trail of Death. A commemorative marker for that 1838 forced walk is not placed in Black Bob Park, but rather is in Heritage Park directly to the south, south of 159th Street. Nonetheless, Crease does not see the marker as totally out of place because he says the Potawatomi campers of well over 500 easily could have been strung out along the waterway down to where Heritage Park now is located. **Source:** Douglas, Jesse C. “Journal of an Emigrating Party of Pottawattomie Indians, 1838”, 147-177. quote on pp. 173-174, in Willard, Shirley and Susan Campbell, editors. *Potawatomi Trail of Death—1838 Removal from Indiana to Kansas*. Rochester, Ind.: Fulton Co. Historical Society, 2003.

If you wish to know locations of Trail of Death markers, click on **MARKERS OF POTAWATOMI TRAIL OF DEATH**.