

Oheyawahi/Pilot Knob

is a place of cultural importance to the Dakota community and of significance in the history of Minnesota statehood.

Oheyawahi/Pilot Knob is protected by the City of Mendota Heights as an Open Space site.

Oheyawahi/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. Park along the street.

Oheyawahi/Pilot Knob can be visited every day during daylight hours.

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

Please take only pictures, leave only footprints.

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



© DAKOTA COUNTY

Oheyawahi/Pilot Knob

MENDOTA HEIGHTS, MINNESOTA



A Place to Appreciate Dakota Heritage

Hekta ahaŋna Ikce Wicaŋta paha kiŋ de Oheyawahi eya cazeyatapi. Dehan isto Woŋakuya Paha eyapi. Wakaŋ dapi naka nina ohodapi. Ikce Wicaŋta ded wacekiyapi k'a naŋuŋ woŋakuye ewicawanpapi. Ded naŋuŋ Treaty of 1851 owapi. De wowapi kiŋ Dakod makoce maka oŋpe ŋektopawinŋe ŋektopawinŋe wikcemna yamni sam zaptaj uŋ icupi. Hehan 1862-1863 waniyeŋtu ecun wicoŋkaŋke ti wan kaŋapi. Naŋuŋ cuŋkaŋke wan ahomni ehdepi. He detaŋhaŋ mni akasamtu. Ded Ikce Wicaŋta wica, wiŋyaŋ k'a naŋuŋ wakaŋ iza wicopiya pazo wicayuhapi. Wicoŋta t'api. Naŋuŋ uŋge ded wicahapi.

This is the north slope of Oheyawahi, "a hill much visited," also now known as Wotakuye 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.

Text from Pilot Knob historical markers; Dakota version courtesy of Glenn Wasicuna.



SETH EASTMAN WATERCOLOR C. 1847
MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

For centuries, Dakota people placed their deceased relatives on scaffolds built on high places, such as Oheyawahi, 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 Oheyawahi, looking toward the present-day MSP international airport.

A Place to Think about Early State History

1700s

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

1805

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

1820

The establishment of Fort Snelling brings an American military presence.

1823

First steamboat arrives at Fort Snelling.

1834

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

1848

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

1851

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

1862-63

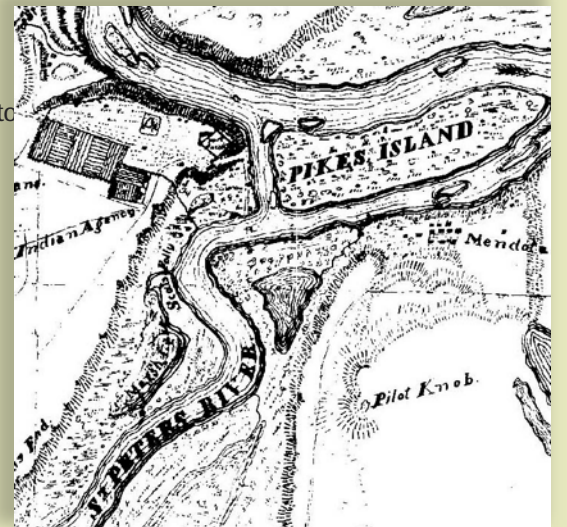
After the beginning of the U.S.-Dakota Conflict, non-combatant Dakota people are held for the winter in a camp below Fort Snelling. Many died, and some were buried on Pilot Knob. Later, the U.S. government forcibly removes most Dakota people from Minnesota.

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.

2004

Oheyawahi/Pilot Knob is determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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.

A Place Reclaimed as Public Land

After the land of Pilot Knob hill was offered for sale by the U.S. government, 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 the area as public open space.

In 2006 the City of Mendota Heights, with help from The Trust for Public Land*, purchased 8.5 acres of Pilot Knob hill from the private landowners. In 2007, the City acquired another 18.5 acres from Acacia Park Cemetery. Oheyawahi/Pilot Knob is once again 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), The F. R. Bigelow Foundation, The McKnight Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, The Scrooby Foundation, and private citizens.*

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

- Think** about its significance to the Dakota nation, past and present.
- View** landmarks from the beginnings of Minnesota state history.
- Look** for deer, wild turkeys, migrating birds and other wildlife.
- Read** the landscape for clues about the past.
- Learn** about oak savanna restoration.

A Place of Reverence

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

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



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Historic Fort Snelling and downtown Minneapolis, from Pilot Knob, 2010

In the 19th century, as today, visitors to Pilot Knob could view what 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.



Council Fires Overlook

Seven blocks of limestone represent the seven Dakota/Nakota/Lakota groups whose members currently reside from Minnesota to Montana, Nebraska to Canada. The 2-ton blocks were quarried in the Minnesota River valley near Mankato. You are invited to sit here.

A Place to Learn about Oak Savanna Restoration

Two hundred years ago, prairie and oak savanna covered Pilot Knob. 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.

In order to restore the land to these vegetation types, Mendota Heights contracted with Great River Greening in 2005 to develop a 10-year restoration plan. 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 repeated controlled burns, mowing invasive weeds, cutting and removing brush, sowing prairie grass seed, planting grass and wildflower seedlings, and planting oak saplings and acorns.



Volunteers cut and stack non-native woody plants, which are later used as fuel at District Energy in St. Paul.



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

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 fork moved up the Minnesota River until it was extinguished near Savage. The other fork 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.

Oheyawahi/ 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.

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

This project has been financed in part with funds provided by the State of Minnesota from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society.

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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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.

FLOWERS ABOVE AND BUTTERFLY © BRUCE WHITE



A Place to Watch Migratory Birds and Wildlife

For thousands of years, the Mississippi Flyway migratory route has been used by the majority of North American birds that winter in the south and nest in the north. The elevation of Pilot Knob plus the habitat it provides makes it an attractive stopover for migrating birds, including species such as Townsend solitaire, rock wren, and peregrine falcon.

The American bald eagle and turkey vulture are two species of large, dark birds often seen over Pilot Knob. They can be told apart by their flight profiles.



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



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

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