

PAST AND PRESENT

High on a hill

At a shallow limestone cliff eight miles northeast of Mount Oread, woodland meets prairie. To the south, the fertile flatlands of the Kansas River Valley roll out in a patchwork dotted with farmhouses. A gravel road winds to the west, then turns toward the north. There's no hint of the bustle of Jayhawk Boulevard or the university's busy urban campuses. But this, too, is KU.

At his death in 1894, Charles Robinson, the state's first governor, bequeathed land near this spot for KU's future use. Later, other donors helped expand the area, and in 1947, it became an active research site. Today, its 1,600 contiguous acres are part of KU's Field Station and Ecological Reserves, a group of native and managed habitats and

experimental research areas, with public shelters and interpretive nature trails.

The newest tract, the Suzanne Ecke McColl Reserve, buffers the Rockefeller Prairie, a remnant of native prairie. The McColl will become an educational site to help visitors enjoy the prairie and learn why such areas should be preserved.

KU third-year architecture students have gotten in on the project, making it easy to take in the view toward Mount Oread. With the help of Dick and Sue Himes of Lawrence, who gave funds for construction supplies, the students designed and built a 400-square-foot deck on the cliff at the prairie's edge. The Westar Energy Green Team provided lumber cut

from recycled telephone poles for the structure's floor and bench.

"This is probably the first time, in their fledgling careers in architecture, that the students got to see the results of something they designed," said their professor, Nils Gore.

It's one of the most recent learning experiences to take place at the ecological reserves, which are protected in perpetuity by KU Endowment.

To learn more about the development of trails and other low-impact educational features at the KU Field Station and Ecological Reserves, or to give, contact Jenna Goodman, 785-832-7417 or jgoodman@kuendowment.org, or visit kuendowment.org/naturereserves/.

— Kirsten Bosnak



LISA SCHELLER

KU third-year architecture students built the wood-and-steel viewing platform at the Rockefeller Prairie.