

Tips for exploring Kansas

Chris Banner
Contributing writer

Do you want to get out and enjoy nature but don't know where to go? You don't need to travel to some far distant place, for lots of good, interesting, pleasurable state parks exist right here in Kansas.

"Kansas Trail Guide" tells you about 75 of the most interesting and scenic places throughout the state.

The first chapter introduces you to various topics related to hiking, biking and horseback riding on these trails.

It discusses the history of the state and what the early travelers and settlers in Kansas saw and thought of the place.

This includes the famous quote from explorer Zebulon Pike (1779-1813), who said after his 1806-1807 expedition, on which he reached as far west as Pike's Peak, that settlers should "leave the prairie incapable of cultivation to the wandering and uncivilized aborigines of the country." This book of places to visit shows just how wrong he was.

We read about the geography and geology of the state and its 11 physiographic regions from the oldest, the Ozark Plateau in the southeastern corner of the state, to the high plains that cover its western third.

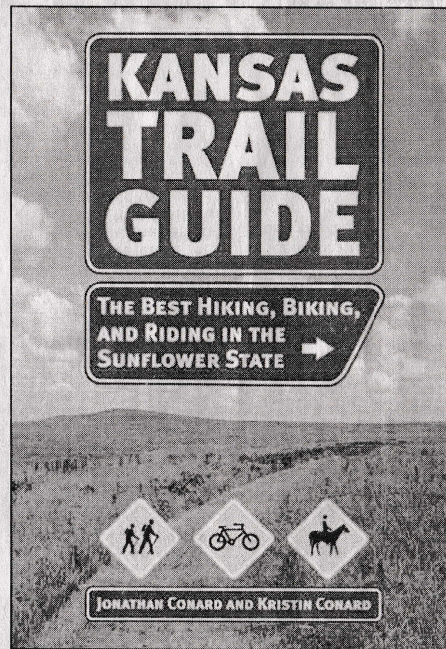
The Conrads discuss the variety of ecosystems and their respective flora and fauna, and how they change in appearance with the seasons. Summer is not necessarily the most desirable season to see and do things outdoors.

When the trees are leafless may be a better season for observing wildlife. They mention several animals, both common and uncommon, and the best season to see them. Birding is particularly good at certain times in Kansas because it is a central flyway.

The climate and weather show great variety over the year, from bitterly cold winters to deadly hot summers, from parched dry to soaking wet to snow covered, all of which affect your experience.

You probably will want to choose your area of travel with those conditions in mind, because a given area may be more interesting and desirable and the weather may be more predictable in one season than another.

"Kansas Trail Guide" tells you how to plan and prepare yourself so that you have a safe, enjoyable experience. Where can you park? Where can you camp? Which clothing is best? How do you protect yourself from discomfort, possibly even death, caused by the insects, reptiles and larger animals as well as poisonous plants? In season, hunters are to



"Kansas Trail Guide: The Best Hiking, Biking, and Riding in the Sunflower State," by Jonathan Conrad and Kristin Conrad. University Press of Kansas, 2015. 304 pages, \$25.

be taken to mind also — you might not want to be out in the woods when they are present.

The book discusses camping facilities, how to contact the authorities to get further information and costs of using Kansas state parks.

The first chapter closes by listing the trails, which are classified by what they have to offer.

While many of these topics are usually directed at beginners, the experienced hikers, cyclists and riders, especially those from out of state, can benefit from reading about them too.

The rest of the book is devoted to listing and discussing how these topics relate to the individual trails in each region of Kansas. The authors divide the state into seven regions, not the usual six, which are north and south eastern, north and south central, and north and south western.

To these, they add a seventh — the Kansas City region — which, though small, makes sense from both a population and a facilities point of view.

The computer generated, colored maps of the sites and trails are excellent. They are clear with no excess, unnecessary detail, but they tell you what you need to know. A good feature is that they include GPS coordinates so that the sites are easy to find on your car's navigation system.

The book is blessed with numerous excellent, striking color photos of scenes on the various trails. For those who have bought into the idea that Kansas is a flat, uninteresting place, these photos will dispel that notion in a

hurry. Even the undulating high plains have their attractions.

The authors, Jonathan and Kristin Conrad, are very much outdoors types who also are able to write in clear, plain English that is a pleasure to read.

This book is intended for all readers in Kansas and other places, for it tells about interesting and enjoyable places that you may never have heard of.

"Kansas Trail Guide: The Best Hiking, Biking, and Riding in the Sunflower State" is a well organized reference book, and is something that you probably will not read cover to cover, though you may find that you cannot stop with just one entry.

Look up the region or theme that you think you're interested in. You will find a lot to choose from.

Christopher Banner is a Manhattan resident and emeritus senior specialist in music at KSU. He has a master's in geography.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Manhattan Mercury is looking for local book worms interested in reviewing books in all genres. Books eligible for review must have been published within the last two years and cannot have been reviewed previously in our publication. Book reviews are to be 500-800 words in length and should be submitted by email. The Mercury pays \$20 for each published review.

For more information or to submit a review, please email lskene@themercury.com.