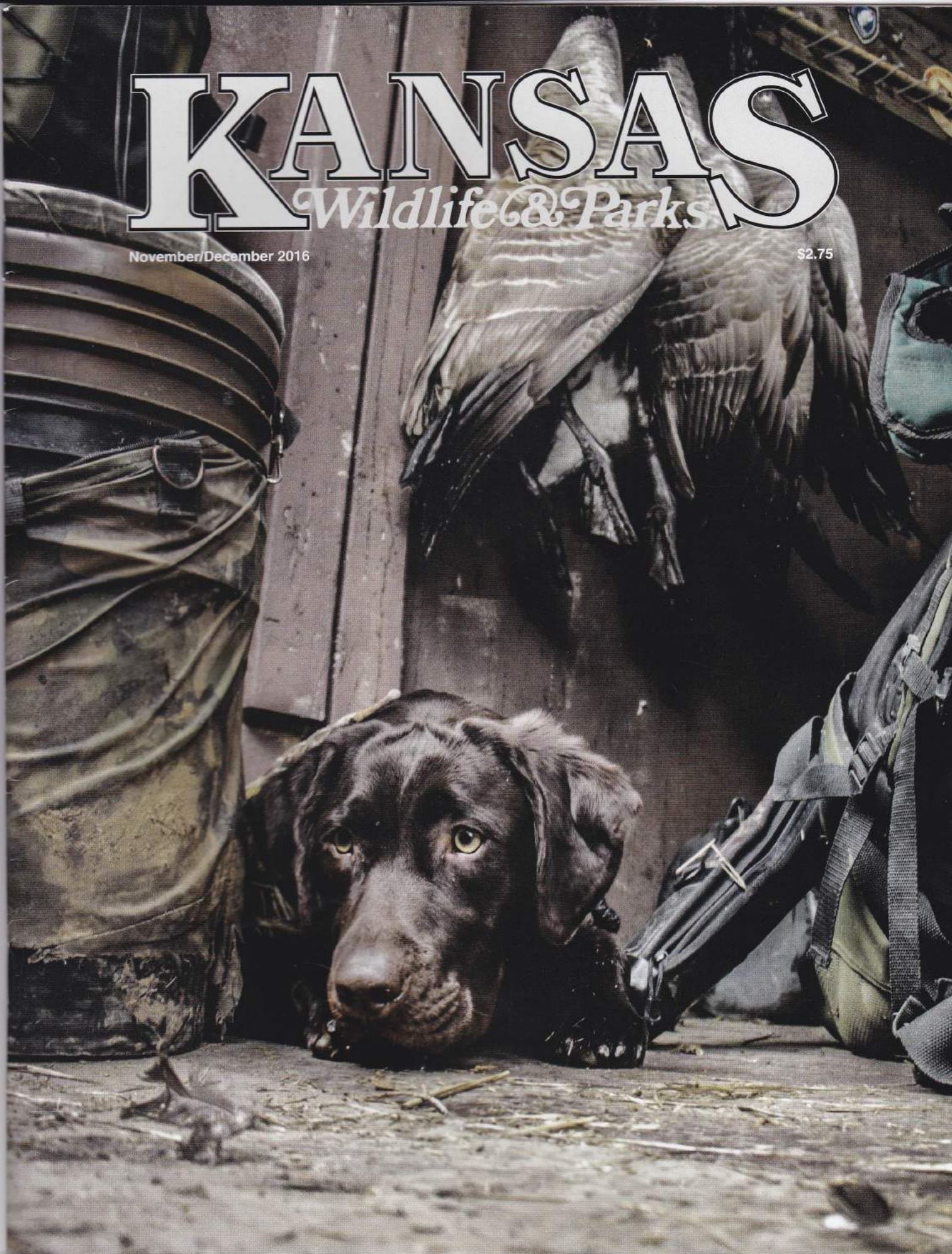


KANSAS

Wildlife & Parks

November/December 2016

\$2.75



*FACTS FOR THE
SUNFLOWER STATE HIKER:*



Kansas' Longitude

94° 38' W
to
102° 1' 34" W

Kansas' Latitude

37° N TO 40° N

Our state is

400

miles east to west

&

210 MILES SOUTH TO NORTH

Kansas cover

82,282

square miles

Geographic Center

Barton County

15 miles NE of Great Bend

Highest Point

Mount Sunflower

4,039 feet above sea level

lowest **Point**

VERDIGERIS RIVER

679 feet below sea level



by Jennifer Leeper,
freelance writer
Kansas City, Mo.

Wildlife & Parks

*THE KANSAS
GUIDE TO
BECOMING AN*

**INTENTIONAL
WANDERER**

Kansas is a surprise gem for hikers.

Yep, I said hikers. The Sunflower State – though technically mountainless – offers bluffs, breaks, badlands, and even canyons perfect for hiking. It's a well-kept secret, but since you're a loyal reader, I'll share with you my hiking Kansas treasure chest of knowledge.

For those new to hiking, preparing for an inaugural trek in Kansas may not be the same as prepping for "fourteeners" (mountain peaks with an elevation of 14,000 feet) in Colorado, but the same rules apply to your couple-of-hours-or-so hike through the relatively flat Flint Hills, or a visit to the "Little Ozarks" in southeast Kansas. In fact, there's nothing "little" about these Ozarks, especially if you underestimate the terrain or lack the right gear or endurance.

GRAB A MAP

A little online research on the various landscapes of Kansas can give you a good foundation for understanding the physical territory you could encounter during your hike. For example, physiographic maps, such as the one offered through the Kansas Geological Survey, illustrate distinctive regions like the Smoky Hills in north-central Kansas and the High Plains in western Kansas.

Armed with a basic knowledge of Kansas topography, you can decide where to plant your boots first, based on your desired scenery, time, and goals. This is where the real fun begins. But be forewarned, your options may be greater than you think.

Kristin Conard, co-author of *Kansas Trail Guide: The Best Hiking, Biking, and Riding in the Sunflower State*, has a hard time narrowing her choices.

"... I really enjoy the trails at Eisenhower State Park near Melvern Lake, and the Prairie Spirit Trail from Ottawa to Iola is in such good shape and represents so much hard work, and along the way, you get idyllic views of rolling farmland."

George Frazier, author of *The Last Wild Places of Kansas*, tends toward untamed, obscure spots when he explores.

"You're a lucky person if some of your favorite hikes are close to home. My "home trails" are the Billy Mills Trail at Haskell Indian Nations University and the Lawrence River Trails and Kansas River Levee that extend northeast from Lawrence, starting at Bowersock Dam."

Dave Dunford, a long-time member and off-time board member of the Prairie Packers, a Kansas hiking club, prefers trekking around Clinton and Perry lakes.

"I like to hike the trail along Rock Creek at the southwest end of Clinton Reservoir. Really good white bass fishing there during the spring run. Also, really great trails around Perry Reservoir."

"The Woodridge area at Clinton Reservoir is a good place to camp and hike when it gets colder."

Dunford added that Elk City Reservoir is another favorite weekend backpacking adventure of his due to the area's "Many large rock formations and cliffs that you don't expect to see in Kansas."

Still wanting for ideas of where to go? Visit the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism's website, www.ksoutdoors.com, and The Slackpacker's Guide to Hiking Trails & Wilderness Travel at www.slackpacker.com and click on "Kansas." Or check out TrailLink by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy at www.traillink.com where you can enter your city, state, or zip, or a specific trail name.

GEAR UP

When gearing up for a hike, there are a few questions you'll need answered before you head out: What will the weather be like? Will the terrain be smooth, rocky or somewhere in between? Will the ground be dry or muddy? Weather and trail conditions are two critical factors in selecting what you'll outfit yourself with.

You can fine-tune your preparation for trail conditions by visiting the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network at www.cocorahs.org. Simply click on "Kansas" for county-by-county information on the possibility or presence of precipitation and comments made about the weather in individual counties.

Beyond clothing, you'll need to think about what time of day you'll be hiking, how steep the terrain may be, and even what you'll carry your goods in. Consider packing a headlamp for early morning and late evening hikes when visibility may be low, especially if you're in new territory. For hikes on rugged terrain, a sturdy hiking stick will give you more leverage and stability. No matter the terrain, outfit yourself with a small backpack to carry your gear in.

Conard suggests choosing gear based on season. "... sunscreen and bug spray in late spring, summer, and early fall. Layers from fall to spring." Conard also advises bringing a trail guide on any hike.

THE RIGHT FOOT FORWARD

What you put on your feet is a critical part of preparing for your hike. When choosing your "sole mates," there are typically four basic kinds of hiking footwear to consider:

- **Hiking shoes.** These are lighter than a boot and offer less support but are ideal if you plan to take shorter hikes on less rugged terrain. Many come in waterproof versions, and are even stylish enough to wear back in civilization.



- **Hiking boots.** Designed for longer hikes, heavier pack loads and more rugged terrain, hiking boots provide support for your feet and ankles. This is kind of the middle ground shoe that you can't go wrong with.

- **Backpacking boots.** Taller, stiffer, and often heavier than most hiking boots, backpacking boots are ideal if you're anticipating multiple day hikes, or treks during winter when snow and ice may be at your feet.

Once you've decided which type of shoe or boot is best suited for your needs, find a style and brand that fits your feet. Be picky and take your time. Good fitting boots might be the most critical piece of equipment you'll buy.

PLAY IT SAFE

Regardless of the time of year, never hike without plenty of water and a general first-aid kit. Consider including in your hiking kit the following:

- Antiseptic towelettes/alcohol wipes: to disinfect a wound
- Antibiotic ointment: to prevent infection
- Bandages of varying size: for cuts, scrapes, and blisters
- Ibuprofen: for pain and inflammation
- Antihistamine: for allergic reactions and insect bites
- Tweezers: to remove splinters
- Bandana: for applying pressure to a wound, or use in a splint
- Powdered emergency electrolyte drink: for quick hydration



You can never be too cautious when you're outdoors, especially if you're new to hiking or are in an unfamiliar area. If hiking alone, let someone know where you're going and when you plan to return. Take your cell phone and make sure it's fully charged.

ENERGIZE YOURSELF

First and foremost, stay hydrated. You may be comfortable mid-trek, but keep in mind that thirst and perspiration aren't the only signs of dehydration. If you don't mind toting them, throw one or two (or more) water bottles in your pack. If you're trying to minimize your load, consider using a hydration pack. These are fairly slim packs that have a built-in water bladder, typically with an attached straw that allow you to sip on the go. Sites like www.backpacker.com provide hydration equipment ratings to help you make your purchasing decision.

If you're planning on a hike that's longer than an hour, throw a few snacks in your pack. From energy bars



and gels, to chews and even jellybeans, outdoor adventurers have seemingly endless choices when it comes to selecting their "fuel." If you're looking to find the latest and greatest in energy choices, check out the reviews at www.outdoorgearlab.com. If you're in to keeping it simple, take food that will keep well in your pack like a peanut butter sandwich, nuts or a banana. They're inexpensive and portable sources of energy.

THE PAY OFF

Hiking is good for the body, but it's probably better for the soul. It connects us to places and can fill voids we didn't even know were there. From forested hills to badlands, treeless plains, Kansas offers the intentional wanderer variety. Walt Whitman said it best when he wrote: "While I know the standard claim that Yosemite, Niagara Falls, the Upper Yellowstone, and the like afford the greatest natural shows, I am not so sure but that the Prairies and the Plains... last longer, fill the esthetic sense fuller, precede all the rest and make North America's characteristic landscape."

ABOUT THE PRAIRIE PACKERS

Born in the 1970s with only a few members, the Prairie Packers have not only endured, but their ranks have swelled to nearly 600 hikers. Based out of Topeka, they trek all over Kansas and beyond. Activities range from hiking (of course) to kayaking, and cycling. Meeting once a month for dinner in Topeka, members discuss future events and hear the adventures of other outdoor enthusiasts. For more information on the Prairie Packers, visit their Facebook page under "Kansas Prairie Packers" or visit their website at www.prairiepackers.org.

20 Places For Your First Hike



SP = State Park
WA = Wildlife Area
SFL = State Fishing Lake

Northwest

Steve Mathes Nature Trail, Prairie Dog SP: 1.4 miles
Coyote Trail, Webster SP: 3 miles
Agave Nature Trail, Cedar Bluff SP: 5 miles

Southwest

Eagle Trail, Meade SP: 1.5 miles
Lake Scott Bridle Trail, Lake Scott SP: 7 miles

Northcentral

Dakota Trail, Wilson SP: 1 mile
Split Boulder Trail, Kanopolis SP: 2 miles

Northeast

Eisenhower Interpretive Trail, Eisenhower SP: .5 miles
Ah-ke-ta Nature Trail, Pomona SP: .5 miles
Cedar Ridge Trail- ADA, Tuttle Creek SP: 1 mile
Pillsbury Crossing (P.C.) Nature Trail, P.C. WA: 2 miles
Pipeline (Campground) Trail, Milford WA: 3 miles
Eagle Ridge Trail, Milford WA: 8 miles

Southcentral

Pond Trail, Sand Hills SP: 1.5 miles
Rolling Hills, Sand Hills SP: 3.8
West Side Trail, Cheney SP: 6 miles

Southeast

Neosho Nature Trail, Neosho SFL: 1 mile
Casner Creek Trail, Fall River SP: 1.5
Table Mound Hiking Trail, Elk City SP: 2.8 miles
Drywood Creek, Crawford SP: 6.8 miles



For a complete list of trails and places to trek in Kansas, visit ksoutdoors.com and click "Activities," then "Hiking, Biking, & Horseback Riding Trails."