# Contents

**Foreword** ........................................................................................................... ix

**Preface and Acknowledgments** ......................................................................... x

## Chapter 1. Introduction ......................................................................................... 1

- History .................................................................................................................... 2
- Geology and Geography ......................................................................................... 3
- Flora and Fauna ..................................................................................................... 5
- Climate and Weather ............................................................................................ 6
- Know Before You Go: Advice and Precautions ................................................... 8
- Costs ..................................................................................................................... 11
- Camping Information ........................................................................................... 12
- Contacts and Resources ....................................................................................... 12
- How to Use This Guide .......................................................................................... 13
- Top Trails ............................................................................................................... 14

## Chapter 2. Kansas City Metropolitan Area ......................................................... 17

- Ernie Miller Park and Nature Center ..................................................................... 19
- Kil Creek Park ...................................................................................................... 22
- Olathe Prairie Center ............................................................................................ 27
- Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens ................................................. 30
- Shawnee Mission Park .......................................................................................... 34
- Wyandotte County Lake Park ................................................................................ 38

## Chapter 3. Northeast Kansas .................................................................................. 43

- Baker University Wetlands Research and Natural Area ........................................ 45
- Banner Creek Reservoir ....................................................................................... 47
- Black Jack Battlefield and Nature Park ................................................................. 50
- Blue River Rail Trail–Marysville ........................................................................ 53
- Camp Alexander–Emporia .................................................................................... 56
- Clinton Lake .......................................................................................................... 58
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton State Park</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Memorial Wildlife Area</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillsdale Lake</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaw River State Park</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Cygne Lake–Linn County Park</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence River Trails</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacLennan Park</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melvern Lake–Eisenhower State Park</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melvern Lake–Outlet Park</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon Trail Nature Park</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry Lake</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pomona Lake</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairie Park Nature Center</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kansas Field Station</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 4. Southeast Kansas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Hill Lake</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Timbers State Park</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elk City State Park</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall River State Park</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunn Park–Fort Scott</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolen Creek Park</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 5. North-Central Kansas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allegawaho Memorial Heritage Park</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coronado Heights</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanopolis State Park</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konza Prairie</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakewood Park–Salina</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan River Trails</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milford State Park</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6. South-Central Kansas .............................................. 163

Tuttle Creek State Park ...................................................... 153
Wilson Lake .......................................................................... 156
Wilson State Park ................................................................. 159

Air Capital Memorial Park .................................................... 165
Camp Horizon–Arkansas City ..................................................... 167
Chapin Park .......................................................................... 169
Chaplin Nature Center .............................................................. 171
Cheney Reservoir .................................................................. 174
Chisholm Creek Park ............................................................... 177
Dillon Nature Center ................................................................. 179
El Dorado State Park ............................................................... 184
Harvey County West Park ...................................................... 187
Lake Barton–Great Bend .......................................................... 189
Maxwell Wildlife Refuge–McPherson State Fishing Lake .......... 192
Meadowlark Trail–McPherson/Lindsborg .................................. 195
Miller’s Meadow–Wichita ......................................................... 198
Pawnee Prairie Park ................................................................. 200
Prairie Sunset Trail ................................................................. 203
Quivira National Wildlife Refuge ........................................... 206
Sand Creek Trail–Bethel College ............................................... 211
Sand Hills State Park ............................................................... 213
Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve .......................................... 216

Chapter 7. Northwest Kansas .................................................. 223

Cedar Bluff State Park ............................................................ 225
Prairie Dog State Park ............................................................ 228
Smoky Valley Ranch ............................................................... 231
Sternberg Museum of Natural History .................................... 236
Webster State Park ............................................................... 239
CONTENTS

CHAPTER 8. SOUTHWEST KANSAS ................................................. 243

Arkalon Park ................................................................. 245
Barber State Fishing Lake ............................................. 247
Cimarron National Grassland ........................................ 249
Frazier Park ................................................................. 256
Lake Scott State Park ...................................................... 258

CHAPTER 9. LONG-DISTANCE RAIL TRAILS .............................. 265

Flint Hills Nature Trail .................................................... 268
Landon Nature Trail ....................................................... 274
Prairie Spirit Trail .......................................................... 277
Southwind Rail Trail ....................................................... 282

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................... 285

INDEX ............................................................................. 287
FOREWORD

Whether you are an avid hiker or prefer to be propelled forward by a bicycle or a horse, or even if you are just looking for a splendid way to spend a beautiful Kansas day, this book should be in your possession.

The brother-sister team of Jonathan Conard and Kristin Conard has spent years examining every detail of Kansas trails to make trail-going easy for the rest of us. This book uncomplicates the details of knowing where to go, when to go, what to expect, and so much more. The Conards’ passion for trails comes through in the specifics, the maps, and the pictures.

Kansas has an incredible legacy of trails, as explained in the first chapter. And after reading it, you’ll feel like it’s your duty as a Kansan to get to a trailhead and forge ahead. Between our wide-open sky and prairie soil are more trails than you can imagine, and they will take you on a remarkable journey of Kansas geography and history.

As the authors explain, Kansas has eleven different physiographic regions, which means that the trails in each region look a bit different. You can really get to know Kansas by hiking at least one trail in each region. But watch out — if you do that, you’ll only want to do more!

If you enjoy the trails, let your friends know. Find a way to brag about your trekking adventures in Kansas (through Twitter or Facebook, for example). You’ll find rock formations, lakes, creeks, woods, and sights that leave you breathless. With their book, the Conards have given us a great launching pad to do some boasting.

I already have my own favorite trails, but my new quest as a Kansas Explorer Club member will be to experience every trail in the Conards’ book. It may take some time, but I’m going to do it — and I’ll thank Jonathan and Kristin with every step.

Marci Penner
Executive Director, Kansas Sampler Foundation


Preface and Acknowledgments

The trails of Kansas don’t always get the respect they deserve, and the state’s reputation as a flat land with little to see is not limited to outsiders. However, for those willing to venture beyond the pavement, there are trails throughout Kansas that highlight some of the best and most scenic natural areas in the state. From the windswept plains to the majestic Flint Hills, the subtle beauty of the Sunflower State is best appreciated from these trails. Spending the better part of a year hiking and biking our way throughout the state has been an amazing experience, and we hope the knowledge and insights we’ve gained will be a valuable resource for those who want to explore Kansas.

We couldn’t have done this without a lot of help. We’d like to thank Maddie Estrada at Garmin for letting us test and use the company’s devices to help us create the maps, and Cathy Kružić and Janie McCullough at Kružić Communications for making introductions to tourism boards. For their support and answers to many questions, we are grateful to Liron BenDor at Overland Park Tourism; Susan Rathke at Emporia CVB; Kristi Lee at Franklin County CVB; Marcia Rozell at Manhattan CVB; Jim Thomas, Kansas Horse Council director; Clark Coan, former director of development at Kanza Rail-Trails Conservancy; Doug Walker, vice president of Kanza Rail-Trails Conservancy Inc.; and Wendy Bowles at Kanopolis State Park. We’d also like to thank the photographers who let us use their photos of some of the trails: Judd Patterson, David Welfelt, Scott Bean, Marciana Vequist, Billie Hufford, Chris Harnish, Amanda Botterweck, and Randy Van Scyoc. We appreciate all the volunteers and park employees across the state who work so hard to keep the trails in good shape — it’s a more difficult job than many can imagine. And thanks to our editor for his support for the project from the beginning.

More than anything, we’d like to thank our family: our brother Andrew and his wife Nicole for their help with and enthusiasm for this book and for opening up their house; Mark and Joyce, our parents, for being endlessly supportive, helping to pick us up on the longer trails, taking pictures, giving guidance, and tackling many of the trails with us; and Melissa, Jonathan’s wife, for being patient and encouraging after long days on the trail and for supporting our dream of writing this book. Finally, we are grateful to God for such a wonderful world to explore.

To Katie, John, Jenna, and Anne: we finished this, so you know that anything’s possible.
Chapter 1

Introduction

These things—the air, the water, the scenery and we who fill these scenes—hold many and many a man to Kansas when money would tempt him away. . . Here are the still waters, here are the green pastures. Here, the fairest of the world’s habitations.

William Allen White, circa 1912
INTRODUCTION

Kansas is widely perceived as a flat state that is best known for its tornadoes and *The Wizard of Oz*. But hiding in plain sight are hundreds of miles of trails waiting to be explored by hikers, cyclists, and horseback riders.

HISTORY

Those who set out to explore the trails of Kansas are following in some famous and historical footsteps. Native Americans traveled across Kansas to hunt game, visit religious sites, and trade with other tribes. Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado traveled through what is now Kansas in 1541, following Cabeza de Vaca’s stories of wealth in the region. It is thought that Coronado and his men stood atop a hill northwest of what is now Lindsborg and looked out over the valley. That hill is now aptly named Coronado Heights.

Some 260 years later, the Lewis and Clark expedition made camp on the banks of the Kansas River and spent time exploring the region during the summer of 1804. As might be expected, their journals included entries on the high heat that is common during a Kansas summer, but they also reflected on the area’s scenery.

*Coronado Heights in the Smoky Hills. Photo by Scott Bean*
Clark wrote in his journal on July 4, 1804: “We Camped in the plain one of the most butiful Plains, I ever Saw, open & butifully diversified with hills & vallies all presenting themselves to the river covered with grass and a few scattering trees a handsom Creek meandering thro at this place the Kansaw Inds.”

As Lewis and Clark returned to the East after their expedition, Zebulon Pike set out across Kansas in 1806 with the mission of exploring the southern portion of the lands acquired in the Louisiana Purchase. Pike started his journey through what is now southeast Kansas and trekked northwest, spending time in the Flint Hills and the Smoky Hills and along the Arkansas River. His journals record the area’s wildlife and scenery, but his overall impression was that the land was not desirable for settlement. In fact, in one entry he wrote, “Our citizens being so prone to rambling and extending themselves on the frontiers will, through necessity, be constrained to limit their extent on the west to the borders of the Missouri and Mississippi, while they leave the prairie incapable of cultivation to the wandering and uncivilized aborigines of the country.”

Pike was certainly wrong in his assessment that the vast prairies of Kansas would limit exploration and travel through the region. From the 1820s to 1860s, before the spread of the railroad, traders and settlers began to move west by trail, and the most important routes went through Kansas. The 2,000-mile Oregon Trail had its start in Kansas, with wagon trains gathering in Kansas City, St. Joseph, Leavenworth, and Atchison. Ruts from the trail can still be seen in various locations, including the Oregon Trail Nature Park in Wamego. Another famous trail, the 750-mile Santa Fe Trail, ran from the Missouri River, through Kansas, to Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was used primarily as a supply route for traders and the military.

In addition to the westbound trails crossing the state, Kansas is well known for the trails used to drive longhorn cattle north from Texas. The Chisholm Trail, the most famous of these cattle trails, initially ran north from Texas through Indian territory to a trading post operated by Jesse Chisholm near the present-day city of Wichita. The trail was extended to Abilene in 1867 to expedite the shipment of vast herds of longhorns to stockyards and markets in the East.

With the development of the railroad and the automobile, many of these trails, which were once the main routes of transportation, became places of leisure and exploration.

**Geology and Geography**

While exploring the Kansas trails, you’ll notice a marked difference in the landscape, depending on where you are in the state. Kansas is made up of eleven physiographic regions, and these differences developed over millions of years. The oldest part of the state, in terms of geology, is the limestone and chert of the Ozark Plateau, deposited in the southeastern corner of the state more than 330 million years ago. This region does the most to challenge the stereotype of Kansas as flat
Physiographic regions

and treeless. It receives more rainfall than any other part of the state, and it is forested and hilly, with caves and steep stream valleys.

The Cherokee Lowlands has fewer trees than the Ozark Plateau, although it is forested along stream banks and hills. It features gently rolling hills and shallow stream valleys on shale and sandstone.

The small sliver of the Cross Timbers, or Chautauqua Hills, that extends into southern Kansas from Oklahoma is composed of sandstone deposited between 286 million and 320 million years ago. Vegetation in the area includes a mix of grassland and hardwood trees such as scrub oak.

The majority of southeast Kansas is within the Osage Cuestas region. Cuesta is Spanish for slope, and the rolling hills of the region typically have steep east-facing ridges rising 50 to 200 feet, with gently descending slopes on the opposite side. These hills have underlying layers of sandstone, limestone, and shale that were deposited during the Pennsylvanian period, 290 million to 323 million years ago.

The landscape of the Glaciated Region in the northeast corner was carved by the advance and retreat of two glaciers from 600,000 to 1.6 million years ago. Glacial deposits of rocks that originated farther north, such as Sioux quartzite, can be found throughout the region. The dominant flora of the hilly area is a mix of tallgrass prairie and deciduous forest.

The Flint Hills are formed of limestone and shale. The chert in the limestone resulted in rocky soil and steep streambeds, which made farming difficult. As a result, this region has been preserved as one of the country’s largest contiguous tracts of native tallgrass prairie. The dominant plant species are warm-season grasses, including switchgrass, Indian grass, little bluestem, and big bluestem, which can reach an impressive 10 feet tall during years with abundant rainfall. These hearty grasses thrive in the prairie, as they are well adapted to flourish in the harsh combination of drought, fire, and grazing that characterizes these areas.

The Arkansas River Lowlands and the Wellington-McPherson Lowlands are similar topographically and geologically. Both are alluvial plains formed from
river and stream deposits over the past 10 million years. In addition, these regions contain inactive sand dunes covered with grass and scattered wetland marshes that are important for migratory shorebirds and waterfowl.

Another region that bucks the flat Kansas stereotype is the Red Hills. In southern Kansas, red shale, sandstone, and siltstone were deposited with gypsum and dolomite 260 million years ago. This resulted in sinkholes and flat red hills topped with dolomite or gypsum. The waters here were sacred to the Plains Indians, and because of the calcium and magnesium sulfate in the waters from the rock, they have therapeutic properties.

The Smoky Hills in north-central Kansas, named for the haze that collects in the valleys, are made up of three distinct formations. The Dakota Formation is composed of sandstone and contains buttes and hills amongst the plains. To the west is the Greenhorn Limestone, with its chalky limestone and shale. The Niobrara Chalk at the western edge of the region features spires and towers of chalk remnants.

The High Plains are predominantly windswept, flat, and treeless. Stretching across nearly the entire western third of the state, the region has swaths of flatlands interspersed with gently rolling hills. It also contains the Ogallala Formation, which is mostly underground and includes the aquifer from which western Kansas gets its water; however, occasional outcrops of the formation can be found aboveground. From east to west within the region, there is a gradual elevation gain.

Flora and Fauna

Kansas has a variety of ecosystems, from tallgrass and shortgrass prairies to woodlands to riparian forests. Moving from west to east across the state, average annual precipitation increases. This rainfall gradient drives the transition from arid shortgrass prairie in the west to tallgrass prairie and mesic woodlands in the east. During the spring and summer, prairie wildflowers and redbuds are in bloom, and the dense, green woodlands provide shaded canopies for many of the trails, particularly in the eastern portion of the state.

In winter, with the leaves off the trees, there's a better chance of spotting wildlife. However, many of the trails provide amazing opportunities for wildlife observation year-round. Since the trails outside of urban areas are more lightly used, animals such as white-tailed deer and wild turkeys can often be spotted. Some trails may offer an opportunity to see iconic Kansas animals such as the American bison, ornate box turtle, and prairie dog, along with less common animals such as the black-footed ferret, American badger, or bobcat.

Birding is popular in Kansas, and the state is part of the Central Flyway—a bird migration route through the Great Plains from Mexico to Canada. Turkey vultures soar overhead in summer; in spring and fall, sandhill cranes and the occasional...
The endangered whooping crane, along with other migratory shorebirds and waterfowl, pass through; and in winter, you can spot bald eagles at several Kansas reservoirs. Great blue herons make their homes along the lakes and streams, prairie chickens perform their elaborate dances out on the prairie, and red-tailed hawks perch on fence posts as they rest between hunting flights.

**Climate and Weather**

As the geographic center of the Lower 48, and with no major bodies of water impacting weather conditions, Kansas has a classic continental climate characterized by a wide variation in temperatures across seasons, with hot summers and cold winters. But as long as you plan ahead (think extra water in the summer and plenty of warm layers in the winter), you can enjoy the trails year-round.

Some of the best times of the year for exploring the trails are spring and fall, when temperatures are typically balmy. With spring rains, the prairies turn green and native wildflowers begin to bloom. In the fall, the changing color of the leaves, particularly in the eastern portion of the state, is inspiring. It’s worth taking the
same trail at different times of the year to see the dynamic impact the changing seasons have on the vegetation and wildlife.

From December to February, trails can best be enjoyed on the mild, sunny days that occur sporadically throughout the winter. One of the prime benefits of winter hiking is the peace and solitude on the trails at this time of year, and the practical advantages include fewer bugs, less overgrowth, and often less wind. As vegetation becomes dormant during the winter, it may also be easier to spot wildlife along the trail, and a light dusting of snow reveals the tracks of even the most secretive species. Some species are actually most likely to be seen during the winter, including the bald eagle, which spends the winter months along reservoirs and rivers in the central and eastern parts of the state.

Be aware that the weather can change quickly, particularly in fall and spring;
what started out as a warm day could turn cold, and vice versa. So plan ahead and bring layers of clothing. No matter the season, wind is likely. On average, the wind speed in Kansas is over 10 miles per hour. For trails with little tree cover, this is a consideration, as is sun exposure.

With the possibility of rapidly changing conditions, you should be prepared for adverse weather on the trail. Thunderstorms can come up quickly in Kansas, and lightning strikes from these storms are the primary threat. If you see lightning in the area, quickly descend to lower ground and avoid exposed ridges, bluffs, or lone trees until the storm passes.

Tornado season is typically April through June, as humid, warm air from the Gulf of Mexico collides with dry, cool air from the Rockies. Much of the state’s yearly rainfall occurs between April and September. The average annual precipitation in Kansas ranges from 45 inches in the southeast to less than 20 inches in the west. The Rocky Mountains are actually responsible for the arid climate in western Kansas. The mountain range creates a rain shadow effect: moist air from the Pacific is pushed upward as it moves east across the Rocky Mountains and loses moisture prior to reaching western Kansas.

In cool temperatures, hypothermia can occur when the body is unable to generate enough heat to maintain core body temperature. Hypothermia can occur gradually and is characterized by shivering, confusion, and lack of coordination. Prevent hypothermia by carrying additional layers of clothing that can be worn if the weather becomes cooler. Avoid cotton-based clothing, which provides little insulation if it becomes damp from perspiration or rainfall.

**Know Before You Go: Advice and Precautions**

The stranger [to Kansas], if he listened to the voice of experience, would not start upon his pilgrimage at any season of the year without an overcoat, a fan, a lightning rod, and an umbrella.

John James Ingalls, “In Praise of Blue Grass,” 1875

A sense of adventure, comfortable shoes, water, snacks, and a dose of common sense should get you through any Kansas trail with lots of enjoyment and few mishaps. But it’s always good to know what hazards you might encounter and to be prepared for them.

**Gear and Clothing**

If you’re experienced in the outdoors, bring whatever works for you. Following are some basic recommendations, not a complete list.

Always bring plenty of water. You can help prevent dehydration by drinking water throughout your time on the trail, particularly in the summer. Pack plenty of water, since the majority of trails do not have potable water available along the
route, although in some cases there may be water available near the trailhead or the parking lot. Water in streams and reservoirs should be properly filtered and purified prior to drinking.

Other recommended items include sunscreen, insect repellent (particularly in summer), a small first-aid kit, and a cell phone, although coverage may not be available in all locations. For longer day trips, it’s wise to carry a flashlight or headlamp. And having a few tasty energy snacks is never a bad idea.

Wear or bring layers of clothing, including a waterproof jacket if there’s a chance of rain. As noted earlier, cotton clothing won’t provide insulation if it gets wet, and it dries more slowly than synthetic materials. Closed-toed shoes are best for all trail users. For those on foot, most of the trails can be hiked with a good pair of walking or running shoes, rather than heavier-duty hiking boots.

Cyclists should wear helmets and bring spare tubes, a multitool, and a repair kit. Equestrians should wear long pants and, ideally, helmets; they should carry items for tack repair, a hoof pick, and an extra lead rope.

**Reptiles and Insects**

While not common, snakes are present throughout Kansas, though few are venomous. The four species of venomous snakes with established populations in the state are the timber rattlesnake, copperhead, prairie rattlesnake, and massasauga. The timber rattlesnake and copperhead are found in eastern Kansas and are associated with woodland areas. The massasauga is found in a variety of habitats,
including prairies, rocky hillsides, and open wetlands. The prairie rattlesnake is found in the western half of the state, and there is an isolated population in Kanopolis State Park. Although these snakes are venomous, they are typically not aggressive unless provoked. Paying close attention to rock ledges and exposed rocks helps avoid unwanted encounters. If you see or hear a snake, give it a wide berth as you walk around it.

Mosquitoes can be a minor annoyance, but they can also spread serious diseases such as West Nile virus. Mosquitoes are most active at dawn and dusk and during the summer. Protect yourself by using an insect repellent and wearing long sleeves and long pants.

Mosquitoes aren’t the only insect pests to be aware of. If you’re walking through high grass, chiggers can be a problem. Their bites are irritating and itchy, but chiggers don’t carry diseases and are easily removed with a warm, soapy shower.

Of more concern are ticks, which can carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease. Areas with deer are likely to have higher populations of ticks. Try to avoid rubbing up against vegetation, use insect repellent (permethrin-infused clothing is ideal, as DEET doesn’t stop ticks), and wear long sleeves and long pants. Check for ticks after every outing, since you may not feel a tick bite, and remember to search the scalp, groin, armpits, and in the ears. Equestrians should check their horses for ticks as well. If you find a tick, remove it immediately by taking tweezers and firmly grasping the tick at the base of the head and pulling steadily. Make sure the mouthparts are removed along with the rest of the tick. If you have concerns or develop a rash or a fever after a tick bite, consult a doctor.

POISONOUS PLANTS

The most common poisonous plant along the trails in Kansas is poison ivy. Poison ivy occurs throughout the state and is typically found in woodlands and along woodland edges. Exposure to the plant can cause itching, skin irritation, and a rash. Poison ivy commonly grows either as a spreading ground cover or as a vine climbing up into trees. The key identifying characteristic of poison ivy is a pattern of three large leaflets: “Leaves of three, let it be.” Wearing long sleeves and long pants can help prevent accidental contact with poison ivy. If you’ve been exposed to poison ivy, clean the affected area with rubbing alcohol or wash as soon as possible. Wash any exposed clothing, too, as it can carry the poison ivy oils, which can cause an outbreak.

HUNTING SEASON

Many state parks and wildlife areas allow hunting during specific seasons. Some trails may cross public hunting areas, and it is advisable to contact officials in the area you will be visiting to determine the specific dates and locations of hunting. Some trails may be closed for use during hunting season. If you’re on a trail that’s
open during hunting season, be mindful and respectful of hunters, and make sure they can see you. Wear blaze orange headgear and a minimum of 100 square inches of blaze orange on both your front and your back.

**Routes**

The trails are well described and mapped out in this book, but it's always a good policy to carry a GPS with spare batteries, a map, or a compass. Let others know where you're going and the approximate time you expect to return. Don't assume you'll get consistent cell phone coverage on the trail. Unexpected storms or other events can result in obstructions on the trail, and some trails are better maintained than others. When in doubt, or when faced with a blocked or undefined trail, the most sensible option is to turn back.

**Responsible Trail Use**

While on the trail, be courteous of others and practice a “leave no trace” policy by traveling only on marked trails, packing out all your trash, and leaving natural objects where you find them. Unless otherwise noted in the trail descriptions, dogs are allowed on the trails if they are leashed.

Avoid heading out on the trails after a recent rain. Trail use after a heavy rain can leave deep ruts that are difficult to smooth out after they dry. Some trails are closed during and after wet weather; respect all signs regarding trail openings and closings.

Many of the trails are multiuse — with cyclists, hikers, and riders all using the same trail — and some basic courtesies should be followed. Cyclists should yield to both hikers and horses. Hikers should yield to horses. Let others know you're coming with a friendly hello, and identify your general location if you're passing someone from behind (“On your left!”). Trail traffic should stay to the right and pass to the left. If you’re approaching someone on horseback, check in with the rider before passing so you don’t spook the horse. Cyclists should keep their speed under control and ride within their limits. Cyclists traveling downhill should yield to those coming uphill.

**Costs**

All Kansas state parks charge a fee for vehicle access. Daily or annual permits are available for purchase, with reduced rates for seniors and for disabled individuals. For updates on the fee schedule, check the website for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism: http://www.kdwpt.state.ks.us/news/State-Parks/Park-Fees. Many of the non–state park trails are free, but if there is a fee, it is noted in the trail description.
Camping Information

Cabins or campsites are available in many Kansas state parks, and a camping permit is required in addition to the motor vehicle permit. Daily, long-term, or annual camping permits can be purchased. Many campsites have hookups for water and electricity; others are more primitive, with only a grill for cooking and a driveway for parking.

Currently, many of the state parks accept reservations for some of their sites, while the others are available on a first come, first served basis. A two-night stay may be required for weekend reservations, and holiday weekend reservations require a five-day stay for campsites and a three-day stay for cabins. For more details, check the website: http://www.kdwpt.state.ks.us/State-Parks/Reservations. Reservations can be made through www.reserveamerica.com.

Along with campsites, many of the state parks have cabins for rent. Primitive cabins provide a place to sleep and not much else. Modern cabins offer true camping luxury, with furnished living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, and kitchens, along with heat and air-conditioning. Just bring your own bedding, towels, and toiletries.

Contacts and Resources

Each featured trail includes specific contact information and hours of operation for the trails themselves (though the hours of the on-site park offices may differ). For the most up-to-date information on trail openings and closures, access details, and camping fees for state parks, contact the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism, 512 SE 25th Avenue, Pratt, KS 67124; 620-672-5911; http://www.kdwpt.state.ks.us.

The Kansas Trails Council (PO Box 695, Topeka, KS 66601-0695; http://www.kansastrails council.org/) is a nonprofit dedicated to maintaining and promoting the Kansas trails system. The Kansas Cycling Association (http://kscycling.org) promotes cycling at every level and provides information on all races and results in Kansas. Promoting mountain biking and maintaining and building single-track trails in south-central Kansas is the mission of the Kansas Singletrack Society (http://www.kssingletrack.com). For details about cycling clubs around the state, consult Kansas Cyclist (http://www.kansascyclist.com).

For information on equestrian events throughout the state and for maps, contact the Kansas Horse Council (8831 Quail Lane, Suite 201, Manhattan, KS 66502; 785-776-0662; http://www.kansashorsecouncil.com).

Volunteer nonprofits committed to building, maintaining, and promoting many of the rail-to-trail initiatives in Kansas include the Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy Inc. (sunflowertrails.org) and the Kanza Rail-Trails Conservancy (info@kanzatrails.org; http://kanzatrails.org).
How to Use This Guide

The state has been divided into seven regions: Kansas City metropolitan area, northeast, southeast, north-central, south-central, northwest, and southwest. The longer rail trails that span multiple regions have their own chapter.

Kansas

Trails are listed within a region alphabetically by the park name. A broad overview of the park or area is followed by an in-depth description of the featured trails for that park or area, along with contact information, hours of operation, and cost. Featured trails are those that best showcase the particular area and were, at the time of writing, in good shape and recommended for use. These trails are 1 mile or longer round-trip and mostly on nonpaved surfaces. Some areas have multiple featured trails, some have a few shorter trails that combine to make up a longer featured trail, and some areas have only one featured trail. Not all trails in all areas are mapped, and some longer trails may have a featured segment with a listing for any additional nearby trails or continuations of the featured trail.

Each featured trail entry starts with the trail name(s), its method of access (hike, bike, bridle), its distance, and whether it’s one-way or a loop. The descriptions of all featured trails include GPS coordinates for notable spots along the trail, and all featured trails have an accompanying detailed map.

Each description ends with directions on how to get to the trailhead, additional trails in the area, and information on camping (if available). For recommendations on places to eat and sleep other than campsites, check the book’s companion website: kansastrailguide.com.

Disclaimer: The information provided is believed to be correct and true at the time of publication. GPS locations are estimated to be accurate to within 5 to 15 feet; however, there is no assumption of liability or responsibility in case of any
INTRODUCTION

discrepancies. Unexpected changes on the trails, such as flooding or fallen trees from storms, can make previously passable trails impassable. Exercise your best judgment in using this guide and on the trails.

TOP TRAILS

Although each trail has its own unique charm, some stand out. Here are our picks for the best of the best.

Bike

Most college towns have a good bike trail or two nearby, and this was a hard list to narrow down. But these well-marked, fun-to-ride bike trails with quick climbs and flowing recovery sections should not be missed.

Camp Alexander, Bike Loop — Northeast
Clinton Lake, North Shore Trails — Northeast
Fall River Lake, Badger Creek North Trail — Southeast
Lawrence River Trails — Northeast
MacLennan Park, Red Trail — Northeast
Manhattan, River Trail — North-central
Wilson Lake, Switchgrass Mountain Bike Trail — North-central
Wyandotte County Lake Park, East Dam Trails — Kansas City

Bridle

Hundreds of miles of bridle trails can be found throughout Kansas, but some stand out because they are easily accessible and well taken care of and offer great views.

Hillsdale State Park, Saddle Ridge SE Red Trail — Northeast
Kanopolis State Park, Horsethief Canyon Trail — North-central
Lake Scott State Park, Multiuse Trail — Southwest
Melvern Lake, Crooked Knee Horse Trail — Northeast
**TOP TRAILS**

**FAMILY FRIENDLY**

The whole family can enjoy these easily accessible, shorter trails over gentle terrain.

- Chaplin Nature Center, River Trail — South-central
- Chisholm Creek Park, Cottonwood Trail — South-central
- Dillon Nature Center, Woodard Trail — South-central
- Melvern Lake, Marais des Cygnes River Nature Trail — Northeast
- Prairie Dog State Park, Steve Mathes Nature Trail — Northwest
- Prairie Park Nature Center, Nature Trail — Northeast
- Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, Migrant’s Mile — South-central

**HISTORICAL**

With Native Americans, explorers, Civil War soldiers, pioneers, and settlers all influencing the history of the state, some trails take you through and past that history.

- Allegawaho Memorial Heritage Park, Kanza Trail — North-central
- Black Jack Battlefield and Nature Park, Battlefield and Nature Trails — Northeast
- Cimarron National Grassland, Companion Trail — Southwest
- Green Memorial Wildlife Area, Oregon Trace Trail — Northeast
- Lake Scott State Park, Multiuse Trail — Southwest
- Oregon Trail Nature Park, Sea of Grass Trail — Northeast

**WILDLIFE AND WILDFLOWERS**

A visit to one of these trails, particularly during spring and summer, almost guarantees some showy wildflowers or a chance to see some native wildlife.

- Baker Wetlands, Nature Trails — Northeast
- Olathe Prairie Center, Nature Trails — Kansas City
- Prairie Park Nature Center, Nature Trail — Northeast
- Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, Little Salt Marsh Trail — South-central
- Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Scenic Overlook Trail — South-central
**INTRODUCTION**

**TOP 10**

Well-maintained, easy to follow, and with some of the best scenery in the state, these trails are our overall top 10.

- Cedar Bluff State Park, Agave Ridge Nature Trail — Northwest
- Elk City State Park, Elk River Trail — Southeast
- Kanopolis State Park, Horsethief Canyon Trail — North-central
- Konza Prairie, Kings Creek Loop — North-central
- Lake Scott State Park, Multiuse Trail — Southwest
- Perry Lake, National Recreation Trail — Northeast
- Prairie Spirit Trail and Southwind Rail Trail — Ottawa to Humboldt
- Shawnee Mission Park, Orange, Violet, and Red Loops — Kansas City
- Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Scenic Overlook Trail — South-central
- Wilson Lake, Switchgrass Mountain Bike Trail — North-central