

By hike or by bike...



Courtesy photo

Siblings Kristin Conard, left, and Jonathan Conard have together written a guide book called "Kansas Trail Guide: The Best Hiking, Biking and Riding in the Sunflower State."

Producing outdoor Kan. manual became a family affair for siblings

By KATHY HANKS

The Hutchinson News
khanks@hutchnews.com

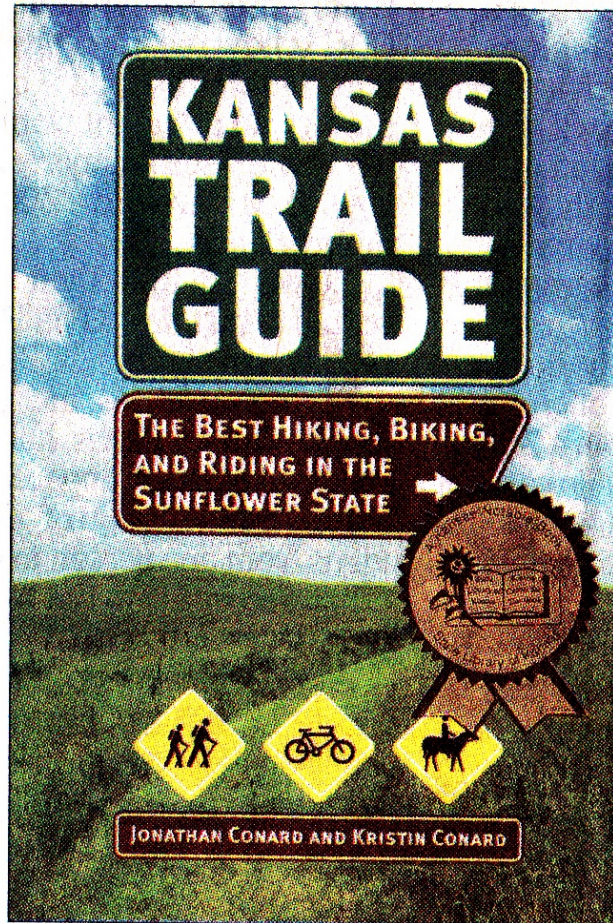
Once they got off the highway, siblings Jonathan and Kristin Conard discovered just how beautiful Kansas can be.

As children they grew up around central Kansas, camping and hiking and learning to appreciate the outdoors. Then their lives took them on different paths. Jonathan didn't stray far and is the head of the biology department at Sterling College. Kristin is a writing instructor at California's Santa Clara University, and they both continue to enjoy the outdoors.

In recent years Kristin has written travel articles about adventures in national parks such as the Grand Canyon. Jonathan's writing has consisted of scientific research. However, in 2012 Jonathan came up with the idea of writing a Kansas hiking guide and asked Kristin if she would collaborate with him.

"There had been one published 10 years ago and I thought an update would be useful," Jonathan said. "There were so many new trails and exciting places to go. I thought there should be a good all-purpose trail guide that included bikes and horses."

They talked it over and initially pitched the idea to the University Press of Kansas with a sample of five



INSIDE

Find out where to meet the Conards and buy the book, **A5**

hikes. "Kansas Trail Guide" was born.

Then it was time to get serious.

"We had to divide and conquer," said Kristin, explaining how they squeezed in walking around Kansas while maintaining full-time careers. They split the state into six regions and chose the areas they each would

cover. For about a year they hiked and biked the state, working toward a Feb. 1, 2014, deadline.

"Jonathan had the luxury of being in Kansas," Kristin said. She, on the other hand, had to map out her explorations for when she could make it back to Hutchinson, where her parents, Mark and Joyce Conard, live. She took off the summer of 2013 to do her Kansas research.

Each trail had to be walked, marked, and set with a Global Positioning System. Photographs needed to be taken and details recorded, such as whether it was a trail for hiking, biking or a bridle trail. They recorded the distance of each trail and whether pets were permitted, and if it was a family-friendly trail. When it was appropriate, they included historical facts. For example, in the northwest Kansas section of the book they wrote about the Smoky Valley Ranch in Logan County, located in the cretaceous formations. They included information about how it was used as a hunting ground for thousands of years, including by the Cheyenne and Arapaho. In 1895, on what would become the ranch, researchers discovered the first physical evidence that humans were in North America at the end of the last ice age. They found the site of a bison jump, where

Guide

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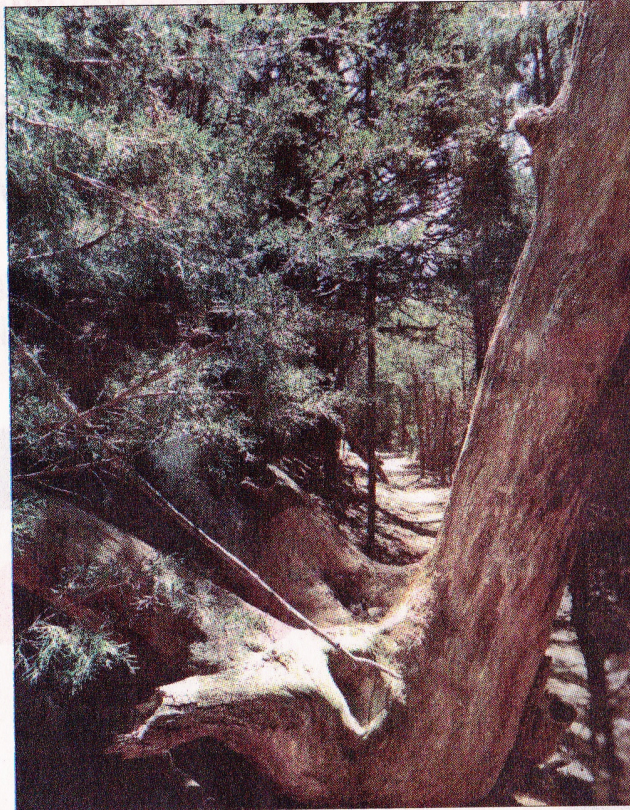
Paleo-Indians drove bison over a cliff.

"There is a lot more out there than is expected," Jonathan said.

To write the book, they estimate they've walked over 80 trails, but they can't begin to number the miles. They reported only two snake sightings. Those were copperheads at Clinton State Park outside of Lawrence.

Exploring the state, from parks in the Kansas City metropolitan area to the shortgrass prairie at Lake Scott State Park in western Kansas, their goal was to create a resource for those who want to explore unique pockets of Kansas.

Researching and photographing the trails for the book became a family undertaking. Their brother Andrew helped with some



of the research. Plus, their parents tackled many of the

trails and even contributed photographs for the book.



Courtesy photos

These photos can be found in "Kansas Trail Guide."

Plus, it became family time for Jonathan and his wife, Melissa, and daughters Katie and Jenna, who did their share of hiking.

They agreed they pushed each other to meet their deadline. The book was published a year ago and recently was selected as a "Kansas Notable Book,"

an annual award given by the Kansas Center for the Book of the State Library of Kansas. The center selects 15 books either about Kansas or by a Kansas author.

"It's a very important thing," said Mike Kehoe, with the University Press. "The notable authors are invited to make a presentation

FYI

The Conards will be speaking at 7 p.m. July 18 at the Lawrence Public Library; 1 p.m., July 30 at Hays Public Library and 6:30 p.m., Aug. 2 at Faith & Life Bookstore, Newton. Books can be purchased via the website: kansastrailguide.com. They have been in stock locally at BookEnds, Bluebird Books, Dillon Nature Center, and Harley's Bicycles.

at the annual State of Kansas Book Festival in Topeka in September. The books are promoted to libraries and the authors are available to make presentations.

"It's a great way to promote literacy, reading, and books about Kansas by Kansans," Kehoe said. "It's a way to celebrate our heritage."