

BOOK REVIEW

JAMES H. LOCKLEAR. 2024. **In the Country of the Kaw: A Personal Natural History of the American Plains.** (ISBN 978-0-7006-3641-9, hbk). University Press of Kansas, 2502 Westbrooke Circle, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-4444, U.S.A. (**Orders:** kansaspress.ku.edu). \$34.99 US, 328 pp., 3 b/w illustrations, 16 color figures, 6" × 9".

About the Author: James H. Locklear is Director of Conservation at Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha, Nebraska. He has dedicated his botanical interests on the Central Grasslands of North America, especially imperiled grassland habitats and plant species. After graduating from the University of Central Missouri with a degree in Biology he worked in a nursery in Kansas City at Rosehill Gardens. His experience working at the Dyck Arboretum of the Plains at Hesston, Kansas and the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum enabled him to pursue his interests in both botany and horticulture.

Book Contents: The prologue describes his boy-hood days traveling in Kansas and Colorado noting the rivers, and following his dad on fishing trips. The author describes his college days at Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, Missouri, and his interest in botany. This led to his work experience at Dyck Arboretum of the Plains in Hesston, Kansas, the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, and Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha, Nebraska.

The Headlands chapter introduces the reader to the rivers in Kansas, for example, the Smoky Hill, Saline, Republican, and Kaw with tributaries finally reaching the bigger Missouri River. The author takes the reader through the High Plains and a description of the Ogallala Aquifer, the largest body of ground fossil water in the U.S.A. Many years of irrigation in western Kansas has significantly lowered water levels of the Ogallala water table. Here is where the author describes playas as a landform consisting of shallow depressions lined with soils of a higher clay content that holds water creating ephemeral wetlands attracting waterfowl.

Aeolian windblown landscapes are described that can be seen in Kansas as the source of loess soil responsible for the fertility and growing of wheat, making Kansas the “breadbasket of the nation.” The Heartland chapter highlights Kansas as the geographic center of the U.S.A. The Dakota Sandstone and Coronado Heights are described here along with the panoramic scenic views of the surrounding areas near Lindsborg and Salina, Kansas. Limestone “post rock” dots the landscape that also are seen as fence posts throughout the Greenhorn outcrop zone. Additional topical sections titled Scarplands, Tree Folk, Setting Sail on the Star-Grass Sea, A Kaw Florilegium, The Days of Manure River, Bird Sketches, Surprised by Shorbs, The Waters of Mother Kaw, Beautiful Contrivances, Community Ecologies, Lithophilia, Rock Towns, Stickers, Epilogue, and more.

This book will trigger the beauty and splendor of the river systems in Kansas. My favorite expression about Kansas was, and still is, “this is God’s country” and my friends jokingly would reply “only God would have it.” Taking Interstate Highway 70 straight through Kansas will give you a flatlander perspective but if you get off on the less traveled state and county roads, you will see the streams, rivers, and physical land features of Kaw Country. The author’s flowery narrative makes for a more interesting description of land-forms and a geographical paradise of Kaw Country.

—Harold W. Keller, Professor Emeritus, Botanist and Mycologist,
Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.