

# People *in motion*



**ARAN van operators Scott Jordan (left) and Patrick Kennedy**

**By Pam Droog**  
Photography by Cathy Morrison

**Scott** Jordan      **Patrick** Kennedy

**Location:** Jefferson City, Mo.

**Position:** Field acquisition technicians at MoDOT General Headquarters

**Background:** Jordan has been an “ARAN man” for four years. He started out on MoDOT’s original Automatic Road Analyzer van, and in January drove the newest one back to Missouri from Canada, where it was built. Prior to joining MoDOT, he was a machinist, and also built and programmed computers.

Kennedy has been an ARAN operator for a year. Previously, he was a heavy-equipment operator. He started his MoDOT career as a bridge painter, then transferred to Transportation Planning. He also has extensive computer experience.

**The Job:** Jordan and Kennedy drive and operate the equipment on MoDOT’s ARAN van. Dozens of government agencies and nations worldwide rely on state-of-the-art ARAN technology to collect in-depth visual and factual data about road smoothness, rutting, grade, pavement texture and condition, right of way and more, through an array of computers, ultrasonic sensors, lasers and video cameras.

“All the images from the front camera go to one computer, the right and left and pavement images go to others,” Jordan explains. “The system takes an image every four millimiles (1 millimile=20 feet). When you review the images, it’s like you’re driving down the road.” To manually shut down and collect data from a mile of roadway would take a week versus a few minutes for the ARAN.

**How it’s Done:** It takes the pair about a year to cover all primary and interstate roads and any others that handle more than 1,700 vehicles daily. Also, the federal government requires MoDOT to collect information on designated sections.

Jordan and Kennedy typically cover about 20,000 miles annually,

300 miles a day, working four 10-hour days a week. They only drive in daylight, and never when it’s raining because moisture could blow out one or more of the van’s 32 sensors. They try to maintain a steady speed of 48 miles per hour and keep 100 feet between the ARAN and traffic ahead.

While one drives, the other monitors the computers and cameras collecting data. The driver also “marks” everything above, below and next to the van, including bridges, stop signs, overpasses, even dead animals.

“It’s very stressful,” Jordan says. “There’s not much time to chit-chat.”



They spend a lot of time planning each day’s destination and route, trying to work in loops around the state to avoid “deadheading” back, or traveling without working.

“We want to constantly be collecting data or we’re defeating the purpose of the van,” Kennedy says. “We also have to end up somewhere where there’s a hotel.”

Every Thursday, the drivers return to Jefferson City and download the data for analysis. At least once a month Jordan and Kennedy recalibrate all the subsystems.

“If we get any rain we’ll pull into a district shed and go through

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At the Visitors Center, Naturalist Cyndi Evans explains, "The bison like to hang out here. They like to scratch themselves on the signs and eat the fresh grass and put their noses up to the windows."

Mud blobs on the panes and footprints on the sidewalks prove her point. The problem may get worse, since about 25 of the park's 76 bison recently had calves. About 36 elk live here, too, as well as prairie chickens and other prairie-dwellers, including the southern plains skink and many insect species found nowhere else in the state. More than 150 bird species have been sighted here.



Established in 1980, the 3,702-acre park is Missouri's largest remaining tallgrass prairie landscape. More than 13 million acres of tallgrass prairie once covered Missouri; today only 65,000 acres remain, scattered in small sites. Visitors can learn a lot through the interpretive displays at the center, or by hiking the four trails. Early morning or late evening are the best times to hike, to truly appreciate the vastness of the prairie, and the uniqueness of Missouri's southwest corner.

Until next time, may your destinations be exciting and the journeys to them eye-opening. ■

Pam Droog is editor of Pathways and an outreach specialist at MoDOT General Headquarters.

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Scott Jordan plots the ARAN'S route.

"We want to be constantly collecting data or we're defeating the purpose of the van."  
Patrick Kennedy

the calibrations," Kennedy says. "We take advantage of downtime. We have too much to do to just watch TV in a motel."

**Favorite Part of the Job:** "Our job is an adventure!" Kennedy says. "We have a really beautiful state so it's fun travel and meet different people."

Jordan enjoyed traveling more before his daughter was born.

"Now what I like best is working with the computers and video," he says.

**Least Favorite Part:** Although they've never had an accident, Kennedy says, "When you take an expensive piece of equipment like the ARAN down a city street it's very stressful because someone could do \$100,000 damage in an instant. But safety is big with us. We're careful to protect the taxpayers' investment."

Also, "everything is recorded!" Jordan notes. "It's like people are constantly watching us, but they're a week behind."

**After Hours:** Kennedy recently purchased and is now remodeling his grandfather's farm near Dixon. He also "fools around with" and sells Camaros and Firebirds.

When he's not hunting deer or turkey, or preparing customers' trophies at Jordan Taxidermy in New Bloomfield, Jordan relaxes with his wife, Cindy, and daughter, Kaci, 2.

**Parting Words:** After spending so much time together in the ARAN, Jordan and Kennedy surely must be good friends.

"We tolerate each other," Kennedy says, with a laugh. ■

Patrick Kennedy adjusts the ARAN's extendable wings.

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