



Todd Hendricks, of Gretna, watches as his liver-colored Brittany spaniel, Tagg, retrieves a pheasant in Seward County. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.



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December 2008

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RESIDENT LIFETIME PERMITS	PURCHASED IN 2008	PURCHASED IN 2009	NONRESIDENT LIFETIME PERMITS	PURCHASED IN 2008	PURCHASED IN 2009
Lifetime Fish (0-5 years old)	\$276	\$307.50	Lifetime Fish (0-16 years old)	\$551	\$632
Lifetime Fish (6-15 years old)	\$326	\$366.50	Lifetime Fish (17+ years old)	\$851	\$951
Lifetime Fish (16-45 years old)	\$426	\$446			
Lifetime Fish (46+ years old)	\$326	\$366.50	Lifetime Hunt (0-16 years old)	\$626	\$738.50
			Lifetime Hunt (17+ years old)	\$1,001	\$1181
Lifetime Hunt (0-5 years old)	\$126	\$148.50			
Lifetime Hunt (6-15 years old)	\$186	\$219	Lifetime Hunt/Fish (0-16 years old)	\$1,076	\$1251.50
Lifetime Hunt (16-45 years old)	\$286	\$300	Lifetime Hunt/Fish (17+ years old)	\$1,601	\$1871
Lifetime Hunt (46+ years old)	\$186	\$219			
Lifetime Hunt/Fish (0-5 years old)	\$376	\$425.50			
Lifetime Hunt/Fish (6-15 years old)	\$501	\$573			
Lifetime Hunt/Fish (16-45 years old)	\$646	\$699			
Lifetime Hunt/Fish (46+ years old)	\$501	\$573			
Lifetime Habitat Stamp	\$260	\$260	Lifetime Habitat Stamp	\$260	\$260
Lifetime Waterfowl Stamp	\$100	\$100	Lifetime Waterfowl Stamp	\$100	\$100



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NEBRASKAland

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Last winter, the Niobrara Ice Jam in Valentine gave participants a unique activity to Nebraska residents and visitors – ice climbing in the Cornhusker state.

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TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JEFF KURRUS

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Scott and Monte Mares have been fishing together their entire lives, and Dad has been with them every step of the way.

TEXT BY JEFF KURRUS, PHOTOS BY MICHAEL FORSBERG

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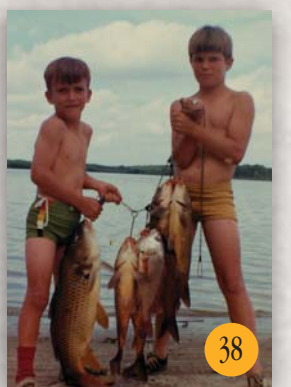
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Portraits from the Past 50

Cover: Ida Lau of Denver, Colorado climbs a ice wall on the south bank of the Niobrara River near Valentine during the Niobrara Ice Jam last January. See story on page 12. Photo by Michael Forsberg. **Opposite:** Following several winter days of dense fog and little wind, hoarfrost covers a fence in Keith County near Keystone. Photo by Bill Hager.



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Future Duck Hunter

My son-in-law, Christopher McGreer, and my grandson, Logan, both of Lincoln, are shown during Logan's first duck hunt earlier this fall. Logan is just a little over two years old and was hunting in Virgil Johansen's blind near Osceola. Coincidentally, Logan's great-grandfather, Leonard Coffin, also hunted ducks out of this blind with Virgil, who is now 82 years old and has hunted in the same pond since he was a young boy. Logan, like most youngsters, wanted to show how well he could call ducks.

Calvin Coffin
Osceola, Nebraska

Skin Warning Helpful

I am a native Nebraskan misplaced in Florida and have subscribed to *NEBRASKAland* for many years.

I specifically wish to thank Eric Fowler for his article on skin cancer that appeared in the May 2008 issue. I go to the pool year-round, and while I always wore a hat with a large bill to shade my face, my ears were exposed. I developed a sore on the rim of my left ear and didn't think too much about it until I read Mr. Fowler's article. I saw my doctor, and he immediately sent me to a dermatology group. The biopsy came back as basal cell carcinoma. Surgery was required to remove the cancer, followed by plastic surgery. I now wear a dorky boonie hat. I also wear a Solar Veil shirt, which has long sleeves and covers me from my neck to my knees with material developed by NASA.

I might add that I never sunbathed and was only in the pool at 9 a.m. or

in the late afternoon. Apparently the glare from the water was sufficient enough to cause the cancer. Like Mr. Fowler, I now nag everyone to wear a dorky boonie hat.

Louise Witzenburg
Lake Mary, Florida

Grandpa's Little Fisherman

Our grandson, Kyle Palky, was four years old when this photo was taken. Kyle and his little brother, Rick, stayed at our house one or two days each week, and their favorite "pre-nap" video was "Fishing with Grandpa," which we had purchased from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at their booth at the Nebraska State Fair. The film was aimed at teaching young children an appreciation for fishing and good sportsmanship. Although we had a library of kids' videos, the little guys watched "the fishin' movie" nearly every day.

Kyle was able to put his knowledge to a real-life test when he and Grandpa

John Palka spent an afternoon at a farm pond near the family homestead in Saline County.

Kyle was fishing with his new "little green fishin' pole" for the first time, catching some little bluegills using grasshoppers he and Gramps had caught for bait, when the two fishermen realized Kyle had "something bigger" hooked on the little green pole. With only a drag adjustment by his grandpa, Kyle brought this 6 ½ pound catfish to shore. News of his catch made the *Crete News* and Kyle was "hooked for life."



Kyle, now 15, has become an avid trapshooter, hunter and fisherman. He continues to use the knowledge and ethics learned from many afternoon viewings of "Fishing with Grandpa." Thanks, Nebraska Game and Parks!!!

Kathy Palky
Dorchester, Nebraska



Left to right: Keith, Tad and Nolan Speicher of Omaha pose with the "state rock" that Keith found at Toadstool Park.

State Rock?

The October *NEBRASKAland* article that mentioned hiking in Toadstool Park reminded me of our experience there this past August.

My grandson, Keith Speicher, found a most unusual and interesting formation there – has anyone else found "Nebraska" in Toadstool?

Pictured with Keith are his brothers, Tad and Nolan, from Omaha.

Yes, we do travel from eastern Nebraska to western Nebraska for our vacations.

Mary Jane Steenson
Omaha, Nebraska

Send your comments to:
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Please include your postal address and telephone number.
Letters may be condensed and edited for clarity. Photographs are welcome and will be returned.

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Deer Exchange

Dozens of participants have signed up for the Deer Exchange, a pilot program of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission that allows for the transfer of deer meat from hunters to people who want to receive it.

A record deer harvest is expected this year. In an effort to thin the whitetail population, especially in eastern Nebraska, 87,000 antlerless whitetail bonus tags have been made available. Crop damage complaints and deer-vehicle collisions have increased along with the deer population.

The Deer Exchange is designed to accommodate the additional harvest of deer. Hunters who have filled their freezers may still bag another deer and have somewhere to take the meat.

This program is available through the Commission's web site at OutdoorNebraska.org. From that site, participants are directed to a page that allows them to register as a donor of deer meat or a recipient. It also links to a page that allows for searches of registered participants by county.

Eager participants should note that it will take some time for a surplus of deer to accumulate. Last year, 48,000 deer were harvested during the nine-day November firearm season. The

other 20,000 deer were taken between September 15 and January 15.

For more information on deer hunting or the Deer Exchange, visit OutdoorNebraska.org.

Price of Lifetime Permits to Increase

At their October meeting, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission board of commissioners approved fee increases for all life-time permits except for lifetime Habitat and Waterfowl stamps. These permit increases range anywhere from \$20 to \$270, but the prices won't be in effect until January 1, 2009, so now is a good time to buy lifetime permits, which are valid even if the owner later moves out of state.

In other action, the commissioners also approved a staff recommendation to remove the bald eagle from the list of threatened species; approved the acquisition of a 120-acre tract of wildlife land in Johnson County that will be an addition to Hickory Ridge Wildlife Management Area (WMA); reduced the daily bag limit of trout (rainbow, brown and brook in combination) in inland waters and waters of the Missouri River from seven to four with a possession limit of eight, and increased the bag limit from seven to eight and the possession

limit from 14 to 16 trout at designated lakes and ponds that do not support trout year-round and are stocked in the fall, winter and/or spring; deleted the 12-inch minimum length limits on smallmouth, spotted bass and largemouth bass in privately-owned waters and established a 15-inch minimum length limits on all black bass in all inland waters, both public and private.

PF Chapter Award

Nebraska's Cornhusker Chapter of Pheasants Forever was honored by *Field & Stream* magazine in its November issue. The chapter was one of three conservation organization chapters highlighted in the Heroes of Conservation feature.

The Cornhusker Chapter was formed in Lincoln in 1987, five years after the national Pheasants Forever organization was formed. In 2007, the chapter enhanced nearly 20,000 acres of land. "What's unique about us is that since we're in Lincoln, we have a lot more people than habitat," says Joe Loxtercamp, chapter president. It was also one of the first PF chapters to hold a mentored-youth hunt, and it has introduced more than 275 children to pheasant hunting in the past 13 years. ■



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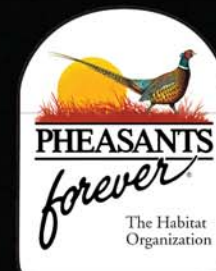
Nebraska Youth Mentor Hunts

12-13-08	Nemaha Valley	Auburn
03-21-09	Niobrara Sportsman	Gordon
Spring 09	Oregon Trail	Scottsbluff
Spring 09	Platte River	Lexington

Nebraska Banquet Dates

01-31-09	Bazile Creek Ringnecks PF	Creighton
01-31-09	Lewis & Clark PF	Hartington
02-07-09	NE PF Statewide Banquet	Grand Island
02-13-09	Great Plains PF	Holdrege
02-13-09	Rock Creek PF	Fairbury
02-14-09	Ponca Creek Ringnecks PF	Bristow
02-21-09	Dodge County PF	Fremont
02-21-09	Heritage PF	Alliance
02-21-09	Little Blue River PF	Hastings
02-21-09	Maple Creek PF	Howells
02-27-09	Cornhusker PF	Lincoln
02-28-09	Cedar River Ringnecks PF	Greeley
02-28-09	Rainwater Basin PF	Sutton
02-28-09	Seward County PF	Seward
02-28-09	Perkins County PF	Grant
03-06-09	High Plains PF	Sidney
03-07-09	Boone County PF	Albion
03-07-09	Heartland PF	Omaha
03-07-09	Lincoln Creek PF	Aurora
03-07-09	Lower Elkhorn Valley PF	West Point
03-07-09	Saline County PF	Crete
03-13-09	Nemaha Valley PF	Johnson
03-13-09	Wachtel fur Immer QF	Eustis
03-14-09	Corn Country PF	McCool Junction
03-14-09	Dixon County PF	Newcastle
03-14-09	Golden Prairie PF	Neligh
03-14-09	Loup River PF	Ord
03-19-09	Elkhorn Valley PF	Norfolk
03-20-09	Logan Creek PF	Wayne
03-21-09	Cass County PF	Plattsmouth
03-21-09	Franklin County Covey QF	Franklin
03-21-09	Southeast Nebraska PF	Beatrice
03-21-09	Western NE Ringnecks PF	Paxton
03-28-09	Niobrara Sportsman PF	Gordon
03-28-09	Prairie Hills PF	Kearney
03-28-09	Republican Valley PF	Cambridge
03-28-09	Washington County PF	Blair
04-03-09	Otoe County PF	Nebraska City
04-04-09	Antelope Valley PF	Oshkosh
04-04-09	Medicine Creek PF	Stockville
04-04-09	Mile High PF	Kimball
04-18-09	Sherman County PF	Loup City
Spring 09	Douglas County - West PF	Elkhorn
Spring 09	Long Branch PF	Humboldt
Spring 09	Lower Platte PF	Ashland
Spring 09	Custer County PF	Broken Bow
Spring 09	Plains Sportsman PF	McCook
Spring 09	Prairie Creek Ringnecks PF	Central City
Spring 09	Southwestern Nebraska PF	Enders

Join the growing number of people who are making a difference for wildlife Habitat and Youth Education in America. Since inception in 1982, Pheasants Forever has had a monumental impact on upland conservation. Do your part by becoming a member today and you will ensure the future of the ringneck pheasant and other wildlife **Forever!**



FOR FURTHER CONTACT INFORMATION OR DATES VISIT WWW.NEBRASKAPF.COM

The Complete Venison Cookbook

Jeff Kurrus

If there's already one deer in the freezer from this year, or

one still left over from last year, it's time to open up *The Complete Venison Cookbook* by Harold W. Webster, Jr. At 420 pages long, "complete" is an understatement. Included is information about deer processing, but the majority of the book focuses on recipes for all edible parts of deer, along with various side dishes to accompany the venison.

For newcomers, the number of recipes could be a bit overwhelming and there are no accompanying photographs, eliminating the desire of many new cooks to match the picture of what they are about to serve. The book's most important aspect is that it allows the new cook to realize that there is more than one way to cook venison.

For the experienced chef, Webster's collection displays countless opportunities for the table. Bottom line: If you've run out of ways to cook your deer, this cookbook probably has more than a few you haven't tried.

A Grasshopper's Worst Enemy

Chris Helzer

The unsuspecting grasshopper munched quietly on a leaf, working its way slowly toward the stem of the plant. As it chewed, the grasshopper watched the triangular head of the green stem pivot very slightly. Wait a minute ... triangular head? What the ... ZOOOMPH!

The excellent camouflage and lightning-quick motion of the praying mantis makes it an excellent predator.

Its long, folded front legs are adorned with spikes that help it catch and hold prey. The shape of those legs and the way it holds them upright led to the name "praying mantis." Though it has functional wings, the mantis hunts on foot,

usually preferring to ambush its prey rather than stalk it. Its distinctive triangular head can pivot at least 180 degrees to watch for both prey and predators. The mantis actually has five eyes – the two large compound eyes on each side of its head and three small simple eyes arranged in a triangle between the larger two. With those eyes the mantis can see movement at least 60 feet away.

There are more than 1,500 species of mantids worldwide, but only 20 in the U.S. Of those, two are common in Nebraska – the Carolina mantis and the Chinese mantis. The Chinese mantis can grow to more than 4 inches in length while the Carolina mantis is usually only 2½ inches or less. Both species eat mainly moths, crickets, grasshoppers and flies, but will also eat many other kinds of insects. The female mantis has also been known to eat her mate immediately after, or sometimes during, mating – although some scientists wonder if that behavior is more common in laboratory situations where the mantis may not be well fed.

Because they are successful predators, the praying mantis is marketed as a "natural" way to reduce the numbers of pest insects in gardens or on small farms. Unfortunately, while mantids are excellent predators, they are unlikely to kill enough insects to have an impact on pest numbers, and they eat predators and other beneficial insects as well as pests. More importantly, there are a number of potential risks to introducing insects to new areas or moving species from place to place. One of



those risks is that the new species can become too successful, as in the case of the introduced Asian multicolored lady bird beetle, which has done so well that it is apparently driving out native lady bug species. The Asian lady bug has also become a pest in its own right, congregating in huge numbers in and around the walls of houses and other places, and leaving a foul-smelling yellow substance behind.

Praying mantids are amazing creatures to study. Because they don't bite humans and will readily eat most live insects, they can be kept as pets. But more importantly, they're a great example of the diversity of life on earth and it's always fun to get a periodic glimpse of them. Unless, of course, you're a grasshopper.

Turpin Time

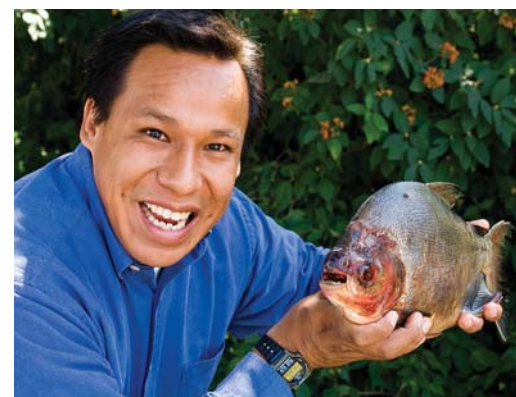
Dick Turpin

The next time you're down there buying your bait for the winter and you're getting some of those waxworms, try this trick. Take the sawdust out of them ... clean them out of the sawdust ... pick out the dead ones ... you're always going to have that ... that is always a problem ... well, we're going to resolve some of that here ... put the waxworms back in



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

here clean ... it says refrigerate ... take that a step farther and freeze them. If you freeze these waxworms they will last forever. The dead are eliminated, you don't have that trouble. When you get out on the ice, they'll be frozen hard ... you can thaw them in your fingers or what I do is just stick one in my lip ... put a couple behind there ... then you've always got one on hand to put on your hook ... spit them out and they're going to be thawed.



An Unusual Catch

Eric Fowler

Jeremiah Penn of Lincoln was a bit surprised, to put it mildly, when he caught a pacu while fishing at Holmes Lake in Lincoln this past August. "I

was hoping it was a bluegill," he said.

The South American fish, which is related to the piranha but mostly dines on vegetation, was likely dumped in the lake by someone who tired of caring for it in their aquarium. At least two other pacus have been caught by Nebraska anglers this year, one from Pawnee Lake near Lincoln in July and the other from Terry's Pitt near Scottsbluff in September. While a pacu wouldn't be able to survive the winter in Nebraska, releasing any exotic fish into Nebraska waters is illegal. If you have one and don't want it, don't dump it – eat it or feed it to your cat.

Donate Those Hides

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, known as the local Elks Lodge in most small towns, is accepting donated deer and elk hides from the beginning of the rifle deer season through the end of the January antlerless deer season.

According to Rodney Nelson of Winside, approximately 1,750 hides collected across the state last year were ultimately turned into soft leather and made into either gloves for wheel-chair bound veterans or craft kits that were distributed to veterans at VA Medical Centers across

the world.

Not much is required of the hunters that wish to donate their deer hides, said Nelson. Before the hides can be shipped, they have to have all excess fat, flesh and tails removed, then fine table salt must be rubbed into all fleshy surfaces. Volunteers at the drop-off locations do most of this work, but hunters are more than welcome to do this themselves if they wish, said Nelson. Care must be taken, however, as even small holes in a hide can result in it being ruined during the tanning process.

Nelson said that 12 of the state's 24 Elks Lodges participated in the program last year and suggested hunters call their local lodge to find out about local drop-off points.

Last year more than 68,000 deer were harvested in the state, meaning only a small percentage of their hides were utilized.

"It's kind of a shame that all of those deer hides get thrown away every year," said Nelson. "Last year the West Point Sportsman Club helped out by collecting 165 hides. If other sportsmen groups around the state would help us out, that would be even better, but even individuals dropping off the hides from their own deer would be great." ■

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Three Days on Ice

*Text and photos by
Michael Forsberg*

*The advertisement on the Yucca Dune outdoor recreation shop web site simply read:
"Don't be a Dorothy! I know five minutes on this section of ice will have you clicking yer heel spurs and whimpering 'I wanna go back to Kansas'... It can do that to ya! So come and get all shook up on the only climbing in Nebraska that makes sense (or doesn't make sense...). Niobrara Ice Jam.
Yes, Valentine, Nebraska."*



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The statement was a bonafide throwdown challenge to the ice-climbing community to come climb Nebraska. The challenger, Tim Ryschon, a physician from Valentine as well as an avid climber and owner of Yucca Dune (an outdoor recreation shop in Valentine), knew from his own climbing experience that he lived near first-rate, ice-climbing opportunities on the Niobrara National Scenic River and that one of the best ice-climbing bluffs along the river was on Lee Simmons' Niobrara River Ranch, just upstream of Smith Falls State Park.

Here was the idea: Yucca Dune employees and local volunteers would organize the event, the ranch would provide access to the bluff, there would be a warming hut with refreshments, a movie night of climbing and ski films in town, and those who wished to stay near the ice bluffs could rent attractive, spacious cabins at the ranch, just across the river from the climbs.

This would be a low-key event. There would be no opening ceremony and no set hours. Climbers would simply check in at Yucca Dune, sign a liability waiver that would make them responsible for their own safety while on Simmons' property, provide their own gear and climb to their heart's desire. So over three days in late-January 2008, the first-annual Niobrara Ice Jam was born.

The only question was, would anybody show up?

Day 1:

It was still dark and the temperature had just dropped to below 0-degrees when I met Stuart Schneider for breakfast at the Grazin J's café in Valentine. Schneider, chief ranger for the National Park Service's Niobrara National Scenic River, which stretches 76 miles across north-central Nebraska, has been a ranger in the National Park Service for 29 years. He's worked in a diversity of habitats, from the high desert and canyons of Zion National Park in Utah to the alpine tundra of Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. He also has 36 years of rock and ice-climbing experience, and that weekend he had traded his ranger hat for a climbing helmet and volunteered his services to help out with the event by making sure, among other things, that the climbers were getting to where they needed to go and journalists didn't go tumbling off into the icy river while trying to cover the story.

As the sun broke the Sandhills horizon, we headed east out of Valentine on Nebraska Highway 12 and traveled about 15 miles until we turned south on the road to Smith Falls State Park. Just

before the park entrance, we turned west onto Niobrara River Ranch property, crossed the river bridge and followed a two-track trail through woods and up the canyon before topping out on the prairie.

As we unpacked our gear, two vehicles with Colorado plates arrived carrying two couples from Denver: Joe Walker and Janet Nord, and Fred Seyffert with Ida Lau, along with a photographer and writer covering the story for the *Norfolk Daily News*.

When I first met the Coloradans, I was searching for a touch of skepticism in the air about whether, parked here in the pasture between barbed-wire fence and frozen cow pies, they really thought there was something worthy of climbing in Nebraska. If there was any skepticism, it disappeared quickly as Schneider led us down a game trail through the woods and to the edge of the cliff that suddenly appeared out of the dark border of trees. Peering over the edge, there was a 150-foot vertical wall of ice that merged with the river far below.

These climbers were going to be "top-roping," which meant that multiple anchor points would be established on top of the cliff. One person (the belayer) would stay on top, anchor into these points and attach themselves into one end of a rope. The climber would rappel down the face to the bottom of the climb and tie into their end. Then the belayer would take in rope as the climber ascends the route. If the belayer does the job well and keeps slack out of the rope, then the climber would only travel a short distance in the event of a fall.

While the Colorado group set up top-ropes for their climbs, Schneider and I hiked over to the other side of the face to practice on an easier route, what he called a Water Ice 2 (WI 2) climb. Climbs are rated 1 through 6. On a WI 1 climb you can walk up it in crampons without any ropes or gear. A WI 6 climb is a wall that is overhanging vertically, and is insane. I had rock climbed through college and had some minor mountaineering experience, but that was years



Colorado-based ice climbers Ida Lau and Joe Walker inspect top-rope anchors they have set up on the canyon rim before beginning a climb.



Janet Nord of Denver swings an ice ax, hoping for a good "stick."

ago. Although much of the rope management work with ice climbing is the same and some of the balance techniques are similar, that was where my knowledge stopped and the learning curve began. The rest of the day Schneider gave me a crash course in ice climbing, beginning with learning how to "read ice." There was good ice and bad ice: Ice that was clear or blue in color and smooth and dense was firm ice and good to climb. Ice that was white and rough, with bubbles in it and where you could hear water running behind, was not. I also learned that the ice surface and structure can change quickly and is never the same year to year, day to day and even hour to hour, particularly here on the Great Plains, where temperature and humidity can vary widely from one extreme to the other throughout the winter season. Schneider also explained to me some of the basic ice-climbing mechanics – how you set your feet into the ice, how you set and pull out an ice ax, and how you can assume certain resting positions that give various muscle groups a break while still maintaining a firm hold on the ice.

As I rappelled down the face, a lot of muscle memory immediately came back from old rock climbing days. But when I began my climb up, I learned quickly this was not like climbing rock. In rock climbing, your primary tools are your hands and your feet. The old adage is to be one with the rock, smearing, jamming or otherwise molding your feet and hands on the rock's surface to ensure that you have enough grip and balance to move your body upward to your next hand or foothold. More or less it is intuitive, and your tools (read hands and feet) are pliable, shapeable and flexible instruments. On ice, however, you are one more step removed. Instead of hands to grip with, you use ice axes. Instead of molded flexible climbing shoes, you use heavy boots with crampons (metal frames with spikes) bound to your boots much like skis are.

These are not flexible instruments, so you must learn proper technique to hold and swing the ax to make sure you get a firm "stick" into the ice, and you must know how to "kick" a step in firmly with the numerous points on your crampons. Not only must you see it, but you must be able to hear and feel it. That takes time, practice and more practice. It took me well over a half hour to do the climb. It took Schneider, who spent much of his climbing years in the mountains of Colorado doing things on rock and ice that would make most people's palms sweat, less than five minutes. Claiming he was

getting too old for this and was out of shape, he shimmied up it like a monkey climbing a tree.

By late afternoon, the temperature had risen to just above freezing. The river that was full of ice in the morning was now running free. As we sat above the climb and I tried to rub the cramps out of my forearms and calves, two bald eagles flew over the river below us and three large bull elk sauntered out of the pine-covered slope across the valley on the north bank and into the open grassland, catching the last solar rays of the day.

When we pulled gear and hiked back out toward the prairie, we met the Colorado climbers coming up the trail. They were grinning ear to ear. One of the climbers, Ida Lau, skipped by us as if floating on air, "Look at the sunset" she said to no one in particular as she pointed off to the west at the sun sinking into the gentle curve of the hills. Then she stopped, turned to us and said, "I honestly didn't think it would be like this. It's beautiful."

Day 2:

Overnight the temperature had plunged to -20 degrees. Rim ice had formed and was floating downriver in trashcan lid-sized chunks shortly after sunrise as we made our way to the ice wall. Up top, where we were setting up a rappel, we stopped to watch a Townsend's solitaire, a robin-sized gray bird, fly from the crown of a tall cedar to the cliff face to get a drink, grabbing onto an imperceptible little hold on the cliff face where groundwater was dripping out of the soil just below the lip of the canyon. Then another solitaire came in to drink; then another.

An hour later, we had rappelled down and set up anchors and ropes on a traverse that allowed me to move horizontally across the ice wall and photograph groups of climbers as they ascended and descended on their climbs. Waiting for the day's climbers to arrive, I could really study the ice wall up close for the first time.

At this spot the Niobrara makes a wide, sweeping, U-shaped bend along the south bank and forms a tall, nearly



Stuart Schneider, Ice Jam volunteer and chief ranger for the Niobrara National Scenic River, checks out the scenery during a climb.

vertical bluff that in the summer looks like a weeping wall. Press your hand on its vertical surface and it is as saturated with water as a wet towel as it slowly drains down into the river below.

In the winter, along this canyon wall and others up and down the river corridor, the groundwater drips out like a leaky outdoor faucet, slowly building layer after layer of ice as the long stretches of deep midwinter cold settles into the valley. Once the ice is formed, it won't completely melt the rest of winter, being as it's well-shaded by the canyon's south rim. Much of the ice here is almost sky blue in color, a sign of dense ice with little air in it. Perfect for climbing.

As Schneider set a final ice screw to create a hook to hold our gear on the traverse, he explained that in this spot there was roughly a 160-foot pitch from the river to the top of the rim, and that this year there were easily 40 to 50 potential "lines" on this face, most of them never climbed. "In fact, I can see about 20 lines right where we are standing."

As soon as he said this, we suddenly heard voices from above. Then a climber with a white stocking cap peered over the lip of the wall, hollered "Rope" and tossed one end of a bright red climbing rope over the edge.

"My God, this is Nebraska?" "Do you see this, Jeff?"

"Look at all those lines – this place is amazing!"

A group of six climbers had shown up from Wyoming and the Black Hills of South Dakota. Once they got on the wall, they let the superlatives fly.

"Man, I'm pumped!"

"This is gnarly!"

"Can you believe this?"

"Holy @!&(&*"

Schneider grinned. "When rock climbers swear it's usually because they're hating it. When ice climbers swear, it's because they love it."

The climbing and banter went on the next several hours. They climbed routes with local names like "Bellino's Ice Folly," "Black Cow Down" and other new routes that have never been named. To Schneider, however, the whole show is not just about the ice, but more importantly, where the ice is.

The Niobrara River Valley, often called the biological crossroads of North America, is where six different ecological communities meet. "There is no other place in the world I know of where you can climb a route starting literally at the bank of a Great Plains river, climb a sheer wall of ice 160 feet high with water that comes out of the ground, top out on a northern boreal forest among a bog of birch trees and club

moss, then walk out in the middle of a mixed grass prairie." He's right.

Day 3:

This morning fresh river otter tracks appeared on the north bank, cutting the corner of an ice shelf, then disappeared at the river edge where the otter plunged back in and headed downstream. Far above along the ice wall, the Townsend's solitaires were back, this time accompanied by northern flickers, drinking deep from the seeps below the lip of the canyon in the same fashion they had yesterday.

The climbers from South Dakota and Wyoming had left to climb on another ice bluff upriver, but the Colorado climbers emerged on the rim of the canyon about noon for their third and final day, determined to climb on the less visited far eastern face before heading back to Colorado.

I rappelled halfway down the face to photograph them up close and personal on their ascent, anchoring myself in place next to the series of narrow, vertical columns of ice they would be climbing, shaped like the long, fluted cylinders of a huge pipe organ in a church sanctuary.

The word sanctuary seems an apt description of this place. Fred, the first climber of the day and an experienced climber, said climbing ice here, particularly these ice pillars, was as good a climb he has had since a recent trip to the Canadian Rockies and rivals a lot of the climbing in Colorado's Front Range or Ouray Ice Park. But he was quick to point out that there was something special here – solitude. In Colorado, he said, many of the climbs that are easily accessible are right at the foot of a highway, and oftentimes you simply are setting your feet and ice ax in the same holes as someone else as you work a climb.

For the next few hours, the Colorado climbers and Mike Tortorella, a teenaged friend from Sutherland who had joined them, picked their way up various routes. One their final climb of day, Schneider and I left the ice wall and moved across the river to watch from below.

Ida rappelled down to her position, studied the wall, and then picked a line. She began working up the center of the blue ice, organ pipe-shaped pillars, moving deliberately, gracefully, almost as if doing a dance. Days later after returning home, she enthusiastically posted this on her blog, explaining the climb:

"Line 4, is definitely a W15. It's nearly a 60ft. wall of ice shaped so that you can stem it too, though not as widely as #3. Very sustained vertical ice. There's two small rest ledges at about 25 ft, and then 40 ft. Thank god for the rests!!

Joe Walker negotiates the last few feet of a climb where ice turns to soil at the rim of the canyon.

Again lots of awesome hooking. I even got a good knee bar in near the top of the second section. Even though I was 4th on the line, I couldn't see any other pick marks. By the time I got to the second rest area, I could barely hold my axes! Very strenuous climb. With a cheering section across the river, I mustered the last of my strength to climb the final 10+ ft of ice then scale the rooty 5+feet of dirt. Roots rule! They held well and in the end I simply grabbed them with my hands to top out...literally crawling. What amazing climbs! It's the best I have ever climbed – personally and ice quality wise. It was the perfect climb to end our wonderful primer to Nebraska Ice. The reporters and locals all asked us if we think we liked it enough to come back. Without hesitation...yes!" ■

Veteran ice climber Joe Walker of Denver, Colorado, encourages friend and novice climber Mike Tortorella of Sutherland.

MOTHER-IN-LAW MAHONEY

Text and photos by Jeff Kurrus

*Sometimes the best thing around is right in front of us.
Every once in a while it just takes a new set of eyes to see it.*

“Do you want to go for a quick ride?” I asked my mother-in-law, Peg, after she had just ridden six hours in a car on a recent visit to our home.

We crossed the Platte River going west outside of Omaha and I pointed to the U.S. flag overlooking the river. “That’s where we’re going,” I told her. When I exited at 426 and drove toward Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, Peg pointed to another flag in between our

in-law gossip.

“Is that the flag?”

“No, that’s the Air and Space Museum flag next door to where we’re going. It’s supposed to be a pretty neat place, but I’ve never been.”

We drove into the park and I waved at the worker at the gate as we entered. “Do you not have to pay to get in here?” she asked.

“All I have to have is a park sticker, which lets me get into all the parks and recreation areas across the



Sunset at the Riverview Lodge.

state for free the entire year.”

“How much is it?”

“Around \$20. They raise it a little every few years.”

“Inflation,” she said. “Two dollars today is twenty cents tomorrow.”

We drove slowly, each corner garnering a different sight, and a new point of the finger from her.

“Miniature golf course,” I said in response to one point.

“How about that?”

“That’s a pavilion where outdoor shows and presentations are held.”

“What are all those people up there doing now?”

“Ice skating.”

“Horses,” she said, pointing to our left and reading the sign. “John Wayne Stables.” She laughed, then proceeded to tell me of her love for not only John Wayne, but Sean Connery, Clark Gable and Cary Grant. “And that’s just a start,” she said.

“They have cabins too,” she said. “And so close to the city. John would love it here,” she added, speaking of her husband back home.

We drove to the observation tower overlooking the Platte River as I swiveled my head from side to side, looking for deer and other wildlife. “We’re going to climb that?” she asked.

“You’ll like the view,” I reasoned. “Are you scared of heights? Laura is.” I knew the addendum about her daughter would encourage her ascent.

“No,” she responded. “I’m from Philadelphia. We booed Santa Claus. I’m not scared of anything.”

From nearly the top of the tower (I say nearly, for the wind was picking up considerably the higher we went), I pointed out Mahoney’s sledding course, the Riverview Lodge, the Platte River, a group of six deer feeding in one of the lower fields, the direction of Omaha, and, most importantly, the way back down.

“Back down. Back down is good,” she said.

After getting back in the vehicle and continuing our tour and conversation, she

again pointed to the cabins and the people going into them. “It is a three-day weekend,” she said.

“Looks like there’s still some places to rent,” I said.

“How much are they?”

“From around \$100 to \$400 a night, depending on how many people you need one for. There are some that can accommodate up to 20 people.”

“They’d be great for the grandkids,” she said. “That’s a lot of cabins. They’d love that.”

“There are four different groups of them. Plus, there’s a large lodge around the corner used for meetings, presentations, or for guests to stay.”

“What’s that?” she asked a few moments later, interrupting herself again in mid-sentence.

“That’s a water park.”

“You could do everything here,” she said. “How far are we from home?”

“We’re about 10 minutes from Omaha,” I said.

Then we saw our first wildlife. Three deer stood near the road, noses buried into the snow in search of some leftover morsel of

winter food.

“Why don’t you get out?” she asked.

“They’re much more wary when you start getting out,” I said. “I can probably get closer just being in the truck.” After a couple minutes, they had seen enough, and slowly disappeared into the woods.

“What are those people doing down there?” she asked.

“They’re ice-fishing. That’s a lake.”

“Really,” she said. “That’s grand.”

We drove by Qwest Lake and continued to the open campground sites, where we saw eight more deer moving between campsites and underneath rows of pine trees.

“There are two more,” she whispered, pointing.

We watched several more groups of deer for the next 10 minutes, finally completing our drive through the park. Then I thought of the raccoons and possums and other night critters that I imagine frequent the area. When I was young, Dad used to take me through a local state park on Sunday



Last moments of daylight at Owen Marina.

nights looking for raccoons rummaging through trash cans. It couldn’t have been the best situation for local park workers to have to

clean up their mess, but to watch a raccoon pop its head from a trashcan with a food wrapper momentarily on his head is the only sign of littering I’ve ever seen that made me smile.

In a way, Mahoney is just like the park I remember growing up. Only it’s cleaner, closer to the city and offers many more outdoor opportunities for visitors.

“It really is grand,” Peg said when we finally left.

I thought that was the last time I would hear that phrase. But months later, when the low wind chill was replaced by high humidity, she was again at Mahoney, this time visiting the water park with her grandkids from Missouri and constantly repeating how “grand” this park truly is. ■



Horse at the John Wayne Stables.



A windy, snowy morning at the Peter Kiewit Lodge.

Nebraska Goose Hunting

The Early Years

By Jon Farrar



During the first half of the 20th century, hunters lucky enough to bag geese, especially a Canada goose, such as these two men from Kenesaw, often paid a visit to the local photography studio to have the memory preserved.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THOMAS G. WEYNAND

In many ways the history of Canada goose hunting in Nebraska is at about 9 o'clock from having gone full circle; perhaps as far as it can go because the Nebraska landscape of today is not the Nebraska landscape of old. In the 1880s, Canada geese were abundant statewide, twice each year during migration, wherever there was water and food; and large Canadas nested in the Sandhills lake country. By the early-1900s they had become rare; by the mid-1900s, over most of the state, any hunter who bagged a Canada goose or two was assured of seeing his photo in the local paper. Through the 20th century, though, the North Platte River Valley continued to attract geese and goose hunters, albeit probably a shadow of what once had been. Why did Canada geese essentially vanish from everywhere in the state except the North Platte Valley?

“The bird has been widely distributed over this country and has furnished great sport in every state lying between the two oceans,” Sandy Griswold wrote in the *Omaha Daily Bee*, January 6, 1895, “but in no locality have they been more numerous or furnished better or more thrilling or a greater variety of shooting than the country traversed by this erratic and legendary [Platte] river. In the spring ten or fifteen years ago they came up from the south in countless millions—the lordly Canada, the white and speckled front—and crowded the sandbars and dotted sloping shores and greening fields along this wondrous stream from source to mouth, and furnished such sport as could be found in no other part of the country. In the fall they came down from the north in a veritable stream of white and gray, and, lingering here until the very climax of wintry weather forced them on toward the temperate gulf states, made such sport as the modern gunner only encounters in his dreams or ancient literature. Though fair shooting is yet to be found at different points along the Platte, nothing can give an adequate idea of the myriads of geese which once settled down in its shallow waters and swarmed its shores.”

Griswold thoroughly chronicled outdoor sports in Nebraska from the late-1880s nearly through the 1920s. His columns during the late-1800s clearly reveal that eastern Nebraska sportsmen had no need to travel far for their goose shooting. Hunters regularly made good bags of large Canada geese in fields along the Elkhorn River west of Omaha. The Platte River between Schuyler and North Bend was legendary hunting grounds for both Canada geese and sandhill cranes, and shooting for both ducks and geese was good in floodplain wetlands along the Missouri River north of Omaha. Perhaps more than anywhere else, though, Omaha sportsmen favored the sprawling, sandbar-laced shallow waters of the Platte River near the towns of Silver Creek, Clarks, Central City and Chapman; only a short train ride away, and awash with geese and ducks during migration. While goose shooting on the Platte’s Big Bend west of Grand Island received less mention in Griswold’s columns, it was probably just as good. “Geese were reported a week ago along the Platte near Sutherland by the thousand and tens of thousands,” Griswold reported in the



When the use of live birds as decoys became illegal in 1935, straw-stuffed decoys, many made by John Lundgren of Axtell, became popular.

Omaha Daily Bee November 17, 1895 edition. Almost certainly the North Platte and South Platte rivers attracted Canada geese in abundance, but the bulk of eastern Nebraska hunters had no reason to travel to the far end of the state for their shooting in the decades before 1900.

Vanishing Canadas

“The sport of goose shooting will soon be a thing of the past unless steps are taken to protect it,” Wm. C. Huffman of Doniphan wrote in the April 29, 1900 *Omaha World-Herald*. “Within the past few years they do not stop in the fall, not because there are no geese or that there is nothing to eat, but because the river is generally low and hunters have had easy access to them, consequently they have been driven out. Hunters go out in the midstream in a boat, if not possible to wade, and build a blind on a sand bar. Geese coming into the river are easily killed in large numbers and are not likely to remain long with those kinds of neighbors on the bars. Now if this mode of hunting is allowed to be carried on before three years will have passed the game will pass on over the river in spring as they now do in the fall.” Huffman proposed hunters should allow the river proper be a goose refuge, and should “be content hunting on bank and bluffs,” and that if they did, “the amount of game coming in would increase instead of decreasing as it is now. Unmolested they generally stay two months on the river, as it is now they are driven out in two weeks or less.”

A year after Huffman’s letter, the *Omaha World-Herald* published a photo of two hunters and 14 “big Canadas” they shot on the Platte River near Clarks. The caption noted it was “perhaps the biggest score made during the winter in the vicinity of Clarks.” A photo of Charles Houghton and son Everett with 10 large Canadas shot in a field near Blair in the March 28, 1909 *Omaha World-Herald* was captioned: “One of the most remarkable kills on wild geese that has been made in this region for many years” Griswold’s columns and letters from readers during the first decade of the 1900s paints a clear picture that Canada geese, and Canada goose hunters, were becoming no more than memories.

“However, a good day’s sport on geese is a rare thing, for where in the old days millions of birds visited this region, but a few scattered flocks is now the rule,” Griswold wrote in the



PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLIAM LEMBURG

In the early 1900s, willow-covered blinds, and occasionally pits, on sandbars were popular on the central Platte River.

November 26, 1905 *Omaha World-Herald*. “Twenty-five years ago there was no region in the world where the wild geese congregated in greater numbers than along the fabled Platte and while it is yet a favorite resort of this noble bird, at its very best it is but a poor reminder of the days that are forever gone. Canadas, Hutchin’s, white geese and speckled fronts, it was one and the same thing in the times agone, they came here, both spring and fall, in countless hordes, and kills of from fifty to 100 to a single gun were occurrences that elicited no unique comment or curiosity. But today let a man bag a pair or two, especially Canadas, and it is an achievement to be heralded among the sportsmen with exceeding pride.”

The reason for declining numbers of Canada geese on the Platte during migration can probably be attributed to two factors: Intense hunting, hence no refuge to hold birds in the area; and the number of geese from populations migrating through central Nebraska had been greatly diminished. Both factors probably had the same effect along the Missouri River, compounded by loss of waterfowl habitat. Drainage districts were formed in the Missouri River Valley to drain wetlands and increase farmland on the floodplain by the 1880s, and even before 1900 there were efforts by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to contain the river with revetments, although complete channelization of the Missouri along Nebraska’s border would not be effectively completed until the 1950s.

“Coming back to the subject of ducks and geese,” Fred L. Heyn wrote in the March 23, 1913 *Omaha World-Herald*, “it is true that fewer are seen in the eastern part of the state than formerly, but that is due to the draining of swamps. A few years ago the swamps around Tekamah and Herman were great gathering places for enormous numbers of waterfowl, but after the swamps had been drained few of the birds returned. The same is true to a certain extent of the whole eastern part of the state”

“Wild geese are not found to any great extent except along the Missouri and Platte rivers, and are really becoming quite scarce,” Chief Deputy Warden George L. Carter wrote in the *Biennial Report of the Game and Fish Commission* for years

1907 and 1908. Incredibly, neither the legislature nor the Commission did anything to protect the few still passing through the state. The daily limit on geese in Nebraska remained from eight to 11 birds until the mid-1920s. Until the federal government assumed responsibility for migratory birds, each state viewed any duck or goose not killed as a bird lost to hunters in other states.

Large kills of Canada geese continued to be reported on the central Platte in the 1910s, but they had become increasingly rare. In the autumn of 1913, John Kennedy and E. Rasmussen of Willow Island east of Gothenburg wrote Griswold: “Enclosed you will find [a] picture of our morning’s shoot of November 3, consisting of twenty Canada geese and nine mallard ducks, which were killed on the peaceful waters of the Platte river just south of here. This is one of the largest kills that has been made here in recent years. Old time wild fowlers around here will verify our statement” “While the Hutchins geese have about all winged their way to the south,” Griswold wrote on November 11, 1917, “the Canadas are just coming in, sparsely, of course, because this grandest of all American game birds there are left, are rapidly approaching the point of extinction.”

Last Stronghold

Griswold, who never hesitated to travel for wildfowl shooting, hunted ducks in the far western Sandhills a number of times, only a stone’s throw from the North Platte River. Surprisingly, he never wrote of hunting waterfowl on either the North or South Platte rivers, and so fails as a reporter of goose shooting there in the late-1800s and early 1900s. Without Griswold’s year-to-year hunting journal, piecing together a picture of how it was is akin to assembling a 5,000-piece jigsaw puzzle with many pieces missing. There were no state or federal waterfowl surveys until the late-1930s, and they were rather casually conducted by the standards of today. Still, by assembling known bits of information, much from old-time goose hunters now gone, and filling the gaps with

logical speculation, something of a record of where Canada geese were hunted, and how, can be constructed.

Most Canada goose hunting in Nebraska during the first half of the 20th century was on the North Platte River. Irving Winterer farmed on the tableland about eight miles northeast of Lisco and was a well-known goose hunter in Garden County in the early and mid-1900s. During those decades, wheat was the principal dryland crop on the tableland both north and south of the river, with only small fields of corn here and there, and so most of the field shooting was done in wheat fields. One of the reasons Winterer and his goose hunting companions had consistently good shooting was that he did not hunt the same field day after day.

“I didn’t get my pistol out as soon as a bunch of geese lit in there,” Winterer said in a 1987 interview when he was 92 years old. “I’d let them come in and feed two or three days. Hell, I just loved to watch ‘em and hear ‘em, but at the same time I was building me up some darn good hunting. I just loved to play with them devils. They’d been in there for three, four days eating and nobody bothered them, and then, god darn, that’s a good place [to hunt].

“I got the first corn picker that came to this part of the country in 1928,” Winterer continued. “That picker would knock the corn stalks down and it would also leave a little shelled corn, knock some shelled corn off, and once in a while there would be an ear. Geese got to be able to see all the way around them, see that there is no coyote, or no man or nothing slipping up on them. They like it on the bare ground. Well hell, it was just like shooting ducks out of the rain barrel. You couldn’t keep those geese out of there.” Winterer recalled days when

his party of hunters killed 40 Canada geese.

After watching where the geese fed in the evening, Winterer and his companions went out at night or midday when geese were not feeding and dug their pits for the morning shoot. “I just dug a hole in the ground,” Winterer recalled. “It was enough room for two guys, and you wouldn’t see it. I would fan the dirt out a little, and then I’d get some [corn] stalks or something, weeds or something [to] cover that new dirt up, [and] let some of the stuff hang over the edge of the hole. Hell, the geese couldn’t see any hole or nothing. And if you sat still, they couldn’t see you. You had to sit quite still, and talk to them a little, and they’d make a circle or two, and, oh god, some of them poor devils, come right in and knock your hat off. And then when the hunting season was over, I took my shovel and went out and filled them [holes] back up.”

During his early years of hunting, Winterer had a friend at a blacksmith shop make tin silhouette goose decoys. “And of course you had to turn enough of ‘em ... so no matter which way they was coming in, why they could see figures out there,” Winterer said. By the 1930s he was also using canvas field decoys stuffed with wheat straw. “They were more realistic than them old slabs of tin. You couldn’t hardly tell they wasn’t a goose itself, until you got right up there in front.” Winterer also used mounted Canada geese as decoys.

“I generally had three or four different pits,” Winterer said. “When I got ready, why then I would get quite a bunch [of hunters] in there, the boys around here that liked to hunt. I never charged anybody a dime and I done all the work myself, furnished all the decoys and everything, and hell, I enjoyed it, you know. I’ll tell you, I was at the height of my glory.”



Dedicated wildfowlers came from some distances and established elaborate camps on the North Platte River.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EARL HAWORTH

Earl “Goldie” Haworth of Sidney, left, hunted ducks and geese on the North Platte River from 1919 into the 1990s. His cabin on the south side of the North Platte River, upstream from Ducklore Lodge, was covered with pine slabs from Wyoming.

“I used to hunt one of the hottest spots on the Lisco table, Irvie Winterer’s,” Jodi McNeel of North Platte recalled in a 2004 interview. “He would hunt it three days and close it four. A dollar a gun, guarantee you a goose.... If you could hit it, you got your goose. I don’t know of anybody that ever come out of there without their goose, because if they didn’t shoot it, somebody shot it for them. He was the first place off of the break, just almost straight north of the Rush Creek roost [on the river].” McNeel remembered Winterer’s pits as nothing more than holes dug in wheat fields. Some hunters would bring “funeral grass,” woven mats of grass or other vegetation used in those days for graveside services, to partially cover the pit opening. “The difference between now and then,” McNeel said, “it was a dollar to hunt up there then. Now these guys give \$10,000, \$20,000 for a spot [like that]. It was pretty hard to get into Irvie’s, because everybody wanted to hunt Winterer’s.”

Not all goose hunting was done on the tableland, though. Prior to creation of the Garden County Refuge in 1925, which initially prohibited hunting within 55 yards of the river, hunters shot from sandbar blinds in Garden County and continued to do so both upstream and downstream after the refuge was established.

Earl “Goldie” Haworth of Sidney shot his first two geese on the North Platte River in 1919 when a sophomore in high school, and he continued hunting the river valley into the 1990s. During his early years he hunted east of Broadwater. After the Garden County Refuge was created, he hunted from a wall tent on the north side of the river immediately upstream from the Garden-Morrill county line, and later built a small cabin there. In 1938, after hunting with Haworth for two years, Omaha brewer Art Storz built his Ducklore Lodge on the site. Haworth guided for Storz until 1942 and then moved a cabin to the south side of the river about two miles upstream

from Ducklore. From the mid-1940s until he quit hunting, Haworth also had a goose pit on a meadow downstream from Lisco on the south side of the river.

In a 1987 interview, Haworth described a strikingly different North Platte River than hunters know today; a broad, shallow, treeless river. “We’d have to take one of those river boats that we’d haul decoys out with,” he said, “and go three or four miles to get willows to put around the blind. And you could wade any place you wanted to with hip boots.”

Jack Robinson of Oshkosh killed his first goose pass-shooting from a tumbleweed blind when only eight years old in 1929. For many years Robinson and his brother hunted with Winterer. Until he had his first blind on the meadows in the late-1930s he occasionally pass-shot geese from the valley bluffs, and, like Haworth, recalled the North Platte River as sprawling and without trees. “You could sit up on the hills out there where we used to do our pass-shooting, and you could see the geese sitting in the river, little bunches scattered all up and down it, only a few trees.”

Although there was little farming on the North Platte River floodplain prior to World War II, there were small patches of dryland corn, Robinson said in a 2000 interview. “Of course corn didn’t get very big then,” he recalled, “but we killed a lot of geese like that.” Robinson had 12 canvas decoys his mother sewed and he and hunting companions stuffed with grounded cork and straw. As the years passed, Robinson’s decoy spread grew to 165 canvas-stuffed goose decoys and a dozen or more mounted Canada geese. For good measure he added home-made silhouette decoys.

“We would just go out and kill maybe two or three and then get out of there and let it sit,” Robinson said. “That’s the way we hunted. Saturday was goose hunting and Sunday was pheasant hunting, and then Wednesday...we started goose hunting again. We would generally get two or three or four

fields that we could hunt, and then we would change off. Sometimes they would get to going to one and you couldn’t drive them out, and the next time, one shot and they were all done.”

“We had a game,” Robinson recalled. “We dug a one-man pit apiece a lot of times if it was a good field and we both could call by mouth, and we were always trying to drop a goose in the other guy’s blind. That was the number one thing to do, and it happened quite frequently. Then we dug two-man blinds generally, and they would be long enough so you could turn around in it. We took cobs when we went out in the morning, this was like still dark, and we would light a bushel of cobs in the dust in the bottom [of the pit], and we would burn them while we was putting our decoys out. Then as soon as we would get all the decoys out, the cobs would be [mostly] burnt and then we would put dried sand in there and that’s how we kept our feet warm.”

Before World War II, pass-shooting from the bluffs was popular. Near Lisco the most prominent bluffs are on the north side of the river and on the south side in the Oshkosh area, so that was where most of the pass-shooting was done. After studying the movement of geese between river roosts and fields on the tableland, hunters positioned themselves on the bluffs or cuts in the bluffs and shot at passing geese. Geese leaving the river had to work to climb enough to clear the bluffs and wasted no effort gaining more altitude than was needed. Robinson remembers as many as 25 or 30 hunters strung out along a good pass in the bluffs on the south side of the river. Hunters also pass-shot geese from haystacks on meadows near river roosts bordering the Garden County Refuge.

During the 1920s and 1930s, most goose hunters in Garden County were local or lived not far away. Many came from Sidney, and some came from farther away. “The party of Denver hunters who have been camped on the river the past month hunting geese returned to their homes last Saturday with a good bag of the elusive birds,” the “Local Mention” column of the *Garden County News* reported on November 26, 1920. And the first goose of the season was often noted, such as the *Garden County News* item of November 4, 1921: “George and Clarence Anderson killed a big goose on the river Sunday. This is the first goose killed here this season.” Accounts of exceptional goose shoots occasionally found their way to the pages of the *Omaha World-Herald*, as a photo of a car draped with about 20 large Canada geese shot by Dr. Palmer, Ray Hartman and R.R. Scott on the North Platte River near Bridgeport a week prior to the December 14, 1924 publication. Just how many hunters were killing how many Canada geese for how many days each autumn on the North Platte River, though, remains largely conjectural.

Garden County Refuge

“We want to get a game reserve on the North Platte River, say from Bridgeport to Keystone, Neb.,” Ed I. Mitchell of Lisco wrote to Griswold in December, 1924. “Lisco seems to

be a central place for hunting and the hunters have no respect for what laws we do have. It is nearly impossible for a bird to light on the river, at all, during the hunting season, and unless something is done there will not be any game to hunt at all. We thought by securing this stretch of river for a sanctuary or resting place for the birds where they could get water and be protected, that there would be good shooting in the fields all winter. As it is they cannot stop. They start shooting at the break of day and by starlight at night and it is a disgrace and shame to the name of sportsmen.”

Mitchell’s plea was answered by the 1925 Nebraska Legislature when state senators Bern R. Coulter of Morrill County and Freeman L. Whitney of Deuel County introduced a bill to set aside the North Platte River and 10 rods (55 yards) on each side of its banks from the mouth to the Nebraska-Wyoming line as a state game refuge. The bill would have created a statutory refuge, and no land would be condemned or acquired by purchase. The bill had widespread support, and widespread opposition from hunters who could see no farther



PHOTO COURTESY OF RUDY FICK

Former game warden Rudy Fick hunted geese on wheat fields along the North Platte River in the 1930s. He later hunted at Ducklore Lodge.

than the end of their shotgun barrel. The bill passed, but the extent of the refuge was reduced to that portion of the river in Garden County. The value of the refuge was evident by the following waterfowl hunting season. A December 2, 1925 *North Platte Evening Telegraph* article reported that: “Sportsmen in this section profess to see in the increased numbers of ducks and geese a confirmation of the wisdom of creating game preserves. There are more ducks and twice as many geese as in any previous year in the North Platte Valley.” In 1947, the legislature extended the boundaries of the Garden County Refuge, and other statutory refuges subsequently created, from 10 to 20 rods.

“Them poor devils, flying from Canada down to Mexico, they didn’t have any place to stop, and hell, they finally put Garden County in the game refuge, and that was the best thing that they ever done,” Winterer recalled. “They didn’t want anything more, they’d roost down there on the river and then every day they’d go out some place for something to eat. They would come out and you could shoot the hell out them That

was sure a blessing that somebody was smart enough to do that. And after that hunting lasted so much longer out there in the country because they just loved to stay down on the river.” Haworth agreed: “Before that refuge went in, see, we’d only have about a week of goose shooting. When the flight was on, that was the only time you had shooting because they wouldn’t stay at all. You’d get to shooting them and they’d leave.”

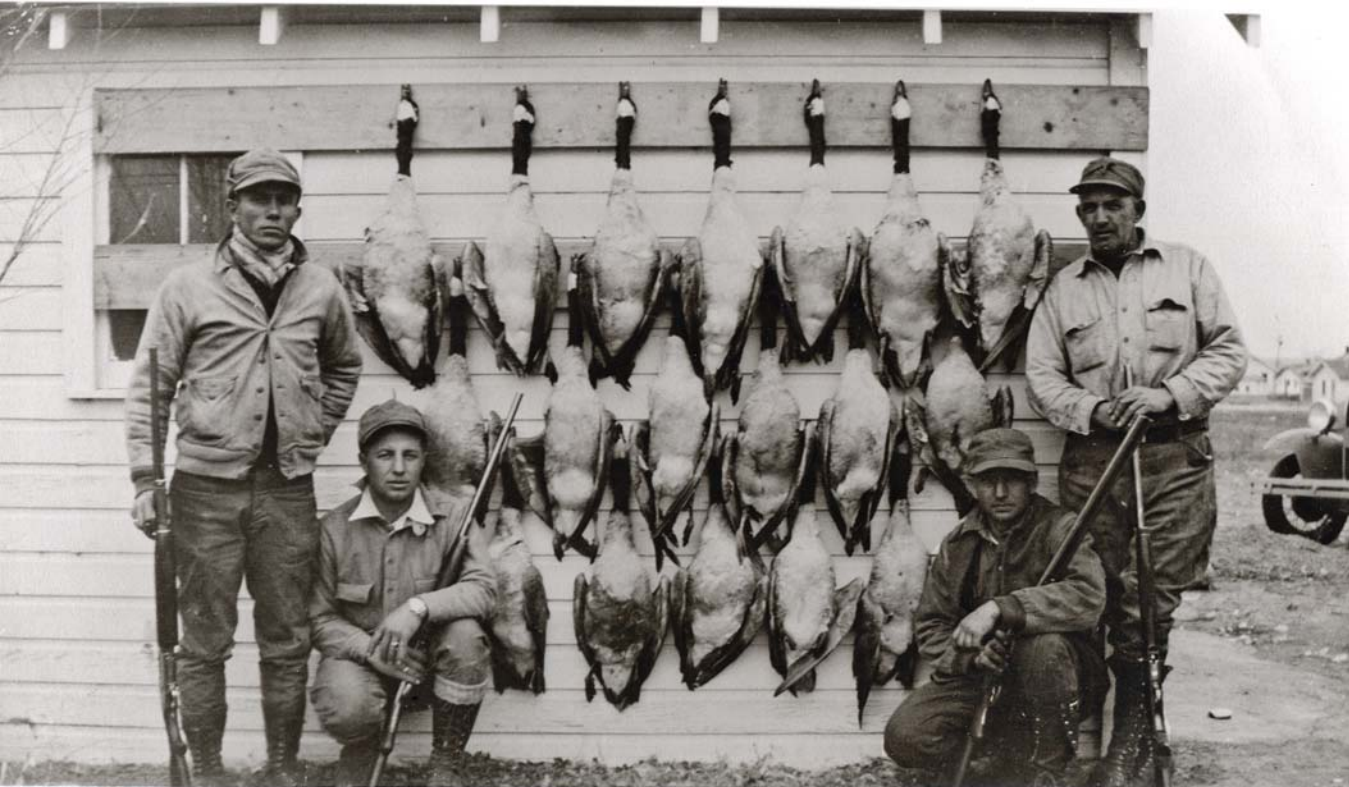
Robinson said another reason for more geese along the North Platte River was inadvertent. In the late-1920s, he said, landowners introduced strawberry clover, a low-growing perennial with creeping stems, in river bottom pastures to increase forage. “Now it’s all over,” Robinson said. “That changed the whole situation. The geese loved it, more started coming and staying on the river.” Prior to the introduction of clover, Robinson said the geese would fly five or six miles south of the river to feed in wheat fields and little patches of corn. In a 1987 interview, Herb Fecht, a wheat farmer east of Dalton in nearby Cheyenne County, recalled Canada geese once flew as far as his family’s farm to feed, about 12 miles from the closest point on the river. Robinson said a few years after clover became abundant, the geese “just quit going south to feed, and would not fly that far north of the river to feed.”

Sugar beets were a popular crop in the North Platte River Valley from the 1930s into the 1950s, according to Robinson, and geese would feed on the green tops left in the fields after the October harvest. During those years, upstream sugar beet processing factories dumped beet pulp, a processing by-product, in the river. Robinson said the geese fed on the pulp and, like strawberry clover, it was an enticement for geese to stop and linger on the river during fall migration. “We called it noodles,” Haworth said. “About every so often you would

have to go out and clean the string off because it would pull the decoys under, the floaters. They would dump that all fall while they were running the mills.”

Canada geese remained abundant on the North Platte River even during the drought years of the 1930s. C.A. Black of Kearney, in the April 1933 issue of *The Nebraska Bird Review*, reported “large numbers of geese” in Garden County in mid-November 1932. While hunting there on November 14, he and another hunter took their legal daily limits of 12 ducks and 4 geese “in a few minutes of shooting.” In the January 1935 issue of the same publication, Black reported: “I was in Garden County during the open season on ducks early in November [1934]. In driving down along the south bank of the North Platte River, from Lisco to Oshkosh, I found the river packed with ducks, mostly Common Mallards, and with geese, for the entire eighteen miles. One cannot even estimate their numbers in this concentration area.”

Also in the January 1935 issue of *The Nebraska Bird Review*, University of Nebraska ornithologist Myron H. Swenk noted that waterfowl hunting had been poor in Nebraska in the autumn of 1934, but there was goose shooting on the North Platte River and elsewhere in the state. Swenk reported good shooting on both ducks and geese along the North Platte River west of Oshkosh, on the Platte River east of Columbus, and some “fair bags” of small Canada geese north of Blair and west of Auburn. He noted that the Platte River from North Platte to Columbus “contained little or no water, and these ordinarily fine shooting grounds had no attraction for the migrating ducks and geese, which passed on southward, late in the season, apparently largely directly to Oklahoma and Texas.”



Haworth, kneeling left, said in 1987 that Canada geese on the North Platte River were larger after 1970. Geese shown in this 1930s photo were probably in the eight- to 10-pound range. Small, Arctic-nesting Canadas were more common in October or early-November.



Beginning in the 1950s, river blinds on the North Platte River became more elaborate and commodious.

U.S. Game Management Agent Clyde L. Licking reported in *The Nebraska Bird Review*, January-June 1940, that a winter survey of waterfowl conducted “by experienced and well qualified observers throughout Nebraska” for the Bureau of Biological Survey (precursor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) in January 1939 reported a few small flocks of wintering geese in eastern Nebraska, “but their numbers were negligible when compared with the total for the state. The largest, and almost only, concentration of geese in Nebraska during the winter of 1938-39 was on the North Platte River in Garden County.”

“To do any goose shooting in the 20’s and 30’s,” McNeel said, “you had to go at least west of Sarben [about midway between North Platte and Kingsley Dam], and the farther west you went the more Canada geese you’d run into, and then you got to the Garden County Refuge.” McNeel was born in 1914 and started hunting the North Platte and South Platte rivers as a boy in the 1920s. “They always had geese up in that Broadwater, Bridgeport, Lisco, Oshkosh and Lewellen area,” McNeel said.

“They claim that when that [Garden County] reserve went in, we gained 5,000 to 10,000 geese but we lost 80,000 ducks,” Haworth said. Haworth attributed the loss of mallards to hunters building small dams to dry up side channels so they could move their blinds closer to the main channel and the refuge boundaries. Haworth said once side channels were eliminated, the main channel cut deeper, many bare sandbars vanished, and so did the best duck habitat. Lower flows because of upstream impoundments increased irrigation from the river, and the encroachment of trees on the river’s banks and sandbars also were likely beginning to bring changes to the North Platte River during the 1930s. In 1987, Haworth said that he had the best of the mallard shooting on the North Platte River when he was young, but the goose hunting had been “getting better all the time.”

Because of the drought and a continent-wide decline in waterfowl abundance, stringent regulations were imposed on waterfowl hunters in the 1930s by the federal government. In

addition to reduced bag limits, a prohibition on the use of live decoys was imposed. In 1935, the legislature established a “forenoon-only” shooting time for waterfowl on the entire Platte, North Platte and South Platte rivers to provide migration waterfowl some refuge. The restriction was not repealed until 1941. Along most of the Platte rivers, that regulation probably benefited ducks more than geese because outside of Garden County few geese paused anywhere in the state during migration.

Ducklore

Apparently there were few, if any, noteworthy pay-to-hunt operations along the North Platte River during the first three decades of the 20th century. Most arrangements for shooting grounds were probably informal, and payment for the privilege was in the form of a gratuity at the end of the hunt. By the 1940s that was probably beginning to change. Haworth recalls the cost of an annual lease for his goose-hunting pit in Garden County was \$60 per year in the mid-1940s. Nor were sportsmen from outside of the area acquiring land specifically for goose hunting as today. If there was a turning point in that, it was probably when Omaha beer brewer Art Storz built his Ducklore Lodge on the north side of the North Platte River west of Lisco in 1938.

Through a mutual friend, Haworth agreed to take Storz hunting in the autumn of 1936. Haworth had chosen the site for his modest 10-by-12-foot cabin well, on the treeless, sandbar-studded section of the North Platte River west of Lisco just upstream from the Garden County Refuge. “There was a direct flyway down through the Sandhills north of the river,” Haworth said, “a big rift, a draw that goes back up in the hills and a second one just a couple of miles upstream from the first. Geese would come down through the hills, hit the river right west of us, turn and come down. We’d be the first ones who had a chance at them.”

Storz returned to hunt with Haworth in 1937. But Storz had bigger plans, and the wherewithal to carry them out. At end of

that hunt, Haworth recalled Storz saying: “Earl, why don’t you let me build a cabin here. You take care of it just like it was your own and look after things and we’ll build a nice cabin.” The next summer Storz had building materials shipped from Omaha, a local carpenter was hired, and by the 1938 waterfowl season Ducklore Lodge was complete. For the next 20 years Storz hunted there, hiring guides, kitchen help and full-time caretakers. He entertained military brass, governors from several states, national outdoor writers, movie stars and wealthy industrialists until he grew too old to hunt the river and sold it in 1958. Haworth guided at Ducklore for several years before growing weary of the people.

While Storz’s Ducklore was an exception on the North Platte River in the 1940s and 1950s, how, where and when Storz and his guests hunted geese probably represents the period, albeit on a grander scale. Because Ducklore was just upstream from the western boundary of the Garden County Refuge, Storz could hunt on the river, and so hunters had the opportunity to shoot ducks as well as geese. Fecht began guiding for Storz in 1945 when he was only 17 years old.

“I got \$5 a day and thought, man I can’t imagine getting paid for doing something I like,” he recalled. Fecht said Storz had six blinds on the river, two each over a spread of about 100 to 130 papier-mâché duck decoys, eight to a chain. Lynn Chichester guided at Ducklore in the late-1940s and in the 1950s. He recalls there being a few wooden and cork-bodied duck decoys. Each set-up also had 15 to 20 metal duck silhouette decoys on long stakes. Chichester said during his time

meadow pits in 1940, and 128 the second year. Apparently the novelty of shooting geese on the meadows was short-lived for the Ducklore hunters. “They really didn’t use that too much because there was pretty fair goose hunting on the river,” Chichester said of the late-1940s and 1950s. He said the reasons were there was no opportunity to shoot mallards from the meadow pits, and it was farther to go in the early morning. “We’d kill all the geese we’d want up there on the river,” Haworth said of his years at Ducklore.

Hunting geese from pits on Garden County meadows became more common during the 1940s. Robinson said that by the end of that decade there were two or three pit blinds per mile on meadows south of the river between Lisco and Oshkosh. Robinson was perhaps one of the first to have a metal pit blind as he owned and operated his own machine and repair shop and had the skills to build them for himself and others. Fuel tanks were often converted into sunken goose hunting pits. Mike Dutko, a long-time Lisco goose hunter, fashioned his meadow pit by welding a cattle tank and part of a culvert tube together. Such pits were difficult to keep buried, as the water table on the meadows was high and hydraulic pressure would pop them out of the ground. Haworth used four engine blocks, one buried deep in the sand on each corner of the blind and secured with cables. Robinson’s best solution was 8-foot long “REA screws,” the sort used to anchor guylines supporting transmission towers, twisted into the ground and attached to the pit with chain.

Up and down the river, hunters were expending evermore effort and money to make their shooting grounds attractive to geese. During the 1940s and 1950s, when manipulation of river channels was still legal, or illegal but overlooked, sandbars were created or washed away by Storz’s men to improve decoy waters. Chichester recalled: “Usually in August I’d go out there, when the river was down quite a little bit from irrigation, and I’d take the old horse and a boat, and 1-by-8 stakes and make a retard in the middle of the river. I put it so the water wouldn’t go over the top but would go underneath and built me a place for decoys with water just about six inches deep. By the 1950s, because of narrowing and deepening of the channel, Chichester said there was water 10 to 12 feet deep, and creating shallow water areas and sandbars was essential to have good decoy waters around each blind. He recalled Storz bringing in a bulldozer to take out unwanted sandbars.

“They come out there and just scraped it off and let it float away, see. And they sprayed a lot of those trees to kill them.”

Haworth said that during the early-1940s Storz hired an “expert dynamiter from Cheyenne” to come out and blow out unwanted sandbars. “We went up on Sunday, 4th of July, and we had a case of dynamite and we blew three islands out. There was a big island out there, and we blew it out.” Haworth said three or four of Storz’s men helped, and when they started they were carrying one stick of dynamite in each hand, arms fully extended, fully expecting them to explode at any moment. “Before we was done we was just carrying it around like cord wood.” Haworth also remembers Storz having a local man come out with a team and brush mower to cut willows and “thick grass” off the islands.



Storz’s meadow pits on the North Platte River were no more than holes in the ground with 2-by-4s around the top and covered with hay.

at Ducklore, the goose decoys were papier-mâché floaters, silhouettes, oval-backs (shell decoys) and some stuffed canvas decoys placed on sandbars.

Ducklore’s river blinds were metal horse tanks partially sunk in the sandbar with a wooden frame above and covered with either willows or slough grass, and were pulled to shore at the end of the hunting season. Storz also had two pit blinds on a meadow on the south side of the river between Lisco and Oshkosh. Storz’s meadow pits were no more than holes dug in the meadow sand, 2-by-4s around the top to which burlap was nailed to cover the walls, a wooden floor and the opening covered with hay. The pits were entirely open on top. Canvas-stuffed decoys and silhouettes were the only decoys used.

Haworth said Ducklore hunters killed 111 Canadas from the



Lee Hudleson, left, and Jack Shelton both worked for the Storz Brewing Company in Omaha, but during the waterfowl season guided at Art Storz’s Ducklore Lodge. Both large and smaller Canada geese were shot there in the 1940s and 1950s.

It is difficult to determine just how good goose hunting was in the 1940s and 1950s on the North Platte River. Most hunters describe it in subjective language, like: “We had good goose and mallard shooting there.” There are Ducklore photos of from two to 11 hunters with 15 to 20 Canada geese, but no indication how many hunters were shooting, or if it was an exceptional day or average day. Robinson said that in the years just before and just after World War II, he and his hunting partner would shoot from 100 to 120 geese each season. Both duck and goose numbers were down after the war. Fecht said in the 1950s, “the hunting just wasn’t very good at all.”

What is interesting to see in photos from the 1920s into the 1950s is the size of the Canada geese. Almost without exception they are large geese, probably in the eight- to 10-pound range. While small Canadas were surely shot during migration, they rarely appear in photos. Haworth said that while the birds were big geese, they were not as heavy as those commonly killed after 1970. McNeel, who occasionally hunted from pits on the tableland in Garden County in the mid-1900s, said: “Once in a while somebody would snag a big goose, but most geese shot were specks or Hutchies. We never shot no great big geese like they do today.” Occasionally a snow goose appears in hunting bag photos from the mid-1900s.

The best goose shooting, according to hunters interviewed from the Oshkosh-Lisco area, came with the November migration push. “Armistice Day, November 11, give or take two weeks before or two weeks after, is when our geese come in,” Robinson said in a 2000 interview. “Back when I used to keep records, we killed more geese on the 17th of November than we ever did any other day, but now we go up to Christmas, even between Christmas and New Year’s.” Robinson said the best shooting in fields was when the river

was carrying slush ice, forcing the geese to leave the river to feed. “Geese don’t go out of that river if they don’t have to,” he said. If the river freezes and stays frozen, though, the geese migrate south. Haworth said that during the 1940s “the geese wouldn’t stay too long, and the shooting was typically over by the end of November.” Typically Storz closed Ducklore Lodge for the season just after Thanksgiving. Today, with more geese and more wintering geese, hunting remains good until the season closes in January, and most years could be good all winter.

Goose hunting was changing on the North Platte River during the 1940s. Tom Olson of Lisco said that in the 1930s and 1940s, probably 90 percent of the goose hunters were locals. But as Nebraska’s premier goose shooting region received more attention, hunters came from farther away. Improved roads and automobiles made traveling farther to hunt – especially from Omaha, Lincoln and Denver – easier and faster. And commercial hunting finally entered the picture.

“It is the intention of the Nebraska [Game, Forestation and Parks] Commission, as well as the Federal authorities, to tighten up considerably on the professional hunters and guides who have been operating on the North Platte River,” the Summer 1940 issue of *Outdoor Nebraska* stated. “In many cases last year, and also in 1938, birds were sold or bartered, and hunters were charged exorbitant rates for blinds where they never had a chance to get a goose and, in other cases, favored guests were allowed and helped to get too many birds. Unless the situation can be better controlled this fall, it is very likely that the Nebraska Commission will ask the legislature for authority to license all such guides and see that they treat the hunters fairly, impartially, and follow the letter of the law.” ■

Continued in the January/February issue.

EAB: The Green Plague

Text by Rocky Hoffmann

This highly invasive, exotic bug has killed thousands of ash trees in the upper Midwest, and now it's creeping closer and closer to Nebraska.

Ironically, when Dutch elm disease destroyed the urban forests and treelined streets of thousands of American towns in the 1950s, the primary species of reforestation consisted of varieties of ash trees. Now, more than half a century later, all species of ash are threatened with total destruction from another highly invasive, exotic problem: The emerald ash borer (EAB) is relentlessly attacking and killing North American ash trees as it slowly and methodically spreads destruction outward from the upper Midwest.

It's likely that the borer arrived in the Detroit area via infested wooden shipping crates from China. Once on U.S. soil, it found the urban tree of choice very much to its liking. The EAB is now responsible for killing millions of shade-giving ash trees in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Indiana, Virginia, Wisconsin and Ontario, and as its range continues to expand, it has the potential to threaten an estimated 10 billion ash trees in North America.

Although the emerald ash borer has not yet been found in Nebraska, it has reached Missouri. Should it migrate into the northern Great Plains states of Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota, where 20 to 60 percent of the total tree

resource is ash, the effect would be powerful. Ash concentrations are higher in Nebraska than anywhere else in the United States, and estimates indicate that more than half of all windbreaks or farmsteads here contain green ash. The cost of removing and replanting community trees alone may average \$700 per tree, and add that to increased energy demands (due to less shade and windbreaks) and ecosystem benefit losses, it is estimated



Emerald ash borers are flying, bright-green beetles for about three weeks as adults, but spend most of their lives as larvae.

that each state would suffer a \$1 billion loss.

The emerald ash borer is a flying, bright-green beetle that has only a three-week adult lifespan in early summer. During that narrow window of opportunity, it breeds and the female lays eggs in the crevasses of ash bark. When the larvae hatch, they tunnel beneath the bark into the cambium layer, where they feed and continue to tunnel until they emerge the following summer as adult beetles. Their disruption and destruction of the cambium layer interrupts the flow of nutrients and water from the roots to the upper branches and leaves of the ash tree. If enough larvae are present, the tree dies. If the tree lives, emerging adults again lay eggs in the bark, and larvae infest the tree again. The cycle continues until the tree dies, all the while infesting other trees in the area.

Entomologists are convinced that new areas of infestation are created through human transfer of the insect's larval form. Much like the original infestation probably came to America in a shipping crate, regional infestations most likely occur from the transportation of infested firewood.

Although chemical treatments are being developed, they currently are appropriate only for high-value trees in residential and urban landscapes – the cost of the treatments and need to repeat them every couple of years will make them too expensive to use in windbreaks and native ash stands. The only other approach that can be used to slow the spread of the pest is to identify an infested area and cut, chip or burn the infested wood. Ash wood should also



Symptoms of EAB infestation include leaf loss in the upper portions of ash trees and the dying out of periphery limbs.

not be transported from the area to use in campfires, home heating stoves or fireplaces.

Beetle trapping programs have not resulted in the capture of any emerald ash borer in Nebraska, and to date there have been no affected trees discovered. Symptoms of EAB infestation include leaf loss in the upper portions of ash trees and the dying out of periphery limbs. Increased woodpecker use and the scarring of bark where woodpeckers attempt to feed on larvae is quite visible. After one year of infestation, the emergence of adult beetles from the cambium layer leaves a D-shaped exit hole in the bark. When the bark is removed, tunneling patterns by the larvae are obvious indicators of infestation.

Anyone suspecting an EAB infestation in Nebraska is encouraged to contact the Nebraska Department of

Agriculture at (402) 471-2394. Information in the national EAB web site, www.emeraldashborer.info, suggests we can all do our part in stopping the spread of EAB. The transportation of firewood poses the main pathway for the movement of EAB and other plant pests. Protect the shade-giving ash trees in your favorite campground or neighborhood by not transporting firewood for campfires or fireplaces, purchasing or gathering firewood locally, and burning it before you leave. ■



EAB larvae and feeding tunnels.

Tree Diversity Tree Diversity Tree Diversity

Choosing a tree for your yard or acreage can be fun and interesting but should involve more than just picking one that looks good and fits your planting space. It is wise to consider what else has been planted and what trees occur naturally in your area. The overplanting of a small number of tree species is a common problem throughout our communities and rural areas. Overuse of a single tree species minimizes diversity, a key component of long-term stability, and greatly increases the vulnerability of the tree itself, and the planted forest as a whole, to pests and disease. As a prime example, Dutch elm disease, caused by a fungus imported to our country in 1930, quickly spread through American towns and devastated native elm populations by the 1950s. The spread of this disease

was greatly amplified due to the abundance of elms in many urban environments, where they had been planted for their beautiful, shade-producing canopy.

The destruction caused by Dutch elm disease should have taught us a lesson, but we weren't observant. Generally speaking, we replanted with one of the most plentiful trees available – green ash, which is highly adaptable statewide and filled the void left by the lost elms. However, overplanting of this species has set us up for another potential disaster.

If the emerald ash borer invades our state and decimates our ash trees, will we again fail to diversify our landscapes? Diversity can be successfully achieved by planting no more than 10 percent of one species in a given area. Native species or introduced species adapted to your

area are the best choices. Plant hardiness zones can be found at www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone. Select species that are adapted to Zone 4, northern Nebraska, and Zone 5, southern Nebraska, for best survival and longevity. Unusual exotics are interesting and some are worth a try, but research your selections, as some are invasive and problematic.

Tree selection could be an article in itself, so who can help with recommendations? Try contacting:

- Local Extension Agents
- Master Gardeners
- Certified Arborists
- Community Foresters with the Nebraska Forest Service
- ReTree Nebraska Initiative
- Nebraska Statewide Arboretum
- The National Arbor Day Foundation



A Cody Christmas

Text and photos by Rocky Hoffmann

“The beautiful Cody home was ablaze with lights and Christmas decorations and warm with welcome and hospitality. Evergreen wreaths and Christmas bells, holly and mistletoe filled every space. Bouquets of white carnations and ferns graced the mantles, and a huge vase of red carnations centered the great dining room table.” So wrote Nellie Snyder Yost in her 1979 biography, *Buffalo Bill*.



MANY DECORATIONS ARE CONTRIBUTED BY LOCAL BUSINESSMEN.



ABOVE: THE DINING ROOM WITH ITS ELEGANT CHINA AND GOLD FESTOONS.

Born William Frederick Cody, Colonel “Buffalo Bill” Cody truly reveled in the Christmas season, especially when it involved children. Some surviving old photographs capture the Colonel decked out as Santa Claus and surrounded by youngsters. A Christmas essay written by his wife, Louisa Frederici Cody, in 1869 while stationed with her husband at Fort McPherson indicates the profound fondness that Cody held for the holiday. Mrs. Cody’s tale was reprinted in *A Frontier Army Christmas*, compiled and annotated by Lori A. Cox-Paul and Dr. James W. Wengert and published by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

“However, right then there were things to take Will’s mind off the loss of his favorite pony. One of them was the fact that midwinter

had come and that Christmas was only a few weeks off. For Will had been deputized by the soldiers and officers to be the official messenger who should go to Cheyenne and return with the necessities of the Christmas season,” wrote Mrs. Cody.

Perhaps the lonely life as a frontier scout away from home on a particularly forlorn Christmas past, sparked a special warmth in Cody’s heart for this joyous occasion, and nothing could possibly demonstrate his enthusiasm for Christmas more than his 550-mile round-trip on horseback in midwinter to bring back holiday enhancements for the troops and toys for the three children that were living with their parents at the fort, one



IN THE KITCHEN, TEA CUP TREE ORNAMENTS AND FRESH GINGERBREAD MEN.



BILL CODY DRESSED AS SANTA AT THE ORACLE MINE SITE IN ARIZONA.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BUFFALO BILL RANCH STATE HISTORICAL PARK



THIS OLD CHRISTMAS CARD SUMS UP THE OVERALL THEME OF “CHRISTMAS AT THE CODYS.”

of them Arta Cody.

“...it was with glowing eyes that I greeted Will when he came back from Cheyenne, loaded down with packages to say nothing of the wagon which followed him. It was two days before Christmas. Up at the fort the soldiers had been working, sending out details into the plains to find the prettiest little pine trees possible, to be placed about the big assembly hall – and I knew that the whole setting would be wonderful”

Wonderful settings were likely arranged by the hands of Louisa, not her rough frontier husband, but certainly Bill was responsible for seeing that the best of trimmings were available for Louisa to work her decorative magic. After Bill and Louisa retired from military circles and built their appropriately named “Scouts Rest Ranch” in North Platte, the Codys welcomed scores of Christmas guests.

More than a century has now passed since Louisa and Bill hosted their final Christmas in North Platte, but during recent Decembers the entire mansion, barn, cob house and springhouse glow in remembrance of those celebrated days. Although Cody certainly would have approved of the modern extravagance in Christmas décor bestowed the

old place, today’s decorations go far beyond what the frontier showman and his wife ever lavished upon the estate.

Today, Buffalo Bill State Historical Park is owned and operated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. “Christmas at the Codys” is an agency-sponsored event, inviting the public to celebrate the holiday season at the ranch. The Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation initiated the event in 1997 as a fundraiser for the organization’s community involvement and eventually turned the celebration over to the Commission in 2006. Park superintendent Steve Kemper and assistant superintendent Aric Riggins tackle most of the lighting chores that define the unique lines of the mansion, including gables, windows, balconies and porches. Even exterior bushes and picket fences are lighted, along with

antique wagons and, of course, the big barn. Without doubt, the house and yard present a magnificent spectacle to those arriving for “Christmas at the Codys.”

“When all the lights are turned on, and especially after a snowfall, the house

looks like a triple-decker cake,” said Kemper. “We string an incredible number of lights for this event, and that doesn’t even consider what are used on the Christmas trees in the house.”

Volunteer groups annually sponsor a Christmas tree for every room and hallway in the mansion. Last Christmas local organizations, including the Lincoln County Tourism Advisory Council, the Nebraskaland Home Economists, the Buffalo Bill Rodeo Committee, the Opportunity Center, Xi Alpha Sigma Sorority and the Lincoln County Boys and Girls Club, uniquely decorated trees and other features of adopted rooms in the mansion.

One of the foremost attractions last year was Louisa Cody’s bedroom, which had a more contemporary look of multi-colored globes and lights but blended well with the past by highlighting the modern ornaments with an antique yo-yo quilt on Mrs. Cody’s bed. Irene Walz, who has been the office coordinator at the State Historical Park and who assists volunteer groups throughout the pre-celebration process, decorated Mrs. Cody’s room.

The great table in the dining room has traditionally been the focus of the decorative eye. Last year, the Lincoln County Tourism Advisory Council decorated the holiday dinner setting in gala Christmas colors of red and gold,



GUESTS ARE INVITED TO TOUR THE HOUSE AND STOP IN THE PARLOR ROOM FOR A VIOLIN, CLARINET OR PIANO SOLO OF A FAVORITE CHRISTMAS MELODY.



A HITCH OF HORSES AND A HAY WAGON GIVE VISITORS A GREAT VIEW OF THE EXTERIOR LIGHTS THAT DECORATE SCOUT’S RANCH.

while placements of fine china and imported crystal symbolically awaited the dinner guests of Christmas past.

Although today’s guests do not sit down to a traditional Cody Christmas feast, they are invited to tour the house or stop in the parlor room for a violin, clarinet or piano solo of a favorite Christmas melody. They may also visit with Buffalo Bill look-alike and re-enactor, Bruce Richmond, and little ones may sit on Santa’s lap and tell him their Christmas wishes.

Outside the mansion, visitors may stop by the cob house and the springhouse for apple cider and fresh-roasted chestnuts. A hitch of horses and hay wagon await those wanting a rhythmic *clompity, clomp, clomp* tour of the grounds that features a spectacular view of the lighted mansion. Local ranchers volunteer their time, teams and tack for this popular event.

The veterans’ tree is across the spring bridge in the massive 1887 horse barn. A traditional cedar tree stands inside the stable doors, and visitors are encouraged to hang messages on the branches to service personnel away from home. Those messages serve as the tree’s only ornaments, except for flags and red, white and blue lights. The veteran’s tree in the barn and all

the handmade Christmas tree ornaments in the house reflect back to the Cody’s first Christmas at Fort McPherson.

Louisa wrote, “I went to the fort to help the other women with the decorations for our first really big Christmas on the plains. How we worked! How we schemed and contrived to make that big hall look like a Christmas back home! All in one day, there was everything to do – and very little to do it with. This was different from the land of civilization. There was no store to run to for an armful of tinsel, no decorator’s shops to furnish holly and mistletoe and Christmas wreaths. The wreaths that hung upon the walls we made ourselves. The bright red berries that spotted them here and there were hard-rolled bits of red paper; the greenery everywhere had come fresh from the buttes and knolls of the plains, with here and there a few cactus spines thrown in to make things more difficult.”

Décor innovation continues to be the premise on which a modern day Christmas at the Cody’s is presented to the public. From tanned-hide Christmas tree skirts and hand-folded parchment ornaments to feather globes, native grass bundles and gingerbread men

ornaments, visitors inside the house feel they are truly experiencing a frontier Christmas.

This year, “Christmas at the Codys” is open to the public from December 19 – 22 from 5:30 p.m. until 8 p.m. Admission is \$5.00, but children 12 years of age and under, as well as military personnel with current service identification cards, are admitted free. ■



HAND-MADE FEATHER GLOBES DECORATE ONE OF MANY CHRISTMAS TREES.

The Next Hole

A Story About Family, Fishing and Time

Text by Jeff Kurrus,
Photos by Michael Forsberg



PHOTO BY DOUG CARROLL

In a conversation that morning at his home where he and his wife, Joanne, had lived for more than 50 years, his eyes lowered as he spoke of lost days on the water that spring. “Not too much fishing this year,” he said, “I must be lazy or old.” A pause, our eyes only making temporary contact. “I go when they go usually,” he said, referring to his two sons, and I wondered if he knew that I knew that was no longer true.

There was a time in life it had been true though, when weekend days and nights with Monte and Scott were the lake. Life was water in the spring, summer and fall. But in the winter, life was a waiting game until the water became hard enough to walk across. Then it became life again. Nowadays, however, past times were current times — he was slowing down, relying on yesteryear stories of his own as well as stories from his sons. In a sense, he was now waiting for that perfect day on the lake. Yet those who knew him best also knew there was once a time when he never would have waited at all.

A little while later, Dad sat with his two boys at the kitchen table, flipping pages of a photo album absent of creativity. A fisherman’s album can be the most boring, repetitive collection of photographs ever assembled. Boring, mind you, to the layman or casual angler. They remind one of Norman Maclean’s narrator in the story “A River Runs Through It” when he says, “So we emptied our baskets and arranged them [the fish] by size and took turns photographing each other admiring them and ourselves. The photographs turned out to be like most amateur snapshots of fishing catches — the fish were white from overexposure and didn’t look as big as they actually were”

Place that album in front of a fisherman who has one of their own, however, or amongst fathers and sons, and each picture deserves a story, about how the fish fought, where it was caught, and ribbing giggles about the hair and clothing ensembles of days past.

The boys pointed to pictures in the album, each photo of the grab-and-grin variety that included the angler, fish and faded background. In the brothers’ minds, however, the background was

far from faded. “That was at Sherman,” Monte said.

“That’s Medicine Creek,” added Scott about the next.

“Olive Creek,” said Monte.

“Willow Creek,” said Scott, the backdrops as clear as the ice they stood on those days.

“Right after they married, Dad went 13 weekends in a row, from Friday night until Sunday night,” said Monte, the younger of the two Mares brothers. “We asked Mom how she ever dealt with that.”

“After a while, I didn’t,” she said, walking into the kitchen, a cup of coffee in hand. “He only married me because my dad was such a great hunter and fisherman. But after all those weekends alone, I got tired of it. As time went on, everywhere I looked it seemed as if there was a mouth wanting to be fed. I had to have a life of my own. So one day I was sitting on the porch and thought, ‘I’ve had enough of this.’ I went and applied for a job. Told him when he got home that I had to go to work in the morning.” She laughed as her husband listened and her boys smiled, firmly bringing Woody Allen’s “time plus tragedy equals comedy” full circle.

The stories continued with each page turn. More than 100 years of fishing experience saved in faded, yellowing photographs. Yet still a much better alternative than the 21st century photo album held conveniently, if ever so briefly, on the world’s cell phone cameras.

Each photograph was different than the one before, everyone getting older from the front of the album to the back. Snapshots of life on the water and of people they no longer were. There would be no more shirtless Monte next to Olive Creek Lake in the summer, hair in front of his face as his teenage

body fought between boy and man. Scott was no longer wearing those rubber boots at Merritt Reservoir, long since discarded for a warmer pair of ice-fishing apparel. And Dad was no longer taking his boys to the water, coercing them from their beds. They had their own lives now, lives that included divorce, job layoffs and kids who didn’t fish.

“I think I ruined mine when they were young,” Scott said.

“Mine will go some,” Monte said, “but not like me and Scott.”

The two have fished together since they were little boys, long before being interrupted by life. But fishing was life, an ever-growing appendage of how



Scott (left) and Monte Mares cut holes at Calamus Reservoir.

each day would always be, introduced by a man who failed to remember how he ever introduced it to them or how he started himself.

“They’re getting into it too big, I think,” Dad said. “Tournaments every weekend. Painted fish on their trailers. I just don’t know what to think of that.”

S pitting snow welcomed Monte and Scott at Calamus Reservoir. It was January, the temperature in the low teens. They were the post-apocalyptic ice anglers, visiting a wasteland on frozen water. They talked



Monte (left) and Scott at Medicine Creek, June 1969.

little as they piled on clothes, topping the last layer with matching coveralls, each back monogrammed with “The 2-pounder Club.” Then they unloaded their 4-wheeler and its accompanying sled carrying a portable shanty, underwater camera, depth finder and a pile of fishing gear: the oranges, blues and greens of various tackle combinations, each the perfect fishing lure for a particular fish, during a particular time, on a particular day – the fisherman’s excuse for all additional tackle purchases. They drove their ATV to the middle of the



One of many holes for Scott and Monte during a hard-water morning.

lake, then turned its engine off.

“Is this about where it was?” Scott asked.

“We’re close,” replied Monte.

“I can’t believe we didn’t GPS this brush pile,” said Scott with a shake of the head. “I’ll drill.”

Scott zig-zagged across the lake with his gas-powered auger, drilling holes through two feet of ice while Monte dropped a transducer into each, evaluating depth in search of fish and structure. Scott continued augering, his ice-laden prairie dog community growing larger by the minute. This was not the *Grumpy Old Men* version of shanty fishing on ice. Nor was it the



Early morning preparation for the Mares brothers at Calamus Reservoir.

stereotypical view comparing ice-fishing to cane pole angling through a hole in the living room floor, just a TV guide and koozie away from any other day of Saturday afternoon football.

“Sometimes you go single tail, or double tail,” started Scott, talking about lure selection. “Or just wax worms. Or hit your jigs with a glow in the dark taser at night. Sometimes that will work a bite. I like chartreuse myself, as well as black tails. I was just experimenting last week with two tails. Always have a wax worm on there, and you want something heavy enough to feel the end of the line, but not too heavy. I’ll use lures less than a 1/16 of an

ounce with 4- or 6-pound test. If you get too stiff a line you can lose sensitivity. If you get too light of line, then the ice might pop it off. All anchored by a standard 7-loop knot.”

They dipped their lures into each of the holes that morning, constantly jigging in search of fish. Sweat beaded, the wind chill lowered. They made small talk about families and fishing. Each person listened intently to the others’ stories, smiling or laughing at the pauses, depending on the worth of the punch line. But always waiting for the last line so the group could momentarily absorb the tale, then reciprocate with a slightly different one

that could start with a plethora of introductions, some better than others. “That reminds me...” is a poor start, and must be supported with a story of intrigue and espionage on the water to regain its footing. “We were fishing on Holmes Lake one day, not unlike the day you just described, when ...” A proper transition from the previous tale. It is the give-and-take that is fishing stories, whether shared on a drive to the lake or near a multitude of holes in the ice.

But the stories also take on a slightly different tone with a new person along, for there is the question that always accompanies these conversations, and each person, regardless of their



Ice-fishing gear for the Mares brothers includes jigging rigs, tackleboxes, ice shanties and sleds to carry all of their equipment.

storytelling prowess or ineptitude, has a version: “When did you start fishing?”

The inquiry itself is loaded, not to be easily answered by stating an age. Once age is introduced, it is the who, then the how, then why. A pause, then the question is silently returned and the stories compared. The conversation goes on, time passing quickly.

“We were always at the lake,” started Monte. “Every weekend we’d get the camper and set up 45 tip-ups that night back when that many were legal. Dad would drill all those holes by hand. Scott would set the depth of the tip-up and I would set the bait. Man, I tell

you, flags were popping. It was exciting. If we got bored, we’d wrestle.”

“‘Why don’t you guys make a round,’ Dad would say,” said Scott. “And me and Monte would take an iron bar and beat it against the ice while we skated around the lake. ‘It gets bait moving,’ he told us. And me, Monte and Mom and Dad were always going somewhere. We’d come back home after two weeks at Merritt and the grass was a foot tall. People just don’t do that anymore.”

“On days we were staying close to the house, Dad would come in and whisper, ‘Let’s go fishing,’” said

Monte.

“‘Dad, I’m really tired. I don’t want to talk,’ I’d say. But that didn’t stop him from talking. He did until we would get up. Then we would fall asleep in the boat. We did that since we were little,” Scott added.

In a young angler’s life, fishing will often take, if only for a moment, a backseat to everything else. Talks between fathers and sons turn from one-sentence dialogues, to one-word responses, to inaudible mumbles to post-sleep groans. It is past the time in life when a father expects his son to fall asleep to and from the lake. He now

seeks a conversation from a colleague on the water, a give-and-take between parts of himself and parts of a complete stranger. Too often, however, he receives neither. Ironically, nowadays Dad would be able to listen to all the stories he could handle, even though he might not be able to relay them to his wife once he got back home.

“Dad doesn’t remember last year or the year before,” said Monte. “But you get him talking about back in the day, and he’s as sharp as a tack.”

“**T**hat Monte, he sure was fast,” Dad said, as he thumbed through the album pages, not one of which ever stuck together. A true sign of an album used.

Both of the boys laughed. “That fish right there,” said Scott, pointing to what seemed to be the same walleye as the page before. “He beat me to that fish that day. ‘Please, Scott. Please Scott, let me check that tip-up,’ he said, and I said okay. Little shit – that was the biggest fish of the day.”

Another page turned, then another. Monte stood up. “Come look at this.” We walked into a side room of the house. “We call this Thingsville,” he said.

A mounted pike greeted us, as did a pile of Master Angler certificates. Antique lures were strung up in bundles, as well as framed, faded pictures of past glories. “Dad made these,” Scott said in one direction.

Monte copied him in another. “He also made these canes.”

“It keeps me out of the bars,” Dad said. “But I don’t make canes anymore. Can’t go fishing if you’re making canes.”

“He also mounted this pike,” Scott said.

“I wasn’t very good at it,” Dad said, but his boys knew different.

“He used to make all kinds of things,” Monte said. “He’d see someone at the lake one weekend and like their contraption, whether it was store-bought or not. Then he’d go home and make it.”

“These were my mother’s teeth,” Dad said, pointing to a set of teeth in the mouth of a fish. The group laughed.

“He made the tip-ups we used,” Monte said.

“Monte, we ought to go and get one

of his tip-ups,” said Scott.

“Yeah,” Monte replied, his eyes growing bigger.

“I-I’ll do it,” Dad said, walking outside while Monte and Scott went back to the table.

“Lots of memories in there,” Monte said. Faded artifacts there were, brightening each spot on the wall they filled.

“**W**hat do you think Monte?” said Scott, his muffled voice now hidden in the makeshift shanty.

“What do you think, Scott?” Monte replied, constantly jigging his bait in the hole at his feet. “If you don’t jig those tip-ups, that bait won’t move. Keep your bait moving. A lot of guys that ice-fish will put minnow poles out and never move them. We’re always raising and lowering.” A pause, then: “But this isn’t how we fish our tournaments. Very little sitting during those times.”

“Dad fished ice tournaments,” said Scott. “Back then there was very little

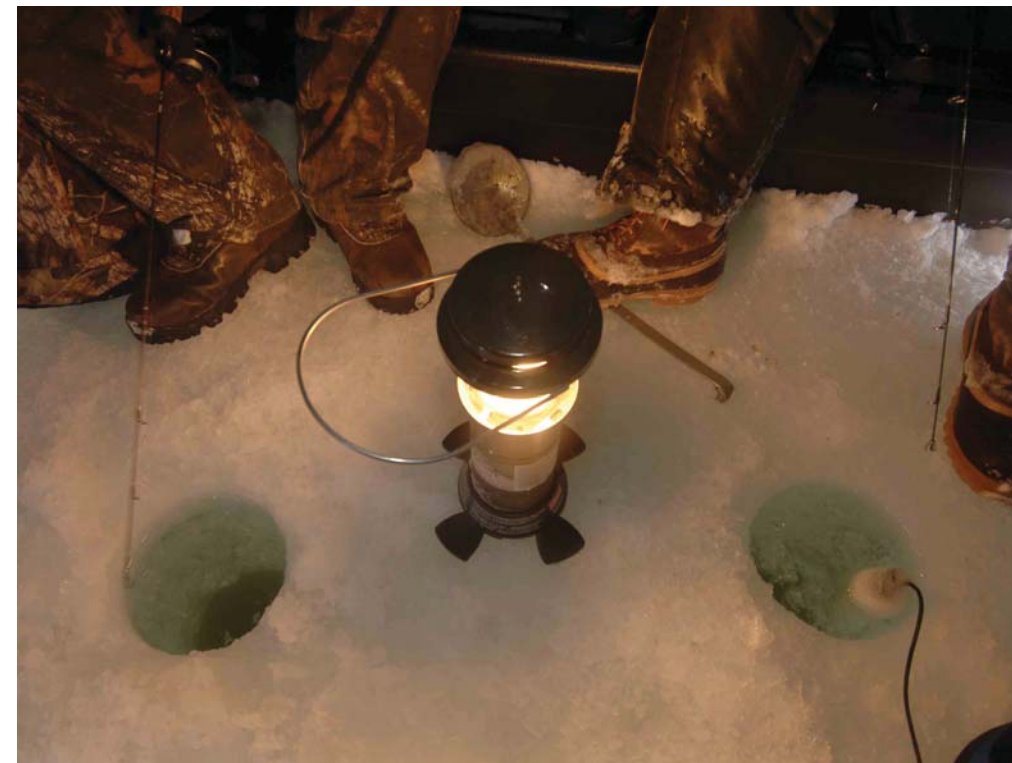
policing them, though. Guys would drop gunny sacks of fish down holes before the tournament started. But it was better by the time we were fishing. The organizers arrange them in two-man teams. One member of the team is given a five-minute head start, while the other can leave five minutes later from a 4-wheeler. Monte’s our runner.”

“It’s 0-degrees and I’m hardly wearing any clothes when I do that,” said Monte.

“He sprints across the lake, going toward his spot. When the first flag goes



Young Monte with a largemouth bass in “Thingsville.”



Inside an ice-fishing shanty at Calamus Reservoir.



One of Dad's homemade tip-ups.

on the ice, people around you have to give you a 20-yard cushion," said Scott.

"When they shoot that gun, you got guys in golf shoes, ice skates and track shoes. People are falling, sliding across the ice. I've seen minnow buckets fly through the air, bait rolling across the ice as I ran to my spot," said Monte. "Once you're where you want to fish, you have a rod in one hand, a stake in the other and you're claiming holes. One of the times we did this, I already had three fish on the ice by the time that Scott got there. Since we had pre-fished the area the day before, our holes were essentially still there. I put a boot through the hole that had glazed

muffled than usual, "Today, we forgot the GPS." A pause. "Think I should drill some more holes?"

"No, Scott, I think we're okay," Monte said.

The thought of adding another handful of holes to the multitude might sound absurd, yet neither of the brothers ever broke a smile. Why should they? No one had said anything funny.

Dad walked back into the house with two of his homemade tip-ups. "There's not much to them, but ..."

"These things are great," Scott said. "Can I see one, Dad?" Monte said.

over a bit and started fishing. Nowadays, though, those young guys beat me all over the lake. The tournament we won at Merritt, I wore some lighter boots because I had to run about a mile."

"We caught 60 crappies that day, and won the tournament by 10 pounds," said Scott. "We won about \$1,000 that weekend."

"We'll mark our areas with GPS so we know how to get back to them," said Monte.

Dad handed one over and took a seat. Monte began to demonstrate while Scott looked on and Dad buried his head back in the album. "That Monte, he sure was fast," Dad said.

"Yeah he was, Dad," said Scott again, turning back to Monte.

"Let me find a picture where those little farts are sitting on buckets," Dad said, searching for the one image that he could still see so clearly in his mind.

Monte finished his description of Dad's homemade contraptions, then the albums were slid aside but the conversations were not. Topics were continually thrown out between brothers: the best small-town locale to eat fish in Nebraska; the geographical differences when naming beers either draws or drafts, or naming deer a 7-pointer or a 4-by-3; raising kids in a country school versus a city school; or the difference between pinging, clear ice and unsafe black ice.

Monte finished by telling about the fish once described to him as the "the two-boot long bass" that he eventually caught, then warned the group never to take a long hike wearing cowboy boots. The group's conversations continually rolled, Monte and Scott trading off as Dad continued to sit, listening.

Does a father think: "Is this what I created?" in instances such as these? Is he secretly smiling? Or is he trying to add his own story to the collection? Trying to remember stories about the Dennis Sebeke, Ron Corneliuses, Don Kurtzers, Harold Kennedys, and Eddie Alberts of past years on the water, long-ago friends who are both described as "good fishermen" as well as those who have "passed on."

Their wrists were programmed to repeatedly jig that day, and their efforts pulled a few crappies from the water. They debated on more strategy, and told more stories. Before the end, both Scott and Monte were fishing right beside each other, still the only two anglers on a field of ice.

"A lot of time they'll come to your bait and just look at it. In March they'll nail it," said Scott.

"Yeah," said Monte.

"But you need to catch as many as you can then because they'll leave."

"Yeah."

"But they'll be back."



With an ice auger in the background, a small crappie is pulled from beneath the ice.

"Yeah."

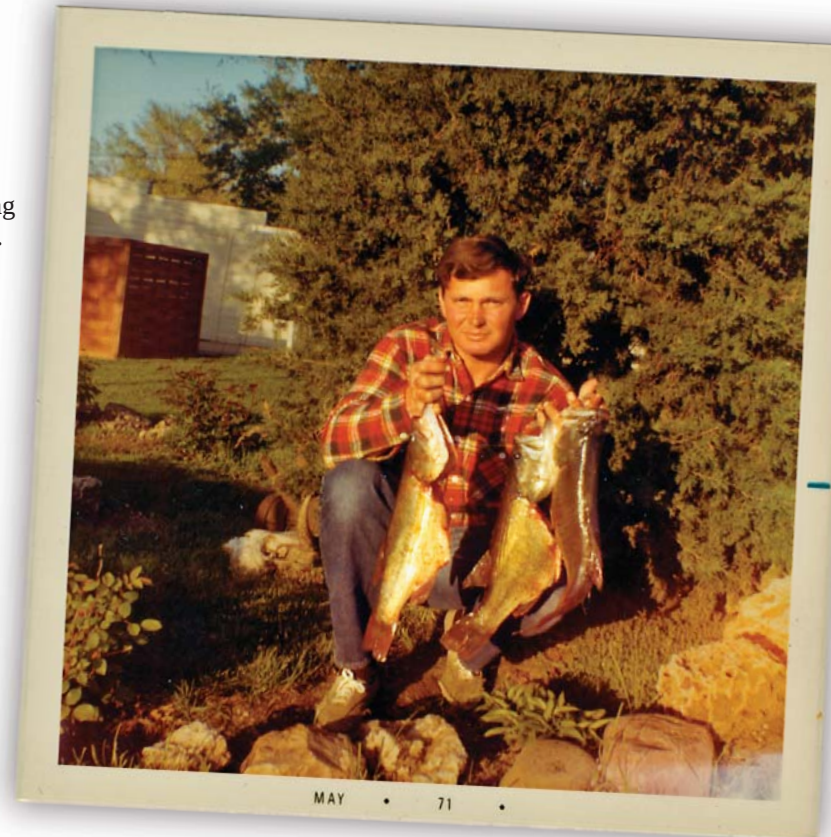
They never argued on the ice, and it wasn't because they had company – they just didn't fight. Not when they talked every night during the week about their ice-fishing plans, nor when they were on the ice four, six or eight straight weekends during a good winter. This was what they did, and would always do. "This was life, and life was good," was once written, and no simpler, or more defining, words could be used to describe this family of anglers. Those still on the ice, and those whose days were now numbered.

There was frequent talk of Dad that day. How could there be a conversation about fishing that didn't include him? Because when it was all said and done, Monte and Scott would know everything the other one knew, plus everything their father knew.

So in the end, did Dad really need to be there at all, or even remember

anything anymore? No, his work was done, had been for some time, and he had given everything he had to them. For his boys, for their entire lives, would never have to fish alone. He would be there with them, whether in body or in memory, ready to dig the next hole. ■

Dad holding a catch of largemouth bass, May 1971.



Scott (left) and Monte Mares have been fishing together since they could walk.

Potatis Korv

Recipes to make your own Swedish potato sausage.

By Rocky Hoffmann

My last name, Hoffmann, is about as Swedish as Martinez is Irish, but I'm certain there are a few Swensons who enjoy a crock of homemade sauerkraut and bratwurst as much as I enjoy a couple links of Potatis Korv.

Even as good as it tastes, finding an authentic Swedish potato sausage in the market is a rare discovery at best, except, of course, if you live in or visit one of Nebraska's several Swedish communities. Oakland claims the Swedish capitol of Nebraska, while Stromsburg, not to be outdone, is the Swede capitol of Nebraska. There is even a Swedeburg, which is not much more than a church and a farming community along U.S. Highway 77 that hasn't made the Nebraska road map for several years. Gothenburg is so Swedish that the high school football team is known as the Swedes, and their grocery market is (what else?) – Peterson's Market.

In the fall when the holidays approach, Peterson's meat department manager Patty Streweler is busy stuffing natural casings with a concoction of the timeworn Peterson recipe for Potatis Korv. Patty stuffs a lot of Swedish potato sausage from Thanksgiving to Christmas. At a market-demand price of more than \$4.50 per pound, she can't seem to make enough to keep the cooler stocked, and it's not just locals who stock up on Peterson's sausage. Patty ships potato sausage all over the country (308 537-2048), and she keeps the recipe under hat.

Not all the Swedish folks in the community, however, are buying Patty's sausage. Instead, many opt to make their own recipe. Sausage making is a heritage handed down from generation to generation, which is

often incorporated into fall family celebrations that have become holiday traditions.

Traditional recipes always call for



two types of meat – beef and pork. However, with hunting as popular as it is in the Gothenburg area and the abundance of deer and deer permits, venison is becoming the substitution of choice for the beef portion of the equation. More and more hunters statewide are turning to home sausage-making of all kinds, and potato sausage is an excellent candidate for the home grinder and stuffer.

The history of sausage making can be traced to dates well before the Swedes began tossing a few spuds into the mix. In fact, King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were making hard sausages, while Homer considered sausage a fairly convenient food on his ninth century B.C. Odyssey. Sausage is a derivative of the Latin word *salsicia*, which refers to anything salted, and if there has been one ingredient that has remained consistent with sausage recipes, it's been salt.

Salt not only provides an important boost over blandness, it also serves as a preservative – to some degree. Sausage makers, however, should always adhere to strict measures of

sanitation and depend totally on refrigeration for longevity. Swedish potato sausage in particular is highly perishable and, once thawed, must be utilized quickly and cooked thoroughly when prepared.

There are probably as many variations of Swedish potato sausage as there are Swedes, but a mix of beef, pork, potatoes and salt are the basic ingredients found in all recipes. Just across the river in neighboring Iowa, folks in Odebolt have been buying Swedish potato sausage from the Odebolt locker and the local market since 1962. The recipe comes from Leo Cooper, a long time Odebolt resident. Leo's recipe was very

traditional and very basic. To the beef, pork, potatoes and salt, Leo added onions and pepper, and instead of messing with the chore of peeling potatoes, he used canned Irish whole potatoes. In preparing this recipe, all the ingredients are mixed, leaving the potatoes whole, and then everything is run through the grinder together. Of course, measuring exact quantities of each ingredient is critical to the outcome of the sausage.

Leo Cooper's Odebolt Locker Swedish Sausage

6 pounds beef
5 pounds potatoes (No. 10 can Irish whole potatoes with liquid drained)
4 ½ pounds pork (not too lean)
2 large onions, chopped
2 ½ ounces of salt (or 5 tablespoons)
½ ounce black pepper (or 1 tablespoon)

A game warden's version of Swedish potato sausage comes from Roger Thompson, District IV supervisor in North Platte, whose hometown is Oakland ... remember,

the Swedish capitol of Nebraska. Roger, of course, uses venison for a beef substitute and introduces a few more ingredients to the mix. Because venison is so lean, the addition of dairy milk and water helps to provide a proper consistency to the sausage. He uses a ¾-inch grinder plate and grinds the meat, potatoes and onions. He then adds the other ingredients and mixes well. He either stuffs the sausage or packages it in bulk to be used as breakfast patties.

Swedish Game Warden Sausage

1 onion, chopped
1 tablespoon salt
1 ½ teaspoons allspice
1 cup non-fat dairy milk
½ cup water (or add more for consistency)
6 cups potatoes, peeled, pared and cut up
1½ pounds lean elk or deer
1 pound lean pork

To make sausage, the home butcher doesn't really need to be a home butcher. What is needed is a simple grinder (hand or electric) with an assortment of grinding plates of varying sizes, a basic sausage press and casings. Natural edible casings are traditional and may be obtained through most butcher shops. Synthetic edible casings are good substitutes and can also be found locally. Books and recipes that feature sausage making are available online, and there are some excellent mail-order sausage-supply houses. The most recognized butcher-supply house is a mail-order company called LEM. One other important ingredient for Swedish Game Warden Potato Sausage is a deer permit. ■

Doe Shooter

Support groups are forming now.

By Eric Fowler

Not long ago, I wondered if there should be a support group for people like me. Call it Doe Shooters Anonymous. We probably would've met around a campfire in some secluded woodlot.

"Hi, my name is Eric, and I shoot does."

"Hi Eric," the others would reply.

It was a small group, partly because for years most Nebraska hunters were only allowed to shoot bucks, and partly because that early management strategy, designed to build the herd, evolved into a social trend. No one wanted to shoot a doe.

I'm sure my younger brother, Mike, would've joined my little group after taking a doe on his first deer hunt, for which I happily served as his guide. My nephew, Sam, then just six years old, was thrilled when we returned to my sister Pam's home ... until he saw the deer: "Aw, it's just a doe," he said.

My brother-in-law, Tim, is a horn hunter and took me deer hunting for the first time when I was 16. His penchant for big deer rubbed off on me and, more recently, his son.

Tim and I have harvested a few trophies, but we've also taken quite a few young bucks, which Sammy likes to call "pencil horns." One year we made a long stalk on a herd of mulies. When a forkhorn and a doe stood up, I shot the buck. After I did, it hit me – why didn't I shoot the doe and let the buck grow up? I'd read about the Quality Deer Management craze that was sweeping the south – let the little ones walk, shoot some does to keep the herd in check and you will be rewarded with more trophy bucks.

My approach to the rifle season had been to hunt hard all week hoping to find a trophy, and at season's end I

would take any deer. But after the state's deer herd grew to the point that I was able to get two permits, my strategy changed. My first priority was to shoot a whitetail doe for the

freezer. My second permit was reserved for a trophy. If I didn't fill it, I didn't care.

These days, I'll usually shoot a doe or two every year. One of my favorite hunts each year is a two-day



muzzleloader doe hunt at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge. Go figure.

For some hunters, it's a trophy or nothing, and I have no problem with that. They are in it for recreation and the challenge. But I don't shoot pencil horns anymore, and I don't understand the hunters checking in deer at 9 a.m. on opening day with forkhorn or basket-rack bucks stacked like cordwood in the back of their truck and saying, "Man, we're just not seeing any big deer."

I wonder why? Could it be: (A) That young buck you shot three years ago didn't have a chance to grow up; (B) You didn't hunt long and hard enough; or (C) All of the above?

Some hunters justify their actions by saying, "If I don't shoot it, someone else will." I tell them that since they did, we'll never know.

Season Choice and bonus tags are making it easier for hunters to shoot does, and with whitetail numbers as they are in some parts of Nebraska, more doe shooters are needed. If hunters don't step up to the plate, they may someday be forced to shoot a doe before they shoot a buck, a strategy that has been deployed in other states.

So go shoot a doe. They taste the same as bucks. And I, for one, won't make fun of you. If someone does, you can make fun of them for shooting a pencil horn. ■

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Maskenthine Lake

This NRD area offers a variety of outdoor opportunities.

By Katie Berger

It may be hard to pronounce, but northeastern Nebraska's Maskenthine Lake Recreation Area is a familiar name among local outdoor enthusiasts.

The 100-acre reservoir was created in 1976 when the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD)

built a 1,500-foot earthen dam on Maskenthine Creek to provide flood control to the town of Stanton, 1½ miles to the south. Opened to the general public in 1979, Maskenthine was the first NRD reservoir in northeastern Nebraska to be made available for public fishing.

LENRD purchased an additional 160 acres ten years later to develop wildlife habitat and construct a sediment trap, and today the recreation area totals 740 acres.

Located about 10 miles east of Norfolk and three miles south of U.S. Highway 275, Maskenthine is nestled in a landscape of gentle hills, big farmhouses and horizons dotted with corn. As I pulled into the north entrance with a crunch of my tires on gravel, a large turkey greeted me with a silent stare and ruffle of feathers. He then turned around to peck the ground, probably knowing I was headed straight for the long, skinny lake in the heart of the recreation area.

Being native to the region, my family always referred to the lake as "Musk-uh-teen," yet our next door neighbor insisted on calling it "Musk-en-thyne." This always resulted in long arguments, but strangely enough, neither one of us was right. Ken Berney, assistant general manager of the LENRD office in

Norfolk, said the lake is named for one of the original homesteaders in the area, and "Mask-en-tyne" (rhyming with "mine") is probably the most accurate pronunciation.

Maskenthine is a favorite fishing spot in the region, often seen as a closer-to-home alternative to Lewis



Anglers fish from the bank of Maskenthine Lake near Stanton.

and Clark or the Fremont lakes. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission monitors fish populations at Maskenthine and stocks it annually with channel catfish and walleye, while bluegill, largemouth bass and northern pike are also present. Boating is allowed in most areas, but a 5-mph, no-wake rule is enforced to prevent shoreline erosion.

A few years ago, Maskenthine was dredged and deepened several feet in the northern section. Berney said severe storms in the '80s and '90s filled the lake's upper end with silt where Maskenthine Creek drains into it. A series of jetties were installed to create a winding, serpentine channel for the stream that prevents the buildup of sediment, and Berney said these jetties now provide a decent spot for bank fishing.

Although mainly a destination for

anglers, Maskenthine offers a variety of outdoor activities, both on and off the water. A 25-pad camping area with a showerhouse, electrical hookups and small swimming beach sit on the western shore, while a disc golf course and hiking trail sit farther back. A large map at the park's entrance indicates where hunting is permitted, with pheasant, waterfowl and deer being popular game. Maskenthine also hosts a number of area events, including fishing contests and a race in the state's "Pscowpath" Mountain Bike Series. "Most people we're happy to work with," said Berney.

While Maskenthine is dotted with mature cottonwoods at its shore, LENRD also

maintains a 20-acre arboretum on the eastern side of the lake. Created in 1976, the arboretum is planted with a variety of trees in a natural arrangement, and a display of native plants and grasses was added in 1988.

I'm not sure I'll ever learn to pronounce Maskenthine correctly, but I do know northeastern Nebraska would be a little less interesting without the lake's strange name and excellent recreation opportunities. ■



Located about 13 miles southeast of Norfolk, Maskenthine Lake offers fishing, camping, hiking and hunting.

Portraits from the Past



◀ This picture was taken in 1933. My dad, Dan Vaughan, is on the right. Maybe your readers could identify the other men in the photo. They were probably hunting in the Huntley area where my mom (Blanche Maret Vaughan) had relatives living. Even though I have lived in the Mid-Atlantic area my roots remain in good old Nebraska. Thanks for all of the wonderful articles. I always go to the photo section first to see if I know anyone from the past.
— Marlene (Mimi) Vaughan Minarik, Alexandria, Virginia



◀ Pictured is my brother, Bob Dush (left), and our cousin Mike (Al) Riskowski, after a hunt in December of 1960 on the farm north of Clarks. At the time Mike grew up in Omaha and coming out to the farm for hunting and fishing really excited him, as you can tell by the expression on his face.
— Joe Dush, Worms, Nebraska



▲ This picture was taken in August of 1964 at Willow Lake north of Brewster. You can see some of the cabins in the background that used to be there. It seemed like half of Burwell would be up there on the weekends. The fish we caught were mostly crappies, a few bass, perch and bluegills. The three guys in this picture are (from left to right) Sam Johnson, myself and Smokey Triplett.
— Dann Wagner, Burwell, Nebraska



▲ A good day in 1942 hunting pheasants in the St. Edward area. Notice that there were no hens and no dogs. The three in the photo are (from left to right) my two cousins, Cliff Lisko and Hank Boruch, and myself.
— Frank Lisko, Osceola, Nebraska



◀ This photo was taken by my uncle, Jack Pesek. I am the little girl (Valerie Nolda) and my brother, Steve Nolda, is next to me. Our cousin, Brad Pesek, is on the right. The photo was taken near Ravenna, circa 1959. I suppose my cousin shot the rabbit but I don't think my brother and I shot the quail. The three of us love reminiscing about our childhood days when Brad would come up from Lincoln. These little hunters are now 56, 57 and 56 years old. My brother and I live in Ravenna and Brad lives in Everett, Washington. Jack Pesek, wrestler and football player for the Cornhuskers in 1946 and 1947, died in 1990.
— Valerie Vierk, Ravenna, Nebraska

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, NEBRASKALand Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 1970. We will give priority to unusual photos or activities. When possible, please include a story about the photograph and identify the people, places and approximate date it was taken. Photos will be returned.

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