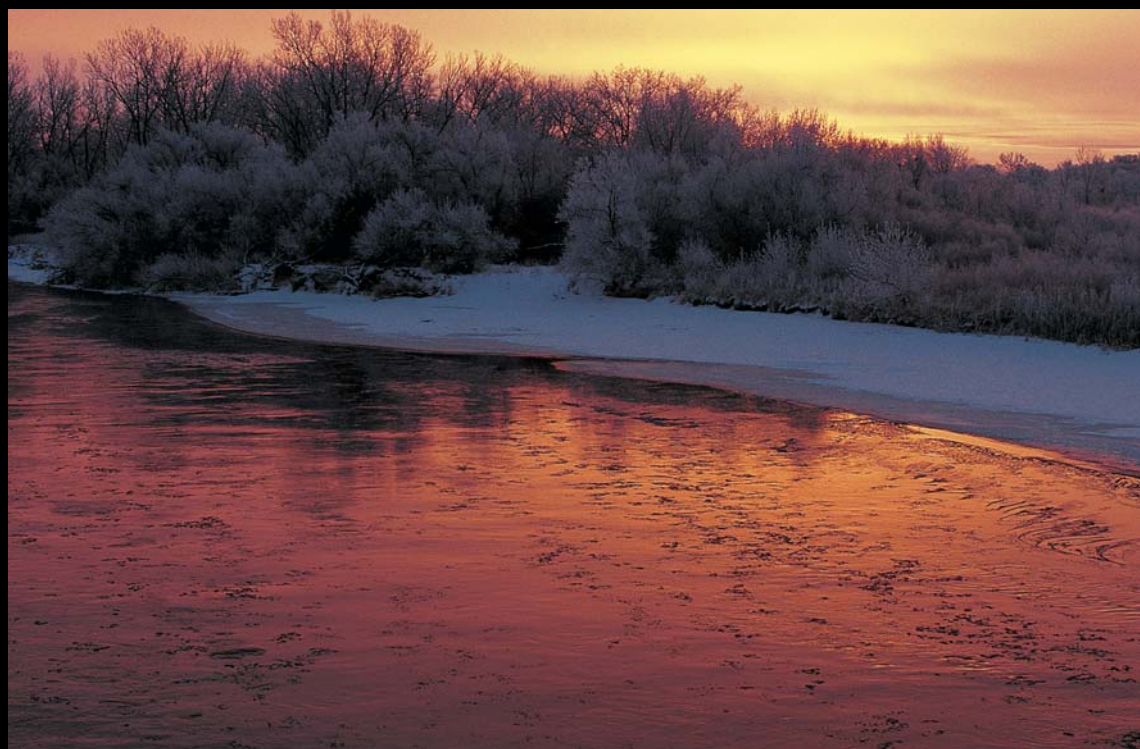




At sunrise, slush ice floats down the North Platte River near Hershey in Lincoln County.
Photo by Rocky Hoffmann.



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NEBRASKAland

January-February 2008

Shooting With a Blind Eye



- PLUS**
- ULTRALIGHT
WINTER CAMPING
 - TALKIN' COON
 - HOW TO MISS A DEER
 - VANISHING BIRCHES
 - BIGHORN CATCH & RELEASE



NEBRASKAland

Volume 86, Number 1, January-February 2008

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There aren't as many people running coonhounds now as there were when Jerry Spech was young. "You got to be silly," said Spech, who still enjoys turning his dogs out and following them through the woods at night with a light on his head.

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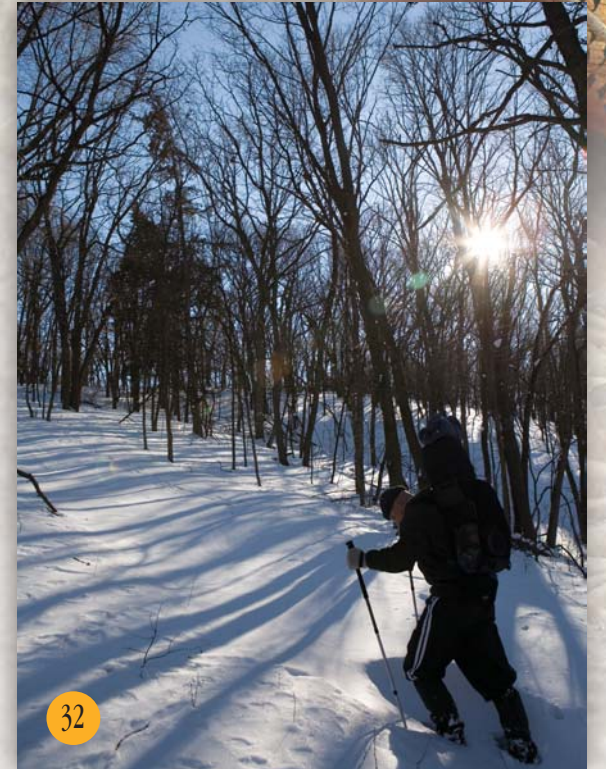
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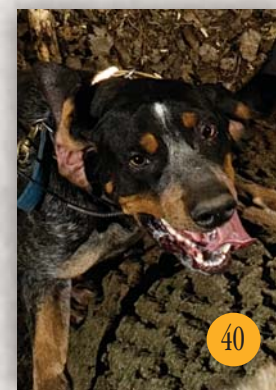
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Portraits from the Past 50

Cover: Blake Steinke, son of photographer Doug Steinke of Shelton, carries Canada goose decoys during a hunting trip near the Platte River. See story beginning on page 10. Photo by Doug Steinke. **Opposite:** Resembling an aerial photograph, a raccoon track leaves landscape-like indentions in the sand at Schilling Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Jeff Kurrus.



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Comment

Misidentified Rock

I did my geology masters of science fieldwork in Boyd and northern Holt counties in 1953. I made one auto trip east to west across Keya Paha County in July that year from Butte to Valentine and back. It was terribly hot, and the road was cow-trail sand. I could not stop or the car would boil. I did not see any glacial deposits in western Boyd County for sure and I am not aware of glacial moraine or till in Keya Paha, so I wonder about the caption for the photo on the cover of the July issue and on page 17 identifying the boulders in northern Keya Paha County as glacial in origin. The area has fairly widespread occurrences of what appears to be light-colored outcropping on or around hilltops in the area near Mills.

Gerald V. Mendenhall, Geologist
Midland, Texas

This second e-mail was received from Mr. Mendenhall after examining a sample of the rock shown in the photos. We appreciate his help in correctly identifying these boulders:

The sample is definitely limestone and from all appearances is an Ash Hollow member of the Ogallala formation of the Pliocene Age (5.3 to 1.8 million years before present). As for the boulders being glacial, there is very little likelihood of their being transported by glacial action. It is almost certain that no major glaciation extended west of the Missouri River Valley. The boulders in the photo are essentially in their place of origin. In Boyd County there is glacial till in the bluffs west of the Missouri River, but the till does not extend onto the tableland west of the breaks.

All of this geologic history makes

no difference in the beauty of the landscape and photography in a bit of Nebraska preserved off the beaten track.

Goldeneyes Revisited

I wanted to thank you for the good article on goldeneyes ("Winter Whistlers" December 2007 *NEBRASKAland*). While cleaning my garage last month I came across one of the wooden goldeneye decoys I carved in high school. Looking at the decoy, I wondered if anyone was ever crazy enough to make whistler decoys just to hunt over them. Your article confirmed the fact that maybe I am not all that crazy or at least there are others like me out there.

The spot I hunted was one of those areas that seemed magical – a channel on the Platte that flowed into a large sandpit. The small area held about every kind of puddle duck and diver on it, including large numbers of goldeneyes late in the year. There was usually a flock of Canadas and a covey or two of quail. I even shot a pair of woodcock over my springer there. You never knew what you would come home with. I could reminisce all day about this, but I must return to reality. Thanks again for the confirmation about not being too crazy.

Matt Houska
Omaha, Nebraska

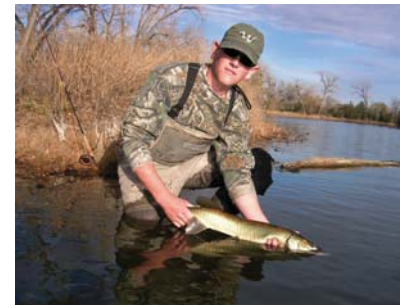
Petrified Troll?

Thanks for a great magazine. I've subscribed off and on over the years, especially when I've lived away from Nebraska, as I do now. The October issue reminded me of the black squirrels that used to venture out from the southern end of Hanscom Park, into my South Omaha neighborhood. I saw them fairly regularly over the years. I heard once that they came from the colony across the river in Council Bluffs.

As for the interesting rock formation on November's back cover – are you sure it's not a



petrified troll, tricked into exposing itself to the dawn by some intrepid hobbit? That's what I thought of immediately, recalling such an incident in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. If not that, then I imagine it was a bunch of kids looking for fossils who eventually had other ideas. Blessings on your work.
John F. Montag
St. Louis, Missouri



Seth Byler shows off his muskie.

Muskie Man

I thought I'd share these pictures of a muskie I caught on my fly rod. I am a 17-year-old avid fly-fisherman from Montana. My uncle, Daryl Bauer, put me on this muskie last November at Fremont State Recreation Area. I put my fly, a size 1/0 yellow bunny strip, right on a submerged log and this muskie came out and hammered it. Although I only hooked one muskie in four days of fishing, I had a great time with my uncle and cousin. What a blast! Thanks for the memories.

Seth Byler
Molt, Montana

Send your comments to:
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Letters may be condensed and edited for clarity. Photographs are welcome and will be returned.

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PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Nebraska deer hunters harvested a record number of deer during the 2007 November firearm season, but more antlerless deer need to be harvested in many parts of the state in order to control the population.

November Deer Harvest Sets New Record

Hunters harvested a record number of deer in Nebraska during the November firearm season, according to a preliminary report by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

With all but one check station reporting, 48,505 deer were killed, compared to 48,170 in 2006. Harvest numbers could have been even higher – unusually warm weather during the season probably reduced some hunters' success levels, since deer and hunters move less on warmer days.

There were 4,610 deer killed in the Panhandle during this year's firearm season, compared to 5,194 in 2006 after the number of bonus antlerless-only tags was reduced by 4,800. The north-central region saw 8,212 deer killed, compared to 7,899 last year. There were an additional 5,000 bonus antlerless-only and 700 either-sex tags available in the northeast, where 10,823 deer were harvested, compared to 9,896 in 2006. The southwest saw 5,038 deer harvested, compared to 5,383 last year, and 8,492 taken in the south-central region, compared to 8,557 in 2006. In the southeast, 11,330 deer

were taken, compared to 11,241 last year after 600 either-sex permits were added.

Despite the record success in November, state biologists are hoping hunters take even more deer during the late firearm deer season.

"Hunters are encouraged to take antlerless deer during the January late seasons to help control the deer herd," said Kit Hams, the Commission's big game program manager.

The January antlerless deer season runs Jan. 1-15, 2008. Season Choice Area (SCA) permits are still available for many areas of the state and allow hunters to harvest antlerless deer with a firearm during the January season. Many of these permits also include a bonus antlerless tag, and nonresidents returning to the state for the holidays can buy SCA antlerless permits for \$55.

For more information, or to purchase a permit, go to www.OutdoorNebraska.org. Permits may also be purchased at Commission permitting offices at Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, Alliance, Bassett, Chadron State Park (SP), Fort Robinson SP, Niobrara SP, Kearney, Norfolk, North Platte, Omaha, Lincoln and Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area.

Great Backyard Bird Count

The 11th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will occur February 15-18, 2008. Sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this outdoor family event asks anyone to count birds wherever they are and enter their tallies online at www.birdcount.org.

These reports create a picture of where birds are across the continent and contribute valuable information for science and conservation. Past count results already show how the numbers of some bird species have changed in recent years, such as a decline in northern pintails and an increase in hooded mergansers, consistent with trends from the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey.

"People who take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count see the results of their efforts in the news and in bird conservation work taking place across the country," said Audubon Education Vice President Judy Braus. "Whether the counts occur at home, at schools or at nature centers, they're more than engaging and educational science activities for young people and adults, they're a way to contribute to the conservation of birds and habitat nationwide."

In 2007, GBBC participants made history, breaking records for the number of birds reported, and the number of checklists. Participants sent in 81,203 checklists tallying 11,082,387 birds and 613 species. A web site dedicated to the GBBC, complete with a gallery of photographs taken by birdwatchers, can be found at www.birdsource.org/gbbc/gallery/2007.

Valentine's Day Special

Eugene T. Mahoney SP is offering a special Valentine's Day package at the park. The package deal is available February 10-14 and includes one night's lodging, a special meal for two, and a complimentary gift package. The price varies based



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on the unit chosen. For more information or to make a reservation, call the park at (402) 944-2523.

Nebraska's Largest Wildlife Training Seminar

Pheasants Forever (PF) announces the state's largest wildlife training seminar will be held in Grand Island on Saturday, February 2, 2008, as part of PF's State Habitat Meeting. Topics at the seminar will focus on many aspects of increasing and improving wildlife habitat in Nebraska.

"Every hunter, landowner, or person interested in increasing wildlife in the state should consider attending the State Habitat Meeting," said Pete Berthelsen, PF's Senior Field Coordinator for Nebraska. "It's an incredibly knowledgeable lineup of Nebraska's wildlife experts all together in one stop."

All sessions are open to the public

for a full-day ticket price of \$40 (includes lunch and refreshments, \$30 if registered by 1-31-08). Held at the Midtown Holiday Inn, the seminars will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and topics include the following: The future of CRP, Quail Management 101, 201 and 301 classes, wildlife management and programs for western Nebraska, CRP Mid-contract Management, the use of prescribed burning on the landscape, patch burn/patch grazing management, a summary of PF and Quail Forever accomplishments in Nebraska, and many others.

The event will also feature a landowner help desk, which will allow landowners from across the state the opportunity to receive an aerial photo of their property and consult with a wildlife biologist about their habitat and conservation program options.

For more information or to register for the event, please visit

www.NebraskaPF.com or call the PF State Office at 308-754-5339. Registration to attend the State Habitat Meeting is limited to the first 400 people registered due to space limitations so get your tickets now.

Nebraska Outdoors Radio Show

Nebraska Outdoors is a weekly call-in talk show that airs every Saturday morning from 7-8 a.m. on ESPN 1480 AM. The show allows outdoor listeners in Lincoln, York, Hastings, Grand Island, Kearney and beyond the chance to call in with questions about hunting, fishing, shooting and outdoor Nebraska-related topics with KFOR's Tim Barrett and the Commission's Jeff Rawlinson, Ralph Wall and Aaron Hershberger.

The number to call to the show is (402) 466-ESPN (3776). You can also link to ESPN1480.com for the streaming online feed of Nebraska Outdoors, which is a partnership between the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Three Eagles Communication.

Information Sought in Eagle Killing

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are encouraging citizens to notify Nebraska Wildlife Crimestoppers (NWC) with any information they have about the Nov. 12 killing of a bald eagle five miles southeast of St. Paul in Howard County, according to Wes Loos, assistant administrator of the Commission's Law Enforcement Division.

If you have knowledge of this or any other game law violation, you are encouraged to call the NWC toll-free hotline, 1-800-742-7627. Persons reporting a violation are not required to give their name or appear in court, but they may be eligible for a cash reward. ■

Recruitment Study Enters Second Year

Biologists looking for information to help walleye and white bass populations.

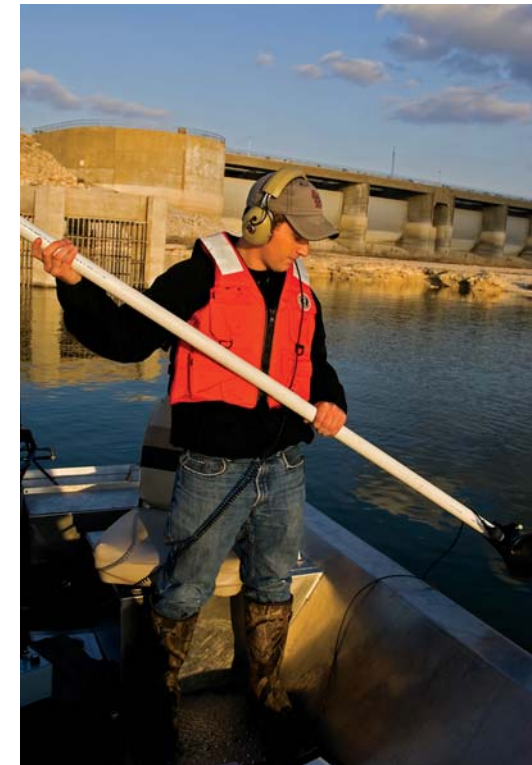
By Rocky Hoffmann

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and researchers from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UN-L) are entering their second year of a study looking at the recruitment of walleye and white bass in five southwestern Nebraska irrigation reservoirs – Enders, Medicine Creek, Red Willow, Swanson and Harlan County. The five-year project is under the direction of Kevin Pope of UN-L and Keith Koupal of the Commission.

All five reservoirs being studied were created for flood control and irrigation, but they also provide important white bass and walleye fisheries for anglers. Because these reservoirs are severely drawn down annually for irrigation purposes, researchers believe that a "recruitment bottleneck" is affecting white bass and walleye there. In order to maintain a walleye fishery in southwestern reservoirs, annual stockings are currently necessary because there is very little natural reproduction and very poor development in the young walleye that are produced. And although white bass reproduction and recruitment occur naturally in these reservoirs, year classes of white bass are often weak or missing.

Walleye and white bass recruitment is not a new problem, but the specific factors that influence recruitment in these reservoirs are not fully understood. This five-year cooperative study is designed to hopefully discover some of the problems involved.

"The project objectives are to document the period of the recruitment bottleneck, while developing a model of population



UN-L graduate student Dustin Martin conducts telemetry for a five-year study of walleye and white bass populations at Enders Reservoir.

dynamics for both species," said Pope. "Researches have already begun to discover and document the spawning habitat of walleye and white bass in the reservoirs. Objectives also will include a prey study of larval and juvenile walleye and white bass during each project year."

"This information is vital to our understanding of walleye and white bass population dynamics in irrigation reservoir systems," said Koupal. "The Commission invests an enormous amount of time, resources and money trying to manage the variable recruitment of walleye and white bass in the southwestern Nebraska irrigation reservoirs."

Both researchers believe that information gained from this study will help improve management activities for walleye and white bass

in irrigation reservoirs not only in Nebraska but throughout the Great Plains as well.

"The study we are conducting will provide an in-depth analysis of recruitment variability. Further, little is known about the ecology of white bass in reservoirs, and any information gained on white bass ecology from this study will be an important contribution to the general knowledge of white bass," said Koupal.

One of the unique elements of the study consists of using telemetry to track adult white bass and walleye prior to and during their spawning seasons. During the past two falls, Pope and Commission fisheries biologists collected white bass and walleye from Red Willow and Enders reservoirs and Pope surgically implanted transmitters that resemble AAA batteries into their abdominal cavities. This

allows researchers to track individual fish during their breeding season and determine the preferred spawning habitat of walleye and white bass in irrigation reservoirs. The transmitters have a nine-month expected lifespan, so the fish have to be collected before each breeding season.

Koupal feels that several factors likely influence the recruitment of white bass and walleye in these large irrigation reservoirs, primarily wind and other weather phenomena, recruitment of gizzard shad, water temperature and excessive long- and short-term water-level fluctuations. Researchers hope this study will help pinpoint some of the recruitment problems in irrigation reservoirs and lead to solutions that will improve these valuable fisheries. ■

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To learn more about the Foundation, or how your tax-deductible contribution can help this mission continue, please visit our website.

www.NebraskaGameAndParksFoundation.org

Shooting With a Blind Eye

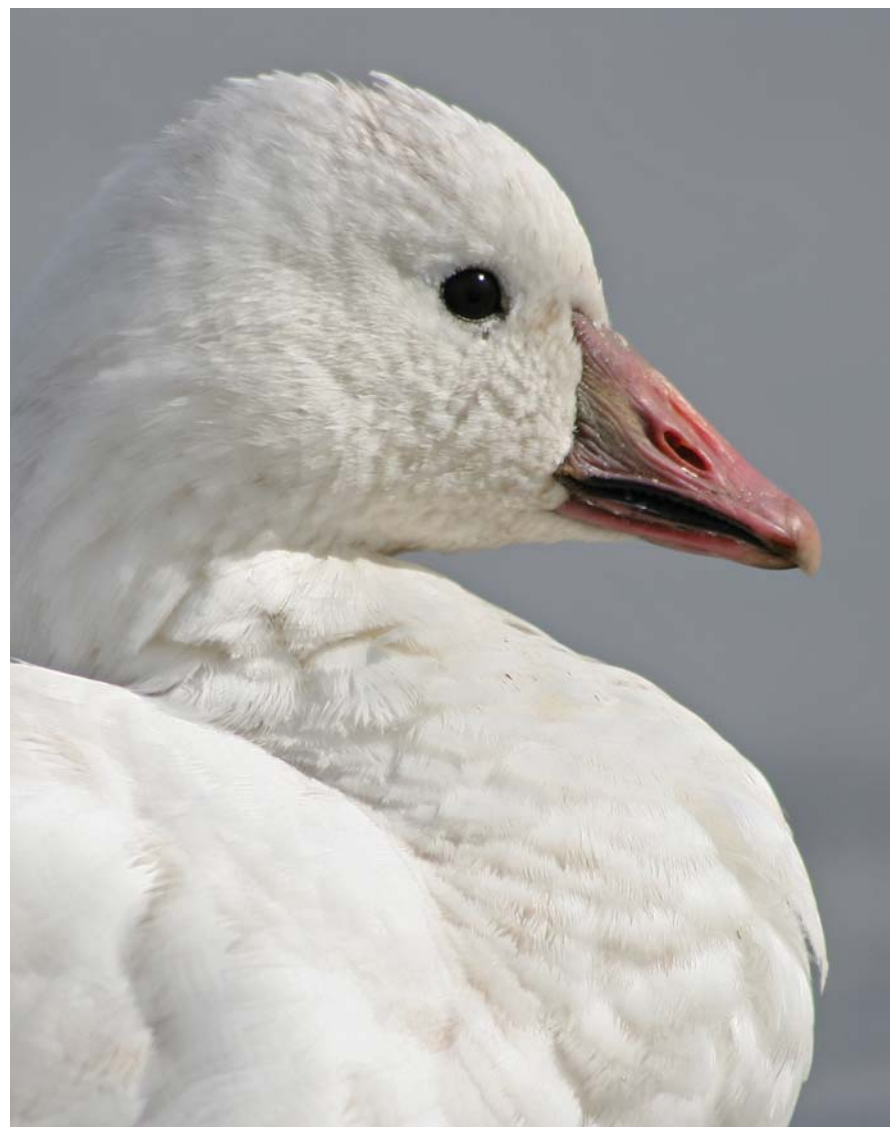
Photos by Doug Steinke



It is difficult to believe that Doug Steinke of Shelton became serious about wildlife photography only three years ago. His tack-sharp, frame-filling images of ducks and geese in flight challenge and surpass photographs taken by many long-in-the-tooth professionals.



WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE.



OPPOSITE: A YELLOW LAB PUP INVESTIGATES DECOYS AND A ROSS'S GOOSE PORTRAIT. ABOVE: A SANDHILL CRANE INSPECTS CANADA GOOSE DECOYS. BELOW: A FOGGY PLATTE RIVER MORNING.

While Steinke's photography experience is recent, his love of waterfowl spans nearly all of his 39 years. Steinke grew up in Holdrege, the heart of the Rainwater Basin, where he discovered his love for waterfowl. That, and about 60 days spent each year in a blind on the Platte River, explains his remarkable waterfowl images.





OPPOSITE: BLAKE, ONE OF STEINKE'S THREE SONS, HELPS MOVE DECOYS. ABOVE: A DRAKE MALLARD'S ICE-STORM RETREAT. BELOW: A DRAKE PINTAIL IN NUPTIAL PLUMAGE.

Some of Steinke's photos are taken while hunting, but he also makes solo trips to his blind just for waterfowl photography. "You can go out there every day for a week," he said, "and you might get one good day for photos." Many of his photos are taken while sitting outside of his blind dressed in camouflage. A shotgunner by nature, he seldom uses a tripod.



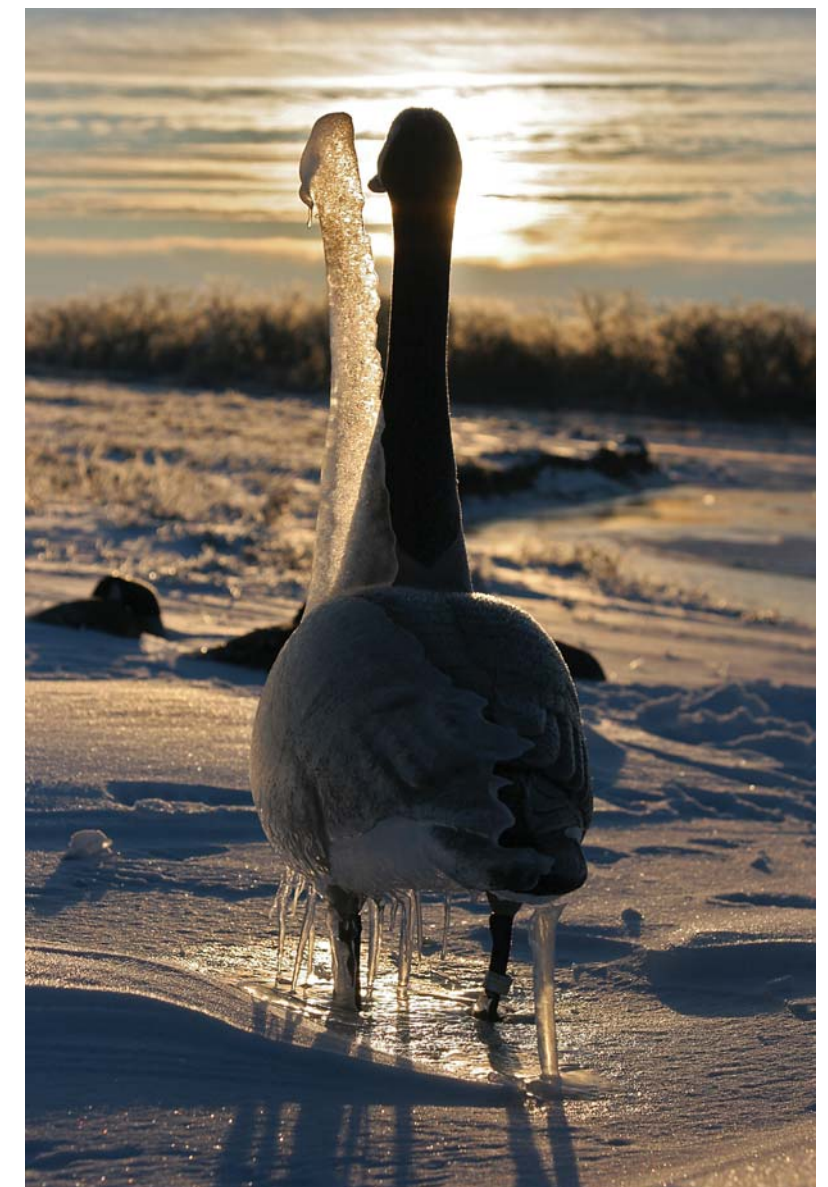


ABOVE: CANADA GEESE. BELOW: BLUE-PHASE SNOW GEESE. OPPOSITE: AFTER THE ICE-STORM MELTDOWN.



Most of Steinke's photos were taken with a Canon EOS 20D digital single lens reflex camera, but he recently upgraded to a Canon EOS 40D. He uses three lenses for nearly all of his wildlife photography: a 24-105 zoom, 70-200 zoom and a 100-400 zoom.

Steinke said he has matured as a waterfowler to the point it doesn't matter whether he shoots a shotgun or camera once he has ducks or geese hanging over the decoys. "When you are young," he said, "you want to shoot as much as you can. I think every hunter goes through that phase. I remember an older hunter telling me years ago that eventually I would be satisfied just to be there. I didn't believe him then." Where Steinke hunts, who he hunts with, and luring birds close with decoys and convincing calling is what the hunt is all about. ■



How To Miss A Deer

By Eric Fowler
Photos by Jamie Vasa

I love chasing deer in the Sandhills. Maybe it's the Cro-Magnon man in me, but there's just something magical about sneaking up on a wild creature and taking it home to the freezer. To me, spot-and-stalk hunting is true hunting, and a lot more fun than sitting in a tree getting cold feet and hoping a whitetail walks within gun or bow range.

A few years ago, while on a hunt north of Arthur, I discovered a great way to get more out of my muzzleloader permit and extend the season: just miss the deer. I call it catch-and-release hunting, and I'm sure the concept will soon be as big as it has become for largemouth bass fishing.

If you don't already know how to miss a deer, you're a liar ... er, uh ... you can probably figure it out on your own. But for you real liars ... excuse me ... crack shots who have no experience in this realm, I'll provide the details on how I missed a deer I snuck within smokepole range of one weekend. I even had Jamie Vasa, a longtime friend and professional photographer, document the fun.

You might have to modify these steps to fit your own hunting situation, but rest assured, they can be applied to a tree stand whitetail hunt as easily as I applied it to this spot-and-stalk mule deer hunt.



- 1** In the first hour of your hunt, crawl to within 50 yards or so of a pair of bedded mulie does, using the wind to keep the deer from smelling you and a soapweed to keep them from seeing you. Slide around the soapweed, take aim and wait for the deer to stand. If they don't right away, whistle and wave your hands and they soon will.

- 2** Repeatedly lift your head from your gun sights to get a better view of the deer as you wait for one to turn and present a broadside shot.



- 3** When the deer finally turns, pull the trigger. But make sure you do so when your head is several inches above the gunstock instead of snug against it. This step is important, because if you use proper shooting form, you might actually hit the deer and end your hunt.

- 4** Watch in awe as the bullet causes sand to explode on the hillside behind the deer after sailing several feet over its back.



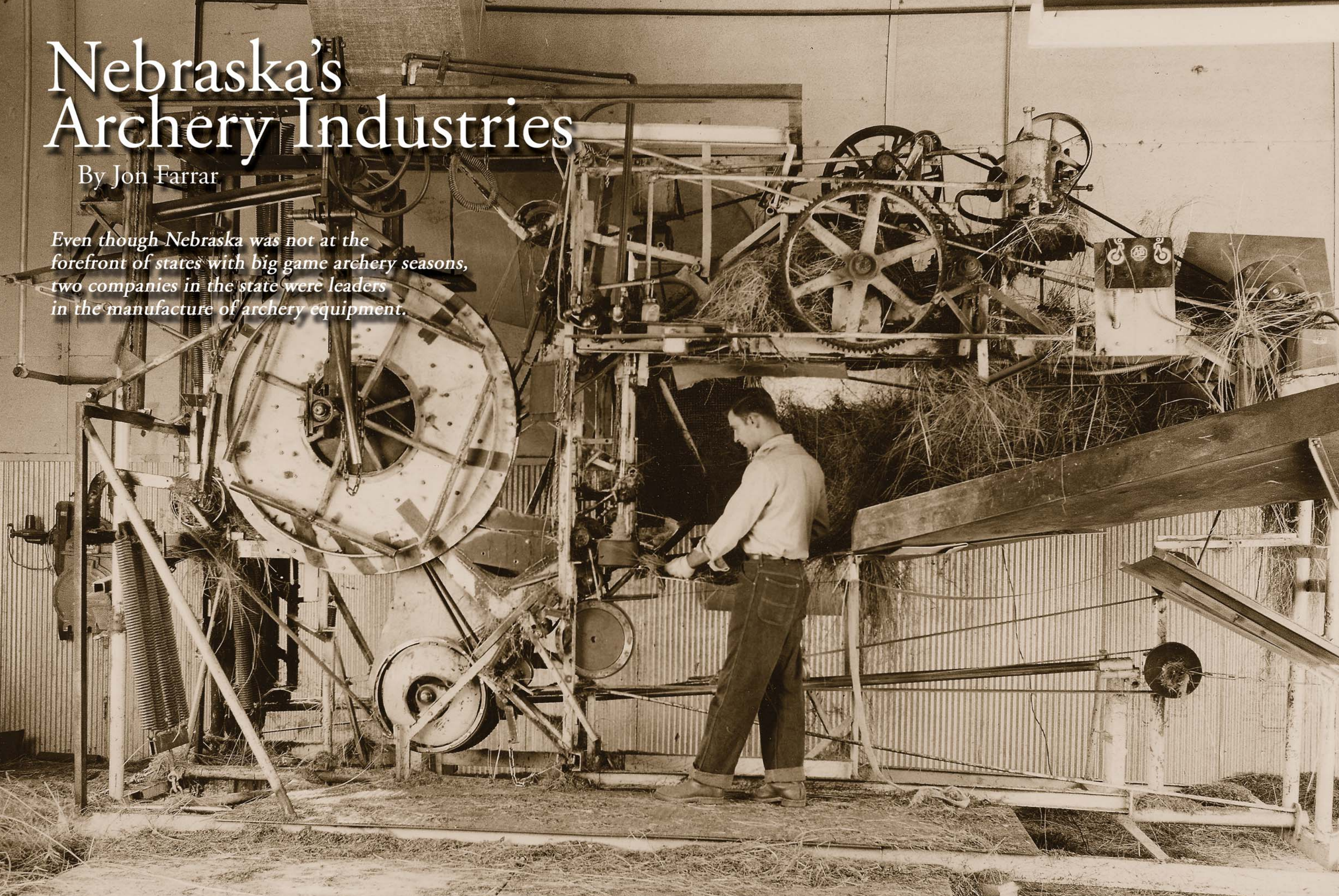
- 5** Quickly reload in case the deer stop and give you another chance to miss. If they don't, you'll still be ready to repeat the process as soon as you find some more deer. Repeat as often as you'd like, unless, of course, you have hungry children to feed at home.



Nebraska's Archery Industries

By Jon Farrar

Even though Nebraska was not at the forefront of states with big game archery seasons, two companies in the state were leaders in the manufacture of archery equipment.





C.A. “Chuck” Saunders made the first archery target-making machine (preceding pages) from parts he salvaged from other machines. By 1963, Saunders Archery in Columbus was manufacturing 70 percent of the targets used by U.S. archers.

Although Nebraska did not have an archery season for deer until 1955, years later than many states, two Nebraska manufacturers have played critical roles in the archery industry – Saunders Archery in Columbus and Cornhusker Archery in Bassett. Their roles in the development of equipment paralleled the emergence of bowhunting and target archery as the widely embraced outdoor sports they are today.

Saunders Archery

Nebraska’s largest volume, longest operating archery equipment manufacturing company had its humble beginning in a Chicago basement. In the 1930s, C.A. “Chuck” Saunders was employed as an electrician and machinist. In his spare time he fashioned bows and arrows. Saunders was dissatisfied with arrow-stopping targets

of the time made of green rye straw, and was convinced he could make one that was more durable. He also believed he could make them with a machine rather than by hand, as targets were made at that time. In 1940, after sketching out a design on the back of an envelope, Saunders built the world’s first archery target-making machine from parts of other machines. Flush with optimism, Chuck and his wife, Phyllis, moved their mat-making operation to the family farm near Manilla, Iowa, in 1942 to be near a supply of rye straw.

Ben Pearson Archery’s ad for machine-wound targets appeared in *Ye Sylvan Archer*, the archery magazine of the day, one month before Saunders’s ad appeared. Pearson was the world’s largest manufacturer of archery tackle at the time. The machines used by Pearson and Saunders were different in design and both were patented, but Saunders found his little family company up against the industry Goliath. Both

were using rye straw to make their mats, but Saunders was not satisfied with their durability and cast about for alternatives. He found it in soggy marsh lands along the Missouri River, a native grass resistant to rot and rodents, one that could absorb more arrows – prairie cordgrass.

“Pearson switched to Johnson grass, which wasn’t very tough,” Saunders wrote in a short history of his company. “In a few years they got out of the

business, and for 35 years we didn’t have a serious competitor.”

Lacking funds for advertising, Saunders let his cordgrass mats sell themselves. “I would just fill an order for rye straw mats with Indian cord grass mats,” he wrote. “A short note was typed on the invoice that we were temporarily out of rye straw and were substituting the more expensive Indian cord grass mats at the same price. It worked. After they tried the Indian

Cord Grass Mat, they could immediately see the advantage.”

Saunders’ father and Phyllis made and marketed mats while Chuck served two years in World War II. When he returned from the army, Chuck resumed making archery mats and, as always, searched for a better way to make a better product. One problem continued to plague Saunders – an unreliable supply of cordgrass along the Missouri River. Some years the

meadows were too wet to harvest, or even under water, and were 90 to 150 miles from Manilla.

So in 1949, Saunders moved his young company to Columbus, Nebraska, where there was an abundant supply of cordgrass in wet meadows along the Platte and Loup rivers and their tributaries. Saunders modified or invented equipment to harvest the grass, including a “marsh-buggy” tractor and special mowing equipment.



Saunders invented or modified equipment to harvest prairie cordgrass from wetlands near Columbus for the manufacture of target mats.

The grass was cut and twisted into a loose rope, then allowed to age and dry to the proper moisture content. Then the grass rope was fed through a Rube Goldberg sort of machine of Saunders design and construction, and under pressure wound into a circular target. At this point the mats were transported to the factory, where they were cured, stitched and the outside of the mat bound with burlap tape. After a few years Saunders began sealing the entire target in burlap. He developed more durable target cores by folding the grass back and forth so the fibers ran parallel to the arrow penetration, rather than spiral wound like the outer rings of the mat, and he marketed target core replacements.

In 1952, Saunders Archery moved out of a rental building into its new, larger factory, and continued to expand its product line, including Wrist Rockets, high-tech slingshots. Saunders had a knack of identifying the accessories archers needed, then designing and manufacturing them, typically jerryrigging the needed machinery from junkyard parts such as bicycle wheels and corn picker clutches.

In the early 1950s, most archers made their own target faces, do-it-yourself bull’s-eye creations with uneven circles, targets not acceptable for archery competition. By the late-1950s,

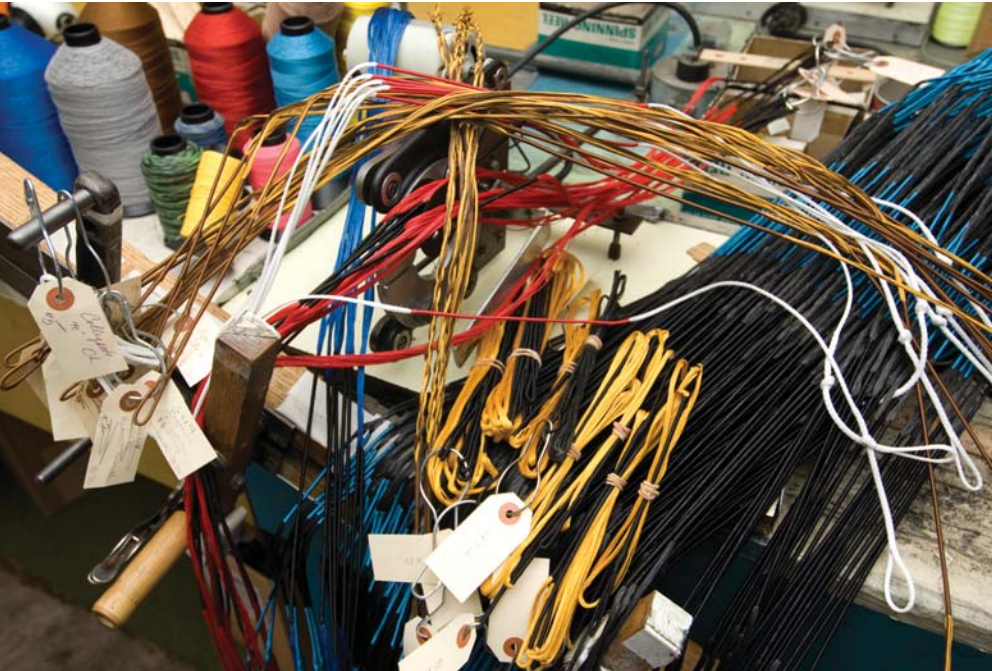
Saunders target faces were familiar sights at all national archery tournaments. The company produced 52 different target faces, each available in several types of material – paper, oilcloth, cardboard and a “toughenized” cover made of a meshwork of nylon threads between two sheets of heavy paper. By 1963, Saunders Archery was manufacturing 70 percent of the targets used by archers in the U.S. By the 1980s, it was selling target faces of game animals as well as the traditional target bull’s-eye. The company never manufactured the three-dimensional game animal targets popular today. Saunders also marketed several designs of target stands. Saunders equipment had a reputation of being well designed and expertly constructed.

While target mats were the company’s core product, Saunders was constantly adding archery accessories to its catalog. The “Bow Bird” was a cardboard disc target with whirling wings that could be launched into the air by hand or machine. By the 1960s, Saunders reels were probably on more carp-shooters’ bows than any other brand. During that same decade, Chuck invested a great deal of time and money developing and marketing indoor archery ranges with automated lanes suggestive of a bowling alley. That venture was abandoned after

several years.

By the mid-1980s, 55 patents were registered to the Saunders family. Saunders Archery products filled many catalog pages, and included bow strings, bow stringers, string silencers, nocking points, arm guards, shooting gloves and tabs, an array of target and hunting arrow points, arrow rests, bow stabilizers, target and hunting sights, bow quivers, arrow holders, camo bow covers, and camo face and hand cream. An advertising tag line for Saunders summarized the company’s product line: “Everything for the archer but the bow and arrow.”

Chuck Saunders was a towering figure in the archery industry and was instrumental in forming the Archery Manufacturers Organization (AMO), which led to the standardization of equipment such as bowstring lengths. In 1986, he was inducted into the Archery Hall of Fame. From the beginning, Saunders Archery was literally a family-run business, with Phyllis and three sons, Eugene, Tom and Charles, integral parts of the company. Chuck Saunders died in 1995. Saunders Archery is still located in Columbus. For information or a catalog: call 1-800-228-1408, write Saunders Archery, PO Box 1707, 1874 14th Ave., Columbus, NE 68602-1707, or go to www.sausa.com.



During Cornhusker Archery’s early years, and before nationwide standards were imposed, it manufactured 108 different bowstrings in its Bassett factory.

Cornhusker Archery

Cornhusker Archery was an internationally important, but little-known, Nebraska archery equipment manufacturer. Dick Mauch, a Bassett native whose name pops up again and again in the history of all aspects of the archery industry and bowhunting, was the key figure in forming the company.

During the 1960s, Mauch was a shareholder and field representative for Bear Archery, which was growing by leaps and bounds at the time but was dependent on several small bowstring manufacturers who could not keep pace with the sale of Bear bows. Further compounding that problem was the lack of industry-wide standards for bowstring length, stretch or material. That would not change until the AMO appointed Mauch, Earl Hoyt and Charles Saunders to write the first U.S. standards for archery equipment,



PHOTOS BY JON FARRAR

Longtime Cornhusker Archery employee Lorrie Shaul finishes a bowstring. At its peak, Cornhusker had 35 employees.

standards imposed in 1968. Mauch served two terms as the AMO president in the 1980s.

Like most small Nebraska towns in the 1960s, Bassett was losing its young people as they moved away to college or to find urban jobs. When Fred Bear suggested Mauch start a bowstring factory in Bassett in the mid-1960s it seemed like the solution to both Bear Archery’s bowstring shortage and Bassett’s shrinking population. Mauch encouraged local businessmen to form a company and bring the archery industry to Bassett with a virtual guarantee from Bear Archery. The endeavor was never launched, however, and Bear continued buying strings elsewhere.

Bear Archery was sold to Victor Comptometer in 1967, but Bear remained a stockholder and figurehead for many years. In 1975, Bear Archery management again approached Mauch about starting a bowstring company. At

that time Mauch was no longer working for the company and had sold his hardware and lumber business in Bassett. With more time for a new venture, he spearheaded the formation of a company financed by a group of local investors. Bowstring machines were brought from Michigan and local workers trained to use them.

Cornhusker Archery turned out its first bowstring in February 1976 and its one-millionth string the following year. At that time Cornhusker was producing strings almost exclusively for Bear Archery, about 500,000 a year, but as its production capabilities grew it began to supply other archery equipment manufacturers, including Saunders Archery in Columbus. During its early years, Cornhusker made 108 different bowstrings. Cornhusker Archery never sold its bowstrings at the retail level to avoid competing with its manufacturing and distributor clients.

“We were working on volume, and a small margin to make it,” Mauch said. “The whole idea of making bowstrings was to bring employment to Bassett, which we did for over 30 years.” At its peak, 35 employees produced bowstrings, most working full time at the factory in downtown Bassett, some working part time on equipment in their homes. At one point, Cornhusker Archery was the biggest bowstring manufacturer in the U.S.

In January 2006, Cornhusker Archery was sold to Concept Archery, a Pennsylvania company producing top-end, compound bows. Concept’s bowmaking operations were moved to Nebraska and housed under the same roof as the bowstring manufacturing operations. In October 2007, the entire operation was moved from Bassett to Pennsylvania, the close of one chapter in the history of Nebraska’s role in the archery industry. ■

As the crow flies, it's almost exactly 600 miles from Havre, Montana to the small Nebraska Panhandle

Bighorn Catch & Release

Text and Photos by Bob Grier

Bighorns captured in Montana and cooperative landowners are brought together to make Nebraska's newest bighorn herd a reality – the Hubbard Gap bighorn reintroduction is the latest effort to return bighorn sheep to their historic range and the first release of bighorns entirely on private land in Nebraska.

As the crow flies, it's almost exactly 600 miles from Havre, Montana to the small Nebraska Panhandle community of McGrew. The mileage by gravel and paved roads is substantially greater, so it takes a long time to make that trip, especially when a vehicle can only drive 15 to 30 mph because of icy, snow-covered and windswept roads through most of Montana, all of Wyoming and a portion of western Nebraska. Which explains why

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission staff had to drive nearly nonstop for more than 20 hours to transport several large stock trailers carrying bighorn sheep back to Nebraska.

For the bighorns, the January 2007 trip to Nebraska took even longer – it's been well over 100 years since bighorns were last seen in the central Wildcat Hills.

The 51 Montana bighorns – 42 ewes, 2 lambs and 7 rams – were released near Hubbard Gap in the Wildcat Hills south of McGrew in mid-January. The

bighorns were Nebraska's latest efforts to reintroduce bighorn sheep into their historic range that once extended across western Nebraska and possibly further east. Of greater significance, the newly established herd is Nebraska's first release of bighorns entirely on private land.

Across the continent, substantial blocks of the bighorn's historical range are no longer suitable habitat for wild sheep, and their current ranges in the west continue to shrink before a growing tidal wave of changing land use and continuing development. South of McGrew, however, farmers, ranchers and other landowners enthusiastically enrolled more than 20,000 acres of land for the opportunity to see free-roaming bands of bighorns return to the area.

The Hubbard Gap herd is Nebraska's fourth bighorn herd, joining the original Fort Robinson herd, the Cedar Canyon herd southwest of Scottsbluff and the Barrel Butte bighorn herd released southwest of Chadron in 2005 that currently roams the Pine Ridge as far east as Chadron State Park and west to the Ponderosa Wildlife Management Area (WMA) southeast of Crawford.

The Nebraska herds and their counterparts throughout the west are testaments to the bighorn's ability to survive and to the esteem that landowners, wildlife enthusiasts, biologists and sportsmen's groups, including the Nebraska Chapter of Safari Club International, the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep



Biologist Holly Kufahl tracks the Hubbard Gap bighorns using a handheld radio receiver and antenna. Each bighorn's radio collar transmits on its own frequency, letting biologists identify and track individual bighorns.



Transplanted from Montana, radio-collared bighorns emerged from trailers in the Wildcat Hills south of McGrew in mid-January.

“I was originally concerned with the damage that bighorns might do to fences, at least until a small group of rams approached me in the pasture one morning and each, in turn, easily jumped my fence.”

— Darrell Roberts, rural McGrew landowner



Helicopters were used to capture bighorn sheep and carry them back to waiting biologists at the processing site.

(FNAWS), the Iowa Chapter of FNAWS and many others share for bighorns. Since the early 1900s, at least 19 wildlife agencies from the United States and Canada have engaged in efforts to re-establish bighorns throughout North America.

These efforts are possible because some western states and Canadian provinces have surplus bighorn populations in their scattered herds that have been used for relocation efforts across the continent.

Kevin Hurley, a wildlife biologist with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, said trapping and moving extra sheep help the donor agencies as much as those that receive sheep. “The



With its rugged terrain, the Missouri River Breaks in north-central Montana is perfect habitat for a burgeoning bighorn sheep population. In 2005, bighorns from the breaks south of the river were captured and released on the Bighorn WMA southeast of Crawford. The sheep captured last January that eventually became the Hubbard Gap herd were captured on the north side of the Missouri.



Bighorn enthusiasts, biologists and researchers alike are intrigued by the display antics used by the bighorn rams during the November and December rutting season. With its head lowered, a young ram from the Cedar Canyon herd approaches several larger rams. Ram breeding displays include the famous “head butting,” “front kicks” and “horning” displays.

relocation of sheep to historic ranges is one way to help manage densities on the bighorn’s critical winter range. Wyoming’s Whiskey Basin herd near Dubois, Wyoming is a good example. Surplus sheep from the Whiskey Basin herd of about 1,500 bighorns provided sheep to six states over the past 50 years.”

Hurley points to research conducted in Alberta that clearly revealed the effect on bighorn winter range densities. During the study, bighorn numbers on selected ranges were allowed to increase and decrease under controlled conditions to study how the population was affected.

“Alberta’s research showed dramatically that as winter range densities of bighorns increase, the herds respond with delayed age of breeding, lower recruitment and decreases in horn growth,” said Hurley “When winter densities were intentionally reduced, the herds return to strong recruitment and greater horn growth.”

Nebraska’s Cedar Canyon herd came from Colorado, and the bighorns for the Barrel Butte herd came from the

Missouri River Breaks in north-central Montana. Part of the Hubbard Gap bighorns were also captured there, with the rest coming from the Sun River herd near Augusta. Sheep for the Fort Robinson herd originated with several animals from Colorado and Wyoming, with the remainder coming from nearby herds in South Dakota.

One key to successful reintroduction efforts nationwide is the identification and selection of suitable sheep habitat. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission wildlife biologists have been conducting habitat suitability studies in the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills to identify, quantify and qualify the important components of bighorn habitat requirements there, including the rugged and steep terrain that bighorns use for escape cover, lambing sites and to meet other needs. Since the initial releases of bighorns in the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills, Commission biologists have conducted almost daily tracking and monitoring of Nebraska’s bighorn herds – research that has provided valuable insights into bighorn habitat requirements as work to identify

potential release sites continues.

“The habitat suitability studies look specifically at larger tracts within the historical range of bighorns here in Nebraska in both the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills. The historic bighorns probably ranged further east, perhaps down the Niobrara and eastward along the North Platte River corridor,” said Todd Nordeen, wildlife manager of the Commission’s district office in Alliance. “There is at least one historical account of a bighorn as far east as Lincoln County, but information on their historic ranges farther east is much less clear.

“The record of bighorns in the Wildcat Hills includes accounts of mountain men, fur traders and immigrants on the Oregon Trail in the mid- to late-1800s, and several rocky outcrops near the North Platte River are still identified by their association or use by the historical bighorns, including Sheep Mountain near the Hubbard Gap release site and Spoon Butte on the Wyoming-Nebraska border north of Henry. Archeologists excavating paleo-Indian sites at Signal Butte and elsewhere in the Panhandle have recovered numerous bighorn



Left to right, Todd Nordeen, Dean Studnicka, Chuck Butterfield, and Chad Taylor carry a young bighorn ram from the helicopter to a nearby work station. Butterfield is a Chadron State College wildlife professor, while the others are Commission biologists. Blindfolds were used to calm captured bighorns as they were processed for the trip back to the Nebraska release site.

artifacts and remains that indicate the bighorns were important to the region's earliest human occupants.

"The proposals for additional release sites considered private land releases as well and a strong effort was initiated seeking cooperative support, including landowner visits and organized public and news media tours. We were fortunate that Kit Hams, the Commission's big game program manager in Lincoln, was well acquainted with landowners near the proposed release site. Once the Hubbard Gap site was identified, numerous landowners stepped forward to enroll their land and provide written permission for the bighorn reintroduction."

With the release site determined, the Commission's wildlife division administrators began discussions with wildlife agencies and departments that had provided bighorns for national reintroduction projects, and Montana responded by placing Nebraska fairly high on their priority list to receive surplus bighorns. Montana also agreed

to provide the bighorns at no cost as long as Nebraska paid for the capture and transport.

In mid-January, 2007, Nordeen, Hams and a crew of Commission wildlife biologists from across Nebraska arrived on the north side of the Missouri River Breaks near Havre. The area is rugged, deeply etched, eroded – and home to several bands of bighorn sheep. The sheep used for the 2005 reintroduction on Nebraska's Bighorn WMA came from this same general area.

Montana wildlife biologists, veterinarians and conservation technicians provided capture and handling instructions for both the Nebraska crew and biologists from North Dakota that gathered at the capture site in January. North Dakota Game and Fish Department's request for bighorns had priority, so the Nebraska staff helped process the morning's first sheep for the waiting North Dakota trailers before beginning work on the sheep destined for Nebraska.

Bighorns captured by the contracting

helicopter wildlife capture crew were flown to the work site, unloaded and carefully processed under the Montana veterinarian's formalized protocols for bighorn sheep. Each bighorn was aged, blood-tested, had DNA samples collected and was fitted with a radio telemetry collar before being loaded into stock trailers for transport back to Nebraska. Montana's wildlife manager responsible for the Missouri Breaks herds worked with the airborne capture crew to identify both sex and age of sheep for the relocation effort.

"Montana's surplus sheep included ewes and younger rams," Nordeen said. "Larger rams are much more difficult to work with, are abusive to the other bighorns during transport and, once released, are likely to wander away from the release site. The Montana biologists did provide several rams 2½ years of age, and in our experience with previous releases, rams up to that age have been very successful during the subsequent breeding seasons."

Several of Nebraska's transport trailers

"Younger rams travel better than larger rams during capture and transport ... and, are able to successfully breed during the November and December rut that follows the late winter move to Nebraska."

— Todd Nordeen, district wildlife manager

were filled with bighorns by late afternoon but the day's operations were suspended by nightfall before Nebraska's quota of sheep could be captured. Instead of holding the sheep overnight to complete the quota the following day, the decision was made to dispatch the trailers back to Nebraska immediately, a fortunate turn of events since high winds and weather grounded the capture crew for several days and suspended all capture efforts on the Missouri.

The overnight return to western Nebraska on black ice and snow-packed roads was tedious but uneventful, and the first trailer arriving on the release site was greeted by landowners and their families, media representatives, school students and others that wanted to witness the return of the bighorns. Additionally, Game and Parks Commissioner George Hall from Bridgeport was on hand to see the release project that he helped approve.

During this first release, Nebraska was receiving a mild touch of the northern weather encountered in Montana, and the released bighorns quickly headed to higher, rocky buttes shrouded in the foggy snowfall.

The Nebraska crew that stayed in Montana moved their base camp closer to the Sun River herd and had to put up with several days of inhospitable weather before aerial trapping efforts could resume. Nebraska's quota of bighorns was soon met, however, and the second release occurred in bright sunshine across a brilliant, snow-covered terrain.

Commission wildlife biologist Holly Kufahl is currently conducting the daily tracking and monitoring of the Hubbard Gap bighorns. Kufahl has received excellent cooperation from the region's landowners and fields several calls each week from people seeking

updates on where the bighorns are. By fall of 2007, her research had found the Hubbard Gap bighorns roaming east to the vicinity of Chimney Rock, and the sheep are once again using Sheep Mountain, nearby Castle Rock and other Wildcat Hills outliers above the North Platte River. In addition to the radio telemetry signals, individual sheep carry easily seen, colored ear tags. Sheep from the Hubbard Gap and Cedar Canyon releases can be identified by their ear tags and in November, Kufahl observed several of the Hubbard Gap bighorn ewes accompanied by Cedar Canyon rams on the edge of Highway 71, near the Wildcat Hills

Nebraska's and other bighorn herds across the region. We've documented at least 30 lambs born during the 2007 summer, but unfortunately we've lost about half of them so far. The bighorn's immunity to viruses and other diseases that have no impact in domestic sheep is well known, and it is almost impossible, and certainly extremely costly, to re-capture and continue efforts to inoculate wild-ranging bighorns in an effort to reduce the losses."

The small band of Cedar Canyon bighorn rams and Hubbard Gap ewes found near the Wildcat Hills Nature Center has re-energized regional bighorn interest this winter and Kufahl



Onlookers, including landowners and school students, watch the first release of Montana bighorns near Hubbard Gap.

Nature Center south of Gering.

"The observations have let me follow the movement and distribution of the herd, as well as its general health and well-being. I've also gained insights into their habitat requirements," she said. "We lost several of the Hubbard Gap bighorns immediately following the release and we are continuing to see losses, primarily of lambs lost to pasteurella pneumonia, similar to the die-off seen for several years now in

and other Commission biologists will continue to expand on the success of Nebraska's most recent effort to return bighorn sheep to their historic range. Uncertainty still attends the newly released herds and other sheep that still roam their historical ranges, but wherever the continent's bighorns are located, wildlife enthusiasts are strong in their belief that bighorn sheep are a valuable part of North America's wildlife heritage and experience. ■

Out in the Cold

Ultralight Solo Winter Camping in
Nebraska's State Parks

Text by Matthew Marx
Photos by Jeff Kurrus



I was soon on the trail, looking out at the snowy forest. I drew a deep, cold breath, then watched it unfurl like smoke. No one had yet set foot here...

“Why the heck would you want to do that?” That’s what I usually hear when I tell people I’m going solo winter camping in Nebraska without a tent. Sometimes I ask myself the same question, yet every winter I find myself lacing up my boots for an overnight solo trek with very little gear. How did I get to this point?

Certainly the joys of ultralight solo winter camping don’t just come out of nowhere – I can’t think of anyone who just woke up one snowy morning and decided to head out into a frigid and desolate Nebraska wilderness area for several days. In my case, it came from an ongoing progression of “normal” camping experiences and searching for something I couldn’t find anywhere else.

Going Ultralight

I’ve always loved to camp. During summers when I was a kid, my parents would take the family camping in central

Nebraska where we would set up an oversized aluminum-pole tent, inflate rubber air mattresses with an accordion-style foot pump and cook on one of those 20-pound, suitcase-style Coleman stoves. As I grew older, we started leaving the safety net of the campground to hike into the wilderness. The heavy equipment, of course, had to be abandoned or replaced by something lighter, but the reward was a sense of isolation and the peace that comes with escaping the hectic buzz of everyday life. After taking progressively longer and longer hikes, I soon realized that the less weight I carried, the freer I felt, and that much of the gear I originally thought of as essential, like a tent, was really unnecessary. At that point, I realized I was “going ultralight” – carrying as light and as little of gear as possible.

For the last 10 years I’ve been hiking and camping mostly with my brother. He’s an ultralight equipment junkie, and I never mind inheriting a barely used sleeping bag because his new model is

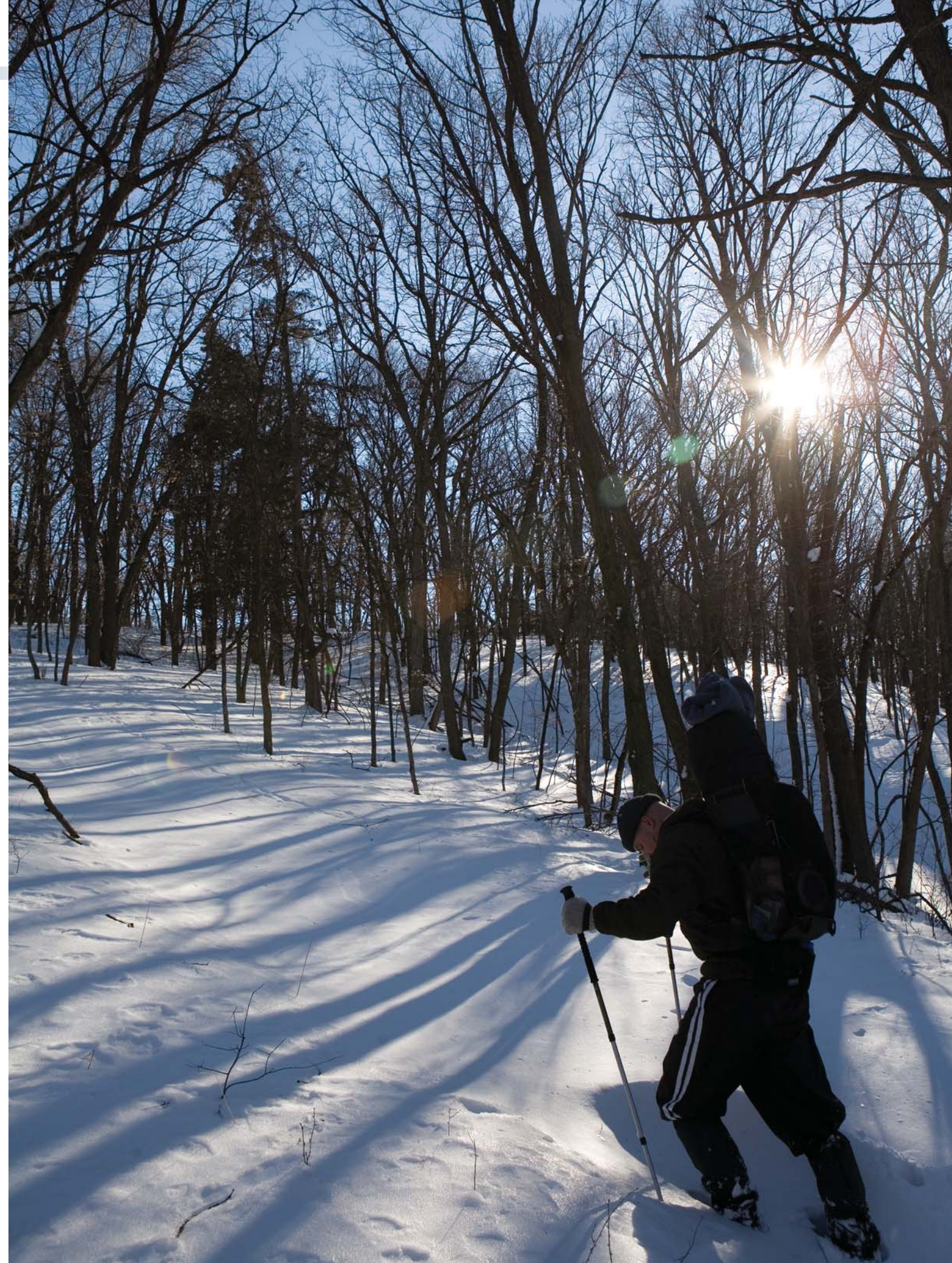
three ounces lighter. Even in the rainy Northwest where he lives, he almost never carries a tent – when the weather turns foul, he simply rigs up an ultralight Siltarp that weighs next to nothing.

I’m always surprised how little I really need to be comfortable on the trail. When I’m camping, I expect to give up most of the comforts of home. Part of the experience is getting in touch with something internal through the physicality of hiking, and gaining a stillness of mind through the beauty of the landscape. And even though I like sharing these experiences with other people, some of the best trips I’ve had were on my own, especially in Nebraska where the beauty is quietly understated. When camping, I gladly give up comfort for the serenity of the wilderness, and when going ultralight, I have an increased sense of lightness and freedom. By camping alone, I have only the stream of my own thoughts as company, and after a couple of days those thoughts adopt the qualities of the Nebraska landscape and I’m left with a kind of clarity I can rarely find in the city.

Why Winter?

The biggest difference between summer and winter camping is the emphasis on survival. While there is some danger in any kind of outdoor excursion, in the winter the cold is ever present, so the smart hiker packs the correct gear and keeps an eye on the weather. In the winter you have to be more aware of the elements and things like sweating too much, which can ultimately chill the body. This necessity of awareness tends to heighten my senses, giving me great satisfaction when I overcome cold conditions by remaining warm and dry. I certainly

The desolate winter woods of Ponca State Park offer challenging hikes as well as many glimpses of Nebraska wildlife, including white-tailed deer.





Keeping the hands warm means performing dexterous tasks quickly – and a good headlamp helps.



don't recommend camping alone in a blizzard, which is downright dangerous for novices, but during a normal winter day, with a little know-how and good gear, you may find it to be the most comfortable camping of your life.

When ultralight camping, having quality equipment is especially important (see sidebar on page 39). If you're on the trail freezing in a cheap sleeping bag, you'll gladly pay triple right then and there for the good one you should have bought in the first place.

For your first solo winter camping trip, go someplace small for just one night. There will be many new experiences to troubleshoot – such as using your stove

A full moon rises over the Missouri River at Ponca State Park.

to melt snow for drinking water, learning how to vent excess heat away from the body, and making a perfectly level place to sleep – so don't attempt a weeklong excursion into a secluded wilderness until you know what you're doing. Many of Nebraska's state parks provide a balance of safety and seclusion. There likely won't be anyone else on the trail, so finding solitude is easy.

On my most recent winter trip I visited Ponca State Park, which boasts nearly 1,400 acres of heavily forested hills overlooking the Missouri River. A foot of heavy snow blanketed the ground during my visit, with daytime temperatures in the twenties and nighttime temperatures in the single digits.

I first checked in at the park lodge to

let the ranger know I would be spending the night in the forest and thought he'd ask the standard, "Why would you want to do that?" Rangers are rangers for a reason, however, and he seemed to understand. "It's beautiful out there," he said, "and you'll certainly have the place to yourself." After asking if I had all the necessary equipment (I didn't tell him I was going without a tent) and making sure I knew the rules of low-impact camping (which is easier in the winter), he produced a map and showed me the best places to hike and camp.

I was soon on the trail, looking out at the snowy forest. I drew a deep, cold breath, then watched it unfurl like smoke. No one had yet set foot here and the path spread before me like canvas. The quiet beauty hushed even the dampened sounds of my own steps. Already my mind began to lose the chattering noise of normal thoughts and absorb the peace of the landscape.

The hills around me had been formed by the ancient river, and I soon found myself climbing a snowy chute. As I ascended, sweat started to emerge



Eat a hot, protein-rich meal just before bed to increase your body temperature.

A man wearing a grey hoodie and beige gloves is holding a black bag in a snowy forest. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background shows bare trees and a snowy ground.

After hiking for most of the day, it was time to find a suitable spot to bed down. The best places to camp are on the sides of gullies or valleys, away from cliffs. I look for fallen logs, which make good seats. In very deep snow, I'll make a snow kitchen – a rectangular

Dusk lingers in Nebraska's wintry valleys, the snow seeming to glow with its own light after the sun has fallen. Nestled in a mummy sack, I felt completely secure in my warm cocoon. The moon had not yet risen, and as the light failed, the stars began to emerge between the branches overhead.

The morning was cold, and I was reluctant to leave my shelter, so I waited for the sun to creep across my bivy sack. After a quick breakfast, I was soon ready for the trail. Slinging the pack across my shoulders, I looked back at my campsite. The only hint I had been there was a brushed-off log and a man-shaped indentation in the snow. As I hiked back to the parking area, I felt light, all of the heaviness of city life having been left somewhere in the woods with the snow and coyotes. This is why I have come here, I told myself. This is why I will come here again. ■

A bivouac sack is more a glorified sleeping bag cover than a tent, and weighs a fraction of its big brother.

Gearing Up Correctly for Cold Weather Camping



A sleeping bag. Down bags are lighter and warmer than synthetics but are useless when wet. And even though it will be below freezing when you're camping, things can get damp while you sleep, either by body heat melting the snow beneath you or by your body being too warm and sweating, which is surprisingly common. In the winter I use a synthetic sleeping bag made by Wiggies that is rated down to zero degrees. Note: Mummy-style bags are much more efficient than traditional rectangular bags.

A bivouac sack. Okay, I know I said to leave the tent behind, but a bivy sack is more a glorified sleeping bag cover than a tent, and weighs a fraction of its big brother. Take it if there is any chance of wind or snow. Falling snow will melt on your warm sleeping bag and soak the outer layer, which will eventually freeze the entire bag. I recommend Outdoor Research's Advanced Bivy, which has a hoop to keep the bag off of your face.

Boots. Nothing ruins a trip more than cold feet. They must be waterproof and insulated. When the snow isn't too deep (a foot or less) I just wear a pair of gaiters. If you're tromping through deep snow, snowshoes are a

A stove. Nothing warms up your core temperature better than a hot meal. Ultralight models abound on the market. I keep it simple with an MSR alcohol-burning, self-contained, one-pot stove. Eat a hot, protein-rich meal just before bed to increase your body temperature. I like precooked Indian curry meals that come in handy foil packets. For breakfast, nothing is better than instant oatmeal. If it's really cold, you'll need to use your stove to melt snow for drinking water. Don't eat snow, as it decreases your core temperature and increases the risk of hypothermia.

The rest of the equipment I take is just basic camping supplies like matches, a pocketknife, ultralight trekking poles (for stability in deeper snow), a space blanket, assorted food and a few other odds and ends. For a two-day trip I try to keep my total equipment weight under 20 pounds.

TREE MY DOG

Text and Photos by Eric Fowler

There aren't as many people running coonhounds as there were when Jerry Spech was young. "You got to be silly," said Spech, who still enjoys turning his dogs out and following them through the woods at night with a light on his head.

Jerry Spech started hunting raccoons with bluetick hounds in 1960 when he was 13 years old. He's only missed a few seasons since, is pretty good at it, and has a fine pack of dogs to hunt behind. He only wishes more people wanted to hunt with him.

"It ain't that nobody likes me," Spech said. "There just ain't too many people who like to hunt coon."

That doesn't stop Spech from donning his mining helmet and following his dogs into the woods near his rural Ceresco home long after the sun goes down. But while pheasant hunters are able to watch their dogs work a field, houndsmen must settle for listening to the bawls, chops and howls the dogs let out when they're on a trail. It's an eerie sound the first time you hear it. But to a houndsman it's magical, sweet music.

"I get so much enjoyment in listening to a coonhound run that coon," Spech

said. "There ain't nothing like it. Not to be narrow-minded, but I feel the only way God wanted you to hunt raccoons is with a dog."

Hunting raccoons with hounds appears, on the surface, to be a fairly simple task. Just send your dogs into the woods, sit back and listen. It usually isn't long before they come across a raccoon trail and let out a howl houndsmen call a strike (see Coonhound Lingo on page 45 for more of the unique language spoken by houndsmen).

Then the chase is on. With their incredible sense of smell, hounds can follow a track for miles. Sometimes they straddle the track the entire way, but Spech says a good hound will drift downwind of the track, circling ahead and pressuring the raccoon until it decides to stop running and climb a tree. When this happens, a hound will let out another distinctive howl, a locate, that tells the handler that a coon is treed.

Handlers recognize the nuances of their dog's trailing and treeing language and know exactly what their animals are doing. Take Spech's prized dog, Rambo. "He'll start a track with a bawl, and when he gets it warmed up it goes to a chop, and then he'll shut up for probably 30 seconds and boy, when you're in a [competitive] night hunt, just get ready, because pretty soon he's going to go 'oowww' and you can say 'tree my dog.'"

What happens when a raccoon is treed depends on the time of year and the hunter. In Nebraska, raccoons can be harvested from September through February. A single shot from a .22-caliber rifle will bring a raccoon to hand and soon its hide will be on the

way to a fur buyer. But for houndsmen, the season never ends since they can run raccoons year-round as long as they don't kill them. And it's the chase that Spech really cares about.

He hunts several nights a week all year long and usually trees a coon every night. Yet he only harvested seven of the raccoons his dogs treed in the 2006-2007 season. "There's a lot of good coon hunters out there, and the older we get the better coon hunters we get, because we don't have that killing instinct and we don't take every raccoon," Spech said.



Jerry Spech handles Colonel and Thor, two of his five bluetick coonhounds, at the base of a cottonwood where they treed a raccoon.



Treed by Spech's hounds, a raccoon peers down from its treetop perch.

Not harvesting raccoons is something the dogs have a hard time understanding. "They want that coon so bad you can't get them away from a tree," Spech said. "During the season, if you knock a coon out, then they're all content and they'll walk back to the truck with you. My dog Sooner will carry a coon in her mouth all the way back to the truck."

But putting that dog, which can weigh 100 pounds or more, on a lead and trying to convince it to leave its prize and head back to the truck takes all the strength Spech has, sometimes more. He's been pulled from his feet

more than once. A smaller handler might be dragged through the woods, especially when working two dogs.

Bluetick, Walker, black and tan, English and other coonhound breeds were developed by early American settlers who found the foxhounds they'd been using in Europe didn't cut it here for raccoons, bears, bobcats, mountain lions and other game that climb trees to escape dogs. These new breeds not only have the incredible sense of smell needed to follow a track, but instinctively tree game and keep it there until their handler arrives.

Some have better noses than others: A cold-nosed dog can follow a track that's hours old, while a warm-nosed dog can only follow fresh tracks. "I've never had a cold-nosed dog and I don't want one," Spech said. "The bad thing is there's a lot of tracks out there and by the time he warms it up, that coon's probably back in his den already. You're not going to see that coon. That's why it's more fun to have a medium-nosed dog."

Perhaps the trickiest part of hunting raccoons with hounds is not being able to control where they go. When they



Spech (right), and his son-in-law, Jerry Foral, cast Sooner and Sadie into the woods to find a trail.

strike a track, they will follow wherever it goes with no regard to property boundaries. “You can’t have enough permission,” said Spech, who has had to knock on doors late at night to ask landowners if it was okay to retrieve his dogs.

While they have great noses, coon dogs aren’t perfect. Even the best ones will occasionally tree a possum, also known to coon hunters as a slick tail or grinner. “They just can’t resist the temptation to tree that thing,” Spech said.

Sometimes hounds will sound as if they have treed a raccoon, but by the time their handler finds them, the coon, if it was ever there in the first place, is gone. Spech said it may be that the raccoon started to climb a tree and jumped down, leaving enough scent on the bark to keep the dog “on wood.”

In other cases, a raccoon might climb one tree, jump to another and climb down without the dogs even knowing it. Treed raccoons also sometimes crawl in a cavity or lay in a crotch or squirrel nest where they can’t be seen.

Occasionally a squall, a call used to imitate a raccoon fight, will draw them from their hiding place. But if hounds locate a coon in a den tree, it might never show itself.

Some raccoons outsmart the dogs on the ground, leading them to a dead end. Flying coons, Spech calls them. “When I was young, we’d run into them flying coons a lot, but heck, none of us had a good coon dog either,” he said with a laugh.

Deer hunters going to or coming from tree stands are about the only other people “nuts enough to come out here with a light on their head and walk through this stuff at night,” Spech said of the woods frequented by coon hunters. Stepping in holes and getting whipped by unseen tree branches are only minor blips in the list of risks that lurk for dog and handler.

A raccoon will sometimes take to a pond or river to try to escape a dog. If the dog follows, the raccoon might swim circles around the dog before crawling on the dog’s head and taking them both down. Remembering one

such occasion, Spech said, “There ain’t no coon that’s going to kill my dog, so I take off into the pond with all my clothes on, grab the coon and throw it off. He was panicked too, so there I am out there with this coon and he’s trying to crawl on me because he drowning.” On another occasion, Spech went into a creek to save his dog and found the water to be a bit deeper than expected. When his friend, Bob John, arrived on the scene, the only sign he found of Spech was his headlamp shining under the water as he fought to pull the coon off his dog.

And then there are the times when hounds “tree in a hole.” For novices, that’s when they locate a raccoon in a hole in the ground. When the hole is a beaver den and big enough for a dog to crawl in, it can mean trouble.

For obvious reasons, simply finding a dog that has treed in a hole is difficult, if not impossible. Spech now relies on a radio collar and telemetry to find his dogs when they go underground. That’s a welcome change to the countless vacation days he took to look for his

dogs during the 34 years he worked at Goodyear. It’s one of two major technological advancements the sport has seen. The other is battery-powered headlamps, which replaced the carbide gas miner’s lights Spech used as a boy.

“It was just like using an acetylene torch for a light,” Spech said. “And those miller moths would fly around and they’d fly through it and get burned and then they’d fall right in your face, an old, dead, stinking, burnt miller. All night long you’d smell that miller burning in your light.”

Finding a dog in a hole is one thing. Getting them out is another. “Thank God, in all my life, I’ve never lost one in a beaver hole, but there’s plenty of men who have,” Spech said. “I got so I don’t like to crawl in those beaver holes by myself anymore because I’m kind of afraid they’re going to cave in. Some of them holes are pretty big and when you get back in there quite a ways it’s a little hairy. I usually tie both of my leashes on my legs so at least if it caves in somebody can see them leads sticking out the hole.”

Spech occasionally hunts with the grandsons of Leonard Roeber, who along with Milford Meisinger taught him to hunt 40-plus years ago when he was growing up in Ashland. “The Lord blessed me as a boy,” Spech said. “I got tied up with nice people who showed me really good coon dogs. My dad

wasn’t a coon hunter. I spotlighted when it was legal. When they made it illegal to spotlight, I didn’t want to give up coon hunting – I enjoyed it too much. I asked if I could go with them one night and they said yes. They never said no. When it was over, I said ‘I sure have been missing out on a lot.’”

He quit for a time after sending three dogs out one night and having only one come home, and it had a gunshot wound. It was back when fur prices were high and hunter ethics low, and he suspected a vengeful neighbor who wanted all of the fur to himself was to blame. With a young family and no time to train new dogs, Spech gave his surviving dog to a friend. “I couldn’t justify taking time away from my family,” he said.

Six years later, that same friend, who had kept the bloodline alive that Spech had begun as a boy, gave him a pup. “He said, ‘You’ve been out of this too long, Jerry. You’ve got to get back in.’”

Now Spech is helping Roeber’s grandsons get back into the sport. He gained the utmost respect for them a few years ago when they hired a backhoe to dig their hound out of a beaver hole. The operator was impressed, too, and didn’t charge them a dime when they got their dog out. He gained more respect for them – and knew they were real coon hunters – when they crossed Wahoo Creek to handle their dogs in

the dead of winter.

“By the time we got back to the pickup, our pants were frozen solid,” Levi Roeber said.

“That was fun though,” said Landy Roeber.

Spech fears there aren’t enough people like the Roeber family to keep the sport from dying in this part of the country. When he was growing up, “Everybody hunted coons.” Now he guesses there are only 50 people in the entire state with coonhounds. Included on that roster is Ryan Sears of Herman, who won the prestigious Autumn Oaks hunt in Richmond, Indiana, last year with a 2½-year-old treeing Walker that earned the title of National Grand Nite Champion.

Hunting with coonhounds remains strong in the South, but records maintained by the United Kennel Club, which sanctions raccoon hunting competitions, confirm Spech’s fears – only six clubs held organized hunts in Nebraska last year, and participation in those was low compared to other states. Four more Nebraska clubs are inactive, some not having held a hunt for a decade or more. And while youth competitions draw more than 100 participants in the South, just 20 attended the Nebraska youth championship last year.

“Kids aren’t into this stuff no more,” Spech said. “I tell you, kids are different



Spech reaches into a hole to put a lead on Sooner after she trailed a raccoon into it.



The desire of Sooner and other good coonhounds to catch a raccoon is so great they will climb a tree when the opportunity presents itself.

now. Everything has to be organized. Back then we'd play pickup baseball on a vacant lot. Today I'd bet you there's no pickup baseball games ever going on. It's all got to be organized."

Spech attends a few of the sanctioned hunts in Nebraska and nationally because he likes to show off his dogs. He could do without the competitive nature of some who participate, especially breeders with plenty to gain from a good showing. Spech quit in the middle of last year's Battle of the Breeds, a prestigious hunt held annually in Ada, Oklahoma, because other hunters were bending the rules. He did so with a score that gave him a chance to finish high in the standings.

That aside, he likes coon hunters. In Ada, he looked around at the crowd of hunters and told a friend, "I'll bet you \$100 that there ain't one millionaire standing in these 300 men. And I'll bet you 30 percent of them spent their week's paycheck to get down here to hunt. I guarantee, you look around and it don't get any more wholesome in America than these boys right here. If it come to having a fight for this country there ain't one of the 300 that would turn and run. They'd fight for this country."

Using hounds isn't the only way to hunt raccoons. While spotlighting coons from a vehicle is now illegal, using a spotlight while on foot is not. Like many farm kids, that was the only exposure Jerry Foral, Spech's son-in-law, had to raccoon hunting before becoming part of the Spech family. "I didn't think it (spotlighting) was that much fun because heck, it's so easy," said Foral, who now has his own coon dog and hunts near his home in Wilber and, whenever possible, with his father-in-law. "You just get in the middle of the creek and shine your light and you know where the coons are. It's like jumping a dam to shoot ducks instead of calling them in. It just ain't the same I guess."

Not to say that hunting raccoons with hounds is difficult. "With a coonhound, you can always go out and catch coons," Spech said. "Very seldom do we go home at night without looking one in the face. I can only think of a few times when I've had to catch my dog. They always end up at a tree."

Spech hunts close to home so often that raccoons in the area are tougher to hunt. "When you go to fresh woods,

— COONHOUND LINGO —

You don't have to spend much time around a raccoon hunter to figure out the sport has its own vocabulary. Some of the colloquialisms are self-explanatory, but those who don't know the difference between a bluetick and a deer tick should read on.

Strike – When a hound finds the first raccoon scent trail after being sent into the woods at the start of a hunt.

Open – The howl a dog lets out when it strikes a track.

On track – When a hound is trailing a raccoon.

Warming him up – When dogs start to close in on a coon and become a bit more excited.

Chop mouthing on a run – The constant "arw arw arw" barking a hound makes while on track, usually a sign they are right on a coon's tail. When silence separates the barks, the dogs are working the track.

Track straddler – A dog that works directly over the track with its nose down, barking constantly.

Locate – The long bawl that a hound lets out when it trees a raccoon.

Smoked that dude – When hounds quickly tree a coon after running a trail hard and fast.

Tree my dog – What a handler says during a hunt competition when they hear their dog locate. Points are awarded to the first dog to both strike and tree.

Turning it over – The chop and "ow, ow, ow" that follows a locate and continues until the handler arrives at the tree.

Blowing the acorns out of the tree – The incessant barking of a dog with a treed raccoon. Of course, since the handler has no idea if the coon is in an oak tree until he gets to it, some simply say their dog is "**blowing the top out of it.**"

Tree in a hole – When a hound runs a raccoon into a beaver den or other hole in the ground rather than up a tree.

Squall – A call used to imitate a raccoon fight and coax a raccoon out of a tree-top hiding spot.

Deer race – When a dog takes up the track of a deer.

Cornfield race – Dogs following raccoons through a cornfield during the summer running season, when scenting conditions are often perfect and raccoon numbers high.

Ahead of the race – The rare occasion when a dog runs a raccoon past its handler, allowing them to see the animals in action.

Slick tree – When a handler makes it to his treed dog and doesn't find a raccoon.

Cold track – An old track that is losing scent, making it difficult for dogs to follow. The opposite, an extremely fresh track, is referred to as "**a smokin' hot deal.**"

Layup – Raccoons that have been in a tree for long enough that their track is gone but the dogs still catch their scent in the wind.

Brick wall – When dogs follow a track that hits a dead end.

Dozer pile – A pile of brush on the ground, often left behind when draws are cleared for farming, in which hounds sometimes tree a coon.

Nice mouth – A dog that has a pleasant howl ... or at least one that's pleasant to a houndsman.

it's like fishing in a barrel," Spech said.

In rare cases, a houndsman gets "ahead of the race" and gets to watch their dogs work. It's only happened to Spech once. A pup of his was running a coon hard, trailing by 150 yards or less, when the raccoon ran across the road and up a tree right in front of him. "I watched her take it across the road and down the road ditch and watched her run over and grab that tree," Spech

said. "It was so exciting to watch that. That was a helluva race."

That's about the only thing better than a cornfield race, something Foral and Spech enjoy each summer. "With the moisture in the corn rows the scent holds really good and the dogs can just run right on the tail of that coon," Foral said.

"Of course, you've got to really enjoy hounds, but that's beautiful music to listen to," Spech said. ■

Vanishing Paper Birches

Birch trees along the Niobrara River have been declining since the mid-1980s.

By Jon Farrar

Canoists drifting down the Niobrara River from Valentine expect, and delight in finding, waterfalls and birch tree colonies along the way. Both are part of what makes the deep river canyon unique. Since the mid-1980s, though, the number and vigor of the Niobrara's birch trees have been declining. In 2005, Dr. Esther D. Stroh, an ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey Columbia Environmental Research Center in Columbia, Missouri, initiated a three-year study to find the reason or reasons for the decline.

The central Niobrara Valley is often called the biological crossroads of the Great Plains, a unique region where six distinct ecosystems exist in close proximity to each other. One of those ecosystems, boreal forest, is a relict of the colder climate found at the end of the Wisconsin glacial period approximately 10,000 years ago. Today, boreal forest communities occur in a wide band spanning Canada and the northern United States. One of the floral components of boreal forest is the paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*).

Paper birch is a cold climate species rarely found where average July temperatures exceed 70 degrees Fahrenheit. The average July temperature at Valentine is slightly more than 73 degrees Fahrenheit, so why, and how, have birch trees persisted along the central Niobrara River? The answer is microclimates. Compared to nearby uplands, temperatures are cooler and humidity higher on shady, north-facing valley walls, where springs come to the surface as seeps or small streams with waterfalls. Protected from desiccating summer winds, these isolated pockets support relict populations of boreal flora – ferns, shrubs, forbs, club mosses and paper birch – far from those species' contemporary range to the north.

A 1982 inventory of birch tree

stands along the Niobrara, funded by The Nature Conservancy, did not note a dieback at any of the 46 birch colonies surveyed. Since that time, however, mature birch trees have been dying, and are not being replaced at the expected rate. While Stroh has not ruled out any explanation for the decline, very few instances of common birch pests or diseases were found in 258 trees examined in 24 sites. The principal thrust of her study was designed to monitor the microenvironment found in birch tree colonies, and to investigate if changes in temperature and humidity, or weather patterns, in recent years might be responsible for the decline.

Stroh and her assistants selected 10 birch tree colonies in which to study microclimate. Small data loggers were installed at each site to measure the temperature and humidity at 30-minute intervals. The information was recorded from June 2005 into November 2007. More elaborate weather monitoring equipment was



The appearance of mushrooms marks dead but still standing birch trees.

installed at the Niobrara Valley Preserve near the Norden Bridge. Birch colonies selected for study represented a variety of locations – upper and lower reaches of the study area, spring branch canyons, north-facing banks at the river's edge, and stands in protected canyons on the north side of the river.

The upper reach of the study area extended from Borman Bridge Wildlife Management Area immediately southeast of Valentine, about 15 miles downstream to Brewer Bridge south of Sparks. The lower reach of the study area spanned from Brewer Bridge downstream to two miles above the mouth of Plum Creek north of Ainsworth.

In addition to monitoring the microclimates, Stroh's team counted, numbered, photographed and rated the health of every birch tree on 24 sites. Each tree was inspected for damage from borers, root rot and animals. Stroh's research is also investigating the genetics of the surviving birches to see if healthy trees have some unique genotype, but results from that study are not yet available.

Stroh found that birch stands on the upper reach of the study area have a higher proportion of living trees than sites on the lower reach or in canyons on the north side of the river. Her data shows the only difference in microclimate between prospering and failing birch colonies was in the daily temperature range of late-winter and early spring. During the March-May period, there was greater daily temperature fluctuation on lower sites. This variation is probably explained by the nature of the river valley. In the first 20 or so miles east of Valentine, the Niobrara River courses through a deep cut canyon. By the time it approaches the Norden Bridge north of Johnstown, though, the river is spreading, the valley widening and



Stark white tree skeletons along the Niobrara River are indicators of declining paper birch colonies.

woodlands are more exposed to the Great Plains's weather extremes. Stroh speculates that weather extremes in March and April in recent years may have had a significant effect on birch trees along the Niobrara.

"If you have a warm March followed by a cold April, such as we had in 2007," she said, "that can be a problem if you are a birch tree. Paper birch is a very shallowly rooted tree, so its roots are sensitive to freeze-thaw events. This affects the water transport in the trees, and root damage is expressed as dieback in the tips of the branches until the entire tree is dead."

There are precedents for massive die-offs of birches in their principal range, such as in Nova Scotia and Maine in the 1930s and 1940s, where about 80 percent were lost, and in northern Michigan and New York in 1981. Stroh said an army of researchers investigated the 1940s die-off, but no cause was ever singled out, although weather extremes were suggested as a factor. A recent study of the die-offs incorporating weather data, Stroh said, "found a strong spatial correlation between early warm springs followed by hard freezes and birch diebacks."

But dying mature birch trees are only part of the equation – there is also little or no population recruitment by way of seedlings in some of the Niobrara River colonies. The scarcity of seedlings may be a direct reflection of scant seed production. In 2007, less than 10 percent of the mature birch trees in the study area produced seeds. Even if seeds are produced, though, there is no guarantee they will fall on sites conducive to germination and survival. Birch seedlings require bare mineral soils and light, hence an opening in the forest canopy.

The encroachment of red cedar into Niobrara Valley woodlands in recent years could be a factor in the poor recruitment of young birch. "Trees might not be putting out seed because they don't feel there is enough light there," Stroh said. "Plants are amazing. If it is not a good year to produce seed, they're not going to invest the resources. I don't know, though, whether opening up the canopy would actually make more of them attempt to put out seeds, or if more would survive and become new trees."

Stroh said that the majority of young birches found at the study sites

are suckers from the roots of older trees, not trees that grew from seedlings. Will suckering alone sustain the Niobrara's birch colonies?

"According to the people who study birches for a living," Stroh said, "birches lose their ability to sprout after about 120 years, and then you need to have some young seedlings coming up. What I've been trying to get across is, paper birches have been on the central Niobrara for about 10,000 years. Even if the birch colonies only recruit by seedlings once every 100 years, that is still enough to keep the population going if conditions continue to favor survival of mature birches."

It is not known if the die-off of mature birch trees in recent years threatens their future existence in the central Niobrara River Valley, or if during the last 10,000 years these remnant populations have gone through similar cycles and survived. Only time and additional research will answer those questions. Stroh said one of the most prosperous colonies of paper birches with young seedlings is just east of the Wachiska footbridge along the nature trail at Smith Falls State Park. ■

ATTRACTIONS/EVENTS

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Stock up on Stocked Trout

Rainbow trout fill Nebraska lakes during winter and spring months.

By Jeff Kurrus



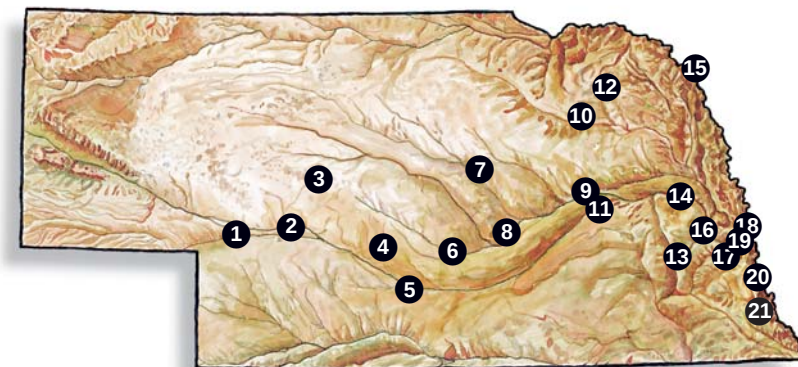
Mark Steele fishes through the ice for trout at Standing Bear Lake in Omaha.

“I’m not after trout, specifically,” said Omahan Mark Steele. “Kind of whatever happens to hit.” Yet as he stood at Standing Bear Lake in north Omaha, trout just happened to be the “whatever” that kept hitting. Fishing approximately 20 feet off the bank through the ice, Steele was using wax worms with tip-ups in about 13 feet of water, just inches off the bottom.

“Catch two, then they go away. An hour later, they come back,” he said, watching each of the three holes he had drilled that morning. Yet he wasn’t the only one on the ice that day. Another angler down the lake also had three trout on hard water, four less than the statewide limit of seven.

Each year the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission stocks lakes throughout the state with trout. And this past year was no different, providing the opportunity for anglers to take advantage of 10-12 inch rainbows during the winter and spring. That list of lakes is as follows:

- 1 Humphrey Pond near Ogallala, 300 trout.
- 2 Birdwood Lake near North Platte, 4,000 trout.
- 3 Arnold Lake in Arnold, 850 trout.
- 4 Lexington City Park Lake, 1,500 trout.
- 5 Holdrege City Park Lake, 3,000 trout.
- 6 Windmill SRA Lake No. 1 near Gibbon, 4,000 trout.
- 7 Ord City Lake, 1,500 trout.
- 8 Such’s Lake in Grand Island, 1,300 trout.
- 9 Pawnee Park Lake in Columbus, 1,500 trout.
- 10 Ta-Ha-Zouka Park Lake in Norfolk, 1,500 trout.
- 11 David City Lake, 600 trout.
- 12 Grove Lake near Royal, 1,500 trout.
- 13 Holmes Lake in Lincoln, 4,000 trout.
- 14 Fremont Lake No. 5 near Fremont, 4,250 trout.
- 15 Crystal Cove in South Sioux City, 4,250 trout.
- 16 Qwest Lake at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, 2,500 trout.
- 17 Weeping Water Pond, Weeping Water, 1,200 trout.
- 18 Benson Lake, 1,050 trout; Hitchcock Lake, 450 trout; Standing Bear, 6,500 trout; and Towl Park, 300 trout (all in Omaha).



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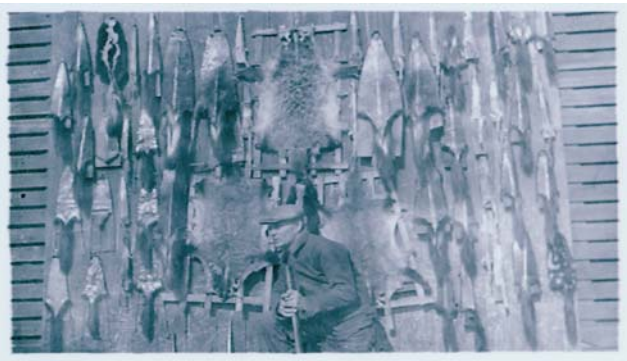
Portraits from the Past



This is my father, Raymond Lecher, and his three children (from left to right) Krissa, Pam and son, Kim, at their home on 306 Paddock Street in Crawford, Nebraska about 1953. Dad trapped for years along White River and Soldier Creek near Crawford. He trapped beaver, mink, muskrats, coon, badgers, etc – whatever the fur buyers would pay him for. Trapping helped our family get by financially since wages were so low back then. I remember sitting in his fur room in the basement, watching him skin and then stretch the hides. I often pinched my nose to keep out the smell that wasn't always good. It was fascinating though.

He was also a good hunter. He'd bring home deer, antelope, turkey, grouse, prairie chicken and pheasants. In addition to trapping and hunting, he loved to fish. He could catch a fish when no one else could. All these pastimes helped put food on our table. Mom could cook it all so good we'd always want more. I still enjoy eating wild game.

– Pam (Lecher) Hersh, Ord, Nebraska



My grandfather, Jens Julius Hansen Eldhardt, immigrated from Denmark to the United States in 1906. He farmed near Randolph and lived in that area until his death in 1958.

Grandpa loved to hunt and trap. He would have photos of himself taken with his "trophies" and send them back to his relatives in Denmark. This is one of those photos, probably taken on the farm near Randolph around 1920.

Thanks NEBRASKAland, keep up the excellent work!

– Margene M. Timm, Lincoln, Nebraska



The first picture is of my great-great-grandfather, Albert Etting (standing), hunting with another gentleman somewhere on the Platte River. The shotgun held by the gentleman is still in our family (above). It is neat to see a photo from the past and actually have a physical connection to it. The gun is still in great condition and was given a clean

bill of health from a gunsmith, with the restriction that only reduced powder shells or black powder be fired through it. Due to its sentimental value, I refuse to take the risk of shooting it. It has earned a well-deserved retirement.

– Scott Krugerud, Aurora, Colorado

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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