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Cover: A limit of bluegills lie next to a Vexilar and ice fishing rod and reel at Lawrence Youngman Lake in Douglas County. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

This page: Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) at sunset in Dawes County. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

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magazine

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2200 N. 33rd Street Lincoln, NE 68503
Phone 402-471-0641
Northeast District Office
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Phone 402-370-3374
Southwest District Office
301 E. State Farm Rd. North Platte, NE 69101
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Magazine Staff

Communications Director Christy Firestone
Public Relations Manager Shawna Richter-Ryerson
Editor Jeff Kurrus
Associate Editor Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley
Regional Editors Eric Fowler, Julie Geiser, Justin Haag
Contributing Editor Michael Forsberg
Regular Contributors Renae Blum, Chris Helzer, Chris Masada, Todd Mills, Ryan Sparks, Gerry Steinauer
Art Director Tim Reigert
Graphic Designer Mel Severin
Photo Librarian Jaclyn Cruikshank Vogt
Circulation
For address changes and questions about your subscription, call 800-632-5263
Advertising Sales Manager
For advertising information contact
Shane G. Gilster, 402-742-0125
Email: shanegilster@gmail.com

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Send your comments and photos to:
Jeff Kurrus, Editor
Nebraskaland Magazine
P.O. Box 30370
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Please include your postal address and telephone number. Letters may be condensed and edited. Photographs are also welcome.



RUNNING RAM

A bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) bounds through the grass at Williams Gap Wildlife Management Area in the Wildcat Hills region of Banner County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



PHIL SWANSON

CREEPIN'

By Joel G. Jorgensen

By late fall most of the songbirds that summer in or migrate through Nebraska are gone for the year, but one odd and uncommon bird should be looked for from October onward. The brown creeper is North America's only tree creeper. These birds do exactly as their name implies: move or "creep" up the trunks and branches of trees in a fashion similar to woodpeckers. They usually start low on a tree and work their way up and then make a short flight to another tree and repeat the process over and over.

Brown creepers are small, cryptically-colored and usually quiet other than their high-pitched calls, which are easily ignored. Lone brown creepers often are observed in loose feeding flocks of common songbirds that include black-capped chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches and woodpeckers in wooded areas and suburban spaces.

Unlike those species that seem to be seeking attention from birdwatchers with loud calls and distinctive plumages, the brown creeper shies away from attention or shameless self-promotion. This species also is not on the guest list of birds expected to make regular appearances at bird feeders or even bird baths. Brown creepers are never common in

Nebraska, so anytime the species is encountered, one should take a few moments to appreciate this peculiar little bird.

A brown creeper's life essentially revolves around tree bark. Creeping birds spend most of their time using their sharp, thin curved bill to probe the grooves in the bark of trees for insects and insect larvae. However, the brown creeper's relationship with bark does not end there, as their nests are typically located in the small space between a tree trunk and the bark that is sloughing off a dying, large tree.

Brown creepers are primarily spring and fall migrants and winter visitors in Nebraska, but they do occasionally nest in the Pine Ridge, Middle Niobrara River region or at sites along the Missouri River, such as Fontenelle Forest. Being easily overlooked, they may be a more common breeder than the few records we have of them indicate. However, most of the brown creepers seen in Nebraska during migration and winter likely breed in the boreal forests of Canada.

So this fall or winter, feel free to give those big trees along your favorite path in the woods a few closer looks for this shy, but nifty, little gem.

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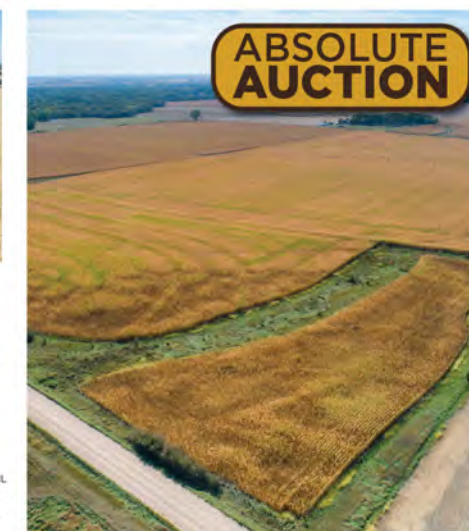
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The “feels like” temperature can be bearable for winter hunters when the wind is light. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

By Martha D. Shulski

In recent years, I’ve heard a new term when listening to weather reports during summer—the “feels like” temperature. I’m not sure what precipitated the shift in nomenclature away from heat index, but I am personally not a fan of the weather conditions that result in its usage. This “feels like” measurement is designed to provide an apparent temperature that takes into account more than just the temperature of the air around you.

How is this “feels like” temperature determined? The calculation uses both relative humidity and air temperature. As both of these values increase, human comfort decreases. Sometimes what may seem like a relatively modest air temperature of 90 degrees can seem downright oppressive if the atmosphere is moist, or sultry, as some early biometeorology researchers have phrased it. Our bodies take advantage of evaporative cooling through sweat, but humid conditions suppress its effectiveness. Exposure at certain categories of high heat feels like temperatures can lead to dangerous outcomes. For example, an index of 103 degrees or higher can cause heat exhaustion with prolonged exposure and/or physical activity.

Temperature and humidity are two commonly observed parameters, although some weather stations also record solar radiation and wind. If this is the case, it is possible and more representative, in fact, to calculate a comprehensive climate index.

Often used to determine cattle stress, it is a product of four different weather variables rather than two. Sunny and calm days drive up this climate index to indicate more uncomfortable conditions, while a breeze and overcast skies suppresses it. Even just a breath of wind can sometimes provide welcome relief and aid in evaporative cooling.

When winter settles upon us, the “feels like” temperature switches to a different mode. Air temperature and wind speed are two of the most important factors that determine our comfort level. As temperatures take a dive and the wind kicks up, a wind chill temperature is determined and reported. This metric is based on the rate of heat loss from exposed skin. The higher the wind speed, the more heat that is lost, and the colder we feel. Even with an air temperature of zero, a wind speed of just 15 mph can result in frostbite in 30 minutes, with a “feels like” temperature of -19. This same cattle comfort index used to describe a summer “feels like” temperature also depicts the cold extremes.

The weather observation network run by our climate office keeps tabs on these “feels like” temperatures all season long. If you are exposed to the elements for any length of time and you’re feeling uncomfortable, be sure to check these “feels like” temperatures.

Martha D. Shulski, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is the director of the Nebraska State Climate Office.

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Gaelic steak is one of Queen Elizabeth II's favorite dishes. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

GAELIC VENISON STEAK

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Queen Elizabeth II is close to what I would consider a “hero,” and Gaelic steak is one of her favorite dishes. Although Her Royal Highness might enjoy this recipe prepared with beef tenderloin at Buckingham Palace, venison loin is the protein of choice when the Royal Family retreats at Balmoral, which is located in the Highlands of Scotland.

Servings: 2

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cooking Time: 40 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 pound of venison loin
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly cracked pepper, to taste
- Olive oil
- ½ pound of peeled parsnips
- ½ pound of peeled starchy potatoes
- 3 tablespoons of butter, separated
- About 1½ cups of heavy whipping cream, separated

- 8 ounces of sliced mushrooms, your choice
- Quarter of an onion, chopped
- 1 ounce of Irish or Scotch whisky

1. Take meat out of the refrigerator one hour prior to cooking. Cut into 2-inch-thick medallions and season with salt.

2. Preheat oven to 300 degrees F. Cut parsnips and potatoes into cubes — the parsnips will take longer to soften, so cut them smaller. Place in a saucepan, cover with salted water and bring to a boil. Simmer until softened, about 30 minutes. Keep warm in the water until you're ready to prepare the rest of the dish.

3. Heat oil and 1 tablespoon of butter in a pan. Pat venison medallions completely dry with paper towels and salt again if desired. When butter and oil gets hot, brown meat on both sides for a good crust. Transfer venison to a rimmed cookie sheet and sprinkle

cracked pepper on both sides. Roast in a 300-degree oven until internal temperature reaches 127 degrees, about 5-7 minutes, for medium rare. Take meat out of the oven and loosely tent with foil. Allow to rest for at least 5 minutes before serving.

4. While the venison is in the oven: In the same pan where the venison was browned, add more oil to the pan and brown sliced mushrooms over medium-high heat. Then add onion and sauté until soft. Carefully stir in whisky and allow to simmer until almost completely evaporated. Lower heat to low and stir in ¾ cup of heavy cream. Simmer until thickened and season to taste.

5. Meanwhile, drain parsnips and potatoes and return to the warm pot. Add 2 tablespoons of butter and mash. Stir in heated heavy cream, as desired, and season to taste. Serve mashed parsnip-potato and venison with cream sauce on top.

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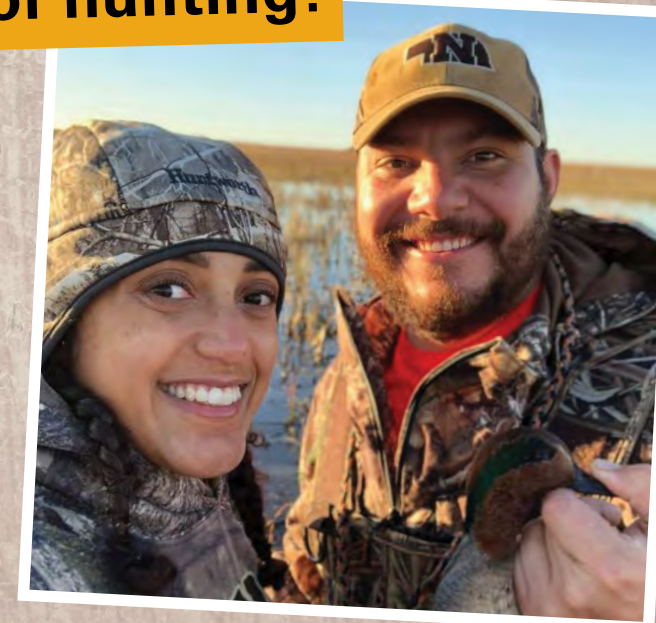
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Rose Creek Mausoleum

Story and photos
by Eric Fowler

Tucked away in a sandstone outcropping in Jefferson County is an oddity that will amaze anyone who visits: a rock-cut tomb carved by hand a century ago.

An arched doorway, 6½ feet high, 4 feet wide and more than 2 feet deep, marks the entrance to McDowell's Tomb in the cliff above Rose Creek.





Nelson McDowell was reportedly a colorful character. And if you visit the “mausoleum” he carved out of a sandstone cliff overlooking Rose Creek in Jefferson County, and later learn that it may have simply been a hobby to keep him busy and in good health rather than a place he intended to be buried, that is easy to believe.

The mausoleum, by definition, isn’t actually a mausoleum. Also known as McDowell’s Tomb, it is located on Rose Creek Wildlife Management Area, a few miles southwest of Fairbury. McDowell started his project in 1915, and over the next 10 years, cut his way nearly 30 feet into the bluff. In the decades since, people have come from near and far, with the oddity even

gaining mention in *Ripley’s Believe It Or Not* in 1971. Nowadays, visitors see the dark, musty and dusty tomb only occupied by moths, spiders and millipedes, and the occasional snake or bat.

McDowell, born in 1856, is the son of J.B. McDowell, who helped found the village of Avoca, Illinois, before

coming to Nebraska in 1868 with his brother, Woodford. J.B. bought land near Beatrice, built the first hotel in the town and moved his family to Nebraska in 1869. He was elected to the state legislature in 1872, and again in 1874, and worked for the Federal Land Office in Lincoln before settling in 1880 in Fairbury. Woodford homesteaded a quarter section of

ground farther west, and in 1869 he had half of that land platted, as did a neighbor, to help found the town of Fairbury, named for the town in which he had resided in Illinois.

Nelson McDowell began working as a clerk in the Secretary of State’s office at the age of 17 while his father was serving in the legislature. He reportedly spent 17 years working in

The circular ceiling of the first room in the tomb, measuring 10 feet wide, includes a horizontal lip, or drum, that leads to a dome in which foot-wide rectangular recesses form an X. At the peak is another 2-foot wide, spherical opening that extends upwards another 2 feet, bringing the entire height of the entry room to 13½ feet.



A second arched doorway 6 feet high and 2½ feet wide leads to the burial chamber measuring 9 feet deep and 6½ feet wide with a less intricate domed ceiling that tops out at 9½ feet. On each side a bench is carved into a bowed wall, one 6½ feet long and the other 7, intended to hold the bodies or caskets of McDowell and his neighbor, Cliff Hunter.

the statehouse, residing in Lincoln at the time, and a few years as a banker in Fairbury. But it is believed that his main occupation later in life was as a farmer. McDowell had health issues and escaped to the Pacific Coast for a time to address them. His return in January of 1914 was noteworthy enough to take up one sentence in the community news

section of the local newspaper. The following year, at age 58 and looking to improve his health, he picked up his tools and began to hammer, chisel and carve away at the base of a rounded, stone outcropping on a north-facing hill above Rose Creek on one of his farms. By the time he was done 10 years later, he had removed roughly 45 cubic yards of sandstone to create his two-room masterpiece. The outer room, an antechamber, has an intricately carved domed ceiling. The inner room, the burial chamber, has benches carved on either side to hold the caskets of McDowell and his neighbor, Cliff Hunter, who reportedly provided McDowell with some assistance in the project.

For the finishing touches, McDowell hired a tombstone carver from Fairbury to engrave some inscriptions on the rocks around the tomb. These include “Mausoleum” above the door, as well as “Lookout Mountain,” “Lover’s Lane,” “Puplit Rock” and “Devil’s Slide.” As word of McDowell’s creation spread, it drew visitors and became a picnic ground. Some chose to leave their own mark, engraving names or initials and dates in the stone, both inside the tomb and on the rocks around it, a tradition that continues to this day. McDowell didn’t appreciate this and fashioned a gate over the entrance to protect the inside of the tomb; he may have even closed it to

visitors at one point.

On Sept. 27, 1937, at the age of 80, McDowell was killed when a car he was riding in was struck by a Union Pacific train at a crossing in Fairbury. The engineer of the train reported that the car came to a complete stop and then suddenly darted forward into his path. The driver, Charles Hansen, also was injured, but could not remember details of the crash. Witnesses speculate the car was still in gear when he stopped and, when he released the clutch, it moved onto the tracks.

McDowell would not be buried in the tomb he created: Some reports

McDowell hired a Fairbury tombstone carver to put the finishing touches on his creation. He carved “Mausoleum” above the arched doorway, and added inscriptions that include “Lookout Mountain” on the cliff nearby. Modern-day carvers, including Joe, have left their own marks.





Graffiti covers nearly every inch of rock near the tomb, including this slab of sandstone to the east, which also features colorful swales left when the sandstone was formed eons ago.

Rose Creek WMA

McDowell’s Tomb is on Rose Creek Wildlife Management Area on 566th Avenue, 1½ miles south of Highway 8 southwest of Fairbury.

The 384-acre area includes a mix of oak woodlands and savannas, native tallgrass prairie and former farm ground now maintained as food plots. It is popular among deer, turkey and quail hunters. Trees and brush growing along two abandoned railroad lines add to its diversity. So does its namesake, Rose Creek, which winds for 1.3 miles through the area and is “a great catfishing creek,” said Brad Seitz, who manages the area for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Seitz initially thought the historical value of the mausoleum might preclude the land being acquired by Game and Parks when the agency was considering its purchase. “Another way I thought was it would be great if the state got it,” Seitz said. “Maybe we aren’t going to do anything special, but at least we’ve got it in public domain and people can come see it.”

The Nebraska State Historical Society determined the tomb, while unique, did not meet the National Park Service’s requirements to be included on the National Register of Historic Places, and the acquisition was completed.

Seitz said he’s sometimes surprised at the number of people who visit the mausoleum, including a few that camp in it. Generally, they leave it alone and clean up after themselves. But vandals continue to carve their names in the rock. Graffiti covers nearly every inch of the tomb and the rocks around it as high as a person can reach, and even higher, suggesting some folks must have hauled ladders to reach a clean slate. Some of the oldest etchings have certainly been covered by new ones. The oldest legible date I could find is 1933. The newest: 2021.

Scofflaws have also used inscriptions created by a Fairbury tombstone carver as target practice. The Mausoleum inscription above the door remains intact. Lookout Mountain is riddled with bullet holes. Another carving is illegible. Three others known to have existed cannot be found.

The bigger threat to the tomb is erosion from Rose Creek, which continues to carve away at the bank below it, and the trail leading to it, taking a large swath of soil and toppling several trees during flooding in 2019.

No trails are maintained on the wildlife area, but there are two primitive paths that lead to it. From the parking lot, follow a two-track maintenance road for a quarter mile and take another right on a less-traveled road. From this junction, it is just 250 yards to the tomb, but the last 80 yards require traversing a steep slope and climbing several eroded banks. The second option is to follow the road 650 yards south of the parking lot and head west before you reach the pond. A faint trail will lead you up a hill, across the ridgetop prairie and back down through the woodland, winding back east to the tomb.



A slab of sandstone that slid from the cliff face overlooking Rose Creek is covered with graffiti.

say it was discovered state law didn’t allow it. Instead, he lies in his family’s plot in the Fairbury cemetery. That was the plan all along, according to other accounts. The tomb “was never intended to be a tomb but simply a hobby,” W.F. Cramb, editor of the Fairbury Journal, wrote in a postscript to McDowell’s obituary a week after his death. “It was all in accord with the waggish nature of Nels McDowell. Its real purpose was to keep him in good health as he had been threatened, in the early days of manhood, with TB and realized that an outdoor life was what he needed.”

McDowell’s prescription apparently worked. “At the time of the accident

which resulted in the instant death, he was apparently in perfect health, erect, ruddy and cheerful looking, more like a man of 50 than past 80,” Cramb wrote.

Newspaper accounts of McDowell’s life say he was an honest, generous, hard-working man. While he owned one of the first automobiles in Fairbury, he lived in small apartments above businesses in downtown Fairbury. “He lived simply and saved his money and left a modest fortune, 875 [acres] of land and considerable property,” Cramb wrote.

His generosity was revealed upon his death. Nine years before he died, he signed the deeds to two quarter

sections of land to brothers Paul and Arthur Zimmerman, who for years had rented them. He told no one about the move, however. Just 18 months before his death, he left envelopes for each brother with another man with instructions to deliver them if he met his demise. A week after his death, the Zimmermans were speechless when they learned of his generous gift.

Notes McDowell left behind also stated he wished the farm on which he built his mausoleum go to the State of Nebraska and become a park and game reserve, something that made headlines in both the local papers and the Lincoln Star. No reports can be found as to why that wish

didn’t become a reality. It can only be assumed that with no will and no official documents supporting the idea, McDowell’s four surviving siblings, who inherited the remainder of his property, chose to do otherwise with the farm.

People continued to visit the mausoleum throughout the years with, and likely some without, permission of subsequent landowners.

So it is somewhat ironic that in 1995, 58 years after his death, McDowell’s wish came true when the property was purchased by Game and Parks. Now anyone willing to take a short hike can be amazed at what one man can do with his hands and a few tools. 

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

In between holiday shopping and family get-togethers, make sure to add some outdoor fun to your schedule. These activities may be just the breather you and your family need. **N**



Take pictures at Chadron State Park

Year-round | Chadron

Nestled in the distinctive buttes and canyons of Nebraska's Pine Ridge, Chadron State Park is a lovely place to pursue winter photography, with or without snow. Between the trails in the park and on the adjacent Nebraska National Forest, there's more than 100 miles of trails and old roads to explore.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

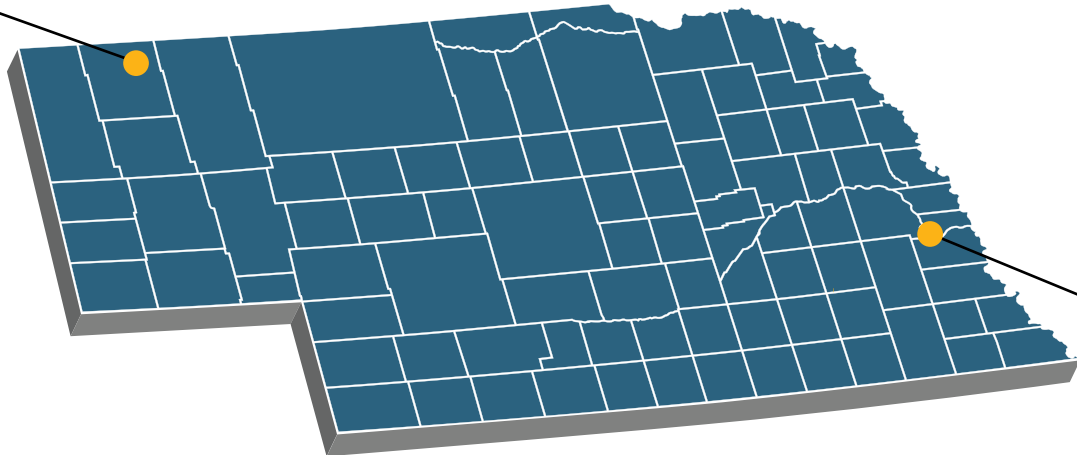


Prepare for ice fishing

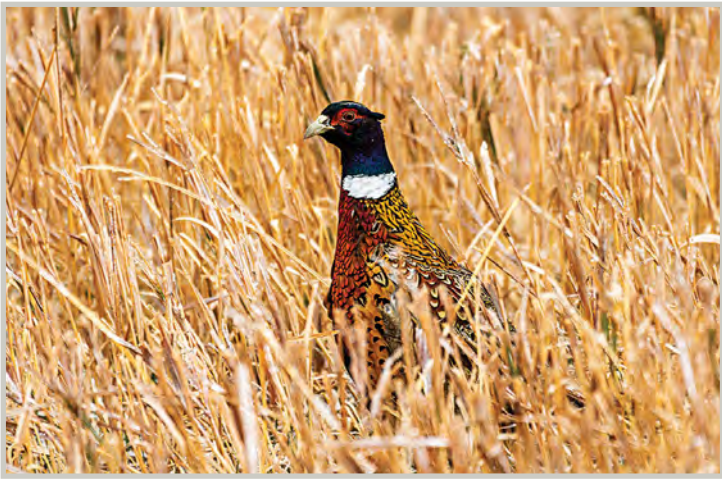
All month | Statewide

Time to ice fish! Make sure your auger is sharp, put fresh line on the reels, and pick up bait from your favorite retailer. If there is ice this month, make sure it's safe before you venture out.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



What To Do in December



Bring home pheasant for the holiday table

All month | Statewide

Wild pheasant makes a unique, delicious centerpiece for the holiday table — with added pride for the hunter who brought it home. Pheasant hunters can find plenty of resources to guide their hunt at OutdoorNebraska.org/Upland, including a 2021-2022 hunting forecast analyzing bird numbers, weather conditions and habitat trends. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

View eagles and waterfowl

All month | Statewide

This month, take the opportunity to view eagles and waterfowl in person, which can be spotted on large bodies of open water. Good locations include Carter Lake, Lewis and Clark Lake, Lake McConaughy, Lake Ogallala, Harlan County Reservoir and DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge. Pick a time when the water isn't frozen or iced over, and make sure to bring your binoculars or spotting scopes. BOB GRIER, NEBRASKALAND



Enjoy winter activities at Mahoney State Park

As weather allows | Ashland

Mahoney State Park is a Nebraska winter paradise. Enjoy sledding and ice skating at the Activity Center, and pair it with a cozy stay in a cabin with a warm fire going. Other possibilities for winter fun include cross-country skiing, ice fishing, wildlife watching, special holiday events and a new lodge for group get-togethers. Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org/Mahoney or by calling the park at 402-944-2523.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



A Puppy for the Holidays

By Todd Mills

Who doesn't want a puppy for Christmas? A hunting companion for the next several years sounds really enticing to most hunters. But finding that right puppy is not only challenging, it's also downright confusing.

The first Lab I ever owned cost me \$50 and came as a referral from a friend who offered to help me train her. I had no idea what I was getting into, but I was certain that this was the dog for me. Call it dumb luck or my friend's persistence in helping me train her, but Nikki was a great retriever and an even better companion. It might have helped that I killed a lot of birds over her, but either way, it taught me a lot about finding the right fit in gun dogs.

Bloodlines Matter but Aren't a Deal Breaker

I can't tell you how many times an eager hunter bragged about the bloodlines of the new puppy he was getting. Field trial champion, hunt test champion, HRC champion ... you name it and I've heard it. But is that really important in choosing the right puppy for you? I think the answer is both yes and no.



LEFT: From the runt to the big bully of the bunch, each puppy will come with different challenges. Choose one that fits your personality.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

ABOVE: Nothing is better than watching a puppy nap among the same decoys they'll be retrieving over in a short matter of time.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



If you're a first-time trainer, a high-powered bloodline can come with its training challenges. Often with a high-powered dog, you're going to get a hard-charging dog, and that can be challenging to keep under control. If your goal is hunt test and field trial, then researching and finding a dog with that type of pedigree is important. If your goal is a well-finished gun dog, then finding a pup out of good hunting lines may suit your needs better. Either way, researching and talking

with previous owners of pups out of the same bloodlines is beneficial before you settle on the litter.

Choosing the Right Pup Out of the Litter

Going to see the litter for the first time is an exciting adventure. Upon arrival, they may all look the same to you. But are they really the same? And how do you know which puppy to pick? By the time you go see them, they are



A young Lab retrieves a mallard duck during a Hall County hunt. DOUG STEINKE



An English pointer responds to a trainer's tool. Consistent work is critical to your dog hunting effectively. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Getting a Labrador retriever pup acclimated to water work will increase its long-term success. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

already forming their personalities and hierarchy in the litter. Everything from birth is about establishing a place in the pack. From the runt to the big bully of the bunch, each will

come with different challenges.

My second lab was the runt. In fact, when I went to pick up Allie, she disappeared from the litter and was nowhere to be found. She was out “hunting” since she had to fend for herself in the litter. Independent and a loner, Allie liked to do things her own way. She was easy to train, but I found it tough to get her to do things right. After a time, I understood that personality trait and adapted my training. With a dominant pup, you’ll get a headstrong dog who thinks she can bully over you. They are stubborn, but also tough as nails and willing to do anything to please you. Whichever pup you choose, realize that adapting your training to their personality is crucial.

As you look over the litter, look at how the pups interact with each other. Try to find a personality trait you can relate to. Obviously looks are important, but so is taking the time to understand the pack and knowing which temperament will work best with you. The book *The Art of Raising a Puppy* by the Monks of New Skete is an excellent resource.

First Month Home

Bringing that pup home is an exciting time for both pup and owner. Exposing the pup to a new environment the right way can be critical to speeding up the training process later. Dogs generally thrive on routine, so establish one as soon as you get home. Allow them to explore as much as they can, while helping them to avoid accidents along the way.

Start getting your dog used to sleeping and resting in their kennel right away. The kennel will become their safe haven and a home when you are gone. During the first couple of days, puppies will object by whining and making a fuss, but



Calandra McCool of Omaha holds a chocolate Labrador retriever. Allowing a pup to tag along on a hunt shows them the ropes for future hunts. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

don't give in. Other than bathroom breaks, encourage them to use the kennel as much as possible. Make it comfortable and inviting, and after a few days, they'll look forward to being inside it.

Puppies require exercise and rest, so make sure you take time to play with them at least three times a day as they adapt to their new home. Then spend time getting them out to socialize with other dogs and people. The more of this you can do, the better as they continue to adapt to their new surroundings.

Early Training Tips

Training a refined hunting dog can take up to three years or more, so patience is the key when starting your gun dog the right way. Establishing boundaries early with your pup is important as they explore and test the waters. Anxious to try and see what they have in their pup, novice trainers make the mistake of moving forward too quickly, skipping the essentials of a solid and steady gun dog.

Initial training sessions should focus on the basic commands of no, sit, stay and come. Also, allow your young pup to drag a lead around with them so they become comfortable with its weight and pressure. A leash-broke dog allows you to restrain them when needed.

Attention spans are short in young dogs, so providing a positive learning environment while not overdoing it is important. Keep training sessions short and avoid creating boredom. When the pup begins to show signs of disinterest, start closing up the training session. Always end on a positive note with plenty of play time at the end.

Also, puppies' memories are short, so don't stress if your dog has a bad session or doesn't seem as interested on certain days. The only thing that can ruin a pup at that age is when a trainer consistently overdoes it, making sessions no longer fun for the dog and owner. First-time pup owners can get overzealous about showing off their pup; training young dogs too long and too hard can dull their drive.

The goal is having a hunting partner for years to come. **N**



If you have other hunters with you, don't carry a gun so you can focus on your young dog. DOUG STEINKE

Field Training

- Nothing can replace live action. After your dog has completed solid obedience training, spend time with them in the field. Too many people love the idea of having a hunting dog, but they often spend very few days in the field with them and can't understand why the dog isn't doing what they want. If you're going to invest in a gun dog, make sure you invest time into shooting birds over them.
- Your dog is going to screw up — a lot. Don't feel embarrassed when this happens. I've seen new dog owners be afraid to hunt dogs with others because they don't want to ruin a hunt. Be prepared for plenty of failure with your dog. These hunting scenarios provide valuable training opportunities for you down the line. One tip is to not carry a gun for the first year if you have other hunters with you. You can spend that time focusing on your pup.
- Let your dog hunt. Man, I get worn out with people who talk to their dogs all the time when we're hunting, trying to do everything for them. Your pup needs time to learn on their own and use their nose and instincts to find birds. Enabling them will only create a dog that is solely dependent on you and that is cause for disaster in the long term.



A pointer receives field work, on this day with homing pigeons, in Cass County. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

How the Republican River Got Its Name

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

Have you ever wondered how the Republican River got its name? Gov. Frank Morrison, a Democrat, used to tease his Republican friends by asking, “Is it because it’s so shallow or so crooked?”

Jokes aside, the connection to the party seems obvious, doesn’t it? With few exceptions, Nebraska has been majority Republican since the Civil War.

But look at the center of this 1839 map detail from *Mitchell’s School and Family Geography*. The Republican Fork had its name long before the Republican Party was organized in the 1850s.

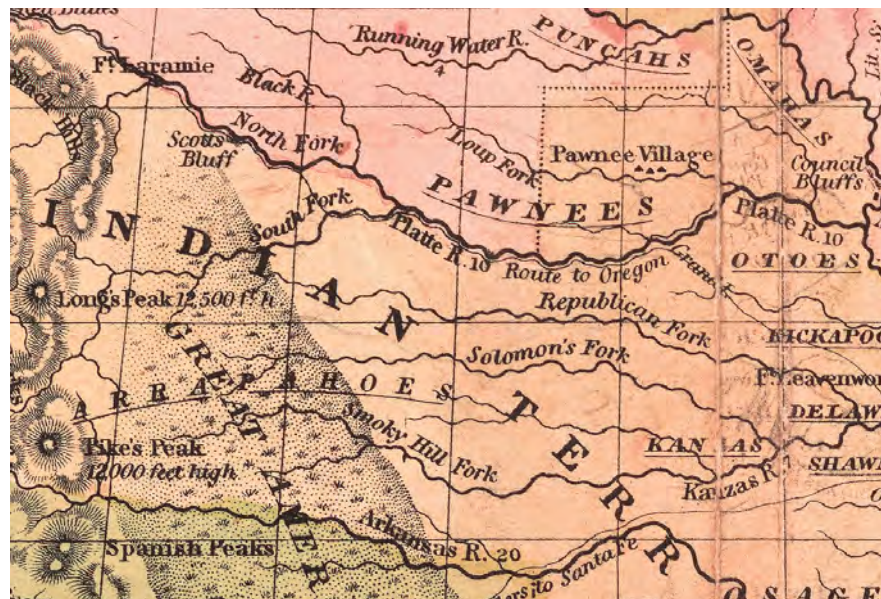
Might the name refer to Jefferson and Madison’s followers? Opposing Hamilton’s Federalists, they usually called themselves Republicans or sometimes Democratic-Republicans.

But the name is older than that, too.

At least by the 1780s, the river was known to French traders as “Fourche des Republicues” — the Forks of the Republicans. Who were the Republicans? The people living there at the time were a band of Pawnees who called themselves “Kitkehahki,” the Little Earth-Lodge people.

For reasons not entirely clear, French traders began referring to the Kitkehahkis as the Republicans. At that time, a “republican” was anyone who believed in government without a king or aristocracy. Perhaps the Kitkehahkis’ ways impressed the traders as an alternative to their homeland’s highly centralized monarchy. Desire for a republic was gaining strength in France — as King Louis XVI was soon to find out. [N](#)

Visit History Nebraska’s website at history.nebraska.gov.



Map from 1839 showing the “Republican Fork.” History Nebraska, Forke map #52



Pawnee Loup Fork Village, near Genoa, 1871. Though this photo was taken a century later and near a different river, it shows what a Pawnee earth lodge village looked like. Pawnee settlements were much larger prior to epidemics that began in the 1790s. A large village might hold more than a hundred lodges and several thousand people. Traders would have noticed how such large, densely populated communities were governed. History Nebraska RG2065-1-1

From the Whitetop

Capturing Nature Photos From the Road

By Nebraskaland Staff



Immaculate Conception Catholic Church
at Montrose in Sioux County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Wake up early, grab a thermos of coffee and take a drive. Gravel roads abound throughout Nebraska, and your vehicle is the perfect photo blind. From scenic views to roadside wildlife, a steady windowsill and your camera is all you need for a photograph worth sharing around the holiday dinner table.

If you're feeling especially motivated, visit one of the state's national wildlife refuges or state recreation areas and take a walk. You're sure to have the area to yourself, just you and the wildlife you're hoping to encounter.



ABOVE: A northern cardinal sits in a tree in the woodlands at Indian Cave State Park in Nemaha and Richardson counties.
ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

OPPOSITE: A mule deer buck grazes in a sunflower field near Chadron.
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Safety Tips for Winter Road Photography

The number of gravel roads in Nebraska seems endless, as are the images to be captured while traveling them. Keep these tips in mind when trying to photograph from your vehicle.

- Pull completely off the road. Don't stop on a hill where other vehicles coming from the other side can't see you, and turn on your hazard lights.
- Use a window mount, sandbag or bath towel to steady your camera on the window sill.
- Snowy scenes can fool your camera's light

meter and result in underexposed images when using automatic exposure settings. Overexpose to insure you get the whitest of whites.

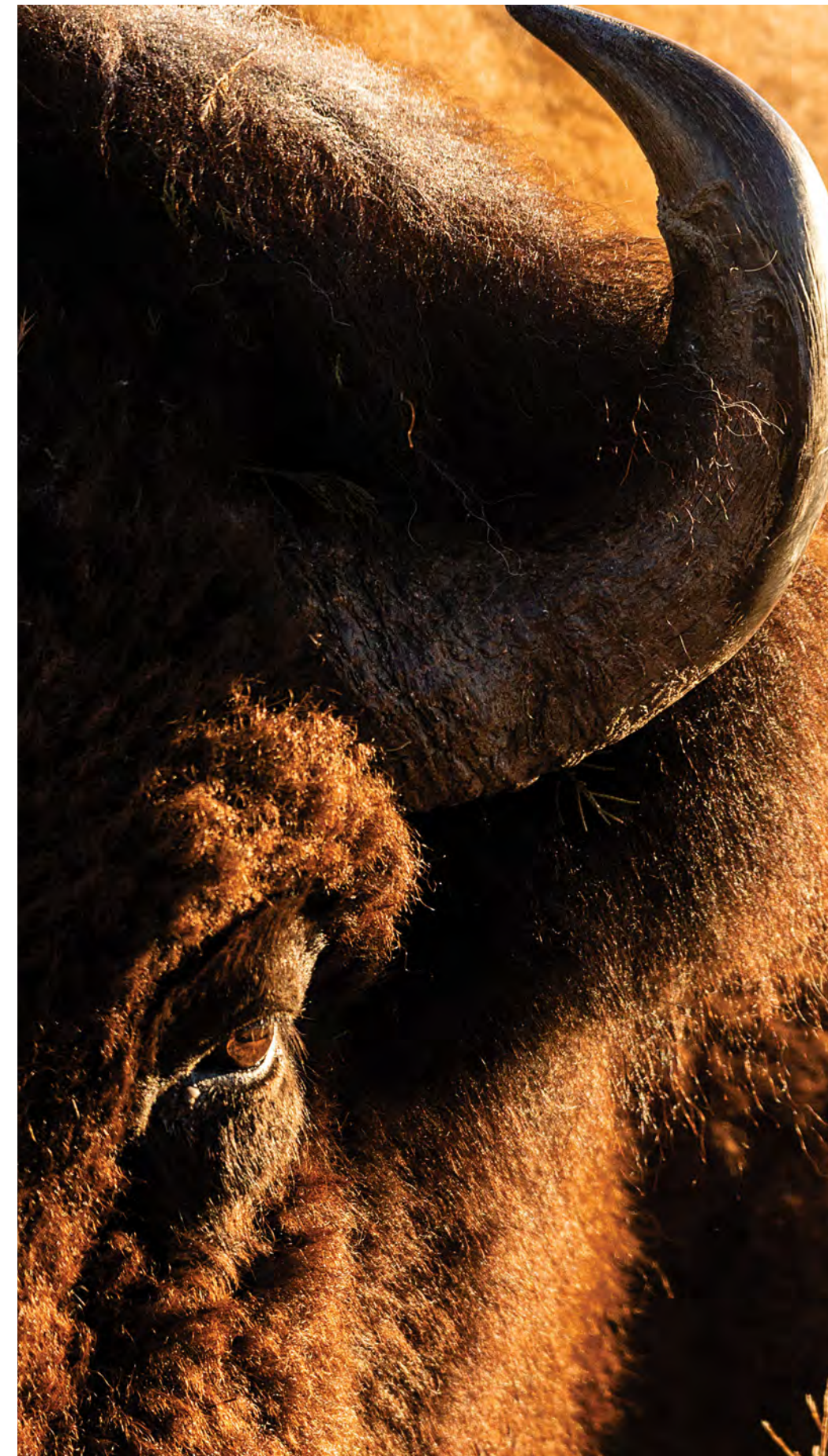
- Some county roads will require higher clearance than a car offers, or even four-wheel drive. When in doubt, turn around, or you will require something else: a tow strap.
- Animals are used to cars. The distance you might gain from stepping out of yours isn't worth the chance of your photo subject running away.

RIGHT: American bison at Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in Cherry County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

ABOVE: Sunrise peeking over the Pine Ridge of Sioux County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



BLACK POWDER

A Muzzleloading Primer

By Tim Reigert

If you haven't tried hunting with a muzzleloader, do so. With a season that spans all of December, unlimited permits and limited competition from other hunters, this challenge is there for the taking. Between using a flintlock or percussion for traditionalists, to hunting with an inline for a more modern esthetic, the choice is yours. But if you are unfamiliar with muzzleloaders, included in this primer are the rifles and accoutrements needed to begin. **N**



1. **Flintlock Rifle** – A firearm that uses a flint-striking ignition mechanism. Introduced in the early 17th century, it rapidly replaced earlier firearm-ignition technologies.
2. **Percussion Rifle** – The percussion cap, introduced circa 1820, is a type of single-use ignition device that enabled them to fire reliably in any weather conditions.
3. **Inline Rifle** – Modern inline black powder rifles are built so the primer or percussion cap can be set directly behind the charge in the barrel of the gun (thus “inline”).
4. **Adjustable Powder Measure (brass)** – Used to ensure the correct powder amount.
5. **Ball or Short Starter** – For starting the projectile at the muzzle's opening.
6. **Non-adjustable Powder Measure (carved antler)**.
7. **Cap holder for percussion caps.**
8. **Ramrod/Ramrod Kit** – The ramrod itself usually stores under the rifle's barrel and is used to “seat” the projectile. Other attachments are used for cleaning and pulling a stuck ball and/or patch.
9. **Round Ball (lead) and Conical lead bullets (swaged).**
10. **Shooting Patches** – Used with lubrication to protect the projectile on its journey both into the barrel and out.
11. **Inline: Sabot-style projectile, pelletized powder and speed loader.**
12. **Bullet or Ball Bag** – For storing (you guessed it) balls or bullets.
13. **Possibles Bag** – To keep most accoutrements together.
14. **Powder Flask** – A smaller container for blackpowder, for priming the pan of a flintlock.
15. **Powder Horn** – A container for blackpowder, generally created from horn.

Tales and Tips

From the Hardwater

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

Many of us hunt and fish because of the people we get to hunt and fish with. Some of the best conversations I've had on the ice, in a duck blind or while walking through tallgrass prairie have featured topics like family, politics and religion. While stories of greenheads and big bucks fill the air, they often are replaced by more serious topics.

This is when true hunting and fishing partnerships — friendships — are formed.

When reminiscing through a set of ice fishing images, I couldn't help but think about what else was going on behind the scenes on these days, as well as the act of fishing itself.

Because while we can ride the cliché about the reasons we hunt and fish with these friends, it always makes the story seem to go a little better if we were, indeed, having some success as well.

Within an Hour

We went straight from the airport to the pond. I had just picked up my best friend, Rob Gaia, after his flight from Tennessee, and we were stepping on the ice as soon as we could.

I walked him through how to use the auger and schooled him on how to play big gillies and bass on 2-pound-test. "Very carefully."

He would release line to the bottom of the lake, wait for the line to bunch up, then turn the handle until he was a foot off the bottom. After a short time of waiting — less than a minute or two — he would reel up another foot and

begin the process again until he was ready to look at the next hole over.

"This is just like when we're bass fishing," I told him. "If the fish aren't there, move."

His joy was immediate, and this image has always carried a different level of meaning for me. Rob has two sons, Hagen and Seth, with his wife Caroline. While Hagen provides all the challenges any 6-year-old does, Seth is a special-needs child who was born so prematurely he could have put his hand and arm through that wedding ring Rob is wearing on his finger.

So anytime Rob has the time to get in the field, he makes those moments as special as he can — and his smile and willingness to learn show that.

Plus, as he told me, "Kurrus, this ice fishing's great. I can put my beer right on the ice, and it stays cold all day long."

Unfathomable

My ice-fishing career started slow. And for good reason. I wasn't sure if I was going to like it, so I was unwilling to fork out much money to see. I was hand-augering one or two holes a trip, ecstatic when I had managed to catch a few fish on homemade jigs through the ice.

However, on the day of this image just two years later, I had pulled my sled — loaded with a gas-powered ice auger, a collection of rods and reels, and my newest purchase, a Vexilar — across the 200-acre lake in search of bluegills.

And, man, did I find them. The fish were stacked in this spot — like fish

Rob Gaia, of Shelby Forest, Tennessee, is all smiles while showing off a Nebraska bluegill from a private pond in Cass County.





A mess of bluegill, Vexilar and ice-fishing rod and reel at Lawrence Youngman Lake in Douglas County.



Matthew Marx shows a bluegill he caught while ice fishing at Lawrence Youngman Lake.

tend to do through the ice I’ve learned — and I continued to catch them that morning with little more than a 1/16-ounce jig tipped with a waxworm. At the end, I sent my “trophy” photo to everyone.

The unfathomable had become true. Terrified to walk on ice of any thickness just three years before and kicking in holes with my feet a year later, I was catching dinner through the ice.

What is He Doing?

I have asked myself this question numerous times during the past 25 years when hunting or fishing with Matthew Marx of Gretna. When in a

situation when most hunters would say “No way,” Matt shrugs and tries anyway. I’ve watched him sneak across a wide-open bean field and arrow a turkey with his bow, and the amount of new techniques he’ll try while fishing are innumerable. When I first balked at fishing a soft plastic “wacky worm” style, he thinks it’s wacky not to try.

On this day, he was wearing a pair of ski goggles on top of a pair of sunglasses. At the time, the goggles seemed a little bit overkill, but the harder the wind blew that day the more money I would have paid for a pair.

We caught countless bluegill,

managing to carve out some hand-sized fish for dinner between us, but the goggles — and Matt’s creativity — won the day for me.

All Alone

Don Cox and I had never met in person, but when I pulled up to Pelican Lake at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, I knew exactly who he was. There was one person, several hundred yards away, fishing alone with a 25-mph driving wind with 15-degree temperatures.

I was there to photograph him. This task, for many in front of the camera, is awkward enough when there are



many trips we would be able to make to this place. So we would need to stay for a while. Our “flags,” as my kids still call them, were a necessity. While the kids are skating, sliding, sledding or even fishing, they can watch the flags, ready for the dead sprint when one erupts.

On this day, we were catching little bluegills — seemingly not much bigger than the kids catching them — and waiting for those flags to go up. And while I remember the 4-pound-catfish we brought in right before dark on one of those flags, I can’t help but think how damn little my kids were back then.

Last Ice

When a group of friends take the same vacation, to the same place, year after year, it’s impossible not to get these trips mixed up.

Yet the one pictured here I remember distinctly. This was the last time

people around. But when a total stranger is doing so, and it seems like you’re the last two people on earth, the awkwardness is amplified.

“So what do we do now?” Don asked me when I met him on the ice.

“I don’t know about you,” I said, “but I’m gonna fish.”

His entire demeanor immediately softened. “Sounds good to me.” After watching him that afternoon, he remains the only angler I have fished alongside who never came close to using a waxworm. Artificial bait was all he needed.

By the time it was good shooting light three hours later, it was like photographing an old friend with his latest catch, which were many.

A Couple of Little Ones

Regardless of the weather conditions, I’ve never shied away from taking my kids fishing.

Sometimes slight modifications must be made, including packing extra clothes for when they step in a hole, making sure there’s enough food to feed two starving tigers, and bringing enough tip-ups to entertain them for hours.

That afternoon, we had been granted access to a pond with some really big channel catfish, but I didn’t know how



OPPOSITE TOP: Don Cox of Minden ice fishes at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Maddie Kurrus, with brother Eli in the background, holds a bluegill caught through the ice.

BELOW: Kevin Green of Omaha fishes at night at Ponca State Park in Dixon County.

everyone in our group was together for our annual pilgrimage to a Ponca State Park mini-lodge for a couple of nights to fish, hike and play cards with our families and their kids. Until the adult stuff took over. Until kids went away to school. Until divorce. Until we no longer made the trip.

Nothing stays the same, but for a split second on this night, when longtime ice fishing partner Kevin Green was cutting holes after dark, I

was sure we had just opened the door on our next level of ice fishing — the night bite.

We could return to Ponca and do this for years, I thought, knowing that the crappie and channel catfish seemed to become especially aggressive after dark at times using the same jig-and-a-waxie tactics we used during the day.

Now I’d be happy if all of us could make just one more trip together, whether we catch a fish or not. **N**



HOLIDAY GIFTS

By Eric Fowler and Jeff Kurrus



I put a few hundred miles on two models of **AKU boots** this summer and fall, and can say the newest entry into the premium hunting boot market in the U.S. is worthy of a spot.

Handcrafted in Italy, the all-leather boots Jager Evo GTX, a mountain boot, and the Riserva GTX, a heavy-duty hiker, are solid. I wore them in moderate terrain in eastern Nebraska and on rugged trails at Fort Robinson State Park, traversed some of the steepest slopes I've set foot on in Colorado and hiked the rockiest trails I've ever seen in Wyoming. Many of these miles included training or hunting with a heavy pack, and never did I question the support my ankles needed in the steep or rocky terrain. The rugged Vibram soles provided plenty of grip and the GORE-TEX liners kept my feet dry.

Both models required a considerable break-in period, as can be expected from a boot made with leather this thick. Once broken in, they fit like a glove. There are lighter boots out there, but these are built for durability. The factory insoles were lacking in cushion and support, and even slipped a bit, but since I have high arches and use after-market inserts, that wasn't an issue for me.

AKU boots are currently available at only a handful of retailers in the U.S., but the company is working to expand that presence. The boots are also available online at akuoutdoor.us. -EF



I was immediately intrigued with **FLPSDE**, an Elkhorn, Nebraska, company, when I saw their dual chamber water bottles.

With one side for drink, and the other for snacks, these water bottles have become a mainstay for my kids

and me at athletic practices and times hunting and fishing.

Coming in an array of colors, including hunter-friendly black, evergreen and sand, these vacuum-insulated, stainless steel bottles live in my vehicles.

While at times I wish these 20-ounce bottles were larger, their size does allow for perfect packing into the deer stand or duck blind. Plus, I have another 7 ounces of dry storage for my favorite trail mix or protein bar to keep me from starving until a whitetail walks within bow range.

Visit flpsde.com for more information. -JK

If you're looking for a stocking stuffer or a snack to throw in your pack, grab some of **Old Trapper's Jumbo Kipperd Beef Steak**.

Made with thick strips of lean beef, well-seasoned with spices and fresh ground pepper and then wood-smoked, the steak snacks are moist, tender and flavorful. They come in three flavors: old fashioned, peppered and teriyaki.

The Kipperd Beef Steak is the latest snack from Old Trapper, which has been making its authentic handmade beef jerky in Forest Grove, Oregon, since 1969. It is available in individual and 12-pack boxes at numerous retailers and online at oldtrapper.com -EF



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The Platte River Safari Club International Chapter is an affiliate of the largest hunter advocacy group in the world. The mission of SCI is to protect the freedom to hunt and to promote wildlife conservation worldwide.

2021 CHAPTER CONVENTION IS JAN. 28 & 29 IN KEARNEY

Platte River Chapter of SCI will hold its first convention on Jan. 28 and 29 at the remodeled Holiday Inn in Kearney. The convention will have speakers, a trade show, a game banquet and live and silent auctions. More information will be announced as planning progresses.

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BOW SQUIRREL HUNT

Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Program Offers a Small-Game Hunting Workshop

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

Widely abundant, squirrels offer a low-cost, accessible introduction to the sport of hunting. Join Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Dec. 4, 2021, for a workshop followed by a mentored squirrel hunt.

This all-day event will take place at the Outdoor Education Center in Lincoln 8 a.m.-6 p.m. The workshop is open to ladies age 16 or older.

The hands-on workshop is divided into two sessions. The morning session will address firearm handling, shooting techniques and target practice at the Outdoor Education Center. Participants will travel to squirrel woods near Lincoln for a guided hunt in the afternoon. Instructors also will cover field dressing and processing.

The cost is \$15 per person and covers instruction, materials and lunch. Registration is required. Purchase tickets through [Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov](https://calendar.outdoornebraska.gov).

Further details will be sent to registered participants. For more information, contact the Nebraska Outdoor Education Center at (402) 471-6141.



Nebraska's squirrel season runs Aug. 1-Jan. 31.

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HOLIDAY GREENERY

*By Julie Van Meter, State Entomologist,
Nebraska Department of Agriculture*

As the holidays draw near, many families will celebrate by decorating their homes with fresh greenery, live trees and woody decorative florals. This is an excellent way to bring a bit of nature into the home. But sometimes, nature comes with unwanted guests.

Unfortunately, invasive plant pests can move in or on holiday greenery that originated from other states. Gypsy moths may lay egg masses on Christmas tree branches and trunks. Boxwood blight spores can be carried on the foliage and stems of boxwood used in garlands and baskets. Invasive beetles have been found emerging from pine cones used as decorations. In recent years, elongated hemlock scale has been found infesting Fraser and balsam fir wreaths and boughs.

Sometimes, the plant itself is the invasive pest. Oriental bittersweet is a highly invasive, exotic plant. Bittersweet berries are frequently used in fall and holiday arrangements and can inadvertently be a seed source to start a new infestation.

Everyone can take these simple steps to protect Nebraska from the introduction and establishment of invasive

plant pests in holiday greenery. Purchase fresh-cut Christmas trees, greenery and decorative florals that were grown locally. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture has a listing of Christmas tree farms on their website at nda.nebraska.gov/publications/promotion/christmas_trees/trees.html.

If you purchase a fresh Christmas tree, wreath or greenery that was not grown in Nebraska, make sure to dispose of it properly after it has served its purpose. Christmas tree recycling sites that chip or burn the trees and greenery are an excellent means of disposal and reduce the risk of any unwanted pests emerging from the trees. Bittersweet, decorative florals and any plant material that may contain seeds are best disposed of in the trash.

The risk of invasive pests emerging while the plant material is in the house is virtually non-existent. There is also no need to be concerned that these pests will cause damage to the home or threaten human health.

Invasive species pose a serious threat to Nebraska, and the environmental and economic damage these pests can cause can be devastating. So, enjoy your holiday traditions and decorations, but do so responsibly. When it comes to fresh-cut trees, wreaths and greenery, the best buys are local.

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A colorful illustration of a yellow building with four square windows and a double door. The words "ASH EXPRESS" are written on the side. A firewood pile is visible next to the door. A cartoon firewood character, a green and yellow striped insect-like figure with a smiling face, is walking on a sidewalk carrying a brown bag. The background includes a bench, a tree, and a firewood pile. The text "DON'T GIVE EMERALD ASH BORER A FREE RIDE" is written in large red letters across the middle. The text "FIREWOOD: BUY IT WHERE YOU BURN IT." is written in large red letters at the bottom left. The text "NEBRASKA Good Life. Great Roots. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE" is written in blue and green at the bottom center. The text "Firewood can harbor tree-killing pests like Emerald Ash Borer, that hitchhike on firewood and destroy trees. Don't Move Firewood!" is written in black at the top right. The text "Artwork by Emily Y. Girl Scout Troop #20512" is written in red at the bottom right.

ASH EXPRESS

DON'T GIVE EMERALD ASH BORER A FREE RIDE

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YOU BURN IT.

NEBRASKA
Good Life. Great Roots.
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Firewood can harbor tree-killing pests like Emerald Ash Borer, that hitchhike on firewood and destroy trees. **Don't Move Firewood!**

Artwork by Emily Y.
Girl Scout Troop #20512



Pike Fishing at Pelican Lake, 1984.

Our sons Wyatt, age 7, and Dustin, age 5, ice fishing on Pelican Lake at the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge. Our sons became Eagle Scouts and enjoyed many adventures camping, fishing and duck hunting.

We traveled to Chadron State Park and Fort Robinson State Park several times as our sons grew up. At Chadron State Park, they first discovered fireflies in the evening. I always had to bring empty jars for collecting all sorts of specimens. Wyatt's interest in insects led him to achieve a doctorate in entomology and become an invasive species specialist. Dustin continues to have an adventurous spirit and loves camping, downhill biking, hiking and traveling in Nebraska's great outdoors.

– Doyce Williams, North Platte



Pheasant Hunting near Wausa, 1999.

Pheasant hunting with my son and two buddies in Wausa, Nebraska, October 1999. Pictured left to right: Lyle Rorvik, Wausa; myself, Elkhorn; my son, Will; and Mike O'Kane, Elkhorn.

We have enjoyed many pheasant hunts in my home town of Wausa.

– Neil Kirby, Elkhorn



Waterfowl Hunting near Silver Creek, 1984.

Opening day of 1984 waterfowl season on Dale Beck Ranch north of Silver Creek, Nebraska. A limit of ducks taken by the late Jack Higgins of Lincoln, left, and me, Randy Chinn, of Columbus. Photo was taken by the late Gene Hornbeck, former retired outdoor editor of the Omaha World-Herald. I'm 72 years old and have been hunting for 60 years and still hunt with my son, Todd Chinn, on the Platte River.

– Randy Chinn, Columbus

Send contributions to: Portraits from the Past, Nebraskaland Magazine, P.O. Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370. Or e-mail to Tim.Reigert@Nebraska.gov. Photos should show people enjoying Nebraska outdoor activities, such as camping, boating, hunting or fishing, and must have been taken before 2000. 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. Text may be edited and photos adjusted for reproduction. All photos will be returned.

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HOLDING MY BREATH

By Jeff Kurrus

There are take-your-breath-away moments in nature. When that deer you’ve been waiting to get a shot at suddenly appears 20 yards away. When the sun first dips below the horizon and the sky fills with pinks and purples. Or even when you finally see the fish at the end of your line, the one that’s bending your rod back on itself.

But there are also hold-your-breath moments in nature ... especially when you have a camera in hand. One such moment is when the light has faded so much and your shutter speed is so slow that any sort of movement, even just breathing, will make it impossible to capture tack-sharp images. And then there are the times when it’s so cold that your breath fogs up the viewfinder, making it impossible to see what you’re trying to photograph.

On this particular day, I experienced both. With light

fading and a long lens in hand, I hid beneath a makeshift cloth blind and repeatedly pressed the button, trying to rest the camera on my knees and holding my breath.

It wasn’t working. The camera continued to shake and I could barely see the raccoon — the animal providing the only source of color in the woods — through my viewfinder.

Finally, I shed the blind and shot madly, drawing an occasional, unconcerned look from the animal. After shooting more than 200 images, I kept eight.

The best of the images you see here. And I accomplished what I wanted to: To show all the little stories that can be found in even the tiniest patches of forest. And as a bonus, I also got what I always hope for when I’m in the outdoors: to have something take my breath away.

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