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DECEMBER 2022

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Hunting Big Water Ducks • Your Nebraska

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Fort Niobrara National Wildlife  
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JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

This page: Air bubbles are  
trapped beneath the ice  
hanging above the White River  
in Dawes County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

Nebraskaland
magazine

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Downy woodpeckers (like this male) are a common sight at backyard suet feeders in December.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

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Limpkin at Wehrspann Lake

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IN THE FIELD



WHITNEY LAKE  
Early ice at Whitney  
Lake in northwestern  
Nebraska.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



Spinning wing decoys are a must when hunting big water birds. TODD MILLS

# BIG WATER BIRDS

By Todd Mills

Late spring and early summer rains are a reason for hope and optimism with the waterfowl crowd. For the hunter who loves a small marsh and the challenges that come with it, this could be the most important ingredient for success. But for years like 2022, when drought has sucked up the majority of small water and affected even larger bodies of water, you must adapt and change or hang it up for the season. For most, like myself, that's not an option. Hunting larger water and river systems can be challenging, but if done right, it can provide you with some spectacular hunting. It takes some adapting and a different approach. Here are some tips that could lead to success in this, and future, dry years.

## Homework Is Not Optional

Unlike small marsh hunting, big water hunts require a great deal of scouting before a plan can be put together. On most big water trips, I'll set aside an entire day to become familiar with the area. It's important to pay close attention to wind direction and search areas where the birds can rest comfortably out of the wind. Coves and areas around points are optimal. And unlike a marsh hunt, your best gunning can come midday. Often, I'll find birds and wait until they go out to feed or move before setting up. No need to be in a hurry, especially if you have the area to yourself.

## Go Big

Hunting big water or river systems can require an entirely different decoy approach. Birds tend to raft in larger numbers

and stick close together, especially later in the season when cold temperatures hit. Larger spreads with an open landing area tend to work best. Find a good landing zone on the downwind side of your spread. If using goose decoys, place your ducks on the back side, right in front of the kill hole. Spinning wing decoys are a must here, especially on sunny days. Birds crossing large bodies of water can see the reflection for miles and will come to investigate. Whatever the first group does, the rest will probably follow suit, so don't be afraid to make adjustments early with your spread.

## Hide Away

Whether hunting from a boat or shore, the hide is crucial on big water. Since you may be far from adequate cover, you must make your hide blend into the background. If you can find a bank to be under or plenty of natural cover like grasses, rock piles or fallen timber, that would be optimal. Even if your hide sticks out a little, it can work if it's well concealed. On a recent hunt we had an A-frame on ice with open water in front. After covering it with surrounding cover, the mallards didn't hesitate to come in.

## Safety First

Big water hunting can create some safety issues. Life jackets when using a boat are a must, but often overlooked. A simple survival kit, GPS, a signal flare or whistle, and extra clothes can save the day. Weather, equipment failure and an injury to yourself or your dog can leave you stranded and uncomfortable. Plan for the best but prepare for the worst.

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Releasing trophy, male bluegill back into a lake — like this one from an eastern Nebraska farm pond — can help provide excellent long-term fishing. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

# DON'T STUNT

By Jeff Kurrus

It's a tough concept for many to learn, especially when panfishing. But if your goal is to catch trophy bluegill today — and long into the future — then put the biggest ones back.

"Bluegill biology is complicated," said Daryl Bauer, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission fisheries biologist. "Your big males are your nest builders, your guards. They grow extremely fast so they can defend the nest and reproduce. You want these fish around."

In contrary, added Bauer, there are other, smaller males — with coloration similar to females — that sneak onto the nests and fertilize eggs. The more of these fish that reproduce, the better the chances are for stunted fish in the future.

"So, if you're keeping those bigger fish," said Bauer, "then you're choosing to harvest faster growing fish and leaving the stunted ones in the lake."

Catch a few fish before deciding what to harvest, because fish size can be relative, and then harvest the smaller males. You can also take some female fish, but immediately release the trophies of both sexes. For example, when fishing a Sandhills lake, release anything larger than 9 inches. In an eastern Nebraska lake, that 9-incher may be the biggest fish, so concentrate on those in the 8-inch range.

The goal isn't to start your fishing story with: "This one time, we were keeping huge gillies." Instead, do your part to keep big bluegill in a lake for years to come.



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Add a couple anchovies into venison pot pie filling for better flavor. JENNY NGUYEN-WHEATLEY, NEBRASKALAND

## VENISON POT PIE

By Jenny Nguyen-Wheatley

**Servings:** 4

**Prep Time:** 15 minutes

**Cook Time:** 4 hours and 30 minutes

**Ingredients:**

- 1 pound of venison stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed but cold
- Salt and freshly cracked pepper
- 4 tbs. all-purpose flour, separated
- 1 pound of baby bella mushrooms, quartered
- Cooking oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 medium to large carrot, peeled and large diced
- 2 anchovy filets packed in oil
- 1 tbs. tomato paste
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup pinot noir
- 1¾ cup brown stock
- 1 medium waxy potato, peeled and large diced
- 2 sprigs of fresh thyme

- 4 sprigs of fresh parsley
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ cup of frozen peas
- 1 egg, beaten

1. Preheat oven to 300° Fahrenheit. Toss venison cubes with salt, pepper and 1 tbs. of flour. Over medium-high heat, heat a splash of oil in a small enameled Dutch oven and brown venison cubes in batches. Remove venison and set aside. Add more oil and brown mushrooms in batches with a pinch of salt, and then remove and set aside.

2. Lower heat to medium and add onion, carrot and a pinch of salt, adding more oil as needed. Sauté for about 5-7 minutes to slightly brown onion. Add tomato paste, garlic and anchovy and sauté for about 1 minute.

3. Return venison and mushrooms to the pot, along with any juices. Add the remaining 3 tbs. of flour and cook for

about 2 minutes, stirring frequently. Then stir in wine until thickened. Next, add stock, potatoes, bay leaf, parsley and thyme. Bring to a boil, and then cover and transfer to a 300° oven.

4. Braise stew for 2½ to 3 hours, or until venison becomes tender. Check halfway through and add more stock as needed; you want the ending stew to be thick and saucy, but not dry. When done, discard bay leaf, thyme and parsley sprigs. Season to taste.

5. Turn up oven temperature to 425°. Spray a 9-inch pie dish with cooking spray. Transfer pie filling into the pie dish and allow to cool for 30 minutes. Then stir in frozen peas and cover with a sheet of puff pastry — trim the edges as needed. Brush egg on top and bake in a 425° oven for 30-35 minutes on the middle rack. Rotate the pie dish halfway through for more even browning. Allow pie to rest for at least 10 minutes before serving.

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# Wildlife Finds

*By Jeff Kurrus*



A sharp-tailed grouse on a frosty fence at  
Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in  
Cherry County. JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



There is a true sense of accomplishment when finding winter wildlife. Whether by foot or vehicle, being in the right place at the right time to see Nebraska’s majestic animals is thrilling.

“See anything?” friends and family often ask on the return home, and when successful, a story ensues about the location, time and an educated guess: “Why were they there?”

It can be an animal the viewer has seen a thousand times, or a bucket list creature seen for the first time, be it big or small, on the east or west side of Nebraska. Regardless, these are sights viewers file away for the “This one time, I saw a ...” conversations they

always circle back to among friends. The story often works its way back to “Did they see you?” This one is tricky. Hunters rarely want their quarry looking in their direction. If the animal knows you’re there, there’s a good chance they’re not coming any closer. Some hunters even make it a point not to make direct eye contact with an animal. Viewers want the exact opposite. The thrill is when the white-tailed doe looks over its shoulders at the person with the binoculars or the sharp-tailed grouse leaps onto a stretch of barbed wire fence and faces the photographer — ready to have its picture taken.

Nothing could be better. Yet, when that pivotal moment comes on a waterfowl flush, when just enough sets of eyes become just uncomfortable enough and the birds fill the sky — even the most skilled wildlife viewer wouldn’t be able to help but admire watching their prized find flying in the opposite direction. [N](#)

**ABOVE:** White-tailed deer near Nine Mile Creek in Scotts Bluff County.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

**OPPOSITE:** Eastern fox squirrel in Lancaster County.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND





**A Virginia opossum bares its teeth on a dirt road in Cass County.** JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

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

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND





**Bighorn sheep ram and ewe at Williams Gap Wildlife Management Area in the Wildcat Hills Region of Banner County.**  
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



**Flocks of Canada and snow geese land in a Scotts Bluff County field.**  
JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



**Seconds later, the birds take flight.** JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



**A mere 17 seconds after the first image was captured (top), the sky is filled with Canada and snow geese.** JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND

# Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Don't let the busy holiday season stop you from spending time outdoors. Here are a few ideas to make your time outside count, from photography opportunities to Christmas displays and birdwatching. [N](#)



## Shoot photos at Fort Robinson State Park

Throughout the month

There's never a bad time to take pictures at Fort Robinson. In early December, park staff and the public team up to decorate Fort Robinson's historical buildings with Christmas lights, which are on display throughout the holiday season. Arrive at dusk to get the best photos. This time of year also provides the opportunity to enjoy the park's stunning landscape and charismatic wildlife outside of the busy tourism season. Grab a camera and have some fun.

JUSTIN HAAG, NEBRASKALAND



## Squirrel hunting

Through Jan. 31 | Statewide

Winter can be one of the most fun and rewarding times to hunt Nebraska's fox squirrels. Get outside on a calm and sunny day with family and friends to make memories and bring home meat for some delicious squirrel stew.

JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND

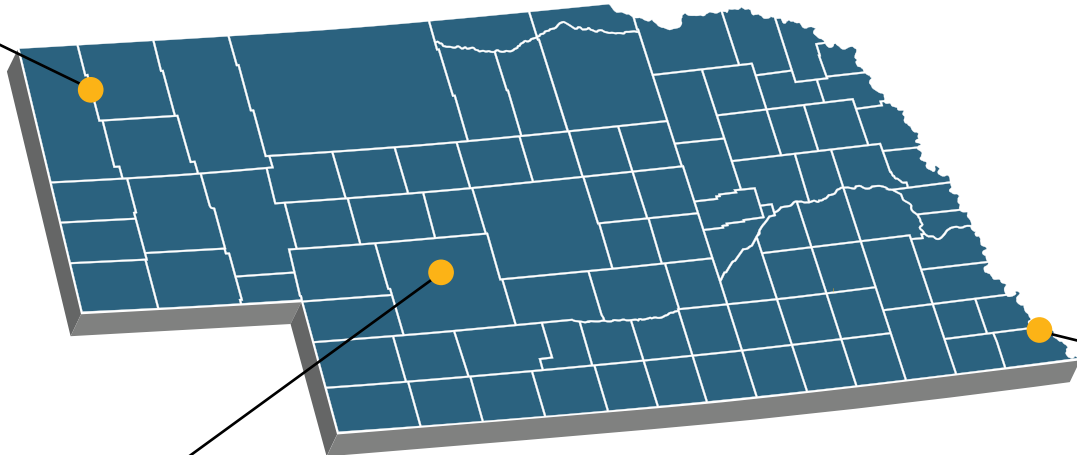


## Geocaching

All year | Statewide

Geocaching opportunities don't stop in winter, though there are a few extra things to consider. Make sure to dress for the weather, tell someone where you're going, and bring a small shovel for snow and a screwdriver to pry open frozen containers.

JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



## See Christmas lights at Buffalo Bill's home

Nov. 25 – Dec. 31 | Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park

See the historic home of Buffalo Bill lit up in a special display. All month, the barn, grounds and mansion will be decorated with Christmas lights. It's free and easy to simply drive by, but for the best experience, get out on the grounds and walk around.

JULIE GEISER, NEBRASKALAND



## Christmas Bird Count, Indian Cave State Park

Dec. 29, 9 a.m. – noon

Stay busy during Christmas vacation by becoming a community scientist. Bird lovers of all ages and experience levels are invited to come help with this winter census of the park's birds. The day includes kids' crafts and a soup feed. Meet at the park office at 9 a.m.; for more information, and to pre-register for the soup feed, call the park at 402-883-2575.

ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND



# Rebranding Blowouts

*Story and photos by Chris Helzer*

Grassland habitat doesn't always equal an abundance of cover. Some of the most barren places in the Sandhills attract a lot of wildlife, including a broad diversity of small creatures that think bare sand looks pretty dang hospitable.

Sandhills blowouts are perfect habitat for visual predators like robber flies because there's little to obstruct their view.





Blowout penstemon is perhaps the best-known inhabitant of Sandhills blowouts, but the blowouts are also terrific habitat for many animals.

Blowouts in the Nebraska Sandhills need a better public relations agent. They’re unpopular with ranchers, who tend to focus on the reasonable fact that bare sand contains very little cattle food. Among the other residents of the Sandhills prairie, though, that negative opinion is in the minority. Lots of smaller animals love them. Most of those animals use blowouts as bonus habitat. They’re a nice place to visit, even if they wouldn’t necessarily want to live there. Blowouts can be a great place to bask in the warmth of the sun, for example. Depending upon the topographic location of blowouts, some can host temporary pools of water after rains. Those can be very popular with

animals that are either thirsty or seeking a quick bath. Looking for a pleasant breeze on a warm day? Blowouts were made for wind. For that matter, they were made by wind, but it comes to the same thing. There is almost always at least a little breeze blowing across the bare sand, unobstructed by vegetation. At other times, of course, there’s so much wind it reshapes the topography of the sand, filling in the tracks of recent visitors and creating attractive ripples across the surface of the blowout. It can be a little more challenging to abide in a blowout during that kind of wind, but that’s when a little burrowing or a retreat to the sheltered edges can be a nice option.

There is surprisingly little written about the habitat use of blowouts by animals. If you mention blowouts as habitat, most people immediately think of the blowout penstemon, or maybe blowout grass. Fewer people can name other plants that live in or around blowouts, especially those without the term “blowout” in their titles. There are lots of them, though, including sandhill muhly, lemon scurfpea and painted milkvetch. What about animals? Kangaroo rats might be the best-known inhabitants of blowouts and other patches of bare sand. Their tracks and holes are easy to find around the edges of blowouts, where they venture out at night to gather leaves, seeds and other



Because they are nocturnal, kangaroo rats (below) are rarely seen during the day but their tracks (above) and burrowing activity illustrate their strong tie to Sandhills blowouts.



JON FARRAR, NEBRASKALAND



Lesser earless lizards are well adapted to the hot expanses of open ground in blowouts.

food. Some of that is for immediate consumption, but a lot of it gets stored underground for later. Their burrow system includes multiple entrances and exits. If you're looking to dig up a kangaroo rat to eat, savvy predators know to look for the holes that are plugged up, not the ones that are left open.

Lesser earless lizards are also big fans of open sand. Their tunnels can be found along the edges of blowouts and other patches of bare ground, especially on south-facing slopes that catch plenty of sunshine. They hunt the multitudes of insects and other invertebrates looking to warm up in that same sunshine. When threatened, they can scamper into holes or vegetative cover or just quickly bury themselves in loose sand.

Other animals make their homes in blowouts, too, but most are small and easy to overlook. There are a number of small sand wasps, for example, that dig nest burrows out in the middle of vast expanses of sand. Those entrances are often closed up by blowing sand, but the wasps have an extraordinary ability to find and re-open their tunnels anyway. That's important, since females of some species make numerous trips to and from those nest burrows carrying



Toads are commonly seen in blowouts, probably drawn by an abundance of insects.

flies for their kids to eat.

Several species of tiger beetle are commonly seen in the exposed sand of blowouts. The larvae of some species make tunnels in the same sand, where they position themselves at

the entrance and snag any potential prey that wanders too close. As adults, many tiger beetles have a shiny metallic sheen and use their speed and quickness to pursue and capture prey within the broad expanses of sand.

In addition to blowout residents, lots of other animals visit blowouts to enjoy the warmth of the sand, take advantage of the open vistas (easy-to-spot prey or watch for potential threats), or for other reasons. Toads, for example, are commonly seen around blowouts, which helps explain why the toad-eating hognose snake is also a frequent visitor. Butterflies often hang out in the bare sand, too, either basking in the sun or, sometimes, picking up minerals from the sand or manure of other visitors. Lots of beetles make tracks across the bare ground as well, including some species that roll and bury balls of dung in the loose substrate.

Several species of band-winged grasshoppers are often hanging around in blowouts. It's easy to see why when you look at their camouflaged bodies, which blend perfectly with bare sand. When sitting still, a band-winged grasshopper is almost impossible to spot until it moves. As adults, they can fly to escape predators, often displaying colorful wings and making a loud clacking sound that helps distract anything trying to catch them. If they can cause enough of a



Many wasp species dig nest burrows in the middle of blowouts.

distraction, they can then quickly land in a new location and disappear into the background once more.

Robber flies are essentially six-legged, surface-to-air missiles with huge eyes. They are commonly found in blowouts, where they sit quietly until a small insect flies into the air nearby, at which point the robber fly instantly



Hognose snakes are often seen in blowouts, probably because of the abundance of toads — their favorite food.



Intersecting highways of wildlife tracks crisscross blowouts, indicating the considerable activity that takes place in those habitats.

launches and intercepts its prey in the air. The broad open habitat of blowouts are perfect for this predatory approach because robber flies can see potential prey in all directions, as well as any possible threats.

From a distance, blowouts look empty and barren. Upon closer inspection, however, they are full of activity, especially during mornings and evenings. During the heat of the day,

many of the animals that use blowouts have retreated underground or into the cool shade around the edges of the open sand. Even then, signs of the abundant and diverse blowout community can be found in the tracks, burrows and other evidence left in the bare sand. That is, unless the wind is blowing.

Maybe blowouts just need a better name. The term

“blowout” can be positive in the case of a big sale at your local mattress store, but usually carries a more negative connotation. No one wants a blowout while driving, for example. Some aspiring public relations firm could surely come up with a more positive way to refer to these little wildlife havens. Sand bowls? Wind scoops? Toad nooks? You get the idea. [N](#)



Eastern tailed-blue butterfly in a blowout.



Bandwing grasshoppers are well-camouflaged against bare sand.



The aptly-named big sand tiger beetle is just one of many predators that hunt in blowouts.

The Council Bluffs (Iowa) Ferry in the territorial days, illustration from Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier* (1954).  
HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2401-0-3



# Crossing Nebraska Rivers by Ferry

*By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska*

We take bridges for granted, but river-crossing Nebraskans mostly relied on ferries into the 20th century. The ferry was a seasonal operation. When the river iced over, you could simply drive your team across, as long as you trusted the thickness of the ice.

During the westward migration along the Oregon, Mormon, and California trails, emigrants first had to pay ferrymen to take them across the Missouri River. Early ferries were rafts propelled by poles or oars. Cable ferries were an improvement,

and “team boats” propelled by horses on a treadmill were faster but less common.

Nebraska Territory opened to Euro-American settlement in 1854. That year, former fur trader Peter Sarpy of Bellevue bought a 165-ton steam ferry to better serve the expected flood of settlers. Also that year, the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company built Omaha’s first brick building to serve as the territorial capitol. It was an investment to ensure continued ferry traffic.



A team boat was propelled by horses on a treadmill. Santee, Knox County. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2118-9-8



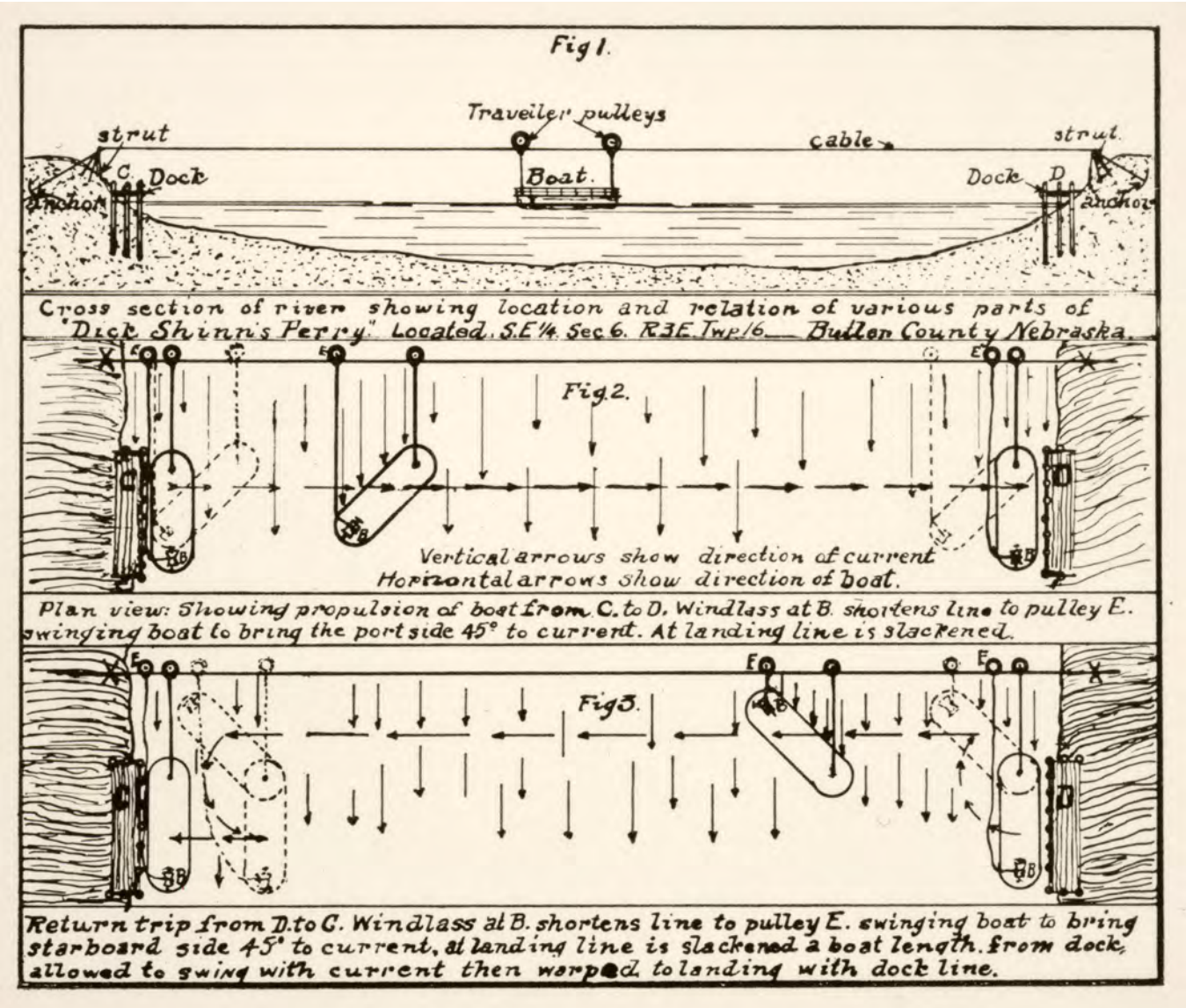
Transferring cars from a railcar ferry in Omaha, 1871. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2341-2-P19

In Omaha, ferry use did not end with the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. The Missouri River remained unbridged until 1872. A special steamboat had a length of railroad track running from bow to stern so it

could ferry railcars.

Along the Platte River south of Schuyler, Moses Shinn and his son, Dick, built a cable ferry in 1859. Shinn's Ferry used the river itself to propel the ferryboat. It was a "reaction

ferry," a type of cable ferry that angles the boat so that the current pushes it laterally. Bridle cables on either end of the boat were attached to "travellers" that would slide along the overhead cable. The diagram (below) shows how



An illustration showing how Shinn's Ferry used the current to propel the boat. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3268-11-14



Automobiles crowd the deck of the *City of Springfield* between Springfield, SD, and Santee, NE, circa 1915.

HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG2865-2-1

it worked.

To the west, the shallow Platte was crossed only by fording until bridges were built. Along the Missouri, ferries for wagons and, later, automobiles, remained in use long after railroad bridges spanned the river. For example, for many years, there was no convenient way for southwestern Iowa farmers to reach the South Omaha stockyards with truckloads of livestock. The Douglas Street Bridge was the nearest crossing. Diesel or gasoline-powered ferryboats, such as the one shown above, provided transport.

Despite demand, ferry businesses struggled to survive in Bellevue. Blame the ever-shifting channel and banks of the Missouri River. A well-prepared landing could be rendered unapproachable by shifting sandbars, and building a new landing also meant building a new road. The completion of the South Omaha Bridge in 1936

finally rendered the Bellevue ferry obsolete — a story similar to other ferries shown here. [N](#)

Visit *History Nebraska's website* at [history.nebraska.gov](http://history.nebraska.gov).



Bellevue ferry landing, June 14, 1924. HISTORY NEBRASKA, RG3097-8-1

# Elk Creek Curling

Story and photos by Jeff Kurrus

There is a long list of ways to raise money. In the outdoor world, it's often banquets, auctions or raffles. Others host fishing tournaments, shoots or competitions like one-box hunts. One Johnson County resident, however, came up with an entirely different plan to raise money to support his community. Arlen Beethe, with the support of the Elk Creek Men's Club, had a thought: Why not introduce a 16th century game made popular in Europe, combine friends, family and absolute strangers to compete, and raise money to help their neighbors?

"Every year the Elk Creek Men's Club gives scholarships to local kids," Arlen said. "We raise money for the Johnson County 4-H and offer help to any number of benefits. If someone has an injury and needs some help — if something needs funding — we try to raise it."

And that's how the Elk Creek curling event began.

"I had always enjoyed watching curling during the Olympics," said Arlen, "so I had this idea to do it on Main



Cole Beethe, perennial Johnson County curling powerhouse, releases a stone.



Curlers, with brooms and beers in hand, stand near the "house" of the curling pitch, counting points.

Street in Elk Creek. But that didn't work."

"Well, that's not the exact way it started," said Arlen's son, Cole, with a chuckle. "Originally, over a couple of years talking in the Village Tavern, our local bar, the idea was to use cow patties for a curling event. We'd freeze them, add weights, and somehow fashion a handle to them."

Luckily, this idea gave way to buying actual curling stones.

## 40 Pounds of Granite

Curling, like every other sporting event, comes with a list of terminology just about as long as a curling "pitch," the sheet of ice on which the game is played. The object of curling, similar to shuffleboard, is to slide granite stones, also called "rocks," into a target area, or "house." The path of

the stone is determined by its speed and team members who sweep and brush the ice ahead of the stone with brooms in order to influence its trajectory or "curl."

The stones are heavy, weighing about 40 pounds, and have a handle for the person releasing them. Arlen originally searched online to find a set of less expensive stones — if you'd call \$2,000 less expensive — for sale in North Dakota.

"Friends of the family, Gary and Kathy Peters, went up to get the stones from a guy who told us he had been an Olympic judge at one time," said Arlen. "After spending a bit of time talking to the guy on the phone, I knew they were in for a long conversation when they met him."

Gary, chucking over the absurdity of the trip with his wife to procure the rocks, recalls that half-day conversation 15

miles from the Canadian border. "He was selling us eight stones along with a set of brooms. The guy kept saying, 'You might need this. You might need that.' I wanted to tell him this is going to be pretty crude where we do this.

"Then, a couple of years later," Gary continued, "we had a guy from western Nebraska reach out. He had some stones we could use. So, for several years we'd borrow the stones and cut him a check for letting us use them. But our treasurer told us he wasn't cashing the checks. When I called him, he told me to just keep the stones. So now I have two sets of curling stones in my basement. They get used one day a year."

The club shoots to have its curling fundraiser the second Saturday in January, advertising mostly by word of mouth



At the Elk Creek curling event (above), the participants release the heavy stones in a "by any means necessary" style.

Morgan Kaster (left) releases a stone during the Elk Creek curling event in Johnson County.

to adapt.

"We first held the event for a few years in an alley behind the firehall in town," said Arlen, "but you had to run a liner and work pouring 50-degree water – hoping it would freeze. It was a pain to get done. So six years ago, we moved it to the pond. The ice can be a little rough, but once you get your house set in, it works well."

## Farm Pond Fun

At the event last winter, no one wore curling shoes, pants or gloves. Instead, the Johnson County farm pond curlers dressed in anything from sneakers to boots, with overalls or blue jeans.

Their attire, of course, didn't affect their play. Some participants maintained a level of professional form while others used an anything-goes approach, shoving the rock down the ice any way they could. For traction, players planted a foot in front of a wooden 2x4 drilled into the ice.

And the pitch — it changed as the weather did, shortening or lengthening as ice conditions changed, but the participants didn't seem to care. With their four-person teams, no one pulled out their measuring tape to see if the area was the 45- to 46-meter length of a competition-size pitch, and even fewer questioned the ice. Small puddles of water became a brief concern midday, not because of the fear of falling through the 8-inch ice, but because wet clothes in January is rarely a good idea.

To play, the stones were released from the front edge of a line called the hog, with extra bragging rights awarded to those who could slide the farthest across the ice without falling down, while still releasing the rock in the general direction of the house. Points were awarded to the stones closest to the center, and additional points were awarded to teams for each stone that is closer than the best of their opponents'. No points were awarded if teams are unable to land a stone in the scoring area.

Cole's teams have won all but one year, and while bragging rights were won that day, the object of Elk Creek curling is always fun.

And fundraising. They do this in the most unique way possible — sliding giant stones across a frozen Nebraska farm pond in January, in hopes of sending rocks to the house. [N](#)

## A Brief Curling History



Above is the 16th century painting "Winter landscape with a bird trap" by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, of Belgium, which portrays a scene of a sport similar to curling being played on frozen ponds.

The first recognized curling clubs were formed in Scotland during the 19th century with international competitions also being held during this century.

By the early 20th century, the game had reached such notoriety it was included in the first Olympic Winter Games in 1924. However, it was removed from Olympic programming until gaining official medal status in 1998 by the International Olympic Committee.

Nowadays, national and international competitions take place on indoor rinks under carefully controlled ice conditions, and more laid-back versions of this popular winter sport are held throughout the world on frozen waters, including at least one in Elk Creek, Nebraska.



## SNOWED IN BY CHOICE

By Jeff Kurrus



There's not a better winter destination in Nebraska than the mini-lodge cabins at Ponca State Park. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND

One of my most memorable family winter trips was to Ponca State Park. We barely beat the snow storm there from the metro, then spent the next two days not able or willing to drive anywhere else. Instead, we hiked, snow-boarded and ice-fished when we were outside, and when back inside our mini-lodge, cooked, played board games and snuggled up together in front of the fireplace. Those were some of the best times I've had with my wife and children. I hope everyone gets the chance to be snowed in at a Nebraska State Park. Here are a few other places to get stuck this winter.

This time of year, one of Chadron State Park's six duplexes are the perfect getaway from the world until they close from Jan. 2 through March 3. Catch up on some reading or take inspiration from Thoreau — wooded buttes and canyons will provide the solitude you need to get ink flowing. Feeling extra feverish? Bring a camera to walk in one of Nebraska's most beautiful winter landscapes. Chadron State Park offers 6 miles of hiking trails, and with the Nebraska National Forest adjacent, you'll have access to another 100 miles of scenic trails and back roads.

With seven modern, two-bedroom cabins open through the winter and situated right on the water, Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area offers the perfect fish-and-stay destination, where you can go from Vexilars and jigging rods back to football and a warm dinner in minutes. All cabins at Lewis and Clark have a covered patio, picnic table, outdoor grill and campfire ring, and fill up quickly in the winter.

Recognized as two of eastern Nebraska's most popular year-round destinations, Eugene T. Mahoney and Platte River state parks offer various lodging options throughout the winter. From hiking and sledding to bringing in your own holiday decorations, these are two of the state's best winter getaways. Whether you come to ice fish, hike or to just relax, these parks near the metro will make you feel miles away from the city.

*Visit [ReserveAmerica.com](https://ReserveAmerica.com) for more information on these and other Nebraska winter lodging options. Reservations can be made as far as a year in advance. Several parks also offer a 30% discount during certain days of the week — a great deal in addition to a much-needed break from the real world.*



Platte River State Park features a number of winter cabin accommodations. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



The cabins at Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area overlook the reservoir, perfect for a fish-and-stay trip. JEFF KURRUS, NEBRASKALAND



Winter lodging options at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park feature cabins (shown) and mini-lodges like Ponca State Park. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

## HUNTING SEASON HABITAT MANAGEMENT

By Jeff Kurrus and Gerry Steinauer

You can't hunt every day of the hunting season, although some wives claim some years we try. To keep you occupied on the days you don't hunt, the following are a few ideas for hunting season habitat management.

### Maintaining Treeless Grasslands

Game birds, such as pheasants, quail and prairie grouse, prefer open, treeless grasslands. One simple, sure-fire fall or winter management practice to improve game bird habitat is cutting eastern red-cedars, from saplings to mature trees, that have invaded your prairie, pasture or Conservation Reserve Program field. Cut all stumps as close to the ground as possible to prevent future damage to vehicles. If you are aggressive and chainsaw many trees, you might consider piling them for burning when there is a good snow on the ground; snow will prevent the fire from escaping. And, since it is the holiday season, ponder keeping a shapely tree for decorating the house. Don't worry, rumor has it that Santa will leave presents even under an invasive cedar tree.

At this time of year, you can also cut invasive deciduous trees, such as Siberian elm, autumn olive and honey locust, from your grasslands. However, since these are re-sprouters, you will have to immediately spray the cut stump with a triclopyr herbicide, such as Garlon 3A, or picloram herbicide,

such as Tordon, to kill the root system. Use caution when using the latter as it can move through the soil and kill nearby desired trees. Information is available online regarding appropriate herbicide use.

### Spraying Invasive Grasses

Invasion of grasslands by non-native, cool-season grasses, such as smooth brome and Kentucky bluegrass, is a problem throughout most of Nebraska. These mostly Eurasian grasses often out-compete our native grasses and wildflowers, which provide valuable food and cover for game birds.

Mid-fall through early winter is the best time to use herbicide application to check these invaders. Wait to spray until after a couple of hard frosts, which send native plants into dormancy, but not the invasive grasses that remain green and susceptible to contact herbicides.

Herbicide spraying can be done into late December; the later you spray, the better the kill on the invaders and the lower the odds of damaging natives. But here's the catch, the brome and bluegrass or other invasive grass must be green when sprayed and the spraying must be done on the first of at least two consecutive days when the temperature reaches at least 50 degrees. On warm days, the plants are actively photosynthesizing and will take the chemical down into their roots ensuring effectiveness.

Small areas can be sprayed with hand sprayers, but for larger plots, use an all-terrain vehicle with a spray rig. Unfortunately, most commercial sprayers have winterized their equipment by the time these grasses are prime for spraying. Use a glyphosate herbicide such as Roundup, at a rate of two quarts per acre along with non-ionic surfactant and ammonium sulfate. Spraying works best if the field has been hayed or grazed in late summer to remove excess thatch that intercepts the herbicide, preventing it from reaching green leaves.

Our final tip: Ease your work load by persuading your hunting buddies to help with the management. Tell them that their work will mean more birds next year and, as a further enticement, promise that you'll send them home with a free Christmas tree.



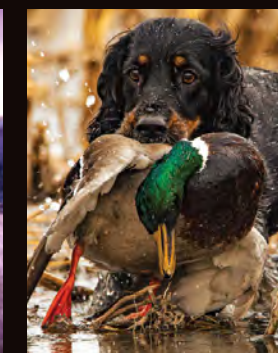
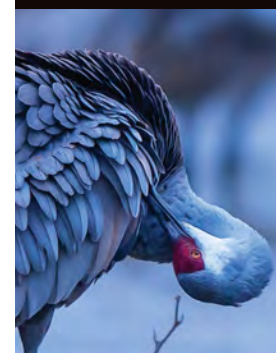
Big bluestem and Maximilian sunflower provide excellent pheasant habitat in a tallgrass prairie pasture. Prior to late fall spraying with a glyphosate herbicide, followed by spring burning, this area of the pasture was dominated by non-natives grasses. GERRY STEINAUER, NEBRASKALAND



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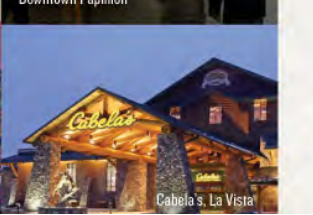
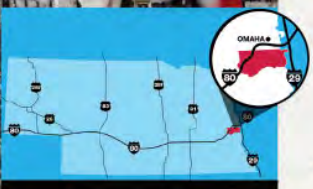
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**HUNTERS HELPING THE HUNGRY**

# KHAPRA BEETLE

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

The khapra beetle (*Trogoderma granarium*) is an exotic invasive insect pest of stored grain, grain products and seeds. The beetle is one of the 100 worst invasive species in the world, causing up to 70 percent grain damage when present. It is currently not known to occur in the U.S., though infestations have been found and eradicated a few times in the last 80 years. Khapra beetles are regularly intercepted at U.S. ports of entry in a variety of commodities including seeds, spices, other foodstuffs, burlap bags, wooden crating and other shipping containers.

Khapra beetles pose a significant threat to agriculture in Nebraska, which is why the Nebraska Department of Agriculture annually conducts khapra beetle surveys statewide. The insect itself could cause significant economic losses to the state by damaging stored grain, grain products and seed. A khapra beetle establishment in the state would also severely impact both interstate and international trade.

The khapra beetle is a tiny brown to black beetle covered with fine hairs. Larvae are creamy white when young and age to brown before pupating and are also covered in hairs.



Khapra beetle larvae and adult.  
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, BUGWOOD.ORG  
PEST AND DISEASES IMAGE LIBRARY, BUGWOOD.ORG

Khapra beetle larvae can look very similar to other common stored grain pests, and a microscope is used to confirm identification.

Larvae are the primary cause of feeding damage. Complete development from egg to adult can take from 26–220 days, depending on environmental conditions. If temperatures drop too low, or conditions become unfavorable, larvae can enter diapause, where they become inactive and may remain in this state for months or years.

The NDA annually conducts khapra beetle surveys across the state to watch for this invasive pest. The survey focuses on international markets that may stock khapra beetle host materials which originate in foreign countries. High volume grain and seed importers and exporters are also surveyed. To date, all surveys have been negative.

For more information on the khapra beetle, visit [Aphis.USDA.gov/aphis/resources/pests-diseases/hungry-pests/the-threat/khapra-beetle](https://Aphis.USDA.gov/aphis/resources/pests-diseases/hungry-pests/the-threat/khapra-beetle)

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# REPLACING THE OFFENSIVE

By Eric Fowler

While on a hunting trip in the Pine Ridge in northwestern Nebraska in 2010, I photographed a picturesque butte in northwestern Sheridan County. When I got back to the office, I looked, as I often do, at the U.S. Geological Survey topographical maps to see if it was named. I couldn't believe that, in the 21st century, a feature could still carry a name that was both sexist and racist.

It no longer does. In September, the U.S. Department of Interior announced the Board on Geographic Names had approved the list of replacement names for federal use for that feature, seven more in Nebraska and more than 650 across the country that included the term that historically has been an offensive ethnic, sexist slur typically directed toward Native American women. On USGS maps, the butte in Sheridan County is now called Evening Star Butte.

Judi gaiashkibos, executive director of the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs and a member of the Ponca Tribe, applauded the move.

"Bravo! Finally," she said.

"I have been called that word in my life, and it was never said in a positive tone," she said. "It was derogatory. As a woman, as a native woman, and the mother of two daughters and two granddaughters, I definitely find that it is really disrespectful, and I absolutely think that it is inappropriate." Society has evolved, gaiashkibos said, and that is good.

And with what is happening in the United States in recent years, it's even more timely.

Other features containing the term include streams, a mound, a reservoir, and a bend on the Missouri River reservoirs in Dawes, McPherson, Richardson and Sioux counties. There had been more. In 2000, then Gov. Mike Johanns asked counties with features containing the term to rename them. Gage, Holt, Knox, Saline and Sarpy counties complied.

Nationally, several states have passed bills requiring the term be removed from the names of more than 1,000 creeks, summits, canyons and other features. But similar bills in other states have failed, as did previous efforts by Native Americans to convince the Board of Geographic Names to remove the term. The board had, however, in the past 20 years considered 261 proposals to change the names of individual features.

September's move by the Board follows months of work by the Derogatory Geographic Names Task Force, which included representatives from numerous government agencies. That effort produced a list of proposed changes, which was reviewed by nearly 70 tribal governments. The new names are immediately effective for federal use.

A complete list of names and a map can be found at USGS.gov.



Evening Star Butte in Sheridan County. ERIC FOWLER, NEBRASKALAND

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- GAME  PARKS -

**Badger and skunk hunting, 1946**

This is a photo of my father, Leonard Pelster, taken at his farm in Elsie. He had just returned from the service in 1946. He was successful in shooting a badger and several skunks. Leonard was also an avid pheasant hunter and shot two albino pheasants, one he proudly displays in his home in North Platte.

– Sally Borowski, Grant



**Deer Hunting near Valentine, 1982**

Pictured with the pickup is Kevin Thorton on the left and Buzz DeNaeyer on the right after retrieving the hunters and their deer.

– Robert Smith, Norfolk



**Coyote hunting by airplane, 1940s**

John Zimmerman took the rest of the men up in his airplane to chase and hunt coyotes west of Gretna, near the Platte River. They were very successful that day, as you can see by all the coyotes hanging on the wings of the plane. The men in the hunt, from left to right: Henry Glisman, Louie Steen, Bill Zimmerman, Henry Siert (my grandfather), Clarence Schroeder, and John Zimmerman.

– Bob Dickinson, Gretna



**Fishing at McConaughy, 1945**

A picture of my mother, Ann Richards, from Oshkosh, on the cover of the Outdoor Nebraska magazine from spring of 1945. She was fishing at Lake McConaughy and conservation officer Loron Bunney took her photo.

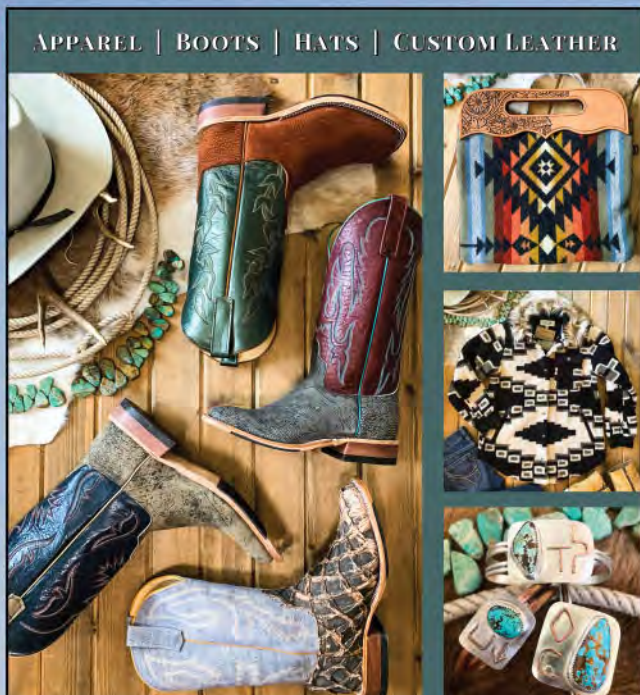
– Barb Chadwick, Oshkosh

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](mailto: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.

# Christmas

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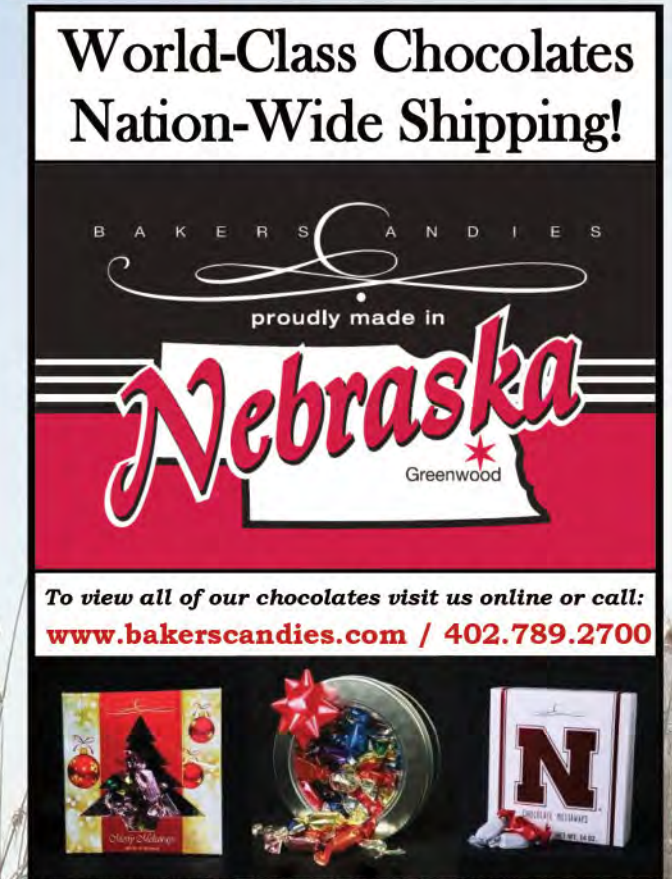


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# SYMBOLIC DEFICIENCY

By Gerry Steinauer

Late one afternoon, the bison skull propped on a chair in our dining room caught my eye. I liked how the sunlight coming through the window cast the skull in warm colors and created sharp shadows. I grabbed my camera and snapped a few photos.

The skull is one of three bison skulls on display in our house. It belonged to a bull bison purchased nearly 20 years ago from a southeastern Nebraska rancher for butcher. I cleaned the skull and placed it on the chair. Later, Grace, my wife, inserted a “cheap plastic vine” into the killing bullet hole and draped it over the skull.

Later, while viewing the skull photographs, I was reminded of Georgia O’Keefe’s paintings of cow skulls I had seen in art books. O’Keefe was an American modernist artist who lived from 1887 to 1986. I pondered why she, like myself, was so infatuated with skulls. I did a little reading.

O’Keefe’s interest in skulls began during a summer visit to New Mexico in 1930, the year after a severe drought littered the desert floor with bones. Fascinated by the “stark elegance of the bones,” she collected cow and horse skulls and shipped them back to New York to paint. One authority said her paintings “attempt to capture the inner essence and therefore true ‘reality’ of

the thing ... [and represent] the death and destruction of the American landscape, or they can be viewed as celebratory works that pay tribute to the animals that first inhabited the Western landscape.”

Whoa! That is such deep symbolism — not what I saw when I photographed my bison skull. To be honest, I rarely notice or understand symbolism in art, movies or literature. For example, Grace recently told me the vine twining from the skull’s bullet hole symbolized “life growing from death.” I totally missed that — I thought she used the vine just to hide the hole.

One possible explanation for my “symbolic incompetence” is that I was born without or with a very small “symbolic lobe,” that little-known part of the brain that recognizes and understands symbolism and inspires artists such as O’Keefe. Or perhaps, unknown to my conscious mind, deep in my subconscious I do understand symbolism and my photographs are loaded with it. Therefore, in reality, my bison skull photograph represents the death and destruction of the great American prairie and pays homage to its iconic creature, the bison.

Hogwash. Who am I trying to fool? I took the photo because, to my simple mind, it looked cool.

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