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Nebraskaland

Volume 97 • No. 6
July 2019

Cover: The sun rises behind a windmill and wildflowers at Metcalf Wildlife Management Area near Hay Springs. Photo by Justin Haag.

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PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

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Cory Loomis, Bloomfield
Red Fox



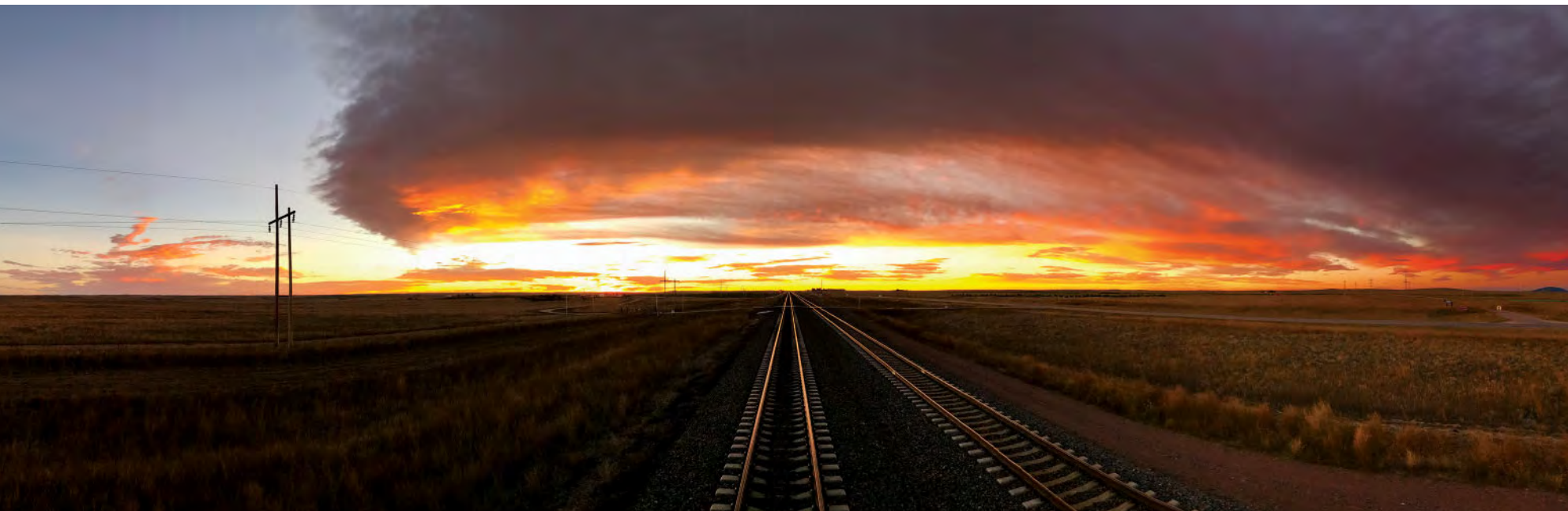
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Wymore Storm



Mark Nutzman, Alma
Sunset near Harlan County Reservoir



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Northern Cardinal



Alan Nash, Scottsbluff,
Sunset on the Western
Coal Lines



OPPOSITE: Cory Loomis,
Bloomfield
Lightning South of Bassett



Cory Loomis, Bloomfield
Honey bee



Cory Loomis, Bloomfield
Merlin

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also welcome.*

A SUNFLOWER GOLDFINCH

An American goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*) sits on a sunflower in front of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission headquarters in Lincoln.

PHOTO BY ERIC FOWLER





PHOTO BY GERRY STEINHAUER

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED: THE WESTERN MASSASAUGA RATTLESNAKE

By Melissa J. Panella

Snakes – people tend to love ‘em or hate ‘em. Snakes can stir up all kinds of emotions and have unfortunately long been considered nothing but trouble, particularly the venomous variety. But, truth be told, a deer is more likely to cause injury to a person than a venomous snake. A little bit of precaution can go a long way toward avoiding a snake bite. Nearly half of the reported snake bites of humans occur when a person deliberately handles a snake.

In fact, snakes are fascinating creatures that can offer benefits to people. For example, without snakes, a major agent of pest control would be lost.

The western massasauga (*Sistrurus tergeminus*) is a small pit viper native to the central and southwestern United States. They are sit-and-wait predators that typically prey on small, terrestrial vertebrates found in wet locations. Massasaugas feed mostly on small mammals such as voles and shrews. Larger mammals such as raccoons, foxes and coyotes will prey on massasaugas. They are also taken by hawks and even other snakes.

Massasaugas prefer moist soils in grassland habitats located in only a handful of eastern Nebraska counties in the

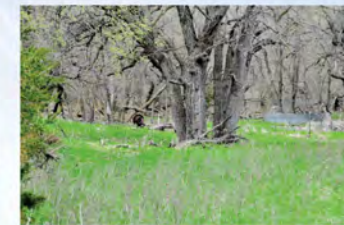
tallgrass prairie ecoregion. They use crayfish burrows as dens. These burrows provide seasonal cover for massasaugas and are an important component of their habitat. Massasaugas tend to den in locations for overwintering that will be safe from flooding; however, floods have been known to eliminate them from locations in the past.

Western massasaugas are on Nebraska’s list of threatened species. They are susceptible to a number of threats, but the most significant has been the alteration and loss of their habitat. As much as 98 percent of Nebraska’s native tallgrass prairie, which is the crucial habitat of the massasauga, has been converted to other uses. The remaining massasaugas rely on tracts of grassland in close proximity to wetlands or ponds and lakes. Massasaugas are highly vulnerable to changes in the core areas they inhabit, because they rarely have access to corridors of habitat that allow them to traverse distances more than a mile.

Massasaugas provide an important ecological service of all-natural pest control. They are also a reminder of our tallgrass prairie heritage. Massasaugas just need some space in Nebraska’s two percent of tallgrass prairie that endures.

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Long-billed Curlew – Justin Haag

FALL MIGRATION IN SUMMER

By Joel G. Jorgensen

It was fun while it lasted, but summer is over. At least that is the case for a number of shorebirds (plovers, sandpipers, snipes, phalaropes and others) that have departed their summer breeding haunts to our north and are now undertaking their “fall” or southbound migration. Typically, the first fall migrant shorebirds observed in Nebraska are lesser and greater yellowlegs, which appear about June 20 and are quickly followed by the closely-related solitary sandpipers. By July, more than a dozen species are moving through the state and heading south.

The commencement of shorebirds’ fall migration comes a little more than a week after the last of the Arctic-bound white-rumped sandpipers pass through the state in early June. However, some individuals migrate south even earlier. A female long-billed curlew outfitted with a satellite

transmitter migrated from the Gulf of Mexico to the Nebraska Sandhills at the end of March in 2010. Presumably it found a mate and nested, but it departed Nebraska and headed back south by mid-May, likely because its nesting attempt failed.

Many of the nesting attempts by the other early-arriving shorebirds in June and early July likely experienced a similar fate. Others of their kind that beat the odds and whose young hatched will remain on their nesting grounds longer to tend to their young. Many of those individuals migrate south at a later date, and most juveniles will migrate later still, in August, September and October.

Shorebirds are vagabonds and many individuals travel up to 20,000 miles in a year. Whatever time of year it may be, you can rest assured that somewhere on the planet there are shorebirds migrating.



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PHOTO BY CHRIS HELZER

MYTHS AND REALITIES OF HARVESTMEN, AKA DADDY-LONGLEGS

By Chris Helzer

Daddy-longlegs, or harvestmen, are commonly seen across Nebraska in houses and yards, as well as in grasslands and woodlands. Although they are arachnids, harvestmen are not spiders. They're part of a group of creatures called opiliones. They do have eight legs, but only two eyes, as opposed to the six or eight eyes most spiders have. Harvestmen also differ from spiders in that they are unable to produce silk.

There is a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding about harvestmen and daddy-longlegs. Some stems from the fact that the name daddy-longlegs is often (incorrectly) applied to various kinds of spiders, especially a diverse group called cellar spiders, which also have very long legs. Some cellar spiders look somewhat like brown recluse spiders which can have a dangerous bite. As a result, because both harvestmen and cellar spiders are called daddy-longlegs, both are often wrongly labeled as dangerous. They're not.

A more specific myth about harvestmen is that they are among the world's most venomous spiders but just don't have long enough fangs to puncture human skin. It makes

a titillating story, but it isn't at all true. In fact, harvestmen don't even have fangs, let alone venom, so the story falls apart pretty quickly.

Speaking of falling apart, while they are harmless, harvestmen do have a somewhat disturbing habit of breaking off their legs as a way to escape predation. It might be a good strategy, but it can be a little creepy to someone just picking a harvestman up to examine it or move it out of the house. The strategy also seems counterproductive because harvestmen's legs contain thousands of tiny sensory organs that help it navigate and understand the world around it. In particular, the second set of legs is used more as antennae than legs, something you can observe yourself if you manage to find one that still has all its legs intact.

With or without a full set of legs, however, harvestmen are innocuous fellow inhabitants of the earth. You might think they're cute, you might think they're creepy, but they won't kill you in your sleep, so that's something to be happy about.



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PHOTO BY RYAN SPARKS

VENISON SLOPPY JOES

By Ryan Sparks

I love sloppy joes. When I was in high school, I scavenged extra “joes” from my classmates who scoffed at them. These venison sloppy joes will please even the most discerning sloppy joe aficionado. Doubling the recipe and serving it at a party is a great way to introduce your friends to venison and get them interested in hunting. I wouldn’t consider them spicy, but for those who wince at heat, omit the sriracha. Serve with potato chips, dill pickles, additional mustard, cold beer and, in the fall, Husker football.

Servings: 6 but can easily be doubled to feed a crowd.

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 1½ to 2½ hours

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 pounds ground venison
- Kosher salt
- 1 medium red onion, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 dried chipotle pepper
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin

- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 2½ cups dry red wine, plus more for deglazing (think Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, etc.)
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon mustard of choice
- 1 tablespoon sriracha
- 1 teaspoon smoked salt or ½ teaspoon liquid smoke
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 12-ounce can whole tomatoes with their juice
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 1½ teaspoons white sugar
- Soft buns to serve

1. In a large Dutch oven over high heat, add the canola oil. When it is hot, add the ground venison, salt it liberally and cook until it begins to caramelize. You will likely need to work in batches to avoid crowding the pan.

The more you stir the meat the longer it will take to brown. Let it be. When all the meat has browned remove it from the pot and set aside.

2. Reduce the heat to medium, add the onion and garlic with a pinch of salt and cook until the onions begin to look translucent. Push the onion mixture to the back of the pot and press the chipotle pepper into the bottom of the pot until it becomes fragrant. Repeat on the other side. Add the cayenne, paprika, cumin, cinnamon, and allspice, then the tomato paste. Cook for two minutes.

3. Add a good splash of red wine and scrape all the browned goodness from the bottom of the pot with a wooden spatula. Once you have the bottom scraped smooth, add the rest of the wine, vinegar, mustard, sriracha and brown sugar. Bring the pot to a simmer and stir to dissolve the sugar. Add the tomatoes and their juice as well as the browned meat, oregano and white sugar. Continue simmering until the mixture reaches the optimal sloppy joe consistency, about 45 minutes (if doubling the recipe it will take around 2 hours). Remove the chipotle pepper, slap a scoop of meat on a bun and enjoy.

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NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —

WILDCAT HILLS

A Wild Place

Story and Photos by Justin Haag

Whether you're looking
for state-of-the-art
facilities, or just a great
view in the pines, this
Panhandle park has it.

Just off Nebraska Highway 71
south of Gering is Wildcat Hills
State Recreation Area, with its
modern shooting complex and
nature center.

High on the list of Nebraska’s captivating scenery and natural assets are the Wildcat Hills. It seems an understatement to label this topographical spectacle as “hills,” as it is actually a land of rugged buttes, ridges and canyons with topographical elements rising upwards to 1,000 feet above the North Platte Valley. Some of the state’s most recognizable landforms – Chimney Rock, Scotts Bluff, Court House and Jail Rocks – are part of this region.

Along Nebraska Highway 71 just 10 miles south of Gering, in the upper elevations of the Wildcat Hills, a special property highlights the best of what this region has to offer. Thanks to the Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, thousands have developed an appreciation for the region’s natural resources, paleontology and recreational opportunities.

The recently renovated and expanded Nature Center with its interactive displays and event space have been a big hit among visitors, as has the new shooting complex



Children hike the trails of Wildcat Hills during a field trip. The park features more than three miles of trails.



Children collaborate on a scavenger hunt at one of the Nature Center’s displays.

that features targets for a variety of firearms and archery equipment. They are among the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s most modern facilities.

In addition to those facilities, 1,094 acres of wilderness just outside the doors help visitors get in touch with nature. Many have grown to love the park’s rugged pine-studded topography, along with a stunning view of Scotts Bluff and the North Platte Valley.

Camping, picnicking, hiking and biking are just a few of the activities available for visitors. Perhaps most of all, it is a great place to take the kids.

An Expanding Mission

No doubt, this property has changed since the Commission acquired the initial Wildcat Hills tract in 1929. Once home to

captive bison and elk herds, the property has evolved along with the public’s wishes.

Visitors realize they are in a special place as they walk into the Nature Center, the park’s headquarters, and encounter the branches of a replica 27-foot ponderosa pine tree rising from the garden level through a hole in the main floor to the vaulted ceiling.

While the property maintains wilderness appeal, the center’s wide range of indoor interpretive displays and programs also highlight nature.

Spearheaded by a team of local visionaries, the Wildcat Hills Nature Center was constructed in the early 1990s. Building on the success of that venture, donor support led to a major expansion of 8,720 square feet, more than doubling the size of the original 5,300-square-foot structure. The

expanded facility, with new areas for meetings, instruction and displays, opened in spring 2017.

Taking a Shot

Early this decade, Commission officials recognized an opportunity, and a need, to promote and facilitate shooting sports in a family-friendly environment. The adjacent wildlife management area had become a popular place for area residents looking for a place to practice shooting.

The Wildcat Hills Shooting Sports Complex, which opened fall 2016 and is easily seen and accessed from the highway, features targets for a variety of firearms and archery equipment.

The offerings include a small-bore range for rimfire rifles and approved handguns, a pellet range with bull’s-eye targets and a state-of-the-art shooting gallery, an archery range with bull’s-



OPPOSITE: The park provides a convenient location to get a taste of the Wildcat Hills’ scenic, rugged topography.

eye and 3-D targets, a shotgun trap range, and a 100-yard range for sighting in rifles and precision shooting. A 5-stand sporting clays range and skeet range are nearing completion.

People may bring approved firearms and bows for all but the air rifle range, which requires use of the complex’s guns. Equipment, including firearms, ammunition, bows and arrows are available for rental, and trained instructors help people get started.

The facility not only serves experts, but also introduces youth and novices to shooting sports and consequently promotes the state’s hunting heritage.

Learning, Naturally

One of Wildcat Hills’ paramount missions is to combat “nature deficit disorder,” the evidence-based idea that children and others are spending less time outdoors.

More than 6,000 children annually take part in education programs at the Nature Center. It is especially popular during field trip season in spring.

Second-grade teacher Erica Croft of Morrill is among the educators using the center to complement the curriculum. She and her teaching partner find the center and its services helpful in expanding students’ knowledge of their environment.

“Many of our students have only been to school and to Scottsbluff, so venturing into the great outdoors is a new experience for a lot of them,” she said. “The facility itself offers a unique, multisensory learning environment. They could look at fossils, bones and habitat recreations. They could create footprints in sand with molds. They could look at slides under microscopes and even touch real life animals.”

Three-dimensional elements, such as taxidermy and fossils, provide outstanding visuals, as do painted murals of the region’s current ecosystem and how scientists believe it looked in prehistoric times.

The new classroom provides a comfortable area to conduct educational activities. Live amphibians and reptiles, including a Blanding’s turtle and western hognose snake, give children an opportunity to see species first-hand.

“During the school year, we study different habitats and ecosystems, so this field trip is a nice complement to our studies,” Croft said. “It puts the ‘theoretical’ learning into everyday, tangible experiences for the kids. They get to see what the prairie looks like, experience the sounds and the smells, see bugs, animals, etc.”

Most of the field trips are led by Amanda Filipi, a Commission outdoor education specialist who serves the Panhandle.

“Amanda does an amazing job working and communicating with the kids,” Croft said. “She has a talent of talking to them like they are mature, but also really injecting a lot of humor

into all of the facts that she is presenting. This isn’t always an easy skill when working with 7- and 8-year-olds.”

In early May, for the second consecutive year, the center opened its doors to hundreds of students for the annual Outdoor Discovery Program – a Commission event that introduces children to nature and a wide variety of outdoor activities. The Wildcat Hills facilities were inadequate before the latest round of construction and expansion, so it was previously staged at the Trails West YMCA Camp in Scottsbluff.

Also for young visitors, the Junior Explorer program features a 16-page full-color book with activities. The program has activities requiring children to find and study natural features, such as animal tracks and plants. The program has a definite Wildcat Hills flavor, with topics specific to the area.

The center also plays host to Wildcat Weekends, a series



The shooting complex offers opportunities for a variety of shooters and archers.



Amanda Filipi, outdoor education specialist, explains a yucca seed pod to children during a hike.



The 27-foot replica ponderosa pine spans two floors, making even the indoors seem suitable for exploration.



Live displays, such as this active bee hive on the Nature Center’s garden level, enhance learning opportunities.

of monthly educational events each with a different theme targeted to the general population.

Nature on Display

Perhaps one of the greatest attributes of Wildcat Hills is that visitors are never certain what they might see. Whether one is hiking more than three miles of trails, or taking in an unrivaled view of the valley on one of the nature center’s observation decks situated above the pines, the park is a visual treat.

A road along the park’s summit links visitors to trails coursing through evergreen-studded ridges and canyons that feature mountain mahogany and other western plant species.

The park attracts a lot of wildlife, and it has become recognized as a premier bird-watching site. Well-stocked feeders near the center’s dark tinted windows allow visitors to observe the wide variety of avian species, such as red crossbills and pine siskins, from the comforts of indoors. In fall, park visitors get an up-close view of feathered species at a bird-banding station operated by the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.

An active indoor honeybee hive with transparent walls allows the busy insects to come and go while giving observers special insight to their work.

Wild turkeys, deer, bobcat and coyotes frequent the park,

and there are even sometimes reports of bighorn sheep – if not at the park, they can be found at one of the many public lands nearby. Even the occasional moose has been reported on the property. Visitors are reminded to keep an eye out for another important member of the High Plains ecosystem, the prairie rattlesnake.

Way Back Wildcats

The Wildcat Hills Nature Center serves as an important stop and southernmost point of the Fossil Freeway, a corridor of seven important paleontological sites that extends northward to the Mammoth Site at Hot Springs, S.D.

Wildcat Hills is the site of the Millenium’s End Quarry, a remarkable trove of diverse fossils representing life 23 million years ago that was discovered on the highway right-of-way in 1999.

Past species such as the “bear dog” Ysengrinia and Prosynthetoceras, a deer-like animal with a slingshot-like horn protruding from its snout, are brought to life in an interpretive mural by artist Jan Vriesen.

Appropriate for a facility with “Wildcat” in its name, a 25-million-year old fossil of two battling saber-toothed cats entangled in death is housed in the center. Renowned paleontologist Loren Eiseley discovered it in the Panhandle in 1932.

A Place to Gather

With the 2017 expansion, the Nature Center gained a greater capacity to host groups.

The Ponderosa Room is designed to be an ideal location for meetings, reunions, birthday parties and small weddings. It seats 125 people in rows or 72 at tables and chairs.

Those who prefer to gather outdoors can capitalize on some of the park’s historical features. Dating back to the park’s earliest days are three Great Depression-era stone shelters that were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Works Progress Administration. The shelters are available on a first-come, first-served basis. The largest of the three accommodates about 40 people and has fireplaces on each end. The other two, which each have a picnic table and fireplace, are ideal for smaller groups.

The park has a camping area with 12 non-reservable sites for those who do not mind limited amenities, and an area on the east side of the park has recently been developed into a camping area for larger groups, such as scout troops. Take note, though, the areas are not accessible with large RVs and trailers because of sharp turn-arounds.

Hiking into the Future

No doubt, the new facilities have increased the park’s popularity. The estimated 35,000 visitors each year represent a 40-percent increase from before the nature center expansion and shooting complex construction. In addition, park staff



Visitors to the Wildcat Hills Nature Center learn not only about today’s wildlife, but also the deer-like Prosynthetoceras and other creatures that roamed the area millions of years ago. This image is from the mural created by artist Jan Vriesen.



The park’s three stone shelters constructed during the Great Depression era with stones from nearby are not only functional but also rich with charm.

continues developing valuable programs and improving the park’s environment.

Gary Shoemaker, the park superintendent since 2016, is a former employee of the Boy Scouts of America and has used connections from his past job to improve the park. More than 20 Eagle Scout projects have enriched the property since he was hired, such as a new entrance sign and a bridge on the Turkey Run Trail.

The true value of Wildcat Hills and its offerings may be best surmised in the reactions of Croft’s second-grade students.

“As we left our field trip this year, our students were so excited,” she said. “We know it is a successful field trip when our students exclaim, ‘I am going to take my mom and dad here this weekend so we can hike some more.’”

That is quite a testimonial, “especially when these kids were pretty sure they didn’t want to hike at all,” she said. 🍌

Outdoor Nebraska

By Renae Blum

Don't sit around waiting for hunting season to begin. There are many ways to enjoy the outdoors now: wildlife watching, stargazing, fishing, even sand castle building. Read on for more. 📖



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Celebrate the Fourth of July at a Nebraska State Park

July 4 | Statewide

Whether your ideal Fourth of July includes grilling, fishing, fireworks, swimming or simply enjoying the outdoors, you can find it at a Nebraska state park or recreation area. Some parks will also have Fourth of the July events; learn more at [Calendar](#). [OutdoorNebraska.gov](#).

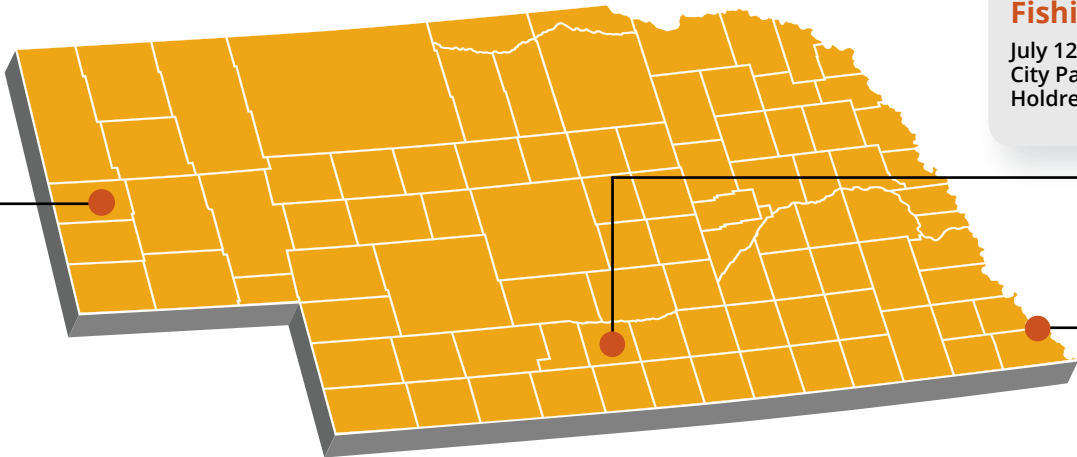


PHOTO BY ROCKY HOFFMANN

Fish for White Bass and Wipers

Throughout the month | Statewide where populations can be found

Fishing for white bass and wipers can be good in July and August. Go early and late in the day, and be ready: when it happens, feeding can be intense, but doesn't last long. Target the larger reservoirs, such as Calamus, Sherman and Lake McConaughy.



Water Wonders

July 13, 10 a.m.
Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area

Community Fishing Night

July 12, 6-8 p.m.
City Park Lake, Holdrege

6th Annual Campfire Christmas in July

July 26-27
Indian Cave State Park

What To Do in July



PHOTO BY JUSTIN HAAG

Attend the Nebraska Star Party

July 28-August 2 | Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area

Merritt Reservoir is one of the best places for stargazing in the nation, and the annual Nebraska Star Party provides the perfect opportunity to enjoy it. The Star Party includes introductory classes for newcomers, a children's program, observing challenges, a photography contest and food. Learn more and register at [nebraskastarparty.org](#).



PHOTO BY JULIE GEISER

Attend Kites and Castles

July 27 | Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area

Take a trip out to Nebraska's largest lake and spend a fun afternoon sculpting a creation on the white sandy beaches – you may win an award in the sand castle building contest! More info at [kitesandcastles.com](#).



PHOTO BY JEFF KURRUS

Participate in the Nebraska Bumble Bee Atlas

July through September | Statewide

You've heard about struggling pollinators and some of the threats they face. The same story is playing in Nebraska with our native bees, including some of our beloved bumblebees. This summer, the Xerces Society is launching a project to help track these essential pollinators and preserve them. Participants will adopt locations and then conduct surveys for bumblebees throughout the state. Stay tuned to [nebraskabumblebeeatlas.org](#) for details about upcoming events and how to register.

The Devine Devil's Den

STORY AND
PHOTOS BY
JUSTIN
HAAG

Scientists of yesteryear agree: this crevice in far northwestern Nebraska is in a class by itself.

Western Nebraska has many landforms labeled canyons. Each contradicts Nebraska's "flat" stereotype, but a true box canyon – one featuring steep walls on each side with single access for entrance and exit – is a rarity in the state.

One site in the northwest corner of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's northwestern-most property fills the bill as such even though it does not carry the name. The crevice known as Devil's Den, which is geologically carved below the rugged ponderosa pine forest at Gilbert-Baker Wildlife Management Area, is a gem among the many scenic treasures at this public land in beautiful northern Sioux County.

Scenic crannies with steep walls at the head of drainages are not uncommon in the Pine Ridge, but, at more than 500 feet long and as deep as 75 feet in places, this one has to be the most spectacular. Perhaps what makes it most special is its width. At only 10-25 feet wide, there are places along the canyon floor where the sky becomes obscured by overlapping irregularities of the towering walls above.

My first visit to Devil's Den came in May 2016 by invitation of Wayne and Janece Mollhoff of Ashland. Wayne, one of the state's most ardent birdwatchers, had stumbled on to the den on a previous visit to the Pine Ridge and considered it worthy for a *Nebraskaland* photographer to see.

Upon meeting at the Gilbert-Baker parking area along



TOP: Devil's den from above. BOTTOM: A carved inscription from June 1911, the month the expedition visited the crevice.

Monroe Canyon Road, Wayne handed me a photocopied image of a *Nebraska History Magazine* cover that featured a photo from a 1911 University of Nebraska expedition to Sioux County.

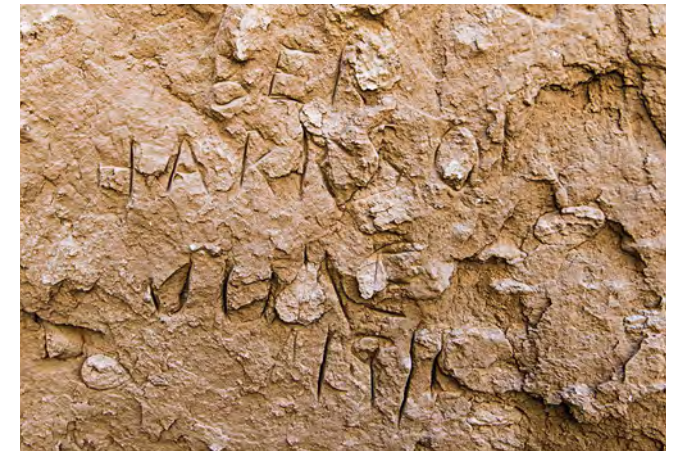
Later, I reveled in reading the journal from that early 20th century expedition, written with astute comments and splashes of humor by one of the state's most renowned naturalists, the late Frank Shoemaker. The journal, which chronicles the June 17-July 2 excursion of that year, provides fascinating insight and observations of the natural world at various sites around Sioux County.

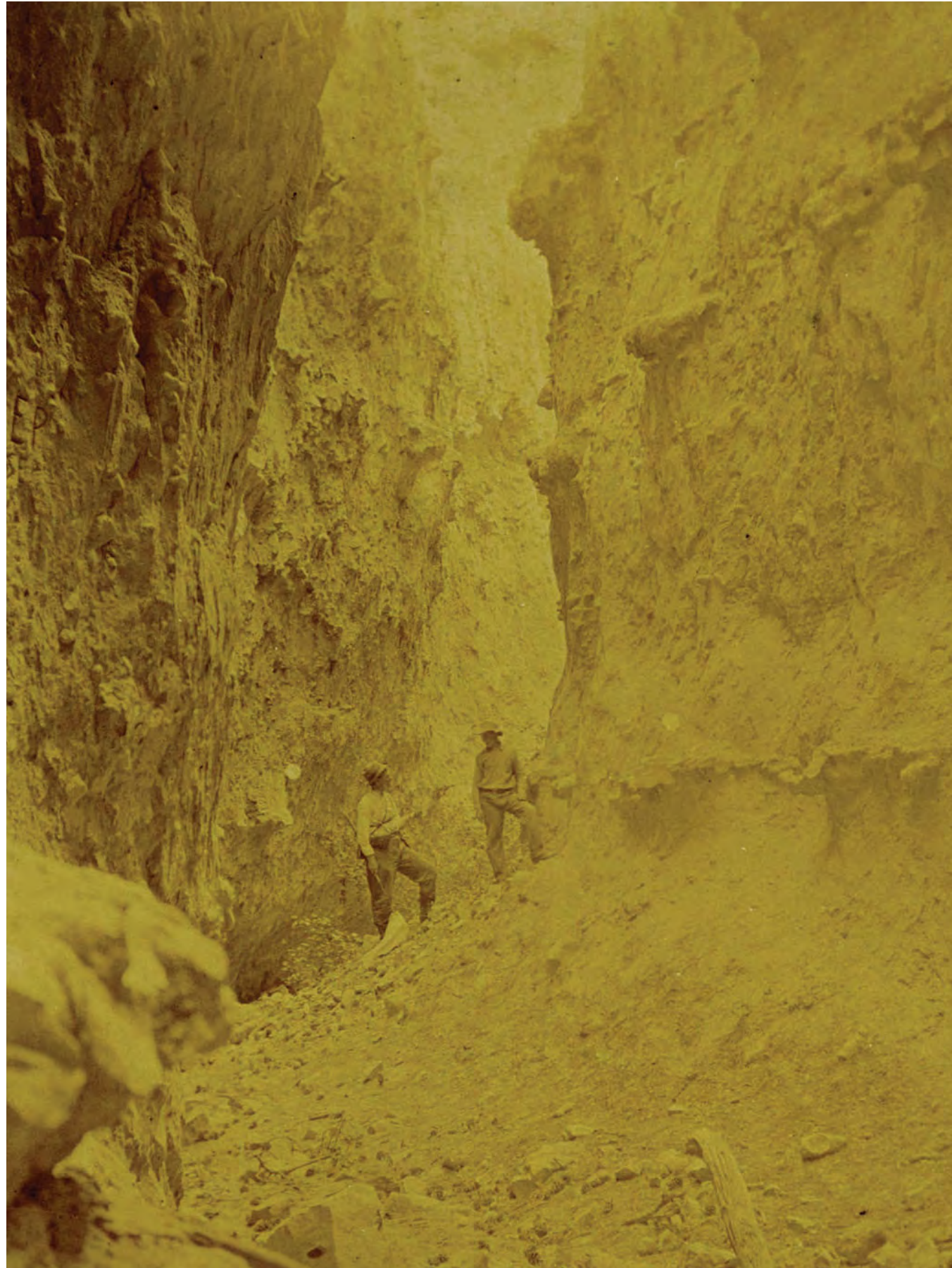
The expedition party, which traveled by train from Lincoln to Harrison, consisted of Shoemaker and six others, including

Dr. Robert Wolcott, a zoologist at the University of Nebraska who specialized in ecology and collected beetles, butterflies, myriopods, reptiles and mites.

Despite all of the notable landforms the team encountered during its journey, Shoemaker described Devil's Den "in a class by itself as regards the geological phenomena of this region." Knowing that Wayne Mollhoff had observed a lot of Pine Ridge country in his pursuit of species such as white-throated swifts and northern saw-whet owls, my excitement to witness a scene he determined to be special was heightened.

From the parking lot, my then 13-year-old son Sawyer and I set out with the Mollhoffs on the 1.65-mile hike – which



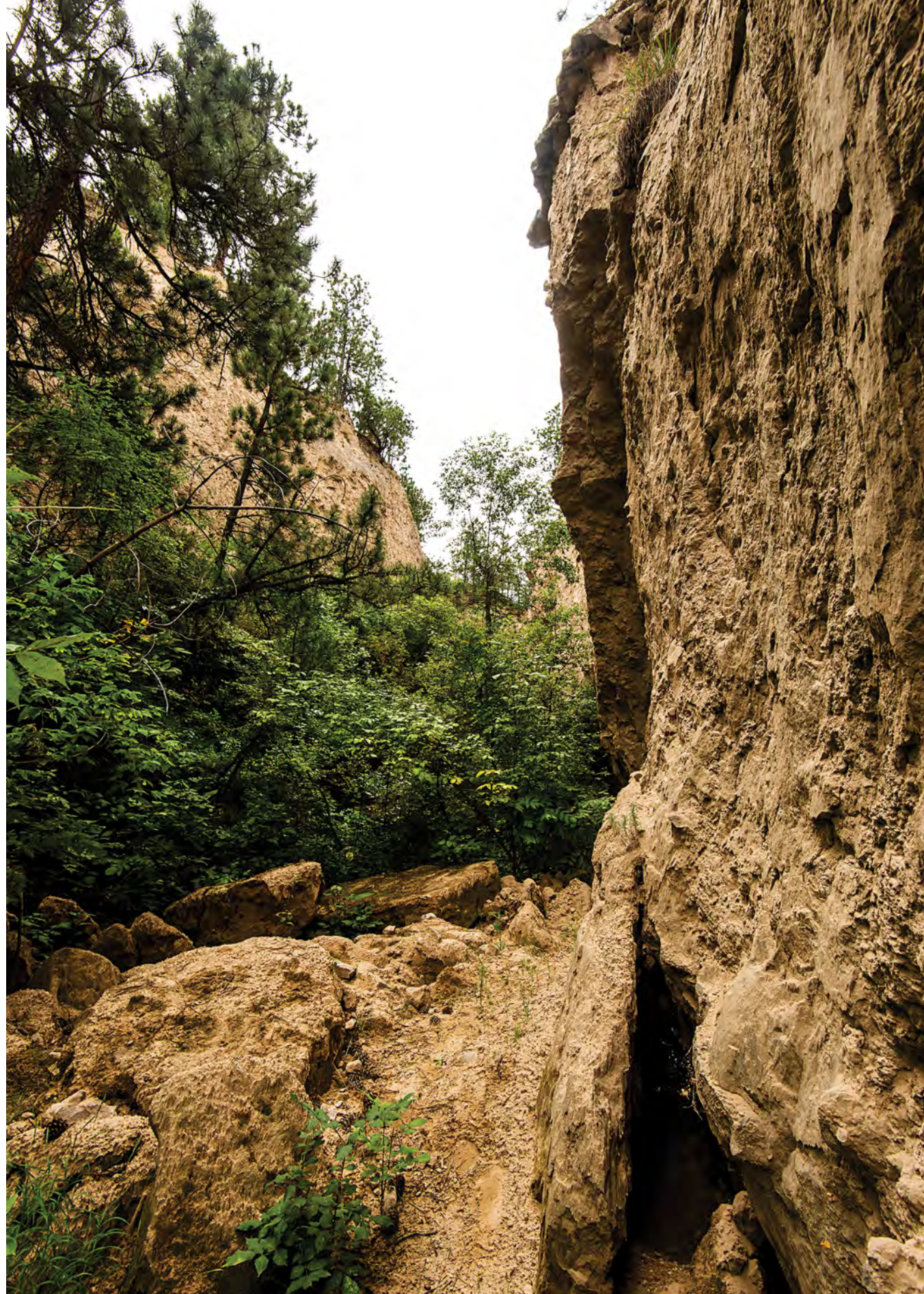


FRANK H. SHOEMAKER COLLECTION, ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN LIBRARIES

This scene of Devil's Den was featured in Frank Shoemaker's journal after visiting the region in 1911.



Wayne and Janece Mollhoff pose to recreate Frank Shoemaker's photo from 107 years prior.



The mouth of Devil's Den is scenic in itself. With some of the highest elevations in Nebraska, species rare to the state, such as Rocky Mountain maple, grow in the area.

seemed 10 times farther than that over the rugged terrain – to the chasm featured in the photograph. After all the ups and downs, the elevation at the ridge above the chasm peaks at 4,900 feet, about 450 feet higher than our starting point.

After making our way down the steep grade and entering the mouth of the crevice, we became awestruck with each step. Our spring visit came 38,315 days after Shoemaker, Wolcott and their guide, Sioux County rancher Noel Priddy, visited the site in late June. Wayne was right – it's a place a *Nebraskaland* photographer should see.

Despite that lengthy span of time, the canyon looked similar to the black and white photo from more than a century ago. Yes, the floor had surely risen a little with eroded sediment from soil and sandstone above, but the canyon retained the same charm. Some fraction of the sediment was surely produced from dozens of carvings along the wall that mark decades of visitors to the remote canyon.

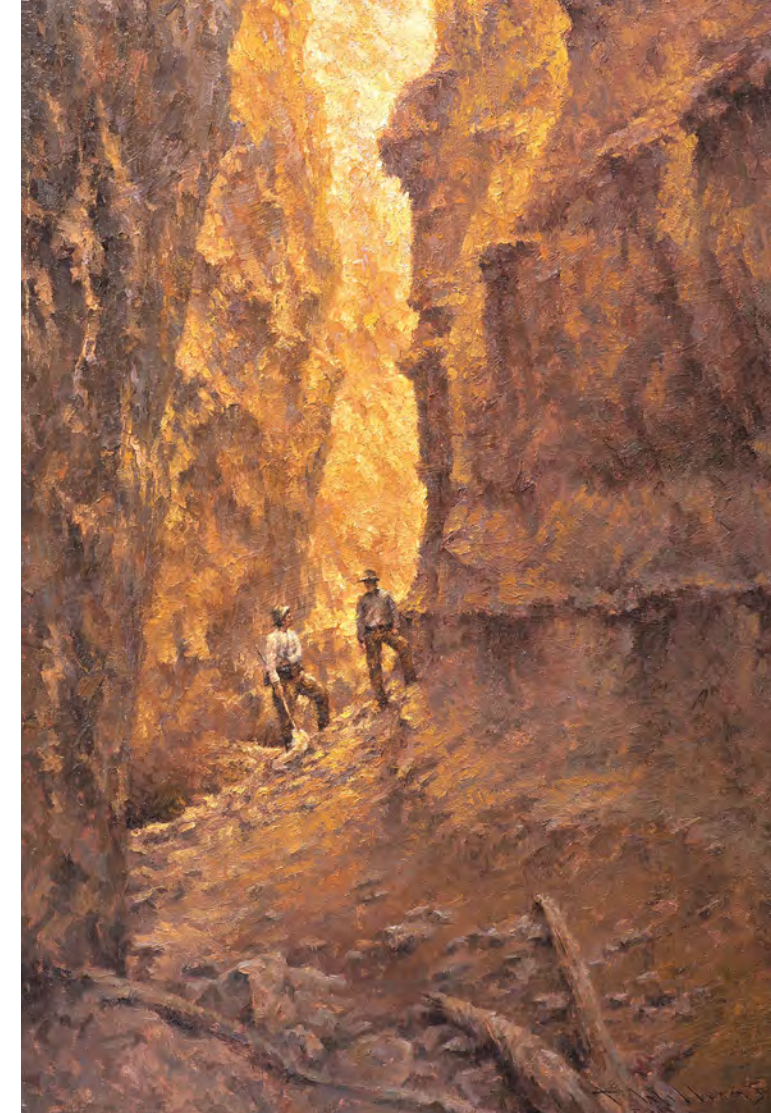
The lush vegetation at the mouth of the chasm gradually gave way to a more barren scene with few signs of plants or animals – except mountain lion tracks that certainly caught our attention. Shoemaker's journal noted nesting sites of Krider's hawk (a morph of the red-tailed hawk) and great horned owl in the canyon, but we noticed no such activity. A large rotting log propped on the wall along one of the most narrow parts of the canyon begs wondering how it fell and how long it has been there.

After Wayne surmised the exact spot Shoemaker's photo was taken, we attempted to restage the scene with him and Janece posing as models. A stubborn shaft of sunlight made its way straight to the bottom of the canyon at the photo site, however, almost as curiously as that rotting log did years before. It created too much of a contrast to overcome by flash. Instead of waiting for the sun to become more agreeable to our efforts, we decided to hike back to the vehicles and perhaps return another day.

Our second effort in May 2018, when the Mollhoffs were visiting the area for the annual meeting of the Nebraska Ornithologists Union, proved more successful. With sunlight cooperating, we did our best to match the focal length, composition and poses in the original photo. The 1911 research party surely would have enjoyed using the Nikon DSLR cameras with the wide range of zoom lenses I was carrying, but nonetheless seemed impressed by the capabilities of its 5x7 long focus box with a Goerz double-anastigmat lens and folding "pocket" Kodak they brought to the region.

Shoemaker's classic photo gained publicity in 2017 when a series of paintings with scenes from each county was released by artist Todd A. Williams. To represent Sioux County, Williams, too, recreated the photo.

Other than that, I have not noticed much mention of Devil's Den. It is not noted on any maps, and I have found only one mention of it in our *Nebraskaland* archives. A July 1966 story



When Todd A. Williams produced an oil painting for each Nebraska county to commemorate the sesquicentennial, he chose the scene at Devil's Den to represent Sioux County.

by Richard Williams of Crawford told the tale of how he and another high school student rappelled to the bottom of the crevice at one of its most sheer points, much to the chagrin of the local game warden.

Fortunately, the adventure ended without incident because Richard Williams later became the first American Indian student to earn a degree from the University of Nebraska. Now retired as president and chief executive officer of the American Indian College Fund, he has received a long list of commendations for his work promoting civil rights for Native Americans.

Perhaps someday Devil's Den will become a popular tourist destination. Similar to many remote, pristine sites in the Pine Ridge, area residents scoff at journalists who provide detailed locations for fear it will be loved to death by too much visitation. Still today, Devil's Den is not marked by any signs and is hard to pinpoint on satellite imagery because of its narrow outline from above.

Regardless, go for a hike and enjoy this spectacular country. You will know Devil's Den if you see it. As Shoemaker wrote, it is in a class by itself. 📍



Betty Hruska of Firth designed this Blackfoot-style ceremonial dress based off of an original historical garment. She used a traditional brain-tanning process on the hides of three deer she harvested.

PHOTO BY RENAE BLUM

A Stitch in Time

In the world of living history, the clothes make the man (and woman)

By Renae Blum

The cannon smoke has mostly dispersed, visitors are trickling back to the parking lot, and Sarah Dack is taking a break. She portrays an officer's wife at Fort Kearny State Historical Park's living history events, and looks every inch the part. Dack is wearing a big-brimmed sunbonnet, leather ankle boots, a sky-blue skirt, and a muslin shirt with pearl buttons, a stand-up collar, and a gathered yoke. Her accessories include an engraved pocket watch necklace and small dangling earrings. At a living history event like this one, it's a common sight – men, women and children walking around dressed in

beautiful period clothing, looking as if they've stepped out of a history textbook. But putting that look together isn't so simple. "You don't go to Walmart to buy anything; everything is handmade, and it follows a pattern or some historical piece," said Betty Hruska of Firth, Nebraska. There's also the challenge of being historically accurate. "In a way, we are educating the public. You're trying to portray an accurate look," said Heather Blazicevich of Omaha. "We want people to feel like, 'My time spent here was good because people really care about historical accuracy.'" When it comes to finding that perfect outfit, you've got a



Interpreters demonstrate military drills during a living history event at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park.

PHOTO BY JENNY NGUYEN-HEATLEY

Dressing for an 1820s Fort

Like many living history volunteers in Nebraska, the reenactors at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park take seriously their duty of educating the public, and the attention to detail shines through in their clothing. Many pieces are handmade, and some are custom-ordered. Pictured are (left to right) Kristy Ericson of Omaha, dressed as a laundress,

and her daughters Taylor and Lylah. Bob Baker of Omaha portrays the captain of the rifle regiment. Baker's entire ensemble cost around \$2,000, which is typical for someone portraying a soldier. For him, the cost is worth it. "I get to share my cost with lots of people and get a great deal of satisfaction and enjoyment in the process," he said.

1. Shako

A shako was a leather cap worn by enlisted men. The color of the wool pom sticking up from the top signified that the wearer belonged to the rifle regiment. The cap plate – the brass insignia on the front – is a copy of an original found on the site of Fort Atkinson, and shows an eagle carrying a rifleman's horn.

2. Eyeglasses

The prescription reading glasses Baker is wearing are copies of an original that dates back to about 1790. "The lenses in these do have a bifocal, which is not something that was made back then," he said.

3. Undershirt and bowtie

Along with a wool vest, beneath the coat Baker is wearing is a long white cotton undershirt. "They didn't really have what we refer to as underwear," Baker said; the long undershirt was worn instead. The bowtie is "a nod toward civilian fashion," Baker said, and also an homage to the neckstock, a piece of leather worn by lower-ranking soldiers that kept them from looking down at their feet.

4. Coat

This 1812-period wool coat is something an officer would have worn in a social setting. "It was something so ostentatious that it would draw attention. And as an officer that's what you would want to do in social situations," Baker said. "You couldn't brag about your rank, but you could certainly wear something that looks like you could afford it."

5. Buttons

Baker has a pewter casting operation and makes the buttons the soldiers wear. The design is based off of buttons uncovered

by archaeological digs at Fort Atkinson.

6. Officer's Sash

Sashes indicated rank and were used to wrap injured soldiers in and carry them off the battlefield. They were dyed scarlet/burgundy to blend in with any arterial blood that was shed. The fear was that if nearby soldiers saw how badly wounded an officer was, they would become demoralized and run away, rather than continue fighting.

7. Gloves

Gloves were typically worn by officers mostly in ceremonial situations, just as they are today, and were made of calfskin or goatskin. Baker got his from a period supplier.

8. Trousers

Baker is wearing narrow-fall drop front trousers. They are made of hemp, a flexible, durable fabric similar to denim.

9. Shoes

Baker's shoes are "almost a boot," he says, "what we call a three-quarter height shoe." This height allowed more freedom for someone on foot, as a company captain likely would have been. Baker had his pair custom-made at Omaha's Dehner Boot Company for about \$400.

10. Sword

An officer's sword was more ceremonial and not necessarily used in battle. An officer on horseback was more likely to carry a curved sword, or saber, to avoid cutting the neck of his horse with his sword when drawing it. This replica was made in Pakistan and cost Baker \$175.

11. Cap

The working-class women and

girls of Fort Atkinson would typically have their heads covered while outside to protect themselves from the sun and any debris and insects. Kristy's head covering is called a country cap, and Lylah's is a colonial cap. Kristy sewed both using period patterns.

12. Shawl

The wool shawls pictured here were handmade by the Ericson family, woven on a triangle loom. They used wool from Columbia sheep that Kristy's mother-in-law raises.

13. Chemise

Like the men's undershirt, the chemise was a long, loose undergarment that doubled as sleepwear.

14. Dress

The fashion of the day was the Empire waistline, falling just below the bust. Drawstrings at the neck and bust made it easy to dress yourself. Work dresses are made of cotton and feature earthy, natural tones and a repeating pattern, which would have been easy to manufacture at the time.

15. Apron

Aprons were worn quite frequently to protect clothing. They can have other uses, too, for a living history volunteer: "I use mine as a hot pad some days," Kristy said. "Just super convenient."

16. Canteen

This tin canteen was made by Chris Hagemann, who portrays a tinsmith at Fort Atkinson and taught himself how to master the craft. Hagemann's workmanship can be seen throughout the Fort. Lylah wove the canteen's strap on a rigid heddle loom at the fort.



few options. If you're intimidated by a sewing machine, you can purchase an outfit from a period supplier. And fellow volunteers are often happy to help, offering to make you something or provide clothing for trade or lending. But for the pride of ownership and sheer cost effectiveness, sewing your own period clothing is, for many people, the way to go.

For some, this is a struggle. For others with a little more experience, it's an art form, and even a money-making venture. Tom Wood of Omaha, who participated in living history at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park for more than 40 years, sells pieces professionally to buyers around the world, and has even made clothing for a period wedding.

"It takes a long time to learn certain curves and stuff like that, or what gives it shape," Wood said. "Once you figure that stuff out, it's easy to make patterns for it."

Then there is someone like Andrew Gaghagen, who'd done some basic mending but had never sewn an outfit before joining Fort Atkinson's living history program in early 2018.

Gaghagen jumped in headfirst, buying a sewing machine and throwing himself into online research. He ordered the wool for his soldier's jacket from a period supplier in Missouri, and ended up selling the first batch he received – the weight of the fabric was incorrect, and the shade of gray was too

Seven-year-old Allene Cummings of Omaha has been reenacting at Fort Atkinson since she was five months old, says her mother, Morgan.

Opposite: Katelyn Reeder of Kearney portrays an upper-class civilian at Fort Kearny State Historical Park. Linda Hendrickson handmade her lace gloves.

brown.

"I kind of feel a sense of duty to get it as historically accurate as possible, because [Fort Atkinson] is there for education. So cutting corners like that wasn't something I wanted to do," he said. "If I had that information I was going to make it as close to how it would have been as possible."

It took multiple frustrating tries to make something he was satisfied with. But now, with one season of living history successfully under his belt, Gaghagen has begun making clothing for other volunteers.

Some reenactors put their own research behind their clothing, studying old paintings, visiting museums, checking out library books, even taking notes from movies like "Pride and Prejudice." And thanks to the Internet, resources are just a click away, and more extensive than ever before.

After a certain point, you develop an eye for period accuracy. Fort Kearny State Historical Park volunteer Renae Hunt can watch a historical drama and spot inaccuracies in the clothing; Blazicevich can do the same thing with patterns. As she's discovered, some patterns made by mainstream companies can look vaguely historical, but turn out to be riddled with inaccuracies once you take a closer look.

Most volunteers at Fort Atkinson choose clothing patterns made by companies that specialize in historical accuracy, said Denise Wenke of Omaha. Some companies "have actually gone into museums and gotten a chance to get hands-on and take measurements and see where the curves are, which way the seams run," she said. "It's a much better option for me."

Sewing period clothing is very different from sewing modern garments, Wenke said. At first glance, the whole set-up can be a bit bewildering, even for an experienced seamstress.

"A lot of the seams aren't placed where they are in modern garments, necessarily. There are a lot of curved seams. And the pattern pieces just do not look like what you're used to pattern pieces looking like," she said. "They just had a very different idea of how to cover the human body."

After researching, creating and wearing period garments, volunteers often gain a unique perspective into the lives and culture of the people they portray. For soldiers at Fort Atkinson, standing up straight and tall was an important part of their image as military men – something living history volunteers learn as they contend with period-accurate uniforms so tight-fitting they're unable to slouch.

And for Wenke, a volunteer at Fort Atkinson, hand-sewing period clothing gave her insight into the rise of the sewing machine. "After making something by hand you can appreciate why people had fewer changes of clothes in this time period, and why, as soon as the sewing machine was invented, even though the price was sky-high, they were in such demand



Ella Vance cuts out a pattern at a sewing party organized by Heather Blazicevich (left), one of the living history volunteers at Fort Atkinson who helps newcomers create their first period ensemble.

that communities would band together to buy one."

While it's possible to make a living history outfit inexpensively, some volunteers take it up a notch, investing in custom-made shoes, specially tailored soldier's uniforms, period-style prescription eyeglasses, period-accurate weaponry, and more. It quickly adds up. People portraying soldiers can easily spend \$2,000 or more on a full kit.

In the end, putting on a handmade, period-accurate outfit can be a special experience, and it does something valuable for the person wearing it, too, not just the visitors looking at him or her.

"Putting that outfit on runs you right back in time," said Wade Davis of Bonner Springs, Kansas, who portrays an Indian trader and interpreter at Fort Atkinson. "It helps transport you back to the time and place, kind of like an actor preparing for a role."

And when the image is complete, the results are pretty unforgettable. ■

Living history events are held at the following Nebraska state historical parks: Fort Atkinson, Rock Creek Station, Fort Hartsuff, Buffalo Bill Ranch, Fort Kearny and Arbor Lodge. Indian Cave State Park occasionally holds events as well. For more information, visit Calendar.OutdoorNebraska.gov or contact individual parks.

When the Carnival Came to Town

By
History Nebraska

The Flying Baldwins were a popular feature of the Walter Savidge Amusement Company. History Nebraska RG1667-1-15



Years ago, the peak of Nebraska summer entertainment came with the Walter Savidge Amusement Company as it pulled into the depot aboard its 20-car, red-and-yellow Pullman train. The Wayne-based traveling show and carnival toured Nebraska and surrounding states from 1906 to 1941.

Walter Savidge was born in Holt County in 1886. He began dreaming of show business at age 12 after attending a Ringling Brothers circus in Humphrey. He practiced tightrope walking on a rope tied between his family’s barn and shed. At age 16 he ran away to “join the circus” and worked as a professional tightrope walker.

The Savidges were an adventurous clan. You may have heard of Walter’s aviator cousins from Ewing. The Savidge Brothers built their first airplane in 1911 and barnstormed the state for several years.

Walter was no aviator, but he and his brother Arthur formed an amusement company in 1906, when Walter was only 20 years old. It started as a one-tent show, with Walter doubling as an acrobat and Arthur performing as one of the actors. The brothers split several years later, and Walter and his wife, Mabel, continued the company. It remained a family affair, with Mabel managing the finances and playing piano for the vaudeville acts.

The company got bigger and bigger, with acrobats, sideshows, an orchestra and dramatic company, carnival rides and concession stands. It was so big they brought their electrical plant to power it all. The big tent could seat 1,600 people, and it took 125 employees to keep everything running.



Some forms of old-time entertainment have not aged well. Similar to many traveling carnivals of the day, Savidge included “freak shows” featuring people with physical abnormalities. Performer George Thompson is shown here with his son. History Nebraska RG1667-6-1



View from the stage of Savidge Players tent theater. History Nebraska RG1667-1-13



Looking east along Farnam Street, Omaha, 1889. History Nebraska RG2341-28



Long Pine Journal, June 2, 1916.

The Savidges were known for providing clean, family-friendly entertainment. Despite the bad reputation of “carnies,” the Savidge crew “is not made of crude fellows who ‘flop’ in strange places, no indeed,” said the *Omaha World-Herald*. “Savidge and his company are welcomed with open arms each year in towns that he has played before.”

Interest in the show dwindled in the late 1930s, probably due to newer forms of entertainment, such as movies. The Savidges closed their show and retired in 1941. Walter died eight years later. Mabel lived until 1989, dying at age 104. 

Adapted from Rebecca A. Buller, “The Walter Savidge Amusement Company,” *Nebraska History* (Summer 2017). history.nebraska.gov



The “Eli Wheel,” a competitor of the Ferris Wheel. History Nebraska RG1667-3-1

Calamus

The Perfect Getaway

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY ERIC FOWLER

On the eastern edge of the Sandhills, tucked into a narrow valley topped by high dunes, lies Calamus Reservoir. This summertime oasis, ringed by white sand beaches, draws sun seekers from throughout the region all summer long, anglers for much of the year and other outdoor enthusiasts year-round.

Fishing is the main draw at the 5,200-acre reservoir, especially for walleyes. With high fishing pressure, anglers might have to stay a while to find a trophy, but they will find plenty of keeper-sized fish. The lake is one of the top spots in the state for white bass and wipers in terms of both the size and numbers. In the late summer, flocks of gulls picking gizzard shad from the surface tell anglers they can find white bass below. Calamus is also a top muskellunge lake in the state, and those who know and target this predator, as well as others who luck into one, can find fish up to 40 inches. Channel catfish are abundant, and Gracie Creek and the pond it feeds are stocked with keeper-sized rainbow trout year-round, giving anglers yet another option.

About 5,000 acres of public land, most of it designated as a wildlife management area, surrounds the reservoir, including two miles of the Calamus River above the lake. A variety of wildlife can be found in these rolling Sandhills, riparian areas and wetlands, including pheasants, quail, turkeys, prairie grouse, waterfowl and white-tailed and mule deer.

Calamus Reservoir has been designated an Important Birding Area by the National Audubon Society for the diversity of species it is home to, including grasshopper sparrow and Bell's vireo, and those it attracts during migration, including numerous shorebirds and waterfowl, thousands of American white pelicans in the spring and fall, and, in the winter, hundreds of trumpeter swans and bald

eagles.

There are 132 sites in three campgrounds – Homestead Knolls, Nunda Shoal and Valley View Flat – where campers can plug in their RV, and another 52 sites without electricity for RVs or tents in those campgrounds and Hannaman Bayou.

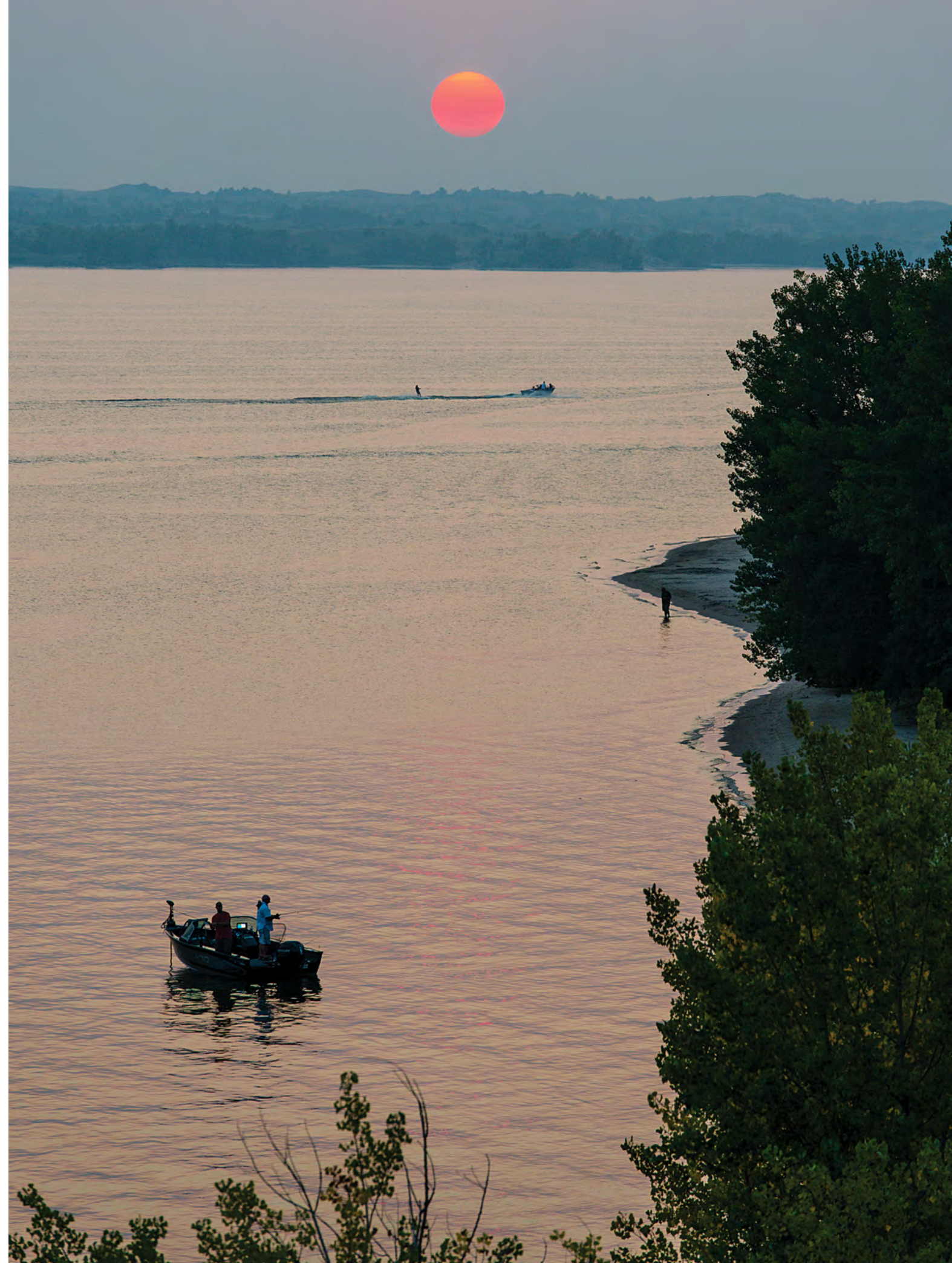
The reservoir is the end of the 56-mile long Calamus River Water Trail, which begins at Highway 7 south of Ainsworth. Those not up for a multi-day paddle can float the river in tube or tank through Calamus Outfitters, which provides other unique recreational opportunities, including Sandhills eco- and birding tours.

The 96-foot high Virginia Smith Dam, completed in 1986 on the Calamus River northwest of Burwell, forms the reservoir. Built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, it stores most of the water the Twin Loups Irrigation District provides to farmers to water 53,000 acres of cropland. It was and likely will remain the last large reservoir built in the state.

There isn't much beach to be found around the reservoir's 30-plus miles of shoreline until the irrigation season begins in mid-June. By July, there is plenty of room to play near the day-use areas and campgrounds, but many hop in their boat and head out to find a stretch of sand to call their own for the day. There are four boat docks on the 9-mile long reservoir, the western half of which limits boats to 5 mph. The wind seems to blow more often than not in this country, which can limit boating but is a big draw to windsurfers from around the region.

Whether you want to ski, land a walleye, enjoy a cool Sandhills night around the campfire, or just take in a spectacular view of the western sky from Sunset Bay at Little York Point, you will find what you're looking for at Calamus Reservoir this summer.

Whether they're casting for white bass, getting one more ride behind the boat or walking the beach, people find plenty to do at Calamus Reservoir on a summer evening.





Jacob Lech of Ord flies behind his sister, Cali, while wakeboarding on Calamus Reservoir.



A group of kids run and tumble down a sand bank above the spot their families chose to park their boats and spend a summer afternoon.



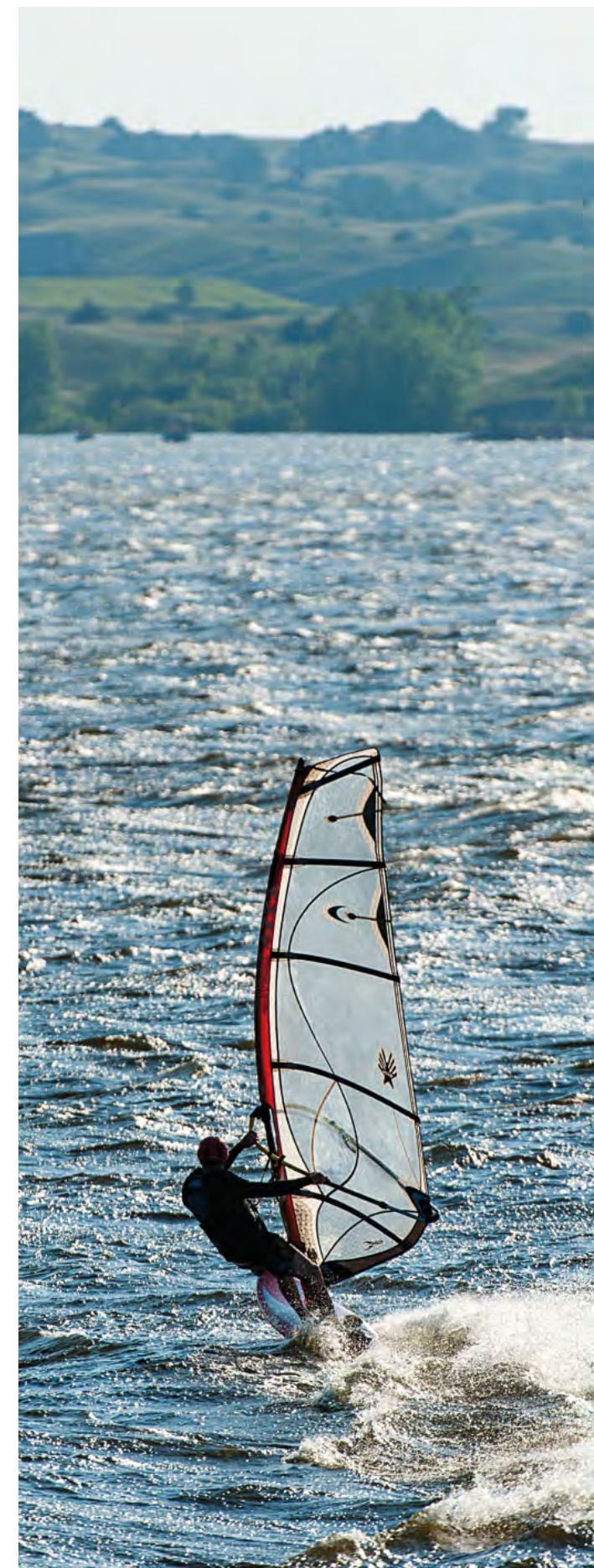
People play volleyball in the shallows of Sunset Bay, a popular spot next to the day use area on Little York Point.



Heidi Hamlin of Lincoln, her daughters Bianca, Carletta and Brianna and niece Sierra Herfel, enjoy a boat ride with Heidi's cousin, Logan Epp of Burwell.



Campers fill new RV sites in the Valley View Flat Campground on the upper end of the reservoir.



Eugene Melechson of Omaha flies across the reservoir on a sailboard.



Monie Carpenter of Wood River, a fishing guide at Calamus Reservoir, reels in one of many doubles he hooked into while fishing for white bass during an early-August bite at sunrise.



Chambers elementary school students feed rainbow trout in an outdoor raceway during a tour of the Calamus Fish Hatchery this spring. Below, Josh Cloeter weighs rainbow trout that Dennis Bridge will take to the Grove Trout Rearing Station.

Calamus Hatchery

The walleye that swim in Calamus Reservoir didn't travel far to get there: they were all produced just below the dam at the Calamus Fish Hatchery, one of five hatcheries operated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

The state's newest and largest hatchery, which opened in 1991, produced about a third of the 42.5 million the Commission raised in 2018, including half of the 8.3 million fingerling and larger fish. Abundant water provided by the reservoir, and the technology to aerate well water and regulate its temperature, makes the Calamus Hatchery the only one in the state to raise cold-, cool- and warm-water species. Production includes 11 million miniscule walleye fry hatched from eggs, 170,000 4- to 5-inch rainbow trout that are moved to the Grove Trout Rearing Station to grow larger, and 116,000 10-inch channel catfish destined for waters across the eastern half of the state. Other species raised this year include cutthroat and tiger trout, northern pike, muskellunge, tiger muskie, largemouth bass, hybrid sunfish, black crappie, yellow perch and saugeye.

The hatchery has interpretive displays and is open to the public. To schedule a tour, call (308) 346-4226.



Pasture Forbs

Weeds or Wildflowers?

*By Gerry Steinauer, Botanist,
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission*

In the world of pasture plants, being labeled a “weed” is bad news. Humans view weeds as unsightly, worthless and even destructive, attacking with spade, mower and herbicides.

Merriam-Webster defines a weed as “a plant that is not valued where it is growing and is usually of vigorous growth, especially one that tends to overgrow or choke out more desirable plants.” The key word here is “valued,” as human values differ, particularly regarding plants.

We can all agree that some plants growing in Nebraska rangelands truly deserve the title “weed.” For others, however, there is disagreement. As a botanist, my “prairie wildflower” might be a rancher or farmer’s “damn weed.”

The Vilification of Native Pasture Forbs

The producer and botanist usually agree that many non-native plants deserve the title “weed.” Introduced



Once viewed only as a crop and pasture weed, common milkweed is now valued and widely used in pollinator plantings as it is a primary food source for the caterpillars of the fast declining monarch butterfly.



A native biennial or short-lived perennial, the late summer-blooming curly cup gumweed prefers disturbed sites, such as heavily-grazed pastures. It generally decreases in abundance when a disturbance dissipates.

intentionally or accidentally from Europe, Asia and elsewhere, and unleashed in a new land without native diseases and pests to check their spread, plants such as Canada thistle, leafy spurge and smooth brome run rampant through prairies, woodlands and wetlands. Botanists despise them for displacing beloved native plants, degrading wildlife habitat and otherwise disrupting ecosystems. They also draw the ire of ranchers by out-competing palatable

and nutritious grasses.

Where producer and botanist often disagree, however, is whether native pasture forbs, herbaceous plants other than a grass or sedge, such as a sunflower or iris, are weeds. Botanists value all native plants, regardless of their level of so-called weediness, whereas many ranchers and farmers worry when “weedy” native forbs such as curlycup gumweed, ragweeds and some goldenrods and sunflowers become abundant in pastures,

believing they have no value and will stifle grass growth.

In presettlement times, these disturbance-tolerant “weedy” forbs flourished along trampled bison trails or watering holes and in drought-worn prairie. Stressed prairie grasses left gaps in the soil and canopy where these opportunists could root and grow. Today, they still occupy disturbed habitats, such as roadsides and areas heavily grazed and trampled by livestock. When a disturbance

dissipates, such as when heavy grazing in a pasture is reduced, the grasses, with time, regain vigor and the forbs will fade, although some perennials may linger.

Land managers often blame the abundance of disturbance-loving forbs on the plants themselves, and not their management. For instance, an uncle once called: “My pasture is overrun with stiff goldenrods and other weeds. What herbicide should I spray it with?”



Hoary vervain is a plant of mixed reputation. Avoided by cattle, landowners generally view it as a weed, whereas biologists view it as a wildflower.

After an internal sigh, I explained that many of these forbs are deep-rooted and hardly compete with mostly shallow-rooted grasses, and most importantly, that if he changed his grass-negating grazing practices, “these weeds” would fade. He balked at my suggestions – having heard enough from his proselytizing nephew. Besides, spraying the pasture sounded easier than changing his grazing, and blaming the goldenrods was gentler on the conscience.

I cannot blame ranchers and farmers

for their anti-forb attitudes. For decades they have been bombarded with questionable claims that these plants compete with grasses or are otherwise bad for livestock.

Nebraska’s weed books and other agricultural publications have been a primary source of pasture forb vilification. Many native plants were included in the weed publications because they were “poor forage for cattle,” enforcing the long-held belief that “if a cow won’t eat it, it’s a weed.”

Many milkvetches, locoweeds and

other plants have been labeled weeds because they contain compounds sometimes toxic to livestock. In truth, these compounds make the plants so unpalatable that livestock consume them only in heavily overgrazed or drought-stricken pastures with little other forage.

For wild bergamot and other wildflowers, no reason is given for their inclusion in the weed books. Perhaps not being a grass and having pretty flowers was crime enough.

The 1962 edition of *Nebraska Weeds*

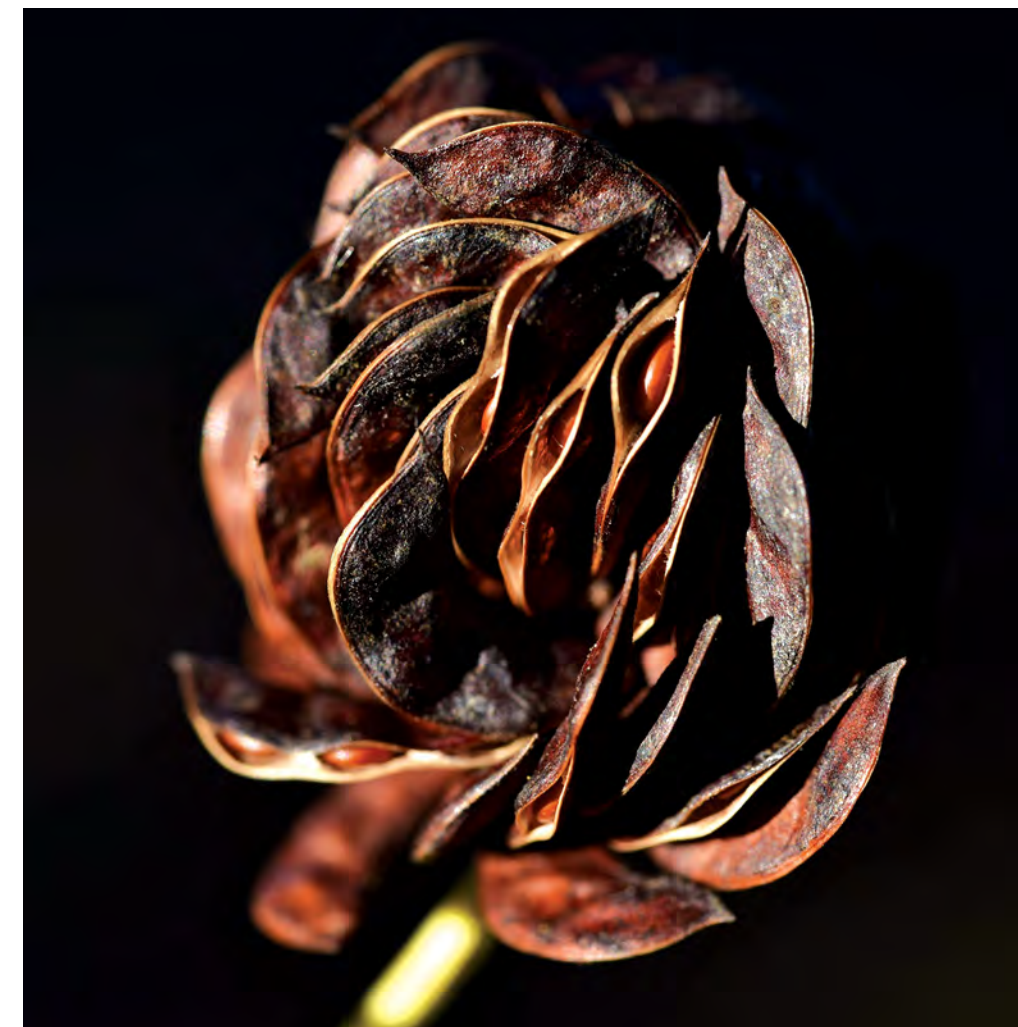
dictated near universal sentences for native pasture forbs: to be “mowed” or “sprayed with 2,4-D,” a herbicide. The book went so far as recommending a good dousing of 2,4-D to eradicate late goldenrod, Nebraska’s state flower. This blow to our state pride is comparable to condemning Herbie Husker to 10 years of hard labor for prancing about the sidelines at Memorial Stadium.

Herbicide companies also proclaim the evils of pasture forbs. At agricultural conferences, for example,

Changing Attitudes

Once labeled a weed, a plant’s tarnished reputation is not easily redeemed. Recently, however, ecologists have demonstrated and promoted the value of native pasture forbs to fast-declining insect pollinators, game birds, other wildlife and even livestock.

Milkweed foliage, for example, is the sole food source of monarch larvae, a species on a spiraling decline, and the late summer blooms of sunflowers and goldenrods are crowded with bees, beetles and butterflies clamoring for the rich nectar and pollen within. Pasture forbs also provide cover for



The seeds of Illinois bundleflower, as well as those of many other pasture and prairie forbs, nourish birds and small mammals throughout long Nebraska winters.



In late summer, pollinators, such as these tachinid flies, swarm to the flowers of rigid goldenrod, which is common in eastern Nebraska pastures.

wildlife, and their nutritious seeds nourish game birds, songbirds and rodents through our long winters. In addition, these forbs support a diverse insect fauna, a critical food source for pheasant, quail and turkey chicks. It is no coincidence that Nebraska pheasant numbers peaked in the mid-20th century before the widespread use of herbicides, when forbs thrived in prairies, pastures and crop fields.

It has long been known that cattle, horses and sheep relish the most nourishing and tender forbs, such as compass plant and purple prairie coneflower, which were long ago grazed out of most Nebraska pastures. Scientists, however, are finding

that many disturbance-tolerant forbs, previously thought ignored by livestock, are grazed at certain growth stages. Cattle, for example, will readily graze young common milkweed plants and later nip off their nutritious blooms.

The widespread and much maligned western ragweed contains 20 percent crude protein, comparable to alfalfa, and is palatable early in the growing season, albeit avoided by cattle when mature.

They have also discovered that forbs can enhance grass growth by providing protective shade and shelter from drying prairie winds, reducing heat stress and water loss. In Kansas mixed-grass prairie, blue grama and buffalo

grass yields were doubled in pastures with western ragweed compared to pastures where it was absent. Deep-rooted forbs may also bring up micro-nutrients from the subsoil which are critical to grass growth and livestock.

As science digs deeper, new insights will be gained as to the ecological and economic value of pasture forbs. Farmers’ and ranchers’ attitudes toward these plants are already changing. Some producers now include milkweeds, sunflowers, goldenrods and other once “weedy” forbs in conservation plantings on their lands and are backing off on herbicide use. Slowly, the once damned are being transformed from weeds to wildflowers. [N](#)

Battling Non-native Weeds

A decade ago, after marrying into a South Dakota farm family, I became familiar with the landowner’s frustration of controlling non-native weeds. Soon after my vows, my wife and mother-in-law indoctrinated me to the family’s “proper method” of digging the tap-rooted musk thistle, and alongside them, I have since marched miles through our prairie pastures with spade in hand.

Four years later, we restored crop fields to prairie vegetation and our battle against the sinister Canada thistle began. Each summer and fall since, my wife and I spent countless days being jarred about on an ATV while spot-spraying herbicides on this colony-forming perennial, only to continually discover new colonies. After some long days spraying, my spirits sank and surrendering thoughts surfaced: “I should call in a crop duster and nuke the whole damn field.” But we persisted with spot spraying.

In our prairies we also campaign against Eurasian cool-season grasses, mainly Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome. In their homelands, these

grasses have co-existed with livestock grazing for millennia and have hardened to it, and are now entrenched in many Great Plains grasslands where they were introduced. These we attack during their peak growth in spring and fall with prescribed fire, haying (fall only) and heavy cattle and horse grazing. If we ease off on this management for even a few years, the invaders will regain dominance from remaining rootstock and seed.

Besides diminishing the non-natives, this management has spurred the growth of prairie plants including a flush of disturbance-loving forbs, mostly western ragweed, goldenrods and sunflowers. As a result, we have been accused of the worst of rural crimes: “letting our weeds go.” Though some may prefer the well-manicured look of a brome and bluegrass pasture, we prefer the unkept look of native plant diversity.

Wildlife also prefer it. In summer red-winged blackbirds, dickcissels and bobolinks now nest in the rich cover, and hen pheasants hover about their foraging chicks – just rewards for our efforts.



On the author’s South Dakota farm, spring and fall livestock grazing is used in a tallgrass prairie pasture to set back the invasive Kentucky bluegrass (foreground) and smooth brome and to promote native forbs.



VISIT NORTH PLATTE

By Robert Olson, Nebraska Tourism Commission

The heart of Lincoln County, North Platte is made for people with an adventurer's soul. Whether you're looking to check out the view from Golden Spike Tower or careen through Potter's Pasture on a mountain bike, this place has something for everyone.

Get a good start to the day with a classic American breakfast at **Penny's Diner**, where you can enjoy fantastic dishes like the Sunrise Skillet in a unique setting of a 1950s diner. If you need an extra boost to get you going in the mornings, the Espresso Shop by Caravan can help. You can also stop by in the afternoon and snag one of their delicious, made-to-order paninis or salads. You won't want to miss out on one of their evening Open Mic nights either. When it comes to dinnertime, check out one of the local favorites, the Switchyard Grill & Pub. Located in a 91-year-old building in downtown, the Switchyard excels when it comes to American cuisine, such as Nebraska-grown beef, but their large menu easily accommodates everyone.

Let Dusty Trails Outdoor Specialists help you cross off an item on your bucket list: tanking! A Nebraska tradition, floating down the North Platte River in a 700-gallon stock tank brings joy to locals and visitors alike. It's just as simple and fun as it sounds: grab some friends and a cooler full of drinks, hop into the tank and choose whether to paddle or just relax while floating down the river. With two-hour to all-day options, it can easily fit into any schedule.

Exploring the area via horseback is also a popular option; Dusty Trails Outdoor Specialists offers rides through Buffalo Bill's Scout Rest Ranch to give you an authentic western

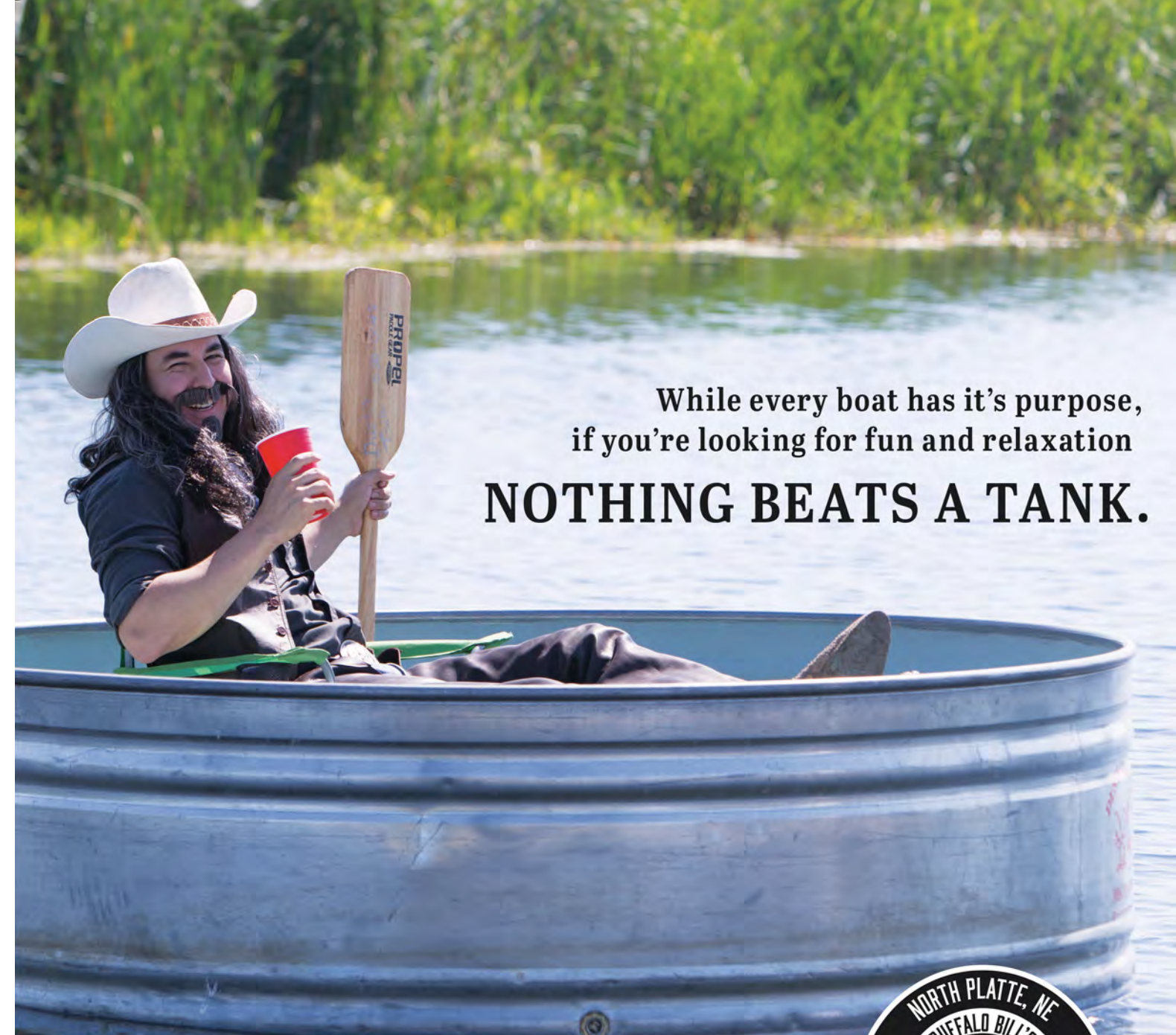
experience. If you enjoy a different type of riding at a faster pace, Potter's Pasture Mountain Bike Trail is sure to get your adrenaline pumping.

Take in the one-of-a-kind view from the top of the Golden Spike Tower and Visitors Center. From both the seventh-floor open-air observation deck and the eighth-floor enclosed viewing area, you can see nearly every bit of Bailey Yard's 315 miles of track. As the largest classification yard in the world, Bailey Yard is a must-see.

If history is what gets you going, there's plenty of that in North Platte, too. The Lincoln County Historical Museum is full of interesting stories and artifacts from important times in west central Nebraska and the Platte River Valley. Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park is rich in history as well, featuring Buffalo Bill Cody's extravagant mansion that he built during the heyday of his Wild West Show. Fort Cody Trading Post, Nebraska's largest souvenir shop, is an iconic piece of Nebraska culture where you can see a 20,000 piece, hand-carved Wild West Show replica.

Book your accommodations at one of the many hotels available in North Platte, including the new bright and modern Tru by Hilton hotel, the nice and homey Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott and the recently renovated Holiday Inn Express & Suites. If you're feeling more outdoorsy, the surrounding state recreation areas feature both modern and primitive campsites. Regardless of which option you choose, you'll be welcomed into the community with open arms.

From tanking to trains, to the unique Wild West history, North Platte has something for you.



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DODDER

By Chris Helzer

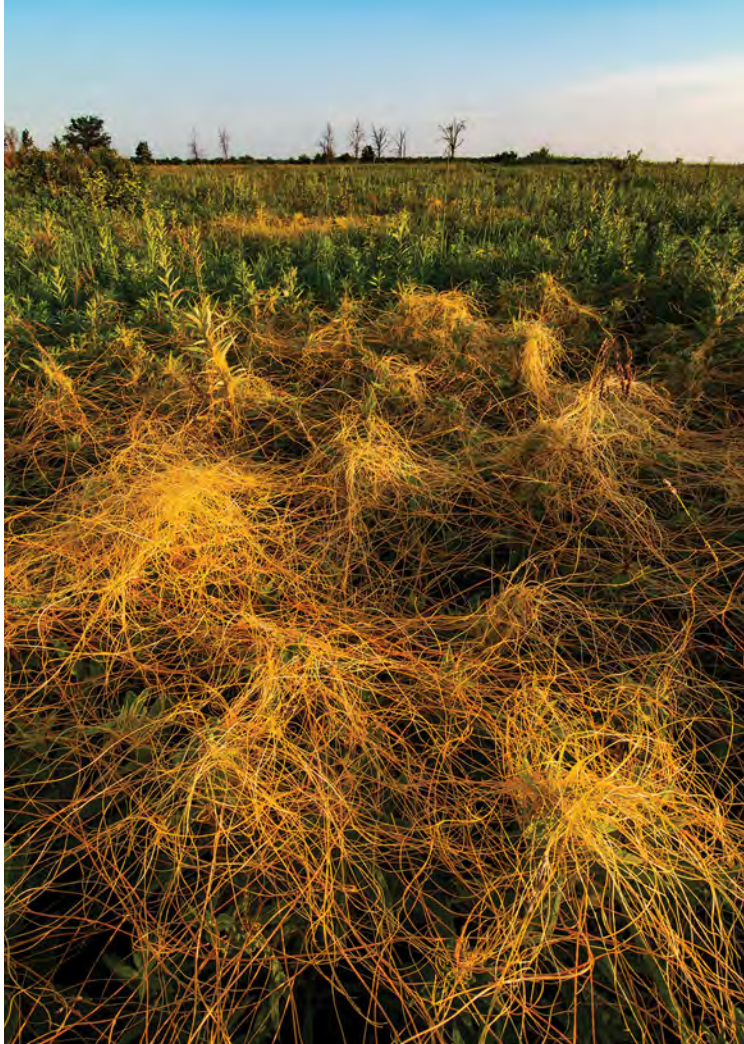
Plants are green. In school, we all learned about photosynthesis, the ability of plants to convert sunlight to food using green chlorophyll in their leaves. It’s one of those foundational ideas upon which we’ve built our understanding of the world.

Well, as it turns out, the world is a pretty complicated place, and there are some plants that aren’t green and that don’t even photosynthesize. One of those is a crazy-looking plant called dodder that grows across much of Nebraska. If you’ve ever seen it, you would be excused for dismissing it as a mass of discarded orange plastic twine.

Dodder is a parasitic plant that pulls nutrients from the host plants it wraps itself around. Because of that ability, dodder doesn’t need to create its own food from sunlight. There are multiple species of dodder, each with its own favorite host plants. Some can be pests on horticultural or agricultural crops, including alfalfa, but the dodder species commonly seen in Nebraska prairies tends to attack sunflower and goldenrod plants.

When a dodder seed germinates in the spring, a long, thin, orange, thread-like plant emerges from the soil and begins to elongate. As it does so, it noses around its surroundings looking for a suitable host plant. If it finds one, the dodder plant wraps itself tightly around its victim, spiraling upward and then reaching out to find other hosts nearby. It inserts tiny projections called “haustoria” into the plants it parasitizes, which extract nutrients out of the host and transport them to the dodder plant. Once a dodder plant is attached to its host, its root withers and dies, and the parasite becomes completely dependent upon the sunflower or goldenrod plants it is attacking.

Dodder is a native plant in Nebraska and has been making its living off of sunflower and goldenrod plants for eons. While it can appear in fairly large patches – up to the size of a double stall garage or so – it doesn’t ever seem to become a major problem for populations of its host plants. After all, dodder can’t live without the sunflower and goldenrod plants it feeds upon. Unless it’s attacking your alfalfa field or entangling your legs as you try to walk through a prairie, dodder should be seen for what it is – an odd, innocuous, weirdly attractive plant that doesn’t follow the rules we all learned about in grade school.



A mass of dodder envelopes a small patch of prairie. Typically, an attack like this doesn’t cause permanent damage to the perennial plants it covers.



The flowers of dodder look like tiny garlands wrapped around the stems of their victims.

PHOTOS BY CHRIS HELZER

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THE INVASIVE JAPANESE BEETLE

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

Japanese beetles (*Popillia japonica*) are exotic, invasive insects, established in over 30 Nebraska counties. Japanese beetle grubs and adults feed on hundreds of types of plants, including roses and lindens, and even soybeans and corn. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture is partnering with the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Japanese beetle researchers on a biocontrol project to release two parasitoid insects in the state that could help reduce Japanese beetle populations.

Biocontrol uses natural enemies to suppress the populations of a target pest. Spring tiphia (*Tiphia vernalis*) and winsome fly (*Istocheta aldrichi*) are two Japanese beetle biocontrol agents with a long and well documented history of use in the United States. The first releases occurred in the 1920s, in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Since that time, these organisms have become established in several other states. Importantly, they have not been found parasitizing any other insects – they only go after the Japanese beetle.

Spring tiphia are small wasps, around one-half-inch in length. Adults emerge in the spring, and after mating, the female locates a Japanese beetle grub in the soil and burrows down to it, stinging the grub and causing temporary

paralysis. She then attaches an egg to the grub. After the egg hatches, the larva slowly consumes the Japanese beetle grub alive. After the grub dies, the larva spins a cocoon and overwinters in the soil, to emerge the next spring.

Winsome fly is a small fly, and adult emergence occurs mid-spring through mid-summer. Female flies attach a single egg to an adult Japanese beetle's pronotum. The egg hatches and the larva burrows into the beetle, consuming it from the inside, leaving only the exoskeleton. The feeding irritates the beetle, which responds by burrowing into the soil, to die within a few days. The larva overwinters underground inside the beetle's exoskeleton, and will pupate and emerge as an adult the next year.

The department will conduct surveys for appropriate release sites in the spring and summer of 2019. A good site will have high Japanese beetle numbers, minimal-to-no pesticide use and suitable plants for parasitoid feeding and resting. If appropriate sites are found, releases could begin this summer.



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This photo of Pete Pedersen, my father, was taken in the 1960s after a successful hunt near the Ponca or Obert areas. He is holding his homemade .30-06 with walnut stock.

He fashioned deerhide “blinders” for his eyeglasses to prevent sun glare when aiming. He was photographed at his acreage at Belden. My brothers were Arlen and Dan, both of whom often went by “Pete.”

– Jane Pedersen Jensen, Plainview

Families from Omaha, Clay County and Adams County had a tradition of getting together on opening day of the pheasant hunting season. 1977 was another successful hunt with their limit by 9:20 a.m.

Members of this hunting party were Mike Olson, Curtis Olson, Ron Jensen, Ron Phelps, Mike Murman, Carl Murman, Craig Murman, Dan Murman, Dennis Murman, Scott Olson, Elmer Murman and Vaughan Phelps.

– Elmer Murman, Hastings



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 1980. 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.



This is my dad – Ernest E. Harmon of Syracuse. He loved his dogs and always had coon hounds. All of my life until he died at 83 he had to make sure his two dogs had homes. With my help we did just that. This picture was taken sometime in the 1950s after a nighttime coon hunt. Usually he had a companion with him – it started with his Uncle John, and the last person was Uncle John’s grandson, Don. In between my two sons Don or Gary went with him.

During my childhood we went to many dog races where

they laid a coon scent trail, and the dogs would follow. The first one would get it treed and then bark.

Later, he would go to water races, usually a pond with the same results as the dog races. Always using a live coon. All during my childhood Dad had a coon to work with his dogs. Sometimes I had to feed it, and the coon did not like me very well!

Dad won a lot of trophies from dog races and water races.

– Irene Fisher, Humbolt



This picture is of my son, Joshua, taken the first day of the first youth hunt season. We were living in McCook at the time. Josh is now a lieutenant in the U.S. Army Rangers. Hunting and being in the great outdoors of Nebraska enabled him to succeed as an Army Ranger, lifelong athlete and graduate of Doane.

– Michael Hartwell, Lincoln



ROLLING WITH THE CHANGES

By Justin Haag

As cliché as the saying may be, it is true that you don't know what you've got until it's gone.

When I started getting serious about wildlife photography about a decade ago, there were so many deer in northwestern Nebraska that I became choosy when pushing the shutter button. Then, not long after, an outbreak of epizootic hemorrhagic disease during a period of drought blasted the population, and I began eagerly snapping a photo of every deer I saw. Since then, the population has been rebounding, and I am back to being a little more selective. Yet, because of experience, I surely give more appreciation to every encounter I have with those whitetails and muleys.

A botanist friend spoke at a recent seminar about his flora surveys in the Pine Ridge, dating back to the 1980s. In the early days, he said, there was so much dwarf juniper (*Juniperis communis*) on the landscape it was nearly impossible to document it all. Then, catastrophic wildfires roared across much of the Pine Ridge in 2006 and 2012. Along with ponderosa pine, it is still hard to find that coniferous evergreen in those expansive burned areas.

I often think of species such as these as I encounter a flock of wild turkeys. Similar to so many animals, Euro-American settlement of the early 1900s pushed them to extirpation in our region. Just in my lifetime, they have gone from being a pretty rare sight to frequent in most places. Reintroduction and conservation efforts have been incredibly successful, and now the big birds are highly abundant throughout Nebraska and beyond.

You never know what nature has in store, so I will keep photographing those wild turkeys. Moreover, you just never know when something unusual – such as a fawn white-tailed deer joining the party in the above photo from Sioux County – might play out while I am in the process. I was certainly glad I took the time to stop and observe what appeared to be just another flock of a common species as the playful youngster emerged from the background.

Whether we are talking species populations over many years, or chance encounters over moments, the scene may change quickly. Keep your eyes open and your camera ready.

TIME WELL SPENT



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