

May / June 2008

IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

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RED ROCK'S WINDSONG

A KAYAKER EXAMINES THE POTENTIAL FOR REWILDING IOWA



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DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Gary Caldwell.

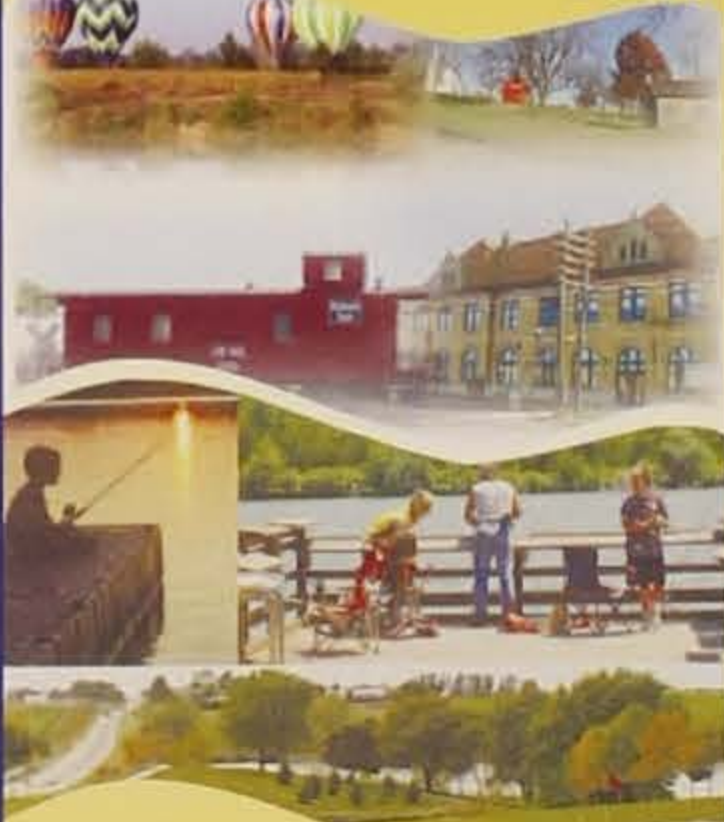
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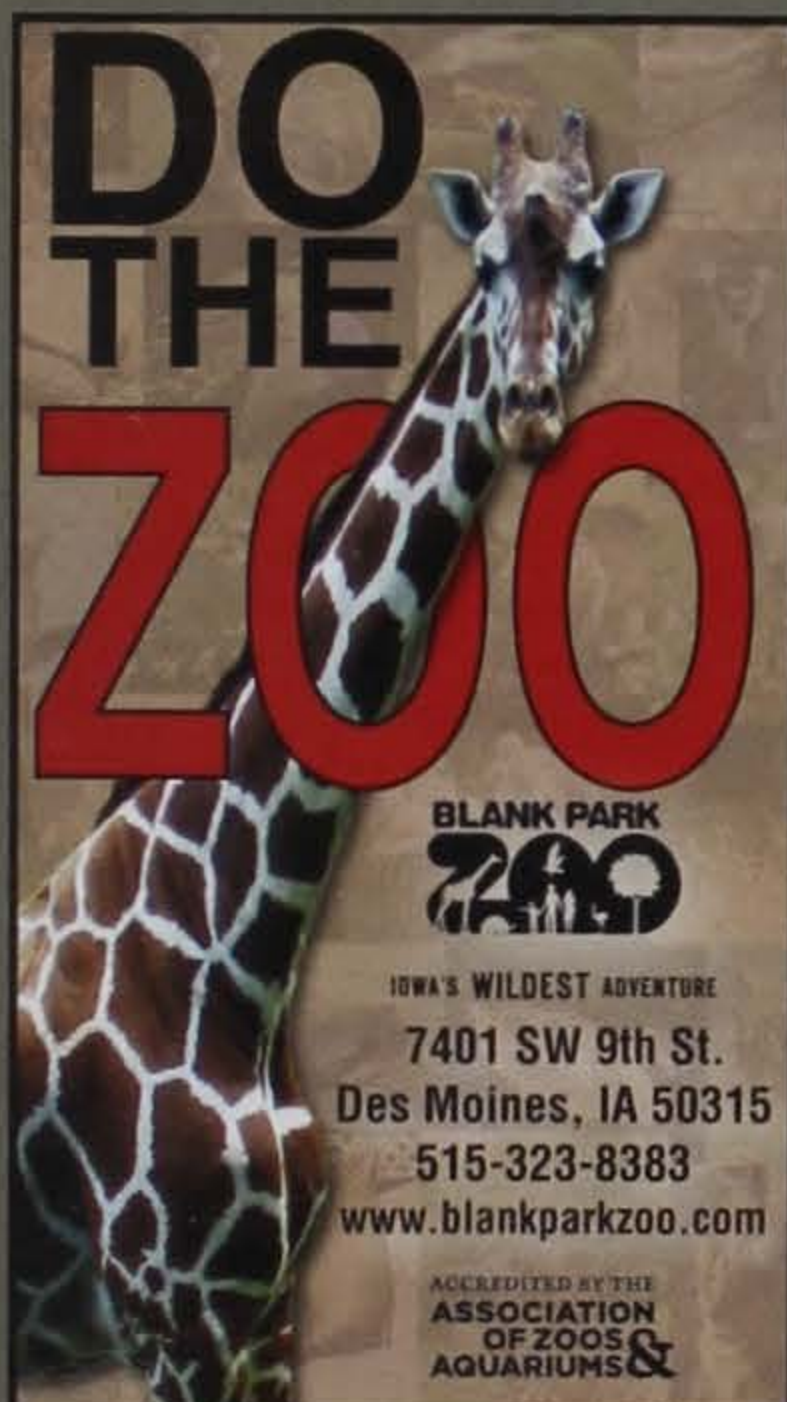


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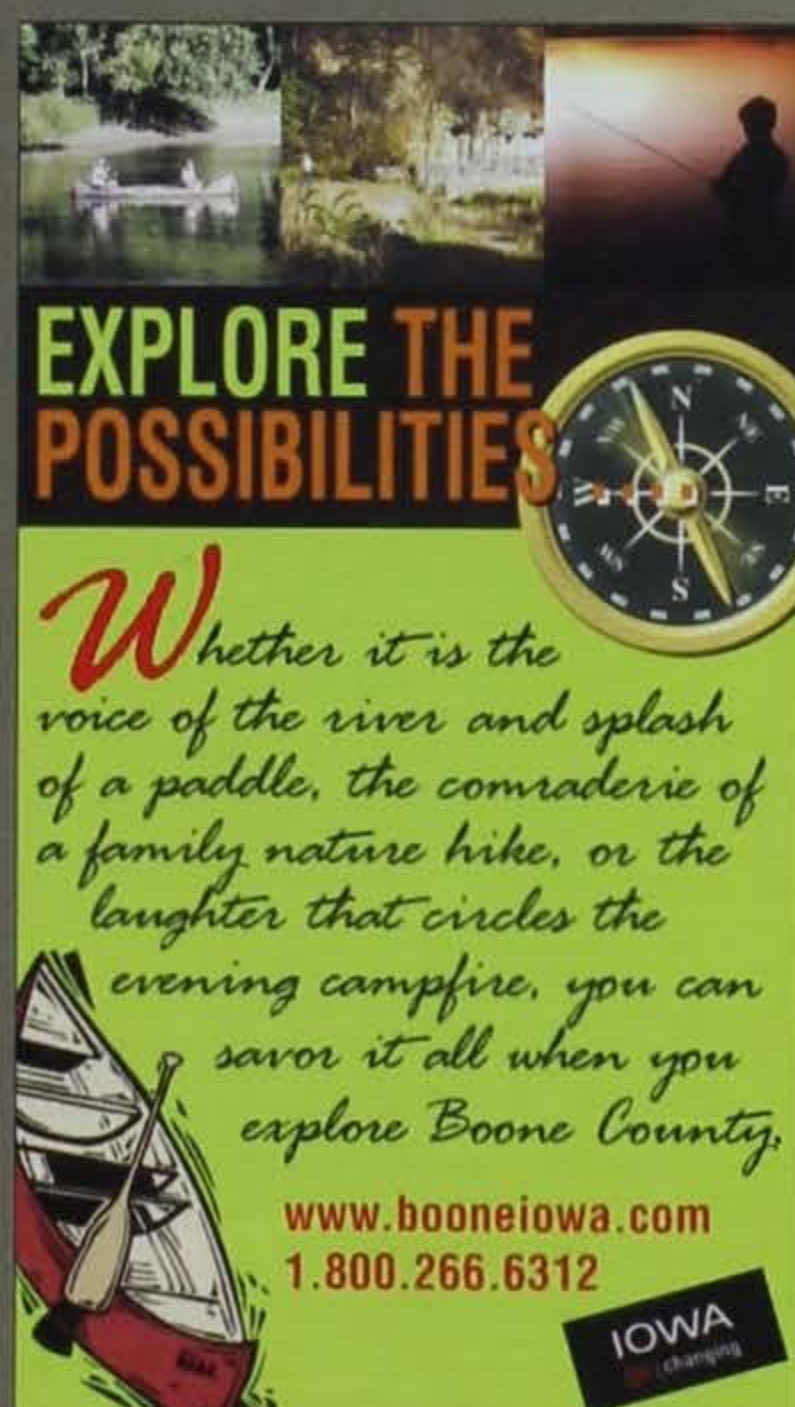
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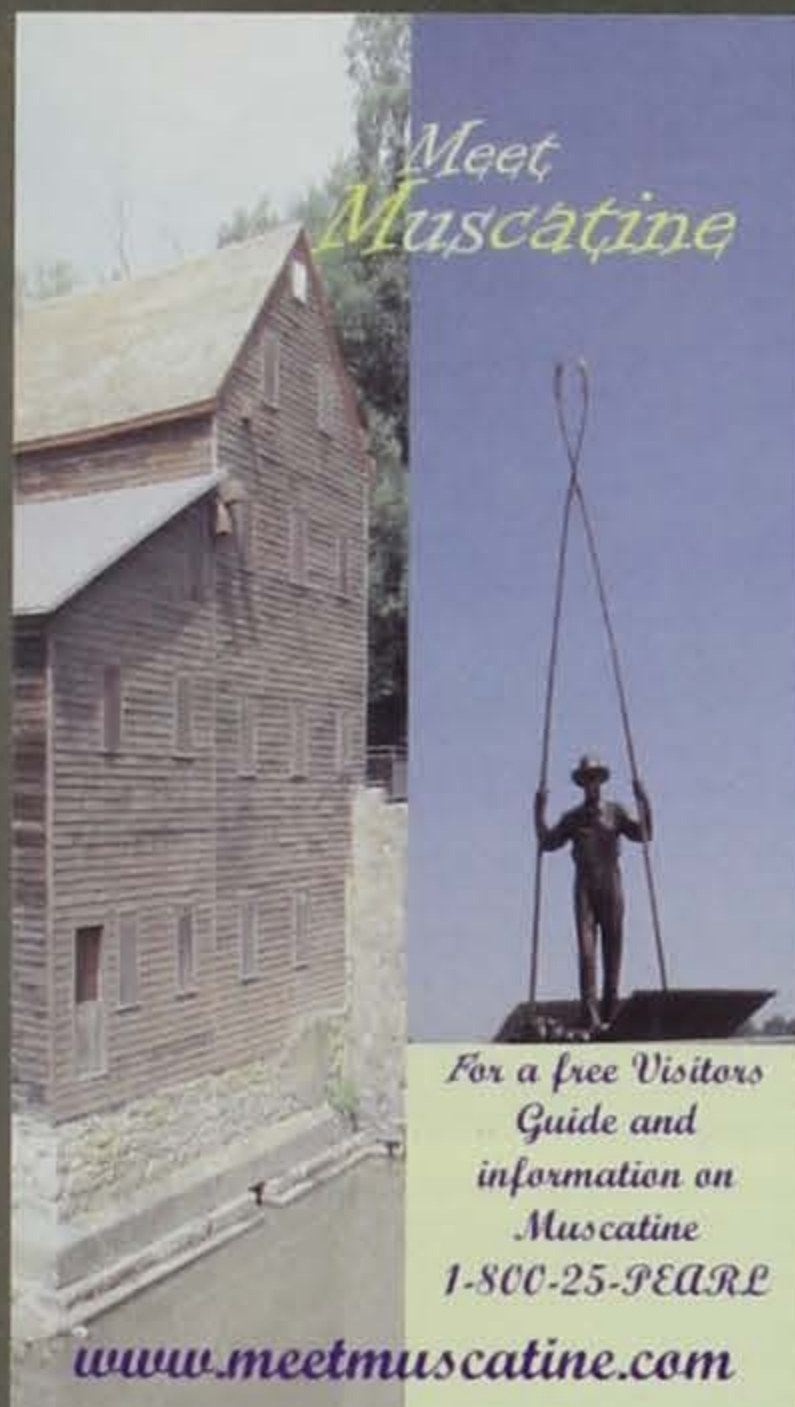
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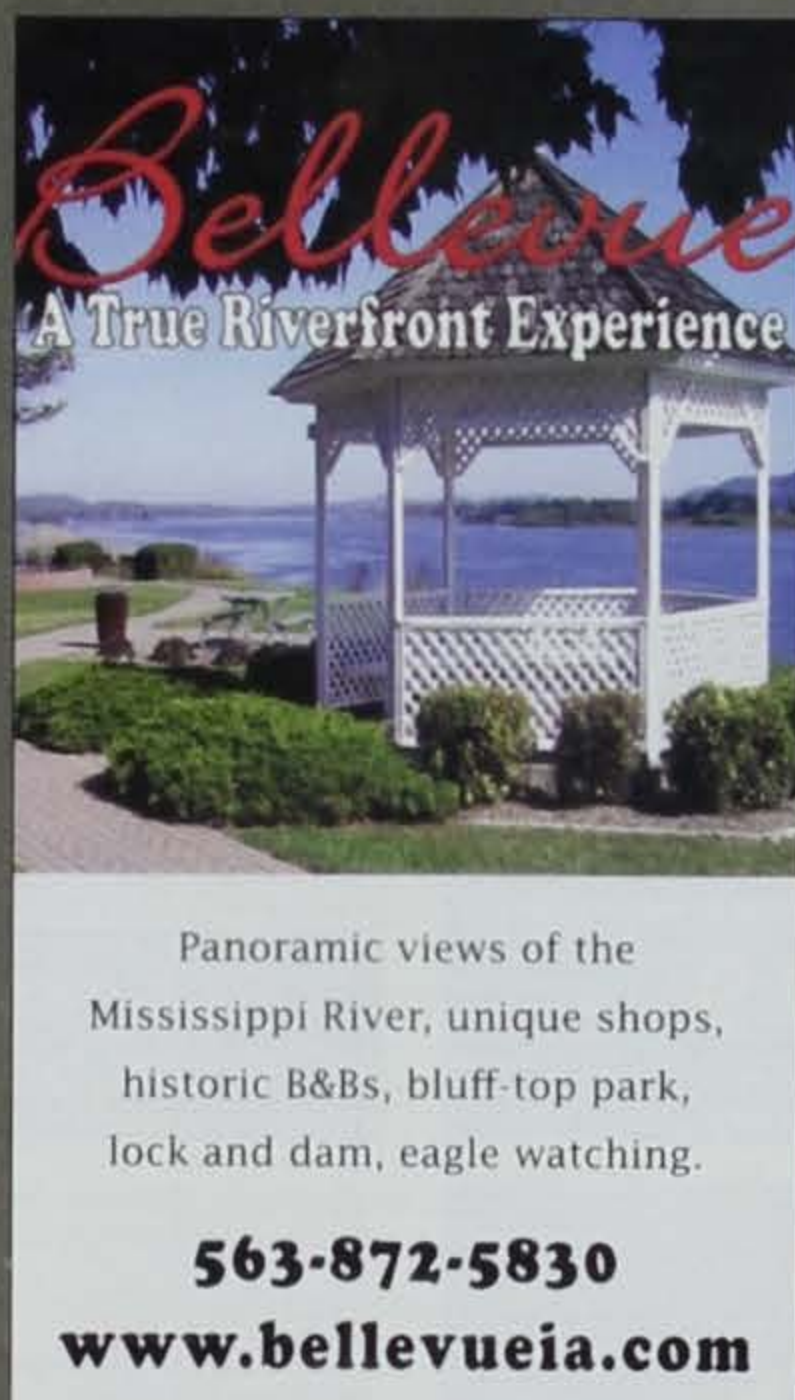
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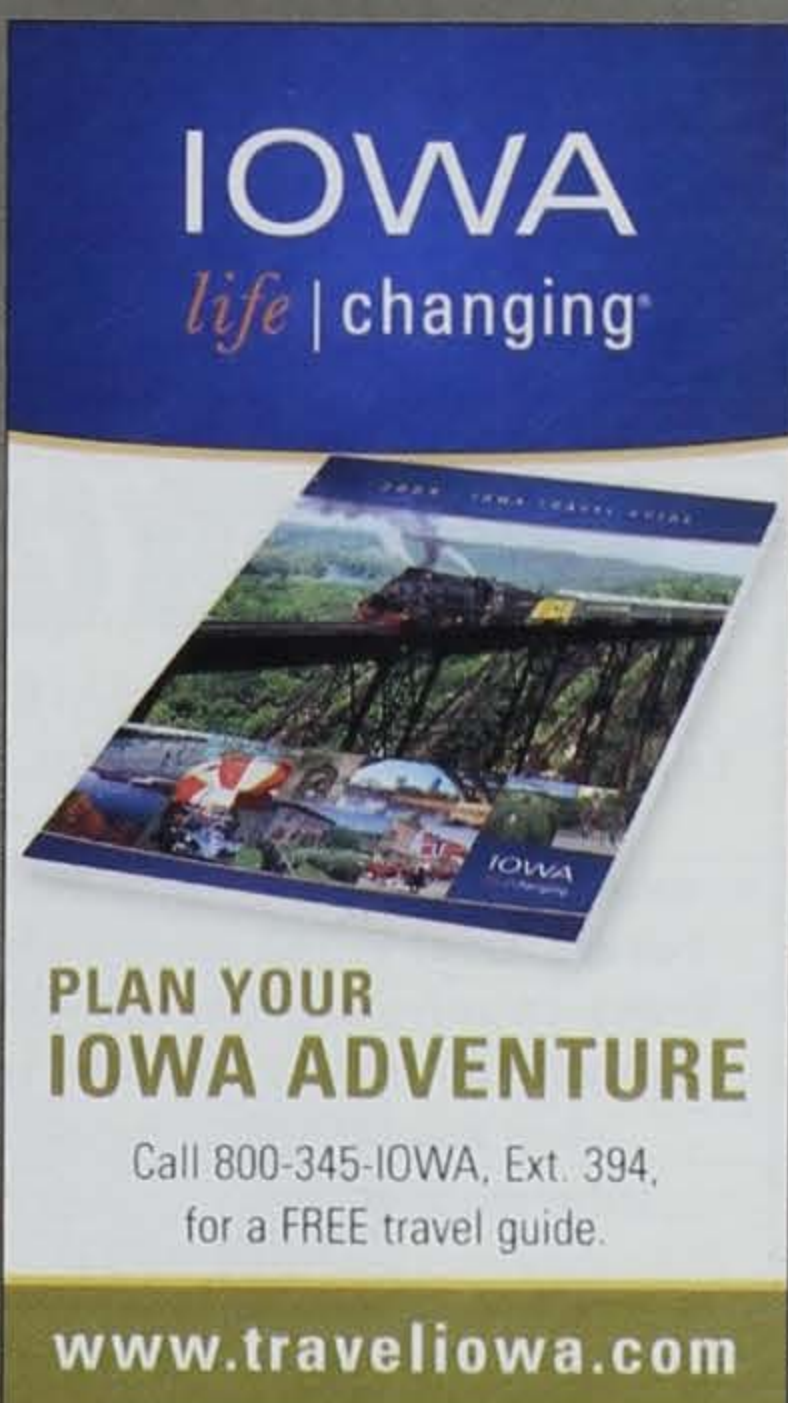
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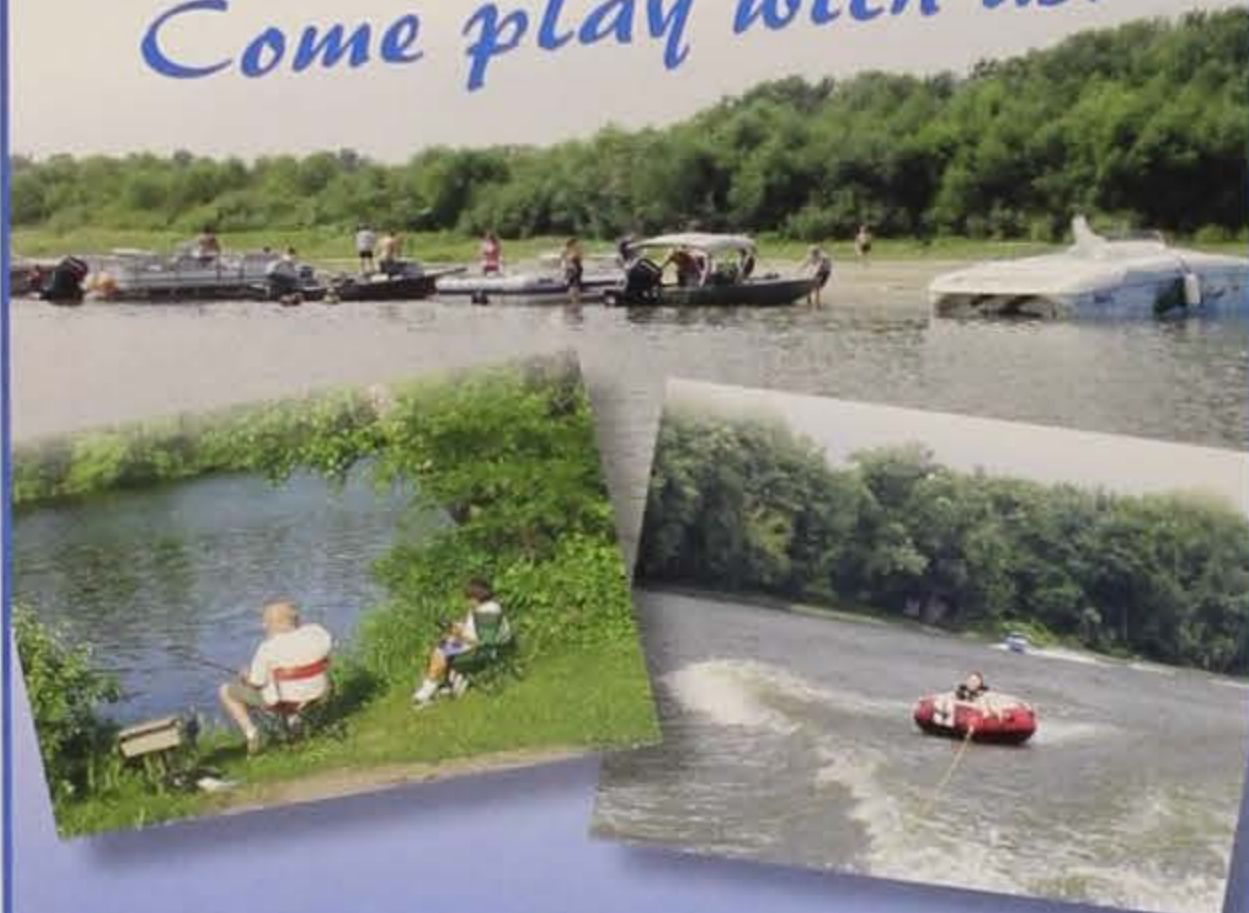
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DNR MISSION

To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life for Iowans and ensure a legacy for future generations.

EDITORIAL MISSION

We strive to open the door to the beauty and uniqueness of Iowa's natural resources, inspire people to get outside and experience Iowa and to motivate outdoor-minded citizens to understand and care for our natural resources.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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CONTRIBUTORS



DIANE MICHAUD

LOWRY "Kayaking allows me to be outside and photograph from a different perspective," says Diane Michaud Lowry, an Ames photographer with

images in catalogs and university publications. An avid year-round kayaker, she's paddled Puget Sound, the Everglades, the Gulf Coast, Lake Superior and most of Iowa. She is a member of The Skunk River Paddlers, The Iowa Whitewater Coalition and Central Iowa Paddlers.



RON HULSE

of Knoxville has spent six years photographing wildlife, insects and birds near Lake Red Rock when not cycling, hiking or volunteering. An avid

paddler, he also helps find sponsors to reintroduce osprey locally and raises awareness of siltation issues at the reservoir. He's a recent retiree with "more hobbies than I have time for."



JIM MESSINA

of Prairie Wings Media Productions in Cedar Rapids, has 24 years of work in nature, wildlife, sports, travel, educational and industrial photos.

His work has appeared in Sierra Club and Smithsonian Institution books, *The Iowan* and the *Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation Magazine*. A winner of the Nikon Optics award for close-up photography, he's earned three best of show awards in the Midwest Interpretive Association competition at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge.



JENNIFER WILSON

is a travel writer who writes for *Better Homes & Gardens* and *Midwest Living*. Originally from Colfax, she's now a city slicker with

a yard full of prairie plants in Des Moines. wilsonhoff@msn.com



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BY JOE WILKINSON PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

First-time climber Julia Smith of Cedar Rapids reflects after a climb at Palisades-Kepler State Park. "It was the best day I've ever had. What an experience with your friends and family. It was wonderful." *Read more on page 16.*

ABOUT THE COVER

DNR Ecologist John Pearson photographed Cordova Cliffs at Lake Red Rock after landing his kayak and scrambling up the rocky face. "Iron oxide in the sandstone weathers much like rust," he says of the red hues. "The rock's slanting lines, or cross-beds, formed as

sand grains settled out of an ancient river." Over time sandbars stacked up and eventually turned to rock. Geologists use the slant patterns to learn about past rivers. About 300 million years ago, the river ran northeast to southwest, carrying sediment from the Appalachian Mountains—then as high as the current Rockies—to a shallow sea in the Great Plains.

Near the photo location is the Cordova Observation Tower on the north shore. It features the world's longest and tallest continuous set of fiberglass stairs, ascending 106 feet. The Midwest's largest observation tower makes for an ideal panoramic sunset view.

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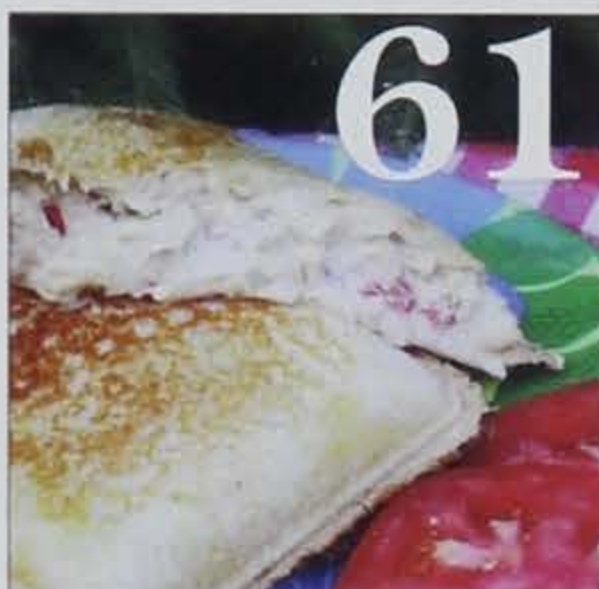
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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



For years, Honey Creek Resort State Park has been a concept on paper. In just a few short months, it will be a reality on the landscape.

After many years of planning and hard work, the resort park will open in August. Iowa's new "Destination State Park" will combine outdoor recreational activities along with family vacation amenities. The 850-acre park, on Lake Rathbun in southern Iowa, will open with a 105-room lodge, a convention center accommodating up to 300 people, restaurant, lounge, indoor water park, 18-hole golf course, RV park, boat dock, boat ramp, fishing facilities and multi-purpose trails.

It will be a gateway to many of those who want to be more involved, but not necessarily had an opportunity to do so. At a time when the state recognizes that recruitment and retention of workers is a future challenge, Honey Creek is an incredibly bold step to improving Iowa's quality of life. It will offer the right blend of experiences, appealing to a wide array of our citizens, from established outdoor enthusiasts to those who are looking for their first taste of these pursuits. Honey Creek Resort State Park signals that we are optimistic about our state's future and are willing to make significant investments toward long-term quality of life improvements.

As DNR director, it is gratifying to me that the resort will combine two of Iowa's best assets—our stunning natural resources and the expertise and experience of our DNR staff who will be on hand to provide a wide variety of natural resources interpretation and environmental education programs.

I hope you will take the opportunity to celebrate the opening of Honey Creek Resort State Park with me this fall, and have the opportunity to visit in the very near future.

RICHARD LEOPOLD, Director of the Iowa DNR

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Lumbricus terrestris—THE NIGHTCRAWLER.

Loved by robins, prized by anglers and pursued by fathers and sons (and mothers and daughters); this plump and slimy delicacy works magic on nearly every fish species. Collecting nightcrawlers was a rite of passage, bringing together families for an inexpensive, family prelude to a day fishing.

Nightcrawlers are available by the metric ton in April and early May when flushed from the ground by spring rains to line sidewalks, streets and parking lots. They're available, albeit difficult to catch, during summer, when partially exposed during cool, damp nights. And if properly cared for, nightcrawlers can last an entire season, from spring spawn to fall feed.

Keep nightcrawlers in a cool, dark place in either commercial bedding or garden soil. A commercial cornmeal-based worm food will keep your bounty fat and sassy; just make sure to follow package labels. Rotting or dead vegetation can be added as well. Whichever is used, the key is to keep it moist—not wet. Use a spray bottle filled with rainwater or distilled water to dampen bedding as needed.

A spare refrigerator in the basement or garage is ideal; set to around 50 degrees. Or find a cool, shady spot out of the way. Make sure the container has a secure lid. Put a brick on top to make sure no 'crawlers get away.

When fishing, take only the nightcrawlers you intend to use and keep them cool. Nightcrawlers stress easily in heat. Release any leftover nightcrawlers on the ground after a trip to avoid killing your home stock.

Check on stored nightcrawlers regularly and remove any dead or stressed crawlers. One dead nightcrawler can wipe out an entire box. And you don't have to guess if the crawlers went south...your nose will tell you.





HEROES AMONGST US

For most of my life, cancer has been a distant threat. Lance Armstrong was about as emotionally involved as I got. But over this last year it hit not only close to home, but with my sister and cousin dealing with the disease, at home as well.

With my sister Betty, my friend Cal, my cousin Jim, and associate and friend Steve, I seem to be in the middle of a cluster. This fact was driven home to me during a recent conversation I had with Steve France, a retired physical education educator in West Des Moines.

Steve called to let me know that he would work me into his schedule after his chemo, a shot he would take 24 hours later to help his white blood cell count, and pheasant hunting. Later he left a message saying he didn't get any pheasants... but at least his dog got some exercise, as did he.

For Steve getting out into the fields and walking with his dog was an end unto itself. No bird...no problem. It was a good day for Steve, his dog, and of course some pheasants.

Later that day as I was driving home, an author was being interviewed on the radio about her book on the Civil War. She said, "When you are forced to think about death, it heightens your appreciation for life."

On that day I had a heightened appreciation for Steve. I said that he was retired, but that is like saying Lance Armstrong is retired. Steve spends a significant amount of time lobbying the legislature for the Iowa Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. His goal is to promote quality daily physical education and he is tireless in that effort.

Steve knows about the health benefits of physical activity, he knows how activity can improve brain functions, and he knows how daily activity can provide a boost to your mental state no matter what your age.

For the last two years Lance Armstrong has provided us a high profile cancer survivor as he has ridden across Iowa. Let me assure you we have another activist out there tramping across our fields or angling on our great lakes, also campaigning for the health of our kids. The fact that he maintains this effort between his own chemo treatments is inspiring.

Let me tell you, there are heroes amongst us.

I usually encourage readers to add activity to their routine. On this occasion I suggest you consider screening. If there is a family history or if you are at increased risk for certain cancers you may need to start screening at an earlier age or be screened more often. Those with symptoms that could be related to cancer should see their doctor as soon as possible. Checking with your doctor and reviewing schedules available from the American Cancer Society are both wise choices.

The ACS site at www.cancer.org provides a useful health check. This quick and easy site offers simple questions and useful answers for you or loved ones. You can get an instant personalized health action plan to share with your doctor.

Tim Lane is the fitness consultant with the Iowa Department of Public Health. He is also a marathoner, former director of the National Ski Patrol, climber, volleyball coach and cyclist. He has cycled across America once and Iowa 25 times. He's a regular participant in RAGBRAI and developed the Ride Right safety program. Tim also helped design and promotes Lighten Up Iowa.

But Why?

Helping adults answer children's nature questions

BY A. JAY WINTER

A. Jay Winter educates up to 20,000 Iowa children each year as the DNR's training specialist at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center.

Why do animals have different feet?

DECLAN, age 4

The next time you and a child see a track or animal, take time to examine and explain the details. Here are some basics.

Wildlife use their feet just like humans—for walking, running, standing, grooming and grabbing food. Each are different, designed specifically for that animal or species.

Whitetailed deer have a specialized thick nail, or hoof, designed for running from prey and pawing for food. Small mammals' feet are adapted for walking and gathering food. These soft-footed animals have pads to reduce friction and cushion limbs when running. Paws also contain claws for digging, such as the badger, or sharp, curved claws for climbing, like the squirrel.

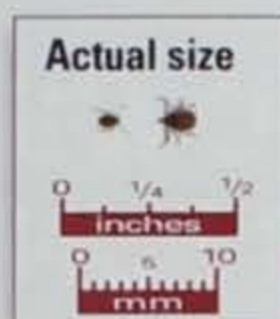
Aquatic animals often have webbed feet to aide propulsion, save energy on long swims, catch prey and escape predators. Webbed feet also provide support in muddy environments. A beaver's webbed hind feet have split toes used to comb oil through fur for waterproofing.

Birds have different feet, too. Raptors' talons are designed for perching and grabbing a meal, but limits walking. Songbirds, however, can perch, walk or hop on their feet, which aids in food gathering and roosting in many settings.

Most birds have three forward-facing toes and one pointing back. Climbing birds, such as woodpeckers, have two toes forward and two back to better cling to tree bark. Wading birds, such as the great blue heron, have long toes to provide support in muddy areas.



QUAIL PHOTO BY ROGER HILL; CYCLIST PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH



Male deer tick on left, female on right.



I GOT BIT BY A LITTLE TICK! I HAVE LYME DISEASE!!

In its adult form, the deer (or blacklegged) tick, is the only known carrier of Lyme disease in the Midwest and the smallest species found in Iowa. However, just because you pluck a sesame seed-sized tick from your skin does not mean you will contract this feared malady or even that the creature is the *Ixodes scapularis* or deer tick.

Like all ticks, deer ticks have a four stage life cycle: egg, larva, nymph and adult. Because other species, such as the American dog tick or the lone star tick, are similar sized during their larval and nymphal stages, they may be easily misidentified as deer ticks. Identifying ticks who share Iowa's outdoors can be mite-e difficult, but don't let this pesky arachnid bug you. Several experts from Iowa State University's Lyme Disease Surveillance Program team can assist. If you are bitten you may submit the tick to the team for identification.

Even if you are certain your pest is not a deer tick, Dr. Lyric Bartholomay, principal investigator at ISU's Medical Entomology Laboratory cautions, "Other species may carry bacteria responsible for disease transmission other than Lyme disease and identification is imperative in seeking proper medical attention." Forty percent of the ticks submitted to the team in 2007 were deer ticks. For details on the ticks collected, see www.ent.iastate.edu/medent/ticksurvey2007.

Answers to other tick questions, including instructions for submitting ticks, are outlined in a new brochure co-written by Dr. Bartholomay. To learn more see *Ticks and Tick Borne Diseases in Iowa* at www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM2036.pdf or contact Bartholomay at 515-294-0594 or e-mail lyrich@iastate.edu.

ASK THE EXPERT -Teri in Waterloo wonders... "Do I have to reserve a campsite?"

BY SHELLY CODNER

While reserving a campsite is the only sure-fire way to guarantee a home-away-from-home for the holiday weekend, it is not a prerequisite for a fun-filled family camping trip, says DNR Parks Bureau Chief, Kevin Szcodronski.

Half of state park campsites are reserveable up to three months in advance of arrival, leaving ample opportunities for late arrivers. While most parks are busy on any given weekend, only a small handful of the busiest—Gull Point on West Lake Okoboji, Rock Creek in Jasper County, Viking Lake in Montgomery County and Wilson Island in Pottawattamie County—typically fill on a normal weekend.

Holidays are a different bailiwick. If you haven't staked your claim to an electric site by midweek prior, pickings may be slim. Alleviate the Friday evening stress by claiming squatters' rights earlier in the week. You'll have to pay for the extra days, but will rest comfortably knowing you have a pad. If you just need a place to pitch a tent and electricity isn't a requirement, many parks will have non-electric sites available even on holidays.

Regardless of when and where, it's best to call ahead before the camper is trailered and the food packed. State park contact information is listed on the DNR's website at www.reserveiaparks.com.

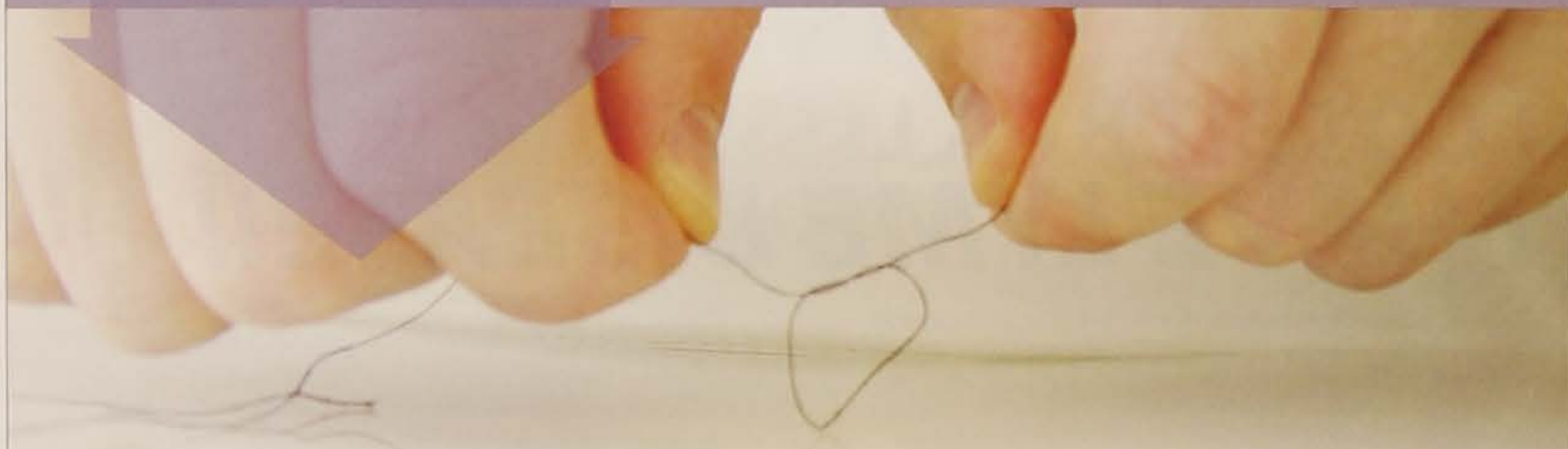


Lewis and Clark State Park, Monona County

GOT A QUESTION? Send to: ASKTHEEXPERTS@DNR.IOWA.GOV

0 OUTDOOR SKILLS

TIPS, TRICKS, HOW-TO AND MUST-KNOWS TO ENHANCE YOUR OUTDOOR FUN



GIVE A TICK THE NOOSE

⤴ If you find yourself outdoors without tweezers and need to remove a tick, use fine weight fishing line or thread tied into a simple overhand knot. Gently tighten the knot around the head of the tick. Slowly pull the ends of the line to tighten the knot and pull out the tick.



JIMINY CRICKET THERMOMETER

If you want to know the temperature but do not have a thermometer, check with a chirping cricket. Males chirp to attract mates and their love song revs up as the mercury climbs. To convert cricket calls to degrees Fahrenheit, count the number of chirps in 14 seconds and add 40. To further impress your hiking friends, count the chirps in 25 seconds and divide by three. Then add four to put the temperature in degrees Celsius. *Cricket love has limits—males typically don't chirp at temperatures below 50 degrees or much above 90 degrees.*

DUCT TAPE BLISTER BUSTER

⤵ The good-for-everything duct tape works for feet, too. Keep one-inch pre-cut sections of duct tape wrapped around water bottles, walking sticks, backpacks, camera straps or any other item you carry when hiking. At the first inkling of a hot spot caused by skin chafing against a sock or boot, apply the tape on the skin. The shiny and slick tape prevents friction from causing a full-blown blister.



EAGLES ON THE MISSISSIPPI

NICK GLYNN AND NICK SISLER, DUBUQUE

Eagle Scouts help beautify Mines of Spain State Recreation Area

With efforts that soar like the eagles above the Mines of Spain State Recreation Area near Dubuque, Nick Glynn and Nick Sisler are adding to the park's beauty. Both completed projects there to earn Boy Scouting's highest rank, Eagle Scout. Glynn organized parents, friends and teammates to restore a former cornfield in the park to a savanna. With the park mostly in prairie or forest, the savanna creates a transition between those two ecosystems. "We were trying to get it back to its natural environment," says Glynn. The project led him to his current studies in environmental science at the University of Dubuque. Sisler gathered a team of volunteers, including the services of a huge construction crane, to clear silver maples from a parking lot. Clearing the trees allowed visitors to gaze out over the Mississippi. "I chose this project because it seemed like it would really make a difference to the park," says Sisler, now a freshman at Northeast Iowa Community College. Park Manager Wayne Buchholtz is active with Scouting and is part of the Northeast Iowa Council's Eagle Review Committee. In addition to holding park programs for younger Boy and Girl Scouts, Buchholtz has a wish list of projects for any potential Eagle Scouts willing to take them on. More than 80 Scouts have completed projects at the Mines of Spain since 1993. "These are projects that the kids want to do, and they want to do something outside. The park staff can't do these projects on our own, and the kids can come back in five or 10 years and see how they've gone."



Nick Glynn Nick Sisler



GROWING SCHOOL PRIDE

BECKY VICTOR-BAKER, DES MOINES

Teacher leads sixth-grade tree planting project and builds pride in middle school

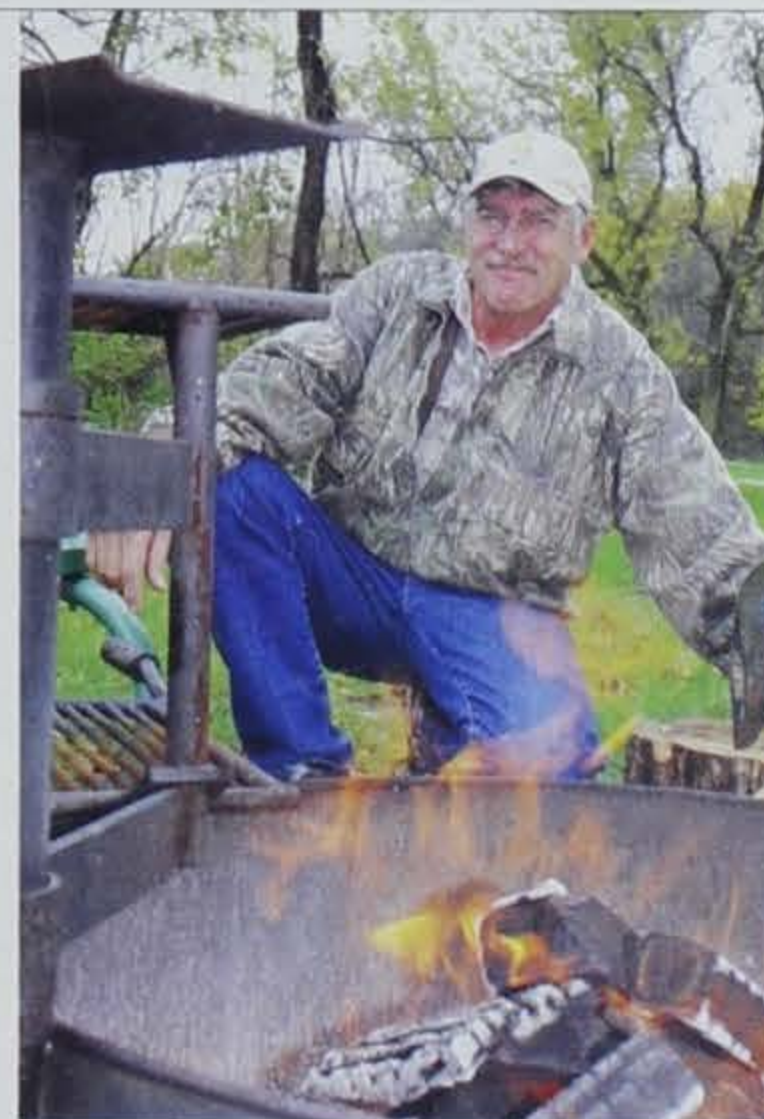
Students at McCombs Middle School in Des Moines are finding a new way to make a mark on campus. Once showing marks of vandalism, McCombs is sprouting new signs of students' presence—about 150 trees. Since 1994, more than 1,000 sixth graders have planted trees as part of an "Ecology and the Environment" unit. Becky Victor-Baker, a social studies and reading teacher, started the project without ever having planted a tree herself. But with the help of Trees for Kids, the DNR, parents, grandparents and numerous donors and partners, the students have planted 12 to 20 trees each year. "The campus was just bare before," says Randy Cook, a DNR forester. "It's a long-term commitment she's made as an educator and an annual tradition for students." Each spring, students spend one day planting new trees, replacing trees lost to disease or storms, and watering and mulching every tree on campus. As the project leafed out, school pride grew and vandalism withered. "It was for the kids to take some pride in their school, and they learn how to work together as a team," says Victor-Baker. A campus that began with just a few trees now boasts ash, pear, birch, evergreen and areas of savanna. "They always look forward to it as the sixth grade project, and students come back to see the trees they planted," she says.

GIVING MORE THAN A FAIR SHARE

RICK TROTTER, FAIRBANK

Retiree gives time, money, electrical expertise to Volga River State Recreation Area

For a day last summer, Rick Trotter of Fairbank traded in his DNR-issue lawn mower for a chauffeured golf cart at the Iowa State Fair. Nominated for his volunteer work at the Volga River State Recreation Area, Trotter was selected "Iowan of the Day" during the fair. "They treated me well, just like they do at Volga," says Trotter. He has worked at the park since 2002, doing general maintenance like campground mowing and looking over the horse trails. He was briefly added to the payroll, but asked to come off so he could volunteer his time, allowing the DNR to hire additional staff as it faced budget cuts. A former electrical supervisor at John Deere in Waterloo, the retiree lent his circuitry know-how to install solar-powered LED lights to the campground check-in station and restrooms. Trotter also donated money toward new fire rings, helping install them on concrete slabs. Trotter has been interested in conservation for years, as his 160-acre property north of Fairbank is covered with switchgrass, food plots for wildlife and 90 acres of trees. As retirement approached, Trotter asked his local DNR forester about volunteering and found himself at Volga. "I can't think of a better place to contribute," says Trotter, who's logged about 2,700 volunteer hours since 2002. "He's a very personable person, gets along with the public well, is a hard worker and sets a good example with his work ethic," said Tom Halverson, park manager at Volga. "You're just glad to see him pull in each morning. He's been a blessing to have around."



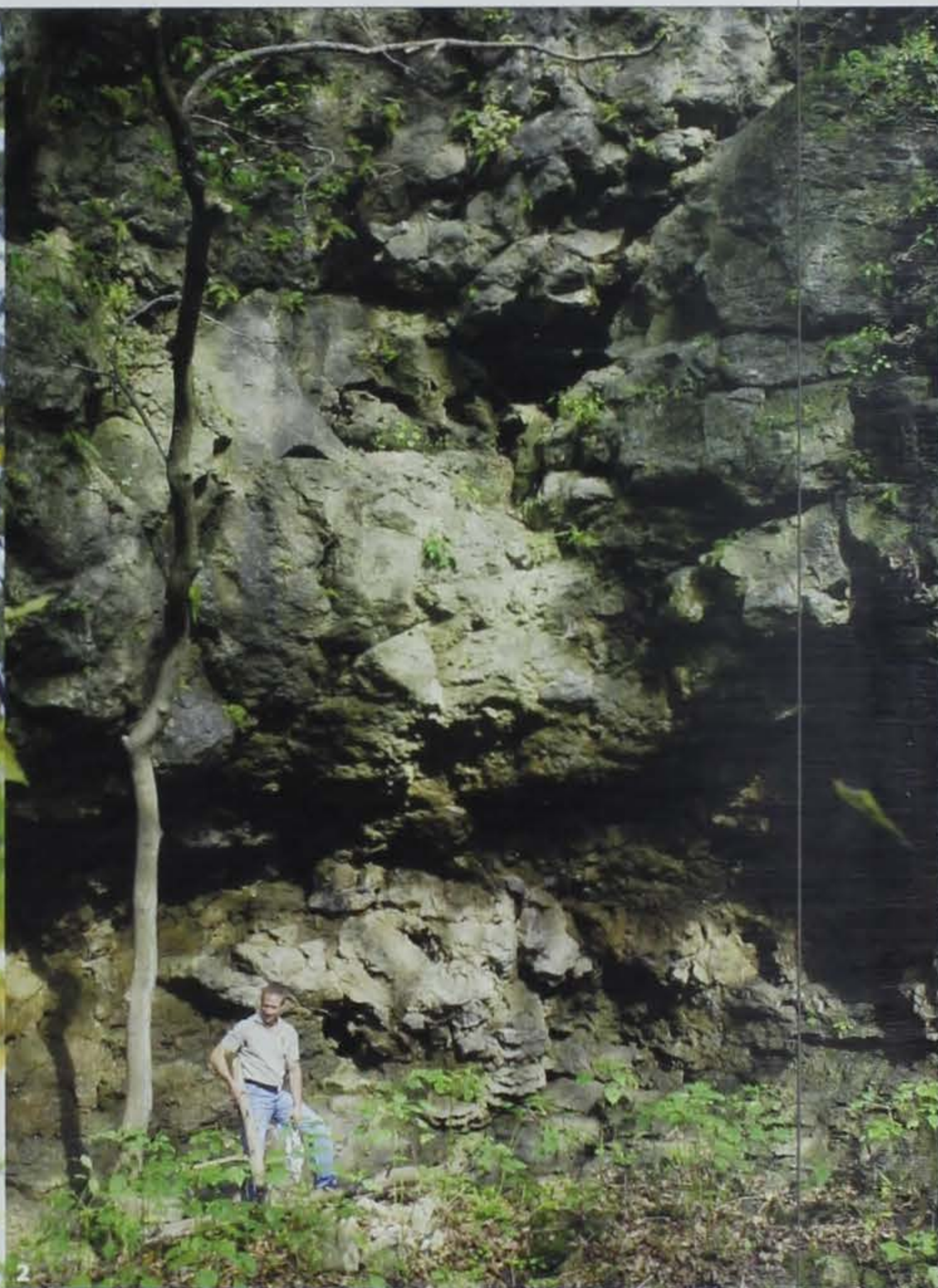
The Wild Kind

Swift water, rocky cliffs and a canoe ride that ends with a beer and a burger. It's a weekend wilderness hoe-down in east-central Iowa.

DNR Park Ranger Jim Hansen climbs one of three major walls at Palisades-Kepler State Park that attract several hundred climbers a year. Most take advantage of a short hike up top to fix their ropes before the climb, others test skills bouldering—a short ropeless climb on a small difficult section of rock.

OPPOSITE: Dave Patton of the University of Iowa Recreation Services climbs a steep face.

FAR RIGHT: Ranger Jim Hansen disassembles a makeshift fire pit to leave no trace of human activity in the Palisades-Dows State Preserve. "People get lost out here. No trails. No facilities. Not even a good public access. It makes the landscape so much different than the rest of Iowa. Almost no one comes here. It's rare to even find a soda or beer can," he says. Huge virgin white and red oaks hug its rugged terrain, offering herons a rookery. "Some years I've seen up to 40 big, stick-built heron nests in the tree tops."



In a way, there are two kinds of parks," begins Jim Hansen, park ranger for Palisades-Kepler State Park in east-central Iowa. He sits forward in his beat-up Naugahyde chair at the Sutliff Bar, a dollar-bills-on-the-ceiling kind of joint, where Johnny Cash plays on the jukebox, and bait and tackle is sold at the cash register.

"There's Lake Macbride, more of a recreational boating place where you can go to the beach, go fishing. Great park."

Hansen pauses, takes a bite out of his pork tenderloin—grilled, not fried. He's a compact guy, trim and springy, built like a high-school wrestler in the lightweight division. If Hansen's not smiling (which he usually is, unless you're making noise in his park after 10 p.m.), you get the picture from his bright blue eyes that a smile isn't too long in coming.

"A park like Palisades is more for people who are going to get out and hike on the trails and who love that densely wooded forest. There aren't many parks where you can rock climb, either. Palisades is the main one."

Hansen sits back, takes another bite, satisfied. You can tell when a ranger loves his park. And Sutliff Bar is a good place for woodsy philosophizing, especially at the end of a long

paddle on the Cedar River that runs just outside its doors.

Talk turns to this smart little patch of Iowa, smack in-between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. Sandy beaches. Giant telescopes in a hidden observatory. Soaring cliffs above a swift river. Ancient hardwood forest where you'd better pack your GPS or end up the subject of the next Jon Krakauer novel.

"It's a little bit of everything, really," Hansen concludes. "It's a unique landscape within what Iowa is."

UP, UP, UP

Established in 1922, the 840 acres of Palisades-Kepler State Park is packed with well-preserved relics—follow the four-mile Cedar Cliff Trail and you'll catch the drift. Limestone structures by the Civilian Conservation Corps look like they could've been built last month. Kids sift through the sand at the beach for old shells and fossils. A few remaining eastern red cedars date back 500 years. Campsites and cabins are enfolded in old growth.

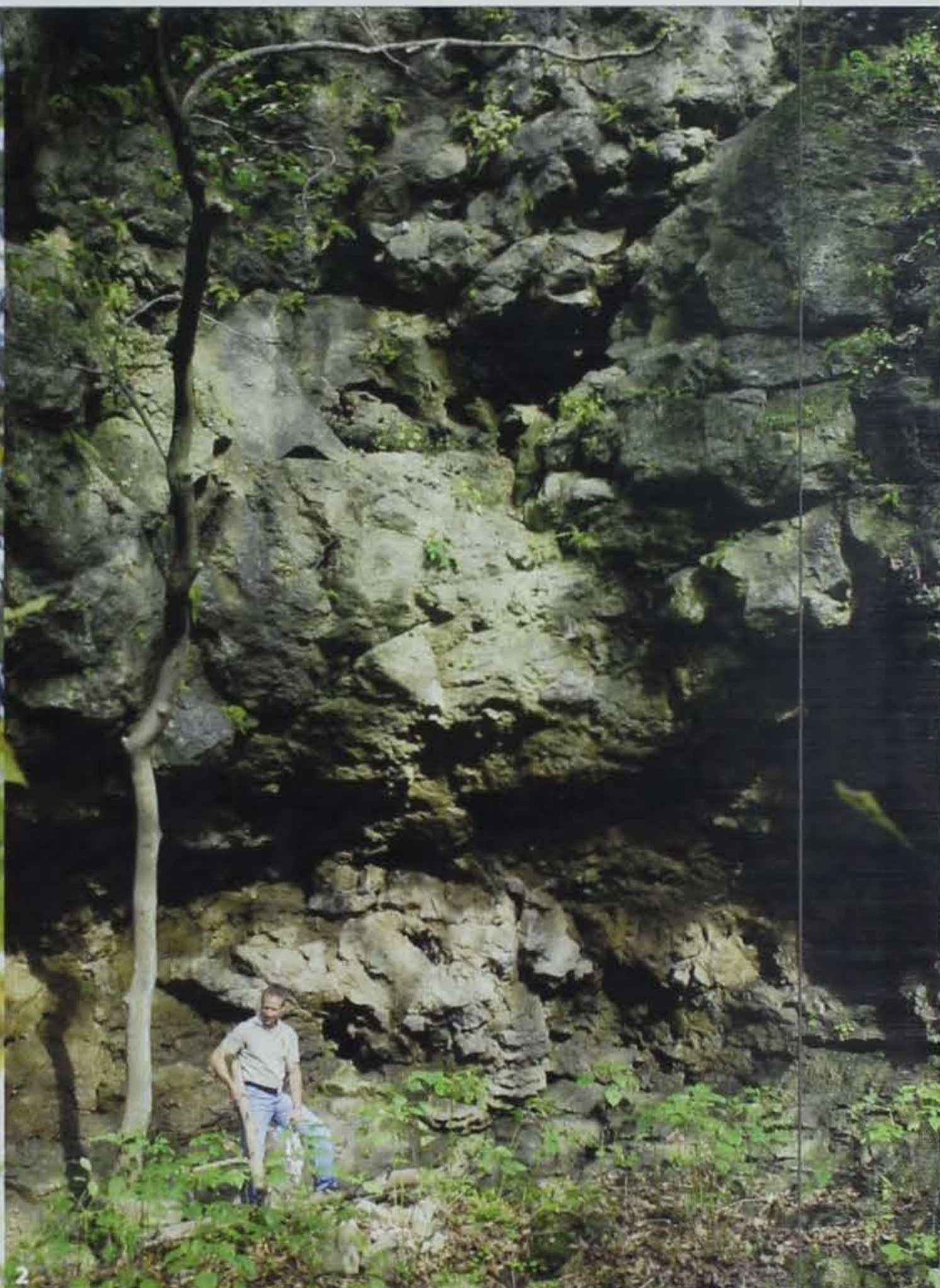
Cliffs formed in ancient times also make Palisades-Kepler a rock-climbing park. Hansen and his crew help keep the sport safe and accessible for climbers who sign waivers

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LEFT: Jim Hoff of Des Moines tests his skill against walls up to 70 feet high. "As you go up the rock wall, you feel like you are free climbing. When you lose your grip or can't hold on, it is a scary situation, but in reality you are connected to the rope and are safe," says Ranger Jim Hansen. Climbers are rewarded with a rappel from the top.

RIGHT: 1) Stiff, grip-like toes and soles make climbing shoes a bonus. 2) Park trails, campgrounds and shelters are family magnets. 3) With a hand from Ranger Hansen, Dylan Smith makes his first climb hours before his fourth birthday. "He could not stop talking about it. He felt like a big guy," says his mother, Julia Smith of Cedar Rapids. 4&5) Dollar bills on the ceiling and an Old West exterior exude character at the Sutliff Bar along the Cedar River.



at the ranger's office. Climbers generally start out at a gym, then graduate to outdoor ascents at places like Raccoon Cove along a steep rock face on the Cedar Cliff Trail.

Dave Patton, assistant director of the University of Iowa Recreation Services, gives a harness talk to a group of novices. His *Touch the Earth* outfitter within the University of Iowa periodically offers trips to the general public during the September-November climbing season.

Patton begins the series of commands that structure every ascent:

"On belay."

"Belay on."

"Climbing."

"Climb on."

Patton says that Palisades holds the majority of Iowa's climbing history. "Royal Robbins climbed here," he says

of the early pioneer of American climbing.

Skittering upward, hands dancing about for a solid hold, his students find this rock a muscle-draining challenge. It's just another surprise about this area that makes it such a solid bet for a visit.

FAST WATER

Patton's *Touch the Earth* also rents kayaks and canoes—handy for the Cedar River. It's about 10 feet deep, a wide and fast run. You'll start downriver from a wrecked dam at the park, then paddle a few hours to Sutliff Access, where, conveniently, you'll take out at the Sutliff Bar, established in 1899 adjacent the old iron Sutliff Bridge.

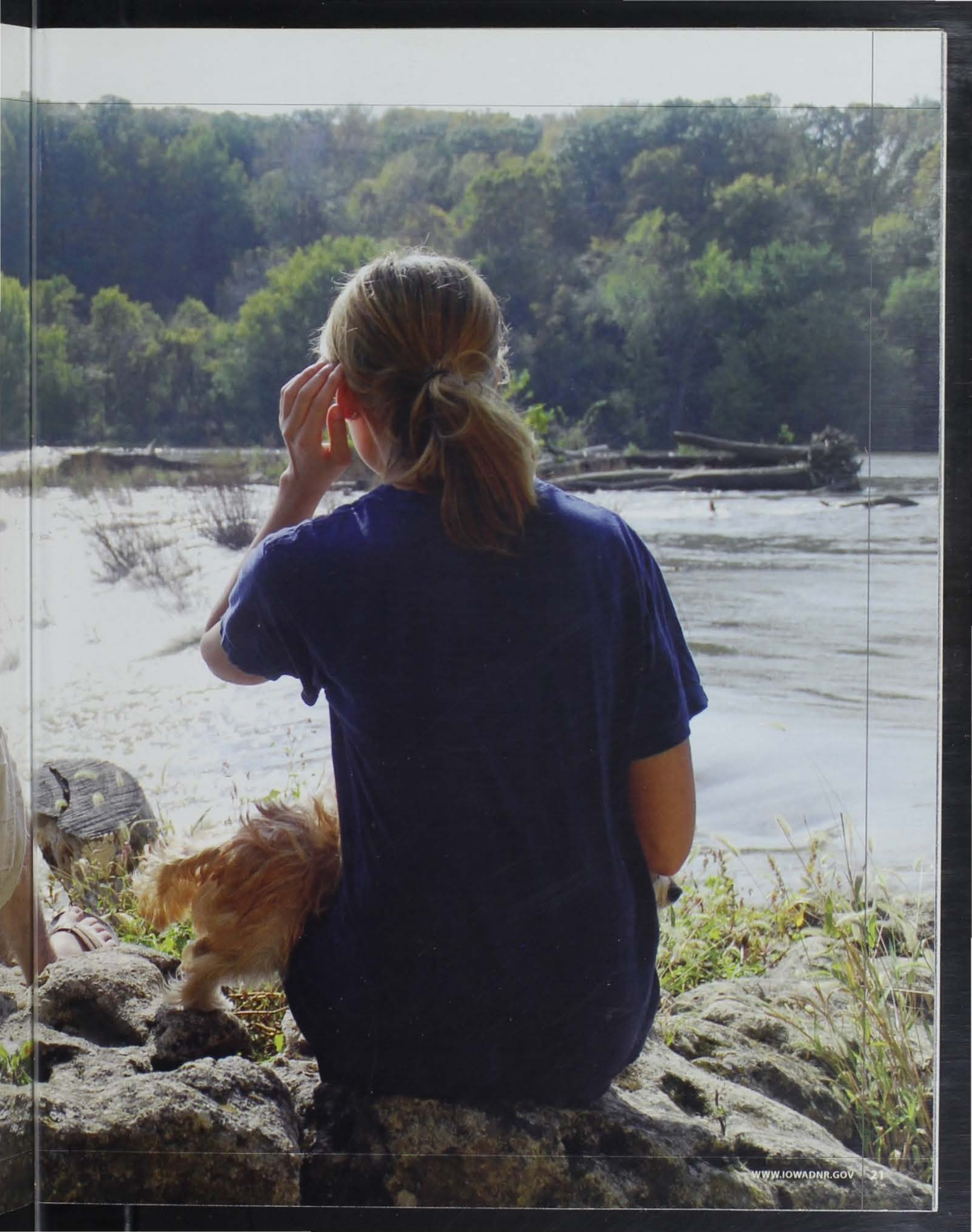
As a canoe pulls up, a waitress leans out the back door and yells, "*Blake! Your food is ready!*" to one of the folks chatting at nearby picnic tables.

LOST IN IOWA

Hikers at Palisades-Kepler State Park take in the view along the Cedar River. Hundreds of yards of sandbar beaches sprawl just downstream. Due to strong currents, beachgoers should stay on the sand.

Across river is the remote and rugged Palisades-Dows State Preserve. Shown between the hikers and obscured by high water is a 1930s-era dam, now broken in portions. Paddlers should portage around the dam for safety to avoid strong current and underwater obstructions.





LOST IN IOWA



1) Down river of Palisades-Kepler State Park is the Sutliff Bridge, where patrons of the adjacent bar and eatery can enjoy a burger on the bridge while fishing or after a paddle. 2-4) Paddlers Marty Colbert of Cedar Rapids and Max Meyer of Marion (green kayak) hit the rapids below a broken section of the 1930s-era dam at Palisades-Kepler. "It's a good whitewater section, but people need to be experienced kayakers skilled with specialty whitewater kayaks," says Park Ranger Jim Hansen, who notes paddlers should portage around the dam for safety. 5&6) Katie Slauson, 10, of Swisher, peers through one of several high-end telescopes at the Palisades-Dows Observatory on the southeast edge of Palisades-Kepler State Park. Public viewing nights allow guests to peek through 16- and 24-inch telescopes. Within the park, campers can also "have some pretty interesting experiences looking at the sky with the naked eye or with binoculars," says Hansen. "There are nights here so dark, you can't see a hand in front of your face."



There's a lazy, happy feeling here. People in these parts have a good thing going, and they know it. Travelers straggle in the door every now and then, exchanging that knowing look between comrades who make a good find on vacation.

MEETING THE HEAVENS

It's with a different sense of wonder—but just as powerful—that visitors stumble upon the Eastern Iowa Observatory and Learning Center, just far enough away from the little shops and restaurants of Mount Vernon to afford a near-perfect darkness. From the observatory parking lot, tiny red squares burn in the distance—easy-on-the-eye red lights within the observatory domes.

In those buildings, telescopes reveal the night sky to the Cedar Amateur Astronomers who built this place—and the visitors they welcome regularly. While navigating

the down-lit sidewalk, you can hear gentle shifting all around as stargazers peer through their telescopes set up on concrete observing pads. The night sky is splayed with bursts of stars like pinholes in a dark canvas.

Inside the observatory, the roof rolls away to expose the sky. There's a fresh freedom in that outer layer of earthly protection peeling back to reveal a heavenly reward. Among the three buildings are five telescopes, including a six-inch refractor like the one Galileo used.

In 2003, when the University of Iowa retired its onsite observatory because its city sky became too bright, it donated a 24-inch Boller & Chivens telescope to the Cedar Amateur Astronomers—kind of like having the NBA's LeBron James play for your Tuesday-night pickup team.

Member Jerry Warner peeks through a telescope and talks about the group's good fortune. "There is



PRESERVE THE NIGHT SKY

Keeping the sky dark is essential for stargazing now and in the future. In general, to reduce light pollution, light only what needs lit, when it needs lit. More tips:

- Get rid of the dusk-to-dawn security light. Use a motion-sensitive light instead, if you need a nighttime security system.
- For exterior lighting, purchase fixtures that shine directly downward (also called full cutoff fixtures). For existing fixtures, consider light shades (www.starrynightlights.com).
- Reduce the night glow at home. Minimize wattage and direct illumination toward the ground. For apartments, talk to your manager about using blackout blinds at night. Put household lights on dimmer switches.
- Turn lights off when you leave the office.
- If you see a billboard or commercial establishment with excessive lighting, or lights directed skyward, let them know you've noticed. It's confusing to migrating birds and pollutes the night sky.
- Write or e-mail your city councilperson, and request that future street illumination purchases be high-efficiency, low-energy, flat-lens streetlights.
- Get used to the dark. Human eyes have good night vision. Do you really need to turn on the light to take out the trash?
- Talk to friends and neighbors. This is one environmental pollution that's easily cleaned up without lasting side effects.

6

nothing like this in Missouri. There is nothing like this in Nebraska. This place is unique," he says. "What we have is very special."

The observatory is sited on the edge of Palisades-Dows State Preserve. There's no obvious public access to this wild place, no groomed trails. Those who venture in from the observatory grounds had better have a good map and know how to use it.

Dr. Neil Bernstein, a biology professor at Mt. Mercy College in Cedar Rapids, knows these woods because they are his classroom. He says wildflowers explode along the steep valleys of its 160 acres every spring—cutleaf toothwort, spring beauties, bloodroot. Neotropical migrants such as warblers find shelter here.

"In spring," says Bernstein, working his way through the scrub, "it's a magnificent awakening."

A young boy visiting the observatory walks the outskirts of the preserve. He stops, his face frozen in the awe of a city kid who isn't used to this backwoods stuff. "This must be a jungle," he concludes.

Bernstein passes him, white work shirt rolled to his elbows and khakis covering his battered boots. The binoculars and red fanny pack mark him as a nature geek, a hiker who stops to muse over the loveliness of nodding trilliums, peer at a titmouse through binoculars, or to note that the mossy dolomite cliffs are calcareous rock—a buildup of marine invertebrate exoskeletons left over from the ancient Iowa sea.

"That's why this is a preserve," says Bernstein, referring to the boy. "So the children can make that realization. For students, where else could they have a natural classroom like this?"

LOST IN IOWA



Bernstein points out beaver tracks and debates with Jim Hansen over what may or may not be bobcat scratchings on a tree. For Hansen, who oversees this area in conjunction with the Linn County Conservation Board, the preserve is just another reason he likes his job.

Hansen stands at the edge of a dolomite shelf, overlooking the green tangle of wilderness. Tiny sunfish and bluegill flit in a stream rolling toward the Cedar. Wild ginger cascades past all manner of ferns to a cluster of spindly blue beech trees. An aster hangs from a rocky outcropping, and a giant snail slides across a patch of moss. Nuthatches beep.

"I wish I had a lawn chair, a cooler of water, and a sandwich," Hansen says. "I could watch this place all day."

And then he sits, taking it all in, ready to talk woodsy philosophy again, which seems to come naturally in this exceptional little pocket of Linn County.

TRAVEL NOTES

PALISADES-KEPLER STATE PARK. 700 Kepler Dr., Mount Vernon, 52314. Forty-four campsites, 26 with electrical hookups. Family cabins. 319-895-6039; www.reserveiaparks.com

SLEEP INN & SUITES. This new building is part of a chain, yes, but it proudly displays local art for sale, keeps the breakfast room in tip-top shape, and boasts the all-important swimming pool for traveling families. From \$95 for doubles. 310 Virgil Ave., Mount Vernon. 319-895-0055; www.choicehotels.com

FOOD

LINCOLN CAFE. Chef and owner Matt Steigerwald changes this menu weekly, based on freshness and availability

of local and regional produce. Seasonally, you might find cocoa-rubbed Iowa elk or a good ole Niman Ranch Iowa pork chop. So good, you'll probably want to buy the t-shirt. 117 First St. W., Mount Vernon. 319-895-4041; www.foodisimportant.com.

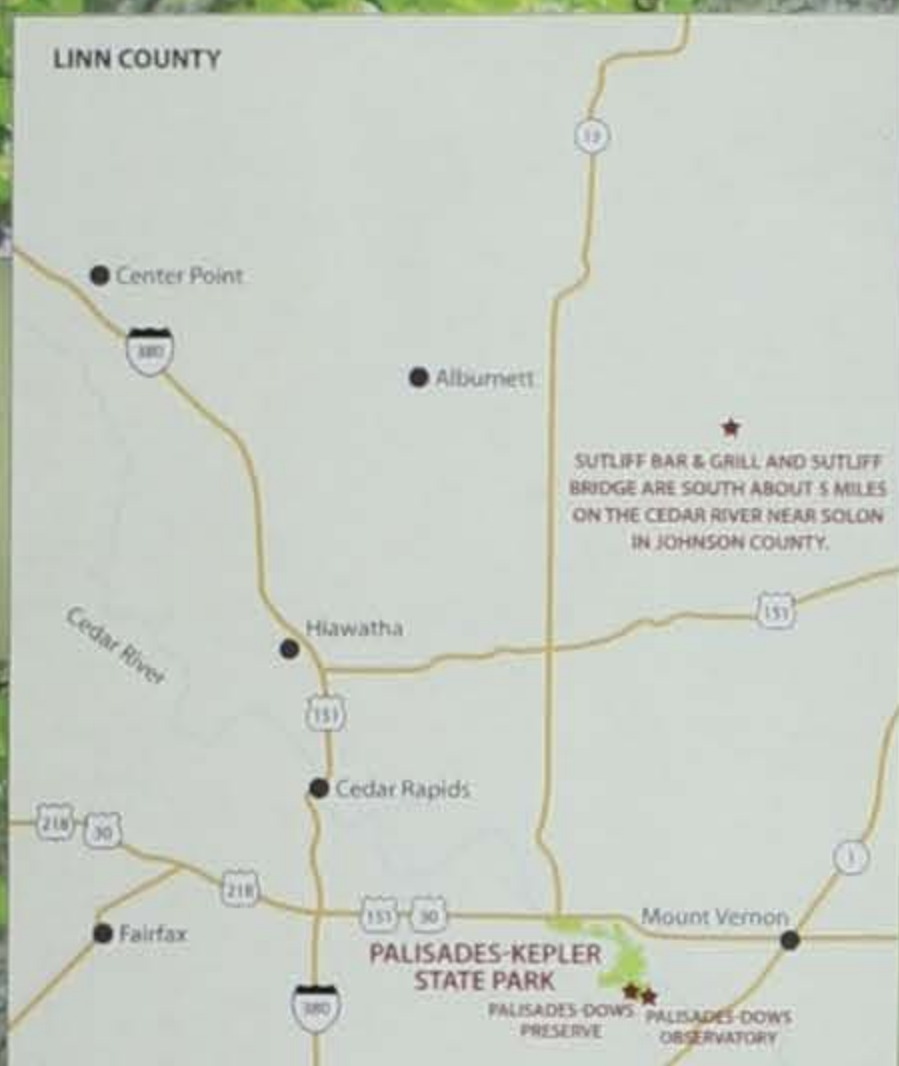
BAXA'S SUTLIFF STORE & TAVERN. 5546 130th St. NE, Lisbon. 319-624-2204; www.sutliffbridge.com.

GWEN'S FAMILY RESTAURANT. A bacon-and-eggs brand hole-in-the-wall on Main Street in Lisbon. 319-455-2873.

ACTIVITIES

PALISADES-DOWS OBSERVATORY. 1365 Ivanhoe Rd., approximately 15 miles southeast of Cedar Rapids and approximately 20 miles north of Iowa City/Coralville. Monthly public meetings are held for those interested in learning more about astronomy and telescopes, and for people who just wonder what it's like to look through a high-quality telescope. Anyone can become a member, too. See the website for a map. www.cedar-astronomers.org.

TOUCH THE EARTH. Oversees the lifetime skills classes at the University of Iowa, plus the Climbing Gym located in the Field House and a non-credit trip program. The Touch the Earth Outdoor Rental Center is 3,500 square feet of tents, sleeping bags, kayaks and lots of other great gear to create your own adventure. It is part of the Hawkeye Tennis and Recreation Complex located off Prairie Meadow Drive in Iowa City, west of the Hall of Fame, east of Hawkeye Storage Lots and north of Hawkeye Drive apartments. 319-335-9293; www.recserv.uiowa.edu/programs/TTE/index.html.



1-3) The rugged Palisades-Dows State Preserve is a birder's haven, as thick forests and unspoiled habitat are largely untraveled by visitors. Dr. Neil Bernstein, a biology professor at Mount Mercy College in Cedar Rapids uses the area as a local classroom. ABOVE: Trails at Palisades-Kepler State Park feature deep, cool ravines in lush hardwood forests that allow families to burn off extra energy.

GET INVOLVED AT THE PARK

Invasive garlic mustard tends to take over forested areas with high-quality wildflowers and vegetation. Palisades-Kepler has not been spared. Why not call the rangers and volunteer an hour of your vacation time? "We would welcome volunteers for that," says Ranger Jim Hansen. "It's easy to find, and you can just take a patch and pull it."

The time to pull the plant is May during bloom. Later times hinder the effort by spreading seeds. When you visit, consider requesting a volunteer assignment.


Call 319-895-6039 for more information.

The Prairies' Wild Food Critics

Immersed in waist-high grasslands in Dickinson County's Spring Run Wetland, researchers explore what grass mixes offer the best bugs for bird growth.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN





OPPOSITE: Iowa State University researcher Jen Vogel (left) and assistant Jessica Davis prepare to weigh, measure and install a radio transmitter on a six-day-old nestling dickcissel. "Weights and measurements allow us to compare growth rates between nests. The transmitters enable us to gauge survival," says Vogel.

"We're mainly looking at insects as bird food," says DNR wildlife diversity technician Stephanie Shepherd. "Insects are a great link between grasslands and birds, and we're trying to determine which different cover types provide more food—have more insects—for different species of birds."

"You'd expect to see more insect diversity on areas containing a greater diversity of plants," she adds. "At this point, no one knows. But we do know that many bird species prefer things like caterpillars and grasshoppers. We hypothesize that birds don't just take the first insect they see. They may be selecting for the better nutritional value."

ABOVE: A male dickcissel guards his nest site among gray-headed coneflowers. A once common prairie nester, dickcissel numbers have declined and are listed as a species of concern.



"Primo grassland tracts" are a full complement of warm-season prairie grasses and rich mix of native forbs. 1) Wildlife researchers Jonathon Vaughn and Jen Vogel check the location of a radioed dickcissel. 2) Measuring the wing growth of a nestling dickcissel. 3) Box of banding and measuring equipment. 4) Color-coded bands on nestling dickcissel.



Located in northwest Iowa's prairie pothole region, Spring Run encompasses more than 3,700 acres of shallow marsh and rolling grassland. If you're a first-time visitor, the vastness of the landscape will impress you. If you're exploring one of the complex's Primo tracts the view becomes downright breathtaking as a kaleidoscope of coneflowers, blazing star and a host of other wildflowers swell to the horizon.

You're also likely to note the total tranquility. The soft rustle of prairie grasses, bird song and the buzzing of summer insects are the dominant sounds.

Strategically locate yourself between two hillsides, and civilization disappears. Here the landscape is void of human artifacts. No fences, power lines, buildings or other obstructions mar the view.

The only visible human evidence is a nearby shred of

colored plastic tied to small shrub branch. The flag was placed several days ago to mark the nest and eggs of a breeding pair of dickcissels. Several native bird species formerly abundant, such as the bobolink, dickcissel and meadowlark, are showing a steady decline in numbers and are listed by ornithologists as a species of concern.

Six days ago, those precious eggs became hatched chicks. Today, Iowa State University researcher Jen Vogel and assistant Jessica Davis have returned to see if the nestlings survived.

Slowly creeping to the site, they are pleased to find all three babies alive and well. Carefully extracting the partially feathered young from their nest, Vogel and Davis retreat to a nearby hillside to begin work.

The first thing each bird gets is a set of color-coded plastic leg bands and then a standard U.S. Fish & Wildlife



Service leg band, explains Vogel. The initial banding on these birds took place two days ago when they were four days old.

"The growth rate of these birds is truly amazing and they've changed a lot in just two days," says Vogel. "Today, we've returned to fit the nestlings with a tiny radio transmitter that only weighs around half a gram. The birds are quickly becoming feathered and are typically ready to leave the nest by day seven—which is tomorrow.

"We also weigh and measure the babies during each visit. If the birds survive long enough, we collect three complete sets of data for each nestling," she adds. "The weights and measurements allow us to compare growth rates between nests in different types of habitat. The transmitters enable us to gauge survival."

Although scientists hope to learn more about the life cycle of nesting songbirds, that's not the real aim of Vogel's study. Researchers are really hoping to discover how all native grassland bird species respond to different types of habitat management. To find those answers, DNR wildlife biologists have currently joined forces with scientists from Iowa State University to conduct one of the most comprehensive and multi-faceted grassland bird studies ever initiated. According to DNR Upland Game Technician Mark "Mac" McInroy, it all boils down to getting the biggest bang for the wildlife dollar.

"During recent years, the DNR has conducted aggressive prairie restorations where large tracts of land have been seeded to a diverse combination of native forbs and warm season grasses," says McInroy. "As those restorations have begun to mature, they have become



some of the most beautiful of all public lands."

But costs run high, notes McInroy. With the need for specialized equipment, high-ticket seed bills and dizzying cycles of mowing, burning and other intensive management practices, prairie restorations are easily the most expensive grasslands to maintain.

"About two years ago, some of our managers began to question the effort of time and money being spent on these restorations," says McInroy. "In terms of grassland birdlife, they were starting to wonder if the extra effort was giving a justified return. In other words, were the direct benefits to wildlife matching the costs?"

"Our biologists already knew that well-established, low-maintenance blocks of cool-season grasses, such as brome or Timothy, had lots and lots of insects for birds to eat. But a question no one could answer was how did those bird and insect densities compare to what was going on in the more complex, native restorations," McInroy adds. "Management budgets are limited and these were serious questions that deserved answers. That's when we began to design the grassland bird study."

After considering public lands statewide, researchers concluded Spring Run offered the best location for meaningful comparisons of how birds respond to various types of grassland management. The area contains diverse grassland cover types ranging from blocks of well-established cool-season CRP grasses, to both new

and mature tracts of warm-season grasslands containing up to five species of native prairie grasses, to "primo tracts,"—grasslands containing warm-season native grasses as well as a rich mix of prairie wildflowers.

Complex and multifaceted, the Iowa grassland bird study is science at its best. Distilled to its purest elements, the project set out to accomplish three goals. The first looked at nesting bird densities and total species diversity occurring among four grassland types. The second reviewed species diversity and abundance, or biomass, of the insect life found on each cover type. The third, and perhaps most challenging, compared how successful birds were at exploiting insect populations at each cover type. After all, it wouldn't do much good if a certain grassland type was absolutely loaded with insects that birds didn't want or couldn't catch.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

"What we really set out to accomplish with the Spring Run study was to collect data that would allow us to make accurate forage base comparisons for different types of grassland habitats," explains McInroy. "This study is not about the aesthetics. We already know that 'primo tracts' containing a rich mix of native forbs and grasses are certainly the most beautiful. Instead, we're strictly looking at bird response to various types of management. This project is in direct response to specific questions asked by DNR land managers and attempts to determine the cost/benefit analysis for different cover types."

The fundamental questions were what species of insects birds wanted. Where did birds experience the greatest success? Did the best hunting occur in tall, short, thick or sparse vegetation? What researchers needed was a tool to collect data to make intelligent comparisons of how grassland birds exploit insect populations found within each habitat. The answers came from a most surprising source—the incubators of a commercial pheasant game farm.

"We knew that comparing dickcissel growth rates and conducting 'bug sweeps' to inventory insect populations within each cover type would give us some important data," says McInroy. "What we needed now was a way to gauge and compare (insect) ingestion rates for birds actually foraging on those various cover types. We finally determined that game farm pheasant chicks would represent a very renewable, very controlled, very repeatable way to reliably capture that information."

Researchers determined the chicks' role in the bird study would be to forage for insects in a way that closely mimicked a natural pheasant family. Success hinged largely on the ability to imprint baby pheasants on surrogate human parents. For some birds, such as waterfowl and raptors, the imprint process is amazingly simple to accomplish with minimal human contact. But to



OPPOSITE: After recording individual weights of five imprinted caged pheasant chicks, DNR Wildlife Diversity Technician Mark McInroy prepares to let the birds forage for 30 minutes, while in the background, Stephanie Shepherd heads out to sweep for bugs with a net. **THIS PAGE:** Five-day-old chicks forage as middle chick reaches up for bug.



ABOVE: A katydid sits atop a gray-headed coneflower. Researchers are trying to determine what grass mixes produce the most bugs. **OPPOSITE:** DNR Wildlife Diversity Technician Stephanie Shepherd examines insects collected during a "bug sweep" at Spring Run Wetland in Dickinson County. Shepherd finds the types and numbers of insects on various grassland habitats. Past studies relied solely on sweep nets, but ground-hugging insects are hard to net in thick vegetation. As a result, sweep net data didn't always match what birds, such as pheasant chicks, were eating. "Abundant insect populations are critical to the growth and survival of upland birds," says Mark McInroy, DNR technician. "But fields with the highest sweep net totals were often not the same places where birds caught the most food. Using 'imprinted' pheasant chicks is best to determine which fields provide the greatest benefit to these types of birds."

imprint nervous, high strung birds such as ring-necked pheasant requires a more sophisticated approach.

"We actually begin imprinting while the chicks are still in the egg," says McInroy. "Three days before hatch we began providing audio stimulus by playing voice recordings of the people who will actually be handling the chicks in the field. Once the chicks hatch and dry off, they are immediately moved to a bonding pen where the real work begins.

"I refer to this as our 'Welcome to the World' event, and it lasts for a straight 10 to 12 hours. During this time, we keep everything nice and tight. The atmosphere is cozy. We huddle with the chicks and we give them security. We give them warmth. We brood them. We talk to them. By the time it's over the chicks have literally accepted us as their mothers."

Following that initial welcome, chicks receive abbreviated socializing sessions for an additional four days. On day five, the birds are ready to hit the field.

CHICKS ON THE HUNT

As researchers arrive at predetermined forage sites, chicks are weighed and released to begin searching for food. Scientists release five chicks at each location and crews use 60 birds per day. Baby birds are perpetually hungry and forage within 30 seconds of hitting the ground. Because of all those hours spent on intensive imprinting, the flock immediately follows its human handler. In most covers, the chicks range three steps or so to each side of their surrogate mother. In sparse habitats, the distance may double.

"As we move through a grassland, there's a lot of communication," notes McInroy. "It's important for the chicks to know exactly where I am. I talk to the birds. I whistle. If all I'm hearing back are 'happy peeps', then I know the birds feel secure and are doing a good forage."

"Most forage events cover around 50 meters—sometimes more. Since we're trying to replicate a wild hen with her brood, it's up to me to set the pace. If the cover is thick and I get too far ahead, the birds begin sounding 'lost' calls which quickly turn to panic as they become more freaked out. But as soon as I call to them, it immediately gets quiet and the chicks start moving toward me."

"What we're looking for is a full 30-minute forage at each location in each cover type. That's our data set," says McInroy. "Age of the birds is crucial to success. On day five, chicks can go the full 30 minutes without being brooded. But by day seven, pheasants are getting much better at thermo regulating and will stray farther and farther from Mom. By day 10, chicks can fly which gives them even more independence. In order to make things work, we have to be able to control and recall birds at the end of their forage."

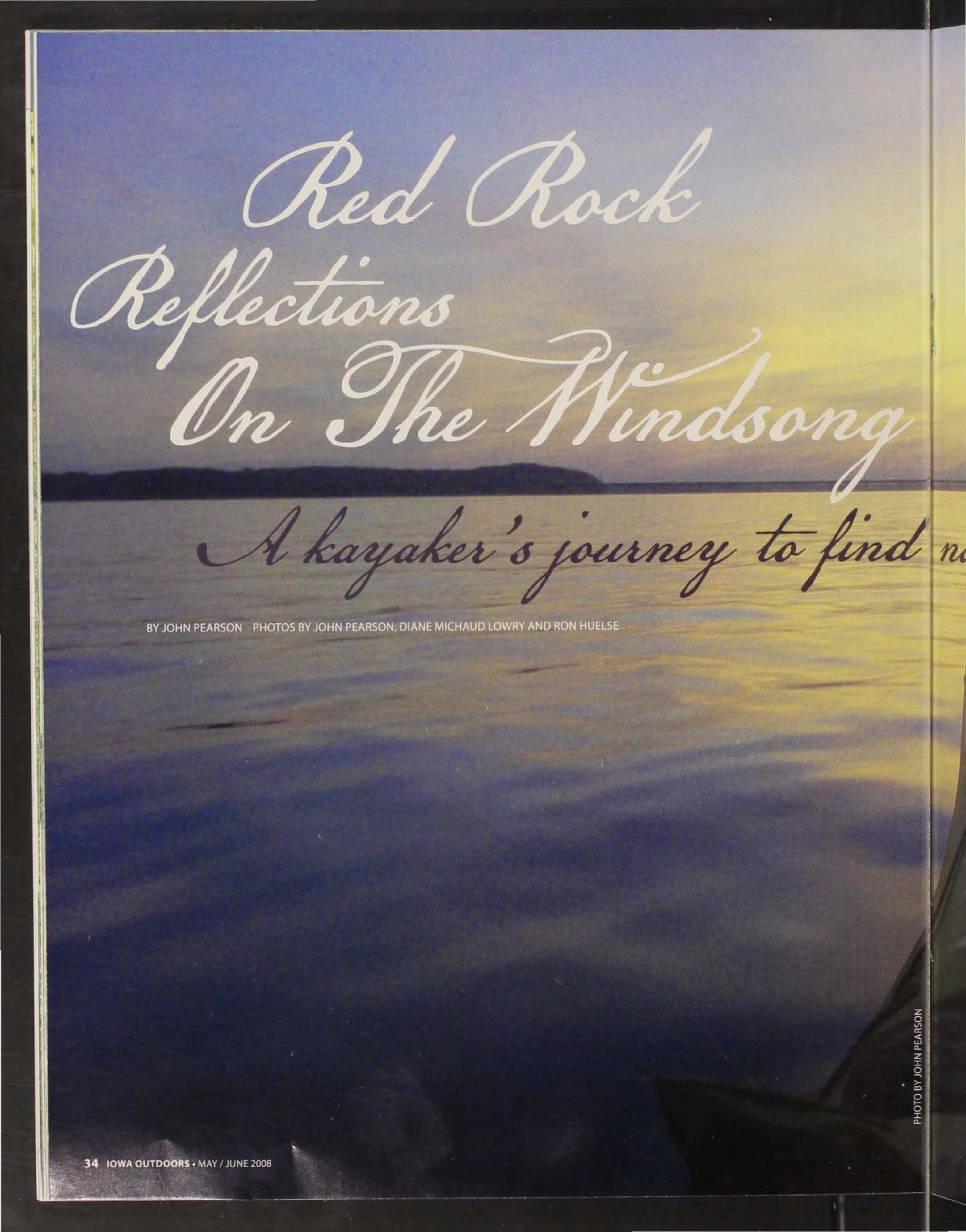


Once the forage is complete, chicks are immediately called in and recaptured. Birds are then weighed a second time to determine the exact weight of insects consumed. Crop contents are extracted and insects are counted and inventoried by species. Finally, ingested insects are weighed and compared to the chick weight gain measured at the end of the forage.

"Chicks are weighed immediately before and immediately after each forage to the nearest milligram," says McInroy. "This is indeed precision work. A milligram is literally less than the weight of a whisper. If I talk to our scale, it will measure my breath at around 5 milligrams. We are capturing some extremely detailed information on how pheasant chicks feed. The 'bug sweeps' show us which insects are there. The chicks show us how successfully they're being used."

"Iowa is the most altered, most intensively managed, and lowest in public lands of any state," says McInroy. "We're also the poorest in terms of dollars spent for conservation. It's obvious to see why finding ways to get the most for our buck is important."

"Iowans want good hunting, good birding, good water quality. All three go hand in hand and all three can be taken care of by utilizing the best and most efficient management practices available. The Spring Run bird study will hopefully allow land managers to determine which practices are also the most cost effective." 🐼




Red Rock Reflections On The Windsong

A kayaker's journey to find no

BY JOHN PEARSON PHOTOS BY JOHN PEARSON, DIANE MICHAUD LOWRY AND RON HUELSE

PHOTO BY JOHN PEARSON



d nature's song

Red Rock Reservoir is a large, artificial lake on the Des Moines River built by the Army Corps of Engineers for flood control. At normal pool, it's more than 15,000 acres; at "flood pool," rising up to 40 feet, it can swell to 70,000 acres, flooding a large marshland at the head of the lake. The "Red Rock tide" is controlled not by lunar cycles, but by actions of human engineers in a concrete bastion on the giant, riprap-armored dam. The reservoir, bisected by a highway and buzzing with weekend motorboats, is a strange place for a wilderness lover.



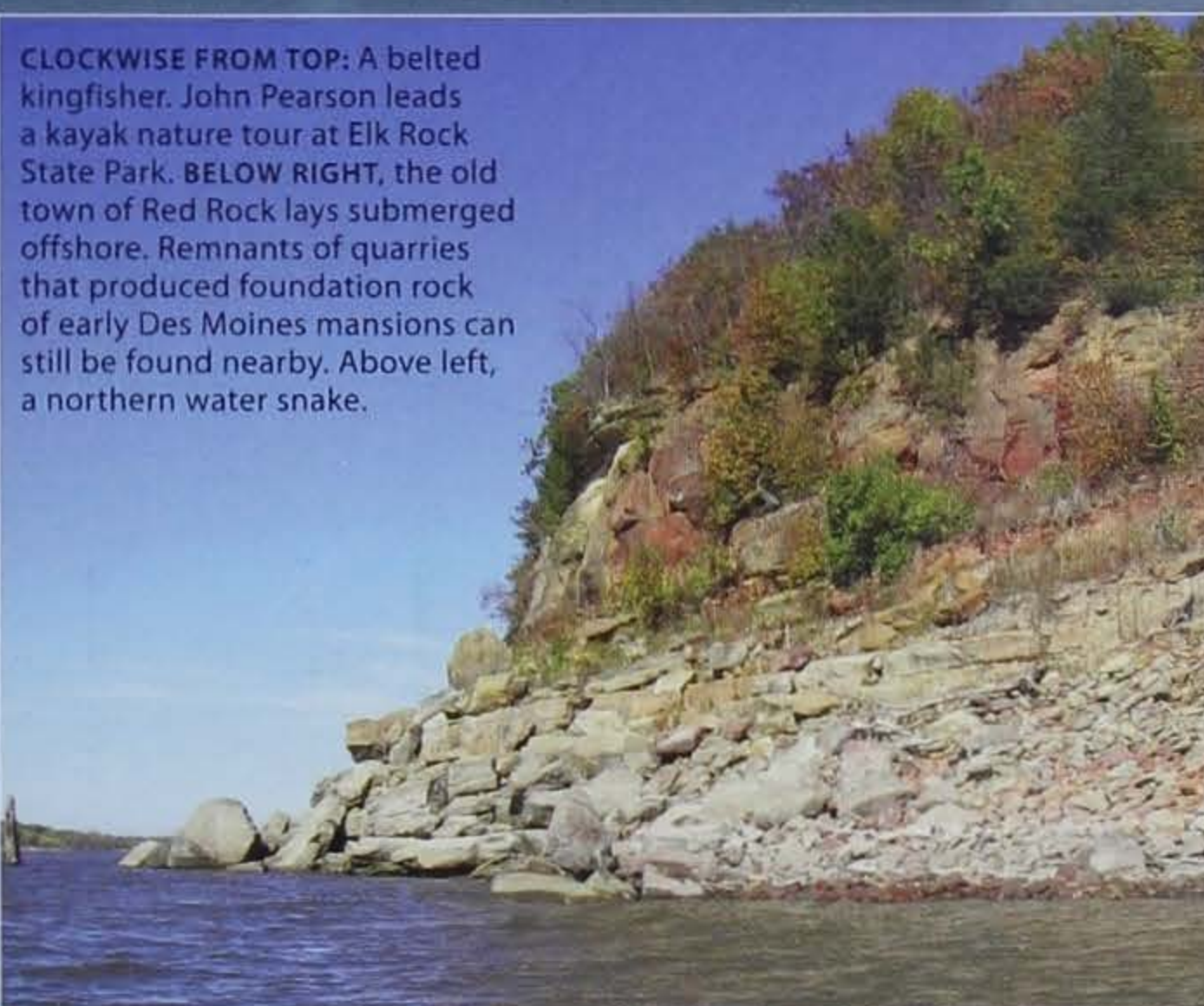
I've heard it twice, but never in Iowa. The first time was in the Boundary Waters wilderness of northern Minnesota, four days on a solo canoe trip: an odd drone like a distant airplane, but one that never drew closer or receded into distance. Like wind rushing through a forest, but on a day that was still. Like buzzing from cicadas, but there are none in the Northwoods.

The second time was in the desert, Big Bend country in west Texas. This time two-toned low notes, moaning softly like the slow push and pull across the bass string of a cello, low, slow, endless. *The wind*, my rational mind speculated—a soft rhythmic zephyr sweeping the vast land, stoking countless grasses, shrubs, rocks and hills,

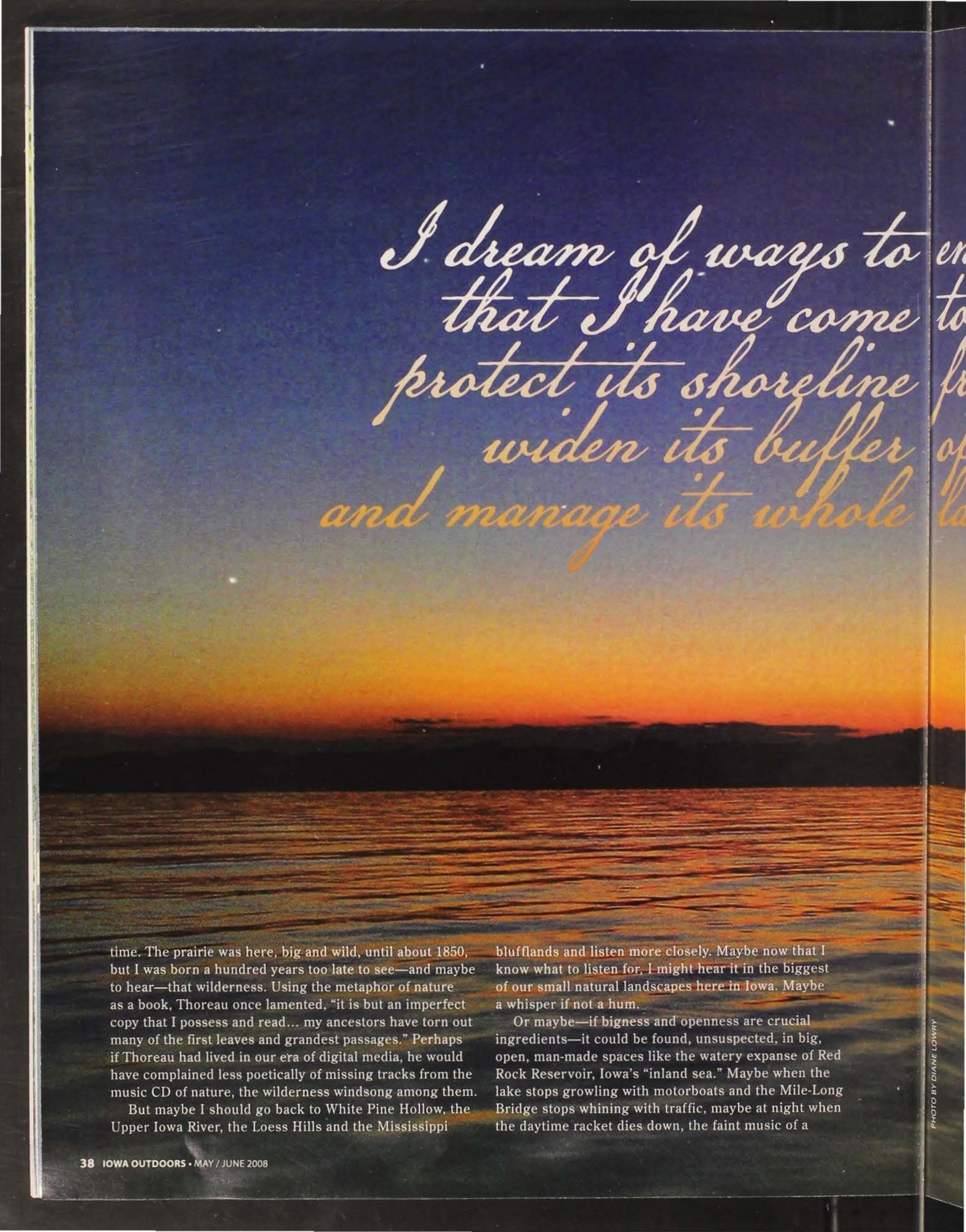
eliciting a collective hum. *Earth music* my poetic mind rhapsodized, bow of the sky drawn across cello of the earth, coaxing a windsong from the wilderness.

Others have heard it, too. Phyllis Fredendall, an artist-in-residence at Isle Royale National Park, relates, "I became aware of a continuous, harmonic hum...I came to know them as 'the ringing of the spheres'—water, rock and sky all resonating in perfect harmony." Mountaineer Rick Ridgeway, describing a subtle hum deep in the alpine wilderness states simply, "It is the background sound of silence."

The hum of big, open, wild places. Maybe that's why I've never heard it in Iowa. No wilderness left, not for a long



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A belted kingfisher. John Pearson leads a kayak nature tour at Elk Rock State Park. BELOW RIGHT, the old town of Red Rock lays submerged offshore. Remnants of quarries that produced foundation rock of early Des Moines mansions can still be found nearby. Above left, a northern water snake.



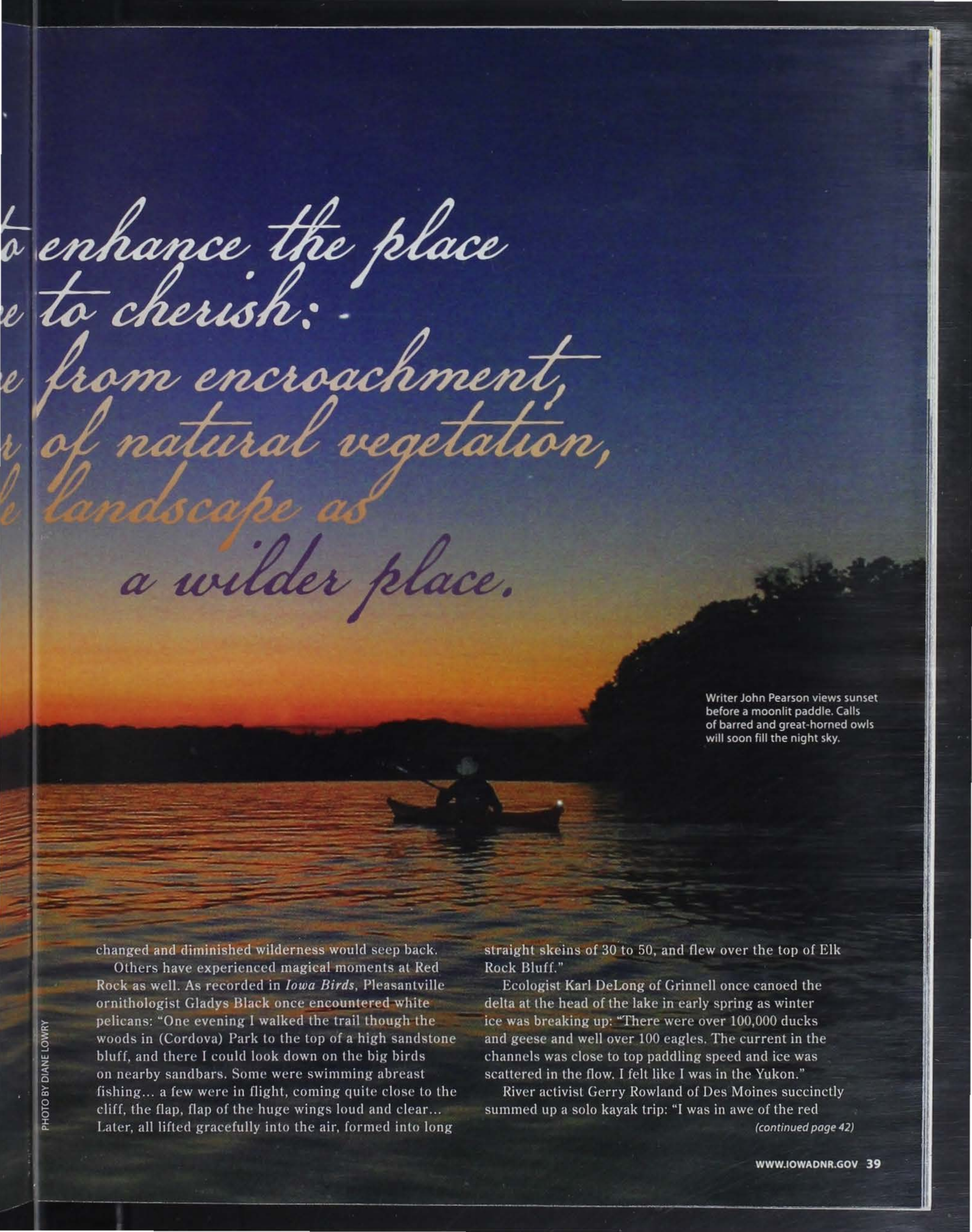
*I dream of ways to
that I have come to
protect its shoreline
widen its buffer
and manage its whole*

time. The prairie was here, big and wild, until about 1850, but I was born a hundred years too late to see—and maybe to hear—that wilderness. Using the metaphor of nature as a book, Thoreau once lamented, “it is but an imperfect copy that I possess and read... my ancestors have torn out many of the first leaves and grandest passages.” Perhaps if Thoreau had lived in our era of digital media, he would have complained less poetically of missing tracks from the music CD of nature, the wilderness windsong among them.

But maybe I should go back to White Pine Hollow, the Upper Iowa River, the Loess Hills and the Mississippi

blufflands and listen more closely. Maybe now that I know what to listen for, I might hear it in the biggest of our small natural landscapes here in Iowa. Maybe a whisper if not a hum.

Or maybe—if bigness and openness are crucial ingredients—it could be found, unsuspected, in big, open, man-made spaces like the watery expanse of Red Rock Reservoir, Iowa’s “inland sea.” Maybe when the lake stops growling with motorboats and the Mile-Long Bridge stops whining with traffic, maybe at night when the daytime racket dies down, the faint music of a

A photograph of a person in a canoe on a calm lake at sunset. The sky is a deep orange and red, reflecting on the water. The person is in the center of the frame, paddling. The background shows a dark shoreline with trees.

to enhance the place
to cherish:
from encroachment,
of natural vegetation,
landscape as
a wilder place.

Writer John Pearson views sunset before a moonlit paddle. Calls of barred and great-horned owls will soon fill the night sky.

changed and diminished wilderness would seep back.

Others have experienced magical moments at Red Rock as well. As recorded in *Iowa Birds*, Pleasantville ornithologist Gladys Black once encountered white pelicans: "One evening I walked the trail through the woods in (Cordova) Park to the top of a high sandstone bluff, and there I could look down on the big birds on nearby sandbars. Some were swimming abreast fishing... a few were in flight, coming quite close to the cliff, the flap, flap of the huge wings loud and clear... Later, all lifted gracefully into the air, formed into long

straight skeins of 30 to 50, and flew over the top of Elk Rock Bluff."

Ecologist Karl DeLong of Grinnell once canoed the delta at the head of the lake in early spring as winter ice was breaking up: "There were over 100,000 ducks and geese and well over 100 eagles. The current in the channels was close to top paddling speed and ice was scattered in the flow. I felt like I was in the Yukon."

River activist Gerry Rowland of Des Moines succinctly summed up a solo kayak trip: "I was in awe of the red

(continued page 42)

A Paddler's Journal

Red Rock is not a wilderness, but I have found wildness there—and opportunities for reflection. Kayaking its coastlines and open water, I am impressed by its rugged sandstone bluffs, surprised by its wildlife and captivated by its spaciousness. Its huge size allows me to slip away from marina-tethered motorboats, pass beyond the bridge-bound highway, cruise isolated shores and encounter natural beauty. My discoveries of wildness have resulted from the incremental accumulation of unexpected encounters, experienced many times in many places.

—John Pearson

March— Snow geese fill the marsh and suddenly erupt into mass flight with wild screeching and a thunderous beating of wings. The immense flock—some 10,000 birds—flies in a tight, swirling, amoeboid fashion, its black-and-white coloration changing kaleidoscopically with the frenzied flapping of black-tipped white wings, the shifting interspersions of dark birds among white ones, and the alternating sunlit and shadowed appearance of individuals as they wheel in and out of the axis between me and the midday sun.

June— Thick fog cloaks the lake and muffles the sound of sparse, Sunday-morning traffic on the Mile-Long Bridge. Paddling west into the Red Rock Wildlife Area, I find a band of turkey vultures perched like gargoyles on a bluff, spreading their dew-soaked wings to dry in the rising sun. Arrayed in uniforms of black feathers and red pates, they glare as if I have stumbled onto a secret meeting of druids. Rounding a rocky point, I spot a coyote trotting along the cliff top just ahead of me. I trail him for nearly a minute before he looks back and discovers me; he blinks in surprise, then glides into the forest and disappears.

August— As the sun settles onto the humid horizon, I slip into the Elk Rock sea cave through its shaded entrance and paddle toward its radiant, sunlit exit. As if passing through a magical dolmen, I emerge into a crepuscular otherworld, its dappled, watery plain dominated by the ochre orb of the sun setting in the ruddy rim of an azure sky, bordered with blackened bluffs, suffused with solitude. I linger on indigo water, bobbing gently on languid waves, outlasting the sluggish sunset, flirting with darkness, then paddle through twilight to the final shore.

October— A full moon rising over shaggy, wooded bluffs unrolls a silvery carpet across the dark lake and draws me past black, moon-shadowed cliffs. Reaching the end of the Elk Rock bluffline, I enter the inky void of Whitebreast Bay. For a mile, I paddle across black,

featureless space, a spherical universe with a star-speckled dome above and black watery bowl beneath, bisected by a plane of moon-streaked water.

December—Viewed from the Mile-Long Bridge, the lake is a vast sheet of ice. In Elk Rock State Park, I hike down a sandy trail into an oak forest and come to the sandstone cliffs over the lakeshore. The long view of the frozen lake is beautiful. Out on the ice, a bald eagle flies from one watery opening to another, hunting fish. I am entranced with the solitude of this place and its elemental beauty of water, stone, forest, and distance.





cliffs, the trees in the water, the wind and waves, and the vastness of the lake."

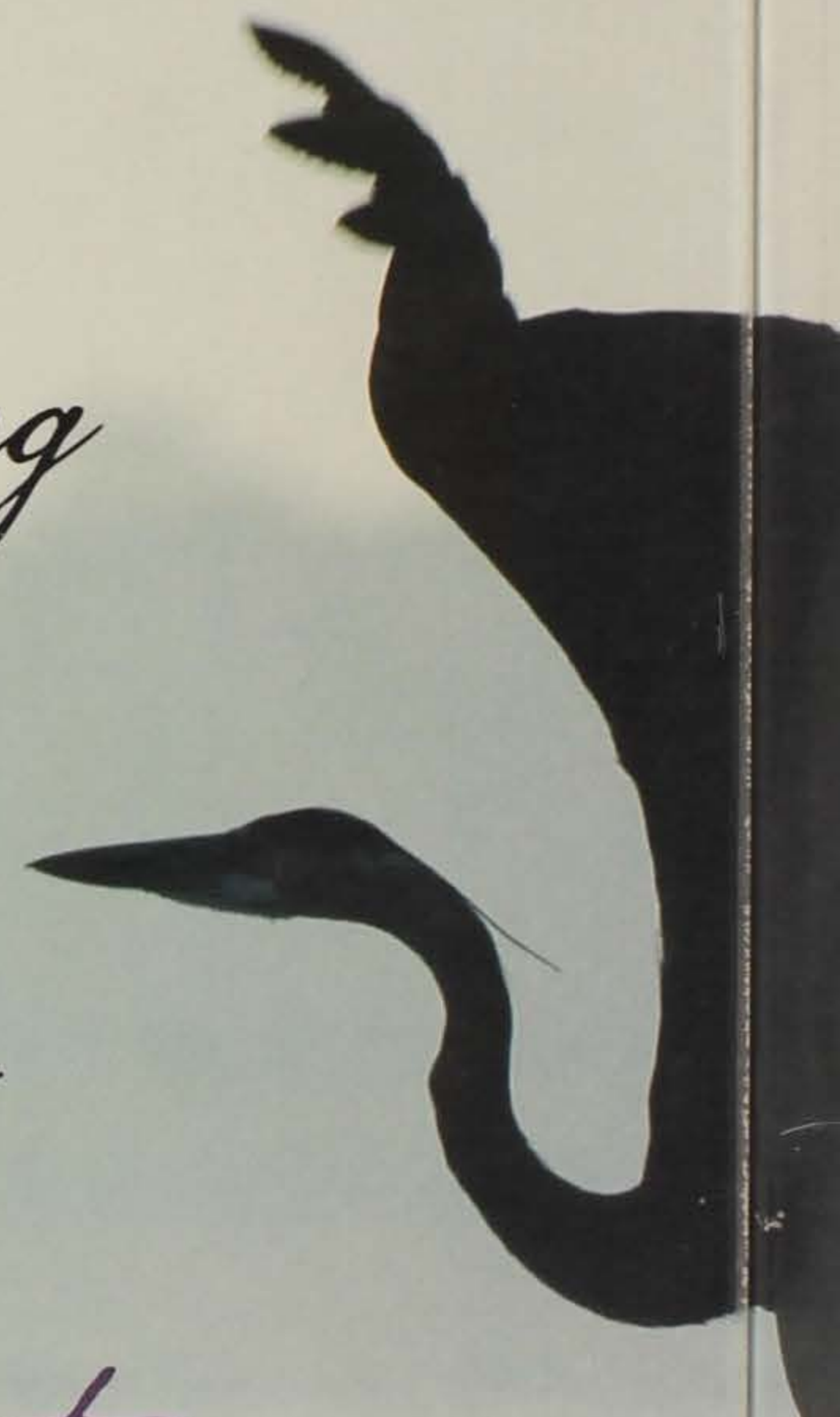
But no windsong, at least not yet. I wonder if Red Rock—or any place in Iowa—could ever become a bigger, more complete wildland capable of sustaining one. Presently lined with a thin band of public land, the emerging wildness of Red Rock Reservoir is only minimally shielded from intensive human use of its surrounding lands. I dream of ways to enhance the place that I have come to cherish: protect its shoreline from encroachment, widen its buffer of natural vegetation, and manage its whole landscape as a wilder place. Imagine that.

REWILDING

Iowa lost its original wilderness, but could regenerate wild land on its altered landscapes. Restoring wildness must include a determination to preserve and expand it in known strongholds—natural prairies, woodlands, wetlands and streams—and a willingness to discover it in unexpected places. We can enhance the inherent wildness of White Pine Hollow, the Upper Iowa River, the Loess Hills and the Mississippi bluffslands...and the nascent wildness of Red Rock Reservoir. Indeed, wildness could be enhanced anywhere that undeveloped public commons—whether land or water, pristine or



OPPOSITE: A few nesting eagles may stay through the summer, but by fall the numbers increase. Many overwinter below the dam. THIS PAGE: Red Rock offers diverse wildlife viewing from the mud nests of cliff swallows to groups of pelicans swimming in a tightening arc to herd fish for an easy meal. At sunset, rewarded kayakers can explore the southwest shore and sandy beaches.



*And the windsong
in Iowa?*

*Could we ever
re-create a place
big enough, quiet
enough, and wild
enough to hear that
"background sound
of silence"?*

not—could be coupled with environmental stewardship of their private surroundings. With sensitive landscape management—an achievement that will require the cooperation of farmers, private landowners and public land managers—all could become more completely and more permanently wild. Expanding, restoring and re-creating wild areas would allow Iowa to reclaim a long-lost ecological identity as a place for farms, cities, people and abundant wildlife, wild land and wildness.

And the windsong in Iowa? Could we ever re-create a place big enough, quiet enough, and wild enough to hear that "background sound of silence?" Could we muster the collective will to restore a "ringing of the spheres?" I don't know, but even if that utopian endpoint remains elusive, rebuilding a landscape with wildness near at hand would be its own reward. And perhaps—if we are bold, creative, patient and lucky—our restored landscape will find a renewed voice. 🦢

The writer is a DNR ecologist and co-author of *The Guide to Iowa's State Preserves*. A longtime hiker, backpacker, and naturalist, he discovered kayaking in 2001. He lives in Indianola southwest of Red Rock Reservoir.

This is an abridged version of an original "Wild Iowa" essay. The full text can be viewed online at the Iowa Project on Place Studies: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~ipops/>



GET INVOLVED

*Learn more about paddling Lake Red Rock,
get kayaking instruction or a guided lake
tour at Canoesport Outfitters in Indianola.
www.canoesportoutfitters.com 515-961-6117
or 1-800-257-6080*



Senior Falcon

Still Knocking
'em Dead at 250 mph

Eighteen-year-old bird
defends downtown territory

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

FLYING HIGH: Peregrine falcon (band number 93T) surveys his territory in downtown Des Moines.





GET INVOLVED

Help support peregrines with a donation. Send checks to DNR Wildlife Diversity Fund, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources, 1436 255th St., Boone, IA 50036-7557. To learn more about peregrine history and review searchable databases of banded birds, go to <http://midwestperegrine.org/>.

For any red-blooded raptor enthusiast, the ear piercing wails were unmistakable. The nesting peregrines were agitated.

Sensing an eminent threat to their young, the falcons lost no time in launching the attack. With deafening screams and high speed dives, the pair engaged in a valiant effort to defend their nest. But in spite of their bravery, the falcons were clearly out-matched. Armed with helmets, protective clothing and miscellaneous rappelling gear, the intruding humans were as committed to their mission as the falcons were to theirs.

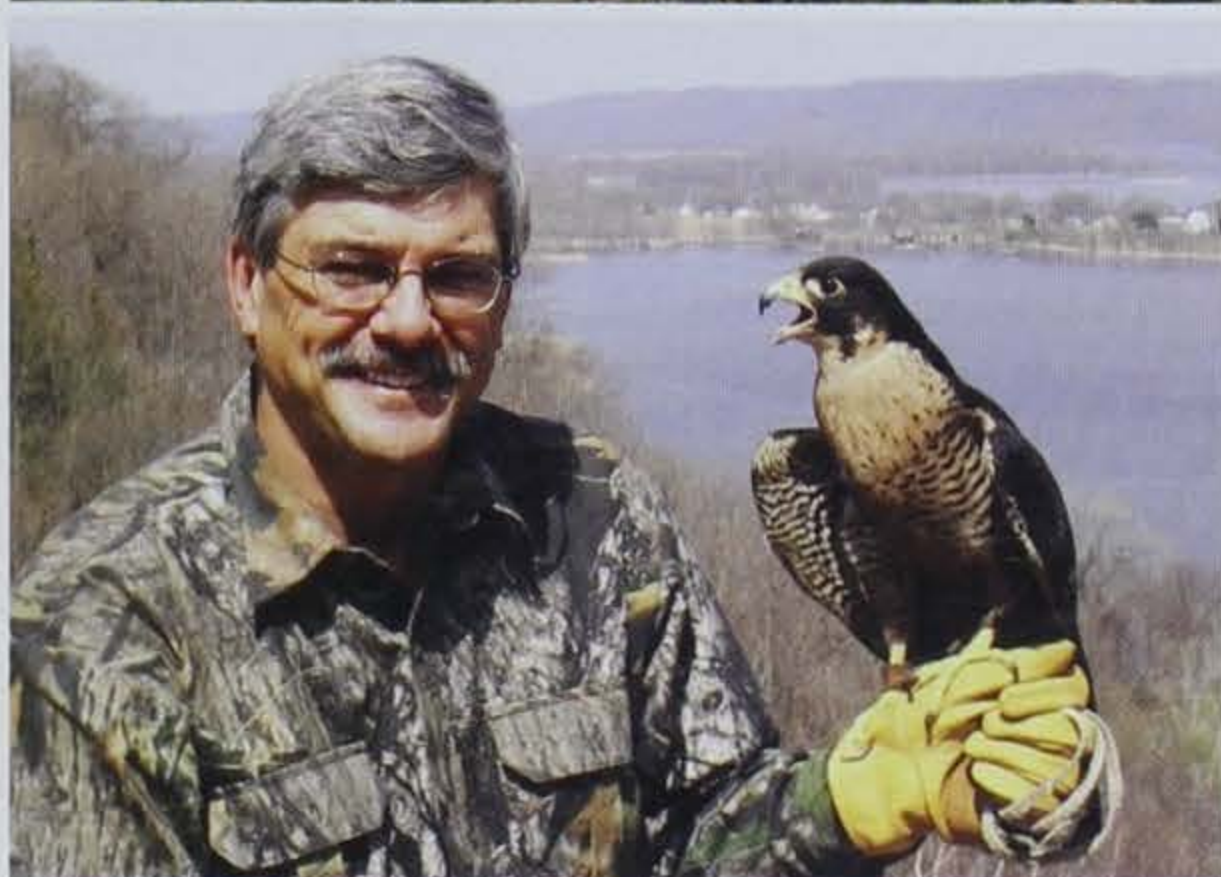
Within the span of a few short minutes, the peregrines' four downy chicks had been extracted from their cave-like lair at the top of Des Moines' American Republic Insurance Company building. After being placed into a plastic pet carrier, the birds were hoisted to a waiting team of DNR wildlife biologists. The first order of business was to collect a blood sample from each nestling. After being weighed, measured and banded, the chicks were quickly returned to the nest. Although the adults remained clearly and vocally disturbed by the proceedings, life soon began a return to normal for Iowa's most famous urban raptors.

As politicians know, it's hard to keep a secret in downtown Des Moines. By now, the morning's commotion had drawn the attention of a crowd of gawking onlookers. None were more excited than veteran wildlife watcher and peregrine enthusiast Todd Hill of Des Moines.

"The day we come up here to band the baby peregrines is my very favorite day of the year," proclaimed Hill, a former employee of the American Republic maintenance staff.

Hill has enjoyed a long, and sometimes painful, association with these unique downtown residents. While working on the building's roof, he's been soundly thumped on more than a few occasions.

So why would one of America's rarest bird nesters make the metro its home? The answer is simple. Located in the heart of capitol city's downtown business area, the insurance building's upper level is pock-marked with decorative alcoves. For cliff-dwelling peregrine falcons,



TOP: A female peregrine (band number 63B), the mate of falcon 93T, returns to her nest at the American Republic Insurance Company building in Des Moines, 601 6th Ave. Washburn captured this photo of the previously unidentified peregrine last summer. **MIDDLE PHOTOS:** Falcons continue to recolonize historic cliff ledge eyries of the Upper Mississippi River. During 2007, expanding Iowa falcon populations established a new modern-day record, with 12 active breeding territories and 10 successful nests producing 23 young. The falcons' successful restoration to these natural cliff nest sites results from efforts of the Iowa Peregrine Falcon Recovery Team. From 1995 to 2000, the group's volunteers raised more than \$100,000 needed to purchase and release 107 captive-reared, young peregrines. **BOTTOM:** "It's been thrilling to watch as wild, self-sustaining populations of peregrine falcons have returned to Iowa," says Washburn, chairman of the Iowa Peregrine Falcon Recovery Team. "For me, it's been a unique privilege to be involved in a project where so many people from so many different backgrounds and disciplines have worked together for a common cause. Being a part of this extraordinary effort has been the highlight of my natural resources career."



ABOVE: The DNR's Pat Schlarbaum under attack atop the eight-story-American Republic Company building. As Schlarbaum moves to inspect a nest below, peregrine falcon number 93T delivers a sneak attack to the back of his head. The wildlife biologist barely catches himself on the roof edge. A fall would have been fatal. As he retreats, the falcon attains a second "radar lock" and the hit raises Schlarbaum's jacket hood. The hood prevents talons from tangling in his hair or collar. "You kind of absorb it and keep going. More accidents occur trying to avoid getting hit. That's what I tell the window washers—just do what you intend to accomplish." Larry's Window Service in Des Moines assist research efforts by suspending scaffolds to lower a crew to the nests. The washers place young falcons into a Porta-Kennel to hand up to Pat, who bands the young falcons before they are returned. "The window washers are incredible advocates for the birds. They've done as much for peregrine appreciation as anybody," he says.

the concrete recesses represent the perfect place to lay eggs and rear young.

"We see all kinds of people here," says Hill. "Many bring binoculars to view the nest—especially when the young are visible. People come from all over. This has become a very popular attraction."

Peregrines first began nesting at American Republic in 1993. Since that time, the nest has become a statewide draw, partly because the rare birds can easily be seen and heard from nearby sidewalks and courtyards.

A focus of the fame surrounding the site is peregrine falcon number 93T. He is the male of the territory. A superstar among peregrines, 93T is currently the best known, oldest and one of the most successful falcons in the history of the species' 30-year, modern-day recovery.

Released in Des Moines as a 45-day-old fledgling by the DNR's Wildlife Diversity Team in 1990, 93T returned to claim downtown during the spring of 1993. He has returned every year since, and has produced an incredible 42 young. He has outlived two mates, and is currently on territory with his third partner—a 4-year-old, wild-produced female (63B) hatched at Woodmen Tower in Omaha.

Peregrine falcons are the planet's most dynamic bird species. Top Guns and masters of flight, peregrines feed exclusively on other birds obtained by spectacular high speed chase. It's a dangerous way to live, and wrecks can be fatal. It's easy to understand why most falcons never reach old age. Nevertheless, it is probable that during the past 17 years, while providing for himself, mates and young, 93T has survived an estimated 10,000 successful kills—all without so much as chipping a talon.

"This bird is a real hunter and takes good care of his family," says Hill. "We find all kinds of evidence on the sidewalk beneath the nest. Most of the prey he brings in are starlings and flickers. We also see bigger things like pigeons and, once in a while, a duck. Most interesting is the really unusual stuff. The other day we found the head of a screech owl. That was surprising," said Hill.


"Watching the falcons is really exciting," he adds. "Usually we just see them carry in food from somewhere else. But one day when I was leaving work, I saw him smack a pigeon right out of the air. That was the best."

"Another time I got to assist one of the young. The baby falcon had just left the nest and was stuck in a small tree in our courtyard. I called the DNR and they said to take the bird back to the roof. I did, and its next flight was successful," says Hill.

That rescue left an impression. "We still have a picture of that bird on the wall in our office," he says.

FLY WITH THE FALCONCAM

Watch live video of the Des Moines peregrine nest. Log on to www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/falconcam.html to see video and learn more about falcons.



TOP GUN— With sizzling high-speed nose dives exceeding 250 mph, the peregrine falcon is the fastest and most dynamic bird species. But few peregrines can match the aerial prowess of downtown Des Moines' number 93T—an 18-year-old, tiercel (male) living atop the American Republic Insurance Company building. Hatched in 1990, the falcon returned to stake his Des Moines territory in 1993. He's returned every year, has outlived two mates, is currently with his third partner, and has fathered and raised 42 young. In caring for himself, his mates, and babies— 93T has made an astounding 10,000 kills. In the photo, startling feathers from a kill remain on his beak as 93T rests on the building ledge. Look close inside the nostril to view a cone-shape cartilage baffle that helps regulate breathing at high speeds. Jet manufacturers adopted that same concept to funnel air into the engine and prevent high speed engine stalls.

The Changing Face of Camping

From canvas Army tents to million dollar mobile mansions

BY JOE WILKINSON



PHOTO BY LEONARD MCCOMBE/GETTY IMAGES



To go from the campground to church in 1946, the camper needed little more than a mirror and some coaching to knot his tie. Accommodations were a canvas tent and tarp stretched from the sedan to the ground in an Iowa campground. His modern-day counterpart might check his tie in an air conditioned bathroom of a luxury motor coach after watching the morning news on satellite television.

A picnic table and fire pit were welcome sights in an earlier era, perhaps the early 1960s, as campers unpacked the car for a weekend escape in the woods. Today, campground staples still greet crowds, whether arriving on a mountain bike with lightweight backpack or a custom motor home with slide-out rooms.



EVOLUTION OF THE RECREATIONAL VEHICLE



1920s



1930s



1940s



1950s



1970s



1980s



Present Day

With two hours before their next game, the guys from Captain Clean were relaxing around the campsite at Palisades-Kepler State Park. Knocked into the consolation bracket that morning, the Marshalltown-area softball team had retreated to Todd Whitmore's fifth-wheel camper; home base while waiting for the next game in the state softball tournament in nearby Cedar Rapids.

"We tried to get in here last weekend, but it was full," says Whitmore. "I had my niece come up to register us early this weekend. We knew the park was here (close to the tournament) and knew it was a nice park."

Part of that attraction is wide campsites, level gravel pads and electrical hookups a short walk from the bluffs over the Cedar River. When he camps, Whitmore enjoys the amenities of his 27-foot weekend home-on-wheels. "I grew up camping; pop-up campers and (smaller) pull-behinds," recalls Whitmore. "I tried tent camping one time and said, 'No. We are buying a camper.' It sleeps eight comfortably and we can pull our 18-foot ski boat behind it. We just throw in the food and clothes and we're ready to go."

With air conditioning, full bath, refrigerator and stove, he is not alone in his camping must-haves. Up and down the paved campground road, fifth-wheels and RVs line up for a summer weekend in the great outdoors. Across Iowa parks, even racetracks and private facilities, camping is changing. In a word? Bigger. In another word? Comfort.

"We have definitely seen a trend from more primitive camping to bigger recreational vehicles with all the equipment: satellite dishes, refrigerator, water...all the things they need to live like they're at home," observes DNR Park Ranger Jim Hansen, a 26-year veteran. "Today, we see more people with time for recreation. They have the means to buy what they want—nice accommodations. Then, when they step outside, they want the campfire and to enjoy the outdoors."

BABY BOOMERS GROW UP

For this writer, as a kid, camping was on our unimproved lot, up the hill from Holiday Lake in Poweshiek County, a private lake development that exploded in popularity in the 1960s and '70s. There, Mom, Dad, seven kids...as well as stray cousins, friends and neighbors, spent the day exploring, catching bullheads, swimming at the beach and boating. At night, it was back to the campfire and Coleman stove, then sacking out in

a giant Army surplus tent. Traffic control? A tree limb dragged across the dusty road slowed the stream of cars.

It wasn't a lot different in state park campgrounds across Iowa. "When I started in 1971, the camping fee was \$2.58, sales tax included," recalls Jerry Reisinger, northeast Iowa parks supervisor for the DNR. "You could camp anywhere you wanted. On busy weekends, you'd see anchor ropes from one tent crossing those from the next tent over. None of the campground roads were paved. Motor homes were just starting to catch on—a large trailer was a 14-footer."

Those days of canteens and canvas are memories now. State campgrounds have upped the ante, too. RVs costing a quarter million dollars—or much more—pull in. Up top,

the satellite dish pulls in hundreds of stations. Walls slide out at the touch of a button. Inside, campers watch plasma TVs from leather recliners after turning the air conditioner down. Your better-half showers after dinner prepared with the stove and microwave. Plates from the dishwasher are returned to custom cabinets.

Call it "Baby Boomers Grow Up." Upon retirement, there's disposable income and time for recreation, more so than any other generation. Meanwhile, a mix of older retirees and younger families join the "boomers" in today's great race to the campgrounds. They love the outdoors. They also enjoy creature comforts, and they are not about to be ignored.

"We continually hear from our customers. They want more

full utilities. And we want our visitors to use our campgrounds to provide that overnight state park experience," underscores Angela Corio, DNR park planner. In past decades, parks aimed for an equal mix of modern and nonmodern sites as campsites were developed. That formula has changed. "The great majority of our campgrounds are full on weekends...on the electric side," notes Corio. "We recognize we can rent almost every electric site we can provide."

Improvements and renovations have been ongoing since state parks were first established in the 1920s. However, the last decade has brought major improvements to meet high-end demands. Since 1998, electric hookups have been upgraded at 29 campgrounds. The \$5.4 million project installed 50-, 30- or 20-amp plugs to meet the power needs of those big rigs. Another 20 campgrounds are targeted in the future.

In that same period, \$2.75 million was spent to replace 14 shower buildings in 13 park and recreation areas. At Palisades-Kepler, the Captain Clean team cooled its heels



in a campground receiving \$327,000 in major improvements in 1998. Concrete roads and gravel camp pads were enhanced by new fire rings and picnic tables. An updated sewer and water system was added and four pull-through, 50-amp sites are in place. All campsites were enlarged and leveled.

Similar improvements show across Iowa. Lake Macbride State Park's modern campground was closed for most of 2007 while a new water system and shower facility were constructed. Electrical hookups and other campsite improvements continue into this season. A similar project was tackled in Lewis and Clark State Park. Prairie Rose State Park had two campgrounds undergo major electrical improvements.

Funding comes from a variety of sources. The Parks and Institutional Road Fund pays for paving and roadway work. Iowa's Restore Primarily, the funding comes from the state's General Fund, as legislative priorities and state budget health factor in to what gets funded.

CAMPERS IN SEARCH OF AMENITIES

"As people enter the RV market, families to retirees, we have seen a migration up the product ladder," agrees Kelli Harms, public relations specialist with Winnebago Industries. "They may (buy) a vehicle with the van-type chassis and as they got older, they'd move to a 34-foot motor home. Now, they want more amenities; they'll move to the 40-foot motor home."

Winnebago's 3,200 employees build 10,000 full size and smaller RVs in Forest City, Charles City and Hampton each year. With 285 dealers across the U.S. and Canada, RVs are big business.

Baby Boomers are typical buyers with the finances to purchase a big-ticket item and free time. But another segment is gaining. "We see more families buying, 35-to-45 year olds," notes Harms. "Maybe they have children in motocross, or weekend tournaments." With a motor home, they don't have to pay for a motel or restaurants, she says.

Today's campers seek out amenities. "When people say they're *camping* these days, it doesn't mean necessarily that they are out in the woods," stresses Reisinger. "Those big motor homes you see on the interstate might be heading to a NASCAR event. They provide comfortable transportation and when people get there, it's their lodging. Construction workers, especially those who specialize and move on after a few weeks, want to sleep in their own beds at night. Lots of seasonal workers stay in our campground a couple weeks and then move on.

They're not going to buy a separate 'camper' for vacation."

So, who are today's state park campers? They're pretty much across the board in age and make up. In the spring around Lake Okoboji, it will be fishing groups. In the fall in Yellow River State Forest, it could be hunters or "leaf lookers." Quite often, whatever the season, it depends on area attractions. Some campers use state parks as home base. They make a run on area antique stores one day and golf the next. A couple summers ago, our family staked out campsites in the Macbride campground during a family reunion.

A couple of decades ago, retirees may have crossed state parks off their vacation lists. "Not nearly as many parks had showers or electrical hookups. If they had power, it was only 20 amps; enough for the air conditioner if you shut down everything else," says Reisinger. "People in their 70s wouldn't go camping. Now, they can relax in their recliner, watch TV and talk to the kids on their cell phones. Then, they can take a stroll in the woods and come back to sit by the campfire."

And it's not just seniors. Ted and Michelle Staff of Cedar Rapids use state parks with their four girls

ages 3 to 13. "We prefer electrical service as a minimum. A level site is a big plus. Water would be nice, too," lists Ted. "With a lot of kids, we can make it a day on our (on-board) fresh water" before refilling at the hydrant.

As a boy, Ted tent camped. As their own family grew, the Staffs considered tents, pop-ups and other small rigs, before settling on a fifth-wheel. "With inclement weather, we don't have to

scurry around. I can do dishes in the pouring rain," offers Ted. "With a bathroom, we don't have to worry about undeveloped areas or a facility that's out of order. There are just a lot of conveniences with it."

Nancy and Mike Engler carry most of their conveniences in their 30-foot pull-behind camper. They've been setting up on the primitive side of Lake Macbride for 36 years. "We come out eight or 10 times a year. This is like a second home to us," recalls Nancy. In the early days, they brought their three kids. Now, it is grandchildren; for two or three days all in a succession of camping units. "As the kids got busy in school, we got away from camping for awhile. When the two older ones were gone, we got a tent, tried several tent camping trips," she says. When the Walcott couple retired, that was the catalyst for buying a modern pull-behind.

They share a treasure trove of memories. "In the early days, it would be four or five couples here for the weekend. I'd spend an hour and a half just frying pancakes," she recalls. "The boys would run into the shallows when the



Green Valley State Park, Union County



Then as now, a day in the campground revolved around meals and the kitchen. Then, the picnic table was a central gathering point. Today meals are cooked over a cookstove or fire—or on the range and microwave inside a motor home.

MAJOR ELECTRICAL AND SHOWER RENOVATIONS, IOWA STATE PARKS

SHOWER UPGRADES

2003 Marble Beach
2003 Viking lake
2003 Brushy Creek
2006 Lake of Three Fires
2007 Lake Macbride
2007 Stone
2008 Waubonsie
2009 Volga

ELECTRICAL UPGRADES

2003 Beeds Lake, Pine Lake, Lewis & Clark, Brushy Creek
2004 Lake Anita, Lake Keomah, Honey Creek, Lake Ahquabi
2005 Elk Rock, Bellevue
2006 Black Hawk
2007 Lake Macbride, Prairie Rose, Stone, Lewis & Clark
2008 Green Valley, Lake Darling, Walnut Woods, Dolliver



carp were spawning and come back mud from head to toe. They'd tie lifejackets to their bikes and go racing off the dock." They recall weathering a tornado and watching the guy who backed his car and trailer into the water trying to launch a boat. "We pulled it out, opened the door and the water came rushing out," laughs Mike. After drying spark plugs, "It turned over and the guy drove it to Cedar Rapids."

"That's what it is all about. Making memories with your family," says Nancy.

CAMPING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Okay. You're a design engineer for a RV company in the 1980s. Would you have envisioned four televisions—including one *outside*—all fed by a satellite dish on the roof? Or moving walls?

"Probably the biggest thing to hit motor homes is slide-out rooms. There are units with one, two, even three walls that can slide," lists Harms, from Winnebago Industries. "It offers different choices in floor plans. It makes it similar to living in your home." A full line of appliances, leather recliners and storage are becoming standard. She says fuel efficiency will factor into future designs.

These trends touch park planners. How can parks attract and keep future campers? "Almost always in renovations, it means wider campsites to accommodate larger units. Inevitably, we lose a few campsites," acknowledges the DNR's Corio. Some private

campgrounds offer cable TV and Wi-fi service. Market research shows that 80 percent of RV users have the Internet at home and many want it during travel. "If we want to attract a full range of family campers, that would be a reason to consider them down the road," says Corio.

Newer online reservations are a plus, too. "It used to be that you didn't know if a campground is full," notes the DNR's Jerry Reisinger. "Now, you can see which site is available, how far it is from the shower building, even which site will accommodate the larger motor home."

And sometimes, high-end luxuries still aren't enough. Talking with two campers, Reisinger learned they traded a Prevost-brand luxury motor home—probably a \$600,000 unit with washer, dryer, satellite dish, leather throughout—for a better one. "He said he wanted...a satellite-seeking unit...so his wife could watch TV while they were driving down the road." With the old one, they had to lower the dish as they traveled, recalls Reisinger. They wanted a computerized steering mechanism to compensate for strong side winds to allow fingertip control at the wheel.



THE TENT AIN'T DEAD

A few decades ago camping meant tenting with bulky, sturdy canvas tents set up with wooden or metal poles, blankets and sleeping bags. If you were lucky, a cot would keep you off the ground. Campfire cookery came courtesy of cast iron or old pots and pans. A trusty steel lantern supplemented firelight for reading.

Over the years, campground necessities adapted.

But don't place tent campers on the endangered species list. Though dwarfed next to 30-foot RVs with slide out walls, there is always a tent spot in state parks.

"All the parks in my district have non-modern sites," stresses Reisinger. "They're usually in a separate campground or area. We try to accommodate people who want the more primitive experience."

Some sites are walk in, with a short hike off the road. That's a convenience for campers with large amounts of gear. At Yellow River State Forest there are about 150 sites on four campgrounds. "They get a fair amount of

use. At times, they're almost full," says Reisinger. "They're not right next to a generator or air conditioner running all night."

The 'stuff' that goes with tenting has changed, too. "Everything is getting lightweight; from personal cookstoves to sleeping pads to lanterns," says Travis Eiselstein. A sales rep at the Fin & Feather Outdoor Store in Iowa City, Eiselstein moves from rack to rack,

pointing out how composites, aluminum and new-age nylons blend with traditions like down sleeping bags. "A lot of people camping are minimalists. They want to get by with as little weight, as little equipment as possible," he says. "Nylon is now siliconized, and runs very thin. It's practically waterproof. Ripstop nylon keeps tears from spreading through the fabric. It's practically waterproof, but you drop pounds like crazy."

The new era equipment is good for hiking into the mountains or loading up for a short trip to the state campground. "Most tent campers are car campers," underscores Eiselstein. "If you pull cookwear out of your car, though, it doesn't have to be heavy." To demonstrate space savings, he stuffs a winter-rated down sleeping bag into a football-sized compression sack.

And there's always the hybrid campers. DNR Park manager Andy Bartlett recalls a tenter at Palisades-Kepler who, from inside his small tent one evening, watched TV through the zipped-up mosquito screen, the signal via portable satellite dish; and powered by his campsite's electrical hookup. 🏠

SNARLED IN OUR MESS

Whether it's discarded plastic six-pack holders or monofilament fishing line, the damage caused by litter and debris to wildlife is unnecessary and easily avoidable.

"Human garbage causes a lot of problems for wildlife," says DNR wildlife specialist Doug Harr. "Pick up whatever you can find. You have to be conscious of being a good outdoor citizen. Pick up not only after yourself, but others as well." Make this a habit at campsites, fishing haunts and trails.

Anglers should never discard monofilament line. "I see dead geese and ducks every year from snarls with monofilament. It tangles around bills and feet." Plastic six-pack holders create choking and entanglement problems for birds, turtles and other wildlife, too.



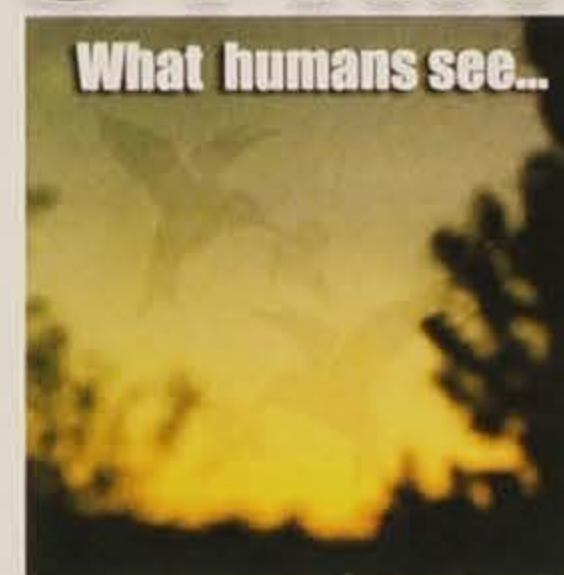
STORY COUNTY HERON
TANGLED IN SIX-PACK HOLDER

MESS BUSTER:

Reuse plastic grocery sacks as trash bags. Stuff a few inside pockets and tackle boxes, keep a few in your vehicle and camera bags, too. While fishing, hiking, paddling, camping or hunting, fill them with any garbage left by thoughtless others. Recycle what you can and put the rest in the trash.

Anglers should put tangles of monofilament line and Styrofoam bait containers in tackle boxes when done. Never discard these outdoors. Many bait shops have monofilament recycling for unwanted line. Clean up after lunches. Pack out plastic sandwich bags, Styrofoam cups, wrappers and plastic straws and lids.

AVOID BIRD STRIKES



Window decals can reduce bird-window collisions.

Birds and large windows can result in painful smash-ups. "Birds see the glass as air," says DNR wildlife specialist and Iowa Audubon president Doug Harr. Windows with frequent bird strikes can be remedied, he says.

SIMPLE, SAFER AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

"Place feeders or bird baths within two feet or 10-20 feet from windows," says Harr. Units placed within two feet of windows force birds to reduce speeds as they approach.

Don't set plants in windows to avoid having it look like a wooded area. "If birds can see through the house through two sets of windows, it is critical to keep plants out of the window. Otherwise it looks like a tunnel through the forest," he says.

Hang objects in windows, such as sun ornaments, crystals or prisms to reflect light. Use bird scare tape made of colored mylar strips. Hang inside or outside the window where slight breezes will twist the reflective tape to create a visual barrier.

USE WINDOW CLINGS

Available at bird stores, these attractive decals look like etched glass to humans, but reflect ultraviolet light to appear purple to birds. (www.windowalert.com)

HOW TO HELP A DAZED VICTIM

If a bird does not fly a few minutes after a collision, place it in a covered, well-ventilated box. The darkness helps calm birds upon recovery. Avoid handling the bird as much as possible and do not feed or give the bird water. If no cats or dogs are in the yard, keep the box in a shady place outside. During cold weather, bring the box inside to a quiet area. Release revived birds outdoors. If the bird hasn't recovered in an hour, the bird may have severe internal injuries and should be taken to a veterinarian or wildlife rehabilitator.

Taking Everyday Tuna Salad To New Heights

Give your tired tuna salad new life and be the toast of the campground with this easy pie iron tuna melt. Take your favorite tuna salad recipe, or borrow our basic combination, and turn this ageless lunchtime relic into something special. Instead of tuna, use any cooked fresh fish. Kick it up by adding a little lemon juice, roasted red peppers, chopped hard boiled eggs, a squirt of dijon mustard, or a pinch of garlic salt or dill. This simple salad can be made at home to save time at the campground.

PIE IRON TUNA MELT

- 1 can tuna, drained, or cooked fresh fish fillets
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise

- 1 stalk celery, diced
- 2 tablespoons sweet or dill pickle relish, or add a tablespoon of each
- ¼ cup diced red onion
- ¼ cup grated cheddar cheese
- sliced tomatoes, if desired
- salt and pepper to taste

Butter two slices of bread. Place one piece, butter side down, in the pie iron. Spread two heaping tablespoons of tuna salad on bread and cover with remaining slice, butter side up. Seal pie iron and toast over smoldering campfire, four to five minutes per side, depending on heat level. Check often to prevent burning.





Braised Leg of Venison



Wild Goose Liver Pâté



The Redhead restaurant in Solon is reminiscent of any small-town Iowa diner—paint-chipped window frames, parquet linoleum flooring, a patchwork of mismatched tables and chairs, even an old silver refrigerator that shows signs of a previous color. But take a closer look and you'll see an eclectic mix of local mixed media art and decor and even more diverse table fare.

Every day wild game gets a touch of flare at Solon's Redhead restaurant
GO TO WHERE QUINTESSENTIAL DOWNTOWN DINER MEETS UPTOWN BISTRO FLAVOR, WHERE IMPORTED BEERS, WINES AND CHEESES SHARE EQUAL TIME WITH LOCALLY GROWN MEAT AND VEGGIES.

"Self-taught" in her grandma's kitchen and her own, Redhead restaurant owner and chef Kim Zesinger says of her lack of formal training, "I don't feel like I have any boundaries." Regular menu items remain the same, but specials change seasonally. "depending on what I can get, and my mood." Emphasis on "mood." Her advice to the home cook: "Do whatever you want. It's just food. Nothing more. Just food." Try her twists on typical Iowa wild game and see if you agree.

WILD GOOSE LIVER PATÉ

- 1 pound wild goose liver
- 1 stick unsalted butter

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- fresh herbs, such as sage, thyme, marjoram—about 1 tablespoon of each
- pinch of grated nutmeg
- salt and pepper
- 1 ounce brandy or cognac

Clean livers and remove any fat deposits. Sauté with butter and chopped onion. Cook until livers are brown on the outside, pink inside. Add herbs and season to taste with salt and pepper. Cool for about five minutes and add the liquor. Process in a food processor and store in an air-tight crock in the fridge. Pâté can be stored in the refrigerator up to 10 days. Serve with crackers or toast points.

BRAISED LEG OF VENISON

- leg roast of a deer (bone in or out)
- olive oil
- whole garlic cloves, peeled
- thyme, rosemary, salt and pepper
- braising liquid, such as red wine or stock (meat or veggie)

Rub the leg with olive oil and dry herbs; salt and pepper to taste (roast is best when coated liberally with herbs). Cut several slits into the meat and stuff with the garlic cloves. Brown in a Dutch oven or heavy pot. Cover the meat half way with braising liquid. Cover and cook at 325° F for 3½ hours.



Chef and Owner Kim Zesinger

Owner and chef Kim Zesinger's culinary skills are rooted in her southern upbringing, with a dash of Chicago's ethnic flavors thrown in. She labels her food "eclectic comfort food," or "provincial French peasant cooking—"a lot like Southern U.S. cooking." Call it what you will, it's hearty, tasty and has flare. Start with a roasted pumpkin seed hummus and pair with a Bulgarian peasant salad with sheep feta, imported olives, and homemade sourdough croutons for a light meal. The 10-ounce Redhead burger stuffed with wine-sautéed mushrooms, shallots and imported French blue cheese is a meal in itself, but comes with either a generous fresh greens salad or a pile of homemade regular and sweet potato fries. Finish with the dessert-of-the-day, like a decadent chocolate lava cake and a cup of organic, free-trade coffee. Eat comfortably knowing most of the food is locally grown and produced, often organic and definitely fresh.



HAVE A GOOD RECIPE OF WILD FOODS TO SHARE? Send to: WILDCUISINE@DNR.IOWA.GOV

SOUTHERN FRIED FLATHEAD NIBBLES

2 pounds clean, flathead catfish
cut into strips
enough buttermilk to cover
1 cup cornflakes—pulsed 4 or 5 times
in a food processor
¼ cup flour
¼ cup cornmeal
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
½ teaspoon kosher salt
2 eggs lightly beaten with
one teaspoon of water
oil for frying

If you like milder fish, soaking in buttermilk helps remove some of the "fishiness." Soak catfish pieces

in buttermilk for an hour. Heat oil to 350° in deep fryer or pan. Mix flakes, flour, cornmeal, salt and pepper in a bag. Spread dry mixture onto a plate. Shake excess buttermilk from fish. Dip and coat in egg, then roll in dry mixture. Fry, being careful not to let fish touch, for three to four minutes or until golden brown. Drain on a brown paper bag. Season to taste.

SMOKED PAPRIKA AIOLI DIP

¾ cup mayonnaise
1 teaspoon smoked paprika, hot or sweet
1 chopped whole scallion
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

Mix and serve with fish.

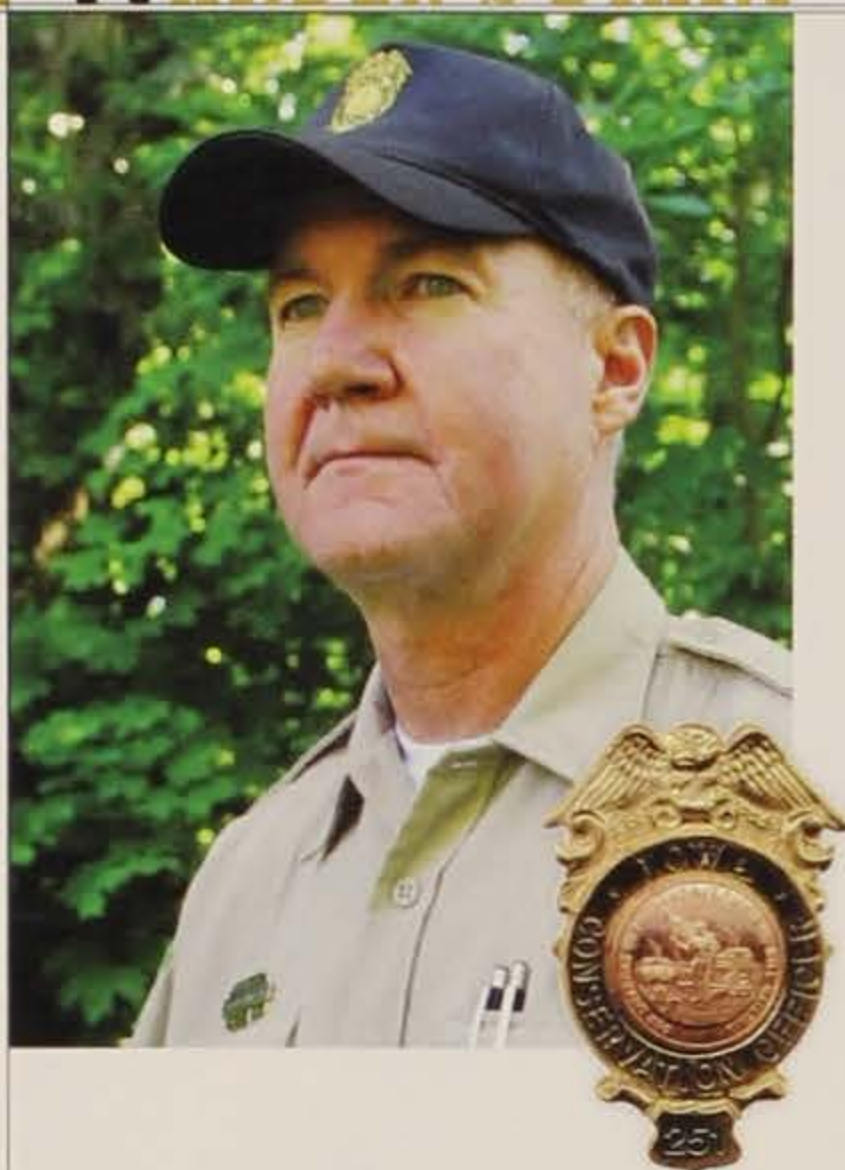


240 E. Main Street
Solon
319-624-5230

HOURS:

LUNCH: Tuesday-Saturday, 11-2.
DINNER: Tuesday-Thursday, 5:30-9 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 5:30-10 p.m.

LIQUOR: Wide selection of domestic, imported and local beer and wine. Tuesday half-price bottle of wine night. Local music, loosely labeled "independent rock," offered the first Saturday of every month.



More Tales from the Duck Marsh

“It never fails,” I thought.

Opening day of duck season, and it was raining. Not a downpour, rather, one of those annoying drizzles that drips off the end of your nose and trickles down the back of your neck.

The sun was starting to rise, and quite frankly, I was in my squad truck pulling over to open the thermos one more time. It really didn't seem like much would be happening as the weather, up to then, hadn't been pushing many ducks.

Of course, when you think that way, that's when the phone rings.

“Chuck, we're duck hunting down here, and a couple of guys are shooting at cormorants. I think they've killed one.”

That came as a surprise to me since cormorants, which are protected, are about as similar to a duck as an ant to an elephant. But when I asked his location, the picture cleared up as the caller was in an area closed to goose hunting. More often we see cormorants mistaken for geese, hence, we affectionately call them “tree geese.”

The call also proved my rule that the odds of you being on the opposite end of the county when something

happens is 100 percent. I was at the north end, and, of course, they were south.

“I'm on my way,” I told them.

Throwing my other plans out the window, I headed south. It would take a little while. The cell phone rang again. It was a different caller whom I've known for years and who happened to be hunting at the same area.

“Chuck, we're hunting down here and there's a couple of guys in a boat with a set-up next to us shooting at cormorants. They have one down on the water.”

He gave me a complete description of the boat and the location on the lake. I called one of my neighboring officers to see if he was close, and asked if he had time to help me. He said he would be on his way.

It wasn't too long and the cell phone rang again. “They've killed another one.”

I finally arrived at the lake and parked. I could see both the callers' boats, but not the suspect. So, I got out my cell phone. “I'm walking along the southeast bank, and I can see a boat. Is that them?” I asked.

“No, you have to walk to the east side of the lake and they're halfway up.”

I put the cell phone in my pocket. “Well, of course they're



Double Crested Cormorant



Canada Goose



clear on the other side of the lake, and, of course, it's raining," I thought. I started to hike from the parking lot. I called my partner, who had arrived, and told him I thought they had probably put in at the south boat ramp since I had not come across their boat trailer and vehicle so far.

I could hear shooting ahead of me. Emerging from some trees on the shore, I stopped to hide behind one and glassed the lake with my binoculars. Sure enough, they were as the callers described. And, sure enough, it was going to be a walk, so I started to hike, trying to keep as concealed as possible.

The cell phone rang again, and I fumbled for it in my pocket. "Chuck, you better hurry, they're picking up their decoys." Sure enough, it was going to be a run now.

Approaching closer, I got on my hands and knees to crawl toward them. Wet was turning to wetter. There was a berm on the shoreline. I crawled behind it, within 15 feet of them. I could hear talking, and their waders sloshing in the water. I peeked over the top. They were pulling up decoys. I couldn't see into their boat, nor any ducks or cormorants. They were laughing so they were certainly having a better time than I was.

When you've crawled to within 15 feet of someone, and you don't want them to see you, what do you think the odds are of your cell phone ringing? One hundred

percent. I grabbed for the phone and quickly opened it, mentally berating myself for not setting it to vibrate. "Chuck, *WHERE ARE YOU? THEY'RE LEAVING!*" I didn't dare answer.

With the boat loaded, the two started to fire up the motor. That created enough noise that I called my partner to say they were on the way to his location. They started across the lake. When it was safe, I stood up to look around. They had been tied to a willow next to the lake. And, stuffed into branches of a willow just above the waterline, were two dead cormorants.

I called my partner again. "I've got two dead cormorants, I'm going to pick them up and head your way."

"OK, take your time, I'm watching them. I think they're chasing a cormorant on the water with their boat."

I shook my head. "Who are these guys?" I thought.

Lugging my two new friends, I hiked back to my truck. I picked up the cell phone and called the hunters who had helped us. Driving to the boat ramp, my fellow officer had them in hand, I backed up to their boat and dropped my tailgate. "Remember these?" I asked.

"Yeah, I shot them."

"Why did you hide them in the tree?"

"Well, they just didn't look quite right."

I suppose not. 🐼

BALTIMORE CHECKERSPOT BUTTERFLY

(Euphydryas phaeton) This butterfly is on the state's threatened insect list and lays eggs on the white turtlehead plant, (*Chelone glabra*) a member of the snapdragon family. As larvae eat the plant, they absorb a member of the chemical family iridoid glycosides to become poisonous, a fact reflected in the bright warning colors of larvae and adult butterflies. The glycoside also stimulates the larvae to feed.

SOURCE OF ITS NAME

The Baltimore checkerspot, like the Baltimore oriole, was named in honor of the English aristocrat George Calvert, a.k.a. the first Lord Baltimore. The family crest was orange and black, just like the butterfly and the bird.

HABITAT

Baltimore checkerspots occur in wetlands in northeast and east-central Iowa plus forest openings in far southeast Iowa. They are most common in fens, a groundwater-fed wetland with rare plants and animals.

DISTRIBUTION

The butterfly is found in only 12 Iowa counties—Allamakee, Cerro Gordo, Chickasaw, Floyd, Henry, Lee, Linn, Louisa, Mitchell, Muscatine, Winneshiek and Worth.

WARNING COLORS

Both the larvae and adults are covered in black and orange—warning colors to potential predators. The larvae pick up a chemical from their first year food plant—turtlehead—that makes both the larvae and the butterflies they become poisonous. Larvae in southeast Iowa may pick up this chemical from eating other members of the snapdragon family.

LARVAE

Females lay clusters of eggs on white turtlehead plants found in northeast and east-central Iowa in mid-June to mid-July. When turtleheads are absent, females seek other members of the snapdragon family to lay eggs.

Larvae have black and orange bands with black, bristly bumps. They feed communally their first year inside a webbing to protect from predators such as small wasps. Larvae can snap their heads to knock off predators or regurgitate on them.

In the fall, larvae crawl to the base of the turtlehead plant and overwinter in ground litter as larvae, not as a chrysalis like many other butterflies. As larvae disperse, they feed on a wide variety of plants before reaching maturity (about 1 inch long) and forming a chrysalis.

ADULTS

In late May to early June mature larvae form a beautiful white chrysalis with black spots or stripes and orange spots. The adults hatch a few weeks later with a checkered wing pattern of black, orange and white. The butterflies mate for a few weeks, then die. Males patrol for females and engage in "fights" with other males, circling high into the sky before separating.

Go from

wildlife...

to the

WILD LIFE!

**2008 Racing Season
is Under Way!**

**MAY 17th
Saturday**



Pride of Iowa
ASA Late Model Challenge
Race Starts at 7:00 pm



USST
Super Truck Series



America's Place To Race™

CONCERT SCHEDULE*

May 17
Trent Tomlinson

May 18
Jan & Dean Show
featuring Dean Torrence

June 22
Blue Oyster Cult

August 10
Heartland

September 20
Phil Vassar

* free concert with paid
admission to race event

**MAY 18th
Sunday**



NASCAR
Camping World Series
Race Starts at 3:00 pm



JUNE 20th, Friday

Indy Pro Series Qualifying - 1:15 pm
IndyCar Series Practice - 1:15 pm



JUNE 21st, Saturday

Jeld-Wen 100 Indy Pro Series Event - 4:00 pm
IndyCar Series Qualifying



JUNE 22nd, Sunday

Iowa Corn Indy 250, IndyCar Series - 12:30 pm



JULY 20th, Sunday

ASA Midwest Tour Super Late Models - 4:00 pm
ARCA Lincoln Welders Truck Series



AUGUST 10th, Sunday

Casey's General Stores Summer Shootout

- USAC Silver Crown Series - 6:00 pm
- Grand Am KONI Challenge - 2:00 pm



SEPTEMBER 20th, Saturday

USAR Hooters Pro Cup Series - 7:00 pm
SCCA VW Jetta Diesels

Schedule subject to change.



Iowa Speedway

3333 Rusty Wallace Drive
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Interstate 80 - Exit 168

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A Rusty Wallace Signature Series Track

Marty Colbert of Cedar Rapids plies the whitewater at Palisade-Kepler State Park.

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