

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2010

IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



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WHERE WILD THINGS ROAM

NATIVE BISON RETURN TO IOWA'S LARGEST PRAIRIE

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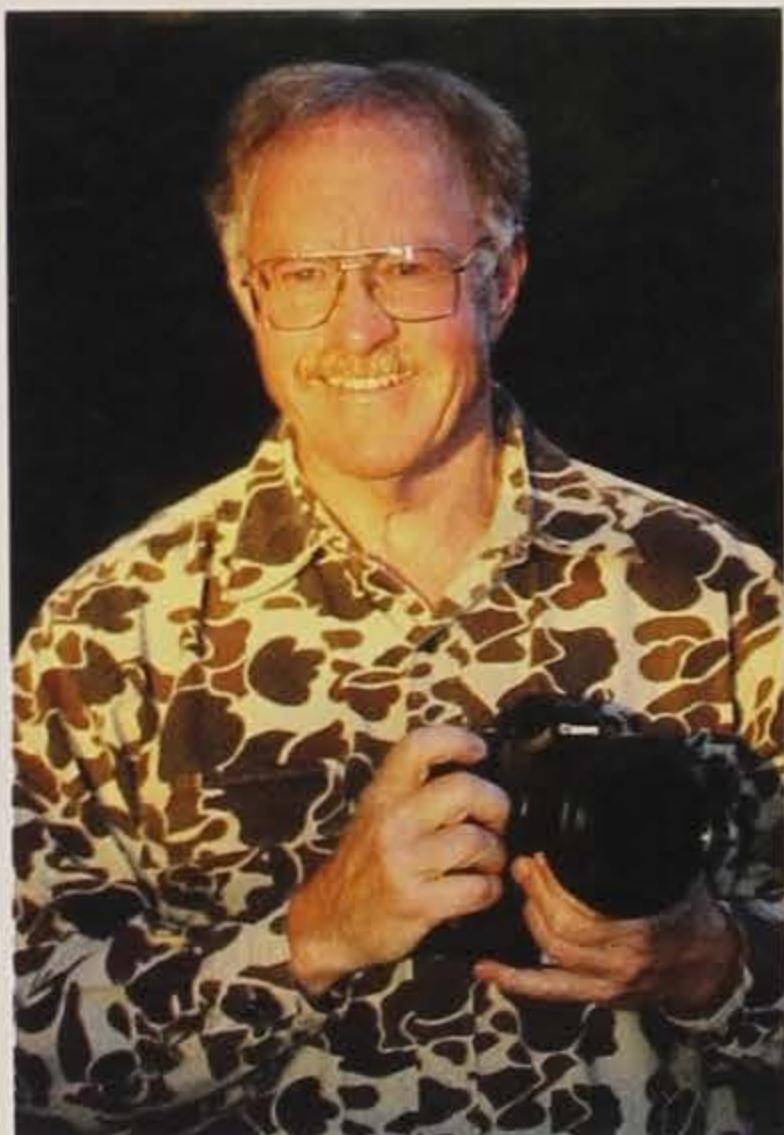
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Contributors



SANDY FLAHIVE is a writer who lives in Des Moines but likes getting behind the wheel of her Jeep and meandering around Iowa, discovering the hidden gems that lay in its many nooks and crannies. She also enjoys spending time at her remote cabin near Stephens State Forest in southern Iowa.



TY SMEDES is a full-time writer and photographer from Urbandale. Published in more than 25 magazines, his work includes images of wildlife, wildflowers and scenes, along with photography of Iowa's cultural events and attractions. He teaches photography classes and leads photo-tours to the Eastern Sierras and Africa. His new coffee-table book, "Capturing Iowa's Seasons," is sold at www.iowanaturestore.com or 1-866-410-0230.

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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.

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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.

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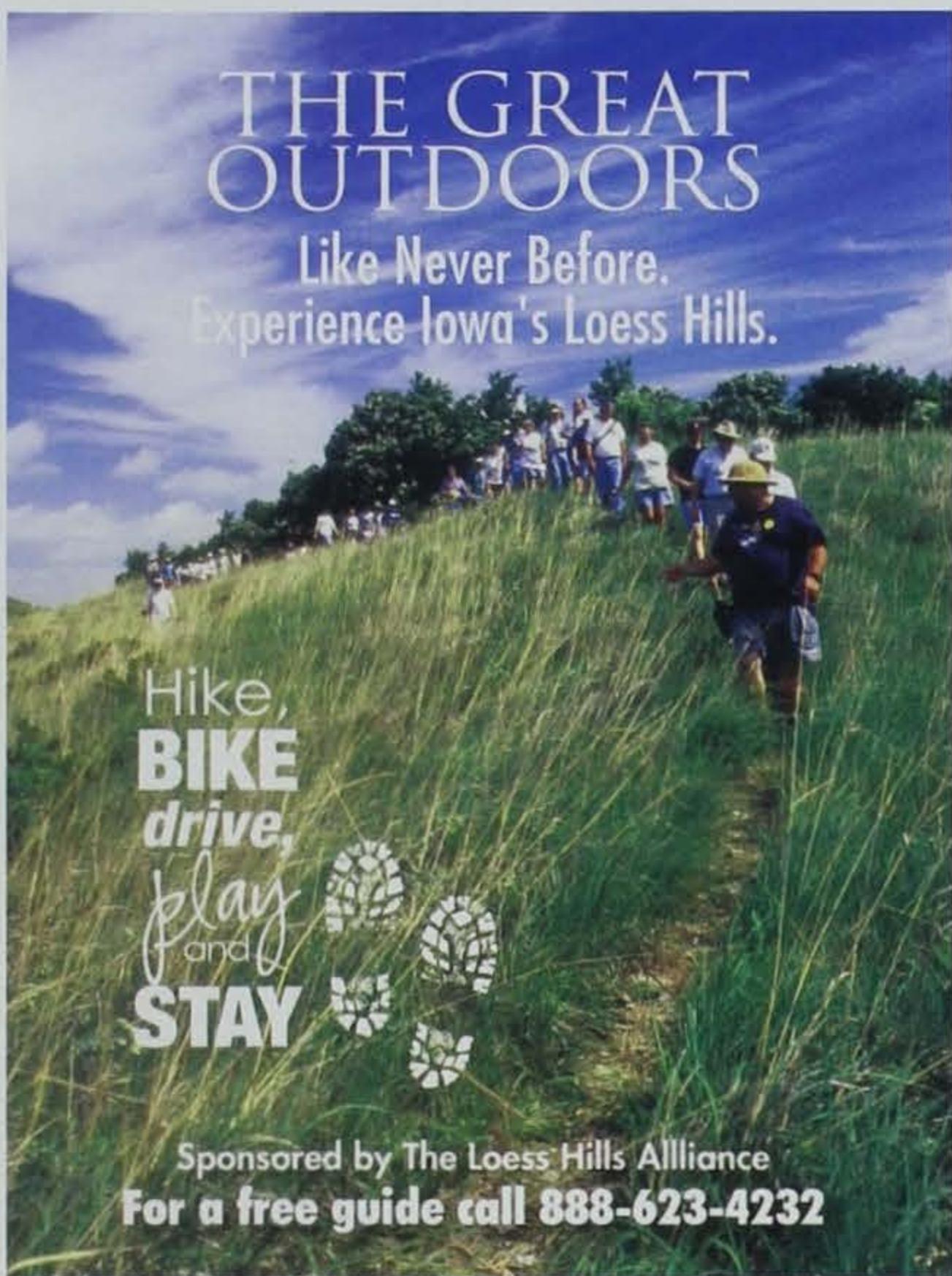
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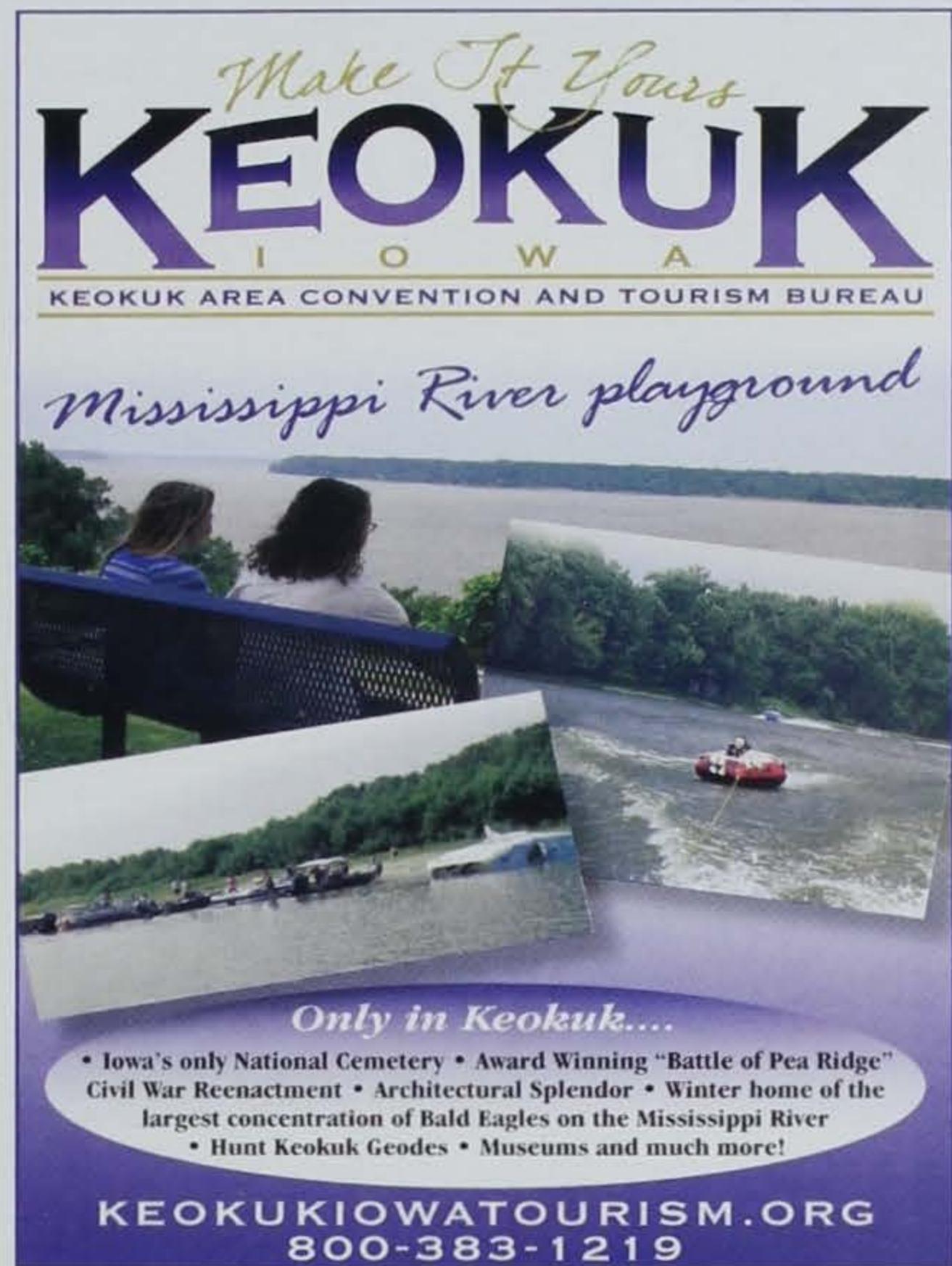
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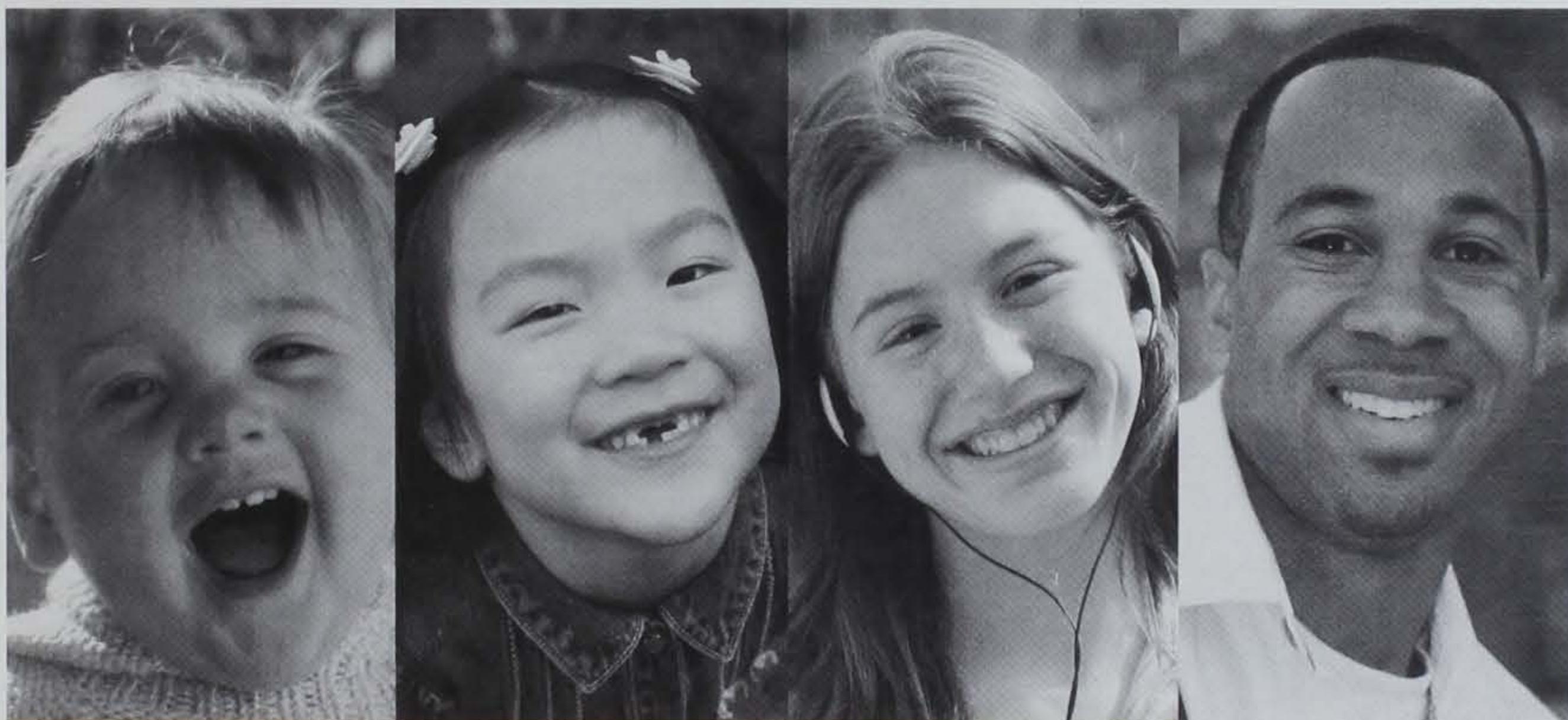
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STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

ABOUT THIS PHOTO AND THE COVER

Contributing photographer Ty Smedes of Urbandale captured these images of bison grazing at Broken Kettle Grasslands, Iowa's largest prairie. It's "an image of what Iowa's northern Loess Hills once looked like, before European settlement, with seemingly endless hills engulfed in a variety of native prairie grasses," he says, along of course, with recently reintroduced bison. See his feature on page 28.



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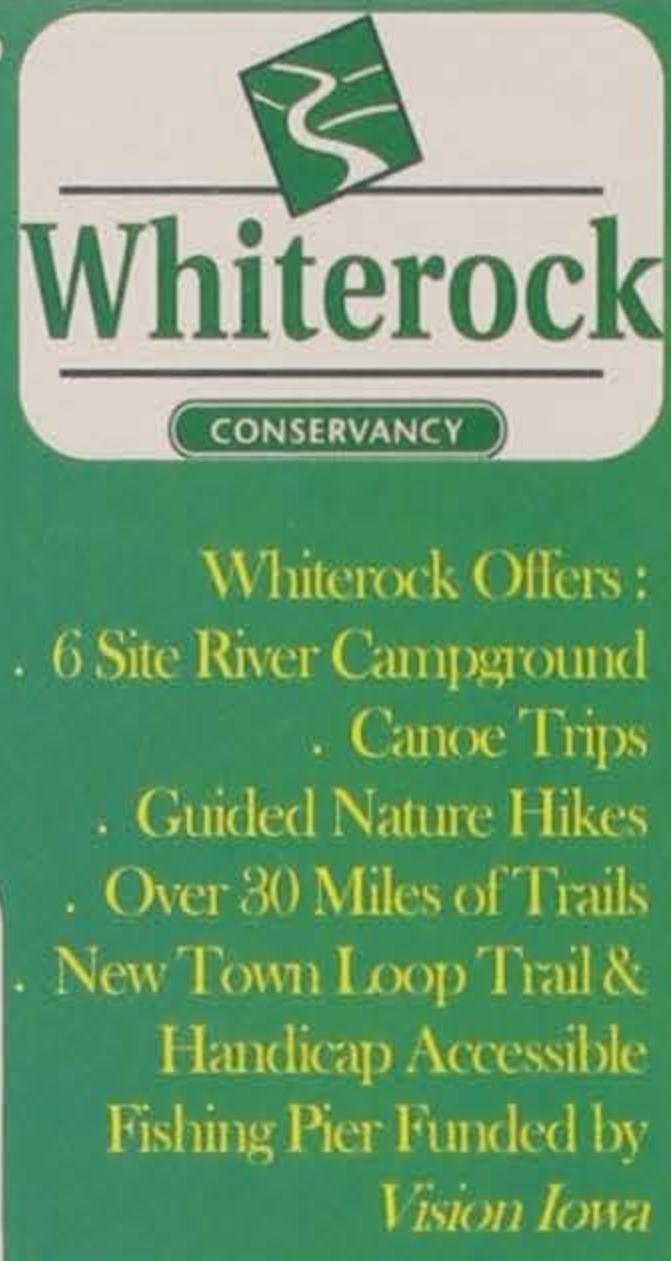
ABOUT THIS PHOTO

At Lekwa Marsh south of Clear Lake, staff photographer Lowell Washburn was at the edge of some cattails in shallow water, with boot-sucking mud above his knees. As daylight approached a dense fog set in. "Egrets began to arrive and I started shooting. After 8 o'clock, the fog lifted and I got to shoot in some brighter light," he says. See more images on pages 56-59.

At Whiterock, it is easy to explore Iowa's natural history and learn about our conservation efforts while hiking our **30+ miles** of dirt trail systems or floating along a scenic **8 mile** section of the Middle Raccoon River. Contact us to reserve your spot for adventure!



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ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Head Lakeside For a Weekend Science Safari

Imagine walking out your back door to find a hairy, ox-sized behemoth stalking through your yard, baring monstrous claws. Now imagine this beast is in the form of... a sloth? No, this isn't a faux-horror film, it is a flashback to 10,000 years ago, when giant sloths were common Iowa inhabitants.

Iowa Lakeside Laboratory on West Lake Okoboji will present a lecture about this brute and other topics during its Natural History Weekend held Sept. 11-12. The event focuses on several unique aspects of Iowa's natural heritage. As Lakeside Lab's Jane Shuttleworth says, "The event is going to be a great chance for people to find out a lot of things about Iowa they didn't know."

While the primary function of Lakeside Lab is a field research station for Iowa's universities, it also hosts several public programs. Not only can you expect giant sloth presentations, but geologists, botanists and ornithologists leading field trips and lectures on notable aspects of Iowa natural history. Guests can hike along with some of the best naturalists Iowa has to offer. Individuals or groups can sign up for the weekend or single days. To register, visit www.lakesidelab.org or call 712-337-3669 for details. Cost is \$60 for the weekend, meals included. Day rates available. Rustic cabins or rooms available onsite, or camp at area state parks. Reserve park campsites at 1-877-427-2757 or www.reserveiaparks.com.

**FREE FAMILY FUN**

Lakeside Lab's compound is open to the public through September. Explore the campus' 60 plus acres of restored prairie, as well as abundant woodlands while taking part in the self-guided Tour of the World of Little Bugs. Remember, most of the facility's programs fall in the peak summer months, so be sure to check the website for a summer 2011 itinerary.

How to Survive a Camping Trip with Kids in Tow

6 Tips For Fun Family Camping

The sky is black, it's pouring rain, the tent is flooding, raccoons ate your food and the kids are crying. Sound like your last family camping trip? If you want to camp with kids but wish to avoid a Clark Griswold experience, follow these tips to ensure a hang-up-free family adventure.

1 BRING THE RIGHT STUFF: This means planning ahead and having decent gear. Matt Berry, camping manager at Fin and Feather in Iowa City, says this is especially important the first time you're taking kids camping. "You want to do everything you can to make it comfortable for them," he says. "This doesn't mean you have to have the best stuff, but keeping them warm, dry and fed makes any camping experience a lot more fun." Berry suggests purchasing a sleeping pad to go under your sleeping bag, claiming that the additional layer between you and the ground can make a big difference. After you pack the right gear, always remember to bring the essentials like sunscreen, bug spray and a fully-stocked first aid kit for accident-prone children.

2 BE PREPARED FOR ANY WEATHER: Iowa weather is anything but predictable. Bring inclement weather clothing and gear to keep you and your kids dry. Marshal Toms, manager of Jax Outdoor Gear in Ames, suggests bringing a deck of cards and some board games to keep everyone entertained in case Mother Nature decides to wreak havoc on your outdoor plans.



3 ACTIVITIES, ACTIVITIES, ACTIVITIES: Always have more than enough activities planned. Berry says that activities can make or break a trip. "Have a list of things you want to do and another list of things you could do in case the original plans fall through," he says. Before you leave, research the camping area and look for kid-friendly activities in adjacent towns, too. Toms says fishing, canoeing, and low-impact hiking are always good go-to activities for children.

4 PUT THE KIDS TO WORK: This is one of the only times in life where kids think chores are fun; take advantage of it. Toms recommends having them help set up the camp site. "Have the kids collect wood for a fire or have them assist with assembling the tent," he says.

5 BE SAFE, NOT SORRY: Go over safety issues ahead of time with your kids. Express to them the need to stay together. Berry recommends buying kids whistles, so when they don't listen to you and get lost anyway, they can blow it and be easily found. It's a cheap way to ensure your peace of mind. Additionally, always take the time to stress the importance of respecting nature and the campsite.

6 HAVE FUN! This is the most vital tip. It's important for kids to appreciate the outdoors and this is almost guaranteed if they have enjoyable experiences. As Berry states, "If kids can build relationships with the outdoors early, they will be more likely to appreciate it and take care of it later in life."

Paved Honey Creek bike trail along prairie section.

Escape on a Cycling Sojourn

Just because RAGBRAI has come and gone doesn't mean the cycling season in Iowa has ended. This fall, Bike World of Des Moines is teaming up with Honey Creek Resort State Park to present the second annual Fall Cycling Festival. On Oct. 9-10, strap the bikes to the car and head to the shores of Rathbun Lake for a weekend of great cycling. Dave Mable of Bike World says, "It's a great occasion to enjoy a beautiful resort, and gives us the opportunity to host a variety of riders." The event caters to all cyclists with both gravel and pavement rides.

CENTURY LOOPS

The event kicks off Saturday morning with a pavement road ride lasting up to 100 miles. If this seems daunting, there's the metric century loop, a more modest 100 kilometer ride (about 60 miles). Cyclists meet at the resort to check in and kickoff the ride.

40-MILE RACE

On Oct. 9, Honey Creek hosts the 2010 Iowa Gravel Road Race State Championships. This 40-mile race, sanctioned by USA Cycling, is open to enthusiasts interested in stoking their competitive spirit or just looking for a good ride. Single day licenses for non-USA Cycling members are available onsite. The day ends with a chili dinner, live music and a slide show of the day's festivities.

35-MILE LAKESIDE RIDE

The weekend wraps up with a lakeside ride, using Honey Creek's trail system, allowing riders to enjoy Rathbun Lake and prairie scenery. "It's perfect for riders looking to enjoy Iowa's golden fall," says Mable. "The trail crosses bridges and the dam. It's just a beautiful path bouncing along the lake."

Advanced registration encouraged. Registration costs are \$25 per rider for access to all of event activities.

Single-day USA Cycling licenses for the gravel race are an additional \$10. For ride details call Dave Mable at Bike World (**515-255-7047**) or www.bikeworldiowa.com.

If a weekend behind the handlebars leaves you craving pampering, the resort can meet those needs with comfy beds, a soak in the indoor pool, or lounging by the massive stone fireplace. "After the ride it will be a great place to relax," in a suite or one of the 28 cabins, says the resort's Hannah Wilmuth, noting the bar and full service restaurant with lake views.

For Honey Creek Resort State Park details call **1-877-677-3344** or visit www.honeycreekresort.com. Special room rates apply. For additional ride details call Dave Mable at Bike World, **515-255-7047**.

FAMILY FRIENDLY: Honey Creek Resort State Park has activities for non-cycling family members including guided hikes and crafts. Kayaking and hiking are popular and kids love the pirate-themed indoor water park.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS: Walk the resort's woodland and prairie paths, or enjoy the views as you tee off at The Preserve, an 18 hole golf course overlooking the lake. The Lakeshore Grille provides American cuisine, and an impressive selection of Iowa wines.





Go Eye-To-Eye With Herky's Hawk Cousins

Fall brings fiery foliage and cooler temps, beckoning those who wilt in summertime heat and humidity. It also attracts majestic birds of prey on their migration route south. Hundreds of hawks pass through Iowa, providing excellent educational opportunities to witness the phenomenon of migration.

Whether you're a birder or not, all are welcome to HawkWatch at Effigy Mounds National Monument in northeast Iowa, just north of Marquette and McGregor the weekend of Oct. 2. Naturalists will help identify raptors and provide families with up-close encounters of hawks during live demonstrations. Stop by the kids' arts and crafts area for mask decorating, bracelet making and coloring.

Go for the day or make a weekend out of it—free events and programs run all day Saturday and Sunday. Hike with a naturalist, observe the capture and banding of raptors and falcons, and get hands-on with crafts and activities.

Visit the breathtaking bluffs and valleys at nearby Pikes Peak State Park or take a detour to The Ion Exchange, a nursery that specializes in native wildflowers, grasses and plants (*1878 Old Mission Dr. Harpers Ferry; 800-291-2143; ionxchange.com*).

GRAB A SCOPE AND KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED FOR THESE HAWKS:

BROAD-WINGED HAWK—a few nest in Iowa forests, but this species is often seen in huge fall migration flocks. Look for pointed wings, short tails, dark brown bodies and pale underwings.

RED-TAILED HAWK—the most common Iowa year-round hawk resident; many also come from farther north to winter. These large hawks have streaked undersides and pale underwings with a dark border.

SWAINSON'S HAWK—usually found in western parts of the United States, but can be seen migrating through western Iowa in the fall. The Swainson's hawk is small with a white face and a dark band across its chest.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK—can be found in boreal, or northern, forests in Canada and the extreme northern United States, but comes to Iowa for winter. Look for small hawks with long tails and red undersides.

COOPER'S HAWK—a year-round resident of Iowa, this species is becoming one of the most common woodland hawks in the state. These hawks have long tails, large heads and broad wings with reddish streaks on the undersides.

For more about HawkWatch and Effigy Mounds National Monument, visit www.nps.gov/efmo/planyourvisit/annual-hawkwatch-weekend.htm or call 563-873-3491. Camping is not allowed at the monument, located four miles north of Marquette and McGregor. Two state areas offer camping. Pikes Peak State Park is about seven miles south and Yellow River State Forest is north of Effigy Mounds. Make camping reservations at 1-877-427-2757 or www.reserveiaparks.com.

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.

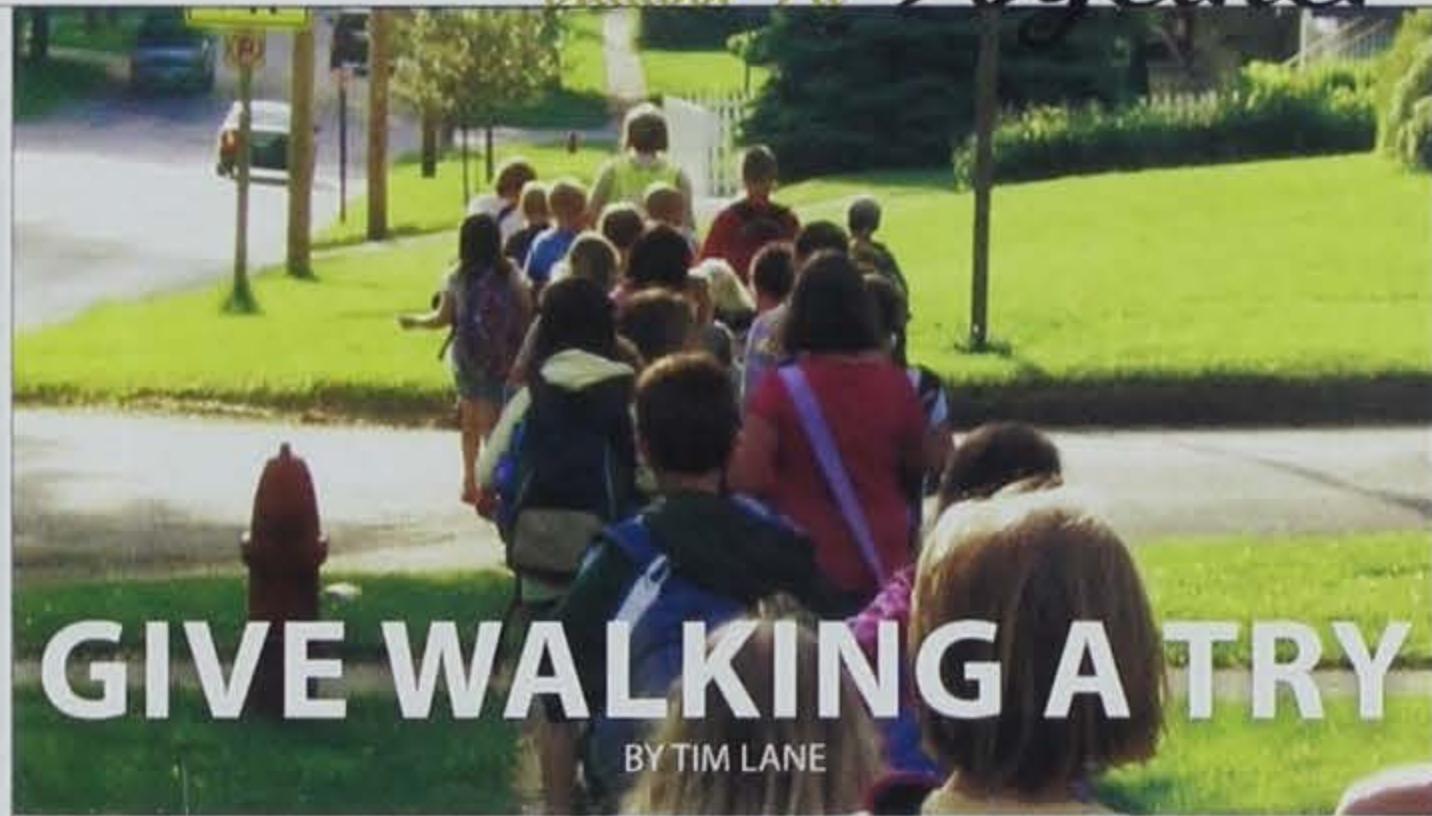
ASTRID, AGE 8, FROM DES MOINES ASKS:
Where does the wind come from?

Here's a non-blustery answer to a breezy question—wind ultimately comes from the sun heating the Earth's surface. Explain to your youngster that not everything heats up at the same rate when in the sunshine. For example, your child can readily understand that a sidewalk may be warm, even hot, while the grass next to it is cool. And so it goes across the planet—the sun doesn't warm the Earth evenly. Land warms faster than lakes or the vast oceans. And on land, various soils, rock and vegetative areas warm at different rates. Of course, while half the Earth is bathed in warming rays, the other half is cooling off in the darkness of night. Cloudy areas heat less than areas with open skies. The equator heats up more than the polar areas.

So what do variations in heat absorption have to do with wind? Bob Dylan might say the answer is blowin' in the wind, but physics holds the key. Heated air expands, and as it does, the air takes up more space. That same volume of air weighs less and rises, that's how hot air balloons operate. As warm air rises, cooler air rushes in to take that space. This movement of air is known as wind.

On a global scale, the major wind systems on Earth arise when large air masses around the equator rise up from the warm ground and water and move toward the poles, causing cooler air from elsewhere on Earth to fill the void. Eventually as air rises, it cools, compresses and sinks. Since the Earth is rotating, it gives all this rising and falling air extra movement as well. (Older children may want to research the Coriolis Effect.)

DANDELION PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; WALKING PHOTO COURTESY IOWA DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH



GIVE WALKING A TRY

BY TIM LANE

My father grew up in Charles City and based on his accounts walked six miles to school...uphill both ways. It was as if he and M.C. Escher were neighbors. (Escher was the Dutch artist that created optical illusion stairs that ended up where they began.) Over time, I discovered that every adult of that era lived real close to my father's logic-defying environment.

Speaking of logic defying, let me share some numbers. When I was in grade school, most kids walked or biked to school. For me it was a six-block flat route. That was in the '60s. The figures have been going downhill ever since. As the number of kids walking and biking was cut in half and then cut in half again, the obesity rates have doubled and doubled again. Our numbers of overweight children have doubled and then tripled. Corresponding rates of diabetes are soaring. Our heaviest kids outweigh the heaviest kids from previous eras by a considerable amount as does the health and financial burden.

Today, children who walk or bike to school are flat out better off for the experience. But the most dramatic figure is for girls. If a girl rides a bike to school, she is seven times more likely to reach the minimum fitness standards than her peers who are motored to school. Children who walk to and from school are not only healthier, but better students. Teachers have reported significantly improved behavior from classes that have logged as little as 12 minutes of activity prior to the start of a school day.

The good news? Communities like Grinnell, Atlantic, Fairfield, Elkader, Waterloo and others are working to create safe routes to school and environments and programs that encourage walking and biking. The Safe Routes to School program provides federal funds for such design and construction as has Iowa's Department of Public Health.

These community plans link sidewalks to schools, parks, business districts and residential areas to not only benefit young citizens, but the oldest. It is a benefit to both schools and the business community. Creating walking and biking routes contributes to a higher quality of life and becomes a marketing asset for recruiting employees and employers.

But in way too many instances, the epidemic of inactivity and resulting disease taxes the current economy and financial resources that can alleviate the problem. When times are tough the tough don't get going...they layoff teachers, often physical education teachers. In Des Moines we spend over twice as many dollars on busing than we do on our physical education staff. A recent headline read that 18 teachers were laid off...I can't wait for the headline announcing that 18 buses have been deactivated as more youth walk or bike to a school that is known for its quality physical education program.

There is strong evidence that the cost of the obesity epidemic will double and thus bankrupt us! Yet the solution is right outside our doors.

Tim Lane is the fitness consultant with Iowa's Dept. of Public Health. A marathoner, former director of the National Ski Patrol, climber and volleyball coach, he has cycled across America and Iowa 25 times. He promotes Live Healthy Iowa.

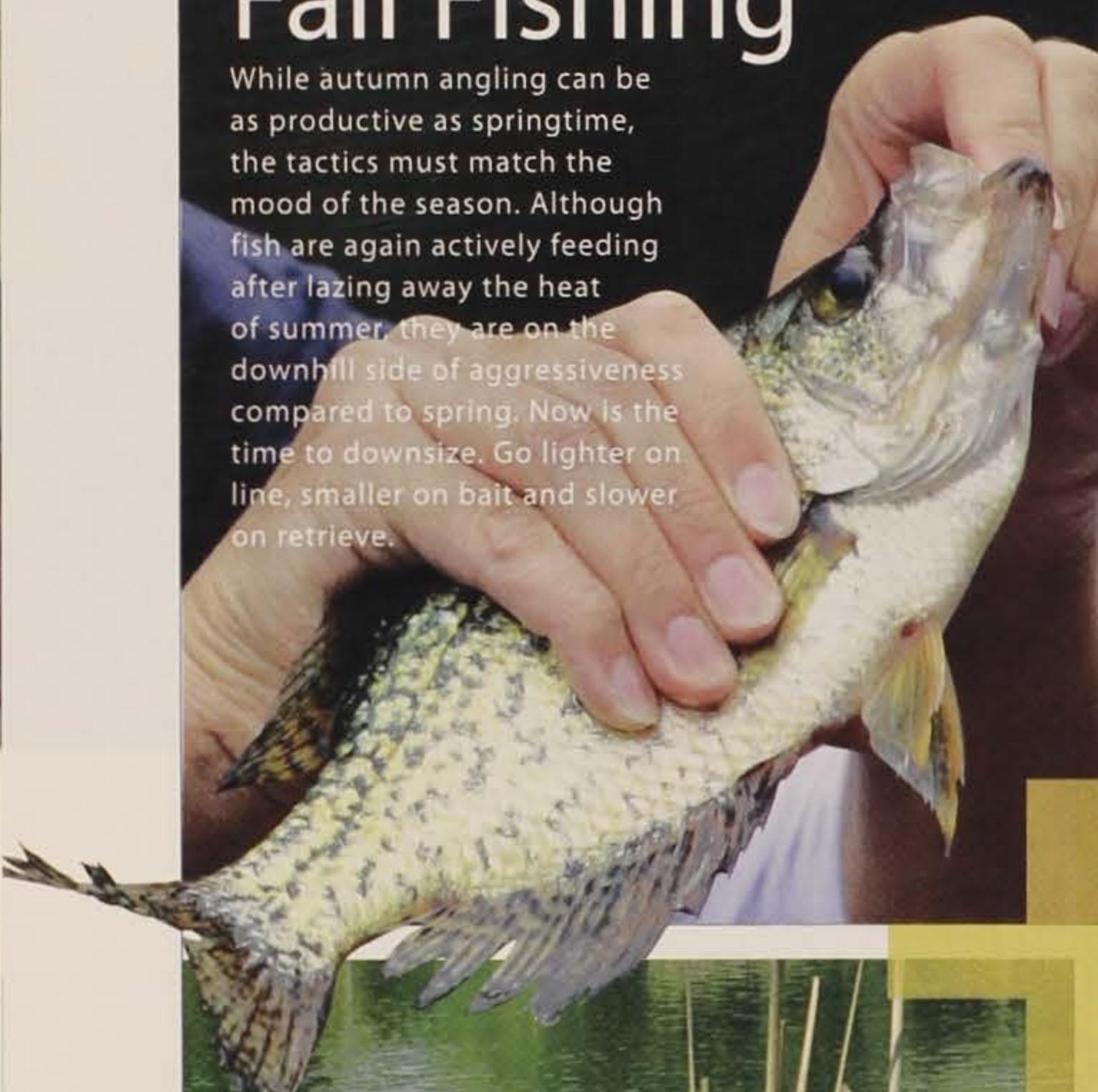
Outdoor Skills

BY BRIAN BUTTON, ALAN FOSTER PHOTOS BY STUDIO Z

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

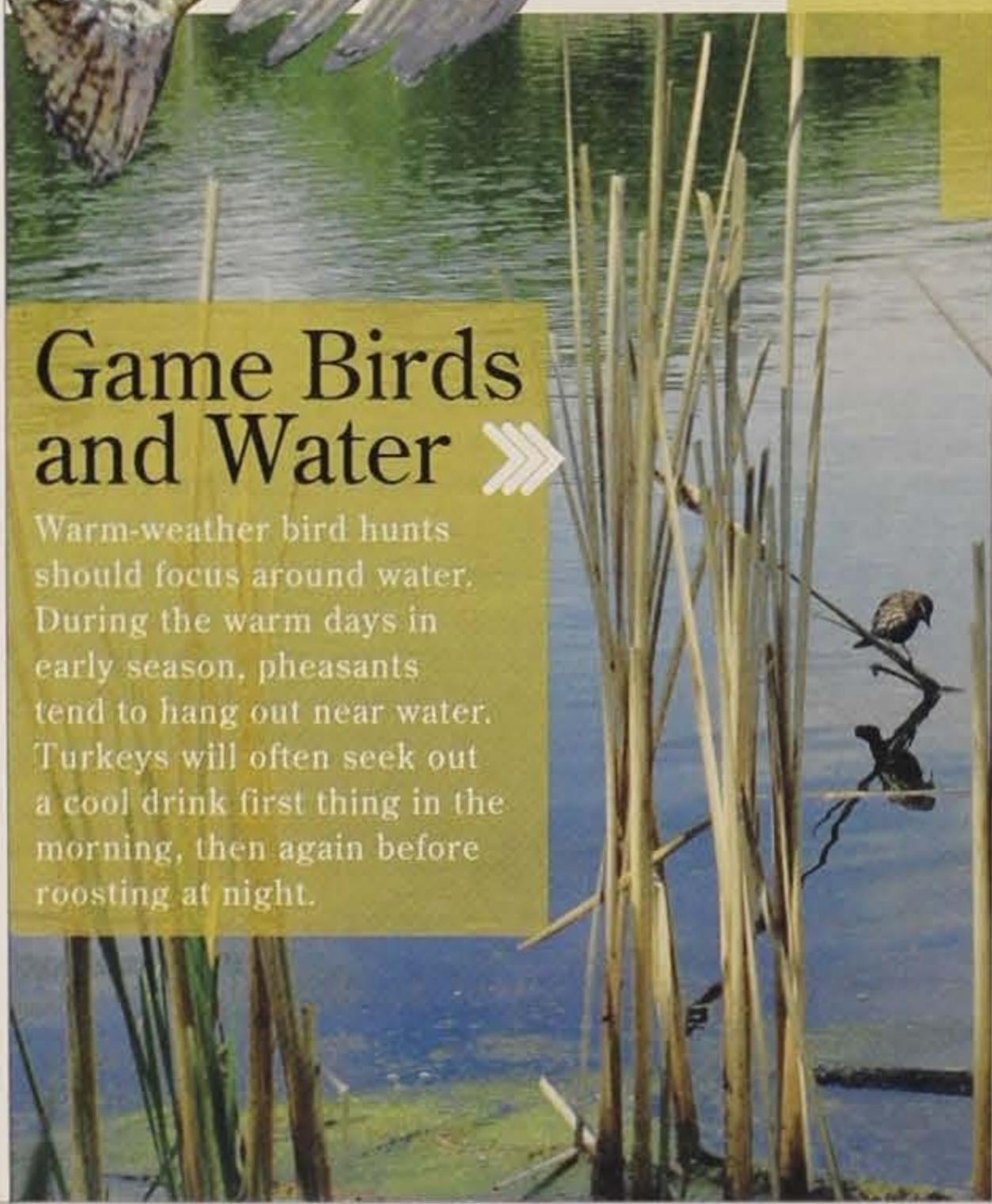
Chill Out for Fall Fishing

While autumn angling can be as productive as springtime, the tactics must match the mood of the season. Although fish are again actively feeding after lazing away the heat of summer, they are on the downhill side of aggressiveness compared to spring. Now is the time to downsize. Go lighter on line, smaller on bait and slower on retrieve.



Game Birds and Water

Warm-weather bird hunts should focus around water. During the warm days in early season, pheasants tend to hang out near water. Turkeys will often seek out a cool drink first thing in the morning, then again before roosting at night.



« Cool Autumn Camp Tip

With the arrival of chilly mornings in the fall, stay warmer by locating your campsite on a location open to the east. The morning sun will warm the location much faster and help take off the chill.

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Tyvek envelopes, like those from UPS and FedEx, can be reused as waterproof, tear-proof bags for maps, field guides or small items. The padded versions work great as cushioned stuffsacks or a waterproof seat at the picnic table. They also make a nice lunch sack to keep a sandwich cool in a daypack.

IT TAKES MORE FUEL TO RESTART AN ENGINE THAN LET IT IDLE?

Many drivers believe that letting their vehicle idle is good for the engine because it helps warm it up. Others idle their vehicles during long waits, such as at a drive-thru or when parked, believing it takes more gas to restart an engine. However, there is no single source that gives idling the green light. On the contrary, most agree this practice needs to come to a screeching halt.

The best way to warm up a cold engine is to drive your vehicle. With the advent of electronic engines you need no more than 30 seconds of idling time before taking off. An idling engine is not operating at optimal temperature so fuel does not undergo complete combustion and therefore leaves fuel residue on the cylinder walls. This residue is deposited on and subsequently causes damage to engine components including cylinders, spark plugs, and the exhaust system and can contaminate the vehicle's oil.

Ask The Expert

BY SHELENE CODNER

Evelyn in Hiawatha asks: "Are state parks and camping closed after Labor Day?"

Iowa's state parks do not close after Labor Day, in fact, most are open year round. From Labor Day through October 31st, in addition to enjoying the beautiful colors of the changing season and watching migrating birds as they pass through, you can enjoy all of the amenities offered throughout the summer months including boating, camping, fishing, hiking, biking and a host of other activities.

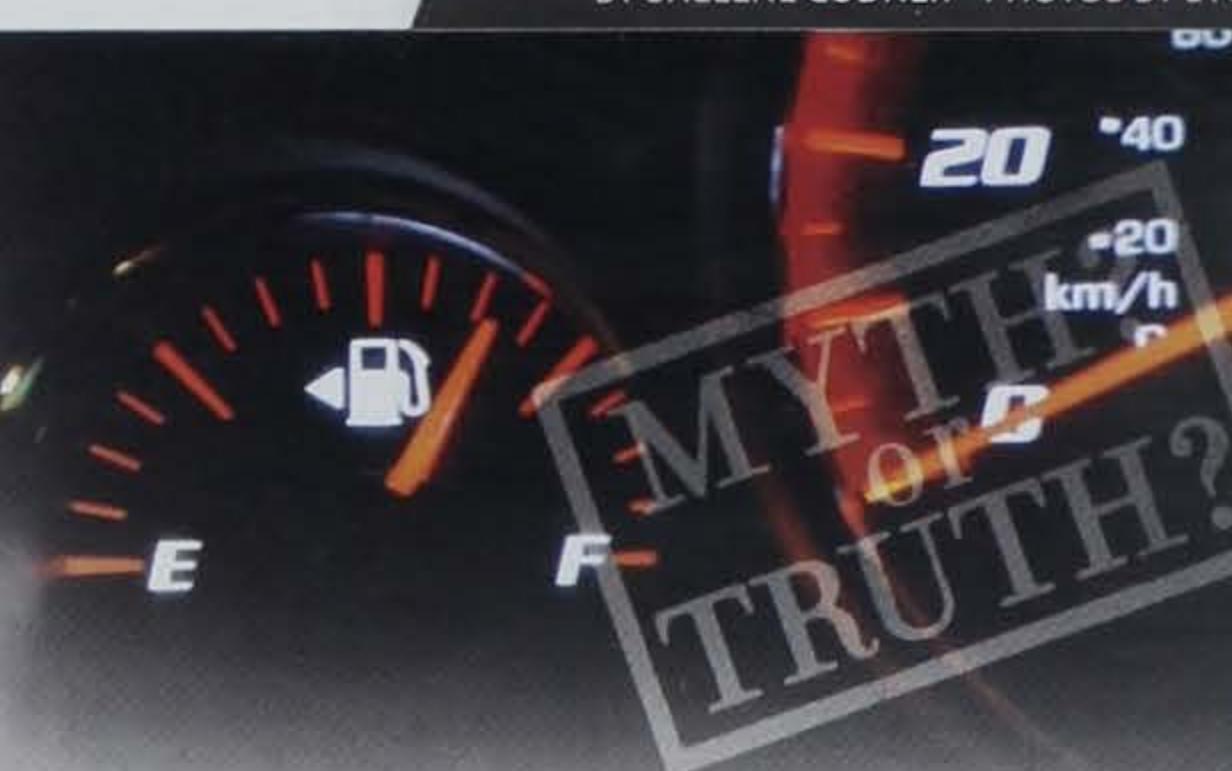
From November 1st to March 31st camping is available on a first come, first serve basis. Many state parks offer amenities that are ideal for winter adventures.

GEORGE WYTH MEMORIAL STATE PARK in Waterloo has four lakes that can be accessed for ice fishing and snowmobiling.

GULL POINT STATE PARK near historic Okoboji, boasts a host of winter activities including ice fishing, snowmobiling, ice-skating and cross-country skiing.

PILOT KNOB STATE PARK near Forest City has a warming house with electricity and heat that provides added comfort for ice skaters, snowmobilers, cross-country skiers and ice fishermen.

Visitors to **RED HAW STATE PARK** near Chariton enjoy ice-skating, sledding, skiing, snowmobiling or a brisk winter hike along trails that wind around the 72-acre lake.



In addition, idling wastes fuel, reduces vehicle performance and increases vehicle emissions. An idling vehicle gets zero miles to the gallon. Ten seconds of idling wastes more fuel than restarting your car. Idling ten minutes can use as much fuel as it takes to travel five miles—this equates to 27 gallons of fuel wasted per year. A diesel engine can burn a gallon per hour idling.

Every gallon of gas used produces about 19 pounds of carbon dioxide and also releases nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, benzene and many other toxins into the air. Prolonged exposure to any of these emissions can lead to serious illness. Children, who breathe faster than adults, are especially at high-risk.

So, as far as this myth is concerned, all signs suggest that we should stop spinning our wheels and put the brakes on idling.

WAUBONSIE STATE PARK, located in the picturesque Loess Hills, offers snowmobiling and cross-country skiing.

In addition to the parks mentioned above, many of Iowa's fifty-five state parks, recreation areas and forests offer similar recreational opportunities and most are opened year round unless weather conditions are prohibitive. Restroom/shower facilities, water hydrants and some cabins are available seasonally.

Those planning an outdoor adventure can obtain more information regarding available amenities and make reservations at **1-877-IAPARKS** or www.reserveiaparks.com

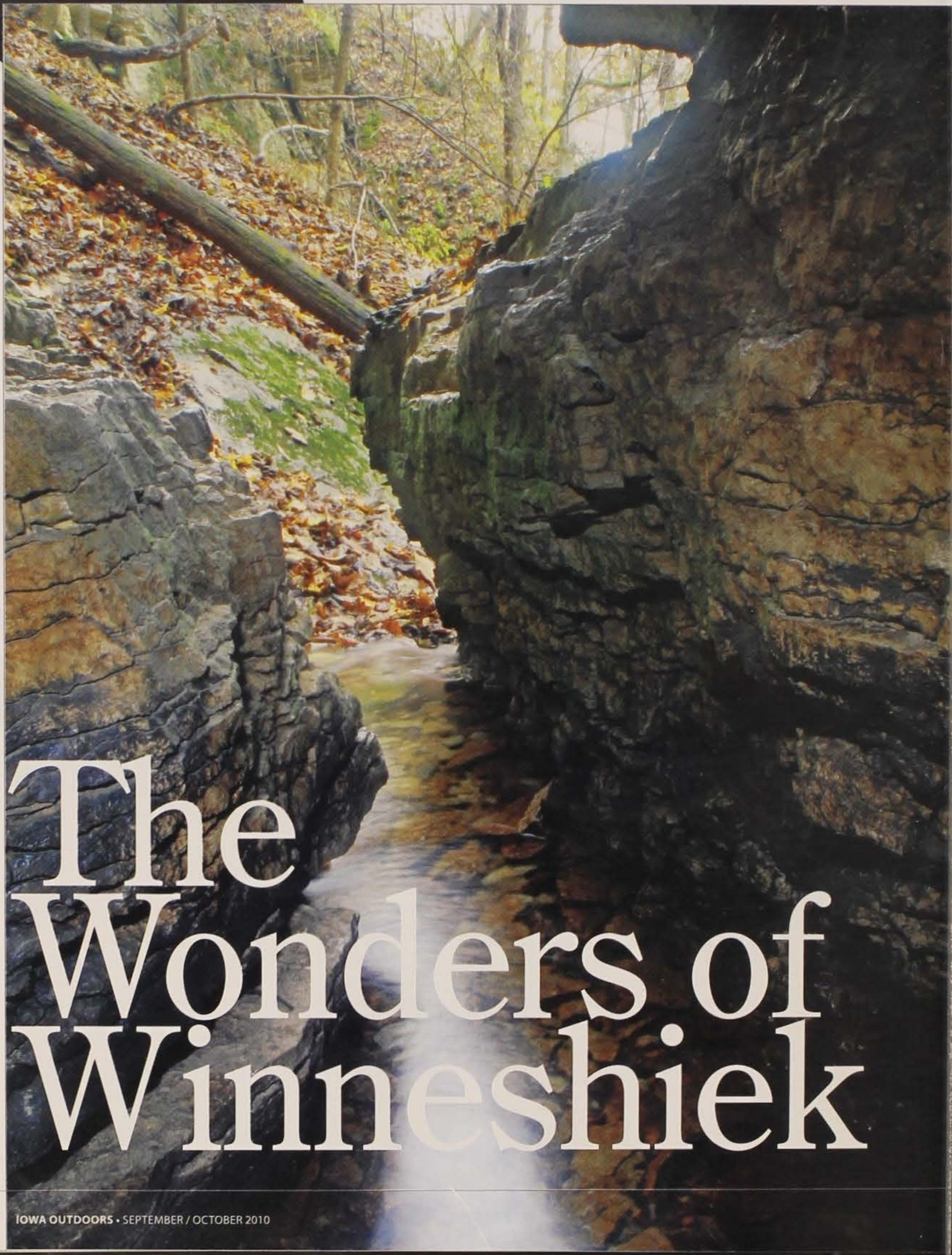
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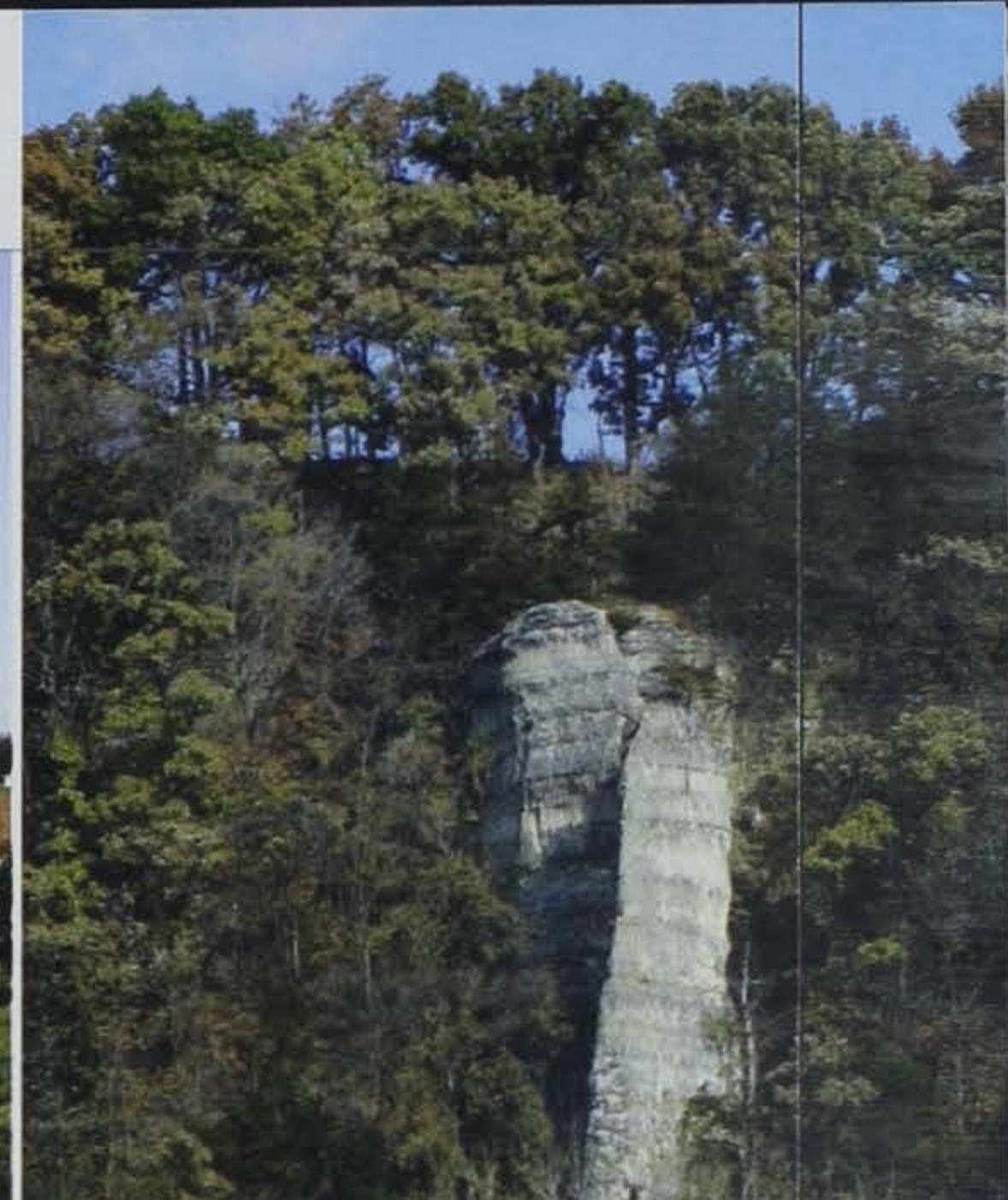
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Lost In Iowa

BY SANDY FLAHIVE PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH



The Wonders of Winnesiek



LEFT: A prominent spring rolls up through a crevice at Malanaphy State Preserve two miles northwest of Decorah. A series of cascading falls ends in a 10-foot plunge into the Upper Iowa River. **ABOVE LEFT:** Upper Iowa River near Bluffton Fir Stand State Preserve. **TOP CENTER:** Rural color near the state trout hatchery. **TOP RIGHT:** Chimney Rock area along the Upper Iowa River. Visitors are treated to jaw-dropping vistas, with each bend in the road or twist of the trail displaying an entirely different landscape. Within a mile of one another, craggy, treed cliffs and limestone formations resembling chimneys lie in great contrast to the golden-bronze farm fields, cold springs and gin-clear trout streams they surround.

When the incomparable Dr. Seuss proclaims in his famous book "Oh, The Places You'll Go!" he probably didn't have Decorah and Winneshiek County in mind. And when he excitedly promises, "Congratulations! Today is your day. You're off to great places! You're off and away!" his reference, likely, is not to the aforementioned gems in the treasure trove that is northeast Iowa in autumn.

But the good man's enthusiastic sendoff could apply to the lucky traveler to these havens, hungry for a morsel—no, make that a large helping—of natural wonders and seasonal beauty.

Appeasing the appetites of refugees from frenzied malls and wacky interstates, Decorah and Winneshiek County serve up a soothing alternative to society's mayhem—a fall feast that includes a world gilded in foliage, cooled by frosty caves, laced with trout-laden streams, cleaved by ancient bluffs, crisscrossed with friendly trails and guarded by soaring eagles. Trumping it all is the venerable Upper Iowa River, flowing gracefully through the season of calm surrender and saving the best of its 136-mile stretch for Winneshiek County.

"Yes, we have it all," agrees Brenda Balk, director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Travelers come year-round for our wealth of activities, and fall is prime. They're often disappointed they don't have time to fit in everything."

GETTING YOUR BEARINGS

In the midst of all these riches is Decorah, hugged by the Upper Iowa River. Settled by Norwegian immigrants (even some of the autumn splendor is provided by Norway maples), this idyllic, storybook town of 8,200 is

where visitors get their bearings and first impressions of the region.

Oh, to have every first impression be so positive. Strolling down Water Street (a fitting name for a town that thrives on the liquid asset), a newcomer is introduced to robust businesses, classy niche shops and humming eateries. Balk confirms the aura of vitality is no illusion. "Our economy is going strong," she says. "So many people want to relocate here."

However, for those on an autumn visit only, lucky you when it comes to lodging. Choices include everything from no-nonsense, national-chain inns and charming B&Bs to the grandly restored Hotel Winneshiek, which professes to "wrap its guests in 21st century comfort and 19th century charm."

Prefer a rustic place with canoe or kayak rental along with the bed? There's one around every bend. Wending through shimmery-gold corn and bean fields Van Gogh could have painted, accommodation-seekers can discover any number of finds such as Hutchinson Family Farm (www.hutchff.com) on Scenic River Road. This operation offers river campsites, fishing and hunting privileges, watercraft rental, shuttle service and a log cabin on the riverbank. "When I was young, we put our canoes in the Upper Iowa across from where the cabin patio is now," reflects 88-year-old Belda Smith, whose daughter and son-in-law, Dixie and Tim Hutchinson, run the current business. As she reminisces, the intermingling hoots of owls float down from the trees and laughter of canoeists, comes up from the water and across the patio. Soon, however, silence prevails and confirms Dixie's slogan for their enterprise: Come and listen to the quiet.

Lost In Iowa

Hungry? Back in Decorah, palate-tempting pleasures are dished out at multiple restaurants. If you're into tradition, try the pizza at Mabe's ("One of the 100 things to eat in Iowa before you die," instructs the Des Moines Register, Ronnie's rolls at Ruby's ("We bought the recipe at auction for \$425," says owner Jo Olson), and the creamy delights at Whippy Dip ("Yesterday I gladly waited in line 30 minutes for a cone," claims local resident Jada Bahls-Kargalskiy).

The historical, cultural and educational venues in the city are mostly self-guided-tours, including the Vesterheim and Porter House museums, as well as Octagon House.

LAPPING UP THE GREAT OUTDOORS

In bestowing her abundance, Mother Nature was no slouch here. Talk about favoritism! Every square inch of Winneshiek County appears to be drenched in beauty and overflowing with recreational opportunities.

Fall's mellow winds, warm air and sapphire sky sporting fluffy clouds beg residents and tourists alike to hike or bike Trout Run Trail. This paved 12-mile loop around Decorah, the result of intense community effort, has been officially designated one of Iowa's Great Places.

Numerous access points allow users to work in anything from a 10-minute leg stretch to a lengthy ride. Along its course are parks and campgrounds, springs and streams, vistas of craggy bluffs and farm valleys, a massive bald eagle's nest, an artsy steel arch over the trail and the invincible Upper Iowa. "It's a great way to escape to nature without leaving town," states Jan Heikes of Decorah.

Although Trout Run is the highest-profile trail around, Travis Greentree, owner of Decorah Bicycles, points out,

"There's terrain for all skill sets. We have 16 miles of off-road trails in the bluffs that offer thrill seekers the challenges of rocks, roots and heights." Trail names such as Log Jam and Roller Coaster intrigue the adventurous and spook the timid.

ICE CAVES AND CLEAR TROUT WATERS

Shrieks of laughter shoot from a nook in the bluffs at the edge of town. Two youngsters scurry from the opening of Ice Cave, part of the state's preserves system and the largest ice cave between the Atlantic Ocean and the Black Hills. "It's freezing in there!" cautions one. No doubt! Cold air trapped in winter freezes spring's melting snow as it drips onto the frigid walls, forming ice that remains throughout summer. Down the road is Dunning's Spring, an impressive 200-feet waterfall.

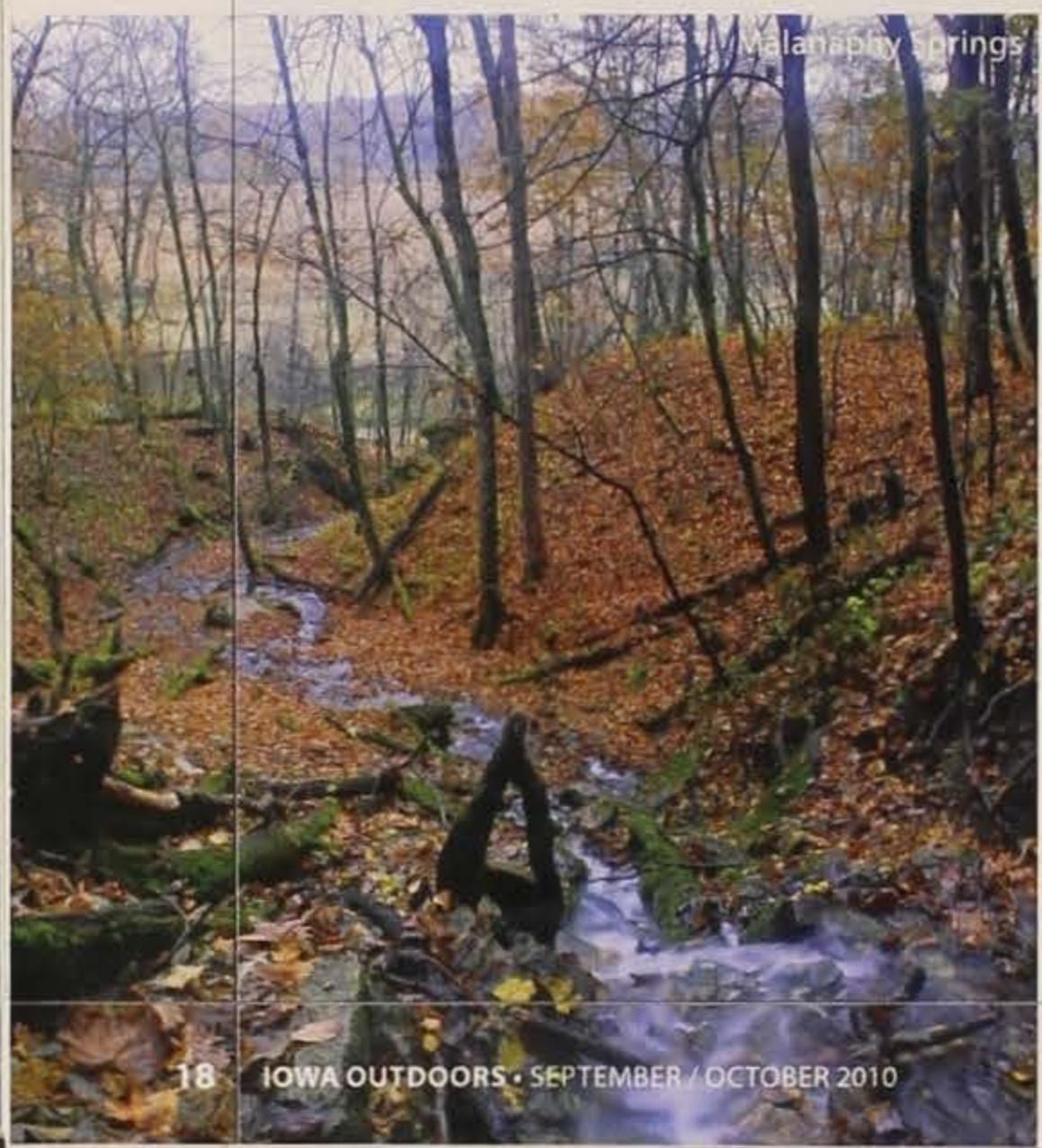
It's gospel that northeast Iowa is synonymous with first-rate trout fishing and Decorah is no exception. Numerous coldwater limestone springs feed local creeks and streams. However, the picture hasn't always been so rosy. Bill Kalishek, a DNR fisheries biologist, explains, "Trout require clean water and by 1980 only six Iowa streams were free enough of sediment and pollutants to sustain trout. The good news is the streams today are much cleaner because of habitat improvement and, especially, landowners working with agencies on watershed projects."

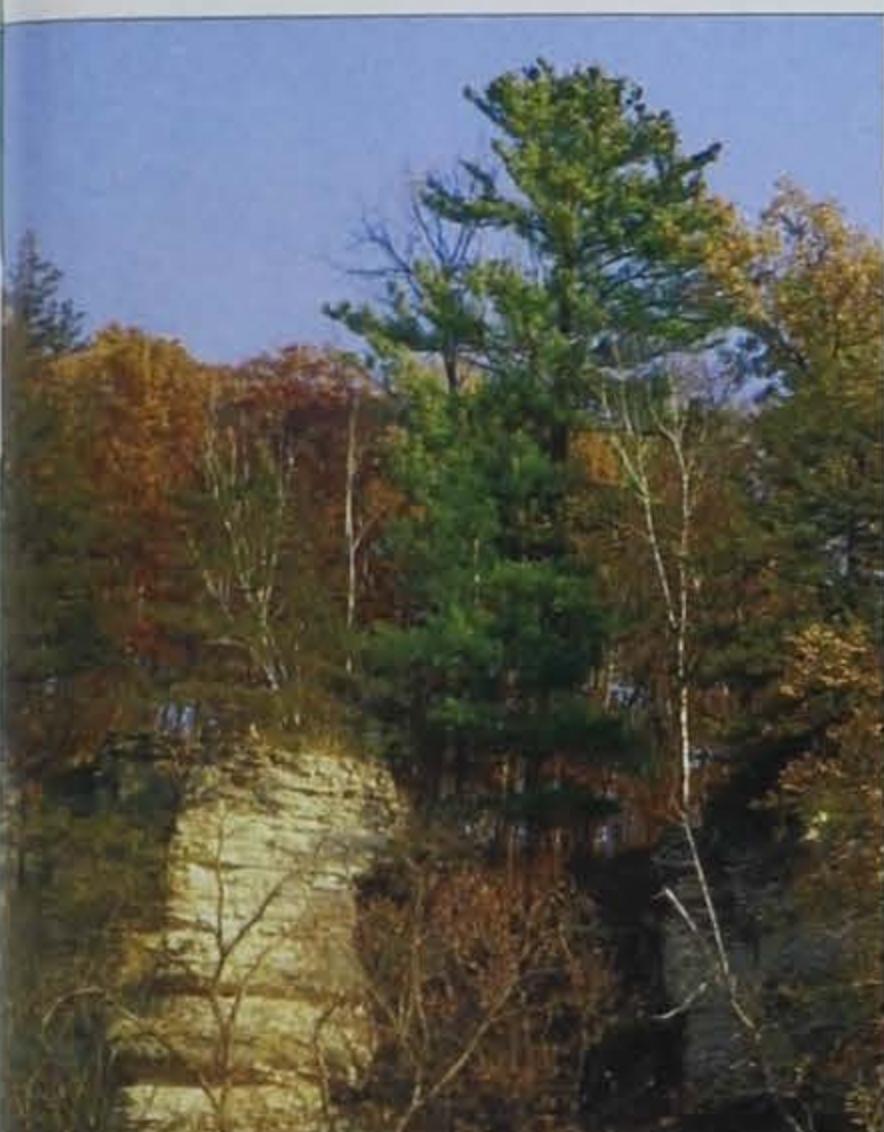
At the Decorah State Fish Hatchery, manager Brian Malaise confirms the turnaround. "Thirty-two northeast Iowa trout streams now have naturally reproducing populations," he says, "and we stock 17 others."

Like morel hunters, trout anglers often have zipped lips about revealing their favorite fishing spot. Bob and Rob Echelbarger, a Mason City father-son duo, aren't secretive

about their preference for Cold Water Creek. Do they fish here often? "Oh, yeah, I'm afraid so," chuckles 81-year-old Bob, as he stands on a mid-stream boulder, cleaning a trout. A WWII vet, "I just had a great Honor Flight trip to Washington D.C. but was anxious to get back here. I'm a river rat, raised on the Mississippi, and grew up fishing. Guess I passed it on to Rob."

Indeed trout rules here, but Decorah native Carl Bergan likes bass and walleye, too. Pushing off in his boat at Chimney Rock bridge to fish under a pre-sunset, lavender-





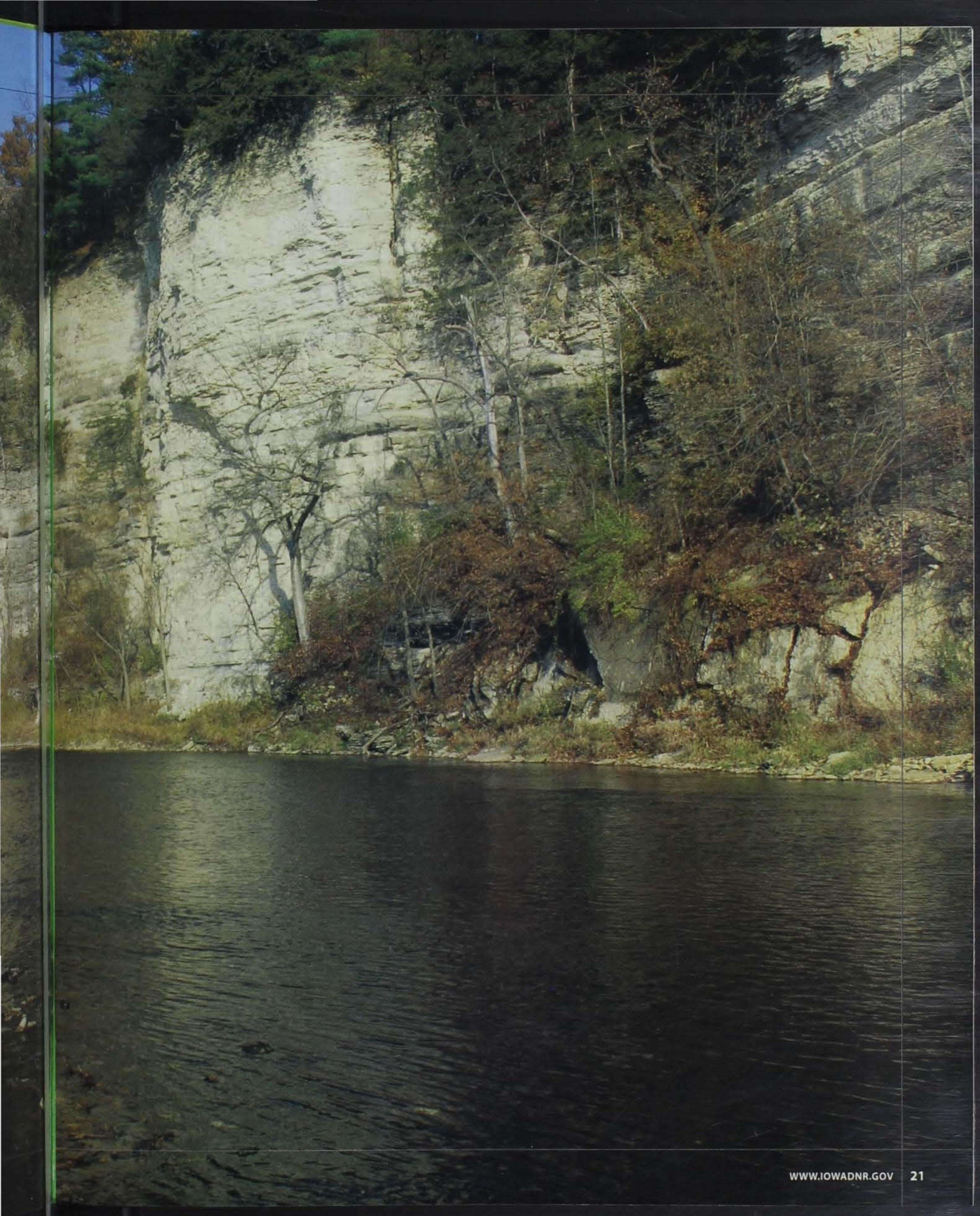
INDIAN SUMMER: Autumn's red and gold, plus the green of fir trees, unique to the area, highlight the white-grey limestone. Artist Bounnak Thammavong created "River Horizon Archway" that spans Trout Run Trail in Decorah, a paved, 12-mile loop around the city. **SILENT NIGHT:** Hospitality and impeccable service are trademarks of the Hotel Winneshiek, an opulently restored landmark in the heart of Decorah. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Experience a bit of Norway without going overseas. The Vesterheim Museum in Decorah is the oldest and most comprehensive museum in the U.S. dedicated to a single immigrant group. **TROUT HAVEN:** A dozen-plus trout streams meander in Winneshiek County. Coldwater Creek, below, gushes forth from a spring nestled against towering bluffs that hide Iowa's most extensive cave system. (See our May/June 2009 issue for more on the cave.) It is Iowa's first stream to have naturally spawning rainbow trout.



Lost In Iowa



TOP PADDLING: Considered the state's best paddling stream by many, the Upper Iowa River is known for its exceptional recreational and ecological significance. With springs, seeps, cold air slopes, sinkholes and caves, the cold water falls at an average rate of more than 16 feet per mile, significantly faster than most waters in the state. Add fall color, and you've have an even more impressive trip.



Lost In Iowa



LEFT: A cyclist rides the dike near downtown Decorah. Casual cyclists and serious mountain bikers have an abundance of trails to choose—everything from the smooth, paved Trout Run Trail to challenging rock-and root-strewn trails that careen through craggy bluffs. OPPOSITE PAGE: Bluffton Fir Stand State Preserve contains one of the largest populations of balsam fir in Iowa. Typically found farther north, the firs dot the cliffs on the low parts of sheer 150-foot high walls, while the upper canopy consists of red oak, sugar maple and basswood. A dense growth of Canada yew covers the forest floor.

and-pink-streaked sky, he comments, "I love the solitude of these quiet fall days on the water." Like so many anglers, he considers fishing to be more than just the thrill of the catch.

EXPLORING THE WONDERS

Ross Bosworth, DNR technician, is a man with a mission as he tromps under the color-coated leaves of sugar maples, basswoods and red oaks that populate the rugged forest of Malanaphy Springs State Preserve near Decorah. Halting, he points upward. "You'll like that," he says to fellow hikers. Hundreds of feet up, water tumbles from a crevice in a cliff. "Some of these bluffs are 300 feet high and they're loaded with springs." Then he abruptly concentrates on the forest floor. "Careful. There are 17 species of land snails here and they're really fragile."

The ultimate destination—and reward—for anyone up for the trek through Malanaphy Preserve is the hard-to-reach series of cascading falls ending in a 10-foot waterfall into the Upper Iowa.

After the vigorous romp through Malanaphy, it's a nice respite to view Bluffton Fir Stand State Preserve from the side of Bluffton Road, eight miles from Decorah. Along with intermittent splotches of yellow and red, the 150-feet-high, north-facing cliffs flaunt bright green. Balsam firs strut across the steep slopes like parading soldiers. "These trees are usually found much farther north," remarks Bosworth. An observer believes the hardy firs deserve respect for their grit in hanging on in such a tough place.

If a popularity contest were held for "Favorite Winneshiek County Preserve," the winner undoubtedly would be Cold Water Spring because it has the largest and most elaborate cavern system in Iowa, with 16 miles of passages zigzagging through Cold Water Cave. The spring itself is the exit of a stream that courses through the cave.

The topography of the preserves and of northeast Iowa in general is karst, a landscape featuring caves, springs

and sinkholes underlain by limestone.

GENUFLICTING TO THE UPPER IOWA

Bike the slopes, hike the trails, fish the streams, discover preserves and explore caves. Obviously the Decorah-Winneshiek County "to do" list is endless. But the crème de la crème is a late-season paddling trip on the Upper Iowa. "Our river is recognized as one of the best places to paddle in the country," proclaims Kalishek, "and the scenery is some of the best you'll ever see."

The stretch from Kendallville to Decorah presents a contradiction of both palette and landscape. Raging red-orange and muted auburn-gold forests and fields adorn one side of the river; gray-black, 300-feet-high walls of limestone ascend the other. Upstream of Decorah, the two extremes compromise, as wooded bluffs line both sides. Springs start flowing into the river here.

A fairly high water level, horseshoe bends, spirited riffles and a few rapids make traveling easy and portages few. Occasionally, tangled limbs and dangling branches thwart the paddler's progress, but mostly the river runs free. Wildlife—a deer, four raccoons, a muskrat—skitter about.

Before long, familiar landmarks appear. Luther College, Pulpit Rock, Phelps Park and the fish hatchery. Overhead, the city's resident bald eagle glides toward home, 80 feet up in a cottonwood tree near the hatchery. All in all, the just-traversed stretch of watery highway renders a composite of the ephemeral beauty of fall in northeast Iowa.

MAKING PLANS FOR MORE GREAT PLACES

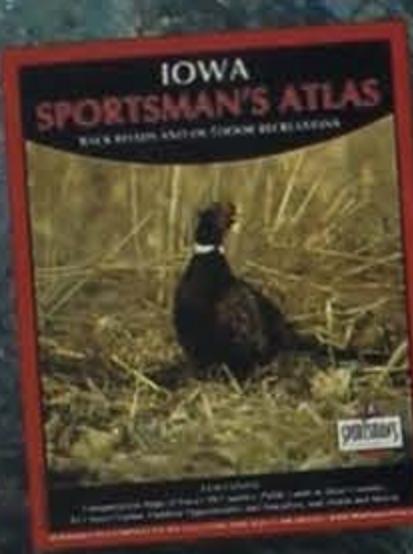
Remember the lament of frustrated visitors—"There's not enough time to fit in everything!" It's true, but that just calls for another great trip.

There's still Festina and Fort Atkinson.

Spillville and Burr Oak.

Springs and streams and parks to be seen.

Oh, the places you'll go! 



Know the way on Winneshiek's winding roads and the other 98 counties with the Iowa Sportsman's Atlas. The complete maps show all public lands, paved, gravel and dirt roads, rivers, creeks and lakes. The most accurate outdoor recreation guide. Large format 13 x 11 inches, spiral bound for easy use. \$21.95. Order at www.iowanaturestore.com or 1-866-410-0230.

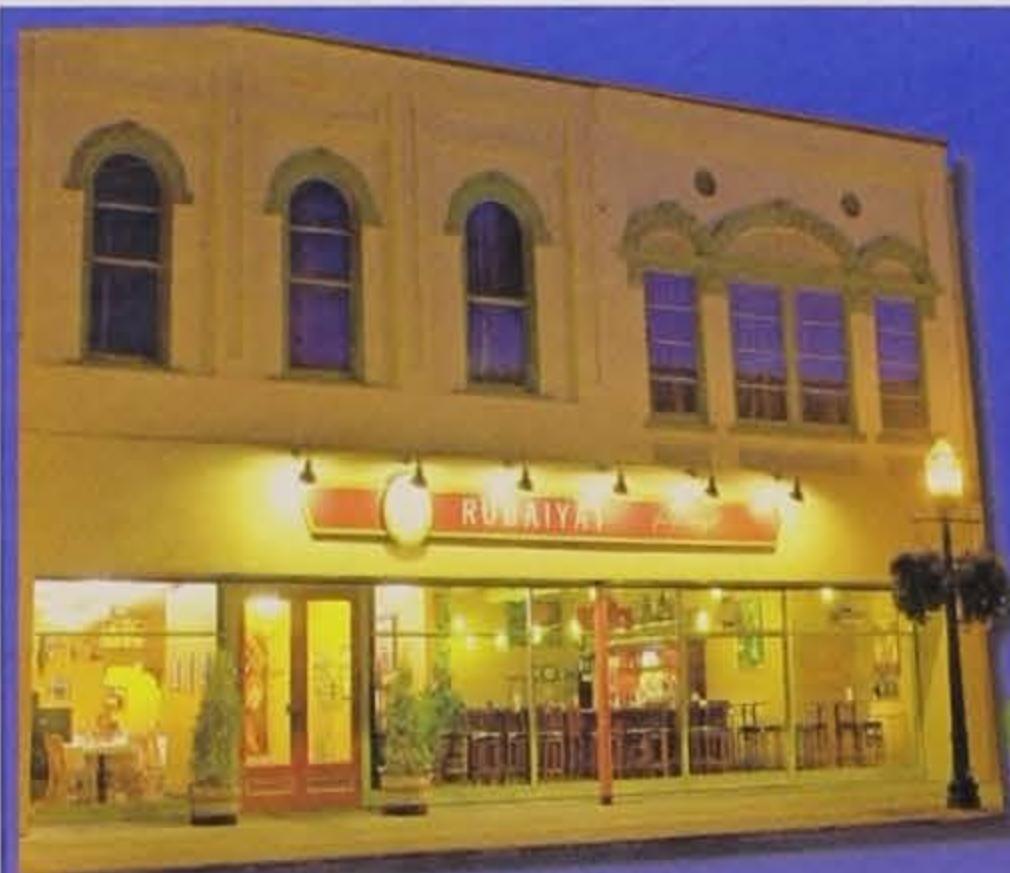
TRAVEL NOTES

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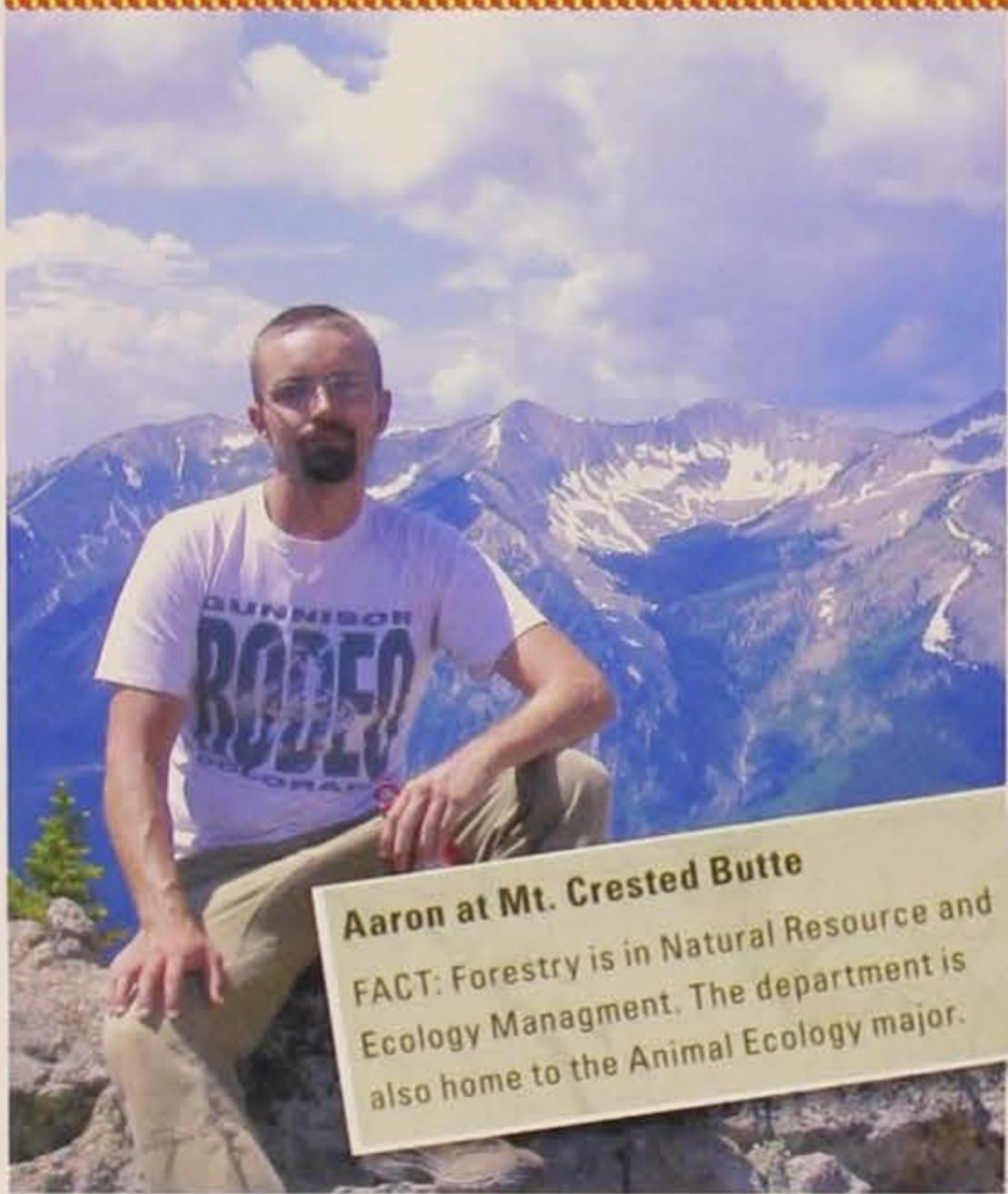
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Forestry student Aaron Rector didn't want a desk job. So he worked for the Colorado State Forest Service where he spent 45 hours in the field for every hour he spent in the office. He had plenty of time to analyze the forest ecosystems in plain sight of lynx, badgers and bobcats. And he landed it thanks to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University. Our resources helped Aaron gain real-life experience to enhance his learning and resume. And, for Aaron, that meant a career outside of the office.

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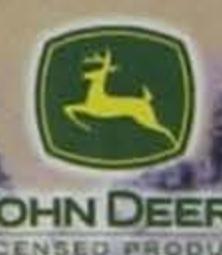
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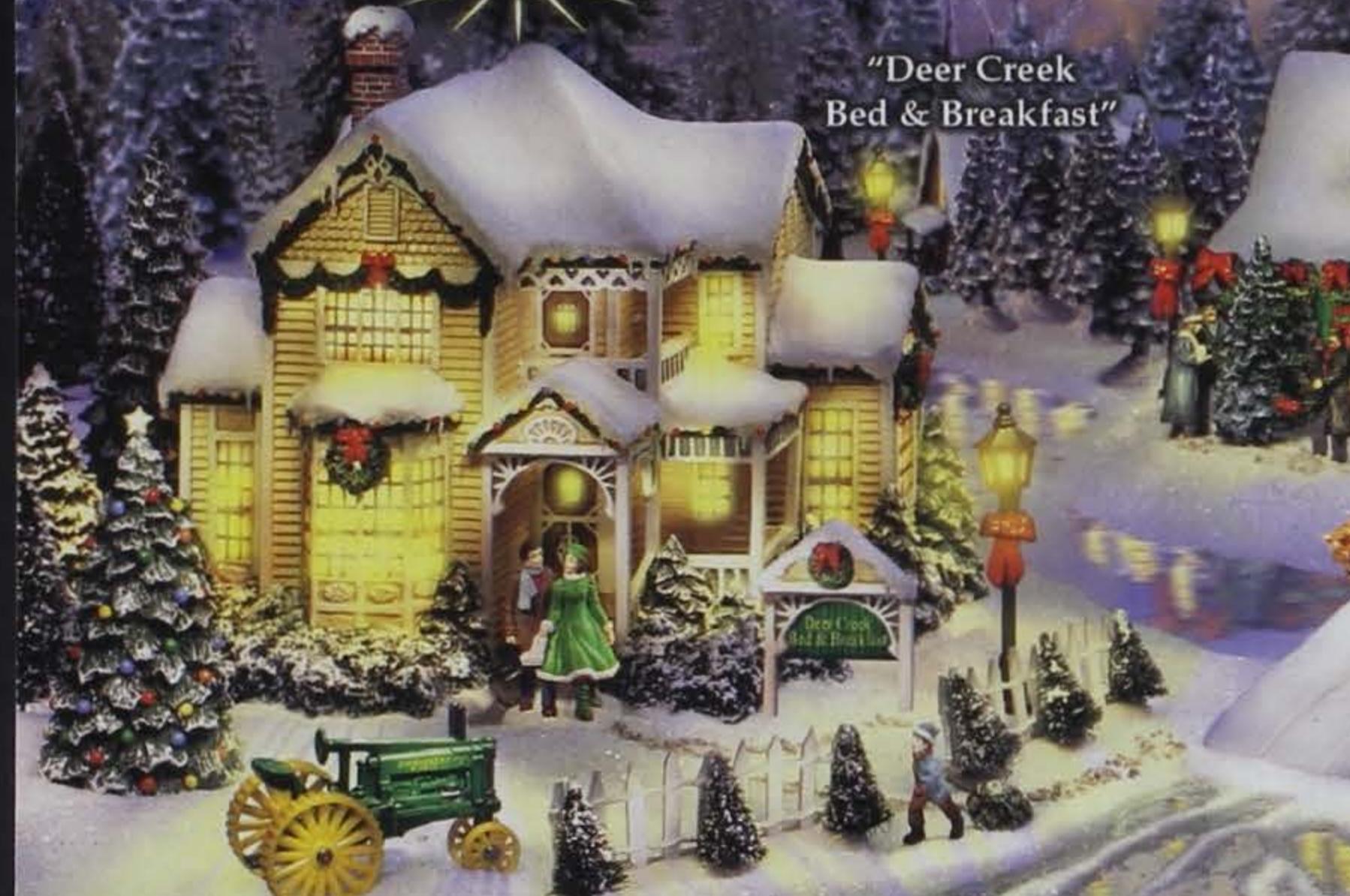
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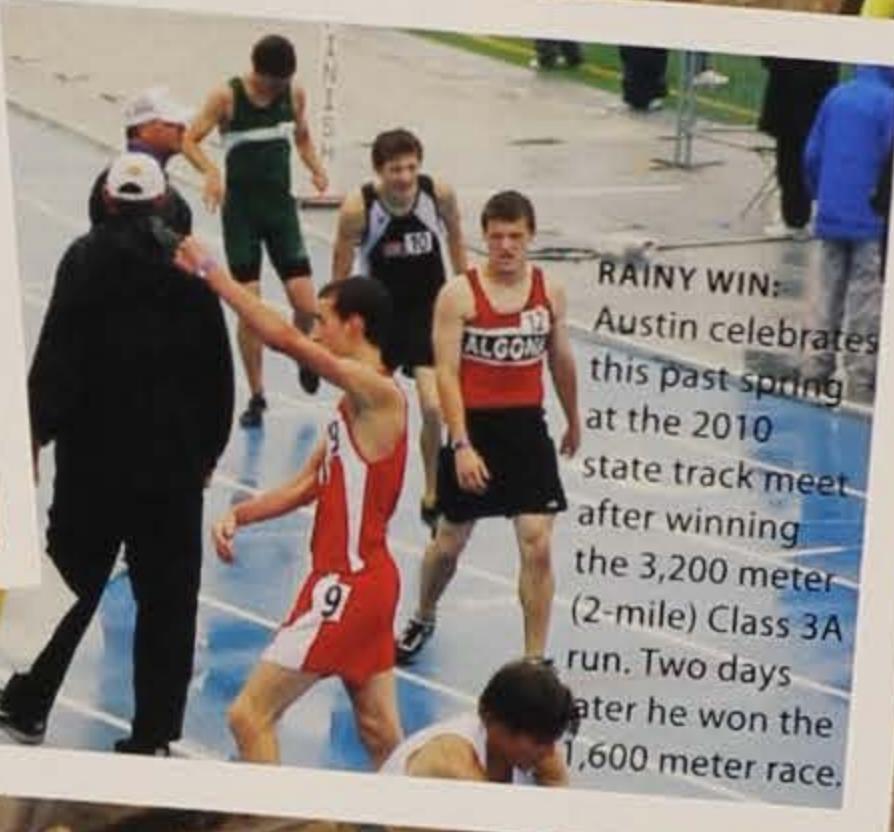
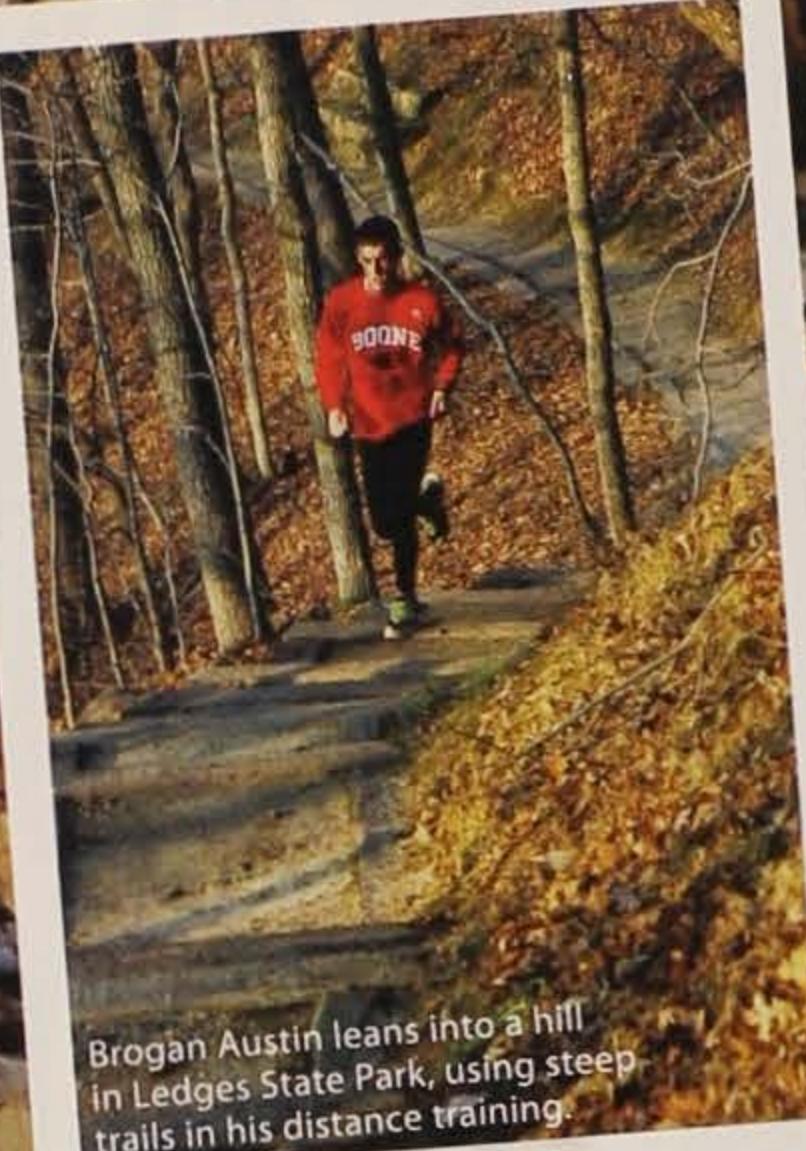
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Uphill Battle

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOE WILKINSON



ASK ANY CROSS COUNTRY runner, hill rhymes with kill. Most runners dread the uphill battle; which saps their remaining stamina and can turn frontrunners into also-rans. However, they realize that training on hills can help their endurance, leg strength and performance.

Brogan Austin took the scenic route last summer—all the way to a state cross country title. He had finished ninth overall in the Class 3A Iowa State Cross Country Meet in 2008, running for Boone High School. Pretty impressive for a junior, or anybody, frankly.

Heading into his senior year, he wanted to do better. "There are no running trails in Boone, but some awesome hills" in Ledges State Park. "My coach wanted me to do hill workouts," says Brogan. Soon, things were looking up—and down—for him.

Sometimes, he just pounded pavement, following roads through the 1,200-acre park, south of Boone. Often, though, he went off-road on steep trails that cling

to the sides of rock ledges. Built seven decades ago by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the steps and trails are scenic for sure. However, the shade from the oak-hickory canopy only goes so far on sultry summer days. "Hot and humid," recalls Brogan. "It's hard to breathe at the top of a hill anyway."

Initially left as sediment deposits when shallow seas covered Iowa 300 million years ago, those awesome sandstone ledges were carved out of bedrock 13,000 years ago by glacier meltwater and stream erosion. Today, the rock formations dwarf the tiny trails, ribbons of road, vehicles and people below. Most people who explore them do so leisurely. "There are couples that walk the trails all the way into cold weather," notes Ledges park manager Andy Bartlett. "A lot of runners, too."

Brogan, though, had a mountain to climb—literally and figuratively. "I logged 518 miles through the summer—100 miles in the park. Sometimes I ran alone, sometimes with friends; sometimes with my

Trail Running Tips

For stability, runners should "keep their feet underneath their body" and use "short, quick steps," advises Paul Sueppel, who teaches a trail running class at The University of Iowa. For shoes, "look for big lugs on the bottom...and good ankle support." Newer trail running shoes feature a low cushion, almost barefoot running, but with a little protection.



dad. I knew those big hills were the key to getting better."

Those near-vertical climbs paid dividends as the 2009 cross country season unfolded. His times were in the range of a minute and a half lower, over the same five kilometer courses he ran a year prior. "I told myself at the end of every race that I had trained harder, that I could push myself harder," says Brogan.

Finishing second at his district meet, he was ready to tackle the state meet course near Fort Dodge. Days of wet weather left the course soggy. Footing was treacherous on the low, grassy hills. But his staying-power was there. Brogan crossed the finish line in 15:35, 45 seconds faster than his clocking over the same—but dry—course a year prior.

Sometimes, when you have a mountain to climb, a few hills aren't going to get in your way. ■

Top Parks for Trail Runners

Many park trails come with a plan. Brogan Austin took advantage of the familiar "box" step design at Ledges. "The steps are designed with the same rise," explains Angela Corio, from the DNR parks bureau. "You know each step is going to rise 6 inches. You can focus on the view instead of tree roots and irregular terrain."

Lake Macbride

Johnson-County, five miles west of Solon

A five mile crushed limestone trail at the north entrance starts with a steep hill, then flattens—perfect for racking up miles. Near Solon, a couple rolling inclines challenge runners.

The trail "gets our athletes off the roads and to a softer surface. The terrain is similar to most cross country courses," notes Emy Williams, cross country coach at Solon High School. Her teams use it regularly, as do The University of Iowa, Cornell and Coe colleges.

A bonus 1.5 mile loop connects the beach to the Macbride/Coralville Reservoir dam. In all, it's about 20 miles of trails that thread along the lake or through the steep, wooded terrain.

Stone State Park

Plymouth/Woodbury counties, north of Sioux City

Eight miles of steep trails. "Surprisingly, we get quite a few runners; Briar Cliff and Morningside colleges and area high schools come out regularly," says park ranger Kevin Pape. "The Missouri River Runners Club sponsors its Broken Toe Trail Run here." The Big Sioux River provides great views.

George Wyth State Park

Black Hawk County, Waterloo/Cedar Falls

With 5.5 miles of paved park trails, runners have dependable, smooth surfaces, plus six miles of grass trails in shady areas along the Cedar River. The park links to 65 miles of metro trails. "The cross country team from Cedar Falls High School will run from school out here to the park and then back," says park ranger Gary Dusenberry. "The National Guard does its physical fitness training here, too."

Green Valley State Park

Union County, two miles northwest of Creston

Creston residents often jog, walk or rollerblade the three miles from town. The trail enters near the dam, on the south edge of the park, opening to nine miles of lakeside grass trails. Southwestern Community College's cross country team does the full circuit in a workout.

Volga Recreation Area

Fayette County, two miles northeast of Fayette

Twenty five miles of trails pass through ancient limestone bluffs and wooded hills in this northeast corner of Iowa. Most trails are a combination of grass and sand, great for dry weather running.

"We get a few joggers and occasionally North Fayette and Valley of Elgin cross country runners," says Volga ranger Scot Michelson. Keep mentally sharp because "It's an equestrian trail, too, so you do need to dodge a few road apples."

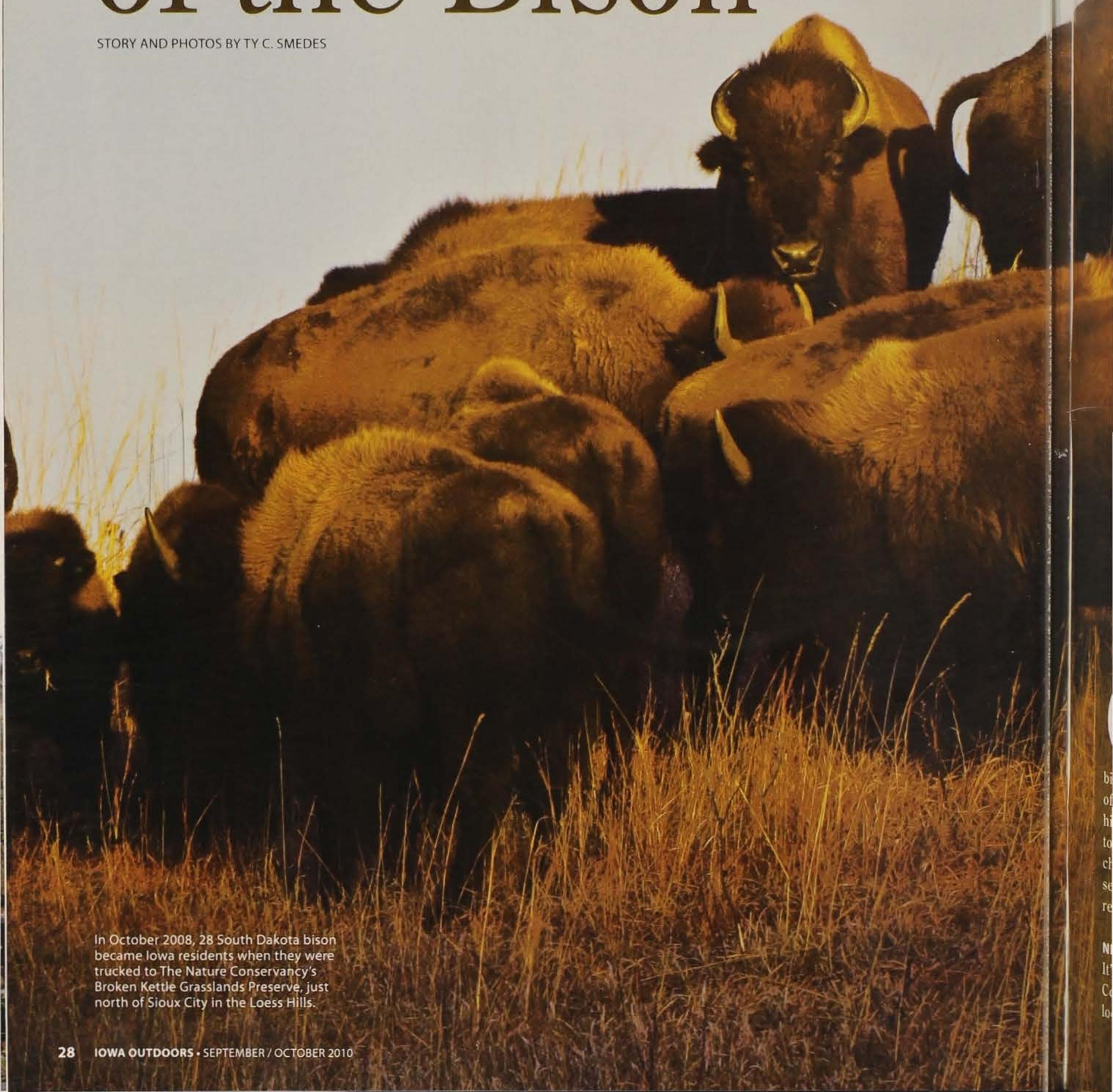
Pikes Peak State Park

Clayton County, south of Marquette/Macgregor

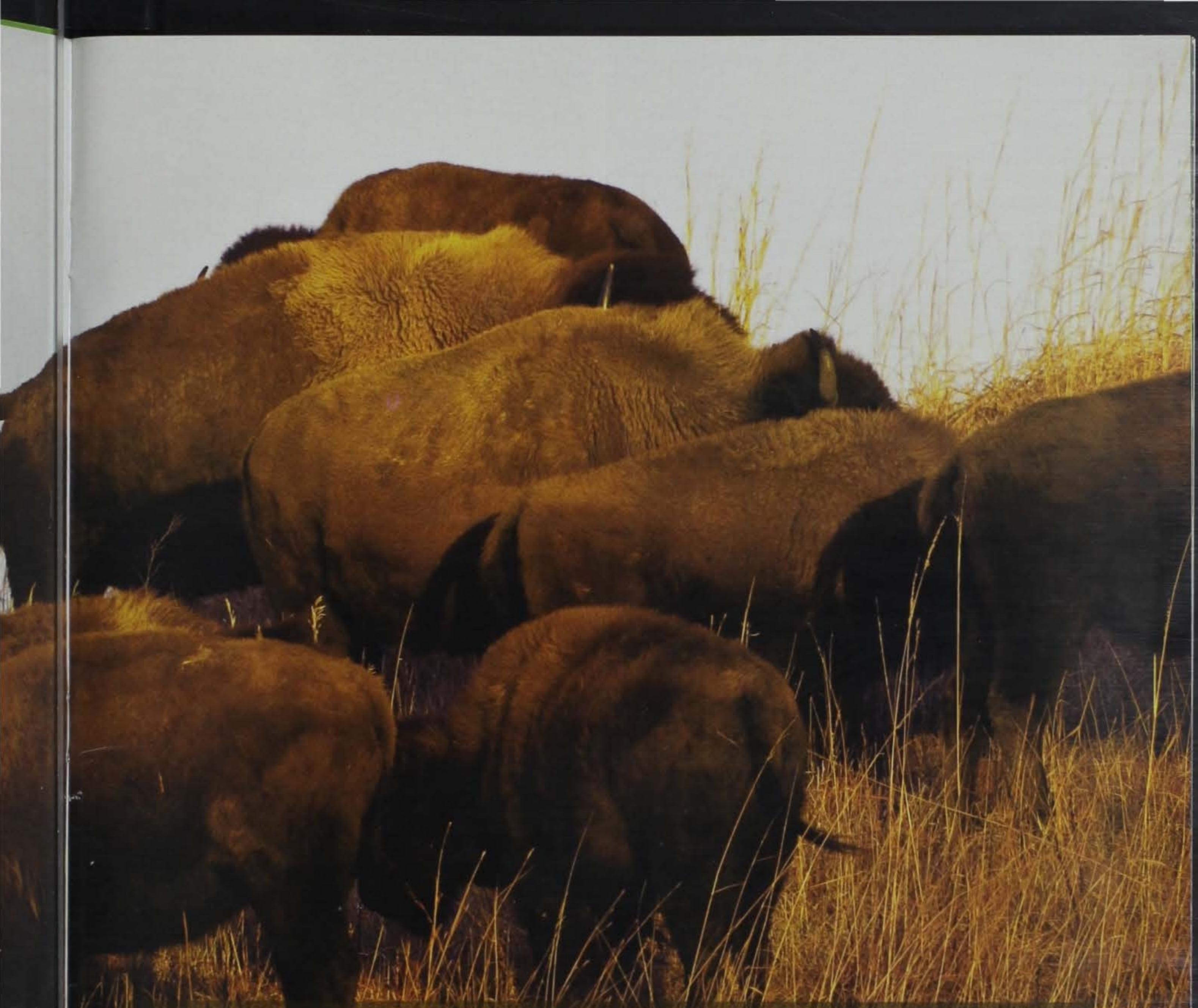
You won't get much speed work due to steep bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. The wooden boardwalk leads to a wall of sheer limestone and jaw-dropping vistas. Eleven miles of rugged dirt trail, feature more tree roots than friendly steps. "We usually see our regular runners. The trails are their network. They create their own route," says Matt Tschirgi, park manager. And he points out, Pikes Peak is known for some of the best hiking in Iowa.

The Return of the Bison

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TY C. SMEDES



In October 2008, 28 South Dakota bison became Iowa residents when they were trucked to The Nature Conservancy's Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve, just north of Sioux City in the Loess Hills.



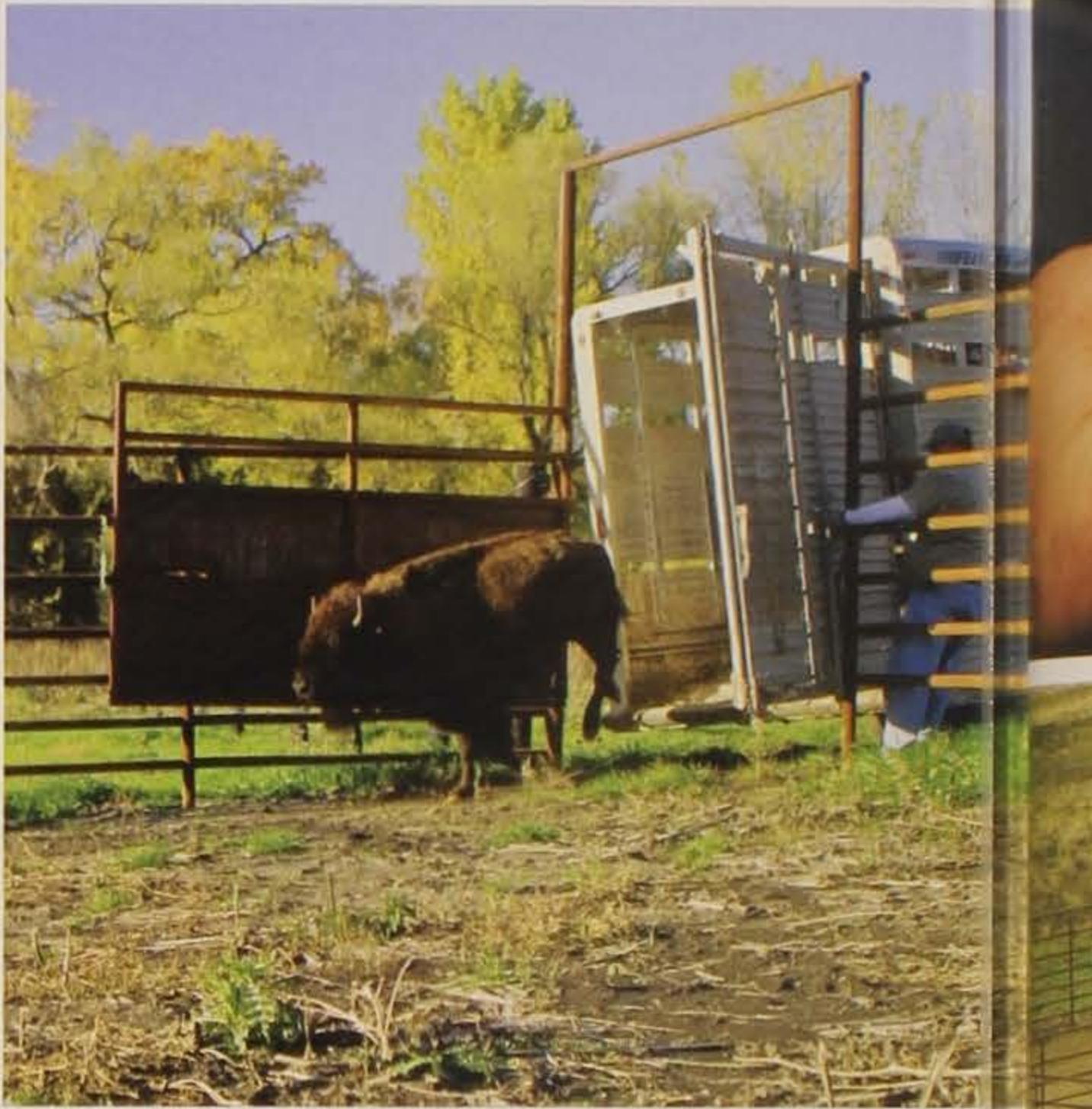
CLAY COUNTY FARMER BOB Bendlin likes to tell the story of how his great-grandfather witnessed what might have been the last known journey of a solitary bison, making its final trek across the northwest corner of Iowa. It was 1871 when Michael Bernhagen gathered his family into a horse-drawn wagon and drove them to the back of the family homestead to view the final chapter of Iowa's bison story. The 19th century European settlement of Iowa, and elsewhere had pushed the remaining animals to near extinction.

NEARLY 140 YEARS LATER

It's a sunny day in late October 2008 at The Nature Conservancy's Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve, located about 20 miles north of Sioux City. A 53-foot-long

trailer carrying 28 bison from western South Dakota's Lame Johnny Creek Ranch has backed up to a recently built steel corral. Scott Moats—the manager at Broken Kettle—opens the back door of the trailer, and moments later the first genetically pure bison become Iowa residents after nearly a 140 years absence in the wilds of Iowa. The Nature Conservancy (a leading conservation organization that works to protect habitat in all 50 states and 30 countries) reintroduced North America's largest herbivore to the Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve in Iowa's northern Loess Hills.

"They've had a long ride," says Eric Robley, Broken Kettle Preserve assistant, "and they've traveled 460 miles to get here." For Scott Moats, it is the culmination of 10 years of planning. "I consulted a bison expert from western Nebraska in order to build the best corral



ABOVE: Broken Kettle Grasslands manager Scott Moats releases a young bison from the 54-foot trailer that brought it and 27 companions 460 miles across South Dakota from the Lame Johnny Creek Ranch. LEFT: Once family members have reunited, the road-weary bison relax and consume hay. OPPOSITE: After each bison is headed down a squeeze chute, they are secured and veterinarians administer vaccinations and add ear tags. Electronic ID tags are injected just under the skin and hair samples are collected from the tail of each animal for DNA analysis. All details are recorded.

network and squeeze-chute. And I've consulted with bison managers in several states, regarding reintroduction and management," he adds.

Planning for their arrival included securing finances and building sturdy fences to ensure the stout animals were safely contained within the populous northwest Iowa farming community. Moats says "barbed wire fences are adequate in the less populated western states. We'll keep them in a smaller 2-acre fenced area for a few days, to make sure they've traveled well, and will then release them into our 125-acre trap pasture, where they will over-winter. They'll be turned into the larger 500-acre pasture next spring."

Bison were an important part of the prairie ecosystem, contributing to its health and diversity. These big grazers kept many aggressive plant species under control, in turn fostering a greater diversity of prairie grasses and forbs, or flowering plants, on the once-vast seas of open prairies.

This initial herd is relatively young, all less than 10 years of age, and consists of five bulls, seven calves and 16 cows, some of which are pregnant. "Bison generally mate from July through August, have a nine-month gestation, and give birth beginning in mid-April" says Moats.

THE QUEST FOR GENETICALLY PURE BISON

For 10 years, scientists from Texas A&M University have tested bison DNA to help guide conservationists. They identified 14 genetic markers that come from cattle, and after testing more than 7,000 bison, the team is confident that only two public herds—in Wind Cave and Yellowstone National Parks—lack evidence of cattle genes.

The Nature Conservancy's Bob Hamilton is a bison expert in Oklahoma. For him and others, the reintroduction of genetically pure bison to the remaining prairie ecosystems is vital. "Most bison on various private ranches throughout the U.S. contain cattle mitochondria, due to experimental crossings initiated between a female cow and a male bison, back in the late 1800s. Mitochondria are responsible for energy production within each animal's cell structure, and the introduction of cattle mitochondria causes an energy reduction in those bison with cattle genes in their background. These animals are at a disadvantage, and may grow more slowly and have less energy than genetically pure bison. And genetically pure bison do much better in winter than cattle," he says.

With five years of screening tests, about 5 to 10 percent of the bison herd was culled to remove cattle



genes. Bison do much better in the northern states and Canada than cattle, because of their winter hardiness and ability to deal with cold weather. "We don't see winter stress in bison until the temperature drops below -25 degrees Fahrenheit," says Hamilton.

THE FIRST ROUNDUP

It's now October 2009, time for the first annual bison roundup. Broken Kettle staff and local recruits all have assigned duties. Each bison is herded into the squeeze-chute, and the power of each grown animal is apparent from the shaking of the 5,000-pound steel framework as they are secured. Veterinarians administer vaccinations and ear tags. Electronic ID tags are injected under the skin, and hair samples collected from the tail of each animal undergo DNA analysis. All details are recorded. The roundup ends without incident, and the herd is confined for a day or so (to ensure no animals were injured) before release into the pasture.

WINTER, WALLOWS AND RENEWAL

It's been a year since the reintroduction and all Broken Kettle bison survived their first winter, although they lost some weight. "This is normal, and all are in good health," says Moats. By the end of the first year, "they seemed

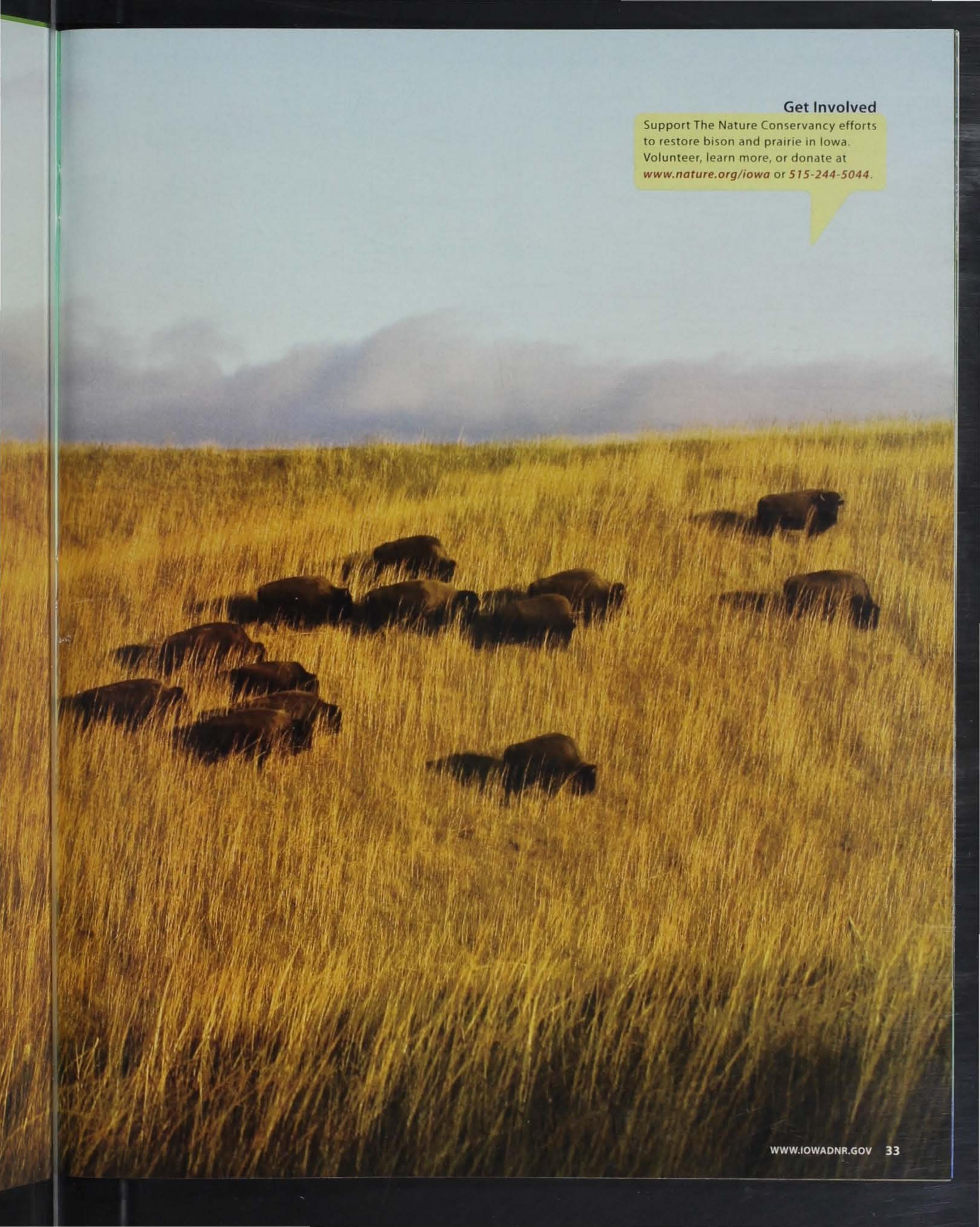
to relax and adapt right away and the first wallow was a surprise. They loved grazing on the new grass that followed the prescribed burn areas." Bison create mud or dust wallows to rid themselves of ticks and for other reasons. And grass which follows a fresh burn is very nutritious. Best of all, nine calves were born during the first summer at Broken Kettle.

GROWING A PURE HERD

"The Nature Conservancy's plan is to maintain four satellite herds" says Hamilton, and animals will be swapped as breeding stock between the Lame Johnny Creek Ranch, Broken Kettle, Missouri's Dunn Ranch and the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve in Oklahoma. Genetic testing and culling of bison with cattle genes will continue. Broken Kettle added 15 more 1 to 2-year-old bison from the Lame Johnny Creek Ranch during fall 2009, and will add about the same number during fall 2010. The expanding herd also added 20 new calves last spring. Moats says the long-term goal "is to reach a herd of 250 bison grazing within a 2,500-acre fenced area." And with a look of pride and a sense of history written on his face, he adds "Broken Kettle's Loess Hills landscape made them look grand. They look like they truly belong."



Mimicking a landscape that Iowa's first settlers witnessed and American Indians utilized for thousands of years, bison graze across a hillside of native Loess Hills prairie. Today, less than a tenth of a percent of the state's original prairie remains, but scientists are working to restore these ecosystems.



Get Involved

Support The Nature Conservancy efforts
to restore bison and prairie in Iowa.
Volunteer, learn more, or donate at
www.nature.org/iowa or 515-244-5044.



From Millions To Dozens Bison Nearly Driven To Extinction

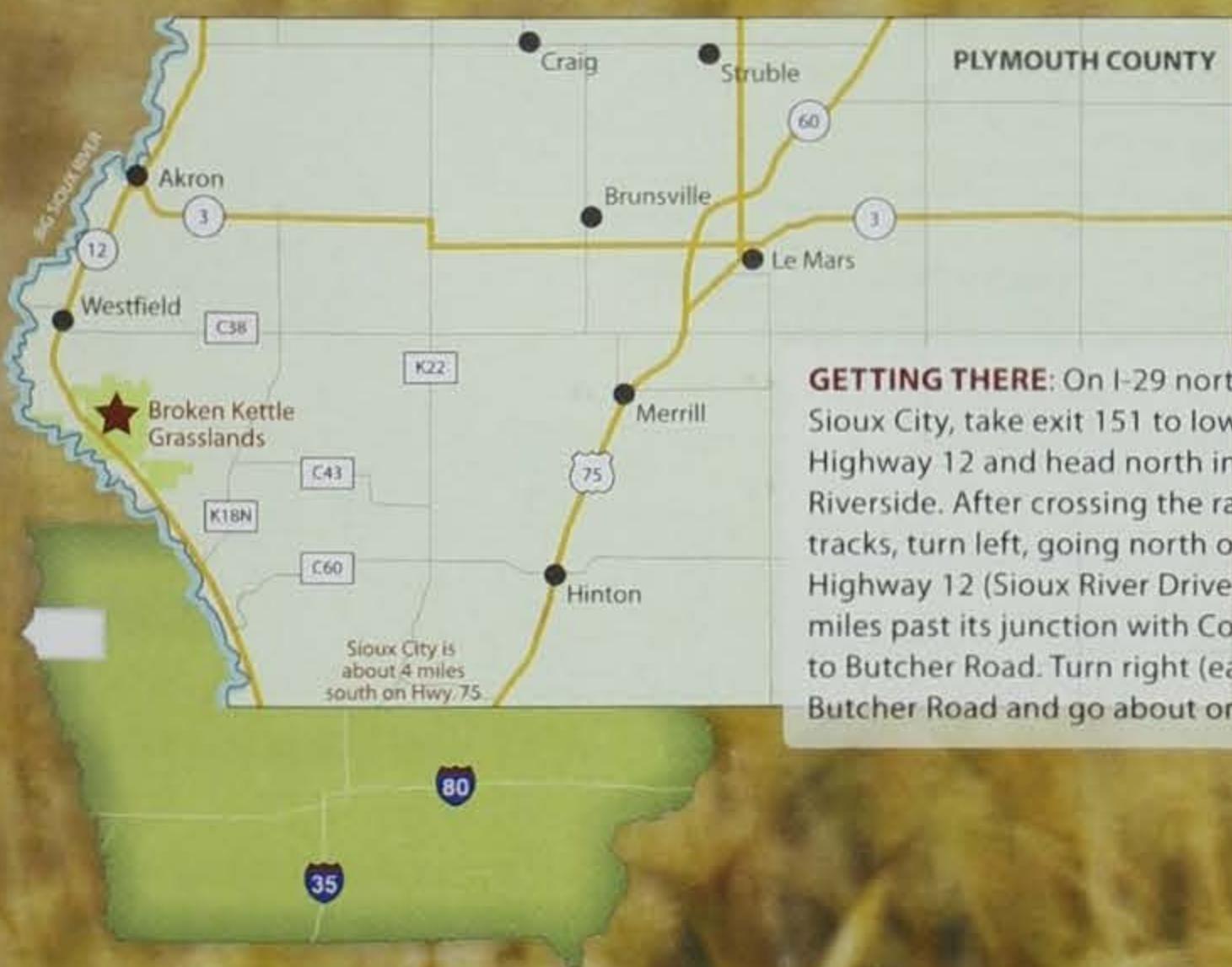
Bison once inhabited the grasslands of North America in massive herds, estimated at 50 to 75 million animals. A strong relationship between American Indians and bison existed for thousands of years, and bison were the center of life for the Plains tribes, providing food, shelter, clothing and spiritual inspiration. It is said that every part of a bison was used in some way, and so the demise of the American bison changed their lives forever.

The near extermination of bison did not occur in a few short violent years. The fur trade, which began in the 1600s, initially focused on beaver, but then began shipping bison robes to Europe. By the early 1800s, trade in robes and buffalo tongues increased significantly with 200,000 bison kills on the plains annually. The 1830s to 1860s were the four decades in which most of the bison slaughter occurred. Wagon loads of robes and tongues moved east, occasionally with select cuts of meat. Newly built railroads brought sport hunters, and the decimation of the bison population continued. By the early 1880s, only a few free-ranging bison remained.

In his book "A Country So Full of Game, the Story of Wildlife in Iowa," retired Iowa State University professor of animal ecology James J. Dinsmore addresses the demise of bison in Iowa. He notes that "bison were once found throughout Iowa, although the greatest numbers were in the northwestern and north-central parts of the state. In most of Iowa, bison disappeared a few years after settlers arrived. The average interval between the date of the first permanent settlement in a county and the last record of a bison there is only six years. Bison had a reputation of having good meat and lots of it, and anytime one could be killed, it was an economic bonus for those settlers lucky enough to be there for the partaking."

The only continuously wild bison herd in the United States survived within Yellowstone National Park. Numbering between 3,000 and 3,500, this genetically pure herd is descended from a remnant population of just 23 individual mountain bison that survived the mass slaughter of the 1800s by remaining undiscovered in the Pelican Valley of Yellowstone Park.

Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota's Black Hills, is home to the other genetically pure bison herd, descended from wild bison. The Wind Cave herd's roots come from 14 bison donated in 1913 by the New York Zoological Society in the Bronx. The zoo, recognizing the potential for extinction of America's bison, exercised great foresight by obtaining a number of animals, years earlier. Six more bison from Yellowstone National Park were added in 1916, and this herd became one of several conservation herds established through the efforts of the American Bison Society. 



BISON CALVES: After traveling from South Dakota last year, the herd faced a tough Iowa winter. "That they're able to calve tells me the forage is adequate and everything they need is here. They should be able to thrive and do what we want them to do ecologically," says Scott Moats, manager of Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve.

The return of the species is important as "Bison provide a crucial grazing disturbance that creates a healthier and more diverse prairie," says Sean McMahon, director of The Nature Conservancy in Iowa. "Now that we've returned this rare population of bison to Iowa's premier prairie we expect our native grasses and wildflowers will do even better," he says.





Foolin Fall 'Eyes

STORY BY MICK KLEMESRUD PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

The best fall walleye fishing happens when the early November deer rut occurs and many anglers are sitting in a tree stand holding a bow instead of a fishing rod. But "Don't hang up your rod," says Jim Wahl, fisheries supervisor for the DNR's northwest district. "Fall is a great time to catch big fish."

In addition to big fish, other temptations pull in anglers—boat traffic is down, cooler temperatures prevail and fewer pesky bugs exists. Here's how to get your fish.

THE RIVERS

Around the first week of November, walleyes crowd into over-wintering holes looking for an easy meal.

In 2000, the DNR increased stocking walleye fingerlings in northeast Iowa rivers and the populations took off. While most Iowa rivers have good walleye numbers, two rate "best of the best:" the Shell Rock River from Greene to the confluence of the Cedar River (Butler and Black Hawk counties), and the Cedar River from Nashua to Vinton (Chickasaw to Benton counties).

"We've had really good reports all through those stretches,"

says Greg Gelwicks, DNR rivers research biologist.

By late summer and early fall, rivers typically have low, clear flows. Walleyes are found in 4 to 6 feet of water in current breaks, like logs or downed trees and near areas with flow, like riffles. A sandbar that drops off to a pool is a good place to find active fish.

Cast a jig and night crawler into the pool, and on the retrieve, lift and drop the bait. Another method is vertically jigging the area or cast into the current and let it swing the jig into the break. Jig size depends on flow. Use only enough weight to feel the bottom. Gelwicks says he uses 1/16-ounce jigs in light flow and will move up to 1/8-ounce in moderate flow. Crankbaits and plastics will work, too.

"They like to sit on the current break and watch for food to come by," says Gelwicks, who implanted walleye with radio transmitters in the Wapsipinicon River and tracked their movements for five years. He says walleyes start moving to overwintering holes in October and finish by November. Deeper holes are 10 to 20 feet deep and out of the current. He says walleyes hang by the drop-offs and aren't necessarily in the deepest part.



While fall walleyes are putting on the feedbag in preparation for winter, they are not as aggressive as spring fish. The key is lighter, smaller and slower on presentation.

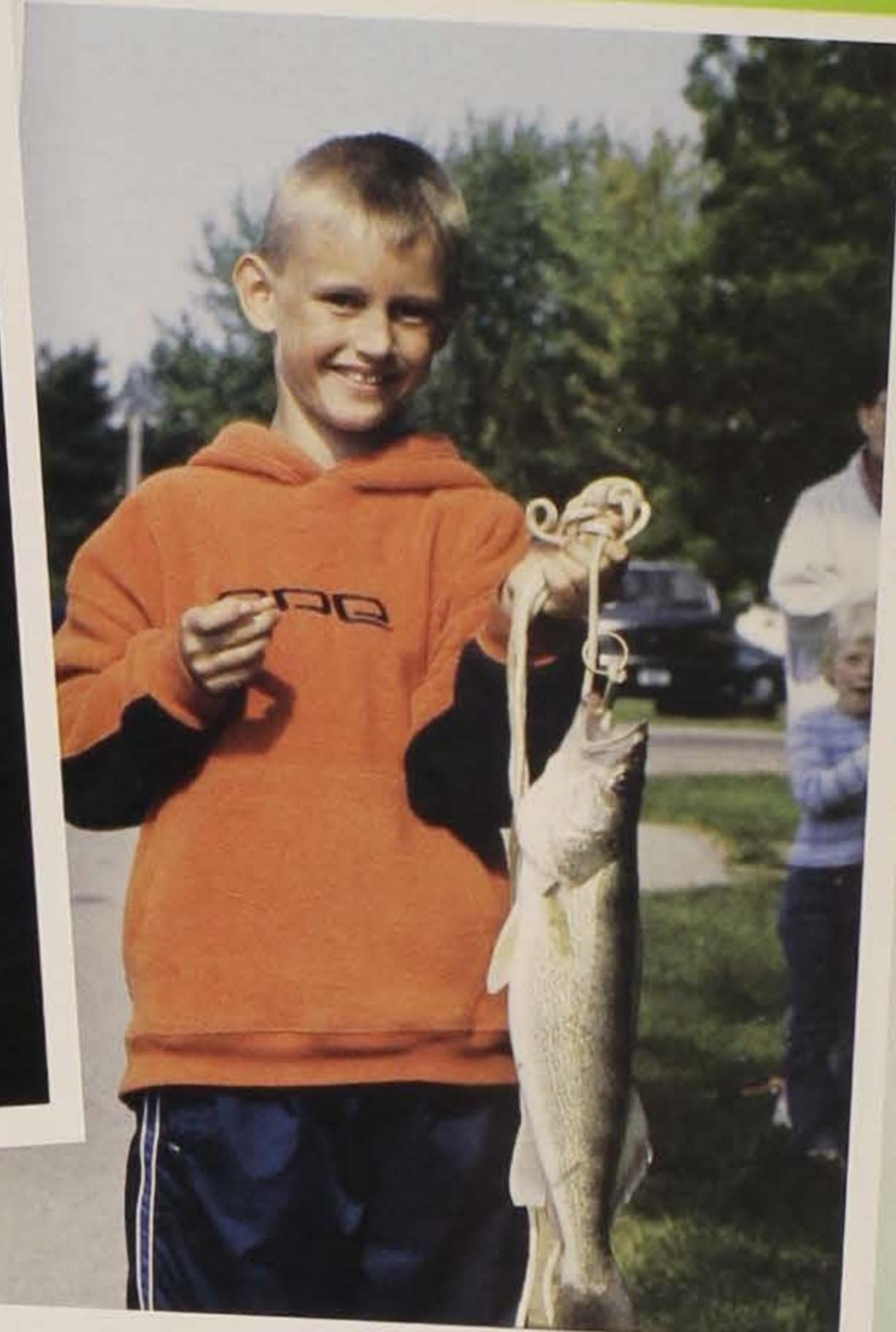
When in their winter holes, switch to minnows. Gelwicks likes to anchor and work the area with a jig. If there are no bites, he moves downstream one boat length to try again. If the hole is large, he trolls it with a three-way rig. Find holes at sharp river bends, around bridges or dredged areas that may be near quarries.

THE LAKES

Lake fishing tactics change for fall walleyes. Use large live bait, fish slow and deep during daylight. At sunset, use twister tails or shallow running crankbaits from shore. Walleyes are common near bridges, points or "neck down" areas with flow. "Neck downs" are constrictions or funnels, like the footbridge and Buffalo Run at Spirit Lake, and the sandbar at McIntosh Woods on Clear Lake.

"It's slow fishing. It's not 50 fish in the boat, but a slower bite—but you will be rewarded with larger fish," Wahl says.

Fishing sunset to after dark is best. With clearer fall water, walleye become spooky and run deep during the day. At night, they come closer to shore, making shoreline angling with waders a good option.



Preferred baits are jigs with a twister tail or shad body, or a shallow running crankbait either pencil- or minnow-shaped. The lure should only dive 2 to 4 feet. Use slow, steady retrieves without excess movement as the fish aren't as aggressive as during the springtime.

Walleyes are looking for food to increase their body weight before winter and to develop eggs for the spring spawn.

"They are opportunistic feeders this time of year, and they target frogs in the fall," Wahl says.

Leopard frogs migrate from sloughs to lakes in September and October to overwinter, providing a food source. A few locations where the migration will take place are on Garlock Slough on West Okoboji and Trickles Slough on Spirit Lake, among others. Walleyes also begin gathering around points, like Big Stoney Point on Spirit Lake and Dodges Point on Clear Lake.

If fishing mid-day, use large baits like a 5- to 6-inch minnow up to a small sucker placed on a 3/8-ounce jig or Lindy rig. Look for sharp breaks where lake contours drop to deeper water, like Omaha Point, Pillsbury Point or Pocahontas Point on West Okoboji Lake. Slowly move the bait by drifting or with a trolling motor. ■



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A Spiritual Place

If Iowa is Heaven, the Cliffs of Bellevue State Park Must be the Gateway.

BY MINDY KRALICEK PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

The city of Bellevue contains some of the best stone architecture from the mid-1850s in Iowa.

IF YOU SEEK THE CLOSENESS

of a divine being, or a place to renew your soul, take a walk along the Overlook Trail in Bellevue State Park this fall.

Stroll through the scattering of magenta and yellow sugar maple leaves resting on supple green grass. Stand on Inspiration Point (also known as Pulpit Rock) before the wide Mississippi River and just breathe. Take in the endless miles of river reflecting the pale blue sky, the hills and floodplain terraces graced with bits of flaming red amid yellows, browns and green foliage. Closer, the quaint Bellevue cityscape is tucked between cream-colored corn fields and the riverbank. Trees and shrubs snuggle a stream in the floodplain as it flows to the river.

It's easy to understand why ancient cultures buried their dead in this exalted place. Indian Mounds Trail, 300 feet above the floodplain, is where American Indians throughout history rest for eternity.

Mark Anderson of the Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist explains that the mounds here are compound mounds. The original mound may have been dug into and other graves and items added from several time periods. The original mounds likely belong to Late Archaic (2500 B.C. – 500 B.C.) or Woodland (500 B.C. – A.D. 1000) peoples, as documented for other mounds in Iowa. Clay sediment in the mounds is like that in the river valley, so they hauled soil up to the overlook to make their mounds.

It is difficult to tell how high the mounds may have been originally. If the mounds are 1,000 years old they will have degraded in rain runoff, Anderson explains.

Artifacts found in the Bellevue area belong to the Iowa, Oto, Omaha, and perhaps the Missouri, Meskwaki, Sac, Fox, and Middle and Eastern Dakota tribes. To prevent gravesite disturbances, the mounds haven't been excavated in recent times.



Scenic views along Overlook Trail captivate park visitors.

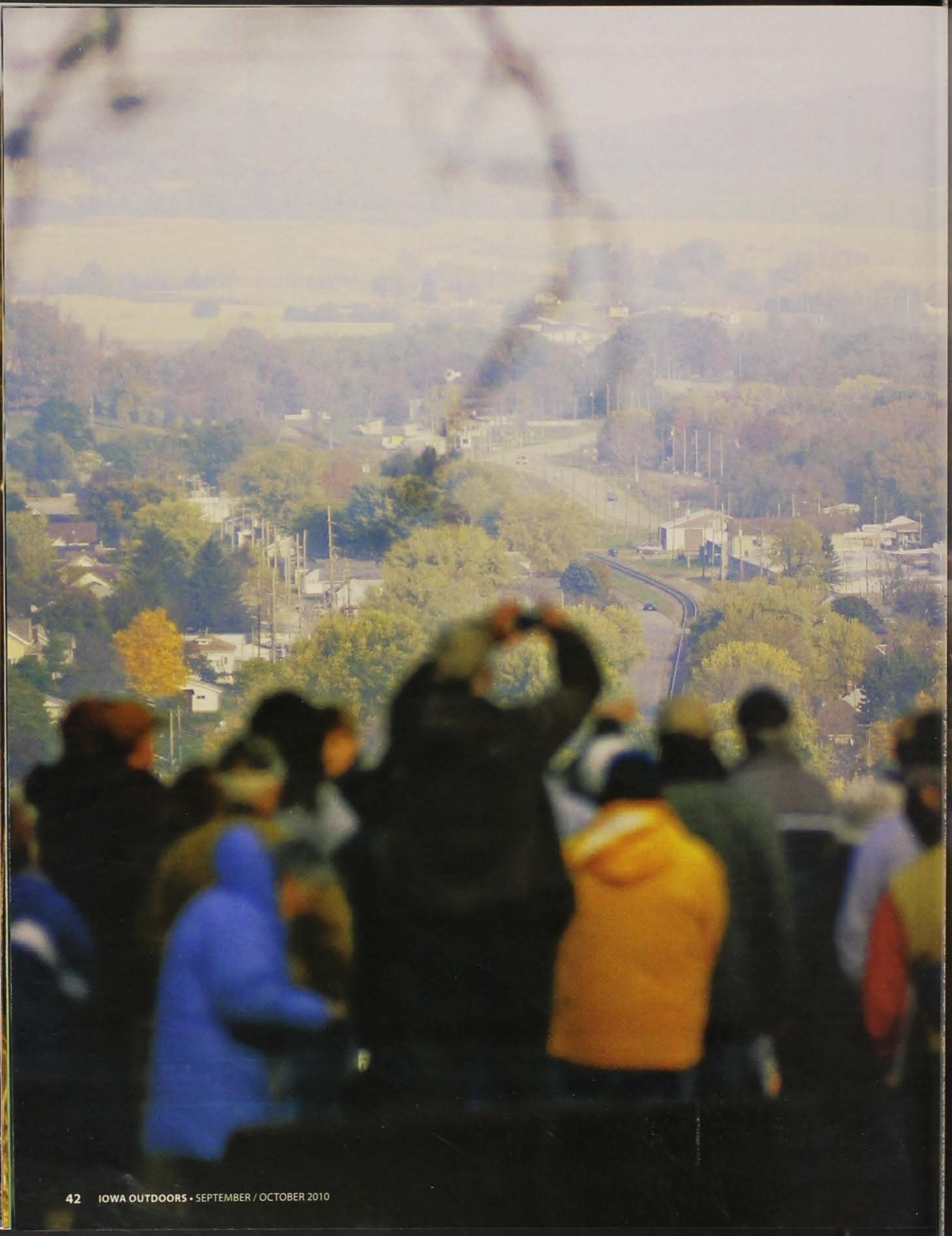


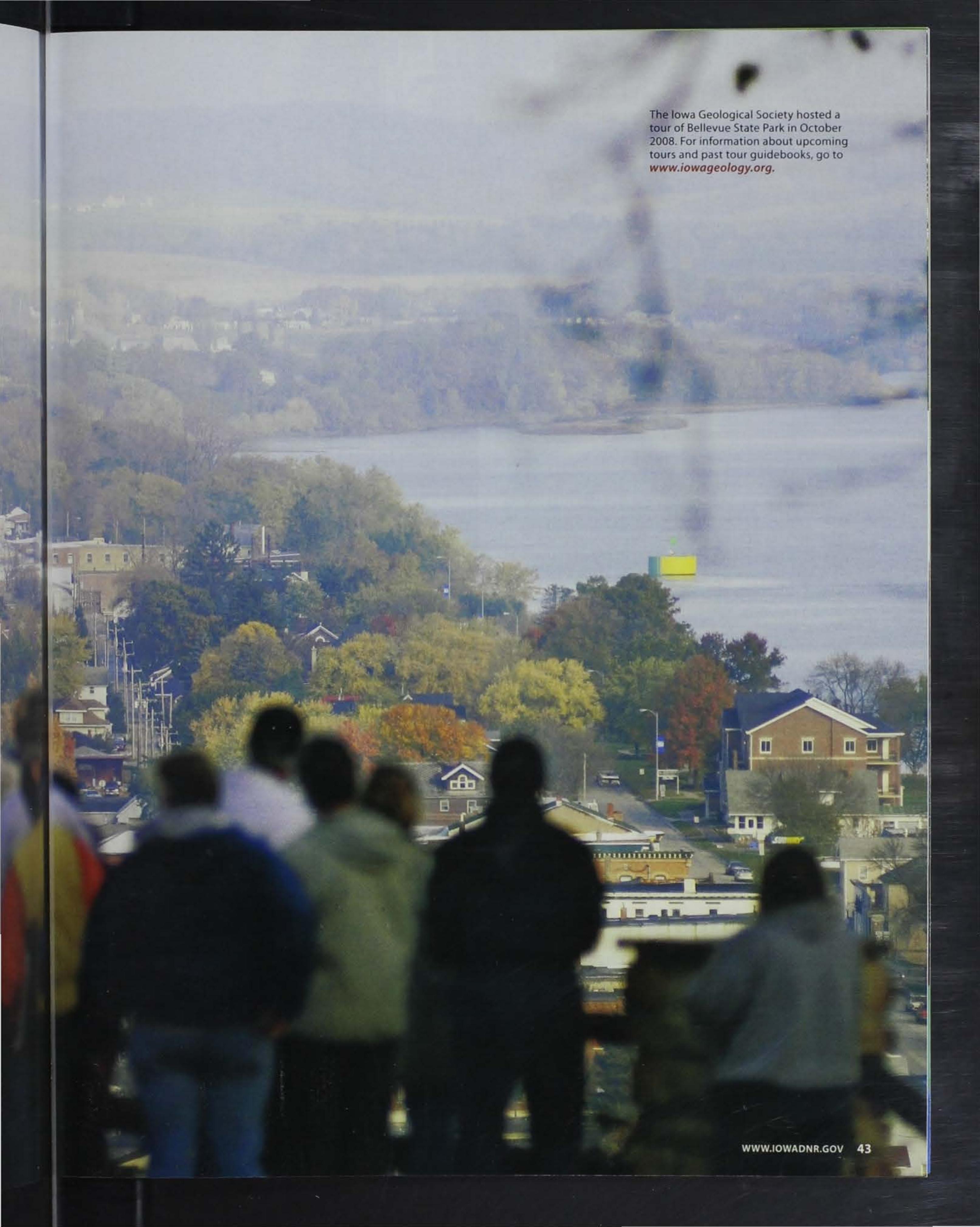
Illinois floodplain terraces along the Mississippi River.

GLIMPSES INTO THE PAST

The Bellevue area had abundant resources for American Indians to sustain a good life. The highest bedrock in the bluffs of the park contains a remarkable amount of white chert. White chert formed when calcium carbonate in limestone was gradually replaced by dissolved silica from marine sponges during times of shallow seas. Chert was used for gemstones and bladed tools. Although not as desirable as flint, chert satisfied their needs.

The river and streams were home to furbearing animals, waterfowl, deer, fish and other edible aquatic life. Muskrat, beaver and mink are still observed in the river's backwaters. Otters are prevalent on the Iowa bank and tributaries, as well as on the islands on the river's Illinois side. The migration route over the Mississippi draws the same raptors and waterfowl of the past. Warblers and other neo-tropical migrant birds that once called this area their summer home now move on to old growth forests elsewhere; yet even today 51 different species of birds have been observed as breeding or possibly breeding in the park, including turkey vultures.

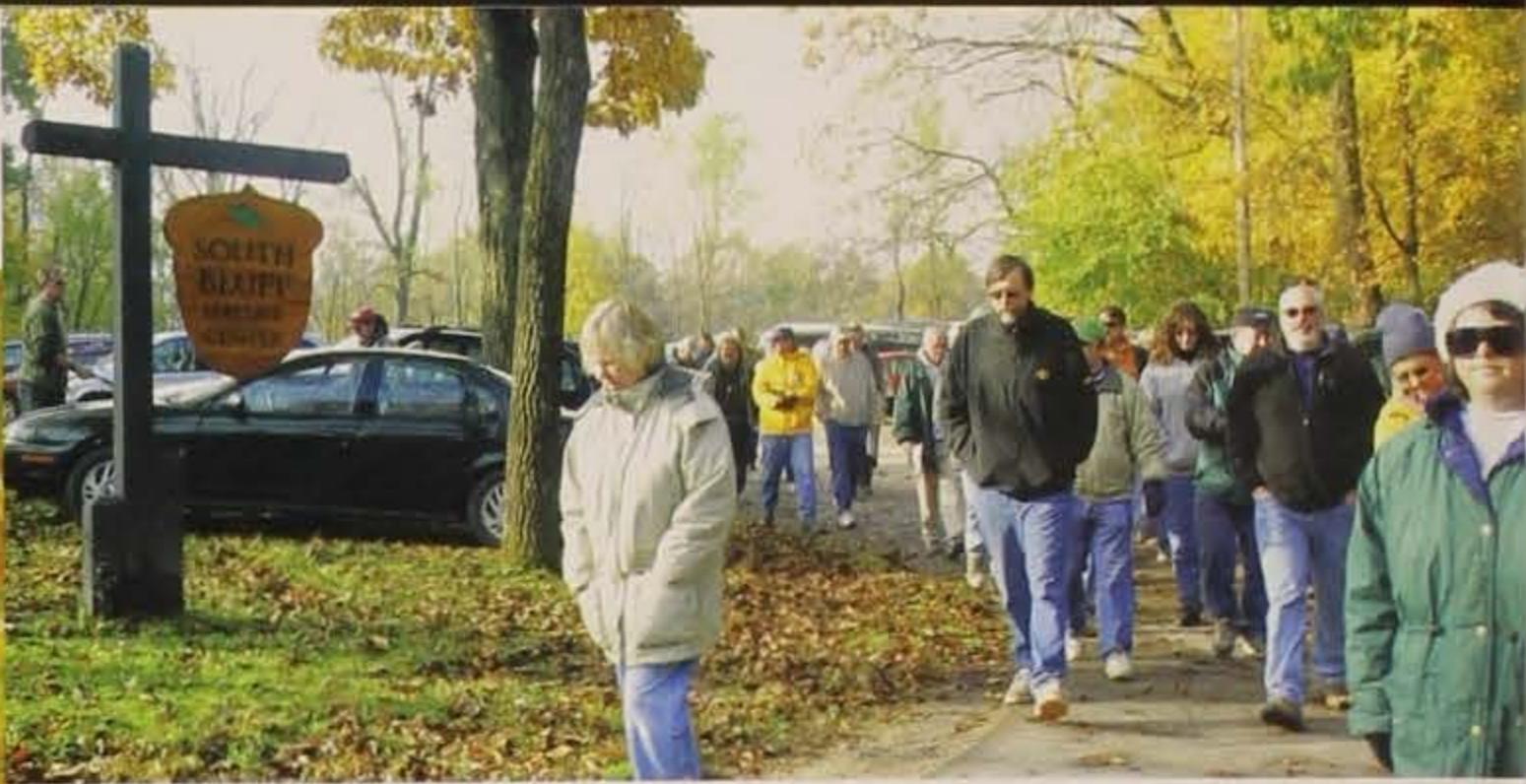


A scenic view of a river valley. In the foreground, several people are seen from behind, looking out over the landscape. The middle ground shows a town with houses and trees, some with autumn foliage. In the background, a large, calm body of water meets a range of hills or bluffs covered in green and yellow vegetation under a cloudy sky.

The Iowa Geological Society hosted a tour of Bellevue State Park in October 2008. For information about upcoming tours and past tour guidebooks, go to www.iowageology.org.



Deep, steep ravines still shelter old forest sugar maples. A few oaks grow along old forest edges.



There were plenty of white and red oaks, hickory, sugar maples and basswood in the forests. Today steep, rocky ravines and shady rock outcrops still support these species of long ago, including floor species of wild ginger, bulblet bladder fern, miterwort and columbine.

Within the park, on the east border of the Dyas Unit, is one small prairie remnant: land still in its natural, uncultivated state. Undocumented until the 1980s, it's an area tolerant of weather extremes and remarkably beautiful. Big bluestem, Indian grass, little bluestem and sideoats grama grow alongside leadplant, flowering spurge, purple prairie clover, partridge pea and prairie blazing star.

SETTLERS CHANGE THE LANDSCAPE

Explorers, fur traders, miners, hunters and trappers passed through the Bellevue area, but did not put down roots. In 1833, an abandoned Sac village sets where the city of Bellevue will eventually rise. The people who used the burial mounds have long since disappeared. Sac Chief Black Hawk meets with John Reynolds of Illinois, Major General Winfield Scott, and representatives of the Fox and Winnebago people who have villages along the Maquoketa and Mississippi rivers. They are finishing the details of a treaty in the council house of the abandoned village. Land is purchased for white settlement that will later become Bellevue State Park and the city of Bellevue.

That same year, James Armstrong arrives and builds a cabin south of the present town and claims the area that eventually becomes the park. The cliff is referred to as "Paradise Bluff."

In 1835 John Bell, the town's namesake, plats the city of Bellevue. He opens the town's first lumber mill. By the 1850s, large rafts of logs from northern forests are carried to Bellevue via the Mississippi River for sawing and regional distribution. Bellevue forests are cleared for farming and grazing.

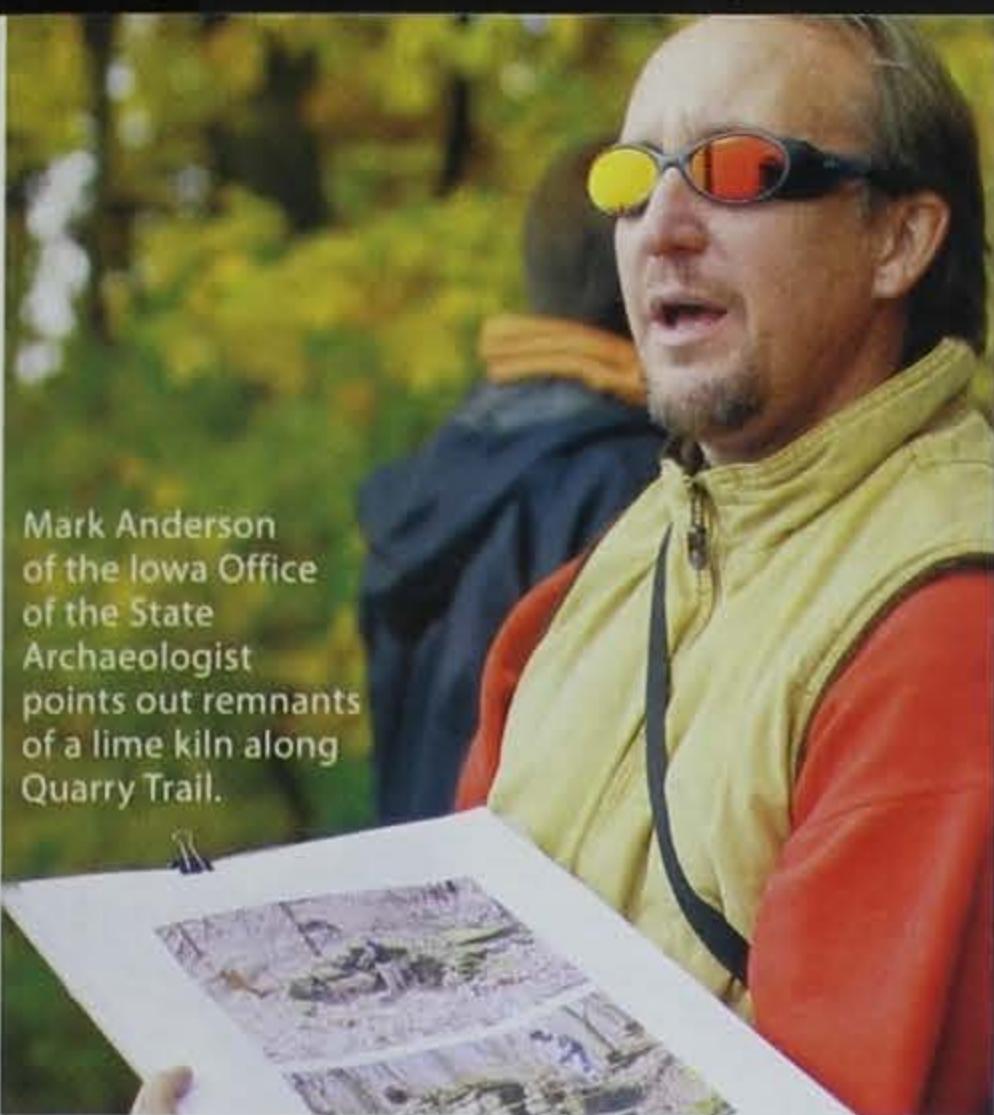
A band of woodchoppers, horse thieves and counterfeiters known as the Brown gang live on a 5-acre island, now just a small spot in the river. The band of outlaws is confronted by a posse of outraged citizens in the town, referred to as the "Bellevue War" of 1840. Brown is killed, along with several others. Thirteen gang members are arrested and tried by a jury of 80 men. They vote whether to hang or whip them. By a margin of three, the jury decides on whipping and exile.

Jasper Flour Mill is built in 1842-43 along a small tributary to Big Mill Creek. Potter's Mill, now a bed and breakfast, begins operations on Big Mill Creek in 1845. Its limestone foundation is built with rock from nearby bluffs.

Four limestone and dolomite quarries open, one in the park area, to provide building stone for the growing town of the 1850s. Lime kilns in several Bellevue locations produce lime mortar.

Other milling operations pop up and, due to disastrous flooding, the industry switches from water power to steam power and then electricity. In the early 1900s the operations evolve into livestock feed grain mills.

By 1875 the population of Bellevue has grown to 2,000 and the city is a large railroad and river shipping point. Businesses include dry goods stores, hardware stores, grocery and drug stores, four millineries, two harness



Mark Anderson
of the Iowa Office
of the State
Archaeologist
points out remnants
of a lime kiln along
Quarry Trail.



One of the Native American mounds along Overlook Trail



DNR ecologist John Pearson discusses new forest growth
where old forest had been cleared for farmland and grazing.

shops, five blacksmith shops, five shoemakers, furniture and cabinet shops, grain and produce warehouses and a shell button factory.

THE BIG CROWDS OF 1925

An appreciation for the beauty of the bluffs south of their city moves Bellevue citizens to create a park commission in 1908, but the Iowa legislature does not authorize establishment of public parks until 1917. Land is purchased in 1925 for Bellevue State Park. It is dedicated in 1928 with a crowd up to 5,000 attending the ceremony. The park continues to grow as land parcels are added over the next 80 years, with the last 224 acres as a public hunting area for mainly deer and turkey.

Early construction projects in the park were not the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps, as in many of Iowa's parks. Instead prison laborers from the Anamosa Reformatory, mostly African-American, construct park roadways, a limestone retaining wall along the road, and a nine-hole golf course and Oak Lodge clubhouse in 1926 through 1928. The construction activities and the workers themselves draw as many as 100 cars of people a day to watch the progress.

Eventually, the city of Bellevue develops a new golf course north of town and golf operations move there.

The Oak Lodge burns in 1973 and a new lodge of eastern red cedar is built. The golf clubhouse becomes the South Bluff Nature Center in 1984.

A FOREST STROLL

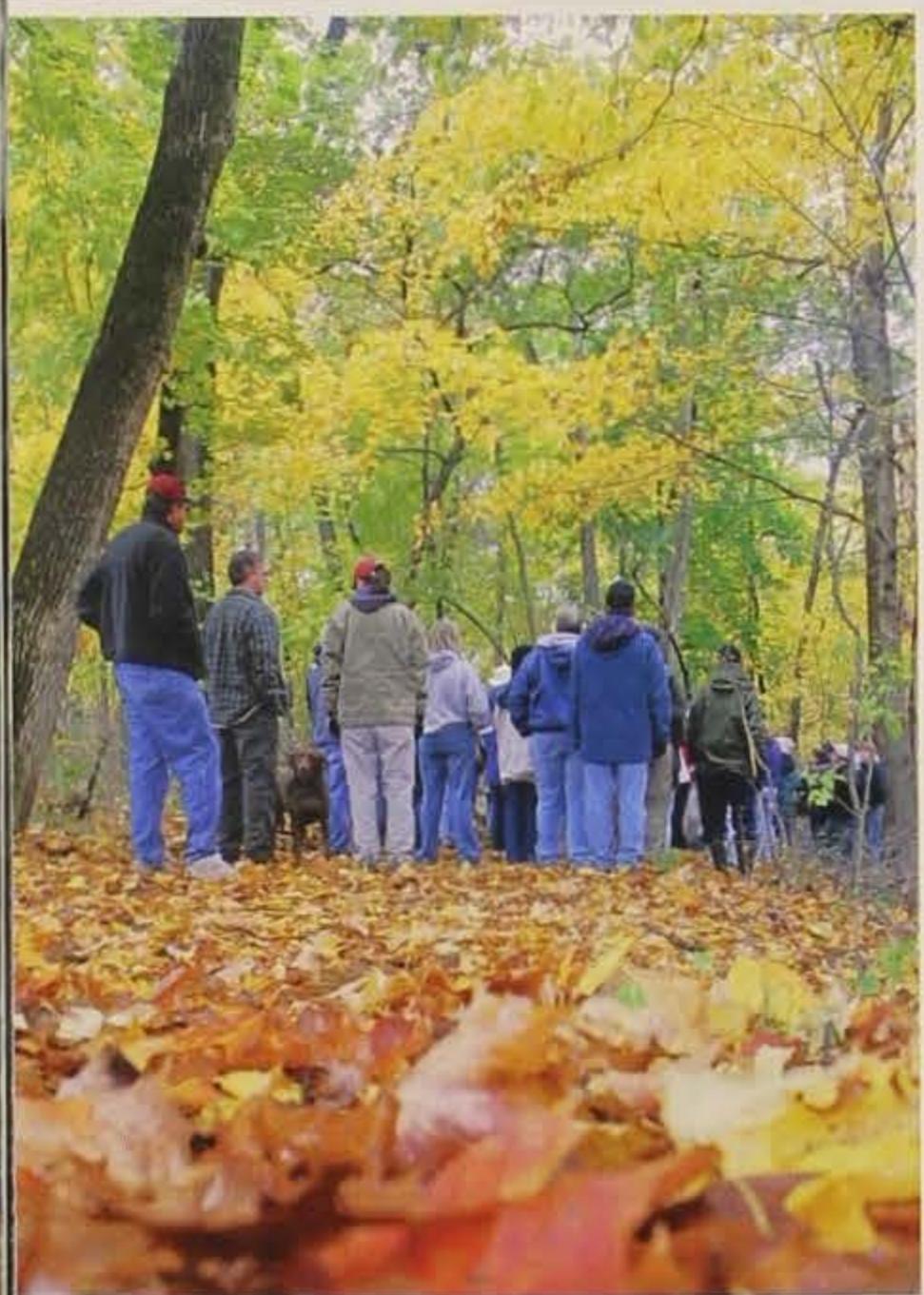
Young forest covers 80 percent of Bellevue State Park, most of it evolving from open forest or scattered trees left to naturalize in 1938. The remainder of the forest covers what was cleared for farmland and grazing. Deep, steep ravines are still sheltered by old forest sugar maples with trunk diameters up to 2.5 feet. A small number of oaks grow along forest edges where they can get enough light. Lawns for picnicking and recreation space, maintained prairie and wildlife food plots make up the remainder of the park.

The young forest is composed of elms, walnut, bitternut hickory and eastern red cedar, with some black and honey locust, big tooth aspen, mulberry, green ash and northern pin oak. Shrubs in the understory form thickets of prickly ash, blackberry, Amur honeysuckle, multiflora rose, Japanese barberry and Missouri gooseberry. Undergrowth





View of the Mississippi River from Inspiration Point



of honewort, logseed, hog peanut, clearweed, Jack-in-the-pulpit, jumpseed, white snakeroot, black snakeroot and garlic mustard is evidence the area was heavily grazed before acquisitioned into parkland.

The fight to keep invasive species from taking over areas of native species is difficult. Non-native species were once planted for ornamental purposes or as food and cover for wildlife. Today, park staff cannot keep the plants under control, says John

Pearson, DNR ecologist. A special machine chops it out or mows it, but people need to follow behind and dab invasive plant stems with herbicide. It's a labor intensive job that the park budget can't afford.

QUARRIES TO BUTTERFLIES

Along Quarry Trail, park visitors will find a partial, rounded stone wall and the stoking door of a lime kiln. Further on is the site of a limestone quarry abandoned 100 years ago. Lichens and foliage camouflage the three stepped edges in the quarry wall where stone was cut and hauled away.

A newer addition to the park has become a major attraction along Meadow Trail: the butterfly garden. This garden was started by Judy Pooler of Bellevue on an acre of ground in a swale of the old golf course in 1985.

Now walkways pass through 148 individual garden plots maintained by volunteers. Plantings are nectar sources for adult butterflies and host plants for caterpillars. At least 58 different types of butterflies have been spotted by volunteers and staff.

A SPECIAL PLACE TO GET INVOLVED

Bellevue residents proudly bring visitors to the park cliffs to gaze across time and dimension. Geological and archaeological sleuths appreciate what lies below the park's surface. History buffs enjoy discovering the remnants of a past era along the park's trails and then venturing into town to view some of Iowa's best stone architecture from the mid-1850s.

So can the cliffs that continue to touch the spirits of so many, inspire Iowans to help the park revive its beauty and diversity of wildlife? A shining example of what enthusiastic volunteers can do is exemplified in the park's butterfly garden and its annual monarch butterfly tagging event in September.

Volunteers are needed to develop the potential of the park to attract tourists and maintain its grounds. Those with geological and archaeological expertise can help with interpretative programs. Those interested in hiking, mushrooming and wildlife watching can coordinate programs. There are opportunities for church, 4-H, Scouting and service organizations to help with park cleanup, invasive species eradication and trail maintenance.

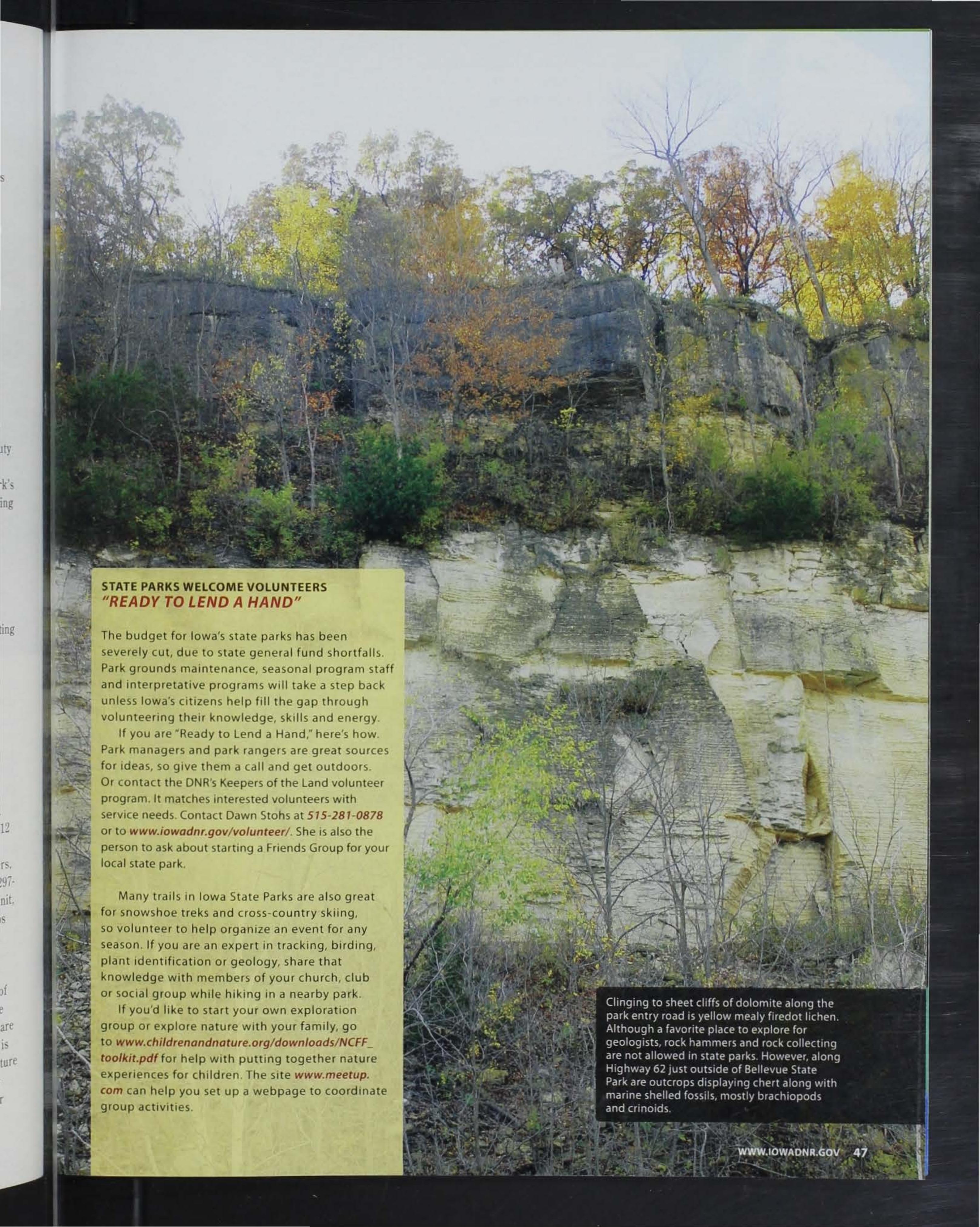
Whether you have a great idea you'd like to help implement, or are looking for an opportunity to get outside and enjoy the beauty of this sacred place, *call the Bellevue State Park staff at 563-872-4019* to help.

PARK AMENITIES

Bellevue State Park is located south of the city of Bellevue along the Great River Road, U.S. Highway 52. It is 22 miles south of Dubuque and, as the crow flies, 12 miles from Galena, Ill. (a 40-mile road trip).

Bellevue State Park is a great destination for campers, especially if you prefer to get away from crowds. The 297-acre Dyas Unit, about two miles south of the Nelson Unit, has 14 sites for tenting, one for organized youth groups and 31 with electrical outlets. It features open picnic shelters, four hiking trails and a modern playground.

Two miles up the road is the 473-acre Nelson Unit, just south of the city of Bellevue, with fantastic views of the Mississippi River. There are six hiking trails inside the unit. The enclosed lodge and open picnic shelters are ideal spots for gatherings and can be reserved. There is also a modern playground nearby. The South Bluff Nature Center houses displays of plants, animals and geology of the park. *Make reservations at www.reserveaparks.com or 1-877-427-2757.*



STATE PARKS WELCOME VOLUNTEERS "READY TO LEND A HAND"

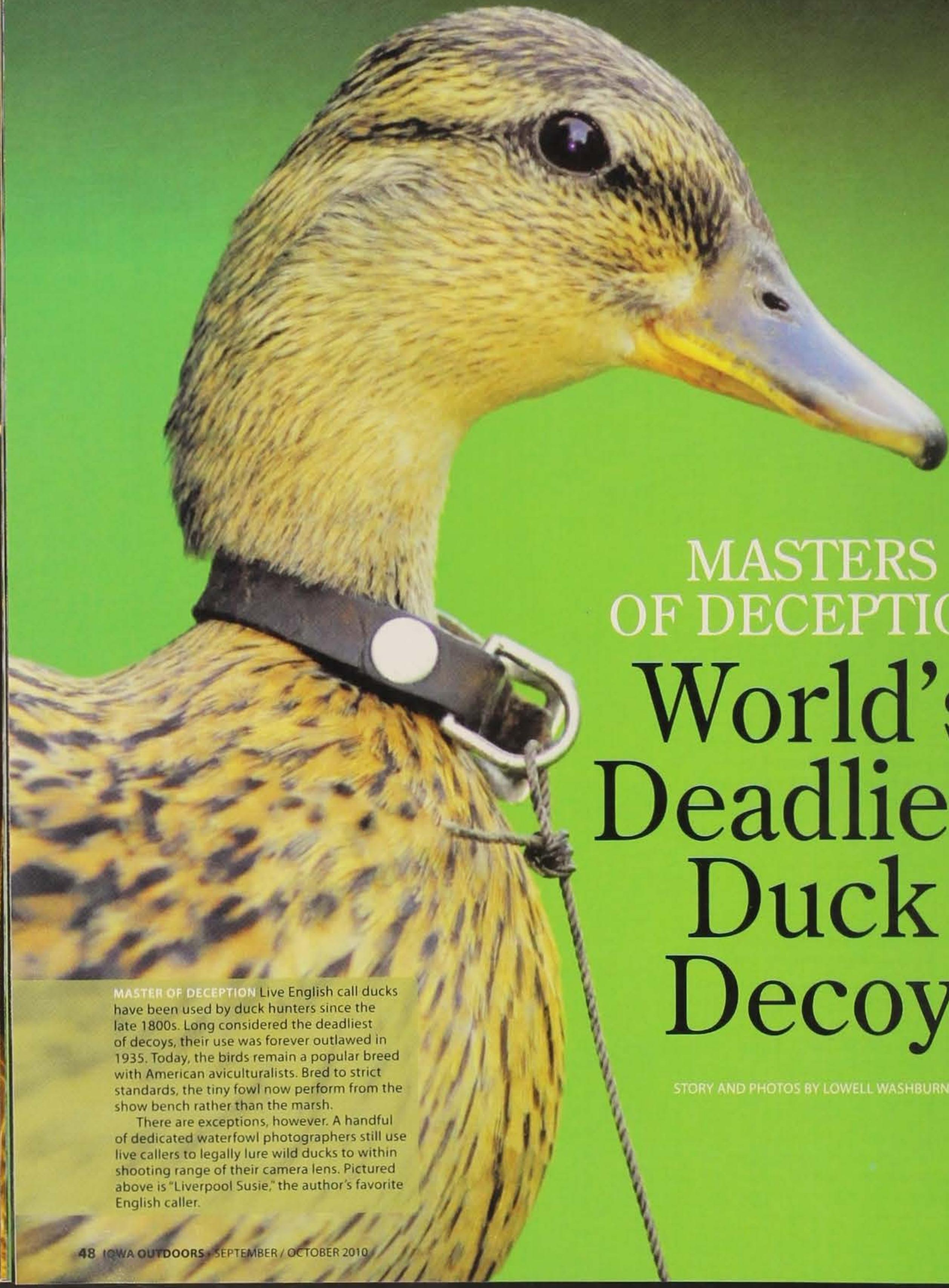
The budget for Iowa's state parks has been severely cut, due to state general fund shortfalls. Park grounds maintenance, seasonal program staff and interpretative programs will take a step back unless Iowa's citizens help fill the gap through volunteering their knowledge, skills and energy.

If you are "Ready to Lend a Hand," here's how. Park managers and park rangers are great sources for ideas, so give them a call and get outdoors. Or contact the DNR's Keepers of the Land volunteer program. It matches interested volunteers with service needs. Contact Dawn Stohs at **515-281-0878** or to www.iowadnr.gov/volunteer/. She is also the person to ask about starting a Friends Group for your local state park.

Many trails in Iowa State Parks are also great for snowshoe treks and cross-country skiing, so volunteer to help organize an event for any season. If you are an expert in tracking, birding, plant identification or geology, share that knowledge with members of your church, club or social group while hiking in a nearby park.

If you'd like to start your own exploration group or explore nature with your family, go to www.childrenandnature.org/downloads/NCFF_toolkit.pdf for help with putting together nature experiences for children. The site www.meetup.com can help you set up a webpage to coordinate group activities.

Clinging to sheet cliffs of dolomite along the park entry road is yellow mealy firedot lichen. Although a favorite place to explore for geologists, rock hammers and rock collecting are not allowed in state parks. However, along Highway 62 just outside of Bellevue State Park are outcrops displaying chert along with marine shelled fossils, mostly brachiopods and crinoids.



MASTERS
OF DECEPTION

World's Deadliest Duck Decoy

MASTER OF DECEPTION Live English call ducks have been used by duck hunters since the late 1800s. Long considered the deadliest of decoys, their use was forever outlawed in 1935. Today, the birds remain a popular breed with American aviculturalists. Bred to strict standards, the tiny fowl now perform from the show bench rather than the marsh.

There are exceptions, however. A handful of dedicated waterfowl photographers still use live callers to legally lure wild ducks to within shooting range of their camera lens. Pictured above is "Liverpool Susie," the author's favorite English caller.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

THE SEASONS ARE CHANGING.

Fall is fast approaching, and Iowa waterfowlers are already anxiously watching the skies anticipating the opening weekend of the duck season. There's still plenty to do between now and then—equipment to inspect, blinds to repair, decoys to sort and bag. For many hunters, the mounds of decoys seem endless with separate spreads for teal, wood ducks, mallards and divers.

But there is one type of decoy that hunters haven't been able to carry to the marshes in the fall autumn. In fact, of all the waterfowl decoys ever devised, it's the only one that has proven so completely effective that its use has been outlawed in every state, province and territory in North America. That deadliest of decoys is the live English call duck.

Loud mouths of the waterfowl world, English callers are short-beaked, pint-sized descendants of the wild mallard. Developed in Europe during the late 1800s, call ducks had but one purpose—to make noise, and plenty of it. Birds failing to make repeated, high volume attempts at luring wild ducks within shooting range of their masters quickly found their own way to the hunter's stewpot.

But were live decoys really as effective as legend would claim? Old time duck hunters who actually used the birds tell the story best. One of those bygone waterfowlers was Clear Lake's Fred Quant. An early duck hunting mentor to my father, Quant was already too old to go afield by the time we first met. But I loved to hear his stories and, as a curious 7-year-old, was totally fascinated with the boisterous flock of live callers he still maintained in a backyard coop.

According to Quant, old time call ducks were like fine bird dogs—they simply loved performing the task they were bred to do. A good English caller would talk to just about anything in the sky, he recalled. Passing flocks of blackbirds, snipe, monarch butterflies—you name it. Anything with wings would trigger an immediate greeting. But most of all, live decoys loved the sight of other ducks. The closer wild flocks approached, the louder and more excited the clamor became.

Quant's methods were similar to those used by many Iowa hunters. After tossing out his spread of wooden decoys, a single live hen would be tethered to a nearby stake. The duck would begin calling as soon as wild birds were sighted. During early fall, trained call ducks would eagerly do their job all day long. But as the high winds and brutal temperatures of late season arrived, live callers would receive periodic breaks. They knew the game well and eagerly looked forward to recess.

When break time arrived, Quant would carefully row his duck boat into the decoys and extend an oar to the weary bird, who would then step onto the paddle. Once the oar was swung back over the gunwale, the bird would jump down and snuggle into the warmth of the small, straw-filled compartment located below deck. A replacement caller would be secured and the hunt resumed.

During the era of muzzleloading black powder shotguns, the skies above timber-shrouded backwaters would often become completely obscured by the sulfurous white smoke of fire-belching double barrels. Following a flurry of gunfire, the smoke could become so thick that retreating ducks were sometimes lost from view. Undaunted, the live callers would continue their noisy chatter. Upon hearing the siren song, departing flocks of mallards would often turn about and actually fly back through the wall of smoke in an attempt to rejoin the decoys. Today, it is hard to determine whether this amazing phenomena was simply a stark testament to the English caller's deadly ability, or if it merely portrays how extremely plentiful and naive America's wild duck populations once were.

Waterfowl enthusiast George VanWyngarden had equally interesting accounts of his days afield with live callers. When we first met in the early 1970s, VanWyngarden still kept a flock of 20 or so callers at his Manson home.

"Of course, they're just pets these days," VanWyngarden explained. "But looking back, I think the call ducks added as much enjoyment to an outing as any other part of the hunt."

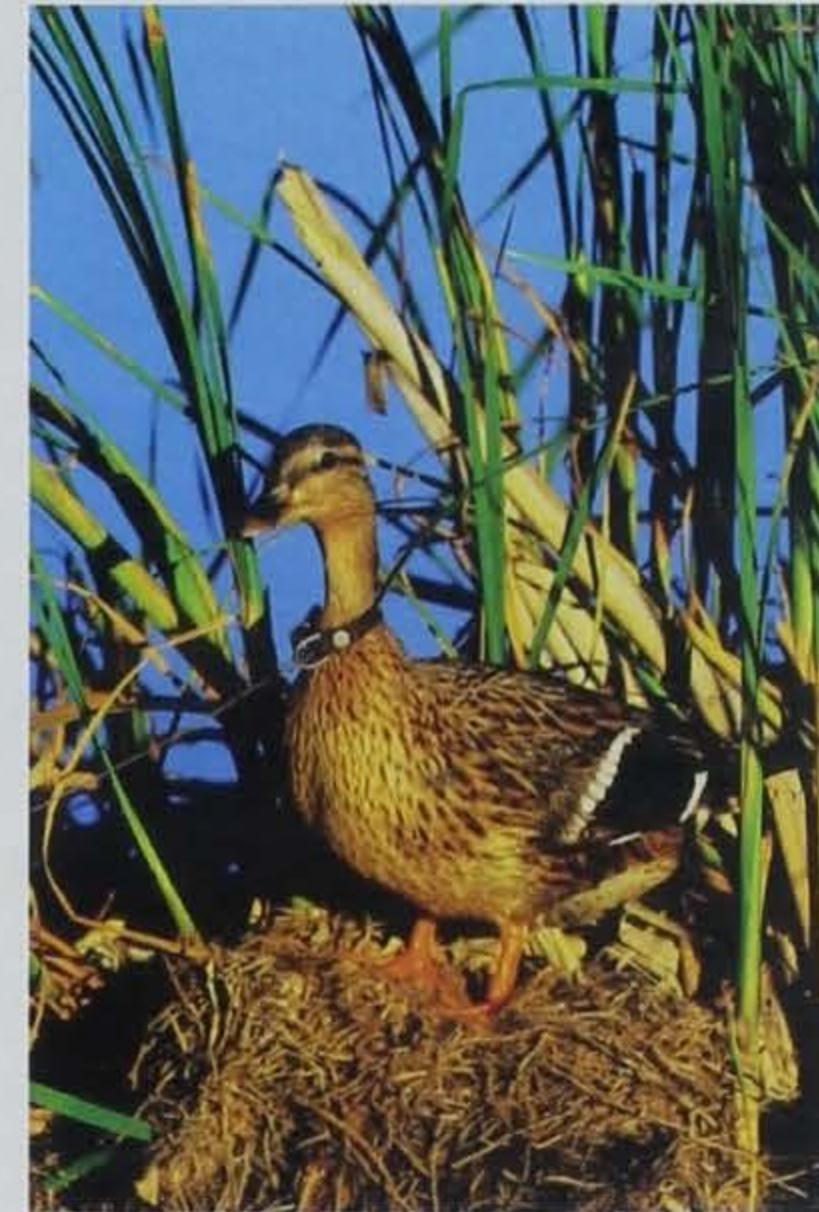
"They just seemed to bubble over with excitement, and their enthusiasm was contagious. We often used several ducks at a time, and they kind of fed off the excitement of the others," he added.

But even the best callers weren't perfect. Sometimes, especially during mild weather, the ducks would sometimes develop a bit of a lazy streak.

"If wild ducks suddenly appeared and the callers didn't respond as quickly as we thought they should, we would pull out our duck calls and blow a couple of notes. Usually, that's all it would take to get the live decoys going," he chuckled.

In 1935, the use of all live decoys—including the beloved English callers—was forever banned. With hunters suddenly forced to rely on their own calling skills, the prohibition led to rapid improvements in the manufacture of commercial wooden duck calls.

"By today's standards, our old duck calls were really junk," recalled VanWyngarden. "They were just something we carried to wake up the call ducks. About half of the time, our calls were so clogged with pipe tobacco and weed seeds that they wouldn't even blow on the first try. But when the live decoys were outlawed, people began to take duck calls more seriously. That's when the quality really began to improve." ■





Bald-face hornets build their signature paper nests in the spring to raise their young. If the nest is disturbed, the females will vigorously defend it with repeated stings to the intruder.

Love Them, Hate Them, OR *Fear Them*

Bald-Faced Hornets are Intriguing Members
of the Iowa Outdoors

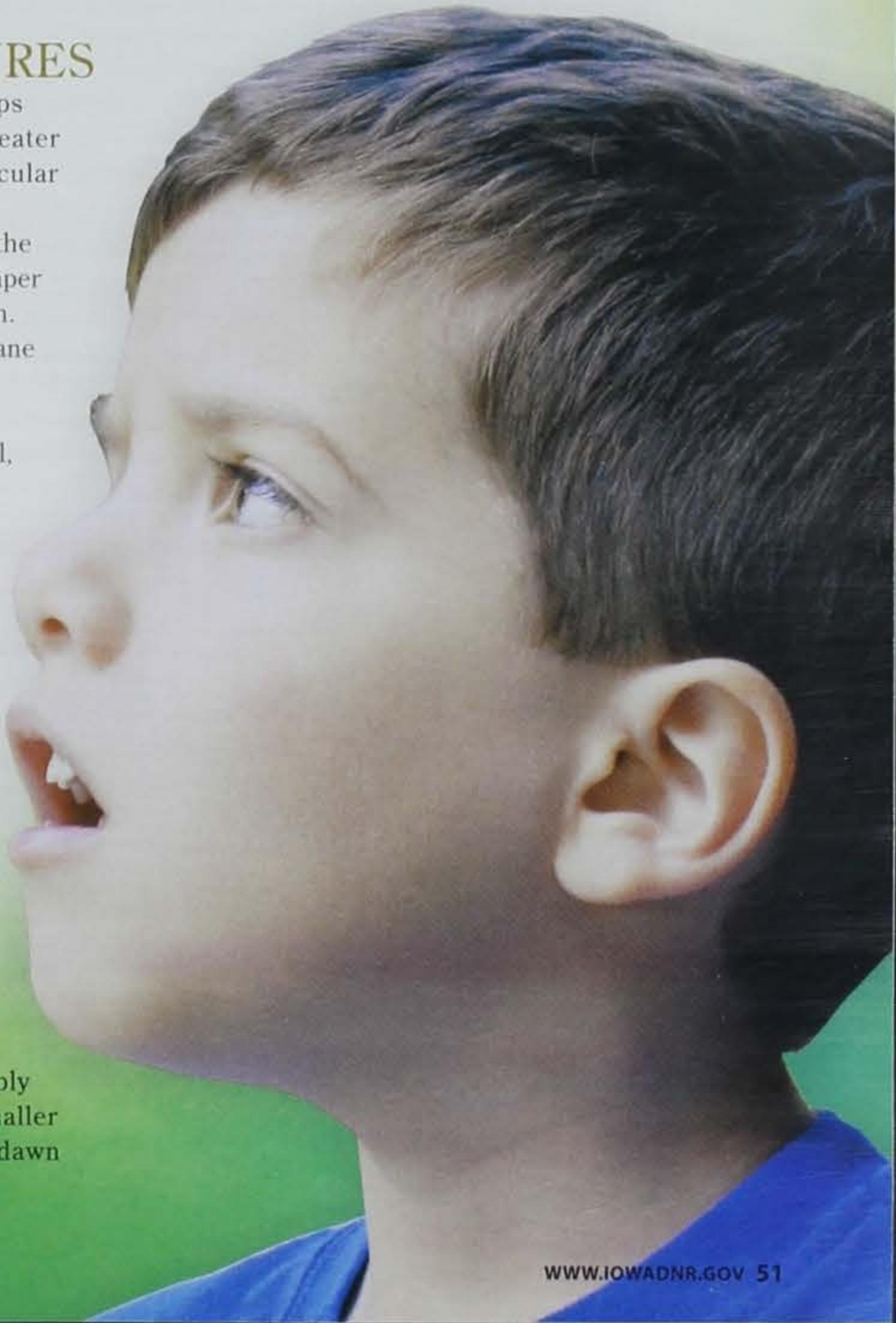
STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

OF ALL THE WILD CREATURES that inhabit Iowa's deciduous woodlands, perhaps no species commands more respect, inspires greater terror or packs a meaner punch than the spectacular black and white insect known as the bald-faced hornet.

Highly social within their own ranks, bald-faced hornets are the insects responsible for constructing the large football-shaped paper nests often seen hanging in trees after autumn leaves have fallen. Famed for its unrivaled ability to deliver large doses of high-octane venom and excruciating pain, an active colony is nothing to fool with—especially during late summer when peak numbers of workers are engaged in rearing and protecting the season's final, and most important, crop of young.

Although bald-faced hornets will aggressively defend their nests against any and all comers, the insects are far too busy to intentionally look for trouble. Most attacks are the result of the insects feeling threatened. It really doesn't matter whether the threat is real or imagined. Once a full scale assault has been launched, the consequences are equally dire.

My personal introduction to this legendary insect occurred when I decided to join high school classmate Ed Kotz on a two-day trout fishing safari into northeast Iowa's Yellow River State Forest. It was early summer and we decided to make camp near the bank of Little Paint Creek. The weather was perfect and the trout were ravenous, hitting just about anything we chose to throw at them. There was one notable exception—a thick 20-inch-plus rainbow spied lurking at the head of what we called the "Cave Pool." No matter what we offered, the huge trout simply refused to budge. While consuming a couple of the fish's smaller relatives that evening, we made serious plans for a crack of dawn effort at bagging this beguiling trophy.



Morning came and I had just arrived at the pool's edge when I heard a mournful howl accompanied by somewhat of a commotion back at camp. Turning around, I was amazed to see Kotz exit his tent in a dead sprint, making a beeline course for the Little Paint. Reaching the stream seconds later, he flopped to the bank and immediately thrust his arm into the icy water. Rushing to see what was up, I learned that a lone bald-faced hornet had somehow found its way into the tent. While rolling up his sleeping bag, Kotz had inadvertently pinned the insect which, in turn, immediately pinned him back.

As Kotz reluctantly pulled his hand from the cooling depths of the trout stream, there could be little doubt as to the focus of the attack. The hornet's stinger had been driven directly into the outer joint of his right thumb which, in addition to emitting pulses of white hot pain, had already begun to turn red and was swelling profusely. I could tell by the tortured look on Ed's face that squeezing a bald-faced hornet was something I did not want to try for myself.

We never did catch that huge trout, and I can't tell you much about anything else that happened during the remainder of our trip. But what I do remember with absolute clarity is the sight of what appeared to be a very visible heartbeat at the end of Kotz's throbbing and discolored thumb.

Although I doubt you could have convinced him of it at the time, Ed's encounter was mild compared to most. Our episode involved a single insect, caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. But when anglers, hikers and other outdoor types unwittingly cross the line and invade the personal domain of an entire colony, the scenario escalates dramatically. Many colonies contain hundreds of workers, and when the nest's high-strung occupants feel compelled to launch a unified mass attack, the assault contains all the ingredients for a never-to-be-forgotten outdoor experience.

Some of the most dramatic accounts originate from extreme northeastern Iowa where forests and paper hornet nests are in plentiful supply. One especially noteworthy incident involved a caravan of canoeists engaged in a camping tour of the Upper Iowa River. The first evidence that trouble was brewing occurred when occupants of the lead vessel began wildly waving their arms while screaming at the top of their lungs. The act was soon imitated by the second canoe, followed by the third, and so on. The event culminated with a couple of Eskimo-style canoe rolls and enough floating equipment that the Upper Iowa soon resembled the scene of a shipwreck. The actual hornet nest was never discovered, I'm told, but I'm also guessing that by then no one was putting much effort into the search.

No less incredible is a second account involving a group of school-age boys from the small Mississippi River community of Sageville. After blindfolding a younger friend, a couple of local roughnecks equipped the unfortunate lad with a sturdy duck-billed push pole commandeered from a dry docked johnboat. The intended recipient of this practical joke was then tricked into swinging the push pole at a low hanging hornet's nest in much the same manner one would use to crush a birthday party piñata. The swing was good, but the joke backfired as the angry swarm set fire to the summer sky. The hornets took no prisoners and, as you might imagine, each and every prankster became an immediate victim. The ensuing exchange between parents nearly came to blows.

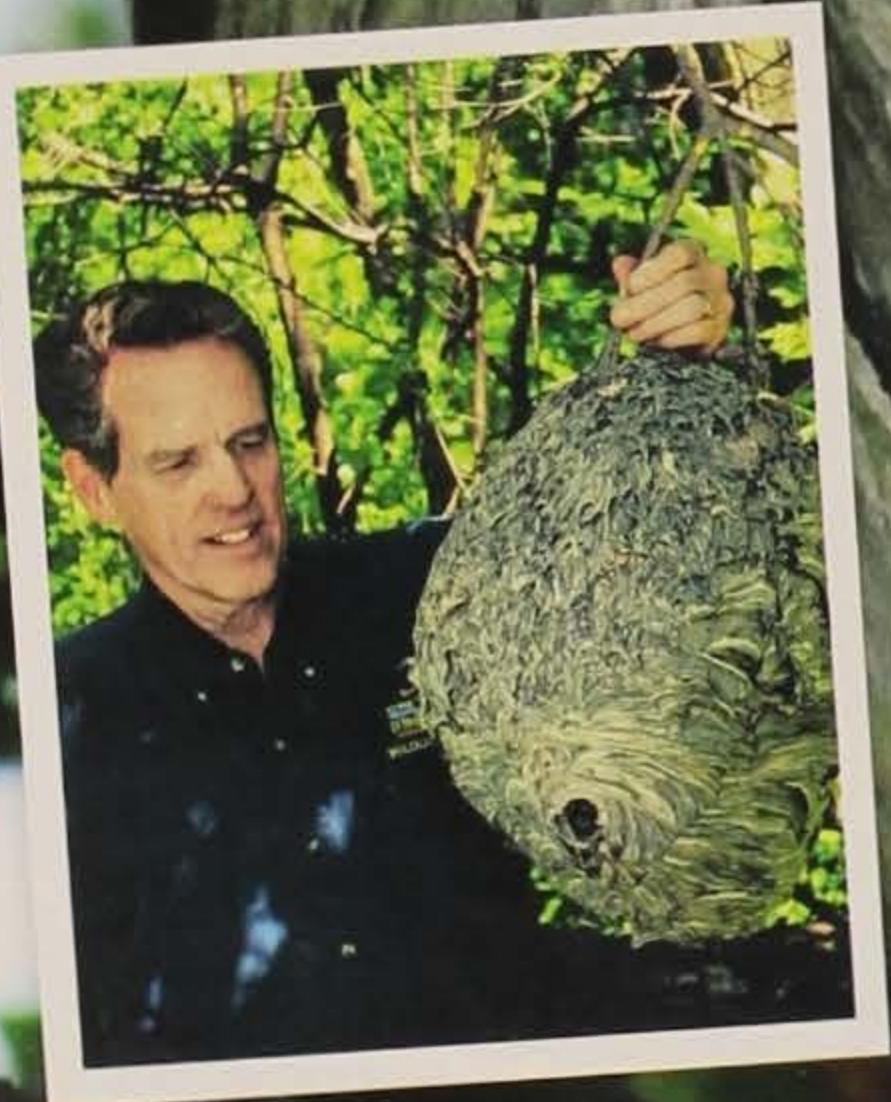
But in spite of the hornet's dangerous potential, amazingly few encounters result in serious human injury. Because of the species' predacious tendency to capture and feed on other insects, professional entomologists even go so far as to list the bald-faced as beneficial.

Unlike bees, bald-faced hornets store no honey toward future survival. Instead, the colony's entire annual effort—all that nest building, caring for young, and





YOUNG BOY PHOTO BY STUDIO Z



By summer's end, bald-faced hornet nests can grow to monstrous proportions and support hundreds of short-tempered workers. In this photo, DNR Wildlife Biologist, Ron Andrews examines an abandoned hornet nest discovered near southeast Iowa's Lake Wapello. The nest measured nearly 2 feet in height and had a circumference of 49 inches.



fearless defending of territory—is solely invested toward the singular goal of producing a dozen or so new queens at the end of the summer.

Those new queens begin making their appearance in September, and most will have abandoned the nest by early to mid-October. Soon after flying and mating with drones, these new generation queens will begin to manufacture a unique, antifreeze-like substance that will prevent cells from freezing as the insects sleep away the winter beneath loose tree bark or buried inside rotting logs. With their life's mission now complete, the rest of this year's colony, including the old queen, will all have perished by mid-November. When warming weather returns next spring, the young fertilized queens will reemerge to construct the foundation for the new nest which will soon support a thriving colony of our most feared insects.

Whether we choose to love them, hate them or fear them—there is no denying that the bald-faced hornet is an intriguing and amazing inhabitant of the Iowa outdoors. ■

Hornet Biology 101

For bald-faced hornets, the year begins in spring as dormant queens emerge from winter resting sites and construct the golf ball-sized nests that will hold the initial crop of young. Upon completion, the queen lays a single egg in each of the perfectly formed paper brood cells. It is the growing colony's most vulnerable stage as the new mother defends the site, hunts and delivers food to the growing young, and lays additional eggs. The season's first generations are entirely comprised of sterile (worker) females who immediately assume the tasks of guarding and enlarging the nest, hunting for insects, caring for eggs and feeding young. From now until summer's end, the queen's sole purpose will be to lay more eggs and plenty of them. Imprisoned within her own empire, the founding queen will not visit the outside world again.

For the growing number of workers, nest construction is a never-ending task. As the queen continues to pump out more and more eggs, the workers continue to enlarge the nest to make room for more and more egg cells. As remodeling continues, original outer walls are peeled away and replaced with new. To accomplish this task, workers use their powerful jaws to strip away thin layers of wood from weathered fence posts or dead trees. Mixed with unique chemicals in the hornet's saliva, the wood is chewed into a pulpy spit wad and then extruded into a thin, but amazingly strong, paper-like material.

By early autumn, nests will have grown to anywhere from the size of a basketball to structures nearly as large as a bushel basket. By now, the number of laboring workers may number well into the hundreds. As the colony acquires peak strength, the queen begins to lay the precious eggs that will produce a dozen or more new queens as well as unfertilized eggs that will become males.

So exactly what makes these particular eggs suddenly become

queens, or how is it possible for anything to hatch from an "unfertilized" egg? I've posed that question to university entomologists and the best answers I've gotten so far are, "Only the hornets know for sure" or "Science is yet unable to unlock that mystery."

By mid to late September, the newly produced queens and males are ready to leave the nest and mate. Only the new queens will survive. For the rest of the colony, the outlook is bleak. Following the season's first hard frosts, the old queen will die as the colony's rigid social order degenerates into chaos. Within a few short days, the nest and all its inhabitants will have perished.

But for the newly fertilized queens, life is just beginning. Burrowing into the confines of rotting logs or other suitable cover, the females become dormant—saved from winter's certain death by filling their cells with a form of self-manufactured antifreeze.

With the return of spring the new queen emerges to begin a new generation. She will soon be surrounded by hundreds of warrior prodigies, all willing to sacrifice their lives in her defense. The new queen will now reign supreme for the remainder of the summer as the growing colony devotes its entire existence to the production of her eventual successor.

When Great Egrets Invade Fish And Frogs Take Cover

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LOWELL WASHBURN

A large black and white photograph showing two great white egrets in a wetland. One egret is in the foreground, facing right, its long neck curved as it looks down at the water. Its reflection is clearly visible in the still surface. Another egret stands behind it, slightly to the left, also facing right. The background is a soft-focus view of the marshy landscape.

After hot summers, northern Iowa's pothole marshes can quickly dry up. While bad news for water-loving ducks, wading birds find an advantage. As food becomes concentrated in ever-smaller pools of water, large numbers of egrets and some great blue herons move in for easy meals.

IOWA ANGLERS KNOW THAT

spearing gamefish is illegal. There are some classic exceptions, of course. Take migrating great egrets, for example. When it comes to these long-necked waders, spear fishing is not only allowed—it's mandatory.

With their impressive size, unique design and stately demeanor, egrets rank high on the list of Iowa's most interesting fall migrants. By early September, the egrets which nested far to our north during summer will suddenly appear in increasing numbers along local shorelines and waterways. The time they linger in Iowa will hinge largely on finding adequate food supplies.

The best migrations occur when a lack of late summer rainfall causes ponds and shallow marshes to temporarily diminish in size. As fish, frogs and other aquatic life concentrate into ever shrinking pools, southbound wading birds are quick to take full advantage of the free buffet.

Watching these spear-beaked masters of stealth hunt for their dinner is an outdoor show that never grows old. Today, it is hard to imagine that during the late 1800s, America nearly lost these magnificent birds as

commercial plume hunters decimated nesting colonies, called rookeries, in search of feathers. Used to adorn women's hats, the showy white plumes of nesting egrets fetched peak market value and commanded twice the price of gold.

Although the commercial feather trade was outlawed during the early 1900s, egrets and other wading birds were dealt a second deadly blow as aquatic hunting grounds became contaminated by the pesticide DDT. Although the use of DDT is now outlawed in the U.S., birds may still consume quantities of DDT-contaminated fish while wintering in Central and South America.

In spite of current environmental challenges, limited numbers of nesting egrets continue their recovery in Iowa. Less than a dozen active rookeries are known across the state, and most egret nests are associated with active colonies of the more common great blue heron. What the future holds for great egrets, as well as for all other Iowa wading birds, will depend largely on how we choose to manage our state's waterways, backwaters and other critical wetland habitats. ■

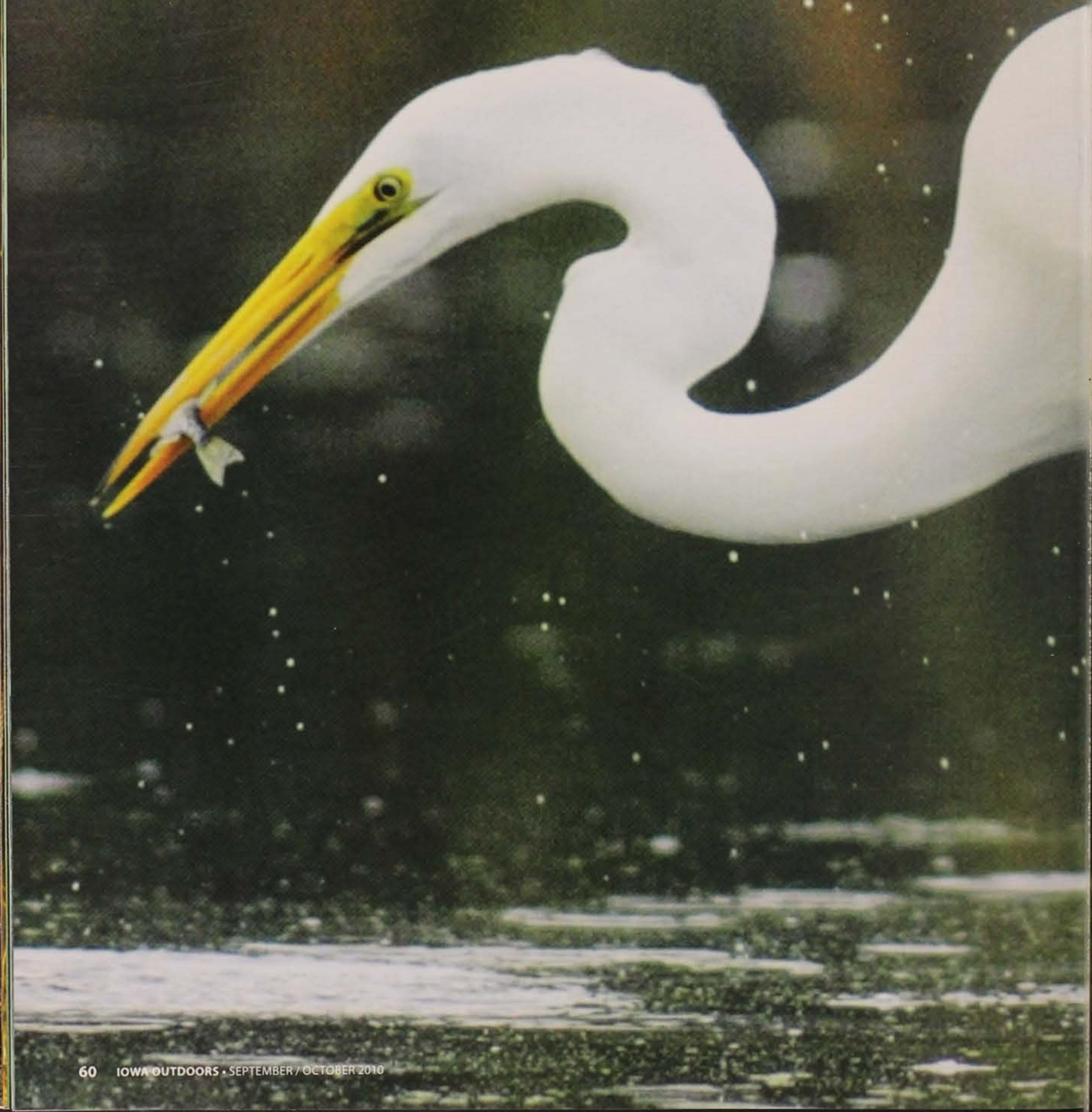


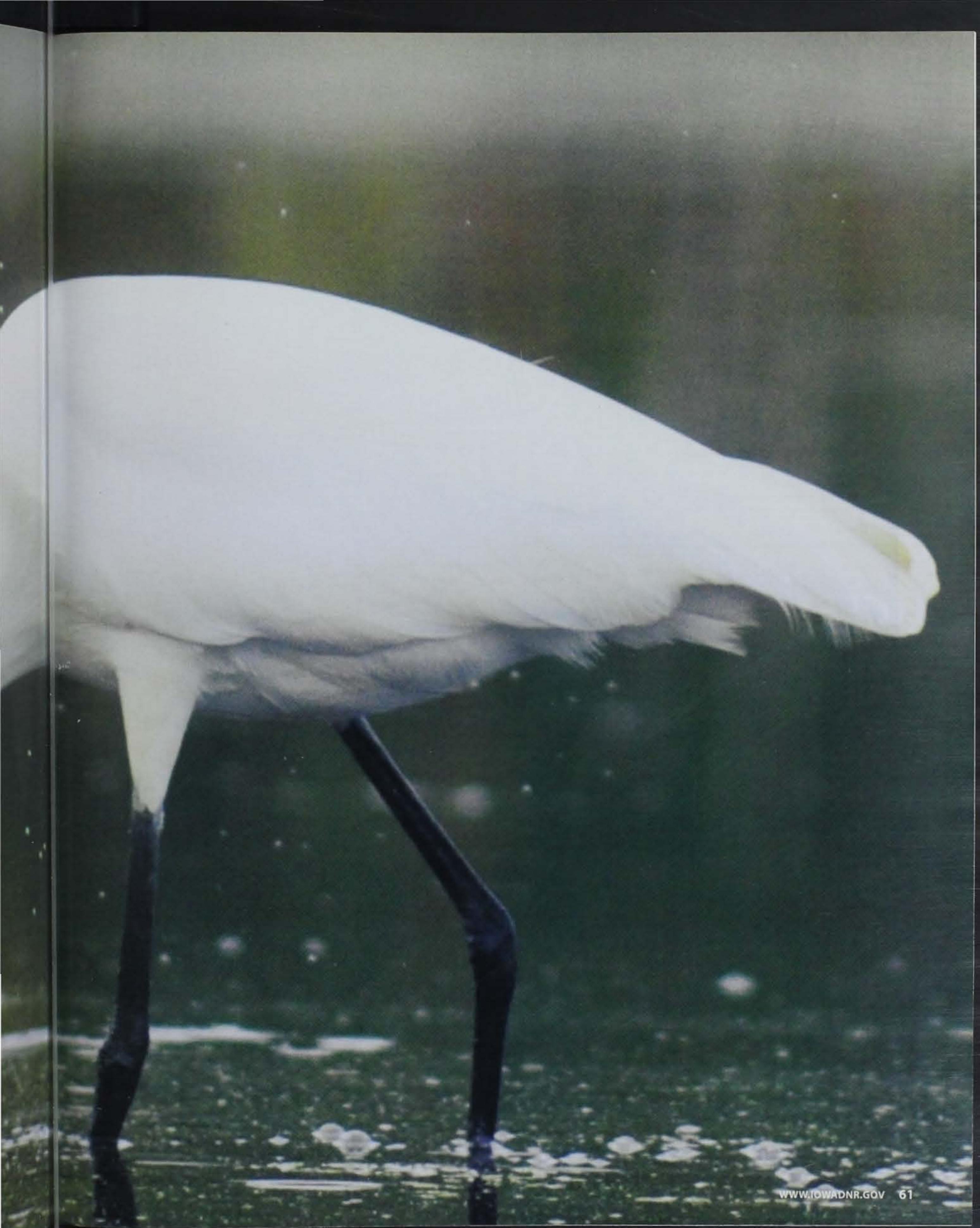
Following a morning of fishing,
a great egret preens its plumage.

Each September, hundreds of migrating great egrets (*Ardea alba*) visit Iowa wetlands where they pause to refuel on fish and frogs before continuing the journey to traditional wintering areas in South America.



SILENT HUNTER—A great egret stalks an Iowa wetland in search of fish, skillfully capturing a young bluegill. After a slow, deliberate walk, a quick, stabbing lunge of the bill is employed to nab its prey.







GET ORGANIZED TO HELP YOUR WATERSHED FOUR STEPS TO CLEANER WATER

Everyday people can work together to make big water quality improvements locally by forming a team and developing a watershed management plan. Here's how.

GET CONNECTED. Surely you're not the only one in your area concerned about the water quality in your local lake or stream. Team up with your neighbors and meet with your local basin coordinator to talk about your goals for improving water quality. By making changes in a watershed, which is the land that drains to a lake, stream or river, we can reduce pollution reaching our waters.

GET PLANNING. Your basin coordinator can provide technical assistance and project guidance, and is essential to help your team apply for Watershed Planning Grants offered by the DNR's Watershed Improvement Program. These grants help teams develop a Watershed Management Plan, which identifies watershed problems and solutions for better water quality. Groups can request grants between \$10,000 and \$50,000, as long as there is a 50 percent local match, to address watersheds on the state's impaired waters list (www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/impaired.html).

GET MOVING. Once you've created a Watershed Management Plan, it's time to get your hands dirty and

put the plan into action. Again, work with your basin coordinator and apply for additional grants. A number of grants, including DNR Watershed Implementation Grants, can help with resources to roll out your plan.

Plans often include working with local farmers and urban residents to reduce runoff, helping county governments improve sewage and storm water management, and improving water by stabilizing streambanks, reducing sediment and nurturing aquatic life. Most importantly, it brings your community together to make these changes. Tell people about the issues with your stream, river or lake and encourage them to help. Work with farmers to install manure storage facilities and embrace the use of terraces and other practices to reduce runoff. Build fences to prevent livestock from trampling streambanks. Plant grass, trees and shrubs around bodies of water to further catch runoff. Create sediment ponds to reduce runoff.

SEE IMPROVEMENT. While this process may seem daunting, the results are impressive. Several Iowa watershed efforts have seen success: clearer water, environmentally-friendly farming practices, increased and improved recreational use, revenue from increased tourist activity, community involvement and more. Your hard work will pay off in the long run and help sustain Iowa's waters for future generations.

Campfire Teal

This simple recipe enhances mild tasting waterfowl—especially early season ducks like teal and woodies. Forget heavy marinades and sauces, the key to tender waterfowl is cooking. Like any wild game, don't overcook, remove from heat when it reaches medium rare to medium, and the result is a meal that beats the fare at many restaurants.

6-8 ducks (teal, wood ducks and mallards are best.)

Olive oil

Favorite seasoning

Smoking wood (hickory, mesquite or any fruit wood)

Brush ducks with olive oil, then sprinkle with seasoning. Grill over indirect, medium heat until cooked to medium rare or medium, about 35 to 40 minutes for six to eight ducks. Serve with wild rice and a mixed green salad.

FIELD TIP:

Field dress ducks as soon as possible and pack on ice. Cooling the meat down enhances flavor and tenderness.



CARE TIP:

To retain moistness, ducks are best prepared skin-on. Dry pluck, then lightly singe hair-like feathers with a small torch. Total prep time is five minutes or less per teal.

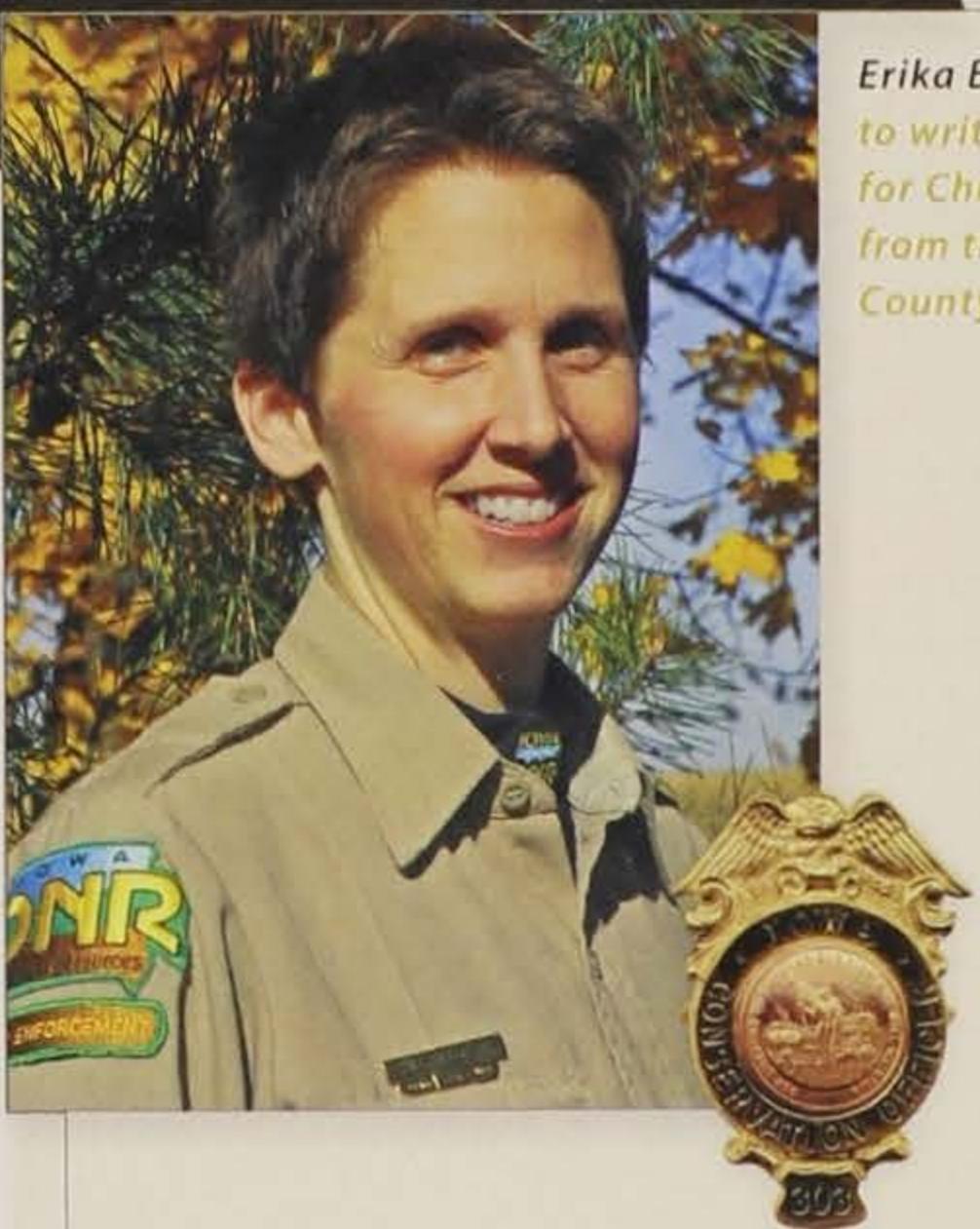
COOKING TIP:

For more flavor, stuff cavity with onions or apple wedges. Bank coals to ensure consistent grill temperature. Remove ducks when juice runs pink to clear. Any longer, and quality diminishes.



Warden's Diary

BY ERIKA BILLERBECK PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH



Erika Billerbeck is the fourth officer to write Warden's Diary, taking over for Chuck Humeston, who retired from the DNR. She lives in Johnson County and began her career in 2000.

Solitary Breed

It's good to know that someone has your back. Conservation officers, for the most part, are pretty solitary creatures. Sure, we help each other out now and then working on specific cases or projects, but in general, there are too few of us with too much terrain to cover. An officer in a rural territory may be one of only two or three other law enforcement units working the whole county on any given night. If our officers happen to call for backup while patrolling the remote dirt roads, it's not unrealistic that help could be an hour away. One of the most common questions people ask me is, "Aren't you scared to be out there all by yourself?" When I stop to think about it, I realize there have been several times, especially at night or when far from the safety of my vehicle, that I've thought to myself "what if" and felt the hackles rise.

On a typical opening day of early duck season, almost all duck hunters emerge from their off-season hibernation and take to the marshes with seeming disregard for weather forecasts or low duck counts. Such was the case on a recent opening day. Excitement permeated the autumn morning and the smell of frying bacon and pancakes browning on the griddle hung heavy in the air, confirming my theory that duck hunters enjoy cooking breakfast in their boats as much as they enjoy shooting ducks from them. Spirits were high in the hunters readying for opening day on the shore of Wiese Slough that morning. My neighboring officer, Tom Campbell, readied his equipment, dumped his small sport boat into the water and set off to begin checking hunters.

The first group he encountered was some veteran hunters who spent so much time in the slough during

hunting season that they might as well have erected a mailbox and called the place home. Campbell was familiar with these seasoned sportsmen, and enjoyed a nice chat while checking their hunting licenses, duck stamps, plugs and steel shot. The hunters told Tom that it had been a very quiet morning, but they were enjoying their breakfast anyway. They offered him some coffee, but he declined, and after wishing the group good luck, Campbell pushed off to resume his trek up the shoreline checking hunters as he went.

Approximately an hour later, Campbell was in the middle of checking another group of hunters when a barrage of gunshots erupted from farther along the shoreline. The volley of deafening shots shattered the morning peace and probably caused some platefuls of scrambled eggs to hit the floor of a few boats. In a morning devoid of both ducks and gunfire, the thundering racket caught everyone's attention. Immediately all eyes turned upward to scrutinize the sky for evidence of a flock of ducks that may have been overlooked. With the exception of a few songbirds, the sky was empty.

"What could they possibly be shooting at?" Campbell wondered as he motored off. He discreetly slithered his boat through the cattails until he could see the vessel from which the gunfire had originated. The boat in question was on the move toward him, so he decided to stay hidden in the cattails until the boat was close enough to stop.

As the boat approached, he counted four hunters onboard: two adults and two youngsters. Campbell emerged from the reeds and waved the boat to a stop. He then pulled alongside the boat and noticed that the

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kids were sporting brand new camouflage coats and gigantic smiles. The adult hunters explained that it was the kids' first duck hunting experience. They had become frustrated by the lack of ducks and were about to head for home

when they decided instead to move into a pothole where several coots were swimming around. The hunters went on to explain that the kids had had a great time shooting at the coots. At this, the kids looked up at Campbell with Cheshire Cat grins and held up their fists clutching several dead coots.

As they were explaining this story, the officer heard the sound of a distant boat motor sputter to life. A few minutes later, the hunters and Campbell turned around to witness a blind-boat approaching them. It was obvious from the sound of the motor that they were trying to push the throttle as far as they could manage in the shallow water. He squinted in bewilderment at the boat and tried to determine what would cause them to be in such a hurry. Not only were they lumbering towards them at an unusually high speed for a blind-boat, but one of the hunters was standing up, leaning over the top of the blind with his shotgun poised ready for action.

When the boat was within close range, Campbell was surprised to see that it was the first group of hunters that he had checked earlier that morning. One of them shouted to Campbell asking if everything was ok. He was quite puzzled by this, but Campbell waved and assured them that everything was fine. The hunters nodded, turned the boat and motored away toward the boat launch.

Officer Campbell continued talking with the coot shooters for a while, checked their licenses and equipment and determined that they were completely legal. He wished them luck and told them he hoped the kids would be able to shoot at something that was actually in flight the next time out.

Realizing that his stomach was growling, Campbell decided to head for the boat ramp. He reached around and fired up the motor. Then, when he put the boat in gear, he heard a loud ZING. Tom watched in dismay as the prop shot off the motor and quickly sank to the bottom of the slough. "Mama said there'd be days like this," he muttered to himself as he plunged his arm into the frigid water in an attempt to retrieve the missing piece. His arm was nearly numb when he finally rescued the prop and discovered that he no longer had the nut to hold it in place.

After a tiring paddle, he eventually reached the boat ramp where the group of veteran hunters was milling around their blind-boat waiting for him. Still baffled by their earlier behavior, he asked, "What in the world was that all about out there?"

One of them answered, "Well, it had been so quiet—I don't think we heard more than a shot or two all morning. We got worried after you left and then heard what sounded like World War III breaking out. Thought for sure you got yourself into a gun fight, so we were on our way to back you up!" Officer Campbell laughed and thanked the hunters for watching out for him.

When my colleague told me this story, it reminded me of how alone we conservation officers really are out there. It also made me appreciate that, many times, there are probably more people watching out for us than we realize. We never know who might be there to support us when the chips are down or who might be silently watching our backs. It may, in fact, be the person we least expect. It may even be a posse of seasoned duck hunters. And it's good to know they're out there.

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BY ALAN FOSTER

SNOWY TREE CRICKET (*Oecanthus fultoni*)

It's the unmistakable, soothing sound of a warm summer night. So enamored by the song of the tree cricket, renowned 1800s American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne described the sound as "audible stillness" and declared "If moonlight could be heard, it would sound just like that."

SAME OLD SONG AND DANCE

Like many insects and animals, the male tree cricket uses its song to attract mates and repel competition. The difference is the male tree cricket must maintain a precise frequency, melody and pitch if he is going to attract any female. Its song is a series of clicks—like a trill or chirp—similar to the sound of running a thumbnail down the teeth of a comb. It is created by rubbing the wings together, dragging a small peg on one wing across a file-like ridge on the other.

LET'S EAT

Tree crickets are omnivorous, feeding on a wide range of plants and other insects. Females deposit their eggs inside the stem of a plant, which can injure the plant. However, their preferred insect meal is aphids, making them beneficial in the yard and garden.

I KNOW YOU'RE OUT THERE

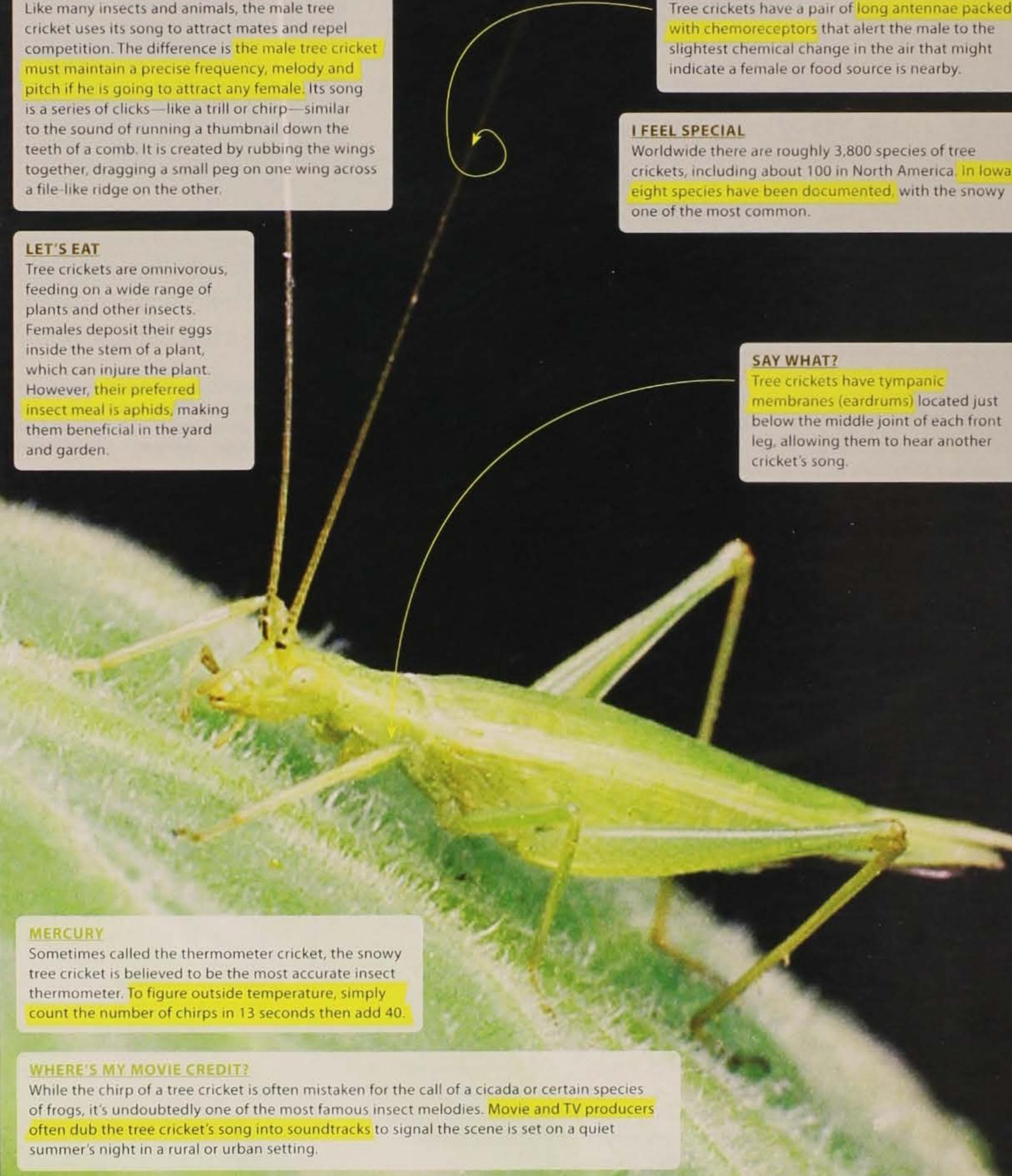
Tree crickets have a pair of long antennae packed with chemoreceptors that alert the male to the slightest chemical change in the air that might indicate a female or food source is nearby.

I FEEL SPECIAL

Worldwide there are roughly 3,800 species of tree crickets, including about 100 in North America. In Iowa, eight species have been documented, with the snowy one of the most common.

SAY WHAT?

Tree crickets have tympanic membranes (eardrums) located just below the middle joint of each front leg, allowing them to hear another cricket's song.



MERCURY

Sometimes called the thermometer cricket, the snowy tree cricket is believed to be the most accurate insect thermometer. To figure outside temperature, simply count the number of chirps in 13 seconds then add 40.

WHERE'S MY MOVIE CREDIT?

While the chirp of a tree cricket is often mistaken for the call of a cicada or certain species of frogs, it's undoubtedly one of the most famous insect melodies. Movie and TV producers often dub the tree cricket's song into soundtracks to signal the scene is set on a quiet summer's night in a rural or urban setting.

Find a volunteer project or post your own event at www.keepersoftheland.org or call 515-281-0878.

Admiration & Legacy

BY JESSIE ROLPH BROWN PHOTOS BY CLAY SMITH

PULLING FOR CLEAN WATER

IOWA RIVER CLEANUP PARTNERSHIP, IOWA CITY
Volunteers yank trash from water, promote stewardship

Three hours and 30 volunteers—that's all it takes for the Iowa River Cleanup Partnership of Johnson County to haul 3 tons of trash out of a stream. Microwaves, recliners, computers, dolls, vintage Phillips 66 station signs—this group has seen it all in the water, even pulling an 1850s Mormon pioneer handcart from a sandbar. "You never know what you'll find," says Carol Sweeting, a city employee who coordinates the cleanups. Following the 2008 floods, the group took more than 50 tons of material off the old power dam spillway. "The Partnership is a wonderful example of how communities can come together after something as devastating as the floods of 2008 to protect and enhance our natural resources," says the DNR's Mary Skopec. However, the group began holding cleanups three years before the flood with high school and college students, families and other locals. Johnson County Conservation Board and university staff pitch in, too. Five cleanups are planned for fall, plus the annual Day of Caring and Make a Difference Day cleanups. The partnership monitors water quality within city limits and has cleaned up Muddy Creek with Iowa City seventh graders. "The Iowa River is worth it. It's part of the community," Sweeting says. "The creeks have been there longer than we have. We want to have more people see where the creeks are and see them as an asset."



LEADING WITH ENTHUSIASM

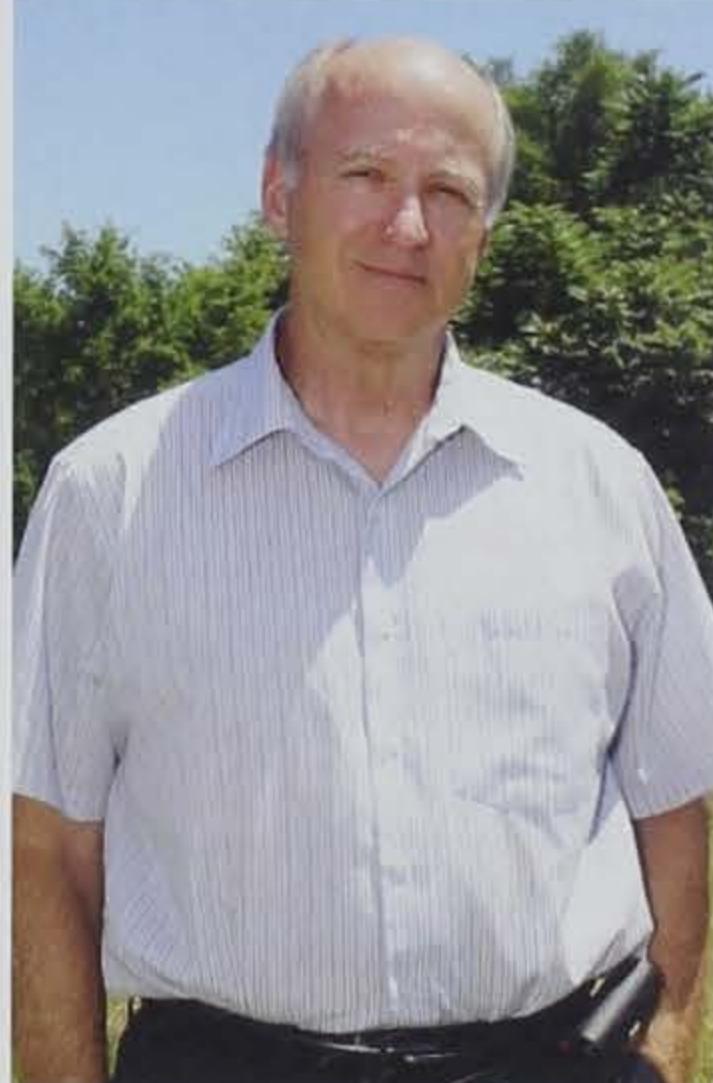
DONISE GRYGIERCZYK, AMES
Recent graduate introduces Iowans to the outdoors

Denise Grygierekzyk grew up hunting with her dad and splashing around in California creeks, but it took a chance encounter in a Boone restaurant to make the outdoors her career. She waitressed a table where two men in camouflage were discussing leading a guided hunt with disabled kids. She tagged along on the next day's hunt, "and I knew that was what I wanted to do," she said. Grygierekzyk originally planned on veterinary school, but switched her major to animal ecology. A focus on interpretation allows her to share a love of the outdoors with others. She sought out chances to help with camps like Outdoor Journey for Girls and Youth Hunting Education Challenge. "Seeing smiles on the faces of girls who've never been in the outdoors keeps me going," she says. The recent Iowa State University graduate serves on Iowa Women in Natural Resources' board and mentors first-time hunters. She's mentored a woman who wanted to learn to hunt but her husband wouldn't teach her, and a 12-year-old girl that "cried because she was so excited that she shot a deer." Grygierekzyk is active in Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, the National Association for Interpretation and other groups. "Denise easily communicates and shares her enthusiasm for the outdoors," says Joli Vollers, a DNR conservation officer and OJ instructor. "She is a glimpse in to a positive future in conservation. I hope she can help us find and develop more young outdoors folks just like her."

ENERGY MAKES THE GRADE

DES MOINES PUBLIC SCHOOLS, DES MOINES
District saves energy and money, teaches kids conservation

It can start with something as simple as switching off a light when leaving a room—and for the Des Moines Public School District, it's saved about \$794,000 in one school year. In addition to students and staff changing behaviors, like switching off lights and keeping hands off the thermostat, the district has taken on larger projects. Geothermal systems heat and cool 25 buildings, while sensors control room temperatures based on occupancy. Computers shut down automatically at the end of the day. New, efficient windows and lighting save energy. This earned 26 buildings in the district an Energy Star rating—one of the highest numbers in the country. Energy Star schools meet strict EPA standards, use less energy and create fewer greenhouse gas emissions than other schools while performing in the top 25 percent of buildings nationwide. "Energy Star is a great way to share with the public your successes and demonstrate the best use of limited resources and taxpayer dollars. Saving energy means more dollars for education," says Bill Good, the district's chief operations officer. With the average age of schools in the district at more than 60 years, the district's efforts also show that older buildings can be energy efficient. Students join the effort, serving as energy monitors in classrooms and following the district's progress in a monthly Energy Report Card. "Getting students to buy in isn't hard," Good says. "We're very encouraged we're able, at times, to incorporate energy conservation into curriculum."



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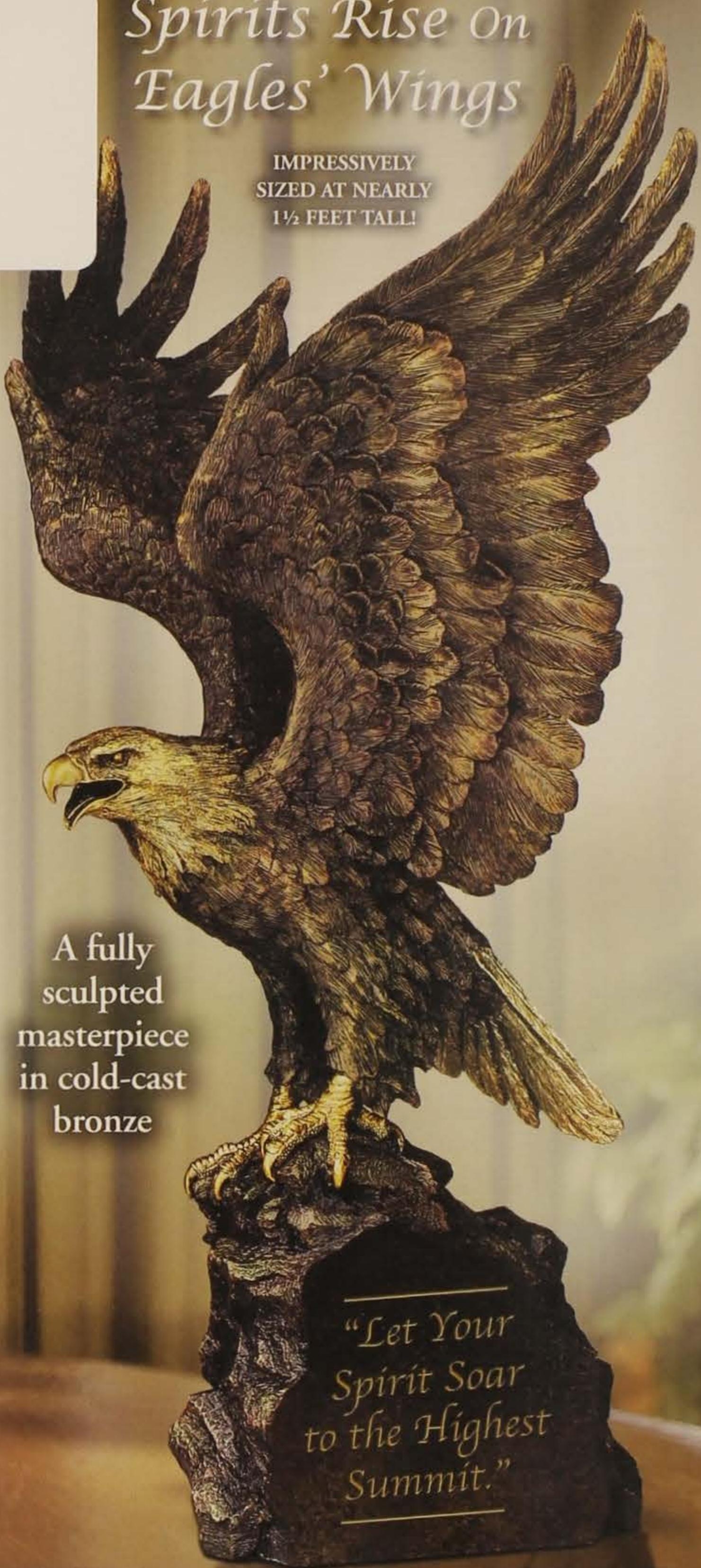
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